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## IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

### NATIONAL

#### Padma Awards 2026 Announced: Celebrating Service Beyond the Spotlight

**In the News:** The Government announced the Padma Awards 2026 awardees ahead of Republic Day highlighting individuals who have made sustained contributions across healthcare, education, social service, traditional arts, environment, and livelihood generation.

##### Key Points:

- **About Padma Awards:** The Padma Awards are among India's highest civilian honors, instituted in 1954 and announced annually on Republic Day. The awards are given in three categories: Padma Vibhushan (second-highest civilian award for exceptional service), Padma Bhushan (third-highest for distinguished service of high order), and Padma Shri (fourth-highest for distinguished service in any field).
- **Padma Vibhushan 2026 Recipients:** Five Padma Vibhushan awards were approved this year, including Dharmendra Singh Deol (posthumous) for Art, V.S. Achuthanandhan (posthumous) for Public Affairs, N. Rajam for Art, K.T. Thomas for Public Affairs, and P. Narayanan for Literature & Education.
- **Padma Bhushan 2026 Recipients:** The Padma Bhushan category features 13 awardees representing excellence across culture, economy, and public life. Notable recipients include actor Mammooty for Indian cinema, playback singer Alka Yagnik for Art, industrialist Uday Kotak for Trade and Industry, former tennis player Vijay Amritraj for Sports, advertising veteran Piyush Pandey (posthumous) for Art, and political leaders Bhagat Singh Koshyari, Shibu Soren, V.K. Malhotra, and Vellappally Natesan for Public Affairs.
- **Padma Shri 2026 Recipients:** The largest group with 113 Padma Shri awards showcases diversity and inclusion across India. Notable recipients include cricketer Rohit Sharma for Sports, actor R. Madhavan for Art, hockey goalkeeper Savita Punia for Sports, and cricketer Harmanpreet Kaur for Sports.
- **History of Padma Awards:** Padma Awards were instituted in 1954 along with Bharat Ratna. The three categories are Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri. Awards do not confer a title and cannot be used as prefix or suffix to names. Government servants are not eligible except doctors and scientists. Posthumous awards are generally not given but allowed in highly deserving cases.

#### Wings India 2026 to Showcase India's Aviation Rise

**In the News:** India's rapidly expanding civil aviation sector will take centre stage at Wings India 2026, Asia's largest civil aviation event, scheduled from January 28 to 31, 2026, at Begumpet Airport in Hyderabad. The four-day mega event Wings India 2026 will be launched with an inaugural ceremony led by the minister by Union Minister of Civil Aviation Rammohan Naidu Kinjarapu, marking the start of a landmark global gathering that highlights India's emergence as a major aviation hub for connectivity, manufacturing, innovation and sustainability.

##### Key Points:

- **Event Overview:** Wings India 2026 is Asia's largest civil aviation event, organised by the Ministry of Civil Aviation from January 28-31, 2026, at Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad. The event will be formally launched by Union Minister Rammohan Naidu Kinjarapu and will showcase India's transformation into a major global aviation hub for connectivity, manufacturing, services, innovation and sustainability.
- **Theme and Strategic Vision:** The event is anchored around the theme "Indian Aviation: Paving the Future – From Design to Deployment, Manufacturing to Maintenance, Inclusivity to Innovation and Safety to Sustainability."
- **India's Aviation Growth Story:** India is also strengthening its presence in MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul), pilot training, aerospace manufacturing, cargo logistics and advanced air mobility, with sustainability initiatives like Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and green airports gaining momentum. Wings India is Asia's largest civil aviation event. UDAN aims to enhance regional air connectivity in India. MRO stands for Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul. Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) is key to reducing aviation emissions.

#### Governor's Address Walkouts and Constitutional Limits

**In the News:** Recent walkouts by Governors during inaugural State Legislative Assembly sessions in Opposition-ruled Karnataka, Tamil Nadu have triggered a constitutional debate on the scope of gubernatorial discretion.

**Key Points:**

- **Constitutional Mandate – Article 176:** Article 176(1) mandates that the Governor "shall" address the Legislative Assembly, or both Houses where a Legislative Council exists, at the commencement of the first session each year. The address is not a personal statement of the Governor but a formal articulation of the policies and programmes of the elected State government.
- **Judicial Precedents on Gubernatorial Discretion:** In *Shamsher Singh vs State of Punjab* (1974), a seven-judge Bench held that public stances critical of Cabinet policy by a Governor amount to an "unconstitutional faux pas." Later, in the *Nabam Rebia* judgment (2016), a Constitution Bench clarified that functions under Articles 175(1) and 176(1) are executive in nature and must be exercised strictly on ministerial advice.
- **Constitutional Role of the Governor:** Constituent Assembly debates, particularly remarks by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, described the Governor as a constitutional head with duties but no independent executive powers. The Governor was envisaged as a neutral representative of the people, not of any political party.
- **Implications of Recent Walkouts:** The Karnataka government may approach the Supreme Court seeking a judicial declaration on the constitutionality of such walkouts. Critics argue that selective or aborted addresses negate the authority of elected legislatures and blur constitutional conventions.
- **Past cases:** Article 176 deals with the Governor's address to the State Legislature. The Governor acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers. *Shamsher Singh* case (1974) limited Governor's public criticism of government policy. *Nabam Rebia* case (2016) classified Articles 175 and 176 as executive functions.

**Making new Inroads in railway**

**In the News:** The INROAD (Indian Natural Rubber Operations for Assisted Development) project, launched with financial backing of ₹100 crore, aims to enhance the quality of natural rubber produced in India's North-East region.

**Key Points:**

- **Project Launch and Funding:** INROAD was launched with ₹100 crore financial support from four major tyre companies—Apollo, Ceat, JK, and MRF—making it a pioneering initiative in the global tyre industry where manufacturers directly invest in improving raw material quality.
- **Oversight and Implementation:** The Rubber Board of India oversees the implementation of the INROAD project, ensuring coordination between tyre manufacturers and rubber farming communities.
- **Geographic Coverage:** The project spans across districts in the North-East region and parts of West Bengal, women empowerment initiatives; capacity building targeting areas with potential for natural rubber cultivation and existing rubber-growing communities.
- **Women's Economic Empowerment:** INROAD emphasizes economic empowerment of women in rubber cultivation. A model smokehouse was inaugurated for the Bhaishkhuli Pragatishil Mohila Samittee, a cooperative of 65 female rubber growers in Goalpara, Assam.
- **Sustainable Model Development:** INROAD seeks to create a sustainable model for rubber cultivation in India by combining capacity building, infrastructure development, and direct industry-farmer collaboration.

**Migrant Voters and Political Outreach in Bihar Assembly Elections**

**In the News:** As Bihari migrants return home for Diwali and Chhath festivals ahead of the Bihar Assembly elections. Results were declared on November 14, 2025. The NDA won with 202 seats., they have emerged as a crucial voting bloc, particularly in northwestern Bihar constituencies.

**Key Points:**

- **Migrant Population Scale:** However, the 2011 census estimated 74.54 lakh migrants, with some reports suggesting up to one crore, and political parties claiming three crore migrants from the state. Estimates of Bihar's out-migration vary widely across sources and political claims.
- **High Remittance Districts:** Three northwestern districts—Saran, Siwan, and Gopalganj—receive the highest remittances from migrants working in Gulf countries, making migrant voters particularly influential in these constituencies.
- **Political Contest Prediction:** Migrants predict the main contest will be between the NDA and maha gathbandhan (Opposition alliance), describing it as likely to be "a tough one."

- **CPI(ML) Assessment:** Dipankar Bhattacharya of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), part of the Opposition alliance, claims Jan Suraj Party has greater traction among migrants from Bihar than among people actually living in the state.

### From Rank to Cadre: The New UPSC Cadre Policy

**In the News:** On January 23, 2026, the Union government notified a revised cadre allocation policy for All India Services (IAS, IPS, and IFoS), replacing the zonal system that had been in place since 2017 with a new alphabetical grouping structure.

#### Key Points:

- **Policy Notification:** The DoPT notified the revised cadre allocation policy on January 23, 2026, introducing a four-group alphabetical structure to replace the earlier five-zone geographical clustering system that had been in place since 2017.
- **What is Cadre Allocation:** Cadre allocation is the administrative process that determines the State or Joint Cadre in which IAS, IPS, and IFoS officers serve, balancing national integration through inter-state exposure and respecting regional familiarity through limited home-state representation.
- **Four New Groups (Alphabetical):** **Group I:** AGMUT (Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territories), Andhra Pradesh, Assam-Meghalaya, Bihar, Chhattisgarh. **Group II:** Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh. **Group III:** Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu. **Group IV:** Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal
- **Insider-Outsider Rules:** "Insider" candidates (home state cadre) will be allocated strictly based on merit rank and vacancy availability. Willingness to serve in the home state is now a mandatory condition for insider eligibility. EWS vacancies will be treated as part of the unreserved category in cadre rosters.
- **Two-Stage Outsider Allocation:** After insiders are placed, outsider candidate allocation follows the roster system in two stages—first for Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD), then for others—to introduce predictability and objectivity.
- **Category-wise Distribution:** Vacancies will be distributed among Unreserved (UR), Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories following established roster procedures for reservation and insider/outsider distribution.

### Lancet Report on Healthcare in India

**In the News:** The 2025 Lancet Countdown Report on Health and Climate Change has become a key reference document highlighting the intersection of climate change and public health globally. Additionally, a 2020 Lancet study on mental health reveals the growing burden of mental health disorders worldwide, with depression and anxiety disorders being major contributors to disability, underscoring the escalating challenge mental health issues pose to health systems globally, including in India.

#### Key Points:

- **Mental Health as a Basic Human Right:** Mental well-being encompasses mental-emotional, social, cognitive, and physical capabilities. Mental health is crucial for personal, community, and socio-economic development and is recognized as a basic human right.
- **COVID-19 as a Catalyst:** While mental health has received sharp attention for more than a decade among medical and counselling communities, the global COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for refocusing attention on mental health issues due to its widespread impact.
- **Global Mental Health Burden:** According to WHO, mental health conditions are among the leading causes of disability worldwide. In 2021, an estimated 1 in 7 people globally were living with a mental disorder, equating to over 1.1 billion people.
- **Mental Health in India:** In India, approximately 11 in 100 people (11%) suffer from mental health disorders, representing a significant public health challenge.
- **Lancet Study Findings (2020):** Mental health disorders account for 5.2% of the global disease burden. Depressive disorder alone contributes 6.2% of the total YLD, while anxiety disorder contributes 4.7% (Mental Health Atlas, 2024).
- **Climate-Health Initiative at COP30:** Based on Lancet Countdown findings, the Belem Health Action Plan (BHAP) was launched at COP30 in Belem, Brazil, with over 35 global philanthropies pledging \$300 million under the Climate and Health Funders Coalition to tackle growing health impacts of climate change.



## Republic Day Parade 2026 Highlights 150 Years of 'Vande Mataram' Through Rare Artwork

**In the News:** The 77th Republic Day Parade at Kartavya Path on January 26, 2026, marked 150 years of 'Vande Mataram' with rare artworks, tableaux, and performances. The celebrations showcased India's freedom legacy, cultural unity, and journey towards Aatmanirbhar Bharat, with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and President of the European Council Antonio Costa as Chief Guests.

### Key Points:

- **'Vande Mataram' as Central Theme:** The sesquicentenary (150 years) of 'Vande Mataram' dominated the visual and cultural narrative of the parade. A series of historic paintings created by artist Tejendra Kumar Mitra in 1923, illustrating the verses of 'Vande Mataram' and published in the 'Bande Mataram Album', were displayed as view-cutters along Kartavya Path. Invitation cards and tickets carried a special logo marking 150 years of the song, featuring a silhouette of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.
- **Historical Significance of 'Vande Mataram':** 'Vande Mataram' holds a unique place in India's freedom struggle and cultural identity. It was written in 1875 by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and first published in the literary journal Bangadarshan. Later, it was included in his novel Anandamath. The song was first sung publicly by Rabindranath Tagore at the 1896 Congress session in Calcutta. It was adopted as India's National Song in 1950 by the Constituent Assembly.
- **Tableaux and Cultural Performances:** A total of 30 tableaux rolled down Kartavya Path, including 17 from States/Union Territories and 13 from Ministries/Departments/Services. The tableaux were presented under two broader themes: "स्वतंत्रता का मंत्र – वंदे मातरम" (Mantra of Freedom: Vande Mataram) and "समृद्धि का मंत्र – आत्मनिर्भर भारत" (Mantra of Prosperity: Self-Reliant India).
- **Military Display and First-Time Features:** The Indian Army showcased a Battle Array Formation for the first time, along with a Mounted Column of 61 Cavalry and seven marching contingents. A total of 18 marching contingents and 13 bands participated. The flypast showcased 29 aircraft including Rafale, Su-30, P8i, C-295, Mig-29, Apache, LCH, ALH, and Mi-17 in different formations. Another highlight was the Indian Air Force Veterans' Tableau providing a glimpse of veterans' contributions for the nation. The Tri-Services Tableau showcased "Operation Sindoor: Victory through Jointness."

## 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976: The 'Mini Constitution' of India Explained

**In the News:** The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976, known as the Mini Constitution, introduced sweeping changes to India's Constitution. It added Fundamental Duties, amended the Preamble with 'Socialist' and 'Secular', expanded Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), shifted subjects to the Concurrent List, and curtailed judicial review.

### Key Points:

- **Background and Why Called 'Mini Constitution':** The 42nd Amendment was enacted in 1976 during the Emergency (1975-77) when Indira Gandhi was heading the Indian Congress. The ruling government aimed to strengthen parliamentary supremacy and implement its socio-economic vision through constitutional changes. It is called the 'Mini Constitution' because it touched almost every major aspect of the Constitution, including the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, Centre-State relations, and judicial powers.
- **Key Changes to the Preamble:** One of the most symbolic changes was made to the Preamble. The words "Socialist" and "Secular" were added to "Sovereign Democratic Republic," redefining India's ideological identity as a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic." The phrase "Unity of the Nation" was replaced with "Unity and Integrity of the Nation."
- **Addition of Fundamental Duties (Article 51A):** A landmark contribution was the introduction of 10 Fundamental Duties under Article 51A, based on the recommendations of the Sardar Swaran Singh Committee (1976). Later, an 11th duty was added by the 86th Amendment (2002) regarding parental duty to provide education to children.
- **Changes in Centre-State Relations (Seventh Schedule):** The amendment strengthened central authority by transferring five subjects from the State List to the Concurrent List: Education, Forests, Weights and Measures, Protection of Wild Animals and Birds, and Administration of Justice. This reduced state autonomy and enhanced central control, significantly impacting federal balance.
- **Impact on Parliament and Executive Authority:** The amendment significantly enhanced executive dominance. The President was made bound to the advice of the Council of Ministers. The Centre was empowered to deploy central forces in states for law and order under Article 257A. Special discretionary powers were given to the Prime Minister and Speaker of Lok Sabha under Article 329A.

### Beating Retreat Ceremony: Meaning, History and Significance

**In the News:** The Beating Retreat Ceremony marks the formal conclusion of India's Republic Day celebrations. Held at Vijay Chowk, New Delhi, it showcases military band performances and reflects a centuries-old military tradition symbolising the end of combat.

#### Key Points:

- **What is the Beating Retreat Ceremony:** The Beating Retreat is a military ceremony that signals the end of formal military engagements for the day and represents the conclusion of Republic Day events in modern India. The ceremony primarily consists of musical performances by massed bands of the Indian Armed Forces. As the sun sets, the bands play patriotic and traditional tunes, creating a solemn yet celebratory atmosphere that reflects discipline, tradition, and national pride.
- **Historical Origins of the Tradition:** The Beating Retreat traces its roots to European military traditions, especially 17th-century England during the reign of King James II. Troops were ordered to beat drums, lower flags, and organise a parade at sunset to signal the end of the day's combat. This practice was earlier known as "watch setting" and took place after firing a single round from the evening gun.
- **Introduction in India:** In India, the ceremony was introduced in the early 1950s, soon after Independence. According to the Union Ministry of Culture, the ceremony was indigenously developed by Major Roberts of the Indian Army, who adapted the traditional retreat concept into a unique Indian display featuring massed military bands.
- **Venue and Organization:** The ceremony is held at Vijay Chowk, located between Rashtrapati Bhavan and India Gate. This iconic location adds grandeur and symbolic value, as Vijay Chowk is associated with national ceremonies and state functions. The President of India arrives in a cavalry unit escorted by the 'President's Bodyguards' (PBG). When the President arrives, the PBG commander orders the National Salute, followed by the playing of the Indian National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana.

### President Approves Ashok Chakra for Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla

**In the News:** President Droupadi Murmu has approved gallantry awards for 70 Armed Forces personnel, including the Ashok Chakra for Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla. The honours recognise exceptional bravery, service, and sacrifice across the Army, Navy, and Air Force, including several posthumous awards.

#### Key Points:

- **Ashok Chakra for Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla:** Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla has been awarded the Ashok Chakra, India's highest peacetime gallantry award. He made history by becoming the first Indian to visit the International Space Station, marking a milestone in India's aerospace and defence-linked achievements.
- **Other Major Gallantry Awards:** The President approved Kirti Chakras for Major Arshdeep Singh, Naib Subedar Doleshwar Subba Singh, and Group Captain Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair. Additionally, 13 Shaurya Chakras were conferred, including one posthumous award. The honours also include one Gallantry Bar to the Sena Medal, 44 Gallantry Sena Medals (five posthumous), six Gallantry Nao Sena Medals, and two Gallantry Vayu Sena Medals, recognising bravery across all three services.
- **Military Decorations for Distinguished Service:** Beyond gallantry awards, the President approved 301 military decorations for Armed Forces and other personnel. These include 30 Param Vishisht Seva Medals, four Uttam Yudh Seva Medals, 56 Ati Vishisht Seva Medals, and nine Yudh Seva Medals. Several Distinguished Sena, Nao Sena, and Vayu Sena Medals were also approved, along with two Distinguished Bars to the Sena Medal, 43 Distinguished Sena Medals, eight Distinguished Nao Sena Medals, 14 Distinguished Vayu Sena Medals, and 135 Vishisht Seva Medals, highlighting exemplary service, leadership, and professionalism in both operational and non-operational roles.
- **India's Gallantry Awards System:** India's gallantry awards system honours acts of bravery in both wartime and peacetime. The Ashok Chakra, Kirti Chakra, and Shaurya Chakra are peacetime gallantry awards, while medals such as the Param Vir Chakra are awarded during war. These honours uphold the values of courage, sacrifice, and devotion to duty, strengthening morale within the Armed Forces and inspiring future generations.

### Neolithic Relics Unearthed at Lakkundi Boost UNESCO Bid

**In the News:** Excavations at Lakkundi village in Karnataka's Gadag district have yielded relics dating back to the Neolithic period, significantly strengthening efforts to secure UNESCO World Heritage status for the historic settlement. The findings underline Lakkundi's deep antiquity and layered cultural history, extending far beyond its well-known medieval temples.

#### Key Points:

- **Current Excavation Details:** An Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-supervised excavation began on January 16, 2026, at the Kote Veerabhadreshwar Temple premises in Lakkundi village, located about 12 kilometres from Gadag town. The excavation was prompted by villagers unearthing valuable artefacts while digging foundations for a house, leading to renewed archaeological attention
- **Historical Significance of Lakkundi:** Earlier known as Lökkigundi, the village is referenced in 11th and 12th century inscriptions where it was compared to Amaravati, the legendary capital of Indra, for its prosperity. Lakkundi was a major economic, religious and cultural centre from the 10th-13th centuries, flourishing under the Kalyana Chalukyas and later the Hoysalas. It housed a "tankashale" (mint) and served as the capital of Hoysala ruler Eradane Ballala in 1192 AD.
- **Religious Diversity and Architectural Legacy:** Lakkundi was the karmabhoomi of Queen Attimabbe, a noted 11th-century Jain philanthropist who commissioned temples, Jain basadis, and wells. The village sheltered 12th-century sharanas such as Shivasharana Ajaganna and Sharane Mukhtayakka, associated with Basaveshwara's Bhakti movement.
- **UNESCO Heritage Push and Conservation Efforts:** The Karnataka government has revived long-pending excavation and conservation plans under Tourism Minister H.K. Patil. The Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation and the Archaeology Museums and Heritage Department have collected over 1,050 artefacts from local households, many now displayed in an open museum. The State has partnered with the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) to finalise a proposal to include Lakkundi and surrounding temples in UNESCO's tentative list, with further surveys likely to expand the list of protected monuments.

### UGC's new regulations to deal with caste-based discrimination and the opposition to them

**In the News:** The University Grants Commission (UGC) notified the University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026, aimed at tackling caste-based discrimination in higher education institutions (HEIs). The regulations establish enforceable mechanisms with strict penalties for non-compliance, marking a shift from advisory guidelines to legally binding rules.

#### Key Points:

- **Broad Coverage of Discrimination:** The regulations define caste-based discrimination as any unfair or biased treatment against Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This explicitly extends legal protection to OBCs, correcting a major omission in the earlier draft framework.
- **Mandatory Equal Opportunity Centres (EOCs):** Every higher education institution must establish an Equal Opportunity Centre (EOC) to promote equity, social inclusion, and equal access. Each institution must form an Equity Committee under the EOC, chaired by the head of the institution, with mandatory representation from SCs, STs, OBCs, persons with disabilities, and women, ensuring inclusive decision-making and grievance redressal.
- **Reporting and Compliance Framework:** EOCs must submit bi-annual reports, while institutions are required to file an annual report on equity-related measures to the UGC, strengthening institutional accountability.
- **National-Level Monitoring Mechanism:** UGC will establish a national monitoring committee comprising representatives from statutory bodies and civil society to oversee implementation, review complaints, and suggest preventive measures.
- **Strict Penalties for Non-Compliance:** Institutions violating the regulations may face debarment from UGC schemes, prohibition on offering degree, distance, or online programmes, or even removal from UGC recognition.

### What Is 'ASC ARJUN'? Indian Railways' New Humanoid Security Robot

**In the News:** Indian Railways deployed its first-ever humanoid robot, ASC ARJUN, at Visakhapatnam Railway Station in Andhra Pradesh. Developed by the Railway Protection Force using indigenous technology, the robot marks a milestone in technology-led passenger safety and station management, reflecting Indian Railways' commitment to artificial intelligence, automation, and indigenous innovation for safer public infrastructure.

#### Key Points:

- **Historic Deployment:** ASC ARJUN represents the first-ever deployment of a humanoid robot on the Indian Railways network, marking a significant step towards smart and technology-driven railway stations. The robot was unveiled by Inspector General (RPF) Shri Alok Bohra and Divisional Railway Manager Shri Lalit Bohra in the presence of Senior Divisional Security Commandant (RPF) Shri A.K. Dubey.
- **Indigenous Development:** The humanoid robot has been fully designed and developed in Visakhapatnam using home-grown technology by the Railway Protection Force (RPF), Visakhapatnam.



- **Advanced Security Features:** ASC ARJUN is equipped with a Face Recognition System (FRS) for intrusion detection, AI-based crowd monitoring during peak passenger hours, and real-time connectivity with RPF control rooms.
- **Multilingual Passenger Assistance:** The robot makes automated public announcements in English, Hindi, and Telugu, providing real-time information and guidance to passengers. It is designed with passenger interaction in mind, offering friendly gestures such as "Namaste" for passengers and salutes for RPF personnel, making stations more approachable and user-friendly.
- **Autonomous Patrol Capabilities:** ASC ARJUN has semi-autonomous navigation with obstacle avoidance capabilities along predefined paths, enabling 24×7 platform patrolling. This continuous monitoring optimizes deployment of RPF personnel and reduces pressure on manpower while maintaining round-the-clock surveillance.

### Uttarakhand Implements Uniform Civil Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026

**In the News:** The Uttarakhand Government implemented the Uniform Civil Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026, marking one year since the state became the first in India to enforce a Uniform Civil Code. The ordinance was promulgated by the Governor under Article 213 of the Constitution of India and came into force with immediate effect, introducing procedural, administrative, and penal refinements to ensure effective and transparent implementation of the UCC Act, 2024.

#### Key Points:

- **Constitutional Framework:** The Uniform Civil Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026, was promulgated by the Governor of Uttarakhand under Article 213 of the Constitution of India following approval from the Chief Minister's Office.
- **UCC Day Celebrations:** January 27, 2026, was observed statewide as "UCC Day" to mark the completion of one year since the Uniform Civil Code was enforced on January 27, 2025. Awareness programs and public interaction events were organized across urban and rural areas in all districts of the state to reinforce citizen engagement with the reformed civil framework.
- **Historic Milestone:** Uttarakhand is the first Indian State to implement a Uniform Civil Code. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami stated that by implementing the UCC, Uttarakhand has shown the way for other states, building public trust through transparency and simplicity in its implementation over the past year.
- **Digital Transformation of Marriage Registration:** Prior to the UCC, marriages were registered under the Uttarakhand Compulsory Registration of Marriages Act, 2010, through an entirely offline process requiring physical presence at sub-registrar offices.
- **2026 Amendments:** The amendments align criminal procedures and penal provisions with India's new legal codes, strengthen registration-related powers, and enhance the appellate mechanism. The provisions of the Code have been made clearer and more practical to ensure effective and transparent implementation.

### Why Madhya Pradesh Has Declared 2026 as the Year of Agriculture?

**In the News:** Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav officially launched the Farmer Welfare Year 2026 (also known as Krishak Kalyan Varsh) at a state-level programme at Jumboori Maidan, Bhopal on January 11, 2026. During the 77th Republic Day celebrations, Governor Mangubhai Patel formally announced and reiterated the state's resolve to observe 2026 as the "Year of Agriculture" while outlining the government's achievements and future roadmap.

#### Key Points:

- **Agriculture Budget Expansion:** The budget for agriculture and allied sectors has witnessed a dramatic increase from ₹600 crore in 2002–03 to over ₹27,000 crore in 2024–25, demonstrating the government's sustained commitment to the sector.
- **e-Mandi Digital Revolution:** The e-Mandi scheme has been implemented in 259 agricultural markets (mandis) across the state, with approximately 40 lakh farmers registered on the digital platform.
- **Enhanced Cattle Welfare Support:** Grants for destitute cattle in cow shelters have been doubled from ₹20 to ₹40 per animal. Correspondingly, budgetary allocation for cattle welfare has increased from ₹250 crore to ₹505 crore, supporting both animal welfare and rural livelihoods linked to cattle rearing.
- **Rural Infrastructure Development:** Major initiatives have been launched for rural development, including housing under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (11 lakh houses approved, 4 lakh completed), road connectivity through Chief Minister's Majra-Tola Yojana (₹21,000 crore approved for connecting 20,000 settlements), and enhanced employment generation under the Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (VB-G RAM G), which ensures 125 days of employment instead of 100 days under MGNREGA.
- **Wildlife Conservation and Tourism:** Madhav National Park in Shivpuri has been declared the ninth tiger reserve of the state. New sanctuaries—Dr Bhimrao Sanctuary in Sagar district and Jahangir Sanctuary in Sheopur district—have been



established. Nauradehi Sanctuary is being developed as the third habitat for cheetahs, boosting eco-tourism and creating employment opportunities for local residents.

### What Does Sampoornata Abhiyan 2.0 Aim to Achieve in Just 90 Days?

**In the News:** NITI Aayog launched Sampoornata Abhiyan 2.0, a mission-mode on January 28, 2026, running until April 14, 2026, a three-month nationwide campaign. The initiative aims to achieve full saturation of essential government services in health, nutrition, education, sanitation, and animal welfare across 112 Aspirational Districts and 513 Aspirational Blocks, ensuring no eligible beneficiary is left behind.

#### Key Points:

- **Campaign Launch and Timeline:** NITI Aayog CEO B.V.R Subrahmanyam inaugurated Sampoornata Abhiyan 2.0 on January 28, 2026, in the presence of senior officials, including Mission Director Rohit Kumar, planning secretaries, district collectors, development partners, and state and district officers. The 90-day campaign will conclude on April 14, 2026, focusing on delivering visible, measurable improvements within a fixed timeframe through outcome-based governance.
- **Six KPIs for Aspirational Blocks:** The campaign targets six Key Performance Indicators at the block level: (1) Regular supplementary nutrition for children aged 6 months to 6 years under ICDS, (2) Accurate real-time growth measurement and tracking at Anganwadi Centres, (3) Functional toilets in Anganwadi Centres, (4) Clean drinking water availability in operational Anganwadis, (5) Adequate and functional girls' toilet facilities in schools to improve attendance, and (6) Vaccination of bovine animals against Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) to protect rural livelihoods.
- **Five KPIs for Aspirational Districts:** At the district level, five major indicators will be tracked: (1) Proportion of newborn babies weighed at birth to monitor infant health, (2) Tuberculosis case notification rates from both public and private healthcare facilities, (3) Regular conduct of Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days (VHSND) and Urban Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days (UHSND) for community health outreach, (4) Schools equipped with functional girls' toilets, and (5) Universal animal vaccination coverage for livestock security.
- **Building on Past Success:** Sampoornata Abhiyan 2.0 builds upon the success of the first Sampoornata Abhiyan held in 2024, which demonstrated that focused, time-bound efforts can deliver strong results. The campaign is part of the broader Aspirational Programmes framework, which includes the Aspirational Districts Programme (launched in 2018 covering 112 districts) and the Aspirational Blocks Programme (launched in 2023 covering 513 blocks), both using data-driven approaches to accelerate development in underserved areas.

### Which States Ruled Republic Day 2026 Tableaux? The Winners Might Surprise You

**In the News:** The Republic Day Parade 2026 awards were officially announced, recognizing the best tableaux and marching contingents displayed on Kartavya Path. Maharashtra, Kerala, and Jammu & Kashmir dominated the states category, while the Indian Navy and Delhi Police led among marching contingents. Awards included both jury-based selections and Popular Choice awards determined through MyGov portal voting by citizens.

#### Key Points:

- **Best State Tableaux Winners:** In the States and Union Territories category, Maharashtra secured first place for its tableau titled "Ganeshotsav: A Symbol of Aatmanirbharta", emphasizing cultural self-reliance. Jammu and Kashmir won second place with "Handicrafts and Folk Dances of J&K", showcasing regional heritage. Kerala ranked third for "Water Metro & 100% Digital Literacy", linking technology with inclusive growth.
- **Best Marching Contingents:** The Indian Navy was adjudged the Best Marching Contingent among the three Armed Forces, praised for discipline and synchronization. In the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and auxiliary forces category, Delhi Police won the top honour. Separate judging panels evaluated different categories to ensure fairness, highlighting operational excellence, ceremonial precision and professional standards.
- **Central Ministries Winners:** The Ministry of Culture won Best Tableau among Central Ministries for "Vande Mataram – The Soul Cry of a Nation". The Central Public Works Department received a special award for its tableau commemorating 150 years of Vande Mataram. A dance group titled "Vande Mataram: The Eternal Resonance of India" also received special recognition for artistic expression and historical themes.
- **Popular Choice Awards - Marching Contingents:** Based on public voting through the MyGov portal, the Assam Regiment was voted Best Marching Contingent among the Services, reflecting citizen preference. The CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) topped the CAPFs category in public voting.

- **Popular Choice Awards - Tableaux:** In the public voting category for tableaux, Gujarat ranked first with "Mantra of Swadeshi – Self-Reliance – Freedom". Uttar Pradesh came second for "Culture of Bundelkhand", and Rajasthan secured third place for "Bikaner Gold Art (Usta Art)". The Department of School Education and Literacy won among ministries for its National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 tableau.

### The Rajasthan honour killing Bill, why Governor has returned it

**In the News:** Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagade returned the Bill to curb honour killings that was passed during the Ashok Gehlot government's tenure (2018-23). The current Bhajan Lal Sharma government cited legal inconsistencies with the new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) as grounds for the Bill's return.

#### Key Points:

- **Bill Background:** The Rajasthan Prohibition of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill was passed during Ashok Gehlot's tenure as Chief Minister to address the rising incidents of honour killings in the state.
- **Need for the Legislation:** The Bill was introduced to combat illegal intimidation by self-appointed bodies against Sagotra marriages (within the same gotra) and inter-caste, inter-community, and inter-religious marriages between consenting adults. Chief Minister Gehlot noted that such couples faced violence, intimidation, forced expulsion from homes, and murder in the name of family, caste, or community honour.
- **Definition of Offences:** The Bill defined three key offences—unlawful assembly (gathering to condemn lawful marriages), endangerment of liberty (pressuring persons to prevent or disapprove marriages), and criminal intimidation. All offences were classified as cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable.
- **Punishment Framework:** Unlawful assembly members: 6 months to 5 years imprisonment and fine up to ₹1 lakh, Endangering liberty: 2 to 5 years imprisonment and fine up to ₹1 lakh. Criminal intimidation: Up to 7 years imprisonment, Causing simple hurt: 3 to 5 years imprisonment and fine up to ₹2 lakh, Causing grievous hurt: Minimum 10 years to life imprisonment and fine up to ₹3 lakh, Causing death: Death penalty or life imprisonment (remainder of natural life) and fine up to ₹5 lakh.
- **Reason for Return:** The Bill references sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) that have been repealed. The government argued that Section 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, which punishes murder with death or life imprisonment, is sufficient to address honour killings.

### India Launched Its First AI-Powered University

**In the News:** India launched its first AI-powered university pilot in collaboration with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Google Cloud, and Chaudhary Charan Singh University (CCSU), Meerut. The initiative, announced at Google's AI for Learning Forum in New Delhi, aims to transform higher education through AI-enabled teaching, learning, and administration.

#### Key Points:

- **Government-Industry Partnership:** The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has partnered with Google Cloud and Chaudhary Charan Singh University to build India's first AI-enabled university model. The programme was unveiled in the presence of Skill Development Minister Jayant Chaudhary.
- **CCSU as National Pilot Campus:** Chaudhary Charan Singh University in Meerut has been selected as the pilot campus where AI tools will be tested and evaluated before nationwide rollout. CCSU will function as a centre of excellence, documenting best practices for other institutions. Technical implementation will be managed by Placecom.
- **Gemini AI Platform Deployment:** Google Cloud's Gemini AI platform will power both academic and administrative functions. Students will access personalized AI tutors that adapt to individual learning speeds, support regional languages, and identify skill gaps aligned with job market needs.
- **Focus on Educational Inclusion:** The project aims to bridge educational gaps linked to language, location, and resources. AI tutors in regional languages and digital access to advanced tools will benefit students from regional and non-metro institutions who often lack exposure to cutting-edge learning technologies.
- **National AI Framework:** Based on outcomes from the Meerut pilot, MSDE plans to develop a National Best Practice Framework to guide over 50,000 colleges and 1,200 universities in adopting AI across India's higher education system.

### Sunetra Pawar, Set to Take Oath as Maharashtra's Deputy CM in 2026

**In the News:** Sunetra Pawar took oath as Maharashtra's first woman Deputy Chief Minister, creating a historic milestone in the state's political history. The 62-year-old leader was unanimously elected as the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) Legislature Party leader following the tragic death of her husband, Ajit Pawar, the former Deputy Chief Minister and NCP supremo, in a plane crash at Baramati on January 28, 2026.

**Key Points:**

- **Oath Ceremony and Political Process:** Sunetra Pawar was sworn in by Maharashtra Governor Acharya Devvrat at Raj Bhavan in a ceremony attended by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and senior NCP leaders including Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare, and Chhagan Bhujbal.
- **Cabinet Portfolios Assigned:** Sunetra Pawar has been entrusted with three key portfolios: Excise, Sports and Youth Welfare, and Minority Affairs (Minorities Development and Auqaf/Waqf departments).
- **Background and Political Journey:** Sunetra Pawar is a senior NCP leader and sitting Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament, though she is not currently a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council. Until the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, she had largely remained out of the public spotlight. In 2024, she contested from Baramati on the NCP ticket but lost to her sister-in-law, NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) MP Supriya Sule, in a high-profile electoral contest.
- **Political Significance and Historic Milestone:** The appointment carries strong political symbolism as Sunetra Pawar becomes Maharashtra's first woman Deputy Chief Minister in the state's history, marking a landmark moment for women's representation in leadership roles.

**The Supreme Court Declared Menstrual Health a Fundamental Right**

**In the News:** The Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark verdict in *Dr. Jaya Thakur vs Government of India*, declaring the right to menstrual health a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. A bench comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan issued a continuing mandamus directing the Central and state governments to ensure free sanitary napkins and functional toilets in all schools.

**Key Points:**

- **Constitutional Framework and Substantive Equality:** The Supreme Court anchored its reasoning in the concept of "substantive equality," expanding the interpretation of Article 14 (Right to Equality), Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty), and Article 21A (Right to Free and Compulsory Education). The bench observed that treating everyone exactly the same may perpetuate inequality, noting that "equal consideration for all may demand very unequal treatment in favour of the disadvantaged."
- **Mandatory Provision of Free Sanitary Napkins:** All government and private schools must provide free oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins (meeting ASTM D-6954 standard) to girl students in Classes 6 through 12. These should be dispensed preferably through vending machines within toilet premises or via a designated school authority.
- **Infrastructure and Toilet Facilities:** Schools in both urban and rural areas must maintain functional, gender-segregated toilets with usable water connectivity, designed to ensure privacy and accessibility for children with disabilities. The Court emphasized that Section 19 of the Right to Education Act's requirement for separate toilets is not merely infrastructural but substantive, as lack of such facilities leads to absenteeism and dropout.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Corners:** Schools have been directed to establish dedicated Menstrual Hygiene Management corners equipped with emergency essentials including spare innerwear, spare uniforms, and disposable bags to handle menstruation-related exigencies such as staining or leakage.
- **Destigmatization Through Education and Training:** The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) have been directed to incorporate age-appropriate, gender-responsive curricula on puberty and menstruation for all students.

**Why a Red Bag Became the Symbol of the Budget: The History Behind It**

**In the News:** Every year on Budget Day, the Finance Minister's appearance outside Parliament carrying Budget documents attracts significant public attention. The red bag or pouch has evolved from a colonial-era briefcase into a powerful symbol representing India's financial governance, cultural identity, and the nation's transition from traditional to digital practices.

**Key Points:**

- **British Origins of the Red Budget Box:** The red color tradition in Budget presentations traces back to British parliamentary practice dating to 1860, when British Chancellor William E. Gladstone introduced a red leather briefcase decorated with the Queen's monogram, later known as the "Gladstone Box." Red was chosen because it appeared prominently in royal symbols



and was favored by Prince Albert, establishing a lasting feature of British Budget Day. The term "budget" itself comes from the French word bougette, meaning a small leather bag, explaining why finance ministers traditionally pose with a bag before entering Parliament.

- **Adoption of the Tradition in Post-Independence India:** India adopted the Budget bag tradition after independence, with the country's first Finance Minister R.K. Shanmukham Chetty presenting the first Union Budget in 1947 while carrying a bag, initiating a custom that continues today. For decades, Indian finance ministers followed the British precedent of carrying Budget papers in a red or leather briefcase, symbolizing authority but also serving as a reminder of India's colonial past.
- **Historic Break from Colonial Custom in 2019:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made history in 2019 by breaking the long-standing colonial custom, choosing to carry Budget documents wrapped in a traditional Indian bahi-khata instead of a leather briefcase.
- **Cultural Significance of Red Cloth and Bahi-Khata:** The red cloth used by Sitharaman was a deliberate choice rooted in Indian tradition, where red is considered auspicious and often used to cover sacred books and important documents. The bahi-khata is a traditional red cloth ledger historically used by Indian traders and shopkeepers for keeping accounts, making it culturally relevant and symbolically meaningful.
- **Transition to Paperless and Digital Budget:** From 2021 onwards, Nirmala Sitharaman introduced another major innovation by presenting a paperless Budget using a digital tablet instead of printed documents. To maintain tradition while embracing modernity, the tablet was placed inside a traditional bahi-khata style cover wrapped in red cloth.

### 34th Foundation Day of National Commission for Women

**In the News:** The National Commission for Women (NCW) celebrated its 34th Foundation Day on January 30, 2026, at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, commemorating over three decades of commitment towards safeguarding and advancing women's rights and dignity across India. The event was organized around the theme "Swasthya hi Sashaktikaran" (Health is Empowerment), reinforcing that women's health lies at the core of empowerment, social equity, and national development. Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda served as Chief Guest, while Women and Child Development Minister Annpurna Devi and Minister of State Savitri Thakur graced the occasion as Guests of Honour.

#### Key Points:

- **Establishment and Constitutional Framework:** The NCW is a statutory body established on January 31, 1992, under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990, making it India's apex statutory body for protecting women's rights, so the 34th Foundation Day would be January 31, 2026, but the celebration was held on January 30. Its establishment resulted from recommendations by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) and the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000).
- **Commission Structure and Composition:** The Central Government nominates the NCW body to ensure representation from various fields relevant to women's welfare. The structure includes a Chairperson committed to women's causes, five Members with experience in law, trade unionism, management, women's voluntary organizations, administration, or social welfare (with at least one member each from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes), and a Member-Secretary expert in management, sociology, or an experienced civil servant. All members hold office for three years or until age 65, whichever is earlier. The current Chairperson is Vijaya Rahatkar.
- **Theme and Central Message - "Swasthya hi Sashaktikaran":** The Foundation Day celebrations emphasized women's health as the cornerstone of empowerment and nation-building.
- **Honors and Recognitions:** Eminent scientists from ISRO and DRDO featured in the NCW Calendar 2026 were honored for their outstanding contributions to nation-building. Dr. Tessy Thomas, widely known as the "Missile Woman of India," was felicitated for her exemplary service and leadership in defence science. The Commission also honored V. Kamakoti, Padma Shri awardee and Director of IIT Madras, for his invaluable support in developing the AI module for "Tere Mere Sapne," a flagship NCW programme aimed at strengthening pre-marital communication and counselling.
- **Key Initiatives and Programmes:** NCW has launched multiple initiatives including a WhatsApp helpline and 24x7 Women Helpline providing online support, psychological counseling, and links to police and hospitals. Mahila Jan Sunwai is a pilot project facilitating speedy disposal of complaints via in-person and online hearings.
- **New Launches and Continued Commitment:** Several initiatives were launched during the Foundation Day event, including a monthly Jagriti magazine, a book on empowering motherhood, and a digital training module for Tere Mere Sapne Pre-Marital Communication Centres. Minister Nadda reaffirmed that women-centric policies will continue to be a national priority.



## INTERNATIONAL

### USA's NDAA 2026 and India

**In the News:** U.S. President Donald Trump signed the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) for Financial Year 2026 into law, emphasizing deeper U.S. engagement with India and the Quad to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific.

**Key Points:**

- **NDAA 2026 Signing:** President Trump signed the NDAA for FY 2026 (October 2025 - September 2026) on December 18, 2025, enabling the Department of Defense to carry out the "Peace through Strength" agenda and protect against domestic and foreign threats.
- **Indo-Pacific Focus:** The Act urges strengthening U.S. defence alliances in the Indo-Pacific, with expanded cooperation with India through the Quad framework, including joint military exercises, defence trade, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance.
- **India Recognized as Key Ally:** India is explicitly recognized as a key U.S. ally under the law, marking a significant diplomatic acknowledgment in U.S. legislation.
- **Nuclear Liability Provision:** The NDAA mandates the U.S. Secretary of State to establish a joint consultative mechanism within the U.S.-India Strategic Security Dialogue to assess implementation of the 2008 Indo-U.S. nuclear deal and align India's domestic nuclear liability rules with international norms.
- **India's SHANTI Bill (2025):** Two days before the NDAA signing, India's Parliament cleared the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, which repeals the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010.
- **SHANTI Bill Provisions:** The Bill caps operator liability for nuclear incidents at ₹3,000 crore, removes supplier liability clauses, aligns India with the Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage, and encourages private sector and foreign participation in India's nuclear sector.

### With Record Oscar Nominations, 'Sinners' Spotlights Unique Film Ownership Model

**In the News:** Ryan Coogler's film *Sinners* made Oscar history by receiving a record-breaking 16 nominations at the 98th Academy Awards, surpassing the previous record of 14 held by *La La Land* (2016), *Titanic* (1997), and *All About Eve* (1950).

**Key Points:**

- **Record Oscar Nominations:** *Sinners*, a vampire-horror film starring Michael B. Jordan, received 16 Academy Award nominations including Best Picture, Best Director, and multiple acting and technical categories—the most nominations in Oscar history.
- **Groundbreaking Ownership Deal:** Warner Bros. agreed to return ownership rights of *Sinners* to director Ryan Coogler after 25 years, potentially generating revenue for him in perpetuity—a rare arrangement in the film industry.
- **Warner Bros.' Policy Reversal:** This deal represents a dramatic shift from Warner Bros.' 2017 stance when they refused similar terms to director Quentin Tarantino for *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, ultimately losing that film to Sony, which granted Tarantino full copyright ownership after 10-30 years.
- **Second Life Phenomenon:** While DVD-era cult classics like *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004) and *The Big Lebowski* (1998) earned significant post-theatrical revenue, streaming has exponentially amplified this phenomenon through multiple licensing deals across territories and platforms.
- **Other Notable 2026 Oscar Outcomes:** *One Battle After Another* received 13 nominations; *Wicked: For Good* and its stars were completely shut out despite the first *Wicked* performing well previously; actor Chase Infiniti and Paul Mescal were notably snubbed.

### How Donald Trump is driving de-dollarisation, and contributing to the gold surge

**In the News:** Gold prices crossed the historic \$5,000-per-ounce mark for the first time, driven by central banks worldwide increasing their gold reserves amid growing concerns over US dollar dominance. The RBI now holds 17% of its forex reserves as gold, up from 12% a year ago.

**Key Points:**

- **Central Banks' Gold Buying Spree:** Central banks globally have been aggressively accumulating gold reserves. Leading the charge in 2025 were Poland (95 tonnes), Kazakhstan (49 tonnes), and Brazil (43 tonnes) according to World Gold Council

data. The RBI's gold holdings increased by 4 tonnes, but the value of its gold reserves rose 70% over the past year due to price appreciation. Last week, RBI's forex reserves increased by \$14 billion, with nearly a third of this rise coming from the appreciation in value of its 880-tonne gold kitty.

- **Gold's Rising Share in Forex Reserves:** What matters is gold's relative position in central bank reserves. The RBI now holds 17% of its forex reserves as gold, up from 12% a year ago. Over the past year, RBI's foreign currency assets increased by just 5% while total reserves rose 12%, with gold being the primary driver
- **Trump's Policies Weakening the Dollar:** According to Morgan Stanley economists, these factors are accelerating the transition away from the dollar. Despite Trump threatening BRICS nations with 100% additional tariffs should they move forward with a common currency, his actions have weakened the greenback's status. The US dollar weakened by 9% in 2025, the most in almost a decade, helping drive gold prices higher.
- **Record Gold Prices in India:** Domestic gold prices hit a fresh lifetime high of Rs 1,52,500 per 10 grams, surging nearly Rs 7,000 (5%) and crossing the Rs 1.5 lakh mark for the first time. Indian gold rates have jumped over 10% or Rs 14,000 in 2026 so far. Domestic prices are trading at a premium to international prices due to rupee weakness, with the Indian rupee depreciating over one rupee against the dollar since the start of 2026, with USDINR futures trading above 91.
- **Strong Gold Demand Fundamentals:** According to the World Gold Council, total gold demand grew 3% year-on-year to 1,313 tonnes in Q3, the highest quarterly total on record, worth \$146 billion (up 44% year-on-year). Year-to-date demand is 1% higher at 3,717 tonnes, valued at \$384 billion (up 41% year-on-year). ETF buying reached 222 tonnes in Q3, while bar and coin demand remained above 300 tonnes for the fourth consecutive quarter. Central bank buying remained elevated at 220 tonnes in Q3, up 28% from the prior quarter, though year-to-date buying of 634 tonnes was slower than 724 tonnes in the same period last year.

### As China purges top military general Zhang Youxia, the key theories around the extraordinary move

**In the News:** China announced an investigation into Zhang Youxia, the only remaining Vice Chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission (CMC), for "suspected serious violations of discipline and law." This marks an unprecedented development in China's ongoing military purges, leaving the seven-member CMC with only two people:

#### Key Points:

- **Who is Zhang Youxia:** Zhang Youxia, 75, is a veteran leader who joined the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1968 and holds the seniormost army rank of general. He was also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party Central Committee, among the top political bodies in China. Zhang shares both professional and personal ties with President Xi Jinping, as their fathers were senior party leaders who knew each other.
- **Unprecedented Scale of Military Purges:** Since 2023, China has rapidly purged top defence officials including former Defence Minister Li Shangfu, former Foreign Affairs Minister Qin Gang, and PLA Rocket Force generals. The CMC, which oversees weapons procurement and combat preparedness, is now at its lowest-ever strength. An analysis shows that of 81 generals promoted by Xi since October 2022, at least 14 have been investigated while at least 23 have effectively disappeared. The investigation also includes CMC member Liu Zhenli, 61, chief of the CMC's Joint Staff Department and another decorated war hero from Vietnam campaigns.
- **Key Theories Behind Zhang's Removal:** Multiple theories exist for Zhang's purge. The Wall Street Journal reported allegations of leaking information about China's nuclear-weapons program to the US, accepting bribes for official acts including promoting an officer to defence minister, and forming political cliques. SCMP reported Zhang was accused of failing to rein in close associates, family members and relatives, and not flagging problems to party leadership.
- **Impact on PLA and Xi's Authority:** The purges will likely impact PLA warfighting capabilities in the short term, with lower-level officials linked to Zhang being targeted. Analysts note that constant replacement of experienced commanders will affect trust, cohesion, logistics, training, and hierarchy. While military activities around Taiwan and skirmishes in the South China Sea will continue, actual war planning becomes more challenging.

### US Withdraws from the World Health Organization: Reasons, Process and Global Impact

**In the News:** The United States has formally exited the World Health Organization (WHO) after completing a mandatory notice period, following an executive order issued by President Donald Trump on the first day of his presidency in 2025.

#### Key Points:

- **Reasons for Withdrawal:** President Trump announced the decision to leave the WHO on the first day of his presidency in 2025, citing alleged failures by the organization in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. US officials claimed that WHO's management decisions caused severe economic and public health consequences for the United States
- **Dispute Over Outstanding Membership Fees:** Outstanding US dues to WHO are estimated at around \$260 million for 2024 and 2025. However, the US State Department disputed the interpretation that payment was a precondition for exit.
- **WHO's Financial Crisis:** The withdrawal has triggered a severe financial crisis for WHO, as the US traditionally contributed around 18% of WHO's total funding (accounting for 18% of the agency's budget in 2023), making it the organization's largest single donor.
- **Global Health Impact:** UN humanitarian affairs office (OCHA) spokesperson Jens Laerke highlighted WHO's indispensable role, noting that the world lives longer, healthier, perhaps a little bit happier because of WHO.

### India-EU Free Trade Agreement Called 'Mother of All Deals' Signed at 16th Summit: Explained

**In the News:** At the 16th India-EU Summit held in New Delhi on January 27, 2026, India and the European Union announced the conclusion of long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, dubbed the "mother of all deals" by EU leaders. Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa, marking a major diplomatic and economic breakthrough after nearly two decades of negotiations.

#### Key Points:

- **Historic Agreement Concluded:** India and the EU formally announced the conclusion of FTA negotiations on January, 2026, ending a negotiation process that began in 2007 and stalled in 2013 due to differences over tariffs, services, and regulatory standards. The negotiations were relaunched in June 2022, and the 2026 conclusion finally ends a nearly 20-year-long process, making it one of the largest trade deals in the world.
- **Scale and Economic Significance:** The India-EU FTA creates a free trade zone of two billion people, representing 25% of global GDP and nearly one-third of global trade. With bilateral trade already exceeding \$136 billion, the agreement is expected to further expand exports in textiles, gems and jewellery, leather, footwear, services, and manufacturing while improving investor confidence in India.
- **Tariff Reductions and Benefits:** According to the EU, the agreement will save €4 billion every year in duties as India has agreed to cut down, and in some cases eliminate, tariffs on nearly 97% of goods imported from Europe.
- **Security and Defence Partnership (SDP):** Alongside the FTA, India and the EU signed a Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) to enhance cooperation in defence production, maritime security, cyber security, and interoperability between forces. The pact will allow Indian companies to participate in the EU's SAFE (Security Action for Europe) programme, a €150 billion defence financing initiative, and talks will begin on a Security of Information Agreement (SOIA) to deepen defence industrial collaboration.
- **Implementation Timeline:** While India and the EU have finalized negotiations and signed the agreement, the trade deal will take effect sometime in 2027. Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal stated that legal scrubbing of the text will take 5-6 months, with formal signing to be done after that process is completed.

### BAFTA Awards 2026 Nomination for Manipuri Film Boong

**In the News:** "Boong", a Manipuri-language film directed by debutante filmmaker Lakshmi Priya Devi, has secured a nomination in the Best Children's and Family Film category at the BAFTA Awards 2026. The nominations for the EE BAFTA Film Awards were announced by the British Academy in London on January 27, 2026, marking a significant milestone for Indian regional cinema and rare global acknowledgement for a Manipuri-language production.

#### Key Points:

- **BAFTA Nomination:** "Boong" has been nominated in the Best Children's and Family Film category at the BAFTA Awards 2026, competing against major international titles including Disney hits "Lilo & Stitch" and "Zootopia 2" (also called "Zootropolis 2"), as well as the animated science fantasy film "Arco". This recognition highlights the growing acceptance of culturally rooted Asian narratives at major Western award platforms.
- **Film Storyline and Cultural Context:** The film had premiere at the 2024 and was released theatrically in India on September 2025. The coming-of-age film follows the story of a young boy named Boong (played by Gugun Kipgen) from the valley of Manipur, who plans to surprise his mother with a gift. In his innocence, he believes bringing his father back home would be the most special gift.



- **Director's Background:** "Boong" is the first feature film from Lakshmipriya Devi, who previously served as first assistant director on Excel Entertainment movies such as "Luck by Chance" and "Talaash", besides Aamir Khan-starrer "PK" and Mira Nair's series "A Suitable Boy". Devi shared the nomination news on Instagram Stories, expressing gratitude and shock at the recognition.
- **Festival Journey and Recognition:** The film had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2024 and was later named Spotlight Film at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne 2025. It was also showcased at prestigious festivals including the Warsaw International Film Festival 2024, MAMI Mumbai Film Festival 2024, and the 55th International Film Festival of India.
- **BAFTA Awards 2026 Schedule:** The BAFTA Awards 2026 ceremony will take place at London's Royal Festival Hall on February 22, 2026, where "Boong" will compete for the honour in the Best Children's and Family Film category.

### Victoria Beckham Receives French Knighthood in Paris

**In the News:** Fashion designer and former pop star Victoria Beckham has been honoured with the title of Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French Ministry of Culture. The prestigious distinction was conferred at an intimate ceremony in Paris, attended by her family including husband David Beckham and their children, marking a defining moment in her creative career and recognizing her significant contribution to fashion and the arts.

#### Key Points:

- **The Honour:** Victoria Beckham was awarded the Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters, one of France's most prestigious cultural distinctions. The Order is among France's highest honours for artists and cultural figures who have significantly influenced global creative industries, recognizing contributions to art, literature, and cultural influence worldwide.
- **About the Order of Arts and Letters:** Established in 1957, the Order of Arts and Letters is a French cultural honour with Knight being the entry-level grade of the order.
- **Recognition for Fashion Contribution:** The knighthood was awarded by the French Ministry of Culture in recognition of Victoria Beckham's contribution to fashion and the arts.
- **Paris Ceremony:** The ceremony took place in Paris, a city closely associated with Beckham's evolution as a luxury fashion designer.

### Trump Raises South Korea Tariffs to 25 Percent

**In the News:** US President Donald Trump announced a sharp increase in tariffs on South Korean exports, raising them from 15 percent to 25 percent. The decision was announced via Trump's Truth Social platform on Monday, accusing South Korea's legislature of failing to ratify a bilateral trade deal struck between Washington and Seoul fast enough, marking a significant escalation in trade tensions with a major US ally.

#### Key Points:

- **Tariff Hike Details:** President Trump increased tariffs on South Korean goods from 15 percent to 25 percent, marking one of the most significant tariff hikes imposed on a major US ally in recent.
- **Background of US-South Korea Trade Deal:** Washington and Seoul reached a \$350 billion trade framework agreement in July 2025, which was further extended during Trump's summit with South Korean President Lee Jae-myung at the APEC forum in Gyeongju, South Korea, in October 2025.
- **Rationale for Tariff Increase:** President Trump accused South Korea's legislature of "not living up to its Deal with the United States" and questioned why the Korean Legislature had not approved the agreement. Trump claimed that while the US moved quickly to reduce its own tariffs from 25 percent to 15 percent as agreed.
- **Legal Status of Implementation:** As of Monday night, the White House had not issued an executive order giving the higher tariffs legal effect. This suggests the announcement may be part of negotiating pressure rather than an immediately enforceable policy change, though the situation remains fluid.

### Dollar Slides to Four-Year Low After Trump Signals Comfort With Weakness

**In the News:** The U.S. dollar fell to its lowest level in four years after President Donald Trump described the currency's value as "great" when asked whether it had declined too much. The comments, made ahead of an economic speech in Iowa, were interpreted by markets as tacit approval of a weaker currency, triggering accelerated dollar selling and pushing the U.S. dollar index down 1.4% to 95.77, its lowest level since February 2022.

#### Key Points:



- **Trump's Currency Stance:** President Trump told reporters the dollar's value was "great" and stated he would want it to "just seek its own level" rather than seeking further decline.
- **Dollar Index Performance:** The dollar index, which measures the greenback's strength against a basket of six major currencies, hit a session low of 95.566 following Trump's comments. The decline reflects growing investor unease over trade tensions, political uncertainty, and questions surrounding U.S. monetary policy independence.
- **Trade Policy Tensions:** Trump accused South Korea of failing to honor trade commitments and announced plans to raise tariffs on South Korean imports, including automobiles, lumber, and pharmaceuticals, to 25%.
- **Intervention Speculation:** Attention in foreign exchange markets centered on the Japanese yen, which strengthened sharply amid speculation of coordinated U.S.-Japan intervention. The yen traded near 152 per dollar after reports that the New York Federal Reserve checked dollar-yen rates with market participants—often seen as a precursor to official intervention. The yen rallied by as much as 4% over two sessions.
- **Broad-Based Dollar Decline:** The euro rose above \$1.20 for the first time since mid-2021, while sterling climbed to its strongest level since September 2021, underscoring the broad-based nature of the dollar's weakness across major currency pairs.

### State of Finance for Nature 2026

**In the News:** The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released the "State of Finance for Nature 2026: Nature in the Red: Powering the Trillion Dollar Nature Transition Economy" report, revealing a critical financing imbalance where for every dollar invested in protecting nature, US\$30 are spent destroying it. The fourth edition tracks global finance flows to Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and highlights the urgent need to redirect financial flows to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation.

#### Key Points:

- **Alarming Financial Imbalance:** In 2023, US\$7.3 trillion flowed into nature-negative activities—including fossil fuel subsidies and investments in high-impact sectors like utilities and energy. Meanwhile, only US\$220 billion supported Nature-based Solutions (NbS), with private finance contributing a mere US\$23 billion, creating a 30:1 ratio of destruction versus protection.
- **Investment Gap and Targets:** To meet global biodiversity, climate, and land restoration targets, NbS investment must increase 2.5 times to US\$571 billion annually by 2030—equivalent to just 0.5 percent of global GDP. This represents a significant scaling-up challenge for both public and private sectors.
- **Trillion-Dollar Nature Transition Economy:** The report highlights the potential to unlock a trillion-dollar nature transition economy by shifting financial flows from nature-negative to nature-positive activities, creating economic opportunities while addressing environmental challenges.
- **Improved Methodology:** The fourth edition uses enhanced data and more robust methods to track NbS finance flows in 2023, NbS investment needs and opportunities to 2030 and 2050, and nature-negative finance, building on established methods from previous editions.
- **Comprehensive Resources:** The report includes supplementary publications such as "The State of Finance for Nature in the G20," "State of Finance for Nature - Restoration Finance Report," and "State of Finance for Nature in Cities 2024," providing sector-specific and regional analyses.

### Doomsday Clock Moves to 85 Seconds from Midnight

**In the News:** The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the Doomsday Clock to 85 seconds to midnight—the closest it has ever been to symbolic global catastrophe. This marks the third time in five years that the clock has moved closer to midnight, reflecting an unprecedented convergence of nuclear, technological, and geopolitical threats facing humanity.

#### Key Points:

- **Record Proximity to Midnight:** The Doomsday Clock now stands at 85 seconds to midnight, the closest position in its history since creation in 1947. Midnight symbolizes global catastrophic events, including nuclear war and civilizational collapse.
- **Nuclear Weapons Escalation:** Major nuclear powers including Russia, China, and the United States are engaged in aggressive posturing. The risk of nuclear weapon use is described as "unsustainably and unacceptably high" due to military operations under nuclear deterrence conditions and renewed great power competition.

- **Arms Control Breakdown:** The New START Treaty, the last remaining nuclear arms control agreement between the US and Russia, expires on February, 2026, with no clear signal of renewal. Russia suspended inspections and data exchange in 2023, though Putin expressed interest in restarting talks in 2025. Nuclear arms control frameworks are collapsing globally, increasing risks of miscalculation.
- **Geopolitical Flashpoints:** Ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, rising tensions in East Asia (particularly over Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula), and instability in the Western Hemisphere contribute to global insecurity involving nuclear-armed states.
- **Artificial Intelligence Risks:** Unregulated AI integration into military systems poses new threats including AI-enabled escalation, misuse in biological research, and weaponized disinformation. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa warned of "informational armageddon" caused by social media and generative AI spreading disinformation.

### US Museum to Return Ancient Bronze Sculptures to India

**In the News:** The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art in the United States announced on January 28, 2026, its plans to return three ancient bronze sculptures to India following rigorous provenance research that confirmed the artefacts were illegally removed from temples in Tamil Nadu..

#### Key Points:

- **Sculptures Identified for Repatriation:** The three bronze sculptures being returned are masterpieces of South India's bronze-casting tradition and were originally sacred temple icons used in religious rituals and processions. All three sculptures were among the sacred idols carried in temple processions.
- **Provenance Investigation:** The National Museum of Asian Art undertook a systematic review of its South Asian collections, scrutinizing each work's transaction history. In 2023, in collaboration with the Photo Archives of the French Institute of Pondicherry, museum researchers confirmed that the bronzes had been photographed in temples in Tamil Nadu between 1956 and 1959.
- **ASI Verification:** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) reviewed the research findings and affirmed that the sculptures were removed in violation of Indian antiquities law, which prohibits unauthorized removal of heritage objects.
- **Shiva Nataraja Sculpture:** The 'Shiva Nataraja' belonged to the Sri Bhava Aushadesvara Temple in Thiruthuraiipoondi taluk, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu, where it was photographed in 1957. The bronze sculpture was later acquired by the National Museum of Asian Art from Doris Wiener Gallery in New York in 2002. A provenance researcher determined that the Doris Wiener Gallery had provided falsified documentation to facilitate the sale to the museum.
- **Somaskanda and Saint Sundarar Sculptures:** These two sculptures entered the collection of the National Museum of Asian Art as part of a gift of 1,000 objects from Arthur M Sackler in 1987. Research confirmed that 'Somaskanda' was photographed at the Visvanatha Temple in Alattur village, Mannargudi taluk in 1959, and 'Saint Sundarar with Paravai' at the Shiva Temple in Veerasolapuram village, Kallakurichi taluk in 1956.
- **Long-Term Loan Arrangement:** The Ministry of Culture agreed to place the 'Shiva Nataraja' sculpture on long-term loan with the museum. It will remain on display as part of the exhibition 'The Art of Knowing in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Himalayas,' allowing the museum to publicly share the full story of the object's origins, removal, and return while promoting transparency and educating global audiences.

### Numbeo's Cost of Living Index 2026

**In the News:** Numbeo released its Cost of Living Index by City 2026, revealing that Swiss cities continue to dominate global rankings amid rising living expenses driven by inflation, currency fluctuations, and growing demand for premium urban lifestyles. Zurich retained its position as the world's most expensive city with a cost-of-living index score of 118.5. Swiss cities occupy six of the top 10 positions, while major US cities experienced notable declines in rankings

#### Key Points:

- **Cost of Living Index Methodology:** The Cost of Living Index measures average expenses for a family of four, including food, transport, utilities, and rent. Numbeo uses New York City as the baseline (index = 100). Cities with scores above 100 are more expensive than New York, while those below are cheaper.
- **Swiss Dominance:** Switzerland emerged as the global epicenter of high living costs in 2026, with six cities in the top 10. Zurich (118.5), Geneva (116.5), Basel (112.4), Lausanne (111.5), Lugano (110.1), and Bern (110.0) all featured prominently.

- **Zurich Remains Most Expensive:** Zurich retained its top position with a cost-of-living index of 118.5, combining high salaries with very high prices for housing, healthcare, and services. While purchasing power remains strong at 164.4, everyday expenses push overall costs well above most global cities
- **US Cities Decline in Rankings:** Major US cities experienced notable declines in 2026. New York, previously ranked 4th in 2025, dropped to 7th position with an index of 100.0 (baseline), reflecting relative stabilization in rents and currency effects. San Francisco also slipped from 7th to 10th place (97.6), while Honolulu ranked 9th (98.2).
- **Indian Cities Among Most Affordable:** Three Indian cities featured in the bottom 10 rankings as most affordable: Indore (#477), Bhopal (#473), and Patna (#470). These cities overtook North African cities such as Cairo and Pakistani cities like Lahore and Karachi, which were previously ranked in 2025, securing positions as some of the world's lowest-cost cities.
- **Index Components:** The comprehensive index includes multiple metrics: Cost of Living Index (overall expenses), Rent Index (housing costs), Cost of Living Plus Rent Index (combined measure), and Purchasing Power Index (income relative to costs). These components provide a complete picture of urban affordability and economic conditions across global cities.

### EU Branded Iran's IRGC a Terror Group

**In the News:** The European Union formally designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization in a landmark decision that signals a sharp hardening of Europe's stance towards Tehran. EU foreign ministers reached consensus after weeks of deliberation, triggered by reports of violent crackdowns on nationwide protests in Iran.

#### Key Points:

- **What Is the IRGC:** The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was established in 1979 following Iran's Islamic Revolution to protect the clerical political system. Over time, it evolved into a parallel power structure, wielding influence across Iran's military, intelligence agencies, missile programme, economy, and foreign operations
- **Background and Justification:** EU foreign ministers reached consensus after weeks of deliberation, triggered by reports of violent crackdowns on nationwide protests in Iran. European officials cited thousands of alleged deaths, mass arrests, and systematic repression of civilians. The EU concluded that the IRGC plays a central role in enforcing state violence at home while simultaneously supporting destabilizing activities abroad.
- **European Consensus:** Countries that were initially cautious, such as France and Italy, ultimately backed the designation, citing legal clarity and security concerns. Senior EU leaders stated that sustained violence against civilians could not go unanswered.
- **Israeli Response:** Israel welcomed the move, calling it a historic decision. Israeli officials argued that the designation strengthens Europe's ability to disrupt IRGC-linked financial, logistical, and operational networks, many of which operate beyond the Middle East.
- **Legal Framework Changes:** The terrorist listing significantly changes the EU's legal framework. Authorities can now act on the basis of IRGC affiliation without needing to prove involvement in a specific terrorist attack.

### The World Bank Pledged USD 8-10 Billion Annually to India

**In the News:** The World Bank Group announced a massive financial commitment of USD 8-10 billion annually to India for the next five years under a newly agreed Country Partnership Framework (CPF). This strategic partnership, aligned with India's Viksit Bharat (Developed India by 2047) vision, aims to accelerate India's growth trajectory and support its ambition of becoming a developed nation.

#### Key Points:

- **Country Partnership Framework (CPF) – Strategic Roadmap:** The Country Partnership Framework is a strategic roadmap that guides cooperation between India and the World Bank Group. The new CPF outlines priority areas where financial support, technical assistance, and global expertise will be combined to deliver large-scale development outcomes
- **India's Development Partnership Approach:** Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman welcomed the CPF during discussions with the World Bank delegation led by its President in New Delhi. She stressed that India values a development partnership beyond monetary assistance, highlighting the importance of knowledge sharing, technical assistance, and global experience brought by the World Bank Group.
- **World Bank Group Institutional Reforms:** The framework benefits from significant internal reforms undertaken by the World Bank Group since 2023 to become faster, simpler, and more impact-oriented. Many of these reforms were influenced during India's G20 presidency, reflecting India's growing voice in shaping global development architecture.



- **World Bank Group – Institutional Background:** The World Bank Group is a global development institution headquartered in Washington D.C., USA, founded in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference. The organization comprises five core institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) providing loans to middle-income countries, the International Development Association (IDA) offering concessional loans and grants to the poorest countries, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) supporting private sector development, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) providing political risk insurance, and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) resolving investment disputes.

### How Trump's America First approach is fracturing transatlantic unity

**In the News:** President Donald Trump's second term is creating unprecedented fractures in transatlantic unity, challenging the foundational principles of NATO and post-World War II Western solidarity. Trump's "America First" agenda, coupled with demands for drastically increased European defense spending, unwillingness to steadfastly support Ukraine against Russia, and territorial ambitions toward Greenland and Canada, has raised serious concerns in Europe.

#### Key Points

- **Historical Context of NATO and Transatlantic Unity:** NATO was created post-World War II as the bedrock of transatlantic unity, colloquially meant to "keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." The alliance's core is Article 5, which states that an attack on any member is an attack on all, affirming collective self-defense. The UK, victorious in WWII, ensured the US would not retreat to its Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which focused American interests solely on the Americas. However, Trump 2.0 appears to embrace a rechristened "Donroe Doctrine," believing US core interests lie primarily in the Americas rather than maintaining European security commitments.
- **Economic Disparity and Defense Spending Imbalance:** The US GDP is approximately USD 31 trillion with a population of 345 million, while European nations collectively contribute USD 28 trillion with around 600 million people.
- **Evolution of Defense Spending Demands:** During Trump's first term, he demanded European NATO members increase defense spending to 2 percent of their GDP, noting that Germany, the largest European economy, spent only slightly more than 1 percent in 2014. NATO members agreed to a 5% target at the June 2025 Hague Summit, to be reached by 2035 (not already increased). The target comprises 3.5% on defense + 1.5% on defense-related spending
- **Territorial Ambitions and the "Board of Peace":** Trump 2.0's agenda includes territorial ambitions that alarm European allies. President Trump has publicly articulated desires to acquire Greenland, a Danish territory and fellow NATO member, despite Denmark having no objections to strengthened US military presence there for defense purposes.. Trump's Administration also supported UNSC Resolution 2803 creating a Board of Peace, ostensibly for Gaza but appearing as a model for global intervention replacing the UN, with President Donald Trump personally noted as chair in the annex, not the US President institutionally.

## SCIENCE AND TECH

### Adani-Embraer Pact to Manufacture Aircraft in India: Explained

**In the News:** The Adani Group and Brazil's Embraer S.A. have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish India's first aircraft manufacturing facility in collaboration with a major global aircraft manufacturer.

#### Key Points:

- **Partnership Overview:** Adani Defence and Aerospace (a subsidiary of Adani Enterprise Ltd) has partnered with Embraer to set up a regional aircraft manufacturing facility in India, covering aircraft manufacturing, component production, aftermarket services, and pilot training. This will be Embraer's first Final-Line Assembly (FLA) production facility in Asia, and the first such facility in India by any of the world's top three aircraft manufacturers (Boeing, Airbus, Embraer).
- **About Embraer:** Embraer is the world's third-largest aircraft manufacturer after Airbus and Boeing, specializing in regional jets carrying 70 to 140 passengers through its E2 family of aircraft. The company manufactures narrow-body, short- to medium-range passenger aircraft, private jets, defence aircraft, and agricultural planes, making it ideal for India's regional connectivity needs.
- **Aircraft Models Under Consideration:** The facility will likely produce either the E-175 (a 76-seater regional jet) or the Embraer E195-E2 (up to 146 seats), both suited for India's regional connectivity plans. Initially, components will be sourced from Brazil, but a complete supply chain will be developed in India over time, involving local MSMEs and component manufacturers.



- **Project Timeline and Location:** Adani Group director Jeet Adani announced that the project site will be finalized "over the next couple of months," with details on investment and specific aircraft type to follow. However, aviation experts suggest it certified for India, given the complexity of setting up production lines and certification processes.

### Akashlabdhi Advances India's Inflatable Space Habitat Mission

**In the News:** Bengaluru-based aerospace startup Akashlabdhi is preparing to launch India's first inflatable space habitat in July 2026, marking a significant milestone in the country's human spaceflight capabilities. The startup, incubated at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), has completed critical safety and validation tests in Switzerland, paving the way for an in-orbit demonstration of its habitat technology later this year.

#### Key Points:

- **AntarikshHAB Technology:** The inflatable habitat named "AntarikshHAB" is designed to address challenges of cost, mass, and limited habitable volume faced by conventional space stations like the International Space Station (ISS).
- **Mission Specifications:** The July 2026 mission will deploy a 80-330 cubic meters module aboard a launch vehicle provided by the SpaceX. The final planned configuration aims for nearly 300 cubic metres, suitable for future human missions in low Earth orbit (LEO).
- **India-Switzerland Research Partnership:** Indian academic partners include IISc, IIT Roorkee, and IIT Delhi, contributing expertise in space structures, materials, systems engineering, and human-centric design. Swiss institutions such as ETH Zurich, EMPA, and the Paul Scherrer Institute are supporting materials science, radiation studies, and validation methodologies.
- **Launch Timeline:** The mission is scheduled for the first quarter of 2026, with specific plans for a July launch, representing a critical step toward India's capability in developing orbital infrastructure for future human spaceflight missions.

### Pechora Missile System and Why Has India Digitised It?

**In the News:** The Indian Air Force successfully completed full digitization of its vintage Pechora surface-to-air missile (SAM) system through an indigenous upgrade programme. The Pechora, inducted in the 1970s and of Russian origin, has been a cornerstone of India's air defence network for nearly five decades.

#### Key Points:

- **About the Pechora Missile System:** The Pechora, officially known as the S-125 Neva/Pechora, is a Soviet-origin, medium-range surface-to-air missile system designed to intercept low- to medium-altitude aerial threats. Inducted into the Indian Air Force during the 1970s, it has been a key element of India's air defence architecture for nearly five decades. The system consists of radar-guided missile launchers and fire control units, typically employing the V-600 missile, and uses the 4R90 Yatagan radar equipped with five parabolic antennas to detect, track, and lock onto targets.
- **Technical Specifications and Capabilities:** The Pechora system has an operational firing range of 30–35.4 km and can engage targets flying at altitudes from as low as 20 meters up to 20–25 km, making it versatile for both low and medium-altitude threats. Its radar can detect targets up to 100 km away, providing early warning and engagement capability.
- **Indigenous Upgrade Programme:** The modernization was executed by Alpha Design Technologies (ADTL), a Bengaluru-based private defence firm that signed a Rs 591.3 crore contract on September 25, 2020. This project marked a major milestone as it became one of the first instances where an Indian private company successfully modernized a vintage Russian-origin weapon system.
- **Successful Validation at Pokhran:** The first fully upgraded Pechora system underwent successful firing trials at the Pokhran test range in Rajasthan between November 6 and December 6, 2025. These user trials validated the system's performance under real field conditions and confirmed operational readiness.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Meghalaya's Living Root Bridges Nominated To UNESCO Heritage List

**In the News:** India officially nominated Meghalaya's "Jingkieng Jri" (Living Root Bridges) for UNESCO's 2026–27 World Heritage evaluation cycle in January 2026. The nomination dossier, titled "Jingkieng Jri / Lyu Chrai Cultural Landscape, Meghalaya," was

formally submitted in Paris by India's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to UNESCO, Vishal V Sharma, to Lazare Assomo Eloundou, Director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre.

**Key Points:**

- **What Are Living Root Bridges:** Living root bridges are natural structures formed by training the aerial roots of rubber fig trees across rivers and streams. Over time, these roots grow stronger and interlock to form sturdy bridges. Unlike concrete bridges, they are alive and continue to strengthen with age. These bridges are examples of sustainable bioengineering passed down through generations.
- **Indigenous Builders:** The living root bridges were built by the indigenous Khasi and Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya using traditional knowledge. Community elders guide younger generations in shaping and maintaining the roots through oral tradition and practice, making it a living cultural tradition.
- **Geographic Location:** The bridges are located in the southern slopes of Meghalaya, mainly across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Popular sites include Nongriat village, home to the famous double-decker root bridge. Surrounded by dense forests, waterfalls, and hills, the region receives heavy rainfall, making these natural bridges essential for connectivity and daily life in remote villages.
- **UNESCO Submission Timeline:** India submitted the nomination dossier for Meghalaya's living root bridges to UNESCO in January 2026. The site will be evaluated during the 2026–27 World Heritage cycle.

**Patna Bird Sanctuary and Chhari-Dhand Added to Ramsar Important Wetland**

**In the News:** Ahead of World Wetlands Day on February 2, 2026, two ecologically significant wetlands—Patna Bird Sanctuary in Etah district, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhari-Dhand in Kutch district, Gujarat—were designated as Ramsar sites of international importance under the global Ramsar Convention. This recognition takes India's total Ramsar wetlands to 98, reflecting the nation's strong commitment to environmental conservation, biodiversity protection, and sustainable wetland management.

**Key Points:**

- **Ramsar Designation and National Commitment:** Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav announced the inclusion of both wetlands in the Ramsar sites list, stating that "the international recognition reflects India's strong commitment to protecting the environment and conserving its wetlands." India became a signatory to the Ramsar Convention in 1982 and has since expanded its network from 26 sites in 2014 to 98 in 2026, representing an increase of over 276 percent.
- **Patna Bird Sanctuary - Avian Biodiversity Hotspot:** Located in Etah, Uttar Pradesh, Patna Bird Sanctuary is a freshwater wetland comprising marshes, woodlands, and grasslands surrounded by agricultural landscapes. The sanctuary has been designated an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) by BirdLife International. It supports 178 bird species and 252 plant species, creating diverse habitats with exceptional biodiversity.
- **Chhari-Dhand - Unique Desert Wetland Ecosystem:** Chhari-Dhand is a seasonal saline wetland located between the famous Banni grasslands and salt flats of Kutch, Gujarat. Despite its arid landscape and harsh climatic conditions, it supports rich wildlife including chinkara, wolves, caracal, desert cats, and desert foxes.
- **Ramsar Convention Framework:** The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is an international treaty signed in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, dedicated to the conservation and wise use of wetlands worldwide.

## IMPORTANT DAYS

**Martyrs' Day**

**In the News:** India observed Martyrs' Day (Shaheed Diwas) on January 30, 2026, commemorating the 78th death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and honoring all freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the nation's independence and unity. The day marked Gandhi's assassination in 1948 at Birla House, New Delhi. President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President C P Radhakrishnan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Union Home Minister Amit Shah paid tributes at Raj Ghat, Gandhi's samadhi, where a Sarva-Dharma Prarthana (multi-faith prayer) was organized.

**Key Points:**

- **Historical Significance:** Martyrs' Day is observed on January 30 to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in 1948. The Government of India declared this date as Martyrs' Day to honor Gandhi's martyrdom and acknowledge countless freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives during colonial rule. The day is also known as Sarvodaya Day, reflecting Gandhi's vision of social justice and upliftment of all sections of society.

- **Two-Minute Silence:** At 11:00 AM across India, a two-minute silence is observed nationwide, encouraging citizens to pause, reflect, and pay collective respect to martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the nation.
- **National Ceremonies at Raj Ghat:** Official ceremonies are held at Raj Ghat, Mahatma Gandhi's cremation site on the banks of the Yamuna River in Delhi. The black marble platform is inscribed with Gandhi's last words, "Hey Ram." National leaders lay multi-color flower wreaths symbolizing respect, gratitude, and remembrance of Gandhi's supreme sacrifice.
- **Military Honours:** Armed forces personnel sound the Last Post using bugles, a traditional military honour signifying final respect to fallen soldiers and national martyrs.
- **Other Martyrs' Day Observances:** India also observes Martyrs' Day on March 23 to honor Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev, who were executed in 1931. While January 30 centers on Gandhi's non-violent philosophy, March 23 remembers young revolutionaries who believed in fearless action, showing that India's freedom struggle had many paths but one shared goal.

### National Voters' Day (NVD) 2026

**In the News:** The President of India presided over the National Voters' Day (NVD) celebrations, marking the 76th foundation day of the Election Commission of India (ECI). The day celebrates democracy and encourages citizen participation in the electoral process. NVD commemorates the establishment of the ECI on January 25, 1950, under Article 324 of the Indian Constitution.

#### Key Points:

- **Theme and Vision:** NVD 2026 adopted the theme "My India, My Vote" with the tagline "Citizen at the Heart of Indian Democracy." This symbolizes the ECI's commitment to designing citizen-centric electoral processes where voter convenience is paramount.
- **Best Election District Awards:** The President presented the Best Electoral Practices Awards to states including Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Gujarat, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Delhi for excellence in technology use, election management, voter awareness, Model Code of Conduct enforcement, and training.
- **Publications Released:** Two publications were launched: "2025: A Year of Initiatives and Innovations" and "Chunav Ka Parv, Bihar Ka Garv," showcasing the ECI's leadership in electoral management and innovations.
- **ECINET Platform Launch (2026):** A user-friendly digital interface integrating more than 40 existing mobile and web applications of the ECI into a single "one-stop" platform for electors, election officials, political parties, and civil society.
- **International Cooperation:** India hosted the India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026 in New Delhi, leading to the adoption of the Delhi Declaration 2026.
- **Historical Electoral Reforms:** Major ECI innovations include Photo Identity Cards (1993), Electronic Voting Machines (1998), SVEEP voter education program (2009), VVPAT for vote verification (2013), NERPAP for roll purification (2015), ERO-NET digital processing (2018), accessible elections for persons with disabilities (2018), and cVIGIL app for reporting violations (2018).

## AWARDS AND HONOURS

### Indian Doctor Wins Wiley Research Heroes Prize 2025

**In the News:** Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, an Indian public health expert, has won the Wiley Research Heroes Prize 2025 in the 'Impact Beyond Academia' category. He is the first Indian to receive this prestigious global recognition, which honors researchers whose work directly influences policy, programmes, and societal outcomes rather than remaining confined to academic publications.

#### Key Points:

- **Award Recognition:** Dr. Lahariya was selected from over 2,000 nominations worldwide and is among only five researchers globally honored in 2025. The Wiley Research Heroes Prize recognizes researchers who ensure that their work is inclusive, innovative, and impactful, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and real-world policy implementation.
- **Category: Impact Beyond Academia:** Dr. Lahariya won the award specifically in the 'Impact Beyond Academia' category for his sustained contribution to public health policy and implementation. This category emphasizes research that goes beyond scholarly publications to create measurable policy impact and societal benefit.

- **Professional Background:** Dr. Lahariya is a health policy researcher, academician, and practicing medical professional. He previously served as a staff member of the World Health Organization (WHO), where he worked on public health programmes and policy frameworks, consistently operating at the intersection of research and governance.
- **Key Research Areas:** His primary research spans crucial public health domains including vaccination programmes and immunization coverage, conditional cash transfer schemes for maternal and child health services, and strengthening primary healthcare delivery systems. These areas directly influence national health outcomes, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

## SPORTS

### Djokovic Rewrote Australian Open Records at 38

**In the News:** Novak Djokovic made tennis history at the Australian Open by defeating world number two Jannik Sinner in an epic semifinal battle. The 24-time Grand Slam champion became the oldest man in the Open Era to reach an Australian Open final, breaking a 53-year-old record previously held by Ken Rosewall. The victory showcased Djokovic's exceptional longevity, elite fitness, and unwavering determination as he chases his record-extending 25th Grand Slam title.

#### Key Points:

- **Historic Record Broken:** Djokovic surpassed Ken Rosewall's 53-year-old record from 1972, when Rosewall reached the Australian Open final at 37 years, two months, and one day old. At 38, Djokovic became the oldest finalist in the Open Era at the Australian Open, a remarkable achievement in modern tennis where physical demands are higher than ever.
- **Epic Semifinal Battle:** Djokovic defeated Jannik Sinner 3–6, 6–3, 4–6, 6–4, 6–4 in a grueling five-set marathon lasting over four hours at Rod Laver Arena. The match finished close to 2 am local time and featured intense rallies and dramatic momentum swings. Despite Sinner firing 26 aces (a career high) and creating 18 break point opportunities, Djokovic saved an astonishing 16 of them, including all eight break points in the deciding fifth set.
- **Career Significance:** The Serbian star is chasing his 11th Australian Open title and a record-extending 25th Grand Slam crown. His last Grand Slam victory came at the 2023 US Open, and his most recent final appearance was at Wimbledon 2024, where he lost to Carlos Alcaraz. This semifinal win demonstrates that Djokovic remains fiercely competitive against the new generation of tennis players.
- **Final Showdown with Alcaraz:** Djokovic will face world number one Carlos Alcaraz in the final, marking his 38th Grand Slam final appearance and the 10th career meeting between the two champions. Djokovic currently leads their head-to-head 5–4, though Alcaraz won their last Grand Slam final at Wimbledon 2024. The match represents a classic clash between experience and youth, making it one of the most anticipated Australian Open finals in recent history.