

Weekly Current Affairs 26th April to 2nd May 2026

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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Shekha Jheel Bird Sanctuary as India's 99th Ramsar Site

In the News: The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has designated Shekha Jheel Bird Sanctuary in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, as a Ramsar site (Wetland of International Importance). The announcement was made by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav, taking India's total Ramsar sites to 99 and Uttar Pradesh's tally to 12 — bringing India closer to a historic century of Ramsar designations.

Key Points:

- **About Shekha Jheel Bird Sanctuary:** Shekha Jheel is a 25-hectare freshwater perennial wetland in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. It came into existence in 1852 following the construction of the Upper Ganga Canal, which divides the lake into two parts. It now stands as India's 99th Ramsar site and Uttar Pradesh's 12th.
- **About Ramsar Sites:** Ramsar sites are wetlands designated under the Ramsar Convention (1971) as Wetlands of International Importance, based on their ecological, botanical, zoological, limnological, or hydrological significance. The designation supports conservation, sustainable use, and international cooperation for wetland protection.
- **Ecological Significance:** The sanctuary serves as a crucial wintering habitat and stopover on the Central Asian Flyway for over 249 water bird species, including the Bar-headed Goose, Painted Stork, and various duck species during the winter season. Mammalian fauna includes the Blackbuck — a Schedule I species under the Wildlife Protection Act — and the Blue Bull (Nilgai).
- **Flora and Vegetation:** The dominant tree species in the sanctuary include Terminalia arjuna and Syzygium cumini. However, the native ecosystem is increasingly threatened by invasive alien species such as Lantana camara, Parthenium hysterophorus, and Water Hyacinth.
- **Threats — Anthropogenic and Ecological:** The wetland faces multiple threats including siltation caused by unscientific mound construction in 1991, loss of forest cover due to land distribution schemes, and increased poaching vulnerability due to nearby road construction. Aggressive water chestnut farming has also reduced foraging surface area for migratory birds.

1st Structured Pulse Procurement in Bihar

In the News: The Government of India has launched Bihar's first-ever structured pulse procurement initiative under the Atmanirbhar Pulses Mission, with organised procurement of masoor (lentil) being led by the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Limited (NCCF). The move is part of broader efforts to strengthen Minimum Support Price (MSP)-based procurement under PM-AASHA and enhance India's self-reliance in pulse production.

Key Points:

- **Bihar's First Structured Pulse Procurement:** For the first time, organised MSP-based procurement of masoor (lentil) has been initiated in Bihar under the Price Support Scheme (PSS). The NCCF is leading procurement operations, while the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited (NAFED) is preparing to scale up operations through its cooperative network across the state.
- **About PM-AASHA:** Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) was launched in 2018 to ensure effective implementation of MSP and protect farmers from price volatility. It operates through three components — the Price Support Scheme (PSS) for physical procurement of pulses, oilseeds, and copra; the Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS) to compensate farmers when market prices fall below MSP; and the Private Procurement and Stockist Scheme (PPSS) to involve private players in procurement.



- **Atmanirbhar Pulses Mission:** Announced in the Union Budget 2025–26 and launched in October 2025, the Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in pulses over the period 2025–26 to 2030–31. It places specific emphasis on Tur (Arhar), Urad, and Masoor — crops critical for daily consumption but currently facing production gaps.
- **Key Objectives of the Mission:** The mission focuses on reducing pulse imports, improving crop yields, promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices, enhancing farmers' incomes, and ensuring long-term nutritional security for the population.
- **Chhattisgarh MSP Procurement — Parallel Expansion:** Alongside Bihar, MSP-based procurement in Chhattisgarh is being driven by the NCCF through the E-Samyukti digital platform and Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) centres spread across multiple districts, focusing on crops like chana and masoor with large-scale farmer participation.

7 AAP Rajya Sabha MPs quit party, set to merge with BJP

In the News: In a major political development, seven of the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) ten Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament resigned from the party and announced their merger with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The announcement was made at a press conference by AAP leader Raghav Chadha, accompanied by Sandeep Pathak and Ashok Mittal, with the required documentation submitted to the Rajya Sabha Chairman.

Key Points:

- **The Defection:** Seven of AAP's ten Rajya Sabha MPs — constituting more than two-thirds of the party's Upper House strength — resigned from AAP and declared their merger with the BJP. The MPs involved include Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak, Ashok Mittal, Harbhajan Singh, Swati Maliwal, Rajinder Gupta, and Vikram Sahney. Signed letters and formal documentation were submitted to the Rajya Sabha Chairman on the day of the announcement.
- **Reasons Cited:** Raghav Chadha, who was recently removed as AAP's Deputy Leader in the Rajya Sabha, stated that the party had "completely strayed from its principles, values and core morals." He accused AAP of working for its own benefit rather than for the country, adding that he had increasingly felt like "the right person in the wrong party." Sandeep Pathak similarly stated that after ten years with the party, he was parting ways with AAP.
- **Anti-Defection Law — Constitutional Provisions:** The anti-defection law, introduced through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment in 1985 and enshrined in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, bars elected representatives from switching parties without risking disqualification. However, mergers supported by at least two-thirds of a party's legislative members are protected from disqualification. The 91st Amendment of 2003 removed the earlier provision that allowed a "split" with one-third support, leaving merger as the only protected route.
- **Legal Questions — Will They Face Disqualification?:** Despite the two-thirds threshold being numerically met, legal experts have raised concerns. Former Lok Sabha Secretary General PDT Achary clarified that numerical strength alone is insufficient — the original party (AAP, led by Arvind Kejriwal) must formally merge with the BJP for the MPs to be protected under the anti-defection law. Since AAP as a party has not merged with the BJP, the seven MPs could still face disqualification proceedings.
- **Historical Precedent:** The first person ever disqualified under the anti-defection law was Lalduhoma, a Lok Sabha member from Mizoram, in 1988, for shifting political allegiance — a case that established a crucial precedent for the law's application. The final authority on disqualification petitions rests with the Speaker or Chairman of the respective House, a process often criticised for delays and political interpretation.

India among countries where Meta automatically blocks flagged content

In the News: India has been identified as one of a limited number of countries where Meta — the parent company of Facebook and Instagram — automatically restricts content at scale based on local law requirements. The development follows Meta's large-scale compliance with takedown notices issued by State authorities and the Union government through the Sahyog portal, a Union Home Ministry initiative.

Key Points:

- **Meta's Automatic Content Blocking in India:** Meta has enabled automatic, large-scale content restriction on Facebook and Instagram in India in response to takedown notices from government and police authorities. Unlike most countries, India is now among a select group where such automatic blocking operates at scale based on local law requirements — with Meta instantaneously restricting access to flagged content without independent review.
- **The Sahyog Portal:** The Sahyog portal is a Union Home Ministry initiative that allows authorised police officials to issue bulk takedown orders and communicate directly with IT intermediaries through a simple online form. It automates and expedites content removal, often targeting political criticism and satirical content, while offering no independent review process. As per the MHA Annual Report 2024-25, over 1,11,185 pieces of suspicious online content were blocked under Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act till March 31, 2025.
- **Legal Basis and Controversy:** The Sahyog portal operates under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, and Rule 3(1)(d) of the Intermediary Guidelines, 2021. Critics argue it circumvents Section 69(A) of the IT Act — which specifically governs blocking orders — and operates opaquely, granting authorities wide censorship powers without adequate legal safeguards or transparency.
- **Safe Harbour Implications:** Under the IT Act framework, social media platforms that fail to comply with government takedown notices risk losing "safe harbour" protection — meaning they could be held legally liable for user-generated content and forced to defend themselves in court alongside content creators whose posts have been flagged.
- **Meta's Compliance Concerns:** Experts have raised alarm over Meta's approach of removing content without adequate scrutiny. Pranesh Prakash, co-founder of the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS), stated that Meta is removing content it is not even legally required to remove. More critically, Meta does not restore content that was taken down unlawfully on its own — it requires the government to issue a formal unblocking order.

Opposition parties moves fresh notice in RS seeking CECs removal

In the News: Opposition parties moved a fresh notice in the Rajya Sabha seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar. The notice was submitted to the Rajya Sabha Secretary General by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and TMC leader Sagarika Ghose, invoking constitutional provisions and relevant legislation — marking a renewed parliamentary effort after earlier notices were rejected by presiding officers of both Houses.

Key Points:

- **The Fresh Notice:** The notice calls for an address to the President seeking the removal of CEC Gyanesh Kumar, invoking provisions of the Constitution, the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (CEC) Act, 2023, and the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. It has been signed by members of the Congress, TMC, SP, DMK, Left parties, Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP), RJD, IUML, and other like-minded parties.
- **Nine Charges Against the CEC:** The notice records nine specific charges against Gyanesh Kumar in detail, including the Election Commission's failure to act on complaints regarding PM Narendra Modi's address to the nation on April 18, 2026 — despite multiple complaints from political parties and citizens. The Opposition alleged that no show-cause notice, advisory, or public response was issued, in stark contrast to the speed of action taken on BJP complaints against Opposition leaders.
- **"Straight Talk" Post Controversy:** The notice highlights the Election Commission's post on X (formerly Twitter) on April 8, following a meeting with a TMC delegation, in which it claimed to have given a "straight talk" to the party. The Opposition described this as the first time in Indian constitutional history that an official communication channel of a constitutional body publicly named and denigrated a recognised political party during an ongoing electoral contest.
- **Other Charges:** Additional charges include an incident involving the alleged use of a BJP state unit's seal on an official Election Commission document in Kerala; concerns over large-scale deletion of voters from electoral rolls in West



Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, described as "mass disenfranchisement"; and allegations that the transfer and posting of bureaucrats in poll-bound states exceeded the Election Commission's constitutional mandate.

- **Constitutional Procedure for CEC Removal:** Under the Constitution and the CEC Act, 2023, the Chief Election Commissioner can be removed only through an address by both Houses of Parliament, passed with a special majority — similar to the procedure for the removal of a Supreme Court judge. The Opposition has urged the Rajya Sabha Chairman to admit the notice, constitute a three-member inquiry committee, and seek Kumar's recusal from election-related duties pending the inquiry's outcome.

Andhra Pradesh Launches Massive Mushroom Mission Worth ₹13,000 Crore

In the News: The Andhra Pradesh government, led by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, announced plans to launch a first-of-its-kind Mushroom Mission with an estimated investment of ₹13,000 crore. The mission aims to make Andhra Pradesh the largest producer of mushrooms in India, surpassing Bihar which currently holds that position.

Key Points:

- **The Mission:** The Andhra Pradesh Mushroom Mission is a first-of-its-kind initiative in the country, with a total estimated investment of ₹13,000 crore. Officials have prepared a comprehensive action plan following directions from Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, and the mission is expected to be formally announced shortly.
- **Production Target:** The mission aims to scale up Andhra Pradesh's annual mushroom production to 67,500 tonnes, surpassing Bihar, which currently leads national production at approximately 45,000 tonnes per year. The initiative is modelled primarily around small and medium production units, each spread across approximately 5,000 square feet, to promote self-employment and sustainable livelihoods in rural areas.
- **Investment and Subsidy Support:** Of the total ₹13,000-crore investment, approximately ₹5,184 crore — nearly 40% of the total project cost — will be extended as subsidy support, jointly funded by the Central and State governments. The project envisages the establishment of around 1.62 lakh mushroom cultivation and business units across the state, along with a limited number of large-scale production units to strengthen supply and processing infrastructure.
- **Focus on Rural and Women Entrepreneurs:** The State government plans to leverage its strong network of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to promote mushroom cultivation at the grassroots level, with particular emphasis on encouraging participation among rural women and small entrepreneurs.
- **Mushroom Varieties and Policy Support:** The mission will focus on commercially viable varieties such as milky mushroom (valued for its heat resilience), paddy straw mushroom, and button mushroom. The State also proposes to classify mushrooms as agricultural produce under the mission framework to facilitate policy support and improved market access.

Justice Lisa Gill Sworn In as First Woman Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh High Court

In the News: Justice Lisa Gill was sworn in as the Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court at a ceremony held at Lok Bhavan in Vijayawada. The oath of office was administered by Andhra Pradesh Governor S. Abdul Nazeer, with Justice Gill succeeding Justice Dhiraj Singh Thakur following his retirement.

Key Points:

- **Swearing-In Ceremony:** Justice Lisa Gill was administered the oath of office by Andhra Pradesh Governor S. Abdul Nazeer at Lok Bhavan, Vijayawada. Chief Secretary G. Sai Prasad commenced the proceedings, while the Registrar General of the High Court read out the Warrant of Appointment issued by the President of India. G. Anantha Ramu, Special Chief Secretary to the Governor, presided over the programme.
- **Dignitaries Present:** The swearing-in ceremony was attended by several prominent dignitaries, including First Lady Sameera Nazeer, Tourism Minister Kandula Durgesh, Members of Parliament (MPs) Kesineni Sivanath and Sana Satish,

Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) P. Anuradha, High Court judges, Director General of Police (DGP) Harish Kumar Gupta, and other senior officials and advocates.

- **Succession:** Justice Lisa Gill takes charge as Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court succeeding Justice Dhiraj Singh Thakur, who retired from the post. Her appointment was formalised through a Warrant of Appointment issued by the President of India.

Ladakh Gets Five New Districts

In the News: Ladakh Lieutenant Governor (L-G) Vinai Kumar Saxena approved the creation of five new districts in the Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh, fulfilling a long-pending demand of the people of the region. With this decision, Ladakh's total number of districts has increased from two to seven.

Key Points:

- **The Five New Districts:** The five newly created districts are Nubra, Sham, Changthang, Zaskar, and Drass. Prior to this decision, Ladakh had only two districts — Leh and Kargil — making it administratively one of the most under-divided regions in the country despite being the largest Union Territory by area.
- **Administrative Significance:** The creation of new districts is aimed at strengthening grassroots governance, decentralising administration, and ensuring faster delivery of public services — particularly to citizens in remote and far-flung areas of Ladakh. The L-G also noted that the move would create new avenues for growth, employment, and entrepreneurship.
- **Prior Approval by the Centre:** The decision had already been approved by the Ministry of Home Affairs in August 2024 under the leadership of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and the L-G's notification on April 27, 2026 formally gave effect to the reorganisation.
- **Background — Ladakh as a Union Territory:** Ladakh was bifurcated from the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and declared a Union Territory on August 5, 2019, when the Central Government also abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, which had granted special status to the state. Since becoming a UT, Ladakh has been under the direct administrative control of the Union Home Ministry.
- **Geographic and Demographic Profile:** Ladakh is the largest Union Territory in India by area, spanning 86,904 square kilometres, and shares borders with both China and Pakistan. It is, however, the second least populous UT, with a population of 2.74 lakh as per the 2011 Census, making effective governance across its vast and difficult terrain a longstanding administrative challenge.

Anti-Defection Law and Merger Clause Constitutional Validity

In the News: The anti-defection law, enshrined in the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, has been at the centre of recurring political controversies across several states including Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, Nagaland, Telangana, and Uttarakhand. The law, originally enacted in 1985, continues to raise debates around legislative independence, delays in disqualification proceedings, and the constitutional validity of its merger clause.

Key Points:

- **Origin and Purpose:** The anti-defection law was inserted into the Constitution as the Tenth Schedule through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1985. It was enacted to prevent political defections driven by the lure of office or other considerations — inspired by the infamous case of Haryana MLA Gaya Lal, who changed his party thrice in a single day in 1967, giving rise to the phrase "Aaya Ram Gaya Ram." The law applies to both Parliament and state legislative assemblies.
- **Grounds for Disqualification:** A legislator is deemed to have defected — and is liable for disqualification by the Presiding Officer of the House — if he either voluntarily gives up the membership of his party or defies the party whip by abstaining or voting against the party's directive on any issue. The Supreme Court has held that "voluntarily giving

up membership" has a wider connotation than formal resignation and can be inferred from a legislator's conduct, such as publicly supporting a rival party or attending opposition rallies.

- **The Merger Exception:** The law permits legislators to change their party without inviting disqualification only if at least two-thirds of the party's legislators agree to merge with another party. In such a scenario, neither those who merge nor those who remain with the original party face disqualification. However, the application of this clause has been controversial, particularly in states like Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, where opposition legislators have defected in smaller groups over time to eventually cross the two-thirds threshold.
- **Role of the Presiding Officer and Judicial Review:** Disqualification decisions are made by the Presiding Officer (Speaker or Chairman) of the respective House. The law originally barred judicial review of such decisions, but the Supreme Court struck down this bar in the landmark *Kihoto Hollohon vs. Zachilhu and Others* case (1992), allowing appeals in High Courts and the Supreme Court — though only after the Presiding Officer has delivered an order.
- **Reform Recommendations:** Various expert committees — including the Dinesh Goswami Committee (1990), the Law Commission (170th Report, 1999), and the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2002) — have recommended that disqualification decisions be made by the President (for Members of Parliament) or the Governor (for Members of Legislative Assemblies) on the advice of the Election Commission, rather than the Presiding Officer, to ensure impartiality.

St Francis Xavier row: Why protests broke out against YouTuber Gautam Khattar in Goa

In the News: YouTuber and founder of Sanatan Mahasangh Gautam Khattar made allegedly derogatory remarks against Saint Francis Xavier at an event in Vasco, South Goa, triggering widespread protests across the state. Khattar was subsequently arrested in Himachal Pradesh and brought to Goa on transit remand on April 26, 2026.

Key Points:

- **The Controversy:** Khattar made the remarks at the 'Bhagwan Parshuram Janmotsav' event organised by the Sanatan Dharma Raksha Samiti Mormugao in Vasco, South Goa, attended by Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). After his speech went viral on social media, protests broke out across Goa, with demonstrators marching to police stations and threatening a bandh, demanding his arrest for hurting religious sentiments and disturbing communal harmony.
- **Who is Saint Francis Xavier:** Saint Francis Xavier, revered as the patron saint of Goa and referred to as "Goencho Saib" (Lord of Goa), was a Spanish Jesuit missionary and one of the founding members of the Society of Jesus. He arrived in Goa in 1542, when it was a Portuguese colony, on a mission to restore Christianity among Portuguese settlers. He died in 1552 on Shangchuan Island off China's coast.
- **The Sacred Relics:** Xavier's mortal remains — considered "incorruptible" by the faithful due to their remarkable state of preservation — have been housed at the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa since 1624. Once every decade, an exposition of the sacred relics is held, during which a four-century-old silver glass casket holding the relics is lowered from the mausoleum and placed at the Se Cathedral for 45 days, drawing pilgrims of all faiths.
- **Previous Controversies:** In October 2024, former Goa Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Subhash Velingkar called for a DNA test of the saint's relics, triggering protests and resulting in a First Information Report (FIR) being lodged against him for hurting religious sentiments. In 2022, Velingkar had also stated that Saint Xavier was instrumental in bringing the Goa Inquisition during Portuguese rule, and suggested that the title of "Goencho Saib" be conferred on Lord Parshuram instead.

Reconstitution of NITI Aayog

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his best wishes on the reconstitution of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog. Ashok Kumar Lahiri was appointed as Vice Chairperson, while five individuals were named as Full-Time Members of the reconstituted body.

Key Points:

- **Reconstitution Announced:** The Cabinet Secretariat issued a notification dated April 24, 2026, formally approving the reconstitution of NITI Aayog in continuation of an earlier notification dated July 16, 2024. All appointments take effect from the date of assumption of charge.
- **New Vice Chairperson:** Ashok Kumar Lahiri has been appointed as Vice Chairperson of NITI Aayog. He will serve on the same terms and conditions applicable to the post, until further orders.
- **Five Full-Time Members Appointed:** The five newly appointed Full-Time Members are Rajiv Gauba, Prof. K. V. Raju, Prof. Gobardhan Das, Prof. Abhay Karandikar, and Dr. M. Srinivas. All appointments are on the standard terms applicable to Full-Time Members of NITI Aayog.
- **Ex-Officio Members Unchanged:** The Ex-officio Members and Special Invitees of NITI Aayog remain the same as those listed in the original July 2024 notification, ensuring continuity in the institution's broader composition.
- **PM's Remarks on NITI Aayog:** PM Modi described NITI Aayog as a vital pillar of India's policy-making architecture, highlighting its role in fostering cooperative federalism, advancing key reforms, and improving the Ease of Living for citizens across the country.
- **Strategic Role Reaffirmed:** NITI Aayog continues to function as a platform for innovation and long-term strategic thinking across sectors, reflecting the government's emphasis on evidence-based, forward-looking governance.

Symbiosis University Launches Asia's First UNESCO Chair on Gender Inclusion and Skill Development

In the News: Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Jayant Chaudhary inaugurated Asia's first UNESCO Chair on Gender Inclusion and Skill Development at Symbiosis Skills and Professional University (SSPU), Pune, during the International Conference on "Women Leading the Future of Work."

Key Points:

- **UNESCO Chair Launch:** The UNESCO Chair on Gender Inclusion and Skill Development was formally inaugurated at SSPU, Pune, marking the first such chair in Asia. The launch took place in collaboration with UNESCO as part of the International Conference on "Women Leading the Future of Work."
- **Key Dignitaries Present:** The inauguration was attended by Aditi Tatkare, Minister for Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra; Monica Nagelgaard, Consul General of Norway; and Dr. Swati Mujumdar, Pro-Chancellor, SSPU, who spearheads the UNESCO Chair initiative.
- **About the UNESCO Chair:** The Chair is anchored at SSPU, which has developed an industry-integrated skilling model focused on training underprivileged girls in future-ready skills. Under this initiative, 10,000 girls have already been trained in sunrise sectors such as robotics, automation, semiconductor technology, advanced manufacturing, and defence technology, with each participant receiving job offers upon completing the course.
- **Conference Themes:** The International Conference brought together global institutions, policymakers, industry leaders, and academia. It focused on women's participation in emerging sectors including Defence Technology, Robotics, Industry 4.0, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Semiconductors, and Global Capacity Centres. Over 40 industry leaders participated as keynote speakers and panellists.
- **Global Participation:** Key international speakers included Mary Overington (Trade and Investment Commissioner, South Asia), Gabriel Bordado (Skills Specialist, International Labour Organization), Soledad Patino (UNESCO Global Skills Academy, Paris), and Priscilla Wanjiku Gatonye (UNESCO-UNEVOC, Germany).

Ending Live-In Relationship Is Not a Crime: SC

In the News: The Supreme Court of India ruled that voluntarily ending a live-in relationship does not constitute a criminal offence. A bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan made this observation while hearing the plea of a woman who had lived with a man for 15 years, had a child with him, and sought criminal proceedings after he married someone else.

Key Points:

- **The Case:** A woman who had been in a live-in relationship for 15 years sought criminal action against her former partner on grounds of sexual harassment and exploitation after he married another woman, despite a child having been born from their relationship. The matter was heard by a bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan.
- **Court's Ruling on Criminal Liability:** The Supreme Court refused to permit criminal proceedings, holding that walking out of a consensual live-in relationship is not a criminal offence. The bench observed that emotional hardship alone cannot convert a consensual relationship into a case of sexual assault or exploitation.
- **No Legal Binding in Live-In Relationships:** The court noted that unlike marriage, live-in relationships carry no legal binding on either party. It cautioned that individuals must be mindful of the legal limitations and uncertainties inherent in such relationships.
- **Woman's Argument:** The woman's counsel stated that she had entered the relationship at the age of 18 as a widow, was allegedly misled by a false promise of marriage, and that the man had married multiple times. The court, however, said it could only examine the legal issue at hand and not adjudicate on personal moral conduct.
- **Child's Maintenance Protected:** While declining to allow criminal prosecution, the court clarified that the woman retains the right to seek maintenance for her eight-year-old child born from the relationship. The bench affirmed that a child's rights remain protected regardless of the legal status of the parents' relationship.

3,635 Gram Panchayats Emerge as Front Runners in PAI 2.0 Report

In the News: The Ministry of Panchayati Raj released the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) 2.0 Report for FY 2023-24 on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day. The report, which serves as a performance report card for each Gram Panchayat, recorded a record national participation of 97.30 per cent, with 3,635 Gram Panchayats emerging as Front Runners based on composite scores.

Key Points:

- **PAI 2.0 Report Release:** The Ministry of Panchayati Raj released the PAI 2.0 Report for FY 2023-24 on National Panchayati Raj Day, April 24, 2026. The report evaluates over 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats across the country against 150 indicators and 230 data points spanning nine thematic areas under the Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs), covering Poverty, Health, Child Welfare, Water, Environment, Infrastructure, Social Justice, Good Governance, and Women's Empowerment.
- **Performance Categories and Results:** Based on composite PAI scores, Gram Panchayats are classified into five categories -- Achiever (A+: 90 and above), Front Runner (A: 75 to below 90), Performer (B: 60 to below 75), Aspirant (C: 40 to below 60), and Beginner (D: below 40). Of the participating Gram Panchayats, 3,635 have been categorised as Front Runners, while 1,18,824 Gram Panchayats (around 45.72 per cent) are placed in the Performer category.
- **Top Performing Themes:** The strongest outcomes were recorded under Theme 1 -- Poverty Free and Enhanced Livelihoods, where 3,313 Gram Panchayats/Traditional Local Bodies achieved A+ grade -- and Theme 2 -- Healthy Panchayats, where 1,015 Gram Panchayats/TLBs attained A+ grade, reflecting strong outcomes in preventive healthcare, nutrition awareness, sanitation, and community engagement.
- **Record Participation:** PAI 2.0 achieved a record national participation of 97.30 per cent, with 2,59,867 Gram Panchayats across 33 States and Union Territories submitting validated data. This is a significant improvement over the 80.79 per cent participation recorded under PAI Version 1.0. Notably, West Bengal did not participate in the PAI 2.0 exercise.
- **Key Improvements Over PAI 1.0:** PAI 2.0 introduces several enhancements over its predecessor, including a single integrated data entry form, mandatory Gram Sabha validation for transparency and accountability, enhanced auto-reporting of data from national portals, soft and cross-data validation mechanisms, real-time dashboards, and embedded vernacular language support. The indicator framework has also been rationalised from 516 indicators and 794 data points in PAI 1.0 to 150 indicators and 230 data points.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Launches Ganga Expressway Project in Uttar Pradesh

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Ganga Expressway in Hardoi district, Uttar Pradesh. The 594-km-long, six-lane greenfield corridor, built at an estimated cost of Rs. 36,230 crore, connects Meerut to Prayagraj across 12 districts and will reduce travel time between the two cities from 10-12 hours to approximately 6 hours.

Key Points:

- **Project Overview:** The Ganga Expressway is a 594-km-long, access-controlled greenfield corridor with six lanes expandable to eight, and a design speed of 120 kmph. Built at an estimated cost of Rs. 36,230 crore under a public-private partnership model, it passes through 12 districts -- Meerut, Bulandshahr, Hapur, Amroha, Sambhal, Badaun, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Unnao, Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh, and Prayagraj -- linking western, central, and eastern Uttar Pradesh.
- **Background:** The expressway was first envisaged in 2007 during the tenure of then Chief Minister Mayawati and was revived in 2019 under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. PM Modi laid the foundation stone on December 18, 2021, in Shahjahanpur, with construction commencing in April 2022. The project is implemented by the Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA), with the Adani Group executing three of the four sections -- Groups II, III, and IV.
- **Key Features:** A notable feature of the expressway is a 3.5-km emergency landing facility (airstrip) in Shahjahanpur district, designed for dual civilian and strategic military use, adding a national security dimension to the project. Integrated Manufacturing and Logistics Corridors are also planned over nearly 2,635 hectares along its alignment across the 12 districts, aimed at improving supply-chain efficiencies and manufacturing competitiveness.
- **Connectivity and Economic Impact:** The expressway is expected to serve as the backbone of a wider expressway network in Uttar Pradesh, linking with the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, Jewar Link Expressway, Farrukhabad Link Expressway, and the planned Meerut-Haridwar extension. It is expected to lower logistics costs, attract industrial investment, support agriculture and rural livelihoods, boost tourism, and generate direct and indirect employment across the region.
- **Benefits for Farmers and Tourism:** Improved connectivity is expected to give farmers better access to urban and export markets, enabling improved price realisation and strengthening rural incomes. The project is also likely to boost tourism, with PM Modi noting it would make travel easier for pilgrims visiting the Sangam in Prayagraj and the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi.

West Bengal Records Highest-Ever Poll Participation Since Independence

In the News: West Bengal recorded a historic voter turnout of 92.47 per cent in its two-phase Assembly elections, the highest in the state since Independence. Phase 1, held on April 23, 2026, recorded 93.19 per cent turnout, while Phase 2 registered 91.66 per cent, combining to a landmark 92.47 per cent across the state's voter base of 6.81 crore.

Key Points:

- **Record Turnout:** West Bengal achieved a historic combined voter turnout of 92.47 per cent across its two-phase Assembly elections, the highest in the state since Independence. Phase 1 (April 23, 2026) recorded 93.19 per cent participation, while Phase 2 registered 91.66 per cent as of 7:45 pm on polling day.
- **Previous Record Broken:** The previous highest turnout in West Bengal was 84.72 per cent, recorded during the 2011 Assembly elections. The current figure surpasses that benchmark by a significant margin of nearly 8 percentage points. The national record for highest poll participation in a state assembly election continues to be held by Tripura, which recorded 93.61 per cent in the 2013 Assembly elections.



- **Women Outpace Men:** The Election Commission noted that women voters slightly outnumbered men in participation, with 92.28 per cent female turnout compared to 91.07 per cent for male voters, reflecting growing political engagement among women in the state.
- **Election Commission's Response:** Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Dr. S.S. Sandhu and Dr. Vivek Joshi, monitored the polling through live webcasting, which was ensured at 100 per cent of polling stations in Phase 2. CEC Gyanesh Kumar praised the participation, stating that the Election Commission salutes every voter in West Bengal for the record turnout.
- **High Turnout in Other States Too:** The Election Commission also noted record or highest-ever participation in Assam and Puducherry, which held simultaneous Assembly elections alongside West Bengal, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

Justice Grewal Appointed NCLT President by Centre

In the News: The Centre notified the appointment of Justice (Retd.) Anupinder Singh Grewal, former Judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, as President of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT). The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved the proposal of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs for the appointment, for a period of five years or till he attains the age of 67 years, whichever is earlier.

Key Points:

- **The Appointment:** The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved the appointment of Justice (Retd.) Anupinder Singh Grewal as President of the NCLT on April 29, 2026. He is appointed for five years from the date of assumption of charge or till attaining the age of 67 years, whichever is earlier, at a pay scale of Rs. 80,000 (fixed) (pre-revised).
- **Background and Legal Career:** Justice Grewal began his legal practice in 1992 before the Punjab and Haryana High Court. He served in Punjab's law officers' services progressively as Assistant Advocate General, Deputy Advocate General, Senior Deputy Advocate General, and Additional Advocate General over more than 19 years, handling civil, constitutional, criminal, service, land acquisition, and public interest litigation matters.
- **Elevation to the Judiciary:** He was elevated as Additional Judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court on September 25, 2014, subsequently transferred to the Rajasthan High Court where he was sworn in as a permanent Judge on May 20, 2016, before returning to the Punjab and Haryana High Court in October 2016.
- **Delhi HC Proceedings:** The Delhi High Court, on April 30, 2026, noted that the Centre's appointment of Justice Grewal rendered infructuous a pending petition filed by NCLT technical member Kaushalendra Kumar Singh. The petitioner had challenged the appointment of Bachu Venkat Balaram Das as acting president, arguing that seniority by date of joining entitled him to the acting president post over Das.
- **About the NCLT:** The National Company Law Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body in India that adjudicates issues relating to Indian companies under the Companies Act, 2013, and also handles insolvency proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016. The appointment of a substantive president is significant for institutional stability and the efficient functioning of the tribunal.

Indian Navy Inducts Fourth Stealth Frigate Mahendragiri

In the News: Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) delivered the stealth frigate Mahendragiri to the Indian Navy in Mumbai. The warship is the sixth ship of the Nilgiri-class (Project 17A) and the fourth and final Project 17A frigate constructed at MDL, marking a significant milestone in India's indigenous warship building programme.

Key Points:

- **The Delivery:** The Acceptance Document was signed by Capt Jagmohan (Retd.), Chairman and Managing Director of MDL, and Rear Admiral Gautam Marwaha, VSM, Chief Staff Officer (Technical), Eastern Naval Command. The warship will subsequently be commissioned as INS Mahendragiri.

- **About Project 17A:** Project 17A frigates, also known as the Nilgiri-class, are advanced multi-mission stealth platforms designed by the Warship Design Bureau. They represent a significant advancement in stealth technology, firepower, automation, and survivability over earlier generations of Indian warships. A total of seven ships are being built under the project, four at MDL Mumbai and three at Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) in Kolkata.
- **Technical Capabilities:** Mahendragiri is equipped with a Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG) propulsion system, advanced sensors, and a comprehensive weapons suite capable of conducting anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare operations. It was built using an integrated construction approach and delivered within stipulated timelines.
- **Indigenous Content and Industry Involvement:** The Project 17A frigates carry approximately 75% indigenous content. The project has engaged over 200 MSMEs and generated direct employment for nearly 4,000 people, with indirect employment for over 10,000 more, reinforcing the government's Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India initiatives in defence manufacturing.
- **Milestone in Shipbuilding:** Mahendragiri is the sixth Project 17A vessel delivered within 17 months of the first ship, Nilgiri, highlighting the pace and growing strength of India's shipbuilding ecosystem. It is also the final Project 17A ship to be built at MDL, completing the yard's contribution to the class.

India's 1st Green Methanol Production Plant

In the News: India is set to commission its first green methanol production plant at the Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) in Kandla, Gujarat. The plant will use *Prosopis juliflora*, one of the world's top 100 invasive species that has threatened Kutch's Banni grasslands for decades, as its primary feedstock to produce marine-grade green methanol.

Key Points:

- **The Plant and Its Location:** The green methanol plant is being built at the Deendayal Port Authority in Kandla, Gujarat. It will produce five tonnes of methanol per day and will be owned by the port authority. The project is being built by Pune-based Thermax Energy using gasification technology developed by Vadodara-based Ankur Scientific.
- **The Feedstock - *Prosopis juliflora*:** The primary raw material is *Prosopis juliflora*, a Mexican-origin shrub locally known as gando baval in Kutch, vilayati keekar in north India, and velikathan in Tamil. Introduced by the British in the 1920s and by the Gujarat forest department in 1961 to halt the advancing salt desert, the plant has since crowded out native grasses over thousands of kilometres in Kutch's Banni grasslands. It is ranked among the top 100 invasive species in the world, and the Gujarat government already wants the species cleared.
- **How Green Methanol is Produced:** The production process involves two stages. First, Ankur Scientific's gasification technology converts the *juliflora* biomass into syngas, a mixture of hydrogen, carbon monoxide, and CO₂, by heating the feedstock in the absence of oxygen. Thermax then converts the syngas into methanol in the second stage. The plant can also run on other agricultural residues such as bagasse and cotton stalk.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Unlike conventional methanol derived from fossil fuels such as natural gas or coal, green methanol uses renewable biomass as its source. Methanol produced from such feedstocks can cut a vessel's CO₂ emissions by up to 95% and NO_x emissions by up to 80%, while eliminating sulphur oxides and particulate matter entirely.
- **Why It Matters for Shipping:** Methanol is increasingly used as a marine fuel in place of conventional bunker oil. The International Maritime Organization's (IMO) 2023 Greenhouse Gas Strategy mandates net-zero emissions from international shipping by or around 2050. Additionally, European Union rules levy heavy charges on ships entering EU ports without a minimum share of green fuel, creating strong commercial demand for green methanol globally.
- **India's Policy Support:** In August 2023, India amended its shipbuilding financial assistance policy to offer a flat 30% subsidy for vessels propelled by green fuels, including methanol, ammonia, and hydrogen. The Kandla project is part of the Government of India's broader plan to convert ports along the western coast into "green ports."

Government Notifies New Citizenship Rules, Streamlines OCI and Application Processes

In the News: The Union Home Ministry on April 30, 2026, notified the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2026, amending the Citizenship Rules, 2009. The amendments introduce a comprehensive digital shift in processes for Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders and citizenship applications, including e-OCI registration, online application portals, and new grievance redressal provisions.

Key Points:

- **Notification of Amendment:** The Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2026 were notified via gazette on April 30, 2026, by the Ministry of Home Affairs, amending the Citizenship Rules, 2009. The changes introduce digital and procedural reforms across OCI registration, renunciation, and citizenship application processes.
- **Minor Child and Passport Restriction:** A new proviso has been added stating that a minor child cannot hold the passport of any other country at any time while simultaneously holding an Indian passport. Earlier rules only required a declaration that the child did not hold a foreign passport at the time of application.
- **Digital Application Portal:** All applications for OCI card registration and renunciation must now be submitted electronically through the official portal at <https://ociservices.gov.in>. The earlier paper-and-ink procedure under the old rules stands replaced. The government will also maintain its official register of OCI holders digitally.
- **Introduction of e-OCI:** The amendment introduces electronic OCI (e-OCI), allowing registered individuals to be issued either a physical OCI card or an electronic OCI registration. The previous requirement of submitting documents in duplicate has been removed.
- **Renunciation and Cancellation of OCI:** Upon renunciation, the individual must surrender the original physical card to the nearest Indian Mission, Post, or Foreigners Regional Registration Officer (FRRO). In case of government-ordered cancellation, the physical card must be returned; if not returned, the government can still declare it officially cancelled. For e-OCI holders, the government can cancel digital registration in its records directly.
- **Fast Track Immigration Programme:** OCI applicants must now sign a consent form to opt into the Fast Track Immigration (Trusted Traveller) Programme, agreeing to biometric data collection during OCI registration. This data may be shared for future fast-track applications or used for automatic enrolment in the programme.
- **About the OCI Scheme:** The OCI scheme was introduced through an amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955, in 2005. It provides registration to Persons of Indian Origin who were citizens of India on or after January 26, 1950, or were eligible to become citizens on that date. Individuals who are, or whose parent, grandparent, or great-grandparent was, a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh are ineligible for OCI status.

Om Birla Reconstitutes Parliamentary Committees for 2026–27: Full Details

In the News: Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has reconstituted four key Parliamentary Committees for the year 2026–27, with effect from May 1, 2026 to April 30, 2027. The reconstituted committees are the Public Accounts Committee, the Estimates Committee, the Committee on Public Undertakings, and the Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Key Points:

- **Committees Reconstituted:** The four Parliamentary Committees reconstituted for 2026–27 are: (1) Public Accounts Committee (PAC), (2) Estimates Committee, (3) Committee on Public Undertakings, and (4) Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The term runs from May 1, 2026 to April 30, 2027.
- **Chairpersons Appointed:** Congress MP K.C. Venugopal (Lok Sabha) has been appointed Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee; BJP MP Dr. Sanjay Jaiswal (Lok Sabha) will head the Estimates Committee; BJP MP Baijayant Jay Panda will chair the Committee on Public Undertakings; and BJP MP Faggan Singh Kulaste (Lok Sabha) will lead the Committee on Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Committee Composition:** The PAC has 22 members -- 15 from Lok Sabha and up to 7 from Rajya Sabha. The Estimates Committee has 30 members, all drawn exclusively from Lok Sabha. The Committee on Public Undertakings has 22

members -- 15 from Lok Sabha and 7 from Rajya Sabha. The Committee on Welfare of SCs and STs has 30 members -- 20 from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha.

- **About the PAC:** The Public Accounts Committee functions under Rule 308(1) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha. It examines whether public funds have been used as approved by Parliament, making it one of the most important financial oversight bodies in the legislature.
- **Election of Chairpersons:** Chairpersons of Parliamentary Committees are elected from among members through proportional representation using the single transferable vote system.
- **Role of Parliamentary Committees:** These committees play a crucial role in ensuring financial accountability and administrative oversight of the government. They examine reports, scrutinise government spending, and make policy recommendations to Parliament.

Filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker Named Festival Director for 57th International Film Festival of India

In the News: The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has appointed acclaimed filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker as the Festival Director for the 57th edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), to be held in Goa. Gowariker, known for landmark films such as Lagaan, Swades, and Jodhaa Akbar, succeeds Shekhar Kapur, who had led the 55th and 56th editions of the festival.

Key Points:

- **Appointment:** Ashutosh Gowariker has been named Festival Director of the 57th IFFI by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. He takes over from filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, who directed the two preceding editions of the festival.
- **About Ashutosh Gowariker:** A celebrated Indian filmmaker, Gowariker is best known for directing Lagaan (2001), Swades (2004), and Jodhaa Akbar (2008). He has had a long association with IFFI, having first attended the festival in 1984, and most recently served as Jury President for International Cinema at the 2024 edition.
- **About IFFI:** The International Film Festival of India was established in 1952, making it one of the oldest and most prestigious film festivals in Asia. Since 2004, it has been permanently hosted in Goa and serves as a major platform for showcasing global cinema and celebrating filmmaking excellence.
- **Gowariker's Remarks:** Expressing gratitude upon the appointment, Gowariker described it as a matter of immense pride and joy. He acknowledged the legacy built since 1952 by numerous festival teams and stated that carrying it forward is a great honour accompanied by a renewed sense of responsibility.

INTERNATIONAL

India-Egypt Defence Cooperation

In the News: The 11th meeting of the India-Egypt Joint Defence Committee (JDC) was held in Cairo from April 20 to 22, 2026. The meeting resulted in the agreement of a bilateral defence cooperation plan for 2026-27, covering military exchanges, maritime security, joint exercises, and defence production collaboration — reaffirming the growing strategic partnership between the two nations.

Key Points:

- **11th JDC Meeting:** The India-Egypt Joint Defence Committee convened its 11th meeting in Cairo from April 20–22, 2026. The Indian delegation was led by Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) Shri Amitabh Prasad, with senior representatives from the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Forces. The Egyptian delegation was headed by senior officials from its Defence Forces and Ministry of Defence.
- **Bilateral Defence Cooperation Plan 2026-27:** Both sides agreed on a forward-looking defence cooperation plan for 2026-27, focusing on five key areas — expanding structured military interaction mechanisms, strengthening joint



training exchanges, enhancing maritime security cooperation, increasing the scope and complexity of military exercises, and promoting collaboration in defence production and technology.

- **Defence Industry Collaboration:** The Indian delegation highlighted India's fast-growing defence manufacturing capabilities, noting that production has crossed US \$20 billion and exports amount to approximately US \$4 billion to over 100 countries. Both sides agreed to develop a dedicated defence industry cooperation plan, with defence manufacturing emerging as a key pillar of bilateral ties — including exploration of co-development and co-production opportunities.
- **Air Force Engagement:** The Indian delegation called on Commander of the Egyptian Air Force (EAF), Lieutenant General Amr Abdel Rahman Saqr, and acknowledged the close cooperation between the air forces of both nations.
- **Milestones in India-Egypt Defence Relations:** A landmark MoU on defence cooperation was signed in September 2022 during the visit of India's Raksha Mantri to Egypt. Bilateral ties were elevated to a Strategic Partnership in 2023. The 11th JDC meeting reaffirmed the mutual commitment of both countries to regional security and stability.
- **Tribute at War Memorial:** The Indian delegation laid a wreath at the Heliopolis War Memorial in Cairo, paying homage to Indian soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice during World War I and World War II.

Shooting at White House-Trump event: How is the US President protected?

In the News: A gunman attempted to storm the ballroom of the Washington Hilton hotel during the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner in Washington D.C., where US President Donald Trump, Vice-President JD Vance, and several senior cabinet members were present. The suspect, identified as Cole Tomas Allen, 31, was arrested after opening fire near a security checkpoint, marking the third assassination threat faced by President Trump.

Key Points:

- **The Incident:** At approximately 20:35 local time, gunshots were fired in the foyer of the Washington Hilton hotel during the White House Correspondents' Dinner. President Trump, First Lady Melania Trump, and Vice-President JD Vance were swiftly evacuated by the Secret Service. A law enforcement officer was shot during the exchange of fire but was discharged from hospital after his bulletproof vest prevented a more serious injury.
- **The Suspect:** The alleged attacker, Cole Tomas Allen, 31, from Torrance, California, was carrying two guns and knives. A mechanical engineering graduate of the California Institute of Technology, he was charged in federal court with assault of a federal officer and using a firearm during a crime of violence. The FBI's criminal investigation and terrorism task force are investigating the case.
- **Secret Service Response:** The Secret Service successfully intercepted the gunman before he could reach the ballroom. President Trump praised his security detail as "great people," and the White House Correspondents' Association president Weijia Jiang thanked the Secret Service for actions that "protected thousands of guests." The Secret Service's swift evacuation of senior officials — including VP Vance, Health Secretary RFK Jr., Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, and aide Stephen Miller — underscored the agency's protective protocols.
- **Trump's Previous Assassination Threats:** This was the third time President Trump faced an assassination threat — a bullet grazed his ear at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania in July 2024, and a suspected gunman was spotted at his golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida in September 2024.

People born after 2009 to be banned from buying cigarettes: The UK's new Bill, explained

In the News: The United Kingdom's Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which bans anyone born on or after January 1, 2009 from ever legally purchasing cigarettes, has been passed by both Houses of Parliament and awaits Royal Assent. Described as the biggest public health intervention in a generation, the legislation aims to create a smoke-free generation in Britain.



Key Points:

- **The Generational Smoking Ban:** Under the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, it will be illegal for shops to sell tobacco products to anyone born on or after January 1, 2009 — meaning anyone currently aged 17 or younger faces a lifelong ban on buying cigarettes. The restriction applies permanently, regardless of their age in the future.
- **Origin of the Bill:** The Bill was originally introduced in 2024 under then-Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who proposed raising the legal smoking age by one year every year. It has now been carried forward and passed into law under the current Labour Party government.
- **Smoke-Free England by 2030:** The legislation is part of the UK government's broader ambition, announced in 2019, to make England smoke-free by 2030 — defined as reducing smoking prevalence to below 5% of the total population. The UK was one of the first countries to ban smoking in public places (2007) and introduced plain packaging for cigarettes in 2016.
- **Vaping Regulations:** The Bill also grants ministers new powers to regulate vaping and nicotine products, including control over flavours and packaging. Vaping will be banned in cars carrying children, in playgrounds, outside schools, and at hospital premises — though it will remain permitted outside hospitals to support those attempting to quit smoking.
- **Global Comparisons — Generational Bans:** New Zealand had introduced a similar birth-year-based smoking ban in 2022 but scrapped key provisions in 2023 as part of a coalition deal, partly due to concerns over lost tobacco tax revenue. In November 2025, the Maldives became the only country to have implemented a full generational smoking ban, barring those born in or after 2007 from purchasing tobacco — applicable to tourists as well.

Emmanuel Macron Announces Exit from Politics After 2027, Ends Speculation of Comeback

In the News: French President Emmanuel Macron announced during a visit to a high school in Cyprus that he will quit politics in 2027, at the end of his second five-year presidential term. The announcement has sparked widespread speculation in France about his next steps and the country's political future.

Key Points:

- **Macron's Announcement:** With one year remaining in his second and final term, Macron stated, "I wasn't in politics before and I'm not going to be after," firmly ruling out a continued political career post-2027. He acknowledged that the hardest challenge at this stage was balancing a defence of his record with honest recognition of what "didn't work out."
- **The 2027 Presidential Race:** France's political landscape is already mobilising for the 2027 presidential election. Key contenders include far-right National Rally (RN) chief Jordan Bardella and Gabriel Attal, a former Prime Minister and centrist candidate seeking to carry forward Macron's political legacy.
- **Macron's International Legacy:** Despite being historically unpopular domestically, Macron has remained highly visible on the global stage. He has been vocal in standing up to United States President Donald Trump over threats to annex Greenland, criticising the war against Iran, and championing European technological and military independence — most notably at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026.
- **Speculation About Post-Presidential Role:** While Macron has ruled out active party politics, observers suggest he may pursue leadership of an intergovernmental body such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the European Commission. Some centrist leaders have even speculated about a possible return in the 2032 French presidential election, when he would again be eligible to stand.
- **Legacy and Public Image:** Macron, aged 48, is reportedly seeking to reshape public perception of his presidency ahead of his exit. Political analysts have drawn parallels with former President Jacques Chirac, whose public image improved considerably after leaving office as daily political controversies faded.



India-New Zealand FTA Signed

In the News: India and New Zealand signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in New Delhi, with Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and New Zealand's Trade and Investment Minister Todd McClay signing the deal. Prime Ministers of both countries hailed it as a "historic" milestone in deepening trade, investment, and people-to-people ties.

Key Points:

- **The Agreement:** The India-New Zealand FTA was signed in New Delhi on April 27, 2026. Negotiations were announced in March 2025 and concluded in December 2025, making it one of the fastest FTAs negotiated by India. The deal is set to come into force within 2026, pending ratification by New Zealand's Parliament.
- **Tariff Concessions:** Under the FTA, New Zealand will remove all tariffs on all goods imported from India, while India will remove or reduce tariffs on 95% of current imports from New Zealand. The deal covers market access, agricultural productivity, investment, and mobility of working professionals and students.
- **Trade Between the Two Nations:** India's exports to New Zealand grew 32.1% in 2024-25 to \$711.1 million, while imports from New Zealand grew 75.2% to \$587.1 million during the same period, reflecting the strong and growing trade relationship between the two countries.
- **Investment Commitment:** The FTA includes a provision wherein New Zealand has committed to facilitating \$20 billion in investments into India over the next 15 years. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) noted this is expected to catalyse industrial infrastructure, manufacturing ecosystems, and innovation clusters across India.
- **Sectors to Benefit:** The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) stated that the FTA will enhance market access for Indian exporters across key sectors such as agriculture, textiles, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, and services including Information Technology and IT-Enabled Services (IT and ITES), education, construction, and health services.

The UAE's exit from OPEC, and its possible impact on global oil prices

In the News: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced its withdrawal from the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the broader OPEC+ alliance, with the exit set to take effect from May 1, 2026. The UAE's state news agency cited Abu Dhabi's long-term economic vision as the primary reason, with the ongoing US-Iran war serving as a significant trigger.

Key Points:

- **About OPEC:** Founded in September 1960 at the Baghdad Conference, OPEC was originally established by five founding members: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela. Created to counter the dominance of Western multinational oil companies (the "Seven Sisters"), OPEC coordinates the petroleum policies of its member states to ensure stable returns. The UAE formally joined OPEC in 1967. In 2016, OPEC+ was formed by onboarding 10 major non-OPEC producers led by Russia, producing roughly 40% of the world's crude oil and accounting for 60% of internationally traded petroleum.
- **UAE's Exit:** The UAE announced its withdrawal from OPEC and the OPEC+ alliance on April 28, 2026, effective May 1, 2026. This ends a membership of over 50 years. The UAE's state news agency cited Abu Dhabi's longer-term economic vision as the stated reason for the exit.
- **Role of the US-Iran War:** The ongoing US-Iran war has significantly disrupted the Strait of Hormuz, which previously handled roughly one-fifth of the world's oil transport. The conflict has damaged oil refinement and production facilities across Gulf nations. With Iran being a founding OPEC member, the alliance's consensus-based decision-making had restricted the UAE's ability to independently secure its exports and forge new strategic partnerships for its own defence.
- **Production Capacity Constraints:** Beyond the war, the UAE had long been dissatisfied with OPEC's strict production quotas. State-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), backed by a USD 150 billion investment, had targeted maximum sustainable crude oil production of five million barrels per day by 2027. OPEC's quotas had left the UAE underutilising both its infrastructure and natural reserves.

- **Economic Diversification Goals:** The UAE's exit is also tied to its broader vision of transitioning from a fossil-fuel-dependent economy to a knowledge-based economy. The country has been expanding into sectors such as education and technology, and ironically, pumping more oil is necessary to accumulate the capital required to fund this transition.
- **Impact on OPEC:** The UAE's exit significantly weakens OPEC by reducing the organisation's collective spare capacity, which had largely been held by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. This will pressure OPEC to compete with the UAE as an independent oil producer, and raises the possibility of other members such as Saudi Arabia also abandoning their own quotas.

Finland Launches Europe's First Fully Integrated Lithium Project Near Kokkola

In the News: Finland has become the first country in Europe to host a fully integrated lithium production cycle, spanning mine, concentrator and refinery, all located within a 43-kilometre radius near Kokkola in western Finland. The Syvajarvi open-pit mine in Kaustinen began operations in late April 2026, marking a landmark moment in Europe's effort to reduce dependence on lithium imports from Asia and Australia.

Key Points:

- **Europe's First Complete Lithium Chain:** The Keliber project in western Finland is the first in Europe to house the entire lithium production chain within close proximity, comprising the Syvajarvi open-pit mine, a nearby concentrator plant and a lithium refinery near the port of Kokkola, all within 43 kilometres of each other. While other European countries such as Portugal and the Czech Republic hold lithium reserves, none has previously integrated all three stages of production at this scale.
- **Strategic Importance of Lithium:** Lithium is a critical mineral essential for the manufacture of modern electronics including electric vehicles and smartphones. Its strategic significance is frequently compared to the role oil played at the dawn of the 20th century. China currently dominates global lithium supply, making Europe's ability to develop domestic sources a matter of both economic and geopolitical importance.
- **Production Process and Output:** Spodumene ore, containing approximately one per cent lithium oxide, is extracted at the Syvajarvi open-pit mine and transported to a concentrator plant that produces a sand-like concentrate. This is then taken to the refinery near Kokkola to produce battery-grade lithium hydroxide, which resembles white sugar crystals and will be stored in 500-kilogram or 1,000-kilogram bags for transport to the European battery industry.
- **Project Scale and Investment:** The Keliber project is a 783-million-euro (approximately 920-million-dollar) investment covering more than 500 square kilometres. In addition to the Syvajarvi mine, six other mining sites are planned in the area. The European Investment Bank has provided 150 million euros in financing. The mine is expected to be fully operational within two years, with the refinery targeting its first packaged output by the end of 2026.
- **Ownership and Stakeholders:** The project is operated by Keliber Oy, a Finnish mining and battery-materials company. South African mining giant Sibanye-Stillwater holds approximately 80 per cent of shares, with the remaining 20 per cent held by the Finnish state-owned Finnish Minerals Group. Sibanye-Stillwater's investment in Keliber represents the company's first major investment in Europe.

India Submits Updated Climate Targets for 2031–2035 to UNFCCC

In the News: The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for the period 2031 to 2035 on March 25, 2026, significantly enhancing the country's climate ambitions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Paris Agreement. The updated targets align with India's dual long-term goals of becoming a developed nation under Viksit Bharat by 2047 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

Key Points:

- **Core Quantitative Targets for 2031-2035:** India's NDC for 2031-2035 sets three key measurable targets: reducing the emissions intensity of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 47 per cent from 2005 levels by 2035; achieving

approximately 60 per cent of cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2035; and creating an additional carbon sink of 3.5 to 4.0 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂ eq.) through forest and tree cover by 2035 from the 2005 baseline.

- **Equity and Climate Justice Framework:** India's NDC is grounded in the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). Despite being home to nearly 17 per cent of the world's population, India accounts for less than 4 per cent of cumulative global carbon dioxide emissions since 1850, with per capita emissions at approximately one-third of the global average. India has committed to net-zero by 2070, asserting its right to equitable development space while contributing meaningfully to global climate goals.
- **Clean Energy and Green Growth Measures:** India's climate strategy encompasses large-scale renewable energy expansion, battery storage systems, green energy corridors, and cleaner manufacturing. Key flagship schemes supporting the NDC include the Green Hydrogen Mission, PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, PM-KUSUM, Carbon Capture Utilization and Storage (CCUS), and nuclear energy expansion.
- **International Leadership and South-South Cooperation:** India leads key global climate initiatives including the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), the Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA) and the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (Lead-IT). India also emphasises South-South cooperation as a pillar of global climate action, supporting developing nations in line with their national circumstances.
- **People-Centric Approach:** India's NDC integrates the Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) framework, promoting behavioural change and sustainable consumption as central to climate action, alongside policy-driven and technology-based measures. Grassroots programmes such as Jal Jeevan Mission, National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture, MISHTI (Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats and Tangible Incomes) and the Soil Health Card scheme operationalise the NDC at the local level.

France Sets 2050 Deadline to End Fossil Fuels

In the News: France has unveiled Europe's first explicit fuel-by-fuel fossil fuel phase-out roadmap, committing to end coal use by 2030, oil by 2045 and fossil gas by 2050. The plan was presented on April 28, 2026, at the Santa Marta global conference on transitioning away from fossil fuels, hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands and attended by nearly 60 countries.

Key Points:

- **Europe's First Fuel-by-Fuel Roadmap:** France's plan is the first of its kind in Europe, setting explicit deadlines for phasing out each fossil fuel individually: coal by 2030, oil by 2045 and gas by 2050. Rather than introducing new climate commitments, the roadmap consolidates existing policies under two core domestic frameworks, the National Low-Carbon Strategy (SNBC) and the third Multiannual Energy Programme (PPE3), into a single cohesive document with clear, measurable deadlines.
- **Santa Marta Conference Context:** The Santa Marta conference emerged after the 30th Conference of Parties (COP30) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) failed to agree on a global fossil fuel phase-out roadmap. A coalition of willing nations subsequently launched talks outside the formal UN climate process. France's announcement is expected to pressure other advanced economies to publish similarly detailed national transition pathways. Notably, the world's three biggest emitters, China, the United States and India, were not present at the conference.
- **Key Implementation Targets:** France's Multiannual Energy Planning aims to reduce fossil fuels' share of final energy consumption from approximately 60 per cent in 2023 to 40 per cent by 2030 and 30 per cent by 2035. Key measures include closing its last two coal-fired power plants by 2027, installing one million heat pumps annually by 2030, ensuring two out of three new cars sold are electric by 2030, banning gas boilers in all new buildings from 2027 and replacing 85 terawatt-hours (TWh) of gas by 2030.
- **Clean Energy Expansion Plans:** On the supply side, France plans to build new EPR2 nuclear reactors, develop 15 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind capacity by 2035, triple its installed solar photovoltaic capacity, expand hydropower

and develop up to 8 GW of electrolyser capacity for hydrogen production. France already generates 95 per cent of its electricity from nuclear and renewable sources, giving it a structural advantage in electrifying transport, heating and industry faster than many European peers.

1st India-Japan AI Strategic Dialogue 2026

In the News: The inaugural India-Japan Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategic Dialogue was held on April 21, 2026, in Mumbai, marking a landmark step in bilateral technological cooperation. The dialogue brought together government stakeholders and AI industry representatives from both nations to advance strategic cooperation across the full AI ecosystem.

Key Points:

- **Event Overview:** The first India-Japan AI Strategic Dialogue took place on April 21, 2026, in Mumbai. It was co-chaired by Amit A. Shukla, Joint Secretary (Cyber Diplomacy), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, and Hanada Takahiro, Deputy Assistant Minister for Cyber Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan.
- **Scope of Discussions:** Both sides engaged in substantive discussions on strategic cooperation across the entire AI stack, focusing on promoting co-creation, enhancing policy convergence, and developing AI solutions in industrial domains to foster a robust, innovative and trustworthy AI ecosystem.
- **Talent and Research Cooperation:** The dialogue explored avenues to strengthen international mobility of AI talent between the two countries and expand joint research through bilateral exchanges and collaborative projects.
- **AI Governance and Multilateral Engagement:** Both sides deliberated on international cooperation in AI governance, policy formulation, and coordinated engagement in multilateral fora, reflecting a shared commitment to shaping global AI norms responsibly.
- **Foundation in Bilateral Commitments:** The AI Strategic Dialogue advances the India-Japan AI Cooperation Initiative, which was announced by Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart during PM Modi's visit to Japan in August 2025. Cooperation in AI constitutes a central pillar of the India-Japan Joint Vision for the Next Decade.

How OPEC has dictated oil prices for decades, and why UAE is exiting it

In the News: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced its exit from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), sending shockwaves through global energy markets. The departure of the cartel's fourth-largest producer is expected to weaken OPEC's ability to manage oil supply and prices, with significant long-term implications for major oil importers like India.

Key Points:

- **OPEC's Origins and Purpose:** OPEC was founded in September 1960 at the Baghdad Conference by five founding members: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. It was established to counter the dominance of Western multinational oil companies, known as the "Seven Sisters," and to coordinate petroleum policies to ensure stable revenues for member states. The UAE formally joined in 1967.
- **How OPEC Controls Oil Prices:** OPEC, led de facto by Saudi Arabia, manages global oil prices by setting strict production quotas for each member country. These quotas are used to prevent oversupply during periods of low demand and to avoid price spikes during supply shortages. The broader OPEC+ alliance, formed in 2016 and including 10 non-OPEC producers led by Russia, collectively accounts for over 40% of global crude oil production.
- **UAE's Standing Within OPEC:** In 2025, the UAE was OPEC's fourth-largest producer, accounting for over 11% of the group's cumulative oil output. Despite having a production capacity of approximately 4.8 million barrels per day (bpd), OPEC's quota system kept its actual output at just over 3.1 million bpd in 2025, far below its potential.
- **Why the UAE is Exiting:** With state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) backed by investments of around \$150 billion and targeting production of 5 million bpd by 2027, the UAE found OPEC's quota constraints increasingly

restrictive. As global oil demand nears its peak due to the energy transition to renewables, the UAE is prioritising monetising its low-cost reserves and protecting market share over collective production restraint, a strategy analysts describe as "leaving money on the table" by staying within OPEC.

- **Strait of Hormuz Factor:** The ongoing Iran war has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, which normally accounts for one-fifth of global oil flows, causing a short-term surge in oil prices. However, once the Strait reopens and initial inventory-building subsides, the UAE's unconstrained production is expected to exert significant downward pressure on global oil prices over the medium term.

India and Sri Lanka Conduct IN-SLN DIVEX 2026 to Strengthen Maritime Cooperation

In the News: India and Sri Lanka conducted the fourth edition of their bilateral diving exercise, IN-SLN DIVEX 2026, in Colombo from April 21 to 28, 2026. The exercise featured INS Nireekshak, India's Diving Support and Submarine Rescue Vessel, alongside Sri Lanka Navy diving teams, with deep-sea dives exceeding 55 metres and mixed gas dives over World War-era shipwrecks off the Colombo coast.

Key Points:

- **Exercise Overview:** IN-SLN DIVEX 2026 was held in Colombo from April 21-28, marking the fourth edition of the India-Sri Lanka bilateral diving exercise. INS Nireekshak, India's Diving Support and Submarine Rescue Vessel, participated alongside diving teams from both navies, focusing on operational coordination and professional synergy in complex underwater operations.
- **Key Operational Highlights:** Divers from both navies conducted advanced deep-sea diving drills including mixed gas diving, with successful execution of dives beyond 55 metres -- enhancing joint capabilities in underwater search, rescue, and salvage operations. A notable highlight was the conduct of mixed gas dives over World War-era wrecks SS Worcester and SS Perseus off the Colombo coast.
- **Senior Naval Visit:** Rear Admiral SJ Kumara, Flag Officer Commanding Western Naval Area, visited INS Nireekshak during the exercise and commended India's continued support in advancing the training of Sri Lankan divers, emphasising the importance of sustained exchange of best practices between the two forces.
- **Humanitarian and Bilateral Initiatives:** India handed over two BHISM (Bharat Health Initiative for Sahyog, Hita and Maitri) cubes under the Aarogya Maitri initiative to bolster Sri Lanka's disaster response and medical preparedness. The Commanding Officer of INS Nireekshak also paid tribute at the IPKF Memorial in honour of Indian soldiers who lost their lives during the Indian Peace Keeping Force operations in Sri Lanka.
- **Beyond Operations:** The exercise also included joint activities such as a beach clean-up drive at Galle Face, friendly sports events, and yoga sessions, fostering camaraderie and mutual trust between the two navies.

Who are Israel's West Bank settlers, and why are they attacking Palestinians?

In the News: Settler violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank has surged sharply in 2026, particularly since the start of the Iran war. Between January 2023 and mid-February 2026, at least 4,765 Palestinians from 97 locations have been displaced by settler violence, according to the UN's humanitarian office. Recent attacks on the Palestinian village of Deir al-Hatab near Nablus have drawn fresh international attention to the crisis.

Key Points:

- **Who Are Israeli Settlers:** Israeli settlers are citizens of Israel who live on Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. More than 700,000 settlers, roughly 10% of Israel's population, live across 34 outposts as a part of broader trends in 2025 and 224 unofficial outposts, 86 new outposts were established. Israel began building settlements after capturing the West Bank in the 1967 Six-Day War. All settlements are considered illegal under international law as they violate the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power from transferring its population to occupied territories.

- **Government Support for Settlements:** The Israeli government openly funds and builds settlements. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a settler himself, has declared vast areas as "state land" and claims to have approved or retroactively. He has openly stated his intent to "bury the idea of a Palestinian state" and called for the dismantling of the Palestinian Authority.
- **Surge in Settler Violence:** Settler attacks have risen sharply since the Gaza war in October 2023 and accelerated further after the start of the Iran war in 2026. Six Palestinians were killed by settlers in the early weeks of the Iran war alone. A major attack on Deir al-Hatab village in March 2026 saw homes burnt, residents shot at, and at least 10 people injured. Settlers are now increasingly targeting built-up Palestinian villages in Area B, having already displaced communities in Area C.
- **Impact and International Response:** Over 4,765 Palestinians from 97 locations have been displaced since January 2023. The UN Security Council in 2016 declared settlements as having "no legal validity," and human rights groups including Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem have characterised Israeli policies in the West Bank as amounting to apartheid. The IDF has faced mounting criticism for allegedly standing by during attacks and failing to prosecute perpetrators.

UN Secretary-General Election

In the News: The United Nations has formally initiated the process for the selection and appointment of its next Secretary-General, following the adoption of General Assembly Resolution 79/327 in September 2025. The process, governed by Article 97 of the UN Charter, is guided by principles of transparency and inclusivity. Interactive dialogues with nominated candidates were held on 21 and 22 April 2026 and broadcast live on UN WebTV.

Key Points:

- **Process Initiation:** A joint letter from the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council, published on 25 November 2025, formally launched the selection process. It invited nominations from Member States and outlined the guiding principles and timeline of the process.
- **Governing Framework:** The selection is based on General Assembly Resolution 79/327, adopted on 5 September 2025, which builds on earlier resolutions and introduces improvements to transparency and inclusivity in the appointment process under Article 97 of the UN Charter.
- **Nomination Process:** Member States or groups of Member States nominate candidates, who must submit a vision statement, curriculum vitae, and campaign financing disclosures. The Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council jointly maintain and update a public list of candidates.
- **Active Candidates:** Five nominations have been received (in alphabetical order): Rafael Mariano Grossi (Argentina) -- nominated 26 November 2025, Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis (Costa Rica) -- nominated 3 March 2026 and Macky Sall (Burundi) -- nominated 2 March 2026.
- **Withdrawn Candidacies:** Two nominations were subsequently withdrawn on 25 March 2026 -- Michelle Bachelet Jeria (nominated by Chile, Brazil, and Mexico) and Virginia Gamba (nominated by the Maldives).
- **Interactive Dialogues:** In accordance with Resolution 79/327, the President of the General Assembly convened webcast interactive dialogues with all candidates on 21 and 22 April 2026, broadcast live on UN WebTV, allowing Member States to engage directly with the candidates.

SCIENCE AND TECH

ISRO Opens Gaganyaan Astronaut Selection to Civilians

In the News: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has begun preparations to select a second batch of astronauts for the Gaganyaan human spaceflight programme, marking a significant shift by opening the astronaut corps to civilians with backgrounds in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) for the first time.

Key Points:

- **Expansion Beyond Military Pilots:** The first batch of Gaganyaan astronauts, selected in 2020, was drawn exclusively from Indian Air Force (IAF) test pilots with 800 to 1,000 hours of jet flying experience. The second batch will include a mix of military personnel and civilian STEM specialists, representing a major departure from the earlier model.
- **Proposed Astronaut Pool:** The second batch is expected to comprise approximately 10 astronauts, including six mission pilots from military aviation backgrounds and four civilian specialists from STEM fields, to support long-duration missions and India's planned space station.
- **Dedicated Selection Committee:** A dedicated committee on astronaut selection and management, comprising ISRO officials and members of the current astronaut corps, is actively working on defining eligibility criteria, designing training modules and establishing evaluation frameworks for the new batch.
- **Adapting to Indian Realities:** ISRO is working to design its own selection criteria suited to Indian conditions. Agencies like NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA) typically require pilot licences even for civilian roles, but obtaining such licences in India is prohibitively expensive. ISRO is exploring alternative pathways, including providing civilians with some form of flying training, to ensure inclusivity without compromising quality.
- **Broader Space Ambitions:** India aims to launch astronauts into space, build a space station and land astronauts on the Moon by 2040. The current astronaut corps, comprising Air Commodore P. Balakrishnan Nair, Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, Angad Pratap and Ajit Krishnan, is simultaneously preparing for their own maiden mission while helping set up infrastructure and training modules for the second batch.

DRDO and Indian Navy Successfully Test Naval Anti-Ship Missile (NASM-SR)

In the News: DRDO and the Indian Navy successfully conducted the maiden salvo launch of the Naval Anti-ship Missile-Short Range (NASM-SR) from a Navy helicopter platform off the coast of Odisha in the Bay of Bengal. Two missiles were launched in quick succession from the same helicopter, marking the first-ever salvo launch of an advanced air-launched anti-ship missile system by India.

Key Points:

- **The Test:** DRDO and the Indian Navy carried out the maiden salvo launch of NASM-SR on April 29, 2026, firing two missiles in quick succession from the same helicopter off the Odisha coast in the Bay of Bengal. All test objectives were fully met, with data captured by range tracking instruments including radar, electro-optical systems, and telemetry deployed by the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur.
- **Missile Capabilities:** NASM-SR is India's first indigenous air-launched anti-ship missile. It features advanced low-level sea-skimming capability, a range of 55 km, and supports fire-and-forget operation in all weather conditions and at all hours. The test also demonstrated the missile's waterline hit capability, meaning the ability to precisely strike a target vessel at or just below the waterline.
- **Technology and Subsystems:** The missile uses a solid propulsion booster and long-burn sustainer. All critical subsystems including the seeker, integrated avionics module, fibre-optic gyroscope-based Inertial Navigation System, radio-altimeter, advanced control and guidance algorithms, high-bandwidth two-way data link, and jet-vane control were developed indigenously by DRDO laboratories and Indian industries.
- **Development Partners:** The missile system was developed by Hyderabad-based Research Center Imarat in collaboration with Defence Research and Development Laboratory (Hyderabad), High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (Pune), Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory (Chandigarh), and ITR Chandipur. Missiles are currently being produced by Development-cum-Production Partners (DcPP) with support from Indian industries and start-ups.

Karnataka Launches Space Tech Centre of Excellence

In the News: The Karnataka government launched India's first state-led Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Space Technology in Bengaluru. The Centre was inaugurated by Minister for Electronics, IT/BT, and Rural Development, Priyank Kharge, in the presence of senior officials and industry leaders.

Key Points:

- **The Launch:** The CoE for Space Technology was established by the Karnataka government through the Karnataka Innovation and Technology Society (KITS) in collaboration with SIA-India (Satcom Industry Association India). It has been set up under a Memorandum of Agreement between KITS and SIA-India to drive research, innovation, startup incubation, and industry-aligned training in space technologies.
- **Vision and Target:** Karnataka aims to capture 40% of the Indian space sector's growth, estimated to unlock a USD 44 billion opportunity by 2033. The initiative is aligned with the Indian Space Policy 2023, which promotes private sector participation in space activities. The global space economy is projected to reach USD 1 trillion over the next decade.
- **Facilities and Support:** The CoE will offer both physical facilities such as satellite integration and testing labs, and software tools for design and development, accessible to startups and academia at subsidised rates. Incubation spaces with working areas, conference halls, and technical support will also be provided.
- **Industry and Academic Partnerships:** The Centre has formalised strategic MoUs with multiple industry and academic partners to support research in space biotech and microgravity, build talent pipelines, and provide startups with training and market access. Key players in Karnataka's space ecosystem include ISRO, Ananth Technologies, Centum Electronics, Pixxel, Bellatrix Aerospace, and Digantara.
- **Skill Development:** The CoE will develop specialised training programmes in collaboration with academic institutions to upskill students and professionals in space technologies, ensuring curricula are aligned with industry requirements.

Received NDMA Alert? India Tests New Cell Broadcast Emergency Warning System

In the News: The Government of India has formally launched its indigenously developed Cell Broadcast System for instant disaster alerting, with Union Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia announcing the initiative on social media. As part of the launch, a test notification accompanied by a siren alert was transmitted to citizens' mobile devices, displaying the message: "Alert citizens, safe nation -- no action is required by the public upon receipt of this message as this is a test message." The system has been developed by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Key Points:

- **Formal Launch of Indigenous Cell Broadcast System:** The Government of India has officially launched the Cell Broadcast (CB) System, an indigenously developed mobile-based disaster communication framework. The system enables instant, location-specific disaster alerts to be sent simultaneously to all mobile devices within a defined geographic area, ensuring near real-time delivery without requiring recipients to take any action during test transmissions.
- **Cell Broadcast Technology:** Unlike SMS-based alerts, the Cell Broadcast System transmits emergency messages to all mobile devices within a geo-targeted area simultaneously. It is particularly suited for time-critical emergencies such as tsunamis, earthquakes, lightning strikes, gas leaks, and chemical hazards, where speed and reach are critical.
- **Indigenous Development by C-DOT:** The CB system has been developed indigenously by the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), the premier R&D wing of the Department of Telecommunications. It is based on the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), as recommended by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and reflects India's commitment to self-reliance in critical communication infrastructure.
- **Existing SACHET System:** Prior to the CB system, NDMA had operationalised the Integrated Alert System called SACHET, also developed by C-DOT, which delivers geo-targeted SMS alerts. SACHET is currently active across all 36 States and Union Territories and has transmitted over 134 billion SMS alerts in more than 19 Indian languages during natural disasters, weather warnings, and cyclonic events to date.
- **How to Manage Alerts on Mobile Devices:** Users can enable or disable Cell Broadcast test messages on their mobile devices via: Settings → Safety and Emergency → Wireless Emergency Alerts → Test Alerts. Once fully operationalised,



the system will transmit alerts across all handsets regardless of test channel settings, ensuring maximum reach during actual emergencies.

ECONOMY

NITI Aayog Launches DPI@2047 Plan, Targets \$30 Trillion Economy and \$18,000 Per Capita Income

In the News: NITI Aayog released its "Vision for Viksit Bharat @ 2047: An Approach Paper," outlining India's ambitious target of becoming a USD 30 trillion economy with a per capita income of USD 18,000 by 2047, coinciding with the centenary of India's independence.

Key Points:

- **The Vision Document:** NITI Aayog's "Vision for Viksit Bharat @ 2047: An Approach Paper" lays out a comprehensive roadmap for India to attain high-income status by 2047. The twin targets are a GDP of USD 30 trillion and a per capita income of USD 18,000.
- **Sustained Growth Requirement:** To achieve these targets, India must maintain a GDP growth rate of 7-10% over the next 20-30 years. The document acknowledges that sustaining such growth over this duration is a feat few countries have managed historically.
- **Avoiding the Middle-Income Trap:** A central concern of the document is the risk of India falling into the Middle-Income Trap, a situation where a country's growth stagnates after reaching a moderate income level. The paper stresses the need for structural reforms to ensure India transitions to high-income status.
- **Structural Challenges to Address:** The document identifies key structural bottlenecks that must be resolved, including upgrading manufacturing capabilities, improving logistics infrastructure, and bridging the rural-urban income divide.
- **Energy, Security, and Sustainability:** The vision emphasises balancing India's energy security needs with sustainability goals, while simultaneously enhancing industrial competitiveness to support long-term economic expansion.
- **Per Capita Income Growth Outlook:** Separately, the OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2024-33 projects India to record the highest per capita income growth globally at 5.4% annually between 2024 and 2033, lending external validation to India's growth ambitions.

ENVIRONMENT

Botanist N. Alim Yusuf Honoured by World Wide Fund for Nature for AI-Based Conservation App

In the News: Botany researcher N. Alim Yusuf of the Malabar Botanical Garden and Institute for Plant Sciences (MBGIPS), Olavanna, Kozhikode, was awarded the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) National Award for developing an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered mobile application capable of identifying invasive plant species in Kerala.

Key Points:

- **Award and Recognition:** N. Alim Yusuf received the WWF National Award at the National ECHO Youth Innovation Summit 2026, held as part of the International Youth Biodiversity Conference in Telangana. He will also receive a seed grant of ₹1.5 lakh from WWF to further develop and scale his project.
- **The Application — Neophyte ID:** Yusuf developed an AI-powered mobile app called Neophyte ID, capable of identifying nearly 100 invasive plant species recorded in Kerala. The app was first launched at the Kerala Science Congress in Kochi in February 2026. It is available in both Malayalam and English.
- **Technology Used:** The app is powered by YOLOv11, an advanced machine learning model. Users can identify whether a plant is invasive simply by capturing its image. The app also integrates geospatial tracking to map the spread of invasive species, providing valuable data for researchers and the Forest department.

- **Invasive Species Crisis in Kerala:** The Kerala Forest Department has been struggling to control invasive plants such as *Senna spectabilis*, *Lantana camara*, and *Eupatorium*. *Senna spectabilis*, an exotic species from South America, has spread rapidly and now covers nearly a third of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, threatening native biodiversity.

Indian Scientist Parveen Shaikh Wins 2026 Whitley Award for Conservation Work

In the News: Indian scientist Parveen Shaikh of the Bombay Natural History Society won the prestigious 2026 Whitley Award for her community-led conservation work to protect the endangered Indian Skimmer on the Chambal River. The award was presented by HRH The Princess Royal at the Royal Geographical Society in London.

Key Points:

- **The Award:** The Whitley Award is presented annually by the UK charity Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN), which has channelled £26 million to over 230 conservationists across 84 countries since 1993. The 2026 ceremony was held on April 29 at the Royal Geographical Society, London, and streamed live on YouTube.
- **About the Indian Skimmer:** The Indian Skimmer is an endangered bird known for its bright orange bill and its distinctive habit of skimming river surfaces to catch fish. India is home to more than 90% of the global population of approximately 3,000 individuals. The birds nest on seasonally appearing sandbars, making them highly vulnerable to changes in river flow patterns.
- **Guardians of the Skimmer Initiative:** Parveen's community-led "Guardians of the Skimmer" project on the Chambal River recruited local nest guardians and carried out continuous scientific monitoring. As a result, nest survival rose from 14% to 27%, and the local population grew from 400 individuals in 2017 to about 1,000 in 2024.
- **Future Plans with Whitley Funding:** The award funding will help Parveen strengthen protection at the Chambal Sanctuary and expand the initiative to key nesting sites around Prayagraj, where the Ganges and Yamuna rivers converge. Conservation here will need to address challenges such as boat traffic, fishing, pollution, and disturbance from pilgrimage activities including the Kumbh Mela.
- **Conservation Methods:** The project uses GPS mapping, systematic data collection, and real-time monitoring. Local guardians are given incentives for their conservation work, predator-proof fencing is installed in vulnerable stretches, and artificial nesting platforms are being experimented with at Chambal.
- **Also Honoured:** Fellow Indian conservationist Dr. Barkha Subba also won a 2026 Whitley Award for her work protecting the Himalayan Salamander and its fragile wetland habitat in Darjeeling, West Bengal.

IMPORTANT DAYS

International Labour Day 2026

In the News: The world observed International Labour Day, also known as May Day, celebrating the contributions of workers and the global labour movement. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) marked the occasion with the theme "Ensuring a Healthy Psychosocial Working Environment," drawing attention to mental health and workplace stress.

Key Points:

- **Date and Observance:** International Labour Day is observed annually on May 1 across the world. In India, it is also known as Antrarashtriya Shramik Diwas. Several Indian states including Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala declare it a public holiday, with protests, marches, and public gatherings honouring the working class.
- **Historical Origins:** The day traces its roots to the late 19th century during the peak of the Industrial Revolution. On April 21, 1856, Australian workers in Victoria staged a mass stoppage as part of the eight-hour workday movement. The date May 1 was specifically chosen to commemorate the 1886 Haymarket Affair in Chicago, where workers launched a general strike demanding an eight-hour workday.

- **Theme for 2026:** The ILO selected "Ensuring a Healthy Psychosocial Working Environment" as the theme for May Day 2026. It focuses on psychosocial risks such as stress, burnout, and mental health challenges in modern workplaces, urging governments and corporations to prioritise mental well-being alongside physical safety.
- **Celebrations in India:** Labour organisations and political parties organise marches and public forums to push for labour reforms and worker welfare. The day also highlights the condition of workers in the unorganised sector, including contract workers, migrants, and domestic workers, who often lack legal protections.

SPORTS

Punjab Kings Set New IPL Record with Historic 265-Run Chase Against Delhi Capitals

In the News: Punjab Kings pulled off the highest successful run-chase in T20 cricket history, overhauling Delhi Capitals' mammoth total of 264 runs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi during the Indian Premier League (IPL). Punjab Kings won the match by six wickets with seven balls to spare.

Key Points:

- **Record Chase:** Punjab Kings successfully chased down 265 runs against Delhi Capitals, setting a new world record for the highest successful run-chase in T20 cricket history. This surpassed their own previous best of 262, achieved against Kolkata Knight Riders in 2024.
- **Explosive Opening Stand:** Openers Prabhsimran Singh (76 off 26 balls) and Priyansh Arya (43 off 17 balls) put on a 126-run partnership, powering Punjab to 116-0 in the powerplay — the second-highest powerplay score in IPL history.
- **Shreyas Iyer's Finishing Act:** Punjab Kings captain Shreyas Iyer played an unbeaten 71 off 36 balls, hitting seven sixes, to guide his team home. He benefited from two dropped catches by Delhi fielder Karun Nair at a crucial juncture.
- **KL Rahul's Record-Breaking Century in Vain:** Delhi Capitals' wicketkeeper-batter KL Rahul scored an unbeaten 152 off 67 balls, Rahul's knock is also the highest by an Indian in the format - beating the previous mark of 151 set by Tilak Varma in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy in November 2024. It is also the third-highest individual score in IPL history overall, behind Chris Gayle's 175 not out (2013) and Brendon McCullum's 158 not out (2008).
- **Rahul-Rana Partnership:** KL Rahul and Nitish Rana (91 off 44 balls) added 220 runs for the second wicket — the highest partnership in Delhi Capitals' history and the second-highest in IPL overall, behind the 229-run stand between Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers for Royal Challengers Bengaluru in 2016.

P. V. Sindhu Gets Voting Role in BWF Council, Becomes Voice of Athletes in Global Badminton

In the News: Two-time Olympic medallist P.V. Sindhu has assumed a full voting position on the Badminton World Federation (BWF) Council, following her election as Chair of the BWF Athletes' Commission in December 2024. She made her first appearance before the global badminton membership at the Annual General Meeting held in Horsens, Denmark, on April 25, 2026.

Key Points:

- **New Role:** Sindhu has been appointed as a voting member of the BWF Council, one of badminton's most significant governance bodies. Her entry into the Council follows her election as Chair of the BWF Athletes' Commission in December 2024, after which she completed the formal vetting process and officially joined the Council at the end of 2025.
- **Significance of the Role:** Sindhu's position is particularly notable as it remains rare for an active athlete competing at the highest level to simultaneously hold a full voting position within badminton's global governance structure. Her

presence ensures that elite players' voices, experiences, and priorities are directly represented in the sport's highest decision-making forums.

- **Role and Responsibilities:** As a voting member of the BWF Council, Sindhu will participate in discussions and decisions that shape the strategic direction and future of badminton worldwide. She will serve as a bridge between the global athlete community and BWF's leadership, bringing the perspectives of players from across the world into governance discussions.
- **First Official Appearance:** Sindhu made her formal debut before the global badminton membership at the BWF Annual General Meeting held in Horsens, Denmark, on April 25, 2026, marking the official beginning of her active tenure on the Council.
- **BWF President's Welcome:** BWF President Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul welcomed Sindhu to the Council, recognising her exceptional skill, grace, and spirit on the court, and describing her as an outstanding role model to represent the voice of athletes within the organisation.

Virat Kohli Becomes First Player to Reach 9000 IPL Runs in Historic Milestone

In the News: Indian cricketing legend Virat Kohli became the first player in the history of the Indian Premier League (IPL) to score 9,000 runs, achieving the milestone during a match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Key Points:

- **Historic Milestone:** Virat Kohli became the first cricketer ever to score 9,000 runs in IPL history, cementing his status as the most dominant and consistent batter in T20 franchise cricket. The milestone was achieved during RCB's match against Delhi Capitals.
- **Match Details:** Kohli reached the landmark in his 275th IPL match, needing just 11 runs before the game began. He completed the feat with a single in the sixth over, having faced a total of 6,732 balls to accumulate 9,000 IPL runs.
- **IPL's All-Time Highest Run-Scorers:** Kohli leads the IPL run-scoring charts by a significant margin. The list of highest run-scorers in IPL history stands as follows: Virat Kohli (9,000+ runs), Rohit Sharma (7,183 runs), Shikhar Dhawan (6,769 runs), David Warner (6,565 runs), and KL Rahul (5,580 runs).
- **Records Within Reach:** Kohli is approaching two additional potential world-firsts in IPL cricket. He is closing in on becoming the first player to score 1,200 T20 runs against a single team (Delhi Capitals). He is also nearing 8,000 IPL runs scored on Indian soil, which would be another unprecedented achievement.

India Launches First Official F1 Sim Racing Championship

In the News: Formula 1 and Mumbai Falcons Racing Limited (MFRL) announced the launch of India's first Official F1 Sim Racing Championship, titled the F1 Sim Racing India Open 2026, on April 28, 2026. The initiative marks the first time Formula 1 has introduced a programme of this nature exclusively for India, aimed at creating a structured pathway from virtual racing to professional motorsport.

Key Points:

- **Championship Launch:** Formula 1 and Mumbai Falcons Racing Limited have jointly announced the F1 Sim Racing India Open 2026, India's first official Formula 1-sanctioned sim racing competition. Mumbai Falcons has been granted the rights to host the championship, establishing a national competitive platform for emerging motorsport talent across the country.
- **Competition Format:** The championship will be played on F1 25, the official game of the FIA Formula 1 World Championship, featuring identical circuits, competitive formats, and team liveries as the global series. Participants can compete via PC, PlayStation 5, and Xbox. Registrations open on April 30, 2026, through the MFRL App (available on Play Store and Apple Store).

- **Tournament Structure:** The competition will follow a multi-stage format, beginning with online qualifiers, progressing to city-based simulator rounds, and culminating in a national final in Mumbai in November 2026.
- **Regulatory and Policy Context:** The launch coincides with esports being officially recognised under the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, lending institutional legitimacy to competitive gaming initiatives such as this championship. India currently has 78.8 million Formula 1 fans, reflecting the sport's massive and growing domestic base.
- **Narain Karthikeyan's Endorsement:** India's first Formula 1 driver, Narain Karthikeyan, backed the initiative, stating that with a generation raised on F1 gaming and a booming fan base, the time is right for an official competitive sim racing championship in India. He described the initiative as globally unique and a new benchmark for talent development.
- **Mumbai Falcons' Track Record:** Founded in 2019, Mumbai Falcons became the first Indian team to win an FIA-accredited international racing championship. The organisation has previously supported the early careers of several drivers who reached the pinnacle of the sport, including Kimi Antonelli, Oliver Bearman, Jehan Daruvala, and Kush Maini, among others.

Tamil Nadu's Rithika Sri Scripts History as India's First Transgender Umpire

In the News: R. Rithika Sri, a 31-year-old transwoman from Salem, Tamil Nadu, has become India's first transgender cricket umpire, having officiated in over 15 matches across the Salem and Coimbatore circuit since 2021. Her perseverance directly led the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) to include an 'Other' gender option in its State Panel Umpire application form for the first time.

Key Points:

- **Pioneering Identity:** Rithika Sri, born R. Muthuraj and a diploma holder in Mechanical Engineering, is the first transgender umpire in Tamil Nadu. She began umpiring in the Salem and Coimbatore circuit in 2021 after being inspired by the Indian Premier League (IPL) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Institutional Support:** The Salem District Cricket Association's (SDCA) umpire committee chairman U. Jayaraman and senior umpires R. Parthasarathy and V. Santhi Booshan played a key role in training and mentoring Rithika. Jayaraman advised her to establish herself as an umpire before undergoing gender transition in 2024, to avoid discrimination affecting her progress.
- **Discrimination and Pushback:** On her first visit to a Coimbatore ground, Rithika was denied entry and faced derogatory remarks. The Coimbatore District Cricket Association (CDCA) intervened by holding a formal meeting with all affiliated grounds, issuing directives against discrimination and ensuring her safety at all venues.
- **On-Field Milestones:** Since joining the CDCA league, Rithika has officiated in over 15 matches ranging from the first to the sixth division. She cleared the CDCA umpiring examination in February and passed the Viva in the following month, and is set to appear for the TNCA State Panel Umpire exam in June.
- **Policy Change:** Rithika's advocacy directly prompted the TNCA to revise its State Panel Umpire application form to include 'Other' as a gender category alongside Male and Female, marking a landmark policy shift in Indian cricket administration.