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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Amit Shah Inaugurates EARTH Summit 2025 in Gandhinagar

In the News: Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah, along with Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, inaugurated the two-day EARTH Summit 2025-26 at Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre in Gandhinagar. The summit, jointly organized by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), focuses on empowering rural innovation for global change and strengthening India's cooperative-driven rural economy.

Key Points:

- **Event Details:** The EARTH (Empowering Agriculture, Rural Tech and Humanity) Summit 2025-26 was inaugurated on December 5, 2025, at Mahatma Mandir, Gandhinagar. This is the second edition in a series of three summits being held across India. The event was attended by Gujarat Legislative Assembly Speaker Shankar Chaudhary, State Agriculture and Cooperation Minister Jitu Vaghani, Deputy Speaker Jethabhai Ahir, and NABARD Chairman Shaji K.V.
- **Organizers and Theme:** The summit is jointly organized by NABARD and IAMAI under the theme "Empowering Rural Innovation for Global Change." The initiative aims to transform India's rural economy through digital innovation, cooperative strengthening, and sustainable agricultural practices, aligning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India).
- **Series of Three Summits:** The EARTH Summit 2025-26 is being held across three cities. The first edition took place at HITEX Exhibition Centre, Hyderabad on November 20-21, 2025. The second edition was held in Gandhinagar on December 5-6, 2025. The final national-level summit will be held in New Delhi in February 2026 to present a comprehensive policy framework for rural development.
- **Sahakar Sarathi Launch:** Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah launched Sahakar Sarathi Private Limited, a shared-services technology platform designed to revolutionize India's rural cooperative banking ecosystem. The platform provides centralized IT services to rural cooperative banks including banking software, cybersecurity tools, and payment systems integration under a pay-per-use model.
- **14 Digital Services Launched:** Amit Shah unveiled more than 13-14 new digital services and products under the Sahakar Sarathi initiative, including Digi KCC (Digital Kisan Credit Card), Campaign Sarathi, Website Sarathi, Cooperative Governance Index (India's first governance quality assessment framework for cooperative banks), ePACS (electronic Primary Agricultural Credit Societies), World's Largest Grain Storage Application, Shiksha Sarathi, and Sarathi Technology Forum.

Right to Disconnect Bill 2025 Introduced in Parliament

In the News: Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) MP Supriya Sule introduced the Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025 in the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session of Parliament. The bill aims to establish an Employees' Welfare Authority to grant workers the legal right to disconnect from work-related calls and emails beyond office hours and on holidays, addressing growing concerns about employee burnout and work-life balance in India's digital work culture.

Key Points:

- **Bill Introduction:** The Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025 was introduced as a private member's bill in the Lok Sabha on December 6, 2025, during the fifth day of the Winter Session of Parliament which began on December 1, 2025. A private member's bill is introduced by a Member of Parliament who is not a minister.
- **Core Provision:** The bill proposes granting every employee the right to refuse to answer work-related telephone calls, emails, and other electronic communications outside their designated working hours and on holidays without fear of disciplinary action, dismissal, or demotion from employers.
- **Employees' Welfare Authority:** The bill calls for the establishment of an Employees' Welfare Authority to enforce the right to disconnect, frame guidelines for implementation, conduct baseline studies on after-hours work engagement, negotiate terms between employers and employees, and resolve disputes regarding after-hours communication.
- **Penalty for Non-Compliance:** Employers or entities (companies or societies) that violate the provisions of the bill will face sanctions at a rate of 1% of the total remuneration of their employees. The authority will have regulatory powers to monitor compliance and ensure employer adherence.

- **Overtime Wages:** The bill mandates that if employees agree to work beyond fixed hours or outside prescribed working hours, employers must pay overtime wages at the normal wage rate. This provision aims to check the surge in unpaid overtime work brought about by digital transformation.
- **Digital Detox Initiatives:** The bill provides for counselling services to increase awareness among employees and citizens on the reasonable use of digital and communication tools for both professional and personal use. It also proposes the establishment of digital detox centres to help employees disconnect from digital distractions.
- **India's Workforce Statistics:** According to data cited in related bills, 51% of India's workforce clocks more than 49 hours per week, and 78% of workers report experiencing burnout. Indians work an average of 46.7 hours per week, higher than the United States (38 hours), Japan (36.6 hours), South Korea (38.6 hours), and China (46.1 hours).
- **Anna Sebastian Perayil Case:** The bill gained momentum following the tragic death of 26-year-old chartered accountant Anna Sebastian Perayil at Ernst & Young India's Pune office in July 2024. She died four months after joining, with her mother alleging death due to extreme work pressure, backbreaking workload, and overwork culture. The Union Labour Ministry initiated an official investigation into the case.
- **Companion Bills by Supriya Sule:** Along with the Right to Disconnect Bill, MP Supriya Sule introduced two other private member's bills: the Paternity and Paternal Benefits Bill, 2025 (proposing paid paternal leave for fathers) and the Code on Social Security (Amendment) Bill, 2025 (recognizing platform-based gig workers as a distinct category with minimum wages, regulated hours, and social security).
- **Global Precedents:** Several countries have enacted right to disconnect legislation. France was the pioneer, passing its law (El Khomri law) in August 2016 requiring companies with 50+ employees to negotiate disconnection rights. Other countries include Portugal (2021), Spain (2018), Italy (2017), Australia (August 2024 for companies with 15+ employees). In the global list, note that Ireland's regime is via a Code of Practice rather than a full statute (but your list of countries and years is fine as a high-level summary). For Belgium, you could note that the first civil-service right to disconnect took effect in 2022, with private-sector rules kicking in from 2023.
- **Constitutional and International Basis:** The bill is based on Article 21 of the Indian Constitution (Right to Life, Liberty and Dignity) and Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which states "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay."
- **Kerala's Similar Initiative:** In September 2025, Kerala Congress (M) MLA Dr. N Jayaraj proposed similar right to disconnect legislation in the Kerala Legislative Assembly for private sector employees, establishing district-level grievance redressal committees with regulatory powers to monitor compliance. Kerala's bill is still a proposal.

Ghaziabad Becomes India's Most Polluted City in November 2025: CREA Report

In the News: The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) released a report identifying Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, as India's most polluted city during November 2025. The report highlighted severe air quality deterioration in the National Capital Region, with Ghaziabad recording the highest levels of particulate matter pollution among Indian cities.

Key Points:

- **CREA Report Findings:** The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air published its monthly air quality analysis for November 2025, ranking Ghaziabad as India's most polluted city based on PM_{2.5} (particulate matter with diameter less than 2.5 micrometers) concentration levels.
- **Pollution Levels Recorded:** Exceeding India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (60 µg/m³ for 24-hour PM_{2.5}) and the WHO guidelines (5 µg/m³ annual mean and 15 µg/m³ 24-hour mean for PM_{2.5}) Ghaziabad recorded extremely high average PM_{2.5} levels during November 2025.
- **National Capital Region Crisis:** Multiple cities in the National Capital Region, including Delhi, Noida, Greater Noida, and Faridabad, featured prominently among India's most polluted cities in November 2025.
- **Contributing Factors:** The severe pollution in Ghaziabad and surrounding areas resulted from multiple sources including vehicular emissions, industrial activities, construction dust, stubble burning in neighboring states, and unfavorable winter meteorological conditions. Low wind speeds, temperature inversion, and reduced mixing height during November prevented pollutant dispersion, leading to accumulation of harmful particles.
- **Health Impact Assessment:** The CREA report highlighted significant public health implications of the severe air pollution, linking elevated PM_{2.5} levels to increased respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular problems, and reduced life expectancy.

- **Government Response Measures:** In response to deteriorating air quality, authorities implemented measures under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), including restrictions on construction activities, entry of polluting vehicles, and closure of schools during peak pollution days.

11th India International Science Festival (IISF) 2025 Begins in Panchkula

In the News: The 11th edition of the India International Science Festival (IISF) commenced in Panchkula, Haryana, running from December 6-9, 2025, at the Dussehra Ground in Sector 5. Union Minister of Science and Technology Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurated the festival under the theme "Vigyan Se Samruddhi: for Aatmanirbhar Bharat" (Science for Prosperity: for Self-Reliant India), celebrating India's progress in science, innovation, and technology with over 40,000 participants expected from India and abroad.

Key Points:

- **Event Duration and Location:** The 11th IISF 2025 is being held from December 6-9, 2025, at Dussehra Ground, Sector 5, Panchkula, Haryana.
- **Theme:** The festival's theme is "Vigyan Se Samruddhi: for Aatmanirbhar Bharat," which translates to "Science for Prosperity: for Self-Reliant India." The theme places science at the center of national development and highlights the role of scientific applications in strengthening self-reliance and economic growth.
- **Organizing Bodies:** IISF 2025 is organized by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) as the lead ministry, coordinated by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) Pune, in association with Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA), a national science movement with swadeshi spirit. The festival is organized under the guidance of Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh.
- **Participating Ministries and Departments:** Key participating organizations include the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Department of Space, Department of Atomic Energy, and other scientific ministries. These departments contribute through frontier technologies, research facilities, and domain specialists.
- **Outreach Partner:** Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA) serves as the outreach partner, facilitating public engagement, student participation, and linkages with schools, colleges, and community-based science groups across the country.
- **Five Thematic Focus Areas:** IISF 2025 focuses on five broad themes: (1) Science, Technology and Ecology of North-West India and the Himalayan Region, (2) Science for Society and Education, (3) Aatmanirbhar Bharat through Science and Technology, (4) Biotechnology and Bio-Economy, and (5) Integration of Traditional Knowledge with Modern Science.
- **Scale and Participation:** The festival is expected to bring together more than 40,000 participants from India and abroad, including scientists, researchers, students, educators, innovators, entrepreneurs, industry professionals, farmers, craftsmen, science communicators, and policymakers. The event features over 150 technical and thematic sessions across science, technology, innovation, and industry.
- **Priority Technology Domains:** The program highlights priority domains such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), Bio-Economy, New Age Technology, Quantum Technology, Gene Editing, satellites, launch systems, space applications, and regional climate science related to the Himalayas and North-West India.
- **IISF History and Inception:** IISF was launched in 2015 in New Delhi under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It was conceived as a national celebration of India's scientific and technological achievements, aimed at promoting scientific temper and enhancing public participation in science.
- **Previous Editions:** Since its inception, IISF has been hosted across major cities: 2015 (New Delhi - 1st edition), 2016 (New Delhi - 2nd edition), 2018 (Kolkata - 3rd edition), 2019 (Lucknow - 4th edition), 2020 (Chennai - 5th edition, held virtually due to COVID-19), 2021 (Goa - 6th edition), 2022 (Bhopal - 7th edition), 2023 (Faridabad - 9th edition held January 17-20, 2024), and 2024 (Assam - 10th edition).
- **Expanded Participation:** In 2021, the Department of Space and the Department of Atomic Energy became integral parts of IISF, broadening its scope and impact beyond the initial organizing ministries.
- **9th Edition Highlights (Faridabad 2024):** The most recent 9th edition held in Faridabad (January 17-20, 2024) under the theme "Science and Technology Public Outreach in Amrit Kaal" drew approximately 1 lakh (100,000) visitors with participation from 21 countries and 35 international delegates. It featured an announcement of a 50-acre Science City in Faridabad and an expo with over 100 stalls from government and private organizations.

Rajasthan Becomes First Indian State to Fully Digitise Voter Rolls Under SIR

In the News: Rajasthan became the first Indian state to completely digitise its electoral rolls under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) program. The achievement marks a significant milestone in India's electoral modernization efforts, with the state's Chief Electoral Officer announcing the completion of the digital transformation of voter registration data across all districts.

Key Points:

- **Historic Achievement:** Rajasthan became the first state in India to achieve complete digitisation of electoral rolls under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) initiative launched by the Election Commission of India. The state successfully converted all physical voter records into digital format, covering approximately 5.5 crore registered voters across 33 districts and 200 assembly constituencies.
- **Special Intensive Revision Program:** The SIR is a comprehensive electoral roll updation exercise conducted by the Election Commission of India to ensure accurate, updated, and error-free voter lists.
- **Voter Verification Process:** As part of the SIR exercise, comprehensive door-to-door verification was conducted using digital tablets and smartphones. BLOs used digital tools such as the BLO mobile app and online portals to verify and update voter details during field verification.

Tamil Nadu Unveils Toy Manufacturing Policy 2025

In the News: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin unveiled the Tamil Nadu Toy Manufacturing Policy 2025, positioning the state as a global hub for next-generation toy design, development, and production. The policy aims to capture a larger share of the global toy market valued at approximately \$180 billion while reviving Tamil Nadu's centuries-old artisanal toy traditions and integrating them with modern manufacturing supply chains.

Key Points:

- **Policy Announcement:** Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced the Toy Manufacturing Policy 2025 in December 2025. The policy had been first announced for release by Industries Minister TRB Rajaa in the Tamil Nadu Assembly in June 2024.
- **India's Toy Trade Transformation:** Between FY 2014-15 and FY 2022-23, India witnessed a 52% decline in toy imports and a 239% surge in toy exports. Toy imports fell from \$332.55 million to \$158.7 million, while exports rose from \$96.17 million to \$325.72 million during this period.
- **Investment Targets:** The state government aims to attract at least 10 anchor investors in the toy manufacturing sector. Large investments exceeding Rs 50 crore that generate a minimum of 500 jobs will qualify for special incentive packages.
- **Dedicated Infrastructure:** The policy proposes establishment of a dedicated Toy Manufacturing Park and promotion of creative design studios to drive research, innovation, and creation of high-skilled jobs.
- **Priority Product Categories:** The policy prioritizes futuristic and high-value product categories including STEM-based educational toys, electronic and interactive toys, puzzles and board games, action figures, and plush dolls.
- **MSME Support:** Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) entering toy manufacturing are eligible for capital subsidies of up to Rs 1.5 crore, along with payroll support and other benefits.
- **Creative Design Studio Support:** A 30% payroll subsidy for 12 months will be offered to creative design studios engaged in toy design or research and development set up in Tamil Nadu.
- **Policy Validity:** The policy will remain valid for five years. It will be implemented through the Industries Department, with SIPCOT (State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited) acting as the nodal agency for incentive disbursement.
- **Thanjavur Thalayatti Bommai:** The iconic Thanjavur Thalayatti Bommai (bobblehead dancing doll), a traditional terracotta toy with GI tag status granted in 2008, continues to symbolize the state's rich artisanal heritage and is positioned for global footprint under the new policy.
- **Ambasamudram Wooden Toys:** Ambasamudram Choppu Saman, traditional wooden lacquered toys from Tirunelveli with history dating back to the 18th century, received GI tag recognition. These toys are made using seasoned wood logs, natural colors, lac resin, and screw pine leaves.
- **Alignment with National Goals:** The policy aligns with the Government of India's 'Make in India' campaign, National Action Plan for Toys (NAPT), and quality control measures including BIS certification requirements for toy safety.
- **Tamil Nadu's Manufacturing Base:** Tamil Nadu already has a significant presence in toy manufacturing among Indian states. The state employs 42% of India's total female workforce in the manufacturing sector and achieved \$44 billion in export performance across various sectors in FY 2023-24.

Tata-Lockheed Martin to Build New MRO Facility for C-130J Super Hercules in India

In the News: Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) and Lockheed Martin officially broke ground on a new Defence Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facility in Bengaluru, Karnataka, to support the C-130J Super Hercules fleet. The groundbreaking ceremony brought together senior officials from the Indian Air Force (IAF), government dignitaries, industry leaders, and senior executives from both Lockheed Martin and Tata Advanced Systems.

Key Points:

- **Facility Overview and Strategic Significance:** The state-of-the-art C-130J MRO facility will be India's first depot-level sustainment centre for the C-130J Super Hercules, marking the first such facility outside the United States and Europe.
- **Construction Timeline and Operational Readiness:** Construction of the facility is expected to be completed by the end of 2026, with the first aircraft scheduled to enter the facility for maintenance operations in early 2027. The phased approach ensures that the IAF's operational capabilities remain uninterrupted while the new infrastructure is being established.
- **Global Network Integration:** The Defence MRO facility will join the existing global network of Lockheed Martin Certified Service Centres and will be strategically positioned to service not only the C-130J Super Hercules but also the KC-130J aerial refueling variant and legacy C-130B-H aircraft in the future. This integration into the global support network enables India to provide maintenance services for regional and international C-130 operators across the Indian Ocean Region and beyond, creating new revenue opportunities through regional servicing capabilities.
- **Regional Security and Operational Benefits:** Rod McLean, Vice President and General Manager of Lockheed Martin Air Mobility and Maritime Missions, emphasized that the facility will bolster response time and security in the Pacific region while ensuring world-class sustainment capability within India.
- **Indian Air Force's C-130J Operations and Achievements:** The IAF currently operates 12 C-130J-30 Super Hercules aircraft, which have been in service since 2011. These aircraft have demonstrated exceptional capabilities in challenging operational environments, including record-setting operations such as high-altitude landings at Daulat Beg Oldi in the Himalayas and operations at Nayoma Air Base in eastern Ladakh, marking the world's highest operational fighter base.
- **Long-Standing Partnership Between Tata and Lockheed Martin:** Tata Advanced Systems and Lockheed Martin have maintained a long-standing industrial partnership through Tata Lockheed Martin Aerostructures Limited (TLMAL), a joint venture established in 2010. TLMAL has the distinction of being the single global source of C-130J empennage (tail) assemblies included on all new Super Hercules aircraft produced globally. In early December 2025, TLMAL celebrated the delivery of its 250th C-130J tail, marking a significant milestone in the US-India defense relationship and exemplifying the success of India's "Make in India" initiative.
- **Connection to Medium Transport Aircraft Programme:** The MRO facility announcement comes as Lockheed Martin and Tata Advanced Systems are jointly pitching the C-130J Super Hercules as the ideal choice for the IAF's upcoming Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA) programme. In 2022, the IAF issued a Request for Information (RFI) to procure approximately 80 medium transport aircraft to replace its aging fleet of Soviet-era AN-32 and IL-76 planes.
- **C-130J Global Fleet and Capabilities:** The C-130J Super Hercules serves 27 operators in 23 nations worldwide, with more than 560 aircraft delivered and over 3 million flight hours logged across 19 different mission types. The C-130J-30 variant offers interoperability with global air forces, low lifecycle costs, reduced fuel consumption resulting in a smaller carbon footprint, and proven performance in extreme operational conditions.

Bollywood Star Raveena Tandon Wins PETA India's Top Annual Award

In the News: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India announced Bollywood actor Raveena Tandon as its 2025 Person of the Year. The recognition celebrates her long-standing commitment to animal rights, fierce dedication to protecting wildlife, tireless advocacy on behalf of community animals, her vow to live meat-free, and her compassionate efforts to promote empathy for all living, feeling beings.

Key Points:

- **Award Recognition and Citation:** PETA India named Raveena Tandon as the 2025 Person of the Year for inspiring compassion for all living beings, standing up for community animals and wildlife, and promoting plant-based eating.
- **Mechanical Elephant Initiative:** Earlier in 2025, Tandon, alongside her daughter and actor Rasha Thadani, partnered with PETA India to gift a life-size mechanical elephant named 'Airavata' to Karnataka's Thousand Pillars Jain Temple at Moodabidri in recognition of the temple's kind decision never to own or hire live elephants. The temple became the first Jain temple in the world to adopt this technology.

- **Humane Education Advocacy:** Tandon has been a champion for humane education, actively promoting PETA India's award-winning Compassionate Citizen programme, which is designed to foster empathy in young learners by helping them better understand and appreciate animals.
- **Campaign Against Animal Cruelty in Fashion Industry:** Tandon joined PETA India in calling attention to the suffering endured by snakes, alligators, and other animals who are violently slaughtered for their skin in the fashion and accessories industry. She has actively campaigned against the use of animal skins in leather accessories, raising awareness that more than 1.4 billion cows, sheep, goats, dogs, cats, and other animals are killed in horrific ways each year to be turned into leather products
- **Plant-Based Eating Advocacy:** Tandon promoted plant-powered eating to her millions of social media followers by publicly calling on Burger King to open a fully vegan location in India or to at least offer vegan Whoppers.
- **Previous Award Recipients:** Past recipients of PETA India's Person of the Year Award include a diverse group of influential personalities. Recent honorees include Bollywood star Adah Sharma (2024), actor Dia Mirza (2023), actor Sonakshi Sinha (2022), actor Alia Bhatt (2021), actor John Abraham (2020), cricketer Virat Kohli (2019), MP Shashi Tharoor (2018), actor Anushka Sharma (2017), actor Sunny Leone (2016), comedian Kapil Sharma (2015), former Supreme Court Justice KS Panicker Radhakrishnan (2014), actor Jacqueline Fernandez (2014), actor R Madhavan (2012), actor Hema Malini (2011), and actor Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, among others.
- **PETA India Background and Mission:** People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India is the country's largest animal rights organization, operating under the simple principle that "animals are not ours to experiment on, eat, wear, use for entertainment, or abuse in any other way." PETA was founded in 1980 with its motto emphasizing that animals deserve ethical treatment across all aspects of human interaction. PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters globally, with PETA President Ingrid Newkirk leading the organization's worldwide efforts.

Maharashtra Sets Guinness World Record for Solar Pump Deployment in Agriculture

In the News: Maharashtra officially entered the Guinness Book of World Records by installing 45,911 off-grid solar agricultural pumps in just 30 days under the 'Magel Tyala Saur Krushi Pump Yojana' (MTSKPY) scheme. The Guinness World Records certificate was presented at a formal ceremony held at the Auric City ground in Shendra MIDC, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis as the chief guest.

Key Points:

- **Record Achievement and Global Recognition:** Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) successfully installed 45,911 off-grid solar agricultural pumps between October 27, 2025, and November 25, 2025, completing the deployment within an intensive 30-day execution window. This accomplishment positions Maharashtra as the fastest-deploying solar agriculture state in India and second only to China globally in the scale and speed of solar pump deployment by a single administrative region.
- **Scheme Implementation Framework:** The record was achieved through the effective implementation of two major government schemes - the PM-KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan) Component B and the state's flagship 'Magel Tyala Saur Krushi Pump Yojana' (MTSKPY). The PM-KUSUM Component B scheme focuses on installation of standalone solar-powered agricultural pumps of capacity up to 7.5 HP in off-grid areas where grid supply is not available or reliable. The scheme provides Central Financial Assistance (CFA) of 30% of the benchmark cost or tender cost, whichever is lower, with state government contributing another 30% subsidy, while farmers bear the remaining 40% of the cost.
- **Maharashtra's Leadership in Solar Agriculture:** Maharashtra has emerged as the leading state in India for solar agriculture adoption, with 7 lakh (700,000) solar pumps already installed prior to this record. This accounts for approximately 65% of all solar pumps installed in India, making Maharashtra the highest contributor in the country.
- **Strategic Approach and Implementation Excellence:** MSEDCL's operational excellence was achieved through structured planning and prioritization, with installation efforts focused on drought-prone zones to maximize impact. The success was made possible through efficient scheme design, transparent vendor empanelment, and strict service-level compliance mechanisms. Every vendor was mandated to resolve farmer grievances within three days, failing which matters escalate to MSEDCL for action. The state adopted a policy to release new agricultural connections exclusively through off-grid solar pumps, shifting fully to solar-based solutions.
- **Pump Sizing Policy and Farmer Benefits:** MSEDCL implemented an equitable pump-sizing policy based on land holdings - 3 HP pumps for agricultural land up to 2.5 acres, 5 HP pumps for land up to 5 acres, and 7 HP pumps for larger holdings.

- **Regional Focus on Marathwada:** The solar pump scheme directly addresses a major challenge in drought-prone regions like Marathwada - the lack of reliable daytime electricity for irrigation, which previously forced farmers to work at night facing risks from insects, snakes, and wild animals.

Nitin Gadkari Backs 10-15 Year Vehicle Scrappage Rule at Auto Summit 2025

In the News: At the Zee Media Auto Summit 2025 held in December 2025, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari defended the 10-15 year vehicle scrappage rule, particularly for diesel and petrol vehicles in the Delhi-NCR region. As chief guest at the event, Gadkari emphasized that reducing air pollution is the critical priority and that older petrol and diesel vehicles are hazardous to the environment, making the scrappage policy essential for public welfare.

Key Points:

- **Summit Platform:** Nitin Gadkari served as chief guest at the Zee Media Auto Summit 2025, an annual gathering organized by Zee Media Publications that brings together automotive industry leaders, experts, and innovators to discuss key achievements and examine trends shaping India's mobility future. The summit also featured the DNA Auto Awards 4.0, recognizing excellence in the automotive sector.
- **Defense of Scrappage Rule:** Gadkari made a significant statement defending the ongoing debate around the 10-15 year diesel and petrol vehicle scrappage rule in Delhi-NCR.
- **Economic Rationale:** Gadkari pointed out the economic implications of continued reliance on fossil fuels, noting that India spends Rs 22 lakh crore annually on petroleum imports.
- **Alternative Solutions and Conversions:** Gadkari suggested practical alternatives for vehicle owners, including converting existing diesel cars to CNG (Compressed Natural Gas), noting that CNG is now widely available in Delhi and conversion kits are accessible for petrol cars.
- **Infrastructure Development Context:** At the summit, Gadkari also highlighted India's broader infrastructure achievements, announcing that the Delhi-Dehradun corridor has begun trial operations and will be fully functional within 10-15 days, and that the Kanpur-Lucknow route now takes only 30 minutes.

Neal Mohan Named TIME's 2025 CEO of the Year

In the News: TIME Magazine announced Indian-origin YouTube CEO Neal Mohan as its 2025 CEO of the Year. The recognition highlights Mohan's leadership in transforming YouTube into a dominant force in global entertainment and culture since taking over as CEO in February 2023. TIME described his role as central to shaping what billions of people watch daily across the world's largest video platform.

Key Points:

- **TIME Recognition and Profile:** TIME Magazine named Neal Mohan as the 2025 CEO of the Year, describing him as the "farmer" cultivating the global cultural diet through YouTube. The publication stated, "In many ways YouTube is creating the cultural diet that the globe is beginning to subsist on. Mohan is the farmer; what he cultivates will be what we eat." TIME characterized Mohan as "surprisingly mellow" despite leading what it termed the "world's most powerful distraction machine."
- **Leadership Transition and Background:** Mohan became YouTube's CEO on February 16, 2023, succeeding Susan Wojcicki who stepped down after serving nine years as CEO. He had worked closely with Wojcicki for nearly 15 years since Google acquired DoubleClick in 2007. Prior to becoming CEO, Mohan served as YouTube's Chief Product Officer from November 2015 to February 2023, overseeing all products including YouTube Kids, YouTube Music, YouTube TV, and YouTube Shorts.
- **Platform Growth and Global Reach:** YouTube has 2.74 billion monthly active users as of 2024, making it the second most popular social media platform globally after Facebook. YouTube Shorts, the platform's short-form video feature launched to compete with TikTok, receives over 70 billion daily views as of 2024.
- **Artificial Intelligence Integration:** YouTube has invested heavily in artificial intelligence to help creators work faster and reach global audiences. In September 2025, YouTube introduced more than 30 AI tools, triple the number launched the previous year. These tools include features like Dream Screen for content creation, auto-dubbing for multilingual content, and Shorts enhancement capabilities. Mohan emphasized that AI would bring back some of YouTube's early energy by giving new creators more opportunities to build audiences from scratch while also playing a critical safety role in content moderation.

India Post Unveils Kerala's First Gen-Z Post Office Extension

In the News: India Post inaugurated Kerala's first Gen-Z Post Office extension counter at CMS College, Kottayam, marking a revolutionary approach to modernizing postal services for younger generations. The facility was officially opened by Shri N.R. Giri, Director Postal Services, Kerala Central Region, with Union Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia praising the initiative as a perfect blend of tradition and innovation.

Key Points:

- **Conceptual Philosophy:** The Gen-Z Post Office was developed following the core philosophy "Of the students, by the students, for the students." The entire space was imagined, planned, and co-created by CMS College students in collaboration with India Post officials, representing a perfect fusion of creativity, sustainability, and modern service delivery.
- **Location and Significance:** The extension counter functions as part of the Kottayam Head Post Office within the historic CMS College campus in Kottayam, which is known as the "Land of Letters" or "Akshara Nagari." This initiative demonstrates how public institutions can adapt to changing societal needs while preserving their legacy and cultural heritage.
- **Multi-functional Design:** The postal extension counter is not just a traditional service point but serves as a vibrant, youthful, nature-infused space that seamlessly blends indoor and outdoor areas. It functions as a work café, green corner, community hub, workplace, meeting place, creative hub, relaxation zone, and community corner, staying true to the college's ethos of harmony with nature.
- **Nature-Themed Features:** The facility includes a nature-themed seating zone with picnic-table style arrangements and a vertical garden offering a refreshing and calming ambience. Additional seating made from refurbished tyres reflects the students' commitment to sustainability and eco-friendly practices, showcasing environmental consciousness in the design.
- **Postal Services:** The facility is equipped with a fully functional Multi-Purpose Counter Machine (MPCM) booking counter with packaging materials and a MyStamp printer, ensuring enhanced service accessibility. Services include QR code-based parcel booking, registered post, customized stamps, and Smart Service touchpoints providing online postal services.
- **Broader National Initiative:** This Gen-Z post office is part of a larger national initiative to modernize postal services across educational campuses in India. The Department of Posts has plans to revamp 46 existing post offices located within educational campuses across the country, transforming them into vibrant, youth-centric spaces.

President Droupadi Murmu Presents Shilp Guru and National Handicrafts Awards for 2023 and 2024

In the News: President Droupadi Murmu presented the Shilp Guru Awards and National Handicrafts Awards for 2023 and 2024 at a special ceremony held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, as part of the National Handicrafts Week celebrations (December 8-14, 2025). The event, organized by the Ministry of Textiles, honored 48 distinguished artisans including 12 Shilp Guru recipients and 36 National Award winners, recognizing their exemplary contributions to preserving and promoting India's rich handicraft heritage while celebrating the sector's crucial role in rural livelihoods, women's empowerment, and sustainable development.

Key Points:

- **Award Ceremony Details:** The prestigious award ceremony was held on December 9, 2025, at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, graced by President Droupadi Murmu as the Chief Guest. The event was presided over by Union Minister of Textiles Giriraj Singh, with Pabitra Margherita, Minister of State for Textiles and External Affairs, attending as the Guest of Honour. Other dignitaries present included Neelam Shami Rao, Secretary (Textiles), and Amrit Raj, Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), along with artisans, industry leaders, exporters, designers, and senior officials.
- **Total Awards Presented:** A total of 48 awards were conferred for the 2023-2024 cycle, comprising 12 Shilp Guru Awards (the highest national recognition in the handicrafts sector) and 36 National Handicraft Awards. Within the National Awards, 2 were special Design and Innovation Awards recognizing contemporary creativity in the sector. Among all awardees, 20 were women artisans, reflecting the growing participation and leadership of women in the handicrafts sector.
- **Diversity of Crafts Recognized:** The crafts recognized included woodwork and wood carving, metal craft and metalwork, clay modeling and pottery, jute craft and natural fiber products, hand-printed textiles and artistic textiles, Pattachitra (traditional scroll painting), leather puppetry, terracotta work, cane and bamboo crafts, stone carving and sculpture, papier-mâché, handmade carpets and rugs, toys, dolls, and puppets, and painting.
- **Sample Awardees for 2023:** For 2023, the Shilp Guru Award in the hand-painted textiles category was presented to Ajit Kumar Das of West Bengal, while D. Sivamma from Andhra Pradesh received the Shilp Guru Award in the leather puppet category, recognizing her mastery in this traditional folk art form. The National Awards for 2023 were conferred to Hirabai Jhareka Baghel of Chhattisgarh for excellence in metal craft.

- **Sample Awardees for 2024:** For 2024, the Shilp Guru Award was presented to Subhash Arora from Haryana in the Metal Craft category, recognizing his exceptional mastery in metalwork techniques, and Mohammad Dilshad from Uttar Pradesh in the wood carving category, honoring his traditional woodworking skills. The National Awards for 2024 were given to T. Baskaran of Tamil Nadu for stone carving, showcasing the southern tradition of sculptural excellence, Rupban Chitrakar from West Bengal for painting, representing the state's rich artistic heritage, and Baldev Baghmare of Madhya Pradesh under the tribal artisans category, highlighting the contributions of indigenous communities to India's handicraft traditions.
- **About National Handicrafts Awards:** The National Handicrafts Awards were instituted in 1965, making 2025 the 60th year of this prestigious recognition. Since their inception, these awards have honored exceptional craftspersons whose exemplary workmanship and artistic excellence have enriched India's cultural landscape and contributed significantly to preserving traditional craft practices
- **About Shilp Guru Awards:** The Shilp Guru Awards were instituted in 2002, making 2025 the 23rd year of this highest recognition in the Indian handicrafts sector. The Shilp Guru designation represents the pinnacle of achievement for master craftspersons who have demonstrated unparalleled mastery, innovation, and contribution to their craft traditions.
- **National Handicrafts Week 2025 (December 8-14):** National Handicrafts Week is observed annually from December 8-14 as a tribute to India's artisans and a celebration of the enduring cultural significance of handicrafts in Indian society. The 2025 edition featured a wide spectrum of activities and public engagements aimed at enhancing awareness about traditional crafts, strengthening artisan livelihoods through market linkages and skill development, and promoting the sector's socio-economic relevance in contemporary India.

Bank of Baroda Recognised as 'Best Bank in India' by The Banker: Key Highlights and Significance

In the News: Bank of Baroda (BoB), one of India's leading public sector banks, was recognized as 'Best Bank in India' at the prestigious Bank of the Year Awards 2025 - Asia-Pacific by The Banker magazine, a Financial Times publication. The award, announced in Mumbai, celebrates Bank of Baroda's excellence, innovation, and outstanding contribution to the banking industry, underscoring the bank's continued focus on delivering superior financial performance, driving digital transformation, enhancing customer experience, and strengthening its leadership position in the Indian banking sector.

Key Points:

- **Award Recognition and Significance:** The Bank of the Year Awards 2025 by The Banker magazine represent one of the most prestigious global recognitions in the banking industry, celebrating the world's leading financial institutions. The Banker is a respected publication of the Financial Times Group, lending significant credibility to the honor. Being chosen by The Banker places Bank of Baroda among top-performing global banks, showcasing India's progress in banking innovation and positioning the bank for enhanced trust among customers, investors, and international partners.
- **Wealth Management Expansion:** The bank has expanded its wealth management product suite offering bespoke solutions to Ultra High Net Worth Individual (UHNWI) and High Net Worth Individual (HNWI) clients including unique investment solutions in Mutual Funds, Portfolio Management Services (PMS), and Alternative Investment Funds (AIF) platforms, as well as relevant Life, Health, and General insurance solutions through partner tie-ups
- **About Bank of Baroda:** Bank of Baroda was founded on July 20, 1908, by Sir Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III in Baroda (now Vadodara), Gujarat, making it one of India's oldest and most established banking institutions with over 117 years of history. As a state-owned banking and financial services organization, the Government of India holds a 63.97 percent stake, making it majorly government-owned. The bank operates an extensive distribution network including 8,200+ branches across India, 10,000+ ATMs for customer convenience, 1,200+ self-service e-lobbies equipped with digital banking facilities, and 20,000 Business Correspondents extending banking services to remote areas. Bank of Baroda serves approximately 165 million customers across 17 countries, reflecting its significant domestic and international presence.
- **International Presence and Subsidiaries:** The bank has joint ventures including IndiaFirst Life Insurance Company Limited for life insurance distribution and India Infradebt Ltd. engaged in infrastructure financing. Bank of Baroda owns 98.57 percent stake in The Nainital Bank, a subsidiary bank.

Alia Bhatt Honoured with Golden Globe Horizon Award at Red Sea Film Festival

In the News: Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt was honored with the prestigious Golden Globe Horizon Award at the 5th Red Sea International Film Festival held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The award, presented during a glitzy Golden Globes Gala event, recognizes Bhatt as an emerging creative force in global cinema whose work bridges cultures and showcases the rising influence of film industries across the Middle East, Asia, and beyond, marking a major milestone in her international career trajectory.

Key Points:

- **Award Ceremony Details:** The Golden Globes Gala event was held on December 11, 2025 (Wednesday evening), during the 5th Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- **About the Golden Globes Horizon Award:** The Golden Globes Horizon Award celebrates artists whose rapid ascent and impactful contributions to film and television reflect a dynamic shift in global storytelling. The inaugural award presented to Alia Bhatt recognizes an artist whose rise in global cinema reflects the growing influence of the Middle East, Asia, and beyond as centers for film and television production.
- **Alia Bhatt's Career Achievements and Recognition:** Alia Bhatt has emerged as one of the most influential entertainers of her generation, earning critical acclaim and box-office success for standout performances throughout her career. She has won multiple Filmfare Awards, Bollywood's most prestigious film honors, recognizing her exceptional acting talent. She was named to Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People list, reflecting her global impact beyond Indian cinema. Bhatt has earned widespread recognition for her nuanced portrayals of powerful women and complex characters that resonate with audiences worldwide.
- **Shared Honor with Hend Sabry:** Tunisian actress Hend Sabry, who received the Omar Sharif Award at the same ceremony, acknowledged the significance of sharing the stage with Alia Bhatt. Sabry's performances in films such as "The Yacoubian Building," "Scheherazade," "Tell Me a Story," and "Asmaa" have won her widespread recognition for portraying complex, socially resonant characters, making the pairing of these two influential actresses particularly meaningful for women's representation in global cinema.
- **Red Sea International Film Festival Context:** The 5th Red Sea International Film Festival, which began on December 4, 2025, has emerged as one of the region's premier film events, particularly significant given that similar festivals in Dubai and Abu Dhabi have wound down operations, leaving a cultural gap in the Middle East film festival calendar. The festival serves as a platform for celebrating global cinema while highlighting the Middle East's growing importance as a center for film production and exhibition.
- **Golden Globes Organization and Ownership:** Golden Globes FAQs state the Golden Globes is owned by Penske Media Eldridge and produced by Dick Clark Productions.

Vigyanika 2025: Promoting Science Through Literature and Creative Communication

In the News: The CSIR–National Institute of Science Communication and Policy Research (CSIR–NIScPR) in New Delhi, alongside Vijnana Bharti (VIBHA), the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) from Pune, and Panjab University, Chandigarh, successfully organized Vigyanika: Science Literature Festival 2025 as an integral part of the India International Science Festival (IISF) 2025 held in Panchkula, Haryana.

Key Points:

- **Festival Overview and Objectives:** Vigyanika: Science Literature Festival 2025 is an annual event that connects science with literature, serving as a vibrant platform for showcasing India's rich legacy of promoting science and inculcating scientific temper among the public through multilingual scientific literature, science poetry, science drama, and folk art.
- **Organizing Institutions:** The festival was coordinated by multiple prestigious scientific and educational institutions working in collaboration. CSIR–National Institute of Science Communication and Policy Research (CSIR–NIScPR), New Delhi, served as the primary coordinating organization, bringing its expertise in science communication and policy research. Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA), a major science popularization movement in India, partnered as a key organizing body.
- **Inaugural Session Theme:** The festival commenced with a special inaugural session titled "Bhartiya Vigyan Vimarsh me Sahitya aur Sanchar Madhyamo ki Bhoomika" (The Role of Literature and Communication Media in Indian Scientific Discourse). This session examined the crucial role that literature and various communication platforms play in shaping India's scientific dialogues and public understanding of science.
- **Historical Evolution of Scientific Institutions:** Prof. Arun Kumar Grover, former Vice-Chancellor of Panjab University, presented a reflective look at the historical evolution of India's scientific institutions and science communication practices.
- **Vigyan Kavi Sammelan (Science Poetry Gathering):** A vibrant highlight of the first day was the Vigyan Kavi Sammelan, a unique event that united poetry and science to showcase how creative literary expression can illuminate scientific concepts and make them emotionally resonant and memorable. Distinguished poets and winners of the "Vigyanika: Science Poem Writing Competition" recited fascinating science poems in multiple Indian languages including Hindi, English, Telugu, Gujarati, Marathi, Konkani, and Punjabi, demonstrating the multilingual nature of Indian science communication.

- **Panel Discussion: Apni Bhasha Apna Vigyan (Our Language, Our Science):** A key panel discussion shed light on the vital role of Indian languages in effective science communication and public engagement with scientific knowledge. Participants including editor Shri Debobrat Ghose and Dr. Manish Mohan Gore stressed that communicating scientific ideas in one's native language fosters inclusivity, enhances comprehension, and encourages active participation from non-English speaking populations who constitute the majority of India's citizens.
- **Integration with India International Science Festival (IISF) 2025:** Vigyanika 2025 was organized as an integral component of the 11th India International Science Festival (IISF) 2025, which was held from December 6-9, 2025, in Panchkula, Haryana, under the theme "Vigyan Se Samruddhi: for Aatmanirbhar Bharat" (From Science to Prosperity: for Self-Reliant India).
- **Historical Context and Evolution:** Vigyanika has evolved as a recurring feature of establishing itself as one of the well-attended and anticipated events within the larger science festival. The Science Literature Festival has been organized in various editions of IISF including IISF 2017 in Chennai, IISF 2018 in Lucknow, IISF 2020 (virtual), IISF 2021 in Goa (hybrid), IISF 2022 in Bhopal, IISF 2023 in Faridabad, and now IISF 2025 in Panchkula.

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal Unveils India's First Zero-Emission Electric Tug Project

In the News: Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal virtually flagged off the steel-cutting ceremony for India's first all-electric green tug, marking a landmark moment in the country's shift toward sustainable and energy-efficient maritime operations. The vessel, designed for Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) in Kandla, Gujarat, is being developed under the Ministry's Green Tug Transition Programme (GTTP), a flagship initiative aimed at accelerating India's maritime decarbonisation efforts and achieving net-zero maritime emissions.

Key Points:

- **Event and Ceremony Details:** The virtual steel-cutting ceremony was attended by Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Shantanu Thakur, Secretary MoPSW Vijay Kumar (IAS), DPA Chairman Sushil Kumar Singh (IRSME), senior officials of DPA Kandla, representatives from Netincon and Ripley (consultants), technical experts from Kongsberg Maritime (equipment supplier), and engineers from Atreya Shipyard which is undertaking the tug's construction.
- **Green Tug Transition Programme (GTTP) Overview:** The Green Tug Transition Programme was formally launched in August 2024 by Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, though it was initially announced in 2023. The program is described as a pivotal component of India's 'Panch Karma Sankalp' (Five-Point Resolution) initiative, which focuses on green shipping and digitalization in the maritime sector. Representing a total investment of approximately Rs. 1,000 crore (around \$120.5 million USD), the GTTP aims to transition harbor tugboats from diesel-powered vessels to zero-emission or low-emission vessels powered by clean technologies.
- **Alignment with Make in India Initiative:** Union Minister Sonowal highlighted that the Make in India and Make for the World pillars continue to guide port modernisation efforts across the country. The construction of this green tug at Atreya Shipyard, a domestic shipbuilding facility, supports India's shipbuilding ecosystem and strengthens indigenous manufacturing capabilities in advanced maritime technologies.
- **DPA's Leadership in Green Port Operations:** Minister Sonowal noted that Deendayal Port Authority's leadership in operationalizing the GTTP demonstrates how Indian ports are moving decisively toward clean-energy solutions. "DPA's initiative shows the world that India is serious about green ports and sustainable maritime logistics.
- **International Technology Partnership:** Norway-based marine technology company Kongsberg Maritime has been contracted to deliver a fully integrated equipment package for this 'first-ever' electric tugboat in India, described as the "world's first" full electric tug integration. Kongsberg will supply advanced systems including electric propulsion technology, battery management systems, navigation and control systems, and vessel automation solutions
- **Construction Timeline and Commissioning:** The tug is being constructed at Atreya Shipyard, with the steel-cutting ceremony on December 3, 2025, marking the commencement of physical construction. The vessel is planned to be handed over and commissioned in the last quarter of 2026 (October-December 2026), approximately one year after the steel-cutting ceremony. Upon commissioning, the unit will operate at Deendayal Port (also known as Kandla Port) in Gujarat, one of India's major ports handling significant cargo volumes including petroleum, chemicals, and containerized goods. The construction timeline demonstrates India's capability to execute complex green technology projects within reasonable timeframes, setting the stage for rapid scaling of green tug deployment across other ports.

Plan for Conducting Census of India 2027 Approved By Union Cabinet

In the News: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the proposal for conducting the Census of India 2027 at an estimated cost of Rs. 11,718.24 crore, marking the beginning of India's first fully digital census. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced the approval following the Cabinet meeting, highlighting that this landmark census—the 16th in India's history and 8th since Independence—will be the world's largest administrative and statistical exercise, involving approximately 30 lakh field functionaries and deploying cutting-edge digital technology for data collection, monitoring, and dissemination.

Key Points:

- **Cabinet Approval and Budget Allocation:** The Union Cabinet, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved a comprehensive budgetary outlay of Rs. 11,718.24 crore (approximately \$1.4 billion USD) for conducting the Census of India 2027 on December 12, 2025. This substantial investment represents the government's commitment to modernizing India's foundational data-collection exercise and transforming traditional paper-based enumeration into seamless mobile and web-based digital processes.
- **Two-Phase Implementation Timeline:** The Census of India 2027 will be conducted in two meticulously planned phases to accommodate India's vast geography and diverse climatic conditions. The first phase, termed Houselisting and Housing Census (HLC), will be conducted from April to September 2026, with each state and union territory selecting a convenient 30-day period within this window for completing the enumeration. This phase will collect comprehensive data on housing conditions, amenities available to households, infrastructure facilities, and assets owned by families. The second and primary phase, Population Enumeration (PE), will be conducted nationwide in February 2027, capturing detailed demographic, sociocultural, and economic parameters of every individual in the country. A critical revisional round will follow from March 1 to March 5, 2027, allowing corrections and verification of collected data.
- **Special Arrangements for Snow-Bound Regions:** Recognizing the unique climatic challenges faced by certain regions, the Census 2027 has special provisions for snow-bound and non-synchronous areas. For the Union Territory of Ladakh and snow-bound regions of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir and the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the Population Enumeration will be conducted earlier, in September 2026, instead of February 2027. This scheduling adjustment ensures that census operations can be completed before heavy snowfall makes these remote and high-altitude areas inaccessible to enumerators.
- **India's First Fully Digital Census:** Census 2027 marks a historic transition from traditional paper-based enumeration to a completely digital, technology-driven exercise. Data will be collected using mobile applications specifically developed for census operations, available in Hindi, English, and regional Indian languages for both Android and iOS platforms, ensuring accessibility across different devices and linguistic preferences. A dedicated portal called the Census Management & Monitoring System (CMMS) has been developed for managing and monitoring the entire census process on a real-time basis, enabling supervisors and administrators to track progress, identify bottlenecks, and ensure quality control instantaneously.
- **Census-as-a-Service (CaaS) Framework:** A central innovation in Census 2027 is the implementation of the "Census-as-a-Service" (CaaS) framework, a novel approach to data dissemination that will provide government ministries, departments, and authorized agencies with clean, machine-readable, and actionable datasets for policy-making at the click of a button. Unlike previous censuses where accessing specific data required manual tabulation, custom reports, and lengthy processing times, the CaaS framework will enable real-time or near-real-time access to census data through digital dashboards, APIs (Application Programming Interfaces), and query-based systems.
- **Legal Framework and Constitutional Mandate:** Census 2027 will be conducted under the legal framework established by the Census Act, 1948, and the Census Rules, 1990, which provide the statutory authority for conducting decennial population censuses in India. The Census Act makes it compulsory for every person to provide accurate information to census enumerators and empowers the government to collect demographic data across the entire territory of India. The census serves multiple constitutional and statutory obligations: it provides the demographic baseline for delimitation (determining boundaries) and reservation of constituencies for Parliamentary elections to the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assembly elections, and elections to Panchayats (village councils) and other local bodies as mandated by various constitutional provisions. Article 82 of the Indian Constitution requires that Parliament readjust the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha based on census population figures. Similarly, state assemblies must be reconstituted based on census data.

India's First Indigenous Hydrogen Fuel Cell Passenger Vessel Begins Commercial Service in Varanasi

In the News: Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal flagged off the commercial operation of India's first fully indigenous hydrogen fuel cell passenger vessel at Namo Ghat, Varanasi, marking a major milestone in the country's green maritime push and efforts to decarbonize inland water transport. The 24-meter air-conditioned catamaran, built by Cochin Shipyard Limited and owned by the Inland Waterways Authority of India, is the first vessel in India to demonstrate hydrogen fuel cell propulsion in a maritime environment, operating on a Low Temperature Proton Exchange Membrane fuel cell system that emits only water as a byproduct, ensuring completely pollution-free navigation on the sacred river Ganga.

Key Points:

- **Historic Launch and Significance:** India launched its first fully indigenous hydrogen fuel cell-powered passenger vessel into commercial service on December 11, 2025, at Namo Ghat in Varanasi, representing a groundbreaking achievement in clean and sustainable maritime transportation. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal stated: "Under the dynamic and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, India is witnessing a transformative shift toward clean, sustainable and self-reliant transportation systems."
- **Maiden Commercial Run:** The inaugural voyage was a five-kilometer journey from Namo Ghat to Lalita Ghat along the river Ganga (designated as National Waterway 1), ferrying a distinguished entourage of ministers, senior government officials, and dignitaries, symbolically signaling the commencement of commercial operations for hydrogen fuel-powered passenger vessels on India's inland waterways.
- **Technical Specifications and Design:** The vessel is designed as a 24-meter catamaran specifically engineered for urban river transit, featuring a twin-hull configuration that provides enhanced stability, greater deck space for passenger comfort, and improved seakeeping characteristics essential for safe navigation on rivers. The fully air-conditioned passenger cabin can accommodate 50 passengers comfortably, providing a premium travel experience with protection from weather elements and ambient noise. The vessel operates at a service speed of approximately 6.5 knots (about 12 km/hour), though some sources indicate it can achieve speeds of 7 to 9 knots depending on operational conditions, river currents, and load factors.
- **Hydrogen Fuel Cell Technology:** The vessel operates on an advanced Low Temperature Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) fuel cell system, representing state-of-the-art clean energy technology adapted for maritime applications.
- **Hybrid Power Configuration:** Beyond the primary hydrogen fuel cell system, the vessel incorporates a sophisticated hybrid energy configuration integrating multiple power sources for optimized efficiency, reliability, and operational flexibility. The hybrid system combines hydrogen fuel cells as the primary power source for sustained propulsion, onboard batteries providing supplementary power during peak demand periods such as acceleration or high-speed operation and serving as backup power ensuring safety if the fuel cell system requires temporary shutdown, and solar panels installed on the vessel's superstructure generating supplementary electrical power from sunlight, reducing overall hydrogen consumption and extending operational range.

Indian Navy to Commission First Indigenous Diving Support Craft 'DSC A20'

In the News: The Indian Navy will commission DSC A20, the first vessel of the indigenously designed and constructed Diving Support Craft (DSC) series, at Kochi under the aegis of Southern Naval Command. The formal induction ceremony, presided over by Vice Admiral Sameer Saxena, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Naval Command, marks a significant milestone in India's pursuit of Aatmanirbharta (self-reliance) and exemplifies the success of the 'Make in India' initiative in the maritime domain, adding a key operational asset that substantially enhances the Navy's diving, underwater support, and coastal deployment capabilities.

Key Points:

- **Commissioning Details and Significance:** The Indian Navy will formally induct DSC A20 into service on December 16, 2025, at Kochi, Kerala, in a ceremony presided over by Vice Admiral Sameer Saxena, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Naval Command. This commissioning represents a landmark achievement in India's defense capabilities and indigenous naval shipbuilding industry, marking the addition of a specialized operational asset to the Navy's inventory.
- **Lead Ship in Five-Vessel Series:** DSC A20 is the lead ship in a series of five Diving Support Craft being constructed by M/s Titagarh Rail Systems Limited (TRSL), Kolkata, under a contract worth Rs. 174.77 crore (equivalent to approximately Rs. 196 crore or \$23 million USD in 2023 values) signed between TRSL and the Indian Navy on February 12, 2021. The first vessel, DSC A20, was delivered to the Navy on September 18, 2025, approximately three months before its commissioning, allowing time for crew training, systems integration, operational trials, and final preparations. The Indian Navy is expected

to receive all five diving support craft progressively during the Financial Year 2024-25, creating a comprehensive fleet of specialized underwater support vessels.

- **Technical Specifications and Design Features:** DSC A20 features a catamaran-type hull form, which provides several critical operational advantages including enhanced stability in rough seas crucial for safe diving operations, greater deck space for diving equipment, decompression chambers, and support apparatus, and improved seakeeping characteristics allowing operations in higher sea states than conventional monohull vessels.
- **Indigenous Design and Development:** DSC A20 is designed and built in complete accordance with the Naval Rules and Regulations of the Indian Register of Shipping (IRS), ensuring compliance with rigorous naval design standards, structural integrity requirements, and safety protocols. The vessel underwent extensive hydrodynamic analysis and model testing at the Naval Science and Technological Laboratory (NSTL), Visakhapatnam, India's premier naval research establishment specializing in underwater warfare systems, sonar technology, and marine engineering.
- **Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India Success:** The commissioning of DSC A20 marks a significant milestone in India's pursuit of Aatmanirbharta (self-reliance) in defense manufacturing and exemplifies the success of the 'Make in India' initiative specifically in the maritime domain. The platform represents seamless collaboration between multiple stakeholders in India's defense ecosystem: the Indian Navy provided operational requirements, design inputs, and quality oversight throughout the construction process; the indigenous shipbuilding industry, represented by Titagarh Rail Systems Limited.

Bhartiya Bhasha Utsav 2025: Celebrating India's Linguistic Diversity and Tribal Heritage

In the News: The Ministry of Education celebrated Bhartiya Bhasha Utsav 2025 at the National Bal Bhawan in New Delhi, marking the birth anniversary of Mahakavi Subramania Bharati, one of India's greatest modern poets and champions of linguistic pride. With the theme "Many Languages, One Emotion" (भाषाएँ अनेक, भाव एक), the week-long festival from December 4-11, 2025, highlighted India's profound multilingual heritage and the emotional unity that binds its diverse population, while the Ministry of Tribal Affairs played a significant role in showcasing tribal languages, cultural depth, and linguistic preservation through innovative technology demonstrations.

Key Points:

- **Event Overview and Timing:** Bhartiya Bhasha Utsav 2025 was celebrated nationwide from December 4-11, 2025, as a week-long festival dedicated to honoring India's rich linguistic heritage. The annual celebration commemorates the birth anniversary of Mahakavi Subramania Bharati (December 11, 1882), a visionary Tamil poet, social reformer, and freedom fighter whose works transcended linguistic and cultural boundaries, embodying themes of unity, freedom, equality, progress, and human dignity.
- **Theme and Philosophy:** The theme "Many Languages, One Emotion" (भाषाएँ अनेक, भाव एक) beautifully captures the essence of India's linguistic diversity and emotional unity. Despite the multitude of languages spoken across the country—from Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Assamese, and Kannada to hundreds of regional, tribal, and minority languages—universal emotions of love, unity, pride, joy, sorrow, aspiration, and patriotism bind all communities together.
- **Tribute to Mahakavi Subramania Bharati:** The festival honors Mahakavi Subramania Bharati, whose command over multiple Indian languages including Tamil, Sanskrit, Hindi, Telugu, Bengali, and others symbolizes the multilingual essence of India's civilizational heritage. Bharati's poetry, imbued with themes of national freedom, social equality, women's empowerment, and progressive reform, continues to inspire generations across linguistic communities.
- **Ministry of Tribal Affairs' Significant Participation:** The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) played a prominent and significant role in Bhartiya Bhasha Utsav 2025, drawing national attention to the vibrancy, cultural depth, and linguistic significance of India's tribal languages, which are often marginalized or overlooked in mainstream discourse. MoTA set up a dedicated exhibition stall showcasing a wide range of tribal language publications from Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) representing multiple states, demonstrating the rich literary and cultural traditions embedded in these languages.
- **Adi Vaani: AI-Powered Tribal Language Translator:** A key attraction at the event was the live demonstration of Adi Vaani, India's first AI-powered tribal language translator, developed under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs with technical leadership from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi. This groundbreaking technology represents a significant breakthrough in linguistic preservation and accessibility, offering real-time text and speech translation between English/Hindi and various tribal languages that traditionally lacked digital infrastructure or technological support. Adi Vaani provides interactive learning tools specifically designed for children, students, and community educators to learn tribal languages in engaging formats.

- **Vande Mataram in 22 Languages:** In a powerful symbolic finale that perfectly embodied the festival's theme of unity in diversity, students from various schools rendered "Vande Mataram"—India's national song—in 22 Indian languages, creating a moving multilingual tribute to the motherland. This extraordinary performance symbolized India's constitutional commitment to linguistic equality reflected in the recognition of 22 scheduled languages in the Eighth Schedule.
- **Alignment with National Education Policy 2020:** Bhartiya Bhasha Utsav 2025 directly implements key provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes multilingualism as a cornerstone of education and a powerful instrument for national unity, cognitive development, and cultural preservation. NEP 2020 recognizes multilingualism's role in preserving India's linguistic diversity while fostering cognitive flexibility, cultural empathy, creative thinking, and emotional growth among students.

70-Foot Iron Statue of Lionel Messi Unveiled in Kolkata: India Honors the Football Legend

In the News: Football legend Lionel Messi virtually unveiled a towering 70-foot iron statue of himself at the Sreebhumi Sporting Club in Lake Town, South Dum Dum, Kolkata, marking the opening of his much-anticipated GOAT (Greatest of All Time) Tour India 2025. The monument, claimed to be the largest statue of Messi anywhere in the world, depicts the Argentine icon holding the FIFA World Cup trophy, symbolizing his historic 2022 World Cup triumph with Argentina in Qatar. The unveiling took place during Messi's first visit to India in 14 years, generating overwhelming excitement among football fans across the country, particularly in West Bengal.

Key Points:

- **Statue Specifications and Significance:** The Sreebhumi Sporting Club completed construction of the massive 70-foot (approximately 21.3 meters) iron statue at Lake Town in South Dum Dum, Kolkata, demonstrating the club's admiration for Lionel Messi. The statue depicts Messi in a triumphant pose holding the FIFA World Cup trophy aloft, commemorating Argentina's victory at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar where Messi finally achieved his lifelong dream of winning football's most prestigious tournament.
- **Record Construction Timeline:** The monumental 70-foot statue was completed in a remarkable 40 days, representing record time for constructing such a massive structure according to West Bengal Minister and Sreebhumi Sporting Club President Sujit Bose. This exceptionally fast construction timeline demonstrates the club's dedication and the urgency to complete the statue before Messi's arrival for the GOAT Tour India 2025.
- **Virtual Unveiling Ceremony:** Lionel Messi virtually unveiled the 70-foot statue on Saturday, December 13, 2025, from the Hyatt Regency Kolkata hotel where he was staying, rather than attending the statue location in person. The virtual unveiling was conducted alongside Messi's Inter Miami teammates Luis Suárez (Uruguayan striker and longtime friend) and Rodrigo De Paul (Argentine midfielder and national team colleague), who accompanied him to India for the GOAT Tour. West Bengal Minister Sujit Bose, who serves as President of Sreebhumi Sporting Club, participated in the inauguration ceremony. Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, co-owner of IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders and an avid sports enthusiast, was also present at the unveiling event, adding star power and cross-industry appeal to the occasion.
- **GOAT Tour India 2025 Overview:** Messi's visit to India is part of his GOAT (Greatest of All Time) Tour India 2025, a three-day, four-city nationwide tour running from December 13-15, 2025, organized by promoter Satadru Dutta. The tour schedule includes: Kolkata on December 13 (statue unveiling, meet-and-greet sessions, and events at Salt Lake Stadium); Hyderabad on December 13 (later the same day at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium); Mumbai on December 14 (Padel GOAT Cup at Brabourne Stadium and celebrity football match featuring Bollywood actors); and Delhi on December 15 (tour conclusion).
- **Historical Context of Messi's India Visits:** This marks Lionel Messi's second visit to India, with his first and only previous visit occurring in 2011, fourteen years ago. During his 2011 visit, the legendary footballer played in a friendly international match at the iconic Salt Lake Stadium (officially Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan) in Kolkata, where Argentina defeated Venezuela 1-0, giving Indian fans their first opportunity to watch Messi play live. The Salt Lake Stadium, one of the largest football stadiums in the world with a capacity of approximately 66,000 spectators, became the venue for Messi's 2011 appearance and again served as a key location for events during the 2025 GOAT Tour.

Cabinet Nod to Atomic Energy Bill Unlocks Opportunities for Private Nuclear Projects

In the News: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the Atomic Energy Bill 2025, officially titled SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India), marking the biggest reform in India's nuclear sector since 1962. The landmark legislation, expected to be tabled in Parliament during the ongoing Winter Session (closing December 19, 2025), opens India's tightly-controlled civil nuclear power sector to private participation for the

first time in over six decades, breaking the monopoly of the Department of Atomic Energy and state-owned Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), as the country aims to achieve 100 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047 to support its net-zero emissions target by 2070.

Key Points:

- **Breaking Six-Decade State Monopoly:** The SHANTI Bill marks a historic shift in India's atomic energy policy, which has been exclusively state-dominated since the Atomic Energy Act 1962 was enacted. The 1962 Act currently prohibits participation of the private sector or even state governments in nuclear activities, granting the central government and/or corporations established by it all rights to India's critical atomic minerals along with exclusive power to operate nuclear power plants.
- **Nuclear Energy Mission and Small Modular Reactors:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a Nuclear Energy Mission for Viksit Bharat (Developed India) in her February 2025 Budget speech, emphasizing that achieving 100 GW of nuclear energy by 2047 is essential for India's energy transition and clean energy goals.
- **Independent Nuclear Safety Authority:** The SHANTI Bill proposes establishing a new independent nuclear safety authority representing a fundamental shift from the current regulatory structure where the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) operates under the DAE, creating potential conflicts of interest. The new centralized nuclear safety authority will function as an independent regulator separate from the Department of Atomic Energy that both promotes and regulates nuclear activities, ensuring transparent, professional, and globally benchmarked safety oversight free from promotional pressures. The authority will be aligned with international safety standards and best practices established by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the global nuclear watchdog based in Vienna, Austria.
- **Uranium Supply and Fuel Security:** India's limited domestic uranium reserves—estimated at approximately 76,000 tonnes concentrated mainly in Jaduguda (Jharkhand) with additional deposits in Meghalaya and Andhra Pradesh—present a significant challenge for nuclear expansion, as domestic resources can meet only about 25% of projected uranium requirements for the planned 100 GW capacity.

Insurance Amendment Bill 2025: Cabinet Approves 100% FDI in Indian Insurance Firms

In the News: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the Insurance Laws (Amendment) Bill 2025, marking a landmark reform that raises the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit in Indian insurance companies from 74% to 100%, allowing full foreign ownership for the first time. The Bill, expected to be introduced in Parliament on Monday, December 16, 2025, during the ongoing Winter Session (ending December 19), represents the most comprehensive overhaul of India's insurance framework in over a decade and aims to attract substantial global capital, enhance market competitiveness, deepen insurance penetration from the current 3.7-4.2% of GDP toward global averages, and support the national goal of "Insurance for All by 2047."

Key Points:

- **Cabinet Approval and Legislative Timeline:** The Union Cabinet approved the Insurance Laws (Amendment) Bill 2025 on Friday, December 12, 2025, following Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement in the Union Budget 2025-26 speech on February 1, 2025, that the FDI limit in insurance would be raised from 74% to 100% as part of new-generation financial sector reforms. Sitharaman had stated: "The FDI limit for the insurance sector will be raised from 74 to 100%."
- **Raising FDI Limit from 74% to 100%:** The centerpiece of the legislation is increasing the foreign direct investment cap in insurance companies from the current 74% to 100%, eliminating all restrictions on foreign ownership and allowing global insurance giants to establish wholly owned subsidiaries in India. This marks a historic transformation for India's insurance sector, which has seen FDI limits gradually liberalized over decades—initially capped at 26% when the sector was opened to private participation in 2000, increased to 49% in 2015, then to 74% in 2021 under the Insurance (Amendment) Act 2021.
- **Global Insurers and Market Impact:** The higher FDI ceiling is expected to draw major global insurance players, with nearly 20 of the world's top 25 insurance companies having no Indian presence today due to ownership restrictions that deterred full commitment. Leading global insurers like Allianz (Germany), AXA (France), Prudential (UK/USA), MetLife (USA), BlackRock's insurance arm, and other Fortune Global 500 insurance companies may now establish wholly owned operations in India or expand existing joint venture stakes.
- **Amendments to LIC Act 1956:** The Bill proposes significant amendments to the Life Insurance Corporation Act 1956, modernizing governance and operational frameworks for India's largest life insurer, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), which dominates the market with over 60% market share in life insurance. The key reform empowers LIC's board of directors to

make operational decisions independently without requiring government approvals for routine business matters, specifically including decisions on branch expansion (opening new offices across India to improve reach), recruitment and human resource decisions (hiring agents, employees, and specialists), product launches and modifications, investment strategies within regulatory guidelines, and other operational matters currently requiring bureaucratic clearances.

- **Strengthening IRDAI's Regulatory Powers:** The Insurance Laws (Amendment) Bill 2025 updates the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) Act 1999, enhancing the regulator's powers and modernizing its regulatory framework to oversee an increasingly complex, technology-driven, and globally integrated insurance market. IRDAI, established in 2000 as an independent statutory body to regulate and develop India's insurance sector, receives strengthened enforcement powers to protect policyholders' interests, ensure solvency of insurers, prevent market misconduct, and maintain industry stability.
- **"Insurance for All by 2047" Vision:** The Insurance Amendment Bill 2025 directly supports the government's ambitious vision of achieving "Insurance for All by 2047," coinciding with India's centenary of independence, aiming to provide comprehensive insurance coverage—life, health, property, liability—to every Indian household regardless of economic status or geographic location.

Government to Rename MGNREGA, Hikes Job Guarantee from 100 to 125 Days

In the News: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved a landmark Bill to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as "Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Yojana" (Revered Father Rural Employment Scheme), marking the second renaming in the flagship scheme's 20-year history. Alongside the name change, the Cabinet significantly enhanced key provisions by increasing the guaranteed employment days from 100 to 125 days per year for rural households and revising the minimum daily wage to Rs. 240, with a proposed allocation of Rs. 1.51 lakh crore for the revamped scheme aimed at strengthening livelihood security, reducing distress migration, and providing enhanced income support to millions of rural workers across India, particularly during lean agricultural periods.

Key Points:

- **Cabinet Approval and New Name:** The Union Cabinet approved on Friday, December 12, 2025, the renaming of MGNREGA to "Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Yojana" (PBGRGY), translating to "Revered Father Rural Employment Scheme," honoring Mahatma Gandhi's vision and ideals of rural self-reliance and development through meaningful employment. The new name signifies that the scheme will go beyond merely providing jobs and will reflect and promote Gandhi's principles of rural development, self-sufficiency, and decentralized economic growth.
- **Increase in Guaranteed Employment Days from 100 to 125:** The Cabinet approved increasing the minimum guaranteed employment entitlement from the current 100 days per financial year to 125 days per year for rural households, representing a 25% increase in the employment guarantee. This 25-day extension provides an additional month of guaranteed work annually, offering enhanced livelihood security and income support to rural families who depend on the scheme, particularly during lean agricultural periods when farm work is scarce and alternative employment opportunities are limited.
- **Revision of Minimum Daily Wage to Rs. 240:** Along with increased employment days, the Cabinet revised the minimum daily wage under the scheme to Rs. 240 per day, representing a substantial wage enhancement aimed at improving real incomes for rural workers and providing protection against inflation that has eroded purchasing power over time. The Rs. 240 minimum wage will apply uniformly across all states as a floor, though actual wage rates vary by state based on local cost of living indices, skill categories, and state-specific notifications under the MGNREGA wage schedule.
- **Historical Evolution of the Scheme:** The employment guarantee program has undergone significant evolution since its inception, reflecting changing political priorities and development philosophies. The scheme was originally enacted on August 25, 2005, as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), based on recommendations from the Narsimha Rao government's Employment Assurance Scheme (1993) and the Food for Work Programme (2004), and envisioned as a legal "right to work" inspired by Gandhian ideals of self-reliant rural livelihoods.
- **Future Implementation and Legislative Process:** The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) will continue overseeing scheme implementation in coordination with state governments, district administrations, and Gram Panchayats, maintaining the decentralized implementation framework that has characterized MGNREGA since inception.

INTERNATIONAL



Netflix to Acquire Warner Bros. Discovery Studios and Streaming Business for \$72 Billion

In the News: Netflix announced a definitive agreement to acquire Warner Bros. Discovery's studio and streaming assets in a landmark \$72 billion equity deal (total enterprise value of \$82.7 billion including debt), marking one of the most significant mergers in entertainment industry history. The transaction brings together the world's largest streaming platform with one of Hollywood's most storied film and television studios, fundamentally reshaping the global media landscape.

Key Points:

- **Historic Merger Announcement:** Netflix and Warner Bros. Discovery announced on December 5, 2025, that they have entered into a definitive agreement under which Netflix will acquire Warner Bros., including its film and television studios, HBO Max streaming service, and HBO premium cable network.
- **Transaction Structure and Terms:** Under the agreement, each Warner Bros. Discovery shareholder will receive \$23.25 in cash and \$4.50 in shares of Netflix common stock for each share of WBD common stock outstanding at the closing of the transaction. The stock component is subject to a collar mechanism whereby WBD shareholders will receive Netflix stock valued at \$4.50 per share, provided the 15-day volume weighted average price of Netflix stock falls between \$97.91 and \$119.67.
- **Assets Included in Acquisition:** Netflix will acquire Warner Bros.' extensive entertainment portfolio, including Warner Bros. Television Group, Warner Bros. Motion Picture Group, Warner Bros. Pictures, DC Studios (encompassing the DC Comics universe including Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman franchises), HBO premium network, HBO Max streaming platform, and Warner Bros.' century-old library containing iconic properties such as Harry Potter franchise, The Wizard of Oz, Casablanca, Friends, The Big Bang Theory, The Sopranos, Game of Thrones, House of the Dragon.
- **Competitive Bidding Process:** The deal concluded a months-long bidding war that began when Warner Bros. Discovery signaled openness to a sale in October 2025 after receiving unsolicited interest from potential buyers. Paramount Skydance, which completed its own \$8 billion merger in August 2025, submitted multiple all-cash bids for the entire Warner Bros.
- **Theatrical Release Commitment:** In a notable departure from Netflix's traditional direct-to-streaming model, the company has committed to maintaining Warner Bros.' current theatrical release strategy and honoring Warner Bros.' existing contractual agreements for theatrical film releases. This represents a significant shift for Netflix, which has historically kept most original content within its streaming platform with only limited exceptions for awards contenders and special events. Netflix stated it "expects to maintain Warner Bros.' current operations" and "build on its strengths, including theatrical releases for films."
- **Warner Bros. Discovery's Complex History:** Warner Bros., founded in 1923, has undergone multiple ownership changes throughout its history. The studio was acquired by AT&T for \$85 billion in 2016 (when it was part of Time Warner). AT&T subsequently spun off the Warner Bros. assets, which were merged with Discovery Inc. in 2022 to form Warner Bros. Discovery under CEO David Zaslav. The newly formed Warner Bros. Discovery faced challenges including significant debt burden, lackluster streaming growth relative to competitors, and declining linear television revenues due to cord-cutting trends.

International Civil Aviation Day 2025: History, Theme, and Global Significance.

In the News: The world celebrated International Civil Aviation Day, marking the 81st anniversary of the signing of the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation in 1944. The day honors the role of civil aviation in connecting nations and ICAO's efforts toward safe, secure, and sustainable aviation. The theme "Safe Skies and Sustainable Future for All" emphasizes the organization's vision for zero fatalities and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Key Points:

- **Historical Significance:** December 7 was chosen as International Civil Aviation Day to commemorate the signing of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention) on December 7, 1944, in Chicago, United States. Fifty-two countries signed the convention during World War II, establishing the foundation for international civil aviation cooperation and creating ICAO.
- **ICAO Establishment:** The Chicago Convention came into force on April 4, 1947, after ratification by 26 states, officially establishing ICAO. The organization became a specialized agency of the United Nations in October 1947. ICAO currently has 193 member states and is headquartered in Montreal, Canada.

- **Day Recognition:** International Civil Aviation Day was first established by ICAO in 1994 to mark the organization's 50th anniversary. The United Nations General Assembly officially recognized December 7 as International Civil Aviation Day in 1996 through resolution A/RES/51/33.
- **Theme 2025:** The theme "Safe Skies and Sustainable Future " continues from the 2024 80th anniversary celebrations, emphasizing ICAO's commitment to safety, sustainability, and inclusive growth. The theme aligns with ICAO's three Essential Aspirations: zero fatalities, net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, and aviation as an integral part of an inclusive transport system.
- **80th Anniversary Milestone:** December 7, 2024, marked the 80th anniversary of the Chicago Convention. ICAO held an Extraordinary Council Session at the Chicago Hilton (formerly Stevens Hotel) on December 4-5, 2024, in the same room where the 1944 convention was signed, bringing together 36 Council members, 10 Ministers, and 50 Directors General of Civil Aviation.
- **India as Founding Member:** India is one of ICAO's founding members, having attended the Chicago Conference in 1944, and has been continuously elected to the ICAO Council since 1944, including the Provisional ICAO period (1944-1947). India maintains a permanent delegation at ICAO headquarters in Montreal.
- **India's Aviation Growth:** India is the world's third-largest civil aviation market (after the USA and China) and the fastest-growing domestic aviation market globally. India recorded 376 million air passengers in fiscal year 2024, including 306 million domestic passengers. The sector contributes nearly \$54 billion to India's circular economy and supports 370,000 direct jobs and 7.7 million indirect jobs.
- **42nd ICAO Assembly 2025:** The 42nd ICAO Assembly was held from September 23 to October 3, 2025, in Montreal, bringing together all 193 member states. The Assembly adopted 32 resolutions unanimously, providing a mandate for transformation and accelerated momentum toward safety, sustainability, and inclusive growth.
- **No Country Left Behind Initiative:** ICAO's "No Country Left Behind" campaign emphasizes ensuring all member states, particularly developing nations, have access to safe, secure, and sustainable aviation infrastructure and services. The initiative addresses infrastructure gaps and promotes capacity building through ICAO's Technical Cooperation Programme.

EU's \$140 Million Fine on Elon Musk's X Ignites Political Storm

In the News: The European Union imposed a fine of approximately \$140 million (around €120 million) on Elon Musk's social media platform X (formerly Twitter) for violations of the Digital Services Act. The penalty triggered a political controversy, with US Vice President JD Vance criticizing the EU for attacking American companies and Elon Musk calling for the abolition of the European Union.

Key Points:

- **Fine Imposition:** The European Commission imposed a fine of approximately \$140 million on X for failing to comply with the Digital Services Act (DSA), which came into full effect in 2024. The fine represents one of the first major enforcement actions under the EU's comprehensive digital regulation framework designed to govern online platforms.
- **Digital Services Act Background:** The DSA is a landmark European Union regulation that establishes stricter rules for large online platforms, requiring them to moderate content, provide transparency in algorithms, protect user data, and take responsibility for illegal or harmful content hosted on their platforms. Non-compliance can result in fines of up to six percent of global annual revenue.
- **US Political Response:** US Vice President JD Vance publicly criticized the European Union's action on X, stating that "The EU should be supporting free speech, not attacking American companies over garbage
- **Elon Musk's Reaction:** X owner Elon Musk responded strongly to the fine, calling for the European Union to be "abolished" and characterizing the regulatory action as an attack on free speech. Musk has consistently positioned X as a platform committed to minimal content moderation and maximum free expression, often clashing with regulatory authorities.

Anant Ambani Becomes Youngest Recipient of Global Humane Society's Animal Welfare Award

In the News: Anant Ambani, founder of the wildlife conservation center Vantara, received the Global Humanitarian Award for Animal Welfare from the Global Humane Society in Washington, DC. He became the youngest person ever and the first Asian to receive this prestigious recognition, which is considered among the foremost global honors in the field of animal welfare and conservation.

Key Points:

- **Historic Recognition:** Anant Ambani became the youngest recipient in the history of the Global Humanitarian Award for Animal Welfare and the first Asian to receive this distinction. The award was presented by the Global Humane Society, the international brand of American Humane Society, which is the oldest national humane organization in the United States (founded in 1877) and the world's largest certifier of animal welfare, verifying humane treatment of over one billion animals globally each year.
- **Award Presentation:** The Global Humanitarian Award was conferred on Anant Ambani at an international event in Washington, DC. The award ceremony was presided over by Dr. Robin Ganzert, President and CEO of Global Humane Society, who has led the organization since 2010.
- **Vantara Conservation Center:** Anant Ambani was honored specifically for his visionary leadership in establishing Vantara, a wildlife conservation center that has redefined large-scale rescue, rehabilitation, and species preservation. Vantara operates on a unique hybrid model that integrates ex-situ care (support provided outside an animal's natural habitat) with in-situ protection (conservation efforts within native ecosystems), creating a long-term, science-led pathway for wildlife conservation focused on safeguarding threatened species and restoring declining populations.
- **Global Humane Certified Distinction:** Vantara achieved the Global Humane Certified designation after completing a comprehensive and independent audit conducted by world-leading experts in animal welfare, behavioral science, veterinary medicine, zoology, and ethics.
- **Distinguished Past Recipients:** The Global Humanitarian Award has been bestowed upon an exclusive group of visionaries whose contributions reshaped animal welfare and conservation.
- **Leadership Impact Statement:** Dr. Robin Ganzert, President and CEO of Global Humane Society, described Anant Ambani's leadership as setting a new global standard for compassion in action.

UPI Recognized as World's Largest Real-Time Payment System by IMF

In the News: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) officially recognized India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as the world's largest real-time payment system by transaction volume. This recognition was formally announced in the Lok Sabha by Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary in a written reply to a parliamentary question, citing the IMF report titled 'Growing Retail Digital Payments (The Value of Interoperability)' dated June 2025.

Key Points:

- **IMF Recognition:** The International Monetary Fund's June 2025 report on 'Growing Retail Digital Payments (The Value of Interoperability)' identified UPI as the world's largest retail fast-payment system by transaction volume.
- **Daily Transaction Capacity:** UPI handles more than 640 million transactions every day, surpassing even Visa's 639 million daily transactions. The platform processes an average of approximately 7,500 transactions every second, demonstrating its robust technical infrastructure and scalability.
- **Government Support Initiatives:** The Government of India, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) have launched multiple initiatives to support small-scale merchants in adopting digital payment systems. These include an incentive scheme for promotion of low-value BHIM-UPI transactions and the Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF).
- **Sector-Wide Integration:** The Government, RBI, and NPCI have initiated deepening of digital transactions through RuPay and UPI across various sectors including public services, transport systems, and e-commerce platforms on a nationwide basis.
- **Digital Payments Transformation:** UPI accounts for 84% of all digital payments in India and represents 50% of the world's digital transaction volume with over 250 billion annual transactions worth approximately \$3.4 trillion. This transformation highlights India's rapid shift from cash-based to digital payment modes over the past five years.

Deepavali Enters UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List, Boosting India's Global Presence

In the News: Deepavali (also known as Diwali) was officially inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity during the 20th Session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee held at the Red Fort in New Delhi. This historic recognition marks a profound moment of pride for India, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailing the festival as the "soul of our civilisation" and stating it will contribute to the festival's global popularity even further.

Key Points:

- **UNESCO Inscription and Committee Session:** The inscription was adopted on December 10, 2025, during the 20th Session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, held at Delhi's Red Fort

from December 8 to 13, 2025. The decision was made in the presence of Union Culture and Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, delegates from UNESCO Member States, international experts, and representatives from UNESCO's global network. This marks the first time India is hosting a session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee, and the meeting is being chaired by H.E. Vishal V. Sharma, India's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO.

- **India's Growing Cultural Recognition:** With Deepavali's inclusion, India now has 16 elements inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list, making it one of the countries with the highest number of recognized elements globally. The 15 other Indian elements already on this prestigious list include the Kumbh Mela, Durga Puja of Kolkata, Garba dance of Gujarat, Yoga, the tradition of Vedic chanting, Ramlila (traditional performance of the Ramayana), Ramman, Kutiyattam Sanskrit theatre tradition of Kerala, Chhau dance from eastern states, Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan, Mudi yettu ritual theatre, traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru in Punjab, Buddhist chanting of Ladakh, and Persian New Year Nawrouz (added in 2024), Sankirtana.
- **Cultural and Spiritual Significance:** UNESCO described Deepavali as a light festival celebrated annually by diverse individuals and communities across India that marks the last harvest of the year and the start of a new year and new season. Based on the lunar calendar, it falls on the new moon (Kartik Amavasya) in October or November and lasts several days.
- **Environmental Stewardship Initiatives:** Government interventions include the development of "green crackers" by CSIR-NEERI (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute) and national campaigns like Swachh Diwali and Shubh Diwali, which have encouraged eco-friendly festivities while preserving the festival's cultural spirit.
- **Historic Timing and Significance:** The event coincides with the 20th anniversary of India's ratification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2005, reaffirming India's sustained commitment to preserving living cultural traditions. The iconic Red Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, served as the venue, symbolizing the convergence of India's tangible and intangible heritage. The other inscribed elements including the Gifaataa festival of Ethiopia, Tangali saree weaving art from Bangladesh, Georgian wheat culture, and family tradition circus from Chile.

UAE Passport Rises in 2025 Global Strength Rankings

In the News: The United Arab Emirates passport maintained its dominant position in global mobility rankings, retaining the #1 spot on the Arton Capital Passport Index for a record seventh consecutive year with a Mobility Score of 179. Separately, the UAE passport holds the 8th position in the 2025 Henley Passport Index, offering visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 184 destinations, representing one of the most dramatic ascents in passport strength globally over the past decade.

Key Points:

- **Arton Capital Passport Index Leadership:** The UAE passport topped the 2025 Arton Capital Passport Index for the seventh consecutive year, retaining its position as the world's strongest passport with a Mobility Score of 179. The Emirati passport provides visa-free access to 125 to 130 destinations, visa-on-arrival to 45 countries, and Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) access to eight countries.
- **Henley Passport Index Performance:** According to the 2025 Henley Passport Index, UAE ranks 8th in the 2025 Henley Passport Index with visa-free/visa-on-arrival access to 184 destinations, up from 11th in 2024. This marks an improvement from the 11th position in 2024, representing continued upward momentum in global mobility rankings. The Henley Passport Index is based on exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the largest and most accurate travel information database, and evaluates 199 passports across 227 destinations. India's passport has slipped to No. 85 in 2025, down five places from the previous year. The country's ranking has seen considerable fluctuation over time, mirroring shifts in global travel policies and India's evolving diplomatic relations.
- **Decline of Traditional Powers:** Most major European passports dropped from scores of 178-179 in 2024 to around 174 in 2025, losing roughly four visa-free destinations each as countries tightened entry rules. The United Kingdom dropped from 32nd to 39th position on certain indexes, continuing its long decline from top-tier status following Brexit.
- **Asian Nations' Surge:** After years of holding steady, Asia's top passports surged forward in 2025. Singapore leads the 2025 Henley Passport Index with visa-free access to 193 destinations, followed by Japan and South Korea tied at second place with access to 190 destinations. Singapore made the biggest leap on the Arton Capital Passport Index, jumping from 30th place to 2nd place with a mobility score of 175. Malaysia rose dramatically from 41st to 17th place, entering the top tier for the first time with a score of 174. India also made significant progress, climbing eight spots to 77th position, representing the biggest ranking jump despite gaining only two additional visa-free destinations.

- **Digital Travel Authorization Expansion:** Despite an overall decline in traditional visa-free global mobility, 2025 marked a record year in travel digitalization and an all-time high in the adoption of Electronic Travel Authorizations (ETAs). Israel, the United Kingdom, Turkmenistan, St. Kitts and Nevis, and the Maldives all adopted ETA systems in 2025.

Trump Unveils \$1 Million Gold Card Citizenship Path

In the News: U.S. President Donald Trump officially launched the "Trump Gold Card" immigration program at a White House roundtable event, offering a fast-track pathway to U.S. for wealthy foreign nationals willing to pay \$1 million, or for corporations paying \$2 million per foreign-born employee.

Key Points:

- **Program Launch and Announcement:** President Trump unveiled the Trump Gold Card program on December 10, 2025, at a business leaders roundtable in the White House's Roosevelt Room, stating "Very excitingly, for me and for the country, we've just launched the 'Trump Gold Card.'"
- **Individual Gold Card Requirements and Process:** For individual applicants, the Trump Gold Card requires a nonrefundable \$15,000 processing fee to initiate the application, payable by credit card or ACH debit (electronic U.S. bank debit). Once the applicant's processing fee is received and background approval is completed through comprehensive vetting by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the applicant must make a \$1 million "gift" or "contribution" by international bank transfer (such as Swift wire transfer).
- **Trump Corporate Gold Card for Businesses:** The Trump Corporate Gold Card allows corporations or similar business entities to sponsor one or more foreign-born employees for U.S. permanent residency. Corporate sponsors must pay a nonrefundable \$15,000 DHS processing fee per employee being sponsored.
- **Differences from EB-5 Investor Visa Program:** The Trump Gold Card represents a significant departure from the existing EB-5 immigrant investor visa program that Congress created in 1990.

INTERPOL Issues Blue Corner Notice

In the News: INTERPOL issued a Blue Corner Notice against Gaurav Luthra and Saurabh Luthra, the absconding owners of Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub in Goa's Arpora village. The notice was issued at the request of Goa Police through the INTERPOL Division of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to collect additional information about the brothers' identity, location, and activities.

Key Points:

- **The Goa Nightclub Fire Tragedy:** A massive fire broke out at Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub in Arpora village, North Goa, around midnight on December 6, 2025 (late Saturday night), killing 25 people and injuring approximately 50 others. The deceased comprised 20 employees of the nightclub from various states including Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Karnataka, along with five tourists including four members from the same Delhi family. Most victims died from suffocation after being trapped in the basement, with only three dying of burn injuries.
- **Cause of the Fire:** Preliminary investigations revealed that the fire was caused by indoor pyrotechnics or electric firecrackers set off inside the nightclub. Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant confirmed that indoor firecrackers started the fire, dismissing earlier theories about a gas cylinder explosion in the kitchen. The spark from the electronic firecracker reportedly shot upward and fell onto the club's temporary roof made of bamboo and palm leaves, which caught fire instantly at approximately 11:45 PM IST. The flames spread within seconds due to the highly flammable decorative materials, giving guests and staff almost no time to escape.
- **About INTERPOL Blue Corner Notice:** A Blue Corner Notice is part of INTERPOL's color-coded system of international notices that enable countries to share alerts and requests for information on wanted persons and crimes worldwide. Unlike a Red Notice which seeks arrest and detention for extradition purposes, a Blue Corner Notice is issued specifically to collect additional information about a person's identity, location, or activities in relation to a criminal investigation. It is also known as an "enquiry notice" and serves auxiliary investigative purposes rather than authorizing arrest.
- **Passport Suspension and Legal Proceedings:** Under Section 10A of the Passports Act 1967, passports can be suspended by the Central Government or an authorized officer in criminal cases. The suspension renders their passports temporarily invalid, preventing the brothers from using those documents for further international travel. However, since they had already left India before the suspension, this action primarily serves to prevent them from traveling to other countries from Thailand.
- **Government Response and Investigation:** Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant visited the fire site around 2:00 AM on December 7 and immediately ordered a magisterial inquiry into the incident. A committee headed by North Goa District

Collector Ankit Yadav was set up under order from Under Secretary Home Manthan Manoj Naik to conduct a comprehensive investigation. The inquiry is expected to include scrutiny of emergency exits, ventilation systems, structural compliance, licensing procedures, and the role of local authorities in allowing illegal construction. Goa Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte stated that a strict investigation would be conducted "down to top" and emphasized that "some heads need to roll," indicating accountability would be established at all levels. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the fire "deeply saddening" and announced Rs. 2 lakh ex-gratia from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) for the next of kin of each deceased person and Rs. 50,000 for those injured. The complete inquiry report was expected to take approximately one week.

- **Demolition Actions and Regulatory Crackdown:** On December 9, 2025, the Goa government intensified its crackdown on the Romeo Lane club chain by ordering demolition of the Romeo Lane restaurant (beach shack) in Vagator, Goa. The district administration demolished part of the structure covering approximately 198 square meters.
- **Prohibition of Pyrotechnics in Tourist Establishments:** On December 11, 2025, the North Goa district administration issued a comprehensive order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, prohibiting the use, bursting, ignition, or operation of fireworks, sparklers, pyrotechnic effects, flame thrower-type devices, smoke generators, and similar fire or smoke-producing equipment inside tourist establishments. The prohibition applies to all nightclubs, bars and restaurants, hotels, guesthouses, resorts, beach shacks, temporary structures, event venues, and entertainment establishments across North Goa district.

TIME Magazine Names 'Architects of AI' as Person of the Year 2025

In the News: TIME Magazine announced exclusively on NBC's TODAY show that it has named the "Architects of AI" as its 2025 Person of the Year, recognizing the tech industry leaders who have driven artificial intelligence from a future concept into a transformative force reshaping society. The magazine cited 2025 as the year when AI's full potential "roared into view" with no turning back, marking a watershed moment when these leaders stopped debating how to create AI and started racing to deploy it across industries, economies, and geopolitical landscapes.

Key Points:

- **Announcement and Recognition Statement:** TIME Magazine's Editor-in-Chief Sam Jacobs announced the selection exclusively on NBC's TODAY show on December 11, 2025, explaining to hosts Savannah Guthrie and Craig Melvin that "this is the year we feel like the people who were designing, imagining and building artificial intelligence stopped debating about how to create this technology and started racing to deploy it, and there are enormous consequences for society." The magazine's official statement declared: "For delivering the age of thinking machines, for wowing and worrying humanity, for transforming the present and transcending the possible, the Architects of AI are TIME's 2025 Person of the Year"
- **The Eight Principal Leaders Featured on Cover:** The first cover illustration, created by digital artist Jason Seiler, features eight prominent tech industry leaders depicted in a recreation of the iconic 1932 "Lunch Atop a Skyscraper" photograph, which originally showed ironworkers seated on a steel beam high above New York City during the construction of 30 Rockefeller Plaza. The eight leaders featured are: Jensen Huang (CEO of Nvidia, the world's most valuable company and near-monopoly provider of AI chips), Sam Altman (CEO of OpenAI, creator of ChatGPT which surpassed 800 million weekly users), Elon Musk (CEO of Tesla and xAI, previous TIME Person of the Year 2021), Mark Zuckerberg (CEO of Meta, previous TIME Person of the Year 2010), Lisa Su (CEO of Advanced Micro Devices/AMD, competing with Nvidia in AI chip production), Demis Hassabis (CEO of Google's DeepMind Technologies AI lab), Dario Amodei (CEO of Anthropic, creator of Claude AI assistant), and Fei-Fei Li (AI pioneer and founder of Stanford's Human-Centered AI Institute and World Labs startup launched in 2024). Five of these eight individuals—Musk, Zuckerberg, Huang, Altman, and Su—are already billionaires with a collective fortune estimated at \$870 billion by Forbes magazine.
- **Additional Leaders Who Spoke to TIME:** Beyond the eight featured on the cover illustrations, TIME's feature story included interviews with additional key figures in AI development and funding. These include Masayoshi Son (CEO of SoftBank, major AI investor and Stargate Project partner), Robin Li (CEO of Baidu, China's leading search engine and AI company), and Larry Ellison (founder of Oracle and Stargate Project partner).
- **Historical Context of TIME Person of the Year Tradition:** TIME's Person of the Year recognition is one of media's longest-running traditions, dating back to 1927 when the magazine selected aviator Charles Lindbergh as its first "Man of the Year" (the title was formally changed to "Person of the Year" in 1999). The designation is not an award of honor but rather an observance of the figure or group who had the most influence on the year's events, for better or for worse. TIME has previously recognized aspects of the technological revolution: in 1982, the magazine named "The Computer" as its Person of the Year (or more aptly "Machine of the Year"), marking the first time an inanimate object received the designation and

representing how personal computers were entering millions of American homes; in 1988, TIME chose "Endangered Earth" as "Planet of the Year"; and in 2006, the magazine selected "You" as Person of the Year, recognizing the emergence of digital communities, social media users as content creators, and the democratization of online content through the World Wide Web.

World Inequality Report 2026

In the News: The World Inequality Lab released the World Inequality Report 2026, the third edition after 2018 and 2022, offering the most up-to-date synthesis of international research efforts to track global inequalities across income, wealth, gender, climate, and territorial dimensions. Edited by Lucas Chancel, Ricardo Gómez-Carrera, Rowaida Moshrif, and Thomas Piketty, and prefaced by economists Jayati Ghosh and Joseph Stiglitz, the report reveals that inequality remains extreme and persistent—especially wealth inequality—with the top 10% globally owning 75% of all wealth while the bottom 50% holds just 2%, and highlights India as one of the world's most unequal countries where the top 1% controls 40% of wealth and the top 10% captures 58% of national income while the bottom 50% receives only 15%, threatening both climate action and democracy worldwide.

Key Points:

- **Release and Context:** The World Inequality Report 2026 was released on December 10, 2025, by the World Inequality Lab based in Paris, France (established in 2016). The report draws on recent research from over 200 global scholars and researchers affiliated with the World Inequality Database covering 70 countries across five continents over long time periods. It is entirely funded by public and non-profit actors ensuring independence from corporate or private influence. The report was launched in the context of the South African G20 presidency, which spotlighted two major global crises: the explosion of inequalities and the weakening of multilateralism. Lead author Ricardo Gómez-Carrera stated: "Inequality is silent until it becomes scandalous."
- **Global Income Inequality Patterns:** Income inequality, while less extreme than wealth inequality, remains highly skewed globally. The top 10% of income earners globally capture 53% of all global income, while the middle 40% receives 38%, and the bottom 50% earns just 8% of global income. To illustrate with a simple example: if the world comprised 10 people and total global income was \$100, the richest person would receive \$53, the next four people would collectively earn \$38, and the remaining five people would divide just \$8 among themselves.
- **India's Inequality Crisis—Income Distribution:** India ranks among the world's most unequal countries with extreme concentration at the top across both income and wealth dimensions. The top 10% of income earners in India capture approximately 58% of national income (up from 57% in the 2022 report), while the bottom 50% receives only 15% of national income (up from 13% in 2022), indicating growing disparities despite economic growth. The top 1% alone earns around 23% of national income, demonstrating extraordinary concentration among the elite.
- **India's Wealth Concentration:** Wealth inequality in India exceeds even income inequality, representing one of the most extreme concentrations globally. The richest 10% in India hold approximately 65% of total national wealth, while the top 1% alone owns about 40% of India's wealth, placing India among countries with highest wealth concentration including South Africa, Brazil, and Middle Eastern nations. The bottom 50% of India's population owns less than 6% of total wealth, and in some measures shows negative wealth shares when debts exceed assets for the poorest segments.
- **India's Changing Global Position (1980-2025):** The report documents India's relative decline in the global income distribution over the past four decades despite absolute economic growth. In 1980, before economic liberalization, more Indians were positioned in the global middle 40% income bracket, with the population relatively dispersed across global income percentiles. By 2025, India has lost significant relative ground, with much of its population now concentrated in the bottom half of the global income distribution, indicating that while India grew, other emerging economies (particularly China) grew faster, and developed economies maintained their advantages.
- **Extreme Gender Inequality:** Gender inequality persists as a defining feature of global inequality with minimal improvement over three decades. Globally, women capture just 25-26% of total labor income, a figure that has remained virtually unchanged since 1990 despite women's increased educational attainment and formal labor force participation, indicating structural barriers preventing economic equity. Excluding unpaid domestic and care work, women earn only 61% of what men earn per working hour globally, representing a massive gender pay gap driven by occupational segregation, discrimination, interrupted career trajectories, and undervaluation of female-dominated professions.
- **Regressive Taxation and Policy Failures:** Despite progressive taxation being one of the most powerful tools to reduce inequality and finance public goods, the report documents systematic tax policy failures favoring the ultra-rich. Effective tax rates rise progressively for most of the population but collapse at the very top, where centi-millionaires (those with over

\$100 million in wealth) and billionaires often pay proportionally lower tax rates than middle-income households through sophisticated tax avoidance strategies including offshore accounts, shell companies, transfer pricing manipulation, capital gains preferential treatment, and carried interest loopholes.

India-Italy Business Forum 2025

In the News: The India-Italy Business Forum 2025 was held in Mumbai during the official visit of Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Mr. Antonio Tajani, marking a significant milestone in advancing bilateral economic cooperation between India and Italy. The Forum brought together Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, senior government leaders, industry associations, unicorn founders, and more than 150 Indian and Italian companies to strengthen industrial collaboration across priority sectors including Automotive, Waste-to-Energy & Renewables, Sports Technologies, Agri-food, and Connectivity, culminating in the signing of the Agreed Minutes of the 22nd session of the India-Italy Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation (JCEC) that establishes a concrete roadmap for future economic collaboration with an ambitious target of achieving €20 billion in annual bilateral trade by 2029.

Key Points:

- **Forum Date, Location and High-Level Participation:** The India-Italy Business Forum 2025 was held on December 11, 2025, in Mumbai, Maharashtra, coinciding with the official visit of H.E. Mr. Antonio Tajani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy. The Forum was co-chaired by Piyush Goyal, India's Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, and Antonio Tajani, representing the highest levels of economic policymaking from both nations. Over 150 Indian and Italian companies participated alongside senior government leaders from both countries, industry associations including FICCI, CII, ASSOCHAM from India and Confindustria from Italy, leading Indian unicorn founders representing the startup ecosystem, and representatives from key institutions including CDP (Cassa Depositi e Prestiti), Invest India, SACE (Italy's export credit agency), SIMEST (Italian fund for SME internationalization), and the Italian Trade Agency.
- **Sectoral Roundtables and Pitching Sessions:** The Forum opened with parallel Sectoral Roundtables and Pitching Sessions featuring focused dialogues on emerging technologies, innovation models, and investment frameworks specific to each priority sector. These structured sessions enabled industry-to-industry interactions where Italian companies pitched business proposals, technologies, and partnership opportunities to Indian counterparts, while Indian companies presented market opportunities, manufacturing capabilities, and collaboration areas to Italian businesses.
- **Plenary Session with Ministerial Participation:** The Italy-India Business Forum Plenary Session was attended by both Ministers—Piyush Goyal and Antonio Tajani—where sector leads presented comprehensive outcomes and recommendations from the Automotive, Renewables, Sports Technologies, and Agri-food dialogues held during roundtable sessions. Speakers included high-level representatives from CDP (Italy's state investment bank managing strategic funds), Invest India (India's national investment promotion agency), SACE (Italy's export credit and insurance agency facilitating Italian businesses abroad), ASSOCHAM (Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India), SIMEST (Italian fund supporting SME internationalization), FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry), CII (Confederation of Indian Industry), Confindustria (Italy's main employers' federation representing manufacturing and service companies), and the Italian Trade Agency (promoting Italian exports and supporting Italian companies in international markets).
- **B2B Matchmaking and Business Interactions:** The Forum featured an extensive B2B (Business-to-Business) matchmaking session facilitating over 100 one-on-one business interactions between Indian and Italian companies across diverse sectors including manufacturing (components, machinery, industrial goods), renewables (solar, wind, energy storage), food processing (dairy, fruits, vegetables, ready-to-eat), sports innovation (equipment, apparel, training technologies), and transportation systems (logistics, supply chain solutions, mobility). These structured matchmaking sessions were organized using business matchmaking software and platforms that pre-matched companies based on complementary interests, capabilities, and partnership goals, enabling productive meetings where specific collaboration proposals could be discussed, contact information exchanged, and follow-up actions identified.
- **Major Business Agreements Signed:** Several significant business agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were announced and signed during the Forum, demonstrating concrete commercial outcomes beyond policy discussions. Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), India's largest state-owned steel producer, awarded three major steel plant modernization projects to Italy's Danieli Group, a global leader in steel plant engineering and technology, which will supply state-of-the-art green steelmaking technology including a modern Blast Furnace, continuous Slab Caster, and Hot Strip Mill with combined production capacity exceeding 4 million tonnes per year, representing contracts valued at

approximately €500 million (~Rs. 4,500 crore), making it one of the largest technology contracts awarded by Indian steel sector to an Italian company.

- **Signing of 22nd JCEC Agreed Minutes:** The defining outcome of the Forum was the formal signing of the Agreed Minutes of the 22nd session of the India-Italy Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation (JCEC), a bilateral mechanism established to promote, facilitate, and monitor economic cooperation between the two countries. The protocol was signed by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani, charting a concrete roadmap for strengthening economic partnership across trade, investment, technology transfer, research collaboration, and people-to-people exchanges.
- **Bilateral Trade Target: €20 Billion by 2029:** Italian Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani announced an ambitious bilateral trade target, stating: "As Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Meloni underlined during the meeting, our goal is to achieve an annual bilateral trade volume of €20 billion by 2029. This is an achievable goal."
- **India-EU FTA and Strategic Context:** Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal emphasized the importance of the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations currently underway, stating: "India is committed towards the FTA which will create the enabling framework which will be a fair, equitable and balanced Free Trade Agreement. It will be a win-win for EU and India, and we should be able to get this over the finishing line."
- **Italy-India Joint Strategic Action Plan Implementation:** Minister Goyal stated that India and Italy are taking proactive steps towards implementation of the Italy-India Joint Strategic Action Plan across key sectors including trade expansion through market access improvements and business facilitation; investment promotion encouraging two-way capital flows and technology transfer; research and innovation collaboration between universities, research institutions, and corporate R&D centers; and people-to-people ties through tourism promotion, cultural exchanges, educational partnerships, and diaspora engagement.

SCIENCE AND TECH

Indian Scientists Discover Alaknanda Galaxy Using James Webb Space Telescope

In the News: Two Indian scientists, Rashi Jain and Yogesh Wadadekar from the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (NCRA-TIFR), Pune, discovered a grand-design spiral galaxy named Alaknanda using NASA's James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). The galaxy, remarkably similar to the Milky Way, existed when the Universe was just 1.5 billion years old, challenging long-established theories about galaxy formation and cosmic evolution.

Key Points:

- **Discovery Team:** The discovery was made by researchers Rashi Jain (lead author) and Yogesh Wadadekar working at the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) in Pune, India. The research findings were published in the peer-reviewed journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics* in November-December 2025.
- **Galaxy Name Origin:** The galaxy was named Alaknanda after a sacred Himalayan river that is one of the two main headstreams of the Ganga, alongside the Mandakini. The naming holds symbolic significance as Mandakini is the Hindi name for the Milky Way galaxy, drawing a poetic connection between the discovery and our own galaxy.
- **Age and Timeline:** Alaknanda existed when the Universe was approximately 1.5 billion years old, which is roughly one-tenth of its current age of 13.8 billion years. The galaxy's light traveled for over 12 billion years to reach the James Webb Space Telescope, making it one of the most distant grand-design spiral galaxies ever identified.
- **Telescope Technology:** NASA's James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), launched in 2021, is the most powerful space telescope ever built with infrared capabilities. The telescope operates from Lagrange Point L2, approximately 1.5 million kilometers from Earth, featuring a 6.5-meter segmented mirror that provides unprecedented resolution for observing distant cosmic objects.
- **Galaxy Structure:** Alaknanda is a grand-design spiral galaxy with two well-defined, symmetric spiral arms wrapping around a bright central bulge approximately 30,000 light-years in diameter.
- **Stellar Mass and Formation:** The galaxy contains approximately 10 billion solar masses of stars. Remarkably, half of Alaknanda's stars appear to have formed in just 200 million years, demonstrating extraordinarily rapid stellar assembly. The galaxy is currently forming stars at a rate 20-30 times faster than the Milky Way's present rate.
- **Gravitational Lensing Discovery:** Alaknanda was discovered in the direction of the massive galaxy cluster Abell 2744, also known as Pandora's Cluster, located in the constellation Sculptor. The cluster's enormous gravity acts as a natural

gravitational lens, bending and magnifying the light from distant background galaxies, making Alaknanda appear twice as bright and enabling detailed observation.

- **Formation Theories:** Scientists propose two main theories for Alaknanda's rapid formation: (1) steady growth through rapid cold-gas accretion, allowing density waves to naturally carve spiral patterns, or (2) a gravitational encounter with a smaller companion galaxy that triggered tidal spiral arms, though such structures typically fade quickly.
- **Research Duration:** The discovery required 15 months of meticulous analysis and work by the research team to process and interpret the JWST data, determine the galaxy's properties, and verify the findings before publication.

SPORTS

Jaiswal Becomes 6th Indian to Hit Tons in All Formats

In the News: Indian cricketer Yashasvi Jaiswal became the sixth Indian player to score centuries in all three international formats (Test, ODI, and T20I). The 22-year-old left-handed opening batsman achieved this feat during India's tour of Zimbabwe, solidifying his position as one of India's most promising young talents.

Key Points:

- **Historic Achievement:** Yashasvi Jaiswal joined an elite group of Indian cricketers who have scored centuries across all three international formats. He became the sixth Indian player to accomplish this rare feat, following Rohit Sharma, Suresh Raina, KL Rahul, Ruturaj Gaikwad, and Shubman Gill. He has a T20I century.
- **Test Cricket Success:** Jaiswal had already established himself as a formidable Test batsman with multiple centuries in the longest format. His Test career includes impressive performances against top-ranked teams, showcasing his ability to adapt to different conditions and opposition bowling attacks.
- **ODI Century Achievement:** The young opener had previously scored his ODI century, demonstrating his versatility across white-ball formats.
- **Age and Potential:** At 23 years of age, Jaiswal is the youngest among the six Indian players to achieve this distinction, highlighting his exceptional talent and potential for a long, successful international career. His early success across formats indicates promising prospects for Indian cricket's future.

Career Statistics: Since making his international debut, Jaiswal has consistently performed across formats, accumulating runs at competitive averages and strike rates. His ability to score quickly while building substantial innings has made him a valuable asset to the Indian team across all formats.

3-Year-Old Indian Boy Becomes World's Youngest FIDE-Rated Chess Player

In the News: Sarwagya Singh Kushwaha from Madhya Pradesh became the world's youngest FIDE-rated chess player at the age of 3 years, 7 months. The toddler from Sagar district achieved a rapid rating of 1572 in the International Chess Federation's December 2025 rating list, breaking the previous record held by another Indian player.

Key Points:

- **Record Achievement:** Sarwagya Singh Kushwaha became the youngest player in history to receive an official FIDE (Fédération Internationale des Échecs) rating at exactly 3 years, 7 months, and 20 days old. He surpassed the previous record held by Anish Sarkar of West Bengal, who achieved his FIDE rating in November 2024 at the age of 3 years, 8 months, and 19 days, breaking the record by approximately one month.
- **FIDE Rating Details:** Sarwagya earned a rapid chess rating of 1572, significantly exceeding the minimum threshold of 1400 required for official FIDE recognition. To obtain a FIDE rating, players must score points against at least five already-rated opponents in official FIDE-recognized tournaments, demonstrating consistent performance against established players.
- **Tournament Performance:** The young prodigy won five out of eight rated games against opponents many times his age in tournaments held across India. His notable victories included defeating 22-year-old Abhijeet Awasthi (rated 1542), 29-year-old Shubham Chourasiya (rated 1559), and 20-year-old Yogesh Namdev (rated 1696) in events including the 24th RCC International FIDE Rapid Cup in Mangaluru, 2nd Shri Dadaji Dhuniwale Open in Khandwa, Dr. Ajit Kasliwal Memorial All India Open Rapid in Indore, and 1st GH Raisoni Memorial in Chhindwara.
- **India's Chess Dominance:** Sarwagya's achievement adds to India's rapidly growing prominence in international chess, representing a significant shift from the Cold War era when Russian players dominated the sport. India currently has D Gukesh as the youngest-ever world chess champion (achieved in 2024 at age 18), five-time world champion Viswanathan

Anand, and numerous young talents excelling at international levels, demonstrating the country's robust chess infrastructure and training programs.

The 33rd Southeast Asian Games Begin in Thailand

In the News: The 33rd Southeast Asian Games officially opened in Bangkok, Thailand, with a grand ceremony at the Rajamangala National Stadium presided over by King Maha Vajiralongkorn and Queen Suthida. This marks Thailand's first time hosting the regional sporting event in 18 years and the return of the Games to Bangkok, where the regional competition was born 66 years ago in 1959 as the SEAP Games. The Games are scheduled to run from December 9-20, 2025, about 13,000 athletes from 11 nations, across 50 medal sports with 574 events.

Key Points:

- **Dates and Host Cities:** The 33rd Southeast Asian Games are taking place from December 9 to 20, 2025, across the Bangkok Metropolitan Region and Chonburi province in Thailand. Originally, Songkhla province was also designated as a host city for 10 sports, but severe flooding in southern Thailand forced organizers to relocate all events from Songkhla to the capital Bangkok and Chonburi. This represents the first time in SEA Games and ASEAN Para Games history that host cities were chosen through a competitive bidding process, with Bangkok, Chonburi, and Songkhla being selected on January 13, 2023, by the Sports Authority of Thailand, with Cabinet approval following in February 2023.
- **Opening Ceremony Details:** The opening ceremony was held on December 9, 2025, at the Rajamangala National Stadium in Bangkok, beginning at 7:00 PM under the theme "We Are One — We Are Connected by the Sea." King Vajiralongkorn and Queen Suthida arrived at 7:50 PM and presided over the ceremony, with the King officially declaring the Games open through a royal address.
- **Royal Participation and Cauldron Lighting:** Her Majesty Queen Suthida accompanied Thai national athletes in a royal electric vehicle during their march into the stadium and is scheduled to compete for Thailand in the sailing competition, representing the national team in the keelboat SSL47 event at the Ocean Marina Yacht Club in Sattahip district, Chonburi province from December 15-18. The torch relay featured three distinguished athletes: skateboarder Vareeraya Sukasem, 2008 Olympic boxing champion Somjit Jongjohor, and two-time Olympic taekwondo gold medalist Panipak Wongpattanakit, who carried the sacred flame (previously bestowed by the King) to light the cauldron. The cauldron lighting triggered a spectacular stadium-wide display of lasers, CGI projections, and a drone show.
- **Participating Nations and Athletes:** All eleven National Olympic Committee (NOC) members of the Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF) are participating in the Games: hosts Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Philippines, Singapore, Myanmar, Vietnam, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Brunei Darussalam, and Timor-Leste. This marks a historic moment as Timor-Leste participates for the first time as a full ASEAN member state, having gained official access to the association on October 26, 2025. A total of 13,657 athletes are competing across 8,266 competitors in 50 sports, including Olympic champions such as Hidilyn Diaz-Naranjo of the Philippines and Indonesia's Rizki Juniansyah.
- **Sports Program and Medal Events:** The Games feature 50 medal sports with 574 gold medals (though there was an inconsistency during the opening ceremony when the MC announced 574 medal sets while the display showed 547), plus 3 demonstration sports and 1 value-creating sport. The sporting program ranges from Olympic disciplines to traditional regional sports.
- **Host City Contract and Administrative Structure:** During the first SEAGF council meeting for the 2025 SEA Games in June 2024, the host city contract was signed by Chadchart Sittipunt (Governor of Bangkok), Thawatchai Srithong (Governor of Chonburi province), and Somnuek Promkhieo (Governor of Songkhla province). The ceremony followed the Olympic and Asian Games host city agreement model, marking the first time a SEA Games host city contract has been formally signed.
- **Cambodia's Withdrawal:** On December 11, 2025, Cambodia withdrew its team from the Southeast Asian Games for safety reasons as a border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia raged for a third day. The National Olympic Committee of Cambodia made the decision due to "serious concerns" and requests from families of athletes to return home. Fighting between Thailand and Cambodia had erupted on December 9.
- **Closing Ceremony and Next Host:** The closing ceremony is scheduled for December 20, 2025, at the Rajamangala Stadium in Bangkok, where the SEAGF flag will be handed over to Malaysia, the host country for the 2027 edition. The handover segment will include performances by Malaysian artists Marsha Milan, Amir Jahari, and Mimifly, symbolizing the continuation of Southeast Asian sporting unity and cooperation. This transition marks the ongoing evolution of the SEA Games as a platform for promoting regional solidarity, sportsmanship, and cultural exchange among Southeast Asian nations.

India to Host Squash World Cup 2025 for the Third Consecutive Time

In the News: India is hosting the Squash World Cup for the third consecutive time, with the fifth edition of the tournament taking place at the SDAT Stadium and Express Avenue Mall in Chennai from December 9 to 14, 2025. Organized by World Squash, the sport's global governing body, this mixed-team international event features 12 nations competing for the championship title, expanded from eight teams in the previous edition. The tournament is sponsored by the Tamil Nadu Government and supported by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport in India.

Key Points:

- **Tournament Format and Expansion:** The 2025 Squash World Cup is the fifth edition of the tournament and features 12 national teams, expanded from eight teams in the 2023 edition. The tournament follows a mixed-team format where each nation fields two men and two women players, competing in ties with four best-of-five matches. Teams have been divided into four pools (A to D) of three teams each for the group stage, with the top two teams from each pool advancing to the quarter-finals.
- **Consecutive Hosting Achievement:** This marks the third consecutive time that India, specifically Chennai, is hosting the Squash World Cup, having previously hosted the tournament in 2023 and serving as the venue for the 2011 edition as well. The Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI) is the organizing body responsible for hosting the championships.
- **Venues and Infrastructure:** The tournament is being played across two premier venues in Chennai: the Express Avenue Mall, featuring a spectacular all-glass show court, and the Indian Squash Academy (also known as Indian Squash & Triathlon Academy or ISA).
- **Match Format and Scoring System:** All matches are played as best-of-five games, with games scored to seven points using the innovative format introduced in the 2023 edition. At 6-6, games are decided by sudden-death tiebreaks, maintaining the fast-paced nature that has been praised by fans. The playing order is determined by coin toss and follows either Woman #2, Man #1, Woman #1, Man #2 OR Man #2, Woman #1, Man #1, Woman #2. Teams are awarded points for winning matches as follows: Woman #1 and Man #1 victories earn 2 points each, while Woman #2 and Man #2 victories earn 1 point each.
- **Participating Nations:** The tournament features representation from all five of World Squash's Continental Federations. From Asia, hosts India are joined by the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, and Hong Kong, China. Africa is represented by defending champions Egypt and South Africa. Europe has two representatives in Poland and Switzerland. Oceania is represented by Australia, and Panamerica by Brazil. This global participation demonstrates the worldwide appeal and competitive nature of the event.
- **Pool Composition:** Pool A features Hong Kong, China, South Africa, and Republic of Korea. Pool B includes hosts India, Brazil, and Switzerland. Pool C brings together Malaysia, Australia, and Poland. Pool D comprises defending champions Egypt, Japan, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This distribution ensures competitive balance across all pools while setting up potentially exciting matchups in the knockout stages.
- **India's Squad Composition:** India has announced a four-member squad blending experience and youth for the 2025 tournament. The men's team features India's No.1 ranked player Abhay Singh (world No. 29, India's top-ranked man) and 17-year-old Anahat Singh (world No. 27, India's top-ranked woman), India's top-ranked women's player who will also be making her World Cup debut as the youngest player in the tournament, and veteran Joshna Chinappa (39 years old), a former World No. 10 who returns after helping India secure bronze in 2023.
- **India's Previous Performance and Aspirations:** In the 2023 edition, India achieved their best-ever result at a Squash World Cup by finishing third with a bronze medal. India topped their group stage with victories over Hong Kong, South Africa, and Japan but lost to Malaysia 3-0 in the semi-finals. This bronze medal finish marked the first time India had reached the podium at a Squash World Cup.
- **Tournament History and Champions:** The Squash World Cup was first held in 1996 in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, where Australia emerged as inaugural champions by defeating England 3-0 in the final, with the tournament featuring 16 teams. England claimed the title in the second edition in 1999 in 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands. Egypt won the third edition in 2011 when the tournament was hosted in Chennai. Egypt is the most successful team in Squash World Cup history with two titles, both won in Chennai.
- **2023 Edition Innovations:** The 2023 relaunched edition introduced several major changes that have been retained for 2025, most notably achieving gender parity within teams with equal representation of male and female players, and introducing games played to seven points with sudden-death tiebreaks, marking a first in World Squash Federation history. These innovations have been praised for creating fast-paced, exciting matches and promoting equal balance between male and female players.

- **India's Opening Performance:** India began their campaign with a dominant 4-0 victory over Switzerland in their Pool B opener on December 10, 2025. Velavan Senthilkumar secured the first point with a 3-0 (7-4, 7-5, 7-4) win. Veteran Joshna Chinappa sealed the clean sweep with a 3-1 (7-1, 5-7, 7-2, 7-0) win against Stella Kaufmann, recovering after dropping the second game. Coach Harinder Pal Sandhu expressed satisfaction with getting the first win out of the way, acknowledging the nerves of playing in front of a home crowd.
- **Government Support and Sponsorship:** The tournament is sponsored by the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDAT) and supported by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport in India, demonstrating strong governmental commitment to promoting squash in the country.

U-19 Asia Cup 2025, Vaibhav Suryavanshi Smashes 171 as India Dominate UAE

In the News: India's 14-year-old batting prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi delivered a jaw-dropping performance by smashing a scintillating 171 off 95 balls in the opening match of the ACC Men's Under-19 Asia Cup 2025 against the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at the ICC Academy Ground, Dubai. The left-handed opener's explosive innings powered India to a mammoth total of 433 for 6 in 50 overs—the highest total in U19 Asia Cup history and India's highest-ever in U19 ODIs—leading to a comprehensive 234-run victory in the tournament's inaugural Group A match.

Key Points:

- **Tournament Overview and Context:** The 12th edition of the ACC Men's U19 Asia Cup 2025 commenced on December 12, 2025, and will run until December 21, 2025, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The tournament features eight teams divided into two groups of four teams each, playing in the 50-over ODI format. Group A comprises India U19, Pakistan U19, Malaysia U19, and hosts UAE U19, while Group B includes Afghanistan U19, Bangladesh U19, Sri Lanka U19, and Nepal U19. Matches are being held at two premier venues in Dubai—the ICC Academy Ground and The Sevens Stadium.
- **Match Situation and Early Play:** After being invited to bat first by UAE captain Yayin Rai, India U19 suffered an early setback when skipper Ayush Mhatre departed for just four runs in the third over, bowled by Yug Sharma. This early dismissal brought 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Aaron George together at the crease at 10 for 1, setting the stage for what would become a record-breaking partnership and individual performance.
- **Suryavanshi's Record-Breaking Innings:** Vaibhav Suryavanshi's innings of 171 runs off 95 balls was a masterclass in aggressive batting, featuring nine boundaries and a staggering 14 sixes. The 14-year-old southpaw from Samastipur, Bihar, raced to his half-century in just 30 deliveries with a massive six off Ahmed Khudadad, demonstrating his intent from early on. He reached his century off only 56 balls, showcasing remarkable acceleration and shot selection. Suryavanshi then continued his relentless assault, completing 150 runs in just 84 balls before finally being dismissed at 171 off 95 deliveries, achieving a phenomenal strike rate of 180.00.
- **Historic Records and Milestones Achieved:** Suryavanshi's 171 is officially the second-highest score by an Indian in a Youth ODI, falling just six runs short of Ambati Rayudu's long-standing record of 177 not out against England U19 in Taunton back in 2002—a record that has stood for 23 years. His innings ranks as the ninth-highest score by any batter in men's U19 ODI history across all nations. Most significantly, Suryavanshi's 14 sixes set a new world record for the most sixes hit by any batter in a single innings at the U19 level, breaking the previous record of 10 sixes held by Afghanistan's Darwish Rasooli from 2017.
- **UAE's Chase and India's Victory:** In response to India's imposing target of 434 runs, UAE could only manage 199 for 7 in their allotted 50 overs, falling short by a massive 234 runs. The UAE batting lineup collapsed early in their chase, unable to build partnerships or maintain the required run rate against disciplined Indian bowling. While Prithvi Madhu and Uddish Suri offered some resistance in the middle and lower order, preventing a complete collapse, their efforts were nowhere near sufficient to challenge India's overwhelming total.
- **Suryavanshi's Phenomenal 2025 Season:** Vaibhav Suryavanshi's 171 against UAE is just the latest chapter in what has been an extraordinary 2025 for the teenage prodigy. This was his second Youth ODI hundred, having scored his first earlier in the year during matches in England. Remarkably, Suryavanshi now has six centuries in 2025 across all formats, demonstrating consistent run-scoring ability and temperament across different conditions and opposition. He recently smashed his first Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (India's premier domestic T20 tournament) century, scoring an unbeaten 108 off just 61 balls for Bihar, showcasing his explosive T20 capabilities. Just last month in November 2025, Suryavanshi played a pivotal role in the Rising Stars Asia Cup held in Doha, Qatar, where he accumulated 239 runs at an impressive average of 59.75 with an explosive strike rate of 243.87, including a blistering 42-ball 144 against UAE—the joint-third-fastest century

by an Indian in men's T20 cricket history. This recent form demonstrates that his performance in the U19 Asia Cup opener was not a flash in the pan but part of sustained excellence throughout the year.

IMPORTANT DAYS

UNICEF Foundation Day 2025: Date, Theme, History & Significance

In the News: UNICEF Foundation Day marks the 79th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), commemorating the organization's founding by the United Nations General Assembly on December 11, 1946. This day serves as a global reminder of UNICEF's enduring commitment to protecting child rights, health, education, protection, and dignity worldwide, while highlighting the organization's mission to ensure every child survives, learns, and is protected regardless of nationality, race, or socioeconomic status.

Key Points:

- **Date and Anniversary:** UNICEF Foundation Day is observed annually on December 11, with 2025 marking the 79th anniversary of UNICEF's establishment. The day falls on a Thursday in 2025 and commemorates the creation of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) by the UN General Assembly on December 11, 1946. This date has been consistently recognized since the organization's inception, providing a yearly moment to unite people of all ages behind the shared goal of improving the lives of vulnerable children around the world.
- **Historical Background and Origin:** The origins of UNICEF can be traced to the humanitarian crisis that followed World War II, when millions of children in Europe and Asia faced hunger, displacement, disease, and poverty. UNGA established UNICEF by resolution 57(I) on 11 Dec 1946; historical documents describe UNRRA's role in the background and transfer of residual funds/assets. The UN General Assembly founded the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in the same year to further institutionalize post-war relief work, focusing on immediate aid to children in countries devastated by World War II.
- **Evolution to Permanent Organization:** In 1950, UNICEF's mission was expanded to confront the long-term needs of women and children, especially in developing countries, recognizing that the organization's work extended far beyond immediate post-war relief. In October 1953, the UN General Assembly declared UNICEF a permanent organization of the UN system, extending its mandate indefinitely to assist vulnerable children worldwide. Following this transition, the name was changed from "United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund" to "United Nations Children's Fund," though the organization retained the original acronym UNICEF.
- **Nobel Peace Prize Recognition:** In 1965, UNICEF was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of its outstanding work for children worldwide and its promotion of brotherhood among nations. This prestigious award acknowledged UNICEF's significant contributions to improving the lives of children globally and its role in fostering peace through humanitarian action. The Nobel Prize recognition elevated UNICEF's international standing and reinforced its mission as a leading advocate for children's rights and welfare.
- **Headquarters and Global Presence:** UNICEF's headquarters is located in New York City, United States, which serves as the central coordination office for all activities ongoing in over 190 countries and territories worldwide.
- **Founder and Leadership:** UNICEF was founded by Ludwik Rajchman, a Polish physician and public health expert, in 1946 to address the urgent needs of children in countries affected by World War II. Rajchman's vision laid the foundation for what would become the world's leading organization dedicated to child welfare and rights.

ECONOMICS

Fino Payments Bank Becomes First to Receive RBI Nod to Transition into SFB

In the News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) granted in-principle approval to Fino Payments Bank Limited (FPBL) for conversion into a Small Finance Bank (SFB), making it the first payments bank in India to receive such approval. The announcement came through an official press release from the RBI's Central Office, marking a historic milestone in India's banking sector evolution and representing a significant expansion opportunity for Fino, which has operated as a payments bank since 2017.

Key Points:

- **Historic Milestone and In-Principle Approval:** Fino Payments Bank became the first payments bank in India to receive in-principle approval from the Reserve Bank of India to convert into a Small Finance Bank, marking a watershed moment in the evolution of India's differentiated banking model. The approval was granted on December 5, 2025, after the RBI evaluated Fino's application under the procedure laid down in the guidelines for 'on tap' licensing of Small Finance Banks in the private sector.
- **Eligibility Criteria and Regulatory Framework:** According to RBI's 'on tap' licensing norms, existing payments banks are eligible to apply for conversion into Small Finance Banks if they are controlled by resident promoters and have completed at least five years of operations.
- **Capital and Net Worth Requirements:** Payments banks interested in converting to SFB status are required to maintain a minimum net worth of ₹300 crore at the time of application, or they must infuse additional paid-up voting equity share capital to achieve this threshold within 18 months from the date of receiving in-principle approval or by the date of commencement of operations as an SFB, whichever is earlier. Additionally, Small Finance Banks are mandated to maintain a minimum Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) of 15% of their Risk Weighted Assets (RWAs) on a continuous basis, subject to any higher percentage as may be prescribed by the RBI from time to time.
- **Branch Network and Rural Presence Mandate:** Small Finance Banks are mandated to open at least 25% of their total banking outlets in unbanked rural centres, ensuring their role in promoting financial inclusion in underserved areas.
- **Fino's Journey and Historical Context:** Fino's journey began in 2006 as a payments technology company, well before the payments bank category was created. The company has been instrumental in India's financial inclusion initiatives, particularly in providing Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) services to beneficiaries under various government schemes, facilitating last-mile connectivity for government welfare programs.
- **Existing SFB Landscape:** With Fino's conversion, it will join a group of 11 existing Small Finance Banks: AU Small Finance Bank, Equitas SFB, Suryoday SFB, Utkarsh SFB, Jana SFB, Unity SFB, Capital SFB, ESAF SFB, Ujjivan SFB, Shivalik SFB, and Slice SFB. Notably, AU Small Finance Bank has already received RBI approval to transition into a universal bank, demonstrating the progression pathway available within India's differentiated banking structure.

STATICS

Bodhi Day 2025: Celebrating the Buddha's Enlightenment and Eternal Wisdom

In the News: Buddhist communities across the world observed Bodhi Day, commemorating the spiritual awakening of Siddhartha Gautama, who attained enlightenment (Bodhi) under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India, more than 2,500 years ago. The sacred occasion marks the Buddha's transformation from ignorance to insight and symbolizes the essence of Buddhism—liberation through self-realization, compassion, and wisdom.

Key Points:

- **Observance Date:** Bodhi Day is celebrated on December 8 annually in Japan and throughout the Japanese diaspora, following the Gregorian calendar adopted during the Meiji Restoration (1862-1869). Theravada Buddhist countries celebrate the Buddha's enlightenment during Vesak festival in April-May.
- **Enlightenment Process:** After forsaking years of extreme ascetic practices, Siddhartha resolved to meditate until he found the root of suffering. He spent approximately seven days to 49 days (accounts vary) in intense meditation under the Bodhi tree, facing mental challenges and temptations from the demon Mara. On the morning of the eighth day of the 12th lunar month, he attained enlightenment while gazing at the morning star Venus.
- **Buddhist Name Origin:** The term "Bodhi" in Sanskrit and Pali means "awakening" or "enlightenment." Upon achieving enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama became known as "Buddha," meaning "The Awakened One" or "The Enlightened One." He discovered the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, which became the foundation of Buddhist philosophy.
- **Four Noble Truths:** The Buddha realized fundamental truths about existence: Dukkha (suffering or unsatisfactoriness exists), Samudaya (suffering arises from attachment and craving), Nirodha (suffering can cease), and Magga (the path to cessation of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path). These teachings address the cycle of suffering and rebirth (samsara).
- **Bodh Gaya Location:** Bodh Gaya is located in Gaya district in Bihar state, approximately 110 kilometers (68 miles) from Patna and 16 kilometers from Gaya district headquarters. It is considered the holiest site in Buddhism and one of the four most important Buddhist pilgrimage destinations, along with Kushinagar (place of Buddha's death), Lumbini (birthplace in Nepal), and Sarnath (first sermon).

- **Mahabodhi Temple Complex:** The Mahabodhi Temple Complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site designated in 2002, marks the exact location of Buddha's enlightenment. The first temple was built by Mauryan Emperor Ashoka around 260 BCE (3rd century BCE). The present temple dates from the 5th-6th century CE during the Gupta period and stands approximately 50-55 meters tall, built entirely of brick.
- **Vajrasana and Bodhi Tree:** The temple complex includes the Vajrasana (Diamond Throne), which marks the exact spot where Buddha sat during enlightenment, and the sacred Bodhi Tree. The current Bodhi tree is a descendant of the original tree, planted in 1881 by British archaeologist Alexander Cunningham from a cutting of the Sri Maha Bodhi tree in Sri Lanka, which itself was grown from a sapling of the original tree sent by Emperor Ashoka in 288 BCE.
- **Japanese Celebration - Rohatsu:** In Japanese Zen Buddhism, Bodhi Day is known as Rohatsu or Rohachi (臘八), literally meaning "eighth day of the 12th month." Zen monks and lay followers traditionally stay awake the entire night before Rohatsu practicing meditation. The holiday is often preceded by an intensive meditation retreat called sesshin.
- **Chinese Celebration - Laba:** The Chinese version is called Laba Festival (臘八), celebrated on the eighth day of the 12th lunar month. The festival is associated with eating rice porridge (congee), which recalls the offering of milk porridge that helped Siddhartha on his journey to enlightenment and replaced earlier meat offerings that violated Buddhist principles.
- **Traditional Observances:** Buddhists commemorate Bodhi Day through meditation and silent contemplation, study of the Dharma (Buddhist teachings), chanting of sutras (Buddhist scriptures), performing acts of kindness and compassion toward other beings, lighting lamps and candles to symbolize enlightenment dispelling ignorance, and offering food and alms to monks and the less fortunate.
- **Home Celebrations:** Some Buddhist families decorate a Ficus religiosa tree (Bodhi tree) in their homes with multi-colored lights, garlands, beads symbolizing interconnectedness, and ornaments representing the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). Multi-colored lights symbolize the many pathways to enlightenment and are kept lit for 30 days beginning December 8.
- **Traditional Foods:** Traditional meals include tea, cakes, and cookies shaped like hearts (referencing the heart-shaped leaves of the Bodhi tree), and kheer or rice congee, representing the Buddha's first meal after ending his six-year period of extreme asceticism.
- **Sacred Sites within Complex:** The Mahabodhi Temple Complex includes several locations associated with Buddha's post-enlightenment meditation: Animeshlocha Stupa (where Buddha gazed at the Bodhi tree without blinking for a week), Ratnachakrama (Jewel Walk where Buddha paced in meditation), Muchalinda Lake (where Buddha meditated during a storm protected by serpent king Muchalinda), and Ratnaghara (site of deep reflection).
- **Temple Management:** The Bodh Gaya Temple Management Committee, established under the Bodh Gaya Temple Act of 1949, manages the site with nine members including both Hindu and Buddhist representatives. A 2013 amendment allowed non-Hindus to chair the committee. The temple area is protected under the Treasure Trove Act of 1878.
- **International Monasteries:** Buddhist countries including Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal, Japan, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan have built monasteries in Bodh Gaya, making it an international center of Buddhist heritage. A 24-meter (80-foot) Great Buddha Statue was consecrated in 1989 by the 14th Dalai Lama.

ECONOMY

SEBI Launches PaRRVA to Verify Investment Returns and Combat Misleading Finfluencer Claims

In the News: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) launched the Past Risk and Return Verification Agency (PaRRVA) on a pilot basis. Developed in collaboration with Care Ratings (CAREEdge Ratings) and the National Stock Exchange (NSE), this verification mechanism aims to authenticate past performance claims made by SEBI-registered market intermediaries and counter misleading investment advice, particularly from unregulated finfluencers.

Key Points:

- **Launch and Purpose:** SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey announced the launch of PaRRVA at a National Stock Exchange event on December 8, 2025, describing it as a pioneering framework that allows SEBI-registered investment advisers, research analysts, and algorithmic stock brokers to present independently validated past returns to investors.
- **Two-Tier Verification Structure:** PaRRVA operates through a dual-agency system where a SEBI-registered Credit Rating Agency (CRA) serves as the PaRRVA, while a recognized stock exchange functions as the PaRRVA Data Centre (PDC). In the pilot phase, Care Ratings acts as the PaRRVA and NSE serves as the PDC. Both entities independently verify historical returns

using a transparent, uniform, and standardized methodology to ensure accuracy and consistency across all performance validations.

- **Eligibility Criteria for Agencies:** To qualify as PaRRVA, credit rating agencies must have operated for at least 15 years, maintain a minimum net worth of Rs 100 crore, and have provided ratings to at least 250 issuers for debt securities. For stock exchanges to function as PDC, they must have existed for minimum 15 years, possess a net worth of at least Rs 200 crore, maintain nationwide terminals, and have robust investor grievance redressal mechanisms including online dispute resolution systems.
- **Coverage and Applicability:** In its initial pilot phase, the PaRRVA framework applies specifically to SEBI-registered Investment Advisers, Research Analysts, and stock brokers offering algorithmic trading services. SEBI amended relevant regulations to allow these previously restricted entities to showcase past performance data, provided it is verified through PaRRVA.
- **Global Benchmark and Oversight:** SEBI Chairman Pandey emphasized that while many international markets acknowledge risks from unverified performance claims, India has taken the lead by creating an independent verification mechanism. PaRRVA positions India as setting a new international benchmark for transparency, accountability, and investor protection in financial markets.

Brookfield to Invest \$1 Billion to Build Asia's Largest GCC in Maharashtra

In the News: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced that Brookfield Asset Management will invest over \$1 billion (approximately Rs. 9,000 crore) to develop Asia's largest Global Capability Centre (GCC) in Powai, Mumbai. The landmark project, spanning 2 million square feet across six acres, will house a multinational bank's GCC operations under a 20-year lease agreement and is expected to create approximately 45,000 jobs (15,000 direct and 30,000 indirect) by its completion in 2029, representing a major milestone in Maharashtra's efforts to position itself as a premier global hub for GCC operations.

Key Points:

- **Project Announcement and Scale:** Brookfield Asset Management, the New York-based global alternative asset manager with Canadian parent Brookfield Corporation, announced a \$1 billion investment to develop Asia's largest Global Capability Centre campus in Powai, Mumbai.
- **Employment Generation:** The project is projected to generate massive employment opportunities, with Chief Minister Fadnavis announcing that "one single project will create 45,000 jobs. The direct employment will span high-skilled technology roles including software engineers, data scientists, and AI specialists; finance and operations functions including analysts, accountants, and compliance officers; research and development positions across various business lines; and specialized corporate functions including human resources, legal, procurement, and business strategy.
- **Timeline and Completion:** The project is scheduled for completion by 2029, representing a four-year construction and development timeline from the late 2025 project launch. This timeline accounts for design finalization, regulatory approvals, site preparation, foundation work, structural construction, interior fit-outs, technology infrastructure installation, security system integration, and testing and commissioning before handover. The 2029 completion target positions the facility to become operational just as global GCC expansion in India is projected to accelerate further, with India expected to see 180 million square feet of office absorption through GCCs between 2025 and 2030 under realistic growth scenarios according to industry analysts.
- **Previous GCC Experience:** In 2024, Brookfield commissioned a similar build-to-suit tower in Pune, Maharashtra, specifically designed to house the GCC of a large financial services corporation, demonstrating proven capability in delivering specialized GCC infrastructure meeting stringent multinational operational requirements.

ENVIRONMENT

Global Environment Outlook 2025

In the News: The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the Global Environment Outlook, Seventh Edition: A Future We Choose (GEO-7) during the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in Nairobi, Kenya. This landmark report, produced by 287 multidisciplinary scientists from 82 countries with contributions from over 800 reviewers worldwide, represents the most comprehensive scientific assessment of the global environment ever undertaken, offering humanity a critical choice between continuing on a path toward environmental catastrophe or transforming key systems to secure a healthy planet, healthy people, and healthy economies.

Key Points:

- **Report Development and Scope:** GEO-7 is the product of 287 multidisciplinary scientists from 82 countries, making it UNEP's flagship environmental assessment and the most comprehensive scientific evaluation of the global environment ever carried out. The GEO-7 process was initiated by UNEA Resolution EA.5/3 approved by Member States in March 2022, with authors meeting in Bangkok, Vienna, and Nairobi to prepare the assessment. The Summary for Policymakers was reviewed and approved at a meeting held from October 27-31, 2025, at the United Nations Office in Nairobi.
- **Current Environmental Crises and Costs:** The report finds that climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, desertification, and pollution and waste have already taken a heavy toll on the planet, people, and economies, costing trillions of dollars each year. Greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 1.5 percent annually since 1990, reaching a new high in 2024, raising global temperatures and intensifying climate impacts
- **Five Key Transformation Areas:** Following the transformation pathways would require sweeping changes across five interconnected key areas. First, Economy and Finance: moving beyond GDP to comprehensive inclusive wealth metrics that track human and natural capital, pricing positive and negative externalities to value goods correctly, and phasing out and repurposing subsidies, taxes, and incentives that result in negative impacts on nature. Second, Materials and Waste: implementing circular product design, transparency and traceability of products and materials, shifting investments to circular and regenerative business models, and changing consumption patterns towards circularity through mindset shifts. Third, Energy: decarbonizing the energy supply, increasing energy efficiency, backing social and environmental sustainability in critical mineral value chains, and addressing energy access and energy poverty.
- **Whole-of-Government and Whole-of-Society Approaches:** GEO-7 calls for interconnected whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches to transform systems of economy and finance, materials and waste, energy, food, and the environment. The report makes clear that transformation of economic and financial systems will unlock transformations in the materials/waste, energy, and food systems while improving environmental management. A key enabling factor of this approach is moving away from GDP as the primary indicator to metrics that also track human and natural capital, which would incentivize economies to move towards circularity, decarbonization of the energy system, sustainable agriculture, and ecosystem restoration.
- **UNEA-7 Context and Theme:** The GEO-7 launch occurred during UNEA-7, held from December 8-12, 2025, at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The theme of UNEA-7 is "Advancing Sustainable Solutions for a Resilient Planet," and the Global Environment Outlook report was strategically launched to provide solutions pathways that feed directly into the discussions and decisions made during the assembly. Professor Edgar E. Gutiérrez-Espeleta, President of UNEA, emphasized that "one of GEO-7's messages is that we must see all four crises together. We cannot just work on climate change alone. These big systems drive life on the planet, and we must act with this vision."

Nagaland Launches Mission Punarutthan During Watershed Mahotsav 2025

In the News: Dr. Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar, Union Minister of State for Rural Development and Communications, launched the State-Level Watershed Mahotsav 2025 and Mission Watershed PUNARUTTHAN at Naga Solidarity Park in Kohima, Nagaland. The initiative, organized by the Ministry of Rural Development in collaboration with the Government of Nagaland, marks a major milestone in transforming water-stressed regions into water-secure, climate-resilient landscapes, with a focus on reviving traditional water bodies, restoring degraded lands, and strengthening water-harvesting systems to ensure sustainable livelihoods for rural communities.

Key Points:

- **Mission PUNARUTTHAN Objectives:** Mission Watershed PUNARUTTHAN focuses on four primary objectives aimed at comprehensive water and land resource management. These include reviving traditional water bodies and old river systems that have fallen into disuse, restoring degraded lands through soil and moisture conservation measures, strengthening water-harvesting systems to capture monsoon rainfall effectively, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods through community participation and convergence with government schemes such as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act).
- **Watershed Janbhagidari Cup 2025 Awards:** Dr. Chandra Sekhar presented the prestigious Watershed Janbhagidari Cup 2025 awards to recognize exceptional community-led watershed management efforts in Nagaland. Three village Watershed Development Committees received awards of Rs. 20 lakh each for their outstanding performance and community involvement in watershed projects. The winning villages were Wamaken village from Mokokchung district, Chudi village

from Wokha district, and Tsaphimi village from Zunheboto district. This competition, based on a public-private-people partnership model.

- **Special Northeast Funding Pattern:** The Minister highlighted that the Government of India provides special financial support to North Eastern States, including Nagaland, reflecting the commitment to accelerate development in the region. Unlike other states where project funding follows a 60:40 Centre-State ratio with the Central government contributing 60 percent and state government 40 percent, North Eastern States receive an enhanced 90:10 funding pattern, with the Central government providing 90 percent of project costs and state government contributing only 10 percent.
- **Nagaland's Leadership in Community-Based Watershed Management:** Dr. Chandra Sekhar praised Nagaland's exemplary role in grassroots environmental management, noting that the state stands at the forefront of community-led watershed development. With its rich ecological heritage, vibrant tribal traditions, and strong community-based governance systems rooted in village councils, Nagaland is uniquely positioned to lead watershed conservation initiatives. The restoration of springs, renovation of water-harvesting structures, and rejuvenation of land resources in Nagaland is not merely an environmental effort but a lifeline for future generations.
- **Nagaland's Transformation from Peripheral to Central Partner:** Nagaland is emerging as a hub for tourism, trade, agriculture, and cultural exchange. The state's unique cultural heritage, represented by events like the Hornbill Festival, showcases unity amid diversity with all Naga tribes participating despite distinct customs, languages, and traditional attire.
- **Jan Bhagidari and Community Participation:** The Watershed Mahotsav 2025 stands as a powerful example of Centre-State collaboration embodying the spirit of cooperative federalism, with both levels of government working together toward shared water security goals.

Supriya Sahu Wins UNEP Champions of the Earth 2025 Award for Climate Leadership

In the News: Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Forest in the Government of Tamil Nadu, was honored with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Champions of the Earth 2025 Award in the "Inspiration and Action" category. The award, announced on the margins of the seventh session of the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, recognizes her pioneering work in sustainable cooling, ecosystem restoration, and climate resilience initiatives that have created 2.5 million green jobs, expanded forest cover, and integrated heat adaptation into infrastructure, benefiting 12 million people across Tamil Nadu.

Key Points:

- **Award Category and Recognition:** Supriya Sahu received the Champions of the Earth Award in the "Inspiration and Action" category for her groundbreaking leadership in subnational climate action. The Champions of the Earth award, established in 2005, is the UN's highest environmental honor, conferred annually by UNEP to individuals and organizations exhibiting exceptional environmental leadership. Since its inception, the award has honored 127 laureates, including heads of state, scientists, activists, youth groups, and grassroots innovators. The 2025 edition focuses on climate justice, resilient buildings, methane reduction, sustainable cooling, and forest protection, recognizing innovative, community-led, and scalable environmental solutions.
- **Award Ceremony and Announcement:** The award was presented at a ceremony hosted by UNEP in Nairobi, Kenya, during the seventh session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) held from December 8-12, 2025. UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen stated that "this year's Champions of the Earth show the kind of leadership that will inspire the world to face down the challenge of climate change," emphasizing that as global impacts of the climate crisis intensify, innovation and leadership across every sector of society have never been more essential.
- **Tamil Nadu's Climate Leadership Position:** Tamil Nadu has emerged as one of the most active Indian states on climate resilience, particularly in regions where high temperatures place everyday life under significant strain. Under Sahu's guidance as Additional Chief Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Forest, the state has developed a comprehensive portfolio linking cooling strategies, urban planning, and ecological recovery to protect families most affected by rising heat.
- **Other 2025 Award Winners:** Supriya Sahu was honored alongside four other exceptional climate leaders: Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change (Policy Leadership category), a youth-led NGO that secured a landmark International Court of Justice opinion affirming states' legal obligations to prevent climate harm and protect human rights; Mariam Issoufou, Principal and Founder of Mariam Issoufou Architects from Niger/France (Entrepreneurial Vision category), who grounds her architecture in local materials and cultural heritage, pioneering climate-resilient buildings across the Sahel; Imazon from Brazil (Science and Innovation category), for forest protection work; and Manfredi Caltagirone (Lifetime

Achievement, posthumous), former head of UNEP's International Methane Emissions Observatory who advanced transparency and science-based policy on methane emissions.

Award Significance and Global Context: The Champions of the Earth award aims to motivate global ambitions aligned with the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognizing that bold action can drive real change for people and planet.

Chhattisgarh Gets Its First Ramsar Site: Kopra Reservoir Declared Wetland of International Importance

In the News: Chhattisgarh achieved a significant environmental milestone as the Kopra Reservoir (also known as Kopra Jalashay) in Bilaspur district was officially designated as a Ramsar Site, making it the state's first Wetland of International Importance. This recognition, announced alongside Rajasthan's Siliserh Lake, elevated India's total count of Ramsar Sites to 96 (up from just 26 in 2014), strengthening the nation's commitment to biodiversity conservation, sustainable water management, and climate resilience. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai called it "a moment of immense pride" for Chhattisgarh, while Forest and Climate Change Minister Kedar Kashyap highlighted the reservoir's rich aquatic ecosystem and avian diversity that made this international recognition possible.

Key Points:

- **Official Designation and Global Recognition:** The Ramsar designation for Kopra Reservoir was officially announced on December 12, 2025, following coordinated efforts by the State Wetland Authority, forest department officials, environmental scientists, researchers, and local communities who worked together to compile the scientific documentation, biodiversity surveys, and management proposals required for Ramsar recognition. The reservoir was inscribed on the Ramsar List as Site Number 2583, joining over 2,400 Ramsar Sites worldwide that collectively cover 2.5 million square kilometers across 172 Ramsar Contracting Parties.
- **Location and Geographic Context:** Kopra Reservoir is located in Bilaspur district, indicating the reservoir may span district boundaries or administrative references vary) in the state of Chhattisgarh, Central India. The reservoir is situated in the upper catchment areas of the River Mahanadi, one of India's major east-flowing rivers that provides vital water resources to Chhattisgarh and Odisha. The surrounding landscape is primarily characterized by fertile agricultural farmlands and scattered rural villages that depend on the reservoir for their livelihoods.
- **Reservoir Characteristics and Formation:** Kopra Reservoir is a human-made or artificial freshwater wetland system shaped by both natural processes and human intervention, representing a distinctive ecosystem that has evolved beyond its original engineering purpose. The reservoir was originally constructed primarily for irrigation purposes to support agricultural activities in the surrounding fertile plains, serving as a critical water storage infrastructure for the region's farming communities.
- **Hydrological and Ecological Importance:** Kopra Reservoir plays multiple critical hydrological roles in the region, making it indispensable for both human communities and natural ecosystems. The reservoir serves as the principal source of drinking water for numerous surrounding villages and small towns, providing safe, accessible freshwater to local populations throughout the year, including during dry seasons when other water sources may be depleted.
- **Aquatic Biodiversity and Ecological Richness:** Beyond its avian importance, Kopra Reservoir sustains exceptionally rich biodiversity across multiple taxonomic groups, creating a complex and vibrant ecosystem. The reservoir hosts abundant fish species including commercially important varieties that support local fishing livelihoods as well as native species that contribute to aquatic food webs, maintaining ecological balance and nutrient cycling. Extensive aquatic plant communities thrive in the shallow backwaters and margins, including submerged vegetation, floating-leaved plants, and emergent macrophytes that provide critical habitat structure, oxygenate the water, stabilize sediments, and support invertebrate populations.
- **Ramsar Criteria Fulfillment:** Environmental experts and the State Wetland Authority determined that Kopra Reservoir fulfills multiple criteria established under the Ramsar Convention for designating Wetlands of International Importance, demonstrating its global ecological significance. According to available information, the site meets Ramsar Criterion 2, which applies to wetlands supporting vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities—satisfied through the presence of the endangered Egyptian Vulture and other threatened bird species.
- **National Context and India's Ramsar Growth:** Kopra Reservoir's designation represents part of India's remarkable expansion of Ramsar Site protection over the past decade, demonstrating the country's growing commitment to wetland conservation. India's Ramsar portfolio has grown dramatically from just 26 sites in 2014 to 96 sites in December 2025, representing a nearly four-fold increase within 11 years and reflecting sustained political commitment, scientific capacity building, and conservation investment.