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## IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

### NATIONAL

#### **This District of Rajasthan Became India's First Fully Insured District**

**In the News:** Alwar district in Rajasthan became India's first district to achieve 100% insurance coverage under the Centre's 'Insurance for All by 2047' roadmap. The milestone was achieved through systematic door-to-door surveys that identified and enrolled 1,367 uninsured individuals across nine villages, with support from NGOs and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) under the Ministry of Finance.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Historic Achievement:** Alwar district became the first in India to achieve complete insurance saturation, marking a significant step toward the vision of 'Secure India-Insured India' under the national 'Insurance for All by 2047' initiative.
- **Insurance for All by 2047 Roadmap:** This joint initiative of the Government of India and IRDAI under the Ministry of Finance aims to achieve universal insurance coverage by the 100th year of India's Independence (2047), focusing on affordability, accessibility, and inclusion across life, health, and general insurance segments.
- **Grassroots Implementation Strategy:** Authorities conducted systematic door-to-door surveys across rural areas to identify 1,367 uninsured individuals above the age of 10 in nine villages, ensuring zero exclusion and demonstrating how targeted administrative efforts can close coverage gaps.
- **Fully Insured Villages:** Nine villages—Bhulla Ka Bas, Bichpuri, Palankheda, Antapada, Hanumanta, Kalyanpura, Morodkhurd, Kodalka, and Lalpur—were officially declared fully insured. Insurance policies were formally handed over during a programme chaired by Additional District Collector Bina Mahawar.
- **NGO Support and Public Sector Partnership:** A non-governmental organisation funded insurance premiums for all eligible adults in the nine villages, ensuring no financial burden on beneficiaries. Policies were issued by the government-owned United India Insurance Company Ltd.
- **Role of IRDAI:** The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India, under the Ministry of Finance, played a crucial role in supporting this initiative as part of the national roadmap for universal insurance coverage.

#### **PMO tells Lok Sabha Secretariat: No questions on PM CARES, relief and defence funds**

**In the News:** The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) informed the Lok Sabha Secretariat that parliamentary questions and matters related to PM CARES Fund, the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF), and the National Defence Fund (NDF) are not admissible under the rules governing the conduct of business in Lok Sabha. The PMO cited specific provisions stating these funds are not primarily the concern of the Government of India as they are constituted through voluntary public contributions rather than allocations from the Consolidated Fund of India.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Parliamentary Inadmissibility:** The PMO notified the Lok Sabha Secretariat that questions and matters concerning PM CARES Fund, PMNRF, and NDF are not permissible under Rule 41(2)(viii) and Rule 41(2)(xvii) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.
- **Rule 41(2)(viii):** This provision states that questions shall not relate to matters which are not primarily the concern of the Government of India, forming the basis for excluding these funds from parliamentary scrutiny.
- **Rule 41(2)(xvii):** This rule specifies that questions shall not raise matters under the control of bodies or persons not primarily responsible to the Government of India, further supporting the inadmissibility determination.
- **Scope of Restriction:** The inadmissibility applies to multiple types of parliamentary interventions including questions, notices for zero hour discussions, and special mentions seeking information about the three funds.
- **PM CARES Fund Background:** The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund) was established on March 27, 2020, following the COVID-19 outbreak as a public charitable trust.
- **Stated Objective of PM CARES:** According to the official website, the fund was created with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, like the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide relief to those affected.
- **Nature of Funds:** All three funds—PM CARES, PMNRF, and NDF—operate as public charitable trusts that rely on voluntary contributions from citizens and organizations rather than budgetary allocations from the Consolidated Fund of India.



## In a first, a visually challenged woman all set to become a judge in Kerala

**In the News:** Thanya Nathan C., a 24-year-old totally blind lawyer, is set to become Kerala's first visually challenged woman judge after ranking first on the merit list of persons with benchmark disabilities in the recently held judicial service examination for Civil Judges (Junior Division) in the Kerala Judicial Service. Her appointment follows a landmark 2025 Supreme Court judgment that affirmed visually impaired candidates' eligibility for judicial service positions.

### Key Points:

- **Historic Achievement:** Thanya Nathan C. will enter the annals of Kerala's judicial history as the first visually challenged woman judge, marking a significant milestone for disability inclusion in the state's judiciary.
- **Landmark Supreme Court Judgment:** A 2025 Supreme Court Bench consisting of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan held that "visually impaired candidates cannot be said to be 'not suitable' for judicial service and they are eligible to participate in selection for posts in judicial service," paving the way for Ms. Nathan's appointment.
- **First in Kerala:** This is probably the first time that a candidate with visual disability has cleared the judicial service examination in Kerala. Currently, there are no visually challenged judges in Kerala, and it is not known whether such candidates had earlier applied for the post.
- **Academic Excellence:** Ms. Nathan, who has no light perception, secured first rank in her LLB examination from Kannur University, demonstrating exceptional academic achievement despite her visual impairment.
- **Legal Practice Background:** The 24-year-old began her legal practice as a junior to K.G. Sunilkumar at Taliparamba in Kannur. Her senior and others encouraged her to take the recruitment examination, which coincided with the supportive Supreme Court verdict.
- **Study Methods and Technology:** Ms. Nathan studied law using texts in the Braille system and now relies on screen-reading software to read texts. As a lawyer, she prepared argument notes in Braille script, showcasing her adaptive methods for legal work.

## Himachal Pradesh Launches 'Padhai with AI' Digital Education Initiative

**In the News:** Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu formally launched 'Padhai with AI', an artificial intelligence-based digital education initiative, at Barthin in Bilaspur district. The programme aims to provide technology-enabled quality learning resources primarily for students preparing for competitive examinations, marking a significant step towards integrating AI into public education delivery at the district level.

### Key Points:

- **Programme Launch:** Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu launched 'Padhai with AI' on February 5, 2026, at Barthin in Bilaspur district. The initiative represents Himachal Pradesh's commitment to modernizing the education system through innovation and technology integration.
- **Target Beneficiaries:** The platform is designed exclusively for students of Bilaspur district, with primary focus on those preparing for government and competitive examinations who often lack access to quality coaching facilities.
- **AI-Based Features:** The platform uses artificial intelligence tools to deliver structured learning content, exam-oriented study material, personalized support, performance tracking, and targeted guidance.
- **Academic Counselling Support:** Along with content delivery, the programme offers continuous academic counselling to help students understand subjects better and adopt effective preparation strategies. This support system guides learners through preparation strategies and subject understanding.
- **Implementation Partnership:** The programme has been implemented by the Bilaspur district administration with institutional support from NTPC (National Thermal Power Corporation). Deputy Commissioner Bilaspur Rahul Kumar explained that the initiative delivers modern, technology-driven educational facilities to students.
- **Government Officials Present:** The launch event was attended by Technical Education Minister Rajesh Dharmani, Revenue Minister Jagat Singh Negi, and senior officials, highlighting the collaborative approach between district authorities, the state government, and public sector organizations.

## Dhami Launches Sharda River Corridor Project in Champawat

**In the News:** Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami laid foundation stones and inaugurated development projects worth Rs 330 crore in Champawat district, emphasizing the transformative potential of the Sharda Riverfront



project. The Chief Minister had initially launched the Sharda Corridor project in October 2025, and stated that the initiative would drive comprehensive development, create employment opportunities, and boost tourism in the region.

#### Key Points:

- **Project Launch and Value:** CM Pushkar Singh Dhama laid foundation stones and inaugurated projects worth Rs 330 crore in Champawat district on February 7, 2026. The Sharda Corridor project was originally launched in October 2025, with the recent event focusing on its implementation and associated development works.
- **Development Radius and Impact:** According to CM Dhama, upon completion, the entire area within a radius of approximately 200 kilometres from the project site will be fully developed. The project is envisioned to transform Champawat district by creating a new identity in tourism, faith-based tourism, and urban facilities.
- **Cultural and Spiritual Significance:** CM Dhama described Champawat as a land rich in faith, culture, and history, possessing spiritual consciousness with the power to guide life. He characterized Goddess Sharda as a symbol of knowledge, learning, and values, stating that developing her sacred ghats (riverbanks) is a matter of great fortune.
- **Balancing Development and Heritage:** The Chief Minister emphasized that Uttarakhand's identity will be strengthened only through a balance of development and cultural heritage preservation. He called upon all citizens to strengthen their resolve for public participation, cultural preservation, and sustainable development.
- **Special Connection to Tanakpur:** CM Dhama mentioned feeling a special energy upon arriving in the land of Tanakpur, highlighting the spiritual and cultural importance of the region within Champawat district.

#### No Confidence Motion Against Om Birla

**In the News:** The Opposition moved a no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. Lok Sabha sources confirmed the motion would be examined and processed according to established parliamentary rules. The move came after the Congress and other opposition parties criticized Birla for preventing Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi from quoting former Indian Army Chief General M M Naravane's unpublished memoir and for Birla's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi could have been attacked inside the House.

#### Key Points:

- **Constitutional Provision for Removal:** The Lok Sabha Speaker can be removed from office under Article 94(c) of the Constitution through a resolution passed by a majority of all then members of the House. This provision applies only to Lok Sabha, not Rajya Sabha. Article 94 also covers vacation and resignation of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker.
- **Notice Requirement:** A member must give written notice to the Secretary-General of Lok Sabha to initiate removal proceedings. The notice can be submitted by two or more members jointly. A minimum of fourteen days' notice must be given before the resolution can be moved.
- **Quorum and Support:** The motion requires backing from at least two members of Lok Sabha, and 50 members must stand up in its favor to fulfill the quorum requirement. If fewer than 50 members rise, the presiding officer informs the House that leave has not been granted.
- **Guidelines for the Motion:** According to Rule 200A, the resolution must be specific with respect to charges, clearly and precisely expressed, and cannot contain arguments, inferences, ironical expressions, imputations, or defamatory statements. Members who submitted the motion cannot speak after it is admitted for discussion.
- **Discussion Process:** If admitted and sufficient members rise in support, the presiding officer declares that leave has been granted and the resolution will be taken up within ten days. During discussion, members moving the motion may speak for up to fifteen minutes if permitted, and the discussion must be strictly confined to the charges in the resolution.
- **Historical Precedents:** No-confidence motions against Lok Sabha Speakers have been moved three times in India's parliamentary history: against Ganesh Vasudev Mavalankar in December 1954, Hukam Singh in November 1966, and Balram Jakhar in April 1987. None of these motions resulted in the Speaker's removal.

#### India Upholds E-Cigarette Ban, Rejects Philip Morris Push for Heated Tobacco Products

#### In the News:

The Union Health Ministry reaffirmed India's decision to maintain the nationwide ban on e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, rejecting calls for regulatory relaxation that would have opened the market to devices such as IQOS. The move deals a significant setback to lobbying efforts by global tobacco major Philip Morris International, which had sought reconsideration of heat-not-burn products as reduced-risk alternatives to conventional smoking.



**Key Points:**

- **Government's Firm Stance:** The Union Health Ministry clarified that the government is not considering revoking, amending, or relaxing the 2019 prohibition on e-cigarettes and heated tobacco devices. The ban explicitly covers heated tobacco products, which are commonly marketed as reduced-risk alternatives to conventional smoking.
- **India's Tobacco Crisis Context:** India is the world's seventh-largest cigarette market by volume, recording over 100 billion cigarette sales annually. Tobacco-related illnesses account for more than one million deaths each year in the country. These alarming statistics reinforce the government's emphasis on strict tobacco control measures and justify the continuation of comprehensive bans on emerging tobacco products.
- **What is IQOS and Heat-Not-Burn Technology:** IQOS is a heated tobacco device launched by Philip Morris in 2014. Heat-not-burn devices heat processed tobacco instead of burning it, producing aerosol rather than smoke. The product is currently available in nearly 80 markets worldwide and claims over 35 million users. While the US Food and Drug Administration has allowed its marketing with certain public health claims, the technology remains controversial in global health circles.
- **Impact of 2019 Ban:** India's 2019 decision effectively barred products from companies such as Philip Morris and Juul from entering the Indian market. The ban was implemented under central law and covers all e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products. Analysts had suggested that market access could significantly expand Philip Morris' footprint in India, where its cigarette market share has grown in recent years despite the prohibition on newer products.
- **Legal Framework for Tobacco Control:** Tobacco control in India is governed by laws such as the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, which regulates conventional tobacco products. The 2019 prohibition on e-cigarettes represents an extension of India's comprehensive tobacco control framework to address emerging products and technologies in the tobacco industry.

**Industrial Relations Code Amendment Bill Tabled in Lok Sabha****In the News:**

Union Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya introduced the Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026 in the Lok Sabha through a supplementary agenda during Zero Hour. The amendment seeks to clarify the legal position surrounding the repeal of earlier labour laws subsumed under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, and aims to prevent potential legal complications regarding the continuity of repealed enactments.

**Key Points:**

- **Purpose of the Amendment:** The Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to remove any scope for confusion over how certain pre-existing labour laws were repealed following the enactment of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020. The amendment is intended to eliminate ambiguity and avoid any future unwarranted legal complications regarding the continuity of repealed laws.
- **Background – Industrial Relations Code, 2020:** The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 consolidated and replaced three major labour legislations: the Trade Unions Act, 1926 (governing trade unions), the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 (regulating conditions of industrial employment), and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 (providing mechanisms for dispute resolution). This consolidation was part of the government's broader labour law reform agenda to streamline and modernize India's labour legislation.
- **Section 104 and Savings Provisions:** Section 104 of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 contains savings provisions to ensure continuity and legal certainty for actions taken under the repealed laws. It clarifies that the repeal operates automatically upon the enforcement of the Code, occurring by statutory operation rather than executive action.
- **February 2026 Notification:** A notification issued in February 2026 further reaffirmed that the repeal was statutory in nature and occurred by operation of Section 104 of the Code itself, not through executive delegation. Despite this clarification, the government deemed it necessary to introduce the amendment to provide absolute legal certainty and prevent potential future legal challenges.



- **Expected Legislative Process:** The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha during Zero Hour and is expected to be taken up for consideration and passing shortly. The swift introduction through supplementary agenda indicates the government's priority in addressing this technical legal issue to ensure smooth implementation of the consolidated labour law framework.

### Delhi Launches Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana for Girls' Education Support

**In the News:** The Delhi government announced the launch of Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana, a new welfare scheme for girls from economically weaker families in the national capital. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced that the scheme will commence on April 1 and provides staged financial assistance totaling ₹56,000 across key education milestones. With accrued interest, the matured amount is expected to grow to approximately ₹1 lakh, supporting educational continuity and early-life financial security for daughters in Delhi.

#### Key Points:

- **Scheme Overview and Financial Structure:** Under Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana, daughters in Delhi will receive total assistance of ₹56,000 in installments, starting from birth and continuing until completion of their graduation or diploma. With interest accrued over time, the deposited amount is expected to grow to around ₹1 lakh upon maturity. The money will be credited to an Aadhaar-enabled bank account in the girl's name, strengthening direct benefit delivery and traceability while ensuring financial inclusion.
- **Phased Payments Linked to Educational Milestones:** The assistance is structured around key transition points where dropout risks often rise. The payment schedule includes: ₹11,000 at birth, ₹5,000 on admission to Class 1, ₹5,000 each on admission to Classes 6, 9, 10, and 12, and a final ₹20,000 after completion of graduation or diploma.
- **Maturity Conditions and Flexibility:** The scheme will mature when the beneficiary either turns 21 years of age or completes graduation or diploma, whichever occurs earlier. This creates a strong incentive for families to keep girls enrolled beyond secondary school. Importantly, the final payout remains available even if higher education is pursued outside Delhi, providing flexibility while maintaining the education-linked benefit structure.
- **Eligibility Criteria and Coverage:** The scheme applies to girls born in Delhi, with families required to have lived in the city for at least three years (residency requirement). Annual family income must not exceed ₹1 lakh (income ceiling for economically weaker sections). Benefits are limited to two daughters per family.
- **Replacement of Ladli Yojana:** The new program replaces Delhi's earlier Ladli Yojana, which was launched in 2008 as a girl child welfare and education support scheme. The government cited gaps in the old scheme such as unclaimed or pending funds due to documentation and procedural issues. A beneficiary identification drive has been initiated to trace pending cases under Ladli Yojana, release eligible dues, and clean up backlogs before transitioning to the new scheme.

### Swami Dayanand Saraswati Remembered on His 202nd Birth Anniversary

**In the News:** India observed the 202nd birth anniversary of Swami Dayanand Saraswati (born 1824)—Vedic scholar, social reformer, and founder of the Arya Samaj.

#### Key Points:

- **Legacy & Identity:** Swami Dayanand Saraswati is regarded as a leading figure of India's 19th-century social and cultural awakening, known for reform, rational thought, and Vedic scholarship.
- **Early Call for Swaraj:** He was among the first to give the call for "Swaraj" in 1876, promoting the idea of "India for Indians," which later inspired nationalist leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak.
- **Arya Samaj Founded (1875):** Established the Arya Samaj to strengthen society through reforms and a return to core values.
- **Core Focus Areas of Arya Samaj:** Emphasised Vedic teachings, social reforms, women's education, opposition to social evils, and the spread of Sanskrit learning.

- **National Recognition:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier released commemorative coins to mark the 200th birth anniversary of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and the 150th anniversary of Arya Samaj, recognising his contributions to reform and national awakening.

### Balaghat Chosen for Grain Storage Plan Pilot

**In the News:** Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh has been selected as the pilot district under the World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in Cooperative Sector (WLGSP). Under the pilot, a 500 MT godown was constructed at Bahudeshiya Prathamik Krishi Saakh Sahakari Society Maryadit, Parswada, inaugurated by the Prime Minister on 24 February 2024, and hired by the Madhya Pradesh Warehousing and Logistics Corporation (MPWLC).

#### Key Points:

- **Pilot Location:** Balaghat (Madhya Pradesh) is the pilot district for WLGSP, focused on decentralised grain storage at the PACS/cooperative society level.
- **Pilot Infrastructure:** A 500 metric tonne (MT) storage godown has been constructed at Parswada under a PACS (primary cooperative society), and the project has been fully completed. The godown has been hired by MPWLC, enabling professional warehousing/logistics linkage for local storage assets.
- **Scheme Convergence Approach:** Implementation is through convergence of existing GoI schemes such as Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure (AMI) Scheme, SMAM, and PMFME, enabling multiple supports through one integrated plan.
- **AIF Support for PACS:** PACS receive interest subvention on loans for godown construction; the loan repayment period for PACS under AIF has been extended from 2+5 years to 2+8 years.
- **Reforms under AMI Scheme:** Margin money requirement reduced from 20% to 10%, making participation easier for PACS and improving project viability.

### New MHA Protocol on Vande Mataram and Jana Gana Mana

**In the News:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) uploaded fresh guidelines on February 6, 2026 (based on a directive dated January 28, 2026) instructing States and government bodies that when both are included in an event, the National Song "Vande Mataram" must be played/sung before the National Anthem "Jana Gana Mana."

#### Key Points:

- **Sequence of Play:** If both are part of the same event, Vande Mataram first, followed by Jana Gana Mana, establishing a clear order of precedence for ceremonies.
- **Official Version & Duration:** The protocol refers to the official version of Vande Mataram, with a duration of about 3 minutes 10 seconds.
- **Mandatory Respect (Standing):** Whenever the official version is sung/played, the audience shall stand to attention. If Vande Mataram appears within a newsreel/documentary/film, the audience is not expected to stand, as it may interrupt the screening and cause confusion.
- **Occasions Mandated (High-level Functions):** The song is to be sung/played on occasions such as: Arrival/departure of the President at formal State functions, before and after the President's address to the nation on AIR/TV, arrival/departure of the Governor/Lieutenant Governor at formal State functions, when the National Flag is brought on parade and other occasions as specially ordered by the Government of India.
- **Band Protocol:** When played by a band, Vande Mataram should be preceded by a roll of drums to alert the audience (unless there is another clear indication).
- **Mass Singing & Public Participation:** On flag unfurling at cultural/ceremonial functions (other than parades), it may be accompanied by mass singing, using a choir and adequate public-audition arrangements; lyrics can be circulated if needed.



- **Constitutional Link:** The protocol aligns with the Fundamental Duty under Article 51A(a) to respect national symbols (especially the National Anthem and the Constitution).

### Indian Navy Assumes Command of Combined Task Force 154

**In the News:** The Indian Navy assumed command of Combined Task Force (CTF) 154, a key multinational training task force under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). Commodore Milind M Mokashi, Shaurya Chakra, formally took over as Commander CTF 154 from the outgoing Commander of the Italian Navy at a ceremony held at CMF Headquarters in Manama, Bahrain. The ceremony was presided over by Deputy Chief of Naval Staff Vice Admiral Tarun Sobti and Commander of the US Naval Forces Central Command, Vice Admiral Curt A. Renshaw.

#### Key Points:

- **About CTF 154:** Established in May 2023, CTF 154 is a multinational maritime training task force under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), specifically oriented towards training and capacity building of its 47 member nations. It operates alongside CTF 150 (Maritime Security), CTF 151 (Counter-Piracy), CTF 152 (Maritime Security in Arabian Gulf), and CTF 153 (Maritime Security in Red Sea).
- **India's Role:** India's assumption of command reflects the region's growing trust in India's professional expertise, operational experience, and its recognition as a Preferred Security Partner among the 47 CMF member nations, underscoring India's commitment to collaborative maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond.
- **Training Focus — Five Core Pillars:** Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), Law of the Sea, Maritime Interdiction Operations, Maritime Rescue and Assistance, Leadership Development.
- **Key Activities:** CTF 154 conducts Maritime Security Enhancement Training (MSET) events, exercises such as Compass Rose and Northern/Southern Readiness, and outreach programs to build partner nations' operational capabilities against common threats like illegal trafficking, piracy, and irregular migration.
- **Inclusive Approach:** The task force enables CMF partner nations to participate in training opportunities without requiring ships or aircraft, by facilitating shore-based courses at locations across the Middle East — making maritime training more accessible to a wider range of nations.

### Parliament Passes Industrial Relations Code Amendment Bill 2026

**In the News:** Parliament passed the Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026, bringing legal clarity to labour-related provisions under India's four labour codes. The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on February 11, 2026, and passed by voice vote in both Lok Sabha (February 12, 2026) and Rajya Sabha amid sharp exchanges between the government and the opposition. The Bill was moved by the Ministry of Labour and Employment under Minister Mansukh Mandaviya.

#### Key Points:

- **Purpose of the Amendment:** The Bill seeks to amend the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, and explicitly clarifies that the three Acts replaced by the Code — the Trade Unions Act, 1926; the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946; and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 — stand repealed from November 21, 2025. It contains savings provisions to ensure continuity and legal certainty, and aims to avoid any "future unwarranted complication" over the continuity of these replaced laws.
- **Background — Industrial Relations Code, 2020:** The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 consolidated three major labour laws as part of a broader reform exercise to simplify India's complex labour regulatory framework into four comprehensive codes covering: Wages, Social Security, Occupational Safety, and Industrial Relations.
- **Government's Stand:** Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya stated that the four Labour Codes, implemented nearly three months ago, guarantee minimum wages, mandate compulsory issuance of appointment letters, and ensure uniform wages for the same work irrespective of gender.

### V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority Secures IGBC Platinum & Shunya Certifications for Sustainable Infrastructure



**In the News:** The V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority (Tuticorin/Thoothukudi) announced that it has become India's first Major Port to receive the Indian Green Building Council's IGBC Platinum Rating, and that multiple campus buildings have also received the Bureau of Energy Efficiency's Shunya and Shunya Plus certifications.

#### Key Points:

- **About the Certification Bodies:** The Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) issues green building ratings, while the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power administers the Shunya certification framework for high-performance energy buildings.
- **IGBC Platinum Achievement:** The Port Authority's Administration Building received the IGBC Platinum Rating, which is IGBC's highest certification category, making VOC Port the first Indian Major Port to achieve this distinction.
- **Energy Efficiency Measures:** The Administration Building uses rooftop solar panels and a high Solar Reflectance Index (SRI) reflective roof coating, which helps reduce the Urban Heat Island effect and supports overall energy efficiency.
- **Water and Resource Management:** The building uses IoT-enabled water meters, Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) monitoring systems, rainwater harvesting, and water-saving plumbing fixtures, resulting in a reported 37% reduction in potable water use; wastewater is treated via an on-site sewage treatment plant and reused.
- **Renewable Energy Use:** The Administration Building reportedly operates on 100% renewable energy, with 89% of electricity generated through on-site solar power and the remaining 11% sourced from off-site renewable energy sources of the port.
- **Inclusivity and Health Features:** The building follows a no-smoking policy, uses eco-friendly housekeeping chemicals, and includes non-slippery ramps, differently-abled-friendly toilets, electric wheelchairs, and lifts with braille and audio assistance.
- **Shunya and Shunya Plus Explained:** Under BEE's Shunya system, a Shunya (Net Zero Energy) building meets its annual energy demand through on-site or off-site renewable energy and has an Energy Performance Index (EPI) between 0 and 10 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year, while Shunya Plus (Net Positive Energy) buildings generate more renewable energy than they consume and have an EPI below 0 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year.
- **Buildings Covered:** VOC Port's Hospital and CISF Barracks were awarded Shunya Plus, while the Administration Building and Guest House were awarded Shunya.
- **Policy Alignment:** The Port Authority linked these achievements to Maritime India Vision 2030 and the Harit Sagar – Green Port Guidelines, presenting them as part of its broader decarbonisation and green-infrastructure agenda.

#### Reliance Industries Limited Secures U.S. License to Import Venezuelan Oil

**In the News:** Media reports stated that the United States issued a general licence to Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) that would allow it to buy Venezuelan oil without violating U.S. sanctions.

#### Key Points:

- **Nature of the Licence:** A U.S. general licence authorises specified transactions, including the purchase, exportation, sale, and refining of Venezuelan-origin oil that has already been extracted.
- **Purpose and Business Impact:** Direct access to discounted heavy Venezuelan crude could reduce feedstock costs for Reliance's large refining operations and enable diversification of crude sourcing.
- **Application and Reporting:** According to the report, Reliance applied for the authorisation in early January 2026 and the licence was issued in February 2026.
- **Replacement of Russian Supply:** The report linked the licence to Reliance's ability to replace Russian crude purchases with Venezuelan supply, amid expectations that Indian refiners would avoid some Russian deliveries.
- **Reliance's Refining Capacity:** Reliance operates two refineries with a combined capacity of about 1.4 million barrels per day, and it has historically processed heavy sour crudes.
- **Prior Trade Pattern:** Reliance had earlier been a regular buyer of Venezuelan oil, but reportedly stopped purchases in early 2025 due to U.S. sanctions.
- **Broader Policy Context:** The report connected the licence to wider U.S. decisions on Venezuela's energy sanctions and to U.S.–India trade and energy discussions.

#### NITI Aayog Releases Sixth Edition of "Trade Watch Quarterly"

**In the News:** NITI Aayog released the sixth edition of “Trade Watch Quarterly” (Quarter 2 of FY 2025–26: July–September 2025), presenting an assessment of global and domestic trade trends along with a thematic focus on India’s electronics trade.

#### Key Points:

- **Release Details:** The publication was released on 13 February 2026 in New Delhi by Suman Bery (Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog) in the presence of Arvind Virmani (Member, NITI Aayog).
- **Scope of the Quarterly:** The edition assesses global and domestic trade trends at a time when global trade growth is described as moderated but still positive, with services outperforming goods and developing regions becoming key drivers.
- **India’s Q2 FY26 Trade Signal:** The analysis states that India’s Q2 FY26 trade performance was driven by export-led momentum, with services and merchandise exports growing by around 8.5% and outpacing import growth in both segments.
- **Developing-Economy Trade Rebalancing:** The publication highlights that trade among developing economies has expanded nearly four-fold since 2005, and it situates India’s trade trajectory within a broader “Global South” rebalancing through regional value chains and new trade corridors.
- **E-Commerce as an Export Enabler:** The edition notes India’s position among the world’s top six e-commerce markets and projects that e-commerce exports could scale and contribute about 20–30% of India’s merchandise exports by 2030, supported by logistics and regulatory improvements and higher MSME participation.
- **Thematic Focus on Electronics:** The quarter’s thematic section examines India’s electronics trade across mobile phones, consumer electronics, industrial electronics, and components, and analyses participation in global electronics value chains along with structural constraints and policy interventions.
- **Electronics Export Facts:** The edition states that electronics is now the second-largest item in India’s export basket; it also reports that electronics exports rose nearly fivefold between 2016 and 2024 to USD 42.1 billion, while global electronics trade is valued at about USD 4.6 trillion.
- **Policy Reference:** The publication references a ₹40,000 crore allocation under an Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme as a policy support for component manufacturing and higher value addition.
- **Competitiveness Priorities:** The edition points to deeper integration into global value chains, improvements in logistics efficiency and tariff rationalisation, and industry-aligned skill development as key drivers of sustained competitiveness in electronics.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Iran sentences Nobel peace laureate Mohammadi to six years in prison: lawyer

**In the News:** An Iranian court sentenced 2023 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi to over seven years in prison, her lawyer Mostafa Nili confirmed. The 53-year-old women’s rights activist, who was arrested on December 12, 2024, after attending a memorial ceremony in Mashhad, received the sentence on Saturday while serving time for her decades-long campaign against Iran’s use of capital punishment and mandatory dress codes for women.

#### Key Points:

- **Sentence Details:** Mohammadi received a six-year prison term for “gathering and collusion to commit crimes,” a one-and-a-half-year sentence for propaganda activities, a two-year ban on leaving the country, and a two-year exile to the city of Khosf in South Khorasan province.
- **Total Imprisonment:** The combined prison sentences amount to over seven years (7.5 years), though her lawyer stated the verdict is not final and can be appealed, with hope for temporary release on bail for medical treatment.
- **Arrest Circumstances:** Mohammadi was arrested on December 12, 2024, after denouncing the suspicious death of lawyer Khosrow Alikordi. Prosecutor Hasan Hematifar stated she made provocative remarks at Alikordi’s memorial ceremony in Mashhad and encouraged attendees to chant “norm-breaking slogans” and “disturb the peace.”



- **Recent Hunger Strike:** Mohammadi conducted a six-day hunger strike from February 2 to February 8, 2025, to protest her imprisonment conditions and inability to make phone calls to lawyers and family. The Narges Foundation reported her physical condition as "deeply alarming" when she ended the strike.
- **Nobel Peace Prize Recognition:** Mohammadi won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2023 for her 20-year fight for women's rights, which the Nobel Committee said made her a symbol of freedom. She is the second Iranian woman to receive this honor after Shirin Ebadi in 2003.
- **Professional Background:** A prominent writer and journalist, Mohammadi serves as deputy director of the Defenders of Human Rights Center (DHRC), an organization dedicated to defending political prisoners and promoting human rights reforms in Iran.

### India-Seychelles

**In the News:** India and Seychelles strengthened their strategic partnership through two key engagements: an Indo-Seychelles Business Roundtable held in Mumbai on February 7, 2026, and a State Visit by Seychelles President Dr. Patrick Herminie to India from February 5-10, 2026. During the visit, both nations announced the "SESEL" (Sustainability, Economic Growth and Security through Enhanced Linkages) Joint Vision and a Special Economic Package of USD 175 million to deepen cooperation in maritime trade, blue economy, and sustainable development under India's MAHASAGAR vision.

#### Key Points:

- **Business Roundtable in Mumbai:** The Indo-Seychelles Business Roundtable was held on February 7, 2026, attended by Seychelles President Dr. Patrick Herminie and Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal.
- **State Visit Significance:** President Herminie's State Visit (February 5-10, 2026) came approximately 100 days after his inauguration and coincided with the 50th year of Seychelles' Independence and the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Seychelles.
- **SESEL Joint Vision:** The leaders announced a Joint Vision for "Sustainability, Economic Growth and Security through Enhanced Linkages (SESEL)" to guide the partnership, emphasizing cooperation on national development priorities, security, prosperity, and people's well-being.
- **MAHASAGAR Vision Framework:** The partnership operates under India's MAHASAGAR vision (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions), which emphasizes economic cooperation, sustainability, and security in the Indian Ocean Region. Seychelles is recognized as an important pillar in this vision and a key maritime partner for India.
- **Priority Cooperation Areas:** Key sectors identified for collaboration include blue economy (fisheries, aquaculture, port development, marine infrastructure, ocean-based renewable energy, marine research), tourism and hospitality, renewable energy, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, financial services and fintech, education and skills development, and digital transformation.
- **Hydrography Cooperation:** Both nations agreed to intensify cooperation in hydrography to support Seychelles' blue economy growth. India will assist in establishing a Seychelles Hydrographic Unit (SHU), with the 3rd Joint Coordination Mechanism (JCM) on Hydrography scheduled for early 2026 in Seychelles.

### India and Greece Seal Defense Pact with Five-Year Game Plan

**In the News:** Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held bilateral talks with Nikolaos-Georgios Dendias, Minister of National Defence of the Hellenic Republic, in New Delhi. During the meeting, both nations signed a Joint Declaration of Intent to strengthen defence industrial cooperation and exchanged a Bilateral Military Cooperation Plan for 2026, marking a significant expansion of the India-Greece Strategic Partnership.

#### Key Points:

- **Joint Declaration of Intent:** The two Defence Ministers signed a Joint Declaration of Intent aimed at strengthening defence industrial cooperation between India and Greece. The declaration marks the beginning of work on a five-year roadmap to expand collaboration, focusing on boosting indigenous defence manufacturing capabilities through co-development, co-production, and technology partnerships.

- **Alignment of Strategic Initiatives:** The five-year roadmap aligns India's Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative with Greece's Hellenic defence reforms under Agenda 2030. This collaboration aims to enhance self-reliance, reduce import dependence, and open new opportunities for defence companies and startups in both countries.
- **Bilateral Military Cooperation Plan 2026:** Both sides exchanged a Bilateral Military Cooperation Plan (BMCP) for 2026, outlining the roadmap for future military engagements and cooperation between the armed forces of India and Greece. The plan charts the course for joint exercises, training programmes, military exchanges, and structured planning to ensure regular interaction, interoperability, and trust-building between the two militaries.
- **Maritime Security Cooperation:** In a significant step towards maritime cooperation, Greece announced the posting of a Greek International Liaison Officer at the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram.

### World Pulses Day 2026 and Why Is the World Talking About Pulses?

**In the News:** World Pulses Day 2026 will be observed on February 10, 2026, drawing global attention to the importance of pulses in nutrition, sustainable farming, and environmental protection. Recognized by the United Nations and supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the day highlights how pulses like lentils, beans, and chickpeas play a powerful role in fighting hunger, improving soil health, and supporting climate-resilient agriculture.

#### Key Points:

- **Annual Observance Date:** World Pulses Day is celebrated every year on February 10. The day has been officially observed since 2019, after being designated by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018. It builds on the success of the International Year of Pulses 2016, which showcased pulses as essential crops for food security and sustainable development.
- **Theme for 2026:** The theme for World Pulses Day 2026 is "Pulses of the World: From Modesty to Excellence." It highlights how humble crops like lentils, peas, beans, and chickpeas have evolved into globally recognized nutrient-rich foods. The theme reflects the growing role of pulses in modern diets, culinary innovation, and climate-smart agriculture.
- **Key Focus Areas:** The 2026 observance highlights the transformation of pulses from basic staples to global superfoods and promotes international collaboration, with the main global event hosted with the Kingdom of Spain in Valladolid.
- **Definition of Pulses:** Pulses are dry edible seeds of legume plants grown for food. They are rich in protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals and are a staple in diets across the world. Common pulses include chickpeas, lentils, dry beans, dry peas, and lupins, which are affordable, nutritious, and culturally diverse.

### India as Chair of the Kimberley Process 2026

**In the News:** India has assumed the chair of the Kimberley Process (KP) for 2026, placing it at the forefront of global diamond governance. This role positions India as a key Global South voice and a central hub in the diamond value chain to drive meaningful reforms in the international diamond trade at a crucial time for the industry. This will be the third time India has been entrusted with the chair of the Kimberley Process.

#### Key Points:

- **About the Kimberley Process:** The KP is an international forum initiated in May 2000 by Southern African countries to regulate the trade in rough diamonds. It aims to prevent the flow of conflict diamonds—rough diamonds used by rebel groups or their allies to finance armed conflicts aimed at undermining legitimate governments—while helping to protect legitimate trade in rough diamonds.
- **Institutional Structure:** The KP is not a formal international organization or legally binding treaty. It has no permanent office or staff and functions on burden-sharing contributions from participating countries, with support from industry and civil society. Its rules are implemented through national laws rather than international legal obligations, and operates as a tripartite setup of governments, industry organizations, and civil society.
- **Current Participation:** The KP has 60 participants representing 86 countries, accounting for approximately 99.8% of global rough diamond production. India is one of the founding members of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), which was launched in 2003 following negotiations with 37 signatory parties.
- **Kimberley Process Certification Scheme:** The KPCS outlines rules governing rough diamond trade and has developed minimum requirements that each participant must meet. Every consignment of rough diamonds crossing international borders must be accompanied by a tamper-resistant KP certificate. Trade in rough diamonds is permitted only between certified KP members who adhere to the scheme's minimum requirements, and participant countries are legally obliged to share timely and accurate statistical data regarding diamond production and trade.



- **India's Diamond Industry Position:** While India is not a major producer of rough diamonds, it is a major importer, sourcing mainly from the United Arab Emirates, Belgium, and Russia, and importing roughly 40% of total global imports in quantity and value. As of 2024, around 90% of the world's diamonds are processed in India, accounting for approximately 75% of global turnover by value, with industries concentrated in Surat and Mumbai.

### Denmark Tops, Afghanistan Last! Where Do India and US Rank in Women, Peace and Security Index 2025/26

**In the News:** The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, in collaboration with the Peace Research Institute Oslo, released the Women, Peace and Security Index 2025/26. The fifth edition of this biennial report ranks 181 countries based on women's inclusion, justice, and security. Denmark retained the top position for the third consecutive time, while Afghanistan ranked last. The report reveals that nearly 676 million women were exposed to conflict in the past year—a 74% rise since 2010—and that global progress on women's status has largely stagnated.

#### Key Points:

- **About the WPS Index:** The Women, Peace and Security Index was first launched in 2017 and is published every two years. It measures women's well-being across three key dimensions: inclusion (economic and political participation), justice (legal equality and discrimination), and security (freedom from violence and conflict). The index uses 13 indicators to generate scores from 0 (worst) to 1 (best) for each country. It is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.
- **Top 10 Best Performing Countries:** Denmark ranks first for the third consecutive time with a score of 0.939, followed by Iceland (0.932), Norway (0.924), Sweden (0.924), and Finland (0.921). The top 10 also includes Luxembourg (0.918), Belgium (0.912), Netherlands (0.905), Austria (0.898), and Australia (0.898). Notably, five Nordic countries occupy the top five positions, demonstrating strong social welfare systems, gender equality policies, robust women's employment, high parliamentary representation, strong legal rights, and low levels of violence against women.
- **Bottom 10 Worst Performing Countries:** Afghanistan ranks last at 181st position with a score of 0.279, followed by Yemen (0.323), Central African Republic (0.362), Syria (0.364), Sudan (0.397), Haiti (0.399), Democratic Republic of Congo (0.405), Burundi (0.407), South Sudan (0.411), and Myanmar (0.442).
- **India's Ranking and Performance:** India ranks 131st with a score of 0.607 in the WPS Index 2025/26, showing steady but uneven progress in women's inclusion and safety. India has improved in areas such as financial inclusion and maternal health, but continues to face significant challenges including gender-based violence and low female workforce participation.

### Global Corruption Perceptions Index 2025

**In the News:** Transparency International released the 31st edition of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025, revealing a concerning global decline in anti-corruption leadership. The global average score fell to 42 out of 100, the lowest in over a decade, with corruption worsening even in established democracies. The index evaluated 182 countries based on perceived public sector corruption levels.

#### Key Points:

- **Global Average Decline:** The CPI 2025 global average score stands at 42 out of 100, marking the lowest level in more than a decade. This represents a concerning downward trend in global anti-corruption efforts. The vast majority of countries (122 out of 182) scored below 50, indicating that more than two-thirds of countries are failing to keep corruption under control.
- **Top Performers - Least Corrupt Countries:** Denmark retained the top rank for the eighth consecutive year with a score of 89, followed by Finland (88), Singapore (84), New Zealand (81), and Norway (81). These countries are recognized for strong institutions, transparency, and effective accountability mechanisms. However, the number of countries scoring above 80 has declined from 12 a decade ago to just 5 in 2025.

- **Bottom Performers – Most Corrupt Countries:** South Sudan and Somalia jointly ranked lowest at 181st position with scores of 9 each, followed by Venezuela (10), Yemen (13), and Libya (13). These countries face severely repressed civil societies, political instability, weak governance structures, and high levels of conflict. Since 2012, 150 journalists covering corruption-related stories in non-conflict zones have been murdered, nearly all in countries with high corruption levels.
- **India's Performance:** India ranked 91st globally with a CPI score of 39 out of 100, showing slight improvement from the previous year. While India remains below the global average of 42, the ranking suggests incremental progress in governance and transparency reforms.
- **Gen Z Anti-Corruption Protests:** 2025 witnessed a wave of anti-corruption protests led by Gen Z, mostly in countries in the bottom half of the CPI whose scores have stagnated or declined. Young people in Nepal (34) and Madagascar (25) took to the streets criticizing leaders for abusing power while failing to deliver public services and economic opportunity.
- **EU's Weakened Anti-Corruption Framework:** In December 2025, the EU agreed its first Anti-Corruption Directive to harmonize criminal laws on corruption, but the framework was watered down by member states including Italy (53), which blocked criminalization of public officials' abuse of office.

### Saudi Arabia to Host HCI Conference 2026 in Riyadh

**In the News:** Saudi Arabia's Human Capability Development Program (HCDP) announced the 3rd edition of the Human Capability Initiative (HCI) Conference 2026, to be held in Riyadh on 3–4 May 2026 at the King Abdulaziz International Conference Center, under the theme "The Human Code." The United Kingdom has been named the Country of Honor, reflecting deepening Saudi-UK cooperation in education, workforce development, and economic collaboration.

#### Key Points:

- **Patronage & Leadership:** The conference will be held under the patronage of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who also chairs the HCDP Committee, signalling high-level priority for human capital development.
- **Vision 2030 Link:** HCI is positioned as part of Saudi Arabia's broader Vision 2030 drive to build a knowledge-based, diversified economy through investment in people and skills.
- **Dates, Venue, Theme:** 3–4 May 2026, Riyadh, King Abdulaziz International Conference Center; theme: "The Human Code."
- **UK as Country of Honor:** The United Kingdom designation highlights expanding collaboration in higher education, vocational training, workforce readiness, and economic cooperation.
- **Continuation of 'Skills of the Future':** Organisers and officials linked the UK partnership to initiatives such as "Skills of the Future," launched at HCI 2025, focused on workforce development and innovation-driven growth.
- **Track Record of HCI:** Across the first two editions, the conference reportedly attracted 23,000+ participants, hosted 550+ speakers, and announced 156 partnerships/initiatives, indicating growing global traction.

### Arctic Sentry Mission

**In the News:** NATO has launched a new Arctic-focused initiative called "Arctic Sentry" (launched February 2026) to strengthen its posture in the Arctic and the High North, consolidating and coordinating Allies' activities under a coherent NATO approach amid rising strategic competition in the region.

#### Key Points:

- **What it is:** Arctic Sentry is a multi-domain NATO vigilance activity designed to strengthen collective defence, coordination, and stability in the Arctic/High North by bringing visibility and coherence to Allies' national activities in the region.

- **Command & Coordination:** The initiative coordinates highlights and ongoing national activities under NATO's framework; reporting indicates coordination through NATO structures linked to Joint Force Command Norfolk for the region's operational approach.
- **Modelled on Earlier Efforts:** Arctic Sentry is framed in line with NATO's broader pattern of "sentry"-style enhanced vigilance/coordination efforts (similar conceptually to other region-focused vigilance activities).
- **Exercises & Preparedness:** The mission initially oversees and aligns ongoing and upcoming Arctic exercises by Allies (e.g., Denmark- and Norway-linked activities) to improve readiness for Arctic operations and protection of critical infrastructure.
- **Why the Arctic matters:** NATO highlights the Arctic/High North as increasingly important due to security competition, new operational realities, and the need to keep sea routes and reinforcement lines open; 7 of the 8 Arctic states are NATO Allies.
- **Arctic basics (for map clarity):** The Arctic lies north of the Arctic Circle (66°34' N) and includes the Arctic Ocean and parts of Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the USA.

### India Hosts First BRICS Sherpas Meeting 2026

**In the News:** India hosted the first meeting of BRICS Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas under its 2026 Chairship in New Delhi from February 9–10, 2026. The meeting was chaired by Secretary (Economic Relations) Mr. Sudhakar Dalela, India's BRICS Sherpa, supported by Joint Secretary (Multilateral Economic Relations) Mr. Shambhu L. Hakki, India's BRICS Sous-Sherpa. The BRICS Sherpas and Country Representatives jointly called on External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar on February 10, 2026.

#### Key Points:

- **Participants:** Senior officials and Sherpas from BRICS member and partner countries participated, including Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the UAE. BRICS currently includes 11 emerging economies serving as a platform for dialogue on global political and economic governance.
- **Theme of India's Chairship:** India presented its priorities under the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability", reflecting India's people-centric and humanity-first approach to its BRICS leadership. Member and Partner countries appreciated the theme and shared their perspectives on advancing these priorities.
- **Key Focus Areas:** Cooperation was discussed across a wide range of thematic sectors including health, agriculture, labour and employment, disaster risk reduction, environment, climate change, energy, innovation, ICT, security and counter-terrorism, and economic and financial domains.
- **People-Centric Approach:** In line with India's "people-centric" Chairship, presentations were also made on cooperation in sports, youth connect, cultural engagements, BRICS Academic Forum, BRICS Think Tank Council, BRICS Civil Forum, BRICS Business Council, and the BRICS Women's Business Alliance.
- **India-China Strategic Dialogue:** On the sidelines of the Sherpa meeting, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri held the India-China Strategic Dialogue with China's Executive Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu. Both sides reviewed progress in stabilising bilateral ties, discussed peace and tranquillity along the border, trade, people-to-people exchanges, visa facilitation, and the early conclusion of an updated Air Services Agreement.

### Tarique Rahman's Win Bangladesh General Elections

**In the News:** The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, secured a sweeping victory in Bangladesh's 13th Parliamentary Elections held on February 12, 2026, winning more than two-thirds majority with at least 212 of the 299 contested seats. Tarique Rahman is set to become Bangladesh's Prime Minister for the first time, replacing interim government chief and Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Rahman and reaffirmed India's commitment to a democratic and progressive Bangladesh.

**Key Points:**

- **Election Overview:** Voting was held across 299 parliamentary constituencies (1 seat postponed due to a candidate's death) from 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM local time. A total of 50 political parties, 1,755 candidates, and 273 independents contested the polls.
- **Election Results:** BNP and its allies won at least 212 of 299 seats, securing a landslide majority. The opposition Jamaat-e-Islami and its allies won 70 seats. Tarique Rahman personally won two seats — Dhaka-17 and Bogra-6. The Election Commission postponed results in Chattogram-2 and Chattogram-4 seats.
- **New Political Landscape:** A reconfigured political landscape emerged with BNP pitted against an 11-party alliance led by Jamaat-e-Islami and the youth-centric National Citizen Party (NCP).
- **India-Bangladesh Relations:** India shares a 4,000-km border and deep historical ties with Bangladesh. Under the interim government of Muhammad Yunus, Dhaka's relations with New Delhi witnessed a significant downturn. PM Modi's congratulatory call to Rahman signals New Delhi's readiness to engage with the new leadership.
- **BNP's Historical Stance Towards India:** Under Khaleda Zia's leadership (1991–96 and 2001–06), BNP had a contentious relationship with India over cross-border insurgency, water-sharing disputes, and transit rights. India had accused Dhaka of sheltering insurgent groups such as ULFA and NDFB. BNP's alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami further complicated ties.

**Vast Space Signs Deal with NASA for Private ISS Mission**

**In the News:** NASA signed an order with Vast for the sixth Private Astronaut Mission (PAM) to the International Space Station, with the mission targeted to launch no earlier than summer 2027.

**Key Points:**

- **Programme Context:** NASA's Private Astronaut Missions are part of its strategy to enable commercial use of low-Earth orbit while the International Space Station remains operational.
- **Mission Identification:** Vast was selected for the sixth private astronaut mission to the ISS, marking Vast's first private astronaut mission in partnership with NASA.
- **Target Timeline and Duration:** The mission is targeted for launch no earlier than summer 2027, and the crew is expected to spend up to 14 days aboard the ISS; an exact date will depend on spacecraft traffic and planning considerations.
- **Launch and Spacecraft:** The crew will fly on a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft launched by a Falcon 9 rocket from Florida, under NASA's order and Vast's announced arrangements.
- **Research Portfolio:** Vast indicated that the mission will focus on science and research, including biology and biotechnology, physical sciences, human research, and technology demonstrations.
- **Commercial Space Station Transition:** Both NASA and Vast framed the mission as supporting the transition from the ISS to commercially operated stations, with Vast positioning it as preparation for its proposed multi-module Haven-2 station concept.
- **Operational Learning:** Vast stated that operating a PAM to the ISS is expected to generate insights into infrastructure and processes required for safe human spaceflight operations in future commercial station missions.

**World Health Organization Prequalifies New nOPV2 Vaccine to Strengthen Global Polio Eradication**

**In the News:** The World Health Organization (WHO) granted prequalification status to a novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2) produced by India's Biological E Limited, expanding the global supply base for outbreak response against type 2 variant poliovirus.

**Key Points:**

- **What WHO Prequalification Means:** WHO prequalification is a quality-assurance listing that enables United Nations agencies and countries to procure vaccines that meet WHO standards for quality, safety, and efficacy.
- **Why nOPV2 Matters:** nOPV2 is used for outbreak response against type 2 variant (vaccine-derived) poliovirus, aiming to stop outbreaks while reducing the risk of seeding new vaccine-derived strains compared with older monovalent OPV2 formulations.

- **New Manufacturer Added:** With prequalification, Biological E becomes the second full manufacturer of nOPV2, alongside Indonesia's PT Bio Farma, supporting diversified and more reliable global supply.
- **Shift from Fill-Finish to Full Manufacturing:** Biological E's role expands from fill-finish activities using bulk vaccine supplied by PT Bio Farma to full manufacture of the vaccine.
- **Supply Scale-Up:** The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) stated that since March 2024, Biological E added 700 million doses to the global stockpile, and it is expected to produce about 600 million doses per year after prequalification.
- **Evidence Base and Scale of Use:** GPEI reported that more than 2 billion doses of nOPV2 have been administered globally since 2021, and that evidence from large-scale use shows effectiveness in stopping variant poliovirus outbreaks.
- **Risk Reduction Claim:** GPEI cited estimates that the risk of new variant polio outbreaks is nearly 80% lower than expected if monovalent OPV2 were used at the same scale.
- **GPEI Partnership:** GPEI is a public-private partnership led by national governments with partners including WHO, Rotary International, the U.S. CDC, UNICEF, the Gates Foundation, and Gavi.

### **Nikhil Gupta Pleads Guilty: How the US Drew Links Between Pannun Plot and Nijjar's Killing**

**In the News:** U.S. authorities announced that Nikhil Gupta, an Indian national, pleaded guilty in New York to offences related to an alleged murder-for-hire plot targeting Gurpatwant Singh Pannun; U.S. filings also pointed to statements and timing that prosecutors say connect the plot's planning to the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Charges and Court Process:** The U.S. Attorney's Office (Southern District of New York) stated that Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, and conspiracy to commit money laundering, and that sentencing is scheduled for 29 May 2026.
- **Who Was the Target:** U.S. authorities described the intended target as a U.S. citizen attorney and political activist associated with a U.S.-based organisation advocating for a sovereign Sikh state (Khalistan); Reuters identified the intended target as Gurpatwant Singh Pannun of Sikhs for Justice.
- **Alleged Coordination with an Indian Official:** According to the DOJ release, prosecutors allege that co-defendant Vikash Yadav, described as an Indian government employee, recruited Gupta in 2023 to orchestrate the assassination; the release states Yadav was employed by India's Cabinet Secretariat, which houses the Research and Analysis Wing.
- **Role of Undercover Operation:** The DOJ release states that Gupta contacted an individual he believed to be a criminal associate who was actually a DEA confidential source, and that he was introduced to a purported hitman who was in fact a DEA undercover officer.
- **Payments Alleged:** Court documents cited by U.S. authorities state that \$100,000 was agreed as payment to the purported hitman, and that \$15,000 in cash was arranged as an advance payment.
- **Timing Around the Prime Minister's Visit:** According to the DOJ release, Gupta instructed that the killing should not be carried out around the time of the Indian Prime Minister's official state visit to the United States scheduled to begin around 20 June 2023.
- **How the Link to Nijjar Was Drawn:** The DOJ release notes that masked gunmen killed Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia on 18 June 2023, and states that Gupta told the undercover officer the next day that Nijjar "was also the target" and that there was "now no need to wait" to kill the intended U.S. victim.
- **Diplomatic Sensitivity:** Reuters reported that India has dissociated itself from any plot against Pannun, stating that such actions are against government policy, and that the allegations have tested India's relations with the United States and Canada.

## SCIENCE AND TECH

### **Ashwini Vaishnaw Launches Qualcomm's This Advanced Chip In Bengaluru**

**In the News:** Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & Information Technology, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, launched Qualcomm's 2 nanometer (2 nm) semiconductor chip at the company's facility in Bengaluru. The launch marks a significant milestone in advanced semiconductor design and underscores India's growing role in global



engineering operations and high-tech manufacturing, while highlighting the country's expanding semiconductor ecosystem.

### Key Points:

- **Chip Launch Details:** Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw launched the Qualcomm 2 nm semiconductor chip in Bengaluru on February 7, 2026. During his keynote address, the minister expressed satisfaction with India's progress and stated that "the entire world is looking at us with hope because of the huge talent we have in our country. The next level of achievement will come from India."
- **Historical Context:** The minister noted that India's semiconductor journey dates back to the 1960s when Intel's origin, the Fairchild group, wanted to set up a semiconductor unit in India. However, the government of that period did not fully understand the importance of semiconductor chips, representing a missed opportunity.
- **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0 - First Focus:** The government is launching ISM 2.0 with a different outlook from ISM 1.0. The first focus area will be design companies and startups who can design semiconductor products and take them to market, emphasizing innovation and commercialization capabilities.
- **ISM 2.0 - Second Focus:** The second focus area will be on developing the entire semiconductor ecosystem in India, including equipment manufacturers, chemical and gas manufacturers, and validation and testing facilities. This comprehensive approach aims to build end-to-end capabilities within the country.
- **ISM 2.0 - Third Focus:** The third focus area will be to deepen the talent base with higher capabilities. While the talent pipeline has been widened, the emphasis will now shift to partnering with universities to develop solutions in different sectors and enhance specialized skills.
- **ISM 1.0 Achievements:** ISM 1.0 focused on establishing the first few semiconductor Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging (ATMP) facilities, building the ecosystem infrastructure, and initiating the talent pipeline. These foundational objectives have been largely achieved, paving the way for the more ambitious ISM 2.0.

### India is set to get two new telescopes and upgrade one in Ladakh

**In the News:** In the Union Budget 2026, the Indian government approved the establishment of two major telescopes—the National Large Solar Telescope (NLST) and the National Large Optical–Near Infrared Telescope (NLOT)—along with the upgrade of the existing Himalayan Chandra Telescope (HCT) in Ladakh. These projects are set to significantly enhance India's observational astronomy capabilities in solar physics, exoplanet research, and studies on the origins of the universe.

### Key Points:

- **Location – Hanle Dark Sky Reserve:** All three telescope projects are located in Ladakh, at the Hanle Dark Sky Reserve—India's first protected dark sky area. Hanle offers minimal light pollution, high altitude (nearly 4,500 metres), dry and stable atmosphere, and clear skies throughout the year, making it one of the best astronomical sites in Asia.
- **National Large Solar Telescope (NLST):** NLST is a 2-metre aperture solar telescope being built in the Merak region near Pangong Tso lake. It will operate in visible and near-infrared wavelengths to study solar magnetism, solar flares, and space-weather events that directly affect Earth's satellites, communication systems, and space missions. Expected to be operational in 5-6 years, NLST will become India's third ground-based solar observatory, complementing facilities at Kodaikanal (Tamil Nadu, established 1899) and Udaipur (Rajasthan, established 1975), and supporting data from Aditya-L1, India's first space-based solar mission launched by ISRO in 2023.
- **National Large Optical–Near Infrared Telescope (NLOT):** NLOT is a 13.7-metre segmented-mirror telescope consisting of 90 hexagonal mirror segments working together as one large mirror. It will be constructed in Hanle for frontier research in exoplanets, stellar evolution, supernovae, and the origins of the universe. NLOT will rank among the world's largest telescopes in the optical-infrared range, with India's experience in the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) project strengthening its technical expertise in segmented mirror technology.
- **Himalayan Chandra Telescope (HCT) Upgrade:** The existing HCT, operational for 25 years with a 2-metre mirror. HCT has played a key role in transient astronomy, studying short-lived cosmic events such as supernovae.

## AI@Work: Driving Productivity, Jobs, and Innovation in India

**In the News:** AI is powering India's productivity, job creation, skilling, and innovation, noting that India ranks 3rd globally in Stanford University's 2025 Global AI Vibrancy Ranking, behind the U.S. and China.

### Key Points:

- **Global Standing (AI Readiness):** India ranks 3rd in Stanford's 2025 Global AI Vibrancy Ranking, reflecting strong momentum in R&D, talent, and AI-driven economic activity.
- **AI Skills Advantage:** As per Stanford's AI Index findings cited, India's relative penetration of AI skills is 2.8. Minor discrepancy.
- **Enterprise Adoption:** 87% of enterprises are actively using AI solutions (as per the NASSCOM AI Adoption Index), indicating mainstream deployment across business functions.
- **2032 Projection:** India's AI market is projected to reach USD \$400 bn GDP contribution by 2030, with an expected CAGR of 42.2%, suggesting rapid scale-up of AI-led economic value.
- **Digital Infrastructure Boost:** NIC's National Data Centres (Delhi, Pune, Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad) have expanded storage to around 100 PB, supporting AI model training, deployment, and hosting.
- **Connectivity Scale:** Internet connections reached 100.29 crore (June 2025) (up from 25.15 crore in March 2014); India also has 400M+ 5G users and expanded OFC length to 42.36 lakh route km, with 2,14,843 Gram Panchayats connected to broadband.
- **National Programmes for AI:** Key initiatives include MeitY's National Programme on AI (4 pillars: National Center on AI, Data Management Office, Skilling, Responsible AI), BHASHINI (36+ languages, 1.2M+ downloads), YUVaI, FutureSkills Prime (25.3 lakh learners, 3000+ courses), SOAR, and IndiaAI FutureSkills (labs + fellowships + Tier-2/3 expansion).

## ENVIRONMENT

### Clean Energy, Global Minds: Inside the New India–Netherlands Hydrogen Fellowship

**In the News:** The Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, strengthened India–Netherlands scientific cooperation in clean energy with the launch of the India–Netherlands Hydrogen Fellowship Programme. The event also witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Groningen, Netherlands, and 19 Indian Institutes of Technology to establish an academic cooperation framework in green energy and hydrogen research.

### Key Points:

- **Programme Launch:** The India–Netherlands Hydrogen Fellowship Programme was launched by Prof. Abhay Karandikar, Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology, in the presence of Huib Mijnaerds, Deputy Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to India. The Scheme Guidelines and Call for Proposals were released during the launch event.
- **Key Focus Areas:** The programme emphasizes system integration, hydrogen safety standards, techno-economic analysis, life-cycle assessment, and indigenization pathways. These focus areas are critical for transitioning hydrogen technologies from research to real-world deployment, particularly in hard-to-abate sectors like steel, cement, and heavy transport.
- **Academic MoU Framework:** DST hosted the signing of an institution-to-institution Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Groningen and 19 Indian Institutes of Technology. The MoU establishes an enabling framework for long-term academic cooperation in hydrogen and green energy research without automatic financial commitments.
- **Alignment With National Missions:** The initiatives align closely with India's National Green Hydrogen Mission, Energy Independence 2047, and Net-Zero 2070 objectives. Prof. Karandikar emphasized that focused international collaboration and targeted capacity-building are critical for advancing hydrogen technologies in alignment with India's clean energy transition goals.

## Aditya Pandya Becomes India's Youngest Male Analog Astronaut

**In the News:** Seventeen-year-old Aditya Pandya became India's youngest male analog astronaut after successfully completing a lunar-habitat-inspired mission from February 1 to 8, 2026. The mission, conducted by AAKA Space Studio in the white plains of Dholavira in Gujarat's Kutch region, simulated Moon-like isolation and autonomous operations, marking a significant milestone in India's emerging analog space research ecosystem.

### Key Points:

- **Mission Organizer:** AAKA Space Studio, a registered ISRO Space Tutor, conducted the analog mission to replicate the physical, psychological, and operational constraints of future planetary habitats. The organization focuses on space research, simulation science, and experiential astronaut training aligned with human spaceflight goals.
- **Mission Duration and Location:** The eight-day mission ran from February 1 to 8, 2026, in the white plains of Dholavira, Kutch, Gujarat. A four-member analog astronaut crew lived in strict isolation inside a container-based lunar analog habitat throughout the entire duration.
- **Aditya's Dual Technical Role:** Aditya Pandya served both as an analog astronaut and as the lead for hardware, Internet of Things (IoT), and habitat intelligence systems. His dual role as system architect and crew member allowed him to test the systems he built under real operational stress during the mission.
- **Pre-Mission Preparation:** Over the six months preceding the mission, Aditya was involved in building and integrating the core technology stack. His responsibilities included developing environmental sensor modules, astronaut biometric monitoring systems, embedded safety hardware, real-time telemetry systems, and modular components through 3D printing and rapid prototyping.
- **Digital Twin Framework:** The lunar analog habitat incorporated a digital twin framework enabling real-time synchronization between the physical habitat and mission control systems. This technology allowed continuous monitoring of crew health, environmental conditions, and system performance, along with detailed post-mission analysis.

## Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage

**In the News:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi shared an article titled "Carbon Capture Can Power India's Next Steel Revolution," authored by Union Minister for Steel H.D. Kumaraswamy, highlighting the role of Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS) in decarbonizing India's heavy industries. Simultaneously, the Union Budget 2026-27 earmarked Rs 20,000 crore for a new CCUS scheme across five key sectors — Power, Steel, Cement, Refineries, and Chemicals — signalling a decisive policy shift from research to commercial deployment.

### Key Points:

- **What is CCUS?** According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), CCUS refers to a suite of technologies that capture CO<sub>2</sub> from large point sources (power plants, industrial facilities) or directly from the atmosphere. The captured CO<sub>2</sub> is then compressed, transported, and either utilized in products or injected into deep geological formations for permanent storage.
- **Why CCUS is Crucial for India — Hard-to-Abate Sectors:** Sectors like Steel, Cement, and Chemicals cannot simply switch to renewable energy as their emissions are process-intrinsic. CCUS is currently the only viable technology to decarbonize these processes. India is the world's 2nd-largest crude steel producer in FY 2024–25, and the sector contributes nearly 10–12% of India's total greenhouse gas emissions.
- **India's Steel Ambitions:** Under the National Steel Policy 2017, India aims to achieve 300 million tonnes of crude steel capacity by FY 2030–31, and 500 million tonnes by 2047 under the Viksit Bharat vision. CCUS acts as a vital bridge technology enabling "Low-Carbon Steel" using existing infrastructure while hydrogen-based steelmaking scales up.
- **Other Key Benefits of CCUS:** Energy Security: Allows continued use of coal (which accounts for ~55–60% of India's primary energy) with reduced environmental impact during the transition phase. Circular Economy: Captured CO<sub>2</sub> can be converted into Methanol or used in Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR), turning waste into a revenue stream. Countering Carbon Taxes: Helps Indian exports comply with the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and attract climate-aligned international investments.

- **India's Key Initiatives:** Union Budget 2026-27: Rs 20,000 crore allocated over five years for CCUS across Power, Steel, Cement, Refineries, and Chemicals.

## IMPORTANT DAYS

### International Epilepsy Day 2026: Raising Awareness for Over 50 Million Affected

**In the News:** February 9 is being observed as International Epilepsy Day, a global awareness initiative aimed at improving understanding of epilepsy and supporting the rights of people living with this neurological condition. Led by the International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) and the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE), the day focuses on breaking stigma, promoting inclusion, and driving global policy and community action for over 50 million people worldwide affected by epilepsy.

#### Key Points:

- **Observance Date:** International Epilepsy Day 2026 is observed on February 9, 2026 (Monday), as a worldwide awareness initiative dedicated to improving public understanding of epilepsy, a neurological disorder characterized by recurrent seizures caused by abnormal brain activity.
- **Organizing Bodies:** The day is led jointly by the International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) and the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE), two global organizations working to advance epilepsy awareness, research, treatment, and advocacy worldwide.
- **Global Impact:** Epilepsy affects over 50 million people worldwide, making it a significant public health concern. The condition can affect people of all ages and is treatable in many cases with timely diagnosis and appropriate medication.
- **Policy Advocacy:** It aligns with the World Health Organization's Intersectoral Global Action Plan on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Disorders (IGAP), reinforcing the global mandate for meaningful systemic change.
- **Epilepsy Pledge 2026 Launch:** A major highlight of International Epilepsy Day 2026 is the launch of the Epilepsy Pledge, a new initiative that represents a transition from awareness to action.

### National Women's Day 2026 India: Significance of 13 February and Sarojini Naidu

**In the News:** India celebrated National Women's Day 2026 on February 13, 2026, marking the birth anniversary of Sarojini Naidu — poet, freedom fighter, and political leader. Born on February 13, 1879, in Hyderabad, she is fondly remembered as the "Nightingale of India" (Bharat Kokila) for her lyrical and patriotic poetry. The Government of India designated February 13 as National Women's Day to honour her lifelong contributions to women's empowerment, social justice, literature, and India's freedom struggle.

#### Key Points:

- **About Sarojini Naidu:** Born as Sarojini Chattopadhyay in Hyderabad on February 13, 1879, she was a child prodigy with extraordinary literary talent. Her father, Aghore Nath Chattopadhyay, was a scientist and educationist, while her mother was a poet. She studied at King's College London and Girton College, Cambridge, before returning to India to dedicate her life to the freedom movement and women's rights.
- **Historic Firsts and Achievements:** First Indian woman President of the Indian National Congress (1925). First woman Governor of United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) in 1947. One of the most influential women leaders in India's struggle for independence.
- **Why Called the Nightingale of India:** Sarojini Naidu earned the title "Nightingale of India" for her lyrical, patriotic, and culturally rich poetry that beautifully captured Indian nature, culture, and nationalism. Her major literary works include — The Golden Threshold (1905), The Bird of Time (1912), The Broken Wing (1917), and The Gift of India.
- **Role in India's Freedom Struggle:** She worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi and actively participated in major national movements including the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement. She was imprisoned multiple times by the British government. Her powerful speeches encouraged youth and women to join the freedom struggle and significantly increased women's participation in politics.



## SPORTS

### Women's Premier League Winners

**In the News:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru won the Women's Premier League (WPL) 2026 title on February 5, 2026, defeating Delhi Capitals by 6 wickets in the final at BCA Stadium, Vadodara. RCB successfully chased down the highest-ever WPL final total of 203/4, with captain Smriti Mandhana scoring 87 off 41 balls and Georgia Voll contributing 79 off 54 deliveries in a record 165-run partnership. This marked RCB's second WPL title and Delhi Capitals' fourth consecutive final defeat.

#### Key Points:

- **WPL 2026 Champions:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru emerged as the 2026 WPL champions by defeating Delhi Capitals by 6 wickets at BCA Stadium, Kotambi, Vadodara on February 5, 2026, securing their second title after winning in 2024.
- **Historic Chase:** RCB chased down the target of 204 runs in 19.4 overs, completing the highest successful chase in WPL final history. Delhi Capitals had posted 203/4, the highest-ever total in a WPL final.
- **Match-Winning Partnership:** Captain Smriti Mandhana (87 off 41 balls) and Georgia Voll (79 off 54 balls) shared a record-breaking 165-run partnership for the second wicket, paving the way for RCB's memorable victory.
- **Complete WPL Winners List:** Mumbai Indians won in 2023 (defeating Delhi Capitals at Brabourne Stadium, Mumbai) and 2025 (defeating Delhi Capitals at Brabourne Stadium, Mumbai). Royal Challengers Bengaluru won in 2024 (defeating Delhi Capitals at Arun Jaitley Stadium, New Delhi) and 2026 (defeating Delhi Capitals at BCA Stadium, Vadodara).
- **Most Successful Teams:** Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bengaluru are tied as the most successful teams in WPL history, each having won two titles. Delhi Capitals have been runners-up in all four editions (2023, 2024, 2025, 2026).
- **WPL 2026 Orange Cap Winner:** Smriti Mandhana (RCB) won the Orange Cap for most runs in WPL 2026 with 377 runs in 9 matches at an average of 53.86 and a strike rate of 153.25, with a highest score of 96.
- **WPL 2026 Purple Cap Winner:** Sophie Devine (Gujarat Giants) won the Purple Cap for most wickets in WPL 2026 with 17 wickets in 9 matches at an average of 16.00 and an economy rate of 8.28, with best bowling figures of 4/37.
- **Player of the Match:** Smriti Mandhana was awarded Player of the Match in the WPL 2026 final for her match-winning knock of 87 off 41 balls that anchored RCB's successful chase.

## AWARDS

### From Puducherry to Washington DC! Doctors Win Chang-Crandall Humanitarian Award 2026

**In the News:** Two senior ophthalmologists from Puducherry, Dr Haripriya Aravind and Dr R Venkatesh of the Aravind Eye Care System, have been selected for the prestigious Chang-Crandall Humanitarian Award 2026 for their outstanding contributions in combating cataract blindness and improving access to affordable eye care. They will receive the honour at the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ASCRS) Foundation conference in Washington DC on April 11, 2026. The \$100,000 grant accompanying the award will be donated back to the Aravind Eye Care System to strengthen its non-profit initiatives.

#### Key Points:

- **About the Chang-Crandall Humanitarian Award:** Instituted in 2017 through an endowment by David and Victoria Chang, the award honours exceptional humanitarian contributions in the field of cataract care across the world. It carries a grant of \$100,000 and is presented by the ASCRS Foundation. Both awardees have decided to reinvest the prize

money into the Aravind Eye Care System, reflecting their commitment to sustainable and community-focused healthcare delivery.

- **About Dr Haripriya Aravind:** She serves as Chief of Cataract and Intraocular Lens (IOL) Services at the Aravind Eye Care System. She began her career in paediatric ophthalmology before transitioning to adult cataract and IOL services. Working in a high-volume hospital environment, she has focused on improving surgical outcomes and streamlining large-scale patient care.
- **About Dr R Venkatesh:** He serves as the Chief Medical Officer at the Aravind Eye Care System. He completed his residency in 1997 and joined the general cataract unit, specialising in Manual Small Incision Cataract Surgery (MSICS) — a cost-effective and high-volume surgical technique widely used in low-resource settings. He has also trained young ophthalmologists and led outreach programmes.
- **Role in Expanding Affordable Eye Care:** Dr Venkatesh played a key role when Aravind established its Puducherry facility in 2003, after completing a glaucoma fellowship in Madurai. Over the past two decades, both doctors have strengthened programmes providing affordable cataract surgeries to underserved communities, combining clinical excellence, innovation, and large-scale service delivery.

## Joint Exercise

### IAF-RTAF Joint Air Exercise Near Malacca Strait Amid Saab's MRFA Pitch

**In the News:** The Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted a joint in-situ air exercise with the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) near the Strait of Malacca, involving IAF Su-30MKI and RTAF JAS 39 Gripen aircraft, aimed at boosting interoperability and operational coordination in the Indo-Pacific.

#### Key Points:

- **Participating Platforms:** IAF deployed Su-30MKI fighters along with enabling assets like AWACS, AEW&C, and IL-78 mid-air refuellers; RTAF fielded Gripen (C/D) fighters.
- **Exercise Nature:** Described as an in-situ (on-site) joint air exercise, focused on strengthening interoperability and coordination between the two air forces.
- **Operational Geography:** Conducted near the Strait of Malacca, a critical maritime chokepoint connecting the Indian Ocean with the Pacific, central to Indo-Pacific security calculus.
- **Why Malacca Strait Matters:** The strait is among the world's most strategic sea lanes—vital for global trade flows and energy shipments (oil/LNG)—making security and surveillance in the region geopolitically significant.
- **MRFA Context (114 Fighters):** The exercise occurred amid renewed attention on India's MRFA programme (114 multirole fighters), where multiple global OEMs are competing.
- **Saab's Gripen-E/F Pitch:** Saab has again promoted Gripen E/F for MRFA, highlighting claims around modern systems, sensor fusion/networking, and cost-effectiveness, alongside proposals aligned with Make in India (local production/industry build-up).