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## IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

### NATIONAL

#### Assam Woman Receives First Citizenship Certificate Under CAA

**In the News:** Dipali Das, a 60-year-old woman from Hawaithang in Cachar district of Assam, became the first person in the state to receive Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). She had entered India from Bangladesh in 1988, was declared a foreigner in 2019, spent nearly two years in a detention camp in Silchar, and was later released on Supreme Court orders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her case marks a landmark in the practical implementation of the CAA in Assam.

#### Key Points:

- **Historic First:** Dipali Das became the first person in Assam to receive Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), receiving her certificate on March 6, 2026, from Cachar district.
- **Background — Migration from Bangladesh:** Dipali Das, originally from Dippur village under Dhirai police station in Sylhet district of Bangladesh, entered India with her husband Abhimanyu Das on February 7, 1988, reportedly fleeing persecution. They settled in Cachar district and have lived there since.
- **Citizenship Dispute:** In 2013, police initiated an inquiry into her nationality. A chargesheet dated July 2, 2013, stated that she was a resident of Baniachong in Bangladesh's Habiganj district and had entered India illegally after March 1971, leading to her classification as a suspected foreign national.
- **Declared Foreigner & Detention:** In 2019, Dipali Das was officially declared a foreigner and sent to a transit/detention camp in Silchar, where she spent nearly two years with her citizenship status unresolved.
- **Supreme Court Order & Release:** In 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021, the Supreme Court directed that 'declared foreigners' in Assam who had been held in detention for more than two years be released, to reduce overcrowding during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dipali Das was released on bail under this directive.
- **Legal Process for CAA Citizenship:** After release, she approached social worker Kamal Chakraborty (also referred to as Chakravarty), who connected her with advocate Dharmananda Deb. The lawyer prepared and filed her application under the CAA.

#### U.P. accounts for most cases of Denial of access to public space to persons from SC communities

**In the News:** According to the NCRB's 2023 Crime in India report, there were 180 reported cases of Scheduled Caste (SC) persons being denied access to public spaces under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act across India. Of these, 173 cases (over 96%) were reported from Uttar Pradesh alone. The crime category has been rising steadily since it was first introduced by the NCRB in 2017, with U.P. accounting for a disproportionately large and growing share of such cases every year.

#### Key Points:

- **NCRB 2023 Data:** There were 180 reported cases of SCs being denied access to public spaces across India in 2023 under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Of these, 173 cases were from Uttar Pradesh, with the remaining cases spread across Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.
- **NCRB 2022 Data:** In 2022, India reported 305 such cases, of which 300 cases (98.36%) were from Uttar Pradesh alone — the peak share ever recorded for any state in this category.
- **Crime Category Introduced in 2017:** The NCRB introduced the crime head 'Prevent or deny or obstruct usage of public place/passage' under the SC/ST Act in 2017 as part of a broader effort to better classify and record caste-based crimes. In the first year (2017), only 12 cases were reported nationwide, distributed across Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala, and Maharashtra. Uttar Pradesh reported zero cases that year.

- **Rising Trend — U.P.'s Share:** From 2018 onwards, U.P. began dominating the data. The state accounted for 68% of all such cases in 2018, 80% in 2019, and peaked at over 98% in 2022. The NCDHR (National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights) noted that this rise reflects 'entrenched caste-based segregation'.
- **Other Crime Category — Social Boycott:** A related crime category — 'being forced to leave place of residence or facing social boycott' — was also introduced in 2017. U.P. had reported 57 such cases that first year. This category has remained relatively stable at around a dozen cases per year nationally.
- **SC vs ST Comparison:** NCRB data shows that cases of denial of access to public spaces are significantly lower for Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities compared to Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, suggesting a distinct pattern of caste-based discrimination affecting SCs.

### NCB Busts 'Team Kalki' Darknet Drug Trafficking Network

**In the News:** The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) dismantled a pan-India darknet-based drug distribution network called 'Team Kalki', arresting two accused — Anurag Thakur and Vikas Rathi — both former Tihar Jail inmates and repeat offenders under the NDPS Act.

#### Key Points:

- **The Network:** 'Team Kalki' was a pan-India darknet drug distribution network active since January 2025, operating through the darknet forum 'Dread' (where it maintained a 4-star vendor rating) and later expanding to the encrypted 'Session' messaging application for order management and delivery.
- **Scale of Operations:** The network dispatched more than 1,000 consignments across India since January 2025, with parcels already intercepted by enforcement agencies in Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, and Karnataka.
- **Drugs Seized:** Officers seized 2,338 LSD blotters, 160 MDMA (Ecstasy) pills weighing 77.517 grams, 73.612 grams of charas, 3.642 grams of amphetamine, and 3.6 kg of liquid MDMA — recovered from 13 domestically intercepted parcels and 2 parcels originating from the Netherlands.
- **The Accused:** Anurag Thakur (previously imprisoned for methamphetamine trafficking by Delhi Police Crime Branch) and Vikas Rathi (previously lodged in Tihar Jail for charas trafficking by Delhi Police Special Cell) met during their simultaneous incarceration in Tihar Jail and later launched the darknet network together.
- **Supply Chain:** LSD and MDMA were sourced from international darknet vendors based in the Netherlands, Poland, and Germany; customers across India placed orders through encrypted platforms to maintain anonymity.
- **Cryptocurrency Trail:** Payments were accepted through Monero and USDT via unhosted wallets; funds were routed through multiple layers of intermediary wallets to obscure tracking, with some proceeds routed into the formal banking system through mule KYC-compliant wallets.
- **About NCB:** The Narcotics Control Bureau is India's apex drug law enforcement agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs, operating under the NDPS Act, 1985. Past major operations include Operation Ketamelon (2025) and Operation Zambada (2023) against international darknet markets.

### Raisina Dialogue 2026

**In the News:** The 11th edition of the Raisina Dialogue 2026 concluded in New Delhi (March 5–7, 2026), marking the landmark launch of the Raisina Science Diplomacy Initiative (SDI) to integrate technological innovation with global foreign policy.

#### Key Points:

- **Raisina Science Diplomacy Initiative (SDI):** A new framework was launched to integrate science and technology into foreign policy, focusing on AI governance, semiconductor supply chains, and India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for developing nations.

- **Shift to a Multipolar World:** The dialogue acknowledged the rise of a multipolar global order, with the Global South playing a major role in shaping the future international system. Emerging South-South partnerships and flexible plurilateral groupings are increasingly influencing global governance.
- **India's Strategic Positioning:** India's engagement through BRICS, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and the India-France-UAE (UFI) Trilateral positions it as a builder of new partnerships and a key voice of the Global South.
- **Thematic Pillar — Contested Frontiers:** The dialogue addressed power polarity and periphery — power diffusing, polarities shifting, and global commons such as oceans, orbits, supply chains, and cyberspace becoming contested battlefields with new actors and new forms of conflict.
- **Theme:** "Samskara — Assertion, Accommodation, Advancement" reflects how civilisations assert their identity, accommodate diversity, and progress through refinement. Nations are asserting sovereignty over borders and bandwidth, while new plurilateral coalitions replace stalled multilateralism.
- **About Raisina Dialogue:** Launched in 2016 by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in collaboration with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), named after Raisina Hill, New Delhi. It is India's premier geopolitics and geo-economics conference, comparable to the Munich Security Conference (Germany) and Shangri-La Dialogue (Singapore).

### As Opposition plans motion to impeach CEC, here is what the law says

**In the News:** The Opposition — led by the Trinamool Congress — began drafting an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar on grounds of alleged "completely biased conduct", particularly related to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal. The removal process for a CEC follows the same procedure as that for removing a Supreme Court judge, as mandated by the Constitution and the CEC Act, 2023.

#### Key Points:

- **Opposition's Contention:** Initiated by Trinamool Congress, the motion alleges 'completely biased conduct' by CEC Gyanesh Kumar. The charge relates to the Election Commission deploying micro-observers to review decisions of the statutory authority only in West Bengal during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
- **Constitutional Provision — Article 324(5):** The CEC can only be removed in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court. Election Commissioners can be removed only on the recommendation of the CEC.
- **CEC Act, 2023 — Section 11:** The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 (passed in December 2023) reaffirms that the CEC shall not be removed except in the same manner as a Supreme Court judge.
- **Process — Article 124(4) of the Constitution:** A Supreme Court judge (and by extension, the CEC) can be removed by a Presidential order, passed after an address by each House of Parliament supported by: (i) a majority of total membership of that House, AND (ii) at least two-thirds of members present and voting — on grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.
- **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968 — Section 3:** A motion for removal must be signed by at least 100 Lok Sabha MPs or 50 Rajya Sabha MPs. The Speaker (Lok Sabha) or Chairman (Rajya Sabha) may admit or refuse the motion. If admitted, a 3-member committee is constituted comprising: (i) a Supreme Court judge, (ii) a Chief Justice of a High Court, and (iii) a distinguished jurist.
- **Investigation & Final Steps:** The committee investigates and submits its report to the Speaker/Chairman. If the judge/CEC is found guilty of misbehaviour or incapacity, the motion is taken up in the House. If passed, the address for removal is sent to the President, who then issues the removal order.

### Amol Palekar to Receive META Lifetime Achievement Award 2026 for Theatre Excellence

**In the News:** Veteran actor, director, and theatre practitioner Amol Palekar will be honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 21st Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards (META) 2026, to be held in New Delhi from March

19 to 25, 2026. Instituted by the Mahindra Group and produced by Teamwork Arts, META celebrates outstanding theatrical productions across India. The award recognises Palekar's decades-long contribution to Indian theatre and cinema as an actor, director, and creative visionary — including his pioneering work in taking theatre to unconventional spaces and his iconic 'boy-next-door' persona in 1970s Hindi cinema.

### Key Points

- **About META — Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards:** META is one of India's most prestigious theatre festivals, instituted by the Mahindra Group and produced by Teamwork Arts. The 2026 edition is the 21st edition of the awards. It is held annually in New Delhi and celebrates excellence in stage performances, promoting theatrical creativity across the country. The Lifetime Achievement Award will be presented during the concluding ceremony of the week-long festival.
- **Amol Palekar — Theatre Contributions:** Palekar is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in modern Indian performing arts. In theatre, he experimented with unconventional spaces and formats — staging performances in parks, terraces, canteens, and garages — making theatre accessible to wider and newer audiences. This innovative approach significantly expanded the reach of contemporary Indian theatre.
- **Amol Palekar — Icon of 1970s Hindi Cinema:** Palekar became a household name in Hindi cinema during the 1970s by portraying relatable, realistic middle-class characters — the iconic 'boy-next-door' — at a time when larger-than-life heroes dominated the industry. He achieved three consecutive silver jubilee hits early in his film career and later established himself as a filmmaker exploring nuanced social and personal themes. Notable films include Chhoti Si Baat, Chitchor, Bhumika, Baaton Baaton Mein, and Gol Maal.
- **META 2026 — Record Participation:** The 2026 edition received a record 422 submissions from theatre groups across India — representing more than 20 states, over 100 cities, and around 60 languages and dialects. From this pool, 10 productions have been shortlisted to compete across 13 competitive award categories, showcasing the breadth and diversity of Indian theatre.
- **Venues & Schedule:** The shortlisted productions will be staged at Kamani Auditorium and the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts in New Delhi, with performances held in two daily sessions throughout the week-long festival (March 19–25, 2026).
- **META 2026 Jury Panel:** The jury evaluating competing productions includes distinguished theatre personalities: Amal Allana, Anuradha Kapur, Rajit Kapur, Satish Alekar, and Ila Arun.

### India Invokes Essential Commodities Act to Secure LPG Supply

**In the News:** The Indian government invoked the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955, to protect household LPG (cooking gas) supply amid disruptions caused by the ongoing US-Israel-Iran conflict, which has effectively halted vessel movements through the Strait of Hormuz — the critical maritime route through which nearly 90% of India's LPG imports pass. With only 25–30 days of domestic LPG inventory available, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas directed all refineries to maximise LPG production by diverting propane and butane streams, supplying output exclusively to state-run oil marketing companies. Hotels, restaurants, and commercial kitchens in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Pune are already reporting acute supply shortfalls.

### Key Points

- **What is the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955?** The ECA grants the Union Government power to regulate or prohibit the production, supply, distribution, trade, and commerce of commodities declared 'essential' — including food, fertilisers, drugs, and petroleum products. It is typically invoked during crises to prevent hoarding, black marketing, price gouging, and artificial shortages. Under the ECA, the government can dictate production priorities, storage, price caps, and distribution to ensure ordinary citizens are not cut off from basic necessities.
- **Why Was ECA Invoked — Root Cause:** India imports more than 60% of its total LPG requirements, with nearly 90% of these imports coming from the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz. The ongoing US-Israel-Iran war has

effectively halted vessel movements through this critical chokepoint. With only 25–30 days of LPG inventory available domestically and no clarity on when the situation will improve, the government acted pre-emptively to prevent acute shortages.

- **Key Government Directives Under ECA:** (1) All public and private refineries must divert propane, butane, and other C3/C4 hydrocarbon streams exclusively for LPG production. (2) The entire additional LPG produced must be supplied only to the three state-run oil marketing companies — IndianOil (IOC), BPCL, and HPCL — for domestic household consumers. (3) No diversion of these streams for petrochemical production is permitted. (4) A 25-day inter-booking period has been introduced for domestic consumers ordering cylinder refills to prevent hoarding.
- **New Regulation — Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026:** Alongside the ECA invocation, the government introduced the Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026, which governs the reallocation of gas. GAIL (India) Ltd has been tasked with coordinating reallocation of gas from lower-priority users to top-priority sectors: domestic PNG (piped natural gas), CNG, LPG plants, and pipeline operations.
- **Pooled Pricing Mechanism:** To cushion the financial impact of higher input costs, the government introduced a 'pooled pricing' mechanism. The Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC) will periodically calculate and notify a single 'pooled price' that averages the cost of diverted gas across all recipients. Entities receiving diverted gas must give a legal undertaking to accept the pooled price, overriding prior contracts, to share the financial burden fairly.
- **Sectors Most Affected by LPG Shortage:** The hardest-hit sectors are hotels, restaurants, eateries, bakeries, and food courts — many of which have already reported supply halts, reduced menus, or partial shutdowns in cities including Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi, Chennai, and Pune. Other affected services include gas crematoriums and laundry/ironing operations using gas.

### Nagauri Pan Methi Receives PPVFRA Patent for Farmers

**In the News:** The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA) formally granted a patent to *Nagauri Pan Methi* (Nagori fenugreek / *Trigonella corniculata* L.) under the 'community farmers' variety' category, published in the Plant Variety Journal (February 2026 issue). This is the world's first sui generis intellectual property protection for this unique fenugreek variety, exclusively cultivated in Nagaur district, Rajasthan. The registration confers statutory ownership and legal rights upon the farming community of Nagaur, protecting their traditional agricultural knowledge from biopiracy and paving the way for a GI tag and export opportunities.

#### Key Points

- **About Nagauri Pan Methi:** Nagauri Pan Methi is a unique variety of fenugreek (*Trigonella corniculata* L.) cultivated exclusively in Nagaur district, Rajasthan. It is grown across more than 7,000 hectares, primarily in Mundwa, Nagaur, Merta City, Jayal, Degana, and Khinvsar. It is a multi-cut leafy crop — leaves are harvested repeatedly during a single season, sun-dried, and sold as a premium spice ingredient.
- **PPVFRA Registration — Key Details:** The patent was granted under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001, and published in the Plant Variety Journal (February 2026). The farming community of Nagaur district is legally recognised as the rightful custodian and rights holder, represented by women farmer Geeta Devi, Pradhan, Panchayat Samiti Mundwa. SABC (South Asia Biotechnology Centre) submitted scientific and field-level evidence along with seed material to PPVFRA on June 25, 2024 for registration.
- **World-First IP Recognition:** This is the world's first sui generis intellectual property protection for Nagauri Pan Methi, recognising the collective innovation, conservation, and custodianship of farmers who have nurtured this plant genetic resource for generations in the arid agro-ecology of Nagaur district.
- **Problem Before Registration — Sold as Kasuri Methi:** Prior to receiving IP protection, Nagauri Pan Methi lacked any legal recognition. Traders and businessmen sold it under different names, most commonly as 'Kasuri Methi', denying farmers the economic benefit of its unique identity and regional value.
- **Triple Dividend — Benefits to Farmers:** (1) Protection against biopiracy and unauthorised commercial exploitation, including spurious and substandard seed sales. (2) Entitlement to benefit sharing from research or commercial

utilisation of the crop's genetic resources. (3) A foundational step towards securing a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, which will enhance market recognition and ensure better prices.

- **About PPVFRA:** The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA) operates under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001. It is responsible for registering plant varieties, protecting breeders' rights, and recognising farmers' contributions to conserving genetic resources.

### Supreme Court Allows Withdrawal of Life Support in Harish Rana Passive Euthanasia Case

**In the News:** India's Supreme Court passed its first-ever order allowing passive euthanasia, permitting the withdrawal of life support for Harish Rana, a 32-year-old man who has been in an irreversible Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) for 13 years following a fall from a building in 2013. A bench of Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice KV Viswanathan allowed the withdrawal of Clinically Administered Nutrition (CAN), ruling it a form of medical treatment that can be lawfully withheld. The landmark ruling is the first judicial application of the Supreme Court's 2018 *Common Cause* judgment, which recognised the fundamental right to die with dignity.

#### Key Points

- **Background — Harish Rana's Case:** Harish Rana was an engineering student at Punjab University, Chandigarh, when he fell from the fourth floor of his paying guest accommodation in 2013. He suffered severe head injuries resulting in 100% quadriplegia and Persistent Vegetative State (PVS). For 13 years, he has been unable to speak, see, hear, or recognise anyone, and has been breathing via a tracheostomy tube and fed through a gastrostomy (PEG) tube.
- **What is Passive Euthanasia?** Passive euthanasia refers to the withdrawal or withholding of life-sustaining medical treatment. India legalised passive euthanasia in 2018 but active euthanasia — any act that intentionally helps a person end their life — remains illegal. A living will (advance directive) allows individuals over 18 to pre-specify medical preferences in the event of a terminal condition.
- **Legal Journey — Courts Approached:** 2024: Harish's father first approached the Delhi High Court, which dismissed the plea in July 2024, ruling he was not terminally ill. August 2024: The Supreme Court refused to entertain the plea but directed Uttar Pradesh to bear treatment costs. 2025: A fresh miscellaneous application was filed before the Supreme Court citing deterioration in Rana's condition. Two medical boards were then constituted to assess his case.
- **Medical Boards' Assessment:** Both the Primary and Secondary Medical Boards certified that Harish Rana had a negligible chance of recovery, required external support for all bodily functions, had permanent brain damage, suffered massive bedsores, and experienced only sleep-wake cycles with no meaningful interaction. The continuation of treatment was found to merely prolong biological existence without therapeutic benefit.
- **Supreme Court's Ruling — Key Directions:** (1) All medical treatment, including CAN (Clinically Administered Nutrition), shall be withdrawn. The standard 30-day reconsideration period was waived. (2) AIIMS shall admit Harish Rana to its palliative care centre and facilitate his transfer from residence. (3) Withdrawal of life support must follow a tailored plan to ensure dignity is maintained throughout. (4) High Courts in all states must direct Judicial Magistrates to receive intimations from hospitals when medical boards reach unanimous decisions on life support withdrawal. (5) The Union of India must ensure Chief Medical Officers in all districts maintain a panel of Registered Medical Practitioners for secondary medical boards.
- **Family's Statement:** Harish's father Ashok Rana called the judgment 'humanitarian', stating the family was doing 'what's best for Harish.' The bench recorded special appreciation for the parents' dedication, with Justice Pardiwala observing: 'His family never left his side... to love someone is to care for them even in the darkest times.'

### Chhattisgarh Cabinet Approves Freedom of Religion Bill 2026

**In the News:** The Chhattisgarh Cabinet approved the draft of the Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026 at a Cabinet meeting held in Raipur under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai. The proposed legislation aims to curb religious conversions carried out through force, inducement, fraud, undue influence, or misrepresentation. The Bill will be introduced during the ongoing Budget Session of the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly.

**Key Points:**

- **Cabinet Approval:** The Chhattisgarh State Cabinet approved the Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026 at a meeting in Raipur chaired by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai. Following cabinet clearance, the Bill will be presented before the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly during the ongoing Budget Session. If passed, it will become part of the state's legal framework governing religious conversions.
- **Objective of the Bill:** The primary aim of the Bill is to prevent unlawful religious conversions and protect the constitutional right of individuals to practice their faith freely. The legislation seeks to ensure that religious conversions occur only through voluntary and informed choice, and not through coercion, manipulation, or misleading practices.
- **Key Provisions — Prohibited Methods of Conversion:** The Bill prohibits religious conversions carried out through force or coercion, inducements or financial incentives, fraud or misrepresentation, and undue influence or manipulation. Conversions conducted through any of these means will be considered unlawful under the proposed legislation.
- **Constitutional Basis:** The Indian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion under Articles 25 to 28, allowing individuals to freely practice, profess and propagate their religion. However, the Constitution also permits governments to regulate religious activities in the interest of public order, morality and health — the basis on which states enact anti-conversion legislation.

**NITI Aayog Releases Fiscal Health Index 2026 to Measure States Financial Strength**

**In the News:** NITI Aayog released the second edition of the Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2026 in New Delhi to assess the fiscal performance and financial stability of Indian states. The report was unveiled by NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Suman Bery and CEO Nidhi Chhibber. The index provides a data-driven framework to evaluate fiscal soundness, promote transparency and support evidence-based policymaking across states.

**Key Points:**

- **About the Index:** The Fiscal Health Index is an annual report by NITI Aayog — the Government of India's policy think tank established in 2015 — designed to comprehensively assess financial management practices of Indian states. State governments account for nearly one-third of India's general government debt, making their fiscal discipline critical to the country's macroeconomic stability and long-term growth.
- **Expanded Coverage:** The 2026 edition expands on the first edition, which covered 18 major states, by additionally including 10 North-Eastern and Himalayan states. Due to significant structural and geographical differences, these states are evaluated and ranked separately from the major states to ensure fair comparisons.
- **Five Pillars of Assessment:** The index evaluates states across five key pillars: (1) Quality of Expenditure — efficiency of public spending; (2) Revenue Mobilisation — capacity to generate own revenue; (3) Fiscal Prudence — responsible deficit and spending management; (4) Debt Index — level and structure of state debt; and (5) Debt Sustainability — ability to manage and repay debt over time.
- **Top Performing Major States (Achievers):** Odisha emerged as the top-performing state in the FHI 2026, improving its score from the previous year. Goa and Jharkhand also featured among the top Achiever states, reflecting strong fiscal discipline and efficient financial management. Front-Runner states include Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka.
- **NE & Himalayan States Rankings:** Among North-Eastern and Himalayan states, Arunachal Pradesh ranked first, followed by Uttarakhand and Tripura. Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya improved rankings through higher capital and developmental expenditure. Himachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland fall in the Aspirational category, facing weaker revenue mobilisation and higher expenditure commitments.

## Cricketers Javon Searles, Griffith and Rathod Suspended Over Bim10 Scandal

**In the News:** The International Cricket Council (ICC) and Cricket West Indies (CWI) jointly announced the provisional suspension of West Indian cricketer Javon Searles, Titans team owner Chitranjan Rathod, and team official Trevon Griffith over alleged anti-corruption violations during the Bim10 Tournament 2023/24 held in Barbados.

### Key Points:

- **The Accused and Charges:** Javon Searles (fast bowler) faces 4 charges under the CWI Anti-Corruption Code; Chitranjan Rathod (Titans team owner) faces 3 charges under the CWI Code; and Trevon Griffith (team official) faces 4 charges under the CWI Code and 1 additional charge under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code — making Griffith the most heavily charged among the three.
- **Nature of Allegations:** All three have been charged with match fixing or improperly influencing match results (Article 2.1.1), soliciting or encouraging others to commit corruption offences (Article 2.1.4), and failing to cooperate with the anti-corruption investigation (Article 2.4.4). Additionally, Searles and Griffith are charged with failing to report corruption approaches, while Griffith alone faces an (Article 2.4.7) additional ICC charge of obstructing the investigation by concealing or tampering with evidence.
- **Wider Investigation:** This case is a continuation of a broader ICC-CWI probe into the Bim10 tournament, which previously saw USA cricketer Aaron Jones charged with five breaches of the CWI and ICC Anti-Corruption Codes on January 28, 2026.
- **Response Deadline and Suspension:** All three have been provisionally suspended from all forms of cricket with immediate effect. They have 14 days from March 11, 2026 to either admit the charges or contest them through the official disciplinary process. The ICC has stated it will make no further public comment until proceedings conclude.

## Goa Government Plans Advocate Protection Bill 2026

**In the News:** The Goa government has decided to introduce the Goa Advocate Protection Bill 2026 in the state legislative assembly to address rising incidents of violence, intimidation, and harassment against advocates performing their professional duties, while also incorporating safeguards against misuse of the proposed law.

### Key Points:

- **Need for the Bill:** Recent years have witnessed a significant increase in cases of violence, intimidation, harassment, and false implication of advocates in criminal proceedings — often while they are performing professional duties in courts. Such actions not only threaten legal professionals but also undermine citizens' fundamental right to legal representation and the overall functioning of the justice delivery system.
- **Key Penalties Proposed:** The Bill prescribes strict punishments — assault or criminal force against an advocate attracts up to 2 years imprisonment and a fine of ₹55,000; grievous hurt attracts up to 7 years imprisonment and a fine of ₹1 lakh; intimidation or harassment attracts up to 2 years imprisonment and a fine of ₹25,000; and threats involving death, grievous injury, or destruction of property attract up to 7 years imprisonment.
- **Constitutional and Legal Significance:** Advocates are recognised as officers of the court and are central to the administration of justice. The Bill reinforces constitutional values of rule of law, access to justice, and judicial independence enshrined in the Constitution of India, ensuring that interference with advocates does not obstruct litigants' fundamental rights.
- **Balanced Framework:** While focusing on protecting advocates, the Bill also incorporates safeguards to prevent misuse of its protective provisions — ensuring accountability alongside protection, and maintaining public confidence in the judicial process.
- **Broader Trend:** Goa joins several other Indian states that have proposed or enacted advocate protection laws, reflecting a growing national recognition of the need to legally safeguard legal professionals to ensure effective and fearless administration of justice.

## India Co-Sponsors UN Resolution Condemning Iran Attacks

**In the News:** India co-sponsored UNSC Resolution 2817, condemning Iran's "egregious" attacks against Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Jordan, demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities and denouncing threats to close the Strait of Hormuz. The resolution was adopted with 13 votes in favour, with China and Russia abstaining.

### Key Points:

- **The Resolution:** The Bahrain-led Resolution 2817, co-sponsored by over 135 nations including India, Pakistan, the US, UK, France, Germany, and Japan, condemned Iran's attacks on Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan as a breach of international law and a serious threat to international peace and security. It demanded Iran immediately and unconditionally cease all attacks, provocations, and use of proxies against neighbouring states.
- **India's Diplomatic Stance:** India's co-sponsorship signals a clear diplomatic alignment with Gulf nations and the broader international community on regional stability. Notably, India and Pakistan — usually on opposite sides — both co-sponsored this resolution, marking a rare convergence of their foreign policy positions.
- **China and Russia's Abstention:** Both veto-wielding permanent members China and Russia abstained, allowing the resolution to pass. Russia separately submitted a draft resolution urging cessation of military activities — making no mention of Iran, Israel, the US, or Gulf states — which failed to garner the required nine votes, receiving only four in favour (China, Russia, Pakistan, Somalia).
- **Strait of Hormuz and Maritime Security:** The resolution specifically condemned any Iranian threats to close or obstruct the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab Al Mandab — two of the world's most critical maritime oil transit routes — reaffirming the right of all states to defend their vessels and uphold navigational freedoms under international law.
- **India's Strategic Interests:** India's support reflects its vital interests in the Gulf — home to a large Indian diaspora and a key source of crude oil and natural gas imports. Stability in the region is directly linked to India's energy security and the welfare of millions of Indian nationals living and working across GCC countries.

## SC Clarifies OBC Creamy Layer Criteria

**In the News:** The Supreme Court of India ruled on March 11, 2026, that parental income alone cannot determine the "creamy layer" status of OBC candidates, resolving long-standing confusion between the 1993 DoPT Office Memorandum and its 2004 clarificatory letter, particularly regarding children of PSU and private sector employees.

### Key Points:

- **The Core Issue:** The 1993 DoPT OM clearly stated that income from salaries and agricultural land should not be counted in the creamy layer income/wealth test. However, a 2004 DoPT clarificatory letter directed inclusion of salary income of PSU and private sector employees, creating unequal treatment between children of government employees and those of PSU/private sector employees — a contradiction that affected hundreds of OBC candidates in civil services examinations since 2016.
- **SC's Ruling — Status Over Income:** A division bench of Justice PS Narasimha and Justice R Mahadevan held that creamy layer determination must be status-based, not purely income-based, considering the parent's post category (Group A/B/C/D) rather than salary alone. The bench observed that "unequal treatment of similarly placed OBC candidates would not only be legally erroneous but constitutionally impermissible," ruling it violative of Articles 14, 15, and 16.
- **About Creamy Layer:** The concept was first introduced in the landmark 1992 Indra Sawhney vs Union of India (Mandal) judgment to exclude socially advanced OBCs from reservation benefits. Under existing rules, children of Group A officers or those promoted before age 40, and children of two Group B officers, fall under the creamy layer. The income limit for non-government occupations is Rs 8 lakh per annum (revised in 2017).
- **Relief for Affected Candidates:** The verdict expands OBC reservation eligibility for children of PSU and private sector employees previously excluded due to salary-based calculations. The Court also directed the government to create

supernumerary posts to accommodate candidates who were wrongly denied OBC benefits under the now-quashed 2004 clarification.

### India's 1st Comprehensive Checklist of Fireflies

**In the News:** Scientists have compiled India's first-ever comprehensive checklist of fireflies, documenting 92 species across 27 genera using over 260 years of scattered scientific records (1758–2025). The study, published in the journal *Zootaxa*, was led by Parvez, a PhD scholar at the University of Calcutta.

#### Key Points:

- **First-Ever National Checklist:** Despite more than 260 years of scattered scientific documentation, no consolidated record of Indian firefly species had ever been compiled before. The checklist brings together records from nearly 300 scientific publications spanning 1758 to 2025, identifying 92 species across 27 genera — over 60% of which are endemic to India.
- **Geographical Distribution:** The Western Ghats emerged as the richest habitat accounting for 25.33% of species, followed by the North-East and Gangetic Plains (~22.66% each), Coastal Regions (17.33%), and the Deccan Peninsula (13.33%). No fireflies were recorded in Desert and Semi-Arid zones.
- **About Fireflies:** Fireflies are soft-bodied beetles belonging to the family Lampyridae, order Coleoptera. They produce bioluminescence through a chemical reaction involving luciferin, luciferase, oxygen, and ATP via a light organ called the photophore — generating nearly 100% energy-efficient "cold light" used primarily for mating communication in adults and as a predator warning signal in larvae.
- **Conservation Gaps:** No Indian firefly species has been assessed for the IUCN Red List, nor are they protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022. Major threats include light pollution, habitat destruction, agricultural chemicals, and rapid urbanisation.

### Health Ministry Grants Lifetime Validity to FSSAI Licences, Ends Dual Licensing for Street Food Vendors

**In the News:** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has approved a set of major regulatory and procedural reforms under the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) aimed at improving ease of doing business while maintaining strong food safety standards. The reforms — finalised after consultations with states, union territories, and industry stakeholders — are in line with the recommendations of the high-level committee on non-financial regulatory reforms constituted by NITI Aayog. Key changes include perpetual validity of FSSAI registrations, revised turnover thresholds, and automatic FSSAI registration for street food vendors.

#### Key Points:

- **Background:** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare approved major FSSAI regulatory reforms after detailed consultations with states, UTs, and industry stakeholders. The reforms align with NITI Aayog's high-level committee on non-financial regulatory reforms.
- **Perpetual Validity of Licences:** The most significant reform introduces perpetual validity for all FSSAI registrations and licences, eliminating the need for periodic renewals. This reduces compliance costs, paperwork, and repeated interactions with licensing authorities for food business operators.
- **Regulatory Focus Shift:** With renewal burdens removed, FSSAI and regulatory agencies can now focus more on monitoring, enforcement, and capacity-building activities rather than administrative processing.
- **Revised Turnover Thresholds (from 1 April 2026):** Businesses with annual turnover up to Rs 1.5 crore will only need basic registration (earlier limit: Rs 12 lakh). Turnover up to Rs 50 crore falls under state licensing; above Rs 50 crore requires central licensing.

- **About FSSAI:** FSSAI is India's apex food regulatory body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. It is responsible for setting food safety standards, licensing food businesses, and enforcing food safety regulations across India.
- **Ease of Doing Business:** These reforms are part of India's broader push to improve ease of doing business by reducing regulatory burden, cutting compliance costs, and simplifying licensing processes across sectors.
- **Street Vendors Act, 2014:** The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, provides for regulation of street vending and protection of vendors' livelihoods. Its linkage with FSSAI registration under the new reforms reduces duplication across regulatory frameworks.

### Fiscal Health Index 2026

**In the News:** Recently, NITI Aayog released the second edition of the Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2026 for Financial Year 2023-24. The index evaluates the fiscal performance of Indian states across five pillars and, for the first time, expands coverage to include 10 North-Eastern and Himalayan states in addition to the 18 General Category States. The report gains significance amid global public debt surging to approximately USD 102 trillion in 2024.

#### Key Points:

- **About FHI:** The Fiscal Health Index is a comprehensive framework developed by NITI Aayog to assess and compare the fiscal performance of Indian states. It uses CAG-verified data to guide reforms, enable peer benchmarking, and encourage evidence-based policymaking.
- **Five Pillars:** The index evaluates states on: (1) Quality of Expenditure, (2) Revenue Mobilisation, (3) Fiscal Prudence, (4) Debt Index, and (5) Debt Sustainability — retained from the first edition.
- **Expanded Coverage:** The second edition expands from 18 General Category States to also include 10 NE and Himalayan states, ranked separately with refined sub-indicators reflecting geographic remoteness, sparse population, limited own-revenue capacity, and heavy dependence on Union transfers.
- **Achievers — General Category:** Odisha, Goa, and Jharkhand are top performers — characterised by own-tax shares above 60%, capital outlay ~4-5% of GSDP, fiscal deficits below 3% of GSDP, and debt levels under 25% of GSDP.
- **Front-Runners:** Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka maintain low debt levels and sustainable fiscal patterns.
- **Performers:** Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan. Bihar improved from Aspirational to Performer; Karnataka and Telangana slipped from Front-Runner to Performer.
- **NE & Himalayan Rankings:** Achievers: Arunachal Pradesh (1st — fiscal surpluses, strong expenditure quality), Uttarakhand. Performers: Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura. Aspirational: Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland — debt at 40-50% of GSDP.

### As Centre revokes Sonam Wangchuk's NSA detention, a look at why Ladakh is seeking Sixth Schedule protections

**In the News:** The Union government has revoked the detention of activist Sonam Wangchuk under the National Security Act (NSA), nearly six months after his arrest on 26 September 2025, in connection with violent protests in Leh in which four people were killed. The development has renewed focus on Ladakh's long-standing demand for Sixth Schedule protections, statehood, and greater democratic representation — a demand that intensified following the bifurcation of Jammu & Kashmir in 2019.

#### Key Points:

- **NSA Detention Revoked:** The Centre revoked the NSA detention of activist Sonam Wangchuk nearly six months after his arrest on 26 September 2025, when he was held responsible for instigating the violent Leh protests on 24 September in which four people were killed and 50 were injured.

- **Ladakh's Grievances:** With no legislature, the people of Ladakh lost democratic representation, autonomous council powers, and access to J&K's recruitment boards. Administration shifted entirely to bureaucrats, making governance feel even more distant than Srinagar.
- **Demand for Sixth Schedule:** Over 90% of Ladakh's population belongs to Scheduled Tribes. The Sixth Schedule under Article 244 of the Constitution provides for Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in tribal-majority areas, offering powers over land, forest, water, agriculture, health, and local policing.
- **Existing Hill Councils:** Ladakh has two Hill Councils — LAHDC Leh and LAHDC Kargil — but neither is under the Sixth Schedule. Their powers are limited to collection of local taxes (e.g., parking fees) and use of centrally vested land.
- **ADCs Under Sixth Schedule:** Currently 10 ADCs exist — all in the Northeast: 3 each in Assam, Meghalaya, and Mizoram, and 1 in Tripura. No region outside the Northeast has ever been included in the Sixth Schedule.
- **About Sonam Wangchuk:** An engineer and innovator awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award (2018), Wangchuk inspired the character played by Aamir Khan in the 2009 film 3 Idiots. He has consistently demanded Scheduled Area status for Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule, calling it a BJP election promise from 2019.
- **Key Protests Timeline:** Student protests (2019) → Hunger strike in Leh (March 2024, 21 days) → Delhi Chalo Padyatra (September 2024) with demands for statehood, Sixth Schedule, public service commission, and separate Lok Sabha seats for Leh and Kargil.
- **Constitutional Hurdle:** The Centre has maintained that the Sixth Schedule applies to the Northeast under the Constitution, while tribal areas in the rest of India are covered by the Fifth Schedule. However, the government can bring a constitutional amendment Bill if it chooses to extend the Sixth Schedule to Ladakh.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Shah Rukh Khan Debuts in Hurun Global Rich List 2026 With \$1.3 Billion Net Worth

**In the News:** Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan has made his debut in the Hurun Global Rich List 2026 with an estimated net worth of \$1.3 billion, released on March 5, 2026, with wealth calculated up to January 15, 2026 — marking a significant milestone in the growing financial influence of India's entertainment industry.

#### Key Points:

- **Shah Rukh Khan's Entry:** SRK debuted on the Hurun Global Rich List 2026 with a net worth of \$1.3 billion, reflecting not just his decades-long Bollywood success but also the financial strength of his business ventures, brand investments, production company, sports investments, and film distribution rights.
- **Sources of Wealth:** Khan's billionaire status is built on multiple income streams — his production company Red Chillies Entertainment (co-owned with Gauri Khan), brand endorsements, global appearances, sports investments, and film distribution rights — highlighting how celebrity wealth increasingly comes from business ownership rather than performance earnings alone.
- **Celebrity Billionaires on the List:** Other prominent celebrity billionaires on the Hurun Global Rich List 2026 include Michael Jordan (\$3.6 billion), Jay-Z (\$2.8 billion), Tiger Woods (\$1.9 billion), Taylor Swift (\$1.6 billion), and Rihanna (\$1.5 billion). New entrants alongside SRK included Bruce Springsteen and Magic Johnson.
- **India's Position:** India ranked third globally with 308 billionaires on the Hurun Global Rich List 2026, behind China (1,110 billionaires) and the United States (approximately 1,000 billionaires), reflecting India's expanding economic and entrepreneurial landscape.
- **About Hurun Global Rich List:** The Hurun Global Rich List ranks individuals worldwide with wealth exceeding US\$1 billion; it is compiled by the Hurun Report, founded by researcher and Chairman Rupert Hoogewerf. The 2026 list noted a record year for celebrity wealth creation driven by brand ownership, technology partnerships, and intellectual property.



- **Upcoming Film 'King':** On the professional front, SRK is working on the action thriller "King" directed by Siddharth Anand, produced by Red Chillies Entertainment in collaboration with Marflix Pictures. The film marks Suhana Khan's theatrical debut, features an ensemble cast including Deepika Padukone, Rani Mukerji, Abhishek Bachchan, and Anil Kapoor, and is scheduled for theatrical release on December 24, 2026.

### **Mojtaba Khamenei Becomes Iran's New Supreme Leader**

**In the News:** Iran's 88-member Assembly of Experts named Mojtaba Khamenei — second son of late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — as Iran's new Supreme Leader on March 8, 2026, just over a week into the fierce war with the US and Israel, signalling the regime's choice of a confrontational, hardline path.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Background — Ali Khamenei's Death:** Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's former Supreme Leader, was killed in an Israeli strike on February 28, 2026 — on the very first day of the US-Israel-Iran war — triggering the urgent selection of a successor by the Assembly of Experts.
- **Who is Mojtaba Khamenei?:** Born on September 8, 1969, in Mashhad, Mojtaba is 56 years old and a Shiite cleric who largely kept a low profile during his father's rule, never holding any public office. He joined the IRGC in 1987, participated in the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88) as a teenager, and pursued Islamic studies at the Qom seminary in 1999.
- **IRGC Links:** Mojtaba has maintained close ties with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) since the 1980s; many believe the IRGC effectively calls the shots in Iran and his selection is seen as cementing that influence further.
- **Selection Body — Assembly of Experts:** An 88-member clerical body responsible for selecting and overseeing Iran's Supreme Leader; it urged the Iranian people to stand behind Mojtaba and "keep unity" after his appointment.
- **Domestic Reactions:** Iranians are deeply divided — pro-establishment supporters celebrated in Tehran, Qom, and Mashhad; but many ordinary Iranians expressed fear that he would be "even more oppressive" than his father, with protests featuring chants of "Death to Mojtaba" also verified by BBC Persian and BBC Verify.
- **International Reactions:** US President Donald Trump called Mojtaba "unacceptable" and a "lightweight," warning he would "not last long" if the appointment was not coordinated with Washington. Israel's defence minister warned that whoever was chosen as successor would be a "target for elimination."

### **HRW Accuses Israel of Using White Phosphorus in Lebanon**

**In the News:** Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report on March 9, 2026, accusing the Israeli military of "unlawfully" striking the village of Yohmor in southern Lebanon on March 3, 2026, using artillery shells loaded with white phosphorus in residential areas, raising serious concerns about violations of international humanitarian law.

#### **Key Points:**

- **The Incident:** HRW examined and geolocated seven images indicating white phosphorus artillery was used in residential parts of Yohmor, southern Lebanon, on March 3, 2026 — several hours after the Israeli military had issued evacuation warnings to residents of Yohmor and 50 other nearby villages, directing them to move at least 1,000 metres away.
- **What is White Phosphorus?:** White phosphorus is a chemical substance used in artillery shells, bombs, and rockets that ignites on contact with oxygen; it burns at extremely high temperatures, can ignite buildings, burns through human tissue down to the bone, and even survivors with minor burns may later face infections, organ damage, or respiratory failure. Human rights advocates state that deploying white phosphorus in populated areas violates international law.
- **Israel's Position:** The Israeli military did not provide an immediate response to HRW's requests for comment; it has previously stated that white phosphorus is used to create smoke screens rather than to deliberately target civilians.
- **HRW's Demand:** HRW called on Israel to immediately stop the use of white phosphorus over residential areas and urged countries supplying weapons to Israel — including white phosphorus munitions — to suspend military aid and arms sales until the practice ceases.



- **Broader Conflict Context:** Lebanon became involved in the wider Middle East conflict after Iran-backed Hezbollah launched attacks on Israel following the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during US-Israeli strikes. Israeli strikes over the past week killed 394 people in Lebanon including 83 children and 42 women, according to Lebanon's health minister; two Israeli soldiers were also killed in southern Lebanon — the first fatalities since the offensive began on March 2, 2026.
- **About Human Rights Watch (HRW):** Founded in 1978 as Helsinki Watch, HRW is a New York-headquartered international NGO that documents human rights abuses — including war crimes, torture, and crimes against humanity — through field investigations and public advocacy. It employs over 275 staff and operates in more than 90 countries. It was a co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize through the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

### India Remains World's Second-Largest Arms Importer: SIPRI Report

**In the News:** According to a new report released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India continues to be the world's second-largest arms importer despite a marginal decline of around 4 per cent in defence imports between 2016–20 and 2021–25, reflecting its gradual shift towards self-reliance in defence manufacturing.

#### Key Points:

- **Decline in Arms Imports:** India's arms imports declined by around 4 per cent between 2016–20 and 2021–25, largely attributed to the government's "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative in the defence sector, with increased indigenous production of missiles, artillery systems, and naval platforms reducing — though not eliminating — dependence on foreign procurement.
- **Russia — Top but Shrinking Supplier:** Russia remains India's largest arms supplier but its share has significantly declined — from nearly 70 per cent (2011–15) to 51 per cent (2016–20) to about 40 per cent (2021–25) — indicating India's growing diversification away from Russian defence equipment.
- **France — Second Largest Supplier:** France accounts for about 24 per cent of India's arms imports (down from 29 per cent earlier), with the defence partnership expected to strengthen further through India's planned procurement of 114 additional Rafale fighter aircraft.
- **Israel — Key Defence Partner:** Israel holds a 15 per cent share of India's arms imports, particularly in drones, missiles, and air defence technologies, and notably overtook the United Kingdom in global arms exports during the 2021–25 period.
- **Global Arms Trade Rising:** The volume of major global arms transfers increased by about 9.2 per cent between 2016–20 and 2021–25, driven by rising geopolitical tensions and ongoing conflicts such as the Russia–Ukraine war.
- **USA — Largest Global Arms Exporter:** The United States accounted for 42 per cent of total international arms transfers, supplying weapons to nearly 99 countries, with Europe emerging as the largest recipient region for American arms exports amid growing security concerns.
- **About SIPRI:** The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) is a Sweden-based independent think tank that tracks global arms transfers, military expenditure, and international security — widely regarded as the global authority on arms trade data.

### Explained: Why Kharg Island Matters to Global Oil Supply

**In the News:** As tensions escalate in the Israel–Iran conflict, global attention has turned to Kharg Island — a small but strategically critical island in the Persian Gulf that handles nearly 90% of Iran's crude oil exports and can load up to 7 million barrels per day. Despite military strikes elsewhere in the region, the island has remained untouched — widely considered a major red line due to its impact on global oil markets.

#### Key Points:

- **Location & Geography:** Kharg Island is located ~25 km off Iran's southwestern coast in the Persian Gulf. Though small in size, it serves as Iran's primary crude oil export terminal. Most of Iran's coastline is shallow, making it difficult for supertankers to dock — Kharg offers deep-water access, enabling efficient loading of massive oil tankers.
- **Infrastructure:** Oil infrastructure dates back to the 1960s, developed with assistance from American oil company Amoco. The terminal includes large storage tanks, extended deep-water jetties, residential areas for workers, and a small airstrip connecting it to mainland Iran. Underwater pipelines link the island directly to Iran's largest oilfields.
- **Economic Importance to Iran:** Nearly 90% of Iran's crude oil exports pass through Kharg Island, making it a critical lifeline for government revenue. The terminal can load up to 7 million barrels of crude oil per day onto tankers, making it one of the most critical energy hubs in West Asia.
- **Why It Remains Untouched in Israel–Iran Conflict:** Despite strikes on fuel depots and infrastructure in Tehran, Kharg Island has not been targeted. Analysts attribute this to the severe economic and geopolitical risks — an attack could disrupt global oil markets, escalate regional tensions, and trigger large-scale retaliation from Iran, potentially widening the conflict across the Middle East.
- **Global Risks If Attacked:** A strike on Kharg Island would severely disrupt Iran's oil export capacity and government revenues. Tehran could retaliate by targeting Gulf oil facilities or blocking the Strait of Hormuz — one of the world's most important energy trade routes — triggering global oil price spikes and wider economic instability.
- **Strait of Hormuz Connection:** The Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant share of global oil trade passes, could be targeted by Iran in retaliation, making Kharg Island's security a matter of global energy concern.

### International Malaria Conference 2026 Ends With Big Health Goals

**In the News:** The International Malaria Conference (IMC) 2026, organised by ICMR–National Institute of Malaria Research (ICMR–NIMR) under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), concluded in New Delhi on March 9, 2026. Held from March 7–9, 2026, the three-day conference brought together scientists, public health experts, policymakers and researchers from India and across the world under the theme "Discovery, Development and Delivery: Driving Malaria Elimination and Beyond."

#### Key Points:

- **About IMC 2026:** Organised by ICMR–NIMR (Indian Council of Medical Research – National Institute of Malaria Research). Held in New Delhi from March 7–9, 2026. Served as a platform for sharing scientific knowledge, strengthening global partnerships, and addressing emerging challenges in malaria control and elimination.
- **Conference Theme:** "Discovery, Development and Delivery: Driving Malaria Elimination and Beyond" — structured around three thematic pillars: Discovery, Development, and Delivery.
- **Key Dignitaries:** Dr. Anup Anvikar (Director, ICMR–NIMR) delivered the welcome address, stressing the need for collaboration among research institutions, national programmes and global partners. Dr. Tanu Jain (Director, NCVBDC – National Centre for Vector Borne Diseases Control) highlighted India's strategic efforts towards malaria elimination.
- **Discovery Sessions:** Focused on advances in parasite biology, transmission dynamics, and emerging molecular mechanisms influencing malaria persistence and drug resistance.
- **Development Sessions:** Highlighted innovations in malaria diagnostics, research tools, and surveillance technologies. Early-career researchers presented through turbo talks and poster presentations, fostering the next generation of malaria researchers.
- **Delivery Sessions:** Focused on translating scientific discoveries into practical public health interventions. Topics included residual malaria transmission, vaccine research advances, and community-based strategies for malaria control.
- **Youth & Research Engagement:** Students and young researchers interacted with leading scientists, mentors and industry experts, gaining insights into research translation, innovation and career opportunities in malaria research and public health.



## Trump Announces \$300 Billion Refinery Partnership with Reliance Industries

**In the News:** US President Donald Trump announced a **historic \$300 billion partnership with India's Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL)** to build America's first new major oil refinery in 50 years at the Port of Brownsville, Texas. The refinery, to be developed under the banner of **America First Refining**, will be specifically designed to process American light shale oil and is expected to create thousands of jobs. However, RIL remained silent on the announcement throughout the day, neither issuing a statement nor informing stock exchanges, raising questions about the deal's status.

### Key Points:

- **Trump's Announcement:** President Trump posted on Truth Social calling it 'THE BIGGEST DEAL IN U.S. HISTORY' — a \$300 billion investment to open the first new US oil refinery in 50 years in Brownsville, Texas. He credited Reliance Industries as the Indian partner and cited his America First agenda of streamlined permits and lower taxes as the catalyst for attracting the investment.
- **The Developer — America First Refining:** The refinery will be built by America First Refining (formerly known as Element Fuels, which received required permissions in 2024). The company is led by Founder and Chairman John V. Calce. Groundbreaking is planned for Q2 2026 (April–June quarter).
- **What the \$300 Billion Represents:** The \$300 billion figure refers to the total value of crude oil processed and fuels produced over 20 years — not upfront investment. Specifically: 1.2 billion barrels of US light shale oil worth ~\$125 billion will be processed, and 50 billion gallons of refined products worth ~\$175 billion will be produced. America First Refining says this will improve the US trade imbalance by \$300 billion.
- **RIL's Investment — J.P. Morgan Estimate:** RIL has not confirmed its involvement. J.P. Morgan estimated that a 30-million-tonne refinery (likely first phase) could cost around \$60 billion in capex, potentially rising higher if petrochemical facilities are added. Assuming a 50% stake with 30–70% equity-debt funding, RIL's implied equity investment could be around \$10 billion. J.P. Morgan noted the deal may be more about profitability than capex intensity.
- **Geopolitical Context:** The announcement comes amid a sharp spike in crude oil prices — crossing \$100 per barrel — following the US-Israeli conflict with Iran that began on February 28, 2026. The new refinery is being positioned as a national security asset that reduces US dependence on West Asian energy supplies and strengthens domestic energy dominance, with mid-term elections approaching in the US.
- **Historical Reference:** The last major refinery built in the United States was the Marathon Refinery in 1976, when oil cost under \$5 a barrel. The Brownsville facility would be the first new refinery in 50 years.

## WHO Foundation and Novo Nordisk Launch Initiative to Tackle Childhood Obesity in India

**In the News:** The WHO Foundation and Novo Nordisk announced a new collaboration aimed at strengthening childhood obesity prevention in India. The initiative will support a scalable school-based health program aligned with the Government of India's Ayushman Bharat School Health and Wellness Programme and WHO's Health Promoting Schools framework, targeting rising obesity levels among children and adolescents.

### Key Points:

- **Partnership Announced:** The WHO Foundation and Novo Nordisk have collaborated to provide financial support towards obesity prevention and health-system readiness in India. India has been identified as a priority country for this partnership, reflecting the scale and urgency of its childhood obesity challenge. The initiative aligns with the Government of India's Ayushman Bharat School Health and Wellness Programme.

- **Rising Obesity Concern:** According to WHO, overweight and obesity now cause more deaths globally than underweight, and are linked to serious noncommunicable diseases including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. India is witnessing a rapid rise in obesity and cardio-renal-metabolic conditions, increasingly affecting younger populations and communities with limited access to healthcare and awareness.
- **Key Focus Areas:** The collaboration will focus on creating healthier early-life environments, promoting physical activity, enabling early risk identification, and strengthening primary healthcare preparedness. It will also integrate health screening, lifestyle education, and mental health support in targeted school districts to identify risks early among children and adolescents.
- **About the WHO Foundation:** The WHO Foundation is an independent organization established in 2020 and headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. It supports the mission of the World Health Organization by mobilising philanthropic capital and building partnerships to advance health equity, strengthen health systems, and drive lasting change toward Health for All.
- **About Novo Nordisk:** Novo Nordisk is a leading global healthcare company founded in 1923 and headquartered in Denmark, with a focus on defeating serious chronic diseases. It employs approximately 68,800 people across 80 countries and markets its products in around 170 countries. The company is known globally for obesity and diabetes treatments including Wegovy and Ozempic (semaglutide).

### Iran war: 'Oil reserves are sufficient... LNG reserves are the greater concern'

**In the News:** Two weeks into the Israel-US-Iran war, the Strait of Hormuz — through which a fifth of the world's oil and gas flows — has been reduced to a trickle. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has flagged this as the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market. Energy expert Ajay Singh, based in Tokyo, warns that while oil reserves across major economies remain sufficient for several weeks, the real and underappreciated concern is the disruption to global LNG (liquefied natural gas) supply.

#### Key Points:

- **Strait of Hormuz Blockade:** Iran has successfully choked off energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz, through which approximately one-fifth of the world's oil and gas demand previously passed. Using drones and the geography of the strait, Iran has weaponised the oil price despite facing overwhelming US military superiority, causing extreme market volatility with crude prices swinging between \$70–\$120 per barrel.
- **Oil Reserves Are Sufficient — For Now:** Major consuming economies hold substantial strategic oil reserves. China maintains over 100 days' worth of consumption, Japan over 250 days, the EU approximately 90 days' worth of imports, and India about 74 days' worth. The IEA's strategic reserves alone can cover close to two months of Persian Gulf supply disruption. Despite the IEA announcing its largest-ever oil release, markets continue reacting out of fear rather than actual supply-demand calculations.
- **LNG Is the Greater Concern:** Natural gas reserves present a more urgent and underappreciated risk. European gas reserves are at typically low winter-end levels, and their seasonal refilling — already weakened by reduced Russian supplies — is now further hampered by the loss of Qatari and Emirati LNG supply. Spot LNG prices in Asia and Europe have surged above \$15/MMBtu, an increase of over 50% in just two weeks. India's actual LNG terminal reserves remain unclear.
- **Kharg Island Left Untouched — A Deliberate Signal:** Despite extensive military operations, the US and Israel have not targeted Iran's primary oil export facility at Kharg Island or major oil and gas production infrastructure. Experts believe this is a deliberate move to stabilise global oil prices, signal restraint to Iran, and preserve Iran's ability to rebuild its economy post-conflict — keeping the Iranian people on side.
- **Path to Resuming Shipping:** Experts argue that a solution must be found given the strait's critical importance to the global economy. A potential approach involves nations dispatching merchant fleets escorted by naval convoys, even while diplomatic efforts continue. This would require large-scale deployment of still-nascent anti-drone technology

(aerial and underwater) on both merchant and warships. Sovereign states may also need to step in to provide insurance cover against loss of life, assets, and environmental damage.

- **Best and Worst Case Scenarios:** The best-case scenario is a negotiated settlement where Iran shifts toward co-existence and economic cooperation with the US and Israel. The worst-case scenario is a protracted conflict extending beyond early April, with Iran — even if weakened or politically fragmented — continuing to disrupt shipping and energy flows across the region, causing prolonged economic and humanitarian damage.

### **Russia is not fighting West Asia war, but is its real winner — thanks to crude windfall**

**In the News:** As the US-Israel-Iran conflict intensifies in West Asia (March 2026), Russia — despite not being a direct participant — has emerged as one of the clearest strategic and economic winners, reaping a massive crude oil windfall driven by surging global oil prices and increased demand for its exports.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Russia's Pre-War Oil Struggle:** Russia's federal budget in early 2026 was under severe strain — energy revenues had fallen nearly 50% year-on-year, pushing the budget deficit close to critical levels. The Kremlin was forced to offer heavy discounts to India and China just to keep oil sales going, with crude selling well below the hoped-for \$60 per barrel.
- **The Oil Price Surge & Russia's Windfall:** Iran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz disrupted global oil flows, pushing Brent crude towards \$100 a barrel — potentially the largest supply disruption on record. Russia capitalised immediately, earning up to \$150 million per day in extra revenue, with an estimated \$1.3–\$1.9 billion in additional tax revenues in just the first 12 days of the conflict.
- **Urals Crude at a Historic Premium:** Russian Urals crude surged over 10% and traded at a premium to the Brent benchmark for the first time in history. Indian and Chinese imports from Russia rose about 22% in the week following strikes on Iran, with India's purchases reaching roughly 1.5 million barrels per day — nearly 50% higher than the previous month.
- **Strategic Gains Beyond Oil:** Russia has reportedly provided Iran with satellite intelligence and tactical insights, benefiting from a prolonged conflict. Additionally, with no European sanctions currently on Russian LNG shipments until 2027, Europe may increase Russian gas imports — further extending Moscow's energy leverage.
- **Limits and Risks:** Russia's windfall has constraints — sanctions, damaged energy infrastructure from Ukrainian attacks, and reliance on a narrow buyer base limit its ability to fully capitalise. A potential US-Iran deal lifting the Iranian oil embargo could crash Brent prices back to \$60 or below, while a prolonged crisis risks triggering a global recession that would ultimately hurt Russian energy demand too.
- **Ukraine — The Silent Casualty:** With US attention consumed by the West Asia conflict, Ukraine has been pushed to the back burner, already facing critical shortages of PAC-3 Patriot interceptor missiles — directly benefiting Russia on the Ukrainian front as well.

### **Homebound Becomes Only Indian Film Shortlisted for Best International Feature Film at Oscars 2026**

**In the News:** The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) announced the shortlist for the Best International Feature Film category at the 98th Academy Awards (Oscars 2026). India's official entry, Homebound — directed by Neeraj Ghaywan — became the only Indian film among the 15 shortlisted titles. However, the film did not advance to the final five nominations announced on 22 January 2026. The award ceremony was held on 15 March 2026 at the Dolby Theatre, Los Angeles.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Shortlisted Film:** Homebound, directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, was India's official submission and the only Indian film to make the shortlist of 15 films for the Best International Feature Film category at the 98th Oscars.
- **Shortlist Announcement:** The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) announced the shortlist on 16 December 2025, selecting 15 films from entries submitted by countries across the world.

- **About the Film:** Homebound tells the story of two friends from rural India aspiring to become police officers in search of dignity and social acceptance. It premiered at major international festivals including Cannes and received strong critical acclaim.
- **Cast:** The film features Ishaan Khatter, Janhvi Kapoor, and Vishal Jethwa in lead roles.
- **Did Not Make Final Nominations:** Despite being shortlisted, Homebound did not advance to the final five nominees when nominations were announced on 22 January 2026, continuing the pattern of Indian films struggling to secure final-round nominations.
- **About the Oscars:** The Academy Awards, presented annually by AMPAS, recognise excellence in filmmaking. The Best International Feature Film category receives entries from 80+ countries, with only five films reaching the final nomination stage.
- **Reasons for Not Advancing:** Experts cited limited US theatrical visibility, a smaller North American release footprint, and insufficient Oscar campaign expenditure as key factors — all of which affect how widely Academy voters engage with international films.
- **Oscar Campaigns:** Securing a nomination requires extensive and expensive promotional campaigns including screenings, advertising, and networking events for Academy members — an area where Indian films often lag behind major US and European studios.
- **Indian Representation:** Despite no Indian feature film nomination, Indian-American filmmaker Geeta Gandbhir received two nominations in documentary categories at Oscars 2026, reflecting broader Indian talent on the global stage.

### US Launches Section 301 Probe into India

**In the News:** The United States Trade Representative (USTR) launched the first Section 301 investigation under the Trump administration, targeting 16 economies including India and China, over concerns of structural excess manufacturing capacity. On 12 March 2026, the USTR launched a second Section 301 probe covering 60 economies over alleged forced labour practices in global supply chains. Both investigations could lead to fresh tariffs on India after May 2026.

#### Key Points:

- **Section 301 — First Probe (11 March 2026):** The USTR launched its first Section 301 investigation targeting 16 economies, including India and China, examining whether industrial policies have created structural excess manufacturing capacity that harms US industries.
- **Section 301 — Second Probe (12 March 2026):** A second Section 301 investigation was launched covering 60 economies, including India and China, to determine whether their failure to ban goods produced with forced labour is unreasonable or discriminatory and burdens US commerce.
- **What is Section 301:** Part of the Trade Act of 1974, Section 301 empowers the USTR to investigate foreign trade practices that violate trade agreements or unfairly restrict US commerce, and to impose tariffs or other trade restrictions as remedies.
- **India's Trade Surplus:** India recorded a \$58 billion goods trade surplus with the US in 2025, with global surpluses also noted in textiles, healthcare products, construction materials, and automobiles.
- **Sectors Under Scrutiny:** The USTR has flagged India's solar modules, petrochemicals, steel, textiles, electronics, and garments. India's solar module manufacturing capacity is nearly three times its domestic demand, raising export-driven surplus concerns.
- **Forced Labour Risk for India:** India prohibits forced labour under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, but Indian exporters — especially in solar panels, electronics, and garments — rely on Chinese intermediate inputs that may be linked to forced labour in China's Xinjiang region.

- **China Supply Chain Risk:** Xinjiang produces about 20% of the world's cotton and polysilicon used in solar panels. Chinese-origin inputs used in Indian exports to the US could draw scrutiny under the forced labour probe.
- **Trade Deal Impact:** The investigation comes amid ongoing India-US trade deal negotiations. India has indicated talks will resume once there is clarity on US tariff policies.

## APPOINTMENTS

### RM Nachammai Becomes First Woman Chief Of Operational Nuclear Plant

**In the News:** RM Nachammai has created history by becoming the first woman to head the operations of a functional nuclear power plant in India under the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL). Announced close to International Women's Day 2026, she has been appointed Chief Superintendent of Kaiga Generating Station Units 3 and 4 in Karnataka, with the role taking effect from March 15, 2026. Her appointment is a landmark for gender inclusion in India's highly specialised nuclear energy sector.

#### Key Points:

- **Historic First:** RM Nachammai became the first woman Chief Superintendent overseeing the operations of a functional nuclear power plant in India under NPCIL — a landmark in the history of India's nuclear programme.
- **Role & Responsibilities:** As Chief Superintendent of Kaiga Generating Station Units 3 and 4 (Karnataka), she oversees the Operations, Maintenance, and Engineering Support divisions of the nuclear reactor complex. The role involves round-the-clock monitoring of reactor operations, safety systems, and plant performance — one of the most technically demanding leadership positions in India's nuclear sector.
- **Effective Date:** March 15, 2026 — announced in close proximity to International Women's Day (March 8, 2026).
- **Academic Background:** Graduate in Electrical and Electronics Engineering from the University of Madras (1990), where she secured a University rank. Joined NPCIL in 1991.
- **Early Recognition — Vikram Sarabhai Award:** She topped the second batch of NPCIL's engineer trainees and was awarded the prestigious Vikram Sarabhai Award, signalling her exceptional technical promise from the start of her career.
- **35+ Years of Experience:** Nachammai has over 35 years of experience across nuclear power plant operations, maintenance, and engineering. She has served at the Madras Atomic Power Station and at Kaiga Generating Station Units 1 and 2.
- **Awards & Recognition:** Received the NPCIL Special Contribution Award in 2010, 2014, and 2017 — reflecting sustained and consistent contributions rather than a single isolated achievement.
- **International & National Outreach:** She has made presentations at national-level forums on nuclear power safety, participated in public awareness programmes, and represented NPCIL in multiple international programmes, projecting India's nuclear safety culture globally.
- **About Kaiga Generating Station:** Located in Karnataka, Kaiga operates four 220 MWe Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) with a total installed capacity of 880 MW. Units 5 and 6 are under development, which will raise the total capacity to 2,280 MW.

## SCIENCE AND TECH

### Iron Dome vs US THAAD vs Iran Bavar-373: Air Defense System Comparison

**In the News:** Amid escalating tensions in the Middle East, air defense systems such as Israel's Iron Dome, the US THAAD, and Iran's Bavar-373 have come under renewed global focus as nations assess their missile defense capabilities in modern warfare.

**Key Points:**

- **Iron Dome (Israel):** Developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and operational since 2011, it is a short-range air defense system designed to intercept rockets, artillery shells, and drones using the Tamir interceptor missile, with a range of ~70 km, interception altitude of ~10 km, and a reported success rate of over 90%.
- **THAAD — Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (USA):** Developed by Lockheed Martin and operational since 2008, THAAD is a high-altitude ballistic missile defense system with an engagement range of ~200 km and interception altitude of up to 150 km. It uses hit-to-kill kinetic technology (no explosives — destroys missiles through direct collision at over Mach 8) and is deployed in the USA, South Korea, and the UAE.
- **Bavar-373 (Iran):** Developed indigenously by Iran's Defense Ministry and operational since 2019, it is a long-range surface-to-air missile system using the Sayyad-4 interceptor, with an engagement range of ~200 km, interception altitude of ~27–32 km, and radar detection range of ~300 km. It was developed as an alternative to Russia's S-300 system.
- **Purpose — Key Difference:** Iron Dome is designed for short-range rocket and artillery threats; THAAD is built to destroy ballistic missiles at high altitude; and Bavar-373 is designed to counter aircraft, drones, cruise missiles, and some ballistic missiles.
- **Interception Layer — Key Difference:** Iron Dome operates at low altitude and short range; THAAD provides high-altitude defense capable of intercepting missiles outside the atmosphere; and Bavar-373 covers medium-to-long-range air defense.
- **Technology — Key Difference:** Iron Dome uses explosive interceptor missiles; THAAD employs kinetic hit-to-kill technology; and Bavar-373 uses radar-guided surface-to-air missiles.

**ISRO Carries Out Successful Ground Test of CE20 Cryogenic Engine**

**In the News:** The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully conducted a sea-level hot test of its CE20 cryogenic engine at the ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri, Tamil Nadu. The engine operated for 165 seconds and generated approximately 22 tonnes of thrust, demonstrating higher thrust capability aimed at enhancing the payload performance of India's LVM3 heavy-lift rocket.

**Key Points:**

- **Successful Test:** ISRO conducted a successful sea-level hot test of the CE20 cryogenic engine on 10 March 2026 at the ISRO Propulsion Complex (IPRC), Mahendragiri, Tamil Nadu.
- **Test Parameters:** The engine operated continuously for 165 seconds and generated approximately 22 tonnes of thrust during the test.
- **Higher Thrust Capability:** The test demonstrated enhanced thrust capability compared to earlier configurations, validating improved engine performance.
- **About CE20 Engine:** CE20 is an indigenously developed cryogenic engine by ISRO that uses liquid hydrogen (LH<sub>2</sub>) as fuel and liquid oxygen (LOX) as oxidiser.
- **Role in LVM3:** The CE20 engine powers the upper (cryogenic) stage of India's heaviest operational rocket, the LVM3 (Launch Vehicle Mark 3), formerly known as GSLV Mk III.
- **Human-Rated Engine:** The CE20 engine has been human-rated, meaning it meets the stringent safety and reliability standards required for carrying astronauts — critical for the Gaganyaan mission.
- **Gaganyaan Mission:** Gaganyaan is India's first crewed spaceflight programme; LVM3 with the CE20 upper stage is the designated launch vehicle for sending Indian astronauts to space.
- **Enhanced Payload Capacity:** Higher thrust from the CE20 directly improves LVM3's ability to carry heavier satellites and payloads to orbit, reducing dependence on foreign launchers.

## IMPORTANT DAYS

### International Mathematics Day 2026 Theme: Mathematics and Hope

**In the News:** International Mathematics Day is observed globally under the theme "Mathematics and Hope." Proclaimed by UNESCO and coordinated by the International Mathematical Union (IMU), the day has been celebrated since 2020 through competitions, exhibitions, and public events that highlight the role of mathematics in solving real-world challenges.

#### Key Points:

- **Day & Date:** International Mathematics Day is observed every year on 14 March, coinciding with Pi Day (3.14).
- **Proclamation:** The day was proclaimed by UNESCO and has been globally celebrated since 2020.
- **Coordination:** It is coordinated by the International Mathematical Union (IMU) with support from UNESCO and partner institutions.
- **Celebrations:** Schools, universities, and scientific organisations mark the day through competitions, creative activities, exhibitions, and public events.
- **Purpose:** The day raises awareness about the importance of mathematics in engineering, data science, finance, medicine, and technology.
- **Student Outreach:** It encourages students to view mathematics as a powerful tool for solving real-world problems, not just a theoretical subject.
- **Theme 2026:** "Mathematics and Hope" reflects the idea that mathematics is a universal human achievement that connects cultures and transcends language and geography.
- **Global Challenges:** The theme highlights mathematics as a tool to address climate change, disease modelling, and technological innovation.
- **Mathematical Thinking:** The theme emphasises how logical reasoning and collaboration can inspire optimism and solutions to complex global problems.

## ENVIRONMENT

### India's Cheetah Population Reaches 53 After Jwala's Five Cubs at Kuno National Park

**In the New:** Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav announced that India's cheetah population has reached 53 individuals after Namibian cheetah Jwala gave birth to five cubs at Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh. This is the 10th successful cheetah litter in India, raising the total number of Indian-born cheetah cubs to 33. The Minister called it a "historic and heart-warming moment" for India's wildlife conservation journey.

#### Key Points

- **Cheetah Population Milestone:** India's cheetah population has crossed 53, including adult cheetahs relocated from Africa and cubs born in India under Project Cheetah.
- **About Jwala:** Jwala is a Namibian cheetah residing at Kuno National Park. With this litter, she becomes a successful third-time mother, indicating that habitat conditions at Kuno are increasingly suitable for breeding.
- **10th Successful Litter:** Jwala's five cubs represent the 10th successful cheetah litter born on Indian soil since the launch of Project Cheetah, with Indian-born cubs now totalling 33.
- **Other Recent Births:** Cheetah Gamini (originally from South Africa) also recently gave birth to four cubs — her second successful litter since arriving in India.



- **New Cheetahs from Botswana:** On February 28, 2026, India received 9 cheetahs from Botswana (6 females, 3 males), placed in quarantine enclosures at Kuno National Park for health monitoring and acclimatisation before gradual release.
- **About Project Cheetah:** Launched to restore cheetahs to India's grassland ecosystems after the species was declared extinct in India in 1952. Cheetahs were first relocated from Namibia and later from South Africa to Kuno National Park to rebuild a viable population.
- **Role of Kuno National Park:** Located in Madhya Pradesh, Kuno is the central hub for cheetah conservation in India. It offers large grassland ecosystems suitable for hunting, reproduction, and adaptation. Monitoring is carried out through radio collars and field observation by wildlife biologists, veterinarians, and forest departments.

### **Nagauri Paan Methi Registered as Community Farmers' Variety**

**In the News:** The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA) has officially registered "Nagauri Paan Methi" as a Community Farmers' Variety, as announced in the February 2026 issue of the Plant Variety Journal. The registration grants statutory ownership and legal protection to the farming community of Nagaur district, Rajasthan, recognising generations of farmers who have conserved and developed this unique crop in the region's arid agro-ecology.

#### **Key Points**

- **About Nagauri Paan Methi:** Scientifically known as *Trigonella corniculata* L., it is a traditional fenugreek variety native to the arid agro-ecology of Nagaur district, Rajasthan. It was earlier misidentified as "Kasuri Methi" — registration restores its authentic identity in domestic and global markets.
- **Registration under PPV&FR Act:** Registered under the PPV&FR Act, 2001. The farming community of Nagaur district is the legal custodian. Application was represented by Geeta Devi, a woman farmer and Pradhan of Panchayat Samiti, Mundwa, formally acknowledging collective innovation and conservation by local farmers.
- **About PPVFRA:** Operates under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. It protects the rights of plant breeders and farmers in India under the PPV&FR Act, 2001.
- **Protection from Biopiracy & Seed Exploitation:** Protects against biopiracy and unauthorised commercial use. Safeguards farmers from spurious/substandard seeds. Community becomes eligible for benefit-sharing if the variety's genetic resources are used in research or commercial products.
- **Women Farmers & Community Rights:** 2026 is the International Year of Women Farmers (declared by FAO). Registration highlights the role of women farmers in conserving traditional varieties and empowers rural communities involved in seed preservation.
- **GI Tag & Export Opportunities:** Registration paves the way for future Geographical Indication (GI) tagging, which could enhance market identity and secure premium prices. Already included in Schedule-I of the Spices Board of India, with support from DBT Biotech Kisan Hub and NABARD's AEFC programme.

### **Black rain in Tehran explained: How Israeli strikes triggered a toxic fallout**

**In the News:** On the night of March 7–8, 2026, Israeli strikes targeted four oil storage facilities and an oil production transfer centre in Tehran and the Alborz province, triggering massive fires. The resulting toxic smoke, laden with hydrocarbons, sulfur, and nitrogen oxides, mixed with rainfall to produce 'black rain' — oily, soot-laden droplets that fell across the city and beyond, raising serious health and environmental alarms. The WHO has warned of real dangers to respiratory health, while scientists caution that contamination from 'forever chemicals' could persist indefinitely.

#### **Key Points:**

- **What is Black Rain?** Black rain forms when rain passes through smoke and pollutant-saturated air and absorbs toxic particles. After the Israeli strikes ignited major fires at oil depots — including the Aghdasieh oil warehouse, Shahrān

oil depot, and Tehran refinery — rain moved through this contaminated atmosphere and fell as oily, blackened precipitation, coating cars, clothes, and skin dozens of miles from the strike sites.

- **Toxic Compounds Released:** The Iranian Red Crescent confirmed that the explosions released significant quantities of toxic hydrocarbon compounds, sulfur oxides, and nitrogen oxides into the atmosphere. These combined with rainfall to create both black rain and acid rain over Tehran.
- **WHO Warning:** The World Health Organization (WHO) officially warned that the black rain and acidic rain falling over Tehran 'is indeed a danger' for the population, primarily to respiratory health. WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier backed Iran's advisory urging residents to remain indoors.
- **Health Risks:** Inhaling or touching the smoke or particles can cause headaches, skin and eye irritation, and breathing difficulties. The Iranian Red Crescent warned of serious lung damage and chemical burns. Senior scientist Peter Ross (Raincoast Conservation Foundation, Canada) highlighted that petroleum mixtures contain thousands of hydrocarbons, including benzene — extremely toxic substances with severe long-term health consequences, including increased cancer risk.
- **Tehran's Geographic Vulnerability:** Doug Weir (Conflict and Environment Observatory, UK) noted that Tehran is surrounded by mountains, causing pollutants to be pushed downward and inward. Combined with the city's dense urban layout, air circulation is poor — making the pollution impact far worse than in open cities.

### Gujarat Launches 'Lake and Air Watch' Initiative to Monitor AQI and Lake Health

**In the News:** The Gujarat state government launched the 'Lake and Air Watch' initiative to monitor and improve air quality and lake health across urban areas. Implemented by the Gujarat Urban Development Mission (GUDM) under the Urban Development and Urban Housing Department, the project will install air quality monitoring systems in 17 municipal corporations and 152 municipal areas to provide real-time Air Quality Index (AQI) data, while using satellite technology to monitor urban lake health.

#### Key Points:

- **Initiative Launch:** Gujarat launched the 'Lake and Air Watch' initiative to tackle environmental degradation caused by rapid urbanisation. The project is implemented by the Gujarat Urban Development Mission (GUDM) under Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel's leadership, aligned with PM Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat' and building sustainable, future-ready cities.
- **Objective:** The initiative addresses environmental problems caused by rapid urbanisation — including declining water quality in lakes, reduced groundwater recharge, and worsening air pollution. It integrates monitoring systems across multiple government departments to enable early identification of issues and timely remedial action.
- **Real-Time Air Quality Monitoring:** Air quality monitoring stations will be installed in 17 municipal corporations and 152 municipal areas, providing continuous real-time AQI data. If AQI levels exceed safe limits, the system will automatically generate alerts so that concerned departments can take immediate curative measures.
- **Satellite-Based Lake Monitoring:** Satellite technology will be used to analyse urban lake health — including lake area, waste presence, pollution levels, siltation and algae growth. Based on this data, timely alerts will be issued to enable prompt conservation action and address common issues like water pollution and declining water quality.
- **Integrated Digital Platform:** GUDM will develop a centralised, integrated digital dashboard to consolidate real-time data on lake health and air quality at the state level. The platform will provide maps, trend analysis, alerts and operational status to ensure better inter-departmental coordination. Data will also be shared transparently with citizens for public awareness.
- **Budget and Implementation:** The initiative has an estimated budget provision of ₹10 crore. GUDM will oversee the project and coordinate across departments to strengthen environmental protection and promote sustainable urban development across Gujarat's cities and towns.

## SPORTS

### India Defeat New Zealand, Clinch T20 World Cup 2026 Title

**In the News:** India defeated New Zealand by 96 runs in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 Final on March 8, 2026, at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, in front of 86,824 fans. India posted 255/5 — the highest total ever in a T20 World Cup final — and bowled New Zealand out for 159 in 19 overs. India became the first team to win three T20 World Cup titles (2007, 2024, 2026), the first to successfully defend the title, and the first to win the tournament on home soil.

#### Key Points:

- **Historic Win:** India won the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 on March 8, 2026, defeating New Zealand by 96 runs in the final at the Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad — becoming the first team to win three T20 World Cup titles (2007, 2024, 2026).
- **India's Batting — 255/5:** Sanju Samson scored a blazing 89 off 46 balls (5 fours, 8 sixes). Abhishek Sharma contributed 52 off 21 balls, and Ishan Kishan hit 54 off 25 balls. Samson and Abhishek put on a 98-run opening stand in just 7.1 overs. Shivam Dube finished with an unbeaten 26 off 8 balls, including 24 runs in the final over. India's 255/5 was the highest total ever scored in a T20 World Cup final.
- **New Zealand's Innings:** Tim Seifert top-scored with 52 off 26 balls, but his dismissal in the 9th over effectively ended New Zealand's hopes. Mitchell Santner hit 43 but it was too little too late as NZ were bowled out for 159 in 19 overs — losing by 96 runs.
- **India Captain — Suryakumar Yadav:** Became the fourth Indian captain to lead the country to a men's cricket World Cup title. He has not lost a single bilateral series since taking charge in July 2024 — a win percentage of 80.77%, the highest among all T20I captains (minimum 20 matches).
- **Jasprit Bumrah — National Treasure:** With 4 wickets in the final, Bumrah surpassed Lasith Malinga to become the leading wicket-taker among pace bowlers in T20 World Cup history with 40 wickets. Named Player of the Match in the final.
- **Sanju Samson — Player of the Tournament:** Samson was the standout batter of the tournament with 321 runs, capping it with his match-winning 89 in the final. He had also scored 97\* and 89 in the two previous innings. Became only the third Indian to win the Fourth Player of the Tournament award at a T20 World Cup (after Virat Kohli in 2014, 2016 and Jasprit Bumrah in 2024).
- **Venue Significance:** The Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad — the same venue where India lost the 2023 ODI World Cup final to Australia — became the site of India's redemption and historic T20 title win, witnessed by 86,824 fans.
- **India's T20 World Cup Titles:** 2007 (South Africa), 2024 (West Indies & USA), 2026 (India — home). New Zealand have now lost two T20 World Cup finals (2021 to Australia, 2026 to India). England and West Indies have each won two T20 World Cups.

### India-New Zealand Plan Major Sports Partnership as 100 Years of Sporting Ties Approach

**In the News:** Union Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya chaired a high-level meeting in New Delhi with New Zealand's sports delegation led by Chris Bishop (Associate Minister for Sport and Recreation). The meeting focused on expanding bilateral sports cooperation as 2026 marks 100 years of India–New Zealand sporting ties and launching the India–New Zealand Centenary Sports Cooperation Programme 2026.

#### Key Points:

- **Historical Background:** Sporting ties began in 1926 when the Indian Army hockey team toured New Zealand — one of the earliest sporting exchanges between the two nations. 2026 marks the centenary (100 years) of this milestone.
- **Delegations:** India: Shri Hari Ranjan Rao (Secretary, Sports), officials from Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, SAI, Indian Olympic Association, and national sports federations. New Zealand: Chris Bishop, Patrick John Rata (NZ High



Commissioner), Ross Taylor (former cricketer), Raelene Castle (CEO, Sport New Zealand), and representatives from Hockey NZ, Athletics NZ, and Paralympics NZ.

- **Centenary Sports Cooperation Programme 2026:** A year-long initiative to commemorate 100 years of sporting ties, focusing on sports development, high-performance training, innovation, and people-to-people engagement.
- **Priority Sports:** Rugby, Rowing, Canoeing, Sailing, Athletics, and Cycling — chosen for New Zealand's expertise and India's growing interest in these disciplines.
- **Sports & Culture Week:** Proposed India–New Zealand Sports and Culture Week to be hosted across cities in both countries, celebrating indigenous sporting traditions and cultural heritage.
- **High-Performance Collaboration:** Joint training camps, coaching exchanges, and knowledge sharing in sports science, analytics, and athlete performance systems. New Zealand's coach development framework may be integrated into NIS Patiala's curriculum.
- **Joint Working Group:** Both countries agreed to form a Joint Working Group to oversee implementation, nominate nodal officers, and establish a monitoring mechanism with periodic reviews.

### ICC Women's ODI Rankings: Smriti Mandhana Retains No.1 Spot, Jemimah Rodrigues Slips to 12<sup>th</sup>

**In the News:** In the latest ICC Women's ODI batting rankings update (March 2026), Indian opener Smriti Mandhana retained the No. 1 position, continuing her dominance as the world's top batter in the format. Meanwhile, Jemimah Rodrigues slipped to 12th place following India's 0–3 ODI series defeat against Australia. New Zealand players, led by captain Amelia Kerr's record-breaking bowling performance, made significant gains in the rankings.

#### Key Points:

- **Smriti Mandhana – No. 1 ODI Batter:** Retained the top position in ICC Women's ODI batting rankings. Remains the highest-ranked Indian in the list, praised for consistent stroke play and match-anchoring ability at the top of the order.
- **Harmanpreet Kaur – 8th Position:** India's captain remained unchanged at 8th place in ODI batting rankings, maintaining her standing among the top-10 batters globally.
- **Jemimah Rodrigues – Slips to 12th:** Dropped one place to 12th position following India's 0–3 ODI series defeat against Australia. Known for her aggressive batting and middle-over acceleration, the poor series result impacted her ranking points.
- **Amelia Kerr (New Zealand) – Outstanding All-Round Performance:** New Zealand captain delivered a stellar showing against Zimbabwe — took 4 wickets in the 1st ODI and a 7-wicket haul in the 2nd ODI in Dunedin, becoming only the **7th player in women's ODI history** to take 7+ wickets in a single match. Climbed 5 places to 11th in ODI bowling rankings and moved up to 5th in ODI all-rounders rankings.
- **Brooke Halliday (New Zealand) – Surges to 11th:** Jumped 8 places to 11th in ODI batting rankings after smashing a brilliant 157 off 117 balls in the 1st ODI against Zimbabwe.
- **Maddy Green (New Zealand) – Rises to Joint 22nd:** Moved up 4 spots to joint 22nd, scoring 67 runs in the 1st ODI and an unbeaten 27 in the 2nd match. New Zealand took a 2–0 lead in the three-match ODI series.
- **Women's T20I Rankings Update:** Changes were recorded following Sri Lanka's series win over West Indies. The rankings update comes ahead of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in England and Wales later in 2026.

### Iran Pulls Out of FIFA World Cup 2026 Amid Geopolitical Tensions

**In the News:** Iran officially withdrew from the FIFA World Cup 2026, hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali confirmed the decision amid escalating geopolitical tensions between Iran, the United States, and Israel, sparking global debate about politics influencing international football tournaments.

**Key Points:**

- **Official Withdrawal Confirmed:** Iran's Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali officially announced that the Iranian national team will not participate in the FIFA World Cup 2026, citing ongoing conflict and rising tensions with the United States and Israel as the primary reasons for the decision.
- **Group G Impact:** Iran had already qualified for the World Cup and was placed in Group G alongside Belgium, Egypt, and New Zealand. All of Iran's group stage matches were scheduled in Los Angeles and Seattle. FIFA must now decide how to manage the vacant spot in the group.
- **Football Federation's Prior Doubts:** Before the official announcement, FFIRI President Mehdi Taj had already expressed serious reservations about participation, stating that recent attacks on Iran had made it extremely difficult for the country to look forward to the tournament.
- **Trump's Comments:** US President Donald Trump posted on Truth Social that while the Iranian soccer team was welcome at the World Cup, he did not believe it was appropriate for them to attend "for their own life and safety." He later clarified that any threat would not come from the United States, calling it the greatest and safest sporting event in American history.
- **Iran's Response to Trump:** The Iranian Football Association (FFIRI) hit back at Trump's remarks, demanding that the United States be stripped of hosting rights, arguing it could not guarantee the safety of participating teams. FFIRI stated that no individual or country — only FIFA — governs the World Cup.
- **FIFA's Stance:** FIFA President Gianni Infantino had previously welcomed Iran's participation and had discussed the matter with President Trump during World Cup preparations. However, FIFA has not officially clarified who will replace Iran in the tournament, nor has it responded to Trump's comments.
- **Historic First:** Iran's withdrawal is set to be the first of its kind in modern football history, underscoring the unprecedented intersection of geopolitics and international sport at the 2026 World Cup.

