

Weekly Current Affairs 9th August to 15th August 2026

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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

In first month of VB-G RAM G, almost 50% year-on-year dip in rural jobs

In the News: Employment generation under the newly implemented Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin), or VB-G RAM G, declined sharply in its first full month. In July 2026, the programme generated 7.67 crore person-days, nearly **49.94% lower** than the 15.33 crore person-days generated under MGNREGS in July 2025. The new framework came into force nationwide on 1 July 2026.

Key Points:

- **What is VB-G RAM G?** The VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 replaced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act framework from July 1, 2026. It represents a major restructuring of India's statutory rural wage-employment system.
- **Employment decline:** Official data showed 7.67 crore person-days of employment in July 2026, compared with 15.33 crore person-days in July 2025. A *person-day* means one person receiving employment for one working day.
- **Enhanced employment guarantee:** The new framework provides up to 125 days of wage employment per financial year to eligible rural households whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work.
- **Budgetary importance:** The programme has received a substantial central allocation for FY 2026-27, underlining the continued importance of rural employment support in India's social-sector policy.

Supreme Court collegium recommends elevation of four judges as Chief Justices of different HCs

In the News: The Supreme Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India Justice Surya Kant, recommended four judges for appointment as Chief Justices of the Patna, Calcutta, Bombay, and Punjab & Haryana High Courts. The recommendations were made at the Collegium's meeting on 6 August 2026.

Key Points:

- **Four recommendations:** Justice V. Kameswar Rao was recommended for the Patna High Court, while Justice Ravindra V. Ghuge was recommended for the Calcutta High Court.
- **Other recommendations:** Justice Mahesh Chandra Tripathi was recommended as Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court, while Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra was recommended for the Punjab & Haryana High Court.
- **Constitutional provision:** Appointment of High Court judges is governed by Article 217 of the Constitution. The formal appointment is made by the President of India.
- **Collegium system:** The collegium system evolved mainly through the Second Judges Case, 1993 and the Third Judges Case, 1998, giving the higher judiciary a central role in judicial appointments.

What is Prakriti Gyan Dham? CSIR-NBRI's First Eco-Educational Hub Inaugurated

In the News: Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh dedicated Prakriti Gyan Dham, a first-of-its-kind eco-educational hub developed by the CSIR-National Botanical Research Institute (CSIR-NBRI). It is located at the Maharishi Parashar Bioresource Centre, Banthra, Lucknow, and combines botanical science, conservation, heritage and public education.

Key Points:

- **Purpose of the Hub:** Prakriti Gyan Dham has been designed as a living repository of India's botanical and cultural heritage. It combines scientific research, environmental education, biodiversity conservation and experiential learning for students, researchers and the general public.
- **PAaVan Path:** A major feature is the PAaVan Path, short for Plants and Associated Vegetations for Appreciating Nature. The interpretive heritage trail showcases curated plant collections representing different ecological regions and vegetation types.

- **Indian Heritage Garden:** The garden contains propagated trees linked with historically important places, including the Bawan Imli Tamarind Tree, Mother Dussehri Mango, Patalpuri Banyan and descendants of trees associated with the Dandi March. QR-enabled audio systems provide botanical and historical information.
- **Plant Conservation:** The Vibhav Enclave focuses on rare, endangered and threatened plants, while the Bhairav Enclave showcases officially designated State Plants of Indian States and Union Territories. These sections highlight biodiversity conservation and plant genetic resources.
- **Bamboosteum:** Another attraction is the Bamboosteum, which houses 43 indigenous and exotic bamboo species. It demonstrates bamboo's significance for carbon sequestration, soil conservation, ecological restoration, green infrastructure and sustainable livelihoods.

E-Samudra Launched as India Accelerates Digital Transformation of Maritime Governance

In the News: Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal launched E-Samudra on 8 August 2026 in Mumbai. The platform seeks to bring services for seafarers, shipping companies, ports and other maritime stakeholders under a comprehensive single digital window.

Key Points:

- **Single-Window Platform:** E-Samudra provides end-to-end digital workflows, online payments, real-time application tracking and digitally issued certificates. It is intended to shift maritime administration towards Digital First and Faceless Governance.
- **Implementing Authority:** The launch programme was organised by the Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA) under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. The initiative focuses particularly on seafarer welfare, safety and service delivery.
- **Associated Digital Initiatives:** The government also highlighted e-NAVIK, a 24×7 grievance-redressal system, the upcoming Seafarer Tracking Dashboard and the Digital Seafarers Employment Agreement (d-SEA). These aim to improve transparency and welfare protection.
- **Merchant Shipping Act Link:** India's maritime-policy framework includes the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, which recognises seafarers as Key Workers, alongside the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 and the principle of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.
- **India's Seafarer Strength:** India's active seafarer workforce increased from about 1.03 lakh in 2013 to over 3.23 lakh in 2025. The government states that India has emerged as the world's second-largest supplier of seafarers.

V.O.C. Port Becomes India's First Scope-2 Emission-Free Major Port

In the News: The V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority (VOCPA) at Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, has been recognised as India's first major port to achieve Scope-2 emission-free operations. The achievement marks an important milestone in India's green-port and maritime decarbonisation strategy.

Key Points:

- **What are Scope-2 Emissions?** Under the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, Scope-2 covers indirect emissions resulting from purchased or acquired electricity, steam, heat and cooling consumed by an organisation. It differs from Scope-1, which relates to direct emissions from sources controlled by the organisation.
- **Renewable-Energy Achievement:** During Q4 of FY 2025-26, renewable-energy generation at VOC Port exceeded its total electricity consumption, enabling Scope-2 emission-free operations.
- **Renewable Share:** During FY 2025-26, 93.89% of the port's electricity consumption was reportedly met through renewable-energy sources. Its renewable infrastructure includes rooftop and ground-mounted solar plants as well as wind-energy capacity.
- **Green Port Initiatives:** VOC Port has developed a Green Hydrogen Hub and commissioned India's first green-hydrogen pilot project at a major port. It is also developing larger green-hydrogen production and green-methanol bunkering facilities.

- **Broader Decarbonisation:** The port has reported a substantial decline in net carbon emissions and carbon intensity per tonne of cargo. These measures position VOCPA as an important example of India's green maritime transition.

18 injured, 4 critical: How latest clash highlights Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border

In the News: At least 18 Assamese villagers were reported injured, four critically, following firing during a confrontation at Mingmang Basti in Assam's Dhemaji district, along the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border. Initial reports linked the clash to allegations of land encroachment.

Key Points:

- **Border Dispute:** Assam and Arunachal Pradesh share a boundary of roughly 800 km. The dispute has historical roots in boundary changes involving the former North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and Assam during the 1950s.
- **Historical Background:** Following recommendations of the 1951 Bordoloi sub-committee, around 3,648 sq km of plain areas in the Balipara and Sadiya foothills were transferred from NEFA to Assam. Arunachal Pradesh later disputed parts of this transfer.
- **Namsai Declaration, 2022:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu signed the Namsai Declaration on 15 July 2022. Of the 123 villages forming the core of the dispute, differences concerning 37 were resolved in principle.
- **2023 Border MoU:** On 20 April 2023, the two states signed an MoU that resolved disputes involving another 34 villages. Thus, an understanding was reached concerning 71 of the original 123 disputed villages.
- **Regional Committees:** Twelve regional committees were constituted to examine disputed areas using factors such as historical perspective, administrative convenience, geographical contiguity and people's will. The latest clash highlights the importance of completing local-level boundary demarcation.

Independence Day 2026 Theme: Yuva Shakti, Meaning, Significance and Key Highlights

In the News: India will celebrate its **80th Independence Day on 15 August 2026**. The national celebrations at the Red Fort will highlight **"150 Years of Vande Mataram"** and **"Yuva Shakti for Viksit Bharat@2047."** The programme places youth participation, innovation and achievement at the centre of India's development vision.

Key Points:

- **Theme and Meaning:** "Yuva Shakti" means **youth power** and highlights the contribution of young Indians to nation-building. It connects youth-led innovation, entrepreneurship, science, skills and public participation with India's goal of becoming a developed country by 2047.
- **Focus on Young Achievers:** **19 medal-winning students** from the 2026 International Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematical Olympiads have been invited to the Red Fort ceremony. Their presence highlights India's growing achievements in science and education.
- **Special Guests:** Around **5,000 special guests** have been invited, including young innovators, PM Internship Scheme interns, startup representatives, PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana trainees and MY Bharat volunteers.
- **Viksit Bharat@2047:** The year **2047 will mark 100 years of India's Independence**. The theme underlines the role of India's young population in achieving economic growth, technological advancement and social transformation by the centenary year.
- **Other Highlights:** NCC cadets and MY Bharat volunteers will participate prominently in the celebrations. Military and security-force bands are also scheduled to perform at hundreds of locations across the country.

Parliament Passes Bankers' Book Evidence Bill 2026

In the News: Parliament has passed the Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026, which seeks to replace the colonial-era Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891. The legislation modernises the legal framework governing the admissibility of bank records, particularly electronic and digital records, in judicial proceedings.

Key Points:

- **Legislative Timeline:** The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 3 August 2026, passed by the Lok Sabha on 5 August, and cleared by the Rajya Sabha on 10 August 2026. It comes under the Ministry of Finance.
- **Replacement of Colonial Law:** The legislation replaces the Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891, which is more than 130 years old. The earlier law allowed certified copies of banking records to be used as evidence without producing original books.
- **Electronic Records:** The Bill explicitly recognises electronic and digital bank records as valid evidence. It also provides safeguards to establish the authenticity and integrity of electronically maintained records.
- **Protection for Bank Officers:** Bank officers generally cannot be compelled to produce original bankers' books or appear as witnesses when the bank is not a party to a case. Courts may make exceptions in situations involving a specified special cause.
- **Broader Financial Coverage:** The Central Government may extend provisions of the law to other entities operating in the financial sector. This makes the legislation adaptable to India's increasingly digital financial ecosystem.

Independence Day 2026: Vande Mataram to Be Sung from Red Fort for First Time

In the News: For the first time, the National Song "Vande Mataram" will be sung from the ramparts of the Red Fort during the Independence Day celebrations on 15 August 2026. The event forms part of the nationwide commemoration of 150 years of Vande Mataram.

Key Points:

- **Historic Performance:** Vande Mataram will be performed as part of the official Independence Day programme at the Red Fort. Its inclusion marks a significant ceremonial addition to the national celebration.
- **150-Year Milestone:** Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay composed Vande Mataram, which was first published in *Bangadarshan* in 1875. It was later included in his famous novel *Anandamath*, published in book form in 1882.
- **Freedom Movement Connection:** Rabindranath Tagore sang Vande Mataram at the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta. The song later became an important patriotic expression during India's freedom struggle.
- **Status as National Song:** On 24 January 1950, Constituent Assembly President Dr Rajendra Prasad stated that Vande Mataram would be accorded honour alongside the National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana.
- **Ceremonial Highlights:** NCC cadets and MY Bharat volunteers will participate in formations connected with Vande Mataram. The programme also includes aerial and ceremonial displays by the Armed Forces.

Independence Day 2026: Is It the 79th or 80th Independence Day?

In the News: India's Independence Day celebration on 15 August 2026 has generated confusion over whether it should be called the 79th or 80th Independence Day. Officially, India will celebrate its 80th Independence Day, although the country will complete 79 years of Independence.

Key Points:

- **Correct Answer:** India became independent on 15 August 1947, and that date itself was the first Independence Day. Therefore, 15 August 2026 will be the 80th Independence Day celebration.
- **Why 79 Years Is Also Correct:** From 15 August 1947 to 15 August 2026, India completes 79 full years as an independent nation. Thus, "79 years of Independence" and "80th Independence Day" refer to two different methods of counting.
- **Simple Calculation:** The ordinal Independence Day can be calculated as $2026 - 1947 + 1 = 80$. The addition of one is necessary because 1947 itself counts as the first observance.
- **Previous Year Reference:** India celebrated its 79th Independence Day in 2025, when it completed 78 years since Independence. This helps explain the numbering for 2026.

Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel Shruti Launched

In the News: The Indian Navy's Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel (NGOPV), Yard 3037, named "Shruti," was launched at Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata, on 11 August 2026. The launch is part of India's ongoing programme to strengthen indigenous naval shipbuilding.

Key Points:

- **Launch Details:** Shruti was launched at GRSE in Kolkata in the presence of senior naval and shipyard officials. GRSE is a major defence public sector shipyard engaged in building warships and other vessels for the Indian Navy.
- **NGOPV Programme:** The Ministry of Defence signed contracts in March 2023 for 11 Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels. Seven are being constructed by Goa Shipyard Limited, while four are being built by GRSE.
- **Operational Roles:** NGOPVs are designed for maritime surveillance, coastal defence, anti-piracy missions, search and rescue, protection of offshore assets and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations.
- **Meaning of Shruti:** The name “Shruti” has roots in India’s cultural and scriptural traditions. The ship’s crest includes symbolic elements reflecting India’s maritime and cultural heritage.
- **Aatmanirbhar Bharat:** The vessel is part of the Government’s Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiatives in defence manufacturing. Indigenous shipbuilding reduces dependence on imports and strengthens domestic defence-industrial capability.

Widow and Orphan Cess on Fuel Begins in Himachal Pradesh

In the News: The Himachal Pradesh Government has introduced a Widow and Orphan Cess of 60 paise per litre on petrol and high-speed diesel. The levy came into effect from 11 August 2026, with the revenue intended to support welfare measures for widows and orphaned children.

Key Points:

- **Rate of Cess:** The levy has been fixed at ₹0.60 per litre on both petrol and high-speed diesel. It is collected in addition to existing taxes applicable to fuel in Himachal Pradesh.
- **Legal Provision:** The cess has been notified under Section 6-A of the Himachal Pradesh Value Added Tax Act, 2005. The measure follows approval by the state government and amendments made to the VAT framework.
- **Maximum Permissible Rate:** The Himachal Pradesh Value Added Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026 authorised the state government to impose the cess at a rate of up to ₹5 per litre.
- **Point of Collection:** The cess will be collected at the first point of sale within Himachal Pradesh. The present rate of 60 paise per litre is significantly lower than the maximum permissible rate.
- **Social-Welfare Objective:** Revenue generated through the cess will be used for programmes benefiting widows and orphaned children. It is an example of an earmarked levy in which tax proceeds are dedicated to a specific social purpose.

Indian Navy’s ‘Shruti’ NGOPV Launched at GRSE Kolkata ICC ODI

In the News: The Indian Navy’s Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel (NGOPV) ‘Shruti’, designated Yard 3037, was launched at Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata, on 11 August 2026. The launch strengthens India’s indigenous naval shipbuilding programme and supports Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India in defence manufacturing.

Key Points:

- **Launch and Naming:** Shruti was launched by Manika Sadhu in the presence of Vice Admiral Sanjay Sadhu, Controller of Warship Production and Acquisition. The name “Shruti” draws from India’s ancient civilisational heritage and is associated with the Vedic tradition.
- **NGOPV Procurement Programme:** The Ministry of Defence signed contracts in March 2023 for 11 NGOPVs at a cost of ₹9,781 crore. Seven vessels are being built by Goa Shipyard Limited, while four are being constructed by GRSE, Kolkata.
- **Indigenous Defence Production:** The vessels are being procured under the **Buy (Indian-IDD)** category, which prioritises indigenously designed, developed and manufactured defence equipment. The programme is significant for defence indigenisation and domestic shipbuilding.
- **Operational Roles:** NGOPVs will undertake maritime surveillance, protection of offshore assets, search and rescue, anti-piracy operations and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. They will strengthen the Indian Navy’s presence in India’s maritime zones.

Tribunals Reforms Bill 2026 Passed in Parliament: National Tribunals Commission to Bring Major Changes

In the News: Parliament passed the Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026, with the Lok Sabha approving it on 10 August 2026 and the Rajya Sabha on 11 August 2026. The Bill proposes major changes in tribunal administration, principally through the establishment of a National Tribunals Commission (NTC).

Key Points:

- **National Tribunals Commission:** The proposed NTC will function as a permanent body overseeing appointments, performance review and complaints relating to tribunals. It will also maintain a National Tribunals Data Grid for improved monitoring and transparency.
- **Composition of NTC:** The Commission will have a Chairperson who has been a Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court, along with two Judicial Members and two Technical Members. Technical Members must possess substantial professional experience.
- **Appointment and Tenure:** Members of the NTC will hold office for five years or until attaining 70 years of age, whichever is earlier. Consultation with the Chief Justice of India is envisaged for appointments to key judicial positions.
- **Tribunal Members:** Chairpersons and members of covered tribunals will generally receive a five-year tenure. The Bill also prescribes age limits and service conditions intended to bring greater uniformity to tribunal administration.
- **Constitutional Context:** Tribunal reforms have repeatedly been examined by the Supreme Court in the Madras Bar Association series of cases. Important constitutional concerns include judicial independence, separation of powers and executive influence over appointments.

Karnataka Bans Tobacco and Nicotine Products

In the News: Karnataka has imposed a one-year statewide prohibition on the manufacture, storage, transportation, distribution and sale of gutkha, pan masala and related products containing tobacco and/or nicotine. The notification was issued on 10 August 2026 in the interest of public health.

Key Points:

- **Scope of the Ban:** The restriction covers gutkha and pan masala containing tobacco or nicotine, including products sold separately in a manner that facilitates mixing by consumers. Food Safety Officers have been tasked with enforcing the prohibition across the state.
- **Legal Basis:** The order has been issued under Section 30(2)(a) of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, read with the Food Safety and Standards regulations. A State Commissioner of Food Safety can prohibit an article of food in the interest of public health for up to one year.
- **Role of FSSAI:** The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) was established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. It functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and regulates food safety standards in India.
- **Tobacco-Control Framework:** Tobacco regulation in India is also governed by the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003. It regulates issues such as advertising, sale to minors, health warnings and smoking in public places.

Delimitation in India

In the News: Delimitation has again emerged as an important constitutional and political issue amid debate over the future redistribution and expansion of Lok Sabha seats. Concerns regarding population-based representation, federal balance and the relative representation of different states have brought the issue into renewed focus.

Key Points:

- **Meaning of Delimitation:** Delimitation refers to the process of redrawing the boundaries of territorial constituencies for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. It also determines constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

- **Constitutional Provisions:** Article 82 deals with readjustment of Lok Sabha constituencies after a Census, while Article 170 contains similar provisions for State Legislative Assemblies. Article 81 deals with the composition of the Lok Sabha.
- **Delimitation Commission:** The Delimitation Commission is a statutory body constituted under an Act of Parliament. Its orders have the force of law and ordinarily cannot be challenged before a court once they come into effect.
- **Freeze on Representation:** The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 froze the readjustment of seats among states to avoid penalising states that had successfully controlled population growth. The 84th Amendment Act, 2001 extended this freeze until the first Census conducted after 2026.
- **Federal Concerns:** Southern states have expressed concern that a purely population-based redistribution may reduce their relative representation despite better performance in population control. Delimitation is therefore closely linked with federalism, representation and demographic change.

Hurun India Most Valuable Family Businesses 2026

In the News: The 2026 Barclays Private Clients Hurun India Most Valuable Family Businesses List ranked the Ambani family-led Reliance Industries as India's most valuable family business. The 300 businesses covered by the list have a combined value of about ₹138 lakh crore. Their aggregate valuation has increased significantly compared with the 2024 edition.

Key Points:

- **Ambani Family Tops the List:** The Ambani family retained the first position with a business valuation of about ₹25.83 lakh crore. Reliance Industries has diversified interests in energy, telecommunications, retail, financial services, media and consumer businesses.
- **Top Three Families:** The Birla family, associated with the Aditya Birla Group, ranked second with a valuation of around ₹8.14 lakh crore. The Jindal family, associated with JSW, stood third with a valuation of about ₹8.02 lakh crore.
- **Combined Business Value:** The 300 family businesses included in the ranking have a combined value of approximately ₹138 lakh crore. The figure highlights the substantial economic scale of family-controlled enterprises in India.
- **Growth Since 2024:** The combined value of these businesses increased by approximately ₹30 lakh crore in two years, representing growth of about 27.5%. The list covers major business groups operating across manufacturing, finance, energy, consumer goods and services.
- **About Hurun India:** Hurun India is part of the Hurun Report network and publishes research and rankings related to wealth, entrepreneurship, family businesses, start-ups and philanthropy. The 2026 list was released in association with Barclays Private Clients.

Why PM Hoists the Tricolour on Independence Day, But President Unfurls It on Republic Day

In the News: India is celebrating its 80th Independence Day on August 15, 2026, with the Prime Minister leading the national ceremony at the Red Fort in New Delhi. The occasion brings attention to the distinct symbolism associated with the national flag ceremonies on Independence Day and Republic Day. The two events commemorate different milestones in India's political and constitutional history.

Key Points:

- **Independence Day Ceremony:** On August 15, the Prime Minister hoists the National Flag at the Red Fort and addresses the nation. Independence Day commemorates India attaining freedom from British colonial rule on August 15, 1947.
- **Republic Day Ceremony:** On January 26, the President of India leads the Republic Day celebrations and unfurls the National Flag. Republic Day commemorates the Constitution of India coming into force on January 26, 1950.
- **Constitutional Significance:** The Prime Minister is the head of the elected Union government, while the President is the constitutional Head of State. Their respective ceremonial roles reflect the different historical significance of Independence Day and Republic Day.
- **Hoisting and Unfurling:** On Independence Day, the flag is raised from the lower part of the flagpole to the top. On Republic Day, the flag is already positioned at the top and is opened or unfurled during the ceremony.

- **National Flag Framework:** The display and use of the Tricolour are primarily governed by the Flag Code of India, 2002, along with the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971. The Constituent Assembly adopted the present National Flag on July 22, 1947.

Uttar Pradesh: Parichha Weir Gets ICID Heritage Recognition

In the News: The 140-year-old Parichha Weir in Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, has been selected by the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage for recognition as a World Heritage Irrigation Structure. The historic structure is situated on the Betwa River and forms an important component of the Betwa Canal System. The recognition acknowledges its engineering, historical and irrigation significance.

Key Points:

- **Location and River:** Parichha Weir is located in Jhansi district of Uttar Pradesh and has been constructed across the Betwa River. The Betwa is an important tributary of the Yamuna and flows through Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- **Historical Background:** Construction of the Parichha Weir began in 1881, while the associated canal system became operational in 1886. The project was developed to expand irrigation facilities in the drought-prone Bundelkhand region.
- **Engineering Features:** The weir is approximately 1,174 metres long and contains hundreds of steel falling shutters that help regulate water storage. It serves as the headworks of the extensive Betwa Canal System.
- **World Heritage Irrigation Structure:** The World Heritage Irrigation Structures programme is administered by the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage. It recognises historically significant irrigation and drainage structures with notable engineering and water-management value.
- **About ICID:** The International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage is an international organisation concerned with irrigation, drainage, flood management and agricultural water management. It was established in 1950 and has its headquarters in New Delhi.

FCRA Bill sent to JPC: What are Parliamentary committees and how do they work?

In the News: The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for detailed examination. The development has drawn attention to the role of parliamentary committees in scrutinising legislation and government functioning. Such committees allow detailed examination of subjects beyond regular discussions in the two Houses.

Key Points:

- **About the FCRA Amendment Bill:** The Bill proposes changes concerning foreign contributions and assets of organisations whose FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered or otherwise ceases to remain valid. It also provides a framework for dealing with such assets.
- **Parliamentary Committees:** Parliamentary committees consist of Members of Parliament who examine legislative, financial, administrative and policy matters in detail. They function under the authority of Parliament and submit reports containing observations and recommendations.
- **Types of Committees:** Parliamentary committees are broadly classified into Standing Committees and Ad hoc Committees. Standing Committees function on a continuing basis, while Ad hoc Committees are created for a particular purpose and cease after completing their assigned work.
- **Joint Parliamentary Committee:** A JPC is an ad hoc committee consisting of members from both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. It may be constituted to examine a particular Bill, policy issue or matter of significant public importance.
- **Departmentally Related Standing Committees:** Parliament has 24 Departmentally Related Standing Committees. Each consists of 31 members, with 21 from the Lok Sabha and 10 from the Rajya Sabha, and examines matters relating to specified ministries and departments.

Supreme Court Clarifies the Scope of Police Remand Under the BNSS

In the News: The Supreme Court has clarified the scope of police custody under Section 187 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023. The Court held that the permissible 15 days of police custody need not necessarily be exhausted within the first 15 days following arrest. The ruling explains an important procedural change introduced by the BNSS compared with the earlier CrPC framework.

Key Points:

- **Section 187 of BNSS:** Section 187 deals with the procedure when an investigation cannot be completed within 24 hours. A Magistrate may authorise police custody for an aggregate period not exceeding 15 days within the statutory period specified by the provision.
- **Police Custody Window:** The 15 days of police custody may be authorised in parts during the first 40 days where the maximum permissible detention is 60 days. Where the maximum detention period is 90 days, such police custody may be authorised during the first 60 days.
- **Difference from CrPC:** Under the earlier interpretation of Section 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, police custody was generally confined to the initial 15-day remand period. The BNSS expressly provides a wider time window within which the authorised police-custody period may be used.
- **Maximum Period Unchanged:** The new framework does not increase the aggregate maximum period of police custody beyond 15 days. It changes the period within which those 15 days may be authorised by a Magistrate.
- **Right to Legal Assistance:** Section 38 of the BNSS gives an arrested person the right to meet an advocate of choice during interrogation. This does not mean that the advocate has a right to remain continuously present throughout the entire interrogation.

18 Monuments Delisted from Protected Sites List

In the News: The Central Government has delisted 18 monuments from the list of centrally protected monuments after determining that they had ceased to be of national importance. The action was taken under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. The Ministry of Culture confirmed the decision in February 2026.

Key Points:

- **Legal Provision for Delisting:** Section 35 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 empowers the Central Government to declare that a monument or archaeological site has ceased to be of national importance. Such a declaration is made through a notification in the Official Gazette.
- **Distribution of the 18 Sites:** Nine of the delisted sites are located in Uttar Pradesh, three in Delhi, two each in Haryana and Rajasthan, and one each in Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The list includes Kos Minars, cemeteries, inscriptions, temple remains and Buddhist ruins.
- **Important Sites on the List:** The monuments include the Nicholson Statue complex near Kashmiri Gate, Bara Khamba Cemetery and Inchla Wali Gumti in Delhi, two Kos Minars in Haryana, and the Telia Nala Buddhist ruins in Varanasi. The government stated that no centrally protected monument was presently classified as missing.
- **Centrally Protected Monuments:** The Archaeological Survey of India, functioning under the Ministry of Culture, is responsible for the conservation and maintenance of centrally protected monuments. In February 2026, the government reported 3,686 centrally protected monuments and archaeological sites under ASI care.

Sprite Tejas Express Becomes India's First Brand-Named Train

In the News: The Lucknow-New Delhi Tejas Express is set to operate under the commercial name "Sprite Tejas Express", making it India's first passenger train to be officially associated with a corporate brand name. The branding is scheduled to begin on August 19, 2026. The train is operated by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation.

Key Points:

- **First Brand-Named Train:** Sprite, a beverage brand of Coca-Cola India, has received branding and advertising rights for the IRCTC-operated Tejas Express. Train numbers 82501 and 82502 are to be announced as the “Sprite Tejas Express” at originating and intermediate stations during the notified branding period.
- **Lucknow-New Delhi Tejas Express:** The service covers about 512 km between Lucknow and New Delhi in approximately 6 hours and 35 minutes. It operates six days a week, except Tuesdays, and has scheduled stops including Kanpur Central, Tundla Junction and Ghaziabad.
- **Role of IRCTC:** Although popularly described as India’s first “private” or corporate train, the service continues to operate on Indian Railways infrastructure. IRCTC manages passenger-facing operations and pays charges to Indian Railways for the use of tracks, stations and related railway infrastructure.
- **Commercial Branding Model:** The arrangement extends railway advertising beyond conventional posters and exterior advertisements by incorporating the sponsor into the train’s announced name. Sprite branding will also appear on selected coaches, creating an additional non-fare revenue channel without changing the underlying ownership of railway infrastructure.

India at 80: How Far Have We Come Since 1947? 10 Numbers That Tell the Story

In the News: India observed its 80th Independence Day on 15 August 2026, marking 79 completed years since Independence in 1947. A comparison of major economic and social indicators highlights the scale of change in output, trade, health, literacy, electricity, digital connectivity and manufacturing. Some historical and present-day figures use different statistical bases, so they indicate scale rather than exact like-for-like growth.

Key Points:

- **Economic Expansion:** India’s first official post-Independence national income estimate was ₹8,710 crore at 1948-49 prices. By 2025, the World Bank placed India’s GDP at about \$3.96 trillion, while GDP per capita stood at about \$2,702.5 at current prices.
- **Foreign Exchange and Trade:** India’s sterling balances stood at ₹1,612 crore at the end of March 1947. Foreign exchange reserves were about \$676.24 billion for the week ending 24 July 2026, while combined merchandise and services exports were estimated at \$860.09 billion in FY2025-26.
- **Health and Literacy:** Life expectancy, around 32 years near the 1951 Census period, reached 72 years in the latest World Bank data for 2024. Literacy rose from 18.33% in the 1951 Census to 80.9% among persons aged seven and above in the 2023-24 PLFS.
- **Power and Digital Connectivity:** Installed electricity-generation capacity was only 1,362 MW in 1947, while utility capacity reached 475,212 MW by March 2025. India also had about 1,092.79 million internet subscribers by March 2026, including more than one billion broadband subscriptions.
- **Manufacturing and Capital Markets:** Manufacturing GVA at constant 2022-23 prices was estimated at ₹47.84 lakh crore in FY2025-26. India’s listed-company market capitalisation was placed at about \$10.56 trillion in 2025, reflecting the expansion of its modern financial and industrial economy.

PM Modi Independence Day Speech 2026: AI Training, Saptadhara, Free Coaching and Viksit Bharat 2047

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation from the Red Fort on India’s 80th Independence Day on 15 August 2026. His address outlined the “Saptadhara” development framework and announced initiatives covering technology skills, free online coaching, semiconductors, nuclear energy, sports and women-led development.

Key Points:

- **Saptadhara Framework:** The seven streams identified were manufacturing; agriculture and food processing; technology and innovation; infrastructure; defence; green and blue economy; and soft power. The framework was presented as a set of priority areas for India’s development towards 2047.
- **AI Skills Initiative:** The government plans to train one crore young people in artificial intelligence skills within one year. The announcement places emerging technologies alongside India’s wider programmes in digital infrastructure, research, start-ups and technological capability.

- **Free Online Coaching:** A nationwide free online coaching network was announced for young people preparing for various competitive recruitment and entrance tests. The proposed system will use India's digital public infrastructure and teaching resources, although detailed eligibility and delivery rules are yet to be released.
- **Semiconductors and Nuclear Energy:** The Prime Minister said additional semiconductor plants would be established over the coming years. India also reiterated its target of reaching 100 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047 and plans to commission five new nuclear reactors within this decade.
- **Sports and Women-Led Development:** A nationwide sports talent hunt is planned for children aged 5 to 15, alongside India's ambition to host the 2036 Olympics. The government also raised its Lakhpati Didi target to six crore women after stating that the earlier three-crore milestone had been crossed.

INTERNATIONAL

Netanyahu vows Iran will 'not have nuclear weapons' with or without deal

In the News: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated that Israel would prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons irrespective of whether Tehran reaches a diplomatic agreement. The statement came amid continuing tensions involving Iran, Israel and the United States.

Key Points:

- **Israel's position:** Netanyahu stated that Iran would not be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons "with an agreement or without an agreement". Israel considers Iran's nuclear capability a major national-security concern.
- **Iran's stand:** Iran has consistently maintained that its nuclear programme is intended for peaceful purposes and has denied that it seeks to develop nuclear weapons.
- **Role of IAEA:** Iran's nuclear activities are monitored under safeguards involving the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), headquartered in Vienna, Austria.
- **JCPOA background:** The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, 2015 placed restrictions and verification measures on Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief. The United States withdrew from the agreement in 2018.

EU, U.K. ask Israel to reconsider escalation in Gaza as Germany suspends some arms exports to Israel

In the News: Israel's decision to expand military operations in Gaza City drew criticism from European governments. The U.K. urged Israel to reconsider the move, while Germany announced restrictions on approving military exports that could be used in Gaza.

Key Points:

- **Reason for European concern:** The proposed escalation in Gaza raised fears of additional civilian displacement and deterioration in the humanitarian situation.
- **U.K.'s position:** British Prime Minister Keir Starmer urged Israel to reconsider the decision and called for a ceasefire, greater humanitarian assistance and the release of hostages.
- **Germany's decision:** Germany announced that it would stop approving certain exports of military equipment that could be used in Gaza, marking a significant policy signal from one of Israel's key European partners.
- **Germany-Israel relations:** Germany's historically strong support for Israel is closely connected to its responsibility for the Holocaust, making any restriction on military exports diplomatically significant.

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement

In the News: Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan signed the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement at the Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed the agreement.

Key Points:

- **Three Signatories:** The trilateral agreement brings together the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Republic of Türkiye and Islamic Republic of Pakistan in a framework aimed at strengthening collective security and defence cooperation.
- **Collective Defence Clause:** The agreement provides that an armed attack against any one of the three states will be regarded as an attack against all three. This mutual-defence provision is one of the most important examination-oriented features of the pact.
- **Venue and Date:** The summit was held at Al-Safa Palace in Makkah on 7 August 2026. The three leaders reviewed bilateral and trilateral relations as well as wider regional-security developments.

Lebanon Becomes First West Asian Country to Abolish Death Penalty

In the News: Lebanon's Parliament approved legislation on 11 August 2026 to abolish the death penalty for all crimes and replace it with life imprisonment with hard labour. The move makes Lebanon the first West Asian country to legislatively abolish capital punishment for all offences.

Key Points:

- **Replacement of Death Penalty:** Under the legislation, capital punishment will be replaced with life imprisonment with hard labour. Existing death sentences are also expected to be commuted under the new framework.
- **Long Moratorium:** Lebanon had not carried out an execution since 17 January 2004, although courts continued to retain the legal authority to impose death sentences. Thus, the country had already maintained a long de facto moratorium.
- **Legislative Journey:** The draft law was introduced by a group of MPs in October 2025. It subsequently passed through relevant parliamentary committees before being approved by Parliament in August 2026.
- **Final Formalities:** Following parliamentary approval, the legislation requires the necessary constitutional procedures, including presidential approval and publication in the Official Gazette, before formally entering into force.

India's 'Peacock Diplomacy' at the United Nations

In the News: India presented **five young peafowls** to the United Nations Office at Geneva in August 2026, reviving a decades-old diplomatic tradition. The gesture highlighted India's cultural identity, biodiversity heritage and use of symbolic diplomacy in international relations.

Key Points:

- **Diplomatic Gift:** The group consists of **four blue peafowls and one white-feathered male**. The birds were presented by India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva and are being housed within the UN complex.
- **Historical Background:** The gesture has an earlier precedent from **1981**, when India sent a breeding pair of peafowls to Geneva. The revival of the tradition illustrates the use of national symbols in strengthening diplomatic goodwill.
- **Palais des Nations:** The peafowls are housed in the grounds of the **Palais des Nations in Geneva**, which serves as the headquarters of the United Nations Office at Geneva. The building was originally associated with the League of Nations.
- **Indian Peafowl:** The Indian peafowl, *Pavo cristatus*, is India's **national bird** and enjoys legal protection under India's wildlife-conservation framework. It also holds significant cultural and historical importance in Indian traditions.

Pakistan's First Lunar Rover Named Jinnah-1

In the News: Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission has named the country's first lunar rover Jinnah-1. The rover is planned to travel to the Moon aboard China's Chang'e-8 mission, scheduled for 2029. It is expected to operate in the lunar south polar region and undertake scientific experiments.

Key Points:

- **Pakistan's First Lunar Rover:** Jinnah-1 is Pakistan's first locally developed rover intended to operate on the surface of the Moon. Its inclusion in Chang'e-8 marks an expansion of Pakistan-China cooperation in lunar exploration.
- **Chang'e-8 Mission:** Chang'e-8 is part of China's lunar exploration programme and is planned for launch in 2029. The mission will focus on scientific exploration and technology demonstrations in the Moon's south polar region.
- **Scientific Objectives:** Jinnah-1 is expected to study lunar geology, plasma conditions and radiation. The rover may also contribute data related to the physical environment and resources of the lunar south pole.
- **About SUPARCO:** The Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission is Pakistan's national space agency. It is responsible for the country's space research, satellite programmes and cooperation with international space organisations.
- **Lunar South Pole:** The Moon's south polar region has attracted global scientific interest because permanently shadowed craters may contain deposits of water ice. Such resources could support future scientific research and sustained lunar exploration.

Virender Singh Basoya Extradited from UAE to India

In the News: The Narcotics Control Bureau secured the return of wanted fugitive Virender Singh Basoya from the United Arab Emirates on August 14, 2026. He had been arrested in the UAE in June following an INTERPOL Red Notice issued at the request of the NCB. The operation formed part of India's continuing action against overseas narcotics networks.

Key Points:

- **Operation GLOBAL-HUNT:** Basoya was brought back under Operation GLOBAL-HUNT, an NCB initiative aimed at identifying, locating and pursuing major narcotics traffickers operating from foreign jurisdictions. The operation uses international law-enforcement cooperation, including INTERPOL Red Notices.
- **Mephedrone Trafficking Case:** The investigation began with a 500-gram mephedrone seizure by Pune Police in February 2024. Subsequent operations led to the recovery of approximately 867 kg in Pune and 970 kg in Delhi, taking the total seizure linked to the investigation to around 1,837 kg.
- **Basoya's Alleged Role:** Investigators identified him as an overseas operative allegedly involved in coordinating the syndicate and facilitating the movement of mephedrone from India to foreign destinations. The 970-kg Delhi consignment was allegedly being prepared for export through courier channels connected with the network.
- **International Cooperation:** Basoya's return followed coordination between Indian agencies and UAE authorities after his arrest under the INTERPOL mechanism. Operation GLOBAL-HUNT has also been associated with the return of wanted narcotics suspects Mohammad Salim Dola from Türkiye and Navin Chichkar from Malaysia.

CENTCOM Announces Falcon Strike Drone Task Force

In the News: The United States Central Command announced Task Force Falcon Strike on August 13, 2026. It is being established as CENTCOM's first multinational, multi-domain attack-drone task force. The formation will integrate unmanned capabilities operated by the United States and participating regional partners.

Key Points:

- **Multi-Domain Drone Force:** Falcon Strike is intended to employ one-way attack drones and unmanned systems operating above, on and below the sea. CENTCOM has begun consultations with regional partners to build a combined multinational capability across its area of responsibility.
- **Link with Scorpion Strike:** Falcon Strike follows Task Force Scorpion Strike, established nine months earlier as the US military's first dedicated one-way attack-drone squadron in the Middle East. Scorpion Strike also demonstrated the launch of an aerial attack drone from a US Navy warship.
- **Leadership by SOCCENT:** Personnel from US Special Operations Command Central, or SOCCENT, will lead the US and regional staff of Falcon Strike. SOCCENT is headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, and handles special operations within the CENTCOM theatre.
- **CENTCOM Area of Responsibility:** US Central Command covers a 21-country area spanning parts of the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. Falcon Strike is intended to combine participating countries' unmanned capabilities into a coordinated regional deterrence structure.

India Named in US Shadow Transshipment Network

In the News: A White House report titled *The Great Transshipment Scam* identified India among countries that the US administration says are exposed to China-linked illegal transshipment. The report alleges that goods originating economically in China can be routed through third countries to avoid higher US tariffs or alter their apparent country of origin.

Key Points:

- **Three-Tier Classification:** The report places India, Mexico, Canada and the European Union in Tier 1, where the claimed transshipment risk exists within very large legitimate trade flows. Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand feature in another category of economies closely integrated with Chinese supply chains.
- **Meaning of Transshipment:** Illegal transshipment involves routing goods through another jurisdiction, sometimes accompanied by minor processing, relabelling or documentation changes, to claim a different origin and avoid applicable duties. It is distinct from ordinary lawful transshipment used in international logistics.
- **Link with Section 301 Tariffs:** The report traces the issue to tariffs imposed on Chinese products beginning in 2018 under Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974. These measures were introduced following US investigations into Chinese trade and technology-transfer practices.
- **Estimated Scale:** The White House report estimated that around \$67 billion of US-bound goods were transhipped from China through major hubs including Mexico, India and Vietnam in 2025. It estimated associated lost tariff revenue at roughly \$28 billion.
- **Proposed Detection System:** Washington is developing an AI-enabled system described as the “Detective Border” to analyse trade flows, production capacity and unusual shipment routes. Indian trade specialists have questioned whether the report sufficiently distinguishes illegal routing from genuine domestic value addition.

Secure Green Land Corridor Links Oman and Saudi Arabia

In the News: Oman and Saudi Arabia moved to operationalise the Secure Green Land Corridor in August 2026 to improve direct overland freight connectivity. Oman-based Arkan Logistics and Saudi Arabia’s SPARK Logistics signed a strategic cooperation agreement on 5 August to activate the route.

Key Points:

- **Direct Freight Connection:** The arrangement uses the direct road link between Oman and Saudi Arabia to reduce cargo transit time and improve supply-chain efficiency. It is intended to raise bilateral shipment volumes and strengthen logistics links between the two Gulf economies.
- **Rub al Khali Route:** The corridor runs through the Rub al Khali, commonly known as the Empty Quarter, one of the world’s largest continuous sand deserts. The direct Oman-Saudi road opened in December 2021 and removed the earlier need for bilateral road traffic to pass through the UAE.
- **Sohar Port Connection:** Sohar Port and Freezone in Oman is supporting the initiative as a major maritime and logistics hub. On the Saudi side, SPARK Logistics operates the logistics zone and dry port at King Salman Energy Park in the Eastern Province.
- **Government Coordination:** The project is being developed with the involvement of Oman’s Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, and customs authorities in both countries.
- **Strategic Trade Route:** The initiative adds an alternative land route at a time when Gulf countries are seeking more resilient logistics networks. It complements maritime trade routes and reduces dependence on indirect road connections for commerce between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia Launches Multinational Maritime Defence Coalition

In the News: Saudi Arabia unveiled plans for a multinational maritime defence coalition in July 2026 to protect shipping and energy routes in the Red Sea region. The initiative emerged amid attacks on Saudi-linked shipping and growing threats to navigation from Yemen’s Houthi movement.

Key Points:

- **Saudi-Led Initiative:** Saudi Arabia is to serve as the founding and leading state of the proposed coalition and host its headquarters. Representatives from 43 countries and the European Union attended the international meeting at which the initiative was discussed.
- **Fourteen Supporting Countries:** Fourteen countries issued a joint statement supporting the initiative, including Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan and Djibouti. Oman and the United Arab Emirates were not listed among the Gulf states backing that statement.
- **Area of Operation:** The coalition is intended to protect freedom of navigation and international trade across the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb Strait and Gulf of Aden. These waters connect Europe and the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean through the Suez-Red Sea route.
- **Bab el-Mandeb Strait:** Bab el-Mandeb is a strategic maritime chokepoint connecting the southern Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean. Disruption in this narrow passage can affect container shipping as well as oil and other energy flows.
- **Existing Maritime Missions:** The initiative joins other security efforts in the region, including the European Union's Operation Aspides, launched in 2024 to safeguard navigation in the Red Sea. The Saudi proposal is designed around broader regional participation and maritime coordination.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

Physicist Deepak Dhar Awarded the 2026 Dirac Medal

In the News: Indian theoretical physicist Deepak Dhar has been named among the recipients of the 2026 ICTP Dirac Medal for major contributions to theoretical and statistical physics. The 2026 honour is shared by Bernard Derrida, Deepak Dhar, Marc Mézard and Haim Sompolsky. The recipients were announced on August 8, 2026.

Key Points:

- **Deepak Dhar's Contributions:** Dhar is recognised for pioneering research in statistical physics and the emergence of complex behaviour from simple interacting systems. His influential work includes the mathematical study of sandpile models and self-organised criticality, which help describe systems displaying avalanches and scale-dependent behaviour.
- **2026 Dirac Medallists:** Dhar shares the honour with Bernard Derrida, Marc Mézard and Haim Sompolsky. The four physicists have made influential contributions to areas involving complex systems, statistical mechanics and the theoretical understanding of collective behaviour.
- **About the Dirac Medal:** The ICTP Dirac Medal was first awarded in 1985 and is named after British theoretical physicist Paul A. M. Dirac. It is presented annually on August 8, Dirac's birthday, to scientists who have made significant contributions to theoretical physics.
- **About ICTP:** The Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics is based in Trieste, Italy. It operates as a UNESCO Category 1 Institute and is governed through an arrangement involving UNESCO, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Government of Italy.

301 Gallantry Medals Awarded to Police, Fire Service Personnel

In the News: The Ministry of Home Affairs announced 301 Medals for Gallantry for Police and Fire Service personnel on the occasion of Independence Day 2026. These formed part of 1,057 Gallantry and Service Medals announced for personnel from Police, Fire Services, Home Guard and Civil Defence, and Correctional Services.

Key Points:

- **Gallantry Medal Distribution:** Of the 301 Medals for Gallantry, 272 were awarded to Police personnel and 29 to Fire Service personnel. The medal recognises conspicuous acts involving the saving of life or property, prevention of crime or apprehension of criminals while facing significant risk.

- **Operational Area Break-Up:** Among the 301 gallantry recipients, 197 served in Left Wing Extremism-affected areas, 51 were associated with the Jammu and Kashmir region, 12 with the North-East and 41 with other regions. The distribution reflects the range of internal-security and emergency-response situations covered by the honours.
- **Distinguished Service Medals:** A total of 92 President's Medals for Distinguished Service were announced. These included 83 for Police Service, four for Fire Service, three for Home Guard and Civil Defence, and two for Correctional Service personnel.
- **Meritorious Service Medals:** The Independence Day honours also included 664 Medals for Meritorious Service. Of these, 606 went to Police personnel, 28 to Fire Services, 18 to Home Guard and Civil Defence, and 12 to Correctional Services, bringing the overall medal count across the three categories to 1,057.

Sangeet Natak Akademi Announces 2024 and 2025 Awards

In the News: The Sangeet Natak Akademi has announced its Fellowships, Akademi Awards and Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar for 2024 and 2025. The honours recognise distinguished and emerging artists across music, dance, theatre, folk and tribal arts, puppetry and allied performing arts.

Key Points:

- **Akademi Fellows:** The Akademi selected seven eminent personalities for its Fellowship, also known as Akademi Ratna. The Fellowship is one of the highest honours in Indian performing arts, and the number of living Fellows is restricted.
- **Akademi Awards:** A total of 108 artists were selected for the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards or Akademi Puraskar for 2024 and 2025. The awards cover music, dance, theatre, folk and tribal traditions, puppetry and scholarship.
- **Yuva Puraskar:** 106 young artists were selected for the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar for 2024 and 2025. The award aims to identify and encourage promising young performers in India's traditional and contemporary performing arts.
- **Prize Money:** The Akademi Fellowship carries ₹3 lakh, while the Akademi Award carries ₹1 lakh. The Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar carries a cash award of ₹25,000, along with other ceremonial honours.
- **About Sangeet Natak Akademi:** Established in 1953, it is India's apex national institution for the promotion and preservation of music, dance and drama. It functions as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

Sangeet Natak Akademi Award Conferred on Shubhada Varadkar

In the News: President Droupadi Murmu presented the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowships and Awards for 2024 and 2025 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, on 13 August 2026. Shubhada Manohar Varadkar was among the recipients and was recognised under the 2024 awards for Scholarship in Performing Arts, Dance.

Key Points:

- **Shubhada Varadkar's Recognition:** Varadkar was selected under the "Overall and Others" field for Scholarship in Performing Arts, Dance. She is closely associated with Odissi and has worked for decades as a performer, teacher, mentor and scholar of Indian classical dance.
- **Akademi Puraskar:** The Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards, also known as the Akademi Puraskar, have been conferred since 1952. They recognise sustained excellence and contribution across music, dance, theatre, folk and tribal traditions, puppetry and related performing arts.
- **Award Components:** Each Akademi Award carries ₹1 lakh, a Tamrapatra and an Angavastram. The Akademi Fellowship, or Akademi Ratna, is a separate and higher distinction carrying a purse of ₹3 lakh.
- **2024 and 2025 Honours:** A total of 115 artists were selected for Fellowships and Akademi Awards covering the two award years. Seven eminent personalities were named Akademi Fellows, while the remaining honours covered a wide range of classical, folk, tribal and contemporary performing-art traditions.
- **About the Akademi:** Sangeet Natak Akademi is India's national academy for music, dance and drama and functions under the Ministry of Culture. The institution promotes, documents and preserves India's diverse performing-art traditions and also supports transmission through initiatives such as Kala-Diksha.

ENVIRONMENT

Parliamentary Panel Backs National Pine Needle Policy

In the News: A Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee has recommended the formulation of a National Pine Needle Utilisation Policy to reduce forest-fire risks in the Himalayan region. The recommendation forms part of its report on forest fires, their adverse effects and mitigation. The proposal seeks to combine fire prevention with productive utilisation of pine biomass.

Key Points:

- **Need for the Policy:** Dry needles shed by Chir Pine trees accumulate on forest floors and can create highly combustible material during dry seasons. Their systematic collection from fire-prone areas can help reduce the intensity and spread of forest fires.
- **Chir Pine:** Chir Pine, scientifically known as *Pinus roxburghii*, is widely distributed across the Himalayan and sub-Himalayan regions. Its dry needles are commonly known as *pirul* in parts of Uttarakhand and neighbouring areas.
- **Productive Utilisation:** Collected pine needles can be converted into bio-briquettes, pellets, biochar, compost, handicrafts and packaging materials. Their utilisation can also provide supplementary livelihood opportunities to local communities and self-help groups.
- **Role of Local Communities:** The committee supported greater participation of local collectors, Van Panchayats and community institutions in pine-needle collection and processing. Decentralised processing units can reduce transportation costs and support local biomass-based enterprises.
- **Forest Fire Management:** The panel also emphasised improved satellite-based fire monitoring, weather forecasting, early-warning systems and dedicated response mechanisms. Preventive biomass management forms an important part of reducing recurring forest-fire risks in Himalayan states.

Great Barrier Reef coral cover rebounds to 35.1%

In the News: The Australian Institute of Marine Science has reported signs of initial recovery in parts of the Great Barrier Reef during its 2025-26 monitoring season. Hard coral cover in the northern region increased from 30% to 35.1%. AIMS attributed the improvement partly to cooling associated with a late summer monsoon.

Key Points:

- **Regional Coral Cover:** Northern Great Barrier Reef coral cover increased by 16.7% relative to 2025 levels, reaching 35.1%. Central-region cover rose from 28.6% to 31.6%, while the southern region recorded a small decline from 26.9% to 26.4%.
- **AIMS Monitoring Programme:** The findings come from the Australian Institute of Marine Science's Long-Term Monitoring Program. The 2026 assessment marks the 40th year of the programme's dataset, providing one of the longest continuous records of changes in Great Barrier Reef coral condition.
- **Survey Findings:** A total of 121 reefs were surveyed for the annual assessment. Of these, 28% recorded an increase in coral cover, 56% showed no significant change and 16% registered declines, indicating considerable variation across different sections of the ecosystem.
- **Continuing Environmental Pressures:** AIMS cautioned that coral recovery remains vulnerable to marine heat stress, cyclones, floods and outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish. Six mass coral-bleaching events occurred on the Great Barrier Reef between 2016 and 2025, highlighting the increasing frequency of thermal stress.

SCIENCE AND TECH

Scientists Discover Unusual Ozone Layer Above North Bay of Bengal

In the News: Indian scientists have detected an unusually high concentration of stratospheric ozone over the North Bay of Bengal. Rather than a completely new ozone layer, the finding concerns an unusual ozone-rich enhancement at about 21-23 km altitude, which persisted for more than a day.

Key Points:

- **Unusual Altitude:** The enhanced ozone-rich layer was detected at approximately 21-23 km, whereas ozone generally reaches its maximum concentration at around 25-30 km altitude. This made the observation scientifically unusual.
- **Role of ARIES:** The Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology, was a major participant. Its indigenously developed 206.5 MHz Stratosphere-Troposphere Radar contributed important observations.
- **NetRAD-ASMA Campaign:** The discovery was made during the Phase-I NetRAD-ASMA campaign, a nationwide programme involving atmospheric-research institutions. Radar observations were coordinated from Nainital, Haringhata, Gadanki and Kochi.
- **Satellites Used:** Researchers combined weather- and ozone-balloon measurements with observations from the Aura Microwave Limb Sounder (MLS) and India's INSAT-3DR satellite, along with atmospheric models and radar networks.
- **Cause of Enhancement:** Scientists concluded that the anomaly was mainly caused by transport of ozone-rich air followed by downward atmospheric motion and compression, rather than primarily by sunlight-driven photochemical production.

NASA Invites ISRO to Join Moon Base Programme

In the News: NASA has invited ISRO to participate in its Moon Base programme, marking a further expansion of India-US cooperation in lunar exploration and human spaceflight. The invitation was discussed during the India-US Civil Space Joint Working Group meeting held in Bengaluru in August 2026.

Key Points:

- **Moon Base Programme:** NASA's long-term lunar plans envisage a sustained human presence near the Moon's South Pole. The region is scientifically important because permanently shadowed craters may contain deposits of water ice.
- **Artemis Programme:** The Moon Base initiative is linked to NASA's broader Artemis programme, which seeks to return humans to the Moon and establish a sustainable presence there before enabling future missions to Mars.
- **Artemis Accords:** India joined the Artemis Accords in 2023. The Accords lay down principles for peaceful, transparent and cooperative civil space exploration and are based on the framework of the Outer Space Treaty.
- **India-US Space Cooperation:** The two countries cooperate through mechanisms such as the Civil Space Joint Working Group. Areas of collaboration include Earth observation, space science, human spaceflight technologies and scientific data sharing.
- **NISAR Mission:** A major example of bilateral cooperation is the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission. It is designed for Earth observation and can monitor changes in ecosystems, glaciers, land deformation and natural hazards.

IMPORTANT DAYS**World Lion Day 2026: Importance, Threats and Conservation Efforts**

In the News: World Lion Day was observed on 10 August 2026 to raise global awareness about lion conservation and threats facing the species. In India, the occasion is especially significant because Gujarat contains the world's only wild population of the Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo persica*).

Key Points:

- **History of the Day:** World Lion Day is observed annually on 10 August. The initiative was started in 2013 by conservationists Derek and Beverly Joubert to draw attention to declining wild-lion populations and the need for habitat protection.
- **India's Lion Population:** India's Asiatic lion population increased from 674 in 2020 to 891 in 2025, recording a significant rise. Their natural range has expanded across approximately 35,000 sq km in 11 districts of Saurashtra, Gujarat.
- **Major Threats:** Lions face habitat fragmentation, reduction of natural prey, poaching and illegal wildlife trade, disease and increasing human-lion conflict as their range overlaps with human settlements and economic activities.

- **Project Lion:** Project Lion was announced on 15 August 2020 for the long-term conservation of Asiatic lions. A 10-year project with an outlay of ₹2,927.71 crore has also been approved for lion conservation.
- **Beyond Gir:** Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, spread across Porbandar and Devbhumi Dwarka districts, is emerging as another important Asiatic-lion landscape. Natural lion movement towards Barda helps reduce conservation dependence on a single geographical habitat.

International Youth Day 2026: Theme, History, Significance and Wishes

In the News: International Youth Day was observed on 12 August 2026 to recognise the role, aspirations and challenges of young people across the world. The 2026 theme was “Different Contexts, Common Aspirations,” highlighting shared goals among youth despite diverse social and economic circumstances.

Key Points:

- **Date and Theme:** International Youth Day is observed annually on 12 August. The 2026 theme emphasised that young people may live in different political, economic and cultural settings but often share common aspirations relating to opportunity, dignity and development.
- **Origin:** The UN General Assembly endorsed International Youth Day through Resolution 54/120 on 17 December 1999. The decision followed recommendations emerging from international deliberations on youth policy.
- **First Observance:** The first International Youth Day was celebrated on 12 August 2000. Since then, the observance has been used to focus global attention on education, employment, participation, health and other youth-related concerns.
- **World Programme of Action for Youth:** International Youth Day is connected to the broader World Programme of Action for Youth, a UN policy framework addressing key areas concerning young people. It promotes youth participation in development, peace-building and decision-making.

SPORTS

World Cup 2027: 10 Teams Qualified, Namibia Still Faces Qualifier Route

In the News: The qualification picture for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2027 has become clearer, with 10 teams securing places in the tournament. The World Cup will be jointly hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, although Namibia must qualify through the prescribed pathway despite being a co-host.

Key Points:

- **Qualified Teams:** The teams that have secured qualification include **South Africa, Zimbabwe, India, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, England, Bangladesh and Afghanistan**. The qualification route combines host status and ICC ODI ranking positions.
- **Namibia's Position:** Namibia is an **Associate Member of the ICC**, unlike Full Member hosts South Africa and Zimbabwe. Therefore, it does not receive the same automatic host qualification and must progress through the qualification pathway.
- **Tournament Size:** The **2027 ODI World Cup will feature 14 teams**, expanding the field compared with the 10-team tournaments held in 2019 and 2023. The expanded format creates more opportunities for Associate nations.
- **Competition Structure:** The tournament format includes preliminary stages followed by a broader group phase and knockout rounds. The structure is designed to accommodate the expanded 14-team field while retaining competitive progression.