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WEST BENGAL



**FEBRUARY
2026**



C-171/2,
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Sector-15,
Noida



641, Mukherjee
Nagar,
Opp. Signature
View Apartment,
New Delhi



21,
Pusa Road,
Karol Bagh
New Delhi



Tashkent
Marg,
Civil Lines,
Prayagraj,
Uttar Pradesh



Tonk Road,
Vasundhara
Colony,
Jaipur,
Rajasthan



Burlington Arcade
Mall, Burlington
Chauraha,
Vidhan Sabha Marg,
Lucknow



12, Main AB
Road, Bhawar
Kuan,
Indore,
Madhya Pradesh



Crystal Heights,
Circular
Road, Lalpur
Chowk, Ranchi,
Jharkhand



Shahi Lane,
SP Verma Road,
South Gandhi
Maidan, Patna

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West Bengal Budget 2026-27

Why in News?

The **West Bengal government** presented its **interim Budget 2026-27** in the State Assembly, outlining a **Rs 4.06 lakh crore expenditure plan** that emphasizes **social welfare schemes, economic support for women and youth, enhanced revenue targets, and expenditure growth** amid preparations for upcoming assembly elections.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Budget Outlook:** The interim budget for **2026-27** was tabled at **Rs 4.06 lakh crore**, with total estimated expenditure pegged at **Rs 3.96 lakh crore**, reflecting a **14.2 % rise** over revised estimates for 2025-26.
 - ✦ **Total Revenue Receipt:** 2,87,791 Crore
 - ✦ **Total Capital Receipt:** 1,08,288 Crore
 - ✦ **Total Revenue Expenditure:** 3,09,551 Crore
 - ✦ **Total Capital Expenditure:** 86,533 Crore
- 💡 **Budget Expenditure:**
 - ✦ **General Services:** 94,389 Crore
 - ✦ **Social Services:** 1,80,862 Crore
 - ✦ **Economic Services:** 73,773 Crore
- 💡 **Budget Allocation in Important Sectors:**
 - ✦ **Agriculture and Allied Activities:** 24,312.97 Crore
 - ✦ **Rural Development:** 15,919.76 Crore
 - ✦ **Irrigation and Flood Control:** 5,858.95 Crore
 - ✦ **Energy:** 5,372.50 Crore
 - ✦ **Industry and Minerals:** 2,842.96 Crore
 - ✦ **Transport:** 14,388.23 Crore
 - ✦ **Science Technology and Environment:** 155.94 Crore
 - ✦ **Education, Sports, Art and Culture:** 51,530.62 Crore
 - ✦ **Health and Family Welfare:** 23,119.21 Crore
 - ✦ **Water Supply, Sanitation, Housing and Urban Development:** 45,544.00 Crore
 - ✦ **Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes:** 6,915.37 Crore
 - ✦ **Social Welfare and Nutrition:** 51,815.03 Crore

- 💡 **Social Welfare Priorities:** Nearly **46 % of the total expenditure** (around **Rs 1.80 lakh crore**) has been earmarked for **social welfare schemes**, showing the government's focus on inclusive development.
- 💡 **Lakshmi Bhandar Scheme Expansion:** The monthly grant under the **Lakshmi Bhandar** cash support programme for women was increased by **Rs 500**, boosting financial assistance to women beneficiaries from February 2026.
- 💡 **Dearness Allowance (DA) Hike:** The budget proposes a **4 % increase in dearness allowance** for West Bengal government employees to help offset inflationary pressures.
- 💡 **Support for Unemployed Youth:** A new scheme, '**Banglar Yuva Sathi**', was announced to provide **Rs 1,500 monthly allowance** to eligible unemployed youth (aged 21-40) until they secure jobs or for up to five years.
- 💡 **Tax Revenue Growth:** The budget projects own tax revenue to increase by about **6.20 %**, with **State GST and excise duties** constituting major contributors to total tax receipts.
- 💡 **Welfare for Gig & Frontline Workers:** Budget proposals include bringing **gig workers** under social security cover and enhancing allowances for **Anganwadi and ASHA workers**, alongside other welfare measures.

Major Police Reshuffle in West Bengal: Peeyush Pandey Appointed Acting DGP

Why in News?

In a significant administrative overhaul just months before the **West Bengal Assembly Elections**, the state government has appointed senior IPS officer **Peeyush Pandey** as the acting **Director General of Police (DGP)** to succeed **Rajeev Kumar**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **DGP Appointment Rules:** As per the **Prakash Singh Case (2006)** judgment:
 - ✦ **Selection:** States must send a list of eligible senior officers to the UPSC.

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- ✦ **Shortlisting:** UPSC prepares a panel of three officers based on merit and seniority.
- ✦ **Tenure:** The DGP must have a minimum tenure of two years, regardless of the date of superannuation.
- 💡 **Acting DGPs:** The Supreme Court has repeatedly discouraged the practice of appointing “Acting DGPs,” emphasizing that permanent appointments should be finalized before the incumbent retires.
- 💡 **Election Readiness:** The reshuffle of 52 senior officers is seen as a strategic move to ensure administrative continuity and maintain law and order ahead of the high-stakes Assembly polls.
- 💡 **The “Acting” DGP Trend:** The appointment continues a trend of interim arrangements. West Bengal has not had a permanent DGP since December 2023 due to ongoing legal disputes between the state and the UPSC regarding the selection panel.
- 💡 **Legal Hurdles:** The matter regarding a permanent appointment remains *sub judice* in the Delhi High Court.

Zoological Survey of India Discovers Two New Marine Worm Species

Why in News?

Scientists from the **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)**, in collaboration with international researchers, have discovered two new species of marine worms from the **nereidid** (polychaete) family along the West Bengal coast.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Location:** The species were identified in the coastal waters of **Digha** and **Bankiput** in the Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal.
- 💡 **Taxonomy:** Nereididae are a family of **marine polychaete worms**, commonly known as **ragworms** or **clam worms**.
- 💡 **The Two New Species:** Segmented worms are recognised by their long, slender bodies, distinct head with eyes and tentacles, and parapodia

✦ **Namalycastis solenotognatha:**

- 📌 **Etymology:** Named from the Greek words *solenotos* (channelled) and *gnatha* (jaw) due to unique canals in its jaw structure.
- 📌 **Habitat:** Found in extreme, sulfide-rich, and organically enriched mudflats, often associated with decomposing mangrove wood.

✦ **Nereis dhritiae:**

- 📌 **Etymology:** Named in honour of **Dr. Dhriti Banerjee**, the first woman Director of the ZSI.
- 📌 **Habitat:** Typically dwells within wooden dock piles on sandy beaches that are submerged during high tide.

- 💡 **Resilience:** A significant finding is that these worms thrive in **highly polluted and human-impacted habitats**, making them potential **bioindicators** for monitoring coastal health.

- 💡 **Ecological Significance:** Nereidid worms are vital “bio-warriors” for coastal ecosystems as they aid in **nutrient cycling** and **sediment aeration**.

- ✦ This discovery, recently published in the journal **Zootaxa**, underscores the hidden biodiversity of the northern Bay of Bengal despite heavy anthropogenic pressure.

West Bengal's Banglar Yuva Sathi Scheme 2026

Why in News?

The **West Bengal Government** has advanced the launch of the **Banglar Yuva Sathi scheme** — a monthly allowance programme for unemployed youth — to **1 April 2026**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Launch:** The scheme will commence from **1 April 2026** instead of the earlier projected date of **15 August**, aligning with the start of the financial year.
- 💡 **Objective:** The scheme is designed to provide **monthly financial support** to **educated unemployed youth** in West Bengal until they secure employment or for **up to five years**.

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- 💡 **Beneficiaries:** Unemployed residents of West Bengal aged **21 to 40 years** who have passed the **Madhyamik (Class X) examination** are eligible.
 - ✦ Eligible beneficiaries will receive **₹1,500 per month** directly in their bank accounts through **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)**.
- 💡 **Interim Budget Allocation:** The scheme was announced as part of the **interim (vote-on-account) budget**, with a proposed allocation of **₹5,000 crore** for implementation.
 - ✦ Youth enrolled in scholarships such as **Aikyashree, Medhashree, Shikhyashree, and Student Smart Card** will also be eligible under this scheme.
- 💡 **Significance:** Banglar Yuva Sathi provides **economic relief to unemployed youth**, supports job preparation and skill development, and forms part of the state's broader **social welfare and employment strategy** aimed at reducing unemployment challenges

West Bengal's ₹92,000 Crore Rail Investment Drive

Why in News?

Union Minister for Railways **Ashwini Vaishnaw** inaugurated **key rail infrastructure works** in **West Bengal** and announced that rail projects worth around **₹92,000 crore** are currently under implementation in the state.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Infrastructure Initiatives:** Projects amounting to nearly **₹92,000 crore** are underway in West Bengal to strengthen **rail infrastructure, enhance safety, and improve connectivity** across the region and adjoining areas.
 - ✦ The newly inaugurated **Siuri Road Over Bridge (cost approx. ₹42 crore)** and the **Kumarpur Road Over Bridge (cost approx. ₹55 crore)** will reduce congestion, improve safety at former

level crossings, and facilitate smoother movement for commuters and goods traffic.

- ✦ A new passenger service between **Asansol–Bokaro Steel City MEMU** was flagged off to boost regional mobility, benefiting daily commuters and industrial workers.
- 💡 **Record Allocations:** West Bengal has received an increased rail budget allocation of **₹14,205 crore**, more than triple the average allocation during 2009–14, signalling sustained focus on **Eastern rail development**.
- 💡 **Strategic Projects:** Railway projects in West Bengal focus on **new line expansion, track doubling and electrification, station modernisation, and improving passenger and freight connectivity**, particularly in North Bengal and adjoining regions.
- 💡 **Vision:** These initiatives align with the central government's broader **"Purvoday"** vision to accelerate **infrastructure-led growth** and improve economic prospects in eastern India.
- 💡 **Significance:** The investments are expected to transform **regional connectivity**, support **economic activity**, and catalyse **socio-economic development** in West Bengal and neighbouring regions.

West Bengal Begins Judicial Scrutiny of Voter List

Why in News?

Judicial officers have commenced the verification of voter documents flagged during the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls in **West Bengal**, following directives from the **Supreme Court of India** to ensure accuracy and integrity.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Judicial Verification Launched:** Serving and former district judges began vetting voter documents categorized under **"logical discrepancies"** as part of the voter list revision process in West Bengal.
 - ✦ The Supreme Court permitted deployment of judicial officers from neighbouring states like **Jharkhand** and **Odisha** to assist in managing the large volume of claims and objections,

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allowing the **Calcutta High Court** to requisition additional judges as needed.

💡 **Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** SIR is an accelerated voter list update exercise aimed at purifying electoral rolls by **resolving discrepancies**, addressing claims and objections, and ensuring that only **eligible individuals** are included before the final roll's publication.

- ✦ Reports indicate that millions of voter entries—especially those under “logical discrepancy” due to **mismatches** in age, parental data or missing documentation require adjudication by the judicial pool before the final list is published.

💡 **Challenges:** Courts across the state have largely prioritised SIR verification work while the apex court instructed **Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)** to hand over pending documents for adjudication.

- ✦ The process has triggered controversy, with political leaders raising concerns about potential **removal of genuine voters** if discrepancies are not resolved fairly and transparently.

💡 **Significance:** The judicial scrutiny of voter documents in West Bengal is a landmark step to uphold electoral roll **accuracy and safeguard democratic rights**.



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National Current Affairs

Two New Wetlands Added to India's Ramsar List

Why in News?

Union Environment Minister **Bhupender Yadav** announced the addition of **two new wetlands** to India's **Ramsar List**, ahead of **World Wetlands Day 2026**.

Key Points

- 💡 **New Ramsar Sites:** **Patna Bird Sanctuary** in **Etah district of Uttar Pradesh** and **Chhari-Dhand** in **Kutch district of Gujarat** have been included in **India's Ramsar list** of wetlands of international importance.
 - ✦ India's Ramsar network has grown from **26 sites in 2014 to 98 sites in 2026**.
- 💡 **Patna Bird Sanctuary:** Patna Bird Sanctuary is one of the **smallest protected bird sanctuaries** and is an **Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA)**.
- 💡 **Chhari-Dhand Wetland:** A **seasonal saline wetland** in the **Rann of Kutch region**, crucial for **migratory waterfowl and desert biodiversity**.
 - ✦ It is Gujarat's **fifth Ramsar site** after Nalsarovar, Thol, Khijadiya and Wadhvana.
- 💡 **Importance:** The newly added sites support **hundreds of migratory and resident bird species** and host wildlife such as **chinkara, wolves, caracal, desert cats and desert foxes**, besides endangered bird species.
- 💡 **Significance:** Inclusion in the Ramsar list reflects **international recognition of India's commitment** to wetland conservation and sustainable management under globally accepted frameworks.
- 💡 **Ramsar Convention:** It is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, signed in 1971 at Ramsar, Iran.
 - ✦ India became a signatory on 1 February 1982.
- 💡 **World Wetlands Day 2026:** It is observed on 2 February.
 - ✦ **Theme: Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage**

PAIMANA Portal Launched by MoSPI

Why in News?

The **Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** has operationalised **PAIMANA** — a new **web-based monitoring portal** for Central Sector Infrastructure Projects worth **₹150 crore and above**.

Key Points

- 💡 **PAIMANA:** It stands for **Project Assessment, Infrastructure Monitoring & Analytics for Nation-building** and is a **centralized digital platform** to monitor large infrastructure projects.
 - ✦ It has replaced the earlier **OCMS-2006 (Online Computerised Monitoring System)** to improve real-time tracking and analytics.
- 💡 **Integration:** PAIMANA is integrated with the **DPIIT's Integrated Project Monitoring Portal** using **APIs (Application Programming Interface)**, enabling **automatic data flow** and reducing manual data entry.
 - ✦ The integration follows the principle of **"one data, one entry"** to standardise project reporting and minimise errors.
- 💡 **Project Coverage:** As of **December 2025**, a total of **1,392 ongoing central sector infrastructure projects** have been onboarded on the PAIMANA portal.
- 💡 **Sectoral Spread:** Projects span key sectors including **Transport & Logistics, Railways, Coal, Power, Housing & Urban Affairs, Water Resources, Telecommunications, Health & Family Welfare**, etc.
- 💡 **Features:** The portal offers **interactive dashboards, advanced analytics, role-based access, automated reports and query modules** for better oversight and decision-making.
- 💡 **Objective:** To enhance **transparency, data quality and timely implementation** of major infrastructure projects, supporting **nation-building and economic growth**.

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Meghalaya's Living Root Bridges Nominated for UNESCO World Heritage List

Why in News?

India has submitted the nomination dossier of Meghalaya's Living Root Bridges—titled “Jingkieng Jri / Lyu Chrai Cultural Landscape”—to UNESCO.

Key Points

- 💡 **Nomination Submitted:** India's Ambassador to UNESCO, Vishal V. Sharma, handed over the nomination dossier to the Director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre.
- ✦ **Heritage Value:** The nomination highlights the cultural, ecological and technological significance of the living root bridges, emphasizing traditional ecological stewardship and generational knowledge.
- 💡 **Location:** The bridges are mainly located across the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya.
- 💡 **Cultural Significance:** These bridges are bio-engineered structures created and maintained by indigenous Khasi and Jaintia communities.
 - ✦ Symbolizing a deep harmony between people, nature, and traditional knowledge.
- 💡 **Global Recognition:** If approved, the site will receive UNESCO World Heritage status, bringing global recognition and boosting conservation efforts and sustainable tourism.

US Museum to Return Three Ancient Bronze Sculptures Stolen from Tamil Nadu to India

Why in News?

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art announced it would return three ancient bronze sculptures to India. The decision follows a multi-year provenance investigation which confirmed the artefacts were illegally removed from temples in Tamil Nadu.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Repatriated Sculptures:** The three relics are masterpieces of South Indian bronze casting, originally used as sacred procession icons in temple rituals:
 - ✦ **Shiva Nataraja:** A Chola-period masterpiece dating to circa 990 CE.
 - ✦ **Somaskanda:** A 12th-century Chola bronze depicting Shiva with his wife Parvati and son Skanda.
 - ✦ **Saint Sundarar with Paravai:** A 16th-century Vijayanagar-period bronze depicting the Tamil saint and his wife.
- 💡 **Identification:** The sculptures' original locations were confirmed using rare 1950s photographs from the French Institute of Pondicherry archives.
- 💡 **Original Sites:** The Shiva Nataraja was stolen from the Sri Bhava Aushadesvara Temple in Thanjavur district.
 - ✦ The Somaskanda was traced to the Visvanatha Swamy Temple in Alathur village, Thiruvavur district.
 - ✦ The Saint Sundarar sculpture originated from a Shiva temple in Veerasolapuram village, Kallakurichi district.
- 💡 **Museum's Ethical Commitment:** The Smithsonian museum cited its ethical stewardship and transparency policies, including its Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns Policy, as the basis for agreeing to repatriate the sculptures.
- 💡 **Cultural heritage restoration:** Return of sacred temple bronzes strengthens India's efforts to reclaim its artistic lineage and religious history.

Indian Institute of Foreign Trade Tops Times B-School Ranking 2026

Why in News?

The Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) has secured the first position in the Times B-School Ranking 2026, consolidating its status as one of India's leading management institutions with a distinctive focus on international trade and global business education.

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Key Points:

- 💡 **IIFT:** Established in **1963** as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
 - ✦ **Status:** It is a **Deemed-to-be University** with campuses in Delhi, Kolkata, Kakinada, and GIFT City.
 - ✦ **Core Focus:** Offers flagship MBA programs, executive education, and doctoral research specifically tailored for **international business**.
- 💡 **SRM University AP (Paari School of Business):** Ranked **No. 1** in the **Top Emerging B-School** category.
- 💡 **Significance of Ranking:** The **Times B-School Ranking 2026** assesses business schools across parameters such as **academic excellence, employability outcomes, industry engagement, curriculum relevance and reputation**.
 - ✦ **Leadership Role:** IIFT's first-place finish reflects its **strength in international business education** and its role in preparing future leaders for global trade dynamics.
- 💡 **Strategic Growth:** The achievement is attributed to the institute's expanded global orientation, academic rigor, and the launch of new initiatives like its offshore campus in **Dubai**.
- 💡 **Vision 2047:** Commerce Secretary **Rajesh Agrawal** emphasized that the institute's excellence aligns with the national goal of **Viksit Bharat**, nurturing professionals capable of driving India to become a global trade powerhouse.

Captain Hansja Sharma Becomes First Woman Pilot of Rudra Armed Helicopter

Why in News?

Captain Hansja Sharma has created history by becoming the **first woman pilot in the Indian Army** to be **qualified to fly the Rudra Armed Helicopter** — a highly advanced, weaponised helicopter used in frontline combat roles.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Historical First:** While women have been flying transport and utility helicopters (like Cheetah and

Chetak), Captain Sharma is the first to transition to the **Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH-WSI) Rudra**, a dedicated attack platform.

- 💡 **Rudra Armed Helicopter:** The Rudra is an armed variant of the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
 - ✦ Equipped with a 20mm turret gun, 70mm rockets, and **anti-tank guided missiles**.
 - ✦ Designed for **Close Air Support (CAS)** and high-altitude warfare.
- 💡 **Gender Neutrality in Combat:** This follows the 2021 decision to allow women into the Army Aviation Corps as pilots. Previously, women were restricted to ground duties or non-combat flying.
- 💡 **Modernization of the Aviation Corps:** The induction of skilled pilots like Captain Sharma into the Rudra fleet enhances the operational readiness of the Army's "eyes and ears" in the sky.
- 💡 **Indigenous Power:** Operating the Rudra showcases the synergy between human excellence and the **Atmanirbhar Bharat** (Self-Reliant India) initiative in defense manufacturing.

New Flowering Plant Hoya nagaensis Discovered in Nagaland

Why in News?

Researchers from **Nagaland University** have discovered a **new species of flowering plant** in the high-altitude of Nagaland.

Key Points

- 💡 **Scientific name:** *Hoya nagaensis*
 - ✦ Documented during systematic **botanical surveys** in under-explored forests.
- 💡 **Discovery:** Kavünhou Community Reserved Forest, Phek district, Nagaland.
 - ✦ The discovery underscores the importance of **community-protected forests** in preserving **rare and endemic species**, as these forests remain largely untouched and biologically rich.

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- 🔦 **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered.
- 🔦 **Biodiversity Hotspot:** Nagaland's high-altitude forests are part of the **Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspot**.
- 🔦 **Research Significance:** The discovery contributes **valuable data to India's botanical records and global plant science**, encouraging further ecological and conservation studies in the region.

SBI unveils CHAKRA Centre for financing sunrise sectors

Why in News?

The State Bank of India (SBI) has launched a dedicated Centre of Excellence (CoE) named 'CHAKRA' to support financing of sunrise sectors and marks a strategic push by the country's largest lender to channel capital into next-generation industries.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Aim:** This initiative aims to catalyse capital expenditure of over **₹100 lakh crore** by **2030** in critical future-ready industries.
- 🔦 **Vision:** It will support **project appraisal, evidence-based policy engagement, white papers and industry roundtables** to inform investors and policymakers.
- 🔦 **Eight Focused "Sunrise" Sectors:** The CoE specifically targets sectors essential for the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision:
- 🔦 **Green Energy:** Renewable Energy, Green Hydrogen & Ammonia, and Decarbonisation.
- 🔦 **Technology & Infrastructure:** Semiconductors, Data Centre Infrastructure, and Smart Infrastructure.
- 🔦 **Future Mobility:** Electric Mobility (E-mobility) and Advanced Cell Chemistry (ACC)/Battery Storage.
- 🔦 **Risk Management:** Unlike a typical think tank, CHAKRA is a "hands-on execution platform" designed to build specific risk models for emerging technologies to avoid misaligned or premature investments.

- 🔦 **Global Partnerships:** SBI has signed MoUs with **21 domestic and global financial institutions**, including Japanese banks **MUFG** and **SMBC**, to enable joint project appraisal and co-financing.

India's First Mega Shipbuilding Cluster in Tamil Nadu

Why in News?

In a landmark move to position India as a global maritime hub, the **National Shipbuilding & Heavy Industries Park, Tamil Nadu (NSHIP, TN)** has been established as the country's first **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** dedicated to developing a mega shipbuilding cluster.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Joint Venture:** The SPV is a **50:50 partnership** between the **V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority (VOCPA)**—a major port under the Union Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways—and the **State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu (SIPCOT)**.
- 🔦 **Strategic Location:** The cluster will be developed at **Thoothukudi (Tuticorin)**, leveraging its strategic proximity to international shipping lanes.
- 🔦 **Project Specifications:** The greenfield cluster will span approximately **2,000 acres**, featuring a **2 km waterfront**.
 - ✦ **1,000 acres** are earmarked specifically for shipyards.
 - ✦ **1,000 acres** will host ancillary industries, marine equipment manufacturing, and common social infrastructure.
- 🔦 **Capacity Goal:** The cluster is designed to house shipyards with a total capacity of roughly **1.2 million Gross Tonnage (GT)** per annum.
- 🔦 **Economic multiplier:** The project is expected to generate employment for over **55,000 people** and attract massive global investments.
- 🔦 **Global Competitiveness:** Helps India aim for higher share in global shipbuilding by developing a **plug-and-play industrial hub**.

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Mukhyamantri Gramotthan Yojana Launched in Gujarat

Why in News?

Gujarat Chief Minister **Bhupendra Patel** launched the **Mukhyamantri Gramotthan Yojana** to strengthen rural governance and infrastructure.

Key Points

- 💡 **Launch venue:** Foundation stones laid at **Bhadran village, Anand district, Gujarat**.
- 💡 **Coverage:** **2,666 villages** to receive **Gram Panchayat buildings-cum-Talati residences** for strengthening local governance.
 - ✦ **Funding:** Project sanctioned at **₹663 crore** to provide functional panchayat infrastructure at the village level.
- 💡 **Urban-Like Facilities:** Scheme includes **modern amenities** such as roads, water, sanitation, solar street lights, **e-Gram digital services**, and community halls.
- 💡 **Focus:** Initial development targets **114 villages** functioning as taluka headquarters without municipal status.
 - ✦ Aims to **reduce rural-urban divide** by bringing essential services closer to rural citizens.
- 💡 **Future Expansion:** Planned to cover **other large gram panchayats (population >10,000)** across Gujarat.
- 💡 **Significance:** Enhances **rural governance capacity**, improves **service delivery**, and creates **infrastructure parity** with urban areas.

Australian Open 2026

Why in News?

The **2026 Australian Open**, the first Grand Slam tennis tournament of the year held in **Melbourne, Australia**, concluded with **Carlos Alcaraz** and **Elena Rybakina** crowned as the men's and women's singles champions respectively.

Key Points

- 💡 **Men's Singles Winner:** **Carlos Alcaraz (Spain)** won the **men's singles title** at the 2026 Australian Open by defeating **Novak Djokovic (Serbia)** in the final.
 - ✦ **Runner-Up:** **Novak Djokovic (Serbia)** finished second after losing to Alcaraz in the final clash.
- 💡 **Historic (Men's):** This victory was Alcaraz's **first Australian Open title** and his **seventh major singles title** overall.
- 💡 **Women's Singles Winner:** **Elena Rybakina (Kazakhstan)** clinched the **women's singles title** by defeating **Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus)**.
 - ✦ **Runner-Up:** **Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus)** was the runner-up, losing to Rybakina in the championship match.
- 💡 **Women's Achievement:** The victory marked Rybakina's **second Grand Slam singles title**, her first Australian Open crown, showcasing her ability to triumph over the world No. 1.
- 💡 **Venue:** The tournament was played on the hard courts of **Melbourne Park**, attracting top tennis talent from around the world.

Exercise Agni Pariksha: Army-ITBP Joint Initiative

Why in News?

The Indian Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) recently concluded a **six-day joint training exercise** named "**Agni Pariksha**" in **Arunachal Pradesh**, aimed at strengthening **inter-force operational synergy** along border regions.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Location:** The exercise was conducted at **Sigar** in the East Siang district of **Arunachal Pradesh**.
- 💡 **Objective:** The primary purpose of the drill was to **familiarise non-artillery personnel** — including **infantry and ITBP troops** — with **artillery procedures, fire control systems, coordination mechanisms**, and the **execution of firing missions** under realistic field conditions.

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- 🔦 **Participants:** Spearhead Gunners of the Indian Army's Spear Corps alongside infantry regiments and personnel from the ITBP.
- 🔦 **Significance:** Improves coordination between the Army and paramilitary forces for **border security and combat operations**.
- ✦ **Operational readiness:** Ensures troops are better prepared for **complex battlefield scenarios**, especially in **high-altitude border sectors**.

India at the 64th Session of the UN Commission for Social Development

Why in News?

India is participating in the **64th Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD64)** at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Key Points

- 🔦 **Leadership:** India's delegation to the **64th Session of CSocD** at the **UN Headquarters in New York** was led by **Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development, Savitri Thakur**.
- 🔦 **Commission:** The **Commission for Social Development (CSocD)** is a key **United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** body that focuses on **international cooperation for social development**, including **poverty eradication, social inclusion, equity, and welfare policies**.
- 🔦 **Chair:** The 64th session was presided over by **Ambassador Khrystyna Hayovyshyn** (Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN) and saw participation from **over 100 UN member states**.
 - ✦ India is an elected member of the 64th session, which brings together member states to assess progress and share lessons on social development issues.
- 🔦 **India's Statement:** India highlighted that **social justice and social protection** are firmly anchored in

constitutional guarantees and aligned with the country's long-term vision of "**Viksit Bharat 2047**".

- ✦ The guiding principle of "**Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas**" was emphasised as reflecting a **whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach** to ensure no one is left behind.

CSIR-NIO Shore-Based Lab Inaugurated in Visakhapatnam

Why in News?

Union Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences, Dr. **Jitendra Singh**, recently inaugurated the **Shore-Based Laboratory** of the **CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography (NIO)** Regional Centre at **Visakhapatnam**.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Infrastructure:** Built at a cost of **₹32 crore** by the **Central Public Works Department (CPWD)**, the state-of-the-art facility covers **4,550 square metres** on a 4-acre campus located in **Yendada village, Rushikonda**.
- 🔦 **Regional Mandate:** The lab will focus on systematic marine geological and geophysical surveys of the **Eastern Continental Margin of India (ECMI)**.
- 🔦 **Strategic Research:** It aims to map bathymetry and identify resource potential for **hydrocarbons, seabed minerals, oil, and natural gas**, influenced by sediment deposits from Himalayan river systems.
- 🔦 **Sectors Supported:** The centre collaborates with stakeholders like ONGC and Oil India to support pharmaceuticals, ports, thermal power, and the fisheries sector.
- 🔦 **Significance for the Blue Economy:** The lab will project tropical cyclone tracks and forecast harmful algal blooms to protect coastal livelihoods.
 - ✦ **Self-Reliance:** By exploring deep-sea resources, it strengthens India's energy security and supports the national **Blue Economy vision**.

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Chittoor District Achieves Guinness World Record for E-Cycle Distribution

Why in News?

The **Chittoor district** administration in **Andhra Pradesh** has officially entered the **Guinness World Records** by distributing **5,555 electric bicycles** within a single 24-hour period.

Key Points:

- 💡 **The Record:** The event secured the title for the **"Most electric bicycles distributed in 24 hours,"** surpassing previous global benchmarks in green mobility initiatives.
- 💡 **Target Beneficiaries:** The e-cycles were primarily provided to **government school students** (specifically girls and those from marginalized communities) to improve educational accessibility and reduce dropout rates.
- 💡 **Logistics:** The distribution was spearheaded by the district collectorate at the **Police Parade Grounds** in Chittoor.
- 💡 **Sustainability Focus:** The initiative promotes **decarbonization** of rural transport and aligns with India's commitment to climate action by reducing reliance on fossil-fuel-based commuting.
- 💡 **Social Empowerment:** By providing clean transport to students, the program addresses the "last-mile" connectivity issue that often hinders rural education.

Dalai Lama Wins First Grammy Award at Age 90

Why in News?

Tibetan spiritual leader **His Holiness the Dalai Lama** won his **first Grammy Award** at the **68th Annual Grammy Awards (2026)** held in **Los Angeles, USA**.

Key Points

- 💡 **Award & Category:** The Dalai Lama won the **Grammy Award** in the **Best Audio Book, Narration**

& **Storytelling Recording** category for his album ***Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama***.

- ✦ This was his **first-ever Grammy Award**, achieved at age **90**, making it a unique recognition for a spiritual leader at one of music's most prestigious platforms.
- ✦ The award was accepted on his behalf by musician **Rufus Wainwright** at the ceremony.
- 💡 **Album Content:** The album blends the **Dalai Lama's teachings on peace, compassion, mindfulness and universal responsibility** with musical compositions and narration, designed to spread messages of harmony across cultures.
- ✦ **Collaborations:** The project features musical contributions from Indian classical maestro **Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and his sons Amaan Ali Bangash and Ayaan Ali Bangash**, with production by Grammy-winning producer **Kabir Sehgal**.
- 💡 **Global Recognition:** The win underscores the **global reach and universal appeal** of Dalai Lama's voice and teachings, crossing cultural, spiritual and artistic boundaries.
- 💡 **International Response:** The achievement drew widespread acclaim, though it was also **criticised by the Chinese government**, which termed the award a form of political manipulation given longstanding tensions regarding the Dalai Lama's status.

Indian-Origin Scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan Wins Crafoord Prize 2026

Why in News?

Indian-origin climate scientist **Veerabhadran Ramanathan** has been awarded the **2026 Crafoord Prize in Geosciences** by the **Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences** — a distinction often described as the **"Nobel of Geosciences"** due to its prestige in fields not covered by the Nobel Prizes.

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Key Points:

- 💡 **Key Contributions:** The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences selected Ramanathan for his “pioneering contributions to our understanding of the role of short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) and the greenhouse effect.”
- 💡 **Discovery of Non-CO2 Greenhouse Gases (1975):** He was the first to demonstrate that Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)—previously only known for ozone depletion—were also potent greenhouse gases.
- 💡 **Atmospheric Brown Clouds (ABCs):** His research identified vast “brown clouds” of soot and dust over South Asia and the Indian Ocean.
 - ✦ He showed that these particles (Black Carbon) absorb sunlight, heating the atmosphere while simultaneously cooling the Earth’s surface (dimming effect), which disrupts monsoon patterns.
- 💡 **Crafoord Prize:** Established by Holger Crafoord (industrialist) and his wife Anna-Greta in 1980.
- 💡 **Awarded by:** The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (the same body that awards Nobel Prizes).
- 💡 **Disciplines:** It is awarded in fields not covered by the Nobel Prizes: **Mathematics, Astronomy, Geosciences, and Biosciences.**

Tripura’s gram panchayat tops India in Panchayat Advancement Index 2.0

Why in News?

Tripura has achieved a historic milestone in grassroots governance by securing the top rank in the **Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) 2.0**, announced by the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Top Performer in PAI 2.0:** Jugal Kishore Nagar Village Committee, located in Jampuijala RD Block, Sepahijala district of Tripura, secured the **first position nationwide** with a score of 88.44 among nearly 2.5 lakh gram panchayats assessed.

- 💡 **Strong Showing by Tripura Panchayats:** Tripura’s exceptional performance didn’t end there:
 - ✦ **South Nalchar Gram Panchayat** (Nalchar RD Block, Sepahijala) secured the **third position with a score of 88.14**.
 - ✦ **Chesrimai Gram Panchayat** (Charilam RD Block, Sepahijala) achieved the **fourth position with a score of 87.85**.
- 💡 **100% Participation:** Tripura achieved the rare distinction of 100% data submission and verification for all its **1,176 Gram Panchayats** and Village Committees for the 2023–24 financial year.
- 💡 **Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) 2.0:** It is an initiative of the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India** that evaluates the performance of **over 2.5 lakh gram panchayats** across the country.
 - ✦ **Framework:** It evaluates local bodies based on **435 unique local indicators** across **9 themes** aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
 - ✦ **Key Indicators:** Includes such as **transparency, service delivery, decentralised planning, community participation and governance outcomes**.
- 💡 **Aim:** The index aims to strengthen **grassroots democracy and local self-governance** in line with national development goals.

Yumnam Khemchand Singh Named Manipur Chief Minister

Why in News?

Yumnam Khemchand Singh, a senior BJP leader, has assumed office as the **Chief Minister of Manipur**, ending nearly a year of **President’s Rule** in the violence-affected state.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Chief Minister:** Yumnam Khemchand Singh (Singjamei MLA), a former Speaker and RSS veteran, is perceived as a “liberal Meitei” figure capable of bridging ethnic divides.

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- 🔦 **Deputy CM (Kuki-Zo):** Nemcha Kipgen (Kangpokpi MLA) made history as the state's **first woman and first Kuki-Zo Deputy Chief Minister**.
- 🔦 **Deputy CM (Naga):** Losii Dikho of the Naga People's Front (NPF) was appointed to represent the Naga community, ensuring a tripartite ethnic representation in the top executive.
- 🔦 **Significance of the Appointments:** First woman and first Kuki-Zo deputy CM highlights steps toward **inclusive governance** in a multi-ethnic state.
 - ✦ The formation of the government after **President's Rule** demonstrates a **return to democratic governance** and political normalcy.
- 🔦 **Constitutional Restoration:** The revocation of President's Rule under Article 356(2) was notified by President Droupadi Murm
- 🔦 **Ethnic Balancing Act:** The inclusion of Meitei, Kuki, and Naga leaders is a deliberate move to rebuild a fractured political landscape after two years of ethnic conflict.

Kalpetta Becomes India's First Fully Paperless District Court

Why in News?

The Kalpetta judicial district in Wayanad, Kerala has become **India's first fully paperless district court**.

Key Points

- 🔦 **Historic Achievement:** Kalpetta has become the **first district court in India** to function completely without paper, transitioning to a fully digital judicial system.
- 🔦 **Inauguration:** The paperless court system was **virtually inaugurated** by **Chief Justice of India Surya Kant**.
- 🔦 **Functioning:** All stages of court proceedings — including **pre-trial processes, recording of evidence, interlocutory orders, and final adjudications** — are now conducted electronically without the use of physical files.
 - ✦ The digital platform, known as the **District Court Case Management System (DCMS)**, was

developed **in-house by the Kerala High Court's IT department** to ensure secure and efficient digital operations.

- 🔦 **Technology:** The system integrates **AI-based judicial assistance tools** that help generate structured case summaries, assist with annotation, query case details, and support judges with faster access to digital records.
- 🔦 **Benefits:** Going paperless is expected to **reduce litigation costs, eliminate delays in transferring files**, enhance **access to justice**, and contribute to **"green jurisprudence"** by lowering the environmental impact of judicial processes.
- 🔦 **Model for Other Districts:** The initiative is being seen as a **model for other judicial districts** across India, with the potential to transform traditional court operations into **efficient digital systems** nationwide.

Tamil Nadu Launches India's First Deep Tech Startup Policy

Why in News?

Tamil Nadu **unveiled India's first dedicated Deep Tech Startup Policy** at the **UImagineTN 2026** technology summit in Chennai.

Key Points

- 🔦 **Policy Launch:** The **Deep Tech Startup Policy 2025-26** was launched by **Chief Minister M.K. Stalin** at the **UImagineTN 2026** summit held in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
 - ✦ Tamil Nadu became the **first Indian state to introduce a dedicated deep tech startup policy**.
- 🔦 **Implementation:** The policy will be coordinated and facilitated by the **Tamil Nadu Technology (iTNT) Hub**, the nodal agency under the state government.
- 🔦 **Investment & Startup Support:** The policy **targets support for 100 deep tech startups** and plans to **mobilise ₹100 crore** in public and private investment over the next five years to bridge the gap between research and market deployment.

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- ✦ The policy emphasises cutting-edge sectors such as **artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, biotechnology, space technologies, and clean energy**, which typically involve advanced scientific research and long gestation periods.
- 💡 **Ecosystem Development:** It aims to **facilitate technology transfer from academic and research institutions to startups**, encourage patent creation, and strengthen infrastructure and capital support for innovation.
- 💡 **Government Support:** The policy includes provisions like a **“Government as Early Adopter” programme** to pilot and validate deep tech solutions in select government departments, aiding startups in proving their technologies.

World Cancer Day 2026

Why in News?

World Cancer Day was observed on **4 February 2026** to raise awareness about cancer, promote early detection, and encourage equitable access to cancer care worldwide.

Key Points

- 💡 **Theme:** The official theme for 2026 is **“United by Unique”**, part of a **three-year global campaign (2025–27)** that underscores that everyone’s cancer journey is different but equally deserving of care and dignity.
 - ✦ The theme stresses **person-centred care**, recognising individual experiences, needs and the importance of dignity in treatment and survivorship planning.
- 💡 **Purpose:** **Raise awareness** about cancer prevention, early detection and treatment.
 - ✦ **Encourage** timely screening and healthy lifestyles.
 - ✦ **Break** myths, stigma and fear associated with cancer.
 - ✦ **Support** patients, survivors and caregivers.
 - ✦ **Improve** access to equitable cancer care worldwide.

- 💡 **Participation:** Individuals, communities, health institutions and governments take part through **awareness campaigns, educational programmes and screening activities** to promote action against cancer.
 - ✦ Health experts emphasise that **early detection saves lives**, and many cancer cases could be **prevented** or better managed with timely screening and lifestyle interventions.
- 💡 **Preventable Causes:** According to WHO analyses, an estimated **4 in 10 new cancer cases can be prevented** through risk-reducing measures such as avoiding tobacco, unhealthy diets, alcohol and improving physical activity.
- 💡 **Equity and Access:** World Cancer Day calls for **equitable access to high-quality care**, especially in low- and middle-income countries where lack of resources and awareness leads to late diagnosis and poorer outcomes.

Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026

Why in News?

The 25th edition of the Winter Olympic Games will officially begin from 6 February. Milano Cortina 2026 will mark the **first time that two cities will jointly host the Winter Olympics**, and it is the fourth time **Italy** will stage the Winter Games.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Opening Ceremony:** Held on 6 February 2026 at the iconic San Siro Stadium in Milan.
- 💡 **Closing Ceremony:** Scheduled for 22 February 2026 at the ancient Verona Arena.
- 💡 **Mascots:** **Tina and Milo**, two stoats whose names are inspired by the host cities (Tina for Cortina and Milo for Milano).
- 💡 **Theme:** Titled **“Armonia” (Harmony)**, the show is produced by Balich Wonder Studio and features performances by **Mariah Carey, Andrea Bocelli, and Laura Pausini**.
- 💡 **India’s Participation:** India is represented by a small but significant contingent at the 2026 Games, continuing its presence in global winter sports.

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💡 **Athletes:** Arif Mohammad Khan, the veteran alpine skier, who previously represented India at the Beijing 2022 Winter Games, has qualified in the **Alpine Skiing** discipline.

✦ **Stanzin Lundup:** Competing in **Cross-Country Skiing**. His participation was confirmed after a selection process that involved a Delhi High Court decision regarding the national quota.

💡 **India participated in the Winter Olympics:** While the Winter Olympic Games began in 1924, India made its debut in 1964.

✦ Including the upcoming Milano Cortina Olympics, India has participated in 12 Winter Olympic editions, with 17 different athletes representing the country over the years.

India's First Indigenous Green Urea Plant in Andhra Pradesh

Why in News?

India's first large-scale indigenous green urea plant will be developed and operationalized at the **Pudimadaka Green Hydrogen Hub** in Andhra Pradesh.

Key Points:

💡 **Strategic MoU:** NTPC Green Energy Limited (NGEL), a subsidiary of NTPC Ltd., and **Assago Industries Pvt. Ltd.** have signed a MoU.

✦ Under the agreement, NGEL will supply **green ammonia, renewable electricity, CO₂**, and other utilities to Assago.

💡 **Objective:** To produce **green urea** using **green hydrogen and renewable energy**, reducing reliance on fossil fuel-based ammonia.

✦ The initiative marks a significant step towards building a **domestic green urea value chain**, reducing dependence on imported fertilizers.

✦ Aims to **create jobs**, strengthen the **green energy sector**, and contribute to Andhra Pradesh's industrial development.

💡 **Environmental Impact:** Expected to **significantly cut carbon emissions** compared to conventional urea plants.

✦ Supports India's **Net Zero 2070 goal** and the **Green Hydrogen Mission** under the National Hydrogen Policy.

💡 **Innovation:** First-of-its-kind **indigenous green urea technology** in India, promoting self-reliance in fertilizer production.

PLASTINDIA 2026 BEGINS IN NEW DELHI

Why in News?

PLASTINDIA 2026, one of the **world's largest plastics exhibitions**, commenced in **February 2026** at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi**.

Key Points:

💡 **Event:** It is the **12th edition** of the **triennial** mega event of the plastics industry, **PLASTINDIA 2026**.

✦ The event is structured around **five strategic pillars** — **Trade, Technology, Talent, Tradition, and Tourism**, emphasising industry growth, innovation, skill development, and cultural integration.

💡 **Organisers:** **Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals (DCPC), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers**, in collaboration with **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** and **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)**.

💡 **Theme :** PLASTINDIA 2026 is held under the theme **"Bharat Next"**.

✦ Aligning with the **Prime Minister's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat**, aimed at strengthening the domestic plastics industry and manufacturing ecosystem.

💡 **Sustainability Focus:** For the first time, It is being organised as a **Zero Waste Exhibition**, ensuring segregation, recycling, and reuse of all solid waste generated at the event.

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Kerala CM Launched Invasive Species Detection App

Why in News?

Kerala has officially launched **NeophyteID**, an AI-powered mobile application designed to detect and track invasive plant species across the state.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Launch & Developers:** Officially launched on 2nd February, 2026, by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the app was developed by the **Malabar Botanical Garden and Institute for Plant Sciences (MBGIPS)**.
- 🔦 **AI Technology:** Utilizing the **YOLOv11** machine learning model, the tool provides real-time identification and **geospatial tracking** for nearly **98 invasive species** in Kerala.
- 🔦 **Functionality & Access:** Users can photograph plants for instant, data-driven identification in both **English and Malayalam**.
- 🔦 **Ecological Impact:** NeophyteID aims to prevent the destruction of native plants during eradication efforts.
- 🔦 **Data-Driven Conservation:** The use of AI and **geospatial tracking** provides researchers with **data-rich insights** into invasive species distribution patterns — critical for planning removal and restoration strategies.

India Wins Record 6th ICC U-19 World Cup Title

Why in News?

India's Under-19 cricket team lifted the **ICC Men's Under-19 Cricket World Cup 2026** trophy, defeating **England U19** by a comprehensive margin to claim the nation's **sixth title in this format**—the most by any team in the tournament's history.

Key Points

- 🔦 **Historic Win:** India secured victory against England by **100 runs** in the final played at **Harare Sports Club, Zimbabwe**.

- ✦ India's Score in Final: 411/9
- ✦ England's Score: 311 (all out)
- ✦ Runner-up: England (U-19)
- ✦ Winning Margin: 100 runs

🔦 **Team Performance:** India's innings was powered by a **brilliant 175-run knock from 14-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi**, playing one of the most remarkable innings in U19 cricket history.

- ✦ **Indian Captain:** Ayush Mhatre
- ✦ **Man of the Match (Final):** Vaibhav Sooryavanshi
- ✦ **Man of the Tournament:** Vaibhav Sooryavanshi — for his outstanding 439 runs in seven matches.

🔦 **Record-Extending Title:** This victory marked India's **sixth ICC U19 World Cup title**, extending the country's record in the tournament and reinforcing India's status as the most successful team in U19 World Cup history.

🔦 **Rise of Youth Talent:** The tournament showcased India's strong pipeline of cricketing talent, with Sooryavanshi's extraordinary performance and the team's collective consistency under pressure, signalling a bright future for Indian cricket.

Indian Teacher Rouble Nagi Wins Prestigious Global Teacher Prize 2026

Why in News?

Indian educator **Rouble Nagi** has been awarded the **Global Teacher Prize 2026**,

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Award:** Rouble Nagi won the **Global Teacher Prize 2026**, receiving the **USD 1 million** award presented by **Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, Crown Prince of Dubai, during the **World Government Summit**.
- 🔦 **Organisers:** The award is presented by **GEMS Education** and organised by the **Varkey Foundation** in collaboration with **UNESCO**.
- 🔦 **Work and Contribution:** Rouble Nagi was recognised for her innovative work using **art-based**

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education to reach children in marginalised communities across India.

- ✦ Through the **Rouble Nagi Art Foundation**, she has established more than **800 learning centres** in over **100 low-income communities and villages**.
- ✦ These centres provide **structured learning opportunities** for children who had **limited or no access** to formal education.
- 💡 **Education Through Art:** A key element of her work is transforming **neglected walls into interactive educational murals**, known as “**living walls of learning**”, that teach literacy, numeracy, public health, environmental awareness, and other subjects directly to children in their environment.
 - ✦ This approach has helped integrate **over one million children** into educational programmes and significantly reduced dropout rates.
- 💡 **Selection and Global Recognition:** Rouble Nagi was selected from **over 5,000 nominations and applications from 139 countries**, reflecting the global significance and impact of her work in education.
- 💡 **Prize Utilisation:** She plans to use the prize money to establish a **vocational institute** offering **free training in professional skills and digital literacy**, aiming to broaden opportunities for underprivileged children and youth.

Miniratna Status for Yantra India Limited

Why in News?

The **Raksha Mantri**, Rajnath Singh, approved the grant of **Miniratna Category-I status** to **Yantra India Limited (YIL)**, a Defence Public Sector Undertaking (DPSU), marking a key milestone in its transformation from a government organisation into a profit-making corporate entity.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Yantra India Limited (YIL):** YIL was formed on **1 October 2021** after the corporatisation of the erstwhile **Ordnance Factory Board (OFB)** into

seven new DPSUs to improve autonomy, efficiency and competitiveness in defence manufacturing.

- 💡 **Organisation Type:** Schedule ‘A’ DPSU under the **Department of Defence Production**, Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- 💡 **Core Products:** Carbon fibre composites, aluminium alloys, glass composites and assembly products for **medium and large calibre ammunition, armoured vehicles, artillery guns and main battle tanks (MBTs)**.
- 💡 **Enhanced Autonomy and Powers:** With the Miniratna Category-I tag, **YIL’s Board of Directors** can now independently approve **capital expenditure proposals up to ₹500 crore** without requiring prior approval from the government.
- 💡 **Promoting Aatmanirbhar Bharat:** The move aligns with the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** initiative to reduce import dependence, promote indigenous design and production capabilities, and strengthen the defence industrial base.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru Clinches Second Title

Why in News?

Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) etched their name in cricketing history by defeating **Delhi Capitals (DC)** to secure their **second Women’s Premier League (WPL)** title.

Key Points:

- 💡 **The Target:** Delhi Capitals set a formidable target of **204 runs**, riding on a strong half-century by Jemimah Rodrigues (57 off 37 balls).
- 💡 **The Record Chase:** RCB achieved the target of **204/4** in 19.4 overs, surpassing the previous record for the highest chase in a major T20 final.
- 💡 **Star Performers:**
 - ✦ **Smriti Mandhana:** Played a captain’s knock of **87 (41)**, the highest individual score in a WPL final.
 - ✦ **Georgia Voll:** Contributed a vital **79 (54)**, forming a record **165-run partnership** with Mandhana for the second wicket.

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- 🔦 **Franchise Milestone:** With this victory, RCB joined Mumbai Indians as the only franchises to have won **two WPL titles** (2024 and 2026).
- 🔦 **Major Achievements & Awards**
- 🔦 **Orange Cap (Most Runs):** Smriti Mandhana (RCB) – 377 runs.
- 🔦 **Purple Cap (Most Wickets):** Radha Yadav (DC) – 14 wickets.
- 🔦 **Emerging Player of the Season:** Georgia Voll (RCB).
- 🔦 **Significance for Women:** Such high-profile victories contribute to the “normalization” of women’s professional sports, encouraging grassroots participation under the “Khelo India” initiative.

China's Plan for Space-Based AI Data Centres

Why in News?

China has announced that it plans to launch **space-based artificial intelligence data centres** over the **next five years** as part of its advanced technological and space infrastructure strategy.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Integrated Architecture:** The plan aims to build a new space architecture that integrates **cloud, edge, and terminal (device) capabilities**.
- 🔦 **Industrial-Scale “Space Cloud”:** By 2030, China intends to create an orbital “Space Cloud” powered by large-scale solar hubs, shifting energy-intensive AI processing from Earth to orbit.
- 🔦 **Processing Power:** The infrastructure will enable “deep integration of computing power, storage capacity, and transmission bandwidth,” allowing data generated on Earth to be processed directly in space.
- 🔦 **Domestic Milestones:** In a significant proof-of-concept, Alibaba Cloud’s **Qwen-3 model** recently became the world’s first general-purpose AI to successfully run inference in orbit on a test satellite.
- 🔦 **China vs. SpaceX:** The announcement positions China as the primary rival to SpaceX’s orbital ambitions.

- ✦ **SpaceX,** following its merger with AI firm xAI, is advancing plans for **solar-powered orbital data centres** and space computing satellites.
- 🔦 **Associated Challenges:** The massive increase in satellites for “Space Clouds” (potentially millions) significantly heightens the risk of collisions and complicates space traffic management.
- ✦ **Technical Risks:** Space-based hardware is highly vulnerable to **solar flares, radiation, and micrometeorite impacts**.

NITI Aayog Plans to Make Andhra Pradesh a Clean Energy Hub by 2035

Why in News?

NITI Aayog unveiled a draft blueprint aimed at transforming Andhra Pradesh into one of India’s top three renewable energy hubs by **2035**. The strategy was presented by NITI Aayog CEO **B.V.R. Subrahmanyam** to the State Chief Secretary under the **ASSET (Accelerating Sustainable State Energy Transition)** platform.

Key Points

- 🔦 **Clean Energy Transition:** The blueprint envisions making Andhra Pradesh a leading **renewable energy producer and exporter** by 2035.
- ✦ The plan is aligned with India’s broader push for **energy security, decarbonisation, economic growth, and climate action** and supports national targets including the **500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity goal by 2030**.
- 🔦 **Energy Affordability and Efficiency:** NITI Aayog estimates that power purchase costs could drop to **₹3.90–4 per unit**, with overall supply costs maintained below **₹6 per unit**.
- 🔦 **Transmission Modernisation:** An investment of **₹65,000–70,000 crore** is earmarked for transmission upgrades, including **Green Energy Corridors**, GIS substations, and HVDC lines.
- 🔦 **Energy War Room:** A dedicated monitoring cell will be established to track the progress of these initiatives.

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- 💡 **Timeline:** The blueprint is expected to be finalised by **early March 2026**, with implementation likely to begin by the middle of the same month.

Delhi Police Launched Operation Shastra

Why in News?

Delhi Police has launched **Operation Shastra**, a major campaign targeting the **growing glorification and display of guns and weapons on social media**, aiming to curb gun culture and enhance public safety.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Objective:** The operation is focused on preventing the **normalisation and celebration of firearms and violent imagery online**, which police believe can influence youth and contribute to unsafe behaviour.
- 💡 **Implementing Agencies:** The initiative is led by the **Delhi Police**, with directives from the **Police Commissioner** and coordinated involvement of **cyber units** and field teams.
 - ✦ Under **Operation Shastra**, authorities monitored thousands of social media accounts and short-form videos where individuals were seen displaying guns, knives, or other weapons for influence or thrill-seeking.
- 💡 **Technological Approach:** The operation incorporated digital scanning and behavioural analysis of publicly available content on social platforms to identify problematic posts that promote weapon glorification.
- 💡 **Significance:** Operation Shastra marks a **modern policing approach** that combines online surveillance with on-ground action to address emerging threats to public safety.
 - ✦ The campaign also seeks to educate communities and discourage youth from engaging in or sharing content that glamorises weapons and violence.

Goa Becomes Second Indian State to Publish a Bird Atlas

Why in News?

Goa has become the **second Indian state** to publish its own comprehensive **state-level bird atlas**, marking a major step in avian documentation and biodiversity conservation.

Key Points:

- 💡 **State:** The **Bird Atlas of Goa** was released in the coastal state of **Goa** making it the **second Indian state**.
 - ✦ Kerala was the **first Indian state** to publish a state-level bird atlas.
- 💡 **Launch:** The atlas was unveiled during the **ninth Bird Festival of Goa**, highlighting the state's emphasis on biodiversity awareness and community participation.
- 💡 **Purpose:** The bird atlas provides a **systematic and spatial mapping** of bird species and their distribution across Goa.
 - ✦ It is expected to support long-term ecological monitoring, scientific research, and conservation planning.
- 💡 **Methodology:** The atlas was developed through **citizen science collaboration** involving ornithologists, researchers, birdwatchers, and volunteers who contributed field observations and data.
- 💡 **Significance:**
 - ✦ It fills critical gaps in **avian biodiversity data** at the state level.
 - ✦ It will assist policymakers and conservationists in designing informed strategies for habitat protection and species management.
 - ✦ The project promotes greater **public engagement in wildlife conservation**.

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VOC Port Becomes India's First to Deploy Anti-Drone Security

Why in News?

Chidambaranar Port Authority (VOC Port) has become the **first port in India** to initiate the deployment of an advanced **Anti-Drone Security System**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **System:** The **Anti-Drone Security System** integrates radar, radio frequency detection, and optical tracking technologies to detect, monitor, and respond to unauthorized drone activities near the port vicinity.
 - ✦ This move was implemented by the **Chidambaranar Port Authority (VOC Port)** in Tamil Nadu.
- 💡 **Purpose:** The system aims to strengthen **maritime infrastructure security**, protect critical assets, and prevent potential threats posed by unmanned aerial systems in key operational zones.
 - ✦ This initiative represents a significant advancement in **port security measures**, aligning with national priorities to **safeguard trade routes and maritime installations** against **emerging technological threats**.
- 💡 **Security concern:** Increasing use of commercial drones globally has prompted security agencies to adopt **counter-drone systems** to mitigate risks linked to **espionage, smuggling, or accidental airspace incursions** near sensitive infrastructure.

Kotak Becomes India's First to Enable Fully Digital FPI Registration

Why in News?

Kotak Mahindra Bank has become the **first custodian in India** to facilitate the **entire Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) registration and account opening process using electronic signatures**, marking a major digital milestone in capital market access.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Institution:** The achievement was announced by **Kotak Mahindra Bank**.
 - ✦ One of India's leading **private sector banks**, when its custody arm enabled fully digital onboarding for FPIs.
- 💡 **Innovation:** This is the first instance in India where an FPI licence and associated client account opening documentation have been executed **entirely with electronic signatures (eSign)** without requiring physical **"wet signatures"**.
 - ✦ The move follows **SEBI's** introduction of a **unified digital workflow** in January 2026, which allows digital signatures to be used within the **Common Application Form (CAF)** portal for FPI registration.
- 💡 **Purpose:** The initiative aims to **simplify and accelerate the process for foreign investors** to enter the Indian market by reducing paperwork, lowering operational risks, and modernising the onboarding experience.
- 💡 **Benefits:** **Paperless onboarding** significantly reduces time and logistical overhead for global investors.
 - ✦ Enhances **ease of doing business** and supports India's aspiration to attract greater foreign investment.
 - ✦ Strengthens India's **digital infrastructure** for capital markets.
- 💡 **Significance:** This development reflects India's shift toward **digital transformation** in financial markets and aligns with broader reforms by SEBI to streamline investor registration and compliance processes.

Walmart Becomes First Retailer to Hit \$1 Trillion Market Value

Why in News?

Walmart has achieved a landmark financial milestone by crossing a **\$1 trillion market valuation**, emerging as the **first traditional retail company** to join the elite trillion-dollar club that has largely been dominated by major global technology firms.

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Key Points:

- 💡 **About Walmart:** It is a **US-based multinational retail corporation** known for its extensive chain of hypermarkets, discount department stores and grocery outlets.
- 💡 **Historic Benchmark:** Walmart's market capitalisation exceeded **\$1 trillion for the first time**.
 - ✦ Placing it among elite companies like **Nvidia, Alphabet (Google's parent)**, and other tech giants.
- 💡 **Factors Driving Growth:**
 - ✦ Expansion of its **online marketplace** and e-commerce services.
 - ✦ Boost from **digital and AI-driven capabilities** integrated into operations.
 - ✦ Strengthening of subscription services like **Walmart+** and rapid delivery offerings.
 - ✦ Growth in Walmart's **advertising business** and supply-chain innovations.
- 💡 **Significance:**
 - ✦ Marks a **shift in retail industry dynamics**, where a traditional retailer has joined ranks usually held by technology and digital-centric firms.
 - ✦ Signals investor confidence in Walmart's **omni-channel strategy** and ability to innovate in a competitive landscape traditionally led by tech companies.

India's First 'Elderly Budget' in Kerala

Why in News?

In the **Kerala State Budget 2026-27**, presented by Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal on **29 January 2026**, Kerala became the **first state in India** to introduce a specialized '**Elderly Budget**' document alongside the main budget to address the needs of senior citizens.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Key Pillars of the Elderly Budget:** The state has earmarked specific funds and policy frameworks to address the geriatric demographic shift:

- 💡 **Financial Security:** Social security pensions have been increased to **₹2,000 per month**, benefiting over 60 lakh individuals.
 - ✦ Total allocation for social security and welfare fund pensions stands at **₹14,500 crore**.
- 💡 **Health & Geriatric Care:**
 - ✦ **Menopause Clinics:** Established in district hospitals with an initial outlay of ₹3 crore.
 - ✦ **Insurance for the 'Missing Middle':** A **₹50 crore** allocation for a health insurance scheme targeting families above the poverty line who are not covered by existing schemes.
 - ✦ **Palliative Care:** Enhanced funding for the community-based palliative care network, a hallmark of the Kerala health model.
- 💡 **Housing & Infrastructure:**
 - ✦ **Retirement Homes:** **₹30 crore** allocated to subsidize the construction of modern retirement homes by private and cooperative sectors.
 - ✦ **Elderly Friendly Cities:** Special grants for local bodies to create "age-friendly" public infrastructure, including parks and walkways.
- 💡 **The Care Economy:**
 - ✦ **On-Call Volunteer Services:** **₹10 crore** to develop a digital platform and cadre of volunteers to assist the elderly living alone with daily chores and medical visits.
 - ✦ **Vayomithram Scheme:** Expanded to all municipal and panchayat wards to provide free medicines and check-ups at the doorstep.
- 💡 **Significance:** Kerala's elderly population is among the highest in India, creating pressure on health, social security and caregiving systems.
 - ✦ The Elderly Budget represents a **proactive policy response** to demographic reality rather than reactive welfare spending.

Airbus-GSV Centre of Excellence: Advancing Sustainable Aerospace

Why in News?

Global aerospace leader **Airbus** inaugurated a state-of-the-art **Centre of Excellence (CoE)** at **Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya (GSV)** in Vadodara, Gujarat.

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Key Points:

- 💡 **Collaboration:** This collaboration between Airbus and GSV aims to strengthen India's **aerospace research ecosystem**, particularly in **sustainable aviation technologies**, and deepen **industry-academia engagement** in the sector.
- 💡 **Objectives of the CoE:** Focused research on decarbonizing the aviation sector, including **Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)** and hydrogen-based propulsion systems.
- ✦ **Skill Development:** Creating a specialized workforce for the Indian aerospace ecosystem, specifically targeting aviation operations, maintenance, and logistics.
- 💡 **Research & Innovation:** Advancing collaborative projects between industry and academia to solve real-world aerospace challenges.
- 💡 **Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya (GSV):** A Central University established under the **Ministry of Railways**, Govt. of India.
 - ✦ **Location:** Based in **Vadodara**, it acts as the primary academic driver for the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.
- 💡 **Significance:** The CoE complements the **C-295 aircraft manufacturing facility** in Vadodara (a Tata-Airbus collaboration), strengthening the domestic supply chain.

- ✦ **Focus:** This theme was selected by the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** to **reframe pulses** from being seen as humble, traditional foods to being recognised for their nutritional richness, culinary diversity and value in sustainable diets.

- 💡 **India's Pulse Scenario (2025-26):** India remains the world's largest producer, consumer, and importer of pulses.
- 💡 **Production Targets:** Under the National Food Security Mission (NFSM), India has targeted a record production of 28-29 million tonnes for the 2025-26 crop year to achieve *Atmanirbharata* (self-reliance).
- 💡 **Importance of Pulses:** Pulses are a rich source of plant-based proteins, fiber, and essential minerals (iron, potassium, magnesium). They are critical for combating **malnutrition** in developing nations.
- ✦ **Soil Health (Nitrogen Fixation):** Legumes possess nitrogen-fixing properties that improve soil fertility, reducing the dependency on synthetic fertilizers and lowering the carbon footprint of agriculture.
- 💡 **Climate Resilience:** Pulses have a low water footprint compared to other protein sources and are highly adaptable to drought-prone environments, making them essential for **Climate-Smart Agriculture**.

World Pulses Day 2026

Why in News?

On **10th February, 2026**, World Pulses Day was celebrated globally to recognize the vital role of pulses (dried seeds of leguminous plants) in achieving the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Designation:** The day was designated by the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** in 2019, building on the success of the **International Year of Pulses (2016)**.
- ✦ **Theme:** *"Pulses of the world: from modesty to excellence"*

India Designated 'Country of the Year' at BIOFACH 2026 in Germany

Why in News?

India has been conferred the prestigious title of **'Country of the Year'** at **BIOFACH 2026**, the world's leading trade fair for **organic products**, being held in **February 2026** in **Nuremberg, Germany**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Event:** **BIOFACH 2026** is the world's largest international trade fair for **organic products**, taking place in **Germany**.

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- ✦ **India** has been officially designated as the 'Country of the Year', recognising its organic agriculture strength and export potential on a global platform.
- 💡 **Organising Authority:** India's participation is organised by the **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)** under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- ✦ **Pan-India Representation:** Exhibitors from **over 20 States and Union Territories** are participating, showcasing India's **agricultural and regional diversity**.
- ✦ **Products:** It displays a wide range of **organic products** such as rice, oilseeds, pulses, spices, herbs, cashew, ginger, turmeric, large cardamom, cinnamon, mango puree, essential oils, and other value-added organic items.
- 💡 **Export Boost:** The event provides a **major international platform** for Indian organic exporters to engage with global buyers, enhance market access, and reinforce India's position in the global organic market.
- 💡 **Significance:** India's recognition as **Country of the Year at BIOFACH** reflects its leadership in **organic agriculture**, growing export footprint, and commitment to **sustainable farming practices** that meet international standards.

Historic Maritime Convergence in Visakhapatnam

Why in News?

For the first time, India is simultaneously conducting three major international maritime events i.e. the **International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026**, **Exercise MILAN 2026**, and the **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Venue:** Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh — India's Eastern Naval Command headquarters and strategic maritime gateway.

- 💡 **Key Events:** This will be the first time India hosts all three major maritime events together.
- 💡 **IFR 2026 :** President Droupadi Murmu will review a massive assembly of warships on 18 Feb, highlighting India's "Builder's Navy" with vessels like INS Vikrant.
- 💡 **Exercise MILAN 2026:** MILAN is a **multilateral naval exercise** organised by the **Indian Navy**, involving professional exchanges, tactical drills and collaborative maritime operations.
- 💡 **IONS Conclave:** India assumes chairmanship (2025–2027), hosting 25+ nations to discuss regional security.
- 💡 **Participation:** Warships and aircraft from over **50–70 countries** are expected to participate, representing major maritime powers and regional partners.
- 💡 **Global Presence:** Countries such as the **United States, Russia, Japan, Australia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Iran, UK, UAE, South Africa and others** will take part, highlighting wide diplomatic engagement.

IIT Madras ₹600 Crore Venture Capital Fund for Deep-Tech Startups

Why in News?

The IIT Madras Research Park has launched a **₹600 crore deep-tech venture capital fund** aimed at nurturing early-stage and **technology-intensive startups** across India's deep-tech ecosystem.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Fund:** The **IIT Madras Research Park (IITMRP)**, in collaboration with **Unicorn India Ventures**, announced the establishment of a **₹600 crore deep-tech venture capital fund** called **IITM Unicorn Frontier Fund I**.
- ✦ The fund includes an additional **₹400 crore 'greenshoe option'**, bringing potential total deployment capacity to **₹1,000 crore** for investment in deep-tech startups.

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- ✦ The fund targets **early-stage deep-tech companies** with technologies such as **AI, semiconductors, defence tech, robotics, and frontier research**.
- 💡 **Strategic Vision:** It emphasizes **technology sovereignty**, reducing reliance on imported technologies by supporting ventures building globally competitive solutions from India.
- 💡 **Innovation Support:** The fund aims to provide **patient capital**, recognizing that deep-tech startups often require **longer gestation periods** due to intensive R&D, prototyping, and regulatory challenges.
- 💡 **Impact:** The initiative is expected to strengthen India's **deep-tech startup ecosystem** by enabling growth of **intellectual property-led ventures** and fostering collaboration between research institutions and industry.
- 💡 **IITMRP:** It is one of India's prominent **university-based research parks**, designed to bridge the gap between **academia and industry** by incubating **startups** and hosting **R&D entities** within its facility.

Gujarat Exchanges LoI with Starlink for High-Speed Internet Connectivity

Why in News?

The **Government of Gujarat** signed a **Letter of Intent (LoI)** with **Starlink**, a subsidiary of Elon Musk's SpaceX, to expand high-speed satellite internet connectivity across the state.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Signatories:** The document was exchanged in Gandhinagar between State Industries Commissioner **P. Swaroop** and Starlink India Head **Prabhakar Jayakumar**, in the presence of Chief Minister **Bhupendra Patel** and Deputy CM **Harsh Sanghavi**.
- 💡 **Target Areas:** The initiative specifically focuses on remote, border, tribal, and underserved regions where traditional telecom infrastructure is limited or difficult to deploy.

- 💡 **Priority Districts:** Special emphasis is placed on "Aspirational Districts" such as **Narmada** and **Dahod**.
- 💡 **Pilot Project Scope:** The initial phase aims to connect key public infrastructure, including:
 - ✦ **Education:** State schools for smart classrooms.
 - ✦ **Healthcare:** Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and telemedicine services.
 - ✦ **Security:** Coastal police outposts and highway safety systems.
 - ✦ **Public Services:** Common Service Centres (CSCs) and e-Governance hubs.
 - ✦ **Logistics & Environment:** Ports, GIDC industrial parks, and wildlife sanctuaries.
- 💡 **Joint Working Group:** A collaborative team comprising representatives from the Gujarat government and Starlink will be established to oversee the pilot assessments and coordinate implementation.
- 💡 **Regulatory Standing:** While Starlink has been issued an LoI, final commercial rollout remains subject to licensing and security requirements from India's central authorities (DoT/IN-SPACe).
- 💡 **Significance:** This strategic move is part of **Gujarat's Digital Connectivity Mission** aimed at **bridging the digital divide** where terrestrial telecom networks are weak or unviable due to geography or cost.

India to Establish Two New Telescopes in Ladakh

Why in News?

In the Union Budget 2026-27, the Indian government approved a major expansion of its ground-based astronomy infrastructure in Ladakh, including the establishment of **two new mega-telescopes** and the **upgrade of an existing facility**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **New Telescope Projects:** Establish the National Large Solar Telescope and the National Large Optical–Near Infrared Telescope.
- 💡 **National Large Solar Telescope (NLST):** To observe the **Sun's surface and atmosphere** with high resolution.

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- ✦ **Location:** Near Pangong Tso lake, Ladakh.
- ✦ **Scientific Focus:** Solar magnetic fields, flares, coronal mass ejections and space-weather phenomena.
- 💡 **Significance:** Once completed, NLST will be India's **third ground-based solar observatory**, complementing existing facilities such as the **Kodaikanal Solar Observatory (Tamil Nadu)** and **Udaipur Solar Observatory (Rajasthan)**, and augmenting data from India's **Aditya-L1 space observatory**.
- 💡 **National Large Optical–Near Infrared Telescope (NLOT):** A **deep-space optical and near-infrared telescope** for cutting-edge cosmic research.
 - ✦ **Scientific Applications:** Studies of **exoplanets, stellar and galactic evolution, cosmology, supernovae and distant galaxies**.
- 💡 **Significance:** With its large collecting area and high altitude site, NLOT will be among **the most powerful optical telescopes** in the region for deep-space observation.
- 💡 **Upgradation of Himalayan Chandra Telescope (HCT):** The HCT will be **upgraded to a telescope with a 3.7-metre segmented primary mirror**, improving its sensitivity and wavelength coverage into optical-infrared regimes.
 - ✦ **Scientific Impact:** The enhanced HCT will allow deeper observations and complement both **international observatories** and the new telescopes being built under this programme.
- 💡 **Why Ladakh?:** Ladakh, located at high altitude with **clear, dry skies and low atmospheric disturbance**, has been identified as an **optimal site for astronomical observations**, and is already home to several important optical and high-energy astronomy facilities.

Himachal Pradesh CM Launches 'Padhai with AI' App

Why in News?

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu launched the 'Padhai with AI' digital learning initiative in Bilaspur district.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Objective:** The initiative aims to provide a **fully digital learning environment** with **continuous academic counselling**, ensuring access to quality study materials and guidance for students preparing for competitive exams.
 - ✦ The initiative is **specifically designed for students** who are preparing for **various competitive examinations** and require technology-assisted learning support.
- 💡 **Vision:** CM emphasised that education is a **transformative force** that broadens thinking and shapes the **future of society**, and the state government is committed to strengthening education through **innovation and equal opportunities**.
 - ✦ The initiative is supported by **NTPC**, which aids in delivering **modern, technology-based and quality educational facilities** to students through the platform.
- 💡 **Equal Access:** The platform is intended to **ensure equal access to quality education** irrespective of students' geographical or **socio-economic background** by leveraging **AI-based technology**.
- 💡 **Significance:** This initiative reflects a broader push by the state government to **integrate artificial intelligence into public education delivery**.
 - ✦ Aiming to address **educational disparities and enhance learning outcomes** for students in rural and semi-urban areas.

Amaravati Quantum Valley Launched under National Quantum Mission

Why in News?

Union Minister Jitendra Singh laid the **foundation stone** of the **Amaravati Quantum Centre** in Amaravati, **Andhra Pradesh**, as a part of India's ambitious **National Quantum Mission**.

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Key Points:

- 💡 **National Quantum Mission:** India's **National Quantum Mission** has an allocation of about **₹6,000 crore** and spans **43 institutions** across **17 states and 2 Union Territories**.
 - ✦ Organised under four core areas: **Quantum Computing, Quantum Communication, Quantum Sensing and Metrology, and Quantum Materials and Devices**.
- 💡 **Nodal Ministry:** Department of Science & Technology (DST), Ministry of Science & Technology.
- 💡 **Vision:** Development of **intermediate-scale quantum computers** in the range of **50–1,000 physical qubits** using different **technology platforms (superconducting and photonic)**.
 - ✦ **Objective:** Establishment of **satellite-based secure quantum communication** and **ground-based quantum networks**.
 - ✦ **Applications:** High-precision timing, navigation, imaging, and detection for defence and space applications.
- 💡 **Amaravati Quantum Valley:** Envisioned as a **dedicated quantum innovation cluster**, integrating research institutions, industry, startups, and talent development ecosystems.
 - ✦ Collaboration with global technology companies such as **IBM** and Indian IT major **TCS** for quantum cloud access and innovation centres.
- 💡 **Strategic Relevance:** Quantum technology is considered a **critical and emerging technology (CET)** globally, with implications for **national security and encryption systems**.

Delhi Launches 'Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana'

Why in News?

The **Delhi Government** has launched a new social welfare scheme called the **Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana** to strengthen girls' education by providing structured financial support from birth through higher education.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Launch:** The Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana was announced by **Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta** and will take effect from **1 April 2026**.
 - ✦ Replacing and upgrading the older **Ladli Scheme** that was **launched in 2008** but faced implementation challenges.
- 💡 **Objective:** The scheme's primary purpose is to **prevent girls from dropping out of school** and to promote their **educational continuity, financial security, and empowerment**.
 - ✦ It aims to support girls from **economically weaker households** across key educational milestones through **phased bank deposits**.
- 💡 **Financial Structure:** Under the programme, financial assistance will be deposited in **phased instalments** linked to major educational milestones — starting from **birth** and continuing through **graduation or diploma courses**.
 - ✦ The cumulative amount deposited will earn interest and is designed to grow to **over ₹1 lakh** at maturity in the **beneficiary's bank account**.
 - ✦ Girls who are already beneficiaries under the previous **Ladli Scheme** will continue to receive entitlements while new beneficiaries will be enrolled under the revamped **Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana**.
- 💡 **Eligibility Criteria:** To qualify, the girl child must be **born in Delhi**, and her family must have **resided in Delhi for at least three years** with an **annual income not exceeding ₹1.20 lakh**.
 - ✦ Up to **two girl children per family** are eligible to be covered under the scheme.
- 💡 **Direct Transfers:** The payments will be credited **directly to the beneficiary's Aadhaar-linked bank account** through a fully **digital application** and disbursement process, ensuring **transparency and ease of access**.

World Radio Day 2026

Why in News?

World Radio Day is an **international observance**, celebrated annually on **13 February**, to recognise radio

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as a powerful medium for communication, access to information, and cultural diversity.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Official Theme:** “Radio and Artificial Intelligence: AI is a tool, not a voice.”
- 💡 **Purpose of Theme:** The official theme, “Radio and Artificial Intelligence,” explores how emerging technologies can support broadcasters without replacing them:
- 💡 **Acknowledgement:** It honours the founding of **United Nations Radio in 1946** and acknowledges the role of radio in building inclusive societies and reaching diverse audiences worldwide.
- 💡 **Adoption:** The observance was **proclaimed by UNESCO in 2011** and later **adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012**.
- 💡 **World Radio Day Conclave 2026: Akashvani Raipur (Chhattisgarh),** in collaboration with UNESCO, hosted a major conclave in Chhattisgarh to deliberate on AI’s role in preserving human-centric communication.
- 💡 **Significance:** World Radio Day celebrates the enduring relevance of radio in a rapidly evolving media environment

Nivedita Dubey First Woman Member of Airports Authority of India (AAI)

Why in News?

Nivedita Dubey has become the **first woman officer** to be appointed to the **Board of the Airports Authority of India (AAI)**, marking a significant milestone in the Indian civil aviation sector’s leadership and gender representation.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Historic Appointment:** Nivedita Dubey has assumed charge as **Member (Human Resources)** — the second-highest position — on the **AAI Board**, making her the **first woman officer ever** inducted into the board of the Airports Authority of India.

💡 **Organisation:** **Airports Authority of India (AAI)** is a **statutory body** responsible for creating, upgrading, maintaining and managing civil aviation infrastructure in India.

💡 **Background:** She began her career with AAI in **1995** as a **management trainee**.

- ✦ Over the years, she has held diverse roles, including **airport manager** at **Indira Gandhi International Airport** and served as **Regional Executive Director (Eastern Region)**.

💡 **Role & Responsibilities:** As Member (Human Resources) on the AAI Board, she will play a key role in **policy formulation, personnel management, industrial relations and administration** for the organisation.

💡 **Significance:** Her appointment is being widely hailed as an **inspiring achievement for women and youth** in India, especially within the **aviation sector**, which has historically seen limited female representation at senior governance levels.

India Hosts First BRICS Sherpa Meeting 2026

Why in News?

India hosted the **first BRICS Sherpa and Sous-Sherpa Meeting in New Delhi** as part of its **2026 chairmanship** of the BRICS grouping.

Key Points:

💡 **Chair & Representatives:** The meeting was chaired by **Sudhakar Dalela**, India’s **BRICS Sherpa** and Secretary (Economic Relations), along with **Shambhu L. Hakki**, India’s **BRICS Sous-Sherpa**.

- ✦ **Participants:** Senior officials and sherpas from BRICS member and partner countries — including Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and the UAE — took part in the discussions.

💡 **Theme:** The priorities were presented under the theme **“Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability,”** reflecting India’s people-centric approach to its **BRICS leadership**.

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- 🔦 **Focus:** Emphasising cooperation across sectors such as **health, agriculture, labour, disaster risk reduction, climate change, energy, innovation, ICT, security** and economic and financial domains.
- 🔦 **Significance:** The meeting laid the foundation for **India's 2026 BRICS agenda** by promoting cooperation, resilience, innovation, and sustainability ahead of the upcoming BRICS Summit.

Country's Second Tulip Garden in Himachal Pradesh

Why in News?

In a significant boost to hill tourism and floriculture, the **CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT)** has officially opened its **Tulip Garden in Palampur** (Kangra district) to the general public.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Second Tulip garden:** This is the country's second major tulip garden after the **Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden in Srinagar (Jammu & Kashmir)**, which is Asia's largest and most famous tulip garden.
- 🔦 **Strategic Location:** Situated at an altitude of approximately 1,290 metres, the garden leverages the unique agro-climatic conditions of the **Dhauladhar range**.
- 🔦 **Variety and Scale:** The garden features over **50,000 tulips** spanning several varieties and colours, including Red, Yellow, Pink, and White.
- 🔦 **Research Integration:** Unlike purely commercial gardens, this is a research-cum-demonstration plot managed by CSIR-IHBT Palampur.
 - ✦ It serves as a testing ground for **indigenous bulb production** to reduce India's dependency on imports from the Netherlands.
- 🔦 **Promotion of Floriculture:** The garden serves as a "Technical Hub" for local farmers, showcasing the commercial viability of tulip cultivation as a high-value cash crop in Himachal Pradesh.

- 🔦 **Tourism Circuit:** The garden adds a new dimension to the Kangra tourism circuit, attracting visitors during the "shoulder season" (late winter/early spring) when traditional snow tourism begins to taper.
- 🔦 **Biodiversity Conservation:** The institute uses this platform to educate visitors on the importance of Himalayan floral diversity.

Nationwide Campaign to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis

Why in News?

The Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, launched the **Annual Nationwide Mass Drug Administration (MDA) Campaign** for the **elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis (LF)** across **12 endemic States** of India.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Mass Drug Administration (MDA) Campaign:** To interrupt transmission of LF and achieve elimination as a public health problem.
- 🔦 **Strategy:** Annual administration of anti-filarial medicines to the **entire eligible population**, excluding pregnant women, infants below a certain age, and seriously ill individuals.
- 🔦 **Drug Used:** Drugs commonly used include **Diethylcarbamazine (DEC)**, **Albendazole**, and in selected districts, **Ivermectin** (Triple Drug Therapy – IDA).
- 🔦 **Target States:** The campaign is being implemented across **12 endemic states:** Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.
- 🔦 **Lymphatic Filariasis (LF):** Lymphatic Filariasis is a **neglected tropical disease (NTD)** caused by **parasitic worms** (*Wuchereria bancrofti*, *Brugia malayi*).
 - ✦ It is transmitted through the **bite of infected mosquitoes**.

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- ✦ Chronic infection leads to conditions such as **elephantiasis, hydrocele, and long-term disability.**
- ✦ India accounts for a **significant global burden** of LF.

💡 **Ahead of Schedule:** India's **2027 target** reflects the nation's proactive stance in meeting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 3) targets early.

PM Inaugurates Seva Teerth and Kartavya Bhavan in New Delhi

Why in News?

The **Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi**, inaugurated **Seva Teerth and Kartavya Bhavan** in New Delhi in February 2026, marking a significant milestone in the modernisation of **India's central administrative infrastructure.**

Key Points:

- 💡 **Inauguration:** Seva Teerth has been inaugurated as the new complex to house the **Prime Minister's Office (PMO)**, symbolising a shift towards **service-oriented governance.**
- ✦ **Kartavya Bhavan** accommodates key Union Ministries to improve **coordination and administrative efficiency.**
- 💡 **Relocation:** The **PMO** has shifted from the historic **South Block to Seva Teerth.**
 - ✦ The new buildings are part of the broader **Central Vista project** aimed at **modernising India's administrative infrastructure.**
- 💡 **Significance:** The complexes are built as **energy-efficient, eco-friendly structures** with **green building standards and modern safety features.**
 - ✦ The new infrastructure is designed to enhance **transparency, accessibility, and seamless public interface** in governance.
- 💡 **Symbolic Shift from Colonial Legacy:** The move represents a transition from **colonial-era administrative buildings to modern, India-centric governance spaces** aligned with the **vision of 'Viksit Bharat'.**

Sthree Suraksha Scheme in Kerala

Why in News?

The **Government of Kerala** has launched the **Sthree Suraksha Scheme** to provide **monthly financial assistance** to **unemployed women and transgender women** in the state.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Scheme:** The **Sthree Suraksha Scheme** is a state-level **social security initiative** designed to provide financial assistance to **economically vulnerable unemployed women and transgender women.**
 - ✦ Eligible beneficiaries receive **₹1,000 per month** as direct financial assistance, credited to their **bank accounts** through the state's social security pension system.
- 💡 **Target Group:** The scheme primarily benefits **homemakers and unemployed women** who are not covered under any existing **social welfare pension schemes.**
- 💡 **Eligibility:** Applicants must be permanent residents of Kerala, aged between **35 and 60 years, unemployed, belonging to Antyodaya Anna Yojana (Yellow Card) or Priority Household (Pink Card) ration card categories,** and should not be beneficiaries of other welfare pensions.
 - ✦ Applications are submitted through **Local Self-Government Institutions** (Panchayats, Municipalities, and Corporations) and are subject to verification by **local authorities.**
- 💡 **Mode of Transfer:** Financial assistance is provided through **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** to ensure **transparency and timely disbursement.**
 - ✦ The scheme is funded by the **Government of Kerala** as part of its social security and **gender welfare initiatives.**
- 💡 **Inclusion of Transgender:** Their inclusion reflects the state's commitment to **social justice and inclusive welfare policies.**
- 💡 **Mechanism:** Beneficiary lists are verified at the local body level to prevent duplication and ensure that only eligible applicants receive benefits.

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- Significance: The scheme strengthens Kerala's social protection framework, promotes women's economic security, and contributes to gender-inclusive development.

PNB Soldierathon 2026

Why in News?

Punjab National Bank has announced the **PNB Soldierathon 2026**, a nationwide marathon event as part of celebrations leading up to its **132nd Foundation Day**.

Key Points:

- Event:** **PNB Soldierathon 2026** is the **second edition** of the bank's flagship marathon event, aimed at promoting fitness, discipline, and national pride.
 - The PNB Soldierathon 2026 marathon is scheduled to be held in **April 2026**.
- Organised by:** The event has been announced by **Punjab National Bank** at its corporate office in Dwarka, New Delhi.
- Theme:** **"Run with Soldiers, Run for Soldiers"** highlights the marathon's focus on honouring the **Indian Armed Forces** and strengthening ties between citizens and defence personnel.
- Foundation Day:** The announcement marks the commencement of celebrations for PNB's **132nd Foundation Day**, reflecting the bank's legacy and social engagement role.
 - During the pre-launch, the official **theme, event name, marathon T-shirt, and medals** were unveiled as part of the preparations.
- Objective:** The marathon aims to promote **fitness, healthy lifestyle, national unity**, and a **civil-military connect**, bringing together soldiers, veterans, youth, and citizens across India.
 - By combining athletic participation with patriotic symbolism, the Soldierathon reinforces PNB's broader mission of **community engagement, social responsibility, and nation-building**.

India-Thailand Joint In-Situ Air Exercise

Why in News?

The **Indian Air Force** and the **Royal Thai Air Force** are undertaking a **joint in-situ air exercise** aimed at boosting operational coordination and interoperability between the two air forces.

Key Points:

- Exercise:** An **in-situ air exercise** refers to a joint training operation conducted under **realistic flight and combat-relevant conditions**.
 - Allowing forces to operate together near **operational environments** rather than in **isolated training simulations**.
- Indian Air Force Assets:** India has deployed several of its frontline aerial assets, including **Su-30MKI fighter aircraft**, **Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)**, **Airborne Early Warning & Control (AEW&C)** platforms, and **IL-78 mid-air refuelling aircraft**.
 - The Royal Thai Air Force is participating with its **Gripen multirole fighter aircraft**, facilitating joint **flight operations and tactical coordination**.
- Objective:** The primary aim of the exercise is to enhance **operational coordination, interoperability, and mutual understanding** in aerial operations between both air forces.
- Strategic Significance:** The exercise highlights expanding defence cooperation between India and Thailand within the broader framework of India's **Act East Policy** and Thailand's **Act West Policy**.
- Benefits:** Involvement of force multipliers such as **Airborne Warning and Control System** and aerial refuelling platforms demonstrates advanced integration of surveillance, command and control, and extended mission endurance capabilities.

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WHO Prequalifies India-Made Novel Oral Polio Vaccine (nOPV2)

Why in News?

The **World Health Organization** prequalified a **novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2)**, a breakthrough in stopping **polio outbreaks** more sustainably with stronger global vaccine supply.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Manufacturing:** This milestone is particularly significant for India as the vaccine is manufactured by **Biological E. Limited (BioE)**, a Hyderabad-based company.
- 💡 **Boost Health Security:** Approval serves as a critical boost to both national health security and India's role in the global eradication campaign.
- 💡 **nOPV2 as a "Game-Changer":** The primary challenge in current polio eradication is **Circulating Vaccine-Derived Poliovirus (cVDPV2)**—outbreaks caused when the weakened virus in traditional oral vaccines mutations back into a virulent form in under-immunized communities.
- 💡 **Superior Stability:** nOPV2 is engineered to be more genetically stable, reducing the risk of reverting to a form that causes paralysis by approximately **80%** compared to traditional vaccines.
- 💡 **Massive Production Capacity:** Biological E. is expected to produce **600 million doses annually**, significantly diversifying the global supply beyond the original manufacturer in Indonesia.
- 💡 **Flexible Logistics:** The vaccine has a **24-month shelflife** and can be stored at standard temperatures for up to six months, making it easier to deploy in remote areas.
- 💡 **World Polio Day:** It is observed every year on **24th October** in order to call on countries to stay vigilant in their fight against the disease.

Corruption Perceptions Index 2025

Why in News?

The **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025**, released by **Transparency International**, ranks **182 countries and territories** on a scale from **0 (highly corrupt)** to **100 (very clean)** based on expert assessments and business perception surveys drawn from 13 independent data sources.

Key Points

- 💡 **Rank:** India ranked **91st out of 182 countries**.
- 💡 **Score:** India's score was **39 out of 100**, showing a marginal improvement from its score of 38 in the previous year.
- 💡 **Progress:** While this allowed India to climb five spots from its 2024 rank of 96, it remains below the global average score of 43.
- ✦ **India's Ranking Progress:** India's slight rise is attributed to the expansion of **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** and e-governance, which have reduced "middleman" corruption in welfare delivery.
 - 📎 **Concerns:** The report noted that while low-level bribery in services has seen a dip, concerns remain regarding **political financing** and the protection of whistleblowers and journalists.
- 💡 **Regional Comparison:** India performs better than **Pakistan (136th)** and **Bangladesh (150th)**, but continues to lag behind **Bhutan (18th)** and **China (75th)**.
- 💡 **Top Countries (Least Corrupt):** **Denmark (1st)** continues to lead the world as the least corrupt country with a score of 89, followed closely by **Finland** in second place.
- ✦ **Singapore** maintains its status as the highest-ranked Asian nation in third, while **New Zealand** and **Norway** round out the top five, reflecting the consistent transparency of Nordic and Pacific governance models.

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- 💡 **Bottom Countries (Most Corrupt):** The bottom five countries are those struggling with prolonged civil unrest, state failure, or autocratic regimes.
 - ✦ **Somalia** and **South Sudan** are tied at the absolute bottom of the index with the lowest score of 9.
 - ✦ They are preceded by **Venezuela**, which continues to face systemic institutional collapse, and **Yemen** and **Libya**, both of whose scores reflect the devastating impact of long-term conflict on public accountability and the rule of law.
- 💡 **Global Findings:** The global average score declined to 42, the lowest in over a decade, signaling that perceived corruption is worsening worldwide.
 - ✦ **122 out of 182 countries** scored below 50, indicating that most nations are struggling to keep public-sector corruption under control.

PM's First Decisions from Seva Teerth

Why in News?

The **Prime Minister of India** announced several significant decisions from **Seva Teerth, New Delhi**, aimed at strengthening social security, women's financial inclusion, agriculture infrastructure, and the startup ecosystem.

Key Points:

- 💡 **PM RAHAT Scheme:** The scheme offers **cashless treatment of up to ₹1.5 lakh** for accident victims to ensure timely and affordable medical care.
- 💡 **Lakshpati Didis Target Increased:** The government doubled the target of **Lakshpati Didis beneficiaries from 3 crore to 6 crore by March 2029** to expand **financial inclusion** and women-oriented savings benefits.
- 💡 **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund Target:** The loan allocation under the fund has been increased to strengthen farmers' access to credit and enhance **agricultural value chains**.

- 💡 **Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 Receives ₹10,000 Crore Corpus:**
 - ✦ Aimed at boosting **innovation** and supporting **early-stage startups**, the fund will provide financial support to new **technology-driven ventures** across the country.
- 💡 **Decisions Reflect Citizen-Centric Governance and Social Welfare:** The initiatives collectively focus on social security, economic growth, women empowerment, and innovation-led development.

Indian Coast Guard Inaugurates Waterjet Production & Testing Facility in Goa

Why in News?

The **Indian Coast Guard** has inaugurated a state-of-the-art **Waterjet Production and Testing Facility** at **Goa**, marking a major step towards **maritime self-reliance** and **enhanced operational capability**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Inauguration:** The Director General of the Indian Coast Guard, **Paramesh Sivamani**, inaugurated the facility in **February 2026**, strengthening India's indigenous defence manufacturing ecosystem.
- 💡 **Partner:** Established in partnership with **M/s Marine Jet Power (MJP) India**.
 - ✦ The unit was developed under the **Manufacturing and Transfer of Technology (ToT) framework** to enable in-country production and testing of waterjet systems.
- 💡 **India Becomes Third Country:** With this development, **India** joins only the **United States** and **South Korea** as the **third nation** globally to host an advanced waterjet production and testing facility.
 - ✦ The facility will **strengthen operational sustainment and maintenance of waterjet propulsion systems** used in ICG vessels and reduce dependency on foreign testing infrastructure.

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💡 **Support:** The unit is expected to support the domestic supply chain, generate employment, and bolster the MSME ecosystem by integrating local manufacturing partners into defence production.

✦ The facility will also serve as a regional hub for South Asia and adjoining regions for testing and maintenance of waterjet systems, positioning India as a key maritime engineering centre.

💡 **Boosts Coast Guard Fleet Capability:** The Indian Coast Guard currently operates more than 100 MJP waterjet propulsion systems onboard its vessels.

Gujarat Launches India's First CBDC-Based Public Distribution System

Why in News?

The Government of Gujarat has launched India's first Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)-based Public Distribution System (PDS) aimed at transforming food subsidy delivery using digital currency.

Key Points:

- 💡 **First in India:** India launched its first CBDC-enabled public distribution system in Gujarat, using Reserve Bank of India (RBI)-authorised digital currency tokens for subsidy delivery.
- 💡 **Digital Tokens:** Under the system, beneficiaries receive CBDC-linked digital coupons or tokens in their wallets.
 - ✦ This can be used to redeem subsidised foodgrains at fair price shops using QR codes or Aadhaar-based OTP authentication.
- 💡 **ATM for 24x7 Access:** A 'Annapurta Grain ATM' was introduced in the Sabarmati zone (Ahmedabad), capable of dispensing up to 25 kg of food grains in 35 seconds.
 - ✦ The new PDS model also includes distribution of essential commodities such as tur dal and chana in 1-kg sealed packs instead of loose supplies to maintain hygiene and quality.

💡 **Significance:** By using CBDC tokens, the system aims to improve transparency, reduce corruption in the food supply chain, ensure traceability of transactions, and strengthen accountability in subsidy delivery.

💡 **Developed by:** The CBDC platform has been developed by Punjab National Bank under the RBI-authorised framework, enabling secure and traceable transactions for beneficiary welfare.

PM Modi Congratulates Barbados PM Mia Mottley on Historic Victory

Why in News?

Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, extended warm congratulations to Mia Amor Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados, on her historic third consecutive electoral victory in the general elections held in Barbados.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Historic Victory:** Mia Amor Mottley secured a third successive term as Prime Minister after her party won all seats in the House of Assembly, marking a significant political milestone.
 - ✦ The Prime Minister of India congratulated her on this achievement, recalling their previous meeting on the sidelines of the India-CARICOM Summit 2024 and expressing India's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.
- 💡 **Deep-Rooted Relations:** PM Modi emphasised that India deeply values its long-standing friendship with Barbados, which continues to expand across diverse areas of cooperation.
 - ✦ He highlighted the intent to work closely with Barbados to further enhance partnership for the benefit of both nations' peoples.
- 💡 **Global & Regional Context:** Mia Mottley has emerged as a globally recognised leader, advocating climate action, economic reforms, and South-South cooperation, contributing to Barbados' diplomatic profile.

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Reliance Secures US Licence to Import Venezuelan Crude Oil

Why in News?

Reliance Industries has been granted a **general licence by the United States government** to directly import **crude oil from Venezuela**, enabling the company to resume discounted heavy oil imports and boost its refining margins.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Venezuelan Oil Imports:** The **United States** issued a licence permitting Reliance to directly purchase Venezuelan crude oil without violating sanctions.
 - ✦ **Venezuelan heavy crude** is sold at a discount and is compatible with the sophisticated units at **Reliance's Jamnagar refinery**.
- 💡 **Diversifies Sources:** The licence helps India's **largest private refiner** reduce dependence on a narrow set of suppliers and diversifies crude sources amid **global market uncertainties**.
 - ✦ Reliance had halted **Venezuelan crude imports** in **2025** due to sanctions but had earlier imported through traders.
- 💡 **Impact:** Venezuelan oil imports may help reduce **India's dependence on Russian crude**, ensuring a more stable and reliable supply of oil for Indian refineries.
- 💡 **Strategic Energy Interests:** By securing discounted heavy crude, Reliance enhances its competitive edge and contributes to **secure energy supply chains** while navigating **international sanctions frameworks**.

Kerala Becomes First State in India to Frame Urban Policy

Why in News?

Kerala has become the **first state** in the country to frame a comprehensive **Urban Policy** aimed at guiding **long-term development** and managing **rapid urbanisation** effectively.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Vision 2050:** The policy envisions the **state in 2050** as a **continuous network of climate-smart cities and towns**, emphasising scientific planning and sustainable governance.
- 💡 **Approval:** The draft policy was approved by the **Kerala cabinet** under the leadership of **Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan**, after nearly two years of preparation by the **Local Self Government Department**.
 - ✦ The initiative was first announced in the **2023–24 state budget**, and a **Kerala Urban Policy Commission** comprising national and international experts was set up to develop the roadmap.
- 💡 **Consultations:** The Commission submitted the **Nava Kerala Urban Policy** report in March 2025, and inputs from a global conference in Kochi were incorporated into the policy.
 - ✦ According to the Commission's estimates, Kerala's urban population is expected to reach nearly **80% by 2050**, requiring **proactive and inclusive urban governance**.
- 💡 **Focus Areas:** The policy outlines key thematic areas including reforms in laws and institutional systems, **capacity building, infrastructure development, people-centric services**, and spatial planning.
 - ✦ It aims to harness the **benefits of urbanisation** to reduce **inequalities**, strengthen **social support systems**, and improve the **quality of infrastructure across urban areas**.

Government Launches Bodhan AI to Integrate AI in Education

Why in News?

The **Government of India** has announced plans to integrate **Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools** into the **education system** across all levels—from pre-primary to higher education.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Bodhan AI:** A not-for-profit company named **Bodhan AI** has been launched at the **Centre of**

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Excellence in AI for Education, hosted by IIT Madras, with the goal of building foundational AI technologies for the education sector.

- ✦ Bodhan AI will develop the **Bharat EduAI Stack** as a **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**—similar in concept to **UPI**—to enable large-scale, interoperable AI services for education.
- 💡 **Objective:** The Centre plans to incorporate AI tools into **teaching and learning processes** nationwide to make education more **adaptive, effective, and accessible**.
- ✦ **Focus Areas:** The initiative will prioritise **research and development** of AI capabilities in **Indian languages**, including automatic speech recognition, speech synthesis, and multilingual language models.
- ✦ Emphasis will be on **multilingual AI systems** capable of understanding and interacting in **various Indian languages** so students can receive feedback and support in their mother tongue.
- 💡 **Applications:** AI tools are expected to support **personalized student learning**, assist teachers with intervention strategies, and aid administrators in evaluating educational outcomes at district and school levels.
- 💡 **Data Privacy and Ethics:** Experts involved in the initiative have highlighted the need to **protect student data** and ensure that **personal information is not stored on public forums**, and to balance AI use with **responsible screen engagement**.
- 💡 **Policy Framework:** The development and implementation of AI tools will align with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, incorporating **NCERT and SCERT** educational frameworks into the AI ecosystem.

Mud Volcano Erupts After Two Decades in Andaman

Why in News?

A **mud volcano** that had been dormant for more than **two decades** erupted unexpectedly at **Shyamnagar** in

Diglipur in North Andaman, causing thick mud and gas to be released from the ground.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Geological Significance:** Mud volcanoes are geological formations that expel **mud, gas, and water** due to **underground pressures and fluid movements**, and are distinct from **conventional lava-spewing volcanoes**.
- ✦ **Location:** The mud volcano is located near **Jal Tikrey in North Andaman's Diglipur**, a region known for its **chain of mud volcanoes** set amid **green forest** landscapes.
- 💡 **Monitoring:** The unexpected activity has attracted geologists who are likely to monitor the site more closely to understand **underground processes** and **fluid dynamics** beneath the islands.
- 💡 **Impact:** Local authorities have taken precautionary measures by **restricting public access** to the eruption site to **ensure safety**, though no major injuries or structural damage have been reported.
- ✦ Experts note that mud volcano eruptions are generally linked to **tectonic activity** and **underground pressure** rather than **external climate factors**, and such events can provide insights into **regional geology**.

Tarique Rahman Set to Become Bangladesh's Next Prime Minister

Why in News?

Tarique Rahman, leader of the **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)**, is poised to become the next **Prime Minister of Bangladesh** after his party won a **landslide victory** in the general elections held in **February 2026**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Election:** The elections marked a **significant political shift** in Bangladesh after a period of **political uncertainty and transitions in leadership**.
- 💡 **BNP Victory:** The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) secured a decisive win in the **2026 general**

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elections, allowing it to form the **next government** with a clear parliamentary majority.

💡 **Tarique Rahman:**

- ✦ He emerged as the top leader of the BNP and is expected to take office as the **Prime Minister of Bangladesh**.
- ✦ He is the son of former President and BNP founder **Ziaur Rahman** and former Prime Minister **Khaleda Zia**.
- ✦ He has been a leading figure in BNP politics for years, even during periods of exile and political challenges.

💡 **Return from Exile:** Rahman had spent almost **two decades living abroad** before returning to **Bangladesh in late 2025** following political changes that cleared the way for his participation in **domestic politics**.

💡 **Campaign Focus:** The **BNP's election campaign** centred on promises of **economic revival, political reform, and national unity**, resonating with voters across the country.

💡 **Significance to India:** Bangladesh is **India's key neighbour** in **South Asia**, sharing a long land boundary and deep economic, cultural, and strategic ties.

- ✦ A new BNP-led government may influence **bilateral cooperation** in areas such as trade, connectivity projects, border management, counter-terrorism coordination, and regional groupings like **BIMSTEC and SAARC**.

- ✦ Indian passport holders can now enter **56 countries** without a prior visa, including those allowing **visa-free entry, visa-on-arrival, or electronic travel authorisation (ETA)**, facilitating ease of international movement.

💡 **Methodology:** The index, published by **Henley & Partners**, ranks **199 passports** across **227 destinations** using data from the **International Air Transport Association (IATA)**, based on **ease of entry without prior visa approval**.

- ✦ **Top-Ranked Passports:** **Singapore** retains the top position with **192 visa-free destinations**, followed closely by **Japan and South Korea**.

- ✦ **Bottom-Ranked Passports:** Countries like **Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria** remain at the bottom of the index, reflecting **restricted international mobility** due to geopolitical and security challenges.

💡 **Regional Comparison:** India ranks above several **South Asian** peers such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal, while Maldives ranks substantially higher in the region.

💡 **Significance:** The improved ranking indicates **strengthened diplomatic ties, enhanced business and tourism opportunities**, and **better international recognition of Indian citizens' travel freedom**.

Henley Passport Index 2026

Why in News?

India's passport has climbed in the **2026 Henley Passport Index**, a globally recognised ranking of passports based on **visa-free travel access**. The rise in rank reflects **enhanced global mobility** for Indian citizens and strengthened diplomatic relations.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Global Ranking:** India's passport has moved to the **75th position** in the 2026 Henley Passport Index, rising **10 places from 85th in 2025**.

BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year 2025

Why in News?

Indian women's cricketer **Smriti Mandhana** has been named the **BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year for 2025** at a prestigious award ceremony in **New Delhi**, in recognition of her outstanding achievements in sport during the year.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Recognition:** **Smriti Mandhana** was honoured as the **BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year 2025** for her consistently brilliant performances.
- ✦ Especially in her pivotal role in **India's historic 2025 Women's World Cup triumph** and success in domestic leagues.

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- 💡 **Sport Honourees:** Chess prodigy Divya Deshmukh was named **Emerging Player of the Year** for her historic win at the **FIDE Women's World Cup**.
 - ✦ **Preethi Pal** received the **Para-Sportswoman of the Year** title for her **two bronze medals** at the **2024 Paris Paralympics**.
- 💡 **Lifetime Achievement:** Veteran shooter **Anjali Bhagwat** was honoured with the **Lifetime Achievement Award** for her trailblazing career, including being the **first Indian woman shooter** to reach an **Olympic final**.
- 💡 **Selection Process:** The winners were chosen by a distinguished jury comprising sports figures such as **Leander Paes, Deepa Malik, and Anju Bobby George**.
- 💡 **Promotion of Women's Sport:** The awards ceremony celebrates and spotlights **excellence and impact of Indian women athletes**, highlighting their contributions in international events and inspiring future generations.

Cross-Border Digital Payments: India-Malaysia

Why in News?

NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL) has signed an agreement with **Payments Network Malaysia Sdn Bhd (PayNet)** — the national payments network of Malaysia — to enable seamless **QR-based merchant payments** between India and Malaysia.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Partnership:** NPCI International and PayNet have entered a strategic agreement to link **India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** with Malaysia's **DuitNow QR** payment system.
- 💡 **Phased Rollout:** The initiative will be rolled out in **two phases**:
 - ✦ **Phase I:** Indian travellers in Malaysia can use their **UPI-enabled apps** to scan **DuitNow QR codes** at merchant locations for seamless payments.

- ✦ **Phase II:** Malaysian visitors to India will be able to scan **UPI QR codes** to make payments using their **DuitNow-enabled apps** once the integration is further expanded.

- 💡 **Coverage:** Indian tourists will gain access to **millions of DuitNow QR acceptance points** in Malaysia, including restaurants, retail outlets, and tourist attractions.

- ✦ Similarly, Malaysian visitors will benefit from acceptance at millions of **UPI QR-enabled merchant locations** across India.

- 💡 **Payment Infrastructure:** *DuitNow QR* is Malaysia's national **QR payment standard** operated by **PayNet**, while **UPI** is India's **real-time digital payments interface**.

- ✦ Linking these systems creates **interoperable infrastructure** for **cross-border merchant payments** without requiring foreign cards or complex currency exchange procedures.

- 💡 **Strategic Vision:** NPCI International's collaboration with PayNet is part of India's broader strategy to **expand UPI's international footprint** and build interoperable real-time payment ecosystems globally, under the guidance of the Government of India and the Reserve Bank of India.

Magnus Carlsen Clinches 2026 FIDE Freestyle World Chess Title

Why in News?

Norwegian chess legend **Magnus Carlsen** won the **2026 FIDE Freestyle Chess World Championship** by defeating American Grandmaster **Fabiano Caruana**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Event:** The **2026 FIDE Freestyle Chess World Championship** was the first official freestyle world championship.
- 💡 **Organised by:** **International Chess Federation (FIDE)** and **Freestyle Chess Operations**.
- 💡 **Venue:** **Schloss Weissenhaus, Wangels, Germany**.

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- 💡 **Winner: Magnus Carlsen** won the championship
 - ✦ This title marks his **21st world championship victory** across different formats of chess.
- 💡 **Runner-up: Fabiano Caruana (USA).**
- 💡 **Freestyle Chess Format:** Also known as **Chess960**, this format randomises the starting position of pieces (except pawns), reducing the role of memorised openings and emphasising creativity and calculation.
- 💡 **Format & Participants:** **Eight top grandmasters qualified** via world rankings and tours to compete in the championship.
- 💡 **Strategic Importance:** The official recognition of **Freestyle Chess by FIDE** signals increasing acceptance of **innovative formats** in **international chess competitions**.

Russia Blocks WhatsApp, Promotes State-Backed App

Why in News?

The **Russian government** has **blocked access to the Meta-owned messaging app WhatsApp** and imposed restrictions on **Telegram**, Russia's two most widely used foreign messaging platforms.

Key Points:

- 💡 **WhatsApp Ban:** Russia has fully **blocked WhatsApp**, citing the platform's alleged refusal to comply with **Russian laws and regulatory requirements**.
 - ✦ The ban was implemented because WhatsApp did not meet **local legal and security obligations**.
- 💡 **Regulator:** The restrictions are enforced by **Roskomnadzor**, **Russia's state communications regulator**.
- 💡 **Shift to State App:** The Russian government is actively promoting **Max**, a **state-supported messaging and super-app**, as a replacement for foreign-owned services.
- 💡 **Restriction on Telegram:** **Telegram** has not been fully banned.

- ✦ Authorities have introduced **restrictions on the platform's functionality** and accused it of failing to remove **extremist or prohibited content**.

- 💡 **National Security Narrative:** Russian authorities argue that restricting foreign messaging apps is necessary for **national security**.
 - ✦ These platforms allegedly facilitate **criminal activity, fraud, and foreign intelligence access**.
- 💡 **Public Reactions:** Digital rights groups **criticised** the WhatsApp ban and Telegram restrictions, saying they **undermine privacy and free communication** while promoting **state-controlled platforms** as part of **Russia's push for digital sovereignty**.

First Indigenous Cadet Training Ship 'Krishna' Launched in Chennai

Why in News?

The **Indian Navy** launched its first indigenously designed and built **Cadet Training Ship (CTS) 'Krishna'** at the **L&T Shipyard in Kattupalli, Chennai** in **February 2026**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **First Indigenous CTS:** 'Krishna' is the **first of three Cadet Training Ships** being constructed by **Larsen & Toubro (L&T)** for the Indian Navy under a contract signed with the **Ministry of Defence**.
 - ✦ 'Krishna' is a fully equipped **sail training and motorised vessel** capable of accommodating **150 cadets and officers** for training purposes.
 - ✦ The ship is named after the **Krishna River**, one of India's longest rivers.
- 💡 **Launch Ceremony:** The **Cadet Training Ship** was launched by **Anupama Chauhan**, the spouse of **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan**.
- 💡 **Strategic Importance:** Enhances India's **blue-water naval capabilities** by producing well-trained officers familiar with **modern naval operations and life at sea**.

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✦ The ship features **modern navigation, communication, and safety systems**, providing cadets hands-on experience with **state-of-the-art maritime technology**.

💡 **Design and Build:** The vessel has been **indigenously designed and built** and is expected to be delivered to the **Indian Navy** by the end of **2026**.

💡 **Aatmanirbhar Bharat:** The project reinforces the **Make in India** and **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** initiative by promoting indigenous defence shipbuilding capabilities.

European Union Opens First 'Legal Gateway' Office in India

Why in News?

The **European Union (EU)** inaugurated its first **European Legal Gateway Office** in **New Delhi**, marking a significant step in facilitating legal and transparent mobility for Indian students, researchers, and professionals—especially in the **information and communication technology (ICT)** sector—between India and EU Member States.

Key Points:

💡 **First-of-Its-Kind Office:** The European Legal Gateway Office in India is the first such facility opened by the EU in a partner country.

✦ It serves as a **one-stop hub** to provide clear, reliable information on legal mobility pathways for work, study, and research opportunities across all **27 EU Member States**.

💡 **Focus:** The initiative aims to support **Indian ICT students, professionals, and researchers** by guiding them on eligibility criteria, skill and qualification requirements, and opportunities available across the EU.

✦ This is part of broader cooperation under the **EU-India Strategic Agenda** adopted at the **16th EU-India Summit**.

💡 **Operational Structure:** The Legal Gateway Office will function through three interconnected components:

✦ A **Gateway Office** in India

✦ A **Support Office** in the EU

✦ A **digital tool** acting as a central information hub on mobility and visa pathways.

💡 **Strategic Significance:** The initiative is expected to deepen **India-EU cooperation** on **migration and mobility**, strengthen ties in **education and employment**, and create mutually beneficial opportunities for both regions' **talent and economies**.

💡 **Economic & Skills:** The office reflects recognition of **India's large and skilled workforce**—particularly in **digital, scientific, and emerging technologies**—and its contribution to global talent pools, while supporting EU employers and institutions to engage with **Indian talent**.

Kerala Declares Tidal Flooding a 'State-Specific Disaster'

Why in News?

In a pioneering move for climate-sensitive policy, the Kerala government recently declared **tidal flooding** (sea incursion during high tides) as a **State-Specific Disaster**.

Key Points:

💡 **Tidal Flooding Definition:** Also known as '**Sunny Day Flooding**' or 'Nuisance Flooding,' it occurs when sea levels rise above the local threshold during high tides, even in the absence of storms or heavy rainfall.

💡 **The Kerala Context:** In districts like **Ernakulam (Kochi), Alappuzha, and Thrissur**, seawater enters homes and shops twice a day through the backwaters and drainage systems, leading to chronic waterlogging.

💡 **Why the "Disaster" Tag?:** Historically, disaster relief was reserved for "sudden-onset" events like cyclones or landslides. Kerala's shift is based on several critical factors:

✦ **Frequency and Intensity:** Due to **Climate Change and Sea Level Rise (SLR)**, high tides are reaching further inland.

📎 What was once a minor inconvenience is now a daily threat to life and property.

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✦ **The “Slow-Onset” Crisis:** Unlike a tsunami, tidal flooding is a slow-onset disaster. Over time, it destroys foundations of houses, ruins furniture, and renders agricultural land saline.

✦ **Filling the Policy Gap:** Under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**, standard relief funds could not be used for “regular” tidal events.

📌 By declaring it state-specific, the government can now offer financial aid for house repairs and livelihood loss.

💡 **Significance for Disaster Management:** It moves the definition away from “sudden trauma” to “cumulative loss,” aligning with the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**.

✦ **Precedent for Coastal India:** Other vulnerable states (Odisha, West Bengal) may follow suit as rising sea levels threaten the entire 7,500 km Indian coastline.

✦ **Technology Hub for Semiconductors and Artificial Intelligence** – aligning with future technology trends.

✦ **Centre of Excellence for Bamboo-Based Technology** – leveraging regional strengths for product and process innovation.

✦ **Skill Development & Innovation Centre for Biodegradable and Eco-friendly Plastics** – encouraging sustainable technology and entrepreneurship.

💡 **Objectives:** The NEST Cluster aims to empower youth in the NER—especially **SC/ST, women, and Divyangjan**—towards **self-employment and entrepreneurship**, while strengthening **MSMEs** through **capacity building, research interventions, and commercialization of products**.

✦ It will adopt a **hub-and-spoke approach** connecting academia, research institutions, industry partners, and government agencies to promote R&D interventions, innovation ecosystems, and skill development at the grassroots level.

💡 **Significance:** The sanctioning of the **North Eastern Science & Technology Cluster (NEST)** represents a strategic initiative by the Government of India to harness science, technology, and innovation for **inclusive development, employment generation, and entrepreneurial growth** in the **North Eastern Region**, aligning with broader goals of regional empowerment and technology-driven economic transformation.

NEST Sanctioned to Boost Innovation in North East

Why in News?

The Government of India has sanctioned a project to establish the **North Eastern Science & Technology Cluster (NEST)** aimed at boosting research, innovation, skill development, and entrepreneurship across the **North Eastern Region (NER)**.

Key Points:

💡 **Project Approval:** The NEST project was sanctioned in **July 2025** under the Schemes of the **North Eastern Council (NEC)** and the **Ministry of Development of North-East Region** with an outlay of approximately **₹22.98 crore** to strengthen science and technology infrastructure in the NER.

💡 **Implementing Agency:** The project will be implemented by the **Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati**.

💡 **Four Thematic Verticals:** NEST will operate through **four key focus areas:**

✦ **Innovation Hub on Grassroots Technologies** – to promote tech solutions for local challenges.

Thanya Nathan to Become Kerala's First Blind Woman Judge

Why in News?

Thanya Nathan is set to make history by becoming Kerala's first visually challenged (completely blind) woman judge.

Key Points:

💡 **Historic Achievement:** Thanya Nathan will be the **first fully blind woman** to be appointed as a judge in Kerala's judiciary.

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- 💡 **Success:** She secured the **top rank among persons with benchmark disabilities** in the competitive **Civil Judges (Junior Division) exam** conducted for entry into the **Kerala Judicial Service**.
 - ✦ She pursued law despite **visual impairment** and completed her **legal education** with the assistance of accessible learning tools and **digital support systems**.
- 💡 **Judicial Inclusivity:** Her achievement follows a **landmark 2025 Supreme Court ruling** affirming that **visually impaired candidates cannot be excluded from eligibility for judicial service**.
 - ✦ Her appointment reflects the **principles of equality and non-discrimination** under **Articles 14, 16, and 21** of the **Indian Constitution**, ensuring equal opportunity in public employment.
- 💡 **Significance:** Thanya's success not only inspires **persons with disabilities** but also contributes to ongoing efforts to make India's legal profession more **accessible and inclusive for all**.

NHAI to Develop Bee Corridors Along National Highways

Why in News?

The **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)** has announced a pioneering initiative to create **pollinator-friendly "Bee Corridors"** along stretches of **India's National Highways** as part of its **sustainable infrastructure development strategy**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **First-of-Its-Kind:** NHAI's Bee Corridor programme will transform **roadside plantations** from decorative to **ecologically functional green corridors** that support pollinators such as honeybees and wild bees.
- 💡 **Objective:** The project aims to address **declining pollinator populations**, enhance **biodiversity**, and **strengthen ecosystem services** such as crop pollination that are vital for agriculture and food security.

- ✦ The Bee Corridors will consist of **continuous linear stretches of vegetation** including flowering trees, shrubs, herbs, and grasses that provide **nectar and pollen throughout the year**.

- 💡 **Native Species:** Plant species such as **Neem, Karanj, Mahua, Palash, Bottle Brush, Jamun, and Siris** — known for their nectar and pollen richness — will be planted with staggered flowering patterns to ensure year-round support for pollinators.

- 💡 **Implementation Strategy:** NHAI field offices will identify suitable stretches of National Highways and vacant land parcels for corridor development based on **agro-climatic conditions and local ecological suitability**.

- ✦ In the **2026–27 fiscal year**, NHAI plans to plant **about 40 lakh trees** along National Highways, with close to **60 % of these allocated under the Bee Corridor initiative**.
- ✦ At least **three dedicated pollinator corridors** are expected to be developed during this period.

- 💡 **Significance:** The Bee Corridor initiative by NHAI represents a **novel model of infrastructure-led ecological restoration**, where India's highway network is leveraged to support **pollinator habitats and biodiversity**.

National Science Day 2026

Why in News?

India observed **National Science Day 2026** on **28 February 2026** with the theme **"Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat"**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Background:** National Science Day was celebrated across India on **28 February** to honour the discovery of the **Raman Effect** by physicist **C.V. Raman** in **1928**, which earned him the **Nobel Prize in Physics** in **1930**.
- 💡 **2026 Theme:** The theme **"Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat"** emphasised the contribution of **women scientists and innovators**.

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in building a **developed India**, recognising their efforts in **research, technology, and STEM fields**.

- ✦ The theme aligned with international efforts such as the **International Day of Women and Girls in Science**, promoting **gender equality** and enhanced **participation of women** in scientific research.

💡 **National Celebrations:** Schools, colleges, research institutions, and science centres organised science exhibitions, workshops, debates, competitions, and public awareness programmes to celebrate women's contributions and inspire future generations of scientists.

💡 **Significance:** The day promoted **scientific temper** among citizens and acknowledged the role of **science in national development**, while the 2026 theme focused on **reducing gender gaps in STEM** and advancing **women-led scientific progress**.

Indian Manipuri Film 'Boong' Wins at BAFTA Awards 2026

Why in News?

The Manipuri-language Indian film 'Boong' made history by winning the **Best Children's and Family Film** award at the **79th British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards 2026**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Historic Win:** *Boong* became the **first Indian film** to win the **Best Children's and Family Film** category at the prestigious **BAFTA Awards**.
- 💡 **Competition:** The **Manipuri film** triumphed over renowned international titles such as ***Zootopia 2*** and ***Lilo & Stitch***.
- 💡 **Film Background:** Directed by **Lakshmipriya Devi** and backed by producers including **Farhan Akhtar** and **Ritesh Sidhwani**.
 - ✦ *Boong* is a **coming-of-age drama** that follows a young boy from Manipur on a heartfelt journey to **reunite his family**.
 - ✦ It premiered at the **Toronto International Film Festival in 2024** and has showcased at several international festivals.

💡 **Theme:** The film revolves around **childhood, family bonds, identity, and emotional resilience**, making it suitable for children and family audiences globally.

- ✦ At the **London ceremony**, the director delivered an emotional acceptance speech, using the platform to highlight **cultural narratives** and **call for peace, resonating with audiences globally**.

💡 **Significance:** The film is a historic achievement for Indian cinema, marking the first time an **Indian production** has won in this category.

- ✦ The win brings global attention to the **socio-cultural narratives of Northeast India**, a region historically **underrepresented in mainstream Indian cinema**.

International Mother Language Day 2026

Why in News?

The world observed **International Mother Language Day** on **21 February 2026**, a day dedicated to celebrating **linguistic diversity**, promoting the **preservation of native languages**, and emphasising the **role of mother tongues in education and cultural identity**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Origin:** **UNESCO** proclaimed this day to protect **linguistic diversity** and promote **multilingualism worldwide**, highlighting the cultural and educational importance of mother languages.
 - ✦ It is observed annually on **21 February**, commemorating the **historic Language Movement in Bangladesh** where students sacrificed their lives in **1952** advocating for the recognition of their **mother tongue, Bangla**.
- 💡 **2026 Theme:** **"Youth voices on multilingual education"**— emphasises the role of young people in promoting multilingual education and inclusive learning in mother tongues.
- 💡 **Promotion of Indigenous Voices:** Highlights efforts to empower indigenous communities by encouraging the use of **native languages as carriers of culture, knowledge, and identity**.

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- 🔦 **Global Observances:** Activities include tributes at **Shaheed Minar** in Dhaka, cultural programmes, panel discussions, and events by educational institutions to celebrate linguistic diversity.
- 🔦 **Significance:** Mother tongues play a critical role in **education, identity formation, and cognitive development**.
 - ✦ International Mother Language Day reinforces the importance of **preserving linguistic diversity, promoting inclusive education, and sustaining cultural heritage globally**.

Union Cabinet Approves Renaming Kerala to 'Keralam'

Why in News?

The **Union Cabinet** has approved the proposal to rename the state of **Kerala** as "**Keralam**", aligning the state's official name with its usage in the Malayalam language.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **Background:** The term "**Keralam**" is the native Malayalam name of the state and has been in continuous cultural and linguistic use for centuries.
- 🔦 **Ancient References:** The term finds mention as "**Keralaputra**" in Emperor Ashoka's **Rock Edict II (257 BCE)**, referring to the **Chera dynasty**.
- 🔦 **Linguistic Reorganisation:** The demand for a united '**Keralam**' for Malayalam-speaking communities dates back to the national freedom struggle.
 - ✦ **Colonial Name:** The English name "**Kerala**" emerged during colonial administration and was retained after Independence.
- 🔦 **Resolution:** The **Kerala Legislative Assembly** had earlier unanimously passed a resolution seeking the name change and forwarded it to the Centre for approval.
- 🔦 **Constitutional and Legal Basis:** **Article 3 of the Indian Constitution** empowers Parliament to form new states and alter the **name, area, or boundaries** of existing states.

- 🔦 **Procedure:** The procedure requires:
 - ✦ A bill introduced in Parliament on the recommendation of the President.
 - ✦ Prior reference of the bill to the concerned State Legislature for its views (which are not binding).
 - ✦ Following Cabinet approval, the proposal will be introduced as a bill in Parliament to formally effect the change.
- 🔦 **Parliamentary Approval:** Once the Bill is introduced, it must be passed by a simple majority of members present and voting in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.
- 🔦 **Presidential Assent:** Following the passage, the Bill is sent for Presidential assent.
- 🔦 **Amendment of Schedules:** Once the Act is notified, the **First Schedule** (which lists the names of the states) and the **Fourth Schedule** (which deals with the allocation of seats in the Rajya Sabha) of the Constitution are updated accordingly.

Zimbabwe launches long-acting HIV-prevention injection Lenacapavir

Why in News?

Zimbabwe has become one of the **first African countries** to launch **Lenacapavir**, a **long-acting injectable drug for HIV prevention**, marking a major milestone in the continent's fight against HIV/AIDS.

Key Points:

- 🔦 **About Lenacapavir:** Lenacapavir is a **long-acting antiretroviral medicine** used for **HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)**.
- 🔦 **Mechanism of Action:** Developed by Gilead Sciences, Lenacapavir is a **capsid inhibitor**. It works by interfering with the HIV-1 viral capsid (the protein shell protecting the virus's genetic material) at multiple stages of its lifecycle, rendering the virus dysfunctional.
- 🔦 **Biannual Protection:** Lenacapavir is the world's first **twice-yearly** (six-month) injectable for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

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- 💡 **WHO Prequalification:** The WHO prequalified the drug in October 2025 and released implementation guidelines in July 2025.
- 💡 **Regional Leadership:** Zimbabwe, along with Zambia and South Africa, has led the adoption of this technology via the WHO Collaborative Registration Procedure to ensure “record time” approval.
- 💡 **Target Population:** The initial phase targets approximately **46,500 high-risk individuals** across 24 sites nationwide, including adolescent girls, young women, sex workers, and pregnant or breastfeeding mothers.
- 💡 **Funding and Support:** The program is supported by the United States government and the **Global Fund**, offering the drug free of charge to vulnerable groups.
- 💡 **Efficacy:** Clinical trials demonstrated **near 100% effectiveness** in preventing HIV infections, significantly outperforming daily oral PrEP pills.

UN Launched Road Safety Financing Project in Four Indian States

Why in News?

The **United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRSF)** has launched a **Sustainable Road Safety Financing Project** in India, aiming to strengthen financial mechanisms and capacity for road safety interventions in selected states.

- 💡 The project was inaugurated in **New Delhi** during the visit of the **UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Road Safety, Jean Todt**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Objective:** The initiative aims to establish sustainable and coordinated **financing mechanisms** for road safety programmes at national and state levels.
- ✦ The project is implemented in partnership with the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)**, **WHO**, **UNICEF**, and non-profits like the **Save LIFE Foundation** to provide technical and policy support.

- 💡 **Focus States:** The financing project is being rolled out in **four Indian states — Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Assam** — to build capacity for implementing effective road safety action plans.
- 💡 **Need:** India records a **high number of road traffic fatalities** each year, with road accidents imposing significant **health, social, and economic costs**, including an estimated loss of around **3 % of GDP due to crashes**.
- 💡 **Sustainable Financing Strategies:** The project promotes innovative financing tools such as **road safety bonds, dedicated taxes, and public-private partnerships (PPP)** to ensure predictable funding streams for road safety.
- 💡 **Capacity Building:** A core component is strengthening **institutional capacity** at national and sub-national levels for **planning, budgeting, and monitoring** road safety investments.
- 💡 **Global Alignment:** The initiative supports the **Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030**, which seeks to halve road fatalities and serious injuries worldwide by 2030.

Rob Jetten Becomes Netherlands' Youngest and First Openly Gay Prime Minister

Why in News?

Rob Jetten has been sworn in as the **Prime Minister of the Netherlands**, making history as both the **youngest person** and the **first openly gay leader** of the country. He assumed office in **February 2026**.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Historic Leadership:** Rob Jetten became the **youngest prime minister** in Dutch history at 38 and the first openly gay person to lead the Netherlands, highlighting progress in **LGBTQ+ representation in politics**.
- ✦ He leads a **three-party minority coalition** composed of his centrist Democrats 66 (D66) party, the centre-right Christian Democratic

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Appeal (CDA), and the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), which together hold **66 of the 150 seats** in the lower house.

- 💡 **Swearing-In Ceremony:** The new government was sworn in by **King Willem Alexander** at the **Huis ten Bosch Palace in The Hague**.
- 💡 **Political Background:** Jetten's political career began in 2010 at the municipal level.
 - ✦ He entered the **Dutch House of Representatives in 2017** and later served as **Minister for Climate and Energy Policy** and as **Deputy Prime Minister before becoming PM**.
- 💡 **Significance:** Jetten's leadership is seen as a milestone for **inclusion and diversity**, particularly for the **LGBTQ+ community**, in a country known for advancing **equal rights (the Netherlands was the first to legalise same-sex marriage in 2001)**.

Five Northeast Frontier Railway Stations Receive 'Eat Right Station' Certification

Why in News?

Five railway stations under the **Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR)** have been awarded the '**Eat Right Station**' certification by the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** for ensuring safe, hygienic, and nutritious food services for passengers.

Key Points:

- 💡 **Eat Right Station:** The initiative is part of the **Eat Right India movement** led by **FSSAI** to promote food safety, hygiene, and nutrition among the public.
- 💡 **Awarded Stations:** Five NFR stations received the certification for maintaining **high standards of food hygiene, quality, and safety practices** at food outlets within station premises.
 - ✦ Dimapur Railway Station (Nagaland)
 - ✦ Alipurduar Railway Station (West Bengal)
 - ✦ Kokrajhar Railway Station (Assam)
 - ✦ Golakganj Railway Station (Assam)
 - ✦ New Mal Junction Railway Station (West Bengal)
- 💡 **Criteria for Certification:** The certification is granted after rigorous assessment of compliance with food safety guidelines, hygiene protocols, proper storage and handling of food, safe water availability, and consumer awareness measures at food vending points.
- 💡 **Implementation Partners:** The certification was facilitated through **joint efforts by FSSAI, Northeast Frontier Railway**, food vendors, and local health officials to improve food safety infrastructure and passenger awareness.
- 💡 **Expansion of Initiative:** The Eat Right Station programme complements other national efforts to improve public health, such as **Swachh Bharat Mission and Safe Water initiatives**, and encourages other **railway zones** to adopt similar standards.

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