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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

OCTOBER WEEK 2

06-10-2025 TO 11-10-2025



**CONVERTED SCS
CAN IDENTIFY AS
BUDDHISTS**

**INDIA TO LAUNCH
RED LIST' SURVEY**

**HYDROPOWER
PROJECT ON
CHENAB**

**KARNATAKA'S
NEERIDDARE
NALE SCHEME**

❖ Tiger deaths trigger demand to reject mini-hydel proposals in M.M. Hills, ESZ of Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

Context: Consequent to a spate of tiger deaths in the M.M. Hills Wildlife Sanctuary, the State government has been petitioned to reject forest diversion proposals that will pave the way for mini-hydel projects along the river Cauvery in the M.M. Hills Wildlife Division and the Eco-Sensitive Zone of the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary.

- Wildlife conservationist Giridhar Kulkarni has red-flagged the issue on grounds that the proposed projects for which forestland diversion has been sought would further fragment the habitat which was already witnessing an increase in conflict situations, and drew attention to the recent poisoning of six tigers in M.M. Hills Wildlife Sanctuary during the last four months.
- Mr. Kulkarni has written a letter to Eshwar B. Khandre, Minister for Forest, Ecology, and Environment, and stated that the three proposals involve the Ranganathaswamy Mini Hydel Project by Pioneer Power Corporation, the Barachukki 2x2.5 MW Mini Hydel Project by Madhyaranga Energy Pvt. Ltd., and a 24.5 MW Hydroelectric Project by Balaji Cauvery Power Pvt. Ltd. — all of which are located near Shivanasamudra and Sathegala in Kollegal taluk.
- Mr. Kulkarni cited the death of five tigers in June 2025 in the Hoogyam range of M.M. Hills Wildlife Sanctuary and another tiger death reported on October 3, all of which were allegedly poisoned, and said that these incidents could be attributed to shrinking habitats and disruption in the predator-prey dynamics.
- He cautioned that the proposed project involving tree felling, blasting, tunnelling, and construction near the river would obstruct wildlife movement and escalate conflict in the adjoining villages.

Ecological importance

- Underlining the ecological importance of the Cauvery-M.M. Hills landscape, Mr. Kulkarni said that the Cauvery riverine belt and the adjoining forests form a vital elephant habitat which is recognised by the Karnataka Elephant Task Force, 2012. The petitioner pointed out that the mini hydel projects create physical barriers for elephant and wildlife movement leading to disruption of migration and ranging patterns, increased crop depredation in nearby villages, and an escalation of conflict situations resulting in retaliatory killing of wild animals.
- Mr. Kulkarni said that the significance of the M.M. Hills-Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) as a connectivity zone linking CWS, M.M. Hills and the BRT Tiger Reserve are well documented.
- He pointed out that an earlier expert committee, which had suggested that one of these projects may be permitted with “minimum intervention and safeguards”, was misleading and no longer relevant. This was because tiger mortality due to conflict has drastically increased in recent years and human-elephant conflicts across Chamarajanagar and Kollegal have intensified.

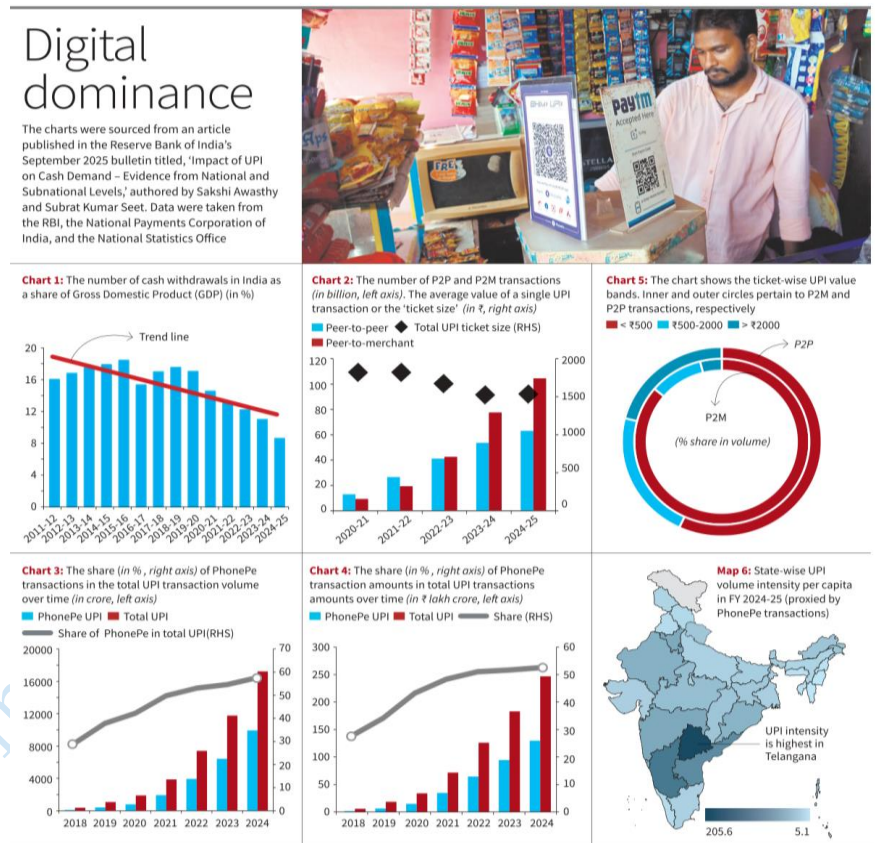
- Mr. Kulkarni said that these projects, if approved, would fragment crucial habitats of tigers and elephants, and exacerbate human-wildlife conflict. The petition, he said, underscores the serious ecological consequences of these projects and added that the consequent habitat fragmentation could lead to further tragic incidents.

❖ Telangana tops States in UPI transaction intensity: RBI paper

Context: Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra also recorded high UPI usage intensity.

- The usage intensity of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions — measured in per capita volume terms — is highest in Telangana among all the States, according to a recent paper published in the Reserve Bank of India's bulletin. The study used PhonePe transaction data as a proxy to assess UPI intensity. Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra also recorded high UPI usage intensity.
- The rise of UPI is likely a major factor driving the decline in cash demand in the economy, the paper notes. This shift is evident in the steady fall in ATM cash withdrawals as a percentage of GDP (Chart 1). The growing use of UPI for low-value, everyday transactions is reflected in the rising share of peer-to-merchant (P2M) payments, while the average value of a single UPI transaction — or the 'ticket size' — has been declining over time (Chart 2). The bulk of peer-to-merchant (P2M) transactions by volume fall within the sub-₹500 value range (Chart 3).
- The RBI paper used data from PhonePe — a payment service that accounts for 58% of total UPI transaction volume (Chart 4) and 53% of the total transaction value (Chart 5). As noted earlier, UPI usage intensity is highest in several southern and western States, and in Delhi. The paper attributes this to the presence of urban centres, economic hubs, and high levels of employment-driven migration in these regions.
- Cash withdrawal intensity remains higher in many northeastern States, as well as in Kerala and Goa. Delhi features on this list too.
- According to the paper, this could be due to factors such as tourism and service-led cash usage, remittance inflows, the continued cash dependence of rural areas, and limited digital infrastructure.

Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra also recorded high UPI usage intensity



❖ British and Indian warships begin four-day maritime exercise Konkan in Indian Ocean

Context: The United Kingdom's Carrier Strike Group (CSG), led by the aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales, commenced Exercise Konkan with the Indian Navy in the Western Indian Ocean.

- The four-day maritime drill aims to enhance combined maritime and air capabilities between the two navies. First held in 2004, Exercise.
- Konkan has traditionally been a biennial engagement. This edition, however, marks the first-ever exercise involving the CSG of both nations — the U.K.'s HMS Prince of Wales and India's INS Vikrant.
- The U.K. CSG, currently on an eight-month global deployment dubbed Operation Highmast, has linked up with the Indian Navy's carrier task force for complex multi-domain operations, including anti-submarine warfare, cross-deck flying operations, and air defence drills.
- Following the exercise, the British warships will make port calls in Mumbai and Goa, highlighting deepening defence ties while showcasing British trade and industry and the strong "living bridge" of people and culture between the U.K. and India.
- British High Commissioner to India Lindy Cameron said, "The U.K. and India believe in an Indo-Pacific that is free and open. We share an ambition for a modern defence and security partnership, a fundamental pillar of U.K.-India Vision 2035, agreed by our Prime Ministers this year. The engagements between the CSG of our two navies demonstrate our commitment to maintaining the rules-based international order in the region and lay the groundwork for future cooperation."
- Commodore James Blackmore, Commander of the U.K. CSG, added that the partnership reinforces shared commitments to security and stability in the Indo-Pacific.



Security drills: Indian Navy and Royal Navy personnel participate in the inaugural day of Exercise KONKAN-25 on Sunday. PTI

Aerial defence exercise

- Upon completion of the port visits, the U.K. CSG will conduct an aerial defence exercise with the Indian Air Force, allowing both forces to test tactics and strengthen interoperability.
- Operation Highmast is a multinational deployment led by the U.K. CSG, providing an opportunity for the U.K.'s Armed Forces to conduct a major global deployment and exercise complex operations alongside allies in the region, with 12 other nations supporting the deployment with ships or personnel.

❖ Indian Navy to commission INS Androth on October 6

Context: The Indian Navy is set to commission INS Androth, the second Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC), at the Naval Dockyard in Visakhapatnam.

- The ceremony will be presided over by Vice Admiral Rajesh Pendharkar, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command.

- Built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata, INS Androth signifies a key step in India's pursuit of maritime self-reliance. The commissioning of Androth follows the recent induction of warships such as Arnala, Nistar, Udaygiri, and Nilgiri, showing the Navy's balanced modernisation across platforms.

❖ Drug makers must comply with revised norms: govt.

Context: Schedule M mandates enhanced quality systems; Centre warns licences of non-compliant units will be cancelled; move follows deaths of children in M.P., Rajasthan due to a 'toxic' cough syrup.

- The Union Health Ministry has sought strict compliance by drug manufacturers with the revised Schedule M norms for pharmaceutical products in India. Licences of non-compliant units would be cancelled, it has warned.
- The direction comes after an emergency meeting with officials of the States and Union Territories on Sunday evening, following a report by the Tamil Nadu Drugs Control Department, which found above permissible levels of diethylene glycol (DEG) in samples of Coldrif, a cough syrup brand.
- The revised Schedule M is an updated set of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and regulations for pharmaceutical products in India, a part of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- It mandates enhanced quality systems, including the Pharmaceutical Quality System and Quality Risk Management, with a compliance deadline of December 31, 2025. The revisions align Indian standards with international GMP guidelines, emphasising product quality and safety, and require new infrastructure, including computerised storage systems and equipment validation.

Children's death

- Testing of cough syrup brands was initiated following the death of more than 10 children in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
- Preliminary findings in the past week have ruled out common infectious diseases, except for one positive case of leptospirosis. Nineteen medicine samples consumed by the children were collected from private medical practitioners and nearby retail stores. The chemical analysis so far indicates that out of the 10 samples analysed till date, nine met quality standards.
- However, one of them, namely, the cough syrup Coldrif, contained DEG beyond the permissible limit.
- Subsequently, regulatory action has been taken by the Tamil Nadu Food and Drugs Administration against the unit, which is located in Kancheepuram. Cancellation of the manufacturing licence has been recommended by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation based on findings upon inspection. Criminal proceedings have also been initiated, the Ministry.
- Tamil Nadu's Drugs Control Department issued an immediate stop production order to the manufacturer of the Coldrif cough syrup following an analysis by a government drug testing laboratory, which found a batch to be "not of standard quality" and "adulterated with diethylene glycol".
- "The report from the Madhya Pradesh drug regulatory authority is still awaited," a senior Health Ministry official said.

- Speaking on the outcomes of Sunday's emergency meeting called by the Union Health Ministry, sources in the Ministry said that maintaining quality and rational use of cough syrup had been reiterated.

❖ Why is ADR crucial for India's courts?

Context: The Minister of Law and Justice recently reaffirmed the government's commitment to legal reforms rooted in India's civilisational ethos.

- Citing the doctrine of Panch Parmeshwar, which embodies the principle of collective consensus in dispute resolution, Arjun Ram Meghwal emphasised the need for global cooperation to strengthen Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms.
- The India Justice Report 2025 highlights significant challenges in India's justice system, particularly including access, delays, and accountability. According to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), the total number of pending cases in India is 4,57,96,239. In the Supreme Court, the number of pending cases is 81,768, and in the High Courts, it is approximately 62.9 lakh. These delays often result in injustice, increasing the focus on ADR as a faster, cost-effective, and socially inclusive way to deliver justice.

What is the constitutional basis of ADR?

- The constitutional basis of ADR in India is enshrined in Article 39A, which mandates the state to provide equal justice and free legal aid.
- Various ADR processes, such as arbitration, conciliation, mediation, and judicial settlement (Lok Adalat), are recognised under Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.
- To regulate processes, these have been incorporated into law. For example, under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act 1996 (amended in 2021), civil and compoundable offences like theft, criminal trespass, and adultery are resolved through a binding award or resolution, respectively. The Arbitration Act, 2021, also mentions the establishment of an Indian Arbitration Council, giving legal backing to arbitration agreements.
- The law fixes a maximum period of 180 days for dispute resolution, ensuring faster justice.
- On many occasions, even after such a solution, if a party is dissatisfied, they can exit the process after two sessions of mediation. Pre-litigation mediation for resolving civil and commercial disputes will not increase the number of pending cases; it will also strengthen interpersonal relationships by increasing interaction at the social level.

How do Lok Adalats function?

- Lok Adalats are governed by the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, inspired by Article 39A. Apart from Permanent Lok Adalat (Section 22-B of the Act), provisions of the National Lok Adalat and e-Lok Adalat are directly helpful in strengthening the justice system, provided awareness about such a system is made effective and widespread.
- The first Lok Adalat in India was organised in Gujarat in 1999. The biggest feature of Lok Adalats is that their decisions shall be final and there is no possibility of appeal. This does not mean that the powers of these courts are absolute.

- The reason for no appeal is that these courts resolve disputes before litigation. In order to prevent any possible absoluteness, it is provided that the dissatisfied party can file a suit in a court.

Why is strengthening ADR crucial?

- According to former Chief Justice of India Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, mediation is a tool for social change, where social norms are brought in line with constitutional values through the exchange of views and flow of information. Solutions arrived at through invaluable discussions during mediation ensure true justice for individuals and groups on their terms, in a language they understand, and provide a platform that protects their sentiments.
- The India Justice Report also highlights inter-State disparities in terms of the backlog of cases. The report says that pending cases have exceeded five crore, and High Courts and district courts are facing vacancy rates of 33% and 21% respectively. Judges in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala have workloads exceeding 4,000 cases.
- A substantial number of cases in High Courts and subordinate courts have been pending for over 10 years. The NJDG provides real-time data on case pendency and disposal, offering a comprehensive view of the judicial system's performance across States and courts.
- The India Justice Report ranks States based on their performance on various aspects of the justice system, including case pendency, with other factors like court infrastructure and judge availability.
- States like Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar have a considerable number of pending cases. This urgently demands rapid disposal and necessitates the strengthening of the ADR for effective per capita justice delivery.



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❖ **Converted SCs can identify as Buddhists**

Context: The State Government issued orders to allow persons from Scheduled Castes to identify themselves as “Buddhist” in the religion column that is part of the Scheduled Castes certificate.

- Order issued by the Social Welfare Department enables those from **101 Scheduled Castes** who have converted to Buddhism to declare their religion in the caste certificate, it also allows the families to declare their religion as “Buddhism” in the religion column in the documents of schools coming under Department of Education and Literacy, private schools and other educational institutions.
- The latest GO has been issued under the **Karnataka Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (Reservation in appointments) Act 1990 which has been amended in 2024.**
- The order said that though a circular had been issued earlier, several organisations and associations had sought clarification on the issue and petitioned the government to issue an order in this regard. The order quoted directions issued by the **Union government’s Ministry of Welfare in November 1990, order by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2016 and 2017, which were based on the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Orders (Amendment) Act, 1990.**

❖ **SC rejects petition against Telangana order for 67% quota**

Context: The Supreme Court declined to entertain a petition challenging a Telangana government order enhancing the Backward Classes’ quota in municipalities and panchayats to 42%, leading to the total reservation of seats in local bodies in the State to touch 67%.

- A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, however, gave the petitioner, Vanga Gopal Reddy, liberty to approach the Telangana High Court against the September 26 order of the State government.
- The Bench had queried why Mr. Vanga Gopal had moved the top court in the first instance and not the High Court. The petition, filed through advocate Somiran Sharma, raised the question whether States could increase the total reservation of seats in local bodies to breach the 50% ceiling.
- Mr. Somiran pointed out the enhancement in the OBC quota had come prior to a notification issued by the Telangana State Election Commission announcing that the panchayat election process in the State would commence from October 9.
- Polling for the local bodies’ election in Telangana would happen in two phases on October 23 and October 27.

Breaching limit

- “Together with the existing 15% for Scheduled Castes and 10% for Scheduled Tribes, the aggregate reservation exceeds 67%, directly violating the 50% ceiling judicially prescribed by the Supreme Court,” the petition had argued. The 50% ceiling rule in reservation was established by a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in the Mandal Commission case judgment of 1992.

- The September 26 order issued by Telangana had followed an attempt by the State to enact a law, the Telangana Backward Classes (Reservations of Seats in Rural and Urban Local Bodies) Bill, 2025, to enhance OBC seats in local bodies by 42%.
- However, the petition said, the Bill had been neither assented to by the Governor nor by the President.
- Mr. Vanga Gopal had said the Telangana government's order augmenting OBC quota in local bodies violated Section 285A of the Telangana Panchayat Raj Act, 2018, which expressly codified the 50% ceiling in reservation in local bodies' seats.
- Kerala govt. tables Malayalam Language Bill in Assembly to conserve linguistic rights. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) government tabled the Malayalam Language Bill, 2025, in the Assembly on Monday.
- Law Minister P. Rajeeve said the Bill aimed to enshrine the Malayalam language at the heart of official communications in the State. It also sought to render it the legal language in courts trying lesser offences under the respective District and Sessions Courts.
- Mr. Rajeeve said the Bill also sought to protect the rights of linguistic minorities, including citizens who considered Tamil, Kannada, Tulu, and Kongu their mother tongues.
- "The Bill conserves their right to use their respective language or English for their communications with the government," he added.
- He said the Bill sought to render Malayalam as Kerala's sole official language. The State now recognised English and Malayalam as official languages. The draft law also proposed to make Malayalam the first language in schools.
- The Bill proposed the creation of a Malayalam Language Development Directorate under the aegis of the Official Language Wing for Personnel and Administrative Reforms.
- Mr. Rajeeve said the Bill rendered Malayalam as the official language of ordinances promulgated by the Kerala Governor, bills introduced in the Assembly, Acts passed by the legislature, and also rules, orders, regulations, and bylaws of the government, with English translations provided.
- Mr. Rajeeve said that earlier versions of the Bill, aimed at preserving, nurturing, and developing Malayalam against the backdrop of the global march of foreign languages, chiefly English, had failed to receive gubernatorial and presidential assent.
- He said the **Union government had raised objections regarding provisions concerned with the rights of linguistic minorities, trilingual education in compliance with the national curriculum and the Right to Education Act, 2009.**
- Mr. Rajeeve said the Bill sought to rectify the anomalies while safeguarding and promoting the Malayalam language and culture.

❖ India, Australia to sign joint defence and security cooperation declaration

Context: Australia has acknowledged India's growing capabilities in producing high-end defence equipment, signalling potential for greater engagement with Indian defence manufacturers in the future. While Canberra has traditionally relied on American and other Western systems, sources said that they see India as an emerging and reliable partner in defence production.

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's upcoming visit to Australia underscores the growing momentum in the defence partnership and its pivotal role in ensuring stability across the Indo-Pacific, an official said.
- Mr. Singh will be on a two-day visit on October 9 and 10, during which he will meet Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles in Sydney and observe live air-to-air refuelling activities aboard a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) KC-30A multi-role tanker.
- Hinting at broader strategic discussions, the senior official said deliberations during the visit are expected to cover major bilateral and regional issues, including countries of mutual concern.

Maritime strategy

- Australia and India are also developing a Maritime Security Road Map to enhance collaboration on maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.
- According to sources, both countries are working toward a new Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation to set the parameters for future engagement.
- This year also marks the fifth anniversary of the India–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, which has witnessed unprecedented progress across diverse sectors — from trade and investment to education, sports, and renewable energy.
- “Defence and security cooperation now stand as one of the strongest pillars of our partnership. Australia and India have emerged as top-tier security partners, with defence engagements more than tripling in the past decade — from 11 activities in 2014 to 33 in 2024,” said a source. “Our partnership enhances each other’s strategic autonomy, options, and capabilities. The Air-to-Air Refuelling Implementing Arrangement – India’s first with any partner – exemplifies growing interoperability,” the source added.
- Australia is also a strong supporter of India’s defence industry ambitions.

❖ Jaishankar says India’s interests are best secured by strategic autonomy

Context: India has always exerted its strategic autonomy, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Monday, referring to the country’s decision to sign a friendship pact with the Soviet Union in 1971 as a “necessary” choice, given the triangular threats India faced from the other big powers, the United States and China.

- Speaking at the launch of the Aravalli Summit, organised by the Jawaharlal Nehru University’s School of International Studies, marking its 70th anniversary, Mr. Jaishankar, an alumnus of the school himself, said that it was necessary for students of foreign policy to factor in a future of multi-alignment and multipolarity. Mr. Jaishankar said recent global volatility, including the imposition of tariffs by the U.S., had made the case for multi-alignment, more than allying with any one power, much stronger.
- “Imagine if [India were] not today adopting strategic autonomy. Please tell me, which country in the world would you like to join up with and put [India’s] future in their hands,” he asked. “I can’t think of anybody. [India’s] interest is best secured by maximising its options, maintaining [its] freedom of choices,” he said.
- Mr. Jaishankar’s comments came a day after he said that trade negotiations with the U.S. would have to respect India’s “red-lines”.

National interest

- The government has also been facing increased pressure from the U.S. over the issue of Russian oil imports. While Mr. Jaishankar did not refer directly to India's position, amidst reports that Russian oil imports in September have been considerably reduced, he praised India's stand during the 1971 war with Pakistan and Liberation of Bangladesh, when India signed a Friendship Treaty with Soviet Union.
- "What we did was in our national interest — we were dealing with a U.S.-China triangle and we had to find a way out of this," Mr. Jaishankar said, answering questions from students at the event, which was co-hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs, and the newly launched Delhi-based Adani Group-owned think tank Chintan Research Foundation. "So, the decision we took in the midst of an acute national security crisis, was necessary," he added, addressing the audience, which included a number of diplomats, including the Ambassador of Russia to India Denis Alipov, and Bangladesh High Commissioner Riaz Hamidullah.
- Asked about India's neighbourhood first policy amid signs of strains with a number of neighbours including Bangladesh, and protest-led regime changes in Sri Lanka and Nepal, Mr. Jaishankar said India has to be prepared to unilaterally "underwrite the infrastructure for cooperation" with countries in the region, and should become the "go-to option" for neighbouring countries when in need.

Managing relations

- "Every country has problematic neighbours, and every big country has more problematic neighbours," the External Affairs Minister said, stressing that the purpose of India's policy was not merely to solve problems, but to "manage relationships to national advantage". Without directly naming Pakistan, he said that barring one country, India has effected "transformational change" in projects with neighbouring countries, in the areas of energy, roads, railway lines, and the movement of people.
- Asked about the "re-hyphenation" of India with Pakistan, post Operation Sindoor, and a reference to recent developments where the U.S., Saudi Arabia, China, Turkiye, and other countries have forged closer ties with Islamabad, Mr. Jaishankar said India "cannot wish away a difficult neighbour", as that is a "reality". But he said that other countries no longer draw an equivalence between India and Pakistan.

❖ Navy commissions its second ASW-class ship INS Androth

- The Indian Navy commissioned INS Androth, the second Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC), at the Naval Dockyard in Visakhapatnam.
- The first ship to be commissioned in this category was INS Arnala in June. The ceremony was presided over by Vice-Admiral Rajesh Pendharkar, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command. Senior naval officers and representatives of Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers were present.



- The ship has a length of 77m and displaces 1,500 tonnes. It is designed to undertake anti-submarine operations in coastal and shallow waters. The vessel is equipped with advanced machinery and control systems.

❖ Deliberations continue on proposed nuclear Bill

Context: Questions on private sector's role, radioactive waste disposal yet to be settled; Finance Minister said in Feb. that govt. intends to amend Atomic Energy Act, Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act.

- Deliberations within the government continue on bringing in new legislation to allow the private sector to operate nuclear plants in India with questions regarding management of nuclear waste and determining if private players can conduct core research into nuclear technologies still being ironed out.
- Drafts of the proposed new Bill were still being deliberated upon by an intergovernmental committee of experts as well as the Law Ministry though there was a “good chance” of it being introduced in the forthcoming Winter Session of Parliament, an official privy to the proceedings told The Hindu on condition of anonymity.
- **Currently, only Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL), Bhartiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Ltd. (BHAVINI), and NPCIL-NTPC joint venture Anushakti Vidhyut Nigam Limited (ASHVINI) can build and operate nuclear power plants in the country.**
- In February, however, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech that the government intended to amend two Acts — the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act — to enable private companies, including foreign companies, to form partnerships, and build and operate nuclear plants in India.
- Despite the India-U.S. nuclear deal of 2008 formally allowing sale of nuclear technologies to India, though with built-in periodic checks and scrutiny by the International Atomic Energy Agency, clauses in India's Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (2010) have been impediments since they impose practically unlimited liability on foreign suppliers of nuclear equipment in case of an accident.



Nuclear reforms: Currently, only three PSUs can build and operate nuclear power plants in the country. FILE PHOTO

Alignment of laws

- “The effort is to align India's laws on liability with that of conventions such as the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC),” the official noted. “However, we also have to bring clarity on questions such as who will be responsible, whether it is the private sector or the government power plant operators, for safe disposal of nuclear waste as well as the re-processing of spent nuclear fuel.

There is also discussion on enabling research and development of core nuclear technologies.”

- The government’s thrust to encourage greater private sector participation is with the larger objective of installing 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047. This is premised not only on importing foreign reactors but also developing Bharat Small Reactors (BSRs) and exploring partnerships with the private sector. BSRs are 220 MW Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs). These reactors are being upgraded to reduce land requirements, making them suitable for deployment near industries such as steel, aluminium, and metals units, serving as captive power plants to aid in decarbonisation efforts.
- The plan involves private entities providing land, cooling water, and capital, while the NPCIL handles design, quality assurance, and operation and maintenance. This initiative aligns with India’s commitment to achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based energy generation and meeting 50% of requirements from renewable energy by 2030.

❖ Fisheries sector hopes to beat U.S. curbs with sustainability label

Context: About 10 Indian marine and saline fish and shrimp varieties are set to get the global Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification soon. The first batch is set to be submitted for the certification in 2026.

- According to experts, the certification is likely to increase the revenue of the fisheries sector by 30% and help fishermen and traders find new markets other than the U.S. in the event of further trade restrictions due to the higher tariffs.
- The certification will also help fishing communities begin ecologically sustainable fishing practices and ensure steady incomes.
- Fisheries Development Commissioner K. Mohammed Koya told The Hindu that the Union Government, under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), would subsidise the certification process, which is done by third-party auditors.
- Mr. Koya said that global affluent markets, such as European and Japanese ones, are looking for sustainably sourced fish.
- “Sustainability is part of our fisheries. Some of our fish varieties may not immediately qualify for sustainable segregations, but many of the varieties are amenable to certification. Once we re-certify the fish, the advantages that we get include access to the best markets. It is a way of certifying the fish so that it gets a better price,” he said.
- Experts said the certification process is in its final stages and they are addressing the technical gaps, including stock assessments for shrimp, squid, cuttlefish and octopus, which are part of the varieties that await MSC certification.
- It is primarily based on the Food and Agriculture Organisation’s (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing and Guidelines for the Eco-labelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries.

Advanced stages

- Speaking recently at a technical session jointly hosted by the MSC and the Sustainable Seafood Network India (SSNI) and the Seafood Exporters Association of India (SEAI), MSC’s India head Ranjit Suseelan said the prioritised fisheries are in the

advanced stages of assessment, raising expectations of MSC certification in the next year.

❖ SC to decide on securities transaction tax's constitutionality

Context: Petition contends that the direct tax on securities transactions violates fundamental rights to equality and to trade or earn a livelihood.

- The Supreme Court of India decided to examine a plea challenging the constitutional validity of the Securities Transaction Tax (STT), a direct tax levied on securities transactions through a listed stock exchange, as imposed under the Finance Act, 2004.
- A Bench headed by Justice J.B. Pardiwala issued formal notice to the Union Government, through the Ministry of Finance, on the petition filed by Aseem Juneja, represented by advocate Siddhartha K. Garg, who contended that the STT violated fundamental rights to equality and to trade or earn a livelihood and the basic right to live with dignity.
- The petition clarified that the challenge to the STT was not because the taxation on the stock market participants had increased or that the taxation was currently high.
- “The current petition is instead questioning the legality of the tax imposed in the form of STT... Firstly, it violates the principle of double taxation as the petitioner (a stock market trader) pays capital gains tax on the profit made in the market and then also has to pay STT, over and above this capital gains tax already paid on the same transaction,” the plea submitted.
- Secondly, Mr. Juneja contended that STT was the only tax in India which was imposed on the “sheer act of carrying out a profession and has to be paid irrespective of whether there is a profit made or not, which makes it almost punitive or deterrent in nature.”
- “Every tax in India is on the profit at the year-end but STT is applicable even if the stock market trader is operating in a loss. STT was introduced in 2004 to combat tax evasion in the stock market. This means that STT to stock market participants is what TDS is to salaried individuals. But the problem is that the TDS is refunded at the end of the year or adjusted with the income tax but no such provision is made for STT and the trader has to pay both,” Mr. Juneja noted.

❖ SC issues notice on plea for portal on financial holdings

Context: The Supreme Court issued notices to the Union Government and several financial regulators on a public interest litigation petition seeking the creation of an integrated digital platform that would allow citizens to access information about all their financial holdings, whether operational, inactive, or unclaimed, across entities regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).

- A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta sought responses from the Union of India, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, the RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, the National Savings Institute, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), and the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).

❖ Sonowal accords ceremonial welcome to 'Very Large Gas Carrier' Shivalik

Context: Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal accorded a ceremonial welcome to the nation's first Very Large Gas Carrier (VLGC) Shivalik at the Visakhapatnam port, on its maiden call to the nation.

- Shivalik, recently inducted under the Indian flag by the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) Ltd. on September 10, represents a significant leap in India's maritime and energy logistics capability.
- Mr. Sonowal congratulated the SCI team and lauded the Visakhapatnam Port Authority (VPA) for facilitating the vessel's smooth handling during its inaugural LPG consignment operation, at the port's LPG terminal.



Union Ports & Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal flagging off VLGC Shivalik. V. RAJU

Other projects

- Mr. Sonowal also inaugurated several developmental projects at Visakhapatnam Port Authority at Sagarmala Conventions, Saligrampuram.
- These included the Operation & Maintenance of East Quay (EQ)-1A Terminal, awarded to M/s Green Energy Resources with an investment of ₹130 crore.
- The project includes deployment of two 120-tonne Harbour Mobile Cranes (HMCs) and connected infrastructure for a 5+1 year period, enhancing capacity by 3 MMTPA.
- The initiative is expected to generate around 150 jobs, reduce logistics costs, and strengthen Visakhapatnam Port's position as a key cargo hub on the East Coast.
- The Minister also inaugurated the Smart Video Surveillance Project, valued at ₹37.53 crore, executed by M/s RailTel Corporation of India Ltd., Hyderabad. The initiative integrates AI/ML-based Video Analytics, IoT technologies, and an Integrated Command Control Centre (ICCC) with five years of O&M support.
- Designed to be implemented within 12 months, the project enhances port security, operational efficiency, and compliance while enabling real-time monitoring, asset tracking, and predictive analytics —making VPA a future-ready 'smart port.'
- Another major project inaugurated was the Digital Health Card System, implemented by M/s Triunfador Pvt. Ltd., Visakhapatnam, at a cost of ₹1 crore.
- The project, to be completed in three months, enables digital access to health records for employees, pensioners, and dependents through QR/Aadhaar-linked smart health cards. Visakhapatnam MP M. Sriharat accompanied Mr. Sonowal, among others.

❖ India's services PMI eases to 60.9 in September

Context: The growth of India's services sector eased in September from the recent high in August, as new business and activity expanded at slower rates, according to a private monthly survey released.

- The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index fell to 60.9 in September, from a 15-year high of 62.9 in August, amid competitive conditions and cost-control measures.
- Notwithstanding the moderation, the September Services PMI index was well above the neutral mark of 50 to signal another substantial upturn in output.

❖ India 'firm' on 'free and fair' election in Bangladesh: Misri

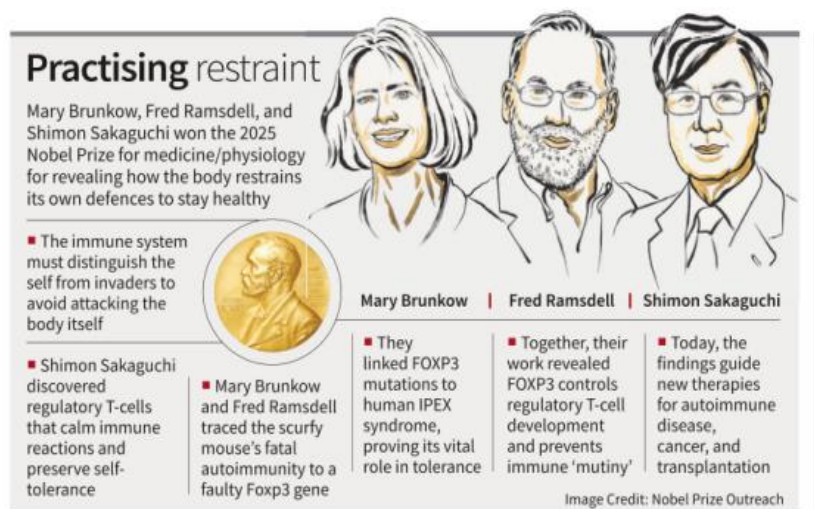
Context: Bangladesh should hold the next general election “without delay” and that India is in favour of “free, fair, inclusive and participatory” election in the country, said Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.

- Speaking to a group of visiting journalists from Bangladesh, Mr. Misri described the scheduled February 2026 election in Bangladesh as a “globally” important event and said India will engage with “any government” that is chosen by the people of Bangladesh. He added that the election will have to acquire both “domestic” and “external” legitimacy.
- “I want to be very very clear in this one matter – if there is any doubt in anybody’s mind – that India is firmly in favour of free, fair, inclusive and participatory elections in Bangladesh and it is in favour of these elections being held at the earliest possible,” said Mr. Misri.
- The election in Bangladesh was announced earlier this year, and Chief Adviser of the interim government of Muhammad Yunus reiterated on multiple occasions that the election would be held in February.
- However, there have been questions about how inclusive would the election be as the Awami League, the party that governed Bangladesh between 2009 and 2024 remains banned, with its leader and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina staying in India.
- Bangladesh has been demanding the extradition of Ms. Hasina to face trial in the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) for the killing of protesters in July-August 2024 when Ms. Hasina faced a student-led uprising that overthrew her government.

❖ Medicine Nobel for scientists who demystified the immune system

Context: The annual Nobel Week — when the world’s most prestigious prizes for scientific achievement are announced — kicked off with three scientists, two Americans and one Japanese, sharing the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for unravelling tantalising aspects of the human immune system.

- Their discovery has helped blaze new paths into treating cancer as well as auto-immune disease — a condition by which the immune system ends up harming healthy cells they are meant to protect.
- Human immune system is a complex of several cells — B cells, T cells, neutrophils and macrophages — that have a role in identifying and eliminating foreign bodies that may bring with it disease. This year’s prize to Mary Brunkow, Fred Ramsdell and Shimon Sakaguchi was for discovering the mechanism and key constituents of the so-called ‘peripheral immune tolerance’.



- The laureates identified the immune system's security guards, regulatory T cells, which prevent immune cells from attacking our own body.
- "Their discoveries have been decisive for our understanding of how the immune system functions and why we do not all develop serious autoimmune diseases," Olle Kämpe, chair of the Nobel Committee, said in a statement.
- Shimon Sakaguchi made the first key discovery in 1995. At the time, many researchers were convinced that immune tolerance only developed due to potentially harmful immune cells being eliminated through a process called central tolerance. Mr. Sakaguchi showed that the immune system is more complex and discovered a previously unknown class of immune cells, which protects the body from autoimmune diseases.
- Mary Brunkow and Fred Ramsdell made the other key discovery in 2001, when they presented the explanation for why a specific mouse strain was particularly vulnerable to autoimmune diseases. They had discovered that mice have a mutation in a gene that they named Foxp3. They also showed that mutations in the human equivalent of this gene triggered a serious autoimmune disease, IPEX.
- Two years after this, Mr. Sakaguchi was able to link these discoveries. He proved that the Foxp3 gene governs the development of the cells he identified in 1995. These cells, now known as 'regulatory T cells', monitor other immune cells and ensure that our immune system tolerates our own tissues.
- The laureates' discoveries launched the field of peripheral tolerance, spurring the development of medical treatments for cancer and autoimmune diseases. This may also lead to more successful transplantations. Several of these treatments are now undergoing clinical trials.

❖ UN to probe human rights violations in Afghanistan

Context: The UN Human Rights Council decided to launch a probe into serious rights violations in Afghanistan, amid growing alarm over the Taliban's measures targeting women and girls.

- The United Nations' top rights body decided to set up an investigation to gather and preserve evidence of international crimes. A draft resolution brought forward by the European Union was adopted without a vote in Geneva.
- "Four years since the Taliban takeover by force, the human rights situation has only deteriorated amid a deepening humanitarian crisis," said Denmark's ambassador Ib Petersen, introducing the resolution on behalf of the EU. The scope of the probe notably includes violations and abuses against women and girls.
- The resolution "deplores the Taliban's institutionalisation of its system of discrimination, segregation, domination, disrespect for human dignity and exclusion of women and girls".
- Council member China disassociated itself from the consensus, saying the resolution "fails to acknowledge the positive progress achieved" in Afghanistan.

Context: It says there is confusion about whether names added in final list are those deleted from draft roll; it asks if the poll panel individually informed the excluded voters, to facilitate their right to appeal

- The Supreme Court reminded the Election Commission that “the degree of transparency and access to information form the hallmarks of an open democracy”.
- It also questioned the top poll body about the individual details of voters added to the final list of voters in Bihar after the special intensive revision (SIR) of the State’s electoral roll.
- Over 21.5 lakh voters have been added in the final roll, and 3.66 lakh removed.
- “There is a confusion about the names added on in the final list... What is the identity of the people added on? Is it an add-on of names taken from the 65 lakh voters deleted in the draft roll or are they new and independent names? The final list shows an appreciation of the number of voters... This exercise we want you to do is in aid of the electoral process, to maintain intact the faith in the electoral process,” Justice Joymalya Bagchi, who was part of the Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant, asked the poll body.

Final list

- The final list shows that there are 7.42 crore eligible voters in the State. This was higher than the 7.24 crore voters listed in the draft electoral roll published after the first phase of the SIR, which had seen the removal of 65 lakh names, given that Bihar had 7.89 crore voters on June 24, the date of notification of the SIR exercise.
- The court asked the EC whether the 3.66 lakh voters deleted from the final list were individually informed through a formal order of deletion to facilitate the filing of appeals against their exclusion. “They have a right to appeal,” Justice Kant told the poll body.
- The Bench also asked whether a separate list of the names and details of the 3.66 lakh excluded voters had been published and made easily accessible at the grass roots level.
- Justice Bagchi referred to **Rule 21A of the Registration of Electors’ Rules, 1960, which requires poll authorities to display the names and details of deleted voters on the notice boards of district electoral offices.**
- Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, for the EC, said the disaggregated data was still being collected from ground-level officers and processed. However, there has not been a single complaint against any exclusion of names in the final list, he said, noting that the final electoral roll has already been shared with political parties.
- “Who is deleted and who is not requires only a basic comparison between the draft roll and the final list,” Mr. Dwivedi argued.
- Justice Kant, at one point in the hearing, threw the EC’s line of argument at the petitioners’ lawyers, advocates Prashant Bhushan and Neha Rathi.
- “Mr. Bhushan, but where are the aggrieved people? The draft voter list is available on the EC website, the final voter list is also available. You could compare and identify the excluded names. Show us specific cases in the 3.66 lakh deleted voters whose names were deleted without any communication... This cannot be a roving enquiry...

For whom are you doing this? They may be illegals who were deleted from the voter list, would they come out and complain?” Justice Kant asked them.

‘Population estimate mismatch’

- Mr. Bhushan said the SIR, instead of cleaning up the electoral process, has only compounded the problems due to the EC’s opacity.
- The court asked the EC to address the issues raised in Mr. Bhushan’s written submissions on Thursday.
- These submissions contended that though the official estimate of the adult population in Bihar for September 2025 was 8.22 crore, the number of electors in the final rolls was only 7.42 crore.
- “Thus, 80 lakh, that is, approximately 10% of the total adult population of Bihar has been denied their right to vote. Such a sharp fall in the adult population to electors’ ratio is a record for India and for Bihar,” the written submissions said.

Missing women, Muslims

- In no State of the country previously have as much as 10% of the electorate been excluded from the electoral roll, Mr. Bhushan said. He added that lakhs of women were ‘missing’ from Bihar’s electoral rolls.
- “After SIR, while Bihar’s gender ratio is 934 in September 2025, the gender ratio in the final electoral rolls has fallen sharply to 892. This translates into 17 lakh missing women... SIR has wiped out a whole decade’s gains in the gender ratio of electoral rolls,” said the submissions presented in court.
- The SIR exercise has also resulted in the disproportionate exclusion of Muslims, Mr. Bhushan claimed.
- “Our analysis based on name recognition software, shows that Muslims were 25% among the 65 lakh voters excluded from the draft rolls and 34% among the 3.66 lakh deleted electors from the final rolls... This disproportionate exclusion accounts for the reduction of about six lakh Muslim voters,” he submitted.

‘Respond to analysis’

- The court asked the EC to respond to Mr. Bhushan’s analysis that at least 5.17 lakh names on the final rolls appear to be duplicates. “There are over 2.5 lakh cases of blank or junk households numbers, over 25,000 electors with gibberish names and nearly 60,000 entries with invalid gender or relation or gender relations mismatch,” the written submissions alleged.

❖ Bigg Boss Kannada 12 gets KSPCB notice for violation of norms

Context: KSPCB order says Vels Studio and Entertainment Limited, the amusement park where the reality show is being shot, was operating without obtaining valid consent from the pollution control board.

- The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) has ordered the closure of M/s. Vels Studio and Entertainment Limited located in Bidadi Industrial Area, Bengaluru South district, for non-compliance of environmental norms.

- M/s. Vels Studio and Entertainment Limited (M/s. Jolly Wood Studios and Adventures) is where the current edition of the Bigg Boss Kannada reality television show is being shot.
- According to a KSPCB order issued on October 6, 2025, M/s. Vels Studio and Entertainment Limited is an amusement park established and operating without obtaining valid consent from the board which falls under Green Category.

Waste water

- It added that during inspection it was found that **waste water generated from different domains of the amusement park was discharged outside the premises without any treatment and causing pollution to the surrounding environment.**
- It further said that the park authorities have provided a Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) of 250 kilo liters per day (KLD). “However, no sewer, no inflow of sewerage to STP was observed, all STP units installed were empty and discharging the waste water outside the premises without any treatment,” it said.
- During inspection it was also found that the housekeeping near STP is very poor and there is no flowchart displayed.
- Diesel Generating sets of capacity 625 KVA and 500 KVA were also installed and operating in the premises.
- “The park authorities have disposed of the solid waste generated viz., disposable paper plates, cups, and plastic waste near STP area without any segregation in an unscientific manner,” it added.

• **KSPCB has issued closure orders under Section 33(A) of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, read with Rule 34 of Karnataka Board for the Prevention and Control of Water Pollution (Procedure for Transaction of Business), and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Rules, 1976.**

In 2024

- Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre said the KSPCB Regional Office in Ramanagara had issued notices to the studio twice in 2024, which its promoters did not comply with. He said that the **studio was operating without obtaining permission under the Water Act and Air Act.**

❖ SWR begins phased rollout of Kavach train protection system

Context: The South Western Railway (SWR) has initiated the process of implementing the indigenously developed Kavach, an electronic rail safety mechanism system, across its network, covering a total of 3,692 route km (RKM). Developed by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) in collaboration with the Indian industry, Kavach is an Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system designed to significantly enhance safety of the railways.

In two stages

- According to SWR officials, the project will be executed in two stages. The first phase will cover 1,568 RKM at an estimated cost of ₹628.63 crore, while the second phase will extend the system to the remaining 2,124 RKM.
- Officials explained that Kavach is a state-of-the-art electronic



safety mechanism built to Safety Integrity Level-4 (SIL-4) standards, the highest benchmark in railway safety.

- “Its primary function is to prevent trains from passing signals set at danger (red) and to avert collisions. If a loco pilot fails to slow down as per prescribed speed restrictions, Kavach automatically triggers the braking system. It also ensures that two locomotives fitted with functional Kavach systems do not collide. Another crucial feature is the automatic relay of SoS messages during emergencies, along with live centralised monitoring of train movements via the Network Monitor System,” the official said.
- The system functions as a Traffic Collision Avoidance System (TCAS), using on-board equipment and transmission towers at stations linked through Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags.
- “This facilitates two-way communication between the station master and the loco pilot during emergencies. Inside the locomotive cabin, an instrument panel provides advance signal information, permissible speed limits, and warnings. In cases where a red signal is ignored, or trains are on a collision course, the system intervenes instantly by applying emergency brakes. Kavach also automatically activates a hooter while approaching level crossings, aiding loco-pilots in low-visibility conditions such as fog,” official added.
- Meanwhile, the Railways has sanctioned work to equip 299 locomotives under SWR with Loco Kavach. Officials said the detailed project estimate is currently under vetting by the accounts department.

❖ PRADA delegation meets Kolhapuri chappal artisans

Context: A delegation from PRADA, the European fashion house that faced allegations of copying the design of the Kolhapuri chappal, visited Athani in Belagavi district recently and interacted with artisans.

- The team led by Gautam Mehra, PRADA’s Indian representative, visited the houses of some artisans and spoke to them. It also visited the Kolhapuri chappal cluster in Athani and documented the working styles of the artisans and took pictures of their portfolio. “They told us that they are willing to work with the government and cooperate with the artisans. They offered to train batches of five to 10 artisans in their design centres in India,” Shivaraj Soudagar, cluster coordinator, told The Hindu.
- “We asked the officers to give us some orders so that we could access a bigger market and get better prices for our product. They agreed to consider our demand,” Mr. Soudagar said.
- Another round of meeting between artisans, LIDKAR officers, and PRADA designers has been scheduled in Bengaluru this week.
- ZP CEO Rahul Shinde said that the district administration had planned a series of actions for the Athani artisans.
- “We want to organise a series of workshops for artisans, in association with agencies like EXIM bank and National Institute of Design. They will not only be aimed at training them in understanding market trends, but also in new designs and use of diverse materials. We will also train them in using e-commerce portals for boosting their sales, standard methods and processes of packing and logistics management.

Another set of resource persons will provide soft skills training, and consumer relations. We will also tie up with legal experts to help our artisans better understand the implications of the Geographical Indication and other laws,” Mr Shinde said.

- MP for Chikkodi Priyanka Jarkiholi said that she would urge the State government and LIDKAR to work with PRADA and find a solution in which the artisans get assured orders and remunerative wages. She said she would speak to LIDKAR officers and artisans in Karnataka and Maharashtra to find a common solution.

❖ **India edges closer to recognising Taliban as Muttaqi to arrive in Delhi for a five-day visit**

Context: Two days before the visit of Amir Khan Muttaqi, Acting Foreign Minister of the Taliban regime ruling Afghanistan, the Indian government came one step closer to formally recognising the Taliban, as a regional grouping that India is a part of admitted Mr. Muttaqi as a “member” for the first time.

- Mr. Muttaqi, who is on the UN Security Council’s list of banned terrorists, was given special permission to travel to India, and officials said he would arrive in for a five-day visit.
- According to sources, Mr. Muttaqi will be accorded full protocol as a visiting Foreign Minister, including being hosted by the government. He will be received at the official venue, Hyderabad House, by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar for talks on October 10.
- India’s Ambassador to Russia Vinay Kumar attended the 10-nation Moscow Format Consultations hosted by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Others in attendance were Pakistan’s special envoy on Afghanistan Mohammad Sadiq and other representatives from China, Iran and Central Asian countries.
- Apart from Russia, no country has recognised the Taliban government thus far, and since the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August 2021, representatives of the ‘Acting government’ in Afghanistan have attended the meeting as observers only. However, a photograph released after the meeting on Tuesday showed Mr. Muttaqi amongst the delegates.
- “For the first time the Afghan delegation headed by Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi participated in the meeting as a member,” said a joint statement issued by all the participants at the meeting, calling for more economic exchanges, provision of humanitarian assistance, and regional connectivity initiatives with Afghanistan, as well as steps to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation.
- Mr. Muttaqi is expected to travel next to India, arriving on October 9. It is unclear whether Mr. Muttaqi would also call on Mr. Modi later in the visit, the first such official visit by a senior Taliban Minister since 2021. During the five-day visit, Mr. Muttaqi, who received special permission to travel from the UN Sanctions committee on September 30, is expected to meet a number of officials and interact with business groups and Afghan nationals living in India.
- Former diplomats said that inviting Mr. Muttaqi to India was a pragmatic move, given India’s interests in Afghanistan, but warned against giving the Taliban regime full recognition until the United Nations decides to do so.
- “India should await international consensus,” said Vivek Katju, who has managed Afghanistan relations at the MEA in the past. However, he added that India should

post a more senior Charge d’Affaires at its Embassy in Kabul, which currently runs as a “technical mission”.

- Former Ambassador to Afghanistan Gautam Mukhopadhyay said that the move to invite Mr. Muttaqi reflects a “convergence of security interests at the expense of certain values and internal security concerns that held the relationship in check”.
- However, Afghanistan’s former Foreign Minister and National Security Adviser Rangin Dadfar Spanta said, “India’s current policy towards Afghanistan is mainly determined by an anti-Pakistan approach. Both Pakistan and the government in Delhi are looking for proxies. This is not about good neighbourliness or peace in our region. Unfortunately, the opposite is true.”

❖ Trio wins Physics Nobel for building device showing ‘quantum tunnelling’

Context: The Nobel Prize for Physics this year will be awarded to three scientists — John Clarke, Michel Devoret and John Martinis, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

- The scientists worked together and devised experiments to tease greater insight into the workings of the quantum world: the realm of the ultra-small when objects, broken down to single, constituent particles, cease to behave in the way we ordinarily expect them to.
- One of the mind-boggling behaviours that particles are capable of here is **“tunnelling”, literally, the ability of particles to pass through physical walls.**
- It is as if a cricket ball hitting the pitch will surely bounce up, but the odd cricket-ball particle will simply burrow into the ground. Such behaviour cannot be observed at the macroscopic level but the scientists showed that it was possible to organise a multitude of single particles and coerce them to exhibit “tunnelling” properties in a system, big enough to be held in the hand.

Electrical circuit

- Much like early insight into quantum mechanics paved the way for transistors and silicon chips in the 1950s, the three scientists devised an electrical circuit with two superconductors, components that can conduct a current without any electrical resistance.
- They separated these with a thin layer of material — called a Josephson junction — that did not conduct any current at all.
- In this experiment, they showed that **they could control and investigate a phenomenon in which all the charged particles in the superconductor behave in unison, as if they are a single ‘particle’ that fills the entire circuit.**
- Following this, they were able to demonstrate that such a particle could be made to behave simulating the flow of electricity even without voltage, a prerequisite for the flow of current.
- These were akin to **the first ‘super-conducting circuits’ that could potentially realise practical, useful quantum computers and quantum sensors.**

- **Quantum computers, unlike contemporary computers, deal in ‘qubits’, rather than binary bits. This allows them to perform calculations exponentially faster but also threaten all kinds of encryption systems that are premised on bit-based computers.**

❖ **‘No State has fully complied with key drug quality norms’**

Context: While 18 State drug control authorities across the country have adopted the Online National Drugs Licensing System (ONDLS) for processing drug-related licences, no State has yet fully complied with the Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA) guidelines, confirmed a source in the Union Health Ministry.

- **Both the ONDLS and CAPA are provisions under the Central government’s revised Schedule M, which is a critical update to India’s pharmaceutical manufacturing regulations.**

Safety standards

- **“CAPA is crucial for ensuring safety and maintaining high standards in regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals. It is a universal quality management methodology for process improvement,”** the official said.
- Voluntary compliance [with CAPA] is crucial for quality maintenance, he said, while speaking about the recent deaths of children in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan due to consumption of adulterated cough syrup.
- **CAPA also focuses on systematically investigating and resolving problems in management issues. “Compliance with CAPA will ensure that drug violation is registered and corrective action is taken,”** the official said.
- **The ONDLS is a digital, single-window platform for processing various drug-related licences in India and has been developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing in coordination with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO).**
- “The system is designed to create a uniform, transparent, and accountable process for drug licensing across all States and Union Territories. It handles applications for manufacturing and sales licences, blood banks, and various certificates, such as WHO-GMP,” said the official.
- Data shared show that of the total 5,308 MSME pharma companies in India, 3,838 have already complied with the revised Schedule M GMP.

❖ **Waiting for other countries to unveil digital currency: RBI**

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is waiting for other countries to launch digital currency and is in no hurry to roll out Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) nationwide for retail, said Deputy Governor Rabi Sankar.

- “We’re in no hurry because, you see, for this system to launch, you also have to have other countries launching it simultaneously,” Mr. Sankar said on the sidelines of Global Fintech Fest on Tuesday. He said the most appropriate use-case for a CBDC was cross border payments, although he did not rule out a retail unveiling.

Use UPI with biometrics

- Mr. Sankar's comments assume significance in light of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's recent observation that it was time for nations to prepare for adoption of stable coins.
- The Global Fintech Fest saw the unveiling of biometric authentication for UPI payments by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). The biometric authentication on-device can be used in place of the PIN that has been in use since UPI was launched in 2016.
- Secretary to the Department of Financial Services at the Ministry of Finance M. Nagaraju unveiled the feature. The facility will be made available to customers who choose to opt, giving them control over their preferred mode of authentication, the announcement said. "Each transaction is independently verified by the issuing bank using robust cryptographic checks, ensuring the highest level of safety while keeping the experience simple and seamless," the NPCI said.
- The biometric system is expected to widely benefit senior citizens and first-time users.

❖ World Bank raises India's FY26 growth outlook to 6.5%

Context: The World Bank has upgraded its growth outlook for India to 6.5% in 2025-26, from the earlier 6.3%, citing stronger domestic conditions and also the impact of the GST rate cuts. However, it has revised downward its forecast for 2026-27 to 6.3%, saying the impact of the U.S. tariffs will dampen growth.

- In its South Asia Development Update released, the World Bank said India's real GDP growth "exceeded expectations" in the April-June 2025 quarter, accelerating to 7.8%. It noted that growth was bolstered by strong private consumption and investment and boosted by lower-than-expected prices.
- **For the current financial year, the World Bank said India's growth has been revised upwards to 6.5% from the earlier prediction of 6.3%.**
- **"India is expected to remain the world's fastest growing major economy,** underpinned by continued strength in consumption growth," the report said. "Domestic conditions, particularly agricultural output and rural wage growth, have been better than expected."
- "The government's reforms to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) — reducing the number of tax brackets and simplifying compliance — are expected to support activity," it added.
- However, it said that the **forecast for 2026-27 has been downgraded from 6.5% to 6.3% as a result of the imposition of the 50% tariff on about three-quarters of India's goods exports to the U.S.**



The government's reforms to the Goods and Services Tax are expected to support activity.

Context: Stablecoins are blockchain-based digital assets designed to maintain a consistent value over time. Until recently, India's approach to stablecoins was cautious. But now Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has stated that India needs to be ready to engage with crypto assets such as stablecoins

- **Stablecoins are a category of crypto assets that aim to maintain a stable value relative to a specified asset, or basket of assets, providing perceived stability. Various definitions of stablecoins exist, with different countries; standard-setting bodies such as the Financial Stability Board, Bank for International Settlements and International Monetary Fund; and many central banks contributing to these definitions.**
- **Largely, stablecoins are blockchain-based digital assets designed to maintain a consistent value over time.** They achieve this by being backed by reserves such as fiat currencies, commodities, or other crypto assets. They are a distinct class of Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs) backed by fiat currencies, commodities, or other assets. They aim to maintain a stable value, thereby distinguishing them from other VDAs.

Broadly, there are three types of stablecoins:

- **Fiat-backed stablecoins** — these are backed by reserves of traditional currencies such as the U.S. dollar or Euro, held in banks or regulated institutions. Examples include the USDT and USDC.
- **Crypto-backed stablecoins** — these are collateralised by other crypto assets. DAI, backed by Ethereum, is a leading example.
- **Algorithmic stablecoins** — these maintain stability through automated algorithms that adjust supply and demand, without relying on reserves. They are more experimental and risk-prone, as seen with projects like TerraUSD.

New financial plumbing

- **In the traditional financial world, cross-border payments are expensive, slow, and fragmented. Stablecoins are digital tokens backed by fiat reserves and powered by blockchain rails which are rewriting that equation.**
- According to Visa's 2025 report Making Crypto Real, over \$220 billion worth of stablecoins are already in circulation, with transactions settling in seconds rather than days, and at a fraction of traditional costs. The average remittance via stablecoin costs as little as \$0.01, compared to \$44 through conventional banking routes.
- This efficiency is not just a technical feat; it's economic evolution. In the same way that HTTP allowed information to flow seamlessly across the web, stablecoins could enable value to flow over digital rails in real time. The emerging vision, often described as "agentic payments," imagines a world where AI systems autonomously initiate transactions paying cloud providers, renewing subscriptions, or even reallocating treasury funds over stablecoin protocols.

A maturing global order

- **Stablecoins have outgrown their niche origins. Institutional finance has taken notice. BlackRock, Fidelity, and Bank of America have each announced or launched stablecoin initiatives, while Societe Generale became the first major European bank to issue a dollar-pegged coin in 2025.**
- Regulators, once sceptical, are now codifying legitimacy. The EU's MiCA framework and the U.S. GENIUS Act provide clear definitions, reserve standards, and consumer protections, transforming stablecoins into regulated financial instruments.
- In effect, what we are witnessing is not the replacement of traditional money but its modernisation. A new three-layered structure is emerging—the blockchain base layer which is decentralised, auditable, and interoperable; the reserve layer which includes regulated institutions backing stablecoins with transparent fiat or treasury reserves; and the interface layer where payment cards, APIs, and digital wallets are making stablecoins usable in everyday commerce.
- Visa and Mastercard's moves to support stablecoin settlement on Ethereum and Solana are not experiments; they are strategic recalibrations.
- Stablecoins are fast emerging as a new settlement layer for global finance. Value can now move as seamlessly as information flows online. By bypassing legacy rails like SWIFT, they transform cross-border transfers from days to seconds, creating a real-time, programmable foundation for the internet economy.

India's evolving stance

- Until recently, India's approach to stablecoins was cautious. But the global tide is shifting, and so is New Delhi's calculus. Recently, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has stated that **India needs to be ready to engage with crypto assets, like stablecoins.**
- The maturation of stablecoins mirrors the path the Internet itself once took: from anarchic experimentation to institutional adoption. What was once a tool for traders is now morphing into a universal payment backbone. In emerging markets, stablecoins are filling gaps that banks find tough to reach; in developed markets, they are cutting inefficiencies that banks long tolerated.
- In Visa's language, **stablecoins are "crypto's superpower."** Their functional advantages, that is, speed, low cost, and transparency are undeniable. But their real promise lies in what they can enable. In an AI-driven, hyper-connected economy, money must move at machine speed.

The road ahead

- **India's digital infrastructure built on UPI, Aadhaar, and account aggregators has already redefined inclusion. The next leap is interoperability: not just between banks, but between blockchains, currencies, and algorithms. Stablecoins, with clear regulation and institutional backing, could provide that bridge.**
- The debate, then, is no longer whether stablecoins will shape the future of finance but how India chooses to shape stablecoins. As the world's financial plumbing gets rewired, nations that embrace stable, programmable, and globally interoperable money will define the rules of the new digital economy. Stablecoins will not replace fiat but they will redefine what fiat feels like in an Internet-operated world.

❖ Trade deal is a launchpad for growth, says British PM

Context: India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement presents unparalleled opportunities, says Starmer as he begins two-day visit; he will hold wide-ranging talks with Narendra Modi.

- The opportunities waiting to be seized under the India-U.K. Free Trade Agreement are “unparalleled”, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in Mumbai as he kick-started his first visit to India after assuming charge.
- “It’s the biggest deal we’ve struck since we left the European Union,” Mr. Starmer said. “I think it’s also the biggest deal that India has ever struck, so it’s hugely important.”
- Mr. Starmer, accompanied by a delegation of nearly 100 entrepreneurs, cultural representatives, and university Vice-Chancellors, arrived in Mumbai for a two-day visit to take advantage of the opportunities brought about by the India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement signed in July.
- “It’s not just a piece of paper, it’s a launchpad for growth. **With India set to be the third biggest economy in the world by 2028, and trade with them about to become quicker and cheaper, the opportunities waiting to be seized are unparalleled,**” he said.
- “Welcome Mr. Starmer on your historic first visit to India,” Mr. Modi said on X. “Looking forward to our meeting tomorrow for advancing our shared vision of a stronger, mutually prosperous future.”
- “During the visit, on October 9 in Mumbai, the two Prime Ministers will take stock of progress in diverse aspects of the **India-U.K. Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in line with ‘Vision 2035’, a focused and time bound 10-year road map of programmes and initiatives in key pillars of trade and investment, technology and innovation, defence and security, climate and energy, health, education and people to people relations,**” the External Affairs Ministry said.
- Both leaders would engage with business and industry leaders regarding the opportunities presented by the trade agreement. “They will also exchange views on issues of regional and global importance,” it added.
- The **India-U.K. CETA aims at boosting bilateral trade by £25.5 billion annually. It provides substantial tariff reductions on a range of goods, including textiles, whisky, and cars, enhancing competitiveness for exporters in both markets.**
- **Specifically, the U.K. will offer duty-free access on 99.1% of its tariff lines, covering 100% of the trade value immediately upon enforcement.**

Investments and visas

- Mr. Starmer’s trip to India has yielded positive statements from some U.K. **companies, such as Rolls-Royce,** about their future plans in India.
- “We have deep ambitions to develop India as a home for Rolls-Royce, building on our strong and successful partnership,” Tufan Erginbilgic, CEO of Rolls-Royce, said in Mumbai. “Our competitively advantaged technologies across air, land, and sea applications position us to successfully build in-country capabilities and foster strategic partnerships that will accelerate India’s progress towards a Viksit Bharat,” he said.

- Mr. Starmer, however, reportedly indicated that the U.K. would not be revisiting its visa requirements for Indians. According to the BBC, Mr. Starmer reportedly said that no business leaders he had met so far raised the question of visas. It added that, during the flight to India, Mr. Starmer said that visas “played no part” in the CETA and that the situation had not changed.
- Mr. Starmer also visited the Yash Raj Films (YRF) studio, where he met Indian producers and film stars, such as Rani Mukherjee.
- The British Prime Minister is reportedly **keen to strengthen cultural ties between India and the U.K. and promote collaboration between the film industries of the two countries.**
- The U.K. government issued a release saying that three new Bollywood movies would be made in the U.K. from next year, with YRF having confirmed plans to bring their major productions to locations across the U.K. from early 2026.
- Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal met Peter Kyle, the U.K.’s Secretary of State for Business and Trade, in Mumbai with a view to moving forward with the operationalisation of the **India-U.K. CETA**, the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement. Mr. Kyle is part of the delegation accompanying Mr. Starmer.

❖ IISc, IIT-M join forces with GBA for World Bank-funded water security and resilience project

Context: The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) has roped in the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT-M) to drive the progress of its ambitious World Bank-funded Bengaluru Water Resilience Project.

- The project will receive **over ₹3,500 crore in funding from the World Bank, with key stakeholders including the GBA, BWSSB, Minor Irrigation, and the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC).**
- The project is expected to be modelled on IISc’s Urban Flood model for Bengaluru, with crucial modifications to align with GBA’s objectives. This development follows discussions between GBA officials and World Bank representatives.
- M. Maheshwar Rao, Chief Commissioner of GBA, stated that the initial meeting with World Bank officials was fruitful and that the water resilience project will soon move into the implementation phase. “Not just this, but the World Bank has offered technical assistance for GBA projects, which are currently under discussion and will be explored,” Mr. Rao.
- **In addition to IISc and IIT-M, the project will involve the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA), Bengaluru-based WELL Labs, and think tank CSTEP.** Munish Moudgil, Special Commissioner (Revenue), GBA, confirmed that the two private agencies will contribute their services under a non-financial memorandum.

World Bank water security project

Works	Funding (in crores)
■ Strengthening SWDs, lakes, nature based solutions	697.2
■ Circular economy and sewage removal	332
■ Enhancing scientific understanding	298.8
■ Coordinated operations and maintenance for SWDs	522.9
■ Disaster risk management reforms and operationalisation	639.1
■ Increasing own source revenue & fiscal and budgetary management compliance	747
■ Strengthening financial foundation	207.5
■ Risk & resilience financing	83
■ Front end fee	8.3

Source: World Bank document

- A GBA source involved in the project explained that the civic authority aims not only to mitigate flooding caused by poor stormwater drain infrastructure but also to improve overall water security in the city. This includes rainwater storage and harvesting, watershed development, and addressing long-term challenges such as floods, droughts, and other climate-related risks.
- For example, the project will strengthen stormwater drains (SWDs), prevent the concretisation of drains and lakes to raise underground water levels, identify natural solutions for flood-prone areas, and establish maintenance plans for SWDs during summer months.
- **The implementation of the project will be managed by Bengaluru Smart Infrastructure Ltd. (BSMILE), a special-purpose vehicle established for mega projects.**

❖ Neeriddare Nale scheme to be launched

Context: The State government will implement the Neeriddare Nale (water is future) initiative across 525 gram panchayats in 27 taluks of 15 districts, which have been identified as areas where the groundwater is exploited.

- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar will formally launch the programme.
- Minister for Minor Irrigation, Science and Technology N.S. Boseraju told reporters here that the **initiative aimed to lay a strong foundation for a water-secure and prosperous Karnataka by improving groundwater levels.**
- **The Neeriddare Nale concept seeks to create public awareness about water conservation, develop strategic plans for sustainable water management, and make citizens active partners in protecting water resources.**
- **In the first phase, the project will cover 525 groundwater-stressed gram panchayats, including over 100 GPs in Kalyana Karnataka, where groundwater depletion is the most severe,** Mr. Boseraju said.

Neeriddare Nale scheme to be launched today



In the first phase, the Neeriddare Nale project will cover 525 groundwater-stressed gram panchayats, including over 100 GPs in Kalyana Karnataka, where groundwater depletion is the most severe. FILE PHOTO

❖ U.S. Senate confirms Sergio Gor as Indian Ambassador, Kapur as regional official

Context: After months of rocky relations, the India-U.S. engagement is set to get a boost as the U.S. Senate confirmed the nominations of Sergio Gor as Ambassador to India and S. Paul Kapur, an American of Indian origin as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia.

- Mr. Gor has also been appointed U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy on **South and Central Asia**, a new post that did not require confirmation. His role in the region has been watched keenly, and with some misgivings in New Delhi, especially as Mr. Gor met with leaders of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan in New York last month, and Pakistani leadership had travelled to Washington.

- Officials did not indicate a date for Mr. Gor to take up his post as Ambassador in Delhi, but did not rule out his arrival in the next few weeks in his role as special envoy, ahead of a possible meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Trump on the **sidelines of the upcoming ASEAN-related summits in Kuala Lumpur on October 26-27, where they may repair ties and discuss scheduling the Quad summit.**
- At the Senate hearing on September 11, Mr. Gor, who said the U.S.-India relationship would “define the 21st century”, indicated that he and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau would travel to the region in October, and set out the tasks before him. Mr. Gor said that he would work to advance the India-U.S. trade relationship so that it is “fair” to American businesses, adding that “India’s protectionist policies and regulatory barriers have prevented [the two countries] from fully realising this partnership”. He also said that “getting” India to stop buying Russian oil is a “top priority”.
- Mr. Gor and Mr. Kapur, who will be the point-persons for India and the region, were confirmed among 107 nominees in a single vote with 51 Senators in favour and 47 against, who convened despite the U.S. government shutdown.
- “Ambassador Gor’s confirmation is a signal to New Delhi that the U.S.-India relationship is a top priority for the administration and the region, and together, through the right diplomatic channels, [India and the U.S.] can iron out the creases and reach consensus,” Mukesh Aghi, president and CEO of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum, said, referring to Mr. Gor as a “trusted confidant” of Mr. Trump, and Mr. Kapur as a “stellar academic and a South Asia scholar who is second to none in understanding the security of the region and New Delhi’s concerns vis-a-vis Beijing and Islamabad”.

Kapur, a seasoned hand

- While Mr. Gor, a 38-year-old close Trump aide and MAGA (Make America Great Again campaign) insider, has no previous experience on India, Mr. Kapur is an experienced analyst on India and the region, known well in South Block. He has worked in the U.S. State Department’s policy planning division in 2020-21. The author of several books and papers on Pakistan-sponsored jihadist groups in South Asia, U.S.-India relations, and India and Pakistan’s nuclear programmes, Mr. Kapur has been a frequent visitor to the region and was a visiting fellow at the Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation until recently.

❖ EC to facilitate elderly to vote using postal ballot in Bihar

Context: The Election Commission will facilitate the elderly, Persons with Disabilities (PwD), and service electors to vote using postal ballots in the Bihar Assembly polls.

- “Such electors can avail themselves of this facility using Form 12 D and submit to the Returning Officer through their Booth-Level Officer within five days of the issuance of the notification of election. Polling teams will collect their votes at their homes,” said the poll body.
- The electors on essential services on the date of poll can apply for the postal ballot facility through the designated nodal officer of their respective department.

❖ Draft labour policy unites social security schemes

Context: It aims at creating universal, portable social security accounts for all workers by 2030; it also seeks to raise women's labour participation to 35%, offer single-window digital compliance for MSMEs.

- **Universal and portable social security is a major component of the draft National Labour and Employment Policy, which proposes to create a universal account by integrating the Employees Provident Fund Organisation, Employees State Insurance Corporation, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, e-SHRAM, and State welfare Boards.**
- The draft policy, known as the **Shram Shakti Niti, 2025**, was released for public consultation.
- The **proposals include the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Code with risk-based inspections, gender-sensitive standards, and the convergence of various skills schemes. The draft policy presents a renewed vision for a fair, inclusive, and future-ready world of work aligned with the national aspiration of a developed India by 2047**, Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said.
- “Rooted in India’s civilisational ethos of śrama dharma, the dignity and moral value of work, the policy envisions a labour ecosystem that ensures protection, productivity, and participation for every worker. It seeks to create a balanced framework that upholds workers’ welfare while enabling enterprises to grow and generate sustainable livelihoods,” Mr. Mandaviya said.

Policy outcomes

- **Expected outcomes of the policy include universal worker registration and social security portability, near-zero workplace fatalities, increased female labour-force participation, a sharp reduction in informal jobs through digital compliance, AI-driven labour-governance capacity in all States, the creation of millions of green and decent jobs, and a fully converged “One Nation Integrated Workforce” ecosystem.**
- The draft policy **seeks to increase women’s participation in the labour force to 35% by 2030, and expand entrepreneurship and career guidance initiatives for youth. It also proposes a single-window for digital compliance, with self-certification and simplified returns for MSMEs. Promotion of green jobs, AI-enabled safety systems, just-transition pathways for workers, and a unified national labour data architecture ensuring inter-ministerial coherence and transparent monitoring are also part of the policy document.**

Accountability plan

- **Policy implementation will proceed in three phases. Phase I (2025–27) focuses on institutional setup and social-security integration.**
- **During Phase II (2027–30)**, the nationwide rollout of universal social security accounts, along with skill-credit systems, and district-level Employment Facilitation Cells. Phase III (beyond 2030) will bring in paperless governance, predictive analytics, and continuous policy renewal.

- “Progress will be tracked through real-time dashboards, a **Labour & Employment Policy Evaluation Index (LPEI)** benchmarking States, and an Annual National Labour Report to Parliament,” the document says.

❖ After delays, IAF set to receive first Tejas Mk1A fighter jet

Context: The Indian Air Force (IAF) is set to receive its first light combat aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk1A on October 17 during a ceremony in Nashik, marking a significant milestone in India’s indigenous fighter jet programme.

- According to officials, two Tejas Mk1A jets will be handed over to the IAF in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. He will visit the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) facility and interact with the staff involved in production.
- **HAL’s contract to deliver 83 Tejas Mk1A aircraft — originally scheduled to begin in February 2024 — has faced delays primarily due to slow engine deliveries from General Electric (GE Aerospace). With only one or two engines being supplied per month, HAL now targets completing deliveries within four years.**
- Negotiations for an additional 97 Tejas Mk1A fighters are in the final stages, with talks between the Ministry of Defence and GE Aerospace under way.
- Defence analysts point out that the IAF is operating with 29 squadrons and that it may take at least five years to bridge the capability gap. Even months after Operation Sindoor, no significant progress has been made in replenishing the depleted fighter squadrons. Recently, two MiG-21 squadrons have been decommissioned.
- IAF chief Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh recently voiced his concern, “Hungry mouths are ready; we are waiting for the food,” he said, emphasising that to maintain optimal strength, the force requires two squadrons — 30 to 40 aircraft — produced every year. Meanwhile, the IAF’s proposal to acquire 114 multi-role fighter aircraft (MRFA) continues to progress through procedural stages.
- The Defence Ministry is considering a plan to procure “Made in India” Rafales, with at least 18 expected to be delivered off-the-shelf in the near term.

❖ WHO seeks clarification from India if cough syrup has been exported to other countries

Context: The World Health Organization (WHO) has sought clarification from India on whether the cough syrup linked to over 15 child deaths in the country have been exported to other countries, a senior official of the global health agency said.

- **The WHO is yet to issue a Global Medical Products Alert on Coldrif syrup, the cough syrup which has allegedly caused the child deaths in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.** The official added that the need for an alert will be investigated only after receiving a response from Indian health authorities.
- So far at least 17 children aged below five have died in India allegedly after consuming cough syrup containing a toxic compound diethylene glycol (DEG). Coldrif was manufactured by Sresan Pharmaceuticals, based in Tamil Nadu. The company is currently under investigation.

- The Central government, in an order dated December 18, 2023, had said that the fixed-dose combination (FDC) of chlorpheniramine maleate IP 2mg and phenylephrine HCl IP 5mg drop/ml “should not be used in children below four years of age.”
- **Prescribed to treat symptoms of cold and cough, including runny nose, sneezing and sore throat and watery eyes, Coldrif contains chlorpheniramine maleate, paracetamol and phenylephrine.**
- The **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation** issued a directive to all State and Union Territory Drug Controllers, calling for strict enforcement of the Drugs Rules, 1945, with specific emphasis on the mandatory testing of raw materials and finished pharmaceutical products before release in the market.

❖ India to boost solar pumps scheme in Africa, island nations

Context: The Union government is looking to showcase the PM-KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthan Mahabhiyan) programme to several African countries and island nations, Union Minister for Renewable Energy (MNRE) Pralhad Joshi said.

- “We are looking to showcase both the **PM-KUSUM and the PM Surya Ghar (for rooftop solar installations) programme** in countries which have problems with connectivity. We are doing this in Africa and island countries through the ISA (International Solar Alliance) platform,” Mr. Joshi said at a curtain-raiser event for the ISA’s eighth General Assembly, scheduled later this month.

• **The ₹34,000-crore PM-KUSUM programme is meant to boost solar energy infrastructure in agriculture by setting up 100 GW of solar power plants in farmer-owned land. Launched in 2019, it was to have added a solar capacity of 308 GW by 2022, but has missed targets. The Centre then set a new target, of 348 GW with a deadline of March 2026.**

- As of September 30, only one part of the scheme, where 17.5 lakh standalone solar pumps were to be installed has made notable progress. About 70% of the pumps have been installed. On the other hand, only 6% of decentralised grid-connected renewable energy power plants, and 16%-25% of grid-connected solar pumps have been installed.

❖ ‘NMIA set to make Mumbai one of Asia’s biggest aviation hubs’

Context: Navi Mumbai International Airport will connect Maharashtra farmers to supermarkets in Europe, Middle East; reduce export costs for SMEs: PM

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **first phase of the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) and said the airport would play a major role in establishing the region as one of Asia’s largest connectivity hubs.**
- He also remarked that the new airport would connect Maharashtra’s farmers to supermarkets in Europe and the Middle East, enabling fresh produce, fruits, vegetables, and fishery products to reach global markets swiftly.
- He noted that the airport would reduce export costs for nearby small and medium industries, boost investment, and lead to the establishment of new enterprises. The greenfield NMIA is built at a cost of about ₹19,650 crore.

- It is expected to become operational in December this year. As the second international airport for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, NMIA will work in tandem with Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) to ease congestion and elevate Mumbai to the league of global multi-airport systems. To be run by the Adani Group, the airport will handle 90 million passengers annually and 3.25 million metric tonnes of cargo. Among its unique offerings is an Automated People Mover (APM), a transit system planned to connect all four passenger terminals, as well as a landside APM linking the city-side infrastructure.
- **The airport will feature a dedicated storage for Sustainable Aviation Fuel, solar power generation of approximately 47 MW, and EV bus services.**
- NMIA will also be the **first airport in the country to be connected by water taxis.**

❖ PM pitches India as global data hub

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi pitched India as a potential 'global data hub', emphasising the importance of "issues like storage, security and sovereignty" of data that is generated globally. "The world wants reliable partners for the design and manufacturing of telecom equipment," he said.

- "Can't Indian companies become reliable global suppliers and design partners?" Mr. Modi asked, while speaking at the inauguration of the India Mobile Congress, conducted by the Department of Telecommunications. The established telcos in India "provide stability, scale and direction" in the telecom sector, and their role is "continuously increasing," Mr. Modi said.
- Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said in his remarks that **India hoped to secure at least "10% of 6G patents," to establish the country's presence in developing the subsequent generation of telecommunications technology.** Mr. Scindia called on Indian firms to "design here, solve for here, and scale for everywhere."
- At a roundtable held during the event with States and Union Territories, officials discussed issues in implementing the roll out of the 4G saturation scheme, which aims to provide high speed fibre optic connectivity to all of India's gram panchayats.
- Tamil Nadu IT Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan urged Mr. Scindia during the discussion to "cap the market share" of telcos, to maintain a healthy market. Mr. Scindia responded saying the telecom sector was "deregulated".
- Mr. Rajan also requested changes to the Right of Way portal, explaining the site did not address State-level issues, which was why TN had not signed on to the model Right of Way rules. The rules provide a framework for applications to local authorities for laying fiber cables and installing telecom equipment.

❖ RBI envisages unified markets interface

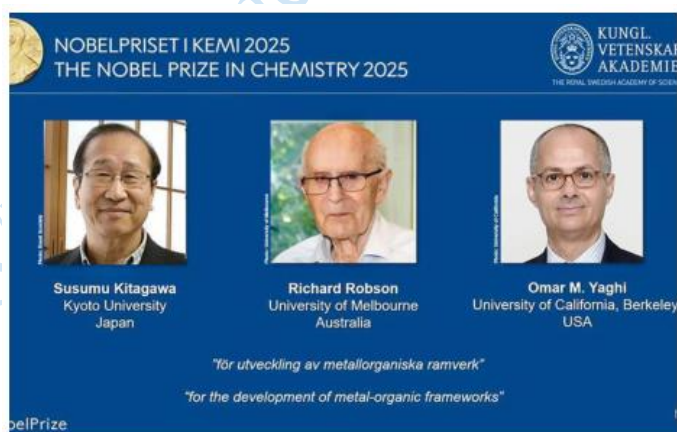
Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has conceptualised a unified markets interface (UMI) to tokenise financial assets and enable settlements using central bank digital currency.

- At the Global Fintech Fest 2025, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said, **“This interface will have the capability to tokenise financial assets and settlements using wholesale CBDC. Early efforts and results from the inaugural pilot in improving market efficiency here are encouraging.”**
- The event also saw the launch of **other features such as UPI Reserve, Internet of Things compatibility of UPI, among others.**

❖ Scientists win Chemistry Nobel Prize for bridging metals and organics

Context: An Australian, a Japanese and a Jordanian-American scientists were announced winners of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for discovering and creating a class of materials, called metal-organic frameworks (MOF).

- **Metallic and organic substances are as far apart in the chemical world** as Australia and the U.S. geographically and it was inconceivable that stable, useful products could be made out of materials formed by integrating them.
- But beginning Richard Robson’s initial conception of them in the mid 1970s, sparked from a science project for his Melbourne University students; to Susumu Kitagawa’s dogged determination, in Kyoto University, at creating porous molecules — despite knowing that they were “useless” — but tinkering with them until he created the right kind of structures that were useful enough to work as a filter whilst remaining flexible and pliant; to finally Omar Yaghi at the University of California, Berkeley, making **a variety of metal-organic frameworks, as he named them, that were capable of drawing water vapour out of desert air at night and releasing them as water in the day.**
- The three will equally share the prize of 11 million Swedish kroner, about ₹1 crore.
- Following the laureates’ groundbreaking discoveries, chemists have since built tens of thousands of different MOFs. Some of these may contribute to solving some of humankind’s greatest challenges, with **applications that include separating PFAS (a family of chemicals that are believed to be toxic) from water, breaking down traces of pharmaceuticals in the environment, capturing carbon dioxide or harvesting water from desert air,** a press statement noted.



Protracted effort: From left, Susumu Kitagawa, Richard Robson and Omar Yaghi, who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. AP

Molecular kit

- Researchers have developed a molecular kit with a wide range of different pieces that can be used to create new MOFs. These have different shapes and characters, providing incredible potential for the rational —or AI-based — design of MOFs for different purposes.
- **First of the block and inspired by a project to make wooden block representations of chemical bonds**, Mr. Robson began by testing the inherent properties of atoms in a new way. He combined positively charged copper ions with a four-armed molecule; this had a chemical group that was attracted to copper ions at the end of each arm. When they were combined, they bonded to form a well-ordered, spacious crystal. It was like a diamond filled with innumerable cavities.
- Mr. Robson immediately recognised the potential of his molecular construction, but it was unstable and collapsed easily. However, Mr. Kitagawa and Mr. Yaghi provided this building method with a firm foundation; between 1992 and 2003 they made, separately, a series of revolutionary discoveries.
- Mr. Kitagawa showed that gases can flow in and out of the constructions and predicted that MOFs could be made flexible.
- Mr. Yaghi created a very stable MOF and showed that it can be modified using rational design, giving it new and desirable properties.
- Initially, it was challenging for the broader scientific community to appreciate MOF as they didn't seem to be much better than a class of materials called zeolites. But things changed when they succeeded in developing soft MOFs — a step up over zeolites that were hard.

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❖ Menstrual leave: Challenges of implementation

Context: The decision to grant one menstrual leave per month has raised concerns about its implementation with many questioning how will workflow be maintained without disruptions.

- A union leader pointed out that while many employers argue that menstrual leave will discourage hiring women, similar arguments were raised globally against maternity leave at one point in time.
- A day after the **Karnataka Cabinet's landmark decision to approve the Karnataka Menstrual Leave Policy-2025 that will ensure one day's paid leave in a month across government and private sectors, many women workers welcomed the move.**
- With this decision, **Karnataka becomes the first State to cover both the government and private sectors in its menstrual leave policy. Odisha and Bihar have a policy for government employees while Kerala has implemented the policy in universities.**
- Gargi M., who works with a semiconductor firm in the city, said that while their work may not involve physical labour, women still need rest during menstruation. She added that the option of working from home does not necessarily help in such situations, and therefore, the policy approval is welcome.
- Meanwhile, union leaders from multiple unorganised sectors stressed the need for inclusion of menstrual leave policy in unorganised sector too, under the provision through Labour Welfare Boards or similar mechanisms.

Existing laws

■ **Bihar policy:** The State has had a menstrual leave policy in place since 1992. Two days per month

■ **Kerala policy:** In January 2023, the State announced menstrual leave for students in all its universities under the Department of Higher Education

Private sector initiatives

■ **Zomato policy**
Introduced a menstrual leave policy in August 2020. Up to 10 days per year.

■ **Swiggy policy**
Offers two days of paid menstrual leave per month. No medical documentation required to avail

■ **Zomato policy**
Introduced a menstrual leave policy in August 2020. Up to 10 days per year.

Menstrual leave: Challenges of implementation

- Umesh A.H., Deputy Labour Commissioner, (Region-1), said that main challenge is workforce adjustments and understanding who will handle the work of those on leave, especially since manpower remains limited in both government and private sectors.
- “Convincing private firms to implement a paid menstrual leave is also a challenge as most companies operate on a five-day work week. However, as society, we can overcome these challenges and will consider these aspects carefully while notifying the policy,” he said.

Context: Jaishankar makes announcement during meeting with Taliban Foreign Minister, raises concerns over forced repatriation of Afghan refugees by Pak., calls 'cross-border terror' a common challenge.

- India will upgrade its 'technical mission' in Kabul to the status of an embassy, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said.
- The announcement came during Mr. Jaishankar's meeting with Amir Khan Muttaqi, Foreign Minister of the Taliban administration in Afghanistan, at Hyderabad House. Mr. Jaishankar also raised India's concerns over the forced repatriation of Afghan refugees by Pakistan and described "cross-border terrorism" as a common challenge to both India and Afghanistan.
- "India is fully committed to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Afghanistan. Closer cooperation between us contributes to your national development, as well as regional stability and resilience. To enhance that, I am pleased to announce today the upgrading of India's technical mission in Kabul to the status of Embassy of India," said Mr. Jaishankar.
- India had shut its embassy in Kabul in 2021 after the U.S.-led forces withdrew from Afghanistan.
- In an interaction at the Embassy of Afghanistan, Mr. Muttaqi welcomed the decision and said, "We will send our diplomats to the Embassy of Afghanistan." He clarified that the Taliban may not send an ambassador at the beginning.
- Mr. Jaishankar noted that India and Afghanistan share a "common commitment towards growth and prosperity" but cautioned that "these are endangered by the shared threat of cross-border terrorism that both our nations face." He did not name Pakistan but urged Mr. Muttaqi to "coordinate efforts" to counter the threat.
- The meeting took place hours after an explosion in Kabul reportedly killed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leader Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, a claim later denied by TTP sources.
- Mr. Jaishankar thanked Kabul for condemning the terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22, saying, "We appreciate your sensitivity towards India's security concerns." He also reiterated India's commitment to facilitating travel for Afghan nationals through a new visa module introduced in April, with more medical, business, and student visas being issued. A joint statement issued after the meeting said that scholarships from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and other organisations are "under active consideration" to enable more Afghan students to study in India.
- The joint statement welcomed starting of the India-Afghanistan Air Freight Corridor, which is expected to "streamline connectivity and boost bilateral trade".
- It further said that both sides "agreed to cooperate on hydroelectric projects with a view to addressing Afghanistan's energy needs and support its agricultural development."
- Mr. Jaishankar also announced six new health projects for Afghanistan, with details to be shared soon. India will gift 20 ambulances to Afghanistan as a "symbolic step" and provide MRI and CT scan machines to hospitals. He further confirmed that India will continue supplying vaccines, cancer medicines, and relief material to earthquake-

affected areas in eastern Afghanistan, adding, “We would like to contribute to the reconstruction of residences in the affected areas.”

❖ Ceasefire takes effect as Israel forces pull back to agreed area

Context: A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came into effect in Gaza on Friday, the Israeli military said, hours after Israel’s Cabinet approved a deal to pause the fighting and exchange the remaining hostages for Palestinian prisoners.

- Israeli forces have withdrawn to agreed deployment lines for the first stage of the ceasefire, it added.
- Tens of thousands of people who had gathered in Wadi Gaza in central Gaza started walking north after the military’s announcement at noon. Beforehand, Palestinians reported heavy shelling in parts of Gaza throughout Friday morning, but no significant bombardment was reported after.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted in a televised statement on Friday that the next stages would see Hamas disarmed and Gaza demilitarised.
- “If this is achieved the easy way — so be it. If not — it will be achieved the hard way,” he said.
- Under the deal, all 48 hostages are expected to be released. In exchange, Israel will release around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.
- The ceasefire marks a key step toward ending a ruinous two-year war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, reduced much of Gaza to rubble, destabilised West Asia, and left dozens of hostages, living and dead, in the territory.
- Israeli Brig. General Effie Defrin, a military spokesman, said that troops had completed their withdrawal to the deployment lines by Friday afternoon, a few hours after the ceasefire officially went into effect.
- Earlier, an Israeli security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the military would control around 50% of Gaza in their new positions.
- In Israel’s offensive, more than 67,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and nearly 1,70,000 wounded, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry. The hostage and prisoner releases are expected to begin on Monday, two Egyptian officials briefed on the talks and a Hamas official said, though another official said they could occur as early as Sunday night.
- All living hostages are expected to be released at the same time, followed by the bodies of the deceased, which could take more time.
- Five border crossings are expected to reopen, including the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, the Egyptian and Hamas officials said. That will allow aid to flow into the territory, parts of which are experiencing famine.

❖ Private hospitals threaten to halt paediatric surgeries under RBSK

Context: Demanding immediate reimbursement of over ₹23 crore dues pending since 2017 for paediatric surgeries done under Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), small and medium private hospitals in Karnataka have threatened to suspend their participation in the State's health schemes.

- The hospitals, which said they are left with no option but to take legal recourse, said if the dues are not cleared at the earliest, they will halt paediatric surgeries under the State's Ayushman Bharat Arogya Karnataka (AB-Ark) health scheme. The dispute dates back to 2016, when the State government introduced additional procedure codes under RBSK, a centrally-funded health scheme under the National Health Mission (NHM), without prior approval from the Centre.
- Private hospital authorities claimed that they acted in good faith on the published codes and provided critical services to ailing children between 2016 and 2018. However, audits later flagged that these codes lacked central clearance, leaving the claims stuck.

Technical glitch

- Officials attribute the delay to a technical glitch in the listing of procedures on the portal of **Suvarna Arogya Suraksha Trust (SAST)**, the nodal agency implementing the State's health schemes. The issue is now before the government.

- **RBSK was launched in 2013-2014 to improve survival, growth and development of children in the 0-18 years group.**
- **Focusing on the screening of infants, children and young adults for 4 D's — Defects at birth, Deficiencies, Diseases, Developmental delays and Disabilities — the scheme initially covered a total of 40 medical procedures which subsequently increased to 104.**
- **The scheme ensured children diagnosed with illness received follow-up care including early intervention services at the district level and including surgeries at tertiary level, free of cost under NHM. Services not available in government hospitals are made available in private empanelled hospitals.**

- Mr. Gupta added that the matter is under review and will be placed before the State Cabinet. He clarified that if the Centre has not approved the additional procedures, the State government will have to bear the expenditure.

❖ SC gives Centre four weeks to respond to pleas for restoration of J&K Statehood

Context: Urging the Supreme Court to weigh the constitutional implications for India's federal structure, petitioners on Friday pressed the Union Government to honour its "solemn promise" of restoring Jammu and Kashmir's Statehood.

- A Bench of Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai and Justice K. Vinod Chandran asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Union Government, to respond to the submissions within four weeks, even as it acknowledged that "various considerations" had to be factored in while making such a decision, including the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack.

- The Bench was hearing an application seeking the restoration of Statehood within a specified time frame, preferably two months. The petitioners, an academic and a social activist, contended that the continued Union Territory status “violates the idea of federalism”, an essential feature of the Constitution’s basic structure. They further pointed out that the smooth conduct of both the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections showed there were no longer any security concerns hindering the restoration of Statehood.

Institutional promise

- Senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy, appearing for MLA Irfan Hafiz Lone, argued that the assurance of restoring Statehood was not a mere political declaration but an “institutional promise” made by the Centre before a constitutional court. She urged the court to consider the “larger question” of what it would signify for Indian federalism if a State could be reduced to a Union Territory “in this fashion”.
- Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for petitioners Zahoor Ahmad Bhat and Khurshaid Ahmad Malik, read from the Supreme Court’s December 2023 judgment on the abrogation of **Article 370** to emphasise that the court had refrained from deciding the Statehood issue only because the Solicitor-General had assured it would be restored after elections.

❖ **Sea phase of KONKAN 25 ends with high operational tempo**

- The sea phase of the bilateral maritime exercise KONKAN 25 between the Indian Navy and U.K.’s Royal Navy concluded following a series of high-tempo naval operations designed to enhance interoperability, operational readiness, and maritime cooperation between the participating navies.
- Indian Navy informed that during the sea phase, the forces undertook a wide spectrum of complex maritime drills encompassing tactical air warfare, air defence, surface and anti-submarine operations, and underway replenishment. The sea phase ended with a ceremonial steampast, where participating units exchanged traditional naval courtesies.

❖ **Hydropower project on Chenab gets clearance**

Context: The Sawalkote project was first accorded an environmental clearance in 2017; the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan added momentum to the approval process, says official

- An apex committee of the Environment Ministry has accorded a fresh environmental clearance to the Sawalkote hydroelectric project, proposed to come up on Chenab river in Ramban, Jammu and Kashmir.
- Planned as a run-of-the-river project utilising the flow of the Chenab to generate electricity, it is reportedly the first major hydropower project on the Indus rivers to be accorded environmental clearance following India’s suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) on April 23, following the Pahalgam terror attack.

- “The Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), after examining the information submitted and detailed deliberations, reiterated its earlier recommendation on the project and recommended the proposal for grant of prior Environmental Clearance to Sawalkote H.E. Project,” said the minutes of a meeting conducted on September 26.
- The project was first accorded an environmental clearance by a designated committee in 2017, when it was originally being steered by the Jammu and Kashmir Power Development Corporation (JKPDC). However, the JKPDC signed a deal with the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC) Ltd. in 2021 to build and commission the project and be effectively in charge of it until 2061.
- Despite the designated committee’s nod, the Environment Ministry could not clear the project as the JKPDC could not procure a forest clearance – which follows a parallel approval process. In September 2023, the project was first accorded a ‘stage 1 forest clearance’ as per publicly available records.
- While the process of transferring the project to the NHPC has been on since 2021, a slew of approvals from the Central Electricity Authority and the Central Water Commission were accorded in July 2025. Public hearings, required to be done under the provisions of the Forest Rights Act, were done between December 2022 to February 2023.
- “The Sawalkote project was already going through various stages of approval. Given its size — though it does not have a storage dam — it will be the largest project of its kind and has always had certain strategic importance. The suspension of the IWT and the plan to utilise the full potential of the eastern Indus rivers have added momentum to the approval process,” a senior official, aware of the approval process of hydroelectric projects, but declined to be identified.

❖ Centre issues guidelines for retiring govt. employees; welfare officer to assist them

Context: The Department of Pensions and Pensioners’ Welfare (DPPW) under the Centre said that it has finalised guidelines for timely payment of retirement dues of Union government officials, which entail appointment of a welfare officer, or pension mitra, for each employee.

- The officer would be deputed by the head of office and assigned to each retiring employee to facilitate filling up of forms and other formalities. The officer shall also be responsible for hand-holding the dependents for documentation and verification in the event of death of the pensioner while submitting the claim for family pension.
- The guidelines have been issued for effective inter-ministerial coordination for timely payment of retirement dues (pension and pensionary dues) and issue of Pension Payment Orders (PPOs)/e-PPOs of Central Civil Services (CCS) employees.
- “Major procedural reforms such as clarification on vigilance clearance before the retirement has been included for reducing the delay in issuance of PPOs/ePPOs. It has been clarified that no pension can be delayed for the want of vigilance clearance as per the specific provisions under CCS(Pension) Rules, 2021. It has been underlined that each ministry/department should ensure that vigilance clearance in respect of their retiring employees is issued three months prior to retirement since the validity of the clearance is of three months as per extant norms,” the Department stated.

❖ 6 State-level RTI panels are defunct; appeals can take years to be heard: report

Context: As the 20th anniversary of the Right to Information Act, 2005 approaches, many State Information Commissions (SICs) and the Central Information Commission (CIC) are either paralysed or so understaffed that hearings could take years to happen, according to a report by a citizens' group working to promote transparency in government functioning.

- The SICs and the CIC hear appeals and complaints when citizens are dissatisfied with the result of an RTI application. There were over 2.4 lakh appeals in 2024.
- The latest edition of the Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS)'s annual assessment shows that six SICs — Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana, Goa, Tripura and Madhya Pradesh — were defunct for varying periods of time between July 1, 2024 to October 7, 2025 as no new Commissioners were appointed upon the incumbents demitting office.”
- The SICs of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Bihar are functioning without a full strength of Commissioners.
- Meanwhile, the Central Information Commission, which hears appeals against RTI responses to Union government organisations, is functioning with only two Information Commissioners, with nine vacancies, including for the Chief Information Commissioner, and hearings can take over a year to come up.
- The backlog is mounting, with Commissions only able to dispose of 1.8 lakh cases in a year with 2.4 lakh appeals. In some States, the current speed of hearings taking place is far slower: the SNS's report “shows that the Telangana SIC would take an estimated 29 years and two months — a matter filed on July 1, 2025 would be disposed [of] in the year 2054.”
- Over 4 lakh appeals and complaints were pending as of June, with Maharashtra (95,340), Karnataka (47,825) and Tamil Nadu (41,059) with the largest outstanding backlog.

❖ Govt. notifies land acquisition to raise Almatti dam height

Context: A total of 1,33,867 acres will be acquired for increasing the height of the dam from 519.60 metres to 524.25 metres.

- The State government has issued a notification for the acquisition of lands for implementing the much-delayed Upper Krishna Project (UKP) Phase III, and the land acquisition process is expected to begin soon.
- A total of 1,33,867 acres would be acquired for increasing the height of the Almatti dam from 519.60 metres to 524.25 metres. Land would be acquired for submergence of land by raising the height of the dam as well for canal projects.

Annual spend

- An estimated ₹75,000 crore would be spent for implementing the project, including land acquisition, reconstruction and rehabilitation, in the next four years.
- Annually, ₹18,000 crore would be provided to the Water Resources Department, it said. The notification said 75,563 acres would be acquired for submerging the land for raising the height of the dam, 6,467 acres for rehabilitation of 20 villages and portion of the Bagalkot town and 51,837 acres for canals.

- When completed, the UKP Phase-III would irrigate 5.94 lakh hectares of land in North Karnataka districts of Vijayapura, Bagalkot, Raichur, Kalaburagi, Yadgir, Koppal and Gadag.

Cabinet clearance

- The special Cabinet meeting held on September 16, 2025, gave clearance for the acquisition of land in one go through “consent award or direct purchase” from farmers.
- The compensation amount, totalling approximately ₹70,000 crore, would be paid over three financial years starting from the current year.
- Farmers whose lands would be submerged due to the increase in dam height would receive ₹40 lakh and ₹30 lakh per acre of wet and dry land, respectively. Farmers whose lands would have to be acquired for building canals would receive ₹30 lakh and ₹25 lakh per acre of wet and dry land, respectively.
- The entire land acquisition process will be taken up through consent or direct purchase to expedite the process, while legal measures would be taken to move the cases related to land acquisition that are pending before various courts to a mediation process.

❖ Microfinance loan defaults surged in 2024-25: Sa-Dhan data

Context: Bihar performed the worst, not only accounting for the highest amounts of loans outstanding, but also the highest rates of default on these loans.

- The rate of delinquencies of microfinance loans rose sharply in 2024-25, according to the latest report by microfinance self-regulatory body Sa-Dhan. The percentage of microfinance loans overdue by more than 30 days increased to 6.2% from 2.1% in 2023-24.
- Similarly, the share of loans more than 90 days overdue increased to 4.8% by the end of March 2025 compared with 1.6% in the previous year.
- “Delinquency levels have risen across the industry,” the 2025 edition of the annual Bharat Microfinance Report by Sa-Dhan said. “The Portfolio at Risk (PAR) 30+ days past due (dpd) surged to 6.2%, up significantly from 2.1% in the last financial year.”
- “State-wise data further corroborate this upward trend in delinquency across the industry,” the report added.
- According to the data, Bihar had ₹57,712 crore worth of microfinance loans outstanding as of March-end 2025.
- Of these, 7.2% were more than 30 days overdue compared with the national average of 6.2%. About 4.6% of the loans were overdue by more than 90 days, the conventional benchmark used to categorise a loan as a non-performing asset.
- The data also showed that rural borrowers fared the worst in terms of loan repayment.

‘Bad’ debts

Delinquency levels have risen across the industry, says the annual Bharat Microfinance Report by Sa-Dhan

■ The data showed that rural borrowers fared the worst in terms of loan repayment

■ Of the ₹2.3 lakh crore of loans outstanding for rural customers, 6.4% were overdue by more than 30 days

■ This is compared with 6.1% and 6% for semi-urban and urban borrowers, respectively



- Of the ₹2.3 lakh crore of loans outstanding for rural customers, 6.4% were overdue by more than 30 days, compared with 6.1% and 6% for semi-urban and urban borrowers, respectively.

❖ India may open retail power to private firms

Context: India plans to open up its retail electricity market for private companies nationwide, ending the dominance of State-run distributors in most States, a draft bill by the federal power ministry showed.

- The move will allow private companies such as Adani Enterprises, Tata Power, Torrent Power and CESC to strengthen their presence across India. A similar attempt in 2022 faced opposition from State distribution companies (discoms).
- Only a handful of India's electricity distribution zones — including the national capital region, Odisha and industrial States like Maharashtra and Gujarat — are currently privatised as the rules do not specifically provide for it. Most are under State control and are burdened with deep financial losses.
- New Delhi has been pushing State-run power utilities to cut losses, clean up balance sheets and upgrade age-old infrastructure. Earlier this year, the country's most populous State Uttar Pradesh invited bids to privatise two of its four power distribution companies. As of June, State discoms owed power generators about \$6.78 billion.

❖ Venezuela's María Machado wins Nobel Peace Prize

Context: Venezuelan Opposition leader María Corina Machado won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for her struggle to achieve a democratic transition in the South American nation, winning recognition as a woman "who keeps the flame of democracy burning amid a growing darkness".

- The former Opposition presidential candidate is a **"key, unifying figure"** in the once deeply divided Opposition to President Nicolas Maduro's government, said Jørgen Watne Frydnes, chair of the Norwegian Nobel committee.
- Reacting to the honour, Ms. Machado said she was confident the Opposition would succeed in securing a peaceful transition to democracy in her country.
- "We're not there yet. We're working very hard to achieve it, but I'm sure that we will prevail," she told Kristian Berg Harpviken, the director of the Nobel Institute and secretary of the Nobel Committee.

Dedicates win to Trump

- "I dedicate this prize to the suffering people of Venezuela and to President Trump for his decisive support of our cause!" she later wrote on X.
- Mr. Maduro's government has routinely targeted its real or perceived opponents.
- Ms. Machado, who turned 58 this week, was set to run against Mr. Maduro in last year's presidential election, but the government disqualified her.
- The crackdown on dissent only increased after the country's National Electoral Council, which is stacked with Maduro loyalists, declared him the winner despite credible evidence to the contrary. The election results announced by the Electoral

Council sparked protests to which the government responded with force that ended with more than 20 people dead.

- **Ms. Machado becomes the 20th woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.**

-----All the best! -----

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