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OCTOBER WEEK 4

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PM SHRI SCHEME

❖ In Doha, Pakistan and Afghanistan agree on ceasefire

Context: Both sides decide to establish mechanisms for lasting peace, stability, a statement said after talks between Defence Ministers of the two nations.

- Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to an immediate ceasefire and setting up of “mechanisms” to ensure lasting peace after days of violent clashes along the border that left several soldiers, civilians, and terrorists dead on both sides.
- The breakthrough came following negotiations between Pakistan’s Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Afghanistan’s Acting Defence Minister Mullah Yaqoob in Doha, facilitated by Qatar and Turkiye, according to a statement issued by Qatar’s Foreign Ministry.
- “During the negotiation, both sides agreed to an immediate ceasefire and establishment of mechanisms to consolidate lasting peace and stability between the two countries,” the statement read.
- The two neighbours also agreed to hold “follow-up meetings” in the coming days to ensure the “implementation” and “sustainability” of the truce “in a reliable and sustainable manner” to achieve security and stability in both countries, it said. The development comes amid heightened tensions along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, triggered by cross-border clashes after alleged Pakistani air strikes near Kabul last week.

‘Verifiable action’

- The Doha talks began on Saturday with Pakistan urging the Afghan Taliban authorities to take “verifiable action” against the **Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**, which Islamabad accuses of launching cross-border terrorist attacks from Afghan soil.
- The Foreign Office, in a statement, said Pakistan had stressed the need for the Afghan authorities to honour their “commitments to the international community” and to address Islamabad’s “legitimate security concerns” by taking verifiable action against terrorist entities. “Pakistan appreciates the mediation efforts of Qatar and hopes these discussions contribute to peace and stability in the region,” it said.
- **Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have remained strained since 2023.**
- Islamabad has been repeatedly raising concerns over the use of Afghan soil by militants carrying out cross-border attacks.
- The situation further deteriorated following repeated terrorist attacks by TTP, including one in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Orakzai district recently, which claimed the lives of 11 military personnel, including a Lieutenant-Colonel and a Major.
- The Foreign Office announced that a temporary ceasefire had been agreed with Afghanistan for the next 48 hours amid the recent border hostilities. Later on Friday, the ceasefire was extended.
- However, hours after Islamabad and Kabul extended their two-day ceasefire, Pakistan launched fresh air strikes targeting terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan late.
- Three Afghan cricketers were among several people killed in the strikes, which followed a terror attack at a military installation in North Waziristan, claimed by TTP.

- Following the incident, the Afghanistan Cricket Board withdrew from participating in the upcoming Tri-Nation T20I Series involving Pakistan, scheduled to be played in late November.
- Army chief Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir warned Afghanistan to choose between “peace and chaos” as it asked Kabul to take firm and immediate action against terrorists using Afghan soil to launch attacks inside Pakistan.

❖ GRAP Stage 2 curbs kick in as Delhi’s air turns ‘very poor’

Context: The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has invoked Stage II of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) across Delhi-NCR as the city’s air quality slipped into the “very poor” category, with the AQI crossing the 300 mark.

- The move came after the Sub-Committee on GRAP reviewed the worsening pollution levels and forecasts by the India Meteorological Department and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, which warned of further deterioration in the coming days.
- “The AQI of Delhi has shown an increasing trend since morning and has been recorded as 296 at 4 p.m. and 302 at 7 p.m.,” the CAQM said, directing authorities to implement all Stage II measures with immediate effect, in addition to Stage I actions already in force.
- The panel also asked all implementing agencies to keep strict vigilance, particularly on dust mitigation and to ensure compliance with targeted timelines laid down under the comprehensive policy to curb air pollution in NCR.
- **Under Stage II of GRAP, several curbs and intensified actions include daily mechanical or vacuum sweeping and water sprinkling on identified roads, preferably before peak traffic hours, to control dust.**
- Construction and demolition sites face intensified inspections to ensure strict enforcement of dust control measures.
- **To promote cleaner mobility, the GRAP Stage II mandates augmentation of public transport services through additional CNG and electric buses and increased frequency of metro services, along with differential fare rates to encourage off-peak travel.**

❖ PM to face Quad, BRICS leaders at ASEAN meet next week

Context: India’s balancing act between the Quad and BRICS will come to the fore at the upcoming Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Kuala Lumpur from October 26 to 28, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend the East Asia Summit (EAS) along with U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

- Leaders or representatives of China, Russia, Japan, India, Australia, and New Zealand are expected at the EAS, while Brazil President Lula da Silva and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa will attend as observers at the ASEAN-related summits.
- This means Mr. Modi, if he does travel to Kuala Lumpur this week, will have the chance to meet all counterparts from the Quad and key founder members of BRICS as well, as India prepares to host both summits next year.

- While the External Affairs Ministry has not so far confirmed Mr. Modi's participation, Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan announced last week that Mr. Modi would attend the ASEAN-related summits, including the EAS, and government officials said Mr. Modi was "likely" to attend.
- **India was meant to be the host of the Quad Summit this year, but with India-U.S. tensions overshadowing the past few months, officials have indicated the Quad Summit could be held in 2026. India will also take over as chair of the BRICS, and host the summit of the 11-nation grouping of emerging economies in 2026. India is the only common factor between the two groupings often antithetical to each other, as one includes the U.S. and its allies, while the other includes Russia and China. In addition, Mr. Trump's trade tariffs, threats against India for buying Russian oil, sanctions on Iran (a new BRICS member), and threats to slap 100% tariffs on the BRICS members that he accuses of backing a common currency to counter the U.S. dollar, have added to the strain.**
- "The downward trend in global economic growth, uncertainty in investment flows and interest rates, unilateral measures and supply chain disruptions have come to define the current international economic landscape," Sudhakar Dalela, Secretary (Economic Relations), External Affairs Ministry, told a conference organised by the Chintan Research Foundation in Delhi last week. "India's BRICS chairship comes at a time when the world is navigating through multiple challenges, particularly affecting the Global South countries," he said, describing India's plans to host the summit in the 20th year of BRICS.
- Meanwhile, Indian and American officials working on setting up the meeting between Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit, have also been discussing scheduling the Quad summit, but no date has emerged thus far, a number of diplomatic sources said. If the U.S.-India-Australia-Japan summit cannot be held this year, as is looking more likely, it will be the second year in a row that India-U.S. tensions would have derailed New Delhi's plans.
- Mr. Modi had invited Quad leaders to a summit in January 2024, timed with Republic Day, but the invitation was declined by then-U.S. President Joe Biden amid a strain over the Pannun case. Mr. Biden subsequently hosted the Quad Summit in September 2024 in the U.S.
- At a closed-door session on the Quad in Delhi this week, organised by the Jindal Global University, experts said Mr. Trump's 'America first' doctrine now posed a "test to Quad resilience".
- As a result, while Mr. Modi's visit to Kuala Lumpur is planned primarily for ASEAN-related meetings with South East Asian leaders, including the review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA), his schedule may also be crowded with discussions on the way forward on the two important groupings India will host in the upcoming months — the Quad and BRICS.

Context: The CHACE-2 payload aboard the spacecraft's orbiter showed an increase in total pressure of dayside lunar exosphere when impacted by the sun's coronal mass ejection, says space agency.

- The lunar orbiter of India's second moon mission, Chandrayaan-2, has made the first-ever observation of the **effects of the sun's coronal mass ejection (CME) on the moon.**
- The Chandra's Atmospheric Composition Explorer-2 (CHACE-2) payload onboard the orbiter had made the observation.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said that the observations from CHACE-2 showed an increase in the total pressure of the dayside lunar exosphere (very thin atmosphere) when the CME impacted the moon.
- "The total number density (number of neutral atoms or molecules present in an environment per unit volume) derived from these observations showed an increase by more than an order of magnitude. This increase is consistent with earlier theoretical models, which predicted such an effect, but CHACE-2 onboard Chandrayaan-2 has observed such an effect for the first time," the ISRO said.

Rare occurrence

- The space agency added that the opportunity to directly observe the effects of the CME on the moon came on a rare occurrence, on May 10, 2024, when a series of CMEs were hurled by the sun. "This increased quantity of solar coronal mass that impacted on the moon enhanced the process of knocking off the atoms from the lunar surface, thereby liberating them to the lunar exosphere, which manifested as the enhancement of the total pressure in the sunlit lunar exosphere," it added.
- The space agency said that this observation would provide scientific insight into the understanding of the lunar exosphere and space weather effects on the moon.

Lunar base

- "Apart from pushing the edge of our scientific understanding about the moon and the lunar space weather, this observation also indicates the challenges of building scientific bases on the Moon. Lunar base architects need to account for such extreme events, which would temporarily alter the lunar environment, before the effects subside," it said.
- Launched on July 22, 2019 using the **GSLV-MkIII-M1 rocket, Chandrayaan-2 carried eight experiment payloads.** However, the Vikram lander, while attempting to make a soft landing on the moon's surface, lost communication from the lander and the ground stations.

❖ 146 species recorded in Kaziranga bird survey

Context: The Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve recorded 146 species in the latest bird survey, Assam's wildlife officials said. The survey was conducted across five key locations – Agoratoli, Gamiri, Panbari, and Panpur ranges of the national park and the adjoining Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary.

- The surveyors recorded 1,919 avian individuals belonging to 146 species. Agoratoli showed the highest diversity with 89 species, followed by Gamiri and Panbari (59 species each), Panpur (55 species), and Laokhowa (37 species).
- Kaziranga officials said that several important resident and migratory birds were recorded during the survey.



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❖ New H-1B visa fee will not apply for change of status: U.S. govt.

Context: Fee will not apply to existing visa holders granted an amendment, change of status, or extension of stay, says the USCIS guidelines; the cut-off date is set at September 21, and current H-1B visa holders can travel freely to and from the U.S.

- In a further relaxation of its rules relating to the new \$100,000 fee on H-1B visas, the United States government said that the fee will not apply to applications for a change of status or an extension of stay in the U.S.
- On September 19, U.S. President Donald Trump had signed a proclamation imposing a \$100,000 fee on H-1B visas. Hours later, his government clarified that this would be a one-time fee and would only apply to new applications.
- Guidelines issued by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Department reiterated this, saying that the proclamation “does not apply to any previously issued and currently valid H-1B visas, or any petitions submitted prior to 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on September 21, 2025”.
- “The Proclamation also does not apply to a petition filed at or after 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on September 21, 2025, that is requesting an amendment, change of status, or extension of stay for an alien inside the United States where the alien is granted such amendment, change, or extension,” the guidelines added.
- Notably, they also said that the proclamation does not prevent any holder of a current H-1B visa from travelling to and from the U.S.
- **The U.S. Chamber of Commerce had filed a lawsuit last week challenging the \$100,000 fee, saying it overrides existing provisions in current laws that apply to the H-1B programme, including provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act.**

Indian interests

- The H-1B visa, and any related fees, are of particular interest to Indians since they are the largest beneficiaries of this visa programme.
- While the U.S. government does not share data on the number of H-1B visa holders currently located in the U.S., other sources — such as FWD.us, an immigration and criminal justice reform advocacy body co-founded by Meta chief executive officer Mark Zuckerberg — say that there were 7.3 lakh H-1B visa-holders in the U.S. as of January of this year. Of these, about 70% were Indian citizens.
- Further, as per data from the USCIS, Tata Consultancy Services had 5,505 H-1B visas approved in 2025 as of the end of June, the second-highest number of H-1B visas granted to any company that year, after Amazon (10,044).

❖ Net FDI fell 159% in August: RBI data

Context: Net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India fell 159% in August, with more money leaving the country than entering it, according to official data. This is the second time this financial year that outflows have exceeded inflows.

- However, the picture is reversed when looked at over a longer time period, with net FDI between April and August 2025 more than 121% higher than in the same five-month period of the previous year.

- Data released by the **Reserve Bank of India** shows that the **repatriation and disinvestment by foreign firms in India and the investments done abroad by Indian companies — which add up to the total money leaving the country — were higher than the gross amount that was invested into India in August 2025.**
- Gross investments into India stood at \$6,049 million in August 2025, 30.6% lower than their level in August last year and 45.5% lower than in July this year.
- This was the lowest level of gross inflows in this financial year so far.
- The amount repatriated and disinvested by foreign companies operating in India stood at \$4,928 million in August 2025, down 5.4% from the amount in August 2024 but nearly 30% higher than the amount in July 2025.
- **Foreign investments by Indian companies contracted 29.7% in August 2025 to \$1,736 million, the lowest in this financial year.**
- Taken together, this meant that net FDI into India — the difference between the gross amount coming in and the total amount going out — stood at -\$616 million in August 2025, 159% lower than in August last year. That is, more money left the country in August 2025 than entering it that month.
- This had happened in May 2025 as well, albeit at a smaller scale, as net FDI had stood at -\$5 million during that month.

Longer period, better picture

- However, the FDI picture looks better when looked at over a longer timeframe.
- **Net FDI in the April-August 2025 period was \$10,128 million, more than 121% higher than in the same period last year. This was driven by an 18.2% increase in gross inflows (\$43,760 million) entering the country and a 6.1% contraction in repatriation and disinvestment (\$21,205 million) leaving India during this period.**
- Foreign investment by Indian companies stood at \$12,427 million in the April-August 2025 period, up nearly 26% over the same period of the previous year.

❖ Core sector growth slows to three-month low

Context: Growth in activity in the eight core sectors slowed to a three-month low of 3% in September on contraction in the coal, crude oil, natural gas and refinery products, as well as a relatively sharp slowdown in fertilizers.

- Slowdown driven by 4 fuel-related sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, and refinery products; Steel was the only one of the eight core sectors that saw growth quicken in September to 14.1%
- Growth in activity in the eight core sectors of the economy slowed to a three-month low of 3% in September dragged down by contraction in the coal, crude oil, natural gas and refinery products as well as a relatively sharp slowdown in fertilizers, official data showed.
- The data in the Index of Eight Core Industries released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows the index's performance in September was faster than a year earlier but slowest since this June.

Fuel-related sectors

- The slower growth was driven by fuel-related sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas and refinery products.
- The coal sector contracted 1.19% compared with 2.6% growth a year earlier, and a 11.4% growth in August.
- Crude oil sector contracted 1.25% from a contraction of 3.9% in September last year. Notably, the crude oil sector had grown 2.4% in August, the first month of growth in eight months.
- The natural gas sector witnessed the largest contraction, of 3.8%, in September. The sector contracted for 15 consecutive months, data showed.
- Likely due to the slide in the crude oil sector, refinery products contracted by 3.6% this September compared with a 5.8% growth a year earlier.

Fertilizers slow down

- The fertilizer sector saw growth slowing to 1.6% in September compared with 1.9% a year earlier and 4.6% in August 2025. The cement sector, too, saw growth slowing to 5.3% in September from 7.6% a year earlier.
- Growth in the electricity sector slowed to 2.1% in September, faster than the 0.5% seen in September 2024, but slower than the 4.1% in August this year.
- The steel sector was the only one of the eight core sectors that saw growth quicken in September to 14.1% from 1.8% in September last year, and 13.6% in August 2025.

❖ Deepavali fireworks send Delhi air quality inching to a five-year low

Context: Following Deepavali, pollution in Delhi inched close to a five-year low with average concentrations of particulate matter (PM) 2.5 across several locations crossing 400 microgram per cubic metre (g/m³) — levels not seen since 2021.

- On Deepavali day, nine cities out of the 293 monitored by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) reported an air quality index (AQI) value of above 300, classed as 'very poor' air quality. On the day after Deepavali, Tuesday (for most of the country), this rose to 16 cities, according to data available on the organisation's website.
- **Nearly all of these cities fell in North India and in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Nationally, Dharuhera in Haryana reported the worst AQI reading of 462.**

Violation suspected

- An analysis of PM 2.5 trends, which was recorded by the CPCB's automatic air quality sensors, by independent weather-and-climate agency, Climate Trends, showed a sharp spike in particulate matter concentration from 4 p.m. on Deepavali day (October 20) in Delhi.
- From values of around 150 at 4 p.m., it spiked to nearly 650 by 11 p.m. This coincides with the period during which bursting firecrackers was legally permissible (8 p.m. to 10 p.m.) on Deepavali day, per the reprieve by the Supreme Court.
- The SC, in its order, had allowed the use of only CSIR-validated 'green crackers', which reportedly emit a minimum 30% less smoke than their traditional counterparts. However, the sheer volume of fireworks during the period, anecdotal reports of the unavailability of these firecrackers, and the air quality index of the day following Deepavali, suggest that these norms were violated.

- A key parameter that determines air quality levels is wind speeds on the festival night, as well as temperatures.
- When night temperatures are low, smoke and chemical pollutants hover like haze and will not rise to higher reaches of the atmosphere and get flushed out. Temperatures on Deepavali night this year ranged from 23-25 degree Celsius, the warmest in five years but low wind speeds and the quantity of smoke retarded its egress out of the Delhi and the Gangetic plain airshed.
- **“When examined together, PM 2.5 and temperature data reveal a consistent pattern: high emissions from fireworks and low night-time temperatures jointly contribute to elevated PM 2.5 concentrations. The sharp post-Deepavali spikes indicate both sustained emissions and poor atmospheric dispersion,” the Climate Trends report notes.**
- “The Diwali of 2025 was one of the most polluted in recent years. The spike between the nights of the 19th and 20th directly corresponds to the widespread use of firecrackers across Delhi-NCR. Moreover, visuals and ground data confirm that burning so-called ‘green’ crackers made no measurable difference compared to regular ones. It’s now evident that allowing firecrackers during this time of year is simply not sustainable for the NCR region’s already critical air quality,” Palak Balyan, Research Lead, Climate Trends, said in a statement.
- A perusal of the AQI values on Deepavali and the subsequent day on the CPCB website shows that in 2023, Delhi’s post-Deepavali (November 13) AQI was 358 (very poor) – close to the 351 (very poor) reported at 4 p.m. this year. The five-year record, however, was on November 5 in 2021, when it recorded 462 (‘severe’).
- **Deepavali AQI this year in the city was 345, only topped by Deepavali AQI of 382 on November 4, 2021.**
- The CPCB presents an annual report of air quality and noise-pollution levels nationally on Deepavali night and following day. It is expected later this week. The Environment Ministry didn’t offer any comment or analysis of the Delhi air quality.

❖ Indian mission in Kabul gets embassy tag

Context: Days after the visit by Taliban administration’s acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, India has upgraded its Technical Mission in Afghan capital Kabul to an embassy. A Ministry of External Affairs statement said, “This decision underscores India’s resolve to deepen its bilateral engagement with the Afghan side in all spheres of mutual interest.”

- Days after the visit by Taliban administration’s acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, India has upgraded its Technical Mission in Afghan capital Kabul to an embassy. In a statement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the upgrading took place with “immediate effect”.
- “In keeping with the decision announced during the recent visit of the Afghan Foreign Minister to India, the government is restoring the status of the Technical Mission in Kabul to that of Embassy of India in Afghanistan with immediate effect. This decision underscores India’s resolve to deepen its bilateral engagement with the Afghan side in all spheres of mutual interest,” said the MEA in a statement. Official sources said a chargé d’affaires (CDA) would soon be appointed who would steer the embassy till the appointment of an ambassador.

- **Multiple major powers such as Iran, China, Russia, Gulf countries and Central Asian republics have engaged the Taliban but Russia alone has granted recognition to the Taliban as the de jure ruler of Afghanistan. Sources indicated that it may be sometime before India sends a formal ambassador to take charge of the embassy in Kabul.**
- The decision to upgrade the Technical Mission was taken after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met with Mr. Muttaqi on October 10 against the backdrop of intense hostilities that had broken out between Afghanistan and Pakistan along the Durand Line. Subsequently, the two sides have declared a ceasefire through mediation of Qatar. India had shut its embassy in Kabul and withdrew the existing staff in August 2021 when the Taliban overthrew the government of President Ashraf Ghani.

❖ **London Book of Records defends recognition of Shakti scheme, KSRTC**

Context: After a row over the 'London Book of World Records' recognition for Karnataka's Shakti scheme and the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), the London Book of Records issued a clarification defending its decision.

- The London Book of World Records has issued a clarification in response to what it described as “defaming and tarnishing” reports published on social media platforms. On October 16, a social media post by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah celebrating world record recognitions for the State’s Shakti Scheme and the KSRTC kicked off a row after opposition parties alleged that the certifying agency, the London Book of World Records, had been dissolved months earlier in the United Kingdom.
- Following the backlash, the original post was deleted on October 17. By then, screenshots of the certificates and the X post had already gone viral.
- In a release, the London Book of World Records stated that social media posts had created confusion regarding its registration and functioning. It clarified that the London Book of Records is a privately registered company under the Companies Act of 2006, with its registered office in England and Wales, and service offices in Pune and Delhi. The company, it said, was initially incorporated under Company No. 15807855 on June 28, 2024, at the Company House in Cardiff.
- However, the release added that this company was dissolved on July 15, 2025, and subsequently re-registered under a new number (16667234) on August 22, 2025, with the same name and management.
- “There is no question of anything dubious, suspicious and issues of a dissolved company,” the statement read, while adding that all contact details are available on the official website.
- The organisation defended its recognition of the KSRTC and Shakti scheme for empowering women.
- It described the initiative as a “testimony of exemplary achievement,” noting that the recognition was based on public service excellence and jointly certified by international chairman Avinash Sakunde and Ivan Gacina, European Union Head, Republic of Croatia.

❖ Modi congratulates new Japan PM, says ties vital to promote Indo-Pacific peace

Context: Ties between India and Japan are “vital” for regional and global peace, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, congratulating Japan’s newly elected Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.

- Officials said the two leaders are expected to speak over the telephone in the next few days, and are likely to meet as early as this weekend, on the sidelines of the upcoming **Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit and the East Asia Summit (EAS).**
- Mr. Modi is expected to travel for the summits, although the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has not made an announcement yet.
- In a message on social media, Mr. Modi said he looked forward to working closely with Ms. Takaichi to further strengthen the India-Japan ‘Special Strategic and Global Partnership’.
- “Our deepening ties are vital for peace, stability, and prosperity across the Indo-Pacific and beyond,” Mr. Modi added.

Agreements inked

- The change in government in Japan comes just weeks after Mr. Modi visited Tokyo to hold the 15th India-Japan summit with then-Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on August 29.
- The two sides had signed a number of agreements including an Economic Security Partnership, including cooperation on building critical mineral industry capacity, and an upgraded Strategic Partnership. Experts say Ms. Takaichi is expected to continue the upward trend in India-Japan ties, and strengthen them further.
- “Ms. Takaichi is a protegee of former PM Shinzo Abe, whose tenure in office (2012-2020) is seen as the golden period for India-Japan ties,” former Ambassador to Japan Deepa Wadhwa. “As a result, she will likely continue to focus on the Indo-Pacific as Mr. Abe did, and we can expect her to be more proactive about the Quad engagement as well,” Ms. Wadhwa added.

❖ FATF may discuss state sponsorship of terrorism; Pakistan entities in focus

Context: The ongoing Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meetings in Paris are expected to deliberate on state sponsorship as a means to fund and support terrorism, including the financing of banned outfits and their proxies operating in Pakistan, said sources in law-enforcement agencies.

- The FATF week started, and its Plenary will be held from Wednesday to Friday. Representatives of over 200 jurisdictions and observers are attending the meetings.
- “Over 130 terror entities and individuals based in, or linked to, Pakistan are listed on the United Nations Security Council’s ISIL/Al-Qaeda Sanctions List. The Resistance Force, a proxy of Pakistan-based banned outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba that carried out the gruesome killings in Pahalgam on April 22, has also been designated by the United States as a global terror outfit,” an official said.

- In June, the **FATF issued a statement condemning the Pahalgam terror attack, stating that it could not “occur without money and the means to move funds between terrorist supporters”.** In July, it released a report, “**Comprehensive update on terrorist financing risks**”, which, for the first time, recognised state sponsorship as a longstanding terror-financing threat to global peace and security.
- **State sponsorship includes providing direct funding, logistics, materials, or training.**
- Indian security agencies have gathered inputs showing that the LeT, under the front of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, has raised funds to rebuild its headquarters in Muridke, which was destroyed by the Indian Air Force on May 7.
- In May, the Pakistani government had announced that it would finance reconstruction of the LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammed facilities. It allocated four crore Pakistani rupees to the LeT for its headquarters Markaz Taiba, while the estimated cost of its complete reconstruction was likely to exceed 15 crore Pakistani rupees. Therefore, according to the agencies, the outfit raised funds on the pretext of “relief for flood victims”.

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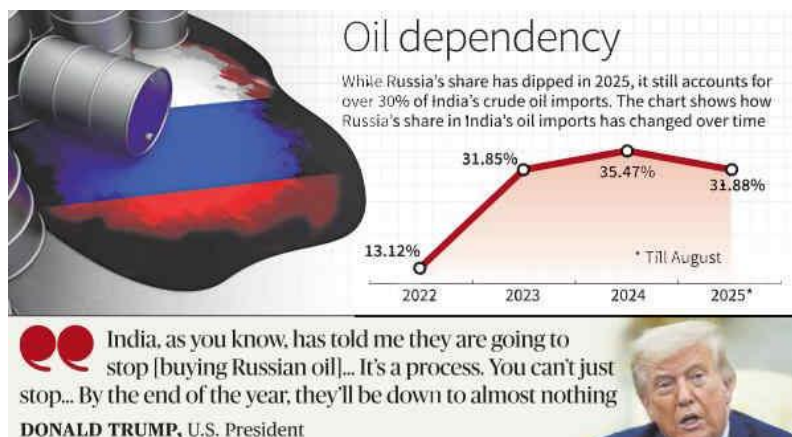
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❖ U.S. sanctions Russian oil majors; Indian refiners poised to cut buy

Context: Rosneft and Lukoil hit with sanctions for ‘funding Kremlin’s war machine’, pushing global oil prices up 3%; Trump says India will cut down imports to ‘almost nothing’ by year-end; Indian firms are ‘recalibrating’ to align with govt. guidelines.

- U.S. President Donald Trump hit Russia’s two biggest oil companies with sanctions in his latest policy shift on Moscow’s war in Ukraine, prompting global oil prices to rise by 3%.
- Mr. Trump also reiterated his claim that India has agreed to “stop” buying oil from Russia and would bring its oil purchases down to “almost nothing” by the end of the year, and said he would persuade China to do the same. India and China are the two biggest buyers of Russian oil.
- Indian refiners — including Reliance, the top Indian buyer of Russian crude — are poised to sharply curtail imports of Russian oil to comply with the new U.S. sanctions, industry sources said.



‘Funding war’

- The U.S. sanctions target oil giants Rosneft and Lukoil, which between them account for more than 5% of global oil output. The U.S. Treasury has given companies until November 21 to wind down their transactions with the Russian oil producers.
- “Given [Russian] President [Vladimir] Putin’s refusal to end this senseless war, Treasury is sanctioning Russia’s two largest oil companies that fund the Kremlin’s war machine,” U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a statement. “We encourage our allies to join us in and adhere to these sanctions.”
- Oil and gas revenue, currently down 21% year-on-year, accounts for a quarter of Russia’s budget and is the most important source of funding for its war in Ukraine, now in its fourth year.
- Mr. Trump expressed confidence regarding India’s response to the sanctions. “India, as you know, has told me they are going to stop [buying Russian oil]... It’s a process. You can’t just stop... By the end of the year, they’ll be down to almost nothing, almost 40% of the oil. India, they’ve been great. Spoke to Prime Minister [Narendra] Modi yesterday. They’ve been absolutely great,” the U.S. President told reporters at the White House on Wednesday.
- Reliance Industries, which operates the world’s biggest refining complex at Jamnagar in Gujarat, has a long-term deal to buy nearly 500,000 barrels per day of crude from Rosneft and also buys Russian oil from intermediaries. It now plans to reduce or cease imports of Russian oil, including halting purchases under its deal with Rosneft, people familiar with the matter said.

'Recalibration on'

- “Recalibration of Russian oil imports is ongoing and Reliance will be fully aligned to GOI [Government of India] guidelines,” a Reliance spokesman said in response to a query on whether the company plans to cut its crude imports from Russia.
- Nayara Energy, another private Indian refiner whose biggest shareholder is Rosneft, also buys oil from the Russian state company, but did not respond to a request for comment on the sanctions.
- State-owned oil refineries, including Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum, are reviewing their Russian oil trade documents to ensure no supply will be coming directly from Rosneft and Lukoil, though trade sources said their purchases are typically made through intermediaries.
- “There will be a massive cut. We don’t anticipate it will go to zero immediately as there will be some barrels coming into the market” via intermediaries, a refinery source said.
- The U.S. sanctions came after Mr. Trump cancelled a planned summit with Mr. Putin in Budapest, saying that it would not achieve the outcome he wanted. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova shrugged off the likely impact of the sanctions, saying Moscow had developed a “strong immunity” to such restrictions. Moscow’s main revenue source comes from taxing output, not exports, which is likely to soften the immediate impact of the sanctions on state finances.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked the U.S. for the new sanctions, saying they were “very important” but that more pressure would be needed to get Moscow to agree to a ceasefire.

❖ Pan-India SIR to cover more than 10 States in first phase

Context: The Election Commission (EC) is all set to announce the schedule for a country-wide roll-out of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls at a press conference in the next few days.

- The first phase of the process will be implemented in more than 10 States and one Union Territory, including election-bound Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, and West Bengal.
- The EC took stock of the preparedness of all States and Union Territories for the pan-India SIR, at the two-day conference of Chief Electoral Officers (CEO) that concluded here on Thursday.

Schedule soon

- The full commission will now discuss the matter and take a call on the schedule, which would be announced soon.
- The process is expected to be rolled out in two phases, beginning with Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, and West Bengal, where Assembly elections are due in 2026.
- Those States where local body polls are scheduled to be held and are likely to experience harsh weather conditions during the winter will be tackled in later phases.

- The sources said the commission heard the points raised by the CEOs of all States at the conference and while it responded to general queries and held a presentation on the SIR, no concrete decisions were announced at the meeting. It was stated that a decision would be communicated to all CEOs after the meeting of the Election Commission members.
- The commission assessed the progress made on the directions previously issued to the CEOs to map the current electors with the electors as per the last SIR in the States and Union Territories, according to an official statement by the poll body.
- The statement said the commission also interacted one-to-one with the CEOs of poll-bound States/Union Territory of Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, and West Bengal.
- The two-day conference was held as a follow-up to the SIR preparedness conference held on September 10, during which all the States/U.T.s gave detailed presentations on the number of electors, qualifying date of last SIR, and the electoral rolls in their respective States/U.T.s as per the last completed SIR.
- The SIR process has been challenged in the Supreme Court. The court, while not questioning the EC mandate to conduct the SIR, had asked the poll body to include Aadhaar as the 12th document to prove identity.

❖ Union govt. asks CJI to recommend successor

Context: The Centre has, in a letter to Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai, sought his recommendation for naming his successor. The CJI is currently on a four-day visit to Bhutan. His office said he would come back and send his recommendation to the government.

- As per seniority norms, Justice Surya Kant is the next in line to become the 53rd CJI. Chief Justice Gavai is scheduled to retire on November 24.
- **Under the Memorandum of Procedure for appointment of the CJI and Supreme Court Judges, the Law Ministry seeks the recommendation of the outgoing CJI on the next appointment. The letter from the government kickstarts the appointment process for the next CJI.**
- Justice Kant became the youngest Advocate-General of Haryana on July 7, 2000, and was designated a senior advocate in March 2001.
- He was elevated as a judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court on January 9, 2004 and was appointed the Chief Justice of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh in October, 2018.
- He was appointed as a Supreme Court judge on May 24, 2019. He is due to retire on February 9, 2027.

❖ Modi to participate in ASEAN meet virtually, drops Malaysia travel plan

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not travel to Malaysia to attend the 47th ASEAN summit on October 26, but will participate in it virtually. This was announced by him in a social media post.

- The annual summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a 10-nation grouping, and associated meetings will be held from October 26 to 28 in Kuala Lumpur.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has not provided any reason for Mr. Modi's decision, though Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said that Mr. Modi had cited the "ongoing Deepavali celebrations" as the reason for the change in plans.



Jaishankar goes instead

- The Ministry announced that External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar would represent Mr. Modi and lead the Indian delegation at the summit on October 27.
- "Had a warm conversation with my dear friend, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia. Congratulated him on Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship and conveyed best wishes for the success of upcoming summits. Look forward to joining the ASEAN-India Summit virtually, and to further deepening of the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," Mr. Modi said.
- In a statement posted on X, Mr. Ibrahim said he had discussed the details of the summit with Mr. Modi. "...I respect his decision and extended my greetings for a happy Deepavali to him and the people of India."
- The summit will draw a host of dignitaries, including U.S. President Donald Trump. It was expected that the venue would be a meeting opportunity for Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump, especially as the India-U.S. relations remain uneasy after Mr. Trump imposed punitive tariff on India because of India's purchase of Russian crude oil.
- Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi exchanged greetings on Deepavali on Tuesday as the India-U.S. negotiations for a trade pact continue. The two sides, however, gave differing takes of the conversation with Mr. Trump telling a group of prominent Indian-Americans and Indian Embassy officials in the White House that the call focused on trade deal, purchase of Russian oil and "no war with Pakistan", and the Indian sources maintaining that Pakistan was not discussed during the call.
- Officials had earlier given mixed signals about Mr. Modi's travel plans for Kuala Lumpur saying that the Bihar election campaign requires the Prime Minister's attention. Earlier, Mr. Trump had invited Mr. Modi to the Sharm-el-Sheikh peace summit for ceasefire in the Gaza Strip but India was represented at the event by Kirti Vardhan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs.
- Since the U.S.'s imposition of 50% punitive tariff on India on August 7, Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump have spoken on multiple occasions, but have not met despite meeting opportunities. The official-level conversation has also become difficult as Mr. Trump continues to insist that he mediated an end to the May 2025 conflict between India and Pakistan, a claim that Indian officials have refused to confirm.

❖ India, Bhutan review border management and security

Context: India and Bhutan reviewed border management and security in a meeting held at Thimphu from October 16-17, a statement by the Union Home Ministry.

- The Ministry said the two countries had reviewed bilateral security cooperation and border management issues, including mobile signal spillover, future road map for integrated check posts, maintenance of boundary pillars, and cross-border movement.
- Discussions covered capacity building for Bhutan's police. The delegations expressed satisfaction at the constructive discussions and reiterated their resolve to work together for a secure border, the Ministry said.
- This was the 14th India-Bhutan Border Management and Security meeting. The last meeting was held in 2019. The Indian delegation was led by Rajendra Kumar, Secretary, Department of Border Management, Home Ministry, while the Bhutanese side was headed by Sonam Wangyel, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs.

❖ Tri-services to get systems, platforms for ₹79,000 cr.

Context: The acquisitions are designed to enhance lethality, mobility and intelligence-gathering capabilities across the services; Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Rajnath, approves the proposals.

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Thursday approved a series of capital acquisition proposals worth around ₹79,000 crore aimed at strengthening the operational capabilities of the Army, Navy and Air Force.
- The Defence Ministry said the approvals granted during a meeting at South Block would cover a wide spectrum of platforms and systems designed to enhance lethality, mobility, and intelligence-gathering capabilities across the Services.
- For the Army, the DAC accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the procurement of the Nag missile system (tracked) Mk-II (NAMIS), ground-based mobile ELINT System (GBMES), and high-mobility vehicles (HMTVs) with material handling cranes.
- The NAMIS (Tracked) will bolster the Army's ability to destroy enemy armoured vehicles, bunkers, and other fortified positions, while the GBMES will provide round-the-clock electronic intelligence on enemy emitters. The induction of HMTVs is expected to significantly enhance logistic support in challenging terrains.
- For the Navy, the AoN was granted for the acquisition of landing platform docks (LPDs), 30 mm naval surface guns, advanced light weight torpedoes (ALWTs), electro-optical infrared search-and-track systems, and smart ammunition for 76 mm super rapid gun mounts.
- The LPDs will augment the Navy's amphibious warfare capabilities and enable it to undertake joint operations with the Army and Air Force. They will also enhance India's capacity to conduct peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief (HADR) missions. The indigenously developed ALWT by the DRDO's Naval Science and Technological Laboratory is capable of engaging conventional, nuclear, and midget submarines.

- For the Indian Air Force, the AoN was accorded for the collaborative long-range target saturation/destruction system (CLRTS/DS) and other related systems. The CLRTS/DS features autonomous take-off and landing, navigation, target detection and payload delivery capabilities, aimed at augmenting the IAF's long-range precision engagement capacity.
- The approvals reflect the government's continuing emphasis on modernisation, self-reliance and indigenisation under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, officials said.

❖ '90% of Gaganyaan development work done'

Context: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman V. Narayanan said that about 90% of the development work on the Gaganyaan mission had been completed.

- "The Gaganyaan mission is going on very well. A lot of technological development has to take place. Number one, the rocket has to be human-rated, the life support system, the crew escape system and of course, human-centric products. I can say today that approximately 90% of the development work has been completed," Mr. Narayanan said.

3 uncrewed missions

- He added that the crewed mission to launch the Indian astronauts into space would take place in 2027 and prior to that, ISRO would undertake three uncrewed missions.
- "Three uncrewed missions have to be accomplished, the first uncrewed mission with the humanoid Vyomitra is expected to take flight by the end of this year. We want to accomplish the crewed mission by 2027," he said.

❖ 'UPI leads in payment volume, RTGS value; debit card deals dip'

Context: In the half year ended June 2025, payment transaction volume was 12,549 crore, amounting to ₹1,572 lakh crore, according to a RBI report.

- In terms of volume, payment transactions grew from 3,248 crore in Calendar Year (CY) 2019 to 20,849 crore in CY 2024 and in terms of value from ₹1,775 lakh crore to ₹2,830 lakh crore during this period, according to Payment Systems Report, a bi-annual publication released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- In the half year (HY) ended June, transaction volume was 12,549 crore, amounting to ₹1,572 lakh crore. Almost all of the growth in payments was attributable to digital payment transactions.
- "In CY19, digital payments accounted for approximately 96.7% of the total payment transactions by volume and 95.5% by value," as per the report.
- By CY24, these figures had risen to 99.7% in terms of volume and 97.5% in terms of value.
- The volume of UPI transactions has increased significantly from 1,079 crore transactions in CY19 to 17,221 crore transactions in CY24. The total value of transactions grew from ₹18.4 lakh crore in CY19 to ₹246.8 lakh crore in CY24.
- In H1 of CY25, the volume of UPI transactions stood at 10,637 crore amounting to ₹143.3 lakh crore in value.

- During the period CY19 to CY24, NEFT transactions more than tripled in terms of volume, from 262.2 crore to 926.8 crore. However, during the same period, in terms of value, they grew from ₹232.9 lakh crore to ₹432.8 lakh crore.
- In H1 of CY25, NEFT already processed 490.5 crore transactions, worth ₹237 lakh crore, indicating sustained growth and widespread adoption.

RTGS surges

- Large value payment system RTGS transactions volume grew from 14.8 crore in CY19 to 29.5 crore in CY24, while transaction value rose from ₹1,388.7 lakh crore to ₹1,938.2 lakh crore during this period.
- In CY25, by H1 alone, RTGS recorded 16.1 crore transactions amounting to ₹1,079.2 lakh crore, indicating sustained growth and usage.

Debit cards dip

- Transactions in debit cards witnessed a decline since 2019, both in volume and value. In volume terms, debit card transactions declined from 495.32 crore in CY19 to 173.80 crore in CY24, while in value terms, they declined from ₹6.83 lakh crore to ₹5.15 lakh crore during this period.
- In H1 2025, debit cards recorded 69.09 crore transactions valued at ₹2.22 lakh crore. While Prepaid Payment Instrument (PPI) transaction volume rose from 516.2 crore in CY19 to 698.9 crore in CY24, transaction value remained almost at the same level of ₹2.23 lakh crore during this period. During H1 of 2025, PPIs recorded transaction volume of 404.7 crore and value of ₹1.23 lakh crore.

❖ India's Russian crude imports in October remain 'robust': Kpler

Context: India's imports of Russian crude oil remain 'robust', tracking at approximately 1.8 million barrels per day at present, provisionally up by 2,50,000 barrels per day from September, maritime data and analytics provider Kpler mentioned in a blogpost.

- The blogpost added Russian barrels remained the 'largest single source of crude for India accounting for about 34% of the overall share and entailed 'compelling discounts' which were 'too significant for refiners to ignore'.
- Thus, it sought to infer U.S. President Donald Trump's remarks initially made on October 15 suggesting India would reduce Russian crude imports, are "likely pressure tactics linked to trade negotiations." India's Russian oil purchases have been the single major point of contention in the talks for a favourable U.S. trade deal.

'Cutting imports costly'

- With Moscow accounting for 30-35% of the Indian basket off late, the blog held, "substitution would require rapid scaling from multiple suppliers at higher costs."
- Kpler also observed though there has been a stronger push for diversification, Russian contracts are typically signed 6-10 weeks before arrival. "Rewiring all that takes time."

❖ 'Ethanol tender order may hit 350 makers'

Context: Ethanol producers have raised concerns on the recent ethanol tender order for the 2025-2026 ethanol supply year that reportedly favours new entrants in deficit zones.

- The published allocations indicate at least 350 distilleries are deprived of adequate procurement orders from Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs). Many of the units were set up on an understanding with the OMCs or were part of earlier policy steps, as per the Grain Ethanol Manufacturers Association (GEMA).
- GEMA said in a release that according to the "Allocation Methodology and Criteria" in the tender document, "The zones where the offers from the distilleries located in the zone are less than the requirement of the zone, this has been considered as deficit zone. For these zones, offers from vendors shall be considered in full for allocation."
- The policy, which appears to support local sourcing in deficit areas, ignores surplus capacity promoted by the OMCs in neighbouring States. The allocation method bypasses distilleries established with understandings such as long-term off-take pacts and expression of interest.

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Context: Observing that “numerous incongruities pervade the Karnataka Cooperative Societies (KCS) Act, 1959 and the KCS Rules, 1960”, the High Court of Karnataka has said that there is an imminent need to overhaul this law, which has become “a patchwork of a series of piecemeal amendments over the decades and no longer suited to the modern socio-economic environment”.

- Pointing out that disputes relating to membership, disqualification, voter eligibility, appointment of administrators, and surcharge proceedings have time and again required judicial intervention in a large number of litigations to harmonise contradictory provisions of the KCS Act and the Rules, the court said recurring litigation indicated a systemic defect in the legislative framework itself. Justice Suraj Govindaraj made these observations while dealing with voter list and other issues related to holding elections to a multi-purpose primary rural agricultural cooperative society, Idagundi in Yellapur taluk of Uttara Kannada district.
- “The courts have attempted to apply the principle of harmonious construction in resolving the issues under this law, but where reconciliation itself becomes impossible, legislative reform is the only viable solution,” the court said.
- “It is therefore my considered opinion that a comprehensive overhaul of the statute is urgently required. Much like The Income-Tax Act, 1961 is being replaced by the Income-Tax Act, 2025... on account of the I-T Act, 1961 having been amended over 65 times in six decades had become overly complex,” observed Justice Govindaraj.
- As the new I-T law, which largely retains existing tax principles, aims to simplify the text and remove redundant provisions to reduce litigation and make compliance easier for taxpayers, a new, consolidated KCS Act for Karnataka is required to replace the current legislation, the court emphasised.
- **“Just as the Companies Act was comprehensively revamped to address contemporary requirements, a modernised co-operative law must be framed to ensure efficiency, transparency, and alignment with constitutional principles of cooperative autonomy. Without such reform, cooperatives will remain entangled in unproductive litigation, stifling their true purpose of empowering members economically and socially,” the court observed.**

Many areas of conflict

- The areas of conflict in the KCS Act and the Rules are manifold, like membership rights and disqualification, preparation of voter lists, conduct of elections, appointment of administrators, jurisdictional overlaps, surcharge proceedings, and audit obligations, the court said while pointing out that many provisions have been rendered otiose by technological and socio-economic changes. The court also requested the Karnataka State Law Commission to look into the issue and take appropriate action.

❖ PM SHRI signing a tactical decision: Minister

Context: Minister for General Education V. Sivankutty described Kerala's decision to sign up for the Centrally sponsored PM School for Rising India (PM SHRI) scheme as a "tactical" move designed to overcome denial of school education funds to the State by the Union government.

- At a press conference held to explain the State government's position in the wake of strident opposition from coalition partner Communist Party of India (CPI) and others, Mr. Sivankutty said Kerala would continue its fight against the Union government policies of implementing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) agenda through education. However, the government was not ready to give up on funds for Samagra Shiksha and other projects, especially when the State was facing financial constraints, he said.
- The Minister said the State had lost ₹188.58 crore in the 2023-24 financial year and ₹513.54 crore in 2024-25. It was due ₹456.01 crore this financial year. This totalled ₹1,158.13 crore.
- **The PM SHRI scheme would wind up by March 2027, he said. By signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for PM SHRI, the State would get the arrears due to Samagra Shiksha Kerala and two years of PM SHRI funds, which together came to ₹1,476.13 crore.**
- Responding to criticism that by signing up for PM SHRI the State had accepted the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, the Minister said the argument was purely technical.
- **The Union government had declared in October 2022 that the objective of Samagra Shiksha was to help implement the NEP, he said.** Even when the State had received Central funds till 2023, it had implemented schemes in keeping with the State's interests. There would be no change in that position, he said.

CPI opposition

- The Communist Party of India (CPI) State secretariat on Friday expressed its "profound disquiet" over the government inking the MoU for the PM SHRI keeping the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Cabinet "in the dark."

❖ Baker's yeast has the resilience to withstand Martian environment, find researchers

Context: Researchers from the Department of Biochemistry, Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and collaborators at the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad, have found that Baker's yeast (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*) has the resilience to withstand harsh conditions found in the Martian environment.

- **Baker's yeast (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*) is an indispensable ingredient in making bread, beer, and biotechnology products.** IISc said that this organism holds clues to how life could survive in extraterrestrial conditions and the findings underscore how baker's yeast could serve as an excellent model for India's efforts in astrobiology research.

- It said that the team exposed yeast cells to high-intensity shock waves — similar to those produced by meteorite impacts on Mars — and perchlorate salts, which are toxic chemicals found in Martian soil.
- Using a High-Intensity Shock Tube for Astrochemistry (HISTA) in Bhalamurugan Sivaraman’s lab at PRL, they simulated shock waves reaching Mach 5.6 intensity. The team also treated yeast cells with 100 mM sodium perchlorate either in isolation or in combination with the shockwaves.
- “One of the biggest hurdles was setting up the HISTA tube to expose live yeast cells to shock waves — something that has not been attempted before — and then recovering yeast with minimum contamination for downstream experiments,” said lead author Riya Dhage.
- IISc said that the yeast cells survived when treated with shock waves and perchlorate, although the cells’ growth slowed down.

Key to resilience

- **“The likely key to their resilience lies in their ability to produce ribonucleoprotein (RNP) condensates — tiny, membrane-less structures that help protect and reorganise mRNA when the cells are under stress. Shock waves triggered the assembly of two types of RNPs called stress granules and P-bodies, while perchlorate exposure led to the generation of P-bodies alone. Yeast mutants that were unable to form these structures were far less likely to survive,”** IISc said.
- It added that the results show how RNP condensates may act as biomarkers for cellular stress under extraterrestrial conditions.
- “What makes this work unique is the integration of shock-wave physics and chemical biology with molecular-cell biology to probe how life might cope with such Mars-like stressors,” said Ms. Dhage.
- “We hope that this study will galvanise efforts to have yeast on board in future space explorations,” said Purusharth I. Rajyaguru, Associate Professor, Department of Biochemistry.

❖ Trouble in ‘soy State’

Context: Madhya Pradesh is India’s largest soybean producer, but young farmers are losing interest in farming, facing key issues such as improper implementation of minimum support price, seed quality, input cost and the possibility of the import of soybean and soybean meal from the United States.

- The oilseed was quite new to farmers in this area even though others in the State had been sowing it as far back as the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The reasons are many:

- Issues that ranged from climate change to the import-export policies of the Union Government. “The yield is very low.
- The price is also almost a ₹1,000 less used to be 15 years ago.
- Do not have any other alternative crops here as maize, a popular alternate crop, is what the nilgai likes.” The nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) is an antelope species which farmers consider to be a nuisance as it destroys crops.
- Import of soybean from the United States: “The government is already importing soybean oil and other edible oils. But if soybean is imported from the U.S., crisis will deepen. The government should set its import-export policy right.



The MSP issue

- There is another issue that he and other farmer leaders are engaged with, which is proper implementation of the minimum support price (MSP) and procurement by the government in local markets.
 - **In the ongoing kharif season, the government had announced ₹5,328 as the MSP for a quintal of soybean. But in the Chhawani grain market of Indore, farmers have been selling their produce for as low as ₹ 3,000 per quintal.**
 - “The government had promised MSP, but we are not getting even half the MSP after the harvest.
 - Soybean cultivation gives huge losses. Both the Centre and State governments claim that they have doubled the income of farmers.
- The Union Government, in a statement on October 6, 2025, had said that the country’s overall oilseed sowing area, during the 2025 kharif season, had decreased by 10.62 lakh hectares compared to the previous year. The decrease in soybean alone was 9.1 lakh hectares. **Madhya Pradesh is India’s largest soybean producer — over 40% — harvesting about 52 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) from about 53 lakh hectares.**
- Farmers are not recovering even the input cost which is the reason for the decrease in cultivation.
 - Earlier used to cultivate coarse cereals, millets and pulses earlier but switched to soybean based on what the government presented to them — soybean cultivation was linked to ensuring self-reliance in edible oil requirements and in meeting the protein needs of a huge population dependent on vegetarian food.
 - “Now the prices of millets and pulses have increased and the prices of soybean have come down. We should not have shifted to soybean”.

The threat of imports

- The Executive Director of the Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA), D.N. Pathak, has seen both the growth and the crisis in the soybean sector. He believes that any shortage in its cultivation will have a direct impact on protein availability as soybean in India is not an oilseed crop. Pathak said, “Only 18% or 19% of the soybean is used to make oil. It is basically a protein crop.” He said SOPA has been requesting the government to ensure that farmers get the correct price. “Productivity is low. It has been low for the last 30 to 40 years. It has not improved. A lot needs to be done to improve productivity. The industry should also work there. The government should certainly make efforts,” he said.
- Pathak said that talk about the import of soybean was being floated by an import lobby with vested interests.
- A trained professional in electronics, Pathak joined SOPA in 1994, as he had a deep interest in agriculture. It comes as no surprise as his family of farmers is from Uttar Pradesh. “We need about 7 million tonnes to 8 million tonnes of soybean meal,” he says. “This means that we must crush about 100 lakh tonnes of soybean, which is our production now. If we grow more, we export. But we cannot compete because our MSP is so high. So, if somebody were to bring soybean from the U.S., what will happen to this soybean which our farmers grow? Or is there a suggestion that we should not grow soybean? U.S. soybean is roughly \$380 a tonne. Our soybean is \$620 per tonne. So should we bring U.S. soybean at \$380?”

The advent of soybean in the State

- In the **1980s, Madhya Pradesh first tried black soybean. The present variety, which is yellow soybean, reached farms by the first decade of 2000.**
- Earlier, cooperative societies used to procure soybean till the end of the 1990s and production was good too.
- Losses: The biggest issue was the seeds. Low quality seeds resulted in a decrease in production and companies began to queue up offering fertilizers and pesticides to enhance production. But this did not work. Rather than it being from lab to land, seeds are coming from market to land,” he said.
- “Cultivation is down and yield is less. Traders are also worried about the future of soybean. The Bhavantar scheme is not helping farmers. Unless soybean meal is exported, it will be difficult to survive. If U.S. soybean comes here, it will be a double blow,” he said. Kailash said some farmers are keeping soybean for three to four years expecting that the prices will improve as export picks up. **According to SOPA, on an average, India exports about two million tonnes of soybean meal; in this season, it could go down by 1.8 million tonnes. SOPA states that the reason for lack of demand for Indian soybean is its higher price.**
- **The Chhawani market is one of the biggest soybean markets in India.** During the season, traders handle about 2,000 tonnes to 2,500 tonnes of soybean a month. Said Kailash, “Traders of this market brought yellow soybean and provided it to farmers for cultivation after the 1990s. The best time was between 1995 to 2015 when we used to get 6,000 tonnes per month.”

- Varun, a former secretary of the market, nodded in agreement. According to him, traders in the market deal with buyers from across the country. “We have a membership of about 1,500 traders. There are a lot of workers too in this market. The fluctuations in the soybean market have impacted traders. They are losing revenue. Such fluctuations are basically from the policies of the government. The import policy of the government is a problem. If the government allows imports of soybean, it will be a major problem.”

A reposing of faith in soybean

- In another part of Indore, despite the sentiment and arguments expressed from the ground, the scientific community has not lost hope in soybean and its future. The Director of the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR)’s Indian Institute of Soybean Research, Kunwar Harendra Singh said: “From only 30,000 hectares during the 1970s, the country has now more than 12 million hectares under soybean cultivation. You will not see any other crop having expanded in such a way. So this is the big achievement as far as this crop is concerned.”
- He said that the present decrease in the area of sowing is primarily due to a decline in prices. “The government has been increasing the MSP, but the market rates were declining very fast. And then, other options like maize are in demand,” he said. “This is the only plant based group which has 40% protein... This needs the attention of the government and also different industries to create the awareness on how to use this good quality protein,” he added, pointing to the need for more research on the use of soybean as a human food.
- “The crop basically belongs to China, and in India earlier, only a few States such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and some of the northeastern States used to cultivate it. “More than 90% of soya is being used for cattle feed. We do not have value-added products. We can make different nutritional powders from this. But the industry has to come forward for that.”

❖ Gyan Bharatam Mission to ink pact with institutes

Context: It is a flagship initiative of Culture Ministry for identifying, digitising, preserving, and promoting India’s manuscripts; the institutes will be categorised as cluster centres and independent centres.

- The Gyan Bharatam Mission on manuscripts, under the Union Culture Ministry, will sign Memorandums of Understanding with around 20 institutes across the country for conservation, upkeep, and digitisation of manuscripts.
- While the 20 institutes will sign the MoUs on Saturday, 30 more will do so over the next few days, a senior official of the Union Culture Ministry. Some of these institutes are Asiatic Society Kolkata, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayagraj, and Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Chennai.



Preserving history: The mission is an initiative to identify, document and digitise India's vast manuscript heritage. FILE PHOTO

- **Gyan Bharatam is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Culture for identifying, documenting, conserving, digitising, preserving, and promoting India's vast manuscript heritage.**
- **It was announced during the Union Budget this year.**
- **The mission's mandate is to preserve and establish a dedicated digital platform — known as the National Digital Repository (NDR) — to share India's manuscript heritage worldwide.**

- The institutions set to sign MoUs have been categorised into cluster centres and independent centres.
- In the case of a cluster centre, the institution shall be responsible for executing all manuscript-related activities of its own centre, as well as those of its designated cluster partner centres, which shall not exceed 20. In the case of the independent centres, the institution shall be responsible for executing all manuscript-related activities pertaining solely to its own collection.
- Gyan Bharatam shall provide the overarching framework, guidance, monitoring, and support for the execution of activities under this partnership. In addition, it shall also provide funding, necessary equipment, and budgetary allocations to the designated Centres, subject to approval of work plans, milestones, and quality verification.
- The various activities to be provided by the institutes with GB's support have been categorised into survey and cataloguing, conservation and capacity building, technology and digitisation, linguistics and translation, research, publication, and outreach.
- The centres have also been asked to constitute a dedicated Gyan Bharatam Cell experienced in each vertical, in the spirit of voluntary service, to represent the Centre with sincerity, while also serving as a vital channel of communication to foster collaboration and ensure smooth coordination.

Funds in instalments

- As far as finances are concerned, funds shall be released in phased instalments in accordance with the implementation schedule and milestones outlined in the approved work plan.
- The first instalment (70%) shall be disbursed upon the annual budget, the second (30%) instalment shall be released only upon submission of progress reports, detailed financial report, submission of utilisation certificates (UCs) and other important documents.

❖ Manipur Nagas declare restrictions ahead of Muivah's visit to Senapati

Context: The Nagas in Manipur have declared a 'Genna' in honour of National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) leader Thuingaleng Muivah ahead of his visit to the State's Senapati on October 29.

- Genna, in Naga culture and traditions, refers to restrictions to ensure maximum participation when a national holiday or an important day for the community is observed.
- The NSCN is also referred to as the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, or NSCN (I-M).

- The United Naga Council (UNC), the apex Naga organisation in Manipur, issued a statement on Friday, declaring 'Genna' in Senapati "on the occasion of the civic reception in honour" of Mr. Muivah, the Ato Kilonser or "Prime Minister" of the "government" run by the NSCN (I-M). The UNC referred to Senapati as Tahamzam, a Naga name.
- Senapati, the headquarters of the Naga-majority district with the same name, is about 60 km north of Manipur's capital, Imphal.
- The UNC said the 'Genna' requires all educational institutions and shops in Senapati to remain closed on the day of Mr. Muivah's visit.
- The council also asked all community members to abstain from all other forms of economic and commercial activities, participate in community gatherings and programmes to celebrate the occasion.

❖ EC warns parties against misuse of AI-generated content during elections

Context: Ahead of the upcoming Bihar Assembly election, the Election Commission on Friday issued an advisory to all political parties on responsible use and disclosure of synthetically generated information and AI-generated content during election.

- In a letter to the heads of all political parties, the poll body said that it had been brought to its notice that "the misuse of hyper-realistic synthetically generated information, including depicting political leaders making electorally sensitive messages, is contaminating the level-playing field in the electoral arena, disrupting fair and equal conditions for all political participants, which is a sine qua non for preserving the integrity of the political campaigning during elections".
- "The use of technology for creating, generating, modifying and altering information and publishing and transmitting synthetically generated information is a deep threat and challenge because of its ability to masquerade as truth and unwittingly trap political stakeholders into incorrect conclusions and therefore, ECI finds it particularly imperative to ensure that transparency and accountability are maintained to preserve electoral integrity and voter trust," the letter said.

Previous guidelines

- The EC had issued detailed guidelines in May last year just before the general elections regarding responsible and ethical use of social media platforms, and an advisory, dated January 16, 2025, specifically addressing concerns around labelling of synthetic and AI-generated content used by political parties for election campaigning. The poll body asked political parties, candidates, and campaign representatives to ensure that any AI-generated or AI-altered image, audio, or video used or disseminated for campaigning purposes shall bear a clear, prominent, and legible label such as "AI-Generated".

❖ RBI may limit banks' market exposure

Context: The regulator has proposed that the total direct exposure to capital markets and acquisition financing be capped at 20% of their tier-1 capital. India's central bank proposed limits to banks' lending against stocks, bonds in capital markets, and for corporate acquisitions to ensure that lenders keep such businesses in check.

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a draft circular proposing that banks' total direct exposure to capital markets and acquisition financing be capped at 20% of their tier-1 capital, weeks after it said it would ease restrictions on funding mergers and acquisitions.
- Earlier this month, the regulator allowed banks to fund acquisitions and raised the cap on loans for buying shares at initial public offerings, as part of a raft of measures to boost bank lending in the world's fifth-largest economy.
- It had also permitted unfettered bank lending against listed debt securities, and raised the limit for lending against equity shares from ₹2 million to ₹20 million.
- The RBI proposed that banks' aggregate capital market exposure, including direct as well as indirect exposure through funds and guarantees, among others, should not exceed 40% of their tier 1 capital, and the exposure towards acquisition finance shall not exceed 10%. Tier 1 capital, the highest-quality capital of a bank, includes equity, retained earnings, and certain instruments that can absorb losses.
- The changes allow domestic banks to lend for acquisitions by Indian corporates, a segment so far cornered by foreign lenders and credit funds.
- In its proposed rules for acquisition finance, the RBI said that banks may finance a maximum of 70% of the deal value, with at least 30% to be funded by the acquiring company.
- It said that commercial banks can offer acquisition finance only to listed entities that have a satisfactory net worth and been profitable for the last three years, adding that the loan should be fully secured by the shares of the target company.



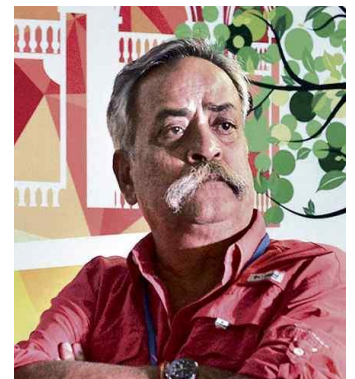
NBFCs' risk-weight

- Separately, it proposed revised risk-weight guidelines for non-banking financial companies' infrastructure loans, a move that could lower capital requirements for lenders financing established projects.

❖ Advertising veteran Piyush Pandey passes away at 70

Context: The former chief creative officer, worldwide, and executive chairman of Ogilvy India was known to break Western influence on Indian advertising by popularising Hindi in ad films and taglines that caught the fancy of the masses.

- He was credited with blockbuster campaigns such as the Fevicol bus ad, the fish catch ad for Fevikwik, Pug and Zoozoos campaigns for Vodafone, Har Ghar Kuch Kehta Hay campaign for Asian Paints, Kuch Khass Hay for Cadbury, Chal Meri Luna for Kinetic and the Abki Baar Modi Sarkar ad campaign for the BJP to name a few.
- Born in Jaipur in 1955, Mr. Pandey did his schooling in the city and moved to New Delhi, where he did his post graduation at St. Stephen's College.



Context: Takaichi said she 'looks forward' to promoting the Japan-India Strategic and Global Partnership; 'in order to promote the main pillar of Tokyo's diplomacy, a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, India is a crucial partner,' says an Assistant Minister.

- In a dramatic announcement three days after she was sworn in, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said her government will ensure that Japan's defence spending would increase to 2% of its GDP by March 2026, two years ahead of schedule, even as she pledged support for "security partnerships" like the Quad, which includes India. Ms. Takaichi, who said the government's first priority is to tackle inflation and boost fiscal spending, was addressing the Japanese Parliament, or Diet, in an inaugural speech about her agenda in office.
- Ms. Takaichi, the country's first woman Prime Minister, also responded to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's congratulatory message on her appointment, saying she "looks forward" to promoting the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership.
- ***"The free, open, and stable international order with which we have become familiar is being significantly shaken by historical shifts in the balance of power and intensifying geopolitical competition,"*** Ms. Takaichi said, citing Russia, China and North Korea as "serious concerns" and promising to deepen Japan's **"multilateral security consultations"** involving the U.S., South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, and **the Quad.**
- **Toshihiro Kitamura said India was a "unique" country for its leadership of the Global South, and that Ms. Takaichi was committed to following former PM Shinzo Abe's lead on the Indo-Pacific.**



Crucial partner

- "In order to promote the main pillar of the Japanese diplomacy, a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, India is a crucial partner. Prime Minister Takaichi is fully committed to promote further cooperation with India," Mr. Kitamura said.
- In the parliament speech, Ms. Takaichi also ordered a review of Japan's National Security, Strategic and Defence plans that included the commitment on raising defence expenditure.
- Japan's GDP last year was about \$4 trillion (591 trillion Yen), and according to the National Security Strategy documents issued in 2022, defence spending was due to reach 11 trillion Yen, or 2%, only by the end of the financial year in 2027. The announcement on defence spending and the Indo-Pacific is significant as it comes a day before Ms. Takaichi leaves for Malaysia where she will meet with counterparts from ASEAN countries on October 26, and then will return to prepare for U.S. President Donald Trump's three-day visit to Japan beginning October 27.
- Ms. Takaichi promised to elevate the Japan-U.S. relationship to "even greater heights". It remains to be seen whether Ms. Takaichi will also raise the Quad and scheduling the Summit due to be held in India later this year, which has been stalled due to India-U.S. tensions on trade issues.

- Ms. Takaichi called **Japan’s population decline its “biggest problem”, and struck a sharp note on immigration, suggesting controls on foreign nationals working in the country, including restrictions on land acquisition by them.**
- Ms. Takaichi gave the parliament address after appointing her Cabinet, which includes several faces familiar to New Delhi. Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi was a minister in the Shinzo Abe cabinet (2017-19), while Internal Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi was the Foreign Minister (2021-23), under former PM Fumio Kishida, and travelled to Delhi for the G20 and Quad Foreign Minister’s meeting. Meanwhile, 44-year-old Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi is the son of former Japanese PM Junichiro Koizumi, who travelled to India in 2005 to reset ties, set off strategic talks and launched the practice of annual summits with PM Manmohan Singh.

❖ **India opposed to any move that may affect truce in Gaza**

Context: A day after the Israeli Knesset passed a preliminary Bill on annexation of the West Bank, India reiterated that it opposes any “unilateral” moves that has the potential to dismantle the peace initiative of U.S. President Donald Trump.

- Speaking at the UN Security Council’s Quarterly Open Debate convened by Russia, India’s Permanent Representative at the United Nations P. Harish said India’s position is based on its assessment of the “overall Palestinian question” and emphasised that food and other requirements “must flow into Gaza in an unimpeded manner”.
- “The landmark initiative of the United States has generated diplomatic momentum towards peace and all parties must adhere to their obligations in this regard. We also remain firmly opposed to any unilateral moves by parties concerned. Now is the time for all parties to support ongoing peace efforts, rather than to derail them,” said Mr. Harish.
- The remarks came soon after the Knesset approved a Bill to apply Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank. The Bill titled “Application of Israeli Sovereignty in Judea and Samaria, 2025” was initiated by Member of Knesset Avi Maoz and was passed by a narrow margin. It was sent to the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee for discussion before being submitted for further votes.

Palestinian question

- Mr. Harish did not refer to the Knesset’s move but reminded that India’s position is “firmly rooted in its consistent stance on the developments since October 7, 2023 as well as the overall Palestinian question.”
- “India has clearly condemned terrorism; stressed there must be an end to destruction, despair and suffering of civilians and sought the immediate release of all hostages; held that humanitarian assistance, particularly, food, fuel and other necessities must flow into Gaza in an unimpeded manner,” said Mr. Harish who described President Trump’s peace initiative as an “enabler and catalyst in this regard”.
- He said that India supports “inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty” and that the two-state solution is the “only pragmatic path”.

- Mr. Harish highlighted **India's recognition of Palestine in 1988 when India began advocating certain important elements of its policy for the Israel-Palestinian conflict — “a sovereign, independent, viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, within secure and recognised borders”**.
- The Indian envoy said that the Palestinian people require support from the international community to “rebuild” their lives. He said peace in Palestine has regional implications and India seeks lasting peace in the region. He further reminded the Israeli and Palestinian stakeholders to “honour their respective commitments”.

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

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