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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

DECEMBER WEEK 1

01-12-2025 TO 06-12-2025

**INDIA, RUSSIA
AGREE TO
BOOST TRADE IN
NATIONAL
CURRENCIES**

**JAL JEEVAN
MISSION
PROJECTS**

**LOK SABHA
PASSES MANIPUR
GST BILL**

**PM INTERNSHIP
SCHEME**

**SAMAGRA
SHIKSHA**

❖ Cyclone Ditwah weakens; 3 die in rain-related incidents

Context: Cyclone Ditwah began to weaken even as it continued its slow northward movement over the Bay of Bengal, parallel to the coast of northern Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

- Over 2,300 people were in relief camps, State Minister for Revenue and Disaster Management K.K.S.S.R. Ramachandran said, adding that 230 huts have been damaged and 56,000 hectares of crops are under water.
- The centre of the cyclonic system stayed around 80 km from the coast as it moved at a speed of just 5 kmph, weakening to a deep depression, according to the Regional Meteorological Centre. It was expected to come within 30 km of the coastline by midnight.

Light rain likely

- Light to moderate rain is likely at isolated places over T.N. and Puducherry-Karaikal on Monday, with thunderstorms and lightning at a few places. Heavy rain is likely at isolated places in Tiruvallur district. Gale winds are likely to decrease gradually, with speeds of 45-55 kmph, gusting to 65 kmph. Sea conditions are likely to improve gradually.
- Addressing a press conference in the State Emergency Operations Centre, Mr. Ramachandran said that due to heavy rain, crops in about 56,000 hectares in various districts are under water.
- Once the water recedes, officials will calculate the actual damage and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin will decide on announcing compensation for the damages incurred by farmers, the Minister said. In response to query later in the day, he said compensation could be granted only if the loss of crops was over 33%.
- The Air Force moved about 300 National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel from Maharashtra and Gujarat to Chennai. In a social media post, Mr. Stalin said: "An IAF C-17 has airlifted NDRF teams and equipment from Pune and Vadodara to Chennai, enabling rapid deployment of over 300 NDRF personnel and around 35 tonnes of essential gear." With the arrival of 10 additional teams, 38 teams are now ready across Tamil Nadu and will be deployed to areas on the basis of their need, Mr. Ramachandran said.
- About 230 huts have been damaged due to the rain, he said. As, over 2,300 people have been accommodated in a total of 38 relief camps in nine districts of Tamil Nadu — 10 camps in Nagapattinam district, nine in Pudukkottai, seven in Villupuram, four in Tiruvarur, two each in Mayiladuthurai, Ramanathapuram, and Thanjavur, and one each in Chengalpattu and Ranipet.
- The Tamil Nadu government is coordinating with other government agencies to ensure the safe return of people from the State who are stranded in Sri Lanka, the Minister said. They are expected to reach on Sunday, he said.

- Mr. Ramachandran said that the situation was “under control” and has not “gone beyond our hands”. He told presspersons that normalcy was expected to return on Monday morning.

❖ SIR form deadline extended to Dec. 11 amid BLO distress

Context: Draft list will be released on Dec. 16; final roll will be published on Feb. 14; EC says additional week is being given for BLOs to share details with BLAs.

- Amid widespread reports of booth-level officers (BLO) facing severe stress, the Election Commission on Sunday extended the schedule of the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in nine States and three Union Territories by a week.
- The enumeration phase will now continue till December 11 instead of December 4. The draft list will be released on December 16 instead of December 9 and the final roll will be published on February 14 instead of February 7, the EC said in a statement.
- The poll body said that 99.65% of enumeration forms have been distributed so far, and 84.30% of completed forms have been digitised.
- Uttar Pradesh has the lowest digitisation rate at 69.56%. West Bengal, where the ruling Trinamool Congress has raised an alarm regarding pressure on BLOs, has completed the digitisation of 95.24% of forms.
- Opposition parties have been questioning the tight deadlines in the SIR exercise, citing the deaths of BLOs, allegedly triggered by stress. The EC’s decision to tweak the schedule also comes on the eve of the Winter Session of Parliament, which begins on Monday and is likely to see widespread protests over the SIR.
- EC sources, however, said that an additional week is being given to allow BLOs, who are poll officials, sufficient time to share the names of absent, shifted, dead, and duplicate voters with BLAs — the booth-level agents appointed by political parties — before the draft rolls are published, so as to ensure full transparency.
- The first phase of SIR was conducted in Bihar and led to the deletion of more than 68 lakh names from the voter lists ahead of the Assembly election.

❖ ‘Judgments must not be tossed out after their authors retire’

Context: Justice B.V. Nagarathna of the Supreme Court has said judgments are not written in sand, but in ink, and should not be “tossed out” by subsequent Benches once the judges who authored them have retired.

- The words of the lone woman judge in the Supreme Court follow recent overruling of judgments by subsequent Benches. One of the cases in point is the recent overturning of the Vanashakti judgment, which had stopped the practice of ex post facto environmental clearances.
- Justice Nagarathna, speaking at an event on Saturday, said the legal fraternity and governance framework have to respect judgments for what they are, and only challenge them through the established process of law. Judgments cannot be discarded merely because “faces have changed”.
- The views of Justice Nagarathna coincided with the observations made by a Supreme Court Bench headed by Justice Dipankar Datta about this trend of overruling judgments following the retirement of their authors.

- “In the recent past, we have rather painfully observed a growing trend in this court [of which we too are an indispensable part] of verdicts pronounced by judges, whether still in office or not and irrespective of the time lapse since pronounced, being overturned by succeeding Benches or specially constituted Benches at the behest of some party aggrieved by the verdicts prior in point of time,” Justice Datta’s Bench had observed in a judgment.
- Justice Nagarathna cautioned that judicial independence warranted judgments to remain anchored in time, and challenged in accordance with the traditions embedded in law.

Personal conduct

- She also added that personal conduct of judges also contributed to the protection of judicial independence. Political insularity was critical to judicial independence.
- “Judicial independence is ultimately conviction, courage and independence of individual judges who decide matters before a court of law,” she said

❖ Centre’s citizenship scrutiny power is ‘limited’, EC says

Context: The Election Commission has dismissed arguments raised in the special intensive revision (SIR) case by the Opposition parties that only the Union government had exclusive authority to scrutinise citizenship, saying the Centre’s power was “limited” to inquiring into the circumstances in which Indian citizens voluntarily acquired foreign citizenship.

- The commission referred to Section 9 of the **Citizenship Act, 1955**, which deals with the termination of citizenship in cases of voluntary acquisition of foreign citizenship. Section 9 vests in the Centre the authority to determine “when or how” an Indian citizen acquired foreign citizenship.
- **“The powers of the Central government are confined to reviewing the acquisition of foreign citizenship, and whether based on such acquisition, the Indian citizenship of a person should be terminated...** It is only for this limited purpose that the exclusive jurisdiction has been vested in the Centre, to the exclusion of all other authorities. Every other aspect related to citizenship can be inquired into by other authorities,” the Election Commission argued in a 184-page affidavit.
- The ruling parties and their leaders in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal have described the SIR as citizenship screening. Parties, including the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, have alleged that the EC was misusing the revision of electoral rolls to conduct a “de novo National Register of Citizens”.
- The poll body asserted its authority to “assess citizenship” for the purpose of registration in electoral rolls. Indian citizenship is one of the constitutional preconditions under Article 326 for entry into the voter list. “Even if we assume, without conceding, it is only the Centre which can appraise citizenship, it is imperative to note that proof of citizenship sought from existing electors under the SIR exercise is for a limited purpose, that is, registration in the electoral rolls which enable the right to vote,” the commission submitted. It emphasised that the SIR exercise was not meant to determine the status of citizenship.

- The commission reiterated that its power to scrutinise citizenship flowed directly from Article 324, which empowered it to supervise and control the conduct of elections, and Article 326. No parliamentary law could oust the EC’s jurisdiction, it said, noting that even the authority of Parliament to make laws on elections under Article 327 must align with the commission’s plenary powers.
- **The Representation of the People Act (ROPA), 1950, through Sections 16 and 19, requires that voters must be Indian citizens. Section 16 disqualifies non-citizens from being included in the electoral roll, and electors must be “ordinarily resident” in a constituency to be registered. An SIR, conducted under Section 21(3) of ROPA, had to be “intense” and was triggered by “felt necessities”, it said. “The guidelines issued with respect to the SIR are constitutional and in the interest of maintaining the purity of the electoral rolls, which is a pre-requisite for free and fair elections that forms a Basic Feature of the Constitution,” it argued.**
- It denied the Opposition’s claim that the SIR was unconstitutional because it shifted the burden of verification onto electors, who must fill up enumeration forms to avoid exclusion from the electoral rolls. The commission said the SIR was a “voter-friendly” and “cooperative exercise”. Electors were required only to sign their pre-filled forms delivered at their homes by booth-level officers.

❖ New finds highlight Great Nicobar project site’s biodiversity

Context: A new species of snake with only four records till date, and a potentially new species of bird photographed only thrice in over a decade are among the latest finds from the site of the Great Nicobar Island mega infrastructure project. Described in November, the two are among the nearly 40 new species reported from here since 2021.

- These include two species of frogs, four crabs, two geckos and a number of insects, including flies, moths, and beetles. Nearly half of these have been described in 2025 alone.
- Named *Lycodon irwini* after the renowned Australian zookeeper Steve Irwin, the new wolf snake was described in the journal *Evolutionary Systematics* by a team of researchers that included R.S. Naveen and S.R. Chandramouli of the Pondicherry University, Zeeshan A. Mirza of the Max Planck Institute for Biology, and naturalist Girish Choure.



Restricted range

- Given the snake’s rarity, its sharply restricted range and potential threats, the researchers have recommended that it be classified as “Endangered” under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List criteria.
- It is from the same east coast of Great Nicobar that birders Pia Sethi and Nitu Sethi from Delhi and Vikram Shil from Port Blair had recently published a paper on the Great Nicobar Crake (*Rallina* sp).

- Writing in the journal Indian Birds, the authors note that very little is known of its “biology, distribution, or population status” and suggest this could be a new species to science given the “distinctive set of (its) morphological features, including several novel ones”.

1,800 species of fauna

- Great Nicobar Island is reported to have 650 species of plants and over 1,800 species of fauna. The region also boasts of remarkable genetic biodiversity, exhibiting about 24% endemism among some faunal groups. The regular discovery of new species, including the latest finds, highlights the island’s rich biodiversity.
- “I am delighted to hear of the new snake and of a new species of crane that has been tentatively described from Great Nicobar,” said Asad Rahmani, prominent ornithologist and former director of the Bombay Natural History Society.
- “Great Nicobar has perhaps the finest tropical rain forest left in India and this calls for its total protection,” Dr. Rahmani added.

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❖ Smartphone makers told to pre-install Sanchar Saathi

Context: The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) ordered smartphone manufacturers to pre-install the Sanchar Saathi app on new devices sold from March 2026, and to make sure “that [the app’s] functionalities are not disabled or restricted”.

- The app will be used to “verify authenticity of IMEIs used in mobile devices”, the order said.
- It is unclear if the app will have access to the IMEI number of devices it is pre-installed on, or if users will have to input the hardware identifier on their own.
- The app can be used to report scam calls, identify SIM cards registered under a person’s name, and remotely disable phones if they are stolen.
- It must be installed on devices sold from March, govt. tells phone makers; move will help safeguard people from buying non-genuine handsets and enable easy reporting of telecom resource misuse
- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) ordered smartphone manufacturers to pre-install the Sanchar Saathi app on new devices sold from March 2026, and to make sure “that [the app’s] functionalities are not disabled or restricted”.
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- In a statement, the DoT said the move was meant to “safeguard the citizens from buying the non-genuine handsets, enabling easy reporting of suspected misuse of telecom resources and to increase effectiveness of the Sanchar Saathi initiative”. The Sanchar Saathi app, first introduced as a portal in 2023, has been used to report scam calls, enable users to identify SIM cards registered in their name, and remotely disable phones if they are stolen. It is much like the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India’s (TRAI) DND app, the commercial spam equivalent.

Secure system

The Government has issued a directive to mobile phone manufacturers as part of a crackdown on telecom scams

■ The DoT order requires pre-installation of Sanchar Saathi app on all new phones

■ Govt. says 50,000 lost phones are recovered per month due to the app

■ For devices that are in the market, the app must be installed as part of an OS software update



■ The move may face resistance from premium smartphone maker Apple, which has resisted similar moves by TRAI in the past

■ The app is used for blocking stolen phones, ensuring IMEI on device is genuine, reporting scam calls

■ The order comes after the DoT directed messaging platforms to perform ‘SIM binding’

2.48 lakh complaints

- The government has promoted the app, with 2.48 lakh complaints received so far on the platform, according to a dashboard on the site. Almost 2.9 crore requests to see mobile connections associated with a certain user have been made, the site says.
- “Spoofed/Tampered IMEIs in telecom network leads to situation where same IMEI is working in different devices at different places simultaneously and pose challenges in action against such IMEIs,” the DoT said.
- “India has a big second-hand mobile device market. “Cases have also been observed where stolen or blacklisted devices are being re-sold. It makes the purchaser abettor in crime and causes financial loss to them. The blocked/blacklisted IMEIs can be checked using Sanchar Saathi App.” In a Google Play listing for the app, the DoT declared that the app does not collect any user data. In a separate statement, the DoT also defended its order to messaging platforms.

- The “DoT’s SIM-binding directions are essential to plug a concrete security gap that cybercriminals are exploiting to run large-scale, often cross-border, digital frauds,” the DoT said.
- “Accounts on instant messaging and calling apps continue to work even after the associated SIM is removed, deactivated or moved abroad, enabling anonymous scams, remote “digital arrest” frauds and government-impersonation calls using Indian numbers.”
- Some smartphone makers have resisted government mandates to pre-install apps around the world. Apple, for instance, resisted the TRAI’s draft regulations to install a spam-reporting app, after the firm balked at the TRAI app’s permissions requirements, which included access to SMS messages and call logs.
- Sanchar Saathi helped recover 50,000 lost or stolen devices in October, the DoT said.

❖ SC gives CBI free hand to stop ‘digital arrest’ scams

Context: It says every type of scam defrauding victims, especially senior citizens, needs to be investigated; court directly ordering CBI, overriding state consent, to conduct probe is an extraordinary step.

- The Supreme Court tasked the Central Bureau of Investigation with cracking down on ‘digital arrest’ scammers and their associates, giving the agency a “free hand” to launch an anti-corruption probe into bankers involved in the opening of mule accounts linked to cybercrimes.
- A Bench of the Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi found “enough was enough”, and held that ‘digital arrest’ scams required the immediate attention of the CBI. A note provided by the Centre in the court showed that ₹3,000 crore had already been scammed by fraudsters from victims, mostly drawn from the elderly population, through ‘digital arrests’.
- “There is no second opinion that every type of cyberscam defrauding victims, especially senior citizens, is required to be investigated. The CBI shall investigate first the digital arrest scams. Other types of cyberscams [fraudulent investments, promise of part-time jobs] can come in the second and third stages,” the court observed in the order.
- The court directly ordering the CBI, overriding state consent, to conduct a pan-India probe and hunt down scammers is an extraordinary step. It cannot order the CBI, except when compelled by exceptional circumstances.
- Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Punjab, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, and Tripura have been directed to accord consent to the CBI under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act to investigate ‘digital arrest’ cases under the Information Technology Act, 2000 in their jurisdictions.

Tough action

The Supreme Court has asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to crack down on ‘digital arrest’ scammers

THREE CATEGORIES OF CYBER SCAMS IDENTIFIED BY SC

■ **Digital arrests:** Victims are made to believe government authorities are entitled to their hard-earned money, and they are subjected to coercive acts of extortion

■ **Investment scams:** Victims are lured by attractive investment schemes to deposit large amounts, but eventually are duped of the money. The fraudsters continue to coin different terminologies to dupe victims. In some of the cases, the money is sought in the name of ‘advance tax’

■ **Part-time jobs:** Victims are paid for ‘free tasks’ like positive reviews or watching YouTube. They are later made to pay huge amounts for ‘premium tasks’



- The court directed the CBI to identify police officers from different States, and domain experts, to aid the investigation. “We want the CBI to undertake a comprehensive investigation on identified cybercrimes on a pan-India basis,” Chief Justice Kant observed.
- Considering the magnitude of the ‘digital arrest’ scams and widespread tentacles of the fraudsters, the Supreme Court directed the CBI to coordinate with the Interpol to identify cybercrime havens abroad. The court impleaded and issued notice to the Reserve Bank of India to respond on the use of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to trace ‘layering’ or the moving of the proceeds of crime through multiple bank accounts to escape detection.
- **Invoking the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules of 2021, the apex court directed online intermediaries to cooperate with the CBI, and provide the agency assistance with regard to data in connection with investigation into ‘digital arrest’ cases.**
- States and Union Territories have to ensure the establishment and operationalisation of regional cybercrime coordination centres to compile data on cybercrimes, and for initiating preventive measures against the offence, the court directed. They should be linked to the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), which is designed to provide an ecosystem for law enforcement agencies to deal with cybercrime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.
- The court said telecom operators had been careless in issuing SIM cards.

❖ **Soon, digital e-stamping will be mandatory**

Context: More than two decades after the e-stamp facility was launched, Karnataka will soon replace it with mandatory digital e-stamping for registerable and non-registerable documents.

- More than two decades after the e-stamp paper facility was launched, Karnataka will replace it with mandatory digital e-stamping for both registerable and non-registerable documents shortly.
- The new facility, which will become mandatory over the next few weeks, will not only bring convenience to public to get the stamp paper from the comforts of their home, but will also prevent misuse, including creating fake stamp papers.

Ease of buying

- From approaching a stamp paper vendor on specified days and time currently, the new facility will provide the ease of buying stamp paper online 24/7 from the comforts of home.
- Not only has it been made fully online, it is also not amenable to any tampering, the government claimed on Monday.
- While earlier if a stamp paper document was lost, public could not retrieve it, under the new facility, since the government will maintain digital record, documents can be retrieved using QR code.
- The e-stamping facility was introduced in Karnataka following the multi-crore fake stamp paper racket was unearthed in 2002-2003. Over the years, revenue from e-stamp paper has brought in substantial revenue to the government.

- If the stamp duty of about ₹45.90 crore was collected in 2009-2010 by issuing about 5.92 lakh certificates, it has gone up to about ₹2,320 crore in 2024-2025 when about 3.07 crore certificates were issued.

Misuse of e-stamp

- “The government has observed misuse of e-stamp papers. The misuse has been happening for several years. The misuse includes printing of e-stamp and taking colour photocopies of it. The e-stamp was also being misused to pay lesser pay than what was supposed to be paid,” Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda told presspersons here on Monday.
- He said that there were 54 classifications for registerable documents whose fees varied from a few hundreds to several thousands. “However, for transactions where several thousands had to be paid as duty, a ₹100 worth stamp paper was being bought, which is mis-classification. This was resulting in losses to the exchequer,” he said, adding that several such cases had been reported.

Tech upgrade

- The Minister said that the digital e-stamp had been mandated for registerable and non-registerable documents. “It has been noticed that nearly half of the non-registerable documents are used to file affidavits. With the changing times, the government has also moved up in the technology.”

❖ Centre moves Bills for pan masala cess and higher duties on tobacco products

Context: The Union government on Monday introduced a Bill in Parliament seeking to raise the excise duty on tobacco products, and another legislation targeting the manufacture of pan masala.

- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the two Bills — The Health Security se National Security Cess Bill, 2025 and the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025 — amid Opposition sloganeering. The Bills are aimed at replacing the revenue from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation cess on tobacco products, which will be discontinued soon. The Health Security se National Security Cess also proposes to augment funding for health and national security through levy of cess on “machines installed, or other processes undertaken in the manufacture of pan masala”.

Launched in 2017

- The GST compensation cess was introduced in 2017 during the launch of the GST system. The proceeds were to be used to compensate States for any losses they faced due to the implementation of GST for a period of five years. During the COVID-19 pandemic years of 2020-21 and 2021-22, the proceeds from this cess fell short of the compensation requirement, leading to the Centre borrowing money to compensate the States.
- The compensation cess on tobacco products is to be discontinued once the government pays back interest on these loans.
- According to sources in the Ministry of Finance, this repayment will be completed in the next few months.

- However, with the removal of this cess, the effective tax rate on and revenues from tobacco products would fall significantly.
- To overcome this shortfall in revenue, the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill has been introduced “in order to give the government, the fiscal space to increase the rate of Central excise duty on tobacco and tobacco products so as to protect tax incidence”.
- “With the levy of GST and compensation cess on tobacco and tobacco products, the rates of central excise duties were reduced significantly to allow for the levy of compensation cess without large impact on their tax incidence,” the ‘Statement of objects and reasons’ of the Bill said.
- The Health Security and National Security Cess Bill seeks to “augment the resources for meeting expenditure on national security and for public health” by levying a cess on the “machines installed, or other processes undertaken in the manufacture of pan masala”.
- The Bill also allows for the imposition of this cess on “any other goods which may be notified”.
- “The cess is linked to the production capacity of machines or other processes rather than the quantity actually produced of such specified goods,” according to the ‘Statement of objects and reasons’ of the Bill.

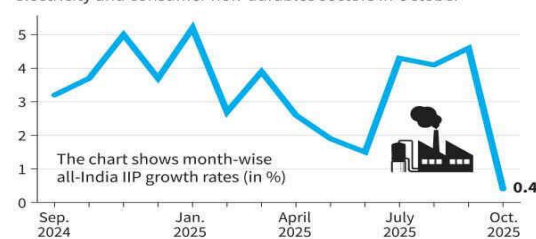
❖ Growth in industrial production slips to a 14-month low of 0.4% in October

Context: Growth in industrial activity slowed to a 14-month low of 0.4% in October 2025, pulled down by contractions in the electricity and consumer non-durables sector, as well as relatively slow growth in the manufacturing sector.

- Data on the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation showed that growth in the index was last lower than the latest figures in August 2024, when it had come in at 0%.
- The electricity sector contracted 6.9% in October 2025, compared with a growth of 2% in October last year. The consumer non-durables sector contracted 4.4% compared with a growth of 2.8% over the same period.
- “Consumer goods registered negative growth, and the inventory factor would have played out,” Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda said.
- “It was -0.5% for durables and -4.4% for non-durables. This would need to be monitored for the next two months where traction in a positive direction should be seen.” he added.
- The mining and quarrying sector contracted 1.8% in October, with the sector contracting in six out of the last seven months. The manufacturing sector grew at a nearly two-year low of 1.8%, down from 4.4% in October last year.
- The infrastructure and construction goods sector grew by 7.1% in October, up from 4.7% in October last year. However, this was lower than the double-digit growth the sector has been seeing in the July-September 2025 quarter.

A steep fall

Industrial activity was pulled down by contractions in the electricity and consumer non-durables sectors in October



❖ GST mop-up slips to ₹1.7 lakh crore in November

Context: The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections slipped to a year-low of ₹1.70 lakh crore in November, growing at a meagre 0.7% year-on-year on a base lowered by the exclusion of proceeds from cess on sin and luxury goods, according to official data.

- India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections slipped to a year-low of ₹1.70 lakh crore in November, growing at a meagre 0.7% year-on-year on a base lowered by the exclusion of proceeds from cess on sin and luxury goods, as per official data.
- While tepid collections were attributed to a major reduction in tax rates on most goods and services, the silver lining was the spurt in consumption across the economy, as evident from the rise in turnover of most companies, giving hope of a multiplier effect of the rate cut in the medium term.
- In a reform aimed at boosting local consumption and fireproofing the economy from global trade winds, the government rationalised GST to just two rates of 5% and 18% from September 22, from 5, 12, 18 and 28% earlier.
- Icra chief economist Aditi Nayar said, "based on the CGA data, the asking rate for CGST collections during the rest of the year is quite high, and a miss on this account seems inevitable. While we believe taxes will fall short of FY26 BE, higher-than-budgeted non-tax revenue would absorb a part of this shortfall. Overall, we do not expect a material fiscal slippage at the current juncture."

❖ E-swathu 2.0 rolled out for property owners in rural areas

Context: In a bid to provide convenience to property owners in rural areas to get their documents without a hitch, the State government launched e-swathu 2.0.

- The facility was launched by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at a function where Gandhi Grama Puraskara was conferred on 238 gram panchayats across the State, selected for the year 2023-2024.
- Mr. Siddaramaiah said that people's participation would strengthen democracy, and gram panchayats should become power centres. The selected gram panchayats were given ₹5 lakh and a memento.

Increasing resources

- Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge explained that legislation and rules had been brought to bring properties under tax net to increase the resources of gram panchayats. Till now, gram panchayats were providing drinking water, streetlights, roads and drainage facilities to properties that remained outside the panchayat limits and were developed without land conversion, and that it was causing financial strain on the gram panchayats.
- "Now these properties are being brought under tax net. The e-swathu 2.0 will help public to get the e khatha document for their properties. The whole process will be quick and transparent," the Minister said. He also warned of possible teething problems in the initial days of the e-swathu being rolled out.
- Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar said that the public should make use of the facility, and that there was no need for people to run from pillar to post. "Pay tax through 11B and register the properties," he said.

❖ Bioterrorism a serious threat, world not ready: Jaishankar

Context: Union Minister warns that ‘non-state actors’ can use biological agents; he says such threats cannot be handled in isolation, pitches for keeping Global South at the centre of strategies to tackle them.

- The world is not yet “adequately prepared” to deal with the threat of bioterrorism, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.
- Speaking at a conference on 50 years of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), Mr. Jaishankar said “non-state actors” can resort to use of biological agents and that the Global South should be at the centre of preparations to deal with bioweapons.
- “Bioterrorism is a serious concern that the international community has to be adequately prepared for. Yet the BWC still lacks basic institutional structures,” said Mr. Jaishankar.

‘No compliance system’

- “It has no compliance system, it has no permanent technical body and no mechanism to track new scientific developments. These gaps must be bridged in order to strengthen confidence,” said the Minister, calling for BWC’s modernisation.
- He said India has proposed a National Implementation Framework that will cover “high-risk agents, oversight of dual-use research, domestic reporting and incident management”.
- Mr. Jaishankar said India is “committed to ensuring the non-proliferation of sensitive and dual-use goods and technologies”, and this has been supported by India’s strong legal and regulatory system.

Role of Global South

- The Minister said biological threats cannot be handled by countries in isolation from international stakeholders and called for making the Global South central to BWC.
- He described “unequal access to vaccines and medicines” as not just development issues but as “global risks”.
- “The Global South is the most vulnerable and has the most to gain from stronger biosecurity. It also has the most to contribute. Its voice must therefore shape the next 50 years of the BWC,” said Mr. Jaishankar, who highlighted India’s ‘vaccine diplomacy’ that took shape against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

❖ Armed forces to procure additional Heron Mk II UAVs

Context: To enhance their unmanned capabilities in the wake of Operation Sindoor, the Indian armed forces have signed up for more satellite-linked Heron Mk II Unmanned Aerial Vehicles under emergency procurement, sources in the Israeli defence industry said.

- According to the sources, the Army and Air Force, which already operate Heron Mk II drones, have placed additional orders while the Indian Navy is acquiring them for the first time. The Navy, which has long relied on Israeli-made Searcher UAVs for surveillance, will soon transition to the more advanced Heron Mk II platform.
- As per existing guidelines, under emergency procurement, armed forces can procure weapons systems, including entire systems, up to ₹300 crore.

- The Heron family, especially the Heron Mk II, has emerged as a key component of evolving combat environments due to its versatility and proven reliability. Indian Army has deployed these drones at forward bases in northern sector.
- In line with India's push for defence indigenisation, several Israel defence industries, including state-owned defence manufacturers, are working with defence PSUs and private partners to enhance local production. The companies are also creating training, maintenance and integration capabilities within India, the official said.

❖ Lok Sabha passes Manipur GST Bill amid disruptions over SIR

Context: The Bill replaces an Ordinance which implemented reforms in Goods and Services Tax in Manipur; statutory resolution moved by Revolutionary Socialist Party member N.K. Premachandran disapproving the Bill was rejected by a voice vote.

- The Lok Sabha, on the first day of the Winter Session on Monday, passed a Bill to replace an Ordinance which implemented reforms in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in Manipur.
- There were frequent disruptions as the Opposition insisted on a debate on the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls under way in nine States and three Union Territories.
- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Manipur Goods and Services Tax (Second Amendment) Bill, 2025 in the afternoon, after one round of disruption.
- The Bill was passed post-lunch after a brief discussion, and a statutory resolution moved by Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) member N.K. Premachandran disapproving the Bill was rejected by a voice vote as Opposition members were protesting in the Well of the House. As soon as the House assembled on Monday, Speaker Om Birla began proceedings by paying respects to former members who passed away recently.
- Mr. Birla then congratulated the women's teams for winning the ICC World Cup 2025 and the T20 Cricket World Cup for the Blind; the women's kabaddi team that won the World Cup; and the athletes representing India at the Deaflympics.
- But as soon as the Question Hour was taken up, Opposition members started shouting slogans pressing for a discussion on the SIR. Mr. Birla tried running the House for about 20 minutes before adjourning until noon.
- When the House reassembled, Ms. Sitharaman introduced three Bills, including one to levy excise duty on tobacco and tobacco products and another to impose a new cess on the manufacture of pan masala, apart from tabling supplementary demands for grants for 2025-2026. The House functioned for about 12 minutes before it was adjourned until 2 p.m.
- When the House met at 2 p.m., Telugu Desam Party (TDP) member Krishna Prasad Tenneti, who was in the Chair, called Mr. Premachandran to speak on the resolution, but the RSP member told the presiding officer that the House was not in order.
- The Chair then called BJP member Shashank Mani, who spoke in favour of the Bill.

- The Bill was then passed by a voice vote amid vociferous protests by Opposition parties, who trooped into the Well of the House. Following this, the House was adjourned for the day.

❖ Army conducts combat launch of BrahMos cruise missile

Context: The Indian Army carried out a combat launch of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile from a test range in the Bay of Bengal.

- The Ministry of Defence confirmed that the mission was executed through a precisely coordinated effort involving a BrahMos unit of the Southern Command and elements of the Tri-Services Andaman & Nicobar Command. Lt. Gen. Dhiraj Seth, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command, lauded the successful combat launch. The launch boosts the Army's long-range strike capability and deterrence.

❖ Farmers cannot be made scapegoats for air pollution in national capital: SC

Context: The Supreme Court said on Monday that farmers could not be made scapegoats for air pollution in the national capital, asking why the blue sky was visible during the pandemic time when stubble burning was on while vehicles were off the roads.

- “Stubble burning happened during COVID time. Why could we still see the sky? There is no need to play politics with this issue or unnecessarily have an ego,” Chief Justice of India Surya Kant addressed the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) and amicus curiae, senior advocate Aparajita Singh, among others in the courtroom.

Burning drop

- A lawyer said cases of stubble burning had come down from 88,000 to 5,500, yet the pollution in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) had not abated. The Chief Justice said farmers need to be sensitised, and crop stubble could be converted into an asset rather than being treated as a liability.
- Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the CAQM, said the target in 2025 was “zero stubble burning”, but that had not been the situation on the ground.
- Justice Joymalya Bagchi, also on the Bench, said the authorities had to look into quelling other sources of air pollution emanating from vehicles, road dust, and construction debris. Justice Bagchi said the CAQM and other authorities might have an action plan on paper, but how much of it was actually implemented on the ground.
- “This is an issue which affects each and every one of us in the NCR. Its repercussions go beyond the boundaries of NCR... If you think the situation on the ground has not met your legitimate expectations, then do you not think you should revisit your action plan?” the CJI asked the CAQM.

Proactive measures

- The previous Bench headed by Justice Gavai (now retired) had given the CAQM a free hand to take “any proactive measure” to curb air pollution throttling Delhi-NCR after the statutory body proposed advancing choice GRAP IV restrictions such as work-from-home and 50% office attendance to the ongoing GRAP III stage itself.

- “Any proactive measure of CAQM to reduce air pollution is always welcome,” the Supreme Court had observed in a November 19 order.

❖ CAD moderates to \$12.3 billion in Q2

Context: India’s current account deficit (CAD) moderated to \$12.3 billion (1.3% of GDP) in Q2 FY26 from \$20.8 billion (2.2% of GDP) in Q2 FY25. Merchandise trade deficit at \$87.4 billion in Q2 FY26 was lower than \$88.5 billion in the same period last year, as per preliminary data on India’s balance of payments (BoP) for the second quarter, [July-September 2025-26], released by the RBI.

- Net services receipts increased to \$50.9 billion in Q2 FY26 from \$44.5 billion a year ago. Services exports have risen on a year-on-year basis in major categories such as computer services and other business services.
- Net outgo on the primary income account, mainly reflecting payments of investment income, increased to \$12.2 billion in Q2 FY26 from \$9.2 billion in the year-ago period.
- Personal transfer receipts under secondary income account, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, rose to \$38.2 billion from \$34.4 billion a year ago. In financial account, FDI recorded a net inflow of \$2.9 billion as against a net outflow of \$2.8 billion in the corresponding period of the previous year.

FPI outflow

Foreign portfolio investment (FPI) recorded a net outflow of \$5.7 billion as against a net inflow of \$19.9 billion a year ago. Net inflows under external commercial borrowings (ECBs) to India amounted to \$1.6 billion compared with net inflows of \$5 billion in the year ago period.

❖ Why does India need bioremediation?

Context: Human waste is leading to a world where access to clean air, water and soil is becoming increasingly difficult. The solution is two-pronged — reduce waste and clean up the waste already made.

What is bioremediation?

- Bioremediation literally means “restoring life through biology.” It harnesses microorganisms such as bacteria, fungi, algae and plants to sequester or transform toxic substances such as oil, pesticides, plastics, or heavy metals. These organisms metabolise these pollutants as food, breaking them down into harmless by-products such as water, carbon dioxide, or organic acids. In some cases, they can convert toxic metals into less dangerous forms that no longer leach into the soil or groundwater.
- There are two broad types of bioremediation — in situ bioremediation, where treatment happens directly at the contaminated site such as when oil-eating bacteria is sprayed on an ocean spill; or ex situ bioremediation, where contaminated soil or water is removed, treated in a controlled facility, and returned once cleaned.

- Modern bioremediation combines traditional microbiology with cutting-edge biotechnology. New biotechnologies are enabling humans to gain unprecedented insight into biology, allowing them to identify biomolecules with useful characteristics. These technologies also allow humans to replicate biomolecules under desired conditions of use, such as in sewage plants or agricultural lands. For example, genetically modified (GM) microbes are designed to degrade tough chemicals like plastics or oil residues that natural species struggle with.

Why does India need it?

- India's rapid industrialisation has come at a heavy environmental cost. Although pollution has been reducing, rivers such as the Ganga and Yamuna receive untreated sewage and industrial effluents daily. Oil leaks, pesticide residues, and heavy-metal contamination threaten both ecosystems and public health.
- Traditional clean-up technologies are expensive, energy-intensive, and often create secondary pollution. Bioremediation offers a cheaper, scalable, and sustainable alternative, especially in a country where vast stretches of land and water are affected but resources for remediation are limited. Moreover, India's diverse biodiversity is a huge advantage. Indigenous microbes adapted to local conditions, such as high temperatures or salinity, can outperform imported strains.

Where does India stand today?

- Bioremediation is gaining traction in India, though still largely in pilot phases. The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has supported several projects through its Clean Technology Programme, encouraging partnerships between universities, public research institutions, and industries.
- The CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute has a mandate to propose and implement programmes related to bioremediation. Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology have experimented with a nanocomposite material synthesised from cotton that can be used to mop up oil spills and others have identified bacteria that can consume toxic pollutants in soils.
- Startups are also entering the space. Firms like Biotech Consortium India Limited (BCIL) and Econirmal Biotech offer microbial formulations for soil and wastewater treatment.
- However, widespread adoption faces challenges such as a lack of site-specific knowledge and the complex nature of pollutants, and a lack of unified bioremediation standards.

What are other countries doing?

- Japan integrates microbial and plant-based cleanup systems into its urban waste strategy. The European Union funds cross-country projects that use microbes to tackle oil spills and restore mining sites. China has made bioremediation a priority under its soil pollution control framework, using genetically improved bacteria to restore industrial wastelands.
- The opportunities for India are immense. Bioremediation can help restore rivers, reclaim land, and clean industrial sites, while creating jobs in biotechnology, environmental consulting, and waste management. It can also integrate with the government's Swachh Bharat Mission, Namami Gange, and other green technology initiatives.

What are the risks?

- The introduction of genetically modified organisms into open environments need to be strictly monitored to prevent unintended ecological effects. Inadequate testing or poor containment can create fresh problems while solving old ones. Public engagement will be necessary to allow the smooth adoption of new technologies. India will need new biosafety guidelines, certification systems, and trained personnel to scale this technology responsibly

What next?

- First, there is a need to develop national standards for bioremediation protocols and microbial applications. Second, building regional bioremediation hubs linking universities, industries, and local governments would enable better understanding of local issues and identifying appropriate technologies for their resolution. Finally, public engagement would raise awareness that microbes can be allies, not threats, in environmental restoration.

❖ Can India become self-reliant in REE production?

How is China using its dominance over rare earth elements as a geopolitical strategy?

- The Union Cabinet has approved a ₹7,280-crore scheme to manufacture rare earth permanent magnets domestically. The scheme would facilitate the creation of integrated Rare Earth Permanent Magnet (REPM) manufacturing facilities, involving the conversion of rare earth oxides to metals, metals to alloys, and alloys to finished REPMs. This announcement comes at a time when China's export controls are squeezing global supply chains.

What is extent of China's dominance?

- Rare earth elements (REEs), a group of 17 minerals, are crucial for their high density, melting point and conductivity. They are moderately abundant, but hard to extract economically and sustainably. China built global supremacy in this sector by controlling 90% of global REE processing and 70% of production, despite holding only 30% of global reserves. In April, China imposed export restrictions on seven rare earth elements and finished magnets, in a bid to counter the trade war. This hit many sectors, especially the automobile sector. "EV makers are the worst hit," said Pranay Kotasthane, deputy director of Takshashila Institution.
- Though China's controls come amid a broader reshaping of global trade due to U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs, they are not new. In 2009, Beijing imposed export quotas on REEs which was scrapped after it lost a World Trade Organisation case brought by the U.S. and others in 2015. "China realised that this is something which it can play in order to achieve its geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic objectives. They played the same playbook in 2020 while restricting the export of graphite. In 2021, they started an export licensing plan in which they started restricting the supplies to certain industries," Dr. Ram Singh, Professor (IB), Head (CDOE), Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, explained.

Why is India focusing on REEs?

- India's focus on REEs is driven by its ambitions in electric mobility, renewable energy, electronics manufacturing and defence. These industries depend heavily on rare earth magnets and components.
- The country imported over 53,000 metric tonnes of REE magnets in FY 2024-25, despite having 8% of the world's REE reserves — mainly in monazite sands across Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Yet, India produces less than 1% of global output. To fix this, the government launched the ₹16,300 crore National Critical Mineral Mission in January, with a total outlay of ₹34,300 crore spread over seven years, to achieve self-reliance. The mission focuses on exploration, processing, and recycling minerals like lithium, cobalt, and rare earths. To boost domestic production, the government has auctioned new mining blocks and is inviting private companies to participate in exploration and processing. "This sector was closed to the private sector until August 2023 and hence this is a new domain. China's restrictions will help generate interest among private players," Mr. Kotasthane said. However, he points out that only a handful of exploration licences were handed out. "The stumbling block is government regulations and control. Deregulating all segments of this supply chain, fast-tracking environmental regulations, and funding exploration projects to reduce information asymmetry is crucial," he said.
- Dr. Singh cautioned that India still lacks refining infrastructure, skilled labour and innovation capacity. He also pointed out that domestic manufacturing would take years to take off given the long gestation period.
- "The good thing is that India isn't in a particularly bad position," Mr. Kotasthane said, pointing out that India's monazite sands have several light rare earths, including Neodymium, which are used in magnets. "Several companies have plans to substantially increase capacity in the rare earth magnet recycling space from end-of-life electronic devices and appliances," he added.

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❖ Kerala's SIR plea is fair, EC should look into it, says SC

Context: The Supreme Court on Tuesday found the concerted pleas of the Kerala government, political parties, and public representatives to extend the enumeration phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the State by at least a week beyond December 13 entirely “just and fair”, and worthy of “due consideration” by the Election Commission.

- A Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India Surya Kant directed Kerala to make a representation, if not already made, with the EC, detailing its reasons for seeking an extension. The representation should be filed with the EC by December 3. The court urged the EC to consider the representation “sympathetically and objectively” in the next two days.

Kerala's appeal

The Kerala government outlined the reasons why it sought the postponement of the enumeration phase of SIR

1 The simultaneous conduct of the SIR and election to the local self-government institutions (LSGI) is a “near impossibility”

2 The constitutional mandate under Articles 243-E and 243-U, as well as a statutory mandate under Section 38 of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and Section 94 of the Kerala Municipality Act, require election to the LSGIs within five years

3 The process of elections — voting, counting and declaration of result — must be, in accordance with the mandate, completed before December 21, 2025



- The Bench, also comprising Justice Joymalya Bagchi, took into consideration the submissions that the elections, essential for grassroots democracy, should be allowed to be held without any hitch.
- Kerala is on the cusp of elections to its 1,200 local self-government institutions made up of 941 gram panchayats, 152 block panchayats, 14 district panchayats, 87 municipalities, and six corporations. There are a total of 23,612 wards heading for polls in the State.
- The EC had recently extended the deadline for completing the enumeration stage from December 4 to December 11 amidst reports of booth-level officers wilting under the “overwhelming pressure” of work, with some even losing their lives.
- The Kerala government, along with its regional parties, besides the ruling party of Tamil Nadu and leaders from West Bengal, has separately challenged the very constitutionality of the SIR in the top court.
- But Kerala's problem is more immediate. The State government said it was heading towards an “administrative impasse” with both the SIR and the local body elections happening simultaneously. The State was staring at a crisis with hardly any personnel left to do the day-to-day government functioning. The State urged the court to intervene with the EC to defer the SIR for the time being.
- Appearing for Kerala, advocate C.K. Sasi said polling for the local body elections was on December 9 and December 11. The counting of votes would be on December 13, and the last date for completion of election was scheduled on December 18. The State said the local body elections would require deployment of 1,76,000 personnel from government and quasi-governmental services for election-related duties, and a further 68,000 police and other security personnel. It said the SIR also would need 25,668 persons from a pool of trained staff experienced with election-related work.

❖ SC gives go-ahead to Kerala to allot prison land to BrahMos unit

Context: The Supreme Court on Tuesday gave the green light for the Kerala government to allot land occupied for an open prison complex to BrahMos Aerospace Trivandrum Limited (BATL), an arrangement which will see inmates share the neighbourhood with supersonic cruise missiles.

- “The allotment of land for BATL, which comes under the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) is intended for the expansion of BATL’s existing operations, specifically for the establishment of a second manufacturing unit dedicated to advanced missiles and strategic hardware,” the State submitted, winning the Supreme Court’s permission.
- A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, based on a positive report submitted by amicus curiae, senior advocate K. Parameshwar, agreed to the State’s proposal to divide 257 acres of the sprawling 457-acre campus of the Nettukaltheri open prison among the BATL, Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and a National Forensic Science University.
- BATL would be apportioned 180 acres, SSB 45 acres to set up a battalion headquarters and 32 acres for the forensic varsity.

Lease expired

- The Nettukaltheri open prison was established in 1964 on leased land. The lease expired in May 2014. Out of the original 487 acres, 12 acres were allocated to the Kerala Institute of Co-operative Management (KICMA) College in 2001 and 16 acres to the Dairy Development Department in 2022. There is also a proposal to allot one acre to the Thiruvananthapuram District Panchayat for settling a Faecal Sludge Treatment Plant.
- Kerala had submitted that the open prison utilised less than 100 acres for its core purposes. The remaining land was used for generating additional income through plantations, etc. The establishment of the SSB battalion headquarters in Kerala would meet a long-pending request of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- “This will give Kerala the permanent presence of a Central Armed Police Force, strengthen national security preparedness and provide employment and local development Opportunities,” the State government acknowledged.

❖ People should disclose details as per Census Act: Home Ministry

Context: On being asked if disclosing caste during the upcoming Census would be optional, the Union government said in Lok Sabha on Tuesday that as per the Census Act, 1948, “the respondent is required to answer questions to the best of his knowledge or belief.”

- The statement came as a written reply by Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai in response to a question by Trinamool Congress member Shatrughan Prasad Sinha, who asked whether disclosing caste for the Census would be optional.
- The Minister’s reply mentioned Section 8(2) of the Census Act, 1948, which says, “Every person of whom any question is asked under sub-section (1) shall be legally bound to answer such question to the best of his knowledge or belief.”
- The next Census will be the first digital census and the first to enumerate caste in Independent India.
- The reply added that the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner is in the process of finalising a questionnaire and it will be notified in the official gazette.

❖ Do we offer a red carpet welcome to Rohingya: SC on plea for due process

Context: The Supreme Court questioned whether individuals who enter India “illegally” can insist that procedural safeguards be applied before their deportation, as it heard a habeas corpus petition alleging the disappearance of several Rohingya persons who were earlier in the custody of the Delhi Police.

- A Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was hearing the petition filed by rights activist Rita Manchanda, who alleged that the Rohingya had been picked up by police in May and that their present whereabouts remain unknown.
- She contended that they could not have been deported without following the procedure prescribed under the law.
- “First, you cross the fenced border illegally, and you enter India. Then you declare that ‘now that I have entered, your laws must apply to me, that I should be issued a show-cause notice, I am entitled to be provided food, I am entitled to be provided shelter, my children are entitled to this and that’. Do we want to stretch the law like this?” the Chief Justice orally remarked, while addressing the submission that any deportation must conform to due process.
- The petitioner’s counsel clarified that she was not opposing deportation per se, but insisted that any such exercise must be undertaken strictly in accordance with the law.

Security considerations

- The Chief Justice, however, pointed to the security considerations inherent to India’s borders. “If you don’t have the legal status to stay as a refugee in India, and you are an intruder, you know very well that we have a very, very sensitive border on the north India side... If an intruder comes, do we give them a red carpet welcome, saying we would like to provide them with all facilities?”

❖ Only 20% of candidates accepted PM Internship Scheme offers: data

Context: While the PM Internship Scheme’s pilot project has exceeded its target of providing 1.25 lakh internship opportunities in a year, it has found few takers among India’s youth, data presented to Parliament show.

- Over two phases, 1.65 lakh internship offers were made by companies to applicants, Minister of State for Corporate Affairs Harsh Malhotra informed the Lok Sabha in a reply to a question. Of these offers, only 20% were accepted. Candidates cited locations, roles, and duration as reasons for declining offers. Of those who accepted offers, one-fifth of participants left their internships before completing them.
- The Prime Minister Internship Scheme (PMIS) was announced in the Union Budget 2024 with the aim of providing internship opportunities to one crore youth in India’s top 500 companies in five years. In October 2024, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs launched a pilot project for the scheme, targeting 1.25 lakh internship opportunities in a year.

Low acceptance rates

- Under the first round of the pilot project, companies posted more than 1.27 lakh internship opportunities on the scheme portal, for which 6.21 lakh applications were received. The companies made 82,000 internship offers, of which 8,700 or 10.6% of the offers were accepted.

- The Minister's reply noted that, as of November 26, 4,565 candidates from the first round had left their internships without completing them. That is, more than half the candidates that started their internships in the first round left before finishing their term.
- In the second round of the pilot scheme from January onwards, companies posted over 1.18 lakh internship opportunities for which they received over 4.55 lakh applications. As of November 26, companies have made over 83,000 offers, of which 24,600 offers or 30% were accepted.
- So far, 2,053 candidates — or 8.3% of the ones who accepted internships in the second round — have left without completing their internships, the government said.
- Taken together, this means that over the two rounds, 1.65 lakh internship offers were made, of which 33,300 (20.2%) offers were accepted. Of those that were accepted, 6,618 (19.9%) candidates quit their internships prematurely.
- The government had initially budgeted ₹840 crore for the pilot project, which was revised down to ₹380 crore in the financial year 2024-25. Of this, the pilot project has so far utilised ₹73.72 crore, the reply said.

❖ Centre says U.P. reported maximum complaints over Jal Jeevan Mission projects

Context: Nearly 17,036 complaints have been received by States and Union Territories on “irregularities” and “poor work quality” in projects initiated under the Jal Jeevan Mission, with about 84% of the complaints coming from Uttar Pradesh.

- Action had been taken against 621 Departmental Officials, 969 contractors, and 153 Third Party Inspection Agencies, the Minister of State for Jal Shakti, V. Somanna, said in response to a query in the Rajya Sabha.
- The total number of complaints was based on reports tabulated by 32 States and Union Territories, and included a range of sources, including “... media reports, suo-moto cognisance, references from public representatives, citizens, and grievance portals”, he said.
- Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of complaints and constituted about 84% of the total complaints received over financial irregularities and poor quality of work under the mission.

Inquiries initiated

- “The State reported that it had initiated enquiries in all 14,264 complaints received from various channels, including suo moto cognisance, and reports have been submitted in 14,212 cases, while enquiries are under process in 52 cases. The State has further reported that action was taken in 434 cases which involved 171 department level officials, 120 contractors and 143 TPIAs, while the remaining complaints have either been addressed or found irrelevant,” the Minister noted.
- After Uttar Pradesh, the States with the most number of complaints are Assam (1,236) and Tripura (376).

❖ One doctor available per 811 persons in India, RS told

Context: The doctor-population ratio in the country is 1:811, the Centre informed Parliament.

- Assuming 80% of registered practitioners in both modern medicine and AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) systems are available, the doctor-population ratio in the country is estimated to be 1:811, the Health Ministry said in a written reply submitted in the Rajya Sabha.
- There are 13,88,185 registered modern medicine doctors in the country, and 7,51,768 registered practitioners in the AYUSH system of medicine, Union Minister J. P. Nadda said.
- Many measures had been taken to improve the availability of doctors in under-served areas, he said, adding that a “hard-area allowance” was given to specialist doctors for serving in remote areas.

❖ Russia wants to increase trade with India: Peskov

Context: Kremlin spokesperson says some countries trying to put obstacles on the way of development of India-Russia trade; proposal on small modular reactors to be discussed during Putin’s visit, he says

- Some countries are trying to create “obstacles” in India-Russia trade, but the two sides are focused on overcoming the challenge and expanding bilateral trade to \$100 billion in the next five years, Dmitry Peskov, Press Secretary of Russian President Vladimir Putin.
- Mr. Putin is scheduled to visit India on December 4. Speaking at a press interaction organised by Russian news outlet Sputnik, Mr. Peskov said Mr. Putin would be accompanied by officials who will bring new proposals in the civil nuclear and military domains. He said the Western sanctions, which have created a hurdle for India-Russia trade relations, were “illegal”.
- “There are some countries that would try and put obstacles on the way of development of our trade. So let’s stick to our own interests and we have to make sure that India is sharing this approach,” Mr. Peskov said, highlighting the need for using national currencies in bilateral trade. He said the share of the U.S. dollar in global trade was “decreasing”.
- Mr. Peskov described the U.S. tariffs imposed on India for the purchase of Russian energy as a “bilateral” issue between India and the U.S. but added, “What concerns us is the way we are going to continue and enlarge the volume of our bilateral business with India not letting anyone interfere in that.”

Payment system

- “Russia continues to be a very important supplier of energy sources to India on competitive prices and we know that this trade is of great benefit to India and at the same time of mutual benefit,” Mr. Peskov said, explaining that “various methods of payments between the two countries will be on the agenda” of the talks during the visit.
- “We have to organise our trade volume and our trade interaction in the way that cannot be affected by third countries. So, the nearly whole volume of our trade relations is

being paid by our national currencies. This is very important as that way we are securing our trade and our sovereignty.”

- On reports of energy major Reliance halting import of Russian crude, Mr. Peskov blamed third countries for “additional pressure”.
- “Some companies are slowing down the purchase while some companies are enlarging the purchase,” he said.
- Mr. Peskov said Russia was trying to circumvent the Western sanctions that had created hurdle in trade, adding, “We consider those sanctions to be illegal from the point of view of international law.”
- “The only sanction can be considered legal when it is approved by the UN Security Council. Unless it is not, it is illegal. So, all these limitations, we do not accept them,” said Mr. Peskov.
- He highlighted the Kudankulam nuclear reactor as an example of successful civil nuclear cooperation between Russia and India and said the upcoming Presidential visit would include a Russian proposal on small modular reactors. Mr. Peskov said Mr. Putin would be accompanied by Rosatom chief Alexey Likhachev.
- “Mr. Likhachev, chief executive of Rosatom will be joining the President during his visit and he will be carrying an offer for the small reactors in his bag. This offer will be on the table for negotiation,” said Mr. Peskov.

❖ DRDO conducts high-speed test of fighter escape system

Context: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully carried out a high-speed rocket-sled test of an indigenous fighter aircraft escape system at controlled velocity.

- According to the Defence Ministry, the test was conducted at the Rail Track Rocket Sled facility of the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory in Chandigarh. The test validated canopy severance, ejection sequencing and complete aircrew recovery. The trial, conducted with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Aeronautical Development Agency, marks a big leap in India’s escape-system testing.

❖ WHO backs use of GLP-1 drugs for weight loss

Context: In a much-anticipated development, the World Health Organization has finally issued global guidelines on the use of popular weight loss drugs. These glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) therapies are being used for the treatment of obesity in adults.

- The WHO guidelines released on December 1 posit equitable access as the key element of using such therapies, and read them as one element of a full complement of actions against obesity.
- “While medication alone won’t solve this global health crisis, GLP-1 therapies can help millions overcome obesity and reduce its associated harms,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhom Ghebreyesus said, while launching these guidelines.
- With the guidelines, the WHO recognises that the GLP-1 class of drugs are indeed effective, and that they are likely to have an impact on the global costs of obesity. Beyond its health impacts, the global economic cost of obesity is predicted to reach \$3 trillion annually by 2030. The guidelines can help efforts to reduce the skyrocketing

health costs associated with managing the condition and associated health complications, the WHO said.

- There are two primary components to the WHO's recommendations: that GLP-1 therapies may be used by adults, excluding pregnant women, conditionally, for the long-term treatment of obesity; and that intensive behavioural interventions in diet and physical activity must be continued alongside the drugs.
- The WHO also specified that while the efficacy of these therapies in treating obesity and improving metabolic and other outcomes was evident, it was making a conditional recommendation partly because of the limited data available on long-term efficacy, safety and probable outcomes when the drugs are discontinued, but also because of their costs which put them out of the reach of many people.
- Obesity is a complex chronic disease and a major driver of noncommunicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and some types of cancer. It also contributes to poorer outcomes for patients who have infectious diseases. It is only in recent years that the treatment for obesity has been revolutionised by the emergence of a class of drugs that not only effect significant weight loss, but also confer a whole range of metabolic benefits to individuals.

Equitable access

- A special communication in the recent issue of JAMA notes that “medication alone cannot solve the global obesity burden. The availability of GLP1 therapies should galvanise the global community to build a fair, integrated, and sustainable obesity ecosystem.
- Countries must ensure equitable access not only to comprehensive disease management, but also to health promotion and prevention policies and interventions targeting the general population and those at high risk.”
- Anoop Mishra, director of the National Diabetes, Obesity, and Cholesterol Foundation, said: “I believe this statement by the WHO is a progressive step towards obesity management worldwide. For India, the costs of these drugs is a roadblock that needs more efforts, insurance coverage and development of generics. The real impact will be there only if a large segment of the population is able to afford these drugs.”
- V. Mohan, chairman of the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, added: “It is good that the WHO's guidelines specify that the drugs alone will not suffice. People will think, ‘all I need to do is take this weekly injection, and then I'm done. I don't need to follow a diet, or exercise.’ Here, the WHO clearly says no. Your diet and exercise are paramount, and only when those fail, and when you really need the help of a drug or if morbidly obese, then you go for these drugs.”

❖ ‘India took leading role in relief efforts in aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah in Sri Lanka’

Context: India has taken a leading role in immediate emergency response efforts in the aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah that has killed more than 450 people and caused widespread devastation, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's office.

- “Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveyed heartfelt condolences to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and reaffirmed that India stands firmly beside Sri Lanka and its people in this difficult hour,” the President's office said.

- Prime Minister Modi on Monday spoke to Mr. Dissanayake and assured him of continued support in the rehabilitation efforts across all regions impacted by Cyclone Ditwah.
- In a telephone conversation, Mr. Modi expressed condolences for the loss of lives and devastation in Sri Lanka, and said the people of India stood in firm solidarity and support with the people of the island nation in this hour of need.
- The Disaster Management Centre has confirmed at least 465 deaths and 366 missing till Tuesday in catastrophic floods and landslides caused by extreme weather conditions since November 16.
- A whopping 14,66,615 people of 4,07,594 families have been affected.

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❖ Govt. withdraws order to install Sanchar Saathi app

Context: It recalls directive to handset makers after outcry over installing app 'without people's knowledge'; Telecom dept. claims spike in downloads; Minister says app helps track fraudulent connections.

- The Department of Telecommunications on Wednesday walked back its directions to phone manufacturers ordering them to install a government app starting next year.
- The reversal caps a turbulent episode, in which the government first downplayed the nature of the mandate before committing to withdraw it altogether, arguing that a recent spike in downloads of Sanchar Saathi meant that there was “no need” for smartphone manufacturers to preload the app on their devices.
- “The number of users has been increasing rapidly, and the mandate to install the app was meant to accelerate this process and make the app available to less aware citizens easily,” a statement said.

DoT's three directions

- The original direction was one of at least three issued after the DoT gave itself new powers to regulate Telecommunication Identifier User Entities (TIUE), a concept the department created to allow it to issue such orders to any entity that used phone numbers, not just telecom operators.
- The order, not shared publicly but leaked by one or more recipients who were not expecting it, sparked immediate uproar as Internet users, civil society and the Opposition collectively criticised the idea of a government app being placed on phones of all Indians without their knowledge.

Minister defends app

- Responding to Congress MP Deepinder Singh Hooda in Parliament, Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia defended the app, saying that “1.5 crore fraudulent mobile connections were disconnected, 26 lakh lost phones were traced ... we have only taken steps to make the app available to everyone”. Still, Mr. Scindia said, “This app's success is premised on public support; if, based on feedback, we have to change the order, we are ready to do that.”
- This is the third such order that was issued after the DoT notified an amendment to the Telecom Cyber Security Rules, 2024 last month. Another order requires platforms like WhatsApp to restrict accounts from operating on their platform if the device being used to access the service doesn't contain the registered SIM card. That order also mandated that services like WhatsApp Web would have to be logged out every six hours, as opposed to staying signed in persistently.
- Yet another order, which has not been previously reported, was issued to major messaging and social media platforms, requiring them to integrate the DoT's Financial Fraud Risk Indicator and a blacklist of suspended mobile numbers into their databases, and “immediately deactivate” their accounts on these platforms.
- The orders come from the DoT's seven-person-strong AI and Digital Intelligence Unit, which deals with issues ranging from SIM security, “illegal telecom setups,” and coordinating with the Reserve Bank of India on issues of financial fraud.
- In its December 1 order, the DoT said, “In order to safeguard the citizens from buying the non-genuine handsets, enable easy reporting of suspected misuse of telecom

resources ... the DoT has issued Directions [to] Ensure that the Sanchar Saathi mobile application is pre-installed on all mobile handsets manufactured or imported for use in India.”

- In the latest statement withdrawing the order, the Department said, “Just in last one day, 6 lakh citizens have registered for downloading the App which is a 10x increase in its uptake ... Given Sanchar Saathi’s increasing acceptance, Government has decided not to make the pre- installation mandatory for mobile manufacturers.”

❖ Ramanujan’s formulae for pi has a connection to modern high energy physics

Context: Physicists from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have found that pure mathematical formulae used to calculate the value of pi 100 years ago by Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan has connections to fundamental physics of today – showing up in theoretical models of percolation, turbulence, and certain aspects of black holes.

- The IISc, in a release, said that in 1914, just before he sailed from Madras to Cambridge, Ramanujan published a paper listing 17 mathematical formulae to calculate pi. They were highly efficient and helped compute pi faster than other methods at the time.

Supercomputers

- It said that even with very few mathematical terms in them, the formulae still yielded many correct decimal digits of pi. The formulae were so foundational that they form the basis for modern computational and mathematical techniques – even the ones used by supercomputers – to compute digits of pi.
- “Scientists have computed pi up to 200 trillion digits using an algorithm called the Chudnovsky algorithm. These algorithms are actually based on Ramanujan’s work,” said Aninda Sinha, professor at Centre for High Energy Physics (CHEP) and senior author of the new study.
- Prof. Sinha and Faizan Bhat, first author and former IISc PhD student, found that Ramanujan’s formulae naturally come up within a broad class of theories called conformal field theories, specifically within logarithmic conformal field theories. The researchers found that the mathematical structure underlying the starting point of Ramanujan’s formulae also comes up in the mathematics underlying these logarithmic conformal field theories. Using this connection, they could efficiently calculate certain quantities in these theories – ones that could potentially help them understand phenomena like turbulence or percolation better. This is similar to Ramanujan going from the starting point of his formulae and efficiently deriving pi.

Wider implications

- “[In] any piece of beautiful mathematics, you almost always find that there is a physical system which actually mirrors the mathematics. Ramanujan’s motivation might have been very mathematical, but without his knowledge, he was also studying black holes, turbulence, percolation, all sorts of things,” Bhat said.
- The IISc said that the study shows that Ramanujan’s century-old formulae have a hitherto hidden application in making current high-energy physics calculations faster and more tractable.

❖ 'States will have to abide by terms of Samagra Shiksha to receive funds'

Context: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan reiterated the Centre's position that all States will have to abide by conditions laid under the Samagra Shiksha to receive funds.

- Answering a question raised by Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas asking for reasons for withholding/ delay in releasing the Central share, Mr. Pradhan in a written reply said: "The release of Central share depends on the submission of the utilisation certificates, audit reports in respect of funds released earlier, physical and financial progress reports, State contributions and compliance with the scheme norms."
- During the Question Hour, Mr. Brittas cited dues worth ₹1,160.52 crore since 2022-23 under the Samagra Shiksha scheme. The scheme was launched in 2018 while the National Education Policy (NEP) was launched in 2020 and the PM-Shri in 2022. He asked if the States were being compelled to accept NEP 2020 or the 2022 scheme as a condition for receiving funds under a 2018 scheme and termed it "arm-twisting".
- Mr. Pradhan, responding to him, accused Mr. Brittas of "misleading" the House and said it was not a partisan policy. He said non-BJP ruled States like Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab and Telangana were getting funds under the scheme.
- The Minister said the government was ready to release all pending dues, subject to fulfilment of the conditions of implementation of NEP.
- In a supplementary question, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's R. Girirajan asked Mr. Pradhan on when the Centre plans to release Tamil Nadu's dues. The Minister did not directly respond to the question. He instead pointed to the Supreme Court's recent observations in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) plea, urging the Union and the Tamil Nadu governments to have talks on the issue of establishing Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) in the State.
- "Tamil Nadu can't put conditions, saying this much we will implement, this much we will not implement," he said.

❖ NCBC suggests exclusion of 35 communities from West Bengal's Central OBC list

Context: Even as the Supreme Court is hearing matters related to Muslim communities populating West Bengal's State OBC lists, the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) has now recommended to the Union government to exclude 35 communities from the State's Central OBC list, most of which are Muslim.

- "This recommendation was made in continuation of the NCBC's scrutiny of West Bengal's OBC list in light of a high number of Muslim communities being listed as OBCs.
- Most of the communities in the list of 35 recommended for exclusion are such Muslim communities. One or two of them may be non-Muslim communities," said Hansraj Gangaram Ahir, under whose chairpersonship the recommendation was made. West Bengal is months away from its next Assembly election.

- Mr. Ahir, whose tenure as NCBC chairperson ended on December 1 this year, spoke to The Hindu after the Social Justice Ministry told Parliament this week that the Commission had tendered its advice to the government to exclude 35 communities from the Central OBC list of West Bengal. Mr. Ahir, however, refused to specify the communities recommended for exclusion, saying: “That is a matter for the government to decide.”
- The recommendation to exclude these communities came months after the NCBC initiated a probe into 37 communities included in the Central OBC list of West Bengal in 2014, just ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.
- Of these, 35 were Muslim communities. Responding to direct questions about the NCBC’s scrutiny of these 37 communities in Lok Sabha, the Social Justice Ministry said on Tuesday that 35 communities had been recommended for exclusion from West Bengal’s Central OBC list.
- The government said the NCBC tendered its advice on the exclusions in West Bengal in January this year.
- The Ministry is in possession of NCBC advice for inclusion and exclusion in Central OBC lists of nine States.

❖ Centre is not considering any proposal to classify denotified tribes, RS told

Context: Five years after the Union Government initiated an ethnographic effort to classify 268 denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes who were thought to have never been classified before, the Union government told Parliament on Wednesday that it is not considering any proposal to classify these communities into Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and OBC categories afresh.

- This comes two years after the Anthropological Survey of India completed the ethnographic study of these communities and recommended their reclassification.
- In their report submitted in 2023, the AnSI had recommended fresh classification of 85 of these communities, reclassification of nine others, and noted that many others were only partially classified.
- This exercise was initiated in 2019 after the government constituted the Development Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities (DWBDNC). This board was set up following the Idate Commission’s report of 2017, which had also flagged the need for these communities’ proper classification into SC, ST, or OBC lists, as have previous Commissions that have looked into denotified communities.
- While setting up the board, the government entrusted the task of classification of these communities to a NITI Aayog panel, which had commissioned the Anthropological Survey of India to study them.

Pressure for quota

- Responding to questions in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday about this study and the government’s plans to finalise the classification of these communities, the Social Justice Ministry said, “There is no proposal under consideration.”
- This comes even as civil society organisations representing the denotified communities in north India have been pushing the government to recognise them as a separate scheduled category akin to SCs, STs, and OBCs. Their rationale has been that very few

States were issuing community certificates to these communities, in the absence of which, they are unable to claim benefits meant for them.

- The Ministry said that the Development Welfare Board was already administering the SEED scheme for the welfare of all denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic communities. However, officials of the Board have told The Hindu previously that a major reason for the slow uptake of the SEED scheme was the lack of clarity on how to classify these communities.

❖ Gyanesh Kumar takes charge at International IDEA council

Context: Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on Wednesday assumed charge as Chairman of the Council of Member States of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) for 2026.

- In his acceptance speech at Stockholm, Sweden, Mr. Kumar highlighted the scale of India's democratic exercise, noting that the country has over 900 million electors across 28 States and eight Union Territories.
- In the 2024 General Election, India witnessed a breathtaking democratic spectacle in which over 20,000 candidates from 743 political parties, including six national and 67 State parties, participated, he said.

❖ Man-animal conflict frays India's wildlife conservation principles

Context: India's countryside continues to witness a deepening crisis of human-wildlife conflict, with increasing instances of wild animals straying into farmland and towns that often result in deaths of both wildlife and people, and calls to 'contain' animal numbers.

- In many parts of Assam, Odisha, Karnataka and other States, farmers now regularly report herds of wild elephants entering paddy, sugarcane or banana fields during the night.
- According to a report by the World Wide Fund for Nature and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), this kind of human-wildlife conflict has become "one of the main threats to the long-term survival of many emblematic species in India."
- As India's infrastructural footprint expands, natural habitats shrink and become fragmented. That fragmentation forces animals to cross into human-dominated landscapes in search of food or migration routes, raising the odds of conflict.
- About 186 elephants were killed after being hit by trains across India between 2009-10 and 2020-21, according to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- As per the data furnished by the Project Elephant Division of the Ministry, Assam accounted for the highest number of elephant casualties on railway tracks (62), followed by West Bengal (57), and Odisha (27).
- "Within a human lifetime, we have witnessed extraordinary and unprecedented changes to our planet," warns Margaret Kinnaird, Global Wildlife Practice Leader at WWF Global. "Human-wildlife conflict, in tandem with other threats, has decimated species that were once common — and pushed rarer ones to the brink."

- Agriculture near forests draws elephants into human fields, increasing conflict. Villages in the vicinity of several tiger reserves in India have seen instances of crop raids by nilgai, deer and bison, prompting calls by angry locals to declare these species as 'vermin'.
- Meanwhile, sensitive scavengers such as vultures suffer silently. Once numbering in the tens of millions across South Asia, several vulture species have seen catastrophic declines — over 95% in some species — driven by a combination of habitat disruption, poisoning from veterinary drugs, and disturbance around their traditional carcass-feeding sites. Without vultures to dispose of animal carcasses, rural India has witnessed a rise in rotting carcasses, stray dogs, and associated public health risks.
- Recognising the urgency, the Centre has rolled out a national-level strategy. The National Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan seeks to address key drivers of conflict — habitat fragmentation, damaged corridors, and retaliatory killing — by promoting mitigation measures, data-driven monitoring, and stronger habitat protection.

❖ Sinking rupee awaits clarity on trade deal

Context: Rupee's decline to ₹90.15 against the U.S. dollar seen as outcome of the delay in the U.S.-India trade deal and Indian regulators' way of handling it.

- The rupee depreciated 0.4% to close at an all-time low of ₹90.15 against the U.S. dollar as the economy awaits clarity on trade deals, and communication from the regulator and government.
- The rupee opened at about 0.1 paisa short of the psychological mark and reached a high of ₹90.3, only to moderate and hit the day's close.
- The depreciation is an outcome of the delay in the U.S.-India trade deal and the Indian regulators' strategy in handling the same, said experts.
- "A sliding rupee is not a weak rupee even as it breaches the psychological barrier of ₹90," said the government-owned State Bank of India (SBI), suggesting that the government thinks all is well.

❖ Experts blame the delay on lack of clarity regarding the trade deal with the U.S.

Context: "The trade deal has not happened and we have been waiting for it for the past 6-7 months. The markets have not factored in the trade deal," Anil Kumar Bhansali, who heads treasury at Finrex Treasury Advisory, a Mumbai-based foreign exchange advisory firm, said, adding that the other reason for the uncertainty was the "lack of communication" from monetary and fiscal authorities in explaining the depreciation.

- The depreciating rupee also needs to be seen in the backdrop of the foreign investors selling Indian stocks and going in search of U.S., Europe, Korean and Japanese equity markets. This creates flight of dollars and thus an increase in supply of rupee reducing the rupee value.
- A depreciating rupee means foreigners pay more when they buy Indian goods.
- For Indian consumers, though, the price impact of a costlier dollar is small as the share of imports is quite small in the consumer price index basket, said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Bank of Baroda.

- He added that under normal conditions a depreciation of up to 4% was not a cause for worry and that there was no need to panic even if the depreciation up to November 2025 had been 4-4.5%.
- The rupee had already hit a fresh low of ₹88.73 a dollar a couple of months ago and the RBI sold U.S. dollars from its reserve in small amounts to arrest this depreciation.
- The central bank under Governor Sanjay Malhotra has been less interventionist than his predecessor, Mr. Sabnavis felt.
- Anindya Banerjee, currency research analyst at Kotak Securities, concurred: “Between FY23 and FY25, the RBI, on an average, bought and sold \$42-43 billion monthly. From April till September, we have the data for 6 months, we have done an average of around \$10.5 billion.”
- Both Mr. Sabnavis and Mr. Banerjee agreed that a cheaper currency would support exporters in the backdrop of the U.S. tariff.
- Rupee traders, however, do not approve of this approach in currency management. Mr. Bhansali said depreciation does not improve exports, but only increases its value.
- The outlook for the rupee is that on a technical level, it will test ₹92 to ₹92.5 levels and if it does not breach this, it could appreciate to ₹88 a dollar, Mr. Bhansali said.

❖ Higher duties on cigarettes will be shared with States: FM

Context: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman clarified that the tax hikes she was proposing on cigarettes was not a cess but an excise duty, which would be part of the divisible pool of taxes that are shared with the States.

- The Lok Sabha passed the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025.
- Delivering her reply to the debate on the Bill in the Lok Sabha, Ms. Sitharaman said that the duty on cigarettes had been higher in the pre-Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime. It was then reduced to a “nominal” rate under GST as cigarettes also attracted a compensation cess.
- With that compensation cess set to be withdrawn soon once the government repays the interest on loans it had taken to compensate states during the pandemic period, the Centre has introduced this Bill to increase the base excise duty on cigarettes so that the tax incidence on them does not fall.
- “This is not a new law, this is not an additional tax or something that the Centre is taking away,” Ms. Sitharaman said.
- “Many MPs here observed that this is a cess. This is not a cess, this is excise duty. Excise duty existed before GST. The amount will be redistributed to the States as per the Finance Commission’s recommendations.”
- The Finance Minister also sought to address some MPs’ concerns that the new tax would increase the price of beedis and thereby harm the lakhs of beedi workers in the country.
- “There is no change in the tax incidence on beedi,” the FM clarified. “Not even a single paisa of tax has been increased.”
- Ms. Sitharaman also spoke about how tax rates on tobacco were increased annually in the pre-GST period, and how tobacco farmers needed to move away from growing tobacco. “Efforts have been made in the past and continue to be made to raise awareness among farmers about the harms of tobacco farming,” she explained.

- “Under the National Agricultural Development Scheme, the crop diversification programme has been covering 10 major tobacco-producing states—Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal — since 2015, and other efforts have been ongoing for decades.”
- She said between 2018 and 2021-22, more than 1.12 lakh acres of land were shifted away from tobacco cultivation to other crops.

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❖ Cabinet approves Bill to prevent hate speech

Context: The State Cabinet has approved the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025, to curb, prevent, dissemination, publication or promotion of hate speech and hate crimes.

- State Cabinet approves Bill to prevent promotion of hate speech, hate crimes
- Bill to be tabled in the legislature during Belagavi session moots punishment for hate crime, including imprisonment up to seven years and a fine.
- The State Cabinet approved the **Karnataka Protection of People from Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2025, for preventing evil practices of imposition of social boycott, social discrimination and social disabilities at various levels by caste or community panchayats or by their members.**
- The Bill proposed prohibition of social boycott of a person or group of persons, including their family members, and for matters connected therewith or incidental.
- It said social boycott of a person or group of persons is a violation of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. It said boycotts and imposition of various punishments by extrajudicial bodies such as caste or community panchayats are still in practice in various communities in the State, resulting in great harassment of individuals or groups in leading their lives with dignity. This has adverse effects on the social life of the community, and has given rise to ill feelings and disharmony in society.
- The Bill proposed to remove these evils and unconstitutional practices from society and proposed to appoint the social boycott prohibition officer. The Bill said existing laws of the State are not adequate in dealing with such evil social practices.
- Any person who imposes or causes to be imposed any social boycott on any member of his community would, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment which would be extended up to three years, the Bill said.

Cattle

- The Cabinet approved the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle (Amendment) Bill 2025 for releasing vehicles seized during illegal transportation on indemnity bond.
- The Bill proposed to remove “bank guarantee” and insert the words “indemnity bond”. The Bill aimed to amend the 2020 Act, which said that the seized vehicle would be released only after depositing the value of the vehicle in the bank and a bank guarantee is issued.

❖ India, Russia Ministers reaffirm defence ties

Context: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Russian counterpart Andrei Belousov co-chaired the 22nd session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation.

- Both sides reiterated that the bilateral partnership is rooted in deep mutual trust, shared principles, and long-standing respect, the Ministry of Defence said. The meeting comes ahead of the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin.
- Mr. Modi welcomed Mr. Putin upon his arrival at the Air Force Station Palam evening.

- In a special gesture, Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin upon his arrival at the Air Force Station, Palam evening, ahead of the India-Russia annual summit scheduled. This is Mr. Putin's first state visit to India since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.
- "Delighted to welcome my friend, President Putin to India. Looking forward to our interactions later this evening and tomorrow. India-Russia friendship is a time-tested one that has greatly benefited our people," said Prime Minister Modi after greeting Mr. Putin on the tarmac of AFS Palam.
- Mr. Putin's first engagement started with a private dinner with Mr. Modi at the latter's official residence at 7 Lok Kalyan Marg. The Russian leader will receive a ceremonial reception at the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan at 11 a.m., which will be followed by a visit to Rajghat, where he will lay a wreath at the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi.
- The 23rd India-Russia annual summit will commence at 11.50 a.m. at Hyderabad House, to be followed by press statements by Mr. Modi and Mr. Putin.
- Several members of Mr. Putin's official delegation reached New Delhi hours before his arrival. Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov met Defence Minister Rajnath Singh evening.
- Both Ministers reiterated that the bilateral partnership is rooted in deep mutual trust, shared principles, and long-standing respect, the Ministry of Defence said.
- Mr. Singh further underscored India's commitment to strengthening its indigenous defence manufacturing ecosystem under the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision, highlighting new avenues for bilateral collaboration in advanced and niche technologies, the Ministry said.
- Mr. Singh emphasised that India aims at boosting both domestic capability and defence exports.
- The two sides are expected to sign a number of agreements, including one on mobility that will indicate Russia's greater willingness to open its labour market for Indian blue-collar workers.

❖ Govt. orders Aadhaar biometric update for school children

Context: The Karnataka government has ordered Aadhaar Mandatory Biometric Update (Aadhaar MBU) for students aged five and 15 in all schools across the State to effectively implement mid-day meals, scholarships and other schemes of the Union and State governments.

- The Unique Identification Authority of India will collect and provide information on students who need to update their biometrics on the basis of Unified District Information System for Education, taluk- and school-wise.
- The State government issued a circular on December 1, setting a deadline of March 1, 2026 for the process to be completed.
- "Due to the pending Aadhaar MBU, students will face delays in applying for scholarships, various examinations and availing themselves of the benefits of Central/State programmes.
- In this context, it is necessary to complete the Aadhaar MBU of all students who have reached the age of five and 15," read the State government's circular.

- A child under the age of five enrolls for Aadhaar by providing the photograph, name, date of birth, gender, address, and birth certificate. The biometric details such as fingerprints and iris are not captured for Aadhaar enrolment below the age of five.
- Therefore, updating fingerprints, iris, and photo in Aadhaar is mandatory when the child reaches the age of five. This is called first Mandatory Biometric Update (MBU).
- When the Aadhaar number holder attains the age of 15, they should furnish all biometrics for update, which is referred to as the second MBU.

❖ Can State retain its place in space?

Context: Karnataka, which recently approved the Space Technology policy 2025-30, has many leading start-ups in the sector headquartered in its capital Bengaluru. Hemanth C.S. speaks to stakeholders in the ecosystem on the policy and its execution.

- On June 24, 2020, as the country was still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Union Cabinet approved the participation of the private sector in space activities and the creation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) to provide a level playing field for private companies to use Indian space infrastructure.
- This reform was hailed as historic in India's space journey, which started in 1962 with the establishment of the Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR), an earlier avatar of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- Soon, space start-ups started mushrooming across the country (currently, there are 330 active space startups in India). The Union Government followed up with further reforms with the Indian Space Policy 2023, and opening up the sector to 100% foreign investment with a new FDI policy.
- More importantly, this paved the way for many States, including Karnataka, to roll out their own space policies.
- The Karnataka government, which recently approved the Karnataka Space Technology policy 2025-30, aims to make Karnataka a global space technology destination.
- The policy has two main aims: to sustain Karnataka as the number one destination for space technology in India and hold 50% of the national market share which is \$22 billion market by 2033; and to propel Karnataka into a global space technology destination with comprehensive capabilities across the space value chain, targeting 5% of the global market share.

ISRO paves the way

- Space and Karnataka, in particular Bengaluru, are synonymous with the ISRO headquarters having been established in the city about five decades ago.
- Many of ISRO's critical establishments such as the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre, ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network, Laboratory for Electro-Optics Systems and Human Space Flight Centre, are located in Bengaluru.
- Some of the leading start-ups in the sector are headquartered in Bengaluru, which gives Karnataka a headstart when compared to Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, which have also come up with their own space policies.

Heart of ecosystem

- “Karnataka has long been the heart of India’s space tech ecosystem, and the new space policy is a strong step towards deepening that leadership. It recognises how rapidly the sector is evolving, whether in satellite manufacturing, Earth observation, launch, or downstream analytics.
- It creates a framework that enables companies like ours to build globally competitive capabilities from India,” says Awais Ahmed, founder and CEO, Pixxel, a Bengaluru-based start-up.
- He added that as a company based in Bengaluru, Pixxel has consistently benefited from the State’s depth in engineering, talent pool, and innovation culture.
- “The new policy creates opportunities for us to advance satellite manufacturing further, strengthen our research partnerships with institutions in the State, and foster closer collaboration with emerging start-ups and suppliers within the region,” said Ahmed.
- He argued that the focus on high-precision manufacturing, testing infrastructure, and support for emerging technologies is particularly ‘relevant to our work in hyperspectral Earth observation and planetary intelligence’. “With the right support mechanisms now coming into place, we expect this to strengthen our ability to build, test, and deliver high-impact space systems from Karnataka,” Ahmed added.

Infrastructure needs

- Among the infrastructure which the government wants to establish through the policy are space manufacturing parks across Karnataka, new testing centres through Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) mode to expand upstream and downstream testing capabilities, and a Centre of Excellence in partnership with industry and academia, which will be the nerve centre and platform connecting industry, academia, start-ups, and government to innovate and accelerate the adoption of space technologies.
- The policy states that its focus area will include upstream and downstream activities for commercial space, defence space, electronics and space research, including astronomy and astrophysics
- The upstream (including space and ground systems) segment also aims to incorporate areas such as space stations, space tourism, in-orbit services, and space manufacturing activities.
- “The government of Karnataka shall support enterprises engaged in the development of next-generation space capabilities, including space stations and tourism infrastructure, in-orbit manufacturing, and servicing capabilities. This also includes space situational awareness systems that ensure safe and sustainable space operations,” the policy states.
- According to the policy, start-ups and MSMEs will be reimbursed Provident Fund (PF) or Employee’s State Insurance (ESI) of ₹1,800 per employee per month for two years subject to total reimbursement of up to ₹12 lakh. This will be applicable for all new employment created during the policy period, provided the employment is for a continuous period of only two years.

Upskilling and reskilling

- Suyash Singh, co-founder and CEO of GalaxEye, welcoming this initiative, said that the focus on upskilling and reskilling prepares the workforce for emerging opportunities.
- “Space technology demands advanced, hands-on expertise that goes beyond classroom learning. It’s encouraging to see the government of Karnataka recognise this as a vital element in developing human capital. Such initiatives will also encourage companies to relocate here, attracted by the presence of a highly skilled talent pool. I also see the PF and ESI reimbursement as a very practical measure,” he said.
- “For us, it means the ability to grow our team sustainably while ensuring they get opportunities to learn, adapt, and stay aligned with the fast-moving nature of space technology. It’s a thoughtful policy design that supports both innovation and people,” he added.

Support for 500 start-ups

- The policy further states that, during the policy period, at least 500 space sector start-ups and MSME will be supported to grow and innovate.
- “During the policy period, over 50 satellites with substantial indigenisation shall be designed, manufactured, assembled, integrated, tested, launched and operated by Karnataka-based NewSpace enterprises for commercial, defence-space and research purposes,” it states.

Bengaluru-based start-ups are all game to leverage this policy.

- Yashas Karanam, co-founder & COO, Bellatrix Aerospace, said that being headquartered in Bengaluru gives it a natural advantage, and the new policy expands that significantly.
- “We plan to engage closely with the State’s thrust areas: skilling, R&D collaboration, and manufacturing incentives. For example, we’re evaluating expanding our subsystem manufacturing footprint within Karnataka if the proposed incentives — capex support, cluster benefits and testing infrastructure — are formalised. Propulsion development relies on high-precision facilities. Hence, access to State-supported test beds or shared qualification centres can dramatically reduce development cycles and costs,” he said.
- His company intends to leverage Karnataka’s positioning efforts — space parks, cluster branding, international outreach — to grow its international customer base while scaling manufacturing locally.

Leveraging NIPUNA

- The policy states that leveraging NIPUNA (an initiative aimed at equipping youth in the State with industry-specific skills and harnessing their potential) and other initiatives of the Government of Karnataka, during the policy period, 50,000 professionals and students will be trained or up-skilled up to industry standards.
- This shall include at least 15,000 women professionals and students who will be trained or up-skilled up to industry standards.
- Going back to the ambitious vision the policy has set for itself, which is ‘to capture 50% of India’s space market by 2034 and 5% of the global share’. Is it realistic?

Execution is key

- Yashas says that the policy's real value will depend on execution. His company Bellatrix Aerospace develops and manufactures advanced propulsion technologies.
- "Propulsion, in particular, requires precision manufacturing, vacuum-test infrastructure, high-fidelity qualification labs, and predictable regulatory pathways. The framework is promising, but its impact will hinge how quickly on-ground capabilities materialise. However, the State's ambition to capture 50% of the national space market is both pragmatic and achievable if the ecosystem investments are deep and sustained," Yashas says.
- Karnataka, given its space history, is certainly a front-runner in the space race. However, other States are catching up, and start-ups see this as a positive sign.

Sign of strategic sector

- "It's a positive sign for the country. State-level policies show that India is recognising space as a strategic sector with economic and technological significance.
- While ISRO and IN-SPACe guide national-level priorities, States creating their frameworks helps unlock regional strengths, in manufacturing, innovation clusters, universities, or specialised research facilities," says Ahmed.
- For companies like Pixxel, it means a more distributed and resilient ecosystem to build in, he added. "As long as these policies complement national goals and facilitate ease of doing business, they can collectively accelerate India's emergence as a global space technology hub," he added.

❖ Sept. 13 to be 'Women Employees' Day' in Karnataka

Context: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah assured women employees that the State government will declare September 13 as "Women Employees' Day" in recognition of their contribution in the State's administration. He was addressing the women's conference organised by the Akhila Karnataka Rajya Sarkari Mahila Noukarara Sangha in Bengaluru.

- The government has approved one-day paid menstrual leave per month for women employees, he said. Discussions are also under way to provide space for the association's office at Bal Bhavan.
- Reaffirming the government's commitment to eliminating gender discrimination, the Chief Minister said women officials were serving on a par with their male counterparts across departments. "Our government is committed to equal treatment and inclusivity," he said.
- He emphasised the need to encourage scientific temper and rational thinking among children and urged women to take the lead in dispelling superstitions and blind beliefs in society. He called upon parents and teachers to nurture a progressive mindset.
- He noted that despite advances in literacy since Independence from 10-12% then to nearly 78% today, even educated individuals often remained influenced by superstition. "Only when we cultivate rational thinking can we build a healthy, egalitarian society," he said.

Context: The UPI remains the most visible face of India's digital public infrastructure, and even as its year-on-year expansion slows, the platform continues to operate at a scale unmatched globally.

- As of August 2025, the UPI recorded 20008.31 million transactions worth ₹2485472.91 crore, pointing out how deeply the payment system has fused into the country's economic and social routines.
- This extraordinary monthly load forms the backdrop for a new assessment of India's DPI journey released on Thursday by the Centre for Digital Public Goods (CDPG) at Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB), in collaboration with Protean eGov Technologies.
- Titled 'State of DPI in India, 2025,' the report is the first comprehensive attempt to map how the building blocks of India's digital ecosystem such as payments, identity, data exchanges, and public platforms, have matured, where they are stagnating, and where gaps have widened.
- Authors of the study note that India's DPI stack, once characterised by rapid expansion, has now entered a consolidation phase. High-usage systems like UPI and FASTag are stabilising, while platforms such as DigiLocker, ONDC, and Account Aggregator are still battling uneven adoption, regulatory friction, and capacity constraints across states.
- The report highlights that the strength of India's DPI lies not only in its scale but in its interoperability, a principle that allowed UPI, Aadhaar, and the Unified Health Interface to cut across bank systems, states, and departments.
- However, it warns that this interoperability cannot be taken for granted as several states continue to lag in onboarding government departments to digital workflows, resulting in fragmented user experiences and delays in service delivery.
- One of the key findings is the uneven maturity of DPI across sectors. While financial DPI has achieved near-universal penetration, digital skilling, health records, education platforms, and municipal services show wide regional disparities.
- The report also points to the rising importance of trust, safety, and accountability in DPI operations. With cyber-fraud, misinformation, and privacy concerns becoming more visible, especially in payment and data-sharing ecosystems, the authors argue that India's next phase of DPI growth must move beyond scale to focus on reliability, transparency, and predictable service quality. They recommend clearer grievance redressal frameworks, standardised protocols for data sharing, stronger public communication during system outages, and independent performance audits.
- For policymakers, the study provides a roadmap for what it calls "DPI 2.0," a shift from infrastructure creation to user-centric governance. This includes enabling smaller private players to build atop public rails, and ensuring State governments have the Budget and technical support to implement digital platforms uniformly.

❖ State must not prosecute citizens without reasonable prospect of conviction: SC

Context: The Supreme Court has cautioned the State against launching criminal prosecution against citizens on a whim, without a reasonable prospect of conviction.

- It said half-baked prosecutions and filing of chargesheets was a violation of citizens' right to fair process, and moreover, adds to the burden of an already weighed-down judicial system.
- "State should not prosecute citizens without a reasonable prospect of conviction, as it compromises the right to a fair process," a Bench of Justices N.K. Singh and Manmohan cautioned.
- The police, at the stage of filing of chargesheet, and the criminal court, at the stage of framing of charges, must act as initial filters ensuring that only cases with a strong suspicion should proceed to the formal trial stage to maintain the efficiency and integrity of the judicial system.
- The judgment was based on a petition filed by a man accused of voyeurism and intimidation.
- He, along with his brother, was having criminal charges on a complaint filed by a woman, who accused them of taking photographs and filming her on their mobile camera.
- The incident dates back to 2020 when she, her friends and some workmen tried to enter the brothers' property. She was alleged to be their tenant. The brothers had restrained her, not letting her in. She accused them of violating her privacy. The Supreme Court discharged the brothers of all the charges, including voyeurism.
- The court noted that 'voyeurism' was defined as "an act of a man watching or capturing the image of a woman engaging in a 'private act' in circumstances where she would usually have the expectation of not being observed".
- "There is no allegation in the FIR and chargesheet that the complainant was watched or captured by the appellant-accused while she was engaging in a 'private act'," Justice Manmohan, who authored the judgment, observed.
- The Supreme Court concluded the woman was actually a "prospective tenant" and had no right to be in the property without the brothers' consent. The verdict found no ground for the charge of criminal intimidation to stay.

❖ Parliament approves Bill to levy excise duty on tobacco

Context: Parliament approved a Bill to levy a higher excise duty on tobacco and related products once the GST compensation cess ends, with the Rajya Sabha returning the legislation to the Lok Sabha.

- The Lok Sabha passed the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025.
- Replying to a discussion on the Bill in the Rajya Sabha, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said this was not an additional tax, and the tax burden, as currently applicable under the GST regime, will continue.
- She said that in the last GST Council, it was discussed in detail, and as was agreed earlier, that the compensation cess collection will probably come to a stop at the end of December.

- “Let me assure here itself straight away that the tobacco products will still be taxed under the demerit category at 40% in the GST frame of things. They will still be taxed at 40%, but there will not be any compensation,” Ms. Sitharaman said.
- The provisions of the Bill will come into effect once the GST compensation cess, which is currently levied on tobacco, comes to an end.

❖ Minister says 4.8 crore cases are pending in lower courts

Context: Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday that the total number of vacant posts of judges in district courts across India was 4,855 and that there were 297 vacancies in various High Courts.

- He said around 4.8 crore cases were pending in lower courts across the country. Sharing the number of pending cases in the Supreme Court in the past five years, Mr. Meghwal, in a written reply, said that 90,694 cases were under trial in the court as of December 1. The pendency was 70,239 in 2021.
- Responding to a question from Vikramjit Singh Sahney, the Minister said filling of vacant positions of judges in district and subordinate courts was the responsibility of the High Courts and the State governments. For the Supreme Court and High Courts, vacancies were being filled continuously in collaboration of the executive and judiciary.
- Uttar Pradesh topped the charts with the most vacancies of judicial officers in district and subordinate courts, according to the data shared by the Minister. Uttar Pradesh has 1,055 vacancies in the lower judiciary followed by 535 vacancies in Gujarat and 384 vacancies in Madhya Pradesh.
- Even among the High Courts, the Allahabad High Court has the maximum number of vacant posts — 60 — and has the most pending cases at 11,66,971. The lower courts in Uttar Pradesh have 1,13,05,841 cases pending, once again, the highest in the country.

❖ M.P. CM releases 3 cheetahs into the Kuno National Park

Context: Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday released three cheetahs into the wild from their enclosures at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Sheopur district, on International Cheetah Day.

- According to officials, Mr. Yadav released Veera and her two 10-month-old cubs in the Parond forest region. He said that the pledge of bringing the big cats back to Asia had picked up pace. “Sheopur Kuno region has now become an international-level centre. The tourism here has gone up five times and the way their [cheetahs] family is growing, the displaced people of the region will get new work opportunities in the coming time,” he said.

Context: The system, called DHRUVA, will provide users a convenient way to share their addresses across platforms; users can grant firms limited address access, after which the label needs re-authorisation.

- The Department of Posts this week released a draft amendment to the Post Office Act, 2023, aimed at introducing an interoperable, standardised, and user-centric addressing system called the Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address, or DHRUVA. The framework has been under consultation for a few months, with one key element, DIGIPIN, rolled out in March.
- A senior official involved in DHRUVA's implementation said it would be able to replace textual addresses with email or UPI address-like labels such as "name@entity", which would act as a proxy for a physical address.
- The government hopes to build this system as part of its digital public infrastructure initiatives and will allow private companies to participate.
- The department is hoping to draw interest from e-commerce and gig platforms, where users need to provide addresses across multiple services. On these platforms, individuals would be able to provide a label instead of an address and authorise firms to receive the geographic coordinates and full text of their address instantly, instead of filling out address forms repeatedly.
- The draft amendment would allow the postal department to set up a Section 8 not-for-profit entity under government supervision. The body would play a role similar to the National Payments Corporation of India, which is an association of banks administering the UPI payments system.

Consent-based

- Users would be able to authorise companies to view their address for a specified period if they wish, after which a given label will require re-authorisation.
- There is no compulsion in the draft amendment for private players to join, the official said, and the department hopes the system will be compelling enough for firms and users to sign up.
- Labels will be provided by address service providers, and the consent architecture will be managed by address information agents, or AIAs.

DIGIPIN system

- The DIGIPIN system is the foundational layer for this service, the official said. DIGIPIN is a 10-character alphanumeric expression of latitude and longitude. The technology was developed to provide more precise locations in rural areas or in cases where the textual expression of a physical address does not offer adequate information.
- DIGIPIN was open-sourced by the department, and each DIGIPIN corresponds to a roughly 14 square metre patch of land, with a mathematical function deterministically generating a unique code. This translates to around 228 billion DIGIPINs for Indian territory.

❖ Supreme Court to review clause in 2025 Order that contradicts Assam Accord

Context: The Supreme Court sought the Centre's response to a plea challenging the constitutionality of a provision that allows persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh who entered India without a passport or valid documents before December 31, 2024, to stay on in Assam.

- A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant issued formal notice to the Centre on the plea filed by the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), represented by senior advocate Jayant Bhushan and advocate Rahul Pratap, challenging Clause 3(l)(e) of the Immigration and Foreigners (Exemption) Order 2025 as violative of the Assam Accord.
- The Accord, meant to halt the influx of people from Bangladesh, required foreigners who had entered Assam on or after March 25, 1971 to be identified and deported. The intent of the Assam Accord was made explicit through the insertion of Section 6A into the Citizenship Act, 1955. Section 6A barred citizenship to immigrants who entered Assam after March 25, 1971.
- “The rationale behind the Assam Accord was to preserve the demography and to promote the cultural, social and linguistic identities and heritage of Assamese people by constitutional and legislative safeguard. Any attempt to extend the cut-off date from March 24, 1971 to December 31, 2024 would be violative of the constitutional, legislative and statutory protection accorded to the people of Assam under the Assam Accord,” the AGP submitted.
- The AGP argued that Clause 3(l)(e) of the 2025 Order has rendered the cut-off date in the Assam Accord otiose. It has indirectly legalised illegal immigration into Assam after March 1971. The clause has also violated Section 6A, which was upheld by a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in October last year.
- The petition submitted that the clause ignored the point that Section 6A would override “all other provisions of law for the time being in force”.

❖ India cuts Russian oil imports by a sharp 38% in October

Context: India imported \$3.55 billion worth of crude oil from Russia in Oct. 2025, down from \$5.8 billion in October 2024; Russia still accounts for about 32% of India's total oil imports by value and volume.

- India cut its oil imports from Russia by 38% in value terms and 31% in volume terms in October 2025 as compared with last year, with the cuts driven by a high base effect as well as an overall reduction in India's oil imports.
- The latest data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows India imported \$3.55 billion worth of crude oil from Russia in October 2025, down from a historically high \$5.8 billion in October 2024. This is the sharpest single-month drop in the value of oil imports from Russia.
- In volume terms, India imported 71.6 lakh tonnes of Russian oil, down from 103.8 lakh tonnes in October 2024, which too was among the highest oil imports India had made from Russia.
- This follows up on a 29% reduction in value terms and 17% reduction in volume terms in September 2025. That said, Russia still accounts for about 32% of India's total oil imports by value and volume.

- The data shows that this cut in oil imports from Russia comes at a time when India's total oil import bill was also down 15.4% in October 2025. However, it also shows that, during this month, oil imports from the U.S. jumped nearly 40% in volume terms, and 18.3% in value terms as compared with October last year.
- A previous analysis had shown that India's strategy to pull back on its Russian oil imports had been playing out for a longer period, beginning well before the U.S. imposed a 25% tariff penalty on India in August for importing Russian oil.
- Over the last 12 months up to the end of October 2025, India had seen a year-on-year fall in Russian oil imports in nine months. Most of these cuts were in double digits, and six were by more than 20% each.
- Notably, on a month-on-month basis, India's imports from Russia have actually grown. That is, oil imports from Russia in October 2025 were 7.3% and 7.8% higher than in September 2025, by value and volume, respectively.
- A report from Rubix Data Sciences, a data analytics firm, predicts that India's imports of Russian oil would have peaked in November, before falling in December.
- "India's crude oil imports from Russia are projected to reach their highest level in five months in November 2025, according to preliminary figures from Kpler, as domestic refiners rushed to lock in cargoes before the U.S. deadline of restricting transactions with sanctioned Russian producers took effect on 21st November," it said.
- According to Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Global Trade Research Initiative and former Director General of Foreign Trade, India's increased dependence on Russian oil over the last few years has resulted in a "lopsided" bilateral relationship.

❖ LIC unveils Protection Plus, Bima Kavach

Context: The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has introduced two new plans Protection Plus and Bima Kavach.

- LIC Protection Plus is a non par, linked, life, individual, savings plan that offers life insurance cover cum savings throughout the term of the policy.
- Bima Kavach is a non par, non linked, life, individual, pure risk plan providing financial protection to the family of the insured in case of his/her death during the policy term. Special premium rates are offered for women and non-smokers under Bima Kavach.

❖ How the Mahad satyagraha(s) shaped constitutional discourse

Context: Mahad marks the birthplace of one of India's first human rights movements initiated by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in 1927, challenging caste discrimination and asserting Dalit rights. It also shaped the idea of India and the ethics of its Constitution.

- The Mahad tehsil, in pre-Independent India, was a part of the Bombay Province and a significant economic centre, providing labour to the industrial sector of the Bombay Presidency.
- In Mahad, imitation of caste norms led to widespread acceptance of caste discrimination, with high-caste individuals treating Dalits with contempt. Untouchability, a result of casteism, represents systemic social exclusion that reinforces the hierarchical nature of the caste system.

- In Mahad, the exclusion of Dalits was evident in their denial of access to drinking water from public tanks, such as the Chavadar Tank.
- Mahad was a key site for one of India's first rights movements, which paved the way for human rights discourse and its lessons absorbed in constitutional ethics.

Understanding the legacy

- The movement for human rights and water democracy started with a resolution, passed in the Bombay Legislative Council in August 1923, initiated by S. K. Bole.
- It stated, "The council recommends that the untouchable classes be allowed to use all public watering places in dharamshalas, which are built and maintained out of public funds administered by parties appointed by the government or created by statute, as well as public schools, courts, offices, and dispensaries".
- This resolution challenged Brahmanical dominance and prompted social change efforts at Goregaon and Dasgaon near Mahad. In 1926, Ramchandra Chandorkar, a leader from the Chambhar caste, jumped into a public reservoir in Goregaon, which sparked attacks on untouchables' — Chambhars and Mahars — properties by villagers.
- In Dasgaon, the Mahar Samaj Seva Sangh, which aimed to unite the depressed classes for equality, saw Chandorkar, R. B. More, Ramji Potdar, and others drink from a local lake and wells. Communist R. B. More's memoir highlights how the region was eager to support Ambedkar's struggle for equity and equality, seeking to restore the rights of untouchables.
- Additionally, this region was renowned for being the birthplace of activists like Gopalbaba Walangkar, N. M. Joshi, Sambhaji Gaikwad, and others. Thus, Mahad was selected by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as the site of one of India's first human rights movements.

Mahad 1.0 and 2.0

- Dr. Ambedkar and his anuyayis (followers) conducted a satyagraha on March 19-20, 1927, by asserting the rights of untouchables to drink water as per the Bole Resolution of 1923.
- The anuyayis of Ambedkar thronged to the event with their meagre belongings, empty stomachs, and lathis (traditionally carried by Mahars, except those who came from the then Bombay presidency) to assert their rights. However, the satyagrahis were denied water by the locals; hence, water worth ₹40 had to be purchased specifically for this purpose.
- After the Mahad 1.0 satyagraha, purification rituals were performed, because Dr. Ambedkar and his anuyayis had touched and consumed the water, which aimed to reinforce the caste system over human rights. Consequently, Dr. Ambedkar planned the Second Mahad conference for December 25 and 26, 1927. Meanwhile, the courts issued a stay restricting water access for outcastes, claiming the Chavadar tank was privately owned.
- During this period, Dr. Ambedkar launched his fortnightly publication, Bahishkrut Bharat, which discussed democratic truths and ideals while emphasising human rights. He also participated in the Ambabai Temple satyagraha, initiated by Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh in November 1927, following violent attacks on Dalits after the Mahad incident, which led to the formation of the Ambedkar Seva Dal for their protection.

- Since the Chavadar Lake case was still pending, Dr. Ambedkar decided against launching a satyagraha after consulting his followers. However, on December 25, he burned the Manusmriti following a resolution from Gangadhar Sahasrabudde, Rajbhoj, and Thorat. In Mahad 2.0, he specifically addressed women, asserting that human rights should include gender equality.

The Mahad revolution

- Dr. Ambedkar stated that the Mahad 1.0 and Mahad 2.0 satyagrahas embodied the zeitgeist of the French Revolution.
- In Dr. Ambedkar's speeches during the Mahad satyagraha, he promotes an enlightened ethos of dignity and self-respect. In Mahad 2.0, Dr. Ambedkar discusses the French National Assembly of 1798. These two historical events, which defined the two eras, Mahad 1.0 and 2.0, were instrumental in shaping the idea of India and the ethics of its Constitution.
- However, the French Revolution, didn't encompass women in its idea of rights. So, neither their National Assembly nor further developments base their substantive egalitarianism by including the living bodies and souls of women. It was Mary Wollstonecraft's intervention via her pamphlet "A Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Citizen" that questioned the exclusion and the place of women in the French Revolution.
- Dr. Ambedkar, in his 1916 paper, had proposed a novel gendered understanding of caste(s), questioning the approach of Indian sociologists to understand the making-remaking-unmaking of women to grasp the issue of caste, as well as the non-workability of the silos approach to annihilate it.
- The end can be achieved through gendered means only. The speeches and actions at Mahad 1.0 have the partnership of women and men, irrespective of their gender, geography, class, and caste(s).
- They gathered there as the National Assembly to break free from the imposed Brahmanical hegemony and chart their own course, just as the Third Estate did during their Tennis Court Oath after being denied permission by King Louis XVI. In Mahad 2.0, although preliminary, the resolution passed appears to be influenced primarily because it inflicts injustice on Shudras. However, even an initial understanding of dogmas, as well as the period of the Manusmriti, suggests that it treated women as Shudras. Contemporary literary and historical texts provide ample evidence to support this.

- Dr. Ambedkar's actions in Mahad 2.0, especially the burning of the Manusmriti and addressing the gathering of women, try to foreground a new discourse on human rights whose liberty, equality, and fraternity principles are derived from non-violent Buddhism.
- Dr. Ambedkar introduced a new concept of a gendered nation whose enlightened nationalism was based not on essentialism but on existentialism, rooted in the body of the people and their natural, legal human rights. Thus, December 25 is also celebrated in India as Indian Women's Liberation Day.
- The only essentialism it strives to seek is the Manuski, based on Maitri, which is a true democracy lived rather than a mere idea of governmentality. This reflects the foundations of constitutional morality derived from the ethics learned during the Mahad Satyagraha, institutionalised in the Constitution of India.

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