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# WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

**DECEMBER WEEK 4**

22-12-2025 TO 27-12-2025

**INDIA, NEW  
ZEALAND WIND  
UP FTA TALKS  
SET TO BOOST  
TRADE**

**LVM3 M6 MISSION**

**NORTH INDIAN  
OCEAN'S STORM  
CYCLE**

**NATIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE  
GRID**

**NHAI BACKED  
INVIT GETS SEBI  
NOD**

**❖ President grants assent to rural employment Bill; govt. lists four focus areas for works**

**Context: President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday gave assent to the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, which replaces the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) enacted by the erstwhile Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government.**

- The new Act brings structural changes to the scheme while increasing the number of guaranteed days of work from 100 to 125, the Centre.
- Amid widespread criticism, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan released a video message, defending the new legislation. He criticised attempts to “mislead” the nation and create “confusion” in the name of the MGNREGA.
- “Viksit Bharat-G Ram G is a step forward from MGNREGA,” Mr. Chouhan said, emphasising that provisions for unemployment allowance have been strengthened in the law.
- There are provisions for penalty for delay in wages, he said, adding a budget of ₹1,51,282 crore has been reserved under the scheme for comprehensive development of villages.
- A government note said the MGNREGA “created works”, while the VB-G RAM G would create “outcomes”.
- Works under the scheme would be undertaken across four focus areas — water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood-related infrastructure, and extreme weather mitigation.
- The Centre continued to be the principal funding partner and the 60:40 model was followed in nearly all Centrally sponsored schemes, the note said.
- Under the MGNREGA, the Centre bore the wage bills and the States paid for 25% of the administrative cost, resulting in a cost-sharing ratio of 90:10.

**❖ Centre rejects mining push charge behind Aravalli definition**

**Context: Asserting that 90% of the Aravalli region will remain “protected”, the Centre rejected claims that the new definition of the Aravalli range will allow large-scale mining and cited a Supreme Court-ordered freeze on new mining leases in the region.**

- It said a Supreme Court-approved framework provides for stronger protection of the mountain system and places a freeze on new mining leases until a comprehensive management plan is finalised.

### **'Stop spreading lies'**

- Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said that the court -approved definition will bring more than 90% per cent of the Aravalli region under “protected area.” Replying to queries from mediapersons, Mr. Yadav also emphasised that “no relaxation has been granted” with regard to the protection of the Aravalli region and claimed “lies” have been spread on the issue.
- “Stop spreading misinformation!” he said in a post on X, amid allegations by the Congress and others that the step will destroy the Aravallis.
- “In the total area of 1.44 lakh square kilometres of the Aravalli, mining eligibility can only be in 0.19 per cent of the area. The rest of the entire Aravalli is preserved and protected,” said Mr. Yadav.
- The Supreme Court, on November 20, 2025, accepted the recommendations of a committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change on the definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges.
- According to the new definition, “Aravalli Hill is any landform in designated Aravalli districts with an elevation of 100 metres or more above its local relief” and an “Aravalli Range is a collection of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other”.
- The government, however, asserted that it is “incorrect to conclude” that all landforms below 100 metres are open for mining.

### **❖ Environment Minister reviews measures to address human-wildlife conflict**

**Context: The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) on Sunday appraised the expansion of Project Cheetah and reviewed measures to address human-wildlife conflict at high-level meetings chaired by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav at the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve.**

- The 28th meeting of the NTCA and the 22nd Steering Committee meeting of Project Elephant brought together officials, scientists and field experts from tiger-and elephant-range States to review progress and future strategies, the Environment Ministry said in a statement.
- Chairing the NTCA meeting, Mr. Yadav underscored the importance of science-based management, landscape-level planning, community participation and inter-State coordination in India's globally recognised tiger conservation model.
- The meeting focused on challenges faced by tiger reserves. Measures to address human-tiger conflict, including a three-pronged strategy, and the project ‘Management of Tigers Outside Tiger Reserves’, were highlighted, the statement said. Issues such as staff shortages, financial constraints, habitat degradation and invasive species management were also reviewed.
- The NTCA ratified decisions of its technical committee, including approval of tiger conservation plans, extension and expansion of Project Cheetah, tiger translocation, prey augmentation, landscape management planning, and carnivore health management training programmes.
- The Project Elephant Steering Committee reviewed regional action plans for elephant conservation in southern and northeastern India.

## ❖ FCI train carrying 1,384 tonnes of foodgrains reaches Kashmir

- In a first, a Food Corporation of India (FCI) freight train from Punjab reached the Anantnag Goods Terminal in Kashmir, carrying around 1,384 tonnes of foodgrains. The freight service was started in Kashmir earlier this year.
- A spokesman of the FCI termed it as “a major milestone for rail-based logistics in the Kashmir Valley” and “formally integrating the region with the national freight rail network”.
- “The movement marks the first instance of bulk foodgrain transportation by rail directly to South Kashmir,” the spokesman said.
- The arrival of the train is a major step to ensure an uninterrupted and efficient supply of foodgrains to the Valley.

## ❖ Speedy justice eludes consumers seeking redress against sellers

**Context: Long travel, repeated adjournments, and mounting backlogs are turning consumer courts into a test of endurance for litigants; vacancies in consumer commissions, limited courtrooms, and procedural hurdles further exacerbate their plight.**

- For many wronged consumers across India, the promise of “speedy justice” enshrined in law remains distant. Consumer courts, conceived as accessible and inexpensive forums for ordinary citizens, have increasingly become arenas of prolonged litigation.
- That reality unfolds in the life of 60-year-old Ashok (name changed), whose consumer dispute has been pending for nearly a decade. At 4 a.m., the small paint factory owner locks his home in Panchkula, Chandigarh, and takes the long road to Delhi.
- His case relates to an insurance claim arising out of a fire that gutted his small paint factory in 2015. When the Bench rises for the day, his matter remains unheard. The court master announces the next date — six months later. “This has been happening for the past three years. For one reason or another, my case never comes up. I don’t know what to do anymore,” he says.
- Twenty-eight-year-old Raju (name changed) from a small district in Chhattisgarh had dreamt of setting up a paper cup manufacturing unit five years ago. He paid the full amount online for a paper cup-making machine and took loan from a local bank to fund the purchase. The machine never arrived.
- Mr. Raju has since been embroiled in protracted litigation — first before the district consumer court, and later at the State forum. His case has now reached the National Consumer Court after the opposite party decided to challenge the order passed in his favour in the lower forums.

### Justice stalled

Lakhs of cases are pending in consumer commissions across the country



### VACANCIES AS ON AUGUST 19, 2025

State Commission		District Commission	
Vacant posts of President	Vacant posts of Member	Vacant posts of President	Vacant posts of Member
18	62	218	518

Source: Rajya Sabha Questions & Answers

- Each hearing requires him to undertake a 24-hour train journey to the national capital, with no assurance that his case will actually be heard. “The last date was November 24. My case did not come up because the court’s time got exhausted with cases at the top of the list,” he recalls.
- Stories such as Mr. Ashok’s and Mr. Raju’s mirror a systemic crisis playing out across consumer courts nationwide.
- A response by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution in Parliament shows that as of January 30, 2024, a total of 5.43 lakh consumer complaints were pending before district, State and national consumer commissions.
- In 2024, the commissions received 1.73 lakh fresh cases but disposed of only 1.58 lakh, leading to a net increase of nearly 14,900 cases. The trend continued in 2025. Up to July this year, 78,031 new complaints were filed, while 65,537 cases were disposed of.
- This backlog persists despite clear statutory timelines under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. Section 38(7) of the Act mandates that complaints be decided within three months where no testing or analysis is required, and within five months where such examination is necessary.
- The law also explicitly discourages delays, stating that adjournments should not ordinarily be granted unless sufficient cause is shown and reasons are recorded in writing.

### **Structural bottlenecks**

- Advocate Anand Prakash attributes the delays to deep-rooted structural issues. “Many consumer commissions are burdened with thousands of pending matters and lack sufficient staff, modern facilities, or effective digital case management systems,” he says. “Vacancies in judicial and non-judicial posts, limited courtrooms and logistical constraints continue to impede timely hearings.”
- The staffing crisis has intensified over time. As of August 19, 2025, 18 posts of President and 62 posts of Member were vacant in State Consumer Dispute Redressal Commissions. At the district level, 218 posts of President and 518 posts of Member remained vacant.
- Another challenge, Mr. Prakash says, lies in the nature of disputes themselves. “Many commission Members are legally trained but lack subject-matter expertise in specialised areas.”
- This often necessitates expert opinions, laboratory reports, or technical clarifications, leading to repeated adjournments.
- Delays are also caused by procedural hurdles — non-service of notices, late filing of affidavits, and requests for time to submit additional evidence.

## ❖ ISRO set to launch mobile broadband satellite

**Context: The Indian Space Research Organisation's upcoming LVM3 M6 mission will place the BlueBird Block-2 satellite into orbit on December 24 under a commercial agreement with the U.S.-based AST SpaceMobile.**

- The mission will deploy a next-generation communication satellite aimed at providing high-speed cellular broadband directly to smartphones across the globe.
- AST SpaceMobile is building a space-based cellular broadband network intended for both commercial and government use. The company says its objective is to bridge connectivity gaps faced by billions of mobile users worldwide.
- AST SpaceMobile has launched five satellites – BlueBird 1-5 in September 2024, which enable continuous Internet coverage across the U.S. and other select countries.
- The company has planned to launch similar satellites to augment its network support and has partnered with over 50 mobile operators across the globe. The BlueBird Block-2 satellite will be the largest commercial communication satellite to be deployed into low earth orbit.



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**Context: New Delhi hopes to enjoy tariff-free access to Wellington's markets; island nation promises 5,000 work visas every year; Prime Minister Modi hails 'historic milestone' reflecting 'shared ambition'.**

- India and New Zealand concluded discussions on a free trade agreement (FTA) that will give India tariff-free access to the island nation's markets, bring in \$20 billion in investments over 15 years, and help double bilateral trade to \$5 billion in the next five years.
- The deal will remove or cut tariffs on 95% of New Zealand's exports — from timber to fruits — to India, but New Delhi safeguarded the interests of its farmers and dairy farmers, considered politically sensitive, and made no concessions on import of dairy, onions, sugar, spices, edible oils, and rubber.
- New Zealand will give temporary employment visas for Indian professionals in skilled occupations with a quota of 5,000 visas annually and a stay of up to three years under the proposed agreement.

### Easing access

The proposed deal will give duty-free access to a range of domestic goods and includes an FDI commitment of **\$20 billion over 15 years**

#### New Zealand to get

- Duty-free access to goods such as sheep meat, wool, coal and over **95%** of forestry and wood articles
- Duty concessions on items such as kiwi fruit, wine, seafood, cherries, avocados, persimmons, bulk infant formula, Manuka honey, and milk albumins
- No concessions in dairy sector

Indian professionals in skilled occupations to get temporary employment entry visa pathway and stay of up to **3 years**



**Ties on track:** Union Minister Piyush Goyal with New Zealand Minister Todd McClay in New Delhi on Monday. PTI

The deal is expected to be signed in the first half of 2026 and aims at doubling bilateral trade to **\$5 billion in five years**

### 'Protecting interests'

- Union Minister for Commerce Piyush Goyal said the government has been "sensitive in protecting interests" of farmers and dairy persons. "Rice, wheat, dairy, soya and various other agricultural products have not been opened up with any access," he said.
- Hailing the FTA, to be signed in the first half of 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Concluded in just nine months, this historic milestone reflects a strong political will and shared ambition to deepen economic ties between our two countries."
- Mr. Modi spoke to his New Zealand counterpart Christopher Luxon over the phone before the two leaders jointly announced the conclusion of the "historic, ambitious and mutually beneficial India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA)," said an official statement.
- "The FTA would significantly deepen bilateral economic engagement, enhance market access, promote investment flows, strengthen strategic cooperation between the two countries, and also open up new opportunities for innovators, entrepreneurs, farmers, MSMEs, students and youths of both countries across various sectors," the External Affairs Ministry said.
- The pact will help Indian exporters, reeling under the impact of 50% tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on Indian goods, diversify shipments in the Oceania region. India has already implemented a trade pact with Australia.
- The Minister said the agreement will provide a fillip to labour-intensive sectors such as apparel, leather, textiles, rubber, footwear and home decor. It will encourage export of automobiles, auto components, machinery, electronic goods and electrical and pharmaceuticals, he said.

- The temporary employment visas cover AYUSH practitioners, yoga instructors, Indian chefs, and music teachers, as well as high-demand sectors including IT, engineering, healthcare, education, and construction, strengthening workforce mobility and services trade.

### ❖ **Forests can't be used for non-forestry purposes: SC**

**Context: Bench upholds appeal filed by Karnataka government against Gandhi Jeevan Collective Farming Cooperative Society, which wanted extension of lease on 134 acres of forest.**

- The Supreme Court has held in a recent judgment that forest lands cannot be used for non-forestry purposes, including agriculture.
- “This court in a catena of decisions has passed numerous mandatory directions prohibiting de-reservation of forest. Granting permission to cultivate the forest land would essentially require clearing of forest and such a course of action is in the teeth of Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 which precludes de-reservation or use of forest land for non-forestry purposes without prior approval of the Central government,” the Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta observed.
- The court upheld an appeal filed by the Karnataka government against Gandhi Jeevan Collective Farming Cooperative Society, which wanted an extension of the lease on 134 acres of forest, which had been illegally granted to them for cultivation.
- The judgment, authored by Justice Sandeep Mehta, directed the State to instead repopulate the forest with indigenous trees. “The cooperative society, having enjoyed cultivatory possession over the forest area for a period of more than 10 years, was not entitled for any further extension of the lease which was in the first place illegally granted. As per the extant statutes, forest lands could not be allowed to be used for non-forestry purposes, which would include agriculture,” the court clarified the law.
- The Karnataka government had specifically mentioned in its affidavit that the lands fell under the category of “forest” and were in the ownership and possession of the State Forest Department.
- The Bench further reminded that a 2000 judgment had held that de-reservation of forest or sanctuaries or national parks could not be made without the permission of the Supreme Court.

### ❖ **NITI Aayog proposes \$10-bn research fund, scholarships to ‘globalise’ higher education**

**Context: Vishwa Bandhu scholarships and fellowships to attract foreign students and faculty, and easing regulation frameworks to enable more international campuses in India are among the policy recommendations made by the NITI Aayog as part of a road map for the “internationalisation” of higher education in India. The public policy think tank has also proposed setting up an Erasmus+-like programme, updated curricula, and expanding the criteria of the NIRF rankings to achieve goals set out in the National Education Policy, 2020.**

- The NITI Aayog released a report titled “Internationalisation of higher education in India: prospects, potential, and policy recommendations”, which recommended 22 such policy interventions in order to deal with the “imbalance between inbound and outbound student mobility”. The study, conducted over the past year, noted that in

2024, for every international student who came to India to study, 28 Indian students went abroad for higher education.

- This report comes a week after the Union government introduced the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, to overhaul India's higher education regulatory framework, under which the proposed Standards Council (Manak Parishad) has been given a specific mandate to design "non-binding frameworks" for the "internationalisation" of higher education in the country.
- The NITI Aayog report has made a host of recommendations in the areas of strategy, regulation, branding, communications, and outreach, and curriculum and culture.

### **Hub for education**

- Noting that India "requires an increase in the inflow of international students" to become a "global destination" for higher education and research, the report also uses different forecasting methods to estimate that by 2047, India could have as many as 7.89 lakh to 11 lakh international students. As of 2022, India was hosting close to 47,000 international students in its higher education institutions.
- Some of the recommendations for internationalisation made in the NITI Aayog report are setting up a Bharat Vidya Kosh as a national research sovereign wealth fund (suggesting a \$10 billion corpus, of which 50% can be raised from diaspora and philanthropy while the Centre matches this amount with another 50%); a Vishwa Bandhu scholarship to attract foreign students; and a Vishwa Bandhu fellowship to attract foreign research talent and faculty.

### **❖ Plan to demarcate mining areas in Aravallis under way**

**Context: The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) will in the coming days prepare a district-wise report on which hills meet the criteria to be considered part of the Aravalli Range, but strictly for the purposes of mining, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said at a press briefing.**

- Under fire from environmental activists and a social media storm alleging that vast tracts of the Aravalli Range may be opened for mining, Mr. Yadav stressed that no new mining licences would be awarded. In line with a Supreme Court order of November 20, a detailed Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM) covering the entire Aravalli Range would be prepared by the ICFRE, he added.
- The plan must demarcate areas where mining must be absolutely prohibited, identify zones where limited and highly regulated mining may be permitted, map sensitive habitats and wildlife corridors, evaluate cumulative ecological impacts, determine ecological carrying capacity, and articulate restoration and rehabilitation measures, according to the Supreme Court order.
- Though the issue of deforestation, mining and associated stone quarrying has been an environmental issue in the courts for years, a uniform definition of what constituted the Aravalli Range of hills, applicable across all the States and Union Territories where the Aravalli Range is found, remained elusive. A committee of experts, consisting of representatives of the Union Environment Ministry, recommended that all States agree to adopt the aforementioned uniform criterion of "100 metres above local relief" for regulating mining in the Aravalli region, as had been in force in Rajasthan since January 9, 2006.

## ❖ Anjadip, indigenous anti-submarine shallow water craft, joins the Navy

**Context: The Indian Navy received Anjadip, the third of eight anti-submarine warfare shallow water craft (ASW SWC), indigenously designed and built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata.**

- The delivery took place in Chennai, marking another significant step in India's drive towards self-reliance in defence shipbuilding.
- The Navy said that the ASW SWC project was being executed under a public-private partnership between the GRSE and the L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli. The vessels had been designed and constructed in accordance with the classification rules of the Indian Register of Shipping (IRS), demonstrating the success of collaborative defence manufacturing in India.
- At approximately 77 metres in length, the ASW SWCs are the largest Indian naval warships to be propelled by waterjets. They are equipped with state-of-the-art lightweight torpedoes, indigenously developed anti-submarine rockets and shallow-water sonar, enabling effective detection and engagement of underwater threats. These platforms will significantly enhance the Navy's anti-submarine warfare capability, coastal surveillance and mine-laying operations, the Navy added.
- Anjadip is named after Anjadip Island off the coast of Karwar in Karnataka and is a reincarnation of the erstwhile INS Anjadip, a Petya-class corvette that was decommissioned in 2003.
- The naming underscores India's commitment to safeguarding its extensive maritime domain.
- With this delivery, the GRSE has achieved the rare feat of delivering five warships to the Navy in a single year. Anjadip is the 115th warship built by the shipyard and the 77th delivered to the Navy. The vessel was accepted by Rear Admiral Gautam Marwaha, VSM, Chief Staff Officer (Technical), Eastern Naval Command.
- Fitted with an indigenous 30-mm naval surface gun and boasting over 80% indigenous content, Anjadip exemplifies the government's Aatmanirbhar Bharat vision and the growing strength of India's domestic defence manufacturing ecosystem, the Navy said.



Navy personnel and officials take delivery of Anjadip, an anti-submarine warfare shallow water craft, in Chennai. PTI

## ❖ 'New series of retail inflation, GDP data from Feb. next year'

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation said that it will release a new series of macroeconomic data with a changed base year for retail inflation as well as national accounts in February and for industrial production in May next year.
- The ministry has convened a pre-release consultative workshop on the base revision of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Consumer Price Index (CPI), and Index of Industrial Production (IIP) on Tuesday.pti

## ❖ India's core sector grows at 1.8% in Nov.

**Context: Cement, steel, fertiliser and coal in positive territory; production of crude oil records contraction of 3.2%; natural gas output falls by 2.5%.**

- The combined Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) increased by 1.8% in November compared with the same period last year, data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- Production of cement, steel, fertiliser and coal recorded positive growth in November 2025, it said.
- Coal production rose by 2.1% in November. However, on a cumulative basis, coal output declined by 1.4% during the April-November 2025-26 period.
- Crude oil production recorded a contraction of 3.2% in November compared with the year earlier.
- The cumulative crude oil index has declined by 1.3% in the current financial year so far.
- Natural gas output fell by 2.5% year-on-year in November 2025, continuing its downward trend. Cumulatively, natural gas production declined by 3% during April-November 2025-26. Petroleum refinery products, the largest component of the core industries index, saw a decline of 0.9% in November.
- Despite a monthly decline, refinery output posted marginal cumulative growth of 0.2% during the period under review.
- Fertiliser production registered a strong growth of 5.6% in November 2025.
- On a cumulative basis, fertiliser output increased by 1.3% during April-November 2025-26. Steel production rose by 6.1% in November, reflecting robust performance in the sector. The cumulative steel index recorded a strong growth of 9.7% during the April-November 2025-26 period.
- Cement emerged as the best-performing segment, recording the highest year-on-year growth of 14.5%.

## ❖ Biofabri, Bharat Biotech ink pact for TB vaccine

**Context: Human vaccine development company Biofabri, which is a part of Spain's Zental group, and Hyderabad-based vaccine maker Bharat Biotech International (BBIL) on Monday announced the signing of a technology transfer agreement for tuberculosis vaccine candidate MTBVAC.**

- The agreement follows the signing of a licensing agreement in 2022 and reinforces their partnership, the companies said.
- The technology transfer process has already begun to ensure BBIL's manufacturing readiness by the time of MTBVAC licensure in India, they said in a joint release.

## ❖ India pledges \$450 million to aid Sri Lanka's recovery

**Context: India announced a \$450-million “reconstruction package” for Sri Lanka to help the island nation recover from the devastating impact of Cyclone Ditwah, which claimed at least 643 lives and displaced scores of people.**

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who is in Colombo as special envoy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, made the announcement, shortly after he called on President Anura Kumara Dissanayake.
- Posting on social media platform X, the Sri Lankan leader described India's gesture as “a new chapter” in India–Sri Lanka relations and said he conveyed Sri Lanka's “deep gratitude” to Prime Minister Modi and the Government of India for their “swift, compassionate support”.
- India's post-cyclone reconstruction package includes \$350 million worth of “concessional Lines of Credit” and \$100 million in grants, targeting sectors most affected in the climate shock incident that ripped through the island in late November.
- Even as Cyclone Ditwah made landfall on November 28, 2025, India swiftly mobilised its military personnel and resources — who were active for over two weeks on the island — to support Sri Lankan authorities in rescue operations, including in remote, inundated areas.
- The Indian High Commissioner was summoned following a series of incidents that started with reports claiming that the main plotters in the murder of Hadi had escaped to India. The protests also focused on Bangladesh citizen Dipu Chandra Das who was lynched and burnt in a public square last Thursday. This triggered mobs to target the Indian High Commission in Dhaka and other Indian missions in Bangladesh. Responding to the security situation, India stopped work at all the Indian Visa Application Centres, but sources said the centres have since restarted work.
- Bangladesh stopped visa facilities at the High Commission here starting Monday and shut “all visa and consular” services in the Assistant High Commission of Bangladesh in Agartala. Protests took place outside the Bangladesh visa processing centre in Siliguri.
- In Mumbai, around 50 activists of the VHP and Bajrang Dal gathered outside the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission holding saffron flags and ‘save Hindus’ placards.
- The protests in Kolkata, organised under the banner of ‘Bongiyo Hindu Jagaran’, turned violent after the protesters tried to breach the barricades and police used force to prevent them. Several persons were injured in the police action, the protesters claimed.
- In a message, chief adviser of the administration Mohammad Yunus said the killing of Das was a “heinous criminal act with no justification and no place in Bangladeshi society” and extended financial support to his family.

## ❖ Maternal mortality dropped as institutional deliveries rose to 89%, says Health Minister

**Context: Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda said that the country's institutional delivery rate had gone up to 89%, leading to a significant reduction in the maternal mortality rate (MMR) during childbirth.**

- Mr. Nadda, who is also the national president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), made the statement after laying the foundation stone for a medical college in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district. He laid foundation for another medical college in Betul district. The two colleges will be operated on a public-private partnership (PPP) model.
- "The rate of institutional deliveries in the country has increased to 89%, which led to a significant reduction in the MMR. The Narendra Modi government is striving through its healthcare services to ensure that citizens remain healthy and do not fall ill in the first place," Mr. Nadda said.
- He said the two medical colleges would also be the first of its kind in the country that would function through the PPP model.
- "The establishment of the medical college would provide better healthcare services to the people of Betul and the surrounding tribal areas," he said.
- "Until the end of the 20th century, there was only one All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi. Now there are 23. In 2014, there were 387 medical colleges. Today, there are 819 medical colleges. Including those in Dhar and Betul, the number of medical colleges has reached 821," the Health Minister said.
- The medical colleges in Dhar and Betul are going to be constructed at an estimated cost of ₹260 crore and ₹300 crore respectively, as per a State government statement.
- The State currently has 33 medical colleges, including 19 government institutions.

#### ❖ Jnanpith Award winner Vinod Kumar Shukla passes away'

**Context: Renowned Hindi poet and author, and the 2024 Jnanpith Award winner, Vinod Kumar Shukla, died in Raipur. He was 88.**

- Mr. Shukla had been undergoing treatment for age-related ailments at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Raipur, since December 2.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed sadness over the death of the writer. "He will always be remembered for his invaluable contribution to the Hindi literary world," Mr. Modi said in a post on X.
- Mr. Shukla was born in 1937 in Chhattisgarh's Rajnandgaon. His journey as a writer began in 1971, when his first poetry collection Lagbhag Jaihind was published. Over the years, he penned several poetry collections, including Kavita Se Lambi Kavita.
- His novels, including Dewar Mein Ek Khidki Rehti Thi and Naukar Ki Kameez, are also well-acclaimed, with the latter even being made into a film.
- Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh Vishnu Deo Sai, in a post on X, expressed heartfelt condolences to his family, readers, and fans.

#### ❖ RBI announces fresh measures to inject ₹2.90 lakh cr. liquidity

**Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday announced to conduct Open Market Operation (OMO) purchase auctions of Government of India securities for an aggregate amount of ₹2,00,000 crore (\$22.34 billion) and dollar rupee swap auction of \$10 billion for a tenor of three years to inject liquidity into the banking system.**

- While the government securities purchases will be conducted in four tranches of ₹50,000 crore each to be held on December 29, 2025, January 5, 2026, January 12, 2026, and January 22, 2026, the dollar rupee swap auction will be held on January 13, 2026, the RBI said.
- According to analysts, these fresh measures, besides infusing rupee liquidity into the banking system, would take away excess dollar liquidity which is believed to have inflated dollar rupee forward premium. Also, this measure is expected to provide a breather to the depleting dollar reserves.
- As per RBI data, it had sold a net of \$11.88 billion in the inter-bank forex market in October 2025 to arrest rupee fall.

IAS/KAS Academy

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## ❖ States told to 'enforce' SC's Aravalli orders

**Context: Amid criticism from environmental activists and allegations that vast tracts of the Aravalli ranges could be opened for mining, the Union Environment Ministry on Wednesday issued orders to the Chief Secretaries of Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat to enforce the Supreme Court's direction preventing the granting of new mining leases across the region till a management plan is finalised.**

- Existing mines with permissions will be allowed, provided they “strictly” comply with norms.
- A letter has also been sent to the Director-General of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), an expert body affiliated to the Environment Ministry, directing it to prepare a Management Plan for Sustainable Mining that should identify “permissible areas for mining” as well as those that are “ecologically sensitive, conservation-critical, and restoration-priority areas within the landscape where mining would be permitted only under exceptional circumstances.” No deadline has been specified to complete the exercise.
- The letters issued on Wednesday align with Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav's recent emphasis on protecting the region.
- A press release from the Environment Ministry stated that the ICFRE exercise would “enlarge the coverage of areas protected and prohibited from mining.”
- Although mining, along with stone quarrying and deforestation in the Aravalis, has been an environmental concern in the courts for years, a uniform definition of the Aravali range applicable across all States and Union Territories remained elusive. A committee of experts, including representatives of the Union Environment Ministry, recommended that all States agree to adopt the uniform criterion of “100 metres above local relief” for regulating mining in the Aravalli region, a standard that has been in force in Rajasthan since January 9, 2006.

## ❖ ISRO sends to low earth orbit largest commercial communications satellite

**Context: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) placed the BlueBird Block-2 satellite in a low earth orbit (LEO).**

- The Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM3) lifted off from the second launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota at 8.55 a.m., and 15 minutes later, placed the satellite in the intended orbit.
- The ISRO accomplished two milestones with this mission as it was able to deploy the largest commercial communications satellite in a low earth orbit, and the BlueBird Block-2 satellite, weighing 6,100 kg, became the heaviest payload to be launched by LVM3 from Indian soil.
- “LVM3 Bahubali rocket M6 launch vehicle has successfully and precisely injected the BlueBird Block-2 communication satellite in the intended orbit. This is the first dedicated commercial launch for a customer from the U.S.,” ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan said. The BlueBird Block-2 communication satellite, developed by AST SpaceMobile in the U.S., is part of the next generation of communication satellites, designed to provide space-based cellular broadband connectivity directly to standard mobile smartphones.

- “I am extremely happy to announce the performance of the orbit that we have got is less than two kilometres. This is one of the best performances of any launch vehicle in the global arena,” Dr. Narayanan said.
- Its success demonstrated the reliability of India’s space programme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said. “Powered by India’s youth, our space programme is getting more advanced and impactful. With LVM3 demonstrating reliable heavy-lift performance, we are strengthening the foundations for future missions such as Gaganyaan, expanding commercial launch services and deepening global partnerships. This increased capability and boost to self-reliance are wonderful for the coming generations,” Mr. Modi posted on X.
- “BlueBird block-2 mission is part of a global LEO constellation to provide direct-to-mobile connectivity through satellite. This constellation will enable 4G and 5G voice and video calls, texts, streaming, and data for everyone, everywhere, at all times. It features a 223m<sup>2</sup> phased array, making it the largest commercial communications satellite ever deployed into low Earth orbit,” the ISRO said.

### ❖ **Telangana likely to get five more GI tags soon**

**Context: Telangana is stepping up efforts to safeguard its traditional crafts and region-specific products by securing Geographical Indication (GI) tags.**

- It has already filed applications for several items, and five of them — Narayanpet jewellery making, Hyderabad pearls, Banjara tribal jewellery, Banjara needle craft, and Batik paintings — are in the final stages of approval.
- Comprehensive documentation and field studies for these products have been completed, according to official sources.
- In addition, applications are pending for Armoor turmeric, Nalgonda chitti dosakai, Kollapur Benishan mango, Mahadevpur tussar silk, Jagtial sesame, and Nayakpod masks, signalling the government’s commitment to expanding the GI portfolio. Over the past two years, the Congress-led government has successfully secured two GI tags: Hyderabad lac nangles (2024) and Warangal chapata chilli (2025).



**Eloquent sheen:** Craftspersons in Telangana are skilled at sorting and stringing the famed Hyderabad pearls. FILE PHOTO

### **Crucial role**

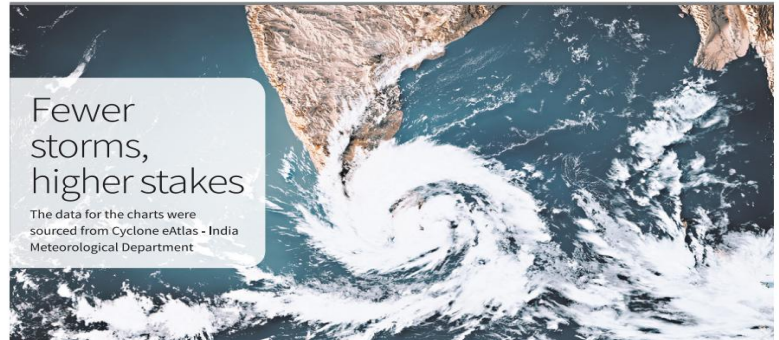
- The GI recognition, granted by the Geographical Indication Registry under the Centre, enhances the value and authenticity of products by highlighting their unique origin and heritage. These tags play a crucial role in creating sustainable employment, boosting rural incomes, and preserving traditional knowledge systems — contributing to inclusive economic growth among farming and artisan communities.
- Currently, Telangana has 18 GI-tagged products, including Pochampally Ikat, Adilabad dokra, Warangal durries, Puttapaka telia rumal, Tandur red gram, Gadwal sari, Siddipet gollabama, Cherial painting, and Hyderabad haleem.
- At least 12 more products are in the pipeline for recognition.
- Looking ahead, the State government plans to identify additional GI-worthy products across food, handicrafts, textiles, and other categories.

- It also intends to set up GI galleries at key locations to showcase GI products and promote them as authentic sourcing destinations.

## ❖ Four trends redefining the North Indian Ocean's storm cycle

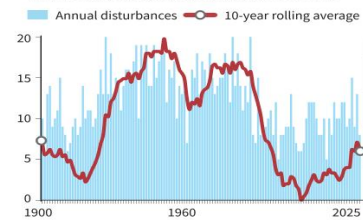
**Context: While the number of total disturbances has decreased, storms are becoming more severe and arriving later in the year.**

- The cyclonic disturbances over the North Indian Ocean, which include the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the land area in between, have changed drastically over the last century.

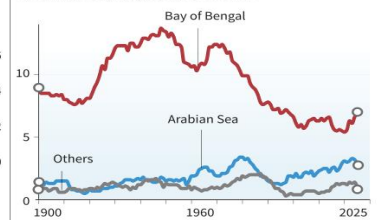


- Broadly, there are four major trends. First, the frequency of cyclonic disturbances has shifted significantly. Chart 1 plots annual disturbances (left axis) alongside a 10-year rolling average (right axis) from 1900 to 2025. While annual figures are often volatile, the 10-year rolling average smooths out this “noise”, making it easier to identify whether the long-term trend is actually rising or falling.

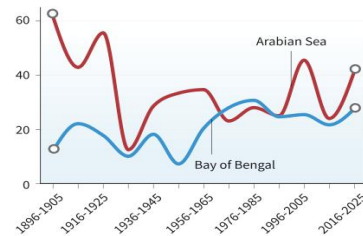
**CHART 1:** The annual disturbances (left axis) alongside a 10-year rolling average (right axis) from 1900 to 2025



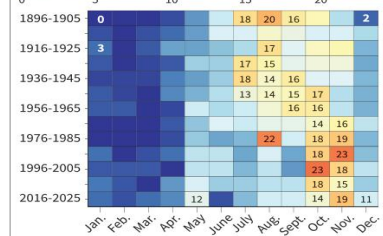
**CHART 2:** The 10-year rolling average of cyclonic disturbances by origin from 1900 to 2025



**CHART 3:** The share (in %) of disturbances that intensified into severe cyclonic storms or higher, across different decades



**CHART 4:** The share (%) of disturbances by their month of origin across different decades. Each row adds up to 100%



- The chart reveals a distinct inverted U-shaped trend in the past century. Between 1900 and 1920, the 10-year rolling average of cyclonic disturbances remained below 10. This figure surged to over 15 by the 1930s, initiating a period of relative stability that lasted through the 1970s. However, the 1980s and 1990s saw a sharp decline, culminating in a new low in the 2000s when the average dropped to eight. While activity rebounded in the 2010s and continues to climb in the 2020s, current levels remain significantly lower than the mid-century peaks.

- Second, the overall decline in disturbances in recent years is driven almost entirely by a sharp drop in activity within the Bay of Bengal. Chart 2 breaks down the 10-year rolling average of cyclonic disturbances by origin: the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and inland/other areas. While the Bay remains the primary cradle for disturbances in the North Indian Ocean, its output has dwindled significantly, dragging down the total as seen in Chart 1. Conversely, the Arabian Sea has seen a marked increase in activity, though its frequency remains lower than that of the Bay even in recent years.

- Third, while the number of disturbances has decreased, their severity has intensified. Typically, a disturbance begins as a low-pressure area (winds <31 kmph) and can intensify into a depression (31–49 kmph) or a deep depression (50-61 kmph). Beyond this point, they are classified as cyclonic storms (62-88 kmph) or severe cyclonic storms

(89-117 kmph). The most destructive stages follow: very severe (118-166 kmph), extremely severe (167-221 kmph), and super cyclonic storms ( $\geq 222$  kmph).

- Chart 3 illustrates the percentage of disturbances that intensify into severe cyclonic storms or higher. In the Bay of Bengal, the share of these storms has risen notably since the 1970s. Interestingly, disturbances originating in the Arabian Sea are historically more likely to reach these severe levels than those in the Bay. Given the increasing frequency of disturbances in the Arabian Sea (as noted in Chart 2), this higher rate of intensification marks a critical shift in the region's risk profile.
- Generally, warmer oceans provide more energy to tropical storms, making cyclones stronger and their paths harder to predict. Data show that the Arabian Sea is heating up more than average, leading to more intense, tougher-to-predict cyclones.
- Fourth, there has been a significant shift in the seasonality of these storms. In the Bay of Bengal, disturbances are increasingly originating in the final quarter of the year (October–December) rather than in the July–September window. Chart 4 illustrates this shift, plotting the percentage share of disturbances by their month of origin across different decades. Prior to the 1980s, activity was concentrated between July and September (indicated by the higher density of red squares). Since then, the focus has shifted to the final quarter of the year (red square density shifting to October to November).

#### ❖ 'China using LAC disengagement to reset India ties, curb U.S. alignment'

**Context: China is attempting to leverage the disengagement from remaining stand-off sites along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to ease tensions and stabilise its relationship with India, a U.S. Department of War report.**

- The report further notes that China has likely explored potential options for bases in several countries, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and other regions, underscoring its growing strategic reach.
- The October 2024 agreement, the report notes, may be part of a broader Chinese strategy to prevent deeper strategic alignment between New Delhi and Washington.
- China's expanding military footprint in South Asia has also drawn attention. According to the report, Beijing has delivered 36 J-10C fighter aircraft to Pakistan in two separate orders over the past five years, along with four frigates.
- It further reads that the announcement by the Indian leadership came just two days before a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS summit, signalling a calibrated diplomatic thaw after years of military and political strain.
- The Xi-Modi interaction marked the beginning of monthly high-level engagements between the two countries. These discussions have focused on border management mechanisms, and explored steps to stabilise broader bilateral ties.
- China is likely attempting to leverage the reduction in tensions along LAC to stabilise relations with India and prevent further deepening of U.S.-India strategic ties, the report states.
- However, India is believed to remain cautious, viewing Beijing's overtures through the lens of past actions and unresolved disputes. Persistent mutual distrust and multiple strategic irritants are expected to continue constraining the relationship.

## ❖ NHAH backed InvIT gets SEBI nod

**Context:** The National Highway Authority of India (NHAH) sponsored Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust received approval from the SEBI as an Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) to enable monetisation of road assets through retail and domestic investors.

- The initiative marks a crucial step in broadening public participation in the National Highway infrastructure growth story, as per a statement issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- Last month, NHAH incorporated Raajmarg Infra Investment Managers Pvt. Ltd. (RIIMPL) as the Investment Manager for the Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust (RIIT).
- RIIMPL is a collaborative venture with equity participation from leading banks and financial institutions, including the State Bank of India. Member (Finance), NHAH, NRVVMK Rajendra Kumar will be the MD and CEO (additional charge) of the investment manager company.

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## ❖ Intel grid linked to NPR with details of 119 crore residents

**Context: The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), a secure platform for the police and other investigating agencies to access government and private databases in real-time, has been linked to the National Population Register (NPR), which has the family-wise details of 119 crore residents in India, government officials have said.**

- The Union Home Ministry has been pushing for the enhanced use of NATGRID by the State police forces and Central law and security agencies for intelligence gathering and speedy investigation of criminal cases through indigenous and secure platforms.
- On December 9, the Ministry informed the Lok Sabha that an Organised Crime Network Database was being developed on NATGRID's IT platform to facilitate secure data-sharing between the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the State Anti-Terror Squads (ATS). The reply said that upgraded NATGRID tools, particularly "Gandiva", are supporting multi-source data collection and analysis.
- NATGRID is, on an average, getting nearly 45,000 requests a month.
- The platform, accessible only to security agencies, became operational last year after being conceptualised in 2009 in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.
- The data for NPR, which stores information family wise, were first collected in 2010 with the first phase of the 2011 Census and was last updated in 2015 through door-to-door enumeration. It was to be updated further during the 2021 Census, which has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- When the Union Cabinet approved the proposal for conducting Census 2027 at a cost of ₹11,718 crore, there was no separate allocation for the NPR. Earlier on July 29, the government informed the Lok Sabha that no decision had been taken to update the NPR during the forthcoming Census exercise.
- The NPR is the first step for the creation of a countrywide National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- Elaborating about "Gandiva", a State police official said the details of all family members of a suspect or a person of interest if available in NPR could be accessed through the platform. Gandiva can be used for facial recognition and entity resolution.
- "If the image of a suspect is available, it can be fed into Gandiva. If any photo identity document such as telecom KYC or vehicle registration or driving licence matches with the photo, Gandiva can provide the details, thereby saving time and resources of an investigator," said the official.

## ❖ Army relaxes social media policy, allows 'passive participation'

**Context: After years of stringent restrictions on social media use, the Indian Army has revised its policy to allow "passive participation" by its personnel on select platforms, while maintaining strict safeguards to protect operational security.**

- According to an Army Headquarters order accessed by, personnel are now permitted to access platforms such as Instagram and X solely for viewing and monitoring content.
- Any form of active engagement, including posting, commenting, sharing, reacting or sending messages, remains strictly prohibited.
- The revised guidelines, issued by the Army Headquarters through the Directorate General of Military Intelligence (DGMI), have come into effect immediately.

- As part of the update, Instagram has been formally included in the list of restricted-use social media platforms.
- The policy allows access to applications such as Instagram only for “purposes of viewing and monitoring”. “No comments or views will be communicated on Instagram,” the order stated, reiterating the Army’s emphasis on protecting sensitive information.
- The guidelines further permit limited use of communication platforms such as Skype, Telegram, WhatsApp and Signal, but only for the exchange of unclassified information of a general nature. Such communication is allowed exclusively with known individuals, with the responsibility of verifying the recipient resting entirely with the user.
- For platforms including YouTube, X, Quora and Instagram, only passive use to access information or gain knowledge has been authorised. Uploading user-generated content or engaging in any form of active participation remains prohibited. LinkedIn may be used only for professional purposes such as uploading résumés or seeking information related to prospective employers or employees.
- The revised policy also advises personnel to avoid generic websites, portals offering cracked or pirated software, free movie platforms, torrent and VPN services, web proxies, anonymised websites, chat rooms and file-sharing platforms. It further cautions that cloud-based data storage services should be used only with extreme care.
- In July 2020, amid heightened security concerns, the Indian Army had directed all officers and soldiers to delete their Facebook and Instagram accounts, along with 89 mobile applications, warning of strict action for non-compliance. The banned list included 59 applications with links to China, which were also prohibited by the Union government at the time.

### ❖ Constitution of India released in Santhali language

**Context: Constitution of India in the Santhali language. The Santhali language is spoken by a significant number of tribal people in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, and Bihar.**

- The President said it is a matter of pride for all the Santhali people that the Constitution of India is now available in their language, written in the Ol Chiki script. It will enable them to understand the Constitution in their own language, she added. Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan and Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal were present on the occasion.

### ❖ FSSAI bars food firms from terming herbal infusions ‘tea’

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has issued a stern warning to food business operators against using the word ‘tea’ for herbal infusions and plant-based blends not derived from *Camellia sinensis*, terming it a case of misbranding and misleading practices under the law.
- The directive comes after the regulator found several food business operators (FBOs) marketing products, such as ‘herbal tea’ and ‘flower tea’, none of which are obtained from the *Camellia sinensis* plant. According to FSSAI regulations, the term ‘tea’ can only be used on packaging and labelling if the beverage is derived from *Camellia sinensis*.

**Context: India faces a lower risk of AI-driven disruption to cognitive jobs compared to Western economies, IT Secretary S. Krishnan has said, citing the country's relatively lower proportion of white-collar roles in the overall workforce and highlighted that the dominance of STEM-based employment can yield newer opportunities.**

- He said AI's (Artificial Intelligence) real impact will come from building and deploying sector and use-specific applications, a process requiring large numbers of trained professionals. He added this is where India's strength lies and where new AI-driven job opportunities will emerge.
- "... For India, where the number of white-collar jobs relative to other jobs is much lower than in the West, this risk to cognitive jobs, I don't think, is as serious as it is in other places," he said in an interview.

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy

## ❖ Govt. raises H-1B interview cancellation issue with U.S.

**Context: India said it had expressed its concern to the U.S. over the mass cancellation of scheduled H-1B visa interviews of Indian applicants and that it was “actively engaged with the U.S. side to minimise disruptions caused to our nationals”.**

- The interviews of thousands of H-1B visa applicants scheduled in the middle of December have been abruptly postponed by several months to scrutinise their social media posts and online profiles. Some of the applicants received mails from U.S. immigration authorities informing them that their interviews are being pushed back to May.
- The government has received several representations from Indian nationals who are facing problems with rescheduling of visa appointments, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.
- Visa-related issues pertain to the sovereign domain of any country, he said.
- “We have flagged these issues and our concerns to the U.S. side, both here in New Delhi and in Washington, DC,” he said.
- “The Government of India remains actively engaged with the U.S. side to minimise the disruptions caused to our nationals,” Mr. Jaiswal said.
- The cancellation of scheduled interviews of the H-1B visa applicants in view of the enhanced vetting measures has resulted in significant delays in their return to the U.S. The rescheduling of the interviews is for all applicants who were previously given appointments from December 15.
- Most applicants were already in India and are now unable to return to the U.S. since they do not have a valid H-1B visa.

## ❖ Finally, SEP for State, but yet to be implemented

**Context: The SEP-2025 has made several recommendations like discarding the three-language formula and adopting a two-language formula instead.**

- The year 2025 will be remembered as the year Karnataka adopted its own State Education Policy (SEP), rejecting the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020. This was a poll promise of the Congress party in 2023.
- The State government formed a committee under former University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Sukhdeo Thorat in October, 2023 to formulate an SEP, and the report was expected within five months. But after several extensions, the SEP report was finally submitted in August, 2025.

Mother tongue

- The SEP-2025 has made several recommendations like discarding the three-language formula and adopting a two-language formula instead. It has also recommended Kannada/mother tongue as the medium of instruction in primary education sector,

extending Right to Education till 18 years of age of the students, implementing reservation matrix in even private education institutes, among others.

- However, the SEP hasn't been implemented yet and it is hoped that it will be implemented from the academic year 2026-27. While the Higher Education Department has formed an experts committee to implement the SEP Commission's recommendations pertaining to higher education, not even such an exercise has been initiated for school education yet. Meanwhile, the State government's decision on KPS Magnet Schools turned controversial this year. The government has announced that it would develop 900 Karnataka Public School (KPS) magnet schools, which will have classes from preprimary to II PUC, across the State and of them 509 will be developed in 2025-27, using an Asian Development Bank loan.
- Each school will get a grant of ₹2 crore to ₹4 crore. These schools identified in each cluster using a scoring method based on grade coverage, enrolment, location and infrastructure, aim to have 1,200 students, with school van facility.
- However, what turned controversial was the decision to merge small government schools within a radius of 1 to 5 km and transfer all their teachers to KPS schools. As a pilot project, the government has already issued an order to merge seven schools in the vicinity with the KPS magnet school in Honganuru village of Channapatna taluk of Bengaluru South district. In addition, about 25,000 small schools are expected to be merged with the KPS schools across the State.
- This was being opposed tooth and nail by educationists, activists, parents and student organisations.

## Boost to education

■ The State government is to implement State Education Policy (SEP) in the year 2026-27

■ The government has announced to fill the vacant posts in Public Universities and Higher Education Department across the State

■ Steps have been taken to fill about 18,000 posts of government school teachers and Pre-University lecturers in the Department of School Education and Literacy



■ Foreign universities that have already signed agreements, including Imperial College of London, Lancaster University, and others, are expected to start from the year 2026-27

■ This year, about 1,400 additional medical seats have been made

available to the State from the National Medical Commission (NMC), and more additional seats are likely to be sanctioned next year

■ The government has given administrative approval for the opening of government medical colleges in Kanakapura and Ramanagara, and permission is expected from the NMC to start the colleges for the year 2025-2026

### Pre-primary schools

- In a similar vein, the State government is starting Early Child Care Education (ECCE – Pre-primary of LKG and UKG) in a total of 4,056 government schools across the State in the year 2025-26. Classes are expected to start in these schools in the academic year 2026-27.
- Lack of pre-primary classes in government schools is said to be one of the key reasons why parents send their children to private schools.
- Of these, the government has given permission to the Commissioner of Public Instruction to start pre-primary classes in 1,105 schools under the Samagra Shiksha Karnataka scheme, 126 PM Shri schools, 1,126 schools under the 'Kalyana Karnataka Region Development Board (KKRDB), and 1,699 KPS Magnet schools.

## First Foreign University

- Meanwhile, the University of Liverpool from United Kingdom (U.K.), became the first foreign university to start its campus in Karnataka. They started their campus in Bengaluru.
- Imperial College of London and Lancaster University, both from the U.K., have already signed an agreement with the Karnataka government to set up their campuses in Bengaluru.

## ❖ Centre failed to define Aravalli hills despite over a year's effort

**Context: The Centre could not decide on uniform technical criteria to define the range; SC's threat of contempt proceedings against committee members prodded them into submitting a definition that only protects hills above 100 m from mining activities.**

- The assignment was to define the Aravallis, an ancient range of weathered hills rambling across four States, from the outskirts of Delhi to Gujarat. Despite three committees labouring over the task for over a year, armed with satellite imagery and expertise from multiple institutions, the Centre could not decide on uniform technical criteria to define the range.
- It was only after the Supreme Court warned of initiating contempt proceedings against officials of the Environment Ministry that a new sub-committee was formed in August 2025, which then gave up trying to define the Aravallis and focused instead on evolving a definition that would “balance” ecological consideration and the Centre’s 2019 National Mineral Policy that encourages mining of critical minerals for the “nation’s economic growth”, according to a 2,000-page affidavit by the Ministry, submitted to the Supreme Court, which was perused by The Hindu.
- The definition of the Aravalli range has sparked an environmental and political firestorm over the last week, with charges that the government’s final definition only protects hills higher than 100 metres from mining.
- That leaves the remaining hills — which make up the vast majority of the 700-km range spanning from Haryana to Gujarat, with the bulk of it in Rajasthan — open to the dangers of mining and degradation.
- Under fire from environmental activists and fighting a social media storm which alleged that vast tracts of the Aravalli ranges may be opened for mining, Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav has stressed that no new mining licences would be awarded until a detailed Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM) covering the entire Aravalli range is prepared by the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, in line with the Supreme Court’s order on November 20.

## Uniform definition

- It was illegal mining, the hacking of the slopes of several hills, that triggered petitions in the past decades, and led to judicial intervention in the first place.
- To help decide on a uniform definition for the Aravalli hills, the Supreme Court constituted a committee in 2024, comprising representatives from the Environment Ministry, the Forest Survey of India (FSI), State Forest Departments, the Geological

Survey of India and the Central Empowered Committee of the SC. This Committee was tasked with creating a scientifically grounded, nationwide definition of the Aravallis.

- Perusal of the committee's documents showed that while the Forest Survey of India in 2010 had a criterion for defining the Aravalli hills in Rajasthan, based on the slope — and importantly, not on the height — the committee was quite concerned that areas that were “not Aravalli” not be included.
- “It is again reiterated that using only elevation and slope as criteria to demarcate the boundary of the Aravalli Hills and Ranges may lead to inclusion errors, as a significant part of Hilly area fall within the identified districts is non-Aravalli,” the panel noted.
- The first scientific attempt to define the Aravallis — till then only recognised as a geographical entity — and delineate it from other hilly terrain in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Haryana came in 2010, when the Supreme Court asked the FSI to delineate the ranges in Rajasthan.
- Under this definition, which was specific to Rajasthan, the Aravalli hills were those that had a slope greater than 3 degrees.
- A technical sub-committee, chaired by the Director General of the FSI in 2024 started on an exercise to define the ‘hills’ for all of the Aravallis beyond Rajasthan.
- “The Survey of India (SoI) and the Forest Survey of India were not in agreement with the approach based solely on slope and local relief,” a report of the Committee noted. “Since the nature of Hills varies across different terrains, it may not be practical to apply uniform criteria of slope and relief across the entire region.”
- Despite six meetings from May 2025 to August 2025, these experts could not agree on a uniform definition.

### **‘Take a policy decision’**

- On August 12, 2025, the Supreme Court said that if “...recommendations were not submitted by the next date, the members of the Committee constituted in terms of our order dated 9th May, 2025, would be liable to be proceeded against for having committed Contempt of this Court...Basically, what is required to be done is to take a policy decision with regard to the definition of Aravali Hills and Ranges...we do not understand as to why a period of more than two months is required for arriving at a policy decision,” the order noted.
- It was following this that the Committee started to focus on getting a definition that would support sustainable mining.
- “...the Aravalli-Delhi system has been identified as having significant potential for critical minerals such as tin, graphite, molybdenum, niobium, nickel, lithium, and rare earth elements...In this context, the Committee was of the considered opinion that while the ecological integrity of the Aravalli Hills and Ranges must remain the foremost priority, it is equally necessary to evolve a framework that enables scientific and environmentally sustainable exploitation of critical atomic minerals. Such a balanced approach would ensure that strategic and developmental interests are not compromised,” the report noted.

**Context: Urban malaria, driven largely by the spread of the invasive vector *Anopheles stephensi* in metropolitan areas such as Delhi, has emerged as a national concern threatening India's goal of eliminating the mosquito-borne disease by 2030, according to the Health Ministry's recently released "Malaria elimination technical report, 2025".**

- The report said asymptomatic infections, difficult terrain, and population movement continued to drive transmission, while high-burden pockets persisted in the districts of Odisha, Tripura, and Mizoram. Cross-border transmission from Myanmar and Bangladesh continued to affect border districts in northeastern India.
- Besides the malaria elimination goal, the country has assigned itself an intermediate goal of achieving zero indigenous cases by 2027, aligning with the World Health Organization's global strategy.
- *Anopheles stephensi* is a mosquito species, now recognised as an invasive threat due to its ability to thrive in urban environments, that breed in artificial containers (tanks, tyres), and efficiently transmit the *Plasmodium falciparum* and *P. vivax* parasites, challenging current malaria control efforts worldwide. In India, urban transmission presents unique challenges related to container breeding, construction sites, informal settings, high population density and fragmented healthcare delivery, necessitating city-specific vector control and surveillance strategies.
- "Strengthening surveillance systems, enhancing vector monitoring and improving supply chain reliability emerged as the top priorities," the report noted.

### **High-burden pockets**

- While India has now largely entered the pre-elimination phase, malaria is no longer uniformly distributed across large geographical areas, the report said. Instead, the disease persists in limited pockets shaped by local ecological conditions, human mobility, occupational exposure, health-system access, and vector dynamics. The report added that active surveillance has been intensified in tribal and forest areas, border regions, and migratory population settings, where residual transmission risks remain high.

### **Drop in cases**

- India has reduced its malaria burden significantly over the past decade, and the number of cases has dropped from 11.7 lakh in 2015 to around 2.27 lakh in 2024, with deaths reducing by 78%. Key challenges that need urgent attention include inconsistent private-sector reporting, limited entomological capacity, drug and insecticide resistance, operational gaps in remote tribal areas, and sporadic shortages of diagnostics and treatment commodities.
- Operational research has emerged as a key enabler for elimination acceleration, the report said.

## ❖ UIDAI to expand full-service Aadhaar centres to 473 by September: CEO

**Context: The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) will increase the number of full-fledged Aadhaar enrolment and update centres for adults to 473 from the current 88 by September 2026, its CEO, Bhuvnesh Kumar.**

- While children can be enrolled for Aadhaar at post offices, adult enrollees have fewer places to go.
- Since adult applicants may have to travel past multiple districts to reach a centre, the expansion will help them, Mr. Kumar said. Such centres offer all modification and enrolment services. Some Aadhaar details can be updated online, but changes in biometrics and updating one's name after a certain limit require a visit to a centre.
- Mr. Kumar said the UIDAI wants to ensure that there is at least one centre in two districts.
- The number of adult enrollees is likely a small percentage of Indians (the precise share cannot be calculated due to the lack of a nationwide Census since 2011), but even a small percentage could translate to lakhs of people due to India's population. "We are working with Google and we will soon have Google locations for Aadhaar centres," Mr. Kumar said.

### **Field verification**

- Mr. Kumar said that due to concerns of illegal immigration, Aadhaar has been issued in recent months "only after field verification" by district administrations. Most adult applicants include non-resident Indians or overseas citizens of India, the latter being foreign nationals with ties to India either by marriage or parentage. Foreign nationals who live in India are permitted to have an Aadhaar as it is not a proof of citizenship.
- The UIDAI is working on the integrity of data by restricting changes in date of birth of Aadhaar holders. "If someone has two different dates of birth in two different documents, one is false," Mr. Kumar said. People who had to change the date of birth once will be allowed to do so after filing an affidavit admitting a clerical mistake but doing so twice will not be allowed, he said.
- Parents who falsified their children's date of birth during Aadhaar enrolment risk criminal action, Mr. Kumar said, referring to a case in which the Allahabad High Court ordered the filing of an FIR against a parent over irregularity surrounding a child's date of birth.

## ❖ Will Indians still ride gold wave in 2026?

**Context: Experts warn these returns may not sustain in the coming year as the run so far has been historical; Gold ETFs continue to log huge inflows.**

- Indian investors had a tumultuous year as the benchmark Nifty returns dipped to negative with overall market turnover hitting a low in December 2025. However, investor interest in gold exchange traded funds (ETFs) increased this year.
- Exchange Traded Funds (ETF) are those that track the performance of an underlying asset. A gold ETF tracks the performance of bullion gold.

## Gold ETFs shine

- The net inflows into gold ETFs increased to ₹25,566 crore between January and November 2025, nearly thrice of what it was in the same period of 2024, going by data from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy(CMIE).
- The share of net inflows into Gold ETFs, in all open-ended schemes, increased to 3.2% between January and November 2025.
- This number was less than 1% in the corresponding periods since 2021-22 , making this the best year for the gold ETFs yet. The net inflow into all open- ended schemes fell 4.8% to ₹7.9 lakh crore up to November 2025. This measure increased 1.5 fold from November 2024, which clearly shows gold ETFs rose in popularity while general mutual fund investment interest was tempered. A lot of this has to do with the Indian investors' behaviour, global factors and local market conditions.

## Regular purchases

- Gold has always been a regular purchase as Indian households expect prices to increase. Gold prices climbed 61% to ₹3.8 lakh a kg in November 2025 from about ₹2.4 lakh a kg in November 2024 making it a historical run. At the same time, Indian stocks were giving sub-optimal returns, expensive and many of the much hyped stocks listed in 2024 were trading below the price they debuted.
- Gold is considered a safe haven asset which investors move to during global uncertainties. This time, the uncertainties were triggered by the tariff war the U.S. President Donald Trump waged, making global markets shaky.
- Moreover, central banks all over the world have continuously increased their gold reserves to diversify holdings and reduce dependence on the dollar, which in effect reduces volatility that could flow from decisions taken under the Trump Administration.
- Gold ETFs are simple, cheap and secure way to invest in gold. A unit of gold ETF would cost about ₹140 to ₹150 , which is inexpensive compared to buying gold in grams.
- Meanwhile, experts warn these returns may not sustain in the coming year as the run so far has been historical.
- “Gold has run up significantly, so next year, we expect the returns to moderate.” said Siddharth Srivastava head of ETF products and fund manager, Mirae Asset Investment Managers (India), adding a rally as high as 60% in a year cannot be expected to go on forever. However, in the long term, gold ETFs will continue to be a diversifying investment and find investor interest, he said.

## ❖ Norms for opening coal mines notified

**Context: The government notified rules that dispense with the Coal Controller Organisation's (CCO) nod for opening a coal mine, individual or sections of a seam in a bid to boost efficiency in approval process for hastening coal output.**

- The amendment entrusts the board of the concerned coal firm with the authority to accord the requisite permissions.
- This would also apply to permission for re-starting mines that were nonoperational for 180 days or more.

- The notified rules mandate the board would be able to give approvals only after it received the requisite approvals from Central or State governments and/or statutory bodies. Also, the board would have to submit information to CCO about the opening of mine.
- The Coal Ministry expects firms to save up to two months in the operationalisation of a mine.

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

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