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# WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

**JANUARY WEEK 2**

05-01-2026 TO 10-01-2026

**VENEZUELA  
FACES AN  
ONGOING  
U.S.-IMPOSED  
OIL BLOCKADE**

**INDIA LOSES 0.4%  
OF ITS GDP**

**BHU SURAKSHA  
PROJECT**

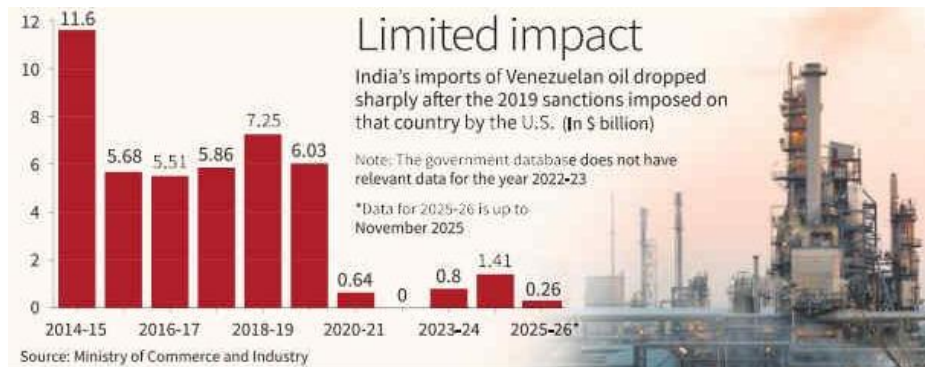
**INDIA-EU FTA  
TALKS**

**TRUMP  
WITHDRAWS U.S.  
FROM UNFCCC**

## ❖ India's Russian oil imports at six-month high in November

**Context: India's Russian oil imports rose to a six-month high in terms of volume and value in November 2025, with its share in India's overall oil imports rising to 35%, latest data showed.**

- This comes at a time when there has been little progress in finalising a trade deal with the U.S. However, India had also increased its purchases of American oil, which jumped to a seven-month high in November, accounting for nearly 13% of India's oil imports that month. Together, Russia and the U.S. accounted for nearly half of India's oil imports in November 2025.
- The data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry showed that India imported 7.7 million tonnes of oil from Russia in November, accounting for 35.1% of the country's total oil imports that month. This was also nearly 7% higher than the volume imported in November 2024 and the highest since May 2025. In value terms, India imported \$3.7 billion worth of Russian oil in November 2025, constituting 34% of its oil import bill.
- The U.S., in August 2025, hiked tariffs on India's imports from 25% to 50% as a "penalty" for its imports of Russian oil. This is despite the fact that, in seven of the eight months leading up to August, India had cut its Russian oil imports on a year-on-year basis.
- According to sources in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, there is growing frustration in the government over the fact that, despite India's willingness to cut Russian oil imports, there has been little progress on addressing the tariff issue.
- "India has already presented its final offer to the U.S. and the negotiators have done what they can," the official said on the condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the issue. "The matter is now pending before their [the U.S.] leadership and nothing seems to be moving there."



### Balancing U.S. interests

- However, despite these apparent frustrations, India has continued to tread a fine line to balance U.S. interests.
- Last November, India's oil imports from the U.S. jumped to a seven-month high of nearly 2.8 million tonnes, with a total value of \$1.4 billion. As a result, the U.S. saw its share in Indian oil imports jump to 12.6% that month, from 4.2% and 5.1% a month and a year earlier, respectively.
- "If the U.S. is serious about the [India-U.S.] partnership, it should first cut the punitive tariff on Indian exports from 50% to 25%, especially since the Russian oil issue — the stated trigger — has already been resolved," Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Global

Trade Research Initiative and former Director General of Foreign Trade for the Indian government, said.

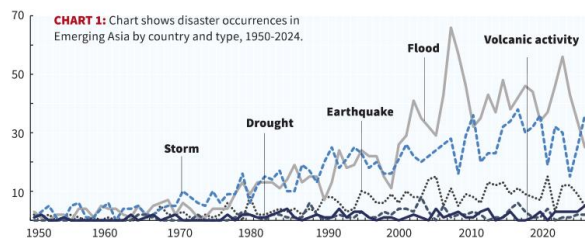
**❖ India loses 0.4% of its GDP every year to natural disasters**

**Context: As the scale of economic loss escalates, disaster risk finance has moved to the forefront of policy.**

Emerging Asian economies that comprise India, China, and the ASEAN-11, face an escalating threat from natural disasters that are growing in both frequency and intensity (Chart 1). Over the past decade, the region has had an average of 100 disasters annually, impacting approximately 80 million people. The nature of these threats varies by geography: while floods and storms are the primary drivers of risk in India, tropical cyclones frequently batter the Philippines and Vietnam. Meanwhile, China and Indonesia contend with significantly higher seismic risks (Chart 2). The human and economic toll of this vulnerability has been punctuated by several landmark catastrophes.

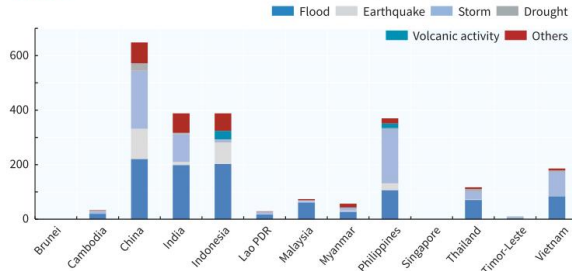
## Asia's climate bill is rising

The charts were sourced from the OECD development centre's "Economic Outlook for Southeast Asia, China and India 2025: Enhancing Disaster Risk Financing" report released in December 2025

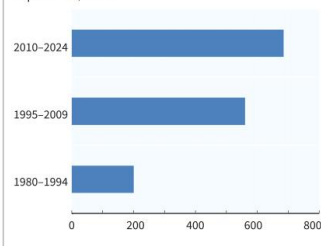


**Counting losses:** A convenience shop owner assesses the damage after floods in southern Thailand in November 2025. AP

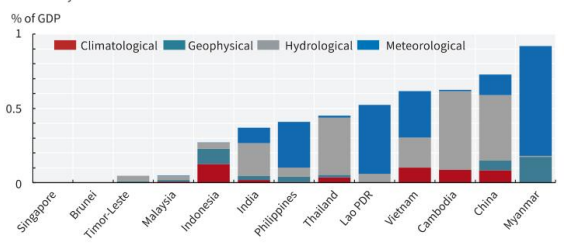
**CHART 2:** Chart shows the total occurrences of disasters in Emerging Asia by country and type, 2000-24



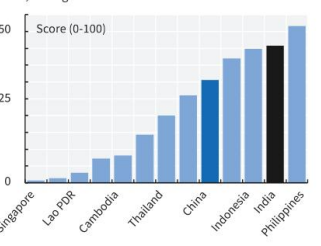
**CHART 3:** Total disaster-related damage among Emerging Asian countries (1980-2024). The data are depicted in \$ billion



**CHART 4:** Average annual loss due to disasters, 1990-2024. The data are depicted as the percentage of a country's GDP



**CHART 5:** World Risk Index, by country, 2025. The higher the score, the higher the risk



- As the scale of economic loss escalates (Chart 3), disaster risk finance has moved to the forefront of regional policy. To design an effective response, governments must first establish a data-driven foundation. From 1990 to 2024, India sustained average annual disaster-related losses equivalent to 0.4% of GDP (Chart 4). The composition of these losses is geographically distinct. India's vulnerability is primarily hydrological (non-storm-related floods and landslides), whereas Myanmar's losses are predominantly meteorological (extreme temperatures and cyclonic storms).
- The regional risk framework also includes climatological factors (drought and wildfire), and geophysical hazards (seismic activity and volcanic eruptions) too. Among the Asian economies analysed, India ranks second only to the Philippines in the World Risk Index (Chart 5). The index calculates risk as the geometric mean of exposure (population burden) and vulnerability (a combination of structural susceptibility, coping capacity, and long-term adaptation).

## ❖ Venezuela crisis unlikely to hit India's energy security

**Context: Venezuelan crude accounted for about 0.3% of India's total oil import in the current financial year up to November; since 2019, India has been cutting its imports from Venezuela after U.S. sanctions.**

- The United States attack on Venezuela is unlikely to have any direct impact on India's energy security, an analysis of the latest data shows.
- Numbers from the Commerce and Industry Ministry show that India imported \$255.3 million worth of oil from Venezuela in the current financial year up to November 2025, about 0.3% of its total oil import during this period.
- In 2013, India had imported as much as \$13 billion worth of Venezuelan oil. Since 2019, India has been cutting its oil imports and commercial engagements with Venezuela in response to U.S. sanctions and threats of secondary sanctions.
- "Given the low trade volumes, existing sanctions constraints, and the large geographical distance, the current developments in Venezuela are not expected to have any meaningful impact on India's economy or energy security," Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Global Trade Research Initiative and former Director-General of Foreign Trade for the Indian government, said.

### **OPEC member**

- Venezuela is a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), a group of countries that largely dominates the global oil market. However, Venezuela currently produces a relatively small amount of crude oil compared with the other oil-producing nations.
- According to OPEC data, Venezuela accounts for about 3.5% of the OPEC's total oil exports, and about 1% of global oil supplies.

### **Heavy oil**

- This relatively low supply is due to the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela and the heavy nature of Venezuelan oil, which requires special refineries that most countries do not have. Most of Venezuela's oil supply goes to China.
- Following the U.S. actions in Venezuela over the weekend, Mr. Trump announced that the U.S. would take over Venezuela's oil supply. "We are going to rebuild the oil infrastructure, which will cost billions of dollars, it will be paid for by the oil companies directly," Mr. Trump said in his address following the attack.

## ❖ India 'concerned' for well-being of people of Venezuela: MEA

**Context: A day after the United States military forcibly took away President Nicolas Maduro and his wife from Venezuela's capital Caracas, India has expressed its concern for the "well-being of the people of Venezuela", and called for dialogue to ensure peace and stability in the region.**

- The External Affairs Ministry had earlier issued a travel advisory for Indian citizens, calling upon them to stay safe as resource-rich Venezuela deals with the escalating situation.

- “Recent developments in Venezuela are a matter of deep concern. We are closely monitoring the evolving situation. India reaffirms its support to the well-being and safety of the people of Venezuela. We call upon all concerned to address issues peacefully through dialogue, ensuring peace and stability of the region,” the Ministry said in a statement.
- The Embassy of India in Caracas, which witnessed U.S. military action on Saturday ahead of the extraction of President Maduro, “is in contact with members of the Indian community and will continue to provide all possible assistance”, the Ministry said.
- Earlier, the Ministry had advised Indian citizens in Venezuela to “exercise extreme caution, restrict their movements and remain in contact with the embassy through their email ID: cons.caracas@mea.gov.in. or the emergency phone number +58-412-9584288”.
- Venezuela shares India’s position on reform of the international institutions, and has been supporting India’s bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council for almost a decade.



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## ❖ Tiger census gets under way in Karnataka

**Context: tiger census got under way in Karnataka on Monday across all forest areas of the State, including the Kali, Bhadra, Nagarahole, Bandipur, and B.R.T. Tiger reserves.**

- It is the sixth such exercise with the enumeration conducted earlier in 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022; in the previous census, it was estimated that Karnataka had around 563 tiger.
- The tiger census got under way in Karnataka across all forest areas of the State, including the Kali, Bhadra, Nagarahole, Bandipur, and B.R.T. Tiger reserves.
- Karnataka has the second highest number of tigers in the country after Madhya Pradesh. Minister for Environment Eshwar Khandre said the census is part of the nationwide tiger estimation exercise which is conducted once every four years.
- The 2026 census is the sixth such exercise with the enumeration conducted earlier in 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022. In the previous census, it was estimated that Karnataka had around 563 tigers.
- The census will be carried out in all patrol beats of the 38 forest divisions across every forest range in the State for which training was given to frontline personnel of the all 13 forest circles and the five tiger reserves between October and December last year.

### **Census in two phases**

- During the first phase of the enumeration for three days, starting on Monday, teams comprising three members will patrol five km daily in forest areas across the State. They will collect details of pugmarks, scats, and direct sightings of tigers, leopards, and other carnivores and also elephants.
- During the second phase, from January 15 to 17, the estimation will be conducted in 14 forest divisions, during which teams will move through forests to collect data on direct sightings of herbivores such as deer, sambar, wild buffalo, and gaur.
- “This will help determine where camera traps should be installed,” Mr. Khandre said.
- Project Tiger Director Ramesh Kumar who has been nominated as the nodal officer to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) will oversee this year’s census.
- “He (Ramesh Kumar) has been instructed to list the number of tigers and other carnivores in each area, assess the population of herbivores in each division, understand how many tigers each forest supports and how much prey is available for them, and thereby identify the forest’s carrying capacity,” the Minister said.

### **Camera trap surveys**

- Using the data collected in the first two phases, camera traps will be installed at suitable locations in the third phase.
- “There are 2,230 camera traps in the five tiger reserves and camera trap surveys have already begun in all five tiger reserves. Of these, the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve has 600 camera traps, Bandipur Tiger Reserve 550, B.R.T. Tiger Reserve 300, Bhadra Tiger Reserve 330, and Kali Tiger Reserve 450 camera traps,” he added.
- He also said that steps have also been taken to install camera traps outside tiger reserves.

- Nearby tiger reserves that have completed camera trap surveys will provide cameras for this purpose. “It is observed that tigers are increasingly venturing out of forests into human habitations, and it appears that the tiger population in the State has increased this time. We will get to know the exact numbers through this census,” he added.

#### ❖ **CM to equal Urs’s record on tenure today**

- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is set to equal the record of D. Devaraj Urs as Chief Minister with the longest tenure in Karnataka. Speaking in Mysuru, Mr. Siddaramaiah said that there was no comparison between him and the former Chief Minister, except that both hailed from Mysuru. He also said records weren’t permanent. He said he was able to serve at the helm for such a long duration solely because of the “blessings of the people”.

#### ❖ **Bhu Suraksha project launched to digitise land records**

**Context: Minister for Revenue Krishna Byre Gowda on Monday launched the Bhu Suraksha Project to expand the digitisation of land records to the offices of Assistant Commissioners (ACs) and Deputy Commissioners (DCs).**

#### **‘To curb malpractice’**

- Speaking at the inauguration of the project here, Mr. Gowda said that Karnataka’s land records were being fully digitised to curb malpractice and improve transparency.
- He recalled that in January last year, the original land records in all taluk offices had been scanned and digitised. “From today, the scanning of records available in AC and DC offices has also begun,” he said. Mr. Gowda described digitisation as a crucial measure to prevent fake entries and the creation of forged documents in land records.
- The Revenue Department, he added, is scanning all original records and preserving them permanently as part of a sustained, State-wide campaign that began last January. Providing an update on progress, the Minister said that the computerisation work had been fully completed in 70 of the State’s 240 taluks. Karnataka has an estimated 100 crore pages of land records, of which around 62 crore pages have already been scanned.
- “All the remaining pages will be completely scanned in the next three to four months,” the Minister said.
- While the scanning of original records in taluk offices is progressing steadily, Mr. Gowda noted that work under the Bhu Suraksha project to digitise records in AC and DC offices had begun last month. “By symbolically launching the scanning process in AC offices today, we have effectively given a State-wide launch to the computerisation of revenue records in AC and DC offices,” he added.

#### **Suspicious cases**

- Referring to past instances of forged land documents, the Minister said such cases were being treated with seriousness.
- “Each suspicious case will be examined thoroughly. Wherever required, documents will be sent to forensic laboratories to verify their authenticity, and appropriate action will follow,” Mr. Gowda said.

## ❖ State-run KMIO gets ISO certification for solid waste management

**Context: The State-run Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology (KMIO) has received the ISO 14001:2015 Environmental Management System certification for its Solid Waste Management (SWM) facility.**

- With this, Kidwai is one of the few hospitals in the country that are recognised for compliance with international environmental standards. This marks a significant step in strengthening environmentally responsible practices at the public-sector cancer hospital.
- The certification is the outcome of a process that began in March 2020, when the institute decided to scientifically reorganise the handling of waste generated within the tertiary care facility.
- A modern SWM facility was set up under a 10-year Build–Own–Operate–Transfer (BOOT) model following a transparent tender process that balanced environmental standards with cost considerations. The SWM facility underwent an independent audit in 2025 and was awarded the certification in December, 2025.
- Kidwai director (additional charge) Naveen T. told The Hindu that 4,000 sq. ft of land was allotted on the institute’s campus for the facility, which was developed in compliance with the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, BBMP by-laws and other statutory norms. The infrastructure was completed by the end of December 2020, with trial runs conducted in January 2021, he said.

### **Biogas plant**

- The facility includes a one-tonne-per-day biogas plant that processes food and garden waste. The biogas generated is purified and used to produce electricity through a 10 kVA generator, which powers the SWM facility and supports charging of electric vehicles on campus.
- Organic residues and slurry are used for aerobic composting, with the manure regularly tested in government laboratories. Dry waste is managed through a dedicated segregation shed, from where recyclable materials are routed to authorised recyclers and non-governmental organisations. Solar-powered lighting, revival of a defunct borewell and periodic air quality monitoring form part of the facility’s green measures, the doctor said.
- Along with infrastructure, the institute also placed emphasis on capacity building. Staff across departments were trained in scientific waste segregation, while the BBMP workers conducted sessions for housekeeping personnel on hygiene and sanitation practices.
- Between January 2021 and November 2025, the facility has processed over 10.89 lakh kg of food waste, 2.80 lakh kg of garden waste, and 3.73 lakh kg of non-value dry waste, diverting them from landfills. Compost generated through the process is used to maintain more than 8,000 trees and 800 potted plants on the campus, Dr. Naveen said. “The near-zero organic waste to landfill status was the result of sustained monitoring and staff participation. Waste management in a large hospital requires both systems and people. Continuous training and strict segregation at source have been key to making the facility effective and compliant,” he said.

- “Achieving ISO 14001 certification reflects our commitment to integrating patient care with environmental responsibility. As a public-sector tertiary care hospital, we believe sustainable practices are essential for long-term resilience,” the director added.

## ❖ Police in States step up social media monitoring

**Context: Dedicated cells rise from 262 in 2020 to 365 in 2024; numbers high in Bihar (52), Maharashtra (50), Punjab (48), West Bengal (38) and Assam (37); officials cite evolving crime trends for rise in cells.**

- Over the past five years, police forces across States have dedicated significant resources to monitoring social media platforms, an analysis of police infrastructure data shows. The number of dedicated social media monitoring cells rose from 262 across 28 States and eight Union Territories as of January 1, 2020, to 365 as of January 1, 2024.

### Expanding surveillance

There were 262 social media monitoring cells across 28 States and eight Union Territories as on January 1, 2020. The number rose to 365 as on January 1, 2024

- Most such cells are operational in Bihar (52), Maharashtra (50), Punjab (48), West Bengal (38) and Assam (37)

- In ethnic violence-hit Manipur, the number of cells increased from 3 on January 1, 2020, to 16 on January 1, 2024, this despite a 140-day Internet shutdown in 2023

- Assam increased the number of its social media cells from 1 in 2022 to 37 in 2024, West Bengal from 2 to 38 and Punjab from 24 to 48

- The number of cybercrime police stations increased from 376 as on January 1, 2020, to 624 as on January 1, 2024.

- The number of drones available with police forces in States and Union Territories increased from 1,010 as on January 1, 2023 to 1,147 as on January 1, 2024

*The annual data on police organisations (DoPO) reports are prepared by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), a police think tank under the Union Home Ministry*



- Most of such cells are operational in Bihar (52), Maharashtra (50), Punjab (48), West Bengal (38) and Assam (37).
- In Manipur, where ethnic violence erupted on May 3, 2023, the number of police social media monitoring cells rose from three on January 1, 2020, to 16 on January 1, 2024. The expansion occurred despite the Internet being suspended in the State for about 140 days in 2023.
- Assam increased the number of social media monitoring cells from one in 2022 to 37 in 2024. West Bengal expanded its network from two to 38 cells, while Punjab doubled its capacity, increasing the number from 24 to 48 between 2022 and 2024.
- Earlier, social media monitoring cells were not counted separately or were part of the cybercrime police stations. They began to function as distinct units from 2021, according to Data on Police Organisations (DoPO) reports for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.
- The annual DoPO reports are prepared by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), a police think tank under the Union Home Ministry.
- The cells started featuring in the reports since 2021, which includes data for the 2020.
- Meanwhile, the number of cybercrime police stations increased from 376 as of January 1, 2020, to 624 as of January 1, 2024.

### **‘Evolving crime trends’**

- Police officials attribute the need for dedicated cells to track and pre-empt the evolving crime trends on social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Instagram.

- The 2024 DoPO report said that the number of drones available with police forces in States and Union Territories stood at 1,147, up from 1,010 as of January 1, 2023.
- The report also noted that 5,92,839 police posts were vacant across the country, against the total sanctioned strength of 27,55,274.
- Of the total sanctioned strength of 27.55 lakh, the actual strength comprised 3,30,621 personnel belonging to Scheduled Castes, 2,31,928 to Scheduled Tribes and 6,37,774 to Other Backward Classes.

#### ❖ **India launches new e-Business visa for Chinese nationals**

- India has introduced an e-Production Investment Business Visa called e-B-4 Visa that Chinese businessmen can apply for to travel to India for specific business activities, including installation and commissioning of equipment. A latest advisory on the Indian Embassy website here said the e-B-4 Visa, which was introduced on January 1, can be applied for online without visiting the embassy or agents. The new visa is introduced in view of the growing demand for business visas to travel to India. It will be issued in about 45 to 50 days, with permission to stay in India for up to six months.

#### ❖ **Coast Guard adds pollution control vessel to its fleet**

**Context: Samudra Pratap, built with over 60% indigenous content, will substantially enhance the Coast Guard's capability in fire-fighting, maritime safety, environmental protection, and surveillance.**

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned the Indian Coast Guard Ship ICGS Samudra Pratap, the first of two indigenously designed pollution control vessels (PCVs) for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), in Goa on Monday. The Minister described the ship, built with over 60% indigenous content, as a symbol of India's maturing defence industrial ecosystem.
- The vessel was built by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL). The Defence Ministry said Samudra Pratap is India's first homegrown pollution control vessel and the largest ship in the Coast Guard's fleet so far. Its induction substantially enhances the ICG's capability in pollution response, fire-fighting, maritime safety, environmental protection, and extended surveillance across the country's vast maritime zones.
- Commissioning the ship, Mr. Singh reiterated the government's goal to increase indigenous content in warships to 90%. He said the vessel integrated multiple roles on a single platform, making it effective not only for pollution control but also for coastal patrol and maritime security in today's complex maritime environment.
- The ship is equipped with advanced pollution detection systems, specialised pollution response boats, modern firefighting equipment, and aviation facilities including a helicopter hangar, enabling greater operational reach even in rough sea conditions.

#### **Protecting marine life**

- Mr. Singh noted that these capabilities would ensure rapid detection and containment of pollution incidents, helping protect coral reefs, mangroves, fisheries, and marine biodiversity, directly supporting coastal communities and the blue economy. Emphasising that marine environmental protection is both a strategic necessity and a moral responsibility, the Defence Minister praised the ICG's role in oil spill response, maritime law enforcement, and coastal cleanliness.

## **Women officers**

- In a notable first, Samudra Pratap will have two women officers aboard. Mr. Singh hailed it as a proud step towards a more inclusive and gender-neutral Coast Guard, highlighting the growing role of women in frontline maritime operations.
- Reaffirming the government's commitment to modernising the ICG, he stressed the need for an intelligence-driven and integration-centric force to address emerging technology-led threats. He expressed confidence that Samudra Pratap will significantly strengthen India's maritime governance.

## **❖ SC grants relief to Adani, sets aside levy on SEZ electricity**

### **Context: 'Customs duty cannot be imposed on power supplied from special economic zone to domestic tariff area; levy lacks statutory authority'.**

- In a relief to Adani Power Limited, the Supreme Court on Monday held that customs duty cannot be imposed on electricity supplied from a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA), setting aside a 2019 judgment of the Gujarat High Court and relieving the company of the levy on power generated at its Mundra plant.
- A Bench comprising Justices Aravind Kumar and N.V. Anjaria ruled that the levy lacked statutory authority and that the State could not retain amounts collected under an invalid tax. Directing the jurisdictional Commissioner of Customs to verify the claim and issue refunds within eight weeks, the apex court cautioned the authorities against raising "hyper-technical objections" that could frustrate the relief granted.
- Adani Power operates a coal-based thermal power plant within the Mundra SEZ in Gujarat's Kutch district, with an installed capacity of 4,620 MW.
- The plant supplies electricity under long-term power purchase agreements to distribution companies in Gujarat and Haryana, apart from meeting the power requirements of the SEZ.
- The dispute traces its origins to February 2010, when the Centre amended customs rules to impose duty on electricity supplied from an SEZ to the DTA, while also seeking to apply the levy retrospectively from June 2009. In the first round of litigation, the Gujarat High Court, in July 2015, had struck down a part of the levy framework and held that Adani Power was entitled to exemption from customs duty on SEZ-to-DTA electricity supplies for a limited period between June 2009 and September 2010. The Supreme Court had subsequently declined to interfere with that ruling.
- Following the 2015 judgment, SEZ authorities took the position that the exemption recognised by the High Court was confined strictly to that defined window and that customs duty remained payable on electricity supplied thereafter.
- Challenging this interpretation, Adani approached the Gujarat High Court again in 2016, seeking a declaration that it had no liability to pay customs duty on SEZ-to-DTA electricity supplies beyond September 2010, along with a refund of the amounts already paid.
- In its June 2019 judgment, the High Court rejected the plea, holding that the earlier ruling had consciously restricted relief to a specific period and that Adani could not subsequently secure broader relief that had not been granted earlier. The High Court also relied on the post-2010 regulatory framework, observing that extending the exemption could result in a double benefit, as Adani would neither pay duty on inputs

used to generate power nor on the electricity supplied to the DTA. It further held that later levy regimes could not be invalidated without being independently challenged.

- Reversing this view, the Supreme Court held that there was no factual distinction between the levy struck down in 2015 and the levy sought to be enforced thereafter for the period between September 16, 2010 and February 15, 2016.

### ❖ Share of southern States in FDI rises as IT inflows double

**Context: The doubling of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into Information Technology (IT) sector in the first half of FY26 (H1FY26) helped the southern States of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu raise their share in total FDI even as Maharashtra and Gujarat saw their shares shrink.**

- FDI into India stood at \$35.2 billion in H1FY26 (April-September 2025), up 18% from \$29.8 billion in the same period last fiscal, official data show.
- The FDI growth was driven by a twofold jump in inflow into the IT sector (categorised as 'Computer Software & Hardware') to \$9 billion in H1FY26. With this, the sector's share rose up to 25% of the total FDI flow compared with 14% in the prior period.

### Still in pole position

- Maharashtra, still at the top position, saw a reduction in share of total FDI in H1FY26 to 30% vs. 45% (\$10.6 billion). Gujarat's share halved to 6.4% while Karnataka with \$9.4 billion and Tamil Nadu with \$3.6 billion were at second and third spot in overall tally.
- FDI into e-commerce majors Meesho and Flipkart, from foreign promoter entities and investors, dominated the top deals. Large PE investments in Access Healthcare Services and Haldiram Snacks and investments by Ardour Investment Holdings in Adani Green Energy were also among the top deals. A \$0.8 billion FDI into Raiden Infotech, a subsidiary of Google, for data centre business was another key FDI during this period.
- Madhavi Arora, chief economist, Emkay Global said the change in FDI shares of States was a function of India receiving more services FDI compared with manufacturing. GCCs and new-age technology firms were concentrated in the Southern states, especially Karnataka.
- Sectorally, the "Services" sector (which is said to include other services besides technology) and 'non-conventional' energy saw a decline in the FDI inflows in this half year.
- In terms of origin, Singapore led the way with a significant \$12 billion invested accounting for 34% of the total FDI.
- The U.S. and Mauritius followed with \$6.6 and \$3.5 billion respectively.

**Context: Poll body defends SIR in the Supreme Court, insists it has power to verify citizenship status under the Constitution; it calls claims of the exercise being a 'parallel NRC' 'rhetoric', says roll revision counts only legal adults unlike citizenship register.**

- The Election Commission of India (EC) began its defence of the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls before the Supreme Court on Tuesday by dismissing claims that it is conducting a “parallel” National Register of Citizens (NRC) as sheer “rhetoric”.
- The poll body maintained that it has the “constitutional power, even a constitutional duty” to ensure that not a single foreigner, as far as possible, occupies space in the nation’s electoral rolls.
- The SIR kicked off in Bihar last year and expanded to cover 12 more States and Union Territories in the ongoing second phase.
- “We have a constitutional duty, and not just a constitutional power, to ensure no foreigners are there on the electoral rolls. It is not important how many foreigners are found... It was repeatedly asked of us to show how many foreigners were found in Bihar, but that is not important.
- Even if there was one foreigner, he had to be excluded. We are not concerned with the rhetoric of the political parties. They may be right or wrong. As the Election Commission, it is our constitutional duty to ensure there are no foreign voters as far as possible,” senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the EC, clarified before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant.
- Mr. Dwivedi said the comparison of the SIR with the NRC was devoid of truth.

### **Faulty comparison**

- In the NRC, “all citizens”, even those of unsound mind, were tallied, the EC said. In the SIR, only those 18 years and above were counted. The EC differentiated between the NRC conducted in Assam and the “special revision” of electoral rolls underway in the State.
- The petitioners, who included Opposition parties and States, had argued that the SIR was merely a “citizenship drive” and a parallel NRC.
- “Of course, rhetorically it was said we are carrying out a ‘parallel’ NRC. The NRC register includes all the people, all citizens, whereas, in electoral rolls it is citizens who are above 18 years of age. Less than that they are not in the electoral roll. A person of unsound mind is excluded from the electoral roll, but is part of the NRC. Preparation of the electoral roll is not a parallel NRC on the face of it,” Mr. Dwivedi contended.
- The senior counsel argued that it was for the Centre to issue a ‘national identity card’ and maintain a ‘National Register of Indian Citizens’ and, for that purpose, establish a National Registration Authority under Section 14A of the Citizenship Act, 1955. On the other hand, the EC drew its power to verify citizenship for the “preparation of the electoral rolls” under Article 324 of the Constitution.

## **Citizenship status**

- “All the important functionaries of the three organs of governance have to be citizens of India, be it the President, Vice-President, MPs, MLAs, or judges of the constitutional courts... No person is eligible to participate in the electoral process unless he is a citizen,” Mr. Dwivedi said.
- Addressing the petitioners’ submission that citizenship was exclusively the domain of the Union government, the EC counsel pointed to Section 9(2) of the Citizenship Act. “The Central government has exclusive jurisdiction only with termination of citizenship on account of voluntary acquisition of foreign citizenship under this provision,” Mr. Dwivedi submitted.
- He said the EC was not foreclosed from “deviating” while revising electoral rolls, provided it recorded the reasons. In SIR 2025, the reasons included rapid urbanisation and migration with an eye to preserving the purity of the electoral rolls.

## **❖ ISRO calls for proposals from Indian scientists to analyse data from Aditya-L1**

**Context: On the second anniversary of India’s maiden solar mission Aditya-L1 reaching the Lagrangian point (L1), the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Tuesday made the Announcement of Opportunity (AO) soliciting proposals for the first AO cycle observations.**

- The Aditya-L1 spacecraft reached the L1 point on January 6, 2024, 127 days after it was launched on September 2, 2023, and since then has been making continuous and comprehensive observations of the Sun from the Sun–Earth L1 point.
- According to ISRO, scientific data from the mission are regularly released in public domain for global scientific utilisation.

## **To maximise return**

- “At present there are more than 23 TB data in public domain and several important scientific results have been published in International peer reviewed journals. To further maximise the scientific return from this unique mission, the ISRO has released the first AO inviting proposals from the Indian solar physics community for Aditya-L1 observation time,” ISRO said.
- It added that this L1 point, located approximately 1.5 million kilometers away from Earth, offers the unique advantage of continuous, uninterrupted observation of the Sun, free from eclipses or occultation.
- This announcement soliciting proposals for Aditya-L1 observation is open to Indian scientists and researchers residing and working at institutes, universities and colleges in India who are involved in research in the area of solar science. Eligible applicants must be equipped to submit proposals as Principal Investigators (PIs) for solar observations with necessary scientific and technical justification and analyse the data, if observation is made based on approvals.

## ❖ Ministry for doubling auto PLI allocation to ₹5,800 crore

**Context: As the scheme, in its third year now, is production-linked, higher output levels necessitate a corresponding scale-up in incentives, says an official.**

- The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) has proposed doubling the allocation for the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for automobiles and auto component manufacturers to ₹5,800 crore in the upcoming financial year. The scheme had received ₹2,818.85 crore in FY 2025-2026.
- The PLI auto scheme incentivises local production of only those products that achieve a domestic value add (DVA) of 50%. The scheme was focused on zero emission vehicles (ZEVs), i.e., battery electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.
- The scheme was announced in 2021, but FY 2023-24 was the first performance year, and an amount of ₹322 crore was disbursed to four approved applicants in FY 2024-25. For the performance year 2024-25, a total amount of ₹1,999.94 crore was disbursed for five approved applicants.
- Looking ahead, the target allocation for FY 2027-28 is nearly ₹8,000 crore, increasing to ₹9,500 crore in the fifth year, a senior government official said.
- These allocations are aimed at achieving the total outlay of ₹25,938 crore as defined when the scheme was launched in 2021.
- Explaining the rationale behind seeking doubling of allocation, the official said that in the initial years, the OEMs were focused on setting up manufacturing plants, which required substantial capital investment. Now, in the third year of the scheme, the focus would be on ramping up production output. As the scheme is production-linked, higher output levels necessitate a corresponding scale-up in incentives.

## ❖ Goyal to visit Brussels to conclude India-EU FTA talks

**Context: In a “decisive push” to finalise the free trade agreement with the European Union, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will be visiting Brussels for a two-day trip on January 8-9, during which he will meet his European counterpart, resolve the final pending issues, and expedite the conclusion of the negotiations, the Centre announced. Mr. Goyal will hold high-level dialogues with EU Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maroš Šefčovič.**

- Services PMI at 11-month low in Dec. on low orders, output Expansion in India's services sector slowed to a 11-month low in December 2025 due to slackening new work orders and output, according to a private sector survey.
- The HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index, which seeks to determine how the level of business activity compares with the situation a month before, fell from 59.8 in November to 58.0 in December. This was the lowest reading since January 2025.

## ❖ ‘Solar module manufacturing more than doubled in 2025’

- India's solar module manufacturing has increased to more than twice since last year, Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi informed. In a social media post, he stated that solar module manufacturing has increased 128.6% on a year-over-year basis to 144 gigawatts (GW) in 2025. It stood at 63 GW in 2024. This implies that India added 81 GW-worth of capacity in the previous year.

❖ 'U.S. takeover of Greenland would mark end of NATO'

**Context: Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said an American takeover of Greenland would amount to the end of the NATO military alliance. Her comments came in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's renewed call for the strategic, mineral-rich Arctic island to come under U.S. control in the aftermath of the weekend military operation in Venezuela.**

- The dead-of-night operation by U.S. forces in Caracas to capture leader Nicolás Maduro and his wife early Saturday left the world stunned, and heightened concerns in Denmark and Greenland, which is a semi-autonomous territory of the Danish kingdom and thus part of NATO.
- Ms. Frederiksen and her Greenlandic counterpart, Jens Frederik Nielsen, blasted the President's comments and warned of catastrophic consequences. Numerous European leaders expressed solidarity with them.
- "If the United States chooses to attack another NATO country militarily, then everything stops," Ms. Frederiksen told Danish broadcaster TV2 on Monday. "That is, including our NATO and thus the security that has been provided since the end of the Second World War."
- Mr. Trump called repeatedly during his presidential transition and the early months of his second term for U.S. jurisdiction over Greenland, and has not ruled out military force to take control of the island. His comments on Sunday, including telling presspersons "let's talk about Greenland in 20 days," further deepened fears that the U.S. was planning an intervention in Greenland in the near future.
- Mr. Trump also mocked Denmark's efforts at boosting Greenland's national security posture.

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## ❖ UN body report sets India's 2025-26 growth at 7.2%

**Context: A day after the Centre estimated the economy to grow at 7.4% in financial year 2025-26, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs said consumption and public investment can “largely offset” the impact of tariffs imposed by the U.S. and enable India to grow by 7.2% this fiscal.**

- However, the report warned that continuing tariffs could weigh on the economy as 18% of Indian exports are U.S.-bound. It said “tax reforms and monetary easing should provide additional near-term support”, adding that strong demand from other markets will limit the tariff impact. The report predicted India's growth to be 7.4% in calendar year 2025. On a fiscal year basis, it estimated India to grow at 6.6% and 6.8% in 2026-27 and 2027-28, respectively.
- “In India, growth is estimated at 7.4% for 2025 and forecast at 6.6% for 2026 and 6.7% for 2027, supported by resilient consumption and strong public investment, which should largely offset the adverse impact of higher U.S. tariffs,” the report said.
- On the other hand, the report presented in the UN DESA's World Economic Situation and Prospects 2026, added that, while the tariffs may adversely affect some product categories, key exports are expected to remain exempt.
- “On the supply side, continued expansion in manufacturing and services sectors will remain a key driver of growth throughout the forecast period,” the report said.
- The report noted that investment trends among developing economies diverged in 2025. “India recorded strong growth in gross fixed capital formation, led by higher public spending on physical and digital infrastructure, defence, and renewable energy,” the report said.
- “The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) countries continued to undertake large-scale capital investments aligned with long-term economic diversification strategies.”
- However, in contrast, the report noted that China saw a contraction in its fixed asset investment through the first three quarters of 2025, due to the ongoing weakness in the property sector.
- “The Indian rupee stabilised against the U.S. dollar in the first half of the year, supported by broad dollar weakness,” the report said. “However, in the second half, the Indian rupee edged lower following stronger-than-expected growth in the U.S. and ongoing trade negotiations.” It added that portfolio outflows and higher U.S. tariffs added to depreciation pressures on the Indian rupee.

## ❖ Trump clears Bill to slap up to 500% tariff on buying Russian oil

**Context: Doubling down on his pressure on India to stop importing oil from Russia, U.S. President Donald Trump has ‘greenlit’ legislation that will empower him to levy up to 500% in tariffs on countries that buy oil or uranium from Russia, according to senior Senator Lindsey Graham.**

- Mr. Graham, a close associate of Mr. Trump, said the U.S. President on Wednesday “greenlit” the Russia Sanctions Bill, which could be voted in Congress “as early as next week”. “This Bill would give President Trump tremendous leverage against countries like China, India, and Brazil to incentivise them to stop buying the cheap Russian oil

that provides the financing for [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's bloodbath against Ukraine," Mr. Graham said.

- The bipartisan Bill introduced in the Senate in April 2025 has thus far got 84 co-sponsors in the Senate (out of 100 members), and 151 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives, suggesting it will be passed smoothly once brought to a vote. The move came ahead of the arrival of U.S. Ambassador-designate Sergio Gor to New Delhi, who had said that ensuring India ends its import of Russian oil is a "top priority".
- Mr. Gor, who was sworn in to the position months ago will begin his tenure as Ambassador to India and "Special Envoy to South and Central Asia" on Monday, and is expected to outline his mission with a public statement.
- Earlier this week, Mr. Trump, who had jointly addressed the press along with Mr. Graham, announced they had a "great legislation coming", as Mr. Graham said the Bill would give the U.S. President discretion to choose the figure of the tariffs over and above 25% penalty tariffs already imposed on India.
- As a result, Mr. Gor's first order of business in Delhi would likely be to push for a full stop to Indian oil imports from Russia, not just a reduction. This week, Reliance announced that it has not received any cargo of Russian oil at its Jamnagar refinery through most of December, and does not expect any in January, indicating that it has stopped orders of the oil for now.
- Indian PSUs increased their intake sharply in November 2025, but with Reliance stopping all such imports and Nayara Energy, the other big importer under sanctions from Western countries unable to import, it is unlikely that India's Russian oil purchases can recover to previous levels. In 2018, under similar pressure from the previous Trump administration, India had "zeroed out" its oil imports from Iran and Venezuela as well.
- Meanwhile in Paris, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski expressed "satisfaction" that India has reduced its oil imports from Russia, during a joint press appearance with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Foreign Ministers of France and Germany.
- "Relations between the European Union and strategic partners such as India are very important to us and I express my satisfaction regarding the reduction of import of Russian oil to India because this is financing the war machine of [Russian President Vladimir] Putin," Mr. Sikorski said.
- In September, during his Senate Foreign Relations Committee confirmation hearings, Mr. Gor said that Mr. Trump had been "crystal clear" on the issue of India's oil purchases. "They (India) must stop buying Russian oil."

#### ❖ Centre to launch scheme to aid road mishap victims

**Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to launch a nationwide cashless treatment scheme for road accident victims, offering coverage of up to ₹1.5 lakh and a cash award for Good Samaritans who rush victims to hospitals.**

- The scheme will cover road accidents anywhere in the country, and not just on national highways, Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari said during a two-day conference of Transport Ministers, Secretaries and Commissioners of all States and Union Territories here.

- Mr. Gadkari cited an AIIMS study and said road fatalities could be reduced by 30% if there was timely medical intervention.
- The medical coverage would be under the third party insurance bought at the time of a car purchase, and where a vehicle was not insured, the government would fund the medical expenses under the Road Safety Fund.
- A person who brings a victim to the hospital, who the government is calling “rahavir”, would be given a cash award of ₹25,000. This could not be claimed by more than one individual, Mr. Gadkari said.

### ❖ State Film Awards: Filmmaker M.S. Sathyu honoured with Puttanna Kanagal Award

**Context: The Lifetime Achievement Awards as part of the Karnataka State Film Awards 2020 and 2021 were announced on Thursday. Renowned filmmaker and theatre personality M.S. Sathyu was honoured with the Puttanna Kanagal Award for the year 2020.**

- Actor-politician Jaimala, who has an experience of over 50 years in the film industry, was named for the Dr. Rajkumar Award. Veteran still photographer Pragathi Ashwath Narayana was picked for the Dr. Vishnuvardhan Award.
- For the year 2021, Sa. Ra. Govindu, producer and former Karnataka State Film Chamber for Commerce (KFCC) president, was honoured with the Dr. Rajkumar Award.
- Director K. Shivarudraiah was named for the Puttanna Kanagal Award, while actor-producer M.K. Sundar Raj was given the Dr. Vishnuvardhan Award.

### ❖ India's first commercial Quantum Computer to be deployed at IIIT, Dharwad

**Context: India's first commercial Quantum Computer to be deployed at the Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) in Dharwad, said Priyank Kharge, Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, IT & BT.**

- “Karnataka is moving decisively in the quantum space. The deployment of India's first commercial Quantum Computer at IIIT-Dharwad marks a significant milestone in our journey to build a world-class quantum ecosystem,” he said.
- The Minister on Wednesday had meetings with the Bengaluru-based deeptech company QpiAI and Singapore-based ZWEEC, to discuss on advancing Karnataka's leadership in quantum technologies and strengthening rural water security.
- “Through strong collaboration with companies like QpiAI, the State government was committed to advancing the Karnataka Quantum Roadmap while ensuring that cutting-edge technology translates into real impact,” Mr. Kharge said.
- According to the Minister, the deployment of the country's first indigenously built Quantum Computer for commercial use at the IIIT-Dharwad, where the State government has recently announced a Centre of Excellence in Quantum AI and Computing, was happening at a quick momentum.

## **Roadmap**

- The QpiAI team also briefed Mr. Kharge on their ambitious roadmap to scale from a 25-qubit quantum computer to a 1,000-qubit system within the next two to three years, positioning Karnataka as a key hub for advanced quantum research, talent development, and industry collaboration.
- The discussions reaffirmed the State government's commitment to working closely with deeptech companies to accelerate innovation, research, and commercial applications in quantum computing, the Minister said.
- The ZWEEC, a Singapore-based company specialising in advanced water technology solutions, may work with rural water supply and sanitation department, Mr. Kharge said.
- According to the Minister, he had discussions with the representatives of the ZWEEC which offers solutions for early detection of drinking water contamination, algal blooms, and intelligent monitoring of water infrastructure through automated and data-driven technologies. "These solutions have relevance for rural drinking water systems and the government will evaluate the technology further," Mr. Kharge added.

❖ **Govt. seeks feedback on draft Bill to regulate pesticides, promote 'safe and effective' use**

**Context: The Union Agriculture Ministry has invited public comments on the draft Pesticides Management Bill that aims to repeal the Insecticides Act of 1968.**

- According to the draft, the new Bill will regulate manufacture, import, packaging, labelling, storage, advertisement, sale, transport, distribution, use and disposal of pesticides to "ensure availability of safe and effective pesticides".
- The Bill strives to minimise risk to human beings, animals, living organisms other than pests, and the environment, and promote pesticides that are "biological and based on traditional knowledge".
- It defines "pesticide" as a substance or mixture of substances, including a formulation, of chemical or biological origin intended to prevent, destroy, attract, repel, mitigate or control any pest in agriculture, industry, pest control operations, public health, storage or for ordinary use.
- The definition includes any substance intended for use as a plant growth regulator, defoliant, desiccant, fruit thinning agent, or sprouting inhibitor and also any substance applied to crops either before or after harvest to protect them from deterioration during storage and transport.
- The draft provides for constituting the Central Pesticides Board to advise the Central government and State governments on scientific and technical matters on administering the proposed Act.
- It will advise the Union government in making criteria for good manufacturing practices, including processes for pesticide manufacturers, best practices for pest control operators, procedure for the recall of pesticides, the criteria for the disposal of pesticides and packages in an environmentally sound manner and standards for the advertisement of pesticides.
- As per the draft Bill, the Union government can appoint a registration committee to make decisions on registration of pesticides, specify conditions subject to which a

certificate of registration is granted, periodically review the safety and efficacy of registered pesticides and amend or cancel certificates of registration. The committee shall also maintain a national register of pesticides in digital form.

- The draft Bill also provides for a punishment of imprisonment up to five years, or fine from ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh or with both for the manufacture, import, sale, exhibit for sale, transport, distribute, use or cause to use of pesticide in “death or grievous hurt of another.”

### ❖ India to continue to work with ISA, back solar adoption

**Context: India will continue to work with the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and support solar adoption and energy transition goals, government sources said on Thursday, even as the U.S. announced its withdrawal from the alliance.**

- In an executive order signed on January 7, the U.S. sought to withdraw from 66 “wasteful, ineffective or harmful international organisations”, which also included the solar alliance.
- “These withdrawals will end American taxpayer funding and involvement in entities that advance globalist agendas over U.S. priorities, or that address important issues inefficiently or ineffectively such that U.S. taxpayer dollars are best allocated in other ways to support the relevant missions,” read a White House fact sheet.
- The 125-member alliance was conceptualised on the sidelines of COP21 in Paris in 2015 and was formally instituted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of France Francois Hollande.
- It aspires to unlock \$1 trillion in solar investments by 2030 whilst reducing technology and financing costs relating to solar implementation.
- The sources stated that the alliance’s programmes are operational in more than 95 countries and had supported creation of national pipelines, regulatory frameworks, and market creation.
- They added that the alliance had been “successful” in demonstrating the “feasibility and effectiveness” of solar solutions.
- Taking note of the latest development, the sources held, “ISA will continue to work with member countries, particularly least developed countries and small island developing states, in development and deployment of solar energy, mobilising finance, building capacity, and reducing risk perceptions.”

### ❖ Textiles ministry signs MoUs with 15 States under Tex-RAMPS scheme

**Context: The Ministry of Textiles has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with 15 States as part of the ‘Textiles focused Research, Assessment, Monitoring, Planning And Start-Up’ (Tex-RAMPS) scheme.**

- The MoUs were signed on the first day of the two-day national textile ministers’ conference in Guwahati on the theme ‘India’s Textiles: Weaving Growth, Heritage & Innovation’.
- The scheme is designed to improve the coverage, quality, timeliness, and credibility of textile-related statistical products and research, according to a press release.

- The initiative drives integrated planning for key sectors including handlooms, handicrafts, apparel, and technical textiles by focusing efforts directly at the cluster and district levels, the release said.
- The Ministry provides an annual grant of ₹12 lakh to each State or Union Territory. An additional grant of ₹1 lakh a year will be provided for each district, based on the development and execution of specific district action plans.

### ❖ India-Europe ties growing, can bring stability to global politics: Jaishankar

**Context: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's first official visit for 2026 began in Europe, with a visit to Paris and Luxembourg, against the backdrop of major shifts in global politics including the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro by the U.S. and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.**

- In Paris, the Minister met his French, German and Polish counterparts for the India-Weimar Triangle meeting. Mr. Jaishankar said he chose Europe to kickstart the year because India-Europe ties were growing and because the two sides could bring stability to the international economy and global politics.
- “Why did I come to Europe? I think it was a very conscious choice. It was a choice which reflected our belief that this relationship with Europe is really poised to grow, grow to the next level,” he said at a joint press conference in Paris on Wednesday, with his Weimar Triangle counterparts.
- “I think we can bring more stability, both into the international economy and global politics, and that really is why I’m here,” he said.
- India’s relationship with the EU and with Europe had the most room to grow, among all its major relationships, Mr. Jaishankar said. The discussions in Paris included India sharing perspectives on challenges in the Indo-Pacific and on the Ukraine conflict, he said on X.
- The European Union and India are working to announce a ‘Free Trade’ Agreement (FTA) during the visit of EU leaders Ursula von der Leyen and António Costa to India for Republic Day later this month. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is in Brussels on a two-day visit (January 8-9) for discussions with his EU counterpart, Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič. German Chancellor Frederik Merz is due in Ahmedabad and Bengaluru next week while French President Emmanuel Macron is due in New Delhi next month for the India AI Impact Summit.
- Mr. Jaishankar also held bilateral discussions with France’s Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot.

### **‘Build bridges’**

- Mr. Barrot emphasised that it was the first time a non-European partner had been invited to the Weimar Triangle meeting format at the Foreign Minister level. The rationale, as per Mr. Barrot, was that France currently held the G7 presidency and India, the presidency of BRICS. He also pointed to the FTA that is approaching finalisation.
- “In an increasingly violent world where balances are being questioned, it is important to build bridges between centres of stability, dialogue and responsibility,” the French Minister said.

- Europe has been reeling from U.S. President Donald Trump’s ambiguity about the transatlantic relationship, including his qualified and wavering support for Ukraine in its war against Russia. More recently, following the U.S.’s capture of Mr. Maduro, Mr. Trump has renewed his push to acquire Greenland, an autonomous region of Denmark. This has alarmed European allies of the U.S., many of whom have defended Denmark and Greenland’s sovereignty to determine their future.
- “There’s no such thing as a collective West. There’s no such thing as a Global South,” the French Foreign Minister said at Wednesday’s press conference.
- “There are but nations who can dialogue for their mutual interests,” he said, adding that countries could come together to defend international law and sovereignty.

### ❖ Trump withdraws U.S. from UNFCCC, a key climate treaty

**Context: U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw the United States from a bedrock climate treaty was slammed by the EU, which vowed to keep tackling the crisis with other nations.**

- The White House flagged the U.S. exit from 66 global organisations and treaties — roughly half affiliated with the United Nations — it identified as “contrary to the interests of the United States”.
- Most notable among them is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the parent treaty underpinning all major international climate agreements. The treaty adopted in 1992 is a global pact by nations to cooperate to drive down planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- European Union climate chief Wopke Hoekstra said the UNFCCC “underpins global climate action” and brings nations together in the collective fight against the crisis.
- “The decision by the world’s largest economy and second-largest emitter to retreat from it is regrettable and unfortunate,” Mr. Hoekstra said.

## ❖ Will exert Constitutional right to oppose Malayalam Bhasha Bill, CM tells Pinarayi in letter

**Context: Urging Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to reconsider the Malayalam Bhasha Bill, 2025, which mandates Malayalam as first language even in Kannada-medium schools, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah warned that Karnataka would oppose the Bill by exercising every constitutional right available to it in defence of Kannada-speaking linguistic minority.**

- “This position flows not from confrontation, but from our duty to the Constitution and to the people whose voices must never be marginalised. Any legislative measure must reflect not only constitutional legality, but constitutional morality,” Mr. Siddaramaiah, while expressing concern, said in a letter to his Kerala counterpart.
- “Karnataka takes immense pride in Kannada. At the same time, we have always upheld the principle that promotion of one’s language must never become an imposition on another,” he said in the letter.
- His letter to Mr. Vijayan comes in the light of the Bill making Malayalam mandatory as first language up to Class X in government and aided schools across Kerala.
- Karnataka fears that the mandatory Malayalam would affect Kannada speaking linguistic minority in Kerala, especially in Kasaragod district. Mr. Siddaramaiah had also expressed his anguish over the issue on social media platform X on Thursday.
- Urging the Kerala government to engage in a broader, inclusive dialogue with linguistic minority communities, educators and neighbouring States, Mr. Siddaramaiah said, “Languages in our country have flourished not through compulsion, but through mutual respect and organic co-existence. Border regions like Kasaragod are living examples of this ethos. A substantial population in Kasaragod relies on and seeks education in Kannada. This preference has evolved naturally over decades. Respecting this reality does not diminish Malayalam rather it strengthens India’s plural fabric.”

### **May meet President**

- Meanwhile, speaking in Belagavi, Kannada and Culture Minister Shivaraj Tangadgi said that, if needed, Mr. Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar would meet President Droupadi Murmu to request her to see that the Bill did not get approval.
- “We will request her to send a team of officers from the Linguistic Minorities Department to inquire into the issue and submit a report. We will also write to the Kerala Governor. The Karnataka Border Area Development Authority has already met the Kerala Governor asking him not to give his assent,” he told reporters.

## ❖ NIT-K Surathkal develops jute-based geocell as alternative to plastic in roadworks

**Context: Researchers at the National Institute of Technology Karnataka (NITK), Surathkal, have developed an industrially manufactured ‘jute geocell’ that can replace plastic geocells used in road construction and slope stabilisation.**

- The project is funded by the National Jute Board under the Union Ministry of Textiles and was executed at NITK Surathkal in collaboration with Birla Jute Mills. It is designed to be cheaper, environmentally sustainable, and suitable for large-scale use, particularly in rural and ecologically sensitive regions.

## **What are geocells?**

- Geocells are three-dimensional, honeycomb-like structures placed beneath roads or on slopes to strengthen weak soil, improve load-bearing capacity, and control erosion. At present, most geocells used in India are made from petroleum-based polymers such as high-density polyethylene or polypropylene. While effective, these materials are expensive, non-biodegradable, and raise long-term environmental concerns, including microplastic pollution.

## **Studies**

- Laboratory studies conducted as part of the NITK research show that jute geocells perform on a par with conventional polymeric geocells. Tensile strength tests recorded values of about 15.7 kilonewtons per metre, comparable to or higher than many plastic geocells currently in use. Plate load tests showed that soil reinforced with jute geocells achieved up to a 120% increase in bearing capacity, along with a significant reduction in settlement. One of the key reasons for this performance is the natural surface texture of jute.
- Researchers found that the surface roughness of jute geocells is more than 10 times higher than that of polymeric geocells, which allows stronger interaction between soil and reinforcement. This improves load transfer without the need for perforations or chemical treatments commonly used in plastic systems.
- A major innovation of the study lies in its manufacturing method. Instead of hand-stitched natural fibre geocells, which are labour-intensive and inconsistent, the team developed a mechanised stitching process using existing jute mill machinery. Jute fabric is cut into uniform strips and assembled into a honeycomb structure through machine stitching to enable consistent quality and industrial-scale production. This approach reduced production costs by nearly 80%, making the technology economically viable for public infrastructure projects, officials from the NITK said.
- Because of their cost advantage and environmental benefits, the jute geocells are considered suitable for rural and low-volume roads, pavement subgrade and base reinforcement, slope stabilisation and landslide mitigation, erosion control on embankments and riverbanks, landfill cover systems and retaining structures.
- From an environmental perspective, jute is a biodegradable and carbon-negative natural fibre, with cultivation capable of sequestering approximately 4.88 tonne of carbon dioxide per tonne of fibre. The technology also supports India's domestic jute industry and rural employment. The researchers noted that as a natural material jute is biodegradable and its long-term durability under extreme environmental exposure requires further study. However, for many temporary and semi-permanent infrastructure applications, this characteristic is seen as an advantage rather than a limitation.

## **Next step**

- Future work will focus on large-scale field trials, development of Indian standards for natural fibre geocells, enhancement of durability through eco-friendly treatments, and integration of the technology into national rural road and slope protection programmes. The system also has potential for adoption in other developing countries facing similar cost and environmental constraints.

## ❖ Governor keeps hate speech Bill ‘under consideration’

**Context: Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has kept the controversial Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill “under consideration”, while approving 19 Bills and sending them back to the government for publication in the official gazette.**

- The hate speech Bill had been strongly opposed by the BJP, and the party had urged the Governor not to approve it.

### **Opposition**

- The legislation, passed in the winter session of the legislature in Belagavi in December last, had triggered a debate, with Opposition parties and free speech advocates arguing that its provisions could be misused.
- According to a press release by R. Prabhu Shankar, Special Secretary to the Governor, the Governor’s Secretariat received 22 files for approval of Bills passed by the State Legislature.
- Of these, 19 Bills have been approved while two Bills, The Karnataka Scheduled Castes (sub-classification) Bill and Shree Chamundeshwari Kshetra Development Authority and Certain Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, have been returned to the government seeking further clarifications.

## ❖ Centre chairs meet to chart pathway for Samagra Shiksha 3.0

**Context: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Friday chaired a consultative meeting with representatives of State governments and experts on the next phase of the Centre’s Samagra Shiksha school education programme, with the Minister noting that it was “essential to once again entrust schools to society” so that the holistic development of students can be promoted and their access to knowledge expanded through “meaningful integration of technology”.**

- At the meeting held in Delhi, which was co-chaired by Skills Development Minister Jayant Chaudhary, discussions focused on best practices, emerging challenges, and priority interventions needed to strengthen school governance, infrastructure, teacher training, and student entitlements.
- Officials told The Hindu that the Union Education Ministry suggested to increase public participation in school management committees, whereas State representatives sought additional support for teacher training and capacity building. Mr. Pradhan said that while salaries of teachers and systems must be the responsibility of the government, operation of the schools themselves must be the responsibility of society.
- Mr. Pradhan said that the Prime Minister’s vision of a Viksit Bharat by 2047 can be achieved only when every child in India has access to quality education, and the country achieves a 100% school enrolment ratio up to Class 12.

## ❖ DRDO conducts key test for hypersonic missile programme

**Context: The Defence Research & Development Laboratory, the Hyderabad-based laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation, has achieved a milestone in India's hypersonic missile programme with the successful long-duration ground test of an actively-cooled scramjet full-scale combustor.**

- The Defence Ministry said the test was conducted on Friday at the DRDL's state-of-the-art Scramjet Connect Pipe Test Facility, where the combustor demonstrated sustained performance for over 12 minutes. The successful trial positions India among the global leaders in advanced hypersonic, aerospace technologies.

## ❖ DPDP Act doesnot 'dilute' RTI Act,A-G says in opinion

**Context: Attorney-General R. Venkataramani has said in a written opinion that the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 did not "dilute" the Right to Information Act, 2005, a government source said.**

- Civil society groups and transparency advocates have argued that the Act's amendment of Section 8(1)(j), turning a partial exemption for government bodies to turn over "personal" information into a total exemption, undermined transparency.
- However, Mr. Venkataramani said that a different part of the RTI Act, which had not been amended, would allow government bodies to disclose such personal information in response to RTI requests. "Section 8(2) of the RTI Act, 2005 mandates disclosure of exempted information whenever public interest outweighs harm," the opinion said. Mr. Venkataramani declined to confirm authorship of the opinion when contacted by The Hindu.
- "There is no dilution of accountability and transparency due to [the] DPDP Act. It only provides a legal framework to ensure balance between privacy and transparency, as mandated by the Supreme Court in the Puttaswamy case judgment."
- The Centre, which notified the RTI amendment in November 2025, even as other parts of the DPDP Act were given a 12-18 month implementation timeline, has made a similar argument. Section 8(1) of the RTI Act lists out exemptions where "there shall be no obligation to give any citizen" information in response to a request.
- The earlier language of Section 8(1)(j) exempted from providing "information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual unless the Central Public Information Officer or the State Public Information Officer or the appellate authority, as the case may be, is satisfied that the larger public interest justifies the disclosure of such information," with a proviso that information that cannot be denied to Parliament cannot be denied to citizens.

## ❖ Varanasi 'Tent City', inaugurated by PM, violated environmental norms: NGT

**Context: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has said that a 'Tent City' established on the Ganga riverbed in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, in 2023 was operated in "violation" of environmental laws.**

- Inaugurating the project on January 13, 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said: “With the Tent City, tourists and devotees coming to Kashi now have an incredible means of accommodation.”
- “We find that the Tent City by the respondents No. 11 and 12 (two private companies) was set up and operated in violation of the environmental norms and the provisions of the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016 for which the environmental compensation has been levied, but not recovered. Therefore, the same is required to be recovered expeditiously,” the NGT said in an order dated January 8.
- The Principal Bench of the NGT comprising chairperson Prakash Shrivastava and expert member A. Senthil Vel was hearing an application that the Tent City was allegedly polluting the riverbed and river water and causing harm to flora and fauna. The applicant also alleged that the sewage of the Tent City was directly discharged into the river.
- “The respondents (government authorities) will ensure that in future violating the provisions of River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016 and the applicable environmental norms, no such Tent City is allowed to be set up on the bank of river Ganga or its tributaries,” the NGT order said.
- The applicant had also alleged that the Tent City was set up at the place of ‘Kachhua Wildlife Sanctuary’ and this sanctuary was illegally de-notified in 2020. The NGT order said that since the de-notification of a turtle sanctuary, which is related to the Tent City, is pending before the Supreme Court, the green court “does not deem it proper” to go into this issue.
- In a report submitted to the NGT in October 2023, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) noted that “application for the prior-approval for the project development of Tent City has been made after the project has already been implemented in 2022”.

