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JANUARY WEEK 3

12-01-2026 TO 17-01-2026

**INDIA,
GERMANY
AGREE TO
SHORE UP
DEFENCE
COOPERATION**

**SPECIAL INTENSIVE
REVISION (SIR)**

**83RD GOLDEN
GLOBES**

**KARNATAKA
SOCIAL BOYCOTT
ACT, 2025**

**PSLV-C62
MISSION**

❖ Centre to seek source code of smartphones in 'security measure'

Context: Tech firms object to 'vulnerability analysis' standards, which include access to confidential information and 'automatic malware scanning'.

- The Centre is considering legally imposing a set of requirements for smartphone makers in Indian markets as part of a raft of “security measures”, prompting behind-the-scenes opposition from tech giants such as Apple and Samsung.
- Among the most sensitive requirements for “vulnerability analysis” in the new Indian Telecom Security Assurance Requirements, drafted in 2023, is access to source code — the underlying programming instructions that make phones work and closely guarded by the manufacturers. This will be analysed and possibly tested at designated Indian labs.
- The proposals require automatic and periodic malware scanning on phones and storing of records of a phone’s activities in the device for at least a year. IT Ministry and tech executives will meet on Tuesday for more discussions, sources said.
- “Any legitimate concerns of the industry will be addressed with an open mind,” IT Secretary S. Krishnan said, adding it was “premature to read more into it”.
- Tech companies have countered that the package of 83 security standards, which will include a requirement to alert the government to major software updates, lacks any global precedent and risks revealing proprietary details, according to four people familiar with the discussions and a Reuters review of confidential government and industry documents.
- Indian government requirements have irked technology firms before. Last month the Centre revoked an order mandating a state-run cyber safety app, Sanchar Saathi, on phones amid concerns over surveillance.
- The new proposal is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s efforts to boost security of user data as online fraud and data breaches increase in the world’s second-largest smartphone market, with nearly 750 million phones.
- Manufacturers will also have to make software changes under the requirements to allow pre-installed apps to be uninstalled and to block apps from using cameras and microphones in the background to “avoid malicious usage”.
- Device makers will have to inform the National Centre for Communication Security about major software updates and security patches before releasing them to users, and the centre will have the right to test them.
- Tech companies Apple, Samsung, Google, and Xiaomi, and the Manufacturers’ Association for Information Technology (MAIT) did not respond to requests for comment. However, MAIT had asked the Ministry last week to drop the proposal, a source with direct knowledge said.

- “This [source code review and analysis] is not possible... due to secrecy and privacy,” MAIT had said in a confidential document drafted in response to the government proposal, and seen by Reuters. “Major countries in the EU, North America, Australia, and Africa do not mandate these requirements.” MAIT’s document says regular malware scanning significantly drains a phone’s battery and seeking government approval for software updates is “impractical” as they need to be issued promptly.

❖ **Language row: Authority seeks explicit exclusion of Kannada linguistic minority areas in Bill**

Context: A day after Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan sought to allay fears of Kannada linguistic minority in Kerala about the Malayalam Bhasha Bill 2025, the Karnataka Border Area Development Authority (KBADA) has said that the Bill should explicitly exempt linguistic minority areas (parts of Kasaragod district) in the mandatory Malayalam first language clause — allowing Kannada to remain the first language, and also remove the inherent contradictions in the Bill.

- While Mr. Vijayan on Saturday pointed out provisions in Clause 7 of the Bill to allay fears of the Kannada-speaking population, the authority pointed out contradictions in the provisions that was also leading to confusion.
- The assessment of the Karnataka government was that under the proposed legislation, those studying in Kannada medium would also need to study Malayalam as a compulsory subject/first language, affecting those who are unfamiliar with that language.

Academic performance

- It could affect the academic performance adversely and Kannada’s primacy would also get eroded over time. It may disrupt existing set-ups where Kannada was the first language, sources aware of the assessment said.
- This comes amidst concerns aired by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah over the adverse effects of the Bill on the Kannada-speaking population in Kerala.
- The sources said that the Kerala government through the Bill should accelerate declaration of specific taluks in Kasaragod district as minority areas under the Bill and secure full benefit of Clause 7 in it that provided for bilingual signboards and teachers’ appointments in Kannada, among others.
- The authority chairman Somanna Bevinamarad is learnt to have echoed similar sentiments.
- An estimate puts the Kannada-speaking people in Kasargod to be more than 70% of the population.

Contradictions

- According to Prakash Matthihalli, secretary of the authority, despite protections in Clause 7 (special provisions regarding linguistic minorities) in the Bill, there were contradictions and difficulties in implementation.
- He said that while Clause 6(1) mandated Malayalam as the compulsory first language in all government and aided schools in Kerala up to 10th standard, Clause 7(1) provided for communication of all letters and transactions in local offices in the local language.

- “However, as per Clause 7(2) students whose mother tongue is any language other than Malayalam may pursue their studies in the languages of their choice that are available in the schools. When the second language English is compulsory in national education curriculum in Kerala, how can a student opt Kannada as first language when Clause 6(1) says Malayalam is mandatory across the State?”
- Further, Clause 7(3) that spoke of students from other States and foreign countries whose mother tongue was not Malayalam, provided for exemption only in 9th and 10th standards. “Clause 7 should explicitly specify the exemption to linguistic minorities areas.”
- Mr. Matthihalli said the Karnataka government had no problem with the Bill if the ambiguities in the provisions were cleared and it exempted the Kannada-speaking regions.

❖ Governor has not returned hate speech Bill: CM

Context: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Sunday that Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has not returned the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill. The Governor has neither rejected nor approved the Bill, he said.

- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Sunday that Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has not returned the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill.
- The Governor has neither rejected nor approved the Bill, he said.
- Speaking to presspersons before leaving for Bengaluru after winding up his programmes scheduled in Mangaluru on Saturday evening, Mr. Siddaramaiah said that the Governor will receive an explanation about the Bill if he seeks one.

‘Leaders jealous’

- The Chief Minister said that removing banners displayed in connection with the inauguration of the statue of Maharshi Valmiki was the reason for the recent clashes between BJP and Congress workers in Ballari. “Why was there a need to remove the banners?” he asked.
- Since BJP leaders G. Janardhana Reddy and B. Sriramulu are not enjoying political power now, they are exhibiting their jealousy in matters related to clashes, the Chief Minister said.
- Mr. Siddaramaiah questioned the BJP’s move to organise a padayatra from Ballari to Bengaluru on January 17 to condemn the clashes.
- The Chief Minister said that the Congress organised a 320-km padayatra from Bengaluru to Ballari in August 2010, targeting the then ruling BJP over illegal mining and corruption. It was in protest against the Reddy brothers treating Ballari as their personal fiefdom and the then Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa not reining them in, he said.
- He said that the Congress had launched the padayatra under the banner ‘Ballari Chalo’ after accepting the challenge thrown by Mr. Janardhana Reddy and Karunakara Reddy and their close associate Mr. Sriramulu in the Assembly, who had dared the party to step into their home district, and asked, “Why is the BJP organising a padayatra now?”
- Mr. Siddaramaiah further denied that there is a tussle for power (for the Chief Minister’s position) in the Congress. “It is all the creation of the media,” he said.

❖ CGWB flags major contamination of groundwater in Andhra Pradesh

Context: The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) has stated in its Annual Ground Water Quality Report, 2025 that Andhra Pradesh is one of the States facing widespread contamination of groundwater as per the BIS standards.

- However, the report notes that the monsoon had shown some improvement in water quality, particularly in the areas affected by high electrical conductivity (EC) and fluoride.
- “Elevated uranium concentrations exceeding 30 parts per billion (ppb) were detected sporadically in Andhra Pradesh and four other States,” the report mentioned. High incidence of residual sodium carbonate beyond permissible limits was also recorded in Andhra Pradesh (26.87% of the samples analysed).
- The groundwater quality alerts issued by the CGWB during June 2024–March 2025 highlighted the high incidence of nitrate, iron, fluoride, chromium, cobalt, manganese, nickel, zinc, arsenic, selenium, cadmium, lead, and uranium, with notable concerns in Andhra Pradesh and eight other States. Andhra Pradesh and some other States were found to be facing seawater intrusion in coastal aquifers, which was attributed to high levels of electrical conductivity.

Uranium hotspots

- Sixteen villages in Sri Sathya Sai district, and three in Tirupati district were found to have uranium levels exceeding 30 ppb.
- Five villages were identified as arsenic hotspots, where the concentration of the heavy metal exceeded 10 ppb. Fluoride contamination above 1.50 mg/l in areas, especially hard rock aquifers in Andhra Pradesh, where over-extraction enhances the mobilisation of fluoride-bearing minerals was one of the major findings.

❖ Indian Army officer from Bengaluru wins UN Secretary-General's Award 2025

Context: An Indian Army officer from Bengaluru, Major Swathi Shantha Kumar, has won the UN Secretary-General's Award 2025 for her project Equal Partners, Lasting Peace.

- Major Swathi is currently serving on an United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and her efforts are said to have significantly enhanced gender parity through the effective deployment and integration of the Indian Engagement team, thereby strengthening grassroot level engagement across the area of responsibility.
- Under her initiative and command, the team successfully conducted short- and long-distance patrols, integrated reverie patrols, and dynamic air patrols to far-flung counties of the host nation. These operations contributed substantially to creating a conducive and secure environment for more than 5,000 women, enabling meaningful participation and community confidence-building.
- Major Swathi is an officer in the Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME). Her father, R. Shantha Kumar, said that she did her schooling in Bengaluru and graduated from the New Horizon College of Engineering following which she was commissioned in the Indian Army.

- “We are very proud that our daughter is serving the nation in uniform, but like any other parent I am worried about her as she has to serve in very harsh terrains and conditions. This award is a recognition for her hard work and discipline which makes me a very happy and proud father,” Mr. Kumar said.
- He added that Major Swathi has been in South Sudan for nearly 15 months and is expected to return to India early next month following which she will be posted in Secunderabad.
- United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently announced and honored the winners of the Secretary General’s Award 2025.
- In his address Mr. Guterres said that the Mission has further strengthened the gender-inclusive approach by the UNMISS.
- This prestigious award recognises initiatives that advance gender parity and promote gender-responsive peacekeeping in alignment with the UN mandate.
- The team was shortlisted from nominations received across all UN peacekeeping missions and UN agencies worldwide and emerged as the winner in the Gender Category, securing the highest number of votes among four finalists through a UN-wide voting process involving the UN personnel globally.

❖ Countdown to launch of PSLV-C62 mission begins

Context: The vehicle, carrying an earth observation satellite and 15 ‘co-passengers’ developed by Indian and overseas customers, is set to lift off at 10.17 a.m today; it is the 105th launch from Sriharikota.

- The 22.5-hour countdown to the launch of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), carrying an earth observation satellite and 15 co-passenger satellites, commenced at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota on Sunday.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is scheduled to launch the PSLV-C62/EOS-N1 Mission at 10.17 a.m. on Monday from the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. This will be the 105th launch from Sriharikota. It will also be the 64th flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle and the fifth mission of the PSLV-DL variant.
- The 15 co-passenger satellites have been developed by start-ups and academic institutions from India and abroad. The EOS-N1 satellite is said to have been built for strategic purposes.
- “It is a commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited (NSIL). EOS-N1 and 14 co-passenger satellites will be injected into a Sun Synchronous Orbit and KID Capsule into a re-entry trajectory,” the ISRO said.
- It added that after the injection of EOS-N1 and 14 satellites, the PS4 stage will be restarted to de-boost and enter a re-entry trajectory, followed by KID Capsule separation. “Both PS4 stage and KID Capsule will re-enter into Earth’s Atmosphere and impact will be in the South Pacific Ocean,” the ISRO said.
- The 15 co-passengers are: Theos-2 earth observation satellite built jointly by Thailand and the U.K.; CGUSAT by Dhruva Space (India); DSUSAT by Dhruva Space; MOI-1 by Dhruva Space and Takeme2Space (India); LACHIT by Dhruva Space and Don Bosco University (India); Thybolt-3 by Dhruva Space; Munal by Nepal university

Antharkshya Pratishtan (Nepal) and MEA, GoI; KID Capsule by Orbital Paradigm (Spain) and RIDE! (France); Edusat by AlltoSpace (Brazil); Uaisat by AlltoSpace; Galaxy Explorer by AlltoSpace; Orbital Temple by AlltoSpace; Aldebaran-1 by AlltoSpace; Sanskarsat by Laxman Gyanpith (India); and AyulSat by OrbitAid (India).

❖ **Faster, demand-led approach needed for PSE privatisation: CII**

Context: The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has suggested an accelerated four-pronged strategy to unlock value from the disinvestment of public sector enterprises (PSEs), calling for a demand-driven approach in selecting units for privatisation, and following a predictable road map.

- In its proposals for the Union Budget 2026-27, the industry lobby urged the Union government to mobilise resources through a calibrated approach to privatisation focusing on sectors where private participation can enhance efficiency, technology infusion, and global competitiveness, to sustain capital expenditure and address developmental priorities amid global economic uncertainties.
- The CII called upon the Centre to announce a rolling three-year privatisation pipeline, outlining which enterprises are likely to be taken up for privatisation during this period while recognising that full privatisation of all non-strategic PSEs is a complex and time-consuming process. It argued that this visibility would encourage deeper investor engagement and more realistic valuation and price discovery, which would contribute towards expediting the privatisation process.

Releasing value

- “Government could reduce its stake in listed PSEs in a phased manner to 51% initially, allowing it to remain the single largest shareholder while releasing significant value into the market. Over time, this stake could be brought down further to between 33% and 26%,” the CII stated in its proposal.
- Reducing the government’s stake to 51% in 78 listed PSEs could unlock close to ₹10 lakh crore, according to its analysis.
- “A calibrated reduction of the government’s stake in listed PSEs to 51% and even lower is a pragmatic step that balances strategic control with value creation. Unlocking nearly ₹10 lakh crore of productive capital would provide vital resources to accelerate physical and social infrastructure development and support fiscal consolidation,” CII Director-General Chandrajit Banerjee said.

❖ **Environment Ministry funds sought for forest management committees**

Context: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is in talks with the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change for funding the management of community forest resources, for which rights have been vested in gram sabhas of tribal communities and other forest-dwellers across the country under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), government officials said.

- Officials of both Ministries met over it recently, and the Tribal Affairs Ministry is also planning to write to the Environment Ministry formally on this matter, a top official told The Hindu, adding that this was necessary to “correct the perception” that the

forest bureaucracy was at odds with the goals of community-led forest resource management.

- For the last 20 years, the FRA has recognised the historical rights of Scheduled Tribe communities and other forest-dwellers on the forests they have lived in and around and vested these rights in them through FRA titles for specific sets of rights. Under the FRA, gram sabhas are entitled to include community forest resource rights (CFR) over areas “they have been traditionally protecting, regenerating, conserving and managing for sustainable use”.
- In 2023, the Tribal Affairs Ministry issued guidelines for the management of forests for which CFR rights had already been granted to gram sabhas.
- These guidelines provided for setting up CFR management committees under the title-holding gram sabhas, mandating that conservation and management plans be drawn up by the communities before the Forest Department is called in to align them with the Environment Ministry’s working plan codes. The Union government is now looking to rope in the Environment Ministry to fund the CFR management committees that are being set up under the FRA.
- One senior official said, “The CFRM committees will need resources and help in functioning. They will need the funds to hire officials, prepare plans, and even train their own community’s people in running the day-to-day operations. The idea is to get funding help from the Environment Ministry for this as well.”
- A meeting at the level of Secretaries of both Ministries was held over the last month. “If needed, safeguards can be built in to ensure that the planning of forest conservation and management remains community-led and is not necessarily taken over by the forest department,” one of the officials said.



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❖ PSLV-C62 strays from flight path, fails to launch satellite

Context: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s PSLV-C62 mission carrying the EOS-N1 earth observation satellite and 15 co-passenger satellites failed to finish its intended trajectory after an anomaly was detected during the end of the third stage of the launch vehicle, resulting in the loss of the satellites and prompting a detailed analysis.

- The PSLV-C62 lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. The launch of the vehicle, which has four stages, went as expected till the third stage, but showed “disturbance in the vehicle roll rates” close to the end of the third stage, ISRO chairman V. Narayanan said.
- “The performance of the vehicle up to the end of the third stage was as expected. Close to the end of the third stage, we saw some disturbance in the vehicle roll rates, and subsequently, there is a deviation observed in the flight path. We are analysing the data, and we shall come back at the earliest,” Mr. Narayanan said.
- Recent outcome is seen as a big setback for the space agency as the PSLV, its workhorse rocket, has suffered back-to-back failures now.
- On May 18, 2025, ISRO's attempted launch of the EOS-09 satellite aboard the PSLV-C61 mission could not be completed, also due to an anomaly in the third stage of the rocket. The EOS-N1 earth observation satellite is said to be built for strategic purposes.

Off target

The anomaly in the PSLV-C62 launch occurred when the third stage of the vehicle was operating

Third stage (PS3) ignites
4 minutes 25 seconds after liftoff

Vehicle starts spinning in an uncontrollable way by around
2 minutes into third stage

ISRO reports trouble receiving data by the
12-minute mark

MONDAY'S FAILURE IS THE FOURTH SINCE THE PSLV'S FIRST MISSION IN 1993, AND SECOND WITHIN A YEAR

- **September 20, 1993:** PSLV-D1, the first mission of the vehicle, fails to place the IRS-1E satellite in orbit
- **August 31, 2017:** PSLV-C39 launch fails with malfunction in heat shield separation
- **May 18, 2025:** PSLV-C61 launch fails with an incident in the third stage

PTI

❖ What do two PSLV mission failures in a row mean for ISRO?

Context: On May 18, 2025, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) suffered a rare failure with its PSLV-C61 mission. The PSLV rocket has long been considered the agency's “workhorse” due to its history of reliable launches. However, on January 12, the PSLV-C62 mission also failed. Indian Space Research Organisation Chairman V. Narayanan confirmed that the rocket's third stage (PS3) experienced an anomaly, marking two consecutive failures for the vehicle.

- To understand the recent failure, it's necessary to examine the C61 mission, whose primary payload was the EOS-09 satellite.

- While the first two stages performed correctly, telemetry data showed a sudden, unexpected drop in chamber pressure within the third stage motor around 203 seconds into the flight. Because the PS3 is a solid-fuel motor, a pressure drop of this nature may indicate a serious structural failure, such as a casing breach or a nozzle blowout. Without the necessary pressure, the engine would not have been able to generate enough thrust.

Data withheld

- Following the C61 incident, a Failure Analysis Committee (FAC) investigated the root cause. However, the FAC's report submitted to the Prime Minister's Office has not been released to the public.
- The reasons are not clear. One possibility is to protect sensitive information about the payload; this said, it is also possible to release a technical failure report regarding the rocket while redacting sensitive information about any satellites.
- Commercial protection is another possibility: ISRO is aggressively pushing the PSLV as a commercial product through NewSpace India, Ltd (NSIL). The PS3 motor is a technologically mature component that should not fail. If the failure was caused by simple negligence or a manufacturing defect, admitting this publicly could damage the rocket's reputation and increase the cost of insuring its launches. Keeping the report classified may be a way to avoid admitting whether the issue was one bad batch of materials or a deeper lapse in quality assurance.

Reason for failure

- Either way, the overall lack of transparency sets the context for the outcome of the PSLV-C62 mission. Once the third stage anomaly became clear, Mr. Narayanan stated that the mission failed due to a "roll rate disturbance", meaning the rocket began spinning uncontrollably. The PS3 stage lacks its own roll control thrusters and instead banks on the stage above it, the fourth stage, to remain stable.
- If the PS3 motor suffered a leak and vented gas from the side of the nozzle, it could create a twisting force strong enough to overpower the fourth stage stabilisers.
- That the third stage motor was affected in both missions suggests the two modes of failure could be related. By keeping the PSLV-C61 investigation internal, the ISRO and the Department of Space avoided external scrutiny of the organisation's "return to flight" criterion.
- If independent experts had been able to review the initial findings, they may have been able to verify the quality of the fixes ISRO implemented before the second launch.
- But the agency launched again eight months later and faced the same result.

❖ Retail inflation at 3-month high of 1.33% in December

Context: Increased figure still below RBI's lower comfort level of 2%; data show broad-based decline in price levels across sectors as reason for low figure; core inflation at 28-month high of 4.8%, says expert.

- India's retail inflation quickened to a three-month high of 1.33% in December 2025, which is still significantly below the lower comfort level of 2% set by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), official data released on Monday showed.
- Data on the Consumer Price Index for December 2025, released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, show that the low levels of retail inflation are a result of a broad-based decline in price levels across sectors. The RBI targets an inflation rate of 4%, with a comfort band of 2% above and below that.
- The food and beverages category saw a contraction of 1.85% in prices in December 2025, a moderation from the contraction of 2.8% seen in November. This is likely due to a high base effect as inflation in this category stood at 7.7% in December last year.
- "However, inflation was high at over 5% for meat products, oils, and fruits and will continue to exert upward pressure in the coming months," Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda said.
- Inflation in the 'pan, tobacco, and intoxicants' category remained unchanged at 2.96% in December 2025 as compared to November. The clothing and footwear category saw inflation easing marginally to 1.44% in December 2025 from 1.49% in the previous month. Inflation in this category had been 2.7% in December 2024. The housing sector, too, saw inflation easing to 2.86% in December 2025 from 2.95% in the previous month. The fuel and light category saw inflation ease to 1.97% in December 2025, as compared to 2.3% in November.
- "Core inflation (CPI excluding food and beverages, fuel and light, and petrol and diesel for vehicles) jumped to a 28-month high of 4.8% in December 2025 from 4.4% in November 2025," Aditi Nayar, chief economist and head, research & outreach at ICRA Limited said. "However, this was largely led by precious metals; core CPI excluding gold and silver remained unchanged at 2.4% between these months."

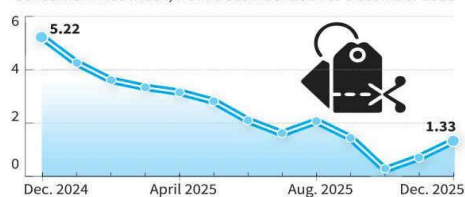
❖ India, Germany agree to shore up defence cooperation

Context: India and Germany will enhance defence trade with an eye on 'co-production and co-development,' Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as the two sides signed an agreement to strengthen bilateral defence industrial cooperation.

- Welcoming German Chancellor Friedrich Merz to India, Mr. Modi said India will launch a 'consultation mechanism' on increasing collaboration with Germany in the Indo-Pacific region.
- In his remarks, Mr. Merz, who is on his first visit to Asia since assuming office in May 2025, said "rough winds" are blowing in world politics and that India and Germany should increase partnership to counter global trends of instability.

Quickening again

The chart shows retail price inflation (in %), measured by the Consumer Price Index, from December 2024 to December 2025



- The list of ‘outcomes’ following the meeting between the two leaders also included several other MoUs and Joint Declarations of Intent covering areas like recruitment of skilled professionals by Germany, sports, and higher education.
- “The growing cooperation in defence and security is a symbol of our mutual trust and shared vision. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Chancellor Merz for simplifying the processes related to defence trade. We will also work on a roadmap to enhance cooperation between our defence industries, which will open up new opportunities for co-development and co-production,” Mr. Modi said following talks with Mr. Merz.
- Mr. Modi pointed out that Chancellor Merz’s visit coincided with India and Germany marking 25 years of strategic partnership and 75 years of diplomatic relations. The two teams also discussed multiple regional issues, including the conflicts in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, with PM Modi reiterating India’s condemnation of terrorism.
- Chancellor Merz urged India to partner with Germany in strengthening ‘global supply chains’. “Unfortunately, we are seeing a renaissance of protectionism,” said Chancellor Merz, adding that protectionism hurts India-Germany trade ties. The comments from the visiting German leader about the rise in protectionism in global affairs came against the backdrop of a decline in India-U.S. trade relations that have been hit by the imposition of punitive tariffs on India by U.S. President Donald Trump.
- Chancellor Merz did not talk about President Trump in his formal remarks, but later, talking to reporters, he mentioned that Germany does not impose tariffs on other countries, an indirect reference to the punitive tariffs that the U.S. has imposed on India.
- “Countries like Germany and India have been focusing on principles of free trade and open markets, and we will continue to focus on these principles in future. We are experiencing that great powers are using supply chains and raw materials as instruments of power. Together we want to oppose this,” said Chancellor Merz, indicating the India-EU Free Trade Agreement could be concluded as early as the end of this month.
- A Joint statement issued after bilateral talks said that the two leaders have “reiterated their support for the conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement as a key outcome of the upcoming EU-India Summit, which will facilitate trade flows and inject further momentum into German-India economic relations.”
- The two sides reiterated their commitment to fight illegal immigration and aimed for full implementation of the provisions of the Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPA) that was signed in December 2022. The agreement is aimed at stopping “irregular migration, human trafficking and document and visa fraud”, said the Joint Statement.”
- It added that a ‘Joint Declaration of Intent’ signed on Monday on the recruitment of healthcare professionals will address Germany’s demand for the sector.

❖ Namo Venkatesha wins film literary award

Context: Namo Venkatesha, a collection of articles on 20 selected films written by senior journalist Raghunath Cha. Ha. has been selected for the State Annual Film Literary Award for the calendar year 2020.

- The book was published by Annapoorna Prakashana, Sirigeri, Ballari district. The Department of Information and Public Relations on Monday announced the awards for the calendar years 2020 and 2021 in Bengaluru.
- The selection committee for the 2020 award was chaired by Hemanth M. Nimbalkar, Commissioner of the Department of Information and Public Relations, with senior journalists Rajashekar Hatagundi and Basavaraj Megalakere as members. For the 2021 calendar year, the film literature award has been conferred on Antarangada Anna, a book on the life of Dr. Rajkumar, authored by writer and film director Prakashraj Mehu.
- The book was published by Sirigandha Prakashana, Bengaluru.
- The selection committee for 2021 comprised noted litterateur Chidananda Sali and journalist Sharanu Hullur.

❖ State govt. notifies social boycott Act

Context: Karnataka Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2025, was published in the gazette by the State government on Monday, following assent given by Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot.

- The Act, which comes into effect, seeks to prohibit social boycott of a person or a group of persons including their family members, and imposes stringent punishment on the offenders.
- Social boycott has been defined as a gesture or an act, whether oral or written, of any social discrimination.

❖ Solar panels yield far more energy per acre than biofuels

Context: A Poland-sized area is dedicated to liquid biofuels. Is there a more efficient way to generate energy?

Electric vehicles might be promoted as the key technological solution for low-carbon transport today, but they were not always the obvious option. Back in the early 2000s, it was biofuels. Rather than extracting and burning oil, we could grow crops like cereals and sugarcane, and turn them into viable fuels.

- While we might expect biofuels to be a solution of the past due to the cost-competitiveness and rise of electric cars, the world produces more biofuels than ever. And this rise is expected to continue.
- In this article, we give a sense of perspective on how much land is used to produce biofuels, and what the potential of that land could be if we used it for other forms of energy. We will focus on what would happen if we used that land for solar panels, and then how many electric vehicles could be powered as a result. We will mostly focus on road transport, as that is where 99% of biofuels are currently used.
- To be clear: we are not proposing that we should replace all biofuel land with solar panels. There are many ways we could utilise this land, whether for food production, some biofuel production, or rewilding. Maybe some combination of all of the above. But to make informed decisions about how to use our land effectively, we need to get a perspective on the potential of each option. That is what we aim to do here for solar power and electrified transport.

Source and impacts

- Most of the world's biofuels come from sugarcane (mostly grown in Brazil), cereal crops such as corn (mostly grown in the United States and the European Union), and oil crops such as soybean and palm oil (which are grown in the U.S., Brazil, and Indonesia). Collectively, these biofuels produce around 4% of the world's energy demand for transport. While that does push some oil from the energy mix, the climate benefits of biofuels are not always as clear as people might assume.
- Once we consider the climate impact of growing the food and manufacturing the fuel, the carbon savings relative to petrol can be small for some crops. But more importantly, when the opportunity costs of the land used to grow those crops are taken into account, they might be worse for the climate. That is because agricultural land use is not "free". If we chose not to use it for agriculture, then it could be rewilded and reforested, which would sequester carbon from the atmosphere.
- From a climate perspective, freeing up that cropland from biofuels would be one alternative. However, another option is to utilise it for another form of energy, which could offer a much greater climate benefit.
- A recent analysis from researchers at Cerulogy estimated that biofuels are grown on 61 million hectares of land. But when they split this allocation between land for biofuels and land for animal feed, the land use for biofuels alone was 32 million hectares. There are much higher published figures too. For this article, we are going to assume a net land use of 32 million hectares. This is conservative, and that is deliberate. For context, that is about the size of Germany, Poland, the Philippines, Finland, or Italy.

Solar power equivalent

- How much solar power could you produce on that land, and how many cars could you run? Could we use those 32 million hectares of land differently to produce even more energy than we currently get from biofuels?
- The answer is yes. If we put solar panels on that land, we could produce roughly 32,000 terawatt-hours of electricity each year. That is 23 times more than the energy that is currently produced in the form of all liquid biofuels. 32,000 terawatt-hours is a big number. The world generated 31,000 TWh of electricity in 2024. So, these new solar panels would produce enough to meet the world's current electricity demand.
- Again, our proposal is not that we should cover all of this land in solar panels, or that it could easily power the world on its own. We don't account for the fact that we would need energy storage and other options to make sure that power is available where and when it is needed (not just when the sun is shining). We are just trying to get a sense of perspective for how much electricity could be produced by using that land in more efficient ways.
- These comparisons might seem surprising at first. But they can be explained by the fact that growing crops is a very inefficient process. Plants convert less than 1% of sunlight into biomass through photosynthesis. Even more energy is then lost when we turn those plants into liquid fuels. Crops such as sugarcane tend to perform better than others, like maize, but even they are still inefficient.

- By comparison, solar panels convert 15% to 20% of sunlight into electricity, with some recent designs achieving as much as 25%. That means replacing crops with solar panels will generate a lot more energy.

Solar versus biofuels

- Now, you might think that we are comparing very different things here: energy from liquid biofuels meant to decarbonise transport, and solar, which could decarbonise electricity. But with the rise of affordable and high-quality electric vehicles, solar power can be a way to decarbonise transport, too.
- Run the numbers, and we find that you could power all of the world's cars and trucks on this solar energy if transport were electrified. Of course, these vehicles would need to be electrified in the first place. This is happening — electric car sales are rising, and electric trucks are now starting to get some attention — but it will take time for most vehicles on the road to be electric. For now, we will imagine that they are.
- We estimate that the total electricity needed to power all cars and trucks is around 7,000 TWh per year, comprising 3,500 TWh for cars and a similar amount for trucks. You could power all of the world's cars and trucks on this solar energy if transport were electrified.
- That is less than one-quarter of the 32,000 TWh that solar panels could produce on biofuel land. Consider those options. The world could meet 3% or 4% of transport demand with biofuels. Or it could meet all road transport demand on just one-quarter of that land. The other three-quarters could be used for other things, such as food production, biofuels for aviation, or it could be left alone to rewild.
- Land use comes at a cost, so we should think carefully about how to use it well. Our point here is not that we should cover all of our biofuel land in solar panels. What we do want to challenge is how we think and talk about land use. People rightly question the impact of solar or wind farms on landscapes, but rarely consider the land use of existing biofuel crops, which do very little to decarbonise our energy supplies.

❖ India to be invited to join U.S-led initiative Pax Silica, says envoy

Context: India was not included in the original launch of the arrangement for cooperation on semiconductors, critical minerals, AI; Gor 'takes charge' of U.S. Embassy with music and fanfare, says both countries continue to actively engage over trade deal.

- India will be invited to join “Pax Silica”, the U.S.-led eight-nation arrangement to cooperate on semiconductors, critical minerals, and artificial intelligence, next month, incoming U.S. Ambassador Sergio Gor announced on Monday. He added that both countries hoped to make progress on long-delayed trade negotiations soon.
- Mr. Gor, who is yet to present his credentials to President Droupadi Murmu, projected a positive outlook for India-U.S. ties after months of tensions over trade, tariffs, and India's import of Russian oil.
- “The United States and India are bound not just by shared interests, but by relationship anchored at the highest levels,” Mr. Gor said in an unprecedented “arrival speech”, delivered with much fanfare from the steps of the U.S. Embassy on Shantipath in Delhi.

- “Real friends can disagree but always resolve their differences in the end,” he added. He said the two sides “continue to actively engage” over the trade deal that had been initially launched nearly a year ago when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Washington. Subsequently, the deal lost momentum as the U.S. imposed 50% tariffs on Indian goods, and has seen six official rounds of negotiations and three visits to the U.S. by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal.
- “Remember, India is the world’s largest nation, so it’s not an easy task to get this across the finish line, but we are determined to get there,” he said.
- India was not included in the original launch of “Pax Silica” in Washington in December, though fellow Quad members Japan and Australia, I2U2 countries, Israel and the UAE, and others including South Korea, Singapore, the U.K., and the Netherlands were invited.

Trump’s visit

- Mr. Gor said he hoped U.S. President Donald Trump would visit India “soon, hopefully in the next year or two”. Mr. Trump was expected to visit India last year to attend the Quad Summit, and India is hoping to host the summit this year.

Unconventional arrival

- The Ambassador’s statement, made to hundreds of U.S. Embassy staffers in Delhi and Indian media, was unconventional as Mr. Gor is expected to present his credentials later this week.
- According to diplomatic protocol, Ambassadors are expected to make public appearances only after the credentials are presented. Mr. Gor arrived at the Embassy with his Ambassadorial convoy, including a special armoured car with red and blue blinking lights.
- As he alighted, the Embassy officials who had gathered there more than two hours before, along with the press, greeted him with loud applause, and as he walked up the steps, a special playlist of songs, reportedly chosen by Mr. Gor, that included the 1960s soul song Hold on, I’m Coming and Mr. Trump’s favourite YMCA were played over loudspeakers.
- The ceremony, which included dozens of media outlets, was telecast live — a break from the past. His predecessor, Biden-appointed Eric Garcetti, had arrived to take up his assignment in a colourful autorickshaw in April 2023, but without the media or the large welcoming assembly.
- Mr. Gor begins with his tasks cut out, given spiralling ties between New Delhi and Washington, particularly over a number of statements, including Mr. Trump’s repeated claim that he mediated the India-Pakistan conflict in May 2025, which the government has strenuously denied.
- Last week, the External Affairs Ministry rejected a claim by U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick that the trade deal had fallen through as Prime Minister Narendra Modi had not called Mr. Trump to finalise it, pointing out that the two leaders had spoken eight times during the year.
- Mr. Gor said that India-U.S. trade negotiators would hold another call.

- In addition, the government has been uncomfortable with the U.S. President's contention that Mr. Modi had promised to cut India's imports of Russian oil "to make him happy", stressing that any decisions are led by market conditions.

Special envoy

- Mr. Gor, who has also been appointed Mr. Trump's Special Envoy for South and Central Asia, has taken a few months to arrive, after being named for the post in August 2024, and confirmed by the U.S. Senate in October.
- Alongside bilateral issues, his travels in the region, particularly to Pakistan and Bangladesh, will be watched most closely in New Delhi.

❖ DRDO carries out flight test of anti-tank guided missile

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Sunday successfully flight-tested the indigenously developed third-generation fire-and-forget man portable anti-tank guided missile (MPATGM) with top-attack capability against a moving target in the K.K. Ranges in Ahilya Nagar, Maharashtra.
- The Defence Ministry said the flight test was conducted by the DRDO's Defence Research & Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad, and it marked a significant milestone towards the induction of the advanced anti-tank weapon system into the Indian Army.
- It incorporates cutting-edge indigenous technologies, including an imaging infrared (IIR) homing seeker.

❖ Modi, Merz launch annual kite festival in Ahmedabad

Context: PM and German Chancellor get grand welcome with music and dance performances; the leaders visit exhibit reflecting Ahmedabad's architectural heritage, watch demonstrations on kite-making.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated the International Kite Festival, 2026 on the Sabarmati riverfront in Ahmedabad, with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz attending as the chief guest. The two leaders launched the festival by flying kites.
- Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi were present, along with members of the State Cabinet, MLAs, municipal corporation office-bearers, and senior State government officials.
- Mr. Modi and Mr. Merz were welcomed with music and dance performances. Cultural presentations included Gujarati folk dance Beda Raas, Kuchipudi, Bharatanatyam, and Mallakhamb.
- The two leaders visited an exhibit reflecting the architectural heritage of Ahmedabad's pols and havelis (traditional houses and grand residences).
- As part of a heritage walkway, a kite museum and a photo wall have been set up. The dignitaries were briefed on kites from different Indian States, made using various materials and techniques. They observed demonstrations by artisans on kite-making.
- The festival on the Sabarmati riverfront draws inspiration from kite-flying celebrations held across Gujarat annually ahead of Uttarayan, also known as Makar Sankranti, which falls this year.

- It celebrates the sun's northward journey and the transition towards summer. The festival is being organised by Gujarat Tourism.
- A musical ensemble by 108 artists from Gujarat and Rajasthan featuring instruments such as sitar, sarangi, violin, mandolin, harmonium, flute, dholak, tabla, and mridang will perform.
- The performance included Vande Mataram, Vaishnav Jan, and German compositions. Folk singer Kinjal Dave will perform and illuminated kites will light up the night sky.
- This year, the festival boasts 135 international kite-flyers representing 50 countries and 65 kite-flyers from 13 Indian States. In addition, 871 kite-flyers from 16 districts of Gujarat are participating.
- **The countries are Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, the U.K., the United States, Vietnam, Slovenia, Bahrain, Nepal, Turkey, and Jordan.**
- To introduce visitors to Gujarati cuisine and handicrafts, 25 handicraft stalls and 15 food stalls have been set up at the venue.

❖ **PNGRB, DVGW ink MoU to advance hydrogen integration**

- India's Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) and its German counterpart DVGW inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish a cooperative framework for integrating hydrogen into the country's natural gas infrastructure.
- Among other things, the MoU would seek to facilitate knowledge sharing relating to safety methodologies. It would also seek to facilitate technical visits and anonymised data sharing.

❖ **Solar industry's wish list for Union Budget**

Context: As India's solar energy capacity continues to accelerate, the domestic industry is seeking an enhanced production-linked incentive scheme, second instalment of PM-Kusum and viability gap funding to accelerate potential for energy storage, in the upcoming Union Budget.

- Subrahmanyam Pulipaka, CEO at the industry body National Solar Energy Federation of India, told The Hindu, "The sector has grown big today, we are no more a sub-sector of the power sector. We are the second-largest generator in terms of installed capacity, therefore, our aspirations have increased in the same proportion."

PLI for ingots

- Mr. Pulipaka sought the government instituting a production-linked incentive (PLI) or a similar scheme, for manufacturing ingots. They are among the raw materials used for making solar cells.
- "These are all capital-intensive parts," he stated.

- Separately, Prafulla Pathak, Solar Energy Society of India (SESI) also insisted on good financial allocation for the industry to help push overall indigenous production.

❖ Hamnet and One Battle After Another reign supreme at 83rd Golden Globes

Context: Paul Thomas Anderson's ragtag revolutionary saga One Battle After Another took top honours at Sunday's 83rd Golden Globes in the comedy category, while Chloe Zhao's Shakespeare drama Hamnet pulled off an upset over Sinners to win best film, drama. Hamnet star Jessie Buckley won best female actor.

- One Battle After Another won best film, comedy, supporting female actor for Teyana Taylor, best director and best screenplay for Mr. Anderson. Sinners won for best score and cinematic and box-office achievement.
- Timothee Chalamet won his first Golden Globe for Marty Supreme.
- The Globes held in California began with a pointedly political opening from host Nikki Glaser.
- "Yes, the Golden Globes, without a doubt the most important thing happening in the world right now," she said.
- Winners included Rose Byrne for best female actor in a comedy or musical in *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*, and Wagner Moura, the Brazilian star of *The Secret Agent*, for best male actor in a drama. Kleber Mendonça Filho's period political thriller also won best international film. Supporting actor front-runner Stellan Skarsgard won for the Norwegian family drama *Sentimental Value*. It was the first major Hollywood movie award for the 74-year-old veteran actor.



Sara Murphy, Teyana Taylor, Paul Thomas Anderson and Chase Infiniti pose with the award for *One Battle After Another*. REUTERS

SC questions EC on voter roll deletions, citizenship

Context: Top court asks poll body if its decision to remove voters from electoral rolls could lead to an investigation into their right to remain in India; EC says voters excluded in SIR have right to appeal.

- The Supreme Court asked the Election Commission (EC) whether an Electoral Registration Officer (ERO)'s decision to strike a person off the electoral rolls after an "inquisitorial" enquiry into his citizenship under the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise could be referred to by the Centre to commence an investigation into the individual's right to remain in



India or be deported.

- Justice Joymalya Bagchi, a member of the Division Bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, asked whether EROs could exclude a person from the electoral rolls even before the Centre took a final call to “strip him of the colour of citizenship”.
- The questions from the court gained significance as draft electoral rolls published in nine States and three Union Territories, including West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, witnessed the deletion of nearly 6.5 crore names in the second phase of the SIR process.
- The queries from the Bench followed submissions made by senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi that Article 326 (the right of adult Indian citizens to vote), the Representation of the People Act, and the Registration of Electors Rules of 1960 collectively empower the EC, through the EROs, to conduct an inquisitorial enquiry into citizenship for specific purposes.
- Mr. Dwivedi said the poll body was entitled to verify citizenship for the purpose of inclusion on the electoral rolls. It was for the Union government to decide if a person would stay on in India or be deported.
- “He [ERO] can enquire. But after he records a finding, is it required under the scheme of Citizenship Act that his finding be referred for an appropriate decision and steps by the Central government? And till then... can you take away his right till a decision is taken by the Central government stripping him of the colour of citizenship?” Justice Bagchi asked.
- Mr. Dwivedi said a decision has to be taken “then and there”.
- “The consequence the other way would be that even though the ERO has found that he is not a citizen, he would continue in the electoral roll and vote. Once a shadow is cast on his citizenship, as long as it is not perverse or arbitrary, he needs to stand out. Nothing is perfect, but we have to chase the utopia of perfection as closely as possible,” Mr. Dwivedi responded.
- The senior counsel said persons excluded from the electoral roll under the SIR had the right to appeal.
- “These things happen. The whole electoral exercise cannot be halted or modified for the sake of some persons. Of course, if the order [of exclusion] is perverse on individual facts, it would have to go. We are not entitled to wait until the final or ultimate decision [by the Centre], which may go one way or the other. He can file an appeal, and if the ERO order is set aside, he can be put back,” Mr. Dwivedi submitted.
- “Your argument is that non-citizens are not entitled?” Chief Justice Kant queried.
- The EC counsel said citizenship and delimitations were the cornerstones of electoral process.
- Mr. Dwivedi said various statutes, including the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, mandated citizenship from applicants.

Context: The Supreme Court on Tuesday delivered a split verdict on the legality of a provision in an anti-corruption law which mandates prior sanction before prosecuting public servants.

- Justice B.V. Nagarathna concluded that Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, was plainly unconstitutional, while Justice K.V. Viswanathan, the puisne judge on the Division Bench, said that sanction must be decided by an independent authority such as the Lok Pal or the Lok Ayukta.

Policy paralysis

- Justice Viswanathan said the mere possibility of abuse of an otherwise valid provision cannot be a ground for declaring it unconstitutional. He compared striking down Section 17A to “throwing the baby out with the bathwater”.
- “If honest public servants are not given a basic assurance that decisions taken by them will not be subjected to frivolous complaints, it is the nation that will suffer. Public servants will resort to a play-it-safe syndrome, and that will result in policy paralysis. The panacea of striking down will turn out to be worse than the disease,” Justice Viswanathan wrote in his opinion.
- He directed that an independent inquiry of the facts of a corruption complaint would be ideal before a grant of sanction.
- The case will now be referred to the Chief Justice of India to be placed before a Bench of three judges.

“A fine balance has to be maintained between the need to protect a public servant against mala fide prosecution on the one hand and the object of upholding the probity in public life by prosecuting the public servant against whom prima facie material in support of allegation of corruption exists, on the other,” Justice Viswanathan observed in his opinion.

- He said the Lokpal had the authority to conduct an inquiry into even an allegation of corruption made against the Prime Minister of the country.
- “If Section 17A is invalidated on the ground that prior approval should not exist at all, the immediate consequence would be that any complaint alleging corruption in official decision-making could straightaway result in a police inquiry or investigation,” Justice Viswanathan reasoned.

❖ **Delivery platforms to stop 10-minute service after Ministry's appeal**

Context: Delivery platforms Blinkit, Zepto, Zomato, and Swiggy are learnt to have decided to remove the 10-minute delivery system from their applications after an intervention by Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya.

- Gig and platform workers went on a one-day strike on December 31 and one of their demands was to end the delivery of items in 10 minutes, citing accidents and health issues. A senior official said Mr. Mandaviya had raised the issue at a meeting held with the aggregators last week. The Ministry sources told The Hindu that Blinkit has removed the 10-minute delivery promise from its branding and others are expected to follow suit in the coming days.
- “They told the Minister that it [10-minute delivery] is being made possible through warehouses at various locations and not by putting pressure on workers. However, Minister urged them to stop this branding practice considering the health and welfare of delivery workers and the companies agreed,” the official said.
- The government source added that the move is aimed at ensuring greater safety, security, and improved working conditions for gig workers. Accordingly, Blinkit has informed the Ministry that the company’s principal tagline has been revised from “10,000+ products delivered in 10 minutes” to “30,000+ products delivered at your doorstep.”
- General secretary of Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers Shaik Salauddin welcomed the intervention of the government and the subsequent decision of the platforms and said it was a significant and much-needed step in protecting the lives and dignity of gig and platform workers.
- “The 10-minute delivery model forced delivery partners into dangerous road behaviour, extreme stress. We welcome and thank Mr. Mandaviya for listening to workers’ voices and intervening decisively in the interest of their safety,” he said .
- Aam Aadmi Party MP Raghav Chadha, who had voiced the problems faced by gig workers in Parliament last month, posted on his X handle: “Satyamev Jayate. Together, we have won...” “I am deeply grateful to the Central Government for its compassionate intervention in enforcing the removal of the “10-minute delivery” branding from quick-commerce platforms,” he added.

❖ **Kuki-Zo groups agree to join Manipur govt. with conditions**

Context: Kuki-Zo tribal groups said on Tuesday that they had resolved to join the popular government in Manipur, provided the Union and the State governments give a written commitment to support the negotiated political settlement for a Union Territory with legislature under the Constitution.

- At a meeting attended by the United People’s Front and Kuki National Organisation (KNO), the Kuki-Zo insurgent groups in Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact with the government, five MLAs and two representatives of the Kuki-Zo Council, a civil society group, in Guwahati on Tuesday, it was resolved that the “commitment must be executed in a time-bound manner, specifically within the current Assembly tenure”, which ends in February 2027.
- The resolution passed by the tribal bodies on Tuesday assumes significance as this is the first time the tribal bodies have agreed to join the State government since ethnic violence between the Kuki-Zo and the Meitei people erupted on May 3, 2023. Post- violence, the SoO groups and the MLAs demanded a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo people.
- Manipur was placed under President’s Rule on February 13, 2025 and the 60- member Assembly which has 37 MLAs from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is under suspended animation.
- The Hindu reported on January 7 that as the President’s Rule in Manipur completes a year on February 13, hectic parleys are on by the Union government to restore the popular government in Manipur. In all, there are 10 Kuki-Zo MLAs in the Assembly, including seven from the BJP, and their participation is key if elected government is restored.

❖ **Trump’s latest 25% tariff warning brings India-Iran ties under renewed strain**

Context: India’s ties with Iran have come under renewed pressure after U.S. President Donald Trump announced on Tuesday that “any country” having trade ties with Tehran would face a 25% tariff if it sought to do business with the U.S.

- Government sources told that India was preparing to bring down its trade with Iran in the current financial year, citing “external economic factors”.
- The developments have come even as India still last weekend, was getting ready to host Iran’s president Masoud Pezeshkian for the upcoming BRICS summit, which India will host this year as it marks the 75th anniversary of establishment of India- Iran diplomatic ties.
- The U.S. policy on increasing pressure on Iran has also put a question mark on the expected visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Syed Abbas Araghchi to New Delhi later this month. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced India’s vision for BRICS 2026 on Tuesday, saying that as BRICS Chair, India would highlight that the intergovernmental organisation is capable of absorbing “global shocks”. India’s policy on Iran will be keenly watched as the Islamic Republic is a member of BRICS of which India has been a founding member.
- At both bilateral and multilateral levels, the India-Iran relation was expected to see multiple high points this year as India was getting ready to broaden its presence in Iran’s Chabahar port, which is of crucial importance for both India’s connectivity plans with Central Asia and

Russia as well as for its newly unfolding partnership with the anti-Pakistan Taliban administration in Afghanistan. Iran joined BRICS as a full member on January 1, 2024, as the grouping expanded by including Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates at the 2023 summit in South Africa.

- Officials said that as a member of the BRICS, Iran's President may not face legal hurdles while travelling to India for the summit.

❖ **Treat inclusion of disabled persons as an advantage: SC**

Context: The Supreme Court on Tuesday urged corporates and investors to consider the inclusion of persons with disabilities not just as a mere "compliance issue" but also as a "strategic advantage" that would enhance their business performance, resilience, and social impact.

- The judgment, co-authored by a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K.V. Viswanathan, is the second in two months with which the Supreme Court is stepping in to highlight that business corporations not only do lead a profit-only existence but also have a constitutional duty to contribute to the society and environment.
- The Bench exercised the court's extraordinary constitutional powers under Article 142 to direct Coal India Limited to give Sujata Bora, who has multiple disabilities, a supernumerary post with a separate desk and specially-designed computer at its North Eastern Coalfields office in Assam.

Context: Mizoram Governor Vijay Kumar Singh extended Governor's Rule in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) for six more months, citing continuing political uncertainty.

- The Council of Ministers said that there was no justification in extending Governor's Rule, as the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) enjoyed a clear majority.

❖ **Equality in society has to start in school, says Supreme Court**

Context: The Supreme Court, in a judgment on Tuesday, said that equality in society had to start in school, where the child of a multi-millionaire or a Supreme Court judge had to sit shoulder-to-shoulder with a child of an autorickshaw driver or a street vendor.

- A Bench headed by Justice P.S. Narasimha elaborated that the obligation of the government under the Right to Education Act (RTE) to ensure that neighbourhood schools admit children belonging to weaker and disadvantaged sections has an "extraordinary capacity to transform the social structure of our society".

“The statutory design [of the RTE Act] is normatively ambitious. It envisages elementary education for all children, across the spectrum of class, caste, gender and economic position, in a shared institutional space. It makes it possible, normatively and structurally, for the child of a multimillionaire or even of a judge of the Supreme Court of India to sit in the same classroom and at the same bench as the child of an autorickshaw driver or a street vendor,” Justice Narasimha, who authored the judgment, wrote.

- The top court’s judgment rose from the bitter experience of the petitioner, Dinesh Biwaji Ashtikar, who was quietly snubbed off when he had approached a neighbourhood school to admit his children for free and compulsory elementary education in 2016.
- “It is his case that, even though information through RTI indicated that seats were available, the neighbourhood school did not respond,” Justice Narasimha narrated.
- The judge observed that educating “young India” and achieving “equality of status” demanded an earnest implementation of the constitutional right under Article 21A to free and compulsory education, followed by the statutory mandate of the 2009 Act.

„National mission“

- “Ensuring admission of such students must be a national mission and an obligation of the appropriate government and the local authority. Equally, courts, be it constitutional or civil, must walk that extra mile to provide easy access and efficient relief to parents who complain of denial of the right,” the Supreme Court declared.

❖ Inter-departmental panel formed to combat „digital arrests“: govt. to SC

Context: The Union government has swung into action to combat digital arrests, which has deprived citizens, mostly elderly and the vulnerable, of thousands of crores of hard-earned money, by forming an inter-departmental committee chaired by its Special Secretary (Internal Security) Ministry of Home Affairs. The committee has held multiple meeting, and representatives of the online platforms Google, WhatsApp, Telegram and Microsoft attended the latest.

- The government has informed the Supreme Court, which is hearing the case on January 13, in a status report that inputs to combat digital arrest scams have been received from the Department of Telecom (DoT) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- The high-level inter-departmental committee (IDC) was formed on December 26, and has officials from multiple agencies to “comprehensively examine all facets of the issue of digital arrests”.

- Chaired by the Special Secretary (Internal Security), the IDC has representations at the level of Joint Secretary and above, officers from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), DoT, Ministry of External Affairs, Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Law & Justice, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, RBI, Central Bureau of Investigation, National Investigation Agency, Delhi Police, and Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), with its Chief Executive Officer acting as the member-secretary.
- Attorney-General R. Venkataramani would attend the meetings of the IDC on a regular basis.

The IDC was formed after a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant had directed inter-departmental Ministerial consultations, under the guidance of the Attorney General, to clear the way to end the bane which has affected a large populace.

- The Centre said the IDC would examine and guide enforcement agencies examine “real-time issues”; identify relevant legislations, rules, circulars and implementation gaps, suggest corrective measures and provide inputs for further directions, as may be required, by the Supreme Court.

❖ PFRDA sets up expert panel on assured NPS payouts

Context: In a bid to explore methods to avert market risks and provide steady income, the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) said it constituted an expert committee to develop a framework for assured payouts under the National Pension Scheme (NPS).

- The 15-member panel, chaired by M. S. Sahoo, former Chairperson, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), would comprise members from the legal, actuarial, finance, insurance, capital markets and academic fraternities.
- The panel would be required to deliberate on the operational design for execution in terms of defining lock-in periods, withdrawal limits, pricing mechanism and fee structure; provide for consumer protection by carving out standardised procedures to prevent mis-selling and address subscribers’ expectations about the nature of assurance, among other things.
- In a consultation paper last September, the PFRDA noted from the subscribers’ perspective, as a „mark-to-market“ defined contribution scheme, NPS “leaves certain key questions unanswered, namely, adequacy of corpus and predictability of retirement income due to factors like market volatility, contribution persistency and investment choices.”

❖ Human + AI will define the future of work by 2027: study

- Human + AI will define the future of work and nearly all HR leaders (97%) anticipate that by 2027, the nature of work will be shaped by humans working alongside AI rather than engaging with it only intermittently, showed a Nasscom-Indeed study.
- As per the study, this trend signalled a shift from AI being a supplementary tool to becoming an integral part of everyday roles, workflows and decision-making processes.

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Context: The prison reform committee submitted its findings to Home Minister G. Parameshwara, warning that the central prison is on the brink of systemic failure.

- The prison reform committee, headed by ADGP (Law and Order) R. Hitendra, submitted its findings to Home Minister G. Parameshwara, warning that the central prison is on the brink of systemic failure.
- The review was ordered after videos went viral showing inmates, including notorious criminals and a terror suspect, allegedly receiving preferential treatment inside the prison.
- The panel also reviewed other central prisons in the State — Mysuru, Shivamogga, Ballari, and Kalaburagi — and compared them with best practices at the Tihar jail in Delhi and the Chanchalguda pPrison in Telangana. According to the report, Parappana Agrahara houses 4,834 inmates, but has only 571 staff members, leaving 388 sanctioned posts vacant. This results in a prisoner–staff ratio of 1:9, exceeding the 1:6 ratio prescribed under the Model Prison Manual. When calculated per shift, the ratio worsens to 1:27, with one officer overseeing nearly 30 inmates at a time.
- Other central prisons also fall short of safety norms. The Mysuru prison houses 774 inmates with 133 staff, while Ballari has 457 inmates and just 93 staff.
- The committee has recommended immediate filling of vacant posts, compulsory staff rotation every three years with a two-year cooling-off period, and annual modern training programmes.

Mobile smuggling

- The panel noted that mobile phone smuggling continues unabated at Parappana Agrahara, largely because existing jammers cannot block 5G signals. This persists despite a 2021 Karnataka High Court directive mandating strict control over mobile phone usage in prisons.
- The committee recommended upgrading to 5G-compatible jammers, deploying portable low-intensity jammers in blind spots, and placing all jammer controls strictly under the Chief Superintendent.
- Between January 2021 and November 15, 2025, 154 FIRs were registered in Bengaluru relating to illegal activities in central prisons. All these cases remain pending at the police station level, the report noted. The committee flagged serious infrastructure deficiencies at Parappana Agrahara, including the absence of a buffer zone, boundary walls measuring less than 20 feet in some stretches, and watchtowers that are too low for effective monitoring.
- It recommended raising boundary walls to 30 feet, installing fine-mesh anti-throwing nets, adding solar fencing and increasing the height of watchtowers.
- Surveillance inside the prison was described as “critically weak.” Parappana Agrahara has only 332 CCTV cameras, covering about 6.6% of inmates, compared with over 8,600 cameras at Tihar jail. Most barracks are not monitored, while toilets have no CCTV camera coverage except for limited voice-recording devices.

- The panel recommended round-the-clock monitoring, AI-enabled cameras to detect prohibited activities, body-worn cameras for staff, and the establishment of a central command centre.

Overcrowding

- Delays in construction at prisons in Shivamogga, Vijayapura, and other locations have worsened overcrowding, forcing inmates into already congested barracks. The committee stressed the need to expedite all pending prison infrastructure projects.
- It also highlighted welfare and administrative shortcomings, including the lack of vocational training, poor segregation of first-time offenders and habitual criminals, suboptimal deployment of female staff, irregular meetings of Prison Visitor Boards and unresolved FIRs.
- Other concerns flagged include unauthorised food and parcel inflow, weak internal intelligence, unnecessary medical referrals and informal lawyer visits without CCTV camera coverage.
- Sources in the department said while the recommendations emphasises technological upgradation and infrastructure development, they fall short in addressing human resource management—considered a critical factor in curbing irregularities and corruption within the prisons department.
- According to senior prison officials, the absence of transparency in staff transfers and the non-existence of a Prison Establishment Board have significantly weakened internal discipline and accountability. Officials pointed out that a dedicated Prison Establishment Board, on the lines of the Police Establishment Board, was proposed to ensure transparent transfers through counselling and systematic deployment of personnel.

❖ Highest annual spike saw 44,000 start-ups added last year: Modi

Context: Prime Minister says Startup India mission has become a 'revolution,' with the country becoming the third-largest start-up ecosystem globally.

- Nearly 44,000 start-ups registered with the government in 2025, the highest annual addition since Startup India was launched, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at an event commemorating the 10th anniversary of the scheme.
- Launched on January 16, 2016, the flagship initiative seeks to foster innovation, promote entrepreneurship, and enable investment-driven growth.

The biggest jump

- “I’m even more pleased to see that the momentum of Startup India is steadily increasing,” Mr. Modi said. “Today’s start-ups are becoming unicorns, unicorns are launching their IPOs, and creating more and more jobs. Last year alone, in 2025, nearly 44,000 new start-ups were registered. This is the biggest jump in any single year since the launch of Startup India.”
- He said that the Startup India mission has become a “revolution” in India, with the country taking its position as the third-largest start-up ecosystem in the world.

- “Ten years ago, there were fewer than 500 start-ups in the country; today, that number has grown to over 200,000,” Mr. Modi said. “In 2014, India had only four unicorns; today, there are nearly 125 active unicorns in India... These figures bear witness to how our start-ups are driving the ecosystem, innovation, and growth.”
- Mr. Modi also talked about how the perception of risk-taking has changed in the country, becoming more widely accepted and even respected.
- “Earlier, risk-taking was discouraged in the country, but today, risk-taking has become mainstream,” Mr. Modi said, adding, “Those who think beyond monthly salary are not only accepted but respected. Risk-taking ideas, which people once considered fringe, are now becoming fashionable.”
- Mr. Modi said that more than ₹25,000 crore has been invested through the Fund of Funds for start-ups that had been created by the government.
- Speaking to the presspersons after the event, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said the focus of the Fund of Funds 2.0, approved in April 2025 with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore, would be on deep tech, particularly in areas witnessing a lot of innovation, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, quantum technologies, defence, and aerospace.
- “These are areas where the country has a need, and where we want to become a global leader,” Mr. Goyal said. “Usually, startups in these areas take a long time to reach the proof-of-concept stage and become successful. The focus will be to make more risk capital available for this.”

❖ SC rejects Justice Varma’s challenge to formation of House inquiry panel

Context: The Supreme Court rejected a petition by Justice Yashwant Varma challenging the Lok Sabha Speaker’s constitution of a committee to inquire into a motion for his removal, underscoring that safeguards for judges cannot paralyse the removal process.

- The court said accepting the Allahabad High Court judge’s interpretation of the Judges (Inquiry) Act would result in a “disabling consequence”, pushing Members of Parliament back to square one.
- Justice Varma is facing an inquiry for misbehaviour after sacks of half-burnt currency were allegedly found at his official residential premises after a blaze on the night of March 14, 2025. He was then a judge in the Delhi High Court. “Constitutional safeguards for judges cannot come at the cost of paralysing the removal process itself,” a Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and S.C. Sharma observed in a 60-page judgment.
- A balance has to be struck between the protection afforded to the judiciary and the effective functioning of the mechanism for removal of a judge triggered by the peoples’ representatives, the court said.
- Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla admitted the MPs’ notice of motion for the removal of Justice Varma on August 12 last year, a day after the Deputy Rajya Sabha Chairman had rejected a separate notice by the Members of his House.
- The Deputy Chairman had assumed the duties of then Chairman and Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, who resigned from office on July 21, the very day both notices for removal were submitted by MPs in their respective Houses.

- In court, Justice Varma had argued that the Speaker did wrong to “unilaterally” constitute the committee under the Judges (Inquiry) Act. Since the notices were given in the two Houses of Parliament on the same day, both Houses should have admitted them.
- The High Court judge said the committee ought to have been formed by the Rajya Sabha Chairman and the Lok Sabha Speaker jointly. He referred to the first proviso of Section 3(2) of the Act in his favour.
- The judge had contended that the proviso should be read strictly. A loose interpretation would not only mar his reputation, but impact the constitutional safeguards provided to the institution of judiciary, exposing judges to arbitrary or biased removal motions by MPs.
- Disagreeing with Justice Varma’s reasoning, Justice Datta, who authored the verdict, held the proviso would apply only if notices given on the same day were admitted in both Houses. In the present case, one House had rejected while the other had admitted the notice.
- “There is nothing in the Inquiry Act to suggest that rejection of a motion in one House would render the other House incompetent to proceed in accordance with law... The interpretation advanced by the petitioner (J. Varma) of rejection of a notice in one House resulting in the notice automatically failing in the other House would entail consequences of a most serious nature. The Members would be put to square one and the process has to be initiated afresh in either House,” Justice Datta reasoned.
- The court said a House of Parliament cannot be deprived of its autonomy because the other House chose to reject the notice of motion.
- It said the mere loss of having a “joint committee” has not caused Justice Varma any legal prejudice. After all, the inquiry committee’s task was restricted to submission of a report. The ultimate decision of his removal would lie with the MPs.

❖ State Budget: Tackling fiscal pressure a challenging task

Context: Union Budget on February 1 is expected to offer some clarity on Central transfers and grants to the State.

- As Karnataka gears up for its 2026-27 Budget, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah faces the challenging task of addressing the State’s widening fiscal pressures.
- The State is grappling with a projected revenue deficit of ₹19,262 crore in the current 2025-26 fiscal year, a figure that could rise further due to recent GST rate rationalisation and other factors.
- The fiscal deficit for 2025-26 stands estimated at ₹90,428 crore, equivalent to 2.95% of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), staying just within the 3% limit prescribed under the Karnataka Fiscal Responsibility Act. To bridge the gap between revenue inflows and outflows, the government must explore measures to curb spending in non-essential areas while boosting revenue through enhanced tax collection, new cesses, or other levies.
- The upcoming Union Budget on February 1, 2026, is expected to offer some clarity on central transfers and grants to the State, which could influence Karnataka’s fiscal planning.

- In the 2025-26 Budget, revenue expenditure was pegged at around ₹3.11 lakh crore, against revenue receipts of approximately ₹2.92 lakh crore, within an overall Budget outlay of ₹4.09 lakh crore. However, ongoing challenges, including GST rate restructuring, have led to an anticipated additional revenue shortfall of about ₹9,000 crore this year, compounded by roughly ₹9,500 crore lost from the non-sharing of certain cesses by the Centre.

More borrowing

- Credit rating agency ICRA has highlighted the State's aggressive borrowing strategy, noting that Karnataka plans to raise a record ₹93,000 crore from the open market in the final quarter of 2025-26 — the highest quarterly borrowing ever by the State.
- This amount is nearly double what the State raised in the same quarter of the previous two fiscal years and exceeds the full-year borrowings in those periods. So far, only ₹12,000 crore has been borrowed through December.
- Overall borrowings for 2025-26 are budgeted at ₹1,16,000 crore, representing about 28% of the total budget size.
- Leader of the Opposition R. Ashok has criticised the Congress-led government, dubbing Siddaramaiah the “Biggest Borrowing CM” amid concerns over rising debt levels.

'Deliberate move'

- According to the Chief Minister's economic adviser and Congress MLA Basavaraj Rayareddy, the decision to front-load borrowings toward the end of the fiscal year is a deliberate move to minimise the interest burden on the State exchequer.
- With welfare commitments, guarantee schemes, and other expenditures continuing to exert pressure, the Budget preparations would require careful balancing to maintain fiscal discipline while sustaining growth and development priorities.

❖ 'Talks on Chabahar will continue with U.S. and Iran'

Context: India remains engaged with both the United States and Iran about ways to continue operations at the port of Chabahar in southeastern Iran, officials said.

- India's relationship with Iran has come under renewed stress since U.S. President Donald Trump announced a new round of tariffs on January 12. The announcement brought into focus India's investments into the port of Chabahar, for which New Delhi had received an exemption from the Trump administration last year. Recent media reports had suggested that India would be wrapping up its work in Chabhar.
- Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Friday, “On October 28, 2025, the U.S. Department of Treasury had issued a letter outlining the guidance on the conditional sanctions waiver valid till April 26, 2026. We remain engaged with the U.S. side in working out this arrangement.” Describing the India-Iran relationship as “long standing”, he said that the ties would be taken forward.

❖ EU leaders to be chief guests at Republic Day function

Context: Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh announced that European Union leaders Antonio Costa, President of the European Council, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, will be the chief guests at India's 77th Republic Day celebrations.

- In a briefing to presspersons ahead of Republic Day, he said that the 90-minute Republic Day Parade on January 26 along Kartavya Path will be themed around 150 years of 'Vande Mataram', a theme that will also anchor the Beating the Retreat ceremony.
- In a symbolic move to end "VIP culture", the Defence Secretary announced that enclosures at the Republic Day Parade will be named after rivers of India, while those at the Beating Retreat ceremony will be named after musical instruments. Earlier, these were referred to as VIP enclosures. The parade will feature several first-time military showcases, including the Bhairav Battalion, Shaktibaan regiments, Drone Shakti, and a universal rocket launcher.
- A major highlight will be the phased battle array format of the Indian Army, with commentary explaining the operational roles of formations and equipment. The aerial component will also be displayed in battle array formation, he said.
- For the first time, a European naval contingent will also take part in the parade.
- Mr. Singh further said that the celebrations will open with 100 cultural artists performing with Indian martial musical instruments.
- Marching contingents will include the Bhairav contingent in 'Uncha Kadam Taal' and the Ladakh Scouts, while an animal contingent comprising Zanskar ponies, Bactrian camels and dogs will reflect India's diverse operational landscape.
- A total of 18 marching contingents and 13 bands will participate in the parade. The flypast will showcase Rafale, Su-30, P-8I, C-130, C-295, MiG-29, Apache, LCH, ALH and Mi-17 aircraft and helicopters in various formations.
- 'Vande Mataram' will be the central focus of the celebrations, with tableaux from six States and departments highlighting the theme.
- Paintings by artist Tejendra Kumar Mitra illustrating verses of 'Vande Mataram' will be displayed at Kartavya Path.

❖ Expert panel sets norms for religious sites in sanctuaries

Context: The guidelines, which are still being deliberated upon by State governments, say that as a general principle, any construction on forest land after 1980 ought to be treated as encroachment.

- An apex expert body of the Environment Ministry, which decides on permitting infrastructure development within wildlife habitat, has brought out guidelines that specify conditions under which land inside wildlife parks or sanctuaries may be diverted for religious structures.
- This follows a first-of-its-kind instance, when a proposal for land diversion within the Balaram Ambaji Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat, came up in early 2024. The sanctuary is host to, according to the State Government, "...two historical temples—Balaram and Ambaji—situated at the opposite corners of the sanctuary."

Case in point

- In July 2024, the body—Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SCNBWL) — had cleared a proposal by Pramukhshri Mukundpuriji Maharaj Seva Trust, Palanpur, Gujarat to “use” 0.35 hectares of forest land in the Balaram Ambaji Wildlife Sanctuary after Chief Wildlife Warden and the State Government approved the proposal, citing the existence of the “establishment” before the settlement of forest rights in the region.
- However, in October 2024, the SCNBWL decided to revoke a clearance after one of its members, HS Singh, said that the right of the Trust on the land had not been recognised or recorded in the forest settlement report or any other government records. Mr. Singh warned that this being the first instance of sanctuary land being considered for allotment to a religious institution, it could set a precedent for similar demands for protected area land.
- He requested the Committee to reconsider its recommendation. During deliberations, the Inspector General of Forests noted there were several such sanctuaries across the country where rights and claims had not been settled.
- Following this, the Chairman of the Committee (Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav) said there were sacred caves and religious places inside forests and wildlife areas mentioned in religious texts. The followers, he said, had decided to develop these areas as a matter of faith and, therefore, an SOP be formulated for submission of applications to the Committee involving religious institutions. He suggested a panel comprising Dr. H. S. Singh and Dr. R. Sukumar may be formed for that purpose.

Rules for construction

- These guidelines—though still being deliberated upon by State Governments—say that as a general principle, any construction or expansion on forest land after 1980 ought to be treated as “encroachment.” A summary of the guidelines was presented before the SCNBWL in its December 2025 meeting, the meeting records note.
- However, in exceptional cases where the State has issued a reasoned and documented order justifying proposed regularisation, such cases could be referred to the Ministry for further consideration on a case-by-case basis.

❖ Secretary-General of RS has administrative role only, says court

Context: The Supreme Court raised concerns about the Secretary-General of the Rajya Sabha, who went far beyond the confines of a purely administrative role to prepare a “draft decision” concluding that the notice of motion given by Rajya Sabha members for removal of Justice Yashwant Varma was inadmissible. The top court said it “would be just and proper if the Secretariat exercises restraint” in such matters.

- The eventual rejection of the MPs’ notice of motion by the Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman was based on the conclusions arrived at by the Secretary-General that not all was “in order”.
- A Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and S.C. Sharma said the Secretary-General had only an administrative role and did not extend to assuming quasi-adjudicatory functions.

- In the judgment, the court expressed hope that next time a judge faced removal, the Secretariat would leave it to the Lok Sabha Speaker or the Rajya Sabha Chairman, as the case may be, to decide on the admission of the motion.
- “We do hope that no other judge faces proceedings for his removal from service on allegations of misbehaviour. Should, at all, there be an unfortunate recurrence of a judge prima facie indulging in misbehaviour and the representatives of the people of the nation demand an investigation... It would be just and proper if the Secretariat exercises restraint and leaves it to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, as the case may be, to decide the question of admission of a motion instead of concluding as to what should be the future course of action,” Justice Datta wrote in the judgment.
- In the present case, the draft decision of the Secretary-General had concluded that the MPs did not use “proper terms” in their notice of removal motion, did not furnish “authenticated documents to support material facts”, and presented incorrect facts and quoted a wrong provision of law.

❖ India-EU free trade pact will be ‘mother of all deals:’ Goyal

Context: The free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU) will be the “mother of all deals” when compared with the seven deals India has signed with “developed” countries, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said.

- He did not, however, confirm or deny the January 27 deadline for the deal. Since 2014, India has signed trade deals with the U.K., Mauritius, the U.A.E., the four EFTA countries (Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein), and Oman, apart from an early harvest deal with Australia.
- “I have done seven FTAs so far, all with developed countries,” Mr. Goyal told reporters.
- “This one will be the mother of all deals.”
- The Minister said the deal is a win-win for India and the EU.

‘Super deal’

- “For the sectors that we are interested in, we are getting a super deal,” Mr. Goyal said. “And on the sectors that they are interested in, we are giving them a super deal. It has to be win-win for both. The good part is that we don’t compete with each other. Our interests are different.”
- He, however, added that he did not want to specify a deadline for the deal.