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FEBRUARY WEEK 2

09-02-2026 TO 14-02-2026

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TO BE PLAYED
BEFORE
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ANTHEM**

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INDUSTRIAL
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❖ India, Malaysia ink pacts to expand strategic ties

Context: The countries sign agreements in key areas, including security and semiconductors; during talks in Kuala Lumpur, Modi and Malaysian PM highlight efforts to promote trade in local currencies

- India and Malaysia vowed to expand their ties in the high-priority sectors of trade and investment, defence, energy, advanced manufacturing and semiconductors with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that both sides are committed to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.
- Following his wide-ranging talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Mr. Modi reiterated India's position on combating terrorism as he said: "Our message on terrorism is clear; no double standard, no compromise." The two sides inked a total of 11 agreements and documents to expand cooperation in a range of key areas, including a framework pact for deeper engagement in the semiconductor sector.
- Mr. Modi, who arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday, and Mr. Ibrahim appreciated efforts to promote the usage of local currencies — the Indian rupee and Malaysian ringgit — for trade settlement.
- "We will pave the way for economic transformation through strategic trust," Mr. Modi said, describing the India-Malaysia relationship as "special".
- During the visit, Mr. Modi met Malaysia's Indian-origin Ministers, MPs, and Senators and interacted with four leading industry leaders.
- "We are maritime neighbours. For centuries, our peoples have had deep and cordial ties," he said in his media statement. Mr. Modi also announced India's decision to establish an Indian Consulate General in Malaysia.
- In his remarks, Mr. Ibrahim noted India's economic growth and said his country would benefit immensely if it could secure more ways and opportunities to collaborate with New Delhi.
- "It (India's economic growth) is on spectacular rise in the international trade scene," he said, describing the decision to use local currencies for bilateral trade as "remarkable".
- In the talks, Malaysia extended its support for India's permanent membership in a reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC).
- Elaborating on engagement in the security domain, Mr. Modi said cooperation in counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, and maritime security will be strengthened, adding that both sides will further expand defence ties.
- "Along with AI and digital technologies, we will advance partnerships in semiconductors, health, and food security," he said, noting that the discussions at the CEO Forum opened new opportunities for trade and investment.
- The Prime Minister touched upon India's position on Indo-Pacific and its steadfast views on the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations's (ASEAN) centrality in the region. "The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as the world's growth engine. We, along with ASEAN, are committed to development, peace, and stability throughout the Indo-Pacific region," he said. "With the support of friendly countries like Malaysia, India will

further expand its relations with ASEAN. We agree that the review of the ASEAN-India Trade Agreement, ITIGA, should be completed expeditiously,” he added.

- During his meeting with Malaysia’s Indian-origin political leaders, he appreciated their active role in strengthening the bilateral relationship between the two countries.
- The PIOs included Tuan Gobind Singh Deo, Minister of Digital, Ramanan Ramakrishnan, Minister of Human Resources, M. Kulasegaran, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department, and R. Yuneswaran, Deputy Minister of National Unity, among others.

❖ **Sound-proof barrier to be built close to Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary**

Context: It is essentially an acoustic wall designed to reduce traffic noise reaching sensitive areas

- To minimise the impact of highway expansion on wildlife, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has proposed constructing a 650-metre sound-proof barrier wall along a stretch of the Mysuru–Kushalnagar highway that passes close to the eco-sensitive zone of Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary.
- The barrier is part of the 92.3-km Mysuru-Kushalnagar access-controlled highway project, aimed at ensuring that vehicular noise and movement do not disturb avian species in one of Karnataka’s most important bird habitats. NHAI officials said that the proposal has already received clearance from the Standing Committee of the State Wildlife Board, and the State government has now forwarded the required documents to the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) for final approval.

Clearance mandatory

- Speaking to The Hindu, NHAI’s Regional Officer (Karnataka) Vilas P. Brahmkar said, “Wildlife clearance is mandatory as the project alignment passes close to protected areas. The highway touches the eco-sensitive zone of Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary and also the buffer zone of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. In the 650-metre stretch near Ranganathittu, we have planned a sound-proof barrier wall to significantly reduce vehicular noise, ensuring that birds are not disturbed and that wildlife movement towards the highway is discouraged.”
- “These safeguards have been incorporated keeping both wildlife protection and road safety in mind. The objective is to allow free movement of birds within the sanctuary while preventing any negative impact from highway traffic,” Mr. Brahmkar added. Another official from the construction site said that the sound-proof barrier is essentially an acoustic wall designed to reduce traffic noise reaching sensitive areas.

Permissible limits

- “In this case, the barrier which will be two to fivemetres high, will absorb and deflect vehicular sound depending on need, so that noise levels within the eco-sensitive zone of the bird sanctuary remain within permissible limits. This is a standard mitigation measure adopted near wildlife habitats and ensures that highway traffic does not disrupt the natural behaviour of birds. Such measures have been implemented in several highway projects in India and abroad, particularly near eco-sensitive and residential areas.” the official explained.

- According to NHAI, the access-controlled highway is being developed to address the steadily increasing vehicular load on the Bengaluru–Mysuru–Madikeri corridor. Once operational, the road is expected to significantly cut travel time between Bengaluru and Kushalnagar, benefiting travellers heading further towards Madikeri and the coastal city of Mangaluru.

Ease congestion

- The ₹4,130-crore project was inaugurated in March 2023 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but progress on the ground had been delayed due to land acquisition hurdles.
- Officials cited disputes over compensation, incomplete land records among some owners, and litigation in certain stretches as key reasons for the slowdown.
- Once completed, the highway is expected to ease traffic congestion in Mysuru, as it originates from Srirangapatna and bypasses the city entirely. This is likely to streamline vehicular movement for commuters and tourists travelling to and from Hunsur, Periyapatna, Kushalnagar, Madikeri, and parts of Kerala via Kodagu.

❖ Tourism Ministry identifies four destinations for development in Udupi

Context: Udupi-Chikkamagaluru MP Kota Srinivas Poojary on Saturday said the Union government has identified four tourist destinations in Udupi district for development under the National Mission for Developing Globally Competitive Tourism Destinations.

- Of the four — Kodi-Kanyana, Kodi-Kundapur, Barkur Port area, and Trasi-Maravanthe — one would finally be chosen for development. The chosen destination will use renewable energy, witness infrastructure development and global campaigns for tourists, and other amenities in accordance with global standards, the MP said.
- Mr. Poojary was chairing a meeting discussing the implementation of the National Mission proposed by the Union Tourism Ministry at Rajatadri, the district office complex in Manipal. The department, he said, was planning to develop more than 50 tourist destinations at a global level with the aim of developing sustainable and responsible tourism in the country. The MP said the scheme was being implemented with the aim of bringing sustainability to the forefront in the tourism sector. They plan on attracting tourists by developing these destinations in an environmentally friendly manner by protecting natural and cultural resources and paying special attention to the development of infrastructure.
- He said the Union government has set apart a ₹300 crore grant for the implementation of the scheme pan-India. Private sector participation would be encouraged in the scheme while the government provides the necessary land.

❖ ₹500 crore ARAI research centre will be established in Mandya: HDK

Context: Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel H. D. Kumaraswamy said the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI) Research Centre will be established in Mandya at a cost of ₹500 crore.

- Addressing a press conference in Mysuru, Mr Kumaraswamy said the project requires 100 acres of land and he had written to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah seeking allocation of land at the earliest.
- The ARAI centre would not only benefit Mandya and Mysuru region, but would act as a major booster for the entire automobile sector of the State.
- Funds for the project have already been earmarked in the Union Budget.
- **ARAI, a premier autonomous research and development organisation functioning under the Ministry of Heavy Industries, Government of India, serves as the principal authority for testing, certification and research in the Indian automotive sector. Headquartered in Pune, ARAI acts as a bridge between the Government and the automobile industry by ensuring compliance with standards related to vehicle safety, emissions control and technical quality, the Union Minister** explained.
- Stating that he wished to establish such a world-class centre of quality and excellence in Mandya, Mr. Kumaraswamy said the additional chief secretary to the State Government's Revenue Department has written to the Mandya Deputy Commissioner to identify suitable land for the project.
- He said the ARAI Centre is his answer to the criticism by some MLAs from Mandya, who repeatedly questioned him on what he had brought to the district after winning the Lok Sabha election from Mandya Lok Sabha constituency.

❖ India and Malaysia are connected by the 'shared affection' for Tamil: Modi

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that India and Malaysia are connected by a shared affection for Tamil, underlining the strong presence of the language in education, media, and cultural life in the country.

- Malaysia is home to nearly three million people of Indian descent, the second largest in the world, with an overwhelming majority of Tamil origin.
- "India and Malaysia are also connected by a shared affection for the Tamil language. In Malaysia, the strong and vibrant presence of Tamil is visible in education, media, and cultural life," Mr. Modi said while speaking to presspersons on the concluding day of his two-day visit to Malaysia.
- "I am confident that today's audio-visual agreement will bring our hearts even closer through films and music, especially Tamil cinema," Mr. Modi said.
- Earlier in the day, Mr. Modi pointed out that his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim is a "big fan" of MGR, just like "several of us in India", as a song from the Tamil actor's movie Naalai Namathe was presented during a lunch hosted for the Indian leader.
- Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran, popularly known as MGR, was a popular Indian actor, director and producer who founded Tamil Nadu's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party and went on to become the State's Chief Minister. Naalai Namathe is one of his several blockbusters, released in 1975.
- "At the lunch hosted by my friend, PM Anwar Ibrahim, one of the songs sung was Naalai Namathe, from a movie starring the great MGR!" Mr. Modi posted on X. He added that "PM Anwar Ibrahim, like several of us in India, is a big fan of MGR!"

- Addressing a community programme on Saturday, Mr. Modi also said that the Indian diaspora continues to serve as a strong bridge between India and Malaysia.
- He said that inspired by this history, India had established the Thiruvalluvar Chair at the University of Malaya and would now set up a Thiruvalluvar centre to further strengthen shared heritage.

❖ **India-Greece defence ties in focus as Ministers meet in New Delhi today**

Context: With a focus on enhancing defence cooperation, Greek Defence Minister Nikos Dendias and Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will hold a bilateral meeting on Monday at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi.

- The discussions are expected to focus on enhancing cooperation in the defence sector, a senior official said.
- Speaking at the India-EU Forum 2026 on Saturday, Mr. Dendias described India as an indispensable partner for Europe, highlighting New Delhi's growing strategic and economic importance for the European Union and Greece in particular.
- Mr. Dendias noted that European perceptions of India have evolved significantly over time, adding that India is now viewed as a "necessary-to-have" partner.
- Defence ties between India and Greece have seen steady momentum in recent months. In January this year, the two countries held the inaugural India-Greece Joint Services Staff Talks in New Delhi, marking a step towards institutionalising defence cooperation.
- Earlier, in September 2025, the Indian Navy and the Hellenic Navy conducted their maiden bilateral maritime exercise in the Mediterranean Sea. The exercise, which concluded on September 18, 2025, was carried out in two phases — a harbour phase at Salamis Naval Base from September 13 to 17, followed by a sea phase on September 17 and 18.
- The upcoming talks are expected to further consolidate the growing defence partnership between the two countries.

❖ **'Linguistic, cultural markers can solve caste enumeration riddle'**

Context: Professor G.N. Devy says this approach may begin with collecting information on mother tongues; the scholar and linguist notes that not taking this opportunity to separately enumerate Denotified Tribes could alienate more than 10 crore people

- Linguistic and cultural markers could hold the key to solving the caste enumeration riddle, says scholar, linguist, author, and cultural activist G.N. Devy.
- In an exclusive conversation with, he explained that even if residents entered what they thought was their caste name, post-Census studies and a carefully layered scrutiny could analyse markers of language, ancestry, lifestyle, and kinships to arrive at a comprehensive list of castes that accounts for all groups, while being able to explain duplication, variations in names, and spellings.
- "This model has been tried and tested for languages," said Professor Devy, whose work leading the "Peoples' Linguistic Survey of India" project resulted in the documentation of more than 780 languages in the country.

- The Union government has planned to hold the next Census in 2026 and 2027. The first phase — houselisting — is set to be completed this year; the second phase — population enumeration (with caste) — is due in 2027. However, the methodology for caste enumeration has not yet been announced by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India.
- There are discussions among activists, scholars, and community leaders about two possible methods: the first is to leave an open field in the Census form — what the 2011 Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) did; and the second is to compile a list of castes for people to select from — what Bihar’s Caste-based Survey did. The argument for the latter often draws its strength from the fact that the 2011 SECC ended up returning more than 46 lakh caste names.

Post-Census study

- Professor Devy argued in favour of the first method, saying that the methodologies of surveying and enumerating languages could be used to condense not just the 2011 SECC data but also the data from the upcoming Census. However, he noted that this would require the government to keep the data open to scrutiny by scholars and involve institutions such as the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI).
- Explaining the approach, Professor Devy said the process may begin with collecting information on mother tongues. “The 2011 Census returned 19,000 mother tongues. But this was put through multiple layers of scrutiny that accounted for duplication, variation in spellings, errors, and yet another layer to filter for those with verified grammar. This narrowed the list down to 1,369 mother tongue languages,” he said.
- Using the example of community classification, he continued, “Similarly, there is a community called Sansi in Punjab. The same community is called Kanjar in Rajasthan, Chhara in Gujarat, and Kanjar Bhat in Maharashtra. But it is one community because they have a shared language called Bhaktu. So, while the census will return four names, it can point to common language, ancestry, lifestyle, relatives, marriages, and kinship bonds. And the Anthropological Survey of India can certify this.”
- Professor Devy added that works such as AnSI’s ‘People of India’ project could be a reference point.

DNT count needed

- Professor Devy, a scholar who co-founded the Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-nomadic Tribes - Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG), along with author Mahasweta Devi and has chaired the government’s 2006 Technical Advisory Group for DNTs, said that the Census office must declare its intention to explicitly count the DNT communities (formerly classified as “criminal” under the colonial-era Criminal Tribes Act, 1871). He noted that if this opportunity is not taken, India risks alienating more than 10 crore people, presenting a “problem that can become much bigger than the problem of calculating, tabulating, and making a proper list”.

Context: Court extends deadline for SIR process in Bengal, seeks clarification on allegations of violence; counsel for the State says 70 lakh people were called for hearing over minor disparities in names

- The Supreme Court said the Election Commission (EC) was using “very restrictive” software tools, at least in the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise in West Bengal, with scant tolerance for “natural” differences and inconsistencies commonly found in India, including Bengali households.
- “Tools applied by you in your software appear to be very restrictive tools. They are eliminating natural differences. Surnames are of various forms — ‘Roy’, ‘Ray’... There is a common practice of ‘Kumar’ being a middle name in Bengali households. Now, if there is an omission of ‘Kumar’, notice is given?” Justice Joymalya Bagchi asked the EC’s counsel, senior lawyer Dama Seshadri Naidu.
- Senior lawyer Shyam Divan, for Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, submitted that of the nearly 1.4 crore people who came under the ‘logical discrepancies’ category, 70 lakh were called to explain minor disparities in their names or even surnames.
- The Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant asked the poll body to extend the deadline for the claims-and-objections phase of the West Bengal SIR for a week beyond the current deadline of February 14. The Bench further directed the State’s Director-General of Police (DGP) to file a personal affidavit, responding to allegations of orchestrated violence and burning of documents at SIR verification centres.
- The court asked the EC to temporarily deploy a fresh batch of 8,505 personnel provided by the State government for SIR work. The court also clarified that micro-observers, whose appointment had drawn objection from the State, would only assist the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs). It would be solely up to the EROs to take a final decision on inclusion or exclusion of voters from the final electoral roll of the State.
- The court said the poll body could deploy suitable officers from the fresh batch for duties as EROs and Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs). The remaining could be made to work along with micro-observers to assist in the scrutiny of documents.
- The hearing commenced with Mr. Divan submitting that micro-observers were superseding EROs and AEROs to decide the fate of electors on the voters’ list.
- Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, for the West Bengal government, said micro-observers were drawn from Central government services and public sector undertakings with no ground knowledge of West Bengal or its idiosyncrasies.
- “They just ran a computer programme... There have been mass exclusions in the name of logical discrepancies. Here, the computer has become a tyrant, deciding with the use of some software, who remains and who has to be purged,” Mr. Divan submitted.
- Mr. Naidu, for the EC, remarked orally that the petitioners – State of West Bengal, its Chief Minister and leaders of the ruling Trinamool Congress Party – were making a “mountain out of a molehill”.
- But Justice Bagchi agreed with Mr. Divan that even those mapped had been called for presentation of documents to verify citizenship. The judge said the programme used by

the EC in certain cases has created a “policy challenge” without understanding the ground realities, resulting in notices going out to a “wider net of people”.

- Mr. Naidu said the court was only seeing the “tip of the iceberg”. He illustrated that the EC scrutiny of the electoral roll had instances of 200 people being linked to a single parent.
- “You definitely have a right to send a hearing notice to people found with 50 grandchildren. But you are issuing notice to even persons with five or six children,” Justice Bagchi responded.

❖ Mysuru Sandal Soap to be relaunched today as Tamannaah’s tenure as ambassador begins

Context: The two-year tenure of film actor Tamannaah Bhatia as the brand ambassador of the State-owned Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited’s (KSDL) to strengthen the market presence its products will commence.

- Disclosing this to mediapersons, Minister for Large and Medium Industries M.B. Patil said that on the occasion the iconic heritage product Mysuru Sandal Soap would be relaunched with a refreshed and contemporary look.
- The Minister said that KSDL had set a target of scaling up its annual turnover to ₹5,000 crore by 2030. In line with this objective, a comprehensive promotional campaign is being undertaken to reach the youth. Ms. Bhatia, who enjoyed considerable star appeal and has over three million followers on social media, had been engaged as part of this strategy. The initiative was expected to help create a strong market for the company’s products in North India as well, he said.
- KSDL was established with the vision of the Maharaja of Mysuru, Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar, the then Dewan M. Visvesvaraya, and industrial chemist S.G. Shastri, popularly known as ‘Soap Shastri’.
- The organisation, which was witnessing healthy turnover and profits, recorded an all-time high production last month across its three divisions — soaps, detergents and cosmetics, Mr. Patil explained.
- At present, the organisation manufactures a total of 57 premium products, ranging from Mysuru Sandal Soap to packaged drinking water.
- As brand ambassador, Ms. Bhatia would feature in advertisements, promotional campaigns and related programmes for KSDL products. It had also been ensured that during the two-year tenure, beginning on Tuesday, she would not endorse similar products of other private companies, the Minister stated.
- He said there was a strong demand for the organisation’s products such as shower gels, talcum powder, hand wash, agarbathis, sambrani, dhoop, Millennium Soap and bathing soaps.
- Promotional videos and other campaign material would be released to coincide with the commencement of the brand ambassador’s tenure.
- In addition, production units would soon be commissioned in the Vijayapura and Dobbspet industrial areas, with the necessary procedures currently under way. Plans were also in place to double the export turnover, which presently stood at around ₹25 crore to ₹30 crore a year, Mr. Patil said.

- Speaking on the occasion, KSDL chairman C.S. Appaji Nadagouda said that production activities were being carried out using existing machinery, without purchasing any new equipment.
- To facilitate this, a strict three-shift work system had been implemented. Markets in Europe and West Asia were also being explored, and efforts were under way to ensure that KSDL products reached non-resident Kannadigas as well, he said.
- KSDL managing director Prashanth said that the menace of counterfeit Mysuru Sandal Soap had been effectively curbed. While KSDL products were currently more popular in South India, greater emphasis was now being placed on market expansion in regions such as Delhi and Central India. The organisation's turnover was expected to touch ₹2,000 crore in 2025-26.

❖ Karnataka will bring out an Ocean Farming Policy, says Priyank

Context: Priyank Kharge, Minister for Information Technology, Biotechnology and Rural Development, has said that the State will bring out an Ocean Farming Policy in the coming months to unlock opportunities in marine and coastal technologies and the blue economy.

- He was speaking at the inauguration of Atria Beyond Labs (ABL) at Atria University, a platform designed to accelerate the translation of academic research into deployable technologies, industry-ready solutions, and scalable start-ups.
- The Minister also highlighted that Karnataka had already taken concrete steps in this direction through the launch of the Centre of Excellence in Aquamarine Innovation in Mangaluru.
- He said the centre was envisioned as a collaborative platform for scientists, industry leaders and policymakers to drive economic growth while ensuring the sustainability of Karnataka's marine ecosystems.
- According to him, the government was revisiting Karnataka's current data policy with the objective of developing a more sustainable and green data framework.
- "We are examining how data infrastructure and the digital ecosystem can become more energy-efficient and more sustainable, and how the entire sector can be accelerated towards responsible, climate-aligned growth," he said.

❖ India and Greece agree to strengthen defence industrial cooperation in five-year road map

Context: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a bilateral meeting with Greece's Minister of National Defence, Nikolaos-Georgios Dendias, in New Delhi.

- The meeting focused on strengthening defence cooperation under the India-Greece Strategic Partnership.
- According to the Defence Ministry, both Ministers reiterated that the partnership was rooted in shared values of peace, stability, freedom, and mutual respect. They agreed to expand the capacities of their indigenous defence industries by aligning India's Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative with Greece's defence reforms under Agenda 2030.

- A Joint Declaration of Intent on strengthening defence industrial cooperation was signed, marking the beginning of work on a five-year road map. The two sides also exchanged a Bilateral Military Cooperation Plan for 2026, outlining future military engagements between the armed forces of both countries, the Ministry added.

Peace, security

- The discussions covered regional peace and security, with both leaders acknowledging the steady deepening of bilateral defence cooperation and strategic ties. Convergence on key maritime issues was highlighted, reflecting the shared outlook of the two ancient seafaring nations.
- The Greek side announced the deployment of a Greek International Liaison Officer at the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram, underlining enhanced maritime cooperation.
- Earlier in the day, Mr. Dendias laid a wreath at the National War Memorial and paid homage to fallen soldiers. He also inspected a Tri-Service Guard of Honour at the Manekshaw Centre.

❖ RBI tells banks not to insist on collateral for loans to MSMEs

Context: Regulator advises banks to extend collateral-free loans up to ₹20 lakh to all units financed under PM Employment Generation Programme.

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday asked banks not to insist on collateral security for loans up to ₹20 lakh extended to units in the micro, small enterprises (MSE) sector.
- “Banks are also advised to extend collateral-free loans up to ₹20 lakh to all units financed under the Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) administered by KVIC,” the central bank said in its Lending to Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) Sector (Amendment) Directions, 2026.
- “Banks may, on the basis of good track record and financial position of the MSE units, increase the limit to dispense with the collateral requirement for loans up to ₹25 lakh as per their internal policy,” the banking regulator said and added that banks may avail the benefit of credit guarantee scheme cover, where applicable.
- “However, accepting gold and silver as collateral pledged voluntarily by borrowers for loans sanctioned by the banks up to the collateral free limit, will not be construed as a violation of the above mandate,” the Reserve Bank said in the circular.
- “With a view to facilitating improved access to formal credit, support entrepreneurial activity and strengthen last mile credit delivery for MSEs with limited collateral, it has been decided to enhance the limit of collateral free loans to MSEs from ₹10 lakh to ₹20 lakh,” RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said in a statement on development and regulatory policies on Friday.

❖ India to support steel exports hit by Europe's carbon tax

Context: India's steel exports will continue to be impacted by the European Union's carbon tax and import quotas, and the government will take steps to help the sector, Steel Secretary Sandeep Poundrik said at a government event in New Delhi.

- The comment comes days after India and the European Union signed a trade deal which slashed tariffs on several sectors, but left the bloc's carbon border tariff, called Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, intact.reuters

❖ '25% ethanol blend, flex fuel can address overcapacity'

- Spurring blending of ethanol with petrol to the extent of 25% and introduction of flex-fuel vehicles would help address the overcapacity existing in the industry, Vijendra Singh, President of the All-India Distillers Association (AIDA) told reporters.
- "The industry holds a cumulative capacity of 200 crore litre," he stated, adding, "Clarity on the two fronts would help utilise the investments already made by the industry."



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❖ Centre mandates label for photorealistic AI content

Context: Amended IT Rules call for disclosure of AI-generated synthetic media, and warn platforms of loss of safe harbour for non-compliance; changes notified by the govt. to take effect on February 20

- The Union government has notified **amendments to the Information Technology Act, 2021, requiring photorealistic AI-generated content to be prominently labelled.** The changes, which will come into force on February 20, also significantly shorten timelines for takedown of illegal material.
- Under the new rules, social media platforms will now have between two and three hours to remove certain categories of unlawful content, a sharp reduction from the earlier 24-36 hours.
- Content deemed illegal by a court or an “appropriate government” will have to be taken down within three hours, while sensitive content, featuring non-consensual nudity and deepfakes, must be removed within two hours.

Content check

Platforms that enable creation or sharing of synthetic content must ensure **clear and prominent labelling** under the new rules



Key changes include:

- Synthetic content to be treated as 'information' for determining unlawful acts under IT Rules
- Timeline for platforms to act on government or court orders reduced from 36 hours to 3 hours
- Sensitive content, including non-consensual deepfake, must be removed within 2 hours
- Platforms to seek disclosures from users for AI-generated content

- **The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026, defines synthetically generated content as “audio, visual or audio-visual information which is artificially or algorithmically created, generated, modified or altered using a computer resource, in a manner that such information appears to be real, authentic or true and depicts or portrays any individual or event in a manner that is, or is likely to be perceived as indistinguishable from a natural person or a real-world event.” The final definition is narrower than the one released in a draft version of these rules in October 2025. As with the existing IT Rules, failure to comply with the rules could result in loss of safe harbour, the legal principle that sites allowing users to post content cannot automatically be held liable in the same way as a publisher of a book or a periodical can.**

- The rules include a carve-out for touch-ups that smartphone cameras often perform automatically.
- Platforms will be required to seek disclosures from users in case their content is AI-generated. If such a disclosure is not received for synthetically generated content, the official said, firms would either have to proactively label the content or take it down in cases of non-consensual deepfakes.
- The amended rules mandate that AI-generated imagery be labelled “prominently”. While the draft version specified that 10% of any imagery would have to be covered with such a disclosure, platforms have been given some more leeway, the official said, since they pushed back on such a specific mandate.

Safe harbour

- “Provided that where [a social media] intermediary becomes aware, or it is otherwise established, that the intermediary knowingly permitted, promoted, or failed to act upon such synthetically generated information in contravention of these rules, such intermediary shall be deemed to have failed to exercise due diligence under this sub-rule,” the rules say, hinting at a loss of safe harbour.
- The rules also partially roll back an amendment notified in October 2025, which had limited each State to designating a single officer authorised to issue takedown orders. States may now notify more than one such officer— an “administrative” measure to address the need of States with large populations, the official said.

❖ Number of ex-Devadasis drops by nearly half

Context: A survey of former Devadasi women in Karnataka has shown a nearly 50 % decline in the numbers identified in the State over the previous survey conducted in 2007-2008. While 46,660 women had been identified as former Devadasis in the 2007-2008 survey, the number has come down to 23,395 in the 2025 survey.

- While activists working for the rights of former Devadasis have expressed scepticism over the numbers thrown up by the latest survey, officials claim that the declining numbers are due to deaths or those who have moved up the social ladder refusing to take part in the survey.

Key recommendations

- Among the key recommendations of the report is that affixing father’s name should not be mandatory in the application forms in educational institutions and other places for children of former Devadasis. It has also recommended announcing a special package for the former Devadasi families for their rehabilitation.
- Women and Child Development Department sources said that the upcoming Budget could announce a special package for them.
- Conducted over three and a half months between September 15 and December 31, 2025, the survey has also identified 90,092 persons belonging to the first, second and third generations of the former Devadasi families in Karnataka.
- The focus of the survey was on collecting details such as social condition, education levels, information of dependents, employment details, ownership of agriculture land, skill training, health condition, basic infrastructure and access to pension.
- **The survey was conducted in Belagavi, Vijayapura, Bagalkot, Raichur, Koppal, Dharwad, Haveri, Gadag, Kalaburagi, Yadgir, Chitradurga, Davangere, Shivamogga, Ballari and Vijayanagar districts.**

Decline in numbers

Former Devadasis identified by 2025 survey in 15 districts 23,395	District with highest numbers Bagalkot 4,189	Second highest Vijayanagar 3,876	Third highest Belagavi 2,649
	Persons identified as first, second and third generation of their families: 90,092		Survey was conducted between September 15 and December 31, 2025
First survey of former Devadasis: 1993-1994			
Identified numbers 22,873	The second survey 2007-2008	Identified numbers 46,660	
Karnataka Devadasi (Prevention, Prohibition, Relief and Rehabilitation) Act, 2025, replaces Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition and Dedication) Act, 1982			

- The report has also recommended providing financial assistance for the marriage of children from former Devadasi families and encouraging inter-caste marriages.
- The report has said that a special student scholarship should be announced for children belonging to former Devadasi families since a large number of them hail from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes. It has also said that special training should be provided to prepare the children from former Devadasi families for competitive examinations.
- Further, it has recommended providing special training in agriculture and animal husbandry, besides providing financial assistance for skill development.

❖ **MNS officers to be eligible for re-employment benefits**

Context: The Union Government has notified the Ex-servicemen (Re-employment in Central Civil Services & Posts) Amendment Rules, 2026 under Article 309 of the Constitution, formally expanding the definition of ex-servicemen to include personnel of the Military Nursing Service (MNS).

- According to the Ministry of Defence, the amendment revises Rule 2(c)(i) to explicitly cover those who have served in any rank — combatant or non-combatant — in the Regular Army, Navy or Air Force, as well as the Military Nursing Service of the Indian Union. The change removes a long-standing ambiguity over the eligibility of MNS officers, who are commissioned officers, for re-employment benefits available to other veterans.
- MNS personnel are now entitled to the same re-employment provisions as other ex-servicemen.

❖ **Internet curbs imposed as violence continues in Ukhrul**

Context: Internet services suspended for five days in the district in Manipur amid reports of armed groups opening fire; Chief Minister appeals for peace while legislators led by Deputy CM visit Litan area

- Internet services were suspended in the Naga-majority Ukhrul district of Manipur for five days as violence between the Kuki-Zo and Naga tribal groups continued for the third consecutive day.
- Local people said miscreants torched nine or 10 houses on Tuesday morning, escalating the tension between Kuki-Zo and Naga villagers in the Litan area, located midway between Imphal and Ukhrul.
- There were reports of armed miscreants opening fire, presumably to scare villagers away.
- Many villagers in the conflict zone have abandoned their houses for safer places, according to officials.
- N. Ashok Kumar, Manipur's Home Commissioner-cum-Secretary, issued an order suspending "Internet/data services, including services through broadband, VPN, and VSAT" in Ukhrul district for five days from 11.30 a.m. on Tuesday.
- This was a preventive and precautionary measure given the volatile law and order situation and "apprehension that some anti-social elements might misuse social media with images, posts, and videos to incite passion", the order said.

- The violence, triggered by an assault on Saturday night, continued despite the enforcement of prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and the deployment of several companies of Central armed forces.
- Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh appealed to the two communities to maintain peace and harmony, while a team of legislators led by Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho visited the Litan area to assess the situation. The team also held meetings with the leaders of the two communities, calling for restraint.
- “The situation is under control along the main roads, but the interior areas, difficult to access, remain tense,” a district official said, declining to be named.
- Meanwhile, the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust appealed to both Tangkhul and Kuki communities to exercise restraint and maintain peace.

❖ Human rights body could function as RTI panel, moots SC

Context: The Supreme Court mooted whether the Chairpersons of Human Rights Commissions of States with low traffic of Right to Information (RTI) appeals could be given additional responsibility of acting as Chief Information Commissioners (CICs) till there is an increase in workload.

- “Suppose it is just 100 appeals pending in a State Information Commission... Any institution you create is a burden on the public exchequer. Taxpayers’ money must be spent on development activities or something... Why not in such States, as an ad-hoc mechanism, the power of the Information Commissions be given to the State Human Rights Commissions?” Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, asked advocates Prashant Bhushan and Rahul Gupta for the petitioners.
- The court was hearing a petition filed by petitioners Anjali Bhardwaj, Commodore Lokesh Batra (retired) and Amrita Johri, seeking timely and transparent appointments to the Information Commissions under the RTI Act.
- The Chief Justice said the “ad-hoc mechanism” could continue till the number of RTI appeals increases in “due course of time”.

❖ Bangladesh plans to shift from Indian to U.S. cotton

Context: Information adviser says ‘game changer’ trade deal can provide Bangladesh greater access to U.S. market; experts caution it will prevent Dhaka from exploring other cotton producing countries

- Bangladesh will replace Indian cotton with U.S.-produced cotton as a result of the U.S.-Bangladesh trade deal that was inked on Monday, said a spokesperson for the interim government here.
- The trade deal was a “game changer” that can provide Bangladesh greater access to the U.S. market.
- Professor Selim Jehan of BRAC University in Dhaka said the deal had made Bangladesh’s cotton market “attractive” for the U.S. but cautioned that Bangladesh should ensure that the U.S. cotton was of high quality.

- “We have got a tariff rate of 19% in the new trade deal with the U.S., which is good compared to our rivals like Cambodia and Indonesia but a clause in the deal has given us greater advantage as the U.S. has agreed to reduce tariff to zero if our textile producers switch to U.S. cotton or manmade fibre,” said Mr. Alam, describing the trade deal as a “big boost” for Bangladesh’s textile sector.
- Mr. Alam said that Bangladesh traditionally imports cotton from India and Central Asia as it does not produce the cotton or yarns necessary for its large textile sector.
- However, this shortcoming has also helped it negotiate with the U.S. more freely as Bangladesh does not have any cotton farmer lobby that could have pressured the government.

Tit-for-tat restrictions

- Cotton and cotton yarn supplies from India and export of Bangladesh’s textile products to India came to the spotlight in April-May 2025 when both sides imposed tit-for-tat restrictions on the movement of the items.
- Bangladesh restricted import of yarn from India through its land ports through an order dated April 13, 2025.
- India exported to Bangladesh cotton yarn worth \$1.6 billion in 2024 and manmade fibre (MMF) yarn worth nearly \$85 million.
- A substantial volume of yarn goes through land ports. Bangladesh is one of the largest importers of Indian cotton.
- After relations between the two countries nosedived in July-August 2024, on May 16, 2025, India imposed curbs on import through land ports of several items which included readymade garments, the largest export item from Bangladesh to India. Bangladeshi authorities have said that they will now shift focus to the market in the U.S., which is the largest textile market for Bangladeshi manufacturers.
- Professor Selim Jehan acknowledged that the trade agreement had “undoubtedly” created a market in Bangladesh for raw cotton from the U.S., but also cautioned that the agreement had “restricted Bangladesh as it will prevent Bangladesh from exploring rival cotton producing countries”.
- “It appears at first that if Bangladesh produces textile products using raw cotton from the U.S., then Bangladesh will save money as the 19 per cent tariff will be reduced to zero. But then, we also have to combine the amount to purchase U.S. cotton with freight charges, transportation etc. to see if ultimately it amounts to a profitable bargain,” Professor Jehan told The Hindu.
- He further said that Bangladesh will have to ensure that the U.S.-supplied cotton matches the cotton from other countries, including India and Egypt.

❖ Indian exporters perturbed by U.S.-Bangladesh trade pact

Context: Bangladesh must use U.S.-sourced raw materials to avail zero tariff, but Indian sector stakeholders feel the time taken to receive U.S. cotton, its transport and storage, could reduce its cost advantage

- The U.S. Bangladesh Agreement on Reciprocal Trade has led to concerns among Indian textile and apparel exporters who were looking forward to a competitive advantage over Bangladesh with the 19% tariff on goods from that country, as Indian merchandise would be taxed a tad lower at 18%.
- According to the U.S. Bangladesh Agreement, the U.S. will establish a mechanism that will allow for certain textile and apparel goods from Bangladesh to receive zero reciprocal tariff based on the use of U.S. cotton or MMF yarn.
- India exported \$1.47 billion worth cotton yarn (570 million kg) to Bangladesh, which is the biggest destination for Indian yarn, in 2024-2025. It also shipped 12-14 lakh bales of cotton to Bangladesh last year. Almost 20% of Bangladesh's garment and 26% of India's cotton apparel exports are to the U.S.

Immediate impact

- "I fear that the immediate impact will be on Indian cotton yarn as Bangladesh can buy U.S. cotton and spin at its textile mills," said Chandrima Chatterjee, secretary general of the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry.
- "How will the U.S. determine traceability of the raw material? As Bangladesh is very strong in apparels, we may stand to lose," said K.M. Subramanian, president of the Tiruppur Exporters Association.
- "Bangladesh has to buy MMF yarn or cotton from the U.S. for the reciprocal tariff of 19% to be waived. But, the MFN rate will continue. The time taken to receive the U.S. cotton and the transport and storage costs should be taken into consideration. Further, not all products can be made from American cotton. So, the product mix should change and supply chain should be realigned in Bangladesh," said Siddhartha Rajagopal, executive director of the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council.
- "There is an Executive Order by the U.S. government issued last April that says that the ad valorem rates of duty applies only on the non-US component of a product, when there is at least 20% value addition," said A. Sakthivel, chairman of the AEPC. "We will appeal to the Indian government to ask for a provision similar to the one given to Bangladesh for Indian apparel exporters too," he said.

❖ Centre plans guidelines for books by defence personnel

Context: Defence Ministry held a meeting to frame them for both serving and retired personnel, says official; to lay down a framework to be followed before any manuscript is cleared for publication

- Amid the controversy surrounding the unpublished memoir *Four Stars of Destiny*, of former Army chief General M.M. Naravane ((retd), the Defence Ministry is working on detailed guidelines for serving and retired armed forces personnel who wish to publish books in future.
- The proposed guidelines will spell out the process to be followed before any manuscript is cleared for publication.
- A senior defence official confirmed that a meeting was held recently to frame a new set of rules, during which a detailed presentation was made. The upcoming framework is expected to incorporate provisions of existing service rules as well as the **Official Secrets Act (OSA)**.
- **At present, there is no single consolidated law specifically governing book-writing by retired Army officers. Instead, different legal and service frameworks apply to serving personnel and retirees. In both cases, national security and protection of classified information remain the primary red lines.**
- **There are no specific service rules barring ex-servicemen or retired Army officers from authoring or publishing books. However, the freedom operates within a legal grey area. The OSA continues to apply for life, even after retirement, making it a criminal offence to disclose classified information, sensitive operational details, or any material prejudicial to national security.**
- **While retired personnel are no longer governed by the Army Act or Army rules** in matters of publication, statutory laws remain applicable. If a manuscript contains operational or sensitive details, authors are expected to submit it to the Ministry for clearance. The relevant department then verifies and cross-checks the content before granting approval.
- **For serving Army personnel, the rules are explicit and mandatory.** Service rules and defence service regulations require prior written permission before undertaking any literary, political or remunerative activity outside official duties. Requests are routed through the chain of command and may require clearance up to Army Headquarters or the MoD, depending on the nature of the content.
- Material relating to classified information, operational details, internal procedures, equipment capabilities, intelligence inputs, or issues affecting national security or foreign relations is strictly prohibited. Even fictional works may face restrictions if they closely resemble real operations or disclose identifiable details.

Fresh framework

The upcoming guidelines are expected to incorporate provisions of existing service rules as well as the Official Secrets Act (OSA)



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- The OSA makes disclosure of classified information, sensitive operational details, or any material prejudicial to national security a criminal offence

- The Act continues to apply to an officer for life, even after retirement

Tricky words: LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi with a copy of the unpublished memoir of former Army chief M.M. Naravane. PTI

Maturity, judgment

- Lt. Gen. (retd.) D.P. Pandey said, “When an Army person retires, he or she is as much a civilian as anyone else but the facet of Official Secrets Act remains. After retirement,

it largely comes down to individual's maturity and judgment regarding what to write and how to present it. One should avoid writing on matters that are classified and not in open domain. However, retired personnel are free to express their personal opinions about politics and matters of national security. If any content falls under the Official Secrets Act, prior permission from the MoD is required."

- He added that in his view, material that is already in the public domain can be written about. There is a laid-down process within the respective Services to grant permission for publication if a book mentions issues related to national interest. If any information published in a book is found to be incorrect or unlawful, there are legal provisions to deal with such infringements.

❖ U.S. drops references added to statement on deal with India

Context: The U.S. backtracked on changes it made to the India-U.S. joint statement and the White House factsheet on the India-U.S. framework for the interim agreement on trade, removing references to 'pulses', 'agricultural products', 'digital service tax' and Indian 'commitments' on investing \$500 billion.

- The references, which were not in the original joint statement, had led to questions being raised in New Delhi.
- Opposition leaders asked the government to clarify its position after officials had categorically said that sensitive agricultural items were not included in the deal and that India had "intended" but not given a binding commitment to investing \$500 billion in American products over a period of five years. **"India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on all U.S. industrial goods and a wide range of U.S. food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red sorghum, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products," the corrected factsheet read.**
- "India intends to buy more American products and purchase over \$500 billion of U.S. energy, information and communication technology, coal, and other products", a line which earlier also included "agricultural" products. The External Affairs Ministry did not respond to a question on whether the government or the Indian embassy had reached out to the U.S. government to request the changes. The U.S. did not issue any statement before amending the documents available online.
- Meanwhile, the U.S. Trade Representative's office deleted another entry related to the India-U.S. deal. The social media post showed a map of India including in it Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and Chinese-controlled Aksai Chin. This is in line with India's official map but runs counter to the U.S.'s official maps that show the two regions as "disputed territory". The post had led to questions being asked about whether the U.S. government was changing its position in India's favour. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri was asked about the map during a meeting of the parliamentary committee on external affairs.

Taking back

The references had raised concerns after not being present in the original **India-U.S. joint statement**



Dropped references:

- Pulses
- Agricultural products
- Digital service tax
- 'Commitments' on investing \$500 billion

❖ Tamil Brahmi inscriptions discovered in Egypt shed light on ancient trade links

Context: A path-breaking finding has shed new light on trade links between ancient Tamilagam, other parts of India, and the Roman Empire. Two researchers have identified close to 30 inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi, Prakrit and Sanskrit at tombs in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. These inscriptions are said to belong to the period between the 1st and 3rd Centuries CE

- The inscriptions were identified during a study in 2024 and 2025 by Charlotte Schmid, Professor at the French School of Asian Studies (EFEU) in Paris, and Ingo Strauch, Professor at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. The team documented them across six tombs in the Theban Necropolis. They followed in the footsteps of French scholar Jules Baillet, who surveyed the Valley of the Kings in 1926 and published more than 2,000 Greek graffiti marks.
- Presenting their findings in a paper titled “From the Valley of the Kings to India: Indian Inscriptions in Egypt” at the ongoing International Conference on Tamil Epigraphy, the scholars said the individuals who made these inscriptions came from the north-western, western and southern regions of the Indian subcontinent, with those from the latter forming the majority.
- Visitors had left brief inscriptions and graffiti by carving their names on the walls of corridors and rooms, marking their presence in the tombs, the researchers said, adding that these sets of inscriptions appear inside the tombs alongside larger bodies of graffiti in other languages, primarily Greek.
- Within such settings, the Indian visitors seem to have followed an existing practice of leaving their names inside the tombs, they said.
- **The name Cikai Korran (pronounced ‘Kotran’) appears repeatedly. It was inscribed eight times across five tombs. The name was found near entrances and high on interior walls among other graffiti marks. In one tomb, it appears at a height of about four metres at the entrance, Mr. Strauch said. “The name Cikai Korran is revealing, as its first element may be connected to the Sanskrit śikhā, meaning tuft or crown. While this is not a common personal name, the second element, korran, is more distinctly Tamil. It carries strong warlike associations, as it derives from a root, korram, meaning victory and slaying. This root is echoed in the Chera warrior goddess Korravai and the term korraivan, meaning king,” Ms. Schmid said.**
- The **name korran also came up in other finds in Egypt.** It appears in Korrapumān, written on a sherd discovered at Berenike, a Red Sea port city, in 1995. The name also occurs in the Sangam corpus, where the Chera king Pittānkorran, praised in the Purananooru, is sometimes directly addressed as korran, the scholars pointed out, adding that these parallel attestations in inscriptions from Pugalur, the ancient Chera capital, dated back to the 2nd or 3rd century C.E.



A Tamil Brahmi inscription with the name *Cikai Korran* in one of the tombs at the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

- Two other individuals also left their names in Tamil Brahmi in these tombs. One inscription reads Kopān varata kantan (Kopān came and saw). The name Kopān has also been found at Ammankovilpatti in Tamil Nadu. Other Tamil names identified include Cātan and Kiran. “When I first identified these inscriptions, I could not believe it. Because so many people have visited these tombs over the years and nobody has identified anything Indian. I asked Charlotte whether I was mistaken,” Mr. Strauch said.
- K. Rajan, academic and research adviser, Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, said the findings are significant as they shed light on the trade links between ancient Tamilagam from the Malabar Coast and the Roman Empire. He said that earlier work in Egypt had focused on the Red Sea port city of Berenike, where excavations were conducted for several years and attention has now moved to the Nile river valley.

❖ ‘Bacteria can talk to each other and are multilingual’

Context: Bacteria can get into us, make us sick, and they can even kill us – but they give us our life too. Bonnie Bassler, renowned molecular biologist and professor of Princeton University, best known for her work in bacterial communication, described bacteria as “magical microbes” holding great promise in the fields of medicine, environment and agriculture.

- “Bacteria can talk to each other and are multilingual, have so much to teach us about how collective behaviours evolved on earth,” said Prof. Bassler said at a lecture on Wednesday titled ‘A chemical language that enables communication between diverse organisms’. “It’s the bacteria in your gut that digests food and gives you those [nutrients].”
- **This phenomenon of bacterial communication, or “quorum sensing”** could indeed be a game changer for medicine, by opening new avenues to develop anti-quorum sensing therapies instead of antibiotics. Several are “notorious bacterial characters,” she said, specifically citing the deadly cholera-causing *Vibrio cholerae* bacterium, and perspectives on treating the disease.
- This bacterium is “the terrible cousin” to an obscure but brilliantly bioluminescent bacterium, the *Vibrio fischeri* that makes blue light and lives in a wonderful one-to-one symbiosis with a squid, she explained.
- The large squids live in knee-deep water along the coast of Hawaii. And as it is a nocturnal animal, when scavenging under a bright moonlit sky, it needs a way to protect itself from predators that track the squid through their moving shadow. And this is where *Vibrio fischeri* glows under the squid, making it shadowless. We know that bacteria very early in life colonise us and they teach our immune system over time to keep harmful bacteria out and to let good bacteria in, she said, adding “We don’t know how they do it, but we know that the microbes are in charge of educating our immune system.”



Bonnie Bassler delivering a lecture at IISc in Bengaluru on Wednesday. ALLEN EGENUSE J.

- “But there are no applications unless people, scientists make discoveries and work on mechanisms and work at the very basic part of how life on Earth manages to do what it does,” Prof. Bassler said.
- Prof. Bassler said she was delighted that she was delivering her lecture on the International Day for Women and Girls in Science.

❖ State introduces online scrutiny system for revenue courts

Context: The Karnataka government has put in place a 15-point online screening measure to tackle the problem of some revenue courts misusing their quasi-judicial powers by taking up cases that are beyond their jurisdiction

- Karnataka, which showed the way in reducing pending revenue cases, has now embarked on an initiative to streamline the functioning of revenue courts. It has taken measures to tackle the problem of some revenue courts misusing their quasi-judicial powers to support irregularities by taking up cases that are beyond their jurisdiction.
- The government has put in place a 15-point online screening measure to prevent revenue courts from overstepping their jurisdiction.

Fact sheet

Why the reforms

- Many AC courts had admitted cases beyond their jurisdiction
- Such cases should have gone before civil courts or not fit to be taken up
- Several parcels of government lands were lost due to their orders
- Misuse of quasi-judicial powers helped in proliferation of revenue layouts

What has been done

- Online scrutiny to prevent admission of such cases
- Process involves 15-point checklist to be digitally signed by Acs
- Live-streaming of revenue court proceedings on a pilot

Pendency

Tahsildar's courts

May, 2023 (10,774), now (488)

AC courts

May, 2023 (73,624), now (11,605)

Middlemen involved

- “The verification of pending cases by the government showed that some Assistant Commissioner’s courts had admitted cases beyond their jurisdiction by usurping the jurisdiction of civil courts to regularise irregularities, perhaps due to the involvement of middlemen,” Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda told The Hindu. “When we analysed the legacy (long-pending) cases, we realised that a large number of them were actually not in the domain of revenue courts at all. Our officers had admitted these cases in collusion with middlemen or petitioners,” the Minister said.
- In some cases, the proper authority for petitioners to approach was civil courts and in some others, there was no way that the revenue courts could have admitted them as they pertained to illegal measures, he noted.
- “For example, if a person has illegally sold another person’s property, it will have to be rejected during the process of mutation (process of updating land records to reflect a change in ownership). But old cases have shown that some revenue courts of Assistant Commissioners would admit the cases and issue direction to the authorities concerned to proceed with mutation as per the sale deed without going into merits,” he explained
- He said that about 10,000 acres of government land were lost as they were passing orders in favour of those who have encroached upon the government land. “This was one of the reasons for proliferation of revenue layouts as orders were being given to issue khatas without survey sketch,” he said.
- Stating that many of these courts were being run “like kangaroo courts”, he said there was gross misuse of quasi-judicial powers. The Minister said that to ensure justice, the

Revenue Department has put in place a system of online checklist that scrutinises cases at the admission stage itself.

How it works

- The scrutiny made mandatory for the AC's courts will have a 15-point checklist for which the ACs will have to tick either "yes" or "no" boxes online with digital signature for authentication. Even a single "no" will reject the case for being admitted. Each of these questions are designed to affirm that the case legally falls within the jurisdiction of the revenue court.
- In addition to this, the government is also experimenting with livestreaming revenue courts. "We have done this on a pilot basis in Bengaluru South ACs court. The feedback is positive," he said.

Pendency now

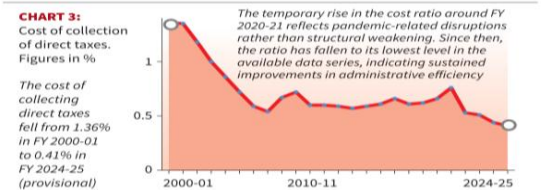
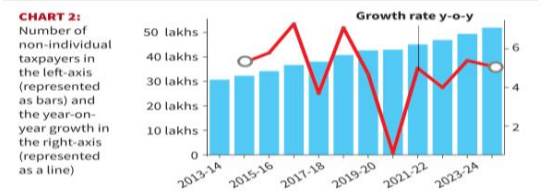
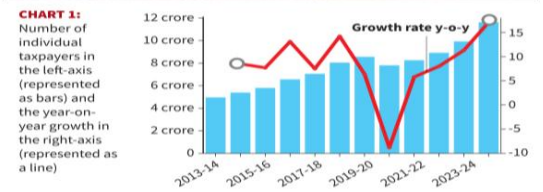
- On the pendency of revenue cases, Mr. Gowda said the present dispensation had reduced the pending cases before tahsildar's courts from 10,774 in May, 2023, to 488 now.
- While the tahsildar's courts are supposed to dispose of cases within three months, the AC's courts are supposed to do so within six months.
- As many as 30 special ACs have been appointed to dispose of legacy cases, he noted.

❖ Taxpayer base more than doubled in the last decade

Context: Expansion of the base has coincided with an improvement in tax administration efficiency

- **India's direct tax system** has undergone a significant expansion over the last decade, marked by a sharp rise in the number of taxpayers as well as sustained improvements in administrative efficiency. Time-series data released by the Income-Tax Department indicate that this expansion has been broad-based and persistent, reflecting deeper formal participation rather than a short-lived compliance surge.
- Between Assessment Year (AY) 2013-14 and AY2024-25, the total number of taxpayers, defined as persons who either filed a return of income or in whose case tax was deducted at source, increased from 5.26 crore to 12.13 crore.
- This increase, which more than doubles the taxpayer base, represents a **compound annual growth rate (CAGR)** of approximately 7.89% over 11 years, underscoring the sustained nature of the expansion. It marks one of the most important structural shifts in India's direct tax landscape since the wider adoption of the Permanent Account Number.

- A disaggregated view of the data shows that individual taxpayers remain the primary drivers of this expansion. As illustrated in Chart 1, the number of individual taxpayers rose from 4.96 crore in AY2013-14 to 11.61 crore in AY2024-25, translating into a CAGR of about 8% over the period.
- Growth was largely steady in the years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, with year-on-year increases mostly in the high single digits. The contraction visible in AY2020-21, when individual taxpayers declined by nearly 9%, coincides with the disruption caused by the pandemic. This was followed by strong recovery, with growth accelerating to double digits in the most recent assessment years, indicating renewed momentum in the expansion of the individual tax base.
- **While individuals dominate the tax system in scale, the expansion has not been confined to households alone.** Chart 2 shows the combined trend for non-individual taxpayers, comprising firms, companies, Hindu Undivided Families, Associations of Persons or Body of Individuals, local authorities, artificial juridical persons, and other residual PAN categories.
- In absolute terms, the non-individual taxpayer base increased steadily from about 0.29 crore in AY2013-14 to nearly 0.48 crore by AY2024-25, corresponding to a CAGR of roughly 5% over the period.
- Growth among non-individual taxpayers has been more moderate than among individuals, but also more stable. Year-on-year growth rates generally remained within the 4% to 7% range in the pre-pandemic years. The pandemic's impact is again evident in AY2020-21, when growth slowed sharply to below 1% before recovering gradually in subsequent years.
- However, unlike individuals, the post-pandemic rebound among non-individuals has been measured, with growth stabilising at around 5% in recent assessment years. This pattern suggests that formalisation has progressed across organisational and business entities, albeit at a steadier pace than individuals.



Cost of collection

- **The expansion of the taxpayer base has coincided with a marked improvement in tax administration efficiency.** As shown in Chart 3, the cost of collecting direct taxes fell from 1.36% in FY2000-01 to 0.41% in FY2024-25. The figure for FY2024-25 is provisional and may be updated later. This long-term decline has occurred despite a substantial increase in the number of taxpayers and total tax collections.
- The temporary rise in the cost ratio around FY2020-21 reflects pandemic-related disruptions rather than structural weakening. Since then, the ratio has fallen to its lowest level in the available data series, indicating sustained improvements in administrative efficiency.

- **Several institutional and technological changes help explain these trends.** Over the past decade, the tax administration has increasingly relied on digital filing systems, pre-filled returns, faceless assessments, and expanded third-party information reporting. These measures have reduced compliance frictions and enabled the system to manage a larger taxpayer base without a commensurate increase in administrative resources.
- **Unlike headline filing statistics that focus on absolute counts, the evidence presented here draws on taxpayer-level data, year-on-year growth dynamics, and long-term CAGR trends** to assess the durability of India's tax base expansion.
- Taken together, the evidence from taxpayer levels, growth rates, CAGR patterns, and collection costs points to a structural strengthening of India's direct tax system. Revenues are being mobilised from a broader cross-section of taxpayers even as administrative efficiency improves, thereby reinforcing the stability and sustainability of public finances and embedding taxation more firmly within the formal economy. This transition has important implications for revenue resilience, equity, and long-term fiscal planning nationwide.
- It is to be noted that growth rates are calculated on a year-on-year basis using taxpayer headcount data.
- **CAGR is computed for the period AY2013-14 to AY2024-25 using unrounded values, and figures for AY2024-25 and FY2024-25 are provisional.**

❖ **Beldanga violence: was it fair to invoke UAPA, SC asks NIA**

Context: The Supreme Court questioned the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as to whether it was "fair and just" to invoke the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) (UAPA) Act in the Beldanga violence case in West Bengal without even looking at any material or evidence, and term it a "terrorist act" affecting the economic security of the nation.

- "Is it just and fair to exercise your powers like that? The case diary and other documents were not placed before you. It is a pre-decisional conclusion arrived at without looking at any material, and you say Section 15 [terrorist act] of the UAPA is applicable?" Justice Joymalya Bagchi, a member of the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, asked the Central agency's counsel, Additional Solicitor-General S.V. Raju.
- Violence erupted in Beldanga on January 16 following the death of a migrant worker from Jharkhand. Large numbers of people took to the streets, blocking railway tracks and a National Highway for several hours. At least 12 people were injured in the clashes, and around 30 were arrested. "Every emotional outburst cannot be packaged as affecting economic security," Justice Bagchi said.
- The Calcutta High Court had, on January 20, issued various directions on the basis of petitions filed by BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari and others, including leaving it open to the Centre to conduct probe by invoking Section 6(5) of the NIA Act.
- On January 26, the Home Ministry directed the NIA to take up the probe of the case. The West Bengal government had moved the top court, arguing there was no material to attract Section 15 of the UAPA. They submitted that none of the scheduled offences under the UAPA were committed.

❖ No reduction in States' share in tax devolution, FM asserts in Lok Sabha

Context: Minister counters Opposition, says that resources that will be transferred to the States is estimated at ₹25.44 lakh crore; Constitution gives Centre authority to collect cesses and surcharges, she adds

- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday dismissed allegations by Opposition members that the Centre was not transferring 41% of the divisible pool of taxes to the States, as mandated by the 15th Finance Commission, asserting that the required transfers were made every year.
- **The 15th Finance Commission had recommended that for 2020 to 2026, the Centre should transfer 41% of its divisible pool of taxes to the States, which the Centre had accepted.**
- “Often, we are accused of not transferring the 41% that the 15th Finance Commission has recommended,” Ms. Sitharaman said in the Lok Sabha, during her reply to the debate on the Union Budget.
- “I assure you, it is 41% that we have transferred to the States. We have not reduced any State’s devolvable tax,” she said.
- The Union Finance Minister said the total resources to be transferred to the States, including the devolution and under Centrally sponsored schemes, was estimated at ₹25.44 lakh crore for 2026-27.
- “This entails an increase of ₹2.7 lakh crore over 2025-26 and is ₹3.78 lakh crore more than the actuals of 2024-25,” she said.
- **“The 16th Finance Commission analysed the States’ share transferred by the Centre to the States from 2018-19 to 2022-23 and concluded that in each of these years, the devolution made by the Centre exactly matches the recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission,”** Ms. Sitharaman added.

Devolution pool

- She said that **it was the Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) that audited the Centre’s finances and decided what the net proceeds of the Centre were, after subtracting from the gross tax receipts the cesses and surcharges collected by the Centre.**
- “Out of that, have we transferred 41% of the divisible pool, that is what should be looked at, not the gross tax revenue,” the senior BJP leader said. “The Constitution gives the Centre the authority to collect cesses and surcharges.”
- The Finance Minister sought to counter charges levelled by Opposition members that the Centre was shrinking the divisible pool of taxes by focusing more on cesses and surcharges, which the States cannot gain from.
- **“The cesses and surcharges are collected for a particular purpose such as health cess, education cess, road cess,”** Ms. Sitharaman said. “These do not benefit the Centre, they go to the States in terms of building schools, hospitals, roads in the States.”

Medium-term Budget

- The Finance Minister explained why the Union Budget included several announcements that were aimed at the medium and long term.

- “This Budget has been prepared as the first Budget in the second quarter of the 21st century,” she said.
- “So, this Budget covers a lot of issues from 2026 to 2050. We are also starting the new five-year cycle of the new Finance Commission and therefore the estimates are largely on the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission,” she said.
- “By doing these [longer term announcements], which are leading us towards the medium and long term, we are also continuing our push in building infrastructure,” she said.
- “It is not just roads and National highways, we are also looking at waterways so that the cost of logistics can come down and States that are in the hinterland will have the advantage of moving goods faster at a lesser cost,” she said.

❖ No plans for distinct legal recognition for denotified tribes: Centre

Context: The Union government is not considering any proposal for distinct legal and constitutional recognition of a category on a par with the SC/ST/OBC classifications for the denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes in India, the Tribal Affairs Ministry told the Rajya Sabha.

- This comes even as these communities (formerly classified as “criminal” under the colonial-era **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871**) are organising to push for a “separate column” in the upcoming **2027 Census** forms for themselves, in the hopes of building it up into a movement for a fresh classification for communities that were once labelled “criminal”.
- In a meeting held on January 30, officials of the Social Justice Ministry assured leaders of the community that they will be counted in the Census.
- Replying to a question from MPs Manoj Kumar Jha (Rashtriya Janata Dal) and Sandosh Kumar P. (CPI) about the issue and the government’s plans for such a new classification, the Ministry said it had consulted with the Social Justice Ministry, which said, “There is no such proposal or plan under consideration.”

❖ Speaker directs Lok Sabha Secretariat to correct notice seeking his removal

Context: Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla asked the Lok Sabha Secretariat to correct shortcomings in the Opposition’s notice seeking his removal from his Constitutional office, and proceed with the corrected notice.

- The revised notice will be listed after the commencement of the second phase of the Budget Session. The second phase will be held between March 9 and April 2.
- “Shortcomings were found in the notice submitted by Opposition MPs to remove Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla,” a source in the Lok Sabha Secretariat said. “The notice referred four times to events of February 2025, on the basis of which it could have been rejected under the rules,” they added.
- Mr. Birla **directed the Secretariat to have the defective notice corrected and then proceed with it.** It will be taken up in the second part of the Budget Session. The first part of the session, which got under way on January 28, will go into recess on February 13.

- While the Opposition’s move is aimed at making a political point on the way the House has functioned, there is considerable interest in the process. **Article 94 of the Constitution deals with the provisions regarding the removal of the Speaker.**

On Article 94C

- **The Opposition notice is under Article 94C, which states that the Speaker “may be removed from his office by a resolution of the House of the People by a majority of the then members of the House”.**
- **This is interpreted as the effective majority of the House, that is, more than half of the strength of the House minus the vacancies.**
- **“The Constitution doesn’t use the word effective majority but it’s meant to convey the effective strength of the House,”** former Lok Sabha Secretary-General P.D.T. Achary told The Hindu.
- **A minimum of 14 days’ notice** has to be given before a resolution seeking the removal of the Speaker can be taken up by the House, and under Article 96, the Speaker can respond to the notice for removal.

❖ **Vande Mataram to be played before National Anthem: govt.**

Context: Fresh set of guidelines issued to States and government bodies but no formal statement made by the Centre; it says when the National Song is sung or played, the audience shall stand to attention

- The Union government has said in a set of instructions to the States and government bodies that the National Song, Vande Mataram, should be sung or played before the National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana, when both the songs are played at an event.
- The fresh set of guidelines were uploaded on the Union Home Ministry website on February 6, but no formal announcement or a statement was issued.
- **It states that whenever the official version of the National Song, around 3.1 minutes long, is sung or played, the audience shall stand to attention. “However, when in the course of a newsreel or documentary, the National Song is played as a part of the film, it is not expected of the audience to stand as standing is bound to interrupt the exhibition of the film and would create disorder and confusion rather than add to the dignity of the National Song,”** it said.
- The Ministry said the instructions were being issued for general information and guidance on the official version of the song, the occasions on which it is to be played or sung, and about the need for paying respect to the song by observance of proper decorum on such occasions.

Setting the tone

Key guidelines for singing and playing the National Song

- *Vande Mataram* should be sung or played before the National Anthem when both are performed at an event

- The audience must stand at attention when the official version, around 3 minutes 10 seconds long, is sung or played

- Standing is not required if it is played as part of a newsreel or documentary



Proud moment: A tableau celebrating 150 years of *Vande Mataram* during the Republic Day Parade. PTI

- The official version shall be accompanied by mass singing during unfurling of the National Flag, cultural occasions, or ceremonial functions other than parades

- It said that Vande Mataram, written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, is known as the “National Song, which is to be sung on arrival and departure of the President at formal state functions and other functions organised by the government, immediately before and after the President addresses the nation over All India Radio and television, on arrival and departure of the Governor or Lieutenant-Governor at formal state functions, when the National Flag is brought on parade, any other occasion for which special orders are issued by the Government of India”.

When a band plays it

- “When the National Song is played by a band, the song will be preceded by a roll of drums to assist the audience to know that it is going to be played, unless there is some other specific indication that the National Song is about to be played,” the Ministry said.
- The official version shall be played accompanied by mass singing on the unfurling of the National Flag, on cultural occasions or ceremonial functions other than parades. The mass singing could be arranged by having a choir of adequate size, suitably stationed, which would be trained to coordinate its singing with the band.
- It may be sung on occasions which, though not strictly ceremonial, are nevertheless invested with significance because of the presence of Ministers and others, the Ministry said.
- “It is not possible to give an exhaustive list of occasions on which the singing (as distinct from playing) of official version of the National Song can be permitted. But there is no objection to the singing of the National Song accompanied by mass singing so long as it is done with due respect as a salutation to the motherland and proper decorum is maintained,” the Ministry said.
- “In all schools, the day’s work may begin with community singing of the National Song...,” it added.

❖ Education Ministry pushes for AI-led teaching and learning at all levels by next academic year

Context: The Ministry of Education is working with the goal of ensuring that artificial intelligence (AI) tools become a part of teaching and learning in one way or another from the kindergarten to the research levels by the next academic year, officials said.

- Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan met with leaders of 10 leading start-ups using AI in the ed-tech sector at a roundtable discussion in IIT Delhi, ahead of the government’s Bharat Bodhan AI Conclave starting Thursday.
- Officials told presspersons on Wednesday that the government will be launching Bodhan AI during the conclave, which is expected to lead to digital public infrastructure (DPI) for the education sector as a whole.
- Mr. Pradhan said that while the government was already working to introduce AI knowledge in curricula, the focus now will be on delivering AI-assisted applications, pushing towards “AI-sovereignty”. Applications include using the tool for teacher capacity building programmes, for preparing personalised lesson plans based on

content already produced by institutions like the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and State CERTs.

- The Education Minister argued that while the government had made significant efforts to take digital devices and internet connectivity to far-flung areas of the country, the next challenge is to use AI to deliver content to students in these regions.
- After the roundtable on Wednesday, which was also attended by Skill Development Minister Jayant Chaudhary, Mr. Pradhan posted on social media, saying that the founders he met were “home-grown”, from “middle-class and tier-III city backgrounds”, “who are building indigenous AI stacks particularly for transforming the educational landscape”.

❖ **SMEs unfamiliar with capital markets, lack intermediaries: SEBI**

Context: Practical guidance not clear, internal governance systems to handle SME IPOs not yet mature, making IPO process cumbersome, says Pandey

- Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) face limited access to intermediary facilities such as merchant bankers and are unfamiliar with capital markets, which make it challenging for them to go public, said SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey.
- “Greater SME participation in markets also diversifies financing channels, reduces risk concentration in banking sector and frees bank capacity for genuine working capital and priority lending. Yet, SME capital market is under-scaled relative to India’s potential.” Practical guidance is unclear and internal governance systems to handle SME IPOs have not matured making the process cumbersome, he added.

❖ **‘India must lead global firms’ reply to climate change’**

Context: India as the world’s fastest-growing major economy, expanding at 6-7% annually, has the scale and momentum to influence how global business responds to climate risk, top officials of the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), a global body that validates corporate emission reduction targets and is referenced by investors and multinational buyers, said.

- They said India now is not just another market, but a strategic priority to meet Net Zero goals.
- Ahead of the **Global South’s first Mumbai Climate Week**, SBTi CEO David Kennedy and former president of Mahindra group, Arun Nanda, are meeting leaders across major conglomerates, to spread the message that climate action in India must move from aspiration to conviction and from isolated commitments to systemic transformation.
- “We claim we are the fourth-largest economy,” Mr. Nanda told. “But we also have a responsibility. We inherited nature not for ourselves but as custodians for future generations. A custodian has two duties: can I protect what I received, and can I improve it?”
- **SBTi provides globally recognised standards that help firms set and validate science-aligned emissions reduction targets.**

- **Globally, more than 10,000 companies work with SBTi, representing nearly 40% of global market capitalisation and about 30% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.**

Below potential

- India, however, has fewer than 500 registered firms, far below its potential.
- “Japan, with a smaller population, has around 2,000 companies registered,” Mr. Nanda said. “India should not be at 500. Realistically, it should be at 5,000,” he stated.
- David Kennedy, CEO, SBTi said, “India is a huge economy and will significantly influence how the world manages climate risk. Growth is essential for India, but it must be green growth.”
- Climate leaders say trade and supply chains are central to this transformation. “For large manufacturers like Tata Motors or Mahindra & Mahindra, 70% or more of product value comes from suppliers.
- “Large corporates are multipliers. When they set science-based targets, they activate thousands of suppliers. That is how ambition becomes systemic impact,” Mr. Kennedy added.

❖ India likely to pursue a U.S. tariff waiver for garments made with American cotton

Context: India is likely to pursue a waiver of the 18% reciprocal tariff for garments that are made with U.S. cotton and exported to that country similar to the concession offered to Bangladesh.

Sector hopeful

- Representatives of textile export promotion councils, who participated in a meeting, said there were indications India will pursue with the U.S. to waive the reciprocal tariff on garments and textiles made with U.S. cotton or man-made fibre.
- The **U.S.-Bangladesh Agreement on Reciprocal Trade** signed on February 9 says the U.S. will establish a mechanism that will allow for certain textile and apparel goods from Bangladesh to receive zero reciprocal tariff rate for a to-be-specified volume of exports from Bangladesh that are produced with cotton and MMF textile inputs from the U.S.

'Allay fears'

- “The U.S. Bangladesh agreement is nothing to be worried about by the Indian textile and apparel sector. The government allayed fears of the industry and indicated India will also pursue a similar proposal,” said A. Sakthivel, chairman of the Apparel Export Promotion Council.
- **India imports five lakh bales American cotton annually, including 2.5 lakh bales of non-Extra Long Staple varieties.**

Context: Brazil is getting ready for the Carnival this weekend, when the country literally comes to a halt, but hectic preparations are under way in Brasilia for President Lula da Silva's upcoming visit to India with a business delegation of 260 companies.

- The largest-ever Brazilian delegation to India marks the culmination of the highest-level engagement between the two countries over the past few years — in a challenging geopolitical scenario. This could also be the Brazilian leader's last major foreign engagement before Brazil gets into election mode for the presidential polls in October this year.
- Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral meeting with Lula in Brasilia in July 2025, when they discussed the expansion of bilateral trade, the Brazilian leader's trip to New Delhi, from February 19 to 21, is being given top priority by the Brazilian government.
- Celso Amorim, who serves as Lula's principal foreign policy adviser, sees the visit as an opportunity for collaboration in strategic sectors between two emerging economies. "Cooperation between Brazil and India can be very broad, but I would highlight above all two domains: technology and defence," Mr. Amorim told The Hindu.
- "Brazil and India have developed, each in its own way, very important aspects of biotechnology too. In space science, India has given us a great example of how it is possible to achieve great accomplishments without necessarily resorting to the technology of the rich countries," said Mr. Amorim, who has earlier served as Foreign Minister and Defence Minister under Presidents Lula and Dilma Rouseff, respectively. Since the 2025 bilateral meeting, the Brazilian side has been working to strengthen its trade ties with India. Jorge Viana, head of the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (Apex Brazil), told The Hindu that Lula asked him last year to put together a delegation as part of his efforts to expand commercial ties with India.

AI summit

- "In **Delhi, the President will participate in the Artificial Intelligence summit**, but we are also organising a huge business meeting in collaboration with our Foreign Ministry. Apex is also opening an office in Delhi as we see India, the most populous nation, as one of the economies with the greatest potential for growth," Mr. Viana told The Hindu from Brasilia. "Till last year, India was our 10th biggest trading partner, but now in recent months it has been competing to be the fifth. It could become the third biggest."
- **In 2025, Brazil purchased Indian products worth \$8.5 billion, while Brazilian exports to India totalled \$7 billion — mainly in oil, sugar, molasses, fats and vegetable oils and iron ore sectors.** However, Mr. Viana says, Brazilians now want to diversify their exports to India.

- “We have 260 Brazilian companies attending the event that Apex is organising in Delhi. We have representatives from all strategic sectors. We are taking a lot of people from the health area, including our Health Minister, because India is a major supplier of medicines to Brazil. We also have important companies of ethanol and biofuel onboard because there is already an agreement between Brazil and India in the area.” He added that there could be a major announcement about the arrival of Embraer, the Brazilian aircraft manufacturing firm, in India.
- While trade may dominate Lula’s agenda in Delhi, **Brazil is also looking at India’s presidency of BRICS in 2026 to further advance the conversation on global governance and multilateralism.**
- “It is important that the **Indian presidency of BRICS leads this discussion about the current world order and how to change it. We all know the struggle there is for the expansion of the UN Security Council. A world without rules is a very difficult world. India and Brazil have always worked with rules,**” he said.

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Context: Commerce Minister says India will receive concessions on textiles exports as Dhaka got through its deal with Washington; the agreement is being finalised, will have details in fine print, he adds

- India will receive the same benefits on textiles exports under its interim trade agreement with the U.S. as Bangladesh gained through its own deal, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said.
- “Just as Bangladesh has a facility that if raw material is purchased from America, then if you process it and make cloth and export it, then it will be available at zero reciprocal tariff; India also has the same facility and India will also get it,” he said.
- The Minister pointed out that India’s agreement with the U.S. is still being finalised. “When the interim agreement is finalised, then you will get to see this in the fine print,” Mr. Goyal told presspersons.
- In an interview with The Hindu earlier this week, Mr. Goyal said that the interim deal is expected to be signed in mid-March.

Trade provisions

- Under the Bangladesh-U.S. deal inked on Monday, reciprocal tariffs on Bangladesh’s exports to the U.S. will be reduced to 19% overall. However, the deal also has a provision saying that, if Bangladesh imports cotton from the U.S., then the tariffs on its textile exports will fall to 0%.
- The Congress had attacked the Centre regarding this clause, with Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, saying that India, which is expected to see tariffs of 18% on exports to the U.S. under the interim agreement, has already been rendered uncompetitive on textiles even before the agreement is signed.
- “He [Rahul Gandhi] spread another lie in Parliament that Bangladesh has got more benefits from the trade deal than India,” Mr. Goyal said.
- The Commerce Minister added that Indian farmers also stand to benefit from increased exports to the European Union, the U.K. , Switzerland, Norway, and Australia due to India’s free trade agreements with these countries and groupings.
- This latest shift in the contours of the India-U.S. deal is not a new one. The U.S. government on Wednesday amended a fact sheet it had uploaded a few days earlier, by removing references to “pulses”, “agricultural products”, and “digital service tax”. The new version of the fact sheet also said India “intends” to buy \$500 billion worth of U.S. goods as opposed to the earlier phrasing that said India has “committed to buy” this amount.
- P. Krishnaprasad, a senior functionary of Samyukt Kisan Morcha, said the organisation will examine the impact of Bangladesh- U.S. deal on cotton farmers in India. “Cotton farmers here are denied minimum support price. Any import of cotton will harm the farmers...,” he added.

Context: The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Thursday released the Consumer Price Index (CPI) data based on a new series with 2024 as base year, placing retail inflation in January 2026 at 2.75%.

- As this is the first data release under the new series, a historical comparison is not yet possible.
- The new series of the CPI, which updated the base year from 2012, was released in the presence of MoSPI Secretary Saurabh Garg, Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran, and other officials of the Ministry.
- The total number of items covered under the new series has increased to 358 from the 299 items in the older series.
- The number of goods covered under the new series has increased to 308 from 259, and the number of services has gone up to 50 from 40.
- The updated CPI series gives new weights to goods and services based on consumption patterns revealed in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24.
- “The economy has undergone a significant transformation in the last decade,” Mr. Nageswaran said in his speech. “Consumption behaviour, market structures, and the compositions of household expenditure have evolved and the new CPI structure unsurprisingly reflects these changes.”
- The new series also collects data from more sources across the country. Data are collected from 1,465 rural markets, up from 1,181. The number of urban markets covered has gone up to 1,395 from 1,114. Notably, the new series also collects data from 12 online marketplaces, a new category that has been included now.
- The new series of the CPI provides more granular data by dividing the underlying goods and services into 12 broad groups compared to the six groups under the older series. As a result of this, and also based on the consumption patterns of the HCES 2023-24, the weights assigned to these goods and services have also been revised to better reflect current consumption.

Index overhaul

The 2024-base CPI basket includes 358 items vs. earlier 299, with goods covered rising from 259 to 308 and services from 40 to 50

- Number of rural markets covered rose from 1,181 to 1,465, urban from 1,114 to 1,395, with 12 online platforms added

- The weightage assigned to the food and beverages category is now 36.75% from earlier 45.86%



- The CPI framework has been expanded from 6 broad groups to 12, offering more granular tracking of goods and services

New weights

- The weightage assigned to the food and beverages category has been revised downward in the new series to 36.75% from the earlier 45.86%.
- “The lower weightage on the relatively volatile food category may make the headline inflation number less volatile, all other things remaining equal,” Mr. Nageswaran said.
- The housing category, with an earlier weight of 10.07%, has been expanded to also include water, electricity, gas and other fuels, and this combined category now has a weight of 17.67%.

- The additional groups in the new series include furnishings, household equipment and routine household maintenance (with a weight of 4.47%), health (6.1%), transport (8.8%), information and communication (3.61%), recreation, sports and culture (1.52%), education services (3.33%), restaurants and accommodation services (3.35%), and personal care, social protection and miscellaneous goods and services (5.04%).
- The paan, tobacco and intoxicants category saw its weight increase to 2.99% from 2.38% in the older series. The clothing and footwear category's weight fell to 2.38% from 6.53%.
- "Since the basket is aligned with recent expenditure data, the inflation signals from this will be more closely matched to the prevailing economic conditions," Mr. Nageswaran said.

❖ Simultaneous polls do not violate Constitution's Basic Structure: Justice Gavai

Context: Simultaneous elections do not violate the Basic Structure of the Constitution or its federal framework, former Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai told Parliament's Joint Committee reviewing the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, which aims to synchronise elections for the Lok Sabha and Assemblies.

- At the panel's meeting, Justice Gavai said the legislation brings "only a change in the manner of elections once", which does not breach the doctrine. The structure of elections and voter rights remain the same, he noted, and therefore, the amendment would be constitutional. He further explained that it is well within Parliamentary competence to bring in such a law.
- Since instruments such as the "no-confidence motion" remain intact, Justice Gavai said, there is no impact on the accountability of the Union or State governments.

Divided opinions

- So far, six former CJIs have spoken to the panel.
- Two of them — Justices U.U. Lalit and Sanjiv Khanna — have raised questions about the Bill in relation to the Basic Structure of the Indian Constitution. Justice Lalit had said that the legislation in its present form will not withstand a legal challenge in the Supreme Court, while Justice Khanna said that it is open to question as "violating and offending the basic structure of the Constitution".
- However, four of the other former CJIs — Justices Ranjan Gogoi, D.Y. Chandrachud, J.S. Khehar, and now, Justice Gavai — told the panel that the Bill does not violate the Basic Structure of the Constitution.
- The Parliamentary Joint Committee, headed by BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary, is reviewing the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 17, 2024.
- Mr. Chaudhary also told presspersons that in Thursday's meeting, several members suggested creating a common electoral roll for panchayat/municipal, Assembly, and national elections.
- "Making separate electoral rolls for each of these elections is a tedious task that usually falls on government teachers..." he said.

❖ Dubey moves Substantive Motion against Rahul in Lower House

Context: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Nishikant Dubey said he had initiated a Substantive Motion against Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi for allegedly being “hand in glove” with “anti-national” forces.

- **A Substantive Motion is an independent, self-contained proposal submitted for the approval of a Legislative House or Assembly, drafted to express a decision or opinion. The motion entails a debate followed by a compulsory vote if the notice is accepted and the motion is moved.**
- Mr. Dubey’s remarks during Zero Hour that he has submitted a notice for the substantive motion led to a furore in the House, leading to adjournment for the day.
- The Substantive Motion comes a day after Mr. Gandhi tore into the India-U.S. interim trade deal, accusing the government of compromising national interests.
- Many parts of his speech were expunged from the records, and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said that the ruling side would move a Privilege Motion against the Congress leader.
- Though, government sources said there had been no decision on moving such a motion and instead it would seek removal from the records of more words and lines from the speech that Mr. Gandhi has not authenticated so far.
- In the Lok Sabha, Mr. Dubey said that he mentioned in the notice that Mr. Gandhi has engaged with the Soros Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and USAID, and has travelled to Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and the U.S. to engage in “anti-India” activities.
- The notice said that Mr. Gandhi, with the help of the foreign organisations, has “very cleverly” been able to “capture the most pious dais of Parliament to foment public sentiments, levelling unsubstantiated allegations not only against the Election Commission but even the Supreme Court, lowering the dignity of the government without any substantive evidence and putting various other institutions in bad light.
- Speaking to the media outside the House, Mr. Dubey said he had demanded the cancellation of Mr. Gandhi’s membership. “He should be debarred from contesting the election for lifetime,” the BJP leader said.

❖ Lok Sabha passes Industrial Relations Code Bill to avoid confusion over 2020 Act

Context: The Lok Sabha passed a Bill to help avoid any “future unwarranted complication” over the continuity of certain laws replaced by the Industrial Relations Code of 2020.

- The Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026, contains savings provisions to ensure continuity and legal certainty.
- The Bill would help avoid any “future unwarranted complication” over the continuity of certain laws replaced by the Industrial Relations Code of 2020.
- The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 replaces the Trade Unions Act, 1926, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, relating to trade unions, industrial employment and industrial disputes, according to statement of objects and reasons of the proposed law.

- It contains savings provisions under Section 104 to ensure continuity and legal certainty. “Though the repeal has occurred by operation of Section 104 of the Code itself, there is a possibility of future confusion being created on a misconceived ground that the Act delegates the power to repeal the said enactments to the executive,” it explained.
- The provisions of Section 104 and a February 2026 notification are clear that the repeal has occurred by the operation of Section 104 of the Code itself. “It is considered desirable to introduce the proposed amendment to avoid any future unwarranted complication,” it said.
- The four Labour Codes implemented nearly three months ago ensures guarantee of minimum wage. These Codes also ensure compulsory issuance of appointment letters as well as uniform wages for the same work irrespective of gender, Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said in the discussion before the passage of the Bill.

❖ DAC gives nod for 114 Rafales for IAF, and six more P-81 aircraft for Navy

Context: Approvals for ₹3.6 lakh crore mark one of the largest capital acquisition clearances; council chaired by the Defence Minister accords AoN for air-ship-based pseudo satellite for the IAF, and anti-tank mines and overhaul of vehicle platforms of Army

- The Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Thursday accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition proposals worth approximately ₹3.6 lakh crore.
- The proposals include 114 Rafale fighter jets from France for the Indian Air Force and six P-8I long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft from the United States for the Indian Navy.
- The Defence Ministry said that for the IAF, the AoN was approved for the procurement of 114 multi-role fighter aircraft (MRFA), combat missiles, and an air-ship-based high-altitude pseudo satellite (AS-HAPS). The Rafale jets are expected to significantly enhance the IAF’s air-dominance capability across the full spectrum of conflict and strengthen its long-range offensive and deterrence posture.
- A majority of the aircraft will be manufactured in India, providing a boost to domestic defence production.
- The Ministry further added that the combat missiles would enhance the IAF’s stand-off ground attack capability with deep-strike precision and high accuracy.
- The AS-HAPS platform will be deployed for persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), electronic intelligence (ELINT), telecommunications and remote sensing for military applications.
- For the Army, the DAC accorded AoN for the procurement of anti-tank mines (Vibhav) and the overhaul of vehicle platforms of armoured recovery vehicles (ARVs), T-72 tanks and infantry combat vehicles (BMP-II).
- The Vibhav mines will serve as an anti-tank obstacle system to delay and disrupt advancing enemy mechanised forces. The overhaul of existing armoured platforms is aimed at extending their service life and ensuring operational readiness, it added.

Reconnaissance aircraft

- The Navy received AoN for six additional P-8I long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft from the U.S., along with a 4 MW marine gas turbine-based electric power generator. The P-8I aircraft will significantly bolster the Navy's long-range anti-submarine warfare, maritime surveillance and maritime strike capabilities.

Reducing dependence

- The induction of the marine gas turbine-based generator under the Make-I category of the Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020 is expected to reduce dependence on foreign manufacturers and enhance self-reliance in naval power generation systems.
- For the Indian Coast Guard, the AoN was granted for the procurement of electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) systems for its Dornier aircraft. The systems will enhance maritime surveillance and strengthen coastal security operations.
- The approvals mark one of the largest capital acquisition clearances in recent years, underlining the government's thrust on force modernisation and indigenisation.

❖ Minister introduces Bodhan AI at conclave

Context: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said here on Thursday that artificial intelligence must be embedded in education to empower students and support teachers.

- At the inaugural session of the Bharat Bodhan AI Conclave, Mr. Pradhan launched Bodhan AI, which has been established as a non-profit organisation under the Education Ministry to build an open-source "Bharat EduAI Stack" to introduce artificial intelligence across all levels of education.

IIT initiative

- Mitesh Khapra of the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras unveiled Bodhan AI and outlined plans for the Bharat EduAI Stack as digital public infrastructure.
- IIT Director V. Kamakoti said that Bodhan AI would aid in making education equitable, of high quality, affordable, and easily accessible.

❖ Joint panel gets time till Monsoon Session to report on UGC replacement Bill

Context: The Joint Committee of Parliament, constituted to examine the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, is expected to submit its report by the end of the Monsoon Session this year. The Bill aims to subsume multiple higher education regulators into a single "umbrella" commission in an overhaul driven by the National Education Policy, 2020.

- The 31-member committee was constituted this week by the Speaker after the Union government introduced the legislation last December and immediately moved the Bill to be sent to the committee.

Objection to the Bill

- Opposition MPs objected to the Bill, saying it will lead to “executive overreach” and subject higher education institutes to “pervasive executive control, graded autonomy, intrusive compliance requirements, severe penalties, and closure powers”, and went against the principles of federalism.
- Soon after moving the Bill to be examined by the committee, officials said the government was expecting the report of the panel by the end of the Budget Session in 2026.
- However, the head of the committee, D. Purandeswari (BJP), moved a motion seeking an extension in the time to submit its report. The Lok Sabha passed the motion. Ms. Purandeswari sought time till the first day of the last week of the Monsoon Session to submit the report.
- This came two days after the Committee Branch of the Lok Sabha notified the names of the 31 members, with the Speaker appointing Ms. Purandeswari as its Chairperson.
- One member of the committee said the Secretariat for the panel was yet to be formed, and work would begin once that was done.

Panel members

- The committee has 20 members from the Lok Sabha and 10 from the Rajya Sabha, with the Bharatiya Janata Party having the largest representation of 12 members. Those part of the committee include BJP MPs Sambit Patra, Tejasvi Surya, Anurag Singh Thakur, and Bansuri Swaraj, Congress members A. Bimol Akoijam and Varsha Gaikwad, and Education Standing Committee Chair Digvijaya Singh.

❖ NPCI’s international arm inks pact with Malaysia’s PayNet

- NPCI International Payments Ltd. (NIPL), the international arm of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), has signed an agreement with Payments Network Malaysia Sdn Bhd (PayNet), to enable QR based merchant payments between India and Malaysia. Indians visiting Malaysia will be able to use UPI apps to make seamless cross border merchant payments at DuitNow QR acceptance touchpoints.

Context: The regulator's directions, to be effective from July 1, also mandates a dedicated mechanism for redressal of recovery related grievances

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in a draft guideline issued on Thursday, has proposed to restrain bank employees or recovery agents to desist from employing harsh methods towards loan recovery.
- Accordingly, they would be prohibited from using minatory or abusive language, sending 'inappropriate' messages either on mobile or through social media, making excessive calls to the borrower or guarantor, and calling outside prescribed hours and making threatening or anonymous calls.
- Intimidating or harassing the borrower or guarantor or relatives, friends, co-workers either verbally or physically, including acts intended to humiliate them publicly will be classified as 'harsh methods'.
- No bank employee or recovery agent can use or issue threat of violence or other similar means to harm the borrower or guarantor or their family, assets or reputation, and make false or misleading representations to the borrower or guarantor, especially about the extent of the debt or the consequences of non-repayment, according to the provisions of the draft guidelines of the Second Amendment Directions, 2026, which relates to responsible business conduct by banks and other regulated entities towards engagement of recovery agents.
- All banks must have a dedicated mechanism for redressal of recovery related grievances. To be called the Reserve Bank of India (Commercial Banks - Responsible Business Conduct) Second Amendment Directions, 2026, these directions will come into effect from July 1, 2026.
- The RBI has invited public comment to the draft guidelines. With recovery agents found to be deploying harsh measures, the RBI has decided to issue comprehensive instructions on conduct related matters in recovery of loans and engagement of recovery agents to all regulated entities.
- This was proposed during the last monetary policy announcement.
- For responsible lending conduct, all banks are required to put in place a policy on recovery of loans, engagement of recovery agents for recovery of loan dues, and taking possession of security.
- The policy will cover aspects related to eligibility and due diligence criteria for engagement of recovery agents, specified activities, code of conduct, and performance evaluation standards, the RBI said.

Debt diktat

The RBI proposes to restrain bank employees and recovery agents from using abusive language, sending inappropriate messages and making too many calls to borrowers and guarantors

■ They cannot call them outside the prescribed hours or make threatening or anonymous calls

■ Harassing kin and friends of borrower or guarantor, including humiliating them publicly, to be classified as 'harsh'



❖ BNP secures landslide victory in Bangladesh

Context: Transfer of power likely by February 17 or 18, say interim government officials; Modi congratulates Rahman on his win, says India will continue its support; national referendum approves reforms

- The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, led by chairman Tarique Rahman, is set to return to power in Dhaka after two decades, following a landslide victory in the February 12 parliamentary election, winning an absolute majority of seats, according to the Election Commission of Bangladesh.
- The BNP-led alliance has secured 212 seats, giving it a two-thirds majority in the Jatiyo Sansad. The 11-party alliance led by the Jamaat-e-Islami has won 77 seats, while independent candidates won eight seats.
- Mr. Rahman has started receiving congratulatory messages from world leaders, including from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- ‘Hasina’s presence in India, Ganga waters treaty to be key priorities for BNP govt.’

❖ Govt. notifies draft good Samaritan rules spelling out reimbursement pathway

Context: Proposing a structured mechanism to reimburse hospitals that provide immediate care during the golden hour to persons unable to pay, the Karnataka government has published the draft Karnataka Good Samaritan and Medical Professional (Protection and Regulation During Emergency Situations) Rules, 2026.

- The rules, notified on Friday, seek to operationalise provisions of the Karnataka Good Samaritan and Medical Professional (Protection and Regulation During Emergency Situations) Act, 2018, which makes it mandatory for all hospitals, public and private, to extend first aid and stabilisation in emergencies. The government has invited objections and suggestions within 15 days.
- The Act protects individuals who voluntarily assist accident victims from civil/criminal liability and police harassment. It ensures anonymity for rescuers, prohibits mandatory witness, and mandates immediate free emergency care.
- Harsh Gupta, Principal Secretary (Health and Family Welfare), told The Hindu that the draft rules addressed a long-felt need for clarity on payments while reinforcing protections for Good Samaritans.
- Pointing out that the definition of emergency care was being interpreted broadly in practice, the Principal Secretary said, “It is not limited to road accidents. Heart attacks, strokes, severe injuries, burns, poisoning, obstetric emergencies or any other emergencies — the rules now mandate that patients must be stabilised without delay.”
- Mr. Gupta said, “We want to ensure that no hospital hesitates to provide emergency care during the golden hour because of uncertainty over who will bear the cost. These rules lay down a clear, time-bound route for reimbursement. Ours is probably the first State to notify such rules.”
- Under the rules, if expenses cannot be recovered from the patient or family, the hospital — within one month from the date of treatment — can submit a claim to the Suvarna Arogya Suraksha Trust (SAST), the State’s health assurance agency.

- Mr. Gupta said that empanelled hospitals would be paid according to package rates under Ayushman Bharat Arogya Karnataka (AB-ArK) scheme. For non-empanelled facilities SAST can sanction the expenditure at the rates admissible under the ABArK scheme or the latest HBP (Health Benefit Package) rates under PMJAY (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana), whichever is higher. “The idea is to keep the process uniform and transparent,” he said.

Appellate mechanism

- The draft provides for an appellate mechanism as well. Any dispute regarding eligibility or payment may be taken up with the Health Commissioner, whose decision would be final.
- The rules also envisage the creation of a Good Samaritan Fund. Apart from government allocations, it may receive donations and corporate social responsibility contributions, including support routed through the Karnataka Road Safety Authority. The fund can be used to clear hospital claims and to compensate Good Samaritans who may incur travel expenses or wage loss while assisting victims or cooperating with legal processes.
- “We also want to recognise citizens who step forward to help. Saving a life should never become a legal or financial burden,” Mr. Gupta said.

❖ National anthem, naada geethe recital now part of daily routine in Karnataka prisons

Context: In what the police call an effort to instil discipline and foster positive thinking among prison inmates, the Karnataka Prisons Department has introduced the practice of singing the national anthem and the naada geethe (State song) twice a day across prisons.

- Director-General of Police (Prisons) Alok Kumar said the initiative aims to ‘reform inmates by encouraging a sense of national and cultural connection’.
- Under the new system, inmates assemble every morning after unlocking at 6.30 a.m. and again in the evening before lock-up at 6.30 p.m. to sing Jana Gana Mana and Jaya Bharata Jananiya Tanujate.

Moment of reflection

- “This will bring positivity among the inmates and help them reflect on the values of peace and harmony,” Mr. Kumar said. “Through regular recitation and collective singing, their thinking patterns may gradually change, which will help subdue violence and aggression inside prisons.”
- Apart from singing the anthem and the State song, inmates are also being trained in basic parade discipline. According to prison officials, several foreigners lodged in Karnataka prisons have also joined the initiative. They are learning about Kannada culture through the Naada geethe, promoting a sense of inclusiveness and national integration. “Many inmates were not even aware of the naada geethe earlier. Many foreigners, who are in prisons, joined as they are now part of the system,” Mr. Kumar added.

Reformative approach

- The concept was mooted about 10 days ago during a departmental review meeting. Prison authorities said inmates were taught the songs through repeated recitation and guided practice, giving them an opportunity to understand the meaning.
- A senior police officer, who witnessed inmates standing in formation and singing together, said the scene reminded him of classic Hindi films such as Karma and Do Aankhen Barah Haath, which depicted reformative approaches within prison systems.
- Singing of National anthem and naada geete has been made a regular practice in all the prisons of Karnataka to inculcate discipline, pride in our native language, traditions and heritage, among the prison inmates. “Prisons should function as the purification units of the society,” Mr. Alok kumar said.

❖ India believed that Panchsheel pact settled border: CDS

Context: Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Friday said that independent India was keen on building a good relationship with China. After Independence, it was for India to decide where the frontiers lay, he said.

- “[Jawaharlal] Nehru probably knew that we had something like the McMahon Line in the east, and we had some kind of claim in the Ladakh area, but it was not clearly defined. That is why he wanted to go in for the Panchsheel Agreement... probably,” General Chauhan said.
- He said that once Tibet was occupied by China, “India gave up those privileges”.
- The CDS added that in 1954, India recognised Tibet as part of China, and both countries signed the Panchsheel Agreement. With this, India assumed that it had settled its northern border and the only area not settled through a formal treaty, from India’s perspective, rested on the Panchsheel Agreement, he said.
- General Chauhan said India believed that the legitimacy of the border was reinforced by identifying six passes through which trade and pilgrimage would take place. “However, the Chinese position was that the agreement was negotiated only for trade and did not reflect their stand on the border dispute,” he added.
- General Chauhan was speaking during the inauguration of Bharat Himalayan International Strategic Manch, a think tank in Dehradun.

❖ New seats of governance meant to meet people’s aspirations: PM

Context: Modi says new PMO, named Seva Teerth, and Kartavya Bhavan are milestones in India’s development journey; he says old buildings embodied ideals of British Empire and lacked space; issues commemorative postage stamp, coin on the occasion

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the new Prime Minister’s Office, named the ‘Seva Teerth’, and two buildings of the Central Secretariat on Friday, and said they were an important milestone in India’s development journey and had been constructed to realise the aspirations of the people of the nation.

- He said the new buildings reflected the government's commitment to citizen-centric governance and national progress. "Seva Teerth, Kartavya Bhavan 1 and 2 mark an important milestone in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat," he said.
- Mr. Modi said the historic structures such as South Block and North Block, which till now were housing important Ministries such as Defence, Home and Finance, besides the PMO, had been built to embody the ideals of the British Empire when the capital of British India was shifted to Delhi from Kolkata in 1912. But the Seva Teerth and Kartavya Bhavan [Central Secretariat] had been constructed to realise the aspirations of the people of the nation. "The decisions made here will serve as the foundation for advancing the ambitions of 140 crore citizens, rather than reflecting the will of a monarch."

'Independent identity'

- He said despite Independence, the capital of a free nation remained deeply entangled in colonial mentality, with Delhi's buildings, public places, and historical sites filled with such symbols. Mr. Modi said that in 2014, the country resolved that the colonial mindset would no longer continue.
- He said the Race Course Road, where the Prime Minister's residence is located, was renamed Lok Kalyan Marg. This was not only a change of name but was an effort to transform the mindset of power into a spirit of service. "The initiative to rename is not merely a change of words; behind all these efforts, lies the same ideological thread — the independent identity of independent India."
- Mr. Modi said it was essential that the vision of a developed India is reflected not only in policies and schemes but also in workplaces and buildings. The places from where the nation is governed must be effective, inspiring, impressive, and motivating.
- Mr. Modi pointed out that South Block and North Block faced space constraints and limited amenities, and being nearly a hundred years old, they were getting damaged, besides facing several other challenges.
- As India rides the "Reform Express", writing a new chapter in international relations, opening new doors through trade agreements, and moving rapidly towards saturation targets, the new pace of work and renewed confidence in Seva Teerth and Kartavya Bhavans will play a major role in achieving national goals, Mr. Modi said.

First decisions

- Earlier, the Prime Minister signed files in the new PMO on the **PM RAHAT Scheme, under which accident victims will get cashless treatment of up to ₹1.5 lakh, the doubling of target of Lakhpati Didis to six crore, and doubling the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to ₹2 lakh crore.**
- He also released a commemorative stamp and coin on the occasion.
- The new buildings are **clad in white and red sandstone**, referencing material traditions found in historic Indian civic and institutional architecture.
- The **metal-clad domes, inspired by Buddha Stupa**, are introduced as contemporary accent elements.

- The **entrance portal draws inspiration from the stone screen-work of Chalukyan temples dating back to the 11th and 13th centuries. The carved stone plinth band is inspired by the base mouldings of the 12th-century Chennakeshava Temple.**

❖ CJI's office received 8,630 complaints against judges from 2016 to 2025: Minister

Context: The office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) received 8,630 complaints against sitting judges in the last decade, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal informed the Lok Sabha.

- The information came in response to a question raised in the House by Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam MP V.S. Matheswaran who had sought the database of complaints regarding corruption, sexual misconduct, or other serious impropriety received against judges of the High Courts or the Supreme Court.

Court scrutiny

Under the judiciary's in-house mechanism, complaints against judges are handled internally by the CJI and Chief Justices of the High Courts, with no public disclosure on outcomes



- Responding to the query, Mr. Meghwal submitted that 8,360 complaints against judges were recorded between 2016 and 2025.
- As per the data shared by the Minister, the CJI's office got 729 complaints against judges in 2016, followed by 682 in 2017, 717 in 2018, and 1,037 in 2019. In 2020 and 2021, such complaints stood at 518 and 686 respectively. In 2022, 1,012 complaints were received, followed by 977 in 2023, 1,170 in 2024, and 1,102 in 2025.
- Though Mr. Matheswaran asked if any action had been taken on the complaints, the Minister did not address the query.
- To another question by the MP on whether the Centre was aware of any system maintained by the apex court to track complaints related to corruption, sexual misconduct, or other serious impropriety against judges of the higher judiciary, the Minister said that under the existing "in-house procedure", the Chief Justice of India and the Chief Justices of the High Courts are authorised to receive and handle such complaints.
- The Minister further noted that complaints submitted through the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) or other channels are forwarded to the CJI or the respective High Court Chief Justices.
- The MP also enquired if the government intended to introduce guidelines to ensure proper documentation, monitoring, and accountability in dealing with complaints against members of the higher judiciary. However, the Minister did not address it.

Context: Court says operators can't list spectrum as an asset for insolvency or liquidation; says it is a scarce natural resource owned by people of India, with legal title vesting exclusively in the Union of India.

- The Supreme Court on Friday laid down that telecom service providers (TSPs) do not own spectrum, a precious and finite public resource meant to be used for the common good of all, and cannot include it among their pool of “assets” for insolvency or liquidation.
- A Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Atul Chandurkar held that Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) excludes any assets over which a corporate debtor has no ownership rights.
- “Mere recognition of spectrum licensing rights as an intangible asset by TSPs in the financial statements is not conclusive of their ownership, as it only represents control over future economic benefits,” Justice Narasimha clarified the law.
- The court said spectrum was a scarce natural resource owned by the people of India, with legal title vesting exclusively in the Union of India, which holds it in trust for the public. “Licensees acquire no proprietary interest in spectrum,” Justice Narasimha, who authored the judgment, underscored.

‘Limited privilege’

- The mere grant of spectrum under a licence does not mean a complete transfer of a finite natural resource from the Union government to a TSP. “It confers only a limited, conditional and revocable privilege to use spectrum, subject to statutory requirements, licence conditions and overriding public interest,” Justice Narasimha clarified.
- The court observed that the Union as the owner and trustee of spectrum on the one hand and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) as the regulator on the other, occupy the entire province of telecommunications.
- “The statutory regime under IBC cannot be permitted to make inroads into the telecom sector and rewrite and restructure the rights and liabilities arising out of administration, usage, and transfers of spectrum which operate under exclusive legal regime concerning telecommunications. The disharmony caused by applying IBC to the telecom sector which operates under a different legal regime was never intended by the Parliament,” the court noted.

On corporate debtors

- The verdict is the culmination of a train of events dating back to the grant of telecom licences to corporate debtors — Aircel Limited, Aircel Cellular Limited and Dishnet Wireless Limited — by the Department of Telecommunications under Unified Access Service Licences (UASL). Domestic lenders, including the State Bank of India (SBI), had extended loan facilities to the corporate debtors for acquisition of rights to use spectrum. Eventually, the corporate debtors failed to pay the licence fee. When the DoT attempted to recover these amounts, the debtors invoked the IBC for a voluntary corporate insolvency resolution process.

- The top court's judgment was based on a series of separate appeals filed by the SBI and others against a 2021 National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) judgment requiring the TSPs undergoing insolvency to clear statutory dues to the DoT before transferring or selling spectrum under the IBC.
- Friday's judgment made it clear that the spectrum cannot be brought under the IBC framework. The TSPs did not own spectrum in the first place to sell it. Besides, the top court made it clear that the DoT dues owed by the TSPs were not "operational debts" under the IBC.
- "Licence fees and spectrum usage charges arise from the grant of a sovereign privilege and represent regulatory consideration, not payment for goods or services. The relationship between the Union and the licensee is that of sovereign licensor and licensee, not a commercial creditor-debtor relationship," the court held.

❖ Adani Group enters nuclear power sector after SHANTI Act

Context: The Adani Group announced its entry into the nuclear power sector on Thursday, via a regulatory filing. This is the first instance of a major power company in India doing so, following the passage of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act in December.

- "We wish to inform you that Adani Power Limited (APL) has incorporated a wholly owned subsidiary — Adani Atomic Energy Limited," the company said, in a notice to the National Stock Exchange of India on February 12. It did not offer any details on the exact nature of the group's plans.
- **The SHANTI Act, which was passed by Parliament in December, replaces the Atomic Energy Act and allows private companies to operate nuclear power plants in India. It also allows such companies to form joint ventures with foreign companies for technology collaboration.**
- There has been criticism of the Adani Group's nuclear power plans since at least November 29, 2025, when a senior Adani executive, Jugeshinder "Robbie" Singh, expressed the Group's interest in the sector.
- During the Parliamentary debate on the Bill, Congress MP Manish Tewari insinuated that the SHANTI Act had been brought in by the NDA government to facilitate the Adani Group's entry into the sector. "Is it a coincidence that the Bill has been brought at a time when the Adani Group has expressed interest in the sector?" he asked, in his opening remarks.
- Following Adani Power's regulatory filing, Congress spokesperson Jairam Ramesh posted on X on Friday, repeating the allegations that the legislation was meant to benefit the Adanis. "The SHANTI Bill was rushed through Parliament...it was enacted to favour the favourite...the real meaning of SHANTI is Shriman Adani's Nuclear Tech Initiative," he said.
- India has an installed nuclear power capacity of 8.8 GW, with the government claiming that it will rise to 32 GW in the next decade. It currently contributes about 3% of generated electricity.

❖ Government clearsexport of 25 lakh tonnes of wheat

Context: The government on Friday allowed export of 25 lakh tonnes of wheat, along with an additional 5 lakh tonnes of wheat products and sugar each, to stabilise domestic markets and ensure remunerative returns to farmers amid a comfortable stock position.

- The decision was taken after a comprehensive assessment of the current availability and price scenario, the Food Ministry said in a statement.
- Wheat stock availability with private entities during 2025-26 stands at approximately 75 lakh tonnes, which is nearly 32 lakh tonnes higher compared with the corresponding period last year, indicating a comfortable supply position in the country, it added. As of April 1, the total wheat availability in the central pool with Food Corporation of India (FCI) is projected at around 182 lakh tonnes, ensuring that export permissions will not impact domestic food security requirements, the Ministry said.
- To facilitate sugar exports, the government has decided to allow export of an additional 5 lakh tonnes of sugar by willing sugar mills during the current sugar season 2025-26. Earlier, the government had permitted the export of 15 lakh tonnes of sugar during the current sugar season vide order dated November 14, 2025.

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