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# WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

February 19, 2026 | Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, India

**FEBRUARY WEEK 3**

16-02-2026 TO 21-02-2026

# INDIA AI IMPACT SUMMIT

**KARNATAKA STATE  
NOTIFIES 1%  
WELFARE FEE FOR  
GIG WORKERS**

**NGT CLEARS  
₹92,000-CR**

**TWO DIGITAL  
HEALTH  
INITIATIVES**

**INFOSYS TIES UP  
WITH ANTHROPIC**

**❖ AI Impact Summit begins today**

**Context: Kicking off the India AI Impact Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the India AI Impact Expo 2026 on Monday. Global tech moguls and leaders of nearly 20 countries are among representatives from some 100 countries expected to attend the meet, the first such event in the Global South, which will end on February 20.**

- The summit will push for equitable access to AI resources, a senior government official said on Sunday, adding that India is focusing the summit on a “human-centric” approach.
- AI Impact Summit 2026 begins today, Modi to inaugurate an India AI Expo Global tech leaders, including Sundar Pichai and Sam Altman, along with representatives from around 20 countries, are expected at the AI Impact Summit this week; participation of Bill Gates, amid scrutiny over his association with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, has drawn criticism Global tech leaders Sundar Pichai and Sam Altman and leaders of about 20 countries, including Brazil and France, are among those from about 100 countries expected to attend the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Impact Summit this week. The event kicks off on Monday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating the “India AI Impact Expo 2026”, which includes pavilions from 13 other countries.
- The event is being hosted from February 16 to 20 at the Bharat Mandapam complex in Delhi where the G-20 Summit was hosted first in 2023. It marks the fourth AI Summit after summits in the U.K., South Korea, and France. Officials said it would be showcased as the first time the summit on the transformative effect and challenges from AI is hosted in a Global South country.
- “India has consistently championed the voice of developing economies in digital policy forums. The summit will push for equitable access to AI resources and fair rule-making,” a senior government official said. Unlike developed countries, India was not seeking to build regulatory frameworks, but was focusing the summit on a “human-centric” approach, for the “economic good” of all, the official added.

**Over 3,000 speakers**

- According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister’s Office on Sunday, the AI Impact event will feature more than 3,000 speakers over 500 sessions and host more than 300 exhibitions and live demonstrations of AI technology and start-ups, which are “structured across three thematic chakras — People, Planet and Progress”. The government hopes to attract more than 2.5 lakh visitors to the event, the statement said.
- After the Expo inauguration on Monday, the summit will see an “all-woman” hackathon on Tuesday in Delhi.

- Mr. Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron will hold bilateral talks in Mumbai on February 17. On February 18, he will host a dinner banquet for the dignitaries and then chair a leaders' summit followed by a Tech-CEOs event on February 19. Brazil President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who will hold bilateral talks with Mr. Modi, is accompanied by a large AI official and tech company delegation and will host an entire session on February 20.
- The heads of 18 other countries are attending. They range from European countries such as Switzerland, Spain, Serbia, Slovakia, Croatia, Estonia, Netherlands, Finland and Greece, to Mauritius, Bhutan and Sri Lanka in the neighbourhood and Kazakhstan, two countries from South America (Bolivia and Guyana) and one from Africa (Seychelles), a list provided by the External Affairs Ministry said.
- Crown princes of Liechtenstein and the UAE will also attend as heads of their delegations as will some prominent former leaders such as former British Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Rishi Sunak. Ministerial delegations from over 45 countries would participate, officials said.
- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, whose tenure ends this year, will also attend. Officials said that big tech leaders such as Google's Sundar Pichai and Open AI CEO Sam Altman will "headline" sessions as will Demis Hassabis (CEO of DeepMind Technologies), Dario Amodei (Anthropic CEO) and Brad Smith (Microsoft president). NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang, who was to be a key speaker, pulled out on Saturday "due to unforeseen circumstances".
- Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who is at the centre of allegations over his links with American businessman and convicted sex offender Jeffery Epstein, is expected to attend. When asked, officials did not confirm what his role in the event would be.
- On Monday, Mr. Gates will be in Andhra Pradesh for a series of meetings with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and others to discuss digital technologies and health development issues.
- Reacting to a poster of Mr. Gates at the AI Summit, Opposition MP Priyanka Chaturvedi called the invitation to him "shameful" and has asked the government not to give "platform and promote" him.

## ❖ Death sentences in India: fewer confirmations, higher acquittals

A staggering 34.6% of death sentences decided by High Courts in the last decade resulted in acquittals

### DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

As of December 31, 2025, 550 men and 24 women were on death row in India – a 43.5% increase in the country's death row population since 2016. About 45% were on death row for murder while 37% were on death row for murder involving sexual offences (Chart 1).

Data also show an increase in the number of persons being removed from the death row since 2020 (Chart 2). The latest Annual Death Penalty Statistics Report, released by the Square Circle Clinic at NALSAR, attributed this trend to an increased hesitance in the appellate judiciary to confirm death sentences.

Over the last decade, the Sessions Courts imposed 1,310 death sentences (822 cases). While 842 of these sentences were considered for confirmation by High Courts, merely 70 of them (8.31%) were upheld. Only 37 of them were decided by the Supreme Court and none were confirmed (Chart 3).

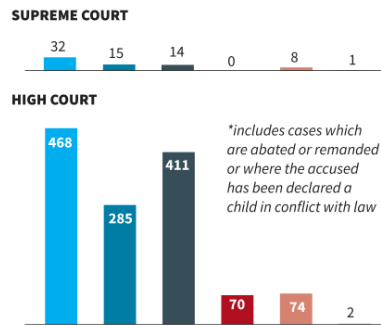
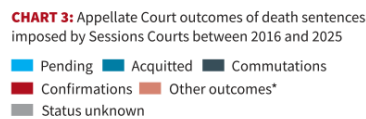
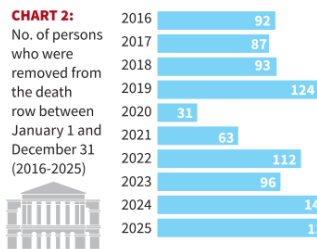
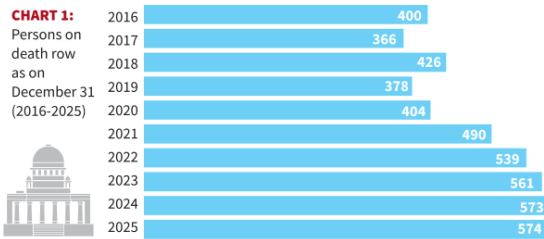
The number of cases confirmed by the High Courts has reduced by more than 60% since 2019. Of the 1,085 death sentences decided by the High Courts over the past decade, 34.65% resulted in acquittals. The highest share of acquittals were recorded at the Patna High Court (78.31%), Karnataka High Court (50.46%), Jharkhand High Court (46.97%), Andhra Pradesh High Court (44.44%), and Allahabad High Court (41.51%).

Further, the Supreme Court has not confirmed any death sentence in the last three years. In fact, in 2025, the Supreme Court acquitted and released 10 death row prisoners – the highest since 2016 (Chart 4B).

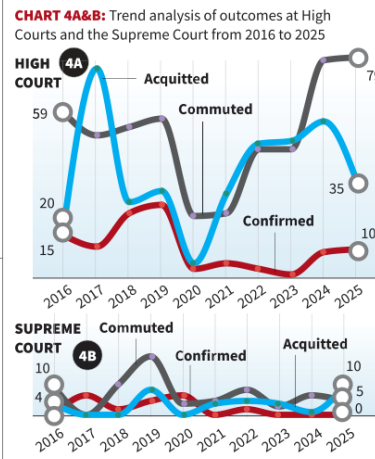
The report stated that this indicates concerns regarding the handling of evidence, procedural fairness, and substantive rights by Sessions Courts.

## Varying judgments

The data for the charts were sourced from 'Death Penalty in India Annual Statistics report 2025 & 10 Years of Death Penalty Data (2016-2025)' published by The Square Circle Clinic, NALSAR University of Law

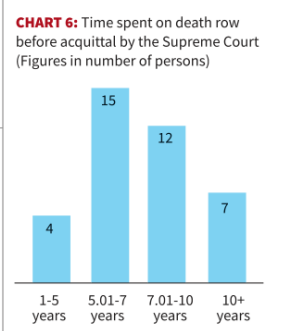
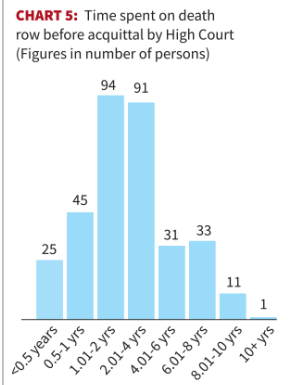


Dr. R. K.



While the Supreme Court decided 38 death sentence cases (involving 42 prisoners) in the last three years, between 2023 and 2025, it did not confirm any

For the purpose of analysis, the report has mostly used the unique IDs that are allotted to each death sentence imposed, as opposed to the unique IDs allotted to cases or persons. Unique IDs that are assigned to each person sentenced to death would lead to inaccurate analysis because of the possibility that a single individual may be sentenced to death in multiple cases. Unique IDs attached to each case would also not be accurate because of the possibility of reimposition of the death sentence in cases of remand



## ❖ INDO-PACOM chief lauds Operation Sindoor, calls for deeper India-U.S. defence relations

**Context: Admiral Samuel J. Paparo, Commander of the United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDO-PACOM), praised the tactical execution of Operation Sindoor, highlighting the seriousness with which its lessons were examined and the introspection that followed.**

- Speaking to a select group of journalists in the national capital, Admiral Paparo said he held “tremendous reverence” for the terrible event (Pahalgam attack) that triggered the crisis, acknowledging the gravity of what had unfolded. At the same time, he made it clear that he would reserve further comment, describing the matter as sovereign and best addressed by the country directly involved.

- He also commended the restraint demonstrated during the operation, underlining the importance of preventing escalation in a volatile security environment.
- Referring to the use of Chinese-origin weapons by Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, Admiral Paparo stressed that constant vigilance and readiness were essential. “One never knows when a crisis may emerge. Maintaining a strong deterrent posture is critical,” he said, adding that every operation must yield lessons for future preparedness.
- He noted that modern long-range weapons rely on complex “kill chains”, the integration of sensors, communications, propulsion systems, warheads, and seekers. In the 21st century, he observed, geography was no longer the decisive factor it once was. Capabilities in space, information systems, propulsion technologies and seeker technologies had become more widely accessible.
- Success in modern conflict, he said, would depend on mastering the information environment, including space and counterspace operations, electronic warfare, low observability and artificial intelligence, to enhance both lethality and survivability.
- Admiral Paparo also praised India’s vision of leveraging artificial intelligence for the benefit of people in the 21st century. He said AI had significant defence applications and that INDO-PACOM was at the forefront of employing AI in military operations. These areas presented substantial opportunities for India and the United States to deepen cooperation, he added.
- Describing the security environment as dynamic and complex, he said it had contributed to the rapid growth of the India-U.S. security partnership. “Our cooperation dates back many years, including agreements in 2018 for Apache helicopters, and more recently MQ-9 platforms, GE-414 engines, P-8I aircraft, and MH-60 Romeo helicopters,” he said.

### ❖ Cotton farmers oppose Goyal’s U.S. import remarks, warn of price crash

**Context: Groups of farmers across the country protest against the statement that India can import raw cotton from the U.S., process it into cloth and export it back at zero reciprocal tariff; farm bodies say this will intensify indebtedness in crisis-ridden fields**

- Groups of cotton farmers across the country have protested against Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal’s recent statement that if India purchases raw cotton from the United States, processes it domestically, makes cloth and exports the finished products back to the U.S., then the country can avail itself of a zero reciprocal tariff — similar to a facility reportedly extended to Bangladesh.
- Farmers’ organisations argue that by taking such a stand, the Centre has ignored the interests of domestic cotton cultivators.
- Mr. Goyal had said that the Opposition was misleading the public by claiming Bangladesh had secured greater benefits. “Just as Bangladesh has a facility that if raw material is purchased from America, processed into cloth and exported, it will be available at zero reciprocal tariff, India also has the same facility and will get it,” he said.

## **Farmers voice concern**

- Several farmer bodies, particularly those working among cotton farmers, have decided to launch protests. Gurbhej Singh Rohiwala, a district leader of the Bharatiya Kisan (Union) (Ekta-Ugrahan) in Fazilka, Punjab, said the district was once known as the “Manchester of Punjab” for its high-quality cotton.
- “Five blocks in this district were known for cotton production. We even had a separate market for cotton procurement. In the past decade, production declined primarily due to poor prices. Now we know the real reason for this neglect. If the government wants to import cotton from the U.S., what is its plan for cotton farmers in Punjab and other States,” he asked.
- Palbhai Ambalia, a farmers’ leader from Gujarat, echoed similar concerns. “Mr. Goyal is working for big textile companies. What should farmers do if India allows cheap U.S. cotton to be dumped here,” Mr. Ambalia asked.
- The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) reiterated its demand for Mr. Goyal’s resignation. Importing raw cotton at zero tariffs will devastate the cotton farmers of India by depleting the domestic prices, the SKM said. If calculated as per the M.S. Swaminathan formula, the minimum support price (MSP) for cotton should have been ₹10,075 per quintal, and the MSP fixed was ₹7,710 per quintal. “Cotton imports from the U.S. surged 95.5% from \$199.30 million in January-November 2024 to \$377.90 million in January-November 2025,” the SKM said.
- The All India Kisan Sabha said, “Import of U.S. raw cotton will further reduce the already low domestic price, and the crisis-ridden cotton fields will witness intensifying indebtedness as well as greater peasant suicides.” It stated India’s cotton production for 2025-26 is estimated at 29.22 million bales, whereas U.S. production for 2024–25 stood at 14.41 million bales. If Indian farmers are exposed to unrestricted global competition, the likely outcome would be further distress, pushing already crisis-ridden cotton farmers towards abandoning agriculture altogether, the AIKS said.

## **❖ Launch vehicle debris with ISRO logo, National Emblem found on Maldives island**

**Context: The debris from a launch vehicle bearing the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) logo and the National Emblem has reportedly been found recently on an uninhabited island in the Maldives.**

- The debris of the payload fairing, believed to be from the ISRO’s Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM-3), washed up on an island near L. Kunahandhoo in the Maldives and was found on February 12.
- A website which tracks Indian spaceflight and aerospace developments said on X that the debris was likely from the LVM3-M6 mission.
- “A PLF [payload fairing] has washed up on an uninhabited island near L. Kunahandhoo, #maldives (found February 12, 2026). The @isro logo’s position below the national emblem suggests it is likely from the LVM3-M6 launch. This follows a similar recovery on December 28, 2025, in Sri Lanka (Trincomalee), which also appeared to be from the same mission,” the website indianspaceflight.in posted on X.
- On December 19, 2025, the ISRO launched the LVM3-M6/BlueBird Block-2 Mission, a dedicated commercial mission aboard the LVM3 launch vehicle.

- During the mission, it successfully launched the BlueBird Block-2 satellite of AST SpaceMobile, U.S., and on November 2 the space agency used the LVM-3 to launch the CMS-03 communication satellite.
- **The LVM3 is the heaviest rocket developed by the ISRO and is a three-stage launch vehicle comprising two solid strap-on motors, a liquid core stage, and a cryogenic upper stage. The ISRO is yet to confirm whether the debris is from an Indian launch vehicle.**

AS/KAS Academy



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## ❖ State notifies 1% welfare fee for gig workers

**Context: The Karnataka government has notified the quantum of the welfare fee to be collected from aggregator platforms to provide social security benefits to platform-based gig workers at 1% per transaction for all services.**

- The Karnataka government has notified the quantum of the welfare fee to be collected from aggregator platforms to provide social security benefits to platform-based gig workers.
- While the Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2025, mandates a welfare fee of 1-5% of the payout to the worker for each transaction, the government has fixed the fee at 1% per transaction for all services.
- The cap per transaction, however, varies for different services.
- For food and grocery delivery services such as Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit, Zepto, and BigBasket the cap is at ₹0.5.
- For ride-hailing services such as Rapido, NammaYatri, and Uber, the cap is fixed at ₹0.5, ₹0.75, and ₹1 for two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and four-wheelers, respectively.
- Logistics services like Porter will have to shell out ₹0.5, ₹0.75, ₹1, and ₹1.5 per transaction for two-wheelers, three-wheelers, light commercial vehicles, and heavy commercial vehicles, respectively.
- For e-marketplace services, ₹0.5, ₹0.75, and ₹1 have been fixed as the cap for two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and light commercial vehicles, respectively. Professional activity providers like Urban Company have the highest cap at ₹1.5.

### **Each quarter**

- According to a Government Order published in the Gazette on February 13, within five working days from the end of each quarter, every aggregator should calculate the welfare fee, self-declare the same, and pay it to the government.
- All the payments will be mapped onto a Payment and Welfare Fee Verification System (PWFVS) administered by the State government and monitored by the Gig Workers Social Security Board. According to the GO, the details of the welfare fee collected and spent will be disclosed and made available on the portal.
- The bank details for making the payment of the welfare fee will be provided on the website of the Labour Department.

## ❖ NGT clears ₹92,000-cr. Great Nicobar project

**Context: The tribunal disposes of a batch of applications over environmental clearance for the project; says 'adequate safeguards' are provided in EC conditions and finds no good ground to interfere**

- A Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Monday cleared the way for the ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island mega-infrastructure project, noting that “considering the strategic importance” of it and “other relevant considerations”, “we do not find any good ground to interfere”.
- It disposed of applications related to the environment clearance (EC) for the project, with a direction to authorities “to ensure full and strict compliance of EC conditions”.
- The project includes a transshipment port, an airport, a power plant, and a township.
- The Bench was hearing a batch of applications related to the EC, which was granted in 2022. An earlier NGT Bench had in 2023 called for the formation of a high-powered committee (HPC) to address certain issues concerning the protection of coral reef colonies, nesting sites of leatherback turtles, and the allegation that parts of the project are located in ecologically protected zones.
- The applicants argued that the government had erred in limiting the terms of reference for the HPC to three issues and that the terms were “factually incorrect”. They said the issues had not been properly examined. The NGT said “adequate safeguards” had been provided in the conditions specified in the EC, which the tribunal had already refused to interfere with in its 2023 order. It said the remaining issues had “been dealt with” by the HPC.
- “A balanced approach is required to be adopted while considering the issue of allowing development of the port on a strategic location and taking adequate steps to carry out the activity strictly in terms of the ICRZ Notification, 2019 instead of prohibiting the activity if the objection is based on apprehension,” the NGT said in its order.
- The NGT Bench, headed by its Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava, noted that it found no error in the drafting of the terms of reference for the HPC, adding that the applicants did not point out “any other substantial issue” that should have been examined by the HPC.
- Further, noting the Union government’s stance against public disclosure of the HPC report, given that it is “of strategic, defence and national importance and has confidential and privileged information”, the NGT said, “The above disclosures reveal that the project is very important for India.”



- The NGT order said that to ensure “full and effective” compliance with the EC conditions, the Environment Ministry “will undertake all measures to protect the coral reefs along the coastal stretch and will also ensure coral regeneration through proved scientific method for regeneration”. The NGT asked the Environment Ministry to prepare and approve an “implementation plan” in this regard

### **‘Responsibility of Environment Ministry’**

- On erosion of shorelines of the Great Nicobar Island, the NGT said it “will be the responsibility” of the Environment Ministry to “ensure that on account of proposed constructions which includes foreshore development, there is no erosion/shoreline change”. On protecting coral reefs, the Bench relied on the government’s submissions that “no coral reef exists within the work area of the project.”
- The applicants had also submitted that the Environmental Impact Assessment for the project was conducted for just one season, as opposed to three seasons as mandated by regulations. On this, the NGT noted the government’s submissions that “since there is no high erosion site in Andaman & Nicobar, therefore, three-season data is not required”.
- While the project’s environmental clearance was under challenge before the NGT, aspects of the project’s forest clearance are currently under challenge before the Calcutta High Court. Apart from the alarm raised by conservationists and activists about the project’s potential damage to the ecology, locals on the island have objected to the project’s approval, alleging that their consent for it had not been taken lawfully. The locals — the Nicobarese and the Shompen — have alleged that their rights on forest lands which are supposed to be used for the project had not been settled.

### **❖ SC Bench to review if new data law delivers a ‘body blow’ to RTI**

**Context: The Supreme Court agreed to refer to a Constitution Bench a series of petitions arguing that India’s new digital personal data law delivers a “body blow” to citizens’ right to a transparent and accountable government under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.**

- Section 44(3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act of 2023 imposes a “blanket ban” on the RTI Act applicants, preventing them from seeking disclosure of ‘personal information’, the petitioners said. They submitted that the provision cynically uses the right to privacy to cripple the citizens’ right to information.
- Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, refused a plea to pass an interim order to stay the implementation of Section 44(3), though the top judge said that the petitions raised a “complex, slightly sensitive and really interesting” question of law.
- “We may have to lay down what is meant by personal information,” Chief Justice Kant remarked, issuing notice to the government.

### **'Unguided discretion'**

- Advocate Vrinda Grover, appearing for petitioner Venkatesh Nayak, submitted that the government, instead of using a chisel, used a “hammer to deliver body blows to citizens’ right to information”.
- Ms. Grover argued that Section 44(3) introduced by the DPDP Act has accorded the government “unguided discretion to deny personal information, which is unconstitutional”. In fact, the fundamental right to privacy has been extended to the State.

### **❖ The petitioners argued that Section 44(3) has amended Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act.**

**Context: Originally, the RTI provision had exempted authorities from disclosing personal information to an applicant if the details sought had no relationship to any public activity or if disclosure would amount to unwarranted invasion of privacy.**

- Even then, the government had to disclose if public interest outweighed privacy. The decision whether or not to reveal ‘personal information’ was taken by a Public Information Officer or the First Appellate Authority under the RTI Act after thoroughly weighing privacy and transparency concerns.
- “Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act had struck the right balance between the right to privacy and the right to information,” advocates Prashant Bhushan and Rahul Gupta, appearing for the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information, submitted.
- Mr. Bhushan argued that a five-judge Constitution Bench in its November 2019 judgment in Central Public Information Officer versus Supreme Court of India had examined Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act to apply the proportionality test to balance the right to information against the right to privacy. The 2019 judgment held that personal information should remain in the realm of privacy unless disclosure was necessary in the larger public interest.
- “It is an unreasonable restriction on the right under Article 19. Privacy is not a fundamental right available to the State. It violates Article 14 by equating the privacy of public functionaries to that of ordinary citizens. It inverts the jurisprudence of privacy vis-à-vis the right to information and prioritises privacy over the larger public interest of transparency and open governance,” Mr. Nayak’s petition argued.
- Mr. Bhushan said the consequence of the DPDP provision was both immediate and serious. “Every RTI application involving identifiable public officials, procurement records, audit reports, appointment files, utilisation of public funds, or exercise of statutory discretion can now be denied automatically on the ground that it ‘relates to personal information’,” Mr. Bhushan submitted.
- The petitioners contended that the amendment to Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act has rendered the “right to information illusory”.

## ❖ J&K plans to harness river waters as IWT is in abeyance

**Context: The Jammu & Kashmir government is mulling to take advantage of the suspended Indus Water Treaty (IWT) by diverting, for the first time, water from the Ravi river in Punjab to the Jammu region, and push for the revival of the Tulbul Navigation Barrage project in the Kashmir region.**

- Sources said Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has raised the issue with the Centre. The Tulbul project hit a dead end when Pakistan raised objections in 1987 under the IWT. However, the Centre put the treaty in abeyance after the 2025 Pahalgam attack.
- The State has made a proposal to enable year-round navigation on the Wular lake by maintaining a minimum depth of water, which was not possible because of the IWT.

## ❖ SC to take a fresh look at pleas on ex post facto eco clearance regime

**Context: A three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court decided to take a fresh look at writ petitions and appeals concerning ex post facto environmental clearance of construction and public projects across the country.**

- The Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant scheduled the case for a detailed hearing on February 25. The CJI said the court would not tolerate any adjournments on that day.
- A Division Bench of the Supreme Court had struck down the Centre's grant of ex post facto or retrospective environmental clearances (ECs) as a "gross illegality" and an "anathema" in a judgment on May 16, 2025.
- However, a subsequent three-judge Bench of the court had recalled the May 16 judgment in a majority verdict delivered in November 2025.
- The majority opinion for the three-judge Bench authored by Chief Justice (now retired) B.R. Gavai had concluded that the continued operation of the May 16 judgment would have a "devastating effect" and "thousands of crores of rupees" invested in building and infrastructure projects would "go to waste". Justice K. Vinod Chandran had backed his view, forming the majority on the Bench.
- Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, the third member of the Bench, had however recorded a sharp dissent. He had termed the majority view as an "innocent expression of opinion" which overlooked the "very fundamentals of environmental jurisprudence".
- The majority opinion of Chief Justice Gavai and Justice Chandran had, while recalling the May 16 judgment, ordered the writ petitions, to be "restored to file". On Monday, petitioners, led by senior advocates Sanjay Parikh and Gopal Sankaranarayanan, argued that the majority opinion of November 2025 authored by Justice Gavai had only recalled the May 2025 judgment without expressly giving an authoritative finding on the validity of the two Office Memorandums (OMs) of 2017 and 2021, which had formed the bedrock on which the government had worked the ex-post facto environmental clearance regime.
- The majority judgment in November 2025 had recorded that the Division Bench which struck down the OMs did not have the benefit of several judicial precedents before pronouncing their verdict on May 16.

- Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Steel Authority of India, submitted that the May 2025 had put several significant public projects on hold, including an airport in Karnataka. Senior advocate P. Wilson and Tamil Nadu Advocate General P.S. Raman submitted that a 218-crore cancer hospital project was also halted abruptly.

### ❖ Araghchi in Geneva for talks as IRGC begins drills near the Strait of Hormuz

**Context: Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived in Geneva for a second round of nuclear talks with the U.S. and technical discussions with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) amid heightened tensions in the Persian Gulf, as Washington has sent a second aircraft carrier to the region, threatening to use force against the Islamic Republic if diplomacy fails.**

- While the U.S. and Iran are expected to hold talks, mediated by Oman, in the Swiss city on Tuesday, the naval forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have started military drills near the Strait of Hormuz, a key chokepoint that connects the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea through the Gulf of Oman.
- "I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal. What is not on the table: submission before threats," Mr. Araghchi wrote in a social media post. IAEA chief Rafael Grossi later said he had "in-depth technical discussions" with Mr. Araghchi ahead of Tuesday's "important negotiations".
- Mr. Araghchi had met Steve Witkoff, U.S. President Donald Trump's West Asia envoy, and other officials for nuclear talks on February 6 in Muscat, Oman's capital, and agreed to continue discussions.
- Meanwhile, the IRGC on Monday started "live-fire intensive drills" named 'Smart Control of Hormuz Strait' under the supervision of chief commander Major General Mohammed Pakpour. The drills aim to test the readiness of the IRGC Navy's operational units and review support programmes and scenarios in the face of "possible security and military threats" in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, reported state-run Press TV.
- "A rapid, decisive, and comprehensive response by the IRGC's operational forces in the face of anti-security plots in the maritime arena is at the core of the operational exercises of the units participating in the drill," it said.

**Context: India and France elevated their relationship to a 'special global strategic partnership' when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met French President Emmanuel Macron.**

- The meeting also saw the amendment of the protocol on **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement**, establishment of an annual Foreign Ministers' Dialogue to review the Horizon 2047 Roadmap, and an agreement on reciprocal deployment of armed forces. At a time of global uncertainty, the India-French partnership is a force for stability, Mr. Modi said.
- The bilateral talks between Mr. Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron in Mumbai resulted in a wide-ranging agreement covering health, critical minerals, defence, science and technology, renewable energy, and skilling.
- With Mr. Macron at his side during a joint press conference at Lok Bhavan, the Prime Minister was expansive in his description of bilateral ties. **"The India-France partnership knows no boundaries.** It can reach from deep oceans to the tallest mountains," he said.
- Mr. Macron also highlighted the unique nature of the relationship, based on common principles such as a shared agreement on the rule of law and a world order without hegemony.
- "We will find a new way which is against hegemony. We want to walk together. We want to give a model to the world about how to work together. ," he said. He emphasised the strategic partnership between the two countries in multiple sectors including defence, science and technology, nuclear power, and high speed rail networks.
- During his first visit to Mumbai and fourth trip to India, Mr. Macron started the day with a jog along Marine Drive, south Mumbai's long coastal promenade, surprising residents.
- It sent a positive message about health for the youth, in a city which hosts marathons, the Ministry of External Affairs said. Mr. Macron paid tribute to the victims of the 26/11 terror attacks at Mumbai's Taj Mahal Palace hotel. "In the face of terrorism, unity and determination," he said.
- Mr. Macron had a cinema-themed lunch with a few film personalities, including Anil Kapoor, Manoj Bajpayee, and Niraj Ghaywan. "Alongside the legends of Indian cinema. Culture brings us together," he posted on X. He is expected to meet investors in Mumbai morning before heading to Delhi.
- Mr. Modi and Mr. Macron launched the **India-France Year of Innovation and the India-France Innovation Network**, with a cultural programme at the iconic Gateway of India to commemorate the launch. In a first for the private sector, Mr. Modi and Mr. Macron virtually inaugurated the H125 Helicopter Final Assembly Line at Vemagal, Karnataka, in the presence of the Defence Ministers from both the countries.
- The Prime Minister also announced the launch of **three new centres: the Indo-French Centre for AI in Health, Indo-French Centre for Digital Science and Technology, and the National Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Aeronautics.** "These are not just institutions, but future-building platforms," he said.

## ❖ India, France renew defence cooperation for 10 years, call to boost military partnership

**Context: India and France renewed their defence cooperation agreement for another 10 years at the sixth India-France Annual Defence Dialogue in Bengaluru.**

- At the meeting, co-chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Minister of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs of France Catherine Vautrin, **India asked France to increase “indigenous content” in the Rafale by up to 50%, and also expand the Rafale’s maintenance, repair and overhaul facility in India.**
- The cooperation agreement was signed by India’s Defence Secretary and France’s Deputy Director General for International Relations and Strategy. Besides, both countries announced Reciprocal Deployment Officers at Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments.
- The two Ministers discussed a range of bilateral security and defence issues, including priority areas for co-development and co-production of equipment.
- The Defence Ministry said the two leaders emphasised the need for a closer defence partnership, connecting industries of both nations, especially in the field of niche technology.
- It said they reaffirmed the commitment to enhance military-to-military cooperation as a key pillar of the strategic partnership.
- Mr. Singh said the recent India-EU Security and Defence Partnership marked a significant step in deepening the collective engagement.
- “Both Ministers agreed to leverage this framework, both bilaterally and in the wider European context for tangible outcomes that will strengthen regional stability, enhance joint capabilities, and reinforce the enduring Indo-French strategic alignment,” the Ministry said.
- An MoU on Joint Venture was also signed for the manufacturing of Hammer missiles in India between the Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Electronics Limited and Executive Vice President, Safran Electronics and Defence.
- Mr. Singh emphasised that **India has been the first responder and net security provider for countries in the Indian Ocean Region and always extends assistance to them in the defence, security and maritime domains to augment their capabilities and ward off any adversary.**
- On terrorism, he said that Pakistan has a long history of nurturing, nourishing, and promoting cross-border terrorism to create disturbance and violence in India. “This has created a serious threat to peace in the region,” he said.

## ❖ Two digital initiatives to boost health AI ecosystem launched

**Context: Union Health and Family Welfare Minister J.P. Nadda launched two digital health initiatives — SAHI (Secure AI for Health Initiative) and BODH (Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI) — during the India AI Impact Summit.**

- “The launch marks a milestone in advancing safe, ethical, and evidence-based deployment of Artificial Intelligence in India’s healthcare ecosystem,” the Ministry said in a release.

- He said that AI did not operate in isolation, but thrived on strong digital infrastructure and high-quality data. He noted that the **National Health Policy, 2017, envisaged the creation of a comprehensive digital health ecosystem that would be interoperable, inclusive, and scalable.**
- “Building on this vision, the government launched the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission in 2020** to establish a robust digital public architecture for healthcare,” he said.

### **SAHI and BODH**

- Describing SAHI as **not merely a technology strategy** but a governance framework, policy compass, and national road map for the responsible use of AI in healthcare, Mr. Nadda said that SAHI would guide India in leveraging AI in an ethical, transparent, accountable, and people-centric manner.
- Additionally, collaboration between the government and academia has led to the development of BODH, which provides a structured mechanism to test and validate AI solutions before large-scale deployment.
- “AI solutions must be rigorously evaluated for performance, reliability, and real-world readiness.
- Together, **SAHI and BODH represent India’s commitment to building a trustworthy, inclusive, and globally competitive health AI ecosystem grounded in innovation, responsibility, and public trust,**” he said.

### **❖ ‘AI Mission 2.0 will have more GPUs for common compute’**

**Context: IndiaAI Mission to purchase 20,000 more graphics processing units; subsequent phase of the mission to lean heavily on AI R&D: Vaishnav.**

- The **IndiaAI Mission will add 20,000 more graphics processing units (GPUs) to the government-run “common compute”** cluster, which is open for local firms, researchers and academia to use, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said at a briefing at the AI Impact Summit.
- The **GPUs will be installed in the common compute cluster “within the next six months,”** Mr. Vaishnav said. “As we go forward, I will be launching the AI Mission 2.0, where there will be a huge focus on research and development, on innovation, on AI diffusion, on further strengthening the common compute that we have been able to develop” in the first phase of the mission, Mr. Vaishnav said.
- IT Secretary S. Krishnan said at a session that the government was providing these resources — including a yet-to-be-unveiled foundational large language model from an Indian firm — “for one reason only: to build applications with real impact.”
- Meanwhile, Opposition leaders sharply criticised the invitation to former Microsoft CEO Bill Gates to address the keynote, citing his alleged closeness with the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.
- Earlier in the day, the Press Trust of India cited government sources, reporting that Mr. Gates would not come. However, a Gates Foundation spokesperson insisted that he would address the summit as planned. “If true, what a shame,” Priyanka Chaturvedi, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP, Rajya Sabha, said on X.

## ❖ India gets first private sector helicopter final assembly line in Kolar

**Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron virtually inaugurated the Tata Advanced Systems' Final Assembly Line (FAL) for the Airbus H125 helicopter.**

- The **facility in Vemagal, Kolar district in Karnataka, is India's first private-sector helicopter FAL. This is the first time India's private sector will undertake the manufacturing, integration, testing and maintenance of a sophisticated rotary-wing platform.**
- The civil H125 will **first** be built at this facility and in future the military variant of the helicopter could also be built.
- The **first** localised H125 is expected to be delivered early 2027 and will also be available for export across South Asia. Tata Advanced Systems Limited and Airbus said that the H125M is optimised to serve as a high-altitude force multiplier across a spectrum of critical missions.
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh who was present on the occasion said the H-125 programme investment is anticipated to exceed ₹1000 crore.
- Minister of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs of France Catherine Vautrin said the inauguration of the facility is a testament to French-Indian defence cooperation.
- Karnataka's Large and Medium Industries Minister M. B. Patil said 500 H125 light helicopters will be manufactured over the next 20 years at this facility. Mr. Patil said 17 acres of land had been allotted for the project.

## ❖ 'India must mop up \$500 bn a year for Net Zero goal'

**Context: India needs to mobilise about \$22 trillion or about \$500 billion a year to meet Net Zero goal by 2070, said Agnes Dasewicz, chief investment and programme officer, Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, in an interview.**

- The GEA works to unlock green energy access in **Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.**
- "You will never be able to do that without aligning government, private finance and philanthropy, because you need all of them to grow in the same direction to achieve that kind of ambition," she said.
- On funding, Wochong Um, CEO, **Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet**, said, "You hear about trillions of dollars that's floating globally.
- "To get that money, the government has to work very closely with the multilaterals. There are a lot of projects out there as a blueprint but not invested as they don't have enough information on technical details, viability and all that stuff. So, doing due diligence to bring it to the bankable stage, that will enable people to invest."

### Multilateral finance

- He said different types of money, like the 'philanthropy and **Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)** and government and private sector are not necessarily aligned and leveraging each other. "So, try to create proof of concept so that it leads to some sort of investable project."

- At Mumbai Climate Week, the Alliance unveiled a national platform for deploying up to \$25 million to modernise power distribution, integrate renewable energy and storage and prepare grids for fast demand growth.

### ❖ Infosys ties up with Anthropic

**Context: Infosys unveiled a partnership with Anthropic, days after investor concerns that AI tools would disrupt the traditional business models of Indian IT services firms shaved billions off their market value.**

- The sell-off was triggered, in part, by the launch of a tool by Amazon and Alphabet-backed Anthropic, which has seen its revenue run-rate in India doubling in four months.

### Enterprise market

- Anthropic has leaned heavily on the enterprise AI market and last month launched Claude Cowork, an AI agent that helps execute computer tasks for white-collar workers. The startup has existing partnerships with Indian companies such as Air India.
- Under the tie-up, Infosys and Anthropic will develop and deploy AI agents, initially focusing on telecom and then expanding into financial services, manufacturing and software development.

### ❖ Tarique Rahman sworn in as Bangladesh PM

**Context: As the new Prime Minister, the BNP chief will head a team of 25 Cabinet Ministers and 24 Ministers of State, all of whom were sworn in by President Shahabuddin; BNP lawmakers were administered the oath as members of Parliament, but not as members of the Constitution Reform Commission.**

- Five days after the parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, Tarique Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was sworn in as the new Prime Minister.
- The swearing-in of the new Prime Minister and his ministerial colleagues came hours after Chief Election Commissioner A.M.M Nasir Uddin administered the oath of Parliament to the newly elected members of the BNP in Parliament, Jatiyo Sansad.
- As the new Prime Minister, Mr. Rahman will lead a team of 25 Cabinet Ministers and 24 Ministers of State, who were all administered oath by President Mohammed Shahabuddin. Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chaudhury, Salahuddin Ahmed, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku – prominent members of the National Standing Committee of the BNP; and Nitai Roy Choudhury, Kazi Shah Mofazzal Hossein, Abdul Awal Mintu, Rashiduzzaman Millat, Shama Obaid from the BNP executive committee were sworn in as Cabinet Ministers.

## ❖ SC asks govt. to consider plea to treat 'racial slur' as a hate crime

**Context: The Supreme Court disagreed with the notion of pigeonholing crime on the basis of race and region, saying it would fuel polarisation, while hearing a petition seeking comprehensive guidelines to recognise 'racial slur' as a separate category of hate crime.**

- Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, said crime, whoever was on either end of it, should be dealt with an iron hand.
- Classifying crimes based on a victim's identity could risk dividing society, Chief Justice Kant said, adding that 75 years after Independence, the nation must find strength and unity in treating all its diverse citizens equally.
- The court asked Attorney-General R. Venkataramani to consider the petition and refer it to an appropriate authority.
- The petition was filed by advocate Anoop Prakash Awasthi in the aftermath of shock and public grief over the fatal attack on Anjel Chakma, a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura, by a group of men in Uttarakhand.

### **Parting words**

- Chakma was attacked after he resisted heckling while out shopping with his younger brother. He died under medical treatment on December 27, 2025, never regaining consciousness. The petition recounted Chakma's tragic words to his attackers, "We are Indians. What certificate should we show to prove that?"
- Mr. Awasthi urged the court "that we must do something" and said people cannot shrug and walk away when somebody was being beaten up by a mob.
- He had argued that the new bouquet of criminal laws, including the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, hardly addressed the issue of hate crime, racial discrimination, and violence against Indian citizens, especially from the northeastern States and other frontier regions.
- Mr. Awasthi submitted that despite the unmistakable hate-based racial motivation of the crime, there was no mechanism available within the initial criminal justice response system, which still viewed racial offences as an ordinary crime.
- "The killing of Mr. Anjel Chakma is not an isolated incident but forms part of a long-standing pattern of racial violence against citizens from the North-Eastern States, including the death of Nido Taniam in 2014 and numerous assaults on students and workers in metropolitan cities, a phenomenon formally acknowledged by the Union of India in parliamentary replies, yet left unaddressed through any dedicated legislative or institutional framework," the petition said.

## ❖ SC forms panel to guide judges about sensitivity, compassion

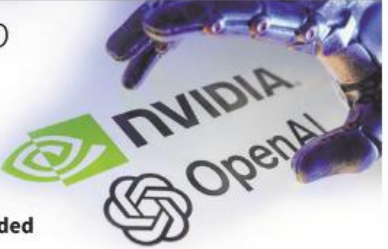
**Context: Over a year after a High Court judge used explicit language to narrate a sexual assault on a minor girl in his judicial order, the Supreme Court has assigned the Director of the National Judicial Academy, Justice Aniruddha Bose (retd), to draw guidelines to infuse the qualities of sensitivity and compassion in judges, especially in the context of vulnerable cases.**

- A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant directed Justice Bose, a former top court judge, to include legal practitioners, academics, and social workers in the expert committee.
- The court said the committee report should be comprehensive and written in simple language, without any legal jargon. The court said there was no point to such an exercise if the victims, whose rights the exercise seeks to protect, did not understand a word of the report. The Bench said the report should be translated into regional languages and submitted in the apex court.
- The court highlighted that there were several offensive words and expressions in local dialects which are used casually in society.
- “It shall be highly appreciated if the committee, as a part of its report, is able to identify and compile such words/expressions, from different languages, so that they do not go unnoticed, and the complainants/victims are empowered to give a better and fuller narrative of the trauma undergone by them,” the judgment, authored by Chief Justice Kant, observed.
- The judgment was triggered by a petition filed by an NGO ‘We the Women of India’, represented by senior advocate Shobha Gupta, and other members of the Supreme Court Bar, including senior advocate H.S. Phoolka about a March 17, 2025 order passed by a Single Judge Bench of the Allahabad High Court.
- The Single Judge order used explicit expressions to detail the sexual assault on the minor girl by two men. It had set aside a summons order issued to the two accused under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and for charges of attempt to rape by a Special Judge in June 2023.
- The Single Judge had concluded that the “pulling down of pyjama string” did not amount to an “attempt to rape” but only a lesser charge of assault or force on a woman with intent to disrobe under Section 354B of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code.
- The Supreme Court had taken suo motu cognisance of the judgment as an example of how “judges and judicial officers have failed to imbibe compassion and empathy in the manner of handling matters involving sexual offences, especially when it comes to vulnerable and/or minor victims and witnesses”.
- Setting aside the High Court order of March 17, 2025, the Supreme Court restored the original June 2023 summons order of the Special Judge to the two accused men.

#### ❖ **Nvidia, OpenAI announce partnerships with Indian firms, educational institutes**

**Context: U.S. tech giants Nvidia and OpenAI announced partnerships with Indian industry and academia at the ongoing AI Impact Summit. The former will work with three firms — Yotta, L&T, and E2E Networks. The latter has signed on with multiple universities with a view to “strengthening AI use among students”.**

- “India’s AI cloud infrastructure will host workloads as well as manufacture intelligence for model training, fine-tuning and high-scale inference,” Nvidia, which makes the graphics processing units that run AI models, said in a statement. “Capacity within these data centers will be reserved for model builders, startups, researchers and enterprises to build, fine-tune and deploy AI in India.” The firm will provide Indian partners with access to Nemotron and NeMo, the former being a family of open source LLMs and the latter a software suite for managing AI agents.
- OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, has partnered with multiple higher education institutes, namely IIT-Delhi, IIM-Ahmedabad, AIIMS, New Delhi, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, and Pearl Academy. “By embedding AI tools, training, and research into the infrastructure of schools and universities, they can equip students with the skills needed to thrive in a world with AI,” OpenAI India’s head of education Raghav Gupta said. “OpenAI is also collaborating with ed-tech platforms including PhysicsWallah, upGrad, and HCL GUVI,” the firm said, adding that one lakh students and staff will benefit from the deal.



**Technical tie-up**  
Chip maker Nvidia will work with three firms while OpenAI has signed on with multiple universities

**OpenAI seeks to ‘equip students with the skills needed to thrive in a world with AI’**

**PARTNERS** ■ IIT-Delhi  
■ IIM-Ahmedabad  
■ AIIMS New Delhi  
■ Manipal Academy of Higher Education  
■ Pearl Academy  
■ University of Petroleum and Energy Studies

**Nvidia to provide firms access to Nemotron, a family of open source LLMs and NeMo, a software suite for managing AI agents**

**PARTNERS** ■ Yotta ■ L&T  
■ E2E Networks

### ❖ Kerala Cabinet gives nod for Bill to issue Nativity Cards

**Context: Modelled on the existing Nativity Certificate, the Nativity Card will serve as an authoritative document for availing services from the Kerala government and meeting other social requirements**

- The State Cabinet gave its nod for the Kerala Nativity Card Bill that empowers the State government to issue Nativity Cards, which, according to the government, would serve as an authoritative document for services provided by it and other “social requirements.”
- **The Nativity Card is modelled on the existing Nativity Certificate issued by the State government to certify that a person is a Keralite. The card will be accepted as an authoritative document for services provided by the State government and other social requirements, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan’s office.**
- The government’s proposal to introduce the Nativity Card, which received the Cabinet’s in-principle nod on December 24 last year, had drawn wide attention as it came amid the controversies over the special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral roll.
- The Bill is likely to be introduced when the current session of the State Assembly reconvenes on February 23. For the purpose of the card, the Bill defines ‘native’ as someone who was born in Kerala and has not accepted foreign citizenship or someone who has a Kerala-born ancestor who had not relinquished Indian citizenship.

- Individuals who have relinquished citizenship will not be eligible for the card. If a holder relinquishes citizenship after receiving the card, the card will be null and void. People born outside Kerala to Keralites who were outside the State on livelihood-related or other reasons also would fall under the ambit of the definition of ‘native.’
- Individuals who require the card should apply to the tahsildar concerned, says the Bill. Although the Tahsildar is the official designated for sanctioning the Nativity Card, registers on the cards will be maintained in village offices, according to the Bill.

### ❖ Centre to bring 1,954 border villages under development scheme

**Context: The second phase of the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) will cover 1,954 strategic villages along the land borders with Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar in 15 States and two Union Territories, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).**

- The VVP was launched in 2023, originally to assist development in villages along the China border. The VVP-II was cleared by the Union Cabinet in April 2025.
- On February 20, Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to launch the VVP-II programme at Nathanpur village in Assam’s Cachar district along the Bangladesh border.

#### Ensuring livelihood

- The Ministry said the main objective of the VVP-II is to meet the developmental needs and well-being of the border population, as well as promote diverse livelihood opportunities to ensure economic and cultural assimilation with the nation.
- “In these villages, opportunities for professional growth, social cohesion and national integration would be enhanced to ensure that border regions are not left behind in the country’s development journey,” the MHA said.

### ❖ Maharashtra govt. revokes 5% quota for Muslims in State

**Context: The Maharashtra government has revoked its old order granting 5% reservation to the Backward Class members of the Muslim community in the State.**

- The reservation was granted under the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) category via the formation of the Special Backward Category-A, or SBC-A.
- Though the community was not drawing any benefits as the ordinance granting the reservation lapsed 11 years ago in 2014, the process of issuing caste verification certificates and validation certificates was being followed till date. In line with the stated legal position, the government has now officially scrapped that as well.

#### 2014 decision

- The Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) Maharashtra government in 2014 had granted 16% reservation to Marathas and 5% reservation to Muslims in government and semi-government jobs and education.
- Both decisions were challenged in the Bombay High Court, even as the government promulgated two ordinances in the matter. While the court struck down reservation for Marathas, and reservation for Muslims in jobs, it observed the need for reservation for Muslims in education.

- After the 2014 Maharashtra Assembly election, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in the State, it failed to promulgate a law before the ordinances lapsed. Thereafter, the community did not receive any benefits under the reservation.

### **'Anti-minority govt.'**

- The Opposition has slammed the government as “anti-minority”.
- Prithviraj Chavan, who implemented the decision as the Maharashtra Chief Minister in 2014, asked why the BJP had scrapped the decision soon after the demise of Ajit Pawar, despite knowing that Ajit Pawar had taken the decision in 2014 as the Deputy Chief Minister then. “Does Ajit Pawar’s party not stand for Muslim reservation anymore,” Mr. Chavan asked.
- Congress leader Amin Patel, who has raised the issue several times in the legislature, said the government should have brought in a law for reservation to Muslim Backward Class in the field of education as it was “essential for nation-building”.

### **❖ Simultaneous polls panel mulling curbs on no-trust motion**

**Context: The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examining the Bill on simultaneous elections is considering a provision that would bar the introduction of a no-confidence motion against an incumbent government if only one year of its term remains, committee chairperson and BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary said.**

- He was speaking at Mind, a conversation series featuring leading newsmakers.
- The **Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024** to enable simultaneous elections was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 17, 2024, and immediately referred to the committee. The panel has held 16 meetings in Delhi so far and travelled across the country.
- Explaining key provisions of the Bill, Mr. Chaudhary said that if enacted before the 2029 general elections, the first sitting of the new Lok Sabha would become the “appointed date”. State Assembly terms beginning thereafter would be truncated to align with the 2034 Lok Sabha polls. This one-time synchronisation, he argued, would not violate the federal structure, contrary to the concerns raised by critics.
- Mr. Chaudhary said the panel is deliberating whether to introduce a time-bar on moving a no-confidence motion. “We are actively considering introducing a provision that would bar the moving of a no-confidence motion if the incumbent government has only one year left in its term,” he said, noting that several states have similar restrictions for Panchayati Raj institutions.
- However, such provisions vary widely across States. Under the Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act, 1994, for instance, a no-confidence motion cannot be moved in the last year of the term against certain panchayat office-bearers. In contrast, the Karnataka High Court ruled on February 9 that there should be no embargo on moving a no-confidence motion in the final year, emphasising the need to prevent misuse of office during the remaining tenure.

- “When grassroots democracy has such a provision, why can’t we adopt it for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies,” Mr. Chaudhary asked.
- While he maintained that such a restriction is legally plausible, he acknowledged that the final decision must be a political one. “We will also consult the political parties on the issue,” he added.
- Mr. Chaudhary conceded that there are infirmities in the current formulation of the Bill, and noted that addressing these gaps is precisely what the panel is attempting to do. For instance, during the deliberations so far, several members have pointed out that the Election Commission has been vested with unfettered powers under the proposed law.
- The panel, he said, could consider introducing an oversight mechanism. At the same time, he said that the poll body is a constitutional body, and there is no reason to distrust its intentions or functioning.

### ❖ Google plans India, U.S. direct subsea cable link

**Context: Google will work on an undersea cable project directly linking the U.S. and India, CEO Sundar Pichai told the media on the sidelines of the AI Impact Summit. This would be the second planned subsea cable system that would in and of itself link the U.S. and India, after Facebook and WhatsApp parent Meta’s Project Waterworth.**

- So far, subsea cable systems, carrying vast majority of Internet traffic between continents, do not have a direct Indo-U.S. link, relying instead on relay points like Singapore.
- It also announced “Google DeepMind partnership to boost AI-powered science and education in India and expanded workforce development efforts,” earmarking \$30 million “Google.org AI [grant] for Government Innovation Impact Challenge to support AI-powered government-to-citizen solutions.” Also, 1.1 crore Atal Tinkering Labs’ students would have access to chatbot assistants.

## ❖ India sees future, not fear, in AI, says Modi

**Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India did not fear artificial intelligence (AI) but saw its future in the technology.**

- “I declare this with utmost responsibility and immense pride,” he said. “We harbour no fear. India envisions its destiny in artificial intelligence, a future that is clearly and profoundly visible for our great nation.” Mr. Modi was speaking at the plenary session of the AI Impact Summit.
- “India is constructing a resilient ecosystem spanning from semiconductors and chip making to quantum computing,” he said, hailing “clear policies” around AI and electronics manufacturing. “This comprehensive effort includes establishing secure data centres, a robust IT backbone, and a dynamic start-up ecosystem.”
- “The fundamental challenge before us is how to transition AI from a purely machine-centric approach to one that is truly human-centric, ensuring it is both sensitive and optimal,” he said. “It is essential that AI must be democratised.
- We must transform this into a powerful instrument for inclusion and empowerment, particularly benefiting the Global South ... just as GPS shows us the way, but it is we who decide where to go, so too the ultimate decision of in which direction we must proceed rests entirely with us.”

## ❖ Switzerland’s President announces Geneva as host of 2027 AI Impact Summit

**Context: The Artificial Intelligence (AI) Impact Summit in 2027 will be held in Geneva, Switzerland’s President Guy Parmelin said here, making a pitch for smaller countries to “come together” to ensure good governance of AI development, so it is not held in the hands of a few “big powers”.**

- Mr. Parmelin, who also met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi for bilateral talks on the sidelines of the AI summit here, said they had discussed cooperating in innovation on artificial intelligence, multilateral cooperation, and trade ties after the conclusion of the India-EFTA trade agreement in 2024.
- “Switzerland is looking forward to hosting the 2027 AI Summit in Geneva — and to working with the subsequent incoming host of the 2028 AI Summit, the United Arab Emirates, as partner for the Geneva Summit,” Mr. Parmelin told presspersons at Switzerland’s “Country Pavilion” at the Bharat Mandapam complex after the plenary session.
- “It will also consolidate our role as a leading centre for innovation and research in AI,” he said adding the next summit would focus on international law aspects of AI.
- Asked about the domination of the two big AI players, U.S. and China, who together account for more than 70% of the global AI industry, Mr. Parmelin said smaller countries should “organise” together and build infrastructure, while recognising specific technological breakthroughs in many of the other countries.
- “It is very important that we work together so that the [technological future of the world] is not just in a few hands of big powers,” Mr. Parmelin said in response to a question.

- “We know some countries have taken a way forward, and it’s very important that good governance is brought to everyone. Notably, countries like South Korea, France, Switzerland, need to work together to bring good governance to other countries,” he added.
- In a statement after his meeting with Mr. Modi, the Ministry of External Affairs said both leaders had discussed the benefits of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between India and the four-nation European Free Trade association (EFTA) for bilateral trade.
- “Both sides agreed to further strengthen collaboration in innovation-led growth, joint research, sharing of best practices, and capacity building through training and skill development initiatives,” the MEA statement said.
- Mr. Modi welcomed plans to hold the Fifth Summit in Switzerland.

### ❖ **India signs statement condemning Israel’s plan for West Bank**

**Context: A day after it skipped a joint appearance with other countries at the United Nations to condemn Israel for its plans for West Bank settlements, India signed a joint statement.**

- The statement, which was read out by the Palestinian Ambassador to the UN, Riyad Mansour, in New York, criticised the Israeli government for its moves to expand its control over the West Bank areas under the Palestinian Authority.
- Among those who accompanied Mr. Mansour were diplomats from Arab nations, BRICS members, Japan and Australia, European Union member states such as Germany, and all permanent members of the UN Security Council, except for the U.S.
- India’s initial decision not to sign the statement, was seen as linked to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s travel to Israel on February 25-26 and his upcoming meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
- The decision was surprising given India’s traditional support for a Palestinian state and its past criticism of Israel’s settlement policy. However, the government appeared to shift its position and signed the document.
- “More than 100 states and international organizations have joined the statement condemning Israel’s unilateral measures and rejecting annexation,” the Palestinian government announced late on Wednesday, including India’s name in the statement.

### ❖ **Rare-earth permanent magnet production to commence within this year: Minister**

**Context: India will commence production of rare-earth permanent magnet within this year, Union Minister for Mines.**

- The Union Cabinet had given nod to a scheme for rare-earth permanent magnet manufacturing of about 6,000 metric tonnes per annum, in November last year.
- This had a financial outlay of ₹7,280 crore. At a critical minerals summit of the industry body FICCI, Mr. Reddy also announced the government’s plan to set up dedicated parks for critical mineral processing plants in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

## ❖ India took part as 'observer' in the first Board of Peace for Gaza meeting, says MEA

**Context: A day after an Indian diplomat participated in the first meeting of the Board of Peace for Gaza in Washington D.C., the Ministry of External Affairs said India was there as an "observer".**

- The official spokesperson of the Ministry, Randhir Jaiswal, reiterated **India's position on the Palestinian issue and said India stood for a "sovereign, independent, and viable state of Palestine based on 1967 borders"**.
- "India attended the Board of Peace meeting held in Washington D.C. as an observer. **India has supported the Gaza Peace Plan initiative** of President Trump and the efforts underway due to **UNSC resolution 2803**," he said in response to a question on India's presence in the meeting. India was represented by Deputy Chief of Mission of the Indian Embassy in Washington D.C. Namgya Khampa.
- Mr. Jaiswal explained India's multiple moves on the Israel-Palestine conflict over the past few days that received sharper focus because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Israel.
- Earlier this week, **India opted out of a joint appearance of member nations at the UN criticising Israel for its continued expansion of West Bank settlements**. India did not initially sign a statement critical of Israel that was endorsed by 85 member states. But, more than 24 hours later, India signed the statement that was read out by the Palestinian Ambassador to the UN criticising the Israeli government for its policy of expanding settlements in the West Bank.
- Israel's recent decisions asking existing Palestinian landholders of West Bank for proof of ownership and facilitating outside settlers to acquire land in the enclave have drawn strong condemnation from multiple quarters.

## ❖ 'AI summit drew \$250-billion investment commitments'

**Context: Calling the AI Impact Summit a "landmark moment for India's global leadership in Artificial Intelligence", IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday said the summit attracted \$250 billion investments in AI infrastructure and saw more than five lakh visitors.**

- Mr. Vaishnaw said the summit also got **\$20 billion in deep tech venture** commitments. "Now we will take our IndiaAI Mission to the next level, where we will go to a totally new level of [large language] models, a new level of common compute, and a new level of safety," he said.
- Mr. Vaishnaw said a 'Delhi Declaration' for AI among several countries would be unveiled. Over 70 countries had signed it, he said, adding that he hoped to surpass the tally achieved in **Paris last year at the AI Action Summit**. Ministerial delegations from some countries are still taking a call on signing the pact.
- The Minister appeared to indicate that both the U.S. and China had signed the declaration. "All the major countries have already signed," he said. "If you feel that somebody has not signed, you need not speculate on that. All the people who matter in AI, they have all signed."

- The summit was held at the sprawling Bharat Mandapam, with more than 500 individual sessions and over 400 exhibitors with booths. It was held in India after similar summits in the U.K., Paris, and Seoul.
- The event was significantly oversubscribed, with attendees overwhelming organisers in the first few days, leading to logistical issues that eased up later in the week as attendance became more manageable.

### ❖ **Modi holds talks with UN chief, other world leaders**

**Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi held bilateral talks with top leaders of Mauritius and Slovakia.**

- Mr. Modi also held a meeting with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and discussed how the global body can play a “constructive role” in making use of artificial intelligence inclusive.
- The Prime Minister met Mr. Guterres and other leaders on the sidelines of the AI Impact Summit.
- Following his talks with Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Mr. Modi said both sides would continue to work in close cooperation to ensure regional security and prosperity.
- Mr. Modi also described **Mauritius as a vital partner in India’s MAHASAGAR vision.**
- Mr. Modi said he and Slovak President Peter Pellegrini **discussed bilateral cooperation in areas of defence, space and digital public infrastructure.**

### ❖ **PM meets Sri Lankan President, discusses areas of cooperation**

**Context: Meeting on the sidelines of the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake “took stock” of progress in bilateral relations, according to the leaders’s social media posts.**

- “Strengthening friendship with a valued neighbour! It was wonderful meeting President Dissanayake in Delhi.
- We took stock of the progress in India-Sri Lanka relations in the recent times. We also discussed avenues of cooperation in areas such as energy, connectivity, infrastructure, healthcare, skilling, culture, blue economy and more,” Mr. Modi said in his post on X.
- Sri Lankan President Dissanayake said the leaders held “extensive discussions on strengthening our historic ties and expanding economic, trade, and cultural cooperation”. Further, he expressed gratitude for India’s “exceptional support” during the recent Cyclone Ditwah.
- The messages had no mention of any specific India-backed project, or of the Tamil question that India has periodically raised with the Sri Lankan leadership in the past.
- The leaders met less than two months after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited Colombo in the wake of Cyclone Ditwah. In addition to supporting Sri Lanka in immediate relief and rescue efforts, India pledged a “reconstruction package” of \$450 million.

## ❖ AI can help India achieve Viksit Bharat goal, but poses high risk to jobs: IMF chief

**Context: IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on Friday said artificial intelligence could lift global growth by 0.8% and help India achieve the Viksit Bharat goal, but poses significant risk of displacement of jobs and financial stability.**

- While being optimistic about the technology, Ms. Georgieva cautioned against “sugarcoating” the impact of AI and called for striking a balance between building and managing AI as a “force for good, or a force for evil”.
- **“AI can lift up global growth by almost a percentage point. We say 0.8%. It would mean that the world would grow faster than it did before the COVID pandemic. And that is fantastic for creating more opportunities, more jobs.**
- This is the magnitude that we see for India, and it would mean that India’s Viksit Bharat is achievable,” Ms. Georgieva said at the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. She said AI creates potential for countries that go fast on digital infrastructure, skills, and adoption of AI, and countries must embrace the opportunities, while being mindful of the risks.

### **Three major risks**

- “I am very optimistic about AI. I’m also not naive, it brings significant risks,” she said while listing out three major risks from AI.
- First, it brings the risk of making countries and the world less fair as some countries will have the technology and others would not, and the other is the risk of financial stability, wherein AI could get loose and create havoc on financial markets.
- Also, it brings the risk of displacement of jobs with no good thinking about how to help people find their place in the new AI economy.
- “We calculated this risk as very high. We actually see the impact of AI on the labour market like a tsunami hitting it. **Globally, 40% of jobs will be affected by AI, some enhanced, others eliminated. In emerging markets 40%, but in advance economies, 60%. And that is happening over a relatively short period of time,**” Ms. Georgieva said.
- She said the IMF will continue to work with countries to understand what is happening in AI and then how to project it for policies for the future.
- An IMF research on how AI is affecting the labour market showed that in United States, one in 10 jobs already requires additional skills and for those who have the skills, the job pays better.

## ❖ PAC pulls up govt. for slow implementation of SANKALP scheme

**Context: Panel questions govt. over absence of a central monitoring mechanism and gaps in due diligence; CAG had flagged shortfalls in financial progress**

- The **Public Accounts Committee (PAC)** of Parliament, chaired by senior Congress leader **K.C. Venugopal**, criticised the government for what members described as “lackadaisical” implementation of the **Skill Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP) scheme**, a flagship programme of the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship**.

- The panel was examining a **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report that highlighted significant delays and shortfalls in both financial and physical progress under the scheme. According to the CAG, only 44% of the budgeted provision for SANKALP was disbursed between 2017-18 and 2023-24 (as of October 2023). The audit also flagged weak adherence to implementation guidelines and a sluggish pace of execution across components.**
- **Approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs in October 2017 with a total outlay of ₹4,455 crore, SANKALP was designed to strengthen short-term skill training through better institutional frameworks, enhanced industry linkages, and targeted inclusion of marginalised communities.**
- **The scheme was slated to be financed through a World Bank loan of ₹3,300 crore, State leverage of ₹660 crore, and industry leverage of ₹495 crore.**
- **Launched in 2018, SANKALP was originally scheduled for completion by March 2023 but was later extended to March 2024. Against the first tranche of the agreed loan of \$250 million, the Bank disbursed ₹1,606.15 crore (86%), but the Ministry utilised only ₹850.71 crore as of December 2023.**
- The CAG attributed part of the delay to “non-preparedness” within the Ministry before the commencement of the loan period. The PAC members echoed this during the meeting, questioning the government over the absence of a central monitoring mechanism and gaps in due diligence.

### ❖ **New IIT-M technique to accurately measure blood clotting time will help implant makers**

**Context: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras have secured a patent for a technique that uses changes in reflected light on the surface of implants to detect blood clot formation.**

- While it will allow manufacturers to use this technique while researching the viability of materials to be used for implants, it also could also be used to test water purity, among other applications, the researchers claimed.

Improving clot testing

- **Haemocompatibility is the ability of a material or medical device to interface with blood without inducing adverse reactions, including clotting.** It is an important parameter to be considered before developing any material to fashion a device — including stents, heart valves and catheters — that will come into contact with blood.
- **The haemocompatibility test also helps to plan for and titrate the dose of anti-coagulation medicine** to be given to a patient, post surgery. This is where IIT-M researchers have stepped in, to offer an optics-based solution to improve the accuracy of this test.
- Subhashree Mishra, Govinda Chandra Behera, Vignesh Muthuvijayan, and Somnath Chanda Roy described the technique in an article published in the journal Review of Scientific Instruments.

- “When blood comes into contact with a foreign material (as used in implants) it begins to clot. When we plan to build implants, we need to check how much time blood is taking to clot over the foreign device. Despite several technological advancements in biomedical devices, issues related to thrombosis remain a persistent challenge,” explained Ms. Mishra, an IIT-M research scholar.
- **The two techniques in use today — the mechanical tilting method, and the free haemoglobin method — are not precise**, she said.
- “We set out to address the shortcomings of the conventional techniques to measure blood clotting,” she added. Researchers used the optics to measure this blood clotting time.
- **“The surface of any implantable device will have a reflective surface.** When blood touches this surface, and the blood clotting process begins, the surface becomes turbid, and the reflectivity of the surface will change. When it does, it will trigger a change in voltage in a connected, highly sensitive photodetector,” Ms. Mishra said, adding that the time taken for this “voltage change” corresponds to clotting time. “The results, from our study, were accurate; and even milliseconds are counted,” she added.
- “We received the patent for this technique last year,” IIT-M Physics professor Dr. Roy said. “We are at the initial stage of discussions with manufacturers. This will enable them to quantitatively screen materials for blood compatibility at the research stage. It can help them distinguish between materials that may be similar but behave very different during clot formation, and has the potential to significantly reduce clot-related risks for patients,” he added.

### Wider applications

- The team is also looking at deploying the technique for other real-world applications, Dr. Roy said, primarily to gauge the purity of water. “With a substrate, and a few changes, it will be able to check even trace impurities in water. There will be clear industry uses for this also,” he added.

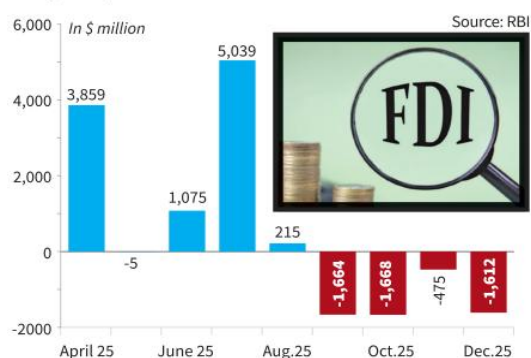
### ❖ Net FDI into India negative for fourth straight month

**Context: Reserve Bank of India data show gross foreign direct investment into India stood at a five-month high, but was overshadowed by outflows**

- Net foreign direct investment (FDI) remained **negative** for the fourth consecutive month in December 2025, coming in at **-\$1.6 billion**, due to repatriation by foreign companies in India and outward investments by Indian companies exceeding the amount of direct investment entering the country, an analysis of the latest data from the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** show.
- According to the RBI data, gross inflows of direct investment stood at a five-month high of \$8.6 billion in December 2025, which was also 17.2% higher than in December 2024.

#### Red streak

Net FDI into India was negative for the fourth consecutive month in **Dec. 2025** due to record levels of repatriation by foreign companies in India



- **“Gross inward FDI** remained robust in December, with Singapore, the Netherlands and Mauritius accounting for more than 80% of total inflows,” the RBI noted in its monthly bulletin report. “The major recipient sectors were transport, manufacturing, computer services, and electricity and other energy generation, distribution and transmission.”
- However, while inflows witnessed relatively robust growth, outflows exceeded them. Repatriation and disinvestments by foreign companies operating in India increased to nearly \$7.5 billion in December 2025, the highest since at least January 2021, the earlier period for which data is readily available.
- Outward investments by Indian companies increased to \$2.7 billion December, up 30.5% over December 2024 and 78% higher than in November 2025.
- “For outward FDI, key destinations were Singapore, the U.S., the UAE, the U.K. and the Netherlands and the major sectors included financial, insurance and business services, and wholesale/retail trade, restaurants, and hotels,” the report noted.
- In earlier editions of the report, the RBI had said that uncertainty over the India-U.S. trade agreement and the 50% tariffs had led to investor hesitation. The data for December 2025 comes before the announcement of the Interim Agreement with the U.S. and the Free Trade Agreement with the European Union, and so likely also reflects this sentiment.
- In this edition, the RBI noted that the announcement of both deals had led to portfolio investors returning to India.
- “Foreign portfolio investments (FPIs) staged a comeback in February with investor sentiments turning around following the India-EU free trade agreement and the interim India-U.S. trade deal,” the report said.

### ❖ **Govt. announces 7 additional measures under Export Promotion Mission**

**Context: The Ministry of Commerce on Friday introduced seven additional measures under the Export Promotion Mission which is meant to strengthen micro, medium and small enterprises (MSMEs) to compete in global markets.**

- According to a statement from the Ministry, the interventions would seek to “address structural constraints faced by MSMEs including high cost of capital, limited access to diversified trade finance instruments, compliance burdens in international markets, logistics disadvantages, and barriers to market entry”.
- The measures seek to enable exporters to access new markets or those with higher element of risk, through varied risk-sharing mechanisms and credit instruments.
- Aiming to provide credit assistance to e-commerce exporters, the provisions would offer structured credit facilities that would provide interest subvention and partial credit guarantees.
- Among them, the direct e-commerce credit facility, meant to provide working capital as an avenue for risk mitigation, would provide support up to ₹50 lakh with 90% guarantee coverage. The overseas inventory credit facility would extend support of up to ₹5 crore with 75% guarantee coverage. For both, an interest subvention of 2.75% would be available. This is subject to entities not breaching the upper limit of ₹15 lakh per applicant in a year.

- “These structured mechanisms aim to strengthen exporter confidence and liquidity flows,” the Ministry explained.
- Welcoming the move, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) said this would “significantly ease working capital pressures”. “Lower cost of finance and improved liquidity cycles will enable MSMEs to price competitively, accept larger orders and strengthen their credibility with overseas buyers. Shared-risk credit mechanisms are also expected to encourage first-time exporters and promote product and market diversification,” the industry body observed.
- To support exporters institute warehouse overseas and fulfilment infrastructure, the latest measures will provide up to 30% of the approved project cost.

### ❖ ‘EU, U.S. trade deals to boost economy; growth resilient’

**Context: India’s free trade deals with the European Union and the U.S. are likely to play a significant role for the economy in the coming years, as foreign portfolio investments and the rupee staged a comeback post the two announcements, the RBI’s bulletin said.**

- An article published in the Reserve Bank’s February bulletin also emphasised the domestic economy remained resilient, with quarterly results of listed private companies showing strengthening of aggregate sales growth.
- Industrial activity remained strong, and the services sector sustained its healthy growth.
- The Union Budget 2026-27 reaffirmed the government’s commitment to fiscal consolidation without diluting the focus on long-term growth, with stepped-up allocation towards capital expenditure, said the article on the state of the economy.

### ❖ Core sector growth slows to 4% in Jan., casts shadow on IIP

**Context: Production growth of India’s eight key infrastructure sectors slowed to a two-month low of 4% in January, as per official data.**

- It was 5.1% in January 2025 and 4.7% in December 2025. Crude oil and natural gas output recorded negative growth in January. Production of refinery products remained flat.
- Production growth of coal and cement moderated to 3.1% and 10.7% during the month under review against 4.6% and 14.3%, respectively, in January 2025.
- However, fertilizer, steel and electricity output recorded a positive growth during the month.
- During the April-January of this fiscal, growth of core sector industries was down to 2.8%, compared with 4.5% a year earlier.
- Aditi Nayar, chief economist, ICRA Ltd. said the slowdown was broad-based with as many as seven of the eight sectors seeing a deterioration in YoY growth performance.
- “Given the trends in core output, IIP (Index of Industrial Production) growth is likely to slow down in January, although we expect the growth in the non-core part of the IIP to continue to outperform core industries’ output, as was the trend in Q3 FY2026..” Consequently, ICRA expects IIP growth to ease to 5.5% in January from 7.8% in December.

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