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JANUARY WEEK 4

19-01-2026 TO 24-01-2026

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❖ Include digital currency link on BRICS agenda: RBI to govt.

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recommended to the Centre that a proposal connecting the central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) of BRICS countries be included on the agenda for the 2026 summit of the grouping, two sources have said.

- The proposal seeks to make cross-border payments easier, in a move that could reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar as geopolitical tensions rise. The RBI's recommendation builds on a 2025 declaration at the BRICS summit in Brazil, which pushed for interoperability between members' payment systems to make cross-border transactions more efficient.
- The RBI has publicly expressed interest in linking India's digital rupee with other nations' CBDCs to expedite cross-border transactions and bolster its currency's global usage. It has, however, said its efforts to promote the rupee's global use are not aimed at promoting de-dollarisation.
- India will host the next BRICS summit later this year. If the RBI's recommendation is accepted, a proposal to link the digital currencies of BRICS members would be put forward for the first time. The BRICS includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, among others. The initiative could irritate the U.S., which has warned against any moves to bypass the dollar. U.S. President Donald Trump has previously said the BRICS alliance is "anti-American" and he threatened to impose tariffs on its members.
- While none of the BRICS members have fully launched their digital currencies, all five main members have been running pilot projects.
- India's digital currency — the e-rupee — has attracted a total of 7 million retail users since its launch in December 2022, while China has pledged to boost the international use of the digital yuan.
- The RBI has encouraged the adoption of the e-rupee by enabling offline payments, providing programmability for government subsidy transfers and by allowing fintech firms to offer digital currency wallets.
- The RBI and the central bank of Brazil did not respond to emails seeking comment. The People's Bank of China said it had no information to share on the subject in response to a request for comment; the South African and Russian central banks declined to comment.
- For the BRICS digital currency linkages to be successful, elements like interoperable technology, governance rules and ways to settle imbalanced trade volumes would be among the discussion topics, one of the sources said.

Ease of payment

If the proposal is accepted, a plan to link digital currencies will be put forward at the 2026 BRICS summit in India

■ The move could reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar as geopolitical tensions rise

■ While none of the BRICS members have fully launched their digital currencies, all five main members have been running pilot projects

■ India's digital currency - e-rupee - has attracted a total of 7 million retail users since its launch in December 2022



- The source cautioned that hesitation among members to adopt technological platforms from other countries could delay work on the proposal and concrete progress would require consensus on tech and regulation.
- One idea that is being explored to manage potential trade imbalances is the use of bilateral foreign exchange swap arrangements between central banks, both the sources said.
- Previous attempts by Russia and Indian government to conduct more trade in their local currencies hit roadblocks.
- Russia accumulated large balances of the Indian rupee for which it found limited use, prompting India's central bank to permit the investment of such balances in local bonds.
- Weekly or monthly settlements for transactions are being proposed to be made via the swaps, the second source said.

❖ IMF upgrades India's growth projection for current financial year from 6.6% to 7.3%

Context: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised upwards its estimate of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the current financial year 2025-26 to 7.3% from its earlier prediction of 6.6%.

- This upward revision, the IMF said in its January 2026 World Economic Outlook update released on Monday, was primarily a reflection of stronger-than-expected growth in the third quarter, and "strong momentum" in the fourth quarter of the financial year.
- "In India, growth is revised upward by 0.7 percentage point to 7.3% for 2025 [FY 2025-26], reflecting the better-than-expected outturn in the third quarter of the year and strong momentum in the fourth quarter," the report said. "Growth is projected to moderate to 6.4% in 2026 and 2027 as cyclical and temporary factors wane," it added.

Slower figure

- The IMF's prediction of 7.3% growth for 2025-26 is just marginally slower than the 7.4% the Union government predicted for the same period.
- For the global economy, the report projects growth to remain "resilient" at 3.3% in calendar year 2026 and at 3.2% in 2027, largely the same as the 3.3% estimated for 2025.
- These forecasts entail a small upward revision for 2026 and no change for 2027 as compared with the predictions made in the October 2025 World Economic Outlook. "This steady performance on the surface results from the balancing of divergent forces," the report said.



■ The Centre has predicted 7.4% GDP growth for 2025-26

■ IMF projects growth to moderate to 6.4% in 2026 and 2027 as cyclical and temporary factors wane

■ Inflation expected to go back to near-target levels of 4% set by RBI, says IMF

■ Global economic growth projected to remain 'resilient' at 3.3% in calendar year 2026 and at 3.2% in 2027

Turbulent times

- “Headwinds from shifting trade policies are offset by tailwinds from surging investment related to technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), more so in North America and Asia than in other regions, as well as fiscal and monetary support, broadly accommodative financial conditions, and adaptability of the private sector.”
- On the inflation front, the report predicted that inflation in India is expected to go back to near-target levels after a decline in 2025 driven by subdued food prices. The Reserve Bank of India’s target for inflation is 4%.

❖ Electronics City Industrial Township Authority is a ‘public authority’, rules commission

Context: The Karnataka State Information Commission has brought the Electronics City Industrial Township Authority (ELCITA) under the purview of the Right to Information Act by declaring it as a “public authority,” and has asked the authority to furnish information within a timeframe in future.

- Stating that though ELCITA does not have an elected body, the commission has said that it has been set up by the government and had all the powers of a local body, including collection of tax. It had been set up under the Karnataka Municipalities Act, and was acting like a town municipality by being responsible for management, finances and development issues.
- The commission has also ordered the ELCITA to appoint assistant public information officer and first appeal authority.
- The recent order by Information Commissioner Rudranna Harthikote came on an appeal by Ganesh Kumar M., who said that the ELCITA was formed through a government gazette without which it cannot exist and questioned the tax collection power if it was a private entity. He had sought details about development works and the tendering process.
- In its defence, the authority cited Supreme Court order in the Thalappalam Cooperative Bank v/s Kerala government and two cases settled by the Madras High Court and argued that it does not fall under the ambit of being a “public authority.”
- However, the commission noted that Electronics City was developed by the Karnataka government-owned KEONICS in 1970 to promote electronic industries that was later transferred to Electronics City Industrial Association for managing the area in 1997.
- The ELCITA was formed in 2013 under Karnataka Municipalities Act 1964 to manage public services such as roads, water supply and cleanliness. Of the total tax collected, which is a responsibility of the government, by the authority, 30% is shared with three village panchayats, it noted.
- Mr. Harthikote has pointed out that any authority formed through a law passed by Parliament or the State legislature or the government order comes under the RTI Act as “public authority” and hence ELCITA also comes under the ambit of the RTI Act.

- While any authority that secures financial aid directly or indirectly becomes a “public authority”, the ELCITA also has government nominees in its management. The order also cites a Madras High Court case in which Tiruppur Area Development Board was declared as “public authority” and brought under the purview of RTI Act. Similarly, the Noida Authority has been declared as a “public authority.”

❖ India signs Letter of Intent to elevate defence ties with UAE

Context: The signing of the pact comes amid increasing Saudi-Pakistan defence cooperation in the Arabian peninsula and especially in Yemen; the two sides also ink energy deal during UAE President’s visit.

- Against the backdrop of growing military tension in the Gulf region, the United Arab Emirates and India signed a “Letter of Intent for a Bilateral Strategic Defence Partnership” on Monday. The Letter of Intent was sealed during the three-hour visit by the President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, when the two sides set a goal of doubling bilateral trade to \$200 billion by 2032.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the UAE leader at the Palam airport and the two leaders discussed, among other issues, the situation in Gaza where U.S. President Donald Trump’s peace plan will be tested in the coming weeks as well as the protests in Iran. In a press briefing after the departure of the dignitaries, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said the two leaders also discussed the situation in Yemen over which Saudi Arabia’s relation with the UAE has nosedived.
- In response to a question on whether the India-UAE strategic defence partnership could drag India into a future conflict scenario in the Gulf region, Mr. Misri said the Letter of Intent was aimed at the “work on concluding a framework agreement for Strategic Defence Partnership”. “So I would really characterise it as a natural evolution from the already considerable defence cooperation between the two countries and not necessarily a response to any specific event that may have taken place in the region or of any intent to get involved in a hypothetical future scenario in the region,” said Mr. Misri.
- There has been greater involvement of Pakistani military in safeguarding Saudi defence and security interests in the Arabian peninsula and especially in Yemen. The Saudi-Pakistan defence cooperation has intensified since the two countries signed a mutual defence agreement on September 17, 2025.
- The Saudi-Pakistan military alliance has been active in the Yemen theatre and that has increased pressure on the UAE.
- During the brief visit, the two sides also signed an energy deal involving the Hindustan Petroleum Company Ltd (HPCL) and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company Gas (ADNOC) that will allow purchase of 0.5 Million Metric Tonnes Per Annum (MMPTA) LNG by the HPCL from ADNOC over 10 years starting from 2028.
- Another Letter of Intent was signed between the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre and the Space Agency of the UAE for the development of space industry in the UAE.

❖ Foreign Ministers of India, Poland spar over neighbours

Context: India and Poland sparred over their respective regional rivals as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Polish Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Radoslaw Sikorski aired their differences over Pakistan and Russia on Monday as the two Ministers met for talks in New Delhi.

- Taking aim at Poland's renewed ties with Pakistan, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar told visiting Mr. Sikorski that India expects its partners not to help "fuel" terrorism in the neighbourhood. Mr. Jaishankar also delivered a severe message to the visiting dignitary about the European Union's sanctions against India's trade and oil imports from Russia, calling it "selective targeting".
- In televised opening remarks at Hyderabad House, Mr. Jaishankar said he wanted to "discuss some of [Mr. Sikorski's] recent travels to the region", a direct reference to the Polish FM's visit to Pakistan in October 2025, where he had met Pakistan's top leadership. The visit to Pakistan by Mr. Sikorski appears to have upset the government as it came a few months after the India-Pakistan conflict in May.
- "Poland should display zero tolerance for terrorism and not help fuel the terrorist infrastructure in our neighbourhood," Mr. Jaishankar said.
- Speaking to reporters after the meeting at Hyderabad House, Mr. Sikorski said that the conversation about India and Poland's respective regions had been "frank", and said that while the two sides agreed on concerns over terrorism, India's participation in "Zapad-2025" military exercises in Russia and Belarus was seen as "threatening".
- "We all have regional concerns and we all have neighbours, and with neighbours you have opportunities and challenges," Mr. Sikorski said, adding that on terrorism India and Poland are of "one mind".
- "We also have concerns. India took part in the Zapad exercises in Russia that we find threatening," he stated.
- The exchange of differences between Delhi and Warsaw was seen as unusual given that the two countries have been improving relations in recent years, and India and the European Union are close to a major trade agreement next week.
- During talks, Mr. Jaishankar turned to the issue of India's imports of Russian oil that he said Mr. Sikorski had been speaking about "publicly" during his visit. In Jaipur on Monday, the Polish Foreign Minister had said that he was "pleased" that India had cut its purchase of Russian oil..
- "I have repeatedly underlined that the selective targeting of India is both unfair and unjustified. I do so again today," Mr. Jaishankar said.

❖ Himachal Cabinet allows 'orphan and widow cess' on fuel

Context: The Himachal Pradesh Cabinet gave nod to promulgate an ordinance to levy a dedicated "orphan and widow cess" on petrol and high-speed diesel at the point of first sale within the State.

- The cess will be non-burdensome to consumers, while ensuring the availability of adequate financial resources for the effective implementation of welfare schemes for orphan and widows, said a statement.

- It gave its approval to adopt the national policy on geothermal energy to facilitate the exploration and development of untapped geothermal energy resources in the State. It approved the Directorate of Energy as the nodal agency for the implementation of the policy.
- The Cabinet decided to establish four laboratories for nutritional profiling and strengthening of the food testing eco-system.
- It decided to allow Alliance Air to operate 46- seater aircraft on the Delhi-Shimla-Delhi and Shimla-Dharamshala-Shimla routes, the statement said.

❖ **EC to host international conference on election management, democracy**

Context: Around a 100 delegates from over 70 countries will take part in the inaugural India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM), 2026 that will be held in the national capital this week.

- The three-day conference, being organised by the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM), a body under the Election Commission of India (EC), is expected to be the largest global conference of its kind hosted by India in the field of democracy and election management.
- It is being held at Bharat Mandapam from January 21 to 23. Nearly 100 international delegates, representing over 70 countries from across the world, are expected, along with representatives of international organisations, foreign missions in India, and academic and practising experts in the electoral domain, the EC said in a statement.
- The Chief Election Commissioner of India, Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, will receive the delegates and inaugurate the session on January 21.
- The three-day programme includes general and plenary sessions for election management bodies (EMBs), besides thematic sessions focusing on global electoral issues, model international electoral standards, and innovations and best practices in electoral processes. A total of 36 thematic groups, led by the CEOs of States and Union Territories and supported by national and international academic experts, will contribute to in-depth deliberations during the conference.

40 bilateral meetings

- The EC will hold over 40 bilateral meetings with the EMBs for further discussions and cooperation on various challenges confronting them around the world. The commission will formally launch ECINET, the EC's one-stop digital platform for all election-related information and services.
- An exhibition showcasing the magnitude and complexity of conducting elections in India, along with the recent initiatives taken by the EC to strengthen the two pillars of elections, preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of elections, will also be held.

❖ Govt. removes QCO on textile machinery imports

Context: The Union Ministry of Heavy Industries has rescinded its order issued on August 24, 2024 relating to quality standards for machinery and electrical equipment safety.

- With this, there will be no quality control standards for imported textile machinery. Weaving and processing machinery are imported by many textile units and the textile industry has been demanding withdrawal of the quality standards order on machinery. Though the order was introduced in 2024, the Centre postponed implementing it. Now, the government has removed the quality control order on all machinery.

❖ China's population drops for fourth year; births at historic low

Context: China's population shrank for the fourth consecutive year as birth rates in 2025 fell by about 10 million from a decade earlier, a trend widely blamed on the long-term effects of the former one-child policy.

- According to the data released by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on Monday, only 7.92 million babies were born in 2025 compared to 9.54 million in 2024, a decline of 17%.
- This marked the lowest birth figure since records began in 1949 and broke the previous lowest record set in 2023, the year India overtook China as the most populous country, according to a UN report.
- China's population fell by 3.39 million people last year compared to 2024.
- Meanwhile, about 11.31 million people died last year – one of the highest totals in five decades.
- At the end of 2024, the number of people aged 60 and above in China had hit 310 million.



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Context: In what has now become a familiar scene, Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi declined to read out his customary address prepared by the State government on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, and walked out of the House.

- Shortly after his exit, the Lok Bhavan issued a statement saying that Mr. Ravi had declined to read the address as it contained “numerous unsubstantiated claims and misleading statements”. Besides, several crucial issues troubling the people were ignored and the Governor’s microphone “was repeatedly switched off and he was not allowed to speak”, it said.
- Disapproving of Mr. Ravi’s action, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin moved a resolution urging the Assembly to take on record only the approved Governor’s Address. The House adopted the resolution unanimously. Mr. Stalin announced that the DMK would take steps for a Constitution amendment to do away with the practice of commencing the first Assembly session of the year with the Governor’s address.
- During the remainder of the session, a debate will be held on the Motion of Thanks to the Governor for his Address to the House.
- Soon after the Governor was escorted in, all members stood for the singing of the Tamil Thaaai Vaazhthu, the State anthem. While others settled in their seats after the song, the Governor initially kept standing, as the tablet placed in front of him displayed the text of the prepared address, to help him read from. He later took his seat.
- The Governor began by extending New Year wishes to the members but then went on to digress from the prepared address. Speaker M. Appavu, seated next to him, stood up and requested the Governor to read out the speech given to him by following the procedure. Realising that the Governor had ignored his request, the Speaker continued to plead with him to read out the prepared speech.
- An uneasy silence prevailed among members of the House, with Mr. Stalin and Leader of the Opposition Edappadi K. Palaniswami in attendance, as the customary procedure was not being honoured, yet again. During the past three years, the Governor has either digressed from the prepared speech or refused to read it out and walked out of the House.
- Citing Constitutional provisions, the Speaker reminded the House about the duties of the Governor. “The Governor cannot voice out his opinion in the Assembly. Please follow the procedure,” the Speaker requested repeatedly, reminding the Assembly that only its 234 elected members are permitted to express their opinions on the floor of the House.
- Later, the Governor chose to walk out of the House. Sources said that Assembly officials escorted the Governor and his aides to his convoy.

Context: Pinarayi Vijayan says Governor made changes to speech prepared by government in Assembly; only the Cabinet-approved version will prevail in keeping with constitutional practice, he adds.

- The Kerala Legislative Assembly saw extraordinary scenes after Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar had made changes to the policy speech prepared by the State government while delivering the customary address at the start of the first session of the New Year.
- Back in the Assembly after seeing off the Governor, Mr. Vijayan said Mr. Arlekar had made changes to paragraphs 12, 15 and 16 of the Cabinet-approved text of the speech. While certain sections were omitted, some additions were made elsewhere, he said.
- He said the Cabinet-approved version would prevail in keeping with the constitutional practice and legislative precedent in Kerala. “Since the Governor presents the policy of the State government in the House, paragraphs 12, 15 and 16 as approved by the Cabinet will prevail,” the Chief Minister said.
- Mr. Vijayan urged Speaker A.N. Shamseer to approve the speech ratified by the Cabinet as the official version of the address.
- The English and Malayalam copies of the policy address distributed to the MLAs and the press remained the versions approved by the Cabinet.
- There was no official response from the Governor’s office despite repeated efforts.
- In the approved text, paragraph 12 read: “Despite these social and institutional achievements, Kerala continues to face severe fiscal stress arising from a series of adverse Union Government actions that undermine the constitutional principles of fiscal federalism.” However, in the speech delivered by the Governor, the paragraph read: “Despite these social and institutional achievements, Kerala continues to face severe fiscal stress arising from curtailment of advances.”
- In paragraph 15, the Governor omitted the following section from the Cabinet-approved version: “Bills passed by State legislatures have remained pending for prolonged periods. My government has approached the Supreme Court on these issues, which have been referred to a Constitution Bench.”
- The Cabinet-approved section in paragraph 16 stated: “Tax devolution and Finance Commission grants are constitutional entitlements of States and not acts of charity, and any pressure on constitutional bodies entrusted with this task undermines federal principles.” Mr. Vijayan said the Governor prefaced this section with the words, “My government feels...”
- **Article 176 of the Constitution mandates a special address by the Governor to State legislatures at the commencement of the first session after a general election and at the start of the first session each year.** Mr. Arlekar marked the beginning of the first session of 2026 and the 16th and final session of the 15th Kerala Assembly. The State is due to go to the polls later this year.
- The CPI(M)-led Left government’s relations with Lok Bhavan have not been cordial in recent years. In January 2024, then Governor Arif Mohammed Khan had created headlines when he wrapped up his policy address in less than a minute. The

government's relationship with Mr. Arlekar had also soured over a number of issues, including delays in securing assent for Bills passed by the Assembly.

- At a press conference announcing the 16th session last week, Speaker A.N. Shamseer said that 14 Bills passed by the Kerala Assembly were awaiting assent.

❖ SIR order was legislative, approach liberal, says EC

Context: Countering attacks that SIR lacked statutory backing and the poll panel invented the procedure out of 'thin air', the EC says Article 324 provided it with the freedom to prepare the electoral roll.

- The Election Commission in the Supreme Court on Tuesday said the order declaring special intensive revision (SIR) was "legislative" in character and the mammoth exercise which followed to "purify" electoral rolls was marked by a "liberal approach".
- The poll body's submission before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant is despite reports that 6.5 crore names of electors have been excluded from draft electoral rolls in nine States and three Union Territories during the second phase of the SIR exercise.
- But the poll panel, represented by senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, said its authority to conduct and control elections were drawn from the vast reservoir of power found in Article 324 of the Constitution.
- Mr. Dwivedi said the powers of the commission were not just administrative in nature, but also adjudicatory and legislative. He referred to the powers under the Election Symbols Order to sit and decide which faction was the real one when a political party split as an illustration of its adjudicatory function.
- "The SIR order was legislative in character. It laid down the complete set of principles and documents required and how it would be done," Mr. Dwivedi submitted.
- Countering attacks from petitioners that the SIR did not have any statutory backing and the poll panel invented the procedure out of "thin air", Mr. Dwivedi said Article 324 provided the commission with the freedom to "deviate" as an enabling feature to prepare the electoral roll, considering the myriad situations that may occur in time.
- Besides, he said, Parliament and the poll panel enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. Both institutions existed to ensure that democracy functioned smoothly, that elections took place and Parliament was attended by elected representatives.
- Mr. Dwivedi said the powers of the poll panel have, over the years, been preserved and not "shut out". The senior advocate, explaining the liberal approach adopted in the SIR 2025, said the presumption was always in favour of citizenship.
- "It is not that we did not attach presumption... Had we not attached presumption, we would have asked everyone from 2003 to produce evidence," he submitted.
- Mr. Dwivedi said the people were excluded from the final list in Bihar due to deaths, duplication and migration. He said pre-filled enumeration forms were issued to all persons in electoral rolls up to June 2025. Probative value was attached to names already included in the electoral roll prepared after the 2002 SIR.
- "These people who could provide nexus with the 2002 list were not required to provide any documents," Mr. Dwivedi said.

- Others who could not show nexus had to only show any one of the 11-plus (including Aadhaar) indicative documents.
- “House-to-house survey with prefilled form was done. They (voters) simply needed to sign the forms. BLOs were charged with the responsibility of uploading them. Booth Level Agents of political parties were submitting 50 forms in a day,” said Mr. Dwivedi, detailing the liberal attitude taken in the 2025 SIR.

❖ SC to examine query by T.N., Kerala on whether ED is a ‘juristic person’

Context: The Supreme Court decided to examine petitions filed by the States of Kerala and Tamil Nadu asking if the Enforcement Directorate (ED), a Central agency, is a “juristic person” who can approach High Courts for enforcement of its “rights”.

- A ‘juristic’ person is a legal fiction by which a non-human, like an incorporated company, is recognised to have rights, duties, sue or be sued like a ‘natural’ person.
- A Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma took serious note of the question of law raised by the States, which have been riddled by ED raids and legal actions in recent times. The Bench issued a notice to the ED, posting the case for hearing after four weeks.
- Kerala said the ED cannot consider itself a “person” but is only a statutory creation.
- The train of events began with the ED filing a writ petition under Article 226 of the Constitution before the Kerala High Court. The agency had challenged a notification issued by the State in May 2021 setting up a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to investigate an audio clip and a letter from two accused persons in the gold smuggling case. The duo had alleged that ED officials were coaxing them to implicate persons holding high offices in the State. The State government had tasked the Inquiry Commission to probe if there was a conspiracy afoot against the State’s political leaders and, if so, to unearth the identity of those behind the plot.
- On hearing of Kerala’s cause, Tamil Nadu has joined ranks with its neighbour in the Supreme Court.
- Tamil Nadu accused the ED of indulging in a “gross and blatant abuse of the process of law by invoking the writ jurisdiction of the Madras High Court seeking mandamus for registration of a case relating to alleged illegal mining”. It argued that the ED’s writs in the High Court were “unmaintainable”.
- Both States want the Supreme Court to decide the question of law authoritatively.
- “A statutory body can exercise only the power conferred by the relevant statute and all statutory bodies need not be body corporate with power to sue. Only a body corporate, with power to sue specifically conferred by the statute, can claim legal status or juristic person, which the Enforcement Directorate admittedly does not have...,” Kerala argued.

❖ Activists urge SC to treat hate speech as a constitutional tort

Context: Prominent activists and religious leaders on Tuesday urged the Supreme Court to recognise hate speech as a “constitutional tort” rather than a mere disruption of law and order. They contended that its inherently “discriminatory” character strikes at the core of constitutional guarantees.

- A constitutional tort is a judicial remedy through which the State can be held vicariously liable for the actions of its agents when they violate constitutional guarantees.
- A Bench of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta was hearing a batch of petitions highlighting the rise in hate speech incidents and seeking directions to regulate religious gatherings and congregations that promote such practices. The Bench reserved its order and directed the parties to file their written submissions within two weeks.
- Appearing for activist Syeda Hameed and academic Alok Rai, advocate Shahrukh Alam submitted that hate speech could not be reduced to a routine policing concern. “Hate speech must be viewed beyond the prism of law and order, given its discriminatory impact. Treating it as a constitutional tort would ensure greater accountability,” she told the court.
- Echoing these concerns, advocate Nizam Pasha, appearing for journalist-petitioners Shaheen Abdullah and Qurban Ali, pointed out that despite the Supreme Court’s October 21, 2022, order directing States to register suo motu FIRs against those delivering hate speeches that incite communal violence, there had been little change on the ground.
- “Such speeches are often delivered by habitual offenders. There is clear prior knowledge of the nature of these religious congregations, yet there is persistent inaction by State investigating agencies,” Mr. Pasha said.
- He further contended that even when aggrieved individuals approach police stations seeking registration of FIRs, law enforcement authorities routinely flout the court’s directions. “In several cases, FIRs are either refused or, even when registered, the appropriate penal provisions are not invoked...,” he said.
- Mr. Pasha further apprised the Bench that there is a direct correlation between hate speech and hate crimes, with acts of violence frequently following incendiary public speeches. Urging the court not to dispose of the petitions, he sought continued judicial oversight of the matter.

❖ **Kisan Sabha flags draft Seeds Bill, says it is unacceptable**

- The provisions of the draft Seeds Bill undermine the role of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and other public sector research institutions and allow monopoly of the private sector over the seed sector, the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) said in its response to the Union Agriculture Ministry on the draft Seeds Bill.
- The AIKS asked the government to consult farmers’ organisations, state governments, and scientific communities engaged in the seed sector. “Any law on seeds should protect the basic rights of the farmers to grow, sow, re-sow, save, use, exchange, share or sell seeds. This should be protected as an inalienable right,” AIKS said.

❖ Congress urges Centre to ensure reservation in private institutions under Article 15(5)

Context: The Congress said that any regulator for higher education must be mandated to oversee the implementation of Article 15(5) of the Constitution, which empowers the state to provide reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in private educational institutions.

- Referring to the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, which seeks to establish a single regulator for higher education and was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 15, 2025, before being referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said such a body must have a clear mandate to ensure the implementation of Article 15(5).
- “Any such regulator should be mandated to oversee the implementation of Article 15(5) of the Constitution, which came into effect exactly 20 years ago today,” he said.

Full implementation

- He urged the Centre to fully implement Article 15(5) on the 20th anniversary of its enactment through the 93rd Constitutional Amendment by the Manmohan Singh-led UPA government.
- Calling it a historic moment, Mr. Ramesh said the amendment enabled the introduction of a 27% reservation for OBC students in Centrally funded higher education institutions (HEIs), including the IITs, IIMs, Central Universities, and NITs. “Since then, lakhs of students from the OBC communities have availed of this reservation, bringing economic and social mobility to millions,” he said.
- Article 15(5) also permits the government to mandate reservation for SC, ST and OBC students in private higher education institutions, Mr. Ramesh said, noting that its validity was upheld by the Supreme Court in the Pramati Educational and Cultural Trust vs Union of India judgment on May 6, 2014.

❖ PhonePe Gets SEBI nod for IPO, to file updated DRHP

- PhonePe has received SEBI approval for its IPO, and will be filing its Updated Draft Red Herring Prospectus (UDRHP) soon, setting the stage for India’s most anticipated fintech IPO in the near horizon, as per sources.
- The IPO will be an Offer For Sale by existing shareholders. The company will not be raising any additional primary capital in the IPO, the sources said. PhonePe leads India’s digital payments market with over 45% market share in UPI transactions.

❖ Will ensure U.S. govt. officials visit India regularly: envoy Gor

Context: Senator Daines concludes visit to persuade leaders to include ‘favourable’ pulse provisions in future FTA, pursue Trump administration’s interests.

- U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor said he would ensure that senior officials of the U.S. Government regularly travelled to India, even as U.S. Senator Steve Daines concluded a two-day visit to India, during which he tried to persuade the Indian side to include “favourable” pulse crop provisions in a future trade deal.

- During his visit, Mr. Daines met Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar, Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal, members of parliament, and U.S. and Indian business leaders.
- “I came to India to reaffirm our two countries’ shared values and strategic partnership and to advocate on behalf of Montana’s pulse crop farmers,” Mr. Daines said in a press statement.
- “I appreciated Minister Goyal for listening to our farmers’ concerns and will continue to work with President Trump to press this important priority.”
- A release by the U.S. embassy in New Delhi added that Mr. Daines “pursued interests of the Trump Administration as well as the people of Montana, including urging favourable pulse crop provisions in any future trade agreements between the United States and India”.
- The issue of allowing agricultural imports has been a sensitive one for India, which has resisted the inclusion of sensitive agricultural products in any free trade agreement it has signed so far. Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal has confirmed that sensitive agricultural issues would be excluded from the upcoming India-EU free trade agreement as well.
- The U.S., however, is a different matter as even Indian Government officials have conceded that the bigger the economy we are dealing with, the larger the concessions we would have to give. However, agriculture and dairy remain “big red lines” for India, as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in June 2025.
- Following his meeting with Mr. Daines, Mr. Goyal took to X to say that Mr. Gor, Mr. Daines and he had had a “productive exchange of views on our bilateral relationship”.
- “As we work to take the partnership between our two nations to the next level in cooperation, I will ensure that senior government officials will regularly travel to India,” Mr. Gor said.
- “As a key member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with extensive experience in Asia, Senator Daines’ meetings with official and private sector stakeholders in New Delhi were instrumental in advancing our bilateral relationship,” he added.

❖ In Dec., core sectors grew at 4-month high

Context: Growth in the eight core industries of the economy quickened to a four-month high of 3.7% in December on a bounce-back in electricity and coal sectors, official data showed.

- The December update of the Index of Eight Core Industries showed growth in December was, however, slower than the 5.1% logged a year earlier.
- Growth in the electricity sector came in at a nine-month high of 5.3% in December, snapping two months of consecutive contractions. This was, however, slower than the 6.2% growth the sector saw in December 2024.
- The coal sector saw growth accelerate to a four-month high of 3.6% in December 2025.
- The steel sector saw growth hasten to 6.85% from 6.7% in November and 7.3% in December 2024. The cement sector saw growth coming in at 13.5% in December 2025, albeit slower than 14.6% seen in November. However, December’s growth came on a high base of 10.3% in December 2024.

❖ Trump slams U.K.'s move to hand over Chagos Islands

Context: A startled British government defended its decision to hand sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, after U.S. President Donald Trump attacked the plan, which his administration had previously supported.

- Mr. Trump said that relinquishing the remote Indian Ocean archipelago, home to a strategically important American naval and bomber base, was an act of “stupidity” that shows why he needs to take over Greenland.
- “Shockingly, our brilliant NATO Ally, the United Kingdom, is currently planning to give away the Island of Diego Garcia, the site of a vital U.S. Military Base, to Mauritius, and to do so FOR NO REASON WHATSOEVER,” he said in a post on his social media platform Truth Social. “There is no doubt that China and Russia have noticed this act of total weakness.”
- “The U.K. giving away extremely important land is an act of GREAT STUPIDITY, and is another in a very long line of National Security reasons why Greenland has to be acquired,” Mr. Trump said.

99-year lease

- The United Kingdom and Mauritius signed a deal in May 2025 to give Mauritius sovereignty over the Chagos Islands after two centuries under British control, though the U.K. will lease back Diego Garcia where the U.S. base is located, for at least 99 years.
- The U.S. government welcomed the agreement at the time, saying it “secures the long-term, stable, and effective operation of the joint U.S.-U.K. military facility at Diego Garcia.”
- In recent years, the United Nations and its top court have urged Britain to return the islands to Mauritius, and the British government says it’s acting to protect the security of the base from international legal challenge.
- But the deal has met strong opposition from British opposition parties, which say that giving up the islands puts them at risk of interference by China and Russia.
- **The U.K. kept control of the Chagos Islands after Mauritius gained independence from Britain in the 1960s. But it evicted thousands of Chagos islanders, who have since mounted a series of legal claims for compensation in British courts. Over 10,000 displaced Chagossians and their descendants now live primarily in Britain, Mauritius and the Seychelles.**

Context: The Supreme Court said the Election Commission (EC) is blessed with the “widest discretions” but its “deviations” while revising electoral rolls, as in the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) exercise, cannot be “untrammelled or unregulated” in breach of principles of natural justice and procedure prescribed under the Registration of Electors Rules of 1960.

- Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, for the EC, submitted that the SIR was “sustainable” under Article 324 read with Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Section 21(3) of the Act clothes the EC with a residuary power to direct a special revision of the electoral roll for any constituency or part of a constituency in “such manner as it may think fit”.
- “But a special revision may involve serious consequences in the civil rights of a person who is already a voter. So, why should we not expect you [the EC] to have a procedure that is transparent,” Chief Justice Surya Kant, heading the Division Bench, asked the EC’s counsel.

Equality

- Mr. Dwivedi conceded that the EC’s deviations from procedure must embrace the constitutional guarantee of equality before the law, equal protection of the laws enshrined in Article 14, constitutional norms of transparency, and ease of voters.
- He, however, contended that Section 21(3) of the 1950 Act allowed the EC to travel beyond the prescribed limits to revise electoral rolls as long as the reasons were recorded and the procedure was fair and just. Section 21(3) unshackled the EC, he said.
- “You have the authority to deviate, but not by throwing out the Rules... Form 6 has six notified documents, your SIR has 11 documents. We would call upon you to answer if you can increase or eliminate documents which are already prescribed?” Justice Joymalya Bagchi, a member of the Division Bench, asked the poll body.
- Justice Bagchi drew Mr. Dwivedi’s attention to clause (2) of Rule 25 of the 1960 Rules, which mandated that an intensive revision of the electoral roll would include the preparation of a fresh roll in accordance with the procedure prescribed under Rules 4 to 23.
- “Rule 25 puts the shackles on you... It cannot be that an authority, however high, can be untrammelled or unregulated...” Justice Bagchi said, leaving it hanging for Mr. Dwivedi to grasp the court’s line of thought.
- Mr. Dwivedi argued that sub-section (3) of Section 21 was a step up from the preceding sub-section (2) of the 1950 Act. Sub-section (2) provided the EC with the authority to hold a revision of the electoral roll before an election.
- Justice Bagchi said the provision of summary revisions in the 1950 Act was a manifestation of the Parliament’s wisdom, as there was constant movement/migration of the population in the early years after Independence. There was a lot of flux then, he said. The Parliament knew it would take some years for the population to settle.

❖ Governor may skip parts of address

Context: Gehlot has expressed reservations over 11 paragraphs in the speech prepared by the State government criticising the VB-G RAM G Act.

- Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot is likely to skip certain portions of the text of his customary address to the joint session of the State legislature that begins.
- The Governor has expressed reservations over 11 paragraphs in the speech prepared by the Congress government in Karnataka. The paragraphs in question strongly criticise the Central government for introducing the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025, which has replaced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The objections also relate to references in the speech to “injustice” to the State of Karnataka in the devolution of funds, taxes, and grants.
- After a meeting with the Chief Minister late in the night over the development, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil told The Hindu that “a few words” in the speech had been modified following reservations expressed by the Governor, but there was no question of entirely dropping paragraphs, which had been cleared by the Cabinet.

After Kerala, TN

- Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi had declined to read out the customary address prepared by the government and walked out of the Assembly. Meanwhile, Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar addressed the Assembly after making changes to the speech drafted by the State government.
- The Karnataka government has convened a special legislative session from January 22 to 31 to discuss the repeal of the MGNREGA, and its replacement with the VB-G RAM G Act. At the conclusion of the session, the State government plans to pass a resolution opposing the new job scheme, and demanding the restoration of the MGNREGA. The State Cabinet had already adopted a similar resolution a few days ago.

❖ Team of experts to ‘define’ Aravallis

Context: The Supreme Court intends to have a team of domain experts help “define” the Aravalli Range, and draw a road map for permissible activities, including the possibility of regulated mining in one of the oldest and ecologically-sensitive mountain systems in the world.

- The committee would comprise experts from “different walks of life”, including environmentalists, scientists, foresters, and “special experts in regulated mining wherever the law permits”, a Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India Surya Kant.
- The court asked Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati and amicus curiae, senior advocate K. Parameshwar, to suggest names.
- The experts would work directly under the court’s supervision and control, Chief Justice Kant said.

- A previous Supreme Court judgment on November 20, 2025, upholding a Central committee's definition of the Aravalli, had led to public furore and apprehensions voiced about the ecological safety of the hill range. Elevations of 100 metres or above, and hill clusters, slopes, and hillocks located within 500 metres of each other, would be considered as the Aravalli, the earlier definition had said. The top court, however, ordered a stay of this judgment on December 29, 2025, after taking up the case again, suo motu.
- Senior advocate Kapil Sibal questioned the very exercise of trying to define the Aravalli. "Mountains cannot be defined. The Himalayas cannot be defined. These are sub-tectonic strata. If you try to define them, you will run into problems," Mr. Sibal advised the court.
- The Supreme Court, while staying its own judgment on the definition of the range, had found that only 1,048 Aravalli hills out of a total 12,081 in Rajasthan alone would meet the 100-metre elevation threshold and, consequently, the lower ranges would be "stripped off" the environmental protection, exposing them to unregulated mining.
- The court had agreed that it would be a "significant regulatory lacuna" in safeguarding the Aravalli. "This stay shall remain in effect until the present proceedings reach a State of logical finality, ensuring that no irreversible administrative or ecological actions are taken based on the current framework," the court had ordered.
- It had barred fresh or renewed mining leases in the Aravalli region without prior permission of the apex court.
- Chief Justice Kant admitted the intervention application represented by Mr. Sibal, saying this was not an adversarial litigation, and views and ideas were welcome.

❖ 'False marriage promise is not criminal if relationship fails'

Context: The newly-introduced offence under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which criminalises sexual intercourse by employing deceitful means, including a promise of marriage, punishes deceit, fraud and exploitation, but not disappointment, failed affection or the collapse of a relationship, said the High Court of Karnataka.

- "Section 69 [of BNS] criminalises sexual intercourse by employing deceitful means including a promise of marriage, without intention of fulfilment. The provision, though newly introduced, cannot be interpreted in a manner that allows it to become an instrument of retroactive criminalisation of consensual relationships upon the mere recital of promise," the court observed.
- Justice M. Nagaprasanna made these observations while quashing a criminal case filed against an advocate by a woman accusing him of having sexual relationship with her on the promise of marriage and later not honouring the promise. The woman had complained that the advocate, who she had approached in a cheque dishonour case in 2020, later became close to her in 2022 and allegedly had a physical relationship with her in 2023 with the promise of marriage but failed to adhere to it. The complaint was filed in December, 2024.

- However, the accused advocate denied having either a physical relationship with her or promising marriage, while alleging that the complaint was a concocted story and the complainant was in the habit of indulging in such acts of trapping men and registering criminal cases against them.
- The court, based on documents on the past and the present relationship of the complainant and other complaints lodged by her, said that “the complaint bears a strong imprint of manipulation and of an attempt to convert private discord into public prosecution”.
- “... it becomes difficult to comprehend, far less accept, how the complainant could credibly assert that she consented to sexual relationship on a promise of marriage, when she appears to have been in a subsisting marital relationship or at the very least, in a continuing domestic association, and is also mother of two children, one about 13 years old and the other about four years,” the court observed.
- The court noted from the records that the complainant had divorced her second husband in 2016 but the birth certificate of her child, who was born in 2020, shows her second husband as the father. Moreover, the four-year-old child has been living with his mother and father, the court said, while relying on recent photographs of the family produced before it.

❖ India mulls Trump Gaza Board invite, as Israel, UAE leaders join

Context: Sources say Arab leaders to be consulted at conference on January 30-31; decision must be considered taking into account India’s support for the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, say experts; Modi likely to travel to West Asia, Israel soon.

- As the government mulls over U.S. President Donald Trump’s invitation to join the U.S.-led Gaza “Board of Peace”, experts caution that India must consider the Board’s “legitimacy” and decide carefully. On Wednesday, a number of countries announced their joint decision to join the Board. They include Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Qatar, and the UAE.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also accepted the invitation.
- Sources here said Indian and Israeli diplomats were discussing possible visits by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel and Mr. Netanyahu to India soon.
- The visits are being discussed as part of a deeper engagement with the region and the Israel-Palestine conflict in the next few weeks.
- On January 30, New Delhi will host Foreign Ministers of the 22-member League of Arab States, and the government is expected to consult many of its close partners in the region about the way forward on the Gaza Peace Proposal promoted by the United States.
- According to sources, Mr. Modi is also planning a visit to West Asia next month, and has invitations to several countries in the region. A senior official confirmed that he is considering visiting Israel. Mr. Modi last visited Israel in 2017 and Palestine in 2018.
- According to the sources, Mr. Netanyahu has a long-pending visit planned to India, which was scheduled, but put off due to different reasons on at least three occasions last year.

Two-state solution

- The engagements are particularly significant after Mr. Trump sent a letter inviting leaders of about 60 countries, including India, Russia, China, Turkiye, Argentina, Brazil, Pakistan, and several West Asian and European countries. The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on whether Mr. Modi would join the Board of Peace, and an official said the matter was “under discussion”.
- According to experts, the decision must be considered carefully, taking into account India’s support for the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, as well as its commitment to helping the Palestinian people.
- “If there is peace in Gaza, that is good for the people there, and India should take a lead in humanitarian assistance, especially given medical expertise,” said former Ambassador Anil Trigunayat, pointing out that the U.S.’s peace plan included finding a pathway to the two-state solution, despite Israel’s opposition to it.
- However, he pointed out that India would find the “corporate governance model” proposed for the Gaza Peace Board, including a one billion dollar fee for permanent membership “troubling”.
- Others pointed to Pakistan’s invitation to the Board as well as an international stabilisation force (ISF) as concerning, as well as President Trump’s suggestion that the “peace model” could be an alternative to the United Nations.
- “Any engagement has to be assessed against clear principles: respect for international law, a defined and limited mandate, and consistency with existing multilateral frameworks, particularly the United Nations. India will presumably take a considered view, keeping in mind regional sensitivities, its long-standing positions, and the need to avoid open-ended or precedent-setting arrangement,” said former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Menon Rao, adding that the government would probably expect greater clarity on the mandate and mission of the Board before responding to the U.S.

Countries onboard

- Among those who had already agreed to join the Board are leaders of Argentina, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Morocco, and Canada. Ukraine and the United Kingdom have expressed their opposition to Russian President Vladimir Putin being invited.
- The U.S. has also nominated Mr. Trump as chair, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Mr. Trump’s special negotiator Steve Witkoff, Mr. Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair, billionaire U.S. financier Marc Rowan, World Bank President Ajay Banga, and Robert Gabriel from the U.S. National Security Council.

❖ ‘Freebies’ different from public welfare investment, says SC

Context: The Supreme Court drew a clear line between state functionaries splurging public money on irrational freebies and “investing” in welfare schemes for the marginalised sections.

- “Distribution of state largesse to individuals at a large scale is different from investing state largesse in public welfare schemes. That distinction should be kept in mind,” Chief Justice Surya Kant observed orally.

- The Supreme Court asked why there was no “dedicated diversion of revenue surplus for developmental purposes which would further the constitutional ideal of inclusivity through free medical care and education for the poor and those not in the creamy layer of the society. The state has a commitment towards this end”.

State’s obligation

- The Chief Justice said launching welfare schemes was an obligation the state had to achieve under the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution.
- The oral observations from the Bench, including Justice Joymalya Bagchi, was in response to an oral mentioning made by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay for early listing of a batch of petitions seeking a judicial declaration that irrational freebies offered by political parties to lure voters during poll time should be considered a “corrupt practice”.
- Mr. Upadhyay said when the petition was filed, the nation was in debt of ₹1.5 lakh crore, which had since increased to ₹2.5 lakh crore. Every Indian was in debt, and yet the state continued to rain freebies before elections, he submitted.
- “This is a very, very important matter,” Chief Justice Kant reacted, agreeing to list it early for hearing.

‘Parasitic existence’

- In January last year, a top court Bench headed by Justice (now retired) B.R. Gavai had asked whether untrammelled freebies lull the poor into a parasitic existence, depriving them of any initiative to find work, join the mainstream and contribute to national development.

❖ SC tells States to frame policy on police media briefing in 3 months

Context: The Supreme Court has directed the State governments to evolve a policy for police-media briefing modelled on a manual prepared by the court’s amicus curiae, senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, establishing a “principled, rights-compatible and investigation-safe framework”.

- The order was passed by a Bench headed by Justice M.M. Sundresh on a batch of petitions led by NGO People’s Union for Civil Liberties, which had in 2014 led to a significant judgment in which 16 mandatory guidelines were laid down as law to be complied with in the aftermath of a police encounter or a suspected extra-judicial killing.
- The court had charged the Home Ministry with the responsibility of preparing the manual for best practices to be followed in police media briefings. The task eventually fell on the amicus.
- In its order, the Supreme Court took on record the document prepared by Mr. Sankaranarayanan titled, ‘Police Manual for Media Briefing’, which was prepared after considering the views of the Union government and the practices prevalent at the international level.
- The order noted the lack of adequate interest shown throughout by the States despite repeated orders granting them time to participate.

- “We do not want to keep these matters pending any longer. We deem it appropriate to direct the States to evolve an appropriate policy for media briefing by taking into consideration the ‘Police Manual for Media Briefing’ furnished by the amicus curiae. The needful will have to be done within a period of three months from the date of receipt of a copy of this order,” the Supreme Court directed in its order on January 15, published on Wednesday.
- The Bench ordered the Supreme Court Registry to upload Mr. Sankaranarayanan’s work on the Supreme Court website within a period of two weeks.
- In his manual, Mr. Sankaranarayanan wrote that his work was in line with the “public’s legitimate interest in timely, accurate information” while safeguarding the need to safeguard the dignity, privacy, and fair-trial rights of victims, witnesses and suspects.
- It is also extremely vital in the current social media age that the police communicate only correct, verified and necessary information to the public, the manual said.

❖ Mozambican rights activist to get Indira Gandhi Peace Prize

Context: Mozambican rights activist and humanitarian Graca Machel has been selected for the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2025, the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust announced.

- The decision was taken by an international jury chaired by former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon.
- Ms. Machel was chosen for her “path-breaking work” in the fields of education, health and nutrition, economic empowerment and humanitarian action, carried out under difficult circumstances, the Trust said in a statement.
- The award carries a cash prize of ₹1 crore along with a citation and a trophy.
- Describing her as a distinguished African stateswoman and human rights advocate, the trust said Ms. Machel’s life’s work has been rooted in the struggle for self-determination and the protection of vulnerable communities.



Graca Machel

❖ ‘Big AI spending does not guarantee geopolitical power’

Context: Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has said that producing massive large language models (LLMs) does not necessarily give countries a geopolitical “edge” and that the return on the massive investments being made in AI technologies will go to countries that are able to deploy them profitably.

- The boom in countries with massive investment “might be leading to a situation” where the firms investing in the AI craze “go bust”, Mr. Vaishnaw said at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, on Tuesday.
- “If you look at the way AI is shaping geopolitics, what can a country which has a very large model, let’s say without taking any names, can it switch off that model,” Mr. Vaishnaw asked. “Fair, switch it off. What will happen to a country like India? We have our own bouquet of models which can be used for 95% of our work. So does creating a

large model give you geopolitical power? I don't think so." The return on investment would depend on deployment capabilities, where India was well-positioned to take a lead by helping firms around the world integrate AI into their processes, Mr. Vaishnav said.

- "It might actually be causing certain conditions where the people who are creating those large models might go bankrupt in the coming years. You never know ... If you have a 50 billion parameter model, you can deploy it using one GPU. If you have a 30 billion parameter model, which is absolutely good for 80% of your work, you don't even require a GPU. Where is the geopolitical thing in that? You have a large number of CPUs working in the entire world, and custom silicon products are coming from an amazing number of companies and countries where you wouldn't need to be dependent on any particular country," he said.

❖ 'Geopolitical tensions point to elevated risks, policy uncertainty'

Context: But current state of economy provides ground for optimism going forward with the GDP growth estimates for 2025-26 indicating that India will remain the fastest-growing major economy in the world, RBI officials write in Jan. bulletin.

- The escalation of geopolitical tensions, marked by developments such as the U.S. intervention in Venezuela, the simmering conflict in the Middle East, ambiguity surrounding the Russia-Ukraine peace deal, and escalation of the row over Greenland, point to still-elevated geo-economic risks and policy uncertainty ahead, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) officials wrote in the January edition of RBI Bulletin. However, they stated amidst these global uncertainties, the current state of the economy provided ground for optimism going forward.
- "The GDP growth estimates for 2025-26 indicate that India will remain the fastest-growing major economy in the world. India has made significant efforts to diversify and strengthen its exports, aiming to mitigate external sector risks," they emphasised in the State of the Economy chapter.
- Stating that the country is currently engaged in trade negotiations with 14 countries or groups, representing nearly 50 nations, including the European Union, Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and the United States, they said December saw India concluding trade negotiations with New Zealand and Oman.
- "The year 2025 also witnessed major economic reforms, including the rationalisation of tax structures, implementation of labour codes for labour market reforms, and financial sector deregulation, all of which are expected to strengthen the growth prospects," the officials stated.
- The RBI officials pointed out that the Reserve Bank's Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2024-25 underscored the resilience of the banking system, supported by strong capital buffers, improved asset quality, and robust profitability.
- "Macro stress test results from the latest Financial Stability Report released in December 2025, affirmed the resilience of banks and non-banking financial companies to withstand losses under adverse scenarios and maintain capital buffers well above the regulatory minimum," the officials mentioned.

- Noting that high-frequency indicators for December suggest continued buoyancy in growth impulses with demand conditions remaining upbeat, they said headline CPI inflation edged up in December but remained below the lower tolerance level.
- The flow of financial resources to the commercial sector has increased over the past year, with both non-bank and bank sources contributing to the credit pick-up. Going forward, the policy focus on striking a balance between innovation and stability, consumer protection, and a prudent approach to regulation and supervision should help improve productivity and support long-term economic growth, they concluded.

❖ Cabinet okays ₹5,000 crore equity infusion into SIDBI

Context: The Union Cabinet approved an equity infusion of ₹5,000 crore into the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) to expand the credit available to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

- The infusion will be made by the Department of Financial Services (DFS) in three tranches. Of the total amount, ₹3,000 crore will be infused in 2025-26 at a book value of ₹568.65 as on March 31, 2025, and ₹1,000 crore each in 2026-27 and 2027-28 at the book value prevailing at the end of the respective previous financial year.
- “After the capital infusion, the number of MSMEs to be provided financial assistance is expected to increase from 76.26 lakh at the end of financial year 2025 to 102 lakh (approximately 25.74 lakh new MSME beneficiaries will be added) by the end of financial year 2027-28,” the government said.
- According to official data, as of September 30, 2025, about 6.9 crore MSMEs registered with the government employed 30.16 crore people. This worked out to an average employment generation of 4.37 persons per enterprise, it said. Based on this average, the addition of new MSME beneficiaries is estimated to generate employment for about 1.12 crore people by 2027-28.
- The additional capital infusion would be necessary to help SIDBI maintain a strong capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR), as its risk-weighted assets are expected to grow with increased lending to MSMEs. “A healthy CRAR, well above the mandated level, is a key to protecting credit ratings,” the release said. “SIDBI will benefit from an infusion of additional share capital by maintaining a healthy CRAR. This infusion of additional capital would enable SIDBI to generate resources at fair interest rates, thereby increasing the flow of credit to MSMEs at competitive costs.”

❖ Raise focus on critical, strategic minerals: official

Context: Between 2026 and 2031, the Ministry of Mines plans to intensify mineral exploration activities significantly with primary focus on strategic and critical minerals, said Piyush Goyal, Secretary of the Ministry.

Boost exploration

- Speaking at the 65th meeting of the Central Geological Programming Board (CGPB), Mr. Goyal said, “We have asked the Geological Survey of India (GSI) to raise the number of exploration projects to 500 with at least 300 dealing with strategic or critical minerals.”
- Urging the Mineral Exploration Corporation Ltd.(MECL), private exploration agencies and States’ Directorate of Geology and Mining (DGM) to spur exploration efforts, the senior bureaucrat held, “We should complete entire mapping of the country, [particularly] the obvious geopotential areas definitely by 2030.” He added it would require “coordinated” efforts from all stakeholders.
- On private exploration agencies and State governments playing a “more proactive role” in exploration, he urged them to utilise funds from the National Mineral Exploration Trust.

Aiding funding

- “That would tackle the problem of getting less budgets from the Central or State governments.
- Noting GSI has taken up projects with private explorers in participation mode, Mr. Goyal held, “I am not very happy with the pace of the projects. We need to change our mindset, have a sense of urgency and realise the country is missing out on key opportunities,” adding, “Given the present geopolitical context, we have no time to waste.”

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❖ Theyyam, a ritual art form of northern Kerala

Context: Theyyam is a ritualistic art form practiced in the northern districts of Kerala, especially Kannur and Kasaragod. It is a sacred performance tradition in which the performer is believed to embody a deity or ancestral spirit during the ritual.



Cultural outreach: An artist performs *Theyyam*, a ritual art form of northern Kerala, during an event in Bengaluru on Thursday. PTI

Key Features

- Religious–ritual nature: Performed in kavus (sacred groves) and temples.
- Transformation of the performer: Elaborate make-up, face painting, towering headgear, and costumes symbolize the deity.
- Trance and possession: The performer enters a trance state, during which devotees seek blessings and oracles.
- Social dimension: Many Theyyam deities represent folk heroes, ancestors, and oppressed communities, reflecting social justice themes.

Music and Performance

- Accompanied by traditional percussion like chenda and elathalam.
- Includes ritual dances, songs, and fire rituals.

Cultural Significance

- Preserves folk beliefs, oral traditions, and local history.
- Represents the syncretic culture of Kerala, blending religion, art, and social memory.

❖ Questionnaire for first phase of Census notified

Context: The Registrar-General and Census Commissioner of India (RG&CCI) on Thursday notified 33 questions that residents will have to answer in the first phase of Census 2027, which will be conducted between April 1 and September 30.

- While the notification published on January 7, 2020 for Census 2021, which was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and never took off, had 31 questions, the current notification has 33. The fresh notification splits the combined question on the type of floor, wall and roof of the Census house into three distinct questions regarding the “predominant material used in the floor, wall and roof” of the house.
- According to the government, this will be the first digital Census, the first to count caste and also the first where respondents will be able to self-enumerate through a yet-to-be announced portal.
- Population Enumeration (PE), the second phase of Census 2027 where caste will be enumerated, will be done in February 2027. Questions are yet to be notified for this phase.
- The notification by RG&CCI Mritunjay Kumar Narayan in the official Gazette said, “...that all the Census Officers may, within the limits of the local areas for which they have been respectively appointed, ask all such questions from all persons on the items enumerated below for collecting information through the houselisting and housing census schedule in connection with the Census of India 2027.”
- **The questions are:** building number (municipal or local authority or Census number); Census house number; predominant material of floor of the Census house; predominant material of wall of the Census house; predominant material of roof of the Census house; use of Census house; condition of the Census house; household number; total number of persons normally residing in the household; name of the head of the household; sex of the head of the household; whether the head of the household belongs to Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe/Other; ownership status; number of dwelling rooms exclusively in possession of the household; number of married couple(s) living in the household; main source of drinking water; availability of drinking water source; main source of lighting; access to latrine; type of latrine; waste water outlet; availability of bathing facility; availability of kitchen and LPG/PNG connection; main fuel used for cooking; radio/transistor; television; access to Internet; laptop/computer; telephone/mobile phone/smartphone; bicycle/scooter/motorcycle/moped; car/jeep/van; main cereal consumed in the household; and mobile number (for Census-related communications only).
- The pre-test or the preparatory exercise for the first phase of Census was held from November 10-30, 2025 in select areas across the country.

❖ Officials ‘coercing’ us to surrender land: tribals

Context: Great Nicobar Island project includes forest lands where Nicobarese lived before 2004 tsunami; ‘it is our ancestral land, we will have nothing for the future generations,’ says council member.

- With some sections of the ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island mega-infrastructure project “nearing approval”, members of the Tribal Council in Little and Great Nicobar on Thursday alleged that they are being pressured by the district administration to “surrender our ancestral lands” to make way for the project.
- **Parts of the project in Galathea Bay, Pemmaya Bay, and Nanjappa Bay require the diversion of forest lands on which the indigenous Nicobarese people had been living before the 2004 tsunami.**
- In an online briefing to journalists, Tribal Council members said they had been called for a January 7 meeting with Nicobar district administration officials, where they were orally asked to sign a “surrender certificate”, giving up their ancestral tribal lands. Hours after the briefing, they were summoned for another meeting where they were asked if they would give up their claims on a portion of their lands if they were allowed to relocate to a different section of the coast.
- Deputy Commissioner of Nicobar Amit Kale Marutirao, and Assistant Commissioner (Campbell Bay) Keshav Narendra Singh, have not responded to The Hindu’s requests for comment.
- “At [the January 7] meeting, a few officials of the district were present along with a representative of the administration’s Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti. We were shown various maps regarding the project and we were asked about our opinion on the development project. And then we were asked to sign the surrender certificate,” Tribal Council chairman Barnabas Manju said, adding that the meeting, held at the Andaman Public Works Department guesthouse in Nicobar’s Campbell Bay, lasted about 10 minutes. The Tribal Council members told the officials that they would have to discuss it amongst themselves.
- At the press briefing, Titus Peter, 1st Captain of Pulobhabi village and a member of the Council, said, “We cannot sign a surrender document like this. It is our ancestral tribal land. We will have nothing for the future generations.” Mr. Manju noted that it had been 21 years since they were displaced by the 2004 tsunami and are yet to hear from the administration about their requests to return to the location of their ancestral villages that had been destroyed by the tsunami.
- Council members said they were not told any specifics about the “surrender certificate”, though Mr. Manju noted that “the officials said they would help us draft it if needed.” The Tribal Council is the apex representative body of the Nicobarese community, which is recognised as a Scheduled Tribe.
- “It is not clear what parts of our ancestral land the officials are referring to. Our understanding is that they want the surrender certificate to mention areas that are covered under what used to be our villages before we were displaced by the tsunami,” said Mr. Peter, pointing to the west coast on a map of Great Nicobar Island.

Context: Net foreign portfolio investments have also been negative so far in the financial year 2025-26, with uncertainty over the India-U.S. trade deal and the weakening rupee affecting investor confidence.

- India's net foreign direct investments (FDI) remained negative for the fourth consecutive month in November 2025, with outflows exceeding inflows by \$446 million that month, an analysis of latest data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) shows.
- The data, released as part of the RBI's monthly bulletin, shows that the main reason direct investment outflows exceeded inflows in November was because of relatively high repatriations and disinvestments by foreign companies operating in India.
- Direct investments are typically made in assets and are viewed as growth-generating, as opposed to portfolio investments, which are generally done in equity and debt for expected returns.
- The RBI noted that net foreign portfolio investments (FPI) have also been negative so far in the financial year 2025-26, with uncertainty over the India-U.S. trade deal and the weakening rupee affecting investor confidence.

In the red

Net FDI into India was negative for the fourth consecutive month in November 2025 due to higher repatriations by foreign companies in India (in \$ million)



Steady gross inflows

- Gross direct inflows, which is the total amount of direct investment coming into the country, stood at \$6.4 billion in November 2025, 22.5% higher than the amount received in November 2024. It was, however, marginally lower than the \$6.5 billion received in October and the \$7 billion in September.
- “Gross inward FDI remained steady in November with Japan, Singapore, and the U.S. accounting for more than 75% of total FDI inflows,” the RBI said in its report.
- “The highest recipients (around 75%) of FDI inflows were the financial services sector, followed by manufacturing, and retail and wholesale trade,” the report added.
- Net FDI, however, which is the balance between outflows and inflows stood at -\$446 million, meaning total outflows exceeded total inflows by that amount.
- Within this, repatriation and disinvestment stood at a five-month high of \$5.3 billion in November 2025, albeit 1.2% lower than it was in November 2024.
- Outward FDI, which is the investments made by Indian companies abroad, stood at \$1.5 billion in November 2025, less than half the \$3.2 billion in October.
- “Outward FDI moderated in November, with Singapore, Mauritius, the U.S. and the U.K. accounting for more than half of total outward FDI,” the RBI noted.
- “Sector-specific breakdown suggests that more than 70% of outward FDI was in manufacturing, financial, insurance, and business services.”
- The RBI report said that net foreign portfolio investments were negative for the 2025-26 financial year up to January 16, 2026.

❖ India, EU to ink new pact on defence and security, says Kallas

Context: India and the European Union agreed on Wednesday to sign a new Security and Defence Partnership covering maritime security, cybersecurity and counterterrorism, the EU's highest ranking diplomat Kaja Kallas announced.

- The partnership will be signed next week during the visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa to India, where they will be chief guests at Republic Day celebrations.
- The leaders will co-chair the 16th India-EU Summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The preparations for the visit were going well, but were not without challenges, said Ms. Kallas, who will be accompanying the leaders to India. The visit is centred around the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which is still being finalised.
- India and the EU will adopt a new comprehensive strategic agenda next week, using a 2030 planning horizon, Ms. Kallas told European parliamentarians in Strasbourg. She noted that the EU is among India's largest trading partners and described India as "indispensable" to Europe's economic resilience.
- The two sides worked on the joint statement and agenda mindful of the fact that the Summit "must deliver, taking into account the geopolitical landscape", Ms. Kallas said.

Ambitious partners

- The two sides are also aiming to conclude a Security of Information Agreement, Ms. Kallas said, adding that in a dangerous world, India and the EU could benefit from working together.
- "[The] EU and India are moving closer together at a time when the rules-based international order is under unprecedented pressure through wars, coercion, and economic fragmentation," she said.
- Ms. Kallas told MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) that India and the EU must become more ambitious partners. "Two major democracies cannot afford to hesitate," she said.
- During the visit to New Delhi, the two sides plan to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding on a comprehensive mobility framework, to facilitate the movement of students, seasonal workers, researchers and highly skilled professionals, and promoting research and innovation, Ms. Kallas said.
- "In the Indo-Pacific and beyond, Europe and India can help anchor stability by defending open sea lanes, strengthening maritime domain awareness and resisting coercion in all of its forms," Ms. Kallas told parliamentarians.

❖ Sinners makes Oscar history with record 16 nominations

Context: Vampire period horror film Sinners, directed by Ryan Coogler, smashed the all-time Oscars record with 16 nominations, the Academy announced. The tally included a best actor nomination for Michael B. Jordan.

- One Battle After Another came in second with 13 nods including best picture, best actor for Leonardo DiCaprio and best director for Paul Thomas Anderson.

- Guillermo del Toro's monster epic *Frankenstein*, Timothee Chalamet-led ping-pong drama *Marty Supreme* and Norwegian arthouse favourite *Sentimental Value* each bagged nine nominations. Period drama *Hamnet* secured eight nods including best actress for Jessie Buckley.



- Mr. DiCaprio, Mr. Chalamet and Mr. Jordan will battle for the best actor Oscar, along with Ethan Hawke for Broadway period drama *Blue Moon* and Wagner Moura from Brazilian political thriller *The Secret Agent*. For best actress, Ms. Buckley will compete with Emma Stone in conspiracy theorist drama *Bugonia*, Renate Reinsve in *Sentimental Value*, Kate Hudson in music biopic *Song Sung Blue*, and Rose Byrne in indie hit *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*.
- Persian-language Palme d'Or winner *It Was Just an Accident*, Spain's hippie odyssey *Sirat* and heart-wrenching Palestinian docudrama *The Voice of Hind Rajab* will compete for best international film.

Context: Authorities directed to register two-wheelers as ‘transport vehicles’ and grant ‘contract carriage’ permits as per law to operate them as bike taxis.

- Declaring that the blanket ban imposed by the State government on the use of two-wheelers as bike taxis is contrary to the provisions of the Motor Vehicles (MV) Act, the High Court of Karnataka directed the State transport authorities to register two-wheelers as “transport vehicles” and grant “contract carriage” permits as per the law to operate them as bike taxis.
- “When the MV Act expressly contemplates the inclusion of two-wheelers as ‘transport vehicles’, plainly, it would not be open for the State government to exclude them from registration as ‘transport vehicles’,” the Court ruled.
- A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice C.M. Joshi delivered the judgment while setting aside the April 2, 2025, verdict of a single Judge, who had refused to issue directions to the State transport authorities to register two-wheelers as transport vehicles, and had directed withdrawal of bike taxi services offered through the platforms of the transport aggregators till the government framed rules for operation of bike taxis.
- The Bench passed the order while allowing the appeals filed by transport technology aggregators — Uber India Systems Private Limited, Roppen Transportation Services Private Limited, which operates Rapido services, and ANI Technology Private Limited, which operates Ola services, and Bike Taxi Owners’ Welfare Association, and Varikruti Mahendra Reddy and other individual bike taxi owners. Rejecting the government’s claim, the Bench said the licence to operate even the bike taxis can be granted under the existing Karnataka On-Demand Transport Technology Aggregator (KODTTA) Rules, 2016, as the definition of “taxi” under the KODTTA Rules includes a “motorcab” and its definition under Section 2(25) of the MV Act include a motor cycle or a two-wheeler.
- However, the Bench declined to accept the contention of the aggregators that they can offer bike taxi services through their platform based on the licence that they have already obtained for four-wheeler taxis under the KODTTA Rules even though the list of two-wheelers to be offered as bike taxis are not part of their existing licences.
- Since taxis include motorcycles, an aggregator is also entitled to operate as an aggregator for bike taxi services but they have to furnish details of the two-wheelers for incorporation in their license under the KODTTA Rules, the Bench said. The aggregators can include details of different types of taxis – two, three and four wheelers – in the same application for grant of licence or can file separate applications for different classes of motor vehicles on boarded as KODTTA Rules do not contain any such restriction, the Bench said while directing the authorities to act on their pending or fresh applications to operate bike taxis.
- Though State government claimed it is its ‘policy decision’ not to allow bike taxis, the Bench pointed out that “there is no statement of policy prohibiting the use of motorcycles as taxis’ but “there is an understanding not to grant permits to motorcycles and, by an unwritten edict, to prohibit their use as taxis in the State of Karnataka”.

- Meanwhile, the Bench said that the State government now cannot contend that a motorcycle is not a ‘transport vehicle’ and that it falls outside the definition of ‘contract carriage’ as the latter had come out with the Karnataka Electric Bike Taxi Scheme in 2021 clearly recognising the amendments to made by the Central government to the MV Act, enabling the States to introduce bike taxis in urban areas, and had registered e-bikes as transport vehicles.
- The e-bike scheme was introduced as an affordable first-and last-mile connectivity after noticing a gap for the first mile and the last mile connectivity, the Bench noted.

Can impose conditions

- Though the Regional Transport Authority (RTA) has the power to refuse a grant of permit to a particular vehicle under Section 74(1) of the MV Act, the said power must not ordinarily be exercised and sans recording reasons in writing, the Bench said.
- While making it clear that the RTA is fully empowered to impose the conditions for contract carriage permit as stipulated in Section 74 of the MV Act, the Bench made it clear that the power to restrict or limit the number of

❖ India to become third largest space-tech economy by 2030: Report

Context: India’s space economy, currently estimated at \$13 billion, is set to touch \$40 billion by 2030, according to the recent India Spacetech-2026 report by early-stage venture capital (VC) firm, Arkam Ventures.

- Titled ‘India’s Space Odyssey’, the report forecasts the sector to grow at twice the pace of the global market and that structural shifts in India’s spacetech ecosystem will propel it to the world’s third-largest space-tech economy by 2030. The growth will be fuelled by cost-efficient engineering, deep manufacturing capabilities and a new generation of start-ups building advanced space technologies for customers worldwide, it noted.
- Over the past five years, more than 300 space-tech start-ups have emerged in India, in areas such as satellite manufacturing, earth observation, launch vehicles, and in-space solutions. “More than two-thirds of the historical capital flows in the Indian spacetech sector have come in the last five years, post the space policy being formulated. We expect \$3 billion to \$5 billion of private capital flows in the sector over the next couple of years to fund cutting edge space innovations.” the report read. According to the VC, this momentum is built on ISRO’s legacy of low-cost, high-impact missions and its active support for private innovation.
- “India is uniquely positioned to lead the global spacetech sector fuelled by the unique ecosystem development role played by the ISRO and the support from the government. Over the next five years, we expect \$3 billion to \$3.5 billion of the VC and Private Equity investments in the sector,” said Rahul Chandra, managing director, Arkam Ventures.

❖ OCI quota rules amended

- The State government has amended the Karnataka Educational Institutions (Prohibition of Capitation Fee) Act, 1984 (Karnataka act 37 of 1984), for admission to government seats in professional educational institutions rules, 2006, and announced the gazette notification draft rules specifying the quotas for Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) in medical education.
- As per the draft, Overseas Citizen of India born on or before March 4, 2021 or being an OCI card holder before the said date will not be entitled for any reservation applicable to a citizen of India.
- Meanwhile, the OCI candidates born on or after March 5, 2021 or being an OCI card holder after the date are eligible for admission only against any Non-Resident Indian (NRI) seat or any supernumerary seat.

❖ Gubernatorial walkouts test constitutional limits

Context: The walkouts of Governors from the inaugural State Legislative Assembly sessions in Opposition-ruled Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala mark a departure from the “limited freewheeling” allowed to them under the Constitution.

- Article 176 (1) mandates that Governors, at the commencement of the first session of each year, “shall” address the Legislative Assembly or, in the case of a State having a Legislative Council, both Houses assembled together and inform the Legislature of the causes of its summons.
- Reports said the Karnataka government may approach the Supreme Court for a judicial declaration on the constitutionality of these gubernatorial walkouts after selective or aborted reading of the special address to the assembled legislators, and indirectly to the people they represent in the Assembly. Leaders from these States argue that the Governors have no discretion to skip paragraphs or not read them in toto. The address articulates the policy of the State Cabinet, whose advice the Governors are to abide.
- The Constituent Assembly Debates quoted Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the role of the Governor in Parliamentary democracy, “The Governor under the Constitution has no functions which he can discharge by himself; no functions at all. While he has no functions, he has certain duties to perform... He is the representative not of a party; he is the representative of the people as a whole of the State.”
- The Supreme Court in its judgment in the Tamil Nadu Governor case held that the discretionary powers of the Governor cannot have the “effect of negating the powers of a responsible government”. The following Presidential Reference agreed to term the Governor as a “guide, philosopher and a friend of the government and the people in general”.
- A seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in the 1974 case of Shamsher Singh versus State of Punjab observed that for a centrally appointed constitutional functionary to “take up public stances critical of government policy settled by the Cabinet” amounted to “unconstitutional faux pas and ran counter to Parliamentary system”.

- The Supreme Court has consistently held that the discretionary powers of Governors are plainly stated in the Constitution. Governors cannot cross the line. A Constitution Bench in the 2016 Nabam Rebia case observed that the Constitution allows Governors elbow room in giving assent or withhold or refer a Bill for Presidential assent, the appointment of the Chief Minister, the dismissal of a government which has lost confidence but refuses to quit since the Chief Minister holds office during the pleasure of the Governor, the dissolution of the House, the Governor's report under Article 356 (President's rule), and while exercising gubernatorial responsibility for specific States.
- The court said addressing the House under Article 175(1) or making a special address under Article 176(1) were "executive functions" performed by the Governor on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.
- The Shamsher Singh judgment spelt out clearly that even the "limited freewheeling" allowed to the Governor was "not left to the sweet will of the Governor but remote-controlled by the Union Ministry which is answerable to Parliament for those actions".
- The court reasoned that if discretion was permitted to the Governor in every one of his roles, Parliamentary democracy would become a "dope" and the Head of the State would become a "reincarnation of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, untroubled by even the British Parliament – a little taller in power than the U.S. President".

❖ HC gives Lokpal two months to decide on sanction against MP

Context: The Delhi High Court on Friday granted two months' time to the Lokpal of India to decide on granting sanction to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to file a chargesheet against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra in connection with the cash-for-query allegations against her.

- A Division Bench allowed the application filed by the Lokpal of India seeking additional time to decide the matter.
- The court also clarified that no further time would be granted.
- The High Court, on December 19, 2025, had set aside a November order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file a chargesheet against the Trinamool MP in the case. It had said the Lokpal's decision was a clear departure from the procedure expressly mandated under law. The order came on a plea filed by Ms. Moitra challenging the Lokpal's decision.
- Ms. Moitra was expelled from the Lok Sabha in December 2024 after BJP MP Nishikant Dubey and advocate Jai Dehadrai alleged that she had taken a bribe from businessman Darshan Hiranandani to ask questions in Parliament. She was accused of compromising her parliamentary privileges and causing national security threats by sharing her Lok Sabha login credentials.

❖ Ambitious scheme to spur next-generation battery manufacturing in India hits hurdle

Context: Delays in visa approvals for Chinese technical specialists, requirements that mandate local manufacturing, and the lack of critical technologies threaten the government's ambitious Advanced Chemistry Cell Production Linked Incentive (ACC-PLI) scheme, says a report by research firms Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis and JMK Research and Analytics released earlier this week. The scheme was launched in October 2021 to catalyse domestic, next-generation battery manufacturing.

- As of October 2025, however, only 1.4 gigawatt-hour (GWh) worth of battery cells have been commissioned on time while 8.6 GWh is under development, but delayed. The 2021 plan had envisaged battery cell-manufacturing capacity of 50 GWh by 2026.
- Advanced Chemistry Cells are components of modern batteries using technologies such as lithium-ion to run electric vehicles and are different from the classical lead-acid batteries that start a car or run inverters.
- The ACC-PLI scheme, launched by the Ministry of Heavy Industries, promised emergent battery manufacturers, who won an auction, a certain amount of money for every battery they sold, as a way to incentivise investment in the sector.
- The government's scheme also aimed to build a local battery supply chain and accelerate electric vehicle (EV) and energy storage adoption.
- Currently, China is the dominant supplier of such cells and one of the aims of the scheme is to reduce India's dependence on the country. With an outlay of ₹18,100 crore (\$2.08 billion), the ACC-PLI sought to attract large companies by mandating a minimum investment of ₹1,100 crore (\$129.3 million). In return, companies would receive maximum subsidy of ₹2,000 per kWh. Another mandate was that the companies should ensure 25% of the manufacturing was local within two years, and 60% within five years.

Huge interest

- While several companies flocked to bid for 50 GWh capacity in the initial round of auctions, only 30 GWh was effectively allotted. Ola Electric, Reliance New Energy, Hyundai Global, and Rajesh Exports emerged as the selected beneficiaries, though Hyundai Global eventually dropped out.
- None of the selected companies actually had expertise in battery manufacturing. Companies that had such experience — Amara Raja and Exide Industries — though in traditional lead-acid ones, were priced out of the auction. "The high net-worth requirement (a minimum of ₹2.25 billion per GWh) further restricted participation to large corporates," the report notes.
- Because none of the three companies have started selling batteries, zero incentives have been disbursed against the targeted ₹2,900 crore by October 2025.
- "India lacks a mature cell manufacturing ecosystem, including critical mineral refining and cell component production, which leaves the industry almost entirely dependent on imports from China," the report underlines.

Context: The trade agreement would be announced next week during the India-EU summit in Delhi; a new Defence and Security partnership and a deal on information security are also on the agenda.

- India and the EU are continuing to hammer out the details of a trade agreement less than 72 hours before European leaders arrive in India for the 16th EU-India Summit. The summit, scheduled for January 27, is centred around a ‘free trade’ agreement (FTA), which has been in the works for more than two decades and is proving difficult to negotiate with “sensitivities” around agriculture, carbon border taxes, service delivery and non-tariff barriers.
- Other agreements on the agenda for the next week are a new Defence and Security partnership, an agreement on information security and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on a mobility framework.
- A joint statement will lay out a new strategic roadmap, outlined in the joint statement, setting the course of the India-EU partnership for the next five years. Deeper cooperation is expected to be announced across various dimensions, including climate change, supply chains and critical minerals, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, as well as cooperation at multilateral forums.
- Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal had confirmed on January 15 that “sensitive agricultural issues on both sides” were off the table. EU officials in Brussels briefing the media on Friday declined to provide details of the trade deal, including agricultural trade. They, however, did confirm that it would be announced — but not signed — next week.
- “I can just confirm that it is our objective to complete the negotiations. Of course, that’s the first step. We’re not talking about signature in Delhi, but we’re talking about conclusion of the negotiations,” an EU official said on Friday. A recent deal between the EU and Mercosur countries of South America has run into trouble around agricultural and other concerns. The European Parliament on January 21 referred the deal to the highest EU court, potentially delaying its implementation.
- Apart from trade, the fact that a Defence and Security agreement that would be signed next week is “significant”, another EU official said. “It is only the third such comprehensive agreement we’ve concluded in Asia, after Japan and the Republic of Korea.”
- The agreement will establish a framework, rather than stipulating specifics in terms of co-production deals, joint military exercises or the transfer of technology.

Technology transfer

- On whether the defence agreement would address technology transfer from the EU to India, one EU official said: “It does, but of course, it remains, even after the agreement, subject to the discretion of the companies and also of the countries allowing for these exports.”
- The security partnership also raises the question of Russia — a core issue on which India and the EU have glaring differences. European officials have more recently acknowledged that New Delhi and Brussels have very different approaches to Russia even as the EU objected to India’s participation in the Zapad 2025 military exercises in

Russia and Belarus, and has repeatedly taken issue with India's oil trade with Russia. New Delhi has accused Brussels of singling it out in these matters and pointed to the EU's own trade with Russia.

- On Friday, officials acknowledged that India and the EU had different histories with Russia. India was "far away" geographically from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. A dialogue on security threats was therefore all the more important to understand the concerns of both sides so the "optimum" level of cooperation can be determined, an official said.
- The sides are also planning to conclude an MoU on mobility that will address the movement of four categories of workers — highly skilled workers, students, researchers and seasonal workers — whose movement is already addressed by the blocs legislation. The number of individuals admitted to each EU country will be up to the country, an official said.
- The two sides are committed to taking the India Middle East Europe Economic (IMEC) Corridor forward, one official said, with feasibility studies being planned.

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

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