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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

MARCH WEEK 3

16-03-2026 TO 21-03-2026

**KEMPEGOWDA
INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT (KIA) HAS
BEEN RECOGNISED AS
THE BEST REGIONAL
AIRPORT IN INDIA AND
SOUTH ASIA FOR THE
THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR**

**INDIA'S TRADE
DEFICIT STANDS AT
\$4 BILLION**

**AMARESH NUGADONI
WINS AKADEMI
AWARD**

**IRDAI MOOTS
PUBLIC INSURANCE
REGISTRY**

**SC ALLOWS 12
WEEKS' PAID LEAVE
TO ALL NEW
ADOPTIVE MOTHERS**

❖ LPG crisis revives talk on ethanol for cooking

Context: As the LPG crunch situation continues, conversations about alternative fuels are picking up. Cooking fuel from ethanol, a by-product of sugar production, is one of them.

- While a major ethanol producer of Asia, India does not yet have a nationwide, large-scale policy mandating ethanol as a cooking fuel.
- Pointing this out, Murugesh R. Nirani, former Minister and chairman of Nirani Business Group, said that under the prevailing circumstances of a shortage of LPG, the government should consider a policy that allows the use of ethanol stoves.
- **“Ethanol is a relatively clean fuel and can be produced from sugarcane, maize, and rice. If recognised as a domestic fuel, it will provide a sustainable market for agricultural products and improve the income of farmers,”** he said.
- He also called for the use of ethanol stoves in hotels, hostels, and lodges, noting that there is excess production of ethanol in the country. “The total production is 2,000 crore litres per annum. But consumption is only 1,100 crore litres, which means 900 crore litres is the excess production,” he said, adding that use of locally produced fuel will also help the country become self-reliant.
- **Currently, ethanol is predominantly used in fuel blending under the Ethanol Blended Petrol programme, for industrial purposes, and in the beverage industry.**
- **Noting that ethanol is cleaner than kerosene,** Yogesh Patil, president, South Indian Sugar Mills Association, Karnataka, called for distributing of ethanol during the crisis instead of kerosene.
- “Increased usage of ethanol as a fuel will reduce our dependence on other countries in times of crisis and help us achieve energy security,” he said.
- According to him, there is excess production of sugarcane in the country, leaving enough quantity of sugarcane juice than can be diverted to produce ethanol. “Our sugar mills, because of the non-lifting of ethanol, are running only at 40-45% capacity. They are facing financial difficulty because we have put up the plants, invested a lot of money, but there is no customer available,” he said. Using ethanol for cooking will help alleviate this at a big scale, he remarked.
- Mr. Patil noted that the association is planning to approach the Chief Minister to request policy decisions in favour of distributing ethanol through any government agency.

❖ Diversify agriculture and encourage farmers to grow pulses, SC tells govt.

Context: The Supreme Court has asked the Union government to revisit its existing policy framework and explore a better substitute under which farmers are incentivised to diversify from conventional crops such as wheat and paddy to pulses.

- Besides a relook into policy and diversification of crops, the court asked the Centre to convene a meeting of different stakeholders to look into various issues.
- These include the absence of an incentivised minimum support price (MSP), sufficient enough to cover the expenditure that small or medium level farmers incur in producing pulses; guaranteed timely sale of pulse products; and fixation of the cost price of yellow peas, which are currently being imported, so that it did not impact the home-grown pulses produced by farmers.
- A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said the Centre, through its Ministries of Agriculture, Commerce and Consumer Affairs, and with the aid of subject experts with ground knowledge, mould a framework which would make pulse cultivation worthwhile for farmers.
- “There should be a campaign to diversify agriculture. Diversification of paddy is the biggest challenge in North India... Do we require such a quantity of paddy? We may need for export purposes, but land can also be diverted for pulses. Please ask your Ministries to constitute a committee of people ... somebody who has worked at the ground level, who knows the psyche and compelling circumstances that drive the farming community,” Chief Justice Kant addressed Additional Solicitor-General N. Venkataraman, appearing for the Centre.
- The court was hearing a petition filed by Kisan Mahapanchayat, an NGO, seeking curbs on the import of yellow peas.

❖ **Veena exponent Jayanthi Kumaresh to receive Sangita Kalanidhi award at Music Academy’s 100th Conference**

Context: The 100th Conference and Concerts of the The Music Academy, Chennai, beginning in December this year, will be marked by the conferment of the Sangita Kalanidhi award on renowned veena player Jayanthi Kumaresh. Bharatanatyam dancer Narendra G. will receive the Nritya Kalanidhi award.

- “The executive committee, at its meeting on March 15, decided to confer the award on her and other awards on various musicians,” said N. Murali, President of the academy.
- Ms. Kumaresh, a member of the musically rich Lalgudi G. Jayaraman family, learnt from her mother, Rajalakshmi. She later trained under her aunt Padmavathi Ananthagopalan and then maestro S. Balachander. She also received guidance from her uncle Lalgudi G. Jayaraman, Sangita Kalanidhi T.K. Brinda, composer Thanjavur Sankara Iyer, and T.R. Subramanian.
- A postgraduate in English, Ms. Kumaresh is one of the foremost exponents of the Saraswati veena and has collaborated with the late tabla maestro Zakir Hussain. She has contributed in large measure to the present increase in the popularity of the instrument.
- “It is a great honour that I have been selected for the award in the 100th Conference and Concerts of the Academy, whose logo features Saraswati with a veena. It is an honour not just for me, but for the veena, the national instrument,” Ms. Jayanthi told.
- She said a veena artiste had been selected for the award after a gap of 34 years, and it was a matter of pride that it had happened in the centenary year of her guru, the late S. Balachander.

- The Sangita Kala Acharya awards will go to vocalist Sugandha Kalamegam and mridangam player Thrissur C. Narendran. The recipients of the TTK Awards are nagaswaram player Injikudi Subramaniam and violinist T.K.V.B. Ramanuja- charyulu.
- The Musicologist Award will go to D. Balasubrahmaniyan, Adjunct Professor of Music and Co-chair of Global South Asian Studies at Wesleyan University. Bharatanatyam dancer A. Janardhanan will receive the Nritya Kala Acharya award, a newly instituted award this year. S. Rajeswari will receive the Dance Musician Award (vocal), and T.K. Padmanabhan the Dance Musician Award (instrumental), the other two new dance awards.
- Mr. Murali said the Sangita Kalanidhi-designate would preside over the academic sessions of the Annual Conference and Concerts of the Academy to be held between December 15, 2026 and January 1, 2027. She will receive the award along with the other awardees on January 1, the day of Sadas.
- Mr. Narendra will receive the Nritya Kalanidhi award at the inauguration of the 20th Annual Dance Festival of the Academy on January 3, 2027.



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Context: Any India-U.S. deal must be weighed against tariff structure and comparative advantage, says official; Commerce Secretary, however, maintains India remains engaged with U.S. on trade deal

- India will sign a trade deal with the U.S. only after the country settles its “tariff architecture” and clarifies country-wise tariff rate, sources in the government have said.
- “Any deal that we finalise and sign has to be seen against the tariff structure or comparative advantage that India gets in the U.S. market,” a senior official in the Ministry of Commerce said. “The U.S. is working on trying to recreate a tariff architecture globally. If they are able to finalise that, at that juncture it would be right to sign the deal,” the official said.
- This comes against the backdrop of two trade-related investigations the U.S. is carrying out that could potentially see additional tariffs being levied on a number of countries, including India.
- Meanwhile, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that India remains engaged with the U.S. on a trade deal.
- “Pursuant to the U.S. Supreme Court judgment dated February 20, 2026 invalidating reciprocal tariffs, the reciprocal tariffs are no longer in force,” Mr. Agrawal told presspersons on Monday. “The U.S. government has issued Executive Orders imposing 10% tariffs pursuant to Section 122 of the Trade Act, 1974 on certain products from all countries,” he added. “India remains engaged with the U.S. side for a mutually beneficial trade agreement,” he said.
- India and the U.S. announced a trade deal on February 2 and a joint statement on the finalisation of a framework for the deal was released on February 7. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal had said that the deal would be signed in March.
- The U.S. Supreme Court on February 20 ruled against the validity of U.S. President Donald Trump’s use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to levy reciprocal tariffs on America’s trade partners. It is after this that the U.S. imposed the 10% tariffs on all its trade partners under Section 122 of the Trade Act, 1974. These tariffs are in force for a period of 150 days from February 24.
- “The U.S. deal was to be signed in March. When we said this, at that time the Supreme Court judgement on IEEPA tariffs had not come,” the official explained. “Now with the Supreme Court judgement on IEEPA tariffs, the tariffs per se don’t exist.”
- Under the framework announced by the two countries, the U.S. was to impose an 18% tariff on India. Now, the new rate will depend on the rates the U.S. imposes on India’s competitors.
- “Depending on how their tariff architecture settles, that will determine where India will land,” the official said. “In case all others are at 19% and above then India will remain at 18%. But if others come down, then India will also come down.”

On Russian oil

- Mr. Agrawal also highlighted that the U.S.’ removal of tariffs on India is linked to its import of Russian oil. “On February 7, 2026, the 25% additional ad-valorem tariffs

imposed by the U.S. on certain Indian exports citing India's imports of Russian oil were removed," Mr. Agrawal noted.

- "We can say that we are buying Russian oil and there has been an increased buying of Russian oil in the current month because of the challenges we are facing."

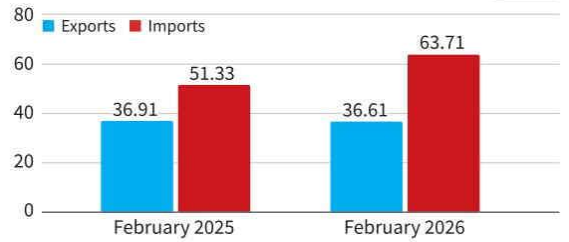
❖ India's trade deficit stands at \$4 billion in Feb.

Context: India's trade balance stood at a deficit of about \$4 billion in February compared with a surplus of \$2.7 billion a year earlier due in large part to merchandise exports staying flat while imports of both merchandise and services grew significantly during the month.

- Goods export flat in Feb.; official sees dip in March on conflict
- Commerce Secretary Agrawal noted March may be challenging on account of logistical issues on West Asia crisis, while releasing Feb. data
- India's trade balance stood at a deficit of about \$4 billion in February compared with a surplus of \$2.7 billion a year earlier due in large part to merchandise exports staying flat while imports of both merchandise and services grew significantly during the month.

Widening deficit

Chart shows India's merchandise trade performance in Feb. 2025 and Feb. 2026. Figures in \$ bn.



- Releasing the data, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said exports in March are likely to be impacted by the ongoing conflict in West Asia.
- As per the Ministry of Commerce and Industry data, total exports, including merchandise and services, grew 11% to \$76.1 billion, while total imports rose 21.7% to \$80.1 billion.
- Within this, merchandise imports widened gap over exports. Merchandise exports were largely flat at \$36.6 billion in February compared with \$36.9 billion a year earlier. Merchandise imports, however, climbed 24.2% to \$63.7 billion over this period.

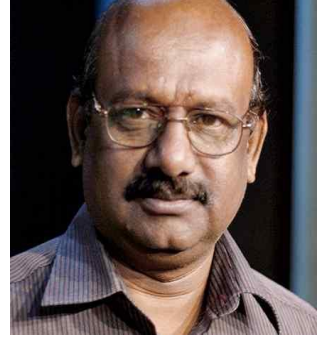
'Likely to worsen'

- Mr. Agrawal said the situation may worsen in March on West Asia crisis.
- "Despite all of the challenges, our merchandise exports have been doing well," Mr. Agrawal told the press. "The month of March will be a challenging one as well, because of too many logistics challenges, and when one part of the geography gets constrained, then too much of exports will not happen. Exports will likely see a downward trend this month because of the logistical challenges."
- In February, services exports climbed almost 25% to \$39.5 billion while imports grew almost 13% to \$16.4 billion.

❖ Kannada writer Amaresh Nugadoni wins Akademi award

Context: Kannada writer Amaresh Nugadoni, 66, has been conferred the Sahitya Akademi award for his short story collection, Dada Serisu Tande. This is his fifth short story collection. Four of his stories have been adapted into films.

- He is known for capturing themes of drought and human suffering in the Kalyan Karnataka region and using the local dialect in his writings.
- The description of the arid landscapes of Kalyan Karnataka in his works, the mountains and the plains of various districts and the lives of the common people after the fall of the Vijayanagar empire are considered unique to Kannada literature.
- He is known for bringing out issues of caste and class discrimination, as well as social justice.
- Prof. Nugadoni, who is recuperating in the hospital after procedure for a heart ailment, said he was very happy to be selected. Prof. Nugadoni said it was an honour for the Kannada language.
- Born Amaresh Halemane in Nugadoni village in Raichur district, he adopted the name of his village as his second name. He studied at various places in Raichur district and pursued his M.A. in Kannada from Gulbarga University in Kalaburagi.



Literary influence

- The biggest literary influence in his life was to come in Raichur, where he met polyglot poet and ghazal writer Shantarasa Hemberalu.
- He served as a lecturer in Akkalkot in Maharashtra, Bidar and Raichur, before joining the Hampi Kannada University. He retired as a professor in 2022. His short story Savari was made into the multiple award-winning film Kanasemba Kudureyaneri by Girish Kasaravalli. It was also screened in several film festivals outside India.
- The story Neeru Tandavaru was brought to screen by Aasif Kshatriya, while Daivakke Modalu Sharanembavu was adapted by G. Rangaswami.
- The story Dhare Uridare was made into Vaghachi Pani by Natesh Hegde. Four of his stories have been staged as plays.

❖ Naval warships escort Indian vessels from the Gulf of Oman

Context: Three warships escort Shivalik, Nanda Devi, Jag Laadki; warships operating under Operation Sankalp, a mission aimed at safeguarding merchant shipping, protecting India's maritime interests

- The Indian Navy has deployed warships to escort Indian-flagged merchant vessels transiting through the Persian Gulf region, according to official sources.
- Three Indian Navy ships have escorted the Indian-flagged merchant ships Shivalik, Nanda Devi, and Jag Laadki from the Gulf of Oman after they crossed the Strait of Hormuz. The warships ensured the safe transit of vessels through vulnerable waters.



Safe arrival: LPG carrier *Shivalik* reached the Mundra Port on Monday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

- Though the conflict has been intense in the Persian Gulf west of Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, east of the strait, has also seen attacks. Jag Laadki, carrying more than 80,000 tonnes of crude oil, left Fujairah terminal in the UAE on Sunday. The vessel had a narrow escape when the terminal was attacked while it was loading.
- Sources said that naval ship escort to Indian merchant ships will continue to be provided. Some 22 Indian-flagged ships are still stranded west of the strait.
- While officials declined to disclose the names of the naval ships involved, a senior official confirmed that the warships were operating in the region under Operation Sankalp, a mission aimed at safeguarding merchant shipping and protecting India's maritime interests in the region.
- Launched in June 2019, Operation Sankalp ensures the safe passage of Indian-flagged vessels through critical sea lanes, and saw action, including during the Houthi attacks.
- Meanwhile, LPG carrier Shivalik reached the Mundra Port on Monday evening, the government confirmed. Earlier in the day, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary at the Shipping Ministry, told reporters in an inter-ministerial briefing that priority berthing and documentation had been arranged to ensure there was no delay in discharging the cargo.
- Nanda Devi, another LPG carrier, is expected to reach Kandla port on Tuesday. Individually, the vessels are holding 46,000 tonnes of cargo, cumulatively, 92,172 tonnes. "Seafarers on board are all safe and would reaching tomorrow at Mundra port," Mr. Sinha said. Jag Laadki will be arriving at the Mundra Port on Tuesday.
- He said there was "no congestion reported at any of the major ports" with export-bound containers at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority having reduced to about 3,900 from 5,600.
- Addressing reporters at the same briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary at the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, said that cooking gas continued to be an "issue of concern" though supply of LPG to domestic consumers continued uninterrupted. No dry out had been reported among distributors, she added.
- Separately, in response to a query, the senior official informed that domestic LPG production had increased 36% since the supply maintenance order.
- Responding to queries about U.S. President Donald Trump seeking countries send warships to guard passage of vessels from the Strait of Hormuz, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson at the External Affairs Ministry, said the issue had not been taken up in any bilateral setting.

❖ Sahitya Akademi announces literary awards for 2025

- The Sahitya Akademi on Monday announced its awards for 2025 in the 24 languages recognised by it, nearly three months after the process was abruptly put on hold following directives from the Union Culture Ministry.
- Among the winners are former diplomat Navtej Sarna, awarded in the English language category for his novel Crimson Spring; Hindi writer Mamta Kalia for her memoir Jeete Jee Allahabad; and Tamil author Sa Tamilselvan for his work Thamizh Sirukathaiyin Thadangal in the literary criticism genre. The awardees will receive an engraved copper plaque, a shawl, and ₹1 lakh. The announcement was delayed after the Culture Ministry cited a need for "restructuring" of the awards.

Context: On the second day of his Brussels visit, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and had discussions, including about the situation in West Asia and Ukraine.

- Mr. Jaishankar was invited to interact with Foreign Ministers from the 27-member bloc, during the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting on Monday, as per a statement from the External Affairs Ministry.
- “We also discussed developments in the Middle East and in Ukraine. De-escalation, stability and energy security are our shared objectives,” Ms. Von der Leyen said in a post on X, about her meeting with Mr. Jaishankar. The EU and India were focused on implementing the trade deal signed in January in New Delhi, “as soon as possible”, she said.
- Thanking the EU’s top diplomat Kaja Kallas for inviting him to the Foreign Affairs Council, Mr. Jaishankar said, “Our conversation today therefore covered trade, investment, technology, mobility and defence in particular.”
- “The stronger convergence between India and the EU in a multipolar world is also expressed in closer consultations,” he added, saying West Asia, Ukraine, and the Indo-Pacific were discussed at the meeting. On Sunday, Mr. Jaishankar publicly thanked Armenia for the safe evacuation of 550 Indian nationals from Iran.
- Ahead of the meeting, Ms. Kallas had outlined various options the EU was considering to open the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial body of water through which a quarter of the world’s oil passes.
- Mr. Jaishankar had said that India would be happy to share what New Delhi was doing with Tehran, with European countries, although he acknowledged that every country had a different relationship with Iran. He had also said there was no quid pro quo involved with Iran permitting the passage of two Indian-flagged tankers carrying LPG crossing the Strait on Saturday, saying this was based on a “history of dealing” with each other.
- Calling the conflict “most unfortunate”, he called for other countries to engage with Tehran. The Minister had also emphasised that India did not have a “blanket arrangement” with Tehran for safe passage of ships, but it was being arranged on a case-by-case basis and discussions were ongoing.

Context: U.S. President Donald Trump had called on NATO allies and other countries to assist in forcibly opening the Strait; Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the U.K. 'will not be drawn into a wider war'; a German government spokesperson said, 'This war has nothing to do with NATO; it's not NATO's war'; Italy's government says it is not at war with anyone

- The EU is in discussion with the UN on a Black Sea Grain initiative type arrangement to open up the Strait of Hormuz, according to its top diplomat Kaja Kallas. The strait, a waterway for a fifth of the world's oil supply, has been virtually closed by Iran following a conflict in the region which began after Israel and the U.S. struck Iran on February 28, sending oil prices soaring to above \$100 per barrel.
- Speaking ahead of an EU foreign affairs meeting in Brussels on Monday morning, Ms. Kallas said that she had discussed adopting a Black Sea initiative type arrangement for the Strait with UN Secretary General António Guterres. The Black Sea initiative, facilitated by the UN and Turkey, sought to ensure the safe export of grain and fertilizer from Ukraine's ports after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.
- Ms. Kallas pointed out that 85% of the oil that goes through the Strait of Hormuz is destined for Asia, and that the blocking of the Strait was also impacting fertilizer production and warned of food shortages next year if the Strait isn't opened up.
- Ms. Kallas also suggested one option was to expand Aspides, the EU's security mission to protect vessels in the Red Sea from attacks by Houthi militants in Yemen. German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful had said he was "very sceptical" of using Aspides to secure the passage.
- "...We will discuss with Member States whether it is possible to really change the mandate of this mission. The point is that whether the Member States are willing to actually use this mission," she said, adding that a third option was to form a "Coalition of the Willing" to open the Strait.
- U.S. President Donald Trump had called on NATO allies and other countries to assist in forcibly opening the Strait, telling the Financial Times on Sunday that it would be "very bad" for the future of NATO if allies did not help the U.S. in opening the passage.
- The easing of U.S. sanctions on Russia was a "dangerous precedent", Ms. Kallas said, adding that the closure of the Strait of Hormuz was to Russia's benefit, helping it to fund its war with Ukraine. New Delhi has also been in talks with Teheran regarding the safety of Indian vessels passing through the Strait.
- European leaders resisted pressure from Mr. Trump to join Washington and Israel's war with Iran. "We will not be drawn into a wider war," British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Monday as he announced millions of pounds in assistance for households facing rising energy costs.
- Referring to the British opposition parties, Mr. Starmer said: "They would have rushed the U.K. headlong into this war, without the full picture of what they were sending our forces into and without a plan to get us out."



European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas speaks during a press conference. AFP

- Mr. Starmer said a diplomatic solution was needed once the armed conflict ended, “to constrain the threat posed by Iran”, which he suggested lay with Teheran’s ability to rebuild a nuclear programme, pose a ballistic missile threat and to arm proxy militias.
- “This war has nothing to do with NATO. It’s not NATO’s war,” German government spokesperson Stefan Kornelius said on Monday. The U.S. and Israel did not consult Europe before the war, Mr. Kornelius said.
- “Italy is not at war with anyone and sending military ships in a war zone would mean entering the war,” Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini said, as per news agency Reuters.
- France, like the U.K., has emphasised that it is focused on defence in the region not offensive strikes. French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday he had spoken to Iranian President Massoud Pezeshkian, and conveyed that France was only taking “strictly defensive” actions to protect its assets in the region and its regional partners and that it was “unacceptable” for France to be targeted.

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❖ KDEM report: Karnataka adds 50 new GCCs in FY25

Context: Samir Venugopal, VP at KDEM, says that GCC talent in the State has gone up from around 3.5 lakh in FY 2021 to 6.5 lakh in FY 2026.

- The Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM) supported setting up 40 new Global Capability Centres (GCCs) in Bengaluru and 10 in Beyond Bengaluru clusters in the financial year 2024-25, as per KDEM's annual report released. The State currently hosts more than 880 GCCs, up from around 500 GCCs in 2021.



With the Beyond Bengaluru push, more than 3300 startups were registered in cities outside Bengaluru. GETTY IMAGES

- Samir Venugopal, VP at KDEM, highlighted that GCC talent in the State has gone up from around 3.5 lakh in FY 2021 to 6.5 lakh in FY 2026. He also noted that Bengaluru has recorded the highest absorption of office space for three consecutive quarters.
- According to the report, the year also saw the number of DPIIT-registered start-ups in the State rising to 16,700. With the Beyond Bengaluru push, more than 3,300 start-ups were registered in cities outside Bengaluru. According to the officials, four corporate proposals have been approved to train people under the Nipuna Scheme, and the programme will go live soon. Around 10,000 beneficiaries expected.
- Sanjeev Gupta, CEO at KDEM, noted that the Beyond Bengaluru clusters have seen 15 GCCs in the last three years. According to him, 11,10,000 sq. ft. of IT park infrastructure is now available in these clusters.
- In the coming year, under the initiative, KDEM aims to onboard 30 new companies, with 10 in each of the clusters, including Mysuru, Mangaluru and the Hubballi-Belagavi-Dharwad cluster. KDEM data suggests that 126 new companies have been set up across the clusters and more than 5,500 jobs have been generated so far under the Beyond Bengaluru programme.
- For the coming year, the initiative aims to anchor 10-plus next-gen GCCs that focus on AI, cybersecurity, semiconductor, climate tech, and healthtech, and to form three clusters of NRI forums outside India to network and invite investment opportunities to the clusters.
- While the State continues to lead on many fronts, Bhaskar Verma, NASSCOM, remarked that it is time for a reset. “While we can keep on talking about Karnataka numbers, the neighbouring State is taking a little lead,” he said, citing a recent NASSCOM report. “While we still have huge numbers, we have to see what needs to be done differently,” he said.
- The event also saw an MoU being launched between STPI and KDEM. Arvind Kumar, Director General of STPI, said that consumer internet was a low-hanging fruit when the ecosystem was being created, and start-ups are now more serious about creating sustainable systems.

- Excise Minister R.B. Thimmapur informed the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday that the government is considering revising the Karnataka Excise Act, 1965, and introducing a new law to curb the illegal sale of liquor.
- The Minister also said the government is examining the possibility of bringing illegal liquor sales under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

In grocery stores

- Replying to a question by Basanagouda Daddal (Congress), Mr. Thimmapur acknowledged that liquor is being sold illegally in grocery stores in Raichur district. He noted that action had not been adequately taken under the existing provisions of the Excise Act and stressed the need for stricter enforcement. He suggested forming special squads in Raichur and Yadgir districts to crack down on illegal liquor sales.

On highways

- The Minister stated that the Excise Department has been conducting continuous patrols to curb irregularities. Regular inspections are being carried out on national and State highways.
- At the district level, standing committee meetings are being held under the chairmanship of the Deputy Commissioner, and necessary measures are being taken to control violations.
- Mr. Thimmapur added that cases have been registered against those involved in the illegal manufacture and sale of liquor.

❖ SC allows 12 weeks' paid leave to all new adoptive mothers

Context: The Supreme Court, in a judgment, declared the protection of maternity leave for working women as a basic human right while urging the Union government to legally recognise paternity leave as a social security benefit, noting that parenthood is not a solitary function performed by one parent alone.

- The judgment came in a challenge to provisions in the Maternity Benefit Act, which was replaced by the Code of Social Security in November 2025, which dictated that only mothers who legally adopt a child below the age of three months were entitled to seek maternity benefit of 12 weeks.

'Lengthy process'

- The petition filed by Hamsaanandini Nanduri, represented by advocate Bani Dikshit, argued that the provision under challenge, Section 60(4) of the 2020 Code, unjustly deprived a mother adopting a child of three months or above of their physical and emotional well-being. Besides, the petitioner successfully argued that the process of legal adoption usually took over three months to complete, rendering the provision completely otiose.

- Justice Pardiwala, authoring the judgment for a Bench comprising Justice R. Mahadevan, observed that an adoptive mother had the same rights and obligations towards the child as the natural mother. In fact, in a case of adoption, the emotional bond with the child has to be consciously nurtured through time, presence and sustained caregiving.
- The court held adoption as an “expression of reproductive autonomy”.
- “The concept of maternity benefit acknowledges the ability of a woman to exercise her reproductive choices without fear of losing her employment, more particularly, the economic security. Thus, it ensures that motherhood does not become a factor for exclusion at the workplace,” Justice Pardiwala observed in the judgment, concluding that the provision was unconstitutional and discriminatory.
- The court pointed out that a mother, without maternity benefit, would be driven back to work, leaving the child with, probably an older sibling. “And if the older sibling happens to be a girl child, it would result in her being withdrawn from school, which reinforces the vicious cycle of gender inequality,” Justice Pardiwala pointed out.

On father’s presence

- Pressing the Union government to make specific legal provisions for paternity leave, the Supreme Court said a child should not be deprived of her father’s presence and a new mother her partner’s companionship in the early phase of caregiving.

❖ Ministry of Planning, Niti Aayog get House panel rap for ‘poor planning’ of finances

Context: The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance pulled up the Ministry of Planning for not “planning” its finances better. The committee found that despite spending less than half of the budget allocated to it, the Ministry was allocated ever-higher amounts over the past three financial years.

- In its latest report tabled in the Lok Sabha, the committee called for “more realistic” planning and financial management by the Ministry. The government’s nodal think-tank, the Niti Aayog, operates through the Ministry.
- The committee also noted “flaws in planning” by Niti Aayog when it comes to its finances.

Under-utilisation

- “After overall scrutiny of estimates, allocations and utilisation of the budget grants during financial years under reference, the Committee are of the view that there has been continuous underutilisation of the earmarked funds by the Ministry of Planning,” the Standing Committee’s report said.
- The committee noted that the Ministry sought ₹1,203.38 crore of funds for the upcoming financial year 2026-27, which is about 22% higher than the ₹1,006.06 crore as per the Budget Estimates (BE) for 2025-26.
- “However, the Actuals for the FY 2023-24 were at ₹290.81 crore against a BE of ₹824.39 crore, which is around 35% of the BE,” the committee noted. “Likewise, the Actuals for the FY 2024-25 were only ₹282.61 crore, against a BE of ₹837.26 crore i.e. just about 34% in percentage terms.”

- The committee noted that this situation seems to have improved in 2025-26 but also said that the actual utilisation amount is only slightly more than half the amount budgeted.
- “With only a narrow window of two months remaining in the FY under reference, the Committee are not very optimistic,” it added.
- The committee said that despite this continuous under-utilisation, the BE of the Ministry grew 20% and 22%, respectively, in the preceding years.
- “The Committee in their previous reports have time and again emphasised the need for more realistic planning and financial management for optimal use of available financial resources,” the report said.
- “The Committee therefore strongly recommend Ministry of Planning to ensure that 2026-27 budget is utilised effectively and to avoid any idling and blocking of funds in the non-responsive Heads.”
- “The Committee hope that the Ministry of Planning would be more fiscally prudent in assessment of their projected expenditure and targets in the future,” it added.

Dismal implementation

- The committee said that its analysis of Niti Aayog’s Quarterly Expenditure Plan (QEP) reveals a “persistent and significant” underutilisation. The data in the report shows that, in 2023-24 and 2024-25, actual spending was approximately 35% and 33% of the total BE, respectively.
- “This indicates flaws in planning as there is dismal implementation of the plans on the ground,” the Committee said. “While FY 2025-26 shows a positive trend with improved utilisation (56.46%), the surge in Q4 expenditure remains a concern.”
- It said that a projected spending of ₹139.17 crore in Q4 of 2025-26 “appears to be a disproportionate rush to exhaust funds”, and also risks violating the Central government’s 15% monthly spending cap.
- “The Committee are of the firm view that there is need to adhere to strict Quarterly Expenditure Percentage norms and NITI Aayog should conduct internal reviews to synchronise administrative sanctions with the QEP,” the report said.

❖ Expedite pending, new gas pipeline projects, Centre tells States, UTs

Context: The Centre has written to State governments and Union Territories, urging them to expedite disposal of pending applications for laying city gas distribution pipelines and approve new applications within 24 hours, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) told reporters here at an inter-ministerial briefing.

- Ms. Sharma also informed that the Centre had urged the respective governments to waive road restoration and permission charges and relax working conditions, among others.
- These actions are part of the government’s broader objective to create a supportive infrastructure to prompt consumers for a switch to piped natural gas (PNG), to ease pressure off liquified petroleum gas (LPG).

- According to data from the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB), as of September end last year, it had authorised laying of approximately 34,200 km of natural gas pipelines. Of this, 25,293 km had been made operational with 9,954 km under construction.

Charges waived

- The regulator said considering the “prevailing geopolitical crisis” it had decided to waive the imbalance charges applicable to relevant entities, shippers and consumers until June 30, with immediate effect.
- “This waiver is being allowed as a temporary relief measure in light of the extraordinary circumstances arising out of the current geopolitical situation in the Gulf countries, which has adversely impacted supply conditions and operational balancing,” the notice read.
- “During the aforesaid period, no imbalance charges shall be levied on concerned entities/shipper in respect of gas scheduling/offtake/transportation/balancing subject to compliance with all other terms and conditions, regulations, and operational requirements,” it added.

❖ IRDAI moots public insurance registry

Context: Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is proposing a Public Insurance Registry to consolidate insurance data across stakeholders, cut information asymmetry, improve fraud detection and enable data-driven regulatory oversight.

Crucial step

- The proposed PIR is a crucial step towards modernising information architecture of the insurance sector, Chairman Ajay Seth told stakeholders discussion on PIR and e-marketplace Bima Sugam organised by IRDAI at New Delhi.
- IRDAI said the PIR is envisioned as a consent-driven, legally compliant digital infrastructure covering entire policy lifecycle from issuance to claims, grievance redressal and dispute resolution. It will be a structured, interoperable information infrastructure.
- Whole Time Member Deepak Sood spoke on the economic and business case of the PIR and the value proposition for all stakeholders.
- Besides senior leadership from insurers, invited stakeholders from the insurance ecosystem attended the meeting.
- Key expectations from the insurance sector were discussed, including compliance readiness, data governance standards, cybersecurity safeguards and role of interoperable digital infrastructure in modernising the insurance ecosystem, IRDAI said in a release on the meeting.
- The need for alignment between the PIR and Bima Sugam to enable seamless access to insurance policies, enhance service delivery, and redefine the overall customer experience was also discussed.

❖ UN condemns displacement of Palestinians in West Bank

Context: The U.N. human rights office on Tuesday expressed concerns about possible “ethnic cleansing,” denouncing an acceleration of Israeli settlements and displacements of thousands of Palestinians in large parts of the occupied West Bank that has grown “more relentless” in recent months.

- A new report from the office of Volker Turk, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, covers a year-long period through the end of October and warns of expanded settlements in large parts of the West Bank and the forced displacement of more than 36,000 Palestinians.
- Since then, “the pace of the concerted efforts by the Israeli government to seize as much Palestinian land as possible — with as few Palestinians in it as possible — is only becoming more relentless,” said Ajith Sunghay, the head of the rights office in occupied Palestinian areas.
- Mr. Sunghay said Israeli security forces “have continued to kill Palestinians with impunity,” have launched daily raids across the West Bank, and increased movement restrictions in the territory that have impeded access to health care, jobs, education and other basic services. “Yet Israeli settlers are roaming free with complete impunity, often armed, forcing Palestinian family after Palestinian family off their lands,” Mr. Sunghay said.
- Mr. Turk, in a statement, alleged that Israeli authorities were “playing the central role in directing, participating in or enabling this conduct”.
- Much of the displacement of thousands has taken place in the northern West Bank, where Israel launched a broad military offensive in early 2025.
- The report says the displacement “appears to indicate a concerted Israeli policy of mass forcible transfer throughout the occupied territory, aimed at permanent displacement, raising concerns of ethnic cleansing.”

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Context: As the State Co-op Apex Bank has now been declared as public authority, the information relating to its functioning, including financial decisions, will now be subject to public scrutiny under RTI

- In a significant order that goes a long way in ensuring transparency in the cooperative banking sector, the Karnataka Information Commission has ruled that the Karnataka State Co-operative Apex Bank qualifies as a public authority under the Right to Information Act, 2005, directing it to comply with provisions of this transparency law.
- The ruling came while hearing a second appeal filed by Hanumantha Vasanth Shinde, who had sought copies of documents submitted by Nirani Sugars Ltd. While availing loans from the Apex Bank between March 2022 and June 2024. The bank had declined the request, stating that it was a cooperative society and hence did not come under the purview of the RTI Act.
- The bank argued that it was neither owned nor substantially financed by the State government and therefore did not fall within the definition of “public authority” under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act.
- However, State Information Commissioner Rajashekara S., who heard the case, rejected the argument, observing that the institution functions under deep and pervasive state control.
- In his order, the Commissioner examined the historical evolution of the bank, statutory provisions governing cooperative institutions, and the extent of administrative and financial oversight exercised by the State.
- The order pointed out that the bank traces its origins to the cooperative movement in the erstwhile Mysore State and was founded by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies in his official capacity. Over the decades, the State government has continued to influence its functioning through policy directions and institutional oversight, it noted.
- The commission observed that the Registrar of Cooperative Societies serves as an ex-officio director on the bank’s board and retains statutory powers to inspect records, conduct inquiries, and order audits under the Karnataka Co-operative Societies Act, 1959.
- Further, audit reports of apex cooperative institutions are required to be submitted to the State government and placed before the legislature. The bank is also regulated by the Reserve Bank of India and supervised by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development for rural credit operations, the order pointed out.
- The commission relied on several judicial precedents to determine whether the bank could be treated as an instrumentality of the State.
- It cited the Supreme Court judgment in Ajay Hasia v/s International Airport Authority case, which laid down tests for identifying State-controlled bodies.
- It referred to the Karnataka High Court ruling in B.T. Krishnegowda v/s Karnataka State Co-Operative Apex Bank, which held that the Apex Bank is an instrumentality of the state and therefore subject to writ jurisdiction.



- The commission directed the Apex Bank to appoint Public Information Officers (PIOs) and First Appellate Authorities (FAAs) across its offices and comply with the proactive disclosure requirements under Sections 4(1)(A) and 4(1)(B) of the RTI Act. It instructed the Principal Secretary of the Cooperation Department and the Registrar of Cooperative Societies to ensure that the bank implements the RTI framework without delay.

Wider implications

- The order could have broader implications for cooperative financial institutions in Karnataka as many of which have resisted RTI requests citing their cooperative status.
- With the Apex Bank now being declared a public authority, information relating to its functioning — including governance practices and financial decisions — may be subject to public scrutiny under the RTI Act. This is expected to have wider implications as this institution that wields significant political influence, especially at grass-roots, is now being opened to public scrutiny.

❖ Bill seeking to prevent ‘honour killings’, caste-based crimes tabled in Assembly

Context: The State government tabled the Karnataka Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prevention and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition (Eva Nammava, Eva Nammava) Bill, 2026, in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday. It aims to curb “honour killings” and violence arising from caste-based objections to inter-caste marriages.

- The Bill notes that caste-based discrimination continues to persist in the State and often manifests in brutal forms of violence, including honour killings, particularly against young adults who exercise their constitutional right to choose their life partners through inter-caste marriages.
- The proposed legislation seeks to ensure freedom of choice in marriage, prevent caste-based crimes, safeguard human rights, and promote dignity in inter-caste unions. It also proposes the creation of an Eva Nammava, Eva Nammava Vedike (meaning “he/she is ours”) to solemnize and support inter-caste marriages.
- The government decided to introduce the Bill in view of rising incidents of violence and killings linked to inter-caste marriages.

Stringent punishments

- The Bill guarantees protection for consenting adults entering into marriage and provides safeguards against family or community coercion. It proposes a minimum punishment of five years’ imprisonment in cases where a person or couple is killed in the name of “honour”.
- In cases of injury inflicted in the name of “honour”, the punishment includes a minimum of two years’ imprisonment along with a fine of ₹2 lakh.

Unlawful gatherings

- The legislation prohibits the assembly of five or more persons with the intention of condemning or opposing a marriage on grounds of caste, tribe, community, tradition, or family objections.

- Those found guilty of participating in unlawful assemblies or engaging in criminal intimidation will face up to three years' imprisonment and a fine of ₹2 lakh.
- All State government officials will be required and empowered to assist law enforcement agencies in implementing the provisions of the law.
- The government will identify districts, sub-divisions, and villages where such crimes have been reported over the past five years. Each district magistrate will constitute a monitoring committee to oversee implementation, review relief and rehabilitation measures, and track prosecution of cases.
- Additionally, an Eva Nammava Vedike will be set up in every district, comprising a retired judge, police officer, revenue officer, sub-registrar, and other members as prescribed.
- The government, in consultation with the High Court, will designate certain district courts as special fast-track courts to try cases related to crimes committed in the name of "honour".

Tax Bill

- The Karnataka Tax on Profession, Trades, Callings and Employments (Amendment) Bill, 2026, was also tabled in the Assembly. It aims to simplify compliance, reduce paperwork, and improve ease of doing business.
- The Bill proposes that filing of returns may be deemed complete in cases where an enrolled person has paid the due tax for the year.
- The move is expected to streamline tax administration, improve voluntary compliance, and enable more efficient use of departmental resources.

❖ Commercial ads to be banned near heritage structures

Context: The State Legislative Council on Wednesday passed two amendment Bills related to advertisements in urban areas and the transfer of police officers. Both the Bills were adopted by the Karnataka Assembly.

- Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh, who tabled the Bill, announced a ban on commercial advertisements in and around heritage structures. Moving the amendments to the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976, and the Karnataka Municipalities Act, 1964, the Minister said the decision is intended to protect the aesthetic and cultural value of heritage buildings while also streamlining advertisement regulation.
- Mr. Suresh said that over the past seven to eight years, thousands of unauthorised advertisements have come up across the State without payment of any fee or tax to local bodies, resulting in significant revenue losses running into hundreds of crores.
- "The amendments are aimed at curbing such unauthorised advertisements and ensuring that urban local bodies receive due revenue," he said.

- In cases where advertisements are displayed on private property, the property owner will not be taxed. Instead, the advertiser or company concerned will be held responsible for payment. Advertisements will be permitted only in designated locations identified by local bodies, ensuring that they do not inconvenience the public. However, no advertisements will be allowed on the walls of heritage structures or in their immediate surroundings in a manner that affects their appearance.
- Exemptions have been provided for professionals such as doctors and lawyers. However, political parties and leaders who put up flex boards, banners and buntings will be required to pay fees based on size, as determined by local authorities.
- The Minister said that advertisement charges will be fixed based on the location and category of urban areas, and the revenue generated will be utilised exclusively for the development of the respective local bodies.
- Responding to members' queries, he said separate rates will be prescribed for LED advertisement boards.

Police Bill

- The Karnataka Police Bill, 2026, moved by Home Minister G. Parameshwara, empowers the Police Establishment Board to immediately transfer police officers up to the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police for misconduct, negligence, or dereliction of duty.
- This amendment allows for action before the mandatory two-year tenure expires. The Act covers cases of "misconduct or gross negligence or dereliction of duty or an act of moral turpitude".
- The Police Establishment Board is authorised to take action directly rather than waiting for lengthy government approval, aiming to reduce political interference and speed up disciplinary actions.

❖ A.P. CM launches free bus travel for differently abled

- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday launched the 'Divyang Shakti' scheme, which offers free bus travel to differently abled persons.
- Accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan, HRD Minister Nara Lokesh and beneficiaries, Mr. Naidu travelled 11 km in a bus. Under the scheme, those with more than 40% disability can travel free of cost in APSRTC buses. Attendants will get a 50 per cent concession on the fare.

❖ Are sale of books, making of prasadam by temples industrial activities, asks SC

Context: The Supreme Court questioned whether activities such as publication and sale of books and manufacture of food associated with temples can be considered an industry.

- The oral observation came from Justice B.V. Nagarathna, who is part of a nine-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant examining the ambit of the definition of 'industry' and whether it would include charities and hospitals.

- The question was posed to the Commissioner of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments in Tamil Nadu. Senior advocate Jaideep Gupta, appearing for the Commissioner, referred to High Court decisions that temple trust activities such as manufacturing prasadam, running hotels or operating transport were an “industry” under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, and an “establishment” under the Shops and Establishments Act.
- Justice Nagarathna said she had authored a single-judge Bench judgment in the Karnataka High Court which had held that a temple was not an establishment under the Karnataka Shops and Establishments Act.
- “But a Full Bench of the Madras High Court had held a temple to be an ‘industry’. The Orissa High Court had held the Jagannath temple to be an ‘industry,’” Mr. Gupta responded to the judge.
- He said temple trusts create food as prasadam. “None of it is created for commercial purposes. The Ramakrishna Mission sells books. But they would give it to you also for free. Their purpose is to propagate their religious practices. Prasadam is primarily for spiritual purposes. We partake in prasadam not to assuage hunger but to partake in a spiritual exercise,” he argued.

❖ India showing steady progress in reducing child deaths amid slowing global gains: report

Context: An estimated 4.9 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2024 worldwide, including 2.3 million newborns, according to the latest estimates released by a UN report on child mortality. The report, released on Wednesday, said that most of these deaths were preventable with proven, low-cost interventions, and access to quality healthcare.

- The report titled “Levels and Trends in Child Mortality” added that under-five deaths globally have fallen by more than half since 2000. However, since 2015, this pace has slowed by more than 60%.
- However, India is among the countries demonstrating steady progress in reducing child mortality through sustained public health efforts. The latest United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UNIGME) Report, 2025 states that the status of neonatal mortality rate reduction in India has shown progress.
- The Union Health Ministry added that India, over the past two decades, has played a pivotal role in reducing child mortality in the South Asia region.
- The Ministry, in its release, said that the Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) recorded a decline since 1990. In 1990, India had an NMR of 57 per 1,000 live births, which fell to 17 in 2024.
- Also, the Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) witnessed a sharp fall — in 1990, the U5MR stood at 127 per 1,000 live births, while in 2024, it declined to 27.
- “This sharp reduction is due to targeted public health interventions, improved institutional delivery systems, and expanded immunisation coverage,” the Ministry said.

- The UN report found that an estimated 2.1 million children, adolescents, and youth – in the age group of 5-24 – died in 2024. Infectious diseases and injuries remain leading causes among younger children, while self-harm is the leading cause among girls aged 15 to 19, and road traffic injuries among boys.
- “This year’s report for the first time estimates deaths directly caused by severe acute malnutrition. It found more than 1,00,000 children aged 1-59 months — or 5% — died from it in 2024. The toll is far greater when indirect effects are considered, as malnutrition weakens children’s immunity and increases their risk of dying from common childhood diseases,” the report by the UNIGME states.
- Mortality data also frequently fail to capture severe acute malnutrition as an underlying cause of death, suggesting the burden is likely substantially underestimated. Some of the countries with the highest numbers of direct deaths from severe acute malnutrition include Pakistan, Somalia, and Sudan.
- Newborn deaths account for nearly half of all under-five deaths. Leading causes of newborn deaths were complications from preterm birth (36%), and complications during labour and delivery (21%).
- Beyond the first month, infectious diseases, including malaria, diarrhoea, and pneumonia were major killers. Malaria remained the single largest killer in this age group (17%), with most deaths occurring in endemic areas of sub-Saharan Africa.
- In 2024, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 58% of all under-five deaths.



❖ KIA named best regional airport in India and South Asia for third year

Context: The Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) has been recognised as the Best Regional Airport in India and South Asia for the third consecutive year at the Skytrax World Airport Awards 2026.

- The airport has advanced in the global airport rankings in 2026, moving up from 48 to 41.
- The Skytrax World Airport Awards, widely regarded as a global benchmark for airport excellence, recognise airports that deliver outstanding customer experience across key touchpoints, including check-in, arrivals, transfers, retail, security, immigration and departures.
- “This recognition builds on KIA’s consistent performance across both experience and scale. The airport has received global recognition recently, including being named Best Airport in Arrivals Globally for the fourth time. While Terminal 2 became the first in India to receive a 5-star Skytrax rating, the airport has achieved the highest Level 5 Accreditation under ACI’s Airport Carbon,” the Bangalore International Airport Ltd. (BIAL) said.
- Hari Marar, managing director & CEO, BIAL said, “Our continued recognition at the Skytrax World Airport Awards reflects the strength of our long-term vision and consistent focus on passenger experience. It is a testament to the collective effort of our teams and partners who continue to push the boundaries of what a modern airport experience can be”.
- “At KIA, our focus is on building for the future, where design, technology, and sustainability come together to create a seamless passenger journey. As we scale and strengthen our position as a key transfer hub in the region, we remain committed to continuously raising the bar on service and experience,” he said.
- Edward Plaisted, CEO of Skytrax, said, “Winning this award for a third consecutive year is a fantastic achievement for KIA and highlights the strong appreciation shown by passengers. Terminal 2 has strengthened the airport’s reputation, and Bengaluru is now positioned among the region’s most recognisable airports”.
- KIA served 43.82 million passengers and handled 520,985 tonnes of cargo in Calendar Year 2025.

Laser interference

- The Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) recorded the least number of laser interference incidents in the last two years among major airports in the country. While most airports witnessed increasing incidents of laser beams being directed at aircraft, KIA, which is the third busiest airport in the country, recorded zero incidents in 2023, 10 incidents in 2024, and one incident in 2025, as per information by Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol to a question in the Lok Sabha during the ongoing Budget Session.

- In contrast, Delhi airport reported 110 incidents in 2023, 144 in 2024, and 147 in 2025; Chennai reported zero incidents in 2023, 67 in 2024, and 54 in 2025; and Hyderabad reported zero incidents in 2023, 59 in 2024, and 38 in 2025. Even airports like Kolkata and Lucknow reported more incidents than KIA. In 2024 and 2025, Kolkata reported 72 and 44 incidents, and Lucknow reported 23 and 26 incidents, respectively.
- Among Karnataka's airports, Mangaluru International Airport featured in the list with 9 incidents in 2024 and 11 in 2025.
- In total, across the 21 major airports in the country, 122 were reported in 2023, and 528 and 502 were reported in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

❖ Renewable Energy Ministry demands sweeping powers

Context: Ministry says it should be recognised as 'Central Government' in matters pertaining to renewables under Electricity Act; Power Ministry currently exercises primary authority over Act's provisions.

- The New and Renewable Energy Ministry has made a case before a parliamentary committee for a significant expansion of its administrative authority over India's renewable energy sector, arguing that it should be recognised as the "Central Government" in all matters pertaining to renewables under the Electricity Act, 2003.
- The demand, part of a detailed reply furnished to the committee in February but made public this month, in response to "stakeholder requests" for a standalone Renewable Energy Act, effectively seeks to redraw the institutional boundaries between the Renewable Energy Ministry and the Power Ministry, which currently exercises primary authority over the Electricity Act's provisions, including those governing grid-connected renewable energy.
- As of January 31, 2026 — the Renewable Energy Ministry cited in a submission — India has installed 271.96 GW of capacity from non-fossil fuel sources, a little over half the country's total installed generation capacity of 520.50 GW. Of this, 263.18 GW is from renewable energy. However, the actual electricity generated from non-fossil sources is about 25%.
- While the Ministry conceded that a separate Act was unnecessary as electricity from renewable sources is already integrated into the grid and governed under the existing framework, it laid out a sweeping list of empowerments it believes are needed to bring "institutional clarity and effective administration" to the sector.
- The Ministry wants the power to design electricity markets for renewable energy, prepare and notify bidding guidelines for renewable energy projects, frame tariff determination principles for the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), and guide the CERC on matters related to renewables.
- It has also sought oversight of the planning and monitoring of Renewable Purchase Obligations, the mechanism that compels distribution companies and large consumers to procure a minimum share of their electricity from clean sources. Several States are laggards in these aspects.

- The Renewable Energy Ministry has further asked that the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) coordinate with it while framing regulations related to renewable energy, and that the National Committee on Transmission work under the Ministry's guidance — a significant institutional claim, given that transmission planning has traditionally been the turf of the Power Ministry and the CEA.

❖ Fight against hate speech must be on behalf of all, says SC

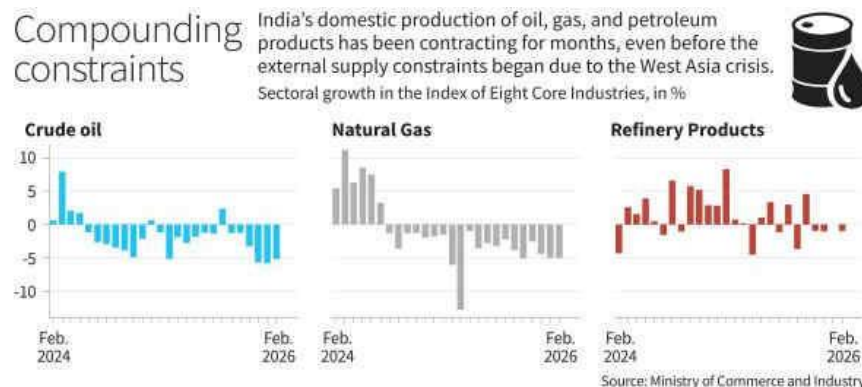
Context: The Supreme Court of India said the fight against hate speech must be on behalf of all, and not just limited to one's own community.

- “Why should a particular community come up and say ‘protect my community against hate speech’? Rather, we should say ‘no one should indulge in hate speech,’” Justice B.V. Nagarathna, heading a Bench, observed orally.
- Justice Nagarathna's remark came while hearing a petition seeking the court's intervention against hate speech targeting the Brahmin community.
- The court found that the petitioner-in-person, Mahalingam Balaji, had even coined a term, ‘Brahmophobia’, which he said should be treated as caste-based discrimination and duly punished.
- Mr. Balaji submitted that the petition was a result of years of research on the “selective and inconsistent application” of the hate speech jurisprudence. He said hate speech has affected the community.
- “We do not want hate speech against any community. That would depend on the level of education, intellectual development, tolerance and patience in the society. Once everyone follows fraternity, then automatically there would be no hate speech,” Justice Nagarathna said.
- Justice Nagarathna advised the petitioner to “develop the capacity to not be influenced by it”. “Many things, if ignored, will fade away. If you react, it will only trigger another reaction,” Justice Nagarathna said. The court allowed the withdrawal of the plea.

❖ Core sectors' pace of growth halves to 2.3% in February

Context: Government data show domestic production of oil, gas, and petroleum products had been shrinking in the run up to current supply constraint.

- India's core industrial growth slowed sharply even before the West Asia crisis began with government data showing growth in the eight core sectors slowing to a three-month low of 2.3% in February.



- This slowdown, as shown by the data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, comes at a time when economists expect a further slowdown in March on supply and export curbs due to West Asia war. The data also shows local output of oil, gas and petroleum products shrinking for months, now compounded by the external supply constraints.
- “Even before the start of the West Asia crisis, the growth of the core sector output in India slowed to a three-month low of 2.3% in February 2026,” said Aditi Nayar, chief economist, ICRA. “The sequential halving in year-on-year growth from 4.7% in January was relatively broad-based with only two sectors viz. cement and steel eking out a year-on-year rise that was above 3.5%.”

Cement at its best

- Cement rose 9.3% in February, the best performance out of the eight sectors. However, this was a four-month low, with the sector breaking a three-month streak of double-digit growth. Steel, too, saw relatively robust growth, but slower than previous months at a three-month low of 7.2% in February.
- Notably, the data shows crude oil, LPG and LNG curbs on West Asia crisis coming at a particularly inopportune time with local output contracting for multiple months — a trend that continued into February.
- Crude oil shrank for the sixth consecutive month at 5.2% in February, while natural gas contracted for the 20th month at 5%.
- Refinery products shrank 1% in February. The sector contracted in six out of the 11 months of FY26 .
- Growth in fertilizers slowed to a five-month low of 3.4% in February albeit on a high base of 10.2% in February last year. Coal slowed to a three-month low of 2.3% while electricity sector slowed to a three-month low of 0.5%. “Longer the crisis persists, resulting in higher fuel prices and tighter availability, larger the downside will be for India’s GDP growth in FY27,” Ms. Nayar said.

❖ RBI injects ₹25,101 cr. in banking system via 3-day VRR auction

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday injected ₹25,101 crore transient liquidity in the banking system through a three-day variable rate repo (VRR) auction.

- The RBI injected the funds at cut-off and weighted average rates of 5.26%, the central bank said in a release.
- The liquidity injected was much lower than the notified amount of ₹75,000 crore, despite a sharp drop in surplus liquidity in the banking system due to advance tax payments. On March 17, the RBI injected ₹48,014 crore liquidity into the banking system via VRR.

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