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BENGALURU**

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# WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

**APRIL WEEK 2**

06-04-2026 TO 11-04-2026

**PM SURYA GHAR  
MUFT BIJLI  
YOJANA**

**JAN VISHWAS BILL**

**DIGITAL WATER  
STACK INITIATIVE**

**FAST BREEDER  
REACTORS**

**INDIA'S FY 27  
GROWTH OUTLOOK  
CUT TO 6.6%**

## ❖ Gig workers' welfare fee from aggregators to be levied from July

**Context: The fee will apply from the quarter beginning in April and will be collected at the start of the following quarter.**

- The welfare fee from aggregators and platforms operating in Karnataka towards the social security of gig workers **will be collected from July 2026.**
- The fee will apply from the quarter beginning in April as the notification was issued in February, and will be collected at the start of the following quarter.
- Additional Labour Commissioner G. Manjunath said, **“The fee is to be paid quarterly.”**
- As it was notified in February 2026, **aggregators will first be liable to pay it for the quarter covering April, May and June. Under the law, the payment must be made by the fifth day of the first month of the following quarter.** Accordingly, the welfare fee for this quarter must be paid by July 5, 2026,” Mr. Manjunath told The Hindu.

### Data collection

- **The welfare fee will go to the Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers' Fund to provide social security and welfare benefits to platform-based gig workers in the State. The quantum of the fee was notified as 1% of every transaction for all the services in February.**
- While the government has asked all the aggregators operating in the State to furnish data of all the workers they engage, a few expressed reluctance, said Minister for Labour Santosh Lad.
- **“To implement the welfare fee, every operator must give details on how many workers they are engaging.**
- The Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers' Welfare Board held a meeting with them, but some of them were dilly-dallying, citing the Central government's Labour Codes. We have given them a deadline. By another week, they should be able to give all the details,” Mr. Lad said.

### Deadline

- The Labour Department has asked the companies to furnish data from January to March 2026 on how many gig workers were active with the platforms and what the approximate payouts were to them.
- The deadline has been fixed as April 17, and the data will be integrated with the board's portal. While the total number of aggregators operating in the State remains unclear, so far nine platforms have furnished the data, the Additional Labour Commissioner said.
- “The data will help us plan the social security schemes for the gig workers,” he said, adding that in the next board meeting, the board members plan to frame some of the important schemes.

- According to the data furnished by the platforms so far, **the number of active gig workers in the State is close to 7 lakh.**
- However, officials feel there could have been potential overlap between data furnished by different platforms.
- “We haven’t been able to check the duplication. We can do it only when our software is ready. Then we will give a unique ID to each of the platform workers and that way duplication could be checked,” said Mr. Manjunath.

### **Clarifications provided**

- Earlier, industry bodies including IndiaTech.org and the Internet and Mobile Association of India had written to the State government seeking a deferment of the welfare fee, citing a lack of clarity on schemes it would be utilised for and a disconnect with the Centre’s Code on Social Security (CoSS).
- “We have given the clarifications to them. Without the data on the number of workers and the quantum of money that we are going to receive, we cannot design the schemes.
- With respect to the labour codes, while the CoSS is yet to be enforced, it provides that aggregators who are contributing to State funds can claim exemption from the contribution to be paid under the CoSS.
- Our law also states that those platforms and aggregators who are paying a welfare fee for the gig workers in the State need not necessarily pay under the CoSS if it becomes applicable,” Mr. Manjunath explained.

### **❖ Telangana joins new RBI strategy for State loans**

**Context: Telangana has joined the list of nine States where the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is rolling out the Benchmark Issuance Strategy (BIS) for State development loans, starting from the current financial year.**

- The Apex Bank said that it has been sensitising the States about the adoption of BIS aimed at enhancing transparency and providing greater clarity to investors. The Strategy involves issuing securities in specific benchmark tenor buckets as per the pre-announced calendar.
- The framework is aimed at creating a larger, more liquid benchmark bonds improving price discovery and providing investors with better visibility into supply in the State bond market. It envisages the issuance of standardised benchmark bonds across specific tenors to reduce market fragmentation.
- **The RBI said it has decided to introduce BIS on a pilot basis in nine States including Telangana based on the concurrence of the respective State Governments, starting the financial year 2026-27.**
- The State Government has accordingly submitted an indent for raising market borrowings to the tune of ₹18,900 crore during the first quarter of the current fiscal.
- In line with the BIS, the State has decided to avail loans with different tenures ranging from six to 10 years to over 25 years. The tenure for ₹2,000 crore and ₹1,900 crore borrowings proposed on April 7 is 16-25 years and above 25 years, respectively.

**Context: The government's acknowledgement on Saturday that it is procuring oil and LNG from Iran after a gap of seven years has sparked hope for Indian traders that it may consider restoring trade with Iran and its interest in the Chabahar port, even as U.S. sanction deadlines loom again in April.**

- The U.S.'s temporary sanctions waiver for Russian oil specifically for India expires on Sunday, while another general waiver for all countries will expire on April 11. In addition, the U.S. waiver for Iranian oil will expire on April 19, and its six-month waiver for India's stake in Chabahar port ends on April 26.
- On Friday, the External Affairs Ministry said it "remains engaged" with the U.S. and all parties on the issue of Chabahar, while officials expressed hope that Washington would consider extending the waivers on oil, given that the war in West Asia continues.
- However, there's no clarity on whether the government will reject U.S. President Trump's demands if the U.S. decides to reimpose sanctions.
- **Iran's restrictions on the Hormuz Strait are a big concern, say exporters, given that more than 80% of India's Basmati exports are destined for West Asian countries and a large number of export consignments are currently stranded in the Strait, stuck in transit at ports or on the high seas, leading to heavy financial losses.**
- In a letter to Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, the Punjab Rice Millers Exporters Association urged the government to arrange a barter agreement with Iran, exchanging Iranian crude oil for Indian rice shipments. "This one significant step would ease India's oil crisis and revive our traditional trade with Iran," association director Ashok Sethi told The Hindu, adding that the exporters are urging the government to make use of the "Rupee payment mechanism", a corpus fund managed through UCO Bank set up in 2012 for commodities trade.
- **If activated, the mechanism would also help India pay for crude oil from Iran, although at present Indian refiners are not taking very large quantities of it, given the high prices, low availability and the need to recalibrate refineries for it.**
- In 2019, the Modi government ended imports of Iranian and Venezuelan oil due to alleged U.S. pressure, and began to reduce imports of Russian oil in November 2025 because of the U.S.'s 25% penalty tariff, which was removed in February 2026. After Mr. Trump threatened another 25% tariff for any trade with Iran, External Affairs Ministry officials pointed out that these were at minimal levels of \$1.6 billion in 2024, dropping from about \$15.7 billion in 2014. The government also pulled out all staff and prepaid its investment commitment of \$120 million to Iran in November 2025 for the Chabahar port development project.
- "On this particular issue (Chabahar port), the sanctions waiver that was given to us is valid till April 26, 2026. The Government of India remains engaged with all concerned in order to address the implications of these developments," Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at a briefing.
- Meanwhile, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry has stressed that decisions on buying oil were commercially driven, denying the U.S. claims that it "allowed" India to buy Russian oil by issuing the waivers so as to keep oil prices low. However, the price of oil has remained high, at more than \$110 per barrel.

- “Amid Middle East supply disruptions, Indian refiners have secured their crude oil requirements, including from Iran; and there is no payment hurdle for Iranian crude imports,” the Ministry said on Saturday.

### ❖ The executive office without a limit

**Context: India has developed a convention limiting a third presidential term, but the Constitution places no such restriction on the Prime Minister’s tenure. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi completing 8,931 days in office, this asymmetry invites closer scrutiny.**

- On March 22, 2026, Narendra Modi completed 8,931 days as head of an elected government in India, combining over thirteen years as Chief Minister of Gujarat (from October 7, 2001 to May 21, 2014) with three consecutive terms as Prime Minister.
- The milestone surpassed the record of Pawan Kumar Chamling, who served as Chief Minister of Sikkim for 8,930 days. Neither the congratulations from within the ruling dispensation nor the alarm from its critics engages the constitutional question the milestone makes unavoidable: why does India’s Constitution impose no limit on how long a single individual may hold the office that wields actual executive power?
- **India is unusual among large democracies in this respect. The United States adopted the Twenty-Second Amendment in 1951, responding to Franklin Roosevelt’s four consecutive terms. South Korea, Brazil, Colombia, and Indonesia all impose presidential term limits. Among parliamentary democracies, the question is considered less urgent because the Prime Minister serves at the confidence of the legislature. But this theoretical availability of removal is what requires scrutiny in the Indian context.**

### Constituent Assembly’s rationale

- The Constituent Assembly’s reasoning was articulated by B.R. Ambedkar in his speech of November 4, 1948 introducing the Draft Constitution. Ambedkar drew a distinction between “the daily assessment of responsibility,” available through questions, no-confidence motions, and adjournment motions, and the “periodic assessment” offered by fixed-term elections. The daily assessment, he argued, was far more effective. No term limit was needed because the legislature’s confidence served as a rolling check.

### What the Tenth Schedule broke

- The Fifty-Second Amendment (1985) inserted the Tenth Schedule, providing for the disqualification of any legislator who votes against the party whip. The Supreme Court in *Kihoto Hollohan vs. Zachillhu* (1992) upheld its constitutionality as a measure to protect the integrity of the electoral mandate. But the Tenth Schedule fundamentally altered the relationship between legislature and executive that Ambedkar had relied upon. Under the anti-defection regime, a ruling-party member who votes against the government on a confidence motion faces disqualification. The no-confidence motion becomes a dead letter whenever the ruling party has a working majority.

- Nor does the British safety valve operate in India. Indian political parties have no institutionalised mechanism for leadership challenges. The anti-defection law locks legislators into party loyalty; the absence of intra-party democracy locks the party into loyalty to its leader.

### **The comparative evidence**

- Tom Ginsburg, James Melton, and Zachary Elkins, in their study of executive term-limit evasion, showed that leaders in multiple regions have sought to extend their tenure through constitutional amendment, replacement, or judicial interpretation.
- Ginsburg and Aziz Huq further argued that democratic decline more often proceeds through incremental institutional decay than through sudden authoritarian rupture. India has not needed to abolish a term limit because it never had one.
- The question is whether the absence of a formal constraint, combined with the neutralisation of parliamentary accountability, produces the same structural risks that term limits elsewhere are designed to prevent.

### **The presidential irony**

- India has developed a convention against a third presidential term, though the presidency is largely ceremonial. No President has served more than two terms. The expectation satisfies the three-part test for constitutional conventions laid down by Ivor Jennings in *The Law and the Constitution* (1959): precedents exist, the actors believed themselves bound by a rule, and the rule has a reason.
- The office that holds no real executive power is constrained by convention. The office that holds virtually all executive power is constrained only by the electorate's periodic verdict, with the anti-defection law largely disabling other accountability mechanisms.
- The strongest counter-argument is that voters have endorsed Mr. Modi's tenure three consecutive times, and that a term limit would override their expressed preference. The objection is serious; a term limit is, in a real sense, anti-democratic.
- But it rests on the premise that Ambedkar relied upon: that periodic elections, combined with parliamentary accountability, suffice to discipline executive power.
- If that accountability has been structurally impaired by the Tenth Schedule, elections must carry a heavier burden. And elections, however free, are a weak constraint on the compounding advantages of prolonged incumbency: control over appointments to regulatory bodies, the Election Commission, and the higher judiciary; the capacity to shape the information environment; and the ability to calibrate policy for electoral benefit across multiple cycles.

### **What might be done**

- The more natural reform is to restore the mechanism the framers relied upon. Exempt votes on confidence motions from the Tenth Schedule's disqualification provision, so that legislators can remove a government without forfeiting their seats.
- A more ambitious possibility is a constitutional amendment limiting consecutive terms as Prime Minister or Chief Minister, while permitting a return after a gap. The State-level dimension is equally pressing, given the extended tenures of leaders such as Jyoti Basu, Naveen Patnaik, and Pinarayi Vijayan.
- The 8,931-day milestone forces attention to whether India's parliamentary system retains the self-correcting capacity the framers relied upon.

## ❖ India can comfortably cater to PNG demand: govt.

**Context: India can comfortably cater to the demand of as many as 30 crore domestic piped natural gas (PNG) connections even if it were to solely rely on its domestic production of liquefied natural gas (LNG), according to Anjan Kumar Mishra, Secretary at the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board.**

- He also said that the government was trying to scale up number of connections added every day.
- With escalating tensions in West Asia, the government has sought to institute mechanisms for an accelerated and incentivised transition to piped gas.
- **The objective is to ease some pressure off the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), supplies of which have been affected.**
- India had approximately 1.1-1.2 crore active domestic PNG connections. These connections consumed 3 million metric standard cubic meters of natural gas per day.
- **India's current production of natural gas was 90 million metric standard cubic meters per day. Therefore, India could comfortably cater to about 30 crore connections solely with its domestic production of natural gas itself, he said.**
- "Even if we are just reserving the [domestic natural gas] production for domestic PNG, we should be able to make provisions for 30 crore connections," Mr. Mishra said. "So, even if you scale up to say two crore, or five crore, we are totally sufficient with respect to our domestic consumption."
- "We are trying to achieve 20,000 connections every day," he said. "At present, we are hovering around 8,000-9,000 connections per day; we are definitely trying to scale the level."
- He further noted that, with permissions being accorded on a "war footing" by the government, municipal corporations, among other entities concerned, had played an active role in the attempt to reach the target.
- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, in a gazette notification dated March 24, had introduced norms to help accelerate the uptake of and transition to PNG.
- Addressing concerns about the requirement of additional capital expenditure amid the expedited push for PNG and pipeline expansion, Mr. Mishra said the accelerated push would provide the city gas distributors (CGDs) an opportunity to infuse their available capital more rapidly.

## ❖ 'Strictly follow CRZ norms while executing Netravati project'

**Context: The Southern Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) at Chennai disposed of applications challenging the execution of Netravati Waterfront Promenade Project by Mangaluru Smart City Limited (MSCL), directing the agency to strictly adhere to the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2011, the conditions imposed in the CRZ clearance, and all other applicable statutory provisions, to ensure seamless execution of the project.**

- Passing the order on March 24, Judicial Member Pushpa Sathyanarayana and Expert Member Prashant Gargava cautioned MSCL, "The Project is already under the radar of not only this tribunal, but also environmental activists."

- MSCL is executing the project between Netravati railway bridge and Bolara seaface over a length of 2.1 km.

### **Landward side**

- Castigating MSCL for dumping debris on the river bank, the Tribunal said MSCL ought to have been aware that the project area falls within both prohibited and permitted coastal zones. “Hence all the proposed structures, such as the toilet block, food kiosk, and ticket counter, are directed to be aligned on the landward side of the old structure constructed prior to 1991.”

### **Non-compliance to NOC**

- National Environment Care Foundation (NECF), Mangaluru, through its General Secretary Shashidhar Shetty, had petitioned the tribunal, alleging non-compliance of conditions in the No Objection Certificate granted by the Karnataka State Coastal Zone Management Authority on October 7, 2022. Two suo motu applications registered by the NGT Principal Bench on the basis of news reports, that were transferred to the Southern Bench, too were disposed off.
- NECF had said the stretch of the riverfront was not suitable for a recreational project as floods could affect visitors during the monsoon. Boat-building yards and fishing activities were affected by the project. MSCL excavated the riverbank up to a depth of one metre, and filled it with black stone and concrete to construct a revetment. Mangroves located on the 2.1-km stretch were destroyed during the process, the NECF had argued.

### **Joint committee report**

- A joint committee comprising representatives of Central Pollution Control Board, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the Dakshina Kannada District Magistrate, and the National Centre for Coastal Research visited the site on June 11, 2024. The committee filed a report on June 20, 2024. It said the debris dumped in the river bank was removed and used for back-filling, while MSCL admitted it was done by mistake.
- The committee stated that mangroves existed only in patches, as per approved Coastal Zone Management plan and local CRZ map prepared by the Institute of Remote Sensing, Anna University. No significant mangrove damage was observed during the inspection.
- The tribunal closed two interlocutory applications filed by NECF on which the tribunal had earlier said MSCL could execute work only on the landward side.

### **❖ HC upholds amendments to Kerala Lok Ayukta Act**

#### **Context: The Kerala High Court upheld the amendments made in 2024 to the Kerala Lok Ayukta Act, 1999.**

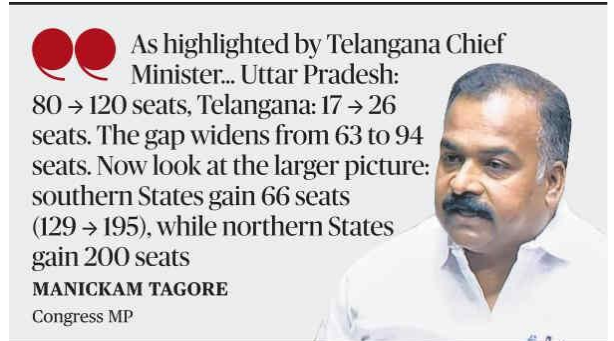
- Division Bench of Chief Justice Soumen Sen and Justice V.M. Syam Kumar delivered the judgment after hearing a batch of petitions, including by Haripad MLA and Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala, challenging the amendments.

- The Act was enacted for the purpose of improving the standards of public administration, including cases of corruption, favouritism, and official indiscipline in the administrative machinery. But the amendments are against its aims and objectives, the petitioners contended.

### ❖ Bill on A.P. capital likely to be tabled in Lok Sabha

**Context: Move follows a resolution passed by A.P. Assembly on March 28 urging Centre to amend the law and declare Amaravati the State's sole capital; former CM had favoured a three-capital formula.**

- The Union government is likely to introduce the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in the current Lok Sabha session to officially recognise Amaravati as the sole capital of Andhra Pradesh.
- Government sources said the move follows a resolution passed by the Andhra Pradesh Assembly on March 28, 2026, urging the Centre to amend the law to incorporate Amaravati as the State's capital.
- The Bill proposes to amend Section 5 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, which had designated Hyderabad as the common capital for both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh for a period not exceeding 10 years.
- It comes after a long process of settling a capital city for Andhra Pradesh after the bifurcation of the erstwhile State in 2014 into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. At that time, the Union government had set up a committee of experts to explore the question of a new capital.
- The committee had submitted a report in August that year. Though it had opposed the idea of a 'super capital' apprehending ecological damage among other issues, the Chandrababu Naidu-led Telugu Desam Party government began land acquisition in the State's Guntur district to establish the capital.
- When the government changed in 2019, work stalled as the new Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy was not in favour of a shift of the State's capital to Amaravati. Alleging that too much money was being spent on it, he proposed instead a "three-capital" formula, suggesting Visakhapatnam as the executive capital, Kurnool as the judicial capital, and Amaravati as the legislative capital.
- When the TDP returned to power in 2024, Mr. Naidu revived the Amaravati plan.
- 'Regional imbalance' bothers Cong. as govt. plans delimitation to roll out women's quota
- The Union government's proposal to carry out the delimitation exercise on the basis of the 2011 Census in order to implement the women's reservation law by the 2029 Lok Sabha election has not only reversed its earlier position but has also prompted the Congress to nuance its stance.
- Until recently, the government had maintained that the law could be implemented only after the completion of the delimitation exercise linked to the first Census conducted after 2026.



- The Congress, which had earlier pressed for the immediate implementation of the women's reservation law, is now demanding an all-party meeting to discuss the potential impact of such a move. Party leaders argue that if the strength of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies is increased uniformly by around 50%, States with larger populations would automatically gain more seats, widening the existing representation gap.
- The issue was first publicly flagged by Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, who pointed to the implications of a population-based increase in seats for southern States. Except for Andhra Pradesh, where the Telugu Desam Party, a member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), is in power, the other southern States are ruled by non-NDA parties that could potentially take a common stance on the issue.
- The Centre, however, has already rejected the Congress's demand for an all-party consultation.
- "As highlighted by Telangana Chief Minister @revanth\_anumula garu — Uttar Pradesh: 80 120 seats, Telangana: 17 26 seats. The gap widens from 63 to 94 seats. Now look at the larger picture: Southern States gain 66 seats (129 195), while northern States gain 200 seats," Congress MP Manickam Tagore said in a post on X.
- Though no official proposal has been placed in the public domain, government sources are said to be examining the possibility of increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha from 543 to around 816 seats, with 33% reserved for women in line with the provisions of the women's reservation law.
- Mr. Tagore said that while a uniform 50% increase in seats might appear fair, the underlying population disparities between regions would inevitably tilt parliamentary representation towards States with higher population growth in the Hindi belt. "Southern States risk being pushed to the political margins," he said.
- Beyond the emerging north-south debate, the Congress is also seeking clarity on how the government proposes to address demands for representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes within the women's reservation framework. Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi had raised this issue during a Lok Sabha debate in 2023.

### ❖ Most parts of India to see more heatwave days: IMD

**Context: East, central and northwest India may experience above-normal temperatures, while North India is likely to see a cooler-than-normal summer; country likely to get 12% more rainfall in April.**

- North India is likely to experience a cooler-than-normal summer this time, while other parts of the country may see more number of heatwave days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.
- From April to June, above-normal maximum temperatures are expected over most parts of east and northeast India, as well as eastern parts of central India, and adjoining peninsular regions. Maximum temperatures are likely to be "normal to below normal" over the remaining parts.

- There will likely be more than the usual number of heatwave days over parts of east, central and northwest India, and southeast peninsula during this period. Many parts of coastal Odisha, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh, and some regions of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka are likely to see heatwaves in April.

### **El Nino fears**

- The country will likely receive 12% more rain than usual in April.
- In July, however, forecasts suggest the emergence of an El Nino, a 1+ degree Celsius warming of regions of the Central Pacific Ocean that frequently links to reduced rain in India.
- Experts said it is still early to link cooler summers to diminished monsoon rainfall though it is a pattern that has held in the past. The IMD is expected to provide an initial forecast on the expected performance of monsoon 2026 on April 15. India experienced surplus monsoon in 2024 and 2025. Save for 2023, India has received 'normal' or excess rainfall in all years since 2020. With fertilizer output expected to be hit this year on account of the Iran-U.S. war, weak rainfall could impact kharif sowing. "Cooler than normal summer means less heating of the landmass, which typically acts as a natural pull for moisture and monsoon. This could affect the onset of the monsoon and its initial progress [over Kerala in June]," said Madhavan Rajeevan, climatologist and former Secretary, the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- "However a clearer picture could emerge only around end May. There is also a forecast for a 'super' El Nino. We shouldn't worry now but if these signals persist in May, the government should prioritise drought management."

### **Historical temperatures**

- At a press briefing, IMD Director-General M. Mohapatra said that while there were "textbook" relationships between landmass temperature and rainfall, the relationship was not simple and there were several meteorological factors that influenced the monsoon. IMD historical records suggest that 2004 and 2014 were years that saw relatively cooler summers over northwestern India followed by weak monsoon rainfall.
- March this year has seen several rain episodes bringing 12% more rain than is usual for the month. There were eight western disturbances that brought rain to northern India as opposed to six.

### **❖ SC wants practical SOP to combat human trafficking**

**Context: The Supreme Court has called for framing a practical, time-sensitive, and uniform Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to combat human trafficking cases.**

- "The court is not interested in any hypothetical or academic formula, but rather a practical strategy/approach which can be implemented/put into place right away, at the local police station level under whose jurisdiction the incident occurs," a Bench headed by Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah observed in a recent order.

## **Running against time**

- The nine-page court order said time was of the “greatest importance” from the moment the police get a complaint of a missing person.
- The guidelines must help in creating a procedural framework for the police to act on as soon as the complaint is received, it stated.
- The court directed the Union Home Secretary, the Home Secretaries and the Directors-General of Police of the States and the Union Territories to hold a discussion with stakeholders who were specifically dealing with issues of human trafficking within their jurisdictions to come up with specific proposals/suggestions for the perusal of the top court.
- The Bench scheduled the next hearing on April 21.
- “The exercise initially shall be limited to the very basic issue of investigation not only being initiated but seriously pursued immediately upon a report received relating to any missing person, more so in the background that till the person is not finally located, the case shall be kept alive not just on paper, but actually on the ground also,” the top court reiterated in the order.
- Besides seeking the aid of senior advocate H.S. Phoolka, who had assisted the Delhi High Court in crafting an SOP for dealing with trafficking cases in the national capital, the top court constituted a committee of P.M. Nair, former Director-General, NDRF; Veerendra Kumar Mishra, Director, Home Ministry; and S.D. Sanjay, Additional Solicitor General.

## **❖ Sanand ‘bridge’ to Silicon Valley: PM on rise in semiconductor ecosystem**

**Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday positioned Gujarat’s Sanand as an emerging link in the global semiconductor network as he inaugurated a semiconductor assembly and test facility of Kaynes Semicon in Sanand, declaring that a “bridge” now connects the industrial town with Silicon Valley.**

- Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister described the current period as the “decade of India” and underscored the rapid expansion of the country’s electronics sector. He projected that India’s semiconductor market could exceed \$100 billion by the end of the decade.
- The plant, built at an estimated cost of ₹3,300 crore, will serve as a significant milestone under India’s semiconductor mission.

## **Global market**

- Stating that India is emerging as a reliable semiconductor supplier in the global market, Mr. Modi added that chips manufactured in Sanand will reach the United States and illuminate the world. “India’s current global semiconductor market stands at ₹4.5 lakh crore, with a target of reaching ₹9 lakh crore by 2030,” he said.
- “As a result, the Semiconductor Mission was launched in India in 2021. This is not merely an industrial policy, but a declaration of India’s confidence on the global stage. He added that today’s New India is not just witnessing change but is moving forward to lead it,” he said.

## **India's position**

- Referring to India's recent participation in the Pax Silica initiative, a U.S.-led coalition focused on securing supply chains for semiconductors, artificial intelligence and rare earth elements, Mr. Modi said such collaborations will enhance resilience in critical technology sectors.

## **'Techade'**

- Describing the current period as India's 'Techade', Mr. Modi noted that India is among the leading adopters of artificial intelligence and pointed to the success of Digital India and fintech as evidence of growing public trust in technology.

## **❖ War can cut 1% point off India's FY27 GDP growth projection: EY**

**Context: India's real GDP growth for the next fiscal could erode by around 1 percentage point, while retail inflation could rise by about 1.5 percentage points from their baseline estimates if the Middle East conflict persists through the next fiscal, an EY report said.**

- The EY Economy Watch report said several sectors, including employment-intensive sectors like textiles, paints, chemicals, fertilizers, cement and tires, could be directly impacted. Any reduction in employment or incomes in these sectors may further dampen aggregate demand. As a result, supply and demand conditions may be affected by global oil market disturbances.
- It said the Indian economy, which imports nearly 90% of its crude oil requirements, is also highly dependent on imports of natural gas and fertilizers, and is particularly vulnerable to such external shocks, with the adverse effects likely to cascade across multiple sectors through strong forward and backward linkages with crude oil and energy.
- The conflict significantly disrupted global crude oil and energy markets by affecting supply, storage, transportation and prices. Even if the conflict is resolved in the near term, some of the disruptions may take considerable time to normalise, it said.

## **❖ Government says 30 mineral blocks made operational in FY2025-26**

**Context: In a first for India, the Ministry of Mines informed that 30 mineral blocks have been made operational in a single financial year viz. FY2025-26.**

- Essential to note, most of the blocks made operational are those of limestone followed by iron ore.
- Majority of these standalone limestone blocks are located in Gujarat, that is, four blocks, followed by Madhya Pradesh with three blocks, Rajasthan with two, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Assam one block each.
- Iron ore blocks made operational originate in Goa (four blocks) whilst Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Karnataka house two blocks each. For example, Odisha has three mines where iron ore and manganese co-exist, while limestone co-exists with marl in two blocks, and with marl and bauxite in one such block— both in Gujarat.
- The two minerals, other than the standalone mines, also exist alongside other minerals as marl and bauxite in other mines that have been made operational.

- For example, Odisha has three mines where iron ore and manganese co-exist, while limestone co-exists with marl in two blocks, and with marl and bauxite in one such block— both in Gujarat. Overall, majority of the blocks made operational belong to Gujarat (8 blocks).



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### ❖ State urges Maharashtra govt. to give Kannada option in TET

**Context: The Karnataka government has urged the Maharashtra government to provide an option for candidates to appear for the Teachers Eligibility Test (TET) in Kannada medium also for those who are serving in Kannada-medium schools in Maharashtra.**

- With the Supreme Court mandating all serving teachers to clear the TET by 2027 to ensure job security, the Maharashtra government has issued Kannada-medium school teachers recruitment notification to fill up vacancies in Kannada-medium schools of Maharashtra.
- The current-unavailability of TET in Kannada medium has caused significant distress and professional uncertainty among those serving as Kannada medium teachers in these schools.
- “These linguistic minority students and teachers come under the protection of constitutional provision of Articles 30, 347, 350, 350A and 350B,”.
- There was around 377 Kannada-medium schools with 44,860 students in Jatta, Akkalkot, Dakshin Solapur where about 80% linguistic minority Kannadigas live.

### ❖ In recognition of Basavanna's ideology, State of Kansas proclaims April 20 as 'Basava Day'

**Context: The State of Kansas in the U.S. has recognised the ideology of Karnataka's 12th century social reformer Basavanna by proclaiming April 20, Basava Jayanti, as "Basava Day" in Kansas. The proclamation was made by Kansas Governor Laura Kelly.**

- The proclamation said: “Basava Day honours the birth and teachings of Jagadguru Basavanna, also known as Basava, a 12th century Indian philosopher and a social reformer who was said to have been a mystic by temperament, an idealist by choice, a statesman by profession, a man of letters by taste, a humanist by sympathy, and a social reformer by conviction, whose message continues to inspire people around the world.”
- It also observes that Basava's vision remains highly relevant today of a just society, free from all discrimination.
- This proclamation celebrates the vibrant contributions of the Lingayat community and the broader Indian-American diaspora to the cultural fabric of Kansas.”

### ❖ Karnataka makes audit of adolescent pregnancies mandatory

**Context: In a move aimed at strengthening adolescent health and addressing early pregnancies, the State government has made it mandatory to audit all adolescent pregnancy cases involving girls aged 10 to 18 years.**

- The audit will be carried out by the respective Taluk Health Officers across the State, covering all such cases reported through both government and private health establishments.

- Adolescent pregnancy continues to be a significant public health and social concern, with implications for maternal health, neonatal outcomes and long-term socio-economic development. Pregnancies in this age group are associated with higher risks of complications, adverse birth outcomes, school dropout and increased social vulnerability. Citing global estimates, nearly half of adolescent pregnancies are unintended.
- The Health Department had directed private hospitals to mandatorily report cases of minor pregnancies under the POCSO Act, warning that failure to do so will invite legal action against both doctors and hospital managements.
- While programmes such as the National Health Mission and the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) focus on adolescent health through counselling, awareness and access to services, the persistence of teenage pregnancies points to gaps that require systematic review.
- Under the new framework, all adolescent pregnancies must be mandatorily reported on the Reproductive and Child Health platform. The audit will examine factors such as age at marriage, educational status, awareness of reproductive health, access to contraception and counselling services, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. It will assess linkages with schemes such as RKSK, ICDS and school health programmes.
- At the taluk level, an audit committee headed by the THO will be set up, with members including health inspectors, Primary Health Centre medical officer, ASHA supervisors, anganwadi supervisors and, where applicable, school representatives.
- Based on the findings, the health system will undertake measures including counselling through designated centres, provision of contraceptive services and pregnancy testing kits, and identification of vulnerable adolescents such as school dropouts, migrants and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

### ❖ Fast breeder nuclear reactor at Kalpakkam takes 'critical' leap forward

**Context: The prototype fast breeder reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam, Chennai, had achieved "criticality". This means that the nuclear reaction in the reactor had become safely self-sustaining, and was on its way to being able to produce electricity.**

- While it will be some months before the PFBR is powered up to its full capacity, and even longer before it produces useful electricity, multiple experiments have to be conducted at low power to check if it's running as expected, which must be evaluated by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board before it grants a go-ahead for commercial power operation, this the beginning of the second stage of India's nuclear programme.

Since it was first formally approved as a project by the government in 2003, the PFBR at Kalpakkam has taken over two decades to reach this stage.

### **PFBR as a bridge**

- India's nuclear reactors are heavily dependent on imported uranium. The country's three-stage programme, conceived in the 1950s, envisages being able to be independent of imported uranium, creating its own stockpile of suitable uranium, and eventually harnessing thorium, of which it has vast stores. The PFBR development serves as an essential bridge.
- "What this means is that we are now on our way to extract 80-100 times more energy from a given quantity of uranium."
- The PFBR is a 500 MW sodium-cooled, pool-type fast breeder reactor designed by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research and built by Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited, both operating under the Department of Atomic Energy.

### **Uranium powerhouse**

- India's pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWR) burn up uranium to produce electricity and small quantities of plutonium. However, less than 1% of the energy from this uranium (that can be used as heat and make electricity) is extracted from these reactors. The 'depleted' uranium in India isn't considered 'waste' but is reprocessed and stored. It, however, cannot be used back in the existing PHWRs.
- "The PFBR reactor is designed to use the 'spent' uranium from the PHWR as well as produce more plutonium. We are no longer using fresh, mined uranium here. As a thumb rule, this means that the 1% energy extracted can go up to nearly 10% for a single cycle and for every additional cycle 10% more. The efficiency of the uranium that is mined goes up substantially.
- "The burn-up or the energy extracted goes from about 8,000 units (in a PHWR) to nearly 100,000 units,".

### **Two more reactors**

- India's current plan, Mr. Grover said, was to construct two more PFBR at Kalpakkam, though this would only be following a proper assessment of the performance of the PFBR for a year. In the current scheme of things, the PFBR will produce only "marginally more" plutonium.
- "Our current priority is to use the uranium that we have far more efficiently. There is a reprocessing plant to come up on site at Kalpakkam which will use the processed spent fuel from the PFBR and for the two future PFBR. The PFBR will use depleted uranium (from the Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors or PHWRs).
- In the future, we will use thorium, but that is still a long time away, and what kind of reactors we will use for that, we need more work and have to wait and watch," he said, adding, "These reactors are self-sustaining but as and when we need more plutonium in the future, the design has to be optimised to extract more plutonium."
- Currently, India has a fleet of 18-20 PHWRs that use natural uranium as fuel and produce plutonium-239 (Pu-239) as a by-product in spent fuel. India's full fleet of 23 nuclear reactors have a combined capacity of 7.48 GW. India hopes to have 100 GW by 2047 and this is premised on a larger fleet of Bharat Small Modular Reactors (which are scaled down PHWR) that are in the pipeline.

- A significant technological challenge that has led to delays in the PFBR is the use of liquid sodium as a coolant to manage the extremely high heat from fissioning uranium atoms in the PFBR. In India's current reactors, the heat is largely absorbed by 'heavy water', or in some cases, ordinary water. Once fully operational, the PFBR is expected to generate 500 MW of electricity, with a design life of 40 years.

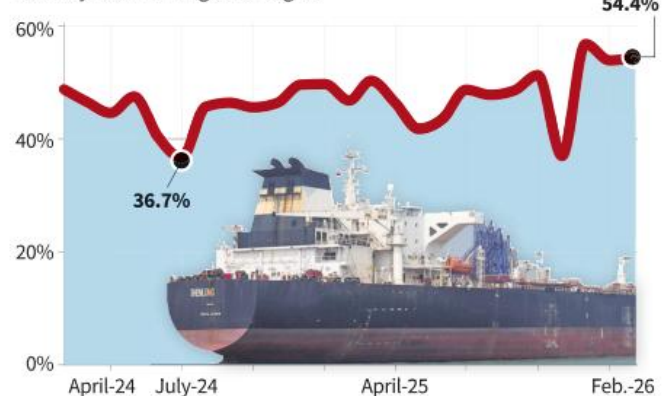
### ❖ 'Records on caste census decision can't be disclosed'

**Context: The Union government has stated that records of the Inter-Ministerial deliberations, inputs, and suggestions referred to in making the decision to enumerate caste in the 2027 Census are exempt from public disclosure under the Right to Information Act, 2005.**

- Responding to a request for these records filed by The Hindu under the RTI Act, the Union Cabinet Secretariat said that these records were exempt from disclosure under Section 8(1)(i) of the 2005 law. This section says the government is not obligated to disclose Cabinet papers, provided that "the matter is over" or "complete"; and provided that "the decisions of Council of Ministers, the reasons thereof, and the material on the basis of which the decisions were taken shall be made public after the decision has been taken".

### Risky Rise

The share of West Asian countries in India's oil imports has recently risen to long-term highs



SOURCE: PETROLEUM PLANNING AND ANALYSIS CELL

- On April 30, the Centre posted a statement, saying, "Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs has decided to include caste enumeration in the upcoming Census." On March 25, responding to requests for information on records relied upon for this decision, the Cabinet Secretariat said, "The information sought is exempted from disclosure under Section 8(1)(i) of the RTI Act."

### ❖ Share of West Asia oil imports rose to 54% just before war

**Context: Latest govt. data show India imported nearly 91% of its crude oil requirement in February 2026, a historic high; Of this, more than half came from West Asia, supplies that are now constrained.**

- India entered the energy crisis brought on by the Iran war particularly susceptible to disruptions in West Asia, the latest government data show.
- Not only was India importing nearly 91% of its crude oil requirements as of February 2026, a historic high, but more than 54% of these imports came from West Asian countries — their second-highest share in nearly 3.5 years.
- The analysis by of data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows that the volume of India's total oil imports in February 2026 increased nearly 33% to 205.3 lakh tonnes over February last year.

- That is, India imported a third more oil in February 2026 than it did a year earlier. Further, according to data with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, India’s oil imports accounted for 90.8% of the total oil processed by Indian refineries in February 2026, up from an already historically-high 90.2% in the first half of 2025-26.
- Not only has India’s dependence on oil imports risen, but it has also recently increased its dependence on the West Asian region. This has come as it had, until the outbreak of the war in West Asia, sought to reduce Russian oil imports in line with demands from the U.S. Russia’s share in the volume of oil India imports rose to 26.5% in February 2026, but was still significantly lower than the peak of 40.2% it had reached in May last year.
- On the other hand, the share of oil imports from India’s West Asian sources — Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar — rose to a combined 54.4% in February 2026. Apart from December 2025, when this figure hit 56.8%, this was their highest share since September 2022.
- However, those sources are now constrained due to the war, with officials in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry confirming to The Hindu that India’s oil imports from Russia have increased “big time” in March 2026, but this time without the benefit of the discount Russia was earlier providing. The official data on India’s oil imports in March will be released in early May.

**Expensive oil**

- The data show that not only was India importing a large quantity of oil in the lead up to the U.S.-Israel war on Iran, but that it was also benefiting from a crash in prices. The price of the Indian basket of crude oil in February 2026 stood at \$69 per barrel.
- Prices had averaged about \$78 in the previous financial year.
- The Indian basket comprises a weighted average of prices of different grades of oil in Oman and Dubai, along with the price of Brent.

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**Context: Each side offers divergent accounts of its terms; Tehran initially agrees to safe passage through Strait of Hormuz but stops vessels later, accusing Tel Aviv of ceasefire violation as Israeli strikes kill 112 in Lebanon; Islamabad to host talks tomorrow.**

- The two-week ceasefire announced by the U.S. and Iran hung in the balance on Wednesday with each side offering divergent accounts of its terms and Israel launching one of its heaviest air strikes on Lebanon since the war began, drawing swift accusations from Tehran of truce violation.
- U.S. President Donald Trump said he has “suspended the bombing of Iran” for two weeks and will begin talks with Tehran based on its 10-point proposal, provided Iran reopens the Strait of Hormuz. Iran said it will halt strikes if U.S.-Israeli attacks stop and promised safe passage through the strait in coordination with its forces during the truce. Pakistan, which mediated between the two sides, said all parties and their allies have agreed to an immediate ceasefire on all fronts, including Lebanon, and Islamabad will host direct talks on April 10.
- However, Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who welcomed the U.S.-Israel ceasefire, said Lebanon was not part of the deal. Israel then stepped up air strikes on more than 100 targets in Lebanon, killing at least 112 people. Iran’s Fars news agency said oil vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz have been stopped because of Israel’s “ceasefire violation”.
- Mr. Trump said earlier in the day that he was suspending his planned attack on Iran based on conversations with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir. “This will be a double sided ceasefire! The reason for doing so is that we have already met and exceeded all Military objectives, and are very far along with a definitive Agreement concerning Longterm peace with Iran, and peace in the Middle East [West Asia],” he added.
- The U.S. had earlier sent a 15-point ceasefire proposal to Iran through Pakistan, which Tehran rejected. Instead, it submitted a 10-point proposal demanding the lifting of all sanctions and continued control over the Strait of Hormuz, according to Iran’s state media.
- “We received a 10-point proposal from Iran, and believe it is a workable basis on which to negotiate. Almost all of the various points of past contention have been agreed to between the United States and Iran, but a two week period will allow the Agreement to be finalised and consummated,” Mr. Trump added.
- Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the U.S. requested for talks based on its 15-point proposals and President Trump has accepted “the entirety of Iran’s 10-point proposals as a basis for negotiations”. “If the attacks on the Islamic Republic of Iran cease, our powerful armed forces will also cease their defensive attacks. Safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz will be possible for two weeks in coordination with the Iranian armed forces and taking into account existing technical limitations,” Mr. Araghchi said in a statement.

- Iran's Supreme National Security Council said the country has dealt a "historic and crushing defeat" to the U.S. and Israel, adding that Washington was forced to accept its 10-point proposal. The 10-point proposal, according to the Council, includes: no new aggression against Iran; continued Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz; acceptance of uranium enrichment; removal of all sanctions; payment of compensation; withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from the region and cessation of war on all fronts, including Lebanon.
- Later in the day, the White House said the 10-point proposal Iran has submitted to the U.S. was different from the plan released by Iran's state media. Mr. Trump also said in an interview that Lebanon was not part of the ceasefire and wrote in a social media post that Iran would not be enriching uranium, both contradicting Iran's public positions.
- "There will be no enrichment of Uranium, and the United States will, working with Iran, dig up and remove all of the deeply buried (B-2 Bombers) Nuclear "Dust," he said. He also said talks are under way on "tariff and sanctions" relief for Iran.
- After the U.S. leader announced the deal, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif invited both sides to Islamabad for direct talks on April 10.
- "I... extend deepest gratitude to the leadership of both the countries and invite their delegations to Islamabad on Friday to further negotiate for a conclusive agreement... We earnestly hope, that the 'Islamabad Talks' succeed in achieving sustainable peace and wish to share more good news in coming days!" he wrote in a social media post.

#### ❖ India welcomes move, calls for trade via Strait

**Context: The Indian government welcomed the U.S.-Iran ceasefire agreement that was brokered by Pakistan close to the deadline, calling for an early end to the conflict and for "unimpeded" trade flow through the Strait of Hormuz.**

- India welcomes Pakistan-brokered Iran-U.S. ceasefire, stresses dialogue and diplomacy.
- The Indian government on Wednesday welcomed the U.S.-Iran ceasefire agreement brokered by Pakistan close to the deadline, calling for an early end to the conflict and for "unimpeded" trade flow through the Strait of Hormuz.
- In a carefully worded statement, the Ministry of External Affairs did not refer directly to any of the parties in the conflict by name. Unlike other foreign ministries in other capitals, the MEA did not "thank" Pakistan for its role in mediating between both sides and for offering to host the next round of talks expected this week.
- However, the MEA said it hoped that the development in West Asia "will also encourage peace efforts in Ukraine", drawing a parallel to trilateral talks between Russia, Ukraine, and the U.S.
- India is expected to further articulate its position as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri is in Washington. After meeting visiting Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman in Delhi on Wednesday, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will travel to Mauritius on Friday for a regional Indian Ocean conference where he will meet counterparts from South Asia and West Asia, and will then fly to the United Arab Emirates for talks on April 11 and 12.

- The agreement was announced overnight by U.S. President Donald Trump, less than two hours before his 8 p.m. deadline (05.30 a.m. India time) for the Iranian government to comply with his demands expired.
- “We welcome the ceasefire reached and hope that it will lead to a lasting peace in West Asia,” the MEA statement said, adding that “de-escalation, dialogue, and diplomacy” are essential to bring an early end to the war.

### **Threats and timing**

- “The conflict has already caused immense suffering to people and disrupted global energy supply and trade networks,” it said, referring to both the airstrikes by the U.S. and Israel, and Iran as well as Iran’s control of the Strait of Hormuz, where only about eight of about 25 ships stuck in the strait have been allowed to pass.
- The timing of the announcement was particularly tense due to Mr. Trump’s comments on Tuesday, threatening that a “whole civilisation will die”, if Iran did not accept a deal and open up the strait. In an apparent climbdown, he said the ceasefire had been made to discuss Iran’s 10-point proposal in response to the U.S.’ 15-point proposal. However, there is little clarity that the U.S. demands would be met by Iran.
- As reports suggest the next round of talks could be held in Islamabad on Friday, with U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance and Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf expected to attend.
- Analysts said New Delhi would need to watch a number of factors closely, including the sustainability of the ceasefire, opening of the strait, as well as whether the role of Pakistan in the peace talks would alter India’s regional balance.

### **❖ MGNREGA: Centre yet to approve labour budget; workers await work in State'**

**Context: While workers in Karnataka have registered and are seeking employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Centre is yet to approve labour budget for the State for 2026-27, even though the financial year has begun. The delay has left many without work during the peak pre-monsoon season.**

- Though Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Grameen) Act, 2025, has replaced MGNREGA, it is yet to be rolled out.
- Under MGNREGA, households first register and obtain job cards and are then required to submit demands for work, either at the gram panchayat or through the online system. Panchayats then allocate and initiate specific works based on the approved labour budget. Until the Centre approves the budget, panchayats cannot start new works. Only the first two steps can be taken.

### **Nil expenditure**

- As on April 8, of the 5,958 gram panchayats in the State, 4,869 reported “zero expenditure”, indicating that no new work has been initiated this financial year across 81% of the local bodies which are primary implementing units for MGNREGA. The remaining 1,089 panchayats have recorded minimal expenditure. The expenses, however, appear to be linked to spillover works from the previous financial years.

- “This is that time of the year when we depend most on MGNREGA,” Ramesh K., a worker from Chincholi, Kalaburagi, who is awaiting work under the scheme, said, explaining that after the harvest, there is not much agricultural work available. “The monsoon has not started yet, so this gap is where income becomes uncertain. The income from MGNREGA helps us to buy seeds and fertilizer for the next crop, and handle small debts,” Mr. Ramesh added.
- “If work is not given now, we have to wait until October or November. By June, the monsoon begins, and most of the work under the scheme cannot be taken up in heavy rains,” said Muniraj M., explaining that after that, agricultural activity picks up again.

### **Form 6 not available**

- Many workers also said that submitting a demand for work itself has become nearly impossible. While some said they are unable to do it online, others said when they approach gram panchayats, they are not being given ‘Form 6’, which is required to submit while demanding work.
- “From past few months, Form 6 is not being given. Officials, however, are not telling us why, but some say new forms under VB-G RAM G were expected, and no work could be offered until they arrive,” said Mahantappa K., a seasonal agricultural worker from Anantapur in Belagavi.’
- Mr. Mahantappa added that while the wages are consistently delayed under the scheme, workers like him have no option as MGNREGA provides employment.
- Unlike previous years when entire families would enroll under the scheme, many families told that households are splitting up, with some members migrating to cities in search of stable work, while others staying back, continuing to seek employment under the scheme.
- In 2025-26, 39.39 lakh had availed themselves of work under the scheme. Though there has been decline in demand, due to factors like deletion of job cards, delayed wage payments and increased digitisation, workers like Lakshmi Raju, from Raichur, point out that for many households, MGNREGA remains the only steady source of income.
- “It brings us up to ₹30,000 per household,” she said, adding that in several women-led households, MGNREGA wages, along with government pensions where available, are often the only sources of income.
- Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Priyank Kharge said the Centre had indicated that VB-G RAM G, which was to come into effect from April 1, 2026, would be extended till the end of April and had asked States to submit estimates. “We submitted the estimates as required, but the labour budget is yet to be approved,” he said. He added that if the framework had been ready, it should have been implemented from the start of the financial year.

**Context: 'Prices, which remained stable during the harvesting season from Dec. 2025 to Feb. 2026, began to fall soon after the conflict escalated in March'.**

- Coffee growers in Karnataka are withholding their produce as prices have declined sharply over the past month, following disruptions triggered by the ongoing conflict in West Asia.
- Planters say prices, which remained stable and favourable during the harvesting season from December 2025 to February 2026, began to fall soon after the conflict escalated in March. The decline, estimated at nearly 20% to 30%, has been attributed to disruptions in export markets, particularly in the Gulf and West Asian region, a key destination for Indian coffee.
- Poovanna B.B., a small coffee planter from Virajpet in Kodagu, said that he had completed harvesting in February but has been unable to sell his produce due to the sudden drop in prices.
- “We were getting good prices during the harvest season, but after the West Asia conflict began, prices dropped significantly. Now, our coffee is lying in the godown as we are reluctant to sell at such low rates,” he said. Mr. Poovanna added that the situation has put growers in a difficult position, as they depend on timely sales to fund plantation activities. “We need money for fertilisers and to pay labourers for works like pruning, which begins this month. With prices so low, it is difficult to proceed with these essential activities,” he said.
- Planters in Chikkamagaluru also shared similar concerns. Ravindra Kumar, a grower from Masagali village in Chikkamagaluru, said that many estate owners are being forced to sell their produce at lower prices despite incurring losses, as they have to repay bank loans taken for plantation activities.

### **Loan repayments**

- “This is the time when we usually sell our produce, clear our annual loans, and use the remaining income for maintenance and household expenses. But with such low prices, we are not making any profit. Still, we have no option but to sell, as loan repayments cannot be delayed,” he said.
- According to export data from the Coffee Board of India for the period between January 1 and March 25, West Asia and Gulf countries continue to account for a significant share of India’s coffee exports. Turkiye imported 4,830.722 tonnes during the period, closely followed by the United Arab Emirates at 4,712.609 tonnes.
- Jordan imported 3,964.182 tonnes, while Libya (2,631.090 tonnes), Egypt (2,619.012 tonnes), Kuwait (2,079.678 tonnes), and Saudi Arabia (1,585.369 tonnes) were among other major buyers in the region. Despite the current price slump, overall export volumes have shown growth. India exported 1,20,874 tonnes of coffee between January 1 and March 25 this year, compared to 97,667 tonnes during the same period last year.

## **Largest destination**

- Europe continues to dominate as the largest destination for Indian coffee. Italy remains the top importer with 22,332.888 tonnes, followed by the Russian Federation (10,246.564 tonnes) and Germany (10,205.247 tonnes). Belgium, Turkiye, and the UAE also feature among the leading importers.
- However, growers say that higher export volumes have not translated into better returns at the farm level due to prevailing geopolitical uncertainties. “With prices remaining unstable, we are now adopting a wait-and-watch approach, hoping for a recovery in the coming weeks.
- Until then, we continue to hold on to our produce, even as financial pressures mount,”said Mr. Poovanna.

## **❖ Launch date of first uncrewed mission of Gaganyaan to be announced soon: ISRO**

**Context: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairperson V. Narayanan said that the launch date for the first uncrewed mission of Gaganyaan would be announced soon.**

- The HLVM3 G1/OM1 mission, which is the first uncrewed mission of Gaganyaan, was scheduled to be launched in the first quarter of 2026. However, it has been delayed.
- “As you are aware, based on guidelines, direction and announcement made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are working on the Gaganyaan programme. Before going for the crewed mission, three uncrewed missions are targeted. Right now, we are working on the first uncrewed mission.
- All activities are going well, the timeframe will be announced in a couple of days,” Dr. Narayanan told reporters on Wednesday, on the sidelines of the International Conference on Spacecraft Mission Operations.

## **❖ ‘Over 4,600 objects placed in orbit in 2025 after 315 space launches’**

**Context: The year 2025 saw 315 successful space launches globally, with about 4,651 objects placed in orbit. According to the Indian Space Situational Assessment Report (ISSAR) for 2025 released, a maximum number of payloads were deployed during 2025.**

- The report stated that 4,651 objects were launched to orbits and 1,911 re-entered the atmosphere with a net annual growth of 74.5%.

## **27 satellites operational**

- With regard to the Indian space assets in 2025, eight satellites were launched and four rocket bodies were placed in orbit. The report said that 12 Indian objects re-entered the atmosphere.
- It added that the IRNSS-1 D satellite was decommissioned 600 km above geosynchronous orbit. In total, there are 86 Indian satellites in orbit of which 27 are operational, 23 are defunct (still in orbit), and 36 decayed.

- Among the Indian rocket bodies, three Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM-3) are still in orbit and five are decayed; four Small Satellite Launch Vehicles are decayed; four Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicles (GSLV) are in orbit and 10 have decayed, and 42 Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles (PSLV) are in orbit and 19 have decayed.
- The report also said that 563 and 519 orbital manoeuvres were carried out in low-earth orbit and geostationary orbit, respectively.
- Fourteen collision avoidance measures were carried out in low-earth orbit along with four in geostationary orbit, the ISSAR report said.

### ❖ 72-year-old man from Shivamogga dies of Kyasanur Forest Disease

**Context: A 72-year-old man from Sagar taluk died of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) at a private hospital in Manipal, Udupi district.**

- The man, who complained of vomiting and diarrhoea, first sought treatment at a private hospital in Sagar on April 5, from where he was referred to the taluk general hospital.
- His blood sample was collected there, and laboratory tests the next day confirmed that he was infected with KFD. He was subsequently referred to a private hospital in Manipal the same day.
- District Health Officer K.S. Nataraj told The Hindu that the patient died in Manipal. "The exact cause of death will be known after the death audit," he said.

#### **Tick-borne disease**

- The KFD is a tick-borne disease, and people living near forest areas are particularly vulnerable to infection. The district administration and officials of the Health and Family Welfare Department are conducting awareness campaigns on preventing its spread. People visiting forest areas have been advised to apply tick-repellent oil on their hands and legs.'

### ❖ Groundwater extraction in State saw reduction in 2025

**Context: Releasing the 2025 Groundwater Assessment Report, Minister Boseraju says the gains have been made owing to good rainfall, policy interventions, and large-scale water conservation initiatives implemented over the past two years.**

- Karnataka has recorded a significant decline in groundwater usage along with a notable increase in annual recharge capacity, reflecting the impact of sustained water conservation efforts and good rainfall, according to Minister for Minor Irrigation, Science and Technology N.S. Boseraju.
- Releasing the 2025 Groundwater Assessment Report here on Wednesday, the Minister said the gains had been made owing to good rainfall, policy interventions, and large-scale water conservation initiatives implemented over the past two years.

#### **Improved indicators**

- According to the report, overall groundwater extraction reduced from 68.44% in 2024 to 66.49% in 2025, indicating more responsible and sustainable usage patterns across the State.

- Also, the annual groundwater recharge capacity has increased from 18.74 billion cubic metres (BCM) in 2024 to 19.28 BCM in 2025, while annual extractable groundwater resources rose from 16.88 BCM to 17.41 BCM.
- The improvement has been driven largely by the expansion of water conservation structures across the State. Recharge through these structures increased by 29.11%, from 0.81 BCM to 1.04 BCM in a year.

### **Rural impact**

- The report indicates improvement in groundwater status across 11 taluks, with several regions moving to safer categories. Chamarajanagar taluk has improved from ‘over-exploited’ to ‘critical’.
- Domestic groundwater extraction has declined by 0.58%, from 1,21,731 hectare-metres in 2024 to 1,21,023 hectare-metres in 2025. Officials attributed this reduction to increased reliance on surface water under the Jal Jeevan Mission.
- Mr. Boseraju said initiatives such as lake rejuvenation, year-round water supply through treated and surface water, sustained public awareness campaigns, and good rainfall have played a key role in reducing over-extraction and improving recharge.
- “Instead of depending solely on the 120-day monsoon, we are ensuring water availability across all 365 days through scientific management. This has strengthened long-term water security for both farmers and urban residents,” he said.

### **Digital Water Stack initiative**

- The Minister also announced the rollout of the Digital Water Stack initiative. Under this framework, the government will introduce space technology and AI-based satellite surveillance to obtain real-time data for continuous groundwater monitoring.

### **❖ Cabinet clears draft amendment Bill over women’s reservation**

**Context: The Union Cabinet approved a draft amendment Bill to implement the Women’s Reservation Act by the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.**

- The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, sources said. The amendment seeks to revise the implementation framework of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, formally known as the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, passed in 2023. Under the proposal, the strength of the Lok Sabha is set to rise from 543 to 816, following a fresh delimitation exercise.
- Of the expanded House, 273 seats, around one-third will be reserved for women. The quota will be applied vertically, providing reservation for women within the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories as well.
- In a significant departure from the existing law, the government plans to carry out delimitation based on the 2011 Census, rather than waiting for Census data from 2027.
- The Bill will be taken up for debate at the Budget Session from April 16-18.

## ❖ Rooftop solar: govt. planning incentive scheme for States

**Context: To meet its target of one crore PM Surya Ghar households by March 2027, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is encouraging States to adopt a “utility-led aggregation (ULA)” model, whereby State electricity distribution companies will fund the installation of rooftop solar systems for households that either cannot afford them or lack the infrastructure to install them.**

- Though this scheme has been in force since mid-2025, it has not been popular. The Ministry is mooted an incentive scheme to make this more attractive to States. “With this scheme, we should be able to cover 30 lakh households,” Renewable Energy Minister Pralhad Joshi said.

## ❖ India withdraws bid to host climate summit in 2028

**Context: The government cites a review of its 2028 commitments, says report; the country had last hosted the summit in 2002, when it was a low-key affair.**

- India has withdrawn its bid to host the 33rd edition of the Conference of Parties (COP 33) in 2028 — the annual United Nations climate talks, according to a report by Climate Home News (CHN).
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced India’s interest in hosting the COP33 at the COP28 in Dubai in 2023.
- The Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change did not comment on the report, but The Hindu has independently confirmed its veracity.
- According to the CHN report, an April 2 letter by Rajat Agrawal, Joint Secretary in the Environment Ministry, to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stated that India was withdrawing its candidacy following a “review of its commitments for 2028”.
- In July 2025, the Environment Ministry set up a dedicated cell for the “professional and logistical requirements” for organising the COP33. This followed a joint declaration at the 17th BRICS summit on July 7, where the member countries “welcomed” India’s candidacy.
- The hosting of the COP rotates among the UN’s five regional groups, with India belonging to the Asia Pacific group.
- The COP30 was held in Brazil. The edition this year is to be jointly hosted by Turkiye and Australia and the 2027 summit (COP32) is scheduled to be held in Ethiopia. With India withdrawing, South Korea is the only country that has so far expressed interest in hosting the COP33. India has hosted the summit only once — in 2002 (COP8) — when it was a relatively low-key affair.
- On March 25, India announced its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), committing by 2035 to source 60% of its installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources, reduce emissions intensity of GDP by 47%, and increase its carbon sink by 3.5-4 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent.

## ❖ India-Turkiye talks hint at a thaw in bilateral relations

**Context: In the first sign that India and Turkiye could be working to restore bilateral relations ruptured during the India-Pakistan conflict last year, officials from both countries held the 12th round of Foreign Office Consultations (FoC).**

- The talks, between delegations led by Turkish Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Berris Ekinci and Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (West) Sibi George in Delhi, were held four years after the last round in 2022 in Ankara. Relations have been tense over a number of statements by Turkiye President Recep Erdogan on Kashmir, and spiralled last May over Turkiye's military support to Pakistan during the Operation Sindoor conflict.

### **Comprehensive review**

- "The discussions focused on areas such as trade and investments, tourism, technology and innovation, energy, cooperation in educational and cultural fields, people to people ties, and fight against cross border terrorism," the Ministry of External affairs said in a statement, referring to the talks as "a comprehensive review of the current state of bilateral relations".
- "The two sides also exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual interest," it added.
- New Delhi and Ankara's move to revive bilateral talks comes days after Mr. George travelled to Azerbaijan, where ties had also been strained over its government's support to Pakistan in statements and military assistance, particularly on the supply of drones, and indicates that the Modi government may be revising its position on the issue.
- Former Indian diplomats also said the development reflected a more realistic approach to relations. "In an era of growing global disorder, India-Türkiye talks reflect a pragmatic effort to manage differences and keep lines of communication open," said Vikas Swarup, who retired as Secretary (West) in the MEA (2019-2021) and had served in the Embassy at Ankara.

## ❖ Steps into the past: 1,500-year-old reservoir unearthed on Elephanta Island near Mumbai

**Context: As we trudged through the scrub jungle on a hill on the Elephanta Island off the Mumbai coast on March 17, Abhijit Ambekar declared with a flourish, "We will show you the wonder-discovery of our excavation." Professor Abhijit Dandekar chipped in, "It is a show-stopper."**

- As we reached the trench, where several men and women were excavating the soil deep below, it was clear that it was a spectacular discovery. There it was: a series of steps leading to a reservoir below. In other words, it was a stepped reservoir or a reservoir built with a wide staircase of perfectly aligned stone blocks.
- Dr. Ambekar, director of the current excavation and Superintending Archaeologist, Mumbai Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), estimated the stepped reservoir to be about 1,500 years old.

- “It is a massive structure — about 14.7 metres long, and 6.7 metres and 10.8 metres wide, forming a T-shape. The excavation has reached a depth of five metres so far. We have exposed 20 steps. The steps are built with stone-blocks which are not from the island. They were ferried from the mainland,” he said.
- While rock-cut cisterns have been found earlier on the Elephanta Island, the discovery of this stepped reservoir was important because it was a carefully designed architecture for storing water, Dr. Ambekar said. “Although the island receives a large amount of rainfall from the monsoon, very little seeps into the soil because of the island’s rocky nature, and the water runs off into the sea,” he said. Hence, this stepped reservoir, which was “a remarkable engineering work.”
- The ASI’s Mumbai Circle began the excavation here in November 2025. It has excavated 19 trenches, each measuring 10 metres x 10 metres.
- The excavation has so far yielded a beautifully built brick structure, which could be a dyeing vat for colouring textiles, a big storage pot, terracotta figurines, glass and stone bangles, beads made of carnelian and quartz and stone anchors. A total of about 3,000 amphorae sherds of Mediterranean origin and torpedo jar sherds from West Asia, including Mesopotamia, have been unearthed. Amphorae and torpedo jars were used for storing wine, oil and fish sauce. Their potsherds showed the island’s long-distance maritime contacts.
- Importantly, 60 copper, lead and silver coins have so far been found in the excavations. Several copper coins have been identified as belonging to ruler Krishnaraja of the Kalachuri dynasty of the sixth century CE, said Dr. Abhijit Dandekar, Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology of Deccan College, Pune.
- The identification was made on the basis of the motif of a seated bull on the obverse and a temple symbol with the legend of Sri Krishnaraja on the reverse, he said.

#### ❖ NTPC inks MoU with Électricité de France

- State-owned National Thermal Power Corp Ltd. (NTPC) said it had inked a non-binding memorandum of understanding (MoU) with French counterpart Électricité de France (EDF) to explore opportunities in India’s nuclear power space.
- According to a statement, the two entities would seek to establish a framework for jointly assessing “feasibility and approach for collaboration”.
- **NTPC is targeting to institute 30 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047.**

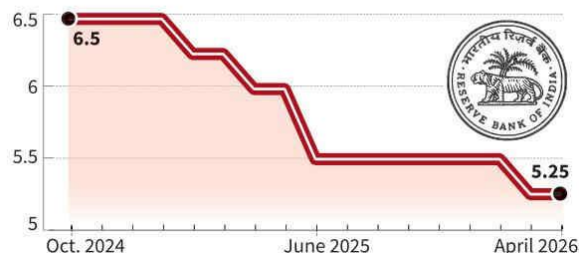
## ❖ MPC factors in ceasefire to keep repo rate unchanged

**Context: Intensity and duration of West Asia conflict, damage to energy and other infra add risk to inflation and growth outlooks, says panel, cuts growth forecast to 6.9%, hikes inflation projection to 4.5%.**

- Hours after Donald Trump announced on social media about the conditional temporary ceasefire in West Asia, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) unanimously voted to hold the repo rate at 5.25%. It also decided to continue with the neutral stance.
- Later, addressing a press conference, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra said that the ceasefire, to some extent, has been taken into account in the monetary policy decision.

### Rate pause

The Monetary Policy Committee unanimously decided to keep the repo rate under the liquidity adjustment facility unchanged



### Low interest rates

- Mr. Malhotra said despite the impact of the war in West Asia, there was a possibility of having low interest rates in the short to medium term in India.
- Stating that the West Asia conflict would impede growth, the MPC opined that the intensity and the duration of the conflict and the resultant damage to the energy and other infrastructure added risk to the inflation and growth outlooks.
- The economy is confronted with a supply shock, it emphasised. Going forward, elevated energy and other commodity prices, as also shocks to availability of inputs due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, were likely to impact growth in 2026-27, it added.
- Taking various factors into consideration, the real GDP growth forecast for 2026-27 has been reduced by 70 bps to 6.9%.
- And the CPI inflation for 2026-27 had been projected a tad higher at 4.5% from 4.4% earlier.
- The RBI has factored in crude price at \$85 a barrel in the inflation forecast for this year and \$75 for next year. Stating that the global economic conditions and sentiment had soured after the outbreak of the West Asia conflict, the MPC said these had adversely impacted the growth-inflation outlook.
- The MPC noted that geopolitical uncertainties had heightened significantly and the upside risks to the inflation outlook, driven by increased energy price pressures and probable weather disturbances affecting food prices, had increased.

## ❖ Elevated crude prices to increase imported inflation, widen CAD: Malhotra

**Context: Despite the unprecedented geopolitical disturbances in West Asia and supply chain disruptions as well as its resultant impact on the global economy, Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra said the fundamentals of the Indian economy remained on a stronger footing at the current juncture than in previous crisis episodes, providing it with 'greater resilience to withstand shocks'.**

- However, Mr. Malhotra noted that elevated crude oil prices could increase imported inflation and widen the current account deficit. He said the disruptions in energy markets, fertilisers and other commodities may adversely impact industry, agriculture and services, reducing domestic output.
- “The heightened uncertainty, increased risk aversion and safe haven demand could impact domestic liquidity conditions, economic activity, consumption and investment and weaker global growth prospects may dampen external demand and reduce remittance flows and adverse spillovers from global financial markets could tighten domestic financial conditions and raise the cost of borrowing,” he said.
- Overall, the initial supply shock can potentially transform into a demand shock over the medium term if the restoration of supply chains is delayed, he emphasised.
- To a question on the impact on remittances, RBI Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta said, “Our remittances come from diverse jurisdictions in which the share of the Gulf countries have declined over time. If you look at the last 10 to 15 years data they [remittances from all geographies] have moved in the upward direction. So we are not anticipating any dip to the remittances because it [the war going by the social media post] is going to be resolved soon.”
- “We anticipate that the demand for migrant workers will infact increase from this [Gulf] region which will help the remittances,” she added.
- She said besides geographical diversity, remittances are coming from a diverse skill pool which includes low-skilled, mid-skilled and high-skilled migrant workers across countries.

#### ❖ Govt. okays 2 hydro units in Arunachal

**Context: In a boost to hydro-electric power in Arunachal Pradesh, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved an investment of ₹26,069.5 crore in the construction of Kamala Hydro Electric project alongside a sum of ₹14,105.83 crore to build the Kalai-II hydro-electric project.**

- The Kamala Hydro-electric project would account for a total installed capacity of 1,720 megawatts and expected to generate 6,870 million units of energy a year. It spans Kamle, Kra Daadi and Kurung Kumey districts of the State. The Kalai-II hydro-electric project, would have an installed capacity of 1,200 MW and generate 4,852.95 million units annually.

#### ❖ Shippers seek clarity as Iran still controls strait of Hormuz

**Context: On Day 1 of ceasefire, nearly 10 vessel exits through the Strait of Hormuz have been reported by Rystad Energy, a Norway-based energy research firm. Of these, four are likely “dark” Iranian tankers, two are bulk carriers and one is a mid-size tanker.**

- “Looking ahead, there is little expectation flows will normalise in the near term,” says Erik Grundt, Senior Data Analyst at Rystad Energy.
- While ship owners and charterers were preparing for a quick exit, they were also awaiting more clarity on the terms and conditions for transit given the indications that Iran still exercises de-facto control over the strait.



### **Technical limitations**

- Iran says safe passage will involve its armed forces and there are “technical limitations” though the U.S. President has talked about “complete, immediate safe opening.” Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Arsenio Dominguez, has said that he is working with relevant parties to implement an appropriate mechanism to ensure the safe transit of ships through the strait.
- Hundreds of ships are stranded west of the Persian Gulf, fearing attacks and damage to cargo, vessel structure and lives of seafarers. Among them were some 35 ships, either Indian-flagged or foreign flagged carrying cargo for India, three weeks into the war. Nearly 22 energy-critical vessels were marked for evacuation with Indian naval assistance. This included three LNG carriers, 12 LPG carriers and seven crude oil tankers. Eight Indian flagged LPG carriers have crossed the strait and come to India since then.
- “Though ceasefire has been announced, we are waiting for clearance from Indian government before our ships will move. We understand that we are bringing supplies essential for the everyday lives of Indians. But the safety of our ships and lives of seafarers onboard are at stake,” says a source among shipowners. He adds the war risk premiums are several times higher for moving ships, so, choosing to move now is also a commercial decision. “We would like relief from government in terms of supporting our war risk insurance payments,” he says.
- Before the war started, while Iran and Oman had territorial waters falling in the strait, no country controlled the transit of ships that was free. A few weeks into the war, Lloyd’s List reported Iran had put in place a system for approving ship transits that could have involved payments. There was a process and ships had to hug the Iranian coast and go around the Iranian Larak Island for visual approval as well. Transits, which had trickled to a handful following the start of war, then rose to 10% of pre-war levels in April, though many of them were Iran-linked.

- “As far as shipowners are concerned, it is still Iran that remains in effective control of the strait and permission will need to be sought from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps,” says Richard Meade, editor-in-chief of Lloyd’s List.
- Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer, of Bimco, an international organisation representing shipowners, charterers and agents, says that the shipping industry is currently awaiting technical details from the U.S. and from Iran on how to transit the Strait of Hormuz safely.
- “Leaving the Persian Gulf without prior coordination with the U.S. and Iran would entail heightened risk and would not be advisable,” he says, adding Iran still reportedly has significant amounts of weapons to control shipping through the strait, including anti-ship missiles, drones, fast attack craft, coastal artillery and mines.

### **Likely transit fee**

- Meanwhile, Iranian Ambassador to China Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli told the media in Beijing Iran was considering transit fee for the Strait of Hormuz. Iran would work with neighbouring countries to ensure safe passage via the Strait but the ‘main safety guarantee would come from Iran,’ he said. At the peak of conflict, there were 22 Indian-flagged vessels in the Persian Gulf region (West of Strait of Hormuz), two in the Gulf of Oman (East of Strait of Hormuz), one in the Gulf of Aden and two in the Red Sea.

### **❖ Indian scientists find new way to measure distances in deep space**

**Context: The dense and rapidly spinning remnant cores of dead stars are called pulsars; they emit beams of radio waves that sweep across the earthlike light from a lighthouse sweeps across ships at sea; pulsars have an extraordinarily fixed spinning rate, so the pulses arrive very regularly.**

- Indian astronomers, including from IIT-Kanpur, have developed a new way to measure distances in the universe using the pulsating cores of dead stars, by studying how their radio emissions are distorted as they travel through space. The technique combines a pair of subtle effects that occur when pulsar signals pass through clouds of ionised gas in the Milky Way.
- The dense and rapidly spinning remnant cores of dead stars are called pulsars. They emit beams of radio waves that sweep across the earth like light from a lighthouse sweeps across ships at sea. Pulsars have an extraordinarily fixed spinning rate, so the pulses arrive very regularly. So astronomers have used them as cosmic clocks.
- Pulsar timing experiments use millisecond pulsars, which spin hundreds of times per second, to create precise timing models that predict the arrival of following pulses. Any difference in arrival time indicates the presence of another astrophysical event, such as those producing gravitational waves.
- But as these radio waves travel through the galaxy before reaching the earth, they also pass through clouds of ionised gas, or plasma, that contain free electrons that slightly alter the radio signal.

## **Way of light**

- Astronomers measure one of these effects using a quantity called the dispersion measure (DM). As radio waves travel through the interstellar medium, free electrons slow down lower frequency waves more than higher frequency ones. This causes different frequencies to arrive at the earth at slightly different times. By measuring the delay caused by dispersion, astronomers can estimate how many electrons lie between the earth and the pulsar.
- In general, signals from more distant pulsars pass through more interstellar plasma and encounter more electrons. As a result, DM provides a rough estimate of how far away the pulsar is.
- Astronomers have long used DM to estimate the distance to pulsars. However, this method relies on models of electron distribution throughout the Milky Way that can be unreliable in complex regions such as the Gum Nebula, a vast region of ionised gas and one of the largest known nebulae in our galaxy. Possibly associated with a supernova explosion or ionisation by hot stars, the nebula contains the Vela Pulsar and regions that can strongly influence radio signals passing through it.

## **Wobbling signals**

- The interstellar medium also affects pulsar signals in another way. As plasma is not perfectly smooth, its irregularities scatter radio waves as they travel through it. This scattering causes the signals to follow multiple paths before reaching the earth. The scattered waves interfere with each other, causing the pulsar's brightness to vary with time.
- The term for this is scintillation, similar to the twinkling of stars in the night sky. Since the signals arrive by different paths and at slightly different times, the signal appears stretched out or smeared. This effect is known as scatter broadening.
- In the new study, published in the Monthly Notices of Royal Astronomical Society, the team combined DM with scatter broadening to refine the distance estimates. As scattering depends on how turbulent the plasma is, the electron density, and the location of the scattering region along the line of sight, the joint method revealed where the turbulent plasma is located between the earth and the pulsar much more accurately.
- “Previously, we had only one ‘soldier’— dispersion — to solve the problem,” the study’s lead author Ashish Kumar, formerly at IIT-Kanpur and now at the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics, said. “Now we have two: dispersion and scattering.”
- The study was carried out with co-authors Avinash Deshpande, former professor at the Raman Research Institute, and Pankaj Jain, a professor at IIT-Kanpur.

## **Systematic application**

- “The authors have done a careful job of utilising a variety of measurements on 10 pulsars to constrain the structure of the interstellar medium in this region, including the distance to the dominant scattering region [the Gum Nebula],” Cornell University professor James Cordes, who wasn’t involved in the study, said.

- He also said combining scattering and dispersion to estimate pulsar distances is not entirely new and has been explored in pulsar studies for decades. In this study, however, the team applied the approach in a systematic way: they used both dispersion and scattering measurements together and adjusted their model step by step until it matched both the observed DM and the scatter broadening.
- The distance where the model and observations agreed was then taken to be the pulsar's distance.
- Their work shows that much of the scattering affecting pulsars in this direction likely comes from turbulent layers of the Gum Nebula. Using observations of 10 pulsars in the same region of the sky as Gum Nebula, researchers also developed a refined model of the nebula's electron distribution. Results showed that the Vela pulsar lies behind the nebula's front shell.

### **No hard limit**

- Scatter broadening depends on how strongly a pulsar's signal is scattered along the line of sight. Calculating this exactly requires extensive analysis. So to simplify it, researchers combined the dependencies into a single parameter, called the k-factor, at a given frequency.
- Estimating the k-factor was the main technical challenge of the study, Dr. Kumar said, as it varies significantly in complex regions. However, one can determine its value for the target pulsar from a nearby pulsar at a known distance.
- For the Gum Nebula, the team analysed several pulsars in the region and calculated their individual k-factors. Instead of adopting a single number, they used a range of possible values to account for uncertainties in the scattering properties of the plasma. The team is now working on a follow-up study of roughly 300 pulsars across our galaxy to determine how the k-factor varies in different directions.
- Parallax-based measurements are extensively used in distance measurements. While the novel method offers several advantages over DM-only estimates, it cannot beat the "gold standards" of the parallax method in terms of accuracy, Dr. Kumar said.
- However, while certain parallax techniques have a "hard limit" on distance, the new method has no specific distance limitation. It could even be used to measure distances to objects outside the Milky Way, like the enigmatic fast radio bursts.

## ❖ Why India wants fast breeder reactors

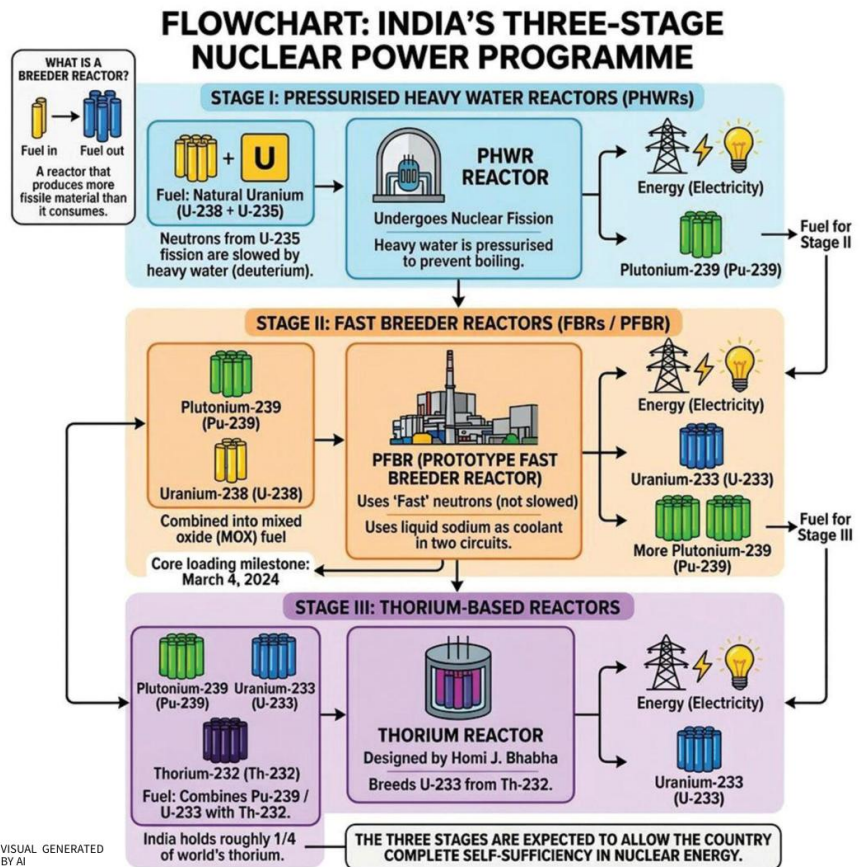
- In an important milestone, the prototype fast breeder reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam achieved criticality on April 6. The term 'criticality' is familiar to India: over the decades, it has been associated with the slow and tedious successes of India's nuclear power programme. At the same time, in keeping with many terms in the nuclear vocabulary, 'criticality' is also often mistaken as an end goal. In reality, it is actually the first step.

### What is criticality?

- A nuclear reactor becomes critical when its chain reaction is able to sustain itself. That is, when an atom's nucleus undergoes nuclear fission, it releases neutrons that trigger at least one more fission reaction in the surrounding nuclei. Reactor engineers ensure this happens by controlling the composition of the fuel (the material whose nuclei undergo fission), how well the neutrons are able to 'access' more nuclei, and the temperature of the reactor. Once a reactor is critical, it also means it is in a kind of stable state. However, it does not mean that it is operating in a commercially viable way. That comes much later. After criticality, the operators keep the reactor running as it produces a low amount of power, for months if necessary, while they check if its operating parameters are within design limits. If an operator is sure that the parameters are, they can go to the next stage.

### How do FBRs work?

- Most of India's currently operating nuclear reactors are pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs). They are designed to support the fission of natural uranium. Natural uranium consists of 99.3% of uranium-238 and 0.7% of uranium-235. '235' and '238' denote the total number of protons and neutrons in the nucleus. In a PHWR, neutrons are introduced into the reactor, where a device called a moderator slows them down. This is necessary for the neutrons to cause uranium-235 to undergo fission. When it does, it releases heat, which the PHWR converts to electricity; a small amount of plutonium; and a few neutrons.
- PHWRs are inefficient because only a small fraction of the fuel, around 1%, undergoes fission before it becomes unusable.



- A fast-breeder reactor (FBR) is more efficient, achieving a fuel use rate of around 10% or more. Mainly, the fuel consists of plutonium, not uranium. The reactor core is surrounded by a 'blanket' of depleted uranium, like the unusable fuel produced by PHWRs. When a fast neutron bombards the blanket, the uranium nuclei are transmuted to plutonium nuclei, which are reprocessed as nuclear fuel. The plutonium-based fuel also uses the fast neutrons to undergo fission, releasing more fast neutrons.

### **What is India's three-stage programme?**

- The nuclear physicist Homi Bhabha is widely credited with conceiving India's nuclear programme in the first years of its independence. The programme has three stages. In the first stage, PHWRs will use natural uranium to produce plutonium and depleted uranium and electricity. In the second stage, FBRs will use the plutonium and depleted uranium from the first stage to produce even more plutonium and electricity. Finally, future nuclear reactors will use plutonium and thorium to produce electricity.
- Bhabha came up with this programme because India has abundant quantities of thorium but only modest reserves of uranium.
- And in this scheme, FBRs have been envisaged as a bridge between the initial step, to use what we have, and the final step, to complete the cycle and thus make India self-sufficient in nuclear power.

### **Why are FBRs challenging?**

- That an FBR is easier said than done would be a gross underestimate. The Indian government approved the PFBR more than two decades ago. It was designed by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research and built by the Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam, Ltd. The latter proved to be more challenging than first expected.
- Among other features, the PFBR uses liquid sodium as coolant. Sodium becomes liquid at a higher temperature, and at higher temperature heat transfer is more efficient. Liquid sodium also does not need to be pressurised. However, it reacts violently with air and water, so the pumps, pipes, and tanks exposed to liquid sodium need to be perfectly sealed, with stringent leak detection protocols. Water-cooled reactors do not have such operational complexities, nor the additional cost.
- India is also not alone in confronting these challenges. Japan's Monju Nuclear Power Plant suffered a sodium leak and fire in 1995, leading to long shutdowns; the plant eventually had to be decommissioned. The Superphénix in France was once the world's largest breeder reactor but it was shut down as well, due to technical issues and high operating costs, which also fanned political opposition. Russia, however, has continued to maintain a small fleet of fast-breeder reactors.
- In other words, operators have shown FBRs to be technically feasible but they are not yet economically feasible; they have also not won broader public acceptance. Aside from the costs of making them, they also demand rigorous oversight — which depends on both engineering excellence and the safety culture.

### **How has India pursued FBRs?**

- India is pursuing FBRs because, as discussed earlier, the three-stage nuclear programme prioritises long-term fuel security. Importantly, it is able to do so because India's nuclear sector remains largely driven by the state. Its decision-making structure is relatively insulated from the ruling establishment: the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) reports directly to the Prime Minister's Office. As a result, as long as there has been political stability, India has been able to sustain nuclear projects across electoral cycles.
- On the flip side, this insulation has reduced scrutiny of the nuclear power programme and protected it from the same pressure to deliver that assails other public sector enterprises like the Indian Railways and the National Highways Authority of India. Engineers have taken on projects with limited transparency on timelines and budgets. When one or both have slipped, the accountability has been spread across agencies. The PFBR's original cost was ₹3,500 crore. It came to ₹6,800 crore in 2019. The DAE also sought multiple deadline extensions. In 2020, it said the PFBR would be commercialised in October 2022. That milestone is still pending.
- The economics of FBRs also remain uncertain. In addition to the aforementioned issues, the broader fuel cycle — especially the reprocessing of spent fuel and the fabrication of new fuel assemblies — will require its own infrastructure. And for this the nuclear establishment will have to set up new regulatory processes.

### **What next for the PFBR?**

- The PFBR will be operated at a low power level to check its behaviour in different operating conditions. Engineers will collect the data from these tests to inform decisions about raising the reactor's power output and refining safety protocols. Eventually, they will seek approval from the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board to operate the reactor in commercial mode.
- This entails running the PFBR at or near its rated capacity to generate electricity for the grid on a sustained basis, with standard operating procedures and clear regulatory oversight. At this point in time, the reactor will also have transitioned from being experimental to a commercial power plant.
- In parallel, the DAE will also develop fuel reprocessing facilities and plan for future FBRs. Once these aims are closer to being realised, the government and India will develop a clearer sense of whether the broader vision of a closed fuel cycle can be realised.

## ❖ Iran ceasefire teeters over disputes on Lebanon, Hormuz

**Context: The tentative ceasefire in the Iran war staggered under the weight of Israel's intense bombardment of Lebanon, Tehran's continued chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, and uncertainty over whether negotiators can find common ground on a range of other differences.**

- Hours after the ceasefire was announced, Israel pounded Beirut with air strikes. Lebanon's Health Ministry said that the strikes killed more than 300 people.
- Israel's strikes "signal deception and non-compliance" and render negotiations "meaningless", Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said. "Our hands remain on the trigger," he added.
- Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said Lebanon was a key part of the two-week ceasefire. "Lebanon and the entire Resistance Axis as Iran's allies, form an inseparable part of the ceasefire," Mr. Ghalibaf said in a post on X.
- Iran and the U.S. appeared to try to pressure each other on Thursday even as both countries were due to meet in Pakistan for talks this weekend.
- Semiofficial news agencies in Iran suggested forces have mined the Strait of Hormuz while U.S. President Donald Trump warned that Iran would be hit even harder if it did not fulfil the agreement.
- The chief of Iran's nuclear agency said that protecting Tehran's right to enrich uranium is "necessary" for progress with the U.S.
- Mohammad Eslami, who leads the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, made the remarks on Thursday to presspersons during commemorations for the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran. "It is a part of the necessary (things) that nobody speaks about," Mr. Eslami said, referring to the U.S. refusal to acknowledge enrichment as one part of Iran's 10-point plan.
- Iranian news agencies published a chart suggesting the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard put sea mines into the strait during the war. The chart showed a large circle marked "danger zone" in Farsi over the route ships take through the strait, through which 20% of all traded oil and natural gas once passed.
- Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with the country's Army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, who jointly "appreciated the restraint demonstrated by all sides". Pakistan's premier spoke to his Lebanese counterpart, Nawaf Salam, and "strongly condemned Israel's ongoing aggression against Lebanon", the Prime Minister's Office said.

## ❖ Karnataka includes root canal treatment under AB PMJAY-CM's ArK scheme

**Context: In a move aimed at improving access to dental care and reducing avoidable tooth loss, the Karnataka government has approved the inclusion of root canal treatment (RCT) under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana-Chief Minister's Arogya Karnataka (AB PMJAY-CM's ArK) scheme. A Government Order (GO) issued provides for the addition of specific procedure codes for root canal treatment under the Dental and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery specialty of the scheme.**

- The root canal treatment is undertaken to treat infection or inflammation of the dental pulp. If left untreated, it can spread to surrounding tissues, leading to complications such as abscess formation and eventual tooth loss. Officials said the decision is expected to benefit a large number of patients who currently opt for tooth extraction due to the high cost of root canal treatment.

## **2 procedures notified**

- The order includes two categories- root canal treatment for anterior teeth and posterior teeth- which have been classified as Complex Secondary Procedures (2B) under the scheme.
- The Suvarna Arogya Suraksha Trust (SAST), the nodal agency that facilitates the scheme, has been directed to adopt Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) Tier-3 (non-NABH) rates.
- Accordingly, the package rate has been fixed at ₹1,360 for anterior teeth and ₹2,040 for posterior teeth, inclusive of all consumables and procedure-related costs.

## **Addressing the gap**

- At present, the scheme covers 12 procedures under dental and oral surgery, but does not include root canal treatment. The inclusion follows a proposal submitted by the SAST. Officials noted that preserving natural teeth helps maintain chewing function and avoids the need for costlier interventions.

## **Cap on cases**

- The government has capped the benefit at 50,000 cases or a financial outlay of ₹5 crore, whichever is lower. The approval has been granted under powers delegated to the Health Department to include new procedures within a specified budget ceiling. The standard guidelines of the AB PMJAY-CM's ArK scheme will apply to these procedures.

## **❖ Government notifies CAPF law; families protest, say it undermines rights of forces**

**Context: On a day when the families of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) personnel protested at the Rajghat against the passing of the CAPF (General Administration) Bill, 2026, by Parliament on April 2, the President gave it her assent. Subsequently the CAPF, General Administration Act, 2026 was notified in the Gazette of India.**

- The protesters stated that certain provisions of the Bill undermined the rights and service conditions of the forces that had served for decades as the first line of defence in safeguarding India's internal security and borders. Retired CAPF personnel and their families, and the wives of several serving officers turned up for the protest with their children.
- Families present at the Rajghat said that other than the Bill they were protesting the neglect of their demands — such as restoration of the Old Pension Scheme, time-bound promotions, uniform service conditions, and dignified career progression.

- **The Act stated that in all CAPFs, 50% of the total posts in the rank of Inspector-General, at least 67% in the rank of Additional Director-General and all posts in the rank of Special Director-General and Director-General shall be filled by IPS officers on deputation.**
- Till now, such postings were done based on executive orders. The Act will negate a May 23, 2025, Supreme Court order which asked the Home Ministry to “progressively reduce” IPS deputation in CAPFs up to the rank of I-Gs in the next two years.

### ❖ **‘India’s FY 27 growth outlook cut to 6.6%’**

**Context: The World Bank has revised downwards India’s growth outlook for 2026-27 to 6.6% from 7.2%, citing the impact of the war in West Asia on household and government consumption, as well as on industrial activity.**

- The **India Development Update report by the World Bank** said that “in the absence of the conflict”, India’s GDP growth was projected at 7.2%, a reflection of better-than-expected growth in 2025-26, “strong initial momentum” in the fourth quarter of that year and a “broad pro-growth reform agenda”.
- **“Growth is now projected at 6.6% in FY27**, reflecting headwinds from the Middle East conflict — assuming an extended disruption in global energy (oil and gas) supply till end-2026,” the report said.
- The **India Development Update report is a companion to the South Asia Economic Update 2026**. That report had projected growth in South Asia to slow to 6.3% in 2026 from 7% in 2025.
- The World Bank’s Acting Director for India Paul Procee noted that there are things that can be done to boost growth. “Boosting private sector-led growth will be critical to strengthening economic resilience and supporting more young people to enter the workforce,” Mr. Procee said.
- The report said that **industrial activity is expected to slow to 7.5% in 2026-27 from 8.8% in the previous year**. It said that the manufacturing sector — especially electronics, automobiles, and other tradable goods — will prop up industrial growth.
- “However, higher input costs and decreased export demand from the Gulf region will weigh on overall industrial growth,” the report said. “Business services are likely to be impacted by the global economic slowdown and higher input costs will adversely impact food and accommodation services.”

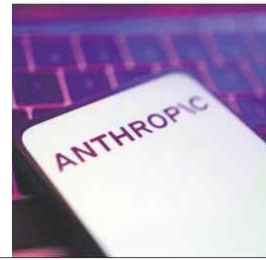
### ❖ **Govt., IT sector studying Anthropic model’s cybersecurity implications**

**Context: Claude’s new LLM has found security vulnerabilities over a decade old in widely used software; as large U.S. firms get early access, Indian firms, IT Ministry are examining what lies ahead; experts flag ramifications of such models’ availability to all.**

- The Indian IT industry and the Union government are studying the ramifications of Claude Mythos, Anthropic’s unreleased model that has been billed as a powerful scanner – and potentially a vector – of undiscovered security vulnerabilities across the world’s most widely used computer systems.

### The task masters

A consortium of U.S. firms and Anthropic are rushing to patch software vulnerabilities human experts have not fixed



- Project Glasswing is a consortium of 40 companies and open-source code maintainers to whom Anthropic is giving early access of the LLM

- This involves a \$100 million budget to perform scans of vast codebases that power other IT systems around the world, including India

- In the Electronics and Information Technology Ministry and at the **Computer Emergency Response Team, India (CERT-in)** are deliberating what Mythos’s capabilities could mean in the coming days, even as a consortium of American firms, in partnership with Anthropic, rushes to patch software vulnerabilities that human cybersecurity experts have not hitherto spotted or fixed.
- Word of Mythos has spread rapidly in cybersecurity circles since the announcement of Project Glasswing, a consortium of 40 companies and open-source code maintainers to whom Anthropic is giving early access of the LLM, with a \$100 million budget to perform scans of the vast codebases that power other IT systems around the world, including in India.
- Anthropic said it has already found several vulnerabilities in softwares such as OpenBSD, FFMPEG and the Linux kernel, systems that are deeply embedded in computers and servers globally, spurring the firm to work with their developers as much as possible in patching bugs before making the model public.
- No Indian firm appears in the partial list of partners that Anthropic published. This does not mean, however, that Project Glasswing will not benefit Indian firms at all. Since IT firms generally use a “tech stack” that combines hardware and software from a variety of vendors, including several products from Glasswing partners, it is likely that patches being released in the coming days will close off certain security gaps in Indian firms.

### **‘Entire tsunami’**

- “The more relevant question is whether Indian firms are investing enough in their own security posture on top of that shared infrastructure, because that part is entirely on them,” Pawan Prabhat, a co-founder of the LLM deployment startup Shorthills AI.
- As such, the IT enterprise services (ITeS) industry may be anxious to be a bigger part of the conversation that Anthropic is having, since systems integrators tend to craft bespoke code for customers, which may suddenly be at risk of being targeted by novel infiltration techniques when Mythos and more powerful models become available to the public.
- Infosys, which announced a partnership with Anthropic during the AI Impact Summit, declined to comment on whether it was a Glasswing partner due to its financial reporting silent period.
- Vinayak Godse, the CEO of the Data Security Council of India (DSCI) under Nasscom, the main cybersecurity forum for the Indian IT industry, told in a telephonic interview from Singapore that the council has been holding meetings with different verticals of IT firms in India to get a handle on the unfolding situation. Mr. Godse welcomed

Glasswing as an initiative, hailing Anthropic as a “responsible” player for not releasing it just yet.

- “If something happened to the underlying core infrastructure (like a router made by Cisco, for example), the impact will be catastrophic,” he said.
- Mr. Godse pointed to a particularly vulnerable group: product companies. “Imagine if this model is available for everyone to use, what happens to the entire **Software-as-a-Service (SaaS)** plus deep tech product ecosystem across the globe,” he asked.
- The latter, he said, “is not only digital, but present in the physical world: systems like **Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) systems [used in manufacturing and public utilities setups], internet of things (IoT) systems, and so on.**” “It’s an entire tsunami coming in,” Mr. Godse said.
- DSCI declined to comment whether it was having any India-focused conversations with Anthropic, which has an office in Bengaluru. In absolute numbers, India is Anthropic’s second largest market. The firm, which did not respond to a query by The Hindu on the role planned for Indian firms in Project Glasswing, has shot to prominence in recent months due to its extremely software-capable LLMs.
- Those capabilities have impacted Indian IT firms’ stock prices, even as the government encourages Indian firms to move fast on deploying AI.

### **Soft targets**

- Government IT systems could be especially vulnerable to attacks, as their security readiness varies widely between different Ministries, States and departments. But Mr. Godse said that he was confident that CERT-in and government departments would be able to respond quickly to threats, as he assessed the state response to widespread attacks on government servers last year during the India-Pakistan conflict as a positive signal.
- **“Government systems like Aadhaar and GST run on older codebases,” pointed out Srinivas Padmanabhuni, the chief technology officer at the LLM testing firm AiEnsured.** “These are exactly the kinds of systems where Mythos has already demonstrated the ability to find vulnerabilities that stayed hidden for decades.” Mr. Prabhat of Shorthills AI said that government systems “might not be of primary interest to professional hackers who are in it for financial gain, but inimical states are a different matter.”
- For firms that position themselves as indigenous alternatives to foreign tech stacks, Mythos turns up an unenviable dilemma: should they act to subject their systems to an audit by an American LLM, or risk the consequences of holding off on hardening their systems with Mythos-level tools?
- Indians have typically excelled in spotting security vulnerabilities, with researchers chasing “bug bounties” to find serious vulnerabilities, which when disclosed to tech firms can fetch a handsome financial reward.
- Mr. Godse noted that this group of researchers may see their work impacted by Mythos. Mythos’s long-term impact could also hinge on the outcome of a longstanding cybersecurity debate: are software vulnerabilities “dense” or “sparse”? In other words, are there infinitely many vulnerabilities in code that are just waiting for a way to be exploited by attackers, or are they rare chinks in otherwise solid armour?

- Nicholas Carlini, an Anthropic researcher, was asked about this debate after a talk in March where he laid out the performance of Opus, the most powerful Claude model available to the public, in finding bugs. It performed shockingly well, he said in its presentation.

### ❖ What does the Jan Vishwas Bill do?

**Context: Unnecessary criminalisation is an anathema to business regulations. India's regulatory framework has significant punitive aspects. Under dozens of Central Acts, minor procedural lapses, missed filings, or technical defaults could land a citizen or a small business owner in jail.**

- The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025-26, seeks to shift India's regulatory approach from a punitive model to "trust-based governance." It builds on the earlier Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023, which decriminalised 183 provisions across 42 Central laws.

### Why is the Bill being introduced?

- The 2026 Bill proposes amendments to 784 provisions across 79 Central Acts administered by 23 ministries. Of these, 717 provisions are earmarked for decriminalisation, while the rest address ease of living more broadly. Its governing principle is proportionality — the severity of the State's response must bear a rational relationship to the gravity of the conduct it targets.
- The Bill pursues three related goals, all rooted in ensuring proportionality in regulation.
- First, it seeks a principled separation between conduct that warrants criminal sanction, such as fraud, wilful evasion, and threats to public safety, and procedural non-compliance that carries no comparable moral charge. Conflating the two does a disservice to the seriousness of the former and an injustice to those caught by the latter.
- The second objective is equity. Smaller enterprises and MSMEs are disproportionately exposed to compliance risks, not because they violate laws more often, but because they lack the capacity to absorb the consequences when accused of doing so. The idea is to make compliance simpler.
- Third, it seeks to provide institutional relief. India's district and subordinate courts carry over 4.8 crore pending cases (NJDG, December 2025), a significant share of which consists of minor regulatory matters. Decriminalising such cases is not leniency but a rational reallocation of judicial resources.

### What are the key features?

- The Bill focuses on removing the criminal liability clause for minor procedural lapses and improving the ease of doing business and living.
- Its central mechanism is the replacement of criminal penalties with civil and administrative alternatives. The measures on imprisonment provisions are intended to be replaced by monetary penalties calibrated to the gravity of the violation.
- For minor or first-time defaults, graded responses such as warnings and advisory notices replace prosecution. Compounding provisions are expanded to provide faster resolution without full adjudication.

- Adjudicating officers are empowered to decide cases within defined timelines, with appellate mechanisms to ensure fairness. Penalties are to be periodically revised to retain their deterrent value, and the Bill emphasises digitisation and procedural simplification to reduce inconsistencies in enforcement.

### **How does it impact institutions?**

- For the judiciary, the most immediate consequence is meaningful relief. Diverting routine regulatory cases from criminal dockets should free courts to concentrate on matters of genuine public significance.
- For regulatory agencies, the Bill increases responsibility. Administrative adjudication is faster and less resource-intensive than criminal prosecution, but it requires institutional capacity, clear guidelines, and oversight mechanisms to avoid arbitrariness. The appellate structures built into the Bill acknowledge this risk, and hence, their effectiveness will depend entirely on how seriously they are operationalised.
- For businesses, particularly MSMEs, reduced criminal exposure could meaningfully shift the calculus around formalisation. The fear of prosecution, even where the underlying conduct is technical rather than intentional, has long acted as a disincentive to transparency and engagement with the formal economy.

### **How does the Bill promote efficient justice?**

- The indiscriminate use of criminal sanctions — treating a tax fraudster and a businessperson who faltered on a procedural formality — undermines the law's pragmatism. By reserving criminal liability for conduct involving genuine intent or harm, and channelling procedural defaults through civil mechanisms, the Bill narrows the scope for over-criminalisation in a structured way.
- A more predictable regulatory environment encourages voluntary compliance. When the consequence of a minor lapse is a proportionate penalty rather than the spectre of prosecution, the incentive structure shifts towards transparency. The durability of these gains will depend on implementation. Enhanced administrative discretion must be matched with clear guidelines, meaningful oversight, and appellate mechanisms that function as genuine checks.
- The Jan Vishwas Bill is a serious and overdue reform. Its success will depend less on what it says than on whether the institutions tasked with carrying it forward are genuinely equipped, and held accountable, to do so.
- There is a risk of excessive discretion in administrative authorities, weak appellate safeguards in some sectors, the possibility that monetary penalties may replace criminalisation without reducing the burden, and limited clarity on uniform standards across different laws.

### **❖ How will Gaganyaan astronauts return safely to earth?**

**Context: The Gaganyaan crew module, which will host the Indian astronauts on their human spaceflight mission, will orbit the earth at about 7,800 m/s. When it re-enters the atmosphere, it will have to shed its kinetic energy.**

- The atmospheric drag itself will be the primary brake, taking away most of its energy in a process called aerobraking. To further reduce the module's velocity for a soft landing, a multi-stage parachute system will be deployed once the module comes within 12 km of the ground.
- A typical recovery system includes all the items required to soft-land the module in sea or on land after aerobraking. This includes parachutes, locating devices to find out where the module has splashed down, and a system to ensure the module is pointing in a favourable direction in case it drops in the sea.
- For touchdown on land, apart from parachutes, the recovery system will fire braking motors to reduce the impact velocity before touchdown. The Russian Soyuz and Chinese Shenzhou modules are designed for terrestrial landing and use retro-rockets for braking.

### **Why do parachutes alone not suffice?**

- As the land is hard, touching down on land needs to be around 1-2 m/s. The module can, however, tolerate landing at around 7-9 m/s in the sea, as water is a natural energy absorber.
- Land touchdowns also require vast, empty territories free of people or buildings, while offering easier crew recovery and quicker refurbishing of the module.
- Sea landings are preferred by countries that lack large deserts or plains. However, it requires recovery ships, flotation bags, and specialised gear to keep the crew safe in rough waters.
- Reducing a module's velocity to less than 2 m/s using parachutes alone is impractical due to the inverse-square relationship between speed and drag area. To slow a module from 7 m/s to 1 m/s, the parachute will have to be roughly 49x larger, incurring a large weight and volume penalty.
- A parachute that large would also be difficult to deploy without tangling.

### **Why is the landing zone elliptical?**

- When a module returns to the earth, it doesn't aim for a bull's-eye but rather a large ellipse. This is because the module's kinetic energy is concentrated almost entirely along its flight track. At hypersonic speeds, minor fluctuations in atmospheric density or re-entry conditions like velocity can cause the module to over- or undershoot its target by hundreds of kilometres.
- In contrast, energy available to make any significant path changes in a direction sideways to its track is very low and hence lateral deviations are minimal. The result is a landing footprint significantly elongated along the path of travel.
- Once a module is in the water, recovery teams use predictive tracking, electronic signalling, and visual aids to find it. The module transmits its GPS coordinates and homing signals to satellites and aircraft and also releases a bright green fluorescent dye.
- If the splashdown is at night or in low visibility, flashing from high-intensity strobe lights from the module will be used to locate it. To ensure it stands out against the deep indigo colour of the water, the module and its flotation bags are painted international orange.

## How will the Gaganyaan crew module be recovered?

- The Gaganyaan recovery operation will be led by the Indian Navy, plus other stakeholders. After the module is slowed by parachutes, it will splash down in the Bay of Bengal. Immediately after, the parachutes will be released to avoid any entanglement and the flotation bags will automatically inflate.
- Once naval divers find and secure the module with a flotation collar and towing gear, it will be winched onto a ship's deck to safely extract the crew.

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## ❖ Governor Gehlot gives assent to 'honour killing' Bill

**Context: Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has given his assent to 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, which has now become an Act and come into force.**

- The Bill seeks to curb so-called “honour killings” and violence arising from caste-based objections to inter-caste marriages. It was passed during the recent Budget session of the State legislature.
- The Act aims to address persistent caste-based discrimination in Karnataka, which often manifests in brutal forms of violence.
- The Karnataka Municipalities And Certain Other Law (Amendment) Act, 2026, that seeks to fix fee on advertisements in urban local bodies covered under Karnataka Municipalities Act, 1964, and the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976, earlier passed by the Legislature and received assent from the Governor, has also been notified.

### **On motor vehicles**

- The Karnataka Motor Vehicles Taxation (Amendment) Act, 2026, that introduces revised tax structures across various categories of vehicles, has also been notified. The Act, passed recently by the Karnataka Legislature, was published in the Karnataka Gazette following the Governor’s approval on April 9 .
- The legislation amends provisions of the Karnataka Motor Vehicles Taxation Act, 1957, with key changes include updated lifetime tax rates for private vehicles based on cost brackets, new tax provisions for electric vehicles, and revised taxation for commercial vehicles such as contract carriages, luxury buses, and sleeper coaches.
- The other legislation notified is The Karnataka State Civil Services (Regulation of Transfer of Teachers) (Amendment) Act, 2026 to regulate transfers of teachers.

## ❖ Gaganyaan mission: ISRO completes second Integrated Air Drop Test in Sriharikota

**Context: Union Minister of State for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh announced the accomplishment of the IADT-02 in a post on X.**

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on April 10 completed the second Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-02) at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.
- In this test, a simulated Crew Module (the capsule in which astronauts sit during a human flight during re-entry and landing), was lifted by an Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter to an altitude of about 3 km and released over a designated drop zone in the sea, near the Sriharikota coast. The simulated Crew Module weighs about 5.7 tonnes, that is equivalent to the mass of the Crew Module in the first un-crewed Gaganyaan mission (G1).
- ISRO said that 10 parachutes of four types were deployed in a precise sequence during the descent of the Crew Module, gradually reducing the velocity for safe touchdown.

- “Subsequently, the simulated Crew Module was successfully recovered in co-ordination with the Indian Navy. The IADT-02 test validated the parachute-based deceleration systems in the Crew Module,” ISRO stated.
- Union Minister of State for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh announced the accomplishment of the IADT-02 in a post on X.
- “Congratulations #ISRO for the successful accomplishment of Second Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-02) for #Gaganyaan, India’s first Human Space flight scheduled next year. The second Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-02) was successfully conducted at Satish Dhawan Space Station Sriharikota. This marks an important milestone towards the readiness for the Gaganyaan mission,” the Minister posted.
- “This test marks another significant step towards the readiness for the Gaganyaan G1 Mission, with active support and participation from the Indian Air Force, Indian Navy, and Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO),” ISRO said.
- On August 24, 2025, ISRO accomplished first Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-01) for Gaganyaan mission in Sriharikota.

### ❖ Draft master plan for Great Nicobar Island projects tourism as primary growth driver

**Context: The draft master plan for developing the Great Nicobar Island (GNI) under the Centre’s ₹92,000-crore mega-infrastructure project has proposed to focus on tourism as the “primary economic driver” of growth, noting that it also intends to get the “population to settle here”, through both permanent and temporary jobs that are expected to be created.**

- The plan has been drafted for a projected population of 3.36 lakh by 2055. By that time, the master plan is expected to achieve an annual inflow of more than a million tourists. Of the projected 3.36 lakh, the local Nicobarese population is expected to grow to about 11,500 from the current 7,500.

#### Tribes challenge plan

- The project, which received Stage-I clearance in 2022, includes an international container transshipment port, an airport, power plants, and a township. However, soon after the clearance, the local Nicobarese population withdrew its consent, alleging that their forest rights had not been settled. The Calcutta High Court is currently hearing a challenge to the project’s clearances.
- Under “future development”, the draft hints at possible development of the Pemmaya buffer area on the western flank of Galathea Bay, where “tribal settlements” may be permitted.
- However, this appears at variance with a separate draft relocation plan to shift local Nicobarese tribes further north to Pulobhabi. While the draft master plan has been notified for public consultation, suggestions, and objections for 30 days, the notification does not mention when the plan was made public.
- The draft master plan has been uploaded on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration’s Public Works Department website. Metadata from the plan document suggests that these files were created on March 31.

- The notified draft master plan proposes a township divided into several clusters: an administrative and institutional cluster near Campbell Bay, a multi-modal logistic cluster (to include airport, port, freight and passenger terminals, defence area, and green development) near Galathea Bay, and tourism, entertainment, and processing clusters along the eastern coast of the island from Galathea Bay in the south to Campbell Bay in the north.
- Envisioning the development of the island as a “seaside destination to enjoy in a pristine and protected environment”, the plan suggests several tourism models — wellness tourism, beach tourism (seven potential beaches identified), nature and biodiversity tourism, adventure tourism, business tourism, gaming tourism, and hubs for family entertainment which may have theme parks.
- The project is expected to span 166.10 sq. km. Of this, about 40.8% has been set aside as “urbanisable”, with the rest for “special projects”. About 121.86 sq km is to come from diverted forest areas.

### ❖ Jaishankar to visit UAE in bid to boost energy security

**Context: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will visit the United Arab Emirates on Saturday and Sunday, against the backdrop of the ongoing hostilities between the U.S., Israel, and Iran that has threatened India’s energy security.**

- “We continue to reach out to countries in the Gulf region. At the direction of the Prime Minister, our Ministers are visiting Gulf countries to strengthen our energy security,” External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.
- “External Affairs Minister is presently visiting Mauritius from where he will be travelling to the UAE on 11th and 12th April. He will hold discussions with the leaders of the UAE to foster stronger India-UAE ties,” Mr. Jaiswal said, explaining that India is helping its neighbours in South Asia while ensuring its own energy security.
- The External Affairs Minister has been in contact with his counterparts in the region as well as in Iran over the course of the war that started on February 28.
- His visit to the UAE will be a follow-up to the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri’s visit to Qatar, which is one of the largest suppliers of natural gas to India. However, amid the escalating tensions, Iran attacked the facilities of QatarEnergy, one of the world’s largest producers of natural gas. In March, it had invoked a force majeure clause, halting its production of liquefied natural gas (LNG).
- “My friend, H.E. Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi has reaffirmed the State of Qatar’s commitment to remain a reliable energy supplier and looked forward to continuing and strengthening energy relations and cooperation with India,” Mr. Puri said, after his visit to Qatar.
- The Centre’s outreach has gained steam as U.S. President Donald Trump announced an uncertain ceasefire earlier this week. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal spoke with his Bahraini counterpart Abdulla bin Adel Fakhro on Thursday. “Our discussions on harnessing the significant opportunities in trade and investment to further elevate India-Bahrain relations, driving greater economic cooperation and shared prosperity,” Mr. Goyal said.

**Context: India firmly opposes the “targeting of civilians and infrastructure” as well as the disruption of navigation due to the war in West Asia, said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, inaugurating the 9th Indian Ocean Conference in Port Louis, which was over shadowed by the conflict and prospects for talks due to begin in Islamabad.**

- Mr. Jaishankar, who was in Mauritius for a two-day visit before leaving for the United Arab Emirates on Friday night met with many leaders from the region, including the leadership of Mauritius, and his counterparts from Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Seychelles, and officials from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Gulf countries present at the conference.
- Many delegates cancelled their attendance due to the conflict and travel disruptions. No delegate attended from the Maldives, as Mauritius and Maldives have suspended diplomatic ties over territorial differences over the Chagos Islands.
- “All of us are deeply concerned about the conflict and would like to see an early return to normalcy,” said Mr. Jaishankar, addressing the conference that included hundreds of delegates from various countries abutting the Indian Ocean.
- “We firmly oppose the targeting of civilians, of infrastructure and of commercial shipping, it is essential that navigation remains safe and unimpeded,” he said, speaking about the direct economic impact of the conflict on energy, trade, fertilizers that had “overarching implications” for all societies in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Earlier, Mr. Jaishankar, who met with Mauritius President Dharambeer Gokhool and former Mauritius Prime Minister and Opposition leader Pravind Jugnauth, said India was “finalising” an agreement for the supply of oil and gas to Mauritius to strengthen its energy security amid the West Asia crisis. “The 2-week ceasefire that has been reached is still a fragile ceasefire. We must not allow ourselves to be lulled into complacency,” said Mauritius PM Naveen Ramgoolam, speaking at the event.
- Mr. Jaishankar also held his first meeting with Nepal Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal, who is part of the newly sworn in government headed by Prime Minister Balendra Shah, and met with Bhutan’s Foreign Minister D.N. Dhungyel and Seychelles Foreign Minister Barry Faure and is understood to have discussed the current energy shortages and how India can help with each of them.
- The strongest words at the event came from Oman Foreign Minister Badr Al Busaidi, who appeared via video link, and cancelled his visit to Mauritius due to travel disruptions and the start of talks between U.S. and Iran officials in Pakistan. In a speech, he called the U.S. and Israel’s “initiation” of the conflict on February 28 “deplorable” and slammed the U.S.’s torpedoing of the IRIS Dena in the Indian Ocean, and also criticised Iran’s blockade of Strait of Hormuz.
- “We must prevent the Indian Ocean from becoming a point of conflict, hostility or zero sum competition,” Mr. Al Busaidi, who was the mediator between U.S. and Iran when the U.S. and Israel began the conflict, said, adding: “Amid growing fragmentation in the global order, we must speak up in favour of justice when such rules are violated.”

- Bangladesh's new Foreign Minister Khalil Ur Rahman, who had visited Delhi and held talks with Mr. Jaishankar and Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri before proceeding to the conference, said that "collective action" was needed to deal with the crisis, and called for "revitalising SAARC", the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation as well as other regional organisations.

### ❖ RBI issues draft NBFC upper-layer review

**Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) invited public comments on the draft amendment directions on review of methodology for identification of NBFC-UL (Non-Banking Finance Company-Upper Layer) and inclusion of Government owned NBFCs in the category.**

- The Scale Based Regulatory (SBR) Framework for NBFCs prescribes a two-pronged methodology for identification of NBFC-UL viz., top ten eligible NBFCs by asset size and parametric scoring methodology.
- To adopt a simple and absolute criteria for identification of NBFC-UL, it is proposed to replace the existing methodology with asset-size criteria, now proposed as ₹1,00,000 crore and above.
- "It is proposed to consider eligible Government owned NBFCs also for inclusion in the list of NBFC-UL based on the revised criteria," the RBI said.
- As per this norm, Tata Sons was to be listed last year as it was named among 15 NBFC-ULs. But to avoid listing, it had surrendered its NBFC licence.
- The RBI had been silent on Tata Sons' listing. The revised norms to be announced soon can make its position clear.

### Justice Varma resigns

**Context: Justice Yashwant Varma, of the Allahabad High Court, who was facing a parliamentary motion for removal, submitted his resignation to President Droupadi Murmu.**

- His resignation came amid reports that a panel, appointed by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, was set to look into the allegations of burnt currency being recovered from his official residence in Delhi during a fire in March last year.
- In his letter sent to President Droupadi Murmu on April 9, Justice Varma wrote: "While I do not propose to burden your august office with the reasons which have constrained me to submit this missive, it is with deep anguish that I hereby tender my resignation from the office of Judge of the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad, with immediate effect."
- In another letter written to withdraw from the proceedings before the Judges Inquiry Committee constituted by the Lok Sabha, Justice Varma termed the inquiry as 'unfair'. "I therefore withdraw from these proceedings with immediate effect and have instructed my Advocates accordingly. I withdraw with the deepest sadness, conscious of the gravity of my decision," he said.

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