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BENGALURU**

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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

MAY WEEK 1

27-04-2026 TO 02-06-2026

**INDIA'S FIRST
GREEN METHANOL
PLANT TO TURN
KUTCH'S MOST
INVASIVE WEED
INTO MARINE
FUEL**

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**S****State submits 1,082 project proposals to Union govt.**

Context: Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar says the Union government has earmarked ₹1 lakh crore under the Urban Challenge Fund for urban development, of which ₹5,000 crore has been allocated for cities in Karnataka.

- Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar has said the Karnataka government has submitted proposals for 1,082 urban development projects to the Centre, with a total estimated cost of ₹1.25 lakh crore.
- Mr. Shivakumar, who visited Delhi last week, met Union Minister for Power, Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar on Saturday and discussed development plans for Bengaluru and other cities in the State.
- He said the Centre has earmarked ₹1 lakh crore under the Urban Challenge Fund for urban development, of which ₹5,000 crore has been allocated for cities in Karnataka.
- “Certain criteria have been prescribed, and we have submitted proposals for 1,082 projects. Of the total project cost of ₹1.25 lakh crore, the Centre is expected to contribute around ₹32,000 crore to ₹35,000 crore,” he said.
- During the meeting, Mr. Shivakumar told Mr. Khattar that Karnataka would be willing to utilise additional funds if other States do not avail their share. Minister for Municipal Administration Rahim Khan and senior officials were also present at the meeting.
- On project implementation, Mr. Shivakumar said Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) would provide 50% of the funding as loans, while the Centre and the State or local bodies would each contribute 25%. “We have submitted the proposals to ensure we do not miss this opportunity,” he said.
- The Deputy Chief Minister also met Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to discuss issues related to building height restrictions, transferable development rights, and premium floor area ratio.
- He said the proposed skydeck project has faced hurdles owing to restrictions linked to the HAL airport. The government has proposed to locate the project at Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout in the city. “We have submitted a proposal to the Defence Minister,” he said.

❖ Helicopters deployed as forest fires spread rapidly across Nilgiris

Context: Officials believe the fires were started by people, possibly in retaliation against the Forest Department’s ‘inaction’ over the death of three persons.

- The Forest Department is fighting multiple fires that have destroyed hundreds of acres of forest in the Nilgiris Forest Division and the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR).
- Helicopters were deployed from the Sulur Air Force base in Coimbatore for the second consecutive day on Sunday to help fight the fires.
- Extensive operation
- According to a press release, a forest fire was reported in the Wenlock Downs Reserve Forest of Parson’s Valley Range of the Nilgiris Forest Division on April 15.

- A team of local foresters was deployed to fight the fire. More than 400 Forest Department personnel were roped in from across Tamil Nadu to put out the flames.
- Crucial locations
- Seven forest fire response vehicles were deployed at crucial locations. Two teams of the State Disaster Response Force and five teams of the Tamil Nadu Fire and Rescue Services Department were drafted for the operations, the release said.
- Members of eco-development committees were also engaged in fighting the fires, which spread rapidly on Saturday, driven by heavy winds, high temperatures, and low humidity.
- The strength of the ascending fires prompted the authorities to seek aerial assistance.
- The Collector made the request to the Tamil Nadu State Disaster Management Authority. An Air Force team from Sullur conducted aerial reconnaissance, and was helping in dousing the fire using a helicopter, the release added. The Forest Department officials said the department was fighting multiple fires in the Singara and Masinagudi Forest Ranges in the MTR as well as those in Parson's Valley. They believe the fires were started by people, possibly in retaliation for the perceived inaction on the part of the Forest Department after the killing of three persons by tigers in The Nilgiris in the last year.
- Warning
- The Forest Department has warned communities residing near the reserve forests against starting fires.
- In Mudumalai, the fires might have been started by herders clearing dry grass for regeneration of cattle fodder, according to officials.

❖ Upgraded SARPA platform to boost snakebite care in Kerala

Context: Amid a rise in snakebite cases in Kerala during the ongoing heat wave, the State Forest Department is set to roll out an upgraded version of its snake-response platform, SARPA, aimed at strengthening emergency response and reducing fatalities.

- The Snake Awareness, Rescue and Protection App (SARPA) has played a crucial role in recent years by coordinating snake rescues, enabling users to report sightings, and providing details of trained responders and nearby healthcare facilities. The platform has been credited with improving response times.
- The proposed upgrade comes against the backdrop of a spike in snakebite cases, which officials and experts link to the present spell of extreme heat. Kerala has reported four fatalities from snakebites last week.
- According to official sources, SARPA is being redesigned to address deficiencies in emergency care by integrating a network of medical professionals and snake experts into the platform. This will allow first responders to access verified and real-time guidance during the crucial minutes following a snakebite.
- One of the persistent challenges in snakebite management is the difficulty in identifying the species involved, which often leads to hesitation in administering anti-snake venom or uncertainty about the correct dosage.

- The upgraded application will include dedicated login access for doctors, which will enable them to guide first-response measures remotely until specialised care is reached.

❖ Modi hails India's strides in nuclear, wind energy

Context: Prime Minister says civil nuclear programme has greatly helped different sectors; highlights that the country now ranks fourth in world in wind energy capacity; calls for Census participation.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed the achievement of criticality in the fast breeder nuclear reactor at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu as a “historic milestone in India’s nuclear energy journey”.
- During his monthly Mann ki Baat address, the Prime Minister focused on India’s nuclear and renewable energy efforts, as well as on various nature conservation initiatives being undertaken across the country.
- He also urged citizens to take part in the Census 2027 enumeration process, saying the data collected were “completely secure, kept confidential, and protected with digital security”.

Nuclear pride

- “India’s civil nuclear programme has greatly helped everyone from agriculture to modern innovators,” Mr. Modi said. “Friends, just a few days ago, our nuclear scientists enhanced India’s pride with another major achievement. The fast breeder reactor in Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, has achieved criticality.”
- He further explained that ‘criticality’ is the stage in which a reactor successfully executes a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction for the first time.
- “This stage signifies the reactor entering the operational phase,” Mr. Modi said.
- “This is a historic milestone in India’s nuclear energy journey. And importantly, this nuclear reactor is built entirely with indigenous technology.”

Strides in wind energy

- The Prime Minister also spoke about India’s wind energy sector, saying that the country had recently achieved a major milestone with wind energy generation capacity exceeding 56 gigawatts (GW). He said that, in the past one year, about 6 GW of new capacity had been added.
- “India is progressing rapidly in wind energy and the world is also looking towards us,” he asserted. “Today India ranks fourth in the world in wind energy capacity. This is the hard work of our engineers, this is the diligence of our youth, this is a symbol of the collective willpower of the nation.”
- Mr. Modi noted that several States in India such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, were leading the charge in this sector.
- “In areas like Kutch, Patan, and Banaskantha in Gujarat, where previously only deserts were visible, large renewable energy parks are now being built,” he said. “Youth are benefiting from this, creating new opportunities, developing new skills, and opening up new avenues for employment.”

Crucial Census

- Mr. Modi also spoke about the Census 2027 data collection process under way in the country, calling it the world's largest Census.
- "Friends, the national Census is not just a government job," he said. "It is the responsibility of all of us. Your participation is crucial. The information you provide is completely secure, kept confidential, and protected with digital security. Let us all participate in this process. Make Census 2027 a success."
- He further explained that Census 2027 had been made digital, with all information recorded directly in digital form by workers going door-to-door using a mobile app.
- "This time your participation in the Census has also been made easier; you can enter your information yourself," Mr. Modi explained. "This facility will open for you 15 days before the worker's arrival. You can enter the information as per your convenience. When you complete the process, you receive a special ID . This ID will be sent to your mobile or email. Later, when the worker visits your home, you can verify the information by showing this ID."
- This process, he added, eliminated the need to enter information again, thereby saving time and simplifying the process.
- "In States where self-enumeration has been completed, Census staff have also begun the work of listing households," Mr. Modi said.
- "So far, the house listing of approximately 12 million families has been completed," he added.

❖ At Chintan Shivir, DNT enumeration in Census discussed

Context: The Social Justice Ministry on Sunday concluded a three-day "Chintan Shivir" (brainstorming session), during which the inclusion of denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes (DNTs) in the ongoing Census 2027 exercise was one of the key focus areas.

- The DNT communities have been demanding a separate column or question in the Census forms, specifically to account for their populations across the country. Community leaders are also mobilising support for a separate Schedule for DNTs on a par with the lists of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The Supreme Court dismissed a petition last month seeking a Census question for DNTs and a separate classification for them, leaving them the liberty to approach the government on the matter.
- During the Chintan Shivir, the Social Justice Ministry brought together Centre and State government officials to discuss the future of its schemes for marginalised sections through panel discussions, breakout sessions and thematic meal sessions.
- Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar said on Sunday that the sessions were "a serious and result-oriented platform for the Centre, States and Union Territories to reflect collectively on how social justice delivery can be made more accessible, responsive and implementation-driven".
- The brainstorming session also discussed scholarship and hostel schemes for SC and OBC students, comprehensive support for transgender people and how to align schemes for them with the new amendments enacted by Parliament in 2026. While a

central focus of the sessions on DNT welfare was the principal bottleneck issue of State and Union Territory governments not providing DNT community certificates, hindering their access to schemes, across different sessions, the issue of obtaining an accurate count of DNT populations across the country also kept coming up, officials said.

- This comes even as members of Centre's Development Welfare Board for DNTs raise concerns over the lack of clarity on their enumeration in the ongoing Census. "As of now, we don't know if there will be a column for OBCs. So we don't know if there will be a DNT column as well or how this is going to be done," one Board official said.

❖ **New Zealand, India to sign FTA today; tariffs to go on all exports**

Context: India and New Zealand will on Monday sign a Free Trade Agreement that will remove tariffs on 100% of India's exports to New Zealand, and either sharply reduce or remove tariffs on 95% of current imports from that country.

- Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday took to social media to welcome Todd McClay, New Zealand's Minister for Trade & Investment, to New Delhi, ahead of the signing of the pact.
- "As we approach the #IndiaNZFTA signing on April 27th, his visit marks a defining moment in our bilateral journey, reflecting the trust, shared values, and common vision that underpin our partnership for sustainable economic growth, driving prosperity for both our nations," he said.
- India's exports to New Zealand grew 32.1% in 2024-25 to \$711.1 million, the latest full financial year for which there is data. Imports from New Zealand grew 75.2% to \$587.1 million over the same period.

Duty-free access

- The deal will provide India with immediate duty-free access on 100% of tariff lines.
- This is down from the 10% tariff New Zealand currently levies on about 450 tariff lines that India exports, including textiles and apparel products, leather and headgear, ceramics, carpets, and automobiles and auto components.
- On average, New Zealand levied a tariff of 2.2% in 2025, which will come down to zero under the agreement.
- The pact between the countries is one of the fastest-negotiated trade agreements that India has entered into, with negotiations being announced in March 2025 and concluding in December.
- India has also managed to keep several items out of the FTA, including all dairy products such as milk, cream, whey, yoghurt, and cheese, animal products other than sheep meat, vegetable products such as onions, chana, peas, corn, and almonds, sugar, artificial honey, animal, vegetable or microbial fats and oils, arms and ammunition, gems and jewellery, and copper and aluminium and their products.
- The FTA includes a provision wherein New Zealand will invest \$20 billion in India over 15 years. This is in the same vein as the \$100 billion investment "commitment" the European Free Trade Association made in their FTA with India.

❖ West Asia war, language on Israel derail joint statement at BRICS meet

Context: Extended late-night parleys and heated debates marked the meeting of the 11-nation BRICS Deputy Foreign Ministers and Special Envoys in New Delhi that ended without a joint statement, has learnt, indicating more trouble for India's BRICS Presidency this year.

- While delegates from the United Arab Emirates and Iran sparred over the war in West Asia, a number of diplomatic and official sources present or briefed about the discussions said that the meetings on April 23-24 also saw an unexpected attempt by India to “tone down” language on Israel and Palestine, which was opposed by almost all other members.
- The issues have set the stage for more difficult negotiations in the weeks ahead as BRICS Foreign Ministers are due to meet on May 14-15, with the summit scheduled for September 10-11. Many BRICS Foreign Ministers have confirmed they will attend the meeting next month, including Russia, China, Egypt, and Brazil.
- In particular, sources present in the meetings said that officials from the Ministry negotiating the joint statement sought to amend paragraphs from BRICS summits in Brasilia in 2025 and Kazan in 2024.
- These included softening language that criticised Israel for its bombardment of Gaza and Lebanon, as well as dropping a reference to “East Jerusalem” to be established as the capital of the Palestinian state as a part of the two-state solution. Ministry officials even sought to replace references of “Israel” while criticising its operations in the West Bank and Lebanon with the less direct term “occupying power”.
- “We were very surprised as India has agreed to such language at many multilateral fora,” said a diplomat who asked not to be named. However, another diplomat pointed out that India had incorporated such changes during the India-Arab League Summit held in Delhi in January 2026. In bilateral statements, India stopped using the term “East Jerusalem” in 2017.
- The MEA declined several requests for a response on whether India's position on Palestine was isolated at the meeting. “There was no change in India's position on the Palestine issue” a government source told PTI news agency on Sunday, attributing the lack of consensus to “sharp difference of positions among members who are party to the conflict”.

❖ Hate speech stems from an ‘us versus them’ mindset: SC

Context: The Supreme Court on Wednesday said that hate speech and rumour-mongering stemmed from an “us versus them” mindset and worked to corrupt a sense of fraternity in a diverse society.

- However, the court declined to direct the enactment of specific laws against hate speech and crimes, instead calling for effective enforcement of existing laws that cover the offence.
- “Hate speech, at its core, stems from a perception of difference that breeds exclusion, where the ‘other’ is viewed as alien, inferior, or undeserving of equal regard,” a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta observed in a 125-page judgment in a series of petitions seeking separate laws for hate speech and crimes. The petitions

had also highlighted the unabated presence of hate speech in society despite repeated Supreme Court judgments.

- Justice Nath cautioned that as long as the binary of “us” and “them” persisted, the promise of fraternity would remain unrealised, and true constitutional belonging would prove elusive.
- “While we decline to issue directions of the nature sought, we deem it appropriate to observe that issues relating to ‘hate speech’ and ‘rumour mongering’ bear directly upon the preservation of fraternity, dignity and constitutional order,” Justice Nath said.
- The judgment said the court cannot enter into the exclusive legislative domain and craft laws against hate speech and the court left it to the Union government and legislative authorities to consider bringing any specific laws to address the bane of hate speech.

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy

❖ India, New Zealand sign 'historic' free trade deal

Context: Deal to be implemented after New Zealand Parliament ratification later this year; Prime Minister calls the agreement a milestone, says it reflects 'convergence of values, trust, and shared ambition'.

- India and New Zealand on Monday signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that Prime Ministers of both the countries hailed as a “historic” step towards deepening trade, investment, and people-to-people ties.
- The FTA, signed by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and his New Zealand counterpart, Todd McClay, in New Delhi, will see New Zealand removing tariffs on all goods imported from India, while India will remove or reduce tariffs on 95% of current imports from New Zealand.
- “Today marks a historic milestone in India’s journey towards deeper global engagement and shared prosperity,” a statement read out by Mr. Goyal quoted Prime Minister Narendra Modi as saying. “The signing of the India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement reflects our strengthening economic partnership and a convergence of values, trust and shared ambition between two vibrant democracies.”
- This FTA, discussions for which were announced in March 2025 and concluded in December 2025, is one of the fastest India has negotiated.
- The deal still needs to be ratified by New Zealand’s Parliament, which Mr. McClay said would happen soon while adding that it would come into force within this year.
- New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon — in a statement read out by Mr. McClay — said that during a time of global uncertainty, this FTA is a clear commitment by both sides to a stable, predictable and rules-based trade. “And the India-New Zealand story is about more than trade,” Mr. Luxon said. “New Zealand and India are building a relationship that is bigger, deeper and more exciting every year — across trade, investment, defence, sport, and innovation.”
- India’s exports to New Zealand grew 32.1% in 2024-25 to \$711.1 million, the latest full financial year for which there is data. Imports from New Zealand grew 75.2% to \$587.1 million over the same period.

Gains beyond trade

- “This FTA is far more than an agreement on tariffs and rules of origin,” Mr. Goyal said. “It is a comprehensive framework spanning market access, agricultural productivity, investment, and mobility, designed to benefit manufacturing, farmers, artisans, MSMEs, women entrepreneurs, students, and skilled professionals across both nations.”
- Apart from the tariff concessions, the FTA also includes several provisions relating to the mobility of working professionals and students from India.
- Mr. McClay expressed confidence that the deal would benefit New Zealander exporters substantially.
- “This once-in-a-generation agreement delivers opportunities New Zealand exporters have never had in India,” he said. “It will deliver thousands of jobs and unleash huge potential for our world-class exporters.”

- Not only will it enhance established business relationships, it will accelerate the development of new partnerships to significantly boost economic engagement and bring benefits to both of our countries.”
- The FTA includes a provision wherein New Zealand has committed to facilitate \$20 billion in investments into India over the next 15 years.
- “Our Make in India flagship initiative offers synergy to New Zealand’s investment commitment of \$20 billion in India and delivers a vibrant partnership that goes beyond trade,” Mr. Modi said in his statement.
- Industry bodies and exporters welcomed the deal, saying it would open up new opportunities for India’s exports in several key sectors.

❖ **Rajnath in Bishkek for SCO meeting**

Context: Event brings together the Defence Ministers of SCO member states; Minister is expected to hold bilateral discussions with his counterparts.

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday arrived in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, leading a high-level Indian delegation for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers’ Meeting.
- On the sidelines of the meeting, Mr. Singh is expected to hold bilateral discussions with his counterparts from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and other participating nations, aimed at strengthening defence cooperation and expanding strategic ties.
- Sources in the Defence Ministry said the meeting would bring together the Defence Ministers of SCO member states to deliberate on key regional and global security challenges, international peace, counter-terrorism efforts, and enhancing defence collaboration within the grouping.
- The discussions are being held amid ongoing geopolitical tensions linked to the West Asia crisis, with member countries likely to explore measures to mitigate the impact of the conflict on regional stability.
- During the meeting, Mr. Singh is expected to reiterate India’s commitment to global peace and stability, while underscoring its firm stance of zero tolerance towards terrorism and extremism in the face of evolving security challenges.
- Established on June 15, 2001 in Shanghai, the SCO is one of the largest regional organisations focusing on political, economic, and security cooperation. Its members are India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, and Belarus.
- India became a full member of the SCO in 2017 and assumed the rotating chairmanship in 2023, further deepening its engagement with the grouping.

❖ **NITI Aayog revamp shows tilt towards science and health**

Context: The revamp of the NITI Aayog last week with a new set of full-time members shows a tilt towards technology and health sectors.

- Usually, the choice for the think tank has leaned towards economists.

- Three of the five new members — Abhay Karandikar, M. Srinivas, and Gobardhan Das — have had long careers in health, biotechnology, and science.
- Mr. Karandikar, who is currently the Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology, was previously the Director of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and Professor of electrical engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai.
- Dr. Srinivas, until recently, was the Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi.
- Mr. Das, who is currently the Director of the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhopal, was Professor, School of Molecular Medicine, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He was also the BJP's candidate in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly election but quit the party prior to joining the institute in Bhopal.
- One of the other two full-time members is an economist. K.V. Raju is currently member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. He specialises in agricultural policy, rural development, and water policy.
- The other full-time member is Rajeev Gauba, a former Cabinet Secretary.
- The NITI Ayog's newly appointed Vice-Chairman, Ashok Lahiri, is an economist. He was the Chief Economic Adviser from 2002 to 2007 and has served at several international policy institutions, including the World Bank and the IMF.
- Like Mr. Das, he was a BJP candidate in the 2021 West Bengal election, the difference being that he won and is the MLA from Balurghat.

❖ U.S. Pacific Air Forces chief pays week-long visit to India to strengthen defence ties

Context: The Commander of the U.S. Pacific Air Forces, General Kevin Schneider, visited India from April 19 to 25, reaffirming the U.S.'s commitment to strengthening its strategic defence partnership with India, and advancing a shared vision for a secure and stable Indo-Pacific, a statement by the U.S Embassy in India.

- During the visit, Gen. Schneider held discussions with senior Indian defence leadership, including officials from the Indian Air Force, aimed at reinforcing long-standing military ties and exploring avenues for operational collaboration.
- The visit underscored the growing scope, complexity and interoperability of U.S.-India defence cooperation across multiple domains, including air, land, sea, space and cyberspace, the statement said.
- Both nations continue to deepen their defence partnership, with shared democratic values and mutual interests in maintaining regional stability, the statement said.
- In recent years, India-U.S. cooperation has included joint exercises, training engagements, and high-level exchanges, improving the ability of both forces to operate together in diverse scenarios, it said.
- The visit reaffirms the strength of the U.S.-India major defence partnership and signals continued momentum in expanding defence collaboration to address evolving regional and global challenges, it said.

❖ Fertilizer security strong, stable, well-managed: Centre

Context: For Kharif 2026, the Ministry of Fertilizers has assessed requirement of 390.54 LMT, the current available stock of 190 LMT is 49% of the requirement, says Additional Secretary.

- Amid criticism by the Opposition that the Centre had failed to ensure availability of cooking gas and fertilisers, the Union Fertilizers Ministry said here on Monday that the country's Fertilizer security remained "strong, stable, and well-managed," with availability consistently exceeding requirement across all major Fertilizers.

'Prices unchanged'

- Addressing an inter-ministerial briefing on the impact of the recent developments in West Asia on the availability and production of Fertilizers, Aparna S. Sharma, Additional Secretary, Department of Fertilizers, said retail prices of Urea, Di Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Triple Superphosphate (TSP) would remain unchanged at ₹266.5, ₹1,350 and ₹1,300 per bag respectively.
- The overall stock position of Fertilizers in the country is improved, with urea stock of 71.58 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) as of now compared with 70.67 LMT on the same day last year.
- DAP stock remains at 22.35 LMT, compared with 15.07 LMT last year. 57.56 LMT of Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), and Potassium (K) Fertilizers are available.
- Last year, the stock was 44.49 LMT. Stock of Single Super Phosphate (SSP) is 26.26 LMT. This was 26.14 LMT last year. 12.46 LMT of Muriate of potash (MOP) is available, compared with 12.87 LMT last year, on the same date.
- Ms. Sharma said a total of 190.21 LMT of Fertilizers was available, compared with 169.24 LMT last year.
- For Kharif 2026, the Ministry has assessed Fertilizer requirement of 390.54 LMT and the current available stock of 190 LMT is 49% of the requirement.
- The Ministry said this was significantly higher than the usual level of about 33%. "This reflects improved planning, advance stocking, and efficient logistics management by the government," the Additional Secretary said.
- She added that issues relating to natural gas availability for domestic urea production had also been addressed, with steady supply being maintained to Fertilizer plants and additional LNG/RLNG being arranged as required.
- "At present -97% LNG/RLNG is available with Fertilizer plants. Most of the urea plants are running at optimum level," she said.
- India secured 13.07 LMT Urea in the global urea tender in February and now the government has diversified import sources and secured 25 LMT of urea through global tenders.

❖ RBI tightens bad loan rules to align with global norms

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has rejigged the rules governing classification of bad loans, definition, and recovery, to align with globally-accepted standards, effective April 1, 2027, according to the Master Directions released.

- According to one of the revised directions, if one loan of a borrower with many loans is classified as a non-performing asset (NPA), all the other loans would also be considered so. The basis for classifying a loan as NPA, however, remains at 90 days overdue. An NPA borrower will be considered a “standard asset” only “on repayment of entire arrears of interest and principal pertaining to all the credit facilities,” as per the revised norms.
- The new regulation also directs banks to establish automated systems to identify NPAs.

❖ TRAI attempts to promote public WiFi hotspots, again

Context: Since at first it did not succeed, TRAI’s trying again. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) came out with a consultation paper seeking a response to the question it asked in 2016: how can public WiFi hotspots take off? As the three private telcos steadily implement tariff hikes, this may be a timely shot at a familiar problem for the government.

- Public hotspots have been beset by many issues. For one, WiFi access/gigabyte is far cheaper than even Indian mobile data prices but mobile data is still pretty inexpensive, constraining demand at scale. A second issue is telcos and Internet service providers’ aggressive campaign against public WiFi, by charging them enterprise-leased line rates costing lakhs a year, pricing out small shops where access points can make a difference.

Hotspot ID friction

- But the bigger issue may be is the government’s insistence on complete visibility of the identity of every individual connecting to a WiFi hotspot with an OTP or some other form of ID verification. This norm was put in place in 2009 and has no equals in most of the world. The 2009 requirements followed terrorist attacks in Ahmedabad and Mumbai. but their utility in signals intelligence and combating crime is questionable.
- TRAI’s paper moots a “super-aggregator” to facilitate “inter-hotspot roaming” and “a centralised- platform-for-authentication” authentication.

ISP pushback

- Further centralisation and more efficient surveillance of WiFi hotspots has been tried. The results speak for themselves. The PM-WANI architecture targeted 10 lakh hotspots under a Public Data Office- type arrangement. To date, less than half that number has been rolled out, four years after the deadline.
- Fixed line connections still cost money to build and is usually the post-network build-out generation that leverages the abundance of the networks to support public goods like WiFi hotspots. India had only about 4.6 crore fixed line Internet connections as of March.
- The commercial paranoia among licensed operators is still an obstruction. TRAI is asking what commercial sops could be given to shop owners and establishments. Prohibition of leased line-level tariffs for hotspot providers may have eased some

deployment friction. The regulator also flagged right-of-way issues and coordination with municipal bodies as a friction point.

Free hotspots

- Building WiFi hotspots in India is not comparable with doing so in a developed nation. The issue is deployers want a business case and can't (or won't) generally fold WiFi into other operating costs. WiFi hotspots are usually free elsewhere. This alone distinguishes our hotspot efforts from any other market.
- But, persistence is in the interests of the Indian Internet. Mobile networks can get crowded, and offloading heavy usage to conveniently-accessible and negligibly-priced WiFi networks can free up licensed spectrum for mobility. These are sticky issues around which the regulator has held two substantive consultations in the last 10 years already. Perhaps the third TRAI paper is the charm.

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy

❖ UAE announces exit from OPEC group

Context: The UAE announced that it will leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) effective May 1, stripping the oil cartel of one of its largest producers and further weakening its leverage over global oil supplies and prices.

- Making the announcement via its state-run WAM news agency, the UAE said it would also be leaving the wider OPEC+ group, which Russia had led in order to try to stabilise oil prices.
- “This decision reflects the UAE’s long-term strategic and economic vision and evolving energy profile, including accelerated investment in domestic energy production, and reinforces its commitment to a responsible, reliable, and forward-looking role in global energy markets,” the UAE said.
- “Following its exit, the UAE will continue to act responsibly, bringing additional production to market in a gradual and measured manner, aligned with demand and market conditions,” it added.
- The move had been rumoured as a possibility for some time, as the UAE pushed back in recent years against production quotas it felt had been too low — meaning it was not able to sell as much oil to the world as it had wanted.
- The UAE has had increasingly frosty relations with Saudi Arabia, OPEC’s largest producer, over political and economic matters in West Asia, even after both came under attack by fellow OPEC member Iran during the current war.
- The UAE’s withdrawal from OPEC will not necessarily have any immediate effects in markets since oil supplies are sharply constrained by the war in Iran, which has closed off the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway through which one-fifth of global oil supplies is transported.
- OPEC, based in Vienna, accounts for roughly 40% of the world’s oil output, but its market power had been waning in recent years as the U.S. ramped up production. The UAE had been a longtime member of OPEC, first through its emirate of Abu Dhabi in 1967 and later when the UAE became its own country in 1971. It had been producing around 3.4 million barrels of crude a day just before the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28.

❖ Internal quota: Govt. notifies new ratio

Context: While the State government has notified the new ratio slicing up 15% reservation among the 101 Scheduled Castes in the State, doubts have been expressed over how the roster points system and introduction of “Scheduled Castes General” would practically work out.

- The government notified the decisions of the special Cabinet meeting held providing 5.25% each to Dalit Left (Madiga and allied castes) and Dalit Right (Holeya and allied castes), and 4.5% to “touchable” castes of Lambanis, Bhovis, Koramas, and Korachas along with 49 nomadic castes and 10 micro communities.
- Along with this, it notified the roster points for 400 (currently it is 100), and clarified that the posts will go into “SC General” pool if the notification does not ensure three

roster points to Scheduled Castes. The notifications issued earlier will be withdrawn and a fresh notification as per the new formula will be issued.

- “A recruitment notification should have posts not less than 15 in the same cadre and in same department to ensure implementation of internal reservation since the third roster point is at 15. This would ensure at least one post for each of the three categories in internal reservation. If the number is less than 15, where three roster points cannot be fixed, it will fall into SC General pool which will be available for all among SCs,” said a senior Dalit officer.
- According to him, mass recruitments such as in Home, Health, and Education departments could help in implementation of internal reservation, but in a number of departments recruitment size is normally small and based on need. “In such scenarios where number of posts to be filled is less than 15, internal reservation will not work.”
- Meanwhile, president of Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Government Employees Association D. Chandrashekaraiyah said that the roster has to be fixed scientifically. “The roster points fixed in 1995 and 2022 were not scientific. The future roster should not be based on that.”

For decimal

- He explained that the roster points have been fixed at 400 to accommodate decimal of .25% given to both Dalit Left and Dalit Right each, and .50% given to touchable communities. Till now, roster points were fixed for 100 for recruitment. “However, the reservation in decimal could take decades to realise.”

❖ Rajnath Singh calls for unified SCO approach to eliminate terrorism

Context: The Minister says the real test for SCO members lies in maintaining consistency and rejecting double standard, particularly in addressing state-sponsored cross-border terrorism; he calls for a more ‘orderly world’ rather than a ‘new world order’.

- Terrorism remains the most serious threat to global peace and the emerging world order, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said while addressing the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers’ meeting in Bishkek.
- Emphasising zero tolerance, he called for a unified and consistent approach to eliminate terrorism, extremism, and radicalism in all forms.
- Mr. Singh underscored that terrorism cannot be justified under any circumstances, asserting that it has no nationality and no theology. He stressed that no grievance, real or perceived, can excuse violence against innocent people.
- Highlighting the importance of credibility, he said the real test for SCO member states lies in maintaining consistency and rejecting double standard, particularly in addressing state-sponsored cross-border terrorism and safe havens.
- Referring to the Pahalgam terror attack, Mr. Singh said the carnage had shaken the conscience of humanity and reaffirmed India’s resolve to hold perpetrators accountable. He noted that through Operation Sindoor, India demonstrated that terrorism epicentres were no longer immune from response. He also recalled the

Tianjin Declaration, which reflects the collective commitment of SCO nations to combat terrorism decisively.

'Three evils'

- The Defence Minister highlighted the role of SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in countering radicalisation and extremism.
- He said tackling the "three evils" — terrorism, separatism and extremism — required a unified front, stronger cooperation, and decisive action against those who supported or sheltered terror networks.
- Beyond security concerns, Mr. Singh pointed to the broader global context marked by increasing unilateralism, conflicts, and a fractured world order. He noted that nations were becoming more inward-looking, weakening global consensus, and cooperation. In such a scenario, he said, the SCO has a pivotal role to play in promoting stability, dialogue and mutual respect.
- Describing the SCO region as home to some of the world's most ancient civilisations, Mr. Singh said it reflected a shared heritage of cultural exchange, trade and cooperation. He emphasised that this legacy should guide member nations in addressing present-day challenges collectively.
- Calling for a more "orderly world" rather than a new world order, Mr. Singh stressed the need for dignity, respect, and peaceful coexistence among nations. He urged SCO members to prioritise diplomacy over conflict and ensure that the current era was defined by peace and prosperity, not war.
- Reaffirming India's commitment, Mr. Singh invoked the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' — the world is one family — and expressed confidence that stronger cooperation within the SCO could transform regional security challenges into opportunities for lasting peace and stability.

❖ 9,400 accounts banned for being linked to digital arrests

Context: In documents before Supreme Court, WhatsApp says its probe began from the initial input from govt. sources to identify and run down the creators or administrators behind scam operations.

- Documents placed on record in the Supreme Court show WhatsApp asserting to the Home Ministry that it detected and banned up to 9,400 accounts linked to "digital arrests" and "law enforcement impersonations" after independent investigations.
- The platform said it had focused on bringing down the entire network of scamsters, mostly active in Cambodia.

Not isolated

- Warning signals sent from probe agencies and the Union government are not treated as isolated or one-off reports, but as a "seed" to map and disrupt the entire criminal network, the platform said.
- The platform said its probe fanned out from the initial "seed" input from government sources to identify and run down the creators or administrators behind scam operations such as digital arrests or accounts actively promoting scam activity within groups and channels.

- The communication between WhatsApp and the Home Ministry was annexed to a status report filed on behalf of the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) by the Ministry. Attorney-General R. Venkataramani appears for the Ministry in the Supreme Court.
- The report said several steps were discussed in a meeting convened by the Inter-Departmental Committee under the chairmanship of the Special Secretary (Internal Security) in March. WhatsApp, along with major telecom service providers (TSPs) such as Airtel, Vodafone-Idea, Reliance Jio, and BSNL, were invited.
- WhatsApp said its work on SIM binding — linking the account with the physical SIM card — was on and the platform would comply with the provisions of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. These include the provisions related to identification and labelling of ‘Synthetically Generated Information’ (SGI) commonly used in video calls made for ‘digital arrests’.
- The Ministry and other stakeholders also agreed on introducing mechanisms for identifying and blocking device IDs used in digital arrest scams. WhatsApp said it would continue to strengthen Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning-based systems to detect impersonation of law enforcement agencies, misuse of official logos and synthetic content.

Detection models

- The report said the online platform has introduced detection models and warning mechanisms to identify impersonation patterns and alert users. It had further agreed to retain data of deleted accounts for a minimum period of 180 days to assist law enforcement investigations.
- Recently, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant had flagged digital arrest scams the “most disturbing” and lethal among cybercrimes, which not only result in merely financial loss to victims but also a “blistering sense of violation”. The CJI had said that such crimes must not be seen as mere economic offences, but an offence against human dignity.
- The Home Ministry had clocked over 2.41 lakh complaints related to digital arrests scams alone, involving losses of approximately ₹30,000 crore.
- The CJI’s Bench had taken suo motu cognisance of digital arrests scams in January this year, saying that victims were psychologically coerced by fraudsters dressed up convincingly as police officers and judicial officers to cough up huge sums of their savings to avert fictional arrests or punitive action. One of the cases before the Supreme Court was that of a 78-year-old woman lawyer, who was duped by fraudsters in a digital arrest scam.

❖ A.P. eyes second mega data centre in Vizag with Reliance as key partner

Context: The Andhra Pradesh government is moving ahead with its plans to position Visakhapatnam as a major data infrastructure hub, with another large-scale data centre project in the pipeline involving Reliance Industries.

- Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu laid the foundation stone for a 1 GW Google hyperscale AI data centre in Visakhapatnam.

- The project, estimated at around \$15 billion (₹1.35 lakh crore), is being developed as a joint venture involving AdaniConnex, Google Cloud, and Airtel Nxtra.

Another project

- Parallely, as per sources in the government, the State government is in the final stages of firming up another major data centre project of 1.5 GW in the same city, with Reliance expected to be the principal partner.
- According to sources, discussions for this project began earlier, with the Andhra Pradesh Economic Development Board confirming in November 2025 that negotiations were underway with Digital Connexion—a consortium comprising Reliance Industries, Brookfield, and Digital Realty.
- The proposed Reliance-backed facility is expected to attract investments exceeding ₹1.6 lakh crore. Highly placed sources in the Secretariat in Amaravati indicated that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) had already been signed with the APEDB, signalling steady progress toward project finalisation. Sources also said that RIL had asked for about 900 acres of land.

Official announcement

- Sources also said that the government was likely to officially announce the development in the second or third week of May.
- Officials said that the upcoming data centre complex would be built to global standards, incorporating high-density AI-ready racks, dedicated power substations, and redundant power supply systems.
- It is also expected to feature robust connectivity infrastructure to cater to hyperscalers, enterprise clients, cloud service providers, and emerging artificial intelligence workloads.
- With back-to-back mega investments, Andhra Pradesh is aiming to transform Visakhapatnam into a leading destination for next-generation digital infrastructure and AI-driven industries.

❖ 'PLI plan warps 2W market, junks innovation-led firms'

Context: A new report says the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for two-wheelers has distorted the auto market by driving growth while sidelining innovation-led manufacturers, even as the Centre argues that many such startups lack the capital and market access to scale.

- Non-PLI entities' sales growth rate slid from 407% in FY22 to -33% in FY24 and -11% in FY25. This shift coincided with a reordering of market leadership, at the expense of the industry's innovation engine, says the Centre for Digital Economy Policy Research in its report titled "Impact assessment of auto PLI on two-wheeler EV industry".

Outside PLI framework

- On innovation, the report highlights much of the patent activity and new product development has come from firms outside the PLI framework. Many PLI beneficiaries avoided hard-to-electrify segments like electric motorcycles.

- In contrast, non-PLI firms are leading development in high-performance and electric motorcycle platforms, but face funding constraints and lack of production-linked support, limiting their ability to scale, states the report.
- However, a senior government official said there was no proposal to unveil a separate PLI scheme for startups in the automotive sector.
- “Ministry of MSMEs has many policies [for such startups]. But they lack capital, market access and R&D,” the official stated
- The report comes amid demands from players like Ather Energy which said the PLI scheme must include specialised EV manufacturers, arguing the current high revenue thresholds and rigid criteria favour legacy automakers and exclude pure-EV startups.
- Launched in 2021, the auto PLI scheme aims to boost local manufacturing, cut imports, and position India as a global hub for future mobility. It focuses on Advanced Automotive Technology products such as electric vehicles, hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, and key components like advanced batteries and power electronics.
- The government has set an overall investment target of about ₹42,500 crore for the auto sector under the PLI scheme.
- Eligibility criteria for vehicle makers require a minimum global revenue of ₹10,000 crore and a commitment to invest at least ₹3,000 crore in India.
- Sops under the scheme are linked to incremental sales over a defined base year. Firms must also reach at least 50% domestic value addition to qualify.

❖ Hate speech stems from an 'us versus them' mindset: SC

- The Supreme Court on Wednesday said that hate speech and rumour-mongering stemmed from an “us versus them” mindset and worked to corrupt a sense of fraternity in a diverse society. However, the court declined to direct the enactment of specific laws against hate speech and crimes, instead calling for effective enforcement of existing laws that cover the offence.
- “Hate speech, at its core, stems from a perception of difference that breeds exclusion, where the ‘other’ is viewed as alien, inferior, or undeserving of equal regard,” a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta observed in a 125-page judgment in a series of petitions seeking separate laws for hate speech and crimes. The petitions had also highlighted the unabated presence of hate speech in society despite repeated Supreme Court judgments.
- Justice Nath cautioned that as long as the binary of “us” and “them” persisted, the promise of fraternity would remain unrealised, and true constitutional belonging would prove elusive.
- “While we decline to issue directions of the nature sought, we deem it appropriate to observe that issues relating to ‘hate speech’ and ‘rumour mongering’ bear directly upon the preservation of fraternity, dignity and constitutional order,” Justice Nath said.
- The judgment said the court cannot enter into the exclusive legislative domain and craft laws against hate speech and the court left it to the Union government and legislative authorities to consider bringing any specific laws to address the bane of hate speech.
- “Hate speech is not merely a deviation from acceptable discourse; it is fundamentally antithetical to the constitutional value of fraternity and strikes at the moral fabric of our Republic. It also runs counter to the deeper civilisational ethos of India....,” the top court said.
- “The constitutional role of the judiciary is primarily to interpret and apply the law, and not to legislate... Any attempt by courts to prescribe detailed statutory schemes or to frame provisions akin to legislation would amount to judicial law-making and would impermissibly trench upon the functions assigned to the legislature,” Justice Nath reasoned.
- The court said hate crimes continue to result in bloodshed because of poor enforcement of existing laws, and not because of a dearth of laws to address the issue and to punish the perpetrators.
- “It cannot be contended that the law is either silent or deficient in addressing grievances arising from conduct that disturbs public order or fosters inter-group hostility. Any deficiency lies not in the absence of law, but in its application and enforcement in specific cases....,” the court said.

❖ NSO survey shows better health-seeking behaviour, relatively low medical charges

- Health-seeking behaviour in India is improving as the proportion of the population reported ailing (PPRA) in 2025 nearly doubled from 2017-18 figures, with rural area

numbers going up to 12.2% from 6.8% and those of urban areas rising to 14.9% from 9.1%, according to the latest findings of the National Statistical Office in the 80th round of the household consumption health survey released on Wednesday.

- Expansion in coverage under government health insurance and financing schemes rose more than threefold — increasing to 45.5% from 12.9% in rural areas, and 31.8% from 8.9% in urban areas, the NSO reported.
- Institutional deliveries have risen to 95.6% in rural areas, and to 97.8% in urban areas, the survey said.
- Covering both rural and urban areas across the country, the survey canvassed 1,39,732 households, including 76,296 households in rural areas and 63,436 households in urban areas.
- The findings of the NSO noted that median out-of-pocket medical expenditure (OOPE) per case of hospitalisation in 2025 has been recorded as ₹11,285, indicating that relatively low expenditure was incurred in over half of the cases of hospitalisation in the country. Only a small number of high-cost cases were observed to push up the average (mean value), the NSO said.
- “This shows that high expenditure is not widespread but limited to specific cases requiring specialised treatment. Moreover, the OOPE in more than half of the entire hospitalisation cases in the public health facilities incur only ₹1,100. Importantly, for non-hospitalisation (outpatient) care, the median OOPE in public health facilities is zero, reflecting that a large proportion of citizens are able to access essential healthcare services entirely free of cost,” the survey said.
- India has also registered a decline in infectious diseases and a rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular conditions.
- In response to rising demand, the utilisation of public healthcare facilities has strengthened, particularly for outpatient care in rural areas, where utilisation increased from 33% to 35%, the survey said.
- This improvement has been attributed to the expansion of comprehensive primary healthcare services, with an emphasis on preventive, promotive, and early diagnostic care, supported by the availability of free drugs and diagnostics, the NSO said.

❖ **Namma 112 emergency service gets multilingual AI upgrade**

- The system can interpret and relay information in real time, helping call handlers respond faster and with greater accuracy
- In a first-of-its-kind initiative in India, the Bengaluru City Police have launched a multilingual AI-powered upgrade to its emergency response system, Namma 112, aimed at breaking language barriers during distress situations.
- The city police introduced the Multilingual Voice AI for Nationwide Key Interventions (VANKI), an advanced solution that enables callers to communicate in their preferred language while seeking emergency assistance. The system can interpret and relay information in real time, helping call handlers respond faster and with greater accuracy.
- The initiative comes in response to Bengaluru’s diverse and global population, where residents include people from across India and abroad. Officials noted that language

differences often delay emergency response, and the new integration ensures that such barriers no longer hinder access to help.

- Developed in collaboration with Monday Ventures and Aeos, the system currently supports more than 10 languages.
- These include Indian languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, Odia, Manipuri, Kashmiri, Nepali and Assamese, along with international languages like Spanish, French and Arabic.
- Authorities said additional languages will be introduced in phases.
- In addition, police officials said the upgraded system will significantly improve response time, clarity in communication and accuracy in deploying emergency services, especially in high-pressure situations.
- With this move, the city police said they have reinforced their focus on inclusive and citizen-centric policing, leveraging technology to make emergency services more accessible, efficient and responsive for all sections of society.

❖ **City tops India's GCC leadership with 15,000 professionals: Report**

- Bengaluru has emerged as India's strongest Global Capability Centre (GCC) leadership hotspot, with an active and accessible leadership pool of over 15,000 professionals, shows a report.
- Released by Xpheno, a specialist staffing firm, the workforce research report titled 'Bengaluru GCCs: The Leadership Quotient' noted that the city's GCC workforce has an overall leadership density of 1:50, which means that one in every 50 professionals is in a leadership role. Additionally, the experience level of the leadership is mid-heavy, with 59% of all leadership currently in the mid operational leadership layers. Bengaluru GCCs are also net talent positive, attracting and retaining more leaders than they lose to other geographies, the report said.
- "Cost arbitrage is no longer the primary driver for GCCs entering India. The focus has decisively shifted to the depth and quality of leadership talent. Bengaluru's strong leadership quotient, backed by scale, experience, and global exposure, continues to make it the most preferred destination for global enterprises setting up capability centers," said Kamal Karanth, co-founder, Xpheno.
- The city's GCC leadership pool also recorded 8% annual net growth. For the current outlook of GCC growth in Bengaluru, this could just be a tab below sufficient levels.
- The report, however, flags the lack of gender diversity. It was found that less than one-fourth of active leaders were women professionals, well below the desired levels.

❖ **'Exporters will benefit from IMEC amid West Asia crisis'**

- Owing to geopolitical tensions in West Asia, connectivity was hindered with the Strait of Hormuz and Suez Canal as the choke points. Now with India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) gaining momentum as alternatives to the choke points, exporters from Karnataka and other States in India stand to gain in the global trade market, observed Kotraswamy M., Commissioner of Central Tax, Bengaluru North, here on Wednesday.

- While speaking at a half-day seminar on “Navigating Geo-Political Challenges: Policy Measures and Preparedness to Build Resilience” jointly organised by the Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce (BCIC) and the Indian Institute of Materials Management (IIMM), Mr. Kotraswamy said, “IMEC is now gaining momentum as a more efficient and more reliable pathway, instead of depending on routes like the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, or even the Cape route which are costly in terms of freight and sailing time.”

GST relief

- Exporters are currently being provided targeted relief under the 56th GST framework. As exports are treated as zero-rated supplies under GST, the effective tax incidence on exports is 0%, allowing businesses to claim refunds on input taxes paid. Refund mechanisms have also been significantly streamlined, with over 90% of eligible GST refund claims now being processed within 7 days, compared to earlier timelines of 15 to 30 days.
- Additionally, under recent GST Council recommendations, automatic refund processing and reduced documentation requirements have cut compliance costs by an estimated 20% to 25% for exporters, thereby improving liquidity and easing working capital pressures, highlighted Mr. Kotraswamy.

State’s performance

- Speaking at the seminar, Prince Mehra, Deputy Manager, EXIM Bank, noted that the State was the 4th largest exporter in India, contributing around 7% to the country’s merchandise exports and recording a steady growth of 7.8% CAGR from FY19 to FY25.

- **In FY25, Karnataka’s exports stood at \$30.5 billion, driven by telecom instruments (17.3%) and petroleum (14%), followed by electrical equipment (5%), RMG/apparel (4.7%), electronics (4.2%), coffee (4.1%) and pharmaceuticals (3.8%).**

❖ Courts cannot reform faith, says SC in Sabarimala review

- Religion must mend itself to stay relevant, say women who entered Kerala temple to enforce right to worship under a 2018 verdict; religious practices must harmonise with social reform, they say
- The Supreme Court on Wednesday said courts cannot herald reform in religion even as senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for two women who made history by entering the Sabarimala temple in Kerala to enforce their right to worship under a 2018 top court verdict, said religion must mend to remain relevant.
- Appearing before a nine-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Ms. Jaising opened submissions for respondents supporting the 2018 verdict, which upheld the right of menstruating women aged between 10 and 50 to enter and pray at the Lord Ayyappa temple.

- “Social reform includes the reform of religion,” Ms. Jaising said. She dismissed the contention that courts could not review religious practices challenged as discriminatory.
- Justice B.V. Nagarathna pointed out that the petitioners, who have sought a review of the Sabarimala verdict, had argued that reform cannot hollow out a religion out of existence. The judge said there ought to be a balance between reforms which actually benefit and those which were intrusive and made inroads into doctrinal and religious matters.
- Ms. Jaising, assisted by advocates Prashant Padmanabhan and Paras Nath Singh, said the Constitution had to be read out as a whole. **One cannot make the right to equality under Article 14 and the right to dignity under Article 21 subservient to the freedom of religion. Religious practices must harmonise with social reform. The Constitution must be read as a whole, and not in bits and pieces. The Constitution was the conscience of the Supreme Court. The morality of the Constitution must govern the decisions of the court, the senior advocate argued.**
- “A person can say a temple is a denomination and only certain people can enter that temple... This would lead to complete balkanisation of Hinduism when the history of the country is that of unification. The Indian Constitution protects every religion, every faith,” she said.

❖ India and China discuss LAC stability, regional security

- The two sides exchange views on regional security and the situation in West Asia; Defence Minister also holds talks with his counterparts from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh met his Chinese counterpart, Dong Jun, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers’ Meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic on Tuesday.

Peace along LAC

- The two sides discussed maintaining peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and exchanged views on broader regional security issues, including the West Asia situation, the spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in India posted on social media platform X.
- On Tuesday, while addressing the SCO gathering, Mr. Singh described terrorism as the most serious threat to global peace and the emerging world order. Emphasising a policy of zero tolerance, the Minister called for a unified and consistent approach among member states to eliminate terrorism, extremism and radicalism in all forms.

Expanding defence ties

- On the sidelines of the meeting, Mr. Singh held discussions with his counterparts from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic, focusing on strengthening defence cooperation and expanding strategic ties with partner countries.
- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, established in 2001 in Shanghai, is one of the largest regional organisations promoting political, economic and security

cooperation. Its member states include India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, and Belarus.

- India became a full member of the grouping in 2017, and assumed its rotating presidency in 2022-23, underlining its growing role in regional security and multilateral cooperation.

❖ **India and Italy to hold talks on boosting defence ties**

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will hold bilateral talks with his Italian counterpart, Guido Crosetto, in New Delhi on Thursday, aimed at strengthening defence ties between India and Italy.
- According to the Ministry of Defence, the two leaders are expected to deliberate on issues related to defence cooperation, and regional and global security developments.
- India-Italy defence relations have gained momentum following Mr. Singh's visit to Rome in October 2023. Mr. Crosetto's maiden visit to India is being seen as a reflection of the growing intent on both sides to expand existing engagements and explore new avenues, particularly in defence industrial collaboration, it added.
- The talks also come against the backdrop of the India-European Union Defence and Strategic Partnership signed in January 2026.

❖ **India and Sri Lanka reaffirm maritime ties through bilateral diving exercise in Colombo**

- India and Sri Lanka reaffirmed their growing maritime partnership by conducting the fourth edition of the bilateral diving exercise, IN-SLN DIVEX 2026, in Colombo from April 21 to 28.
- The Indian Navy said that it deployed its diving support and submarine rescue vessel INS Nireekshak, while the Sri Lankan Navy fielded its diving teams, jointly enhancing operational coordination and professional synergy.
- Focused on complex underwater operations, the exercise was aimed at strengthening interoperability through advanced deep-sea diving evolutions, including mixed gas diving drills. Divers from both Navies carried out extensive harbour and open-sea dives, demonstrating high levels of operational expertise.
- A key highlight of the exercise was the conduct of mixed gas dives off Colombo over the World War-era wrecks SS Worcester and SS Perseus.
- Marking a significant milestone, the divers successfully executed deep-sea dives beyond 55 metres, boosting joint capabilities in underwater search, rescue and salvage operations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), it added.
- During the exercise, Rear Admiral S.J. Kumara, Flag Officer Commanding, Western Naval Area of the Sri Lanka Navy, visited INS Nireekshak and commended the Indian Navy's continued support in enhancing the training of Sri Lankan divers. He emphasised the importance of sustained exchange of best practices and professional expertise.
- In a solemn gesture, the Commanding Officer of INS Nireekshak paid homage at the Indian Peace Keeping Force Memorial in Colombo, laying a wreath in honour of

Indian soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice during the IPKF operations in Sri Lanka.

- Further, extending humanitarian cooperation, two BHISM (Bharat Health Initiative for Sahyog, Hita and Maitri) cubes (portable hospital units) were handed over under India's Aarogya Maitri initiative, enhancing disaster response and medical preparedness.
- The exercise concluded with a ceremonial send-off for INS Nireekshak, symbolising the strong camaraderie and enduring maritime partnership between the two Navies.
- **IN-SLN DIVEX 2026 stands as a testament to sustained bilateral collaboration, aligned with the MAHASAGAR vision (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions), and a shared commitment to peace, stability and security in the IOR.**

❖ **Modi inaugurates 594-km Ganga Expressway in Uttar Pradesh, praises overall development**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated the 594-km Ganga Expressway in Hardoi, describing it as the identity of a "new Uttar Pradesh", which would emerge as a new lifeline for the State's connectivity and employment.
- Hailing the development of the State, Mr. Modi added, "In Uttar Pradesh today, not only are expressways being built, but the overall development is also progressing at an even faster pace."
- "The Ganga Expressway is not merely a road project, but the foundation of Uttar Pradesh's economic, social, and industrial transformation in which development is moving ahead even faster than the speed of the expressway itself. People can now reach the Sangam in a few hours and visit Kashi for darshan," he said.
- Inaugurating the project built at an approximate cost of ₹36,230 crore, he said the six-lane access-controlled expressway was likely to significantly reduce travel time, making the journey from Meerut to Prayagraj possible in about six hours. The expressway would begin from Meerut and pass through Hapur, Bulandshahr, Amroha, Sambhal, Badaun, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Unnao, Rae Bareli, and Pratapgarh before culminating in Prayagraj.
- "Previously, farmers' produce could not reach markets promptly, but now, with the expressway, products will arrive at markets more quickly, thereby increasing farmers' income," Mr. Modi said.
- Uttar Pradesh was experiencing significant infrastructure development with remarkable advancements in expressways, airports, industrial corridors, and defence manufacturing.

Swift progress

- "Initiatives like the BrahMos missile project are providing a new identity to the State's industrial capabilities. Uttar Pradesh is swiftly progressing towards becoming a one-trillion-dollar economy. With fresh opportunities in investment, industry, and employment, the State's reputation has evolved, making it a key destination for investors," the Prime Minister said.

- He slammed the Opposition parties, primarily the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, for being “anti-women” and opposing the women’s reservation amendment Bill.
- Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the expressway would serve as a major medium for the progress of farmers, employment for youth, preservation of faith and culture, and the prosperity of Uttar Pradesh.
- Earlier, the Prime Minister held a roadshow in Varanasi drawing large crowds along the route.

❖ **Jaishankar speaks with Araghchi days after BRICS logjam**

- Days after an India-led meeting among BRICS envoys failed to reach a consensus on the conflict in West Asia, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Iranian counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, spoke over phone on Wednesday.
- Following the conversation that is part of the preparatory steps ahead of BRICS ministerial meeting that will be held here next month, the Iranian embassy here said that the two Ministers discussed the current Iran-U.S. ceasefire as well as “bilateral, regional and international issues”.
- “Had a detailed conversation about various aspects of the current situation. We agreed to remain in close touch,” said Mr. Jaishankar after receiving the call from Mr. Araghchi. The Iranian Minister had visited Pakistan, Oman and Russia in the past five days to find a “workable framework” to resolve the conflict that erupted on February 28.
- The Embassy of Iran said the two Ministers “discussed and exchanged views on the latest developments related to the ceasefire, bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues”.
- The conversation indicates continuity in high-level contacts despite the fact that a meeting of Deputy Foreign Ministers and Special Envoys from BRICS and MENA (Middle East North Africa) held here last week failed to reach a consensus on the crisis as member countries had differing positions on matters such as Israel’s involvement in the conflict.
- The Hindu had reported that the envoys could not reach a consensus because of differences between Iran and the UAE, as well as India’s desire to dilute the language about the Israel-Palestine conflict. The BRICS dialogue is part of the preparatory exchanges that are taking place ahead of the Ministerial meeting that will take place here next month.
- Russia has indicated that Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will attend the BRICS Ministerial meeting in New Delhi. “On the 14th and 15th of May, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov will participate in a full-fledged session or council, of the foreign ministries of BRICS countries in New Delhi. This session under the Indian presidency will become a good opportunity for detailed and profound discussion of relevant issues of international agenda,” said Maria Zacharova, spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday.
- Mr. Araghchi’s participation is yet to be confirmed.

❖ **NHRC is exceeding its jurisdiction: Allahabad HC**

- In a sharply worded observation, a judge of the Allahabad High Court said the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was overlooking serious cases of violence against Muslims while engaging in matters “that prima facie do not concern” its mandate.
- The court was hearing a petition, filed by the Teachers Association Madaris Arabia, challenging a February 2025 NHRC directive to the Economic Offences Wing to investigate allegations against 558 aided madrasas in Uttar Pradesh. Justice Atul Sreedharan, part of a Division Bench including Justice Vivek Saran, said he was “astounded” by the Commission’s order and questioned its jurisdiction.

❖ **EPFO to launch portal to track inoperative accounts**

- The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is set to launch E-PRAAPTI, a dedicated digital platform to facilitate identification, tracking, unique account number (UAN) linking, and activation of old EPF accounts.
- A senior Labour Ministry official said E-PRAAPTI, or EPF Aadhaar-Based Access Portal for Tracking Inoperative Accounts, will provide a streamlined Aadhaar-based authentication mechanism that will enable members to securely access their old EPF account which may not have an UAN linked with it and initiate the process for updating their member profile, followed by seamless UAN linking and activation.
- “In the initial phase, the portal will be member ID-based, ensuring a secure and efficient roll-out while delivering immediate benefits to a large segment of members who possess their member IDs,” the official said.
- Going forward, E-PRAAPTI’s scope will be expanded to include members who may not be able to recall or access their old member IDs. “The platform is expected to reduce manual intervention, minimise documentation, and enhance transparency and efficiency,” he said.

Claims settled

- The official said the EPFO had settled a record 8.31 crore claims in 2025-26, compared with 6.01 crore in 2024-25. “5.51 crore claims were for advance or partial withdrawals, indicating the ease of access to PF accounts, enabling members to draw upon their savings to meet their needs. 71.11% of advance claims were processed in auto mode (processed in three days), up from 59.19% in the previous year, minimising manual intervention. 6.68 crore members were able to file their claims without the hassle of uploading cheque leaf image,” he said.

❖ **Increased imports buoy natural gas stocks in March**

- Total natural gas available for sale in India grew 7.8% in March; the gross domestic production.
- of 2,874 MMSCM during the month, as per provisional PPAC data, was 4.9% lower on a YoY basis.
- Amid the looming fuel supply disruptions due to the West Asia conflict, the total natural gas available for sale in India grew 7.8% in March 2026, fuelled by an

increase in imports of liquified natural gas (LNG), according to latest government data.

- The increase in availability comes despite India's net domestic production of natural gas for sale slipping 4.3% in March 2026, the first month following the start of the West Asia crisis.
- Separately, during a press briefing, Mukesh Mangal, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, confirmed to reporters that the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) was looking at how it could resume services to West Asia.
- "Starting shipping services is not like we decide today and start tomorrow, it is a combination of many things like getting cargo, arranging berthing on West Asia ports, transport of cargo from that port to hinterland of different countries," he said.
- On India's assessment of the UAE exiting the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its impact on prices, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Petroleum Ministry said "it is too early to comment".
- According to provisional data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), gross domestic production of natural gas was 2,874 million metric standard cubic metre (MMSCM) during the month. This was 4.9% lower on a year-on-year basis.
- Natural gas producers use some quantity of the overall gas produced for internal consumption with some quantity is lost during processing.
- Net production of natural gas, which is what is sold to consumers in power, fertiliser, city-gas distribution, refinery and petrochemical sectors, during the reported period stood at 2,381 MMSCM, down from 2,489 MMSCM in the year-ago period. This stood at approximately 83% of the gross production in March this year.
- India's imports of LNG, on the other hand, jumped 20.5% on a year-on-year basis to 2,888 MMSCM during this period.
- Overall, according to the provisional data, the total gas available for consumption, inclusive of both imports and domestic production, stood at 5,726 MMSCM, although PPAC cautions the actual figure could be "much lower" owing to the situation in West Asia.

❖ **'India, U.K. need to simplify regulatory mechanisms'**

- India and the United Kingdom need to simplify their complex regulatory mechanisms, London's Lady Mayor Dame Susan Langley told The Hindu.
- The comments are significant on the background of the India-U.K. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) which will be effective soon. During her maiden visit to India, the international Ambassador for the U.K.'s financial and professional services sector, emphasised on the need for both the countries to understand each other's markets more strategically, and discussed the barriers for the rolling out of the FTA.
- She lauded India's Aadhaar experiment but added that the U.K. will not walk that path, though it is looking for a universal identification system. "What you have done with Aadhaar is really impressive. But I can't say that we will be following it up," she said. She also spoke of the opportunities for the British insurance companies in India, which is one of the under-insured countries in the world. She drew parallels between London and Mumbai, adding that their financial ecosystems looked similar.

- “There is a need to understand each other’s regulatory environment,” she said, when asked about the consistent issues she hears from the British companies about accessing Indian markets and the other way round. “The thing with regulation is, each year when you review it, you add more to it. You rarely remove anything or make things simpler. Over time, it gets to a stage where it becomes too complex. I think, India and the U.K. have recognised the need. I would not say, deregulate. I would never advocate that. But simplification is a very good word,” she said.
- Ms. Langley visited New Delhi and Mumbai from April 25 to April 29, where she met industry leaders, government officials and Ministers.

Barriers for FTA

- Speaking of the barriers in the success of the long-awaited Free Trade Agreement, she said that the British companies still lacked an understanding of the Indian markets and their potential. “Even with the FTA, we need case studies and real success stories to make the FTA work to encourage people to invest in both directions,” she said, emphasising on the need to highlight the success stories from India and the U.K.

❖ Govt. proposes E100 as approved fuel

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a draft notification proposing to recognise E100 (or 100% ethanol) as an approved automotive fuel, clearing the way for certification and large-scale production of vehicles capable of running entirely on ethanol. The proposed amendments relate to Rule 115, sub-rule (18) of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules (CMVR), which governs the recognition and specification of alternative fuels in India.
- A key change allows vehicles earlier approved for up to 85% ethanol blends to now be certified for 100% ethanol, paving the way for pure ethanol-powered vehicles rather than just blended fuel options. A senior government official explained that the amendments will allow for “homologation” and type approvals of E-100 powered vehicles by agencies like Automotive Research Association of India, facilitating their roll-out and adoption by consumers.
- Homologation is the official certification process ensuring a vehicle, or its components, complies with government technical, safety, and environmental regulations before it can be sold or used on public roads.

❖ ‘Consumer demand must to spur green products’

- Consumers demanding products and services with lower carbon footprint would be a crucial factor in driving corporates towards adopting more green practices and products, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday.
- He added it was also essential for corporates to have economically-viable propositions.
- Speaking at the launch of think-tank Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)’s digital analytics platform ‘CRAVIS’, Mr. Goyal said, “There can be no better

way to get more acceptability, more conscious and more action from corporates than consumer demand.”

- He added, “If we (consumers) value products made with lower carbon emissions and net carbon impact on environment, boardrooms will become more conscious.”
- Further, he sought to emphasise, notwithstanding the potential intent among corporates to green products and services, it was essential they have an economically-viable proposition.

Look at EBITDA

- “At the end of the day, after all the good intention, the corporate is going to look at the EBITDA and profit, that is what the stock market and shareholder are going to recognise. Therefore, we will have to convert each of these opportunities into an economically viable product,” he stated, adding the government would also have to go along with the effort.

❖ Iran vows to safeguard its nuclear capabilities

- Tehran will secure Persian Gulf, implement new rules to manage Strait of Hormuz, says Mojtaba Khamenei; U.S. President had earlier said that he wanted a deal from Iran on the nuclear issue
- Iran’s Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said on Thursday that the country would “safeguard” its “nuclear and missile” capabilities and lay down new rules for managing the Strait of Hormuz, hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said a blockade of Iranian ports would remain until a nuclear deal is reached.
- “A new chapter for the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz is taking shape,” he said in a statement, marking Persian Gulf Day. “The Islamic Republic will secure the Persian Gulf region and dismantle the enemies’ exploitative schemes in this waterway. The legal frameworks and implementation of new management for the strait will bring peace and progress to the benefit of all the region’s nations,” he said.
- The war on Iran, launched by the U.S. and Israel, has turned into a maritime battle of wills after Mr. Trump announced a ceasefire on April 8. While the ceasefire is still holding, Iran’s chokehold of the strait, the mouth of the oil-rich Persian Gulf, remains intact. The U.S. has imposed a blockade on Iran-linked vessels in the Gulf of Oman to exert economic pressure on Tehran.
- Last week, U.S. media reported that Iran made a proposal to the U.S. via Pakistan promising to ease its control of the strait in return for the U.S. lifting its blockade. Iran said it would discuss outstanding issues, including the nuclear programme, in the second round.
- Mr. Trump, in an interview, said on Wednesday that he wanted a deal from Iran addressing America’s core concerns, including the nuclear issue.
- “The blockade is somewhat more effective than the bombing... They want to settle. They don’t want me to keep the blockade. I don’t want to [lift the blockade], because I don’t want them to have a nuclear weapon,” he said.

- Iran has always maintained that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes. Mr. Trump, who ordered U.S. bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities in June 2025, had then said he had "obliterated" the nuclear programme.
- Mr. Khamenei said Iranians would safeguard all of the country's technological advances, including the nuclear and missile programmes. Iranians "will regard all their national identity capacities — spiritual, human, scientific, industrial, and foundational and cutting-edge technologies, from nano and bio to nuclear and missile — as their national capital, and will safeguard them just as they do their maritime, land, and air borders," he said in the statement.
- He added that the U.S. presence is the "most important factor of insecurity" in the region. "America's illusory bases lack even the ability to ensure their own security, let alone any hope that America could provide security for the region's dependents and Americanophiles."
- U.S. Central Command stated on Wednesday in a social media post that it had reached a "significant milestone after successfully redirecting the 42nd commercial vessel attempting to violate the blockade". There are "41 tankers with 69 million barrels of oil that the Iran can't sell", it said.
- Oil prices soared to four-year highs on Thursday, with the global benchmark Brent spiking more than 7% to \$126.41 a barrel for June delivery.
- Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said the Persian Gulf is an "inseparable" part of Iran's identity, adding that the U.S. blockade is "doomed to fail". "As we have repeatedly announced, the presence and interference of foreigners will not help improve security in the region but will create tension and disrupt lasting peace in the Persian Gulf," he said in a statement. Mr. Pezeshkian added that Iran would adhere to "the principles of freedom of navigation and maritime safety, except for hostile countries".
- Iran's Parliament Speaker and chief negotiator Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf signalled that Tehran would not give up its control over the Strait of Hormuz. "Iran, by exercising control over the Strait of Hormuz, will ensure that it and its neighbors enjoy the precious blessing of a future free from the presence and interference of America," he wrote in a social media post.

❖ **Empty LNG ship from Dahej heads into Strait of Hormuz for loading in the UAE's Das Island**

- In a development that has given hope of normalcy returning across the Strait of Hormuz, LNG carrier Umm Al Ashtan, which had departed from Dahej in Gujarat after unloading its cargo there, is heading up towards crossing the strait. The vessel, which had finished cargo operations early in March and had been drifting, is likely to cross the strait early on Friday and make way to Das Island, an LNG terminal in the UAE.
- This is among the first instance since the war started that an empty ship in ballast condition is sailing upstream of the Strait of Hormuz to load cargo even as hundreds of loaded ships are still stuck west of the strait inside the Persian Gulf.

- The passage of Umm Al Ashtan indicates that LNG production is starting at Das Island, which has a capacity of 6 million tonnes per year, almost 1% of global LNG manufacturing capacity. Shipping industry sources, however, say that a sure sign of normalcy would be when the dozen LNG carriers that loaded in Qatar start heading out.
- Umm Al Ashtan is managed by Adnoc Logistics and Services, belonging to the well-known Adnoc Group of Abu Dhabi. It has a cargo carrying capacity of 73,100 tonnes and has delivered cargoes to India.
- In another India-related LNG shipping, Mubaraz, an LNG tanker, after loading in Das Island, has transited and is currently en route to China but currently cruising on the west coast of India. Mubaraz had switched off its automatic identification system (AIS) as it transited the strait and sailed into the Arabian Sea. The AIS was switched on as it neared the Indian coast.
- Mubaraz, carrying some 59,000 tonnes of LNG and owned by Adnoc's shipping company, was originally scheduled to deliver to India. It was among the 22 energy-carrying ships that the government had earmarked for evacuation to India.
- In another positive development, Idemitsu Maru, carrying 2 million barrels of crude oil, also transited the strait recently and is headed to Nagoya, Japan.

❖ Revenue-deficit States may face fiscal stress, says Centre

- The Union Finance Ministry has warned that States with revenue deficits and high debt burdens will find it harder to deal with fiscal shocks, including from the West Asia crisis, forcing them to either reprioritise expenditure away from productive areas, or approach the Centre for more funds at a time when it is trying to consolidate its own finances.
- In its Monthly Economic Review for April, the Department of Economic Affairs in the Ministry said nine of the 18 large States analysed were in revenue deficit as per their own projections for 2026-27. Seven are projected to be revenue surplus, while one is in revenue balance.
- A revenue deficit is when expenditure on recurring items such as salaries, pensions, subsidies, and interest payments exceed the revenue earned from sources such as taxes and fees.
- The States with projected revenue deficits as a percentage of their GSDP are Himachal Pradesh (-2.4%), Punjab (-2.2%), Kerala (-2.1%), Andhra Pradesh (-1.1%), Rajasthan (-1.1%), Haryana (-0.9%), Karnataka (-0.7%), Maharashtra (-0.7%), and Chhattisgarh (-0.3%). Tamil Nadu and West Bengal were excluded from the analysis as they have so far presented only interim budgets for 2026-27.
- "Revenue-deficit States are constrained by the debt servicing obligations and carry, on average, significantly higher outstanding liabilities than revenue-surplus States, and many of them spend more than 15% of their revenue receipts on interest payments," the report noted.
- Of all the States analysed, Punjab has the highest projected ratio of interest payments to revenue receipts of 22.8%.

- “States simultaneously running a revenue deficit and high outstanding liabilities have fewer degrees of freedom to respond to fiscal shocks,” the report said. “Specifically, they may have to resort to expenditure restructuring or may demand higher central transfers to meet the present unforeseen shocks.”
- On the other hand, the report highlighted the States that were doing fiscally well. The eight States with projected revenue surpluses as a percentage of their GSDPs are Odisha (3%), Jharkhand (2.5%), Uttar Pradesh (1.6%), Goa (1.3%), Gujarat (0.8%), Uttarakhand (0.6%), Telangana (0.3%), and Bihar (0.1%). “Notably, eight States which have budgeted revenue surpluses for 2026-27, save for Telangana, have their capital outlay as a percentage of State GDP higher than their projected fiscal deficit, ” the report said.
- It highlighted the example of Odisha: while the State’s 3.5% fiscal deficit is higher than the 3% norm, the fact that it is in revenue surplus and its capital outlay is 6.5% of GSDP “mark it as a case of deliberate investment rather than fiscal stress”.
- “States that are unable to maintain the golden rule of fiscal financing, that is, zero revenue deficit, will face increased stress as a result of the present crisis,” the report said.

❖ Revenue Dept. has no jurisdiction on agricultural lands under GBA limits: HC

- The High Court of Karnataka has ruled that the State Revenue Department cannot exercise jurisdiction under the Karnataka Land Revenue (KLR) Act over lands that have come under the jurisdiction of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP)/Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), even if those lands retain their agricultural classification in revenue records.
- A Division Bench comprising Justices D.K. Singh and T.M. Nadaf passed the order in a batch of appeals in connection with the legal battle over eviction proceedings initiated in 2023 against owners of sites and houses in Sainik Vihar Layout by the tahsildar of Bengaluru North taluk.

Tahsildar’s action

- The tahsildar, following litigation before a single judge of the court, had initiated proceedings against owners of sites and houses in the layout on the complaint by a group of land owners alleging that the formation of the layout on agricultural land was illegal as the land was not converted for its non-agricultural use as per the provisions of the KLR Act.
- However, the Bench raised the question of whether the tahsildar, an officer of the State Revenue Department, could exercise power under the KLR Act even after the areas in which the land is situated had been transferred to the jurisdiction of the erstwhile BBMP, now the GBA’s Bengaluru North City Corporation.

After layout formation

- The Bench, noting that the BBMP had issued ‘B’ khatas to sites in the layout for the limited purpose of property tax assessment, said that once the land on which the layout was formed is transferred to the BBMP, the revenue authorities, such as the

tahsildar and Deputy Commissioners would have no authority as such authority vests with the BBMP/GBA.

Only GBA

- Without examining the legality of using agricultural land for residential purposes without the conversion of land or seeking a sanction for building construction, the Bench said that now it is only the GBA, the authority empowered to act under the GBA Act against violations of land use and illegal construction, that can proceed as per the law.

❖ Integrated Satellite Township project approved

- State government to provide a bank guarantee to the tune of ₹7,500 cr. to the project that will entail acquisition of 7,404 acres in Ramanagara taluk
- The Integrated Satellite Township project in Bengaluru South district that had kicked up a political storm will be implemented at a cost of ₹18,133 crore. The State government gave in-principle approval to the project as well as compensation package to farmers on Thursday.
- The Cabinet agreed to provide a bank guarantee to the tune of ₹7,500 crore to the project that will entail acquisition of 7,404 acres in nine villages of Ramanagara taluk in Bengaluru South district.
- “This a very big project that is also time bound,” Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil told presspersons here during the post-Cabinet briefing.
- When asked about the farmers’ protest against the project, and also opposition from Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy, he said, “There will be no problem in land acquisition and the government will provide compensation under the 2013 Land Acquisition Act.”
- The government has decided to allot 9,693 sq ft of developed site per acre in lieu of land acquired or whatever the value of the land, he said, adding that Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar would spell out the details shortly.

High speed rail corridor

- The Cabinet also gave its approval to provide administrative and legislative support to the Hyderabad-Bengaluru High Speed Rail Corridor. Stations have been proposed in Alipura, Devanahalli and Koidhalli, and 103 kms length running through Chickballapur, Tumakuru, and Bengaluru Rural districts in Karnataka is expected to increase connectivity in these districts, besides easing entry into Kempegowda International Airport. On Thursday, the Chennai-Bengaluru high speed rail corridor also received administrative approval.
- The government also approved providing viability gap funding of ₹28.47 crore to Star Air to provide Bidar-Bengaluru and Kalaburgi-Bengaluru air service. While the Kalyana Karnataka Region Development Board will bear 80% of the cost, the Infrastructure Department will fund 20%.

- The Cabinet also approved setting up of a soap manufacturing unit of the Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Ltd. at Ittangihal in Vijayapura district.
- A three -day special Lok Adalat under Samadhan Samaroh would be held from August 21 by Supreme Court to provide opportunity for one time settlement. “Both Supreme Court and State government are listing out possible cases that could come before the Special Lok Adalat,” said Mr. Patil.

❖ **Should the PIL jurisdiction be reconsidered?**

Public Interest Litigation (PIL) emerged in the 1970s as a transformative judicial innovation aimed at widening access to justice for the poor and the marginalised. This was achieved by relaxing the strict rules of standing to permit representative actions, and by broadening the scope of judicial notice to allow courts to take suo motu cognisance of public issues and convert them into litigation. Over time, however, concerns have been raised about the misuse of this jurisdiction. More recently, during the ongoing proceedings in the Sabarimala reference case, the Union government has urged the Supreme Court to reconsider the PIL framework altogether, citing the rise of “agenda-driven litigation.” Should the PIL jurisdiction be reconsidered? Anuj Bhuwania and Talha Abdul Rahman discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Aaratrika Bhaumik.

Where should courts draw the line on who can file PILs?

Anuj Bhuwania: The evolution of PIL can be traced to the Supreme Court decisions of the late 1970s, such as *Hussainara Khatoon & Ors. vs. Home Secretary, State of Bihar* (1979), which marked a departure from the traditional doctrine of locus standi, under which only an aggrieved party could approach the court, towards permitting representative standing. This enabled third parties to institute proceedings on behalf of marginalised groups unable to access justice due to systemic barriers. Over time, however, there has been a discernible shift towards a broader model of citizen standing, where individuals approach the court not as representatives of affected groups but in their own capacity as members of the citizenry. This transition has led courts to engage with issues in an open-ended and, at times, indeterminate manner. In my view, the court’s jurisdiction ought, as far as possible, to be invoked by those who are directly affected or, at the very least, by those with a clear interest in the matter.

Talha Abdul Rahman: I do not believe that the rules of locus standi should be reverted to their earlier, restrictive form. The structural barriers that justified its relaxation decades ago remain largely intact, and courts continue to be inaccessible to the poor and marginalised. For instance, individuals whose homes are demolished by the state as a purported punitive measure may often lack the means or capacity to seek judicial redress. In such circumstances, if third parties step forward to challenge these demolitions on the ground that due process has not been followed, they ought to be accorded standing. This is not merely a representative action, but an assertion of a constitutional guarantee — that the rule of law must be upheld in its full measure, even where the harm is not personally suffered.

PILs often involve complex, polycentric disputes. Do they risk judicial overreach and the exclusion of key stakeholders?

TAR: The concern is valid. There have been instances where courts, while hearing such matters, have had to respond to executive inaction. This then raises a recurring question: do they possess the institutional competence to navigate such issues? In my view, they do, particularly when assisted by able counsel and robust adversarial presentation. At the same time, courts have also consciously refrained from encroaching upon the domains reserved for the executive or the legislature. For instance, on April 29, the Supreme Court declined to direct the enactment of specific laws on hate speech, instead leaving any legislative redress to the appropriate authorities. This reflects an important reality — there are limits to what the courts can do.

AB: In the past, there have been several instances where courts, while hearing PILs, have proceeded without hearing those directly affected. This was particularly evident in a series of cases before the Delhi High Court in the mid-2000s concerning slum evictions, where PILs filed by resident welfare associations sought the removal of slums, but the slum dwellers themselves were not impleaded as parties. Similarly, the Supreme Court's handling of pollution-related litigation over the past four decades, much of it arising from PILs filed by environmentalist M.C. Mehta, highlights the limits of judicial intervention in addressing problems of such scale and complexity.

How can courts address the rise of 'ambush PILs' filed to preclude genuine claims?

AB: Increasingly, there have been instances of litigants rushing to court with poorly drafted petitions, often with the intention of securing an early dismissal and thereby precluding genuine litigants from approaching the court. These petitions are frequently driven by partisan motives. This is deeply concerning, as it risks prompting courts to deal with such matters in a cursory manner, without fully engaging with the complexities they warrant. In my view, this is not merely an issue of abuse of jurisdiction, but a problem rooted in the very nature of PIL itself.

TAR: It is often difficult to distinguish an 'ambush PIL' from one that raises genuine grievances. Yet, their proliferation has fostered an environment of suspicion, with courts increasingly questioning the bona fides of petitioners. While this may not fully address systemic concerns, there are procedural safeguards. The Supreme Court Rules, 2013, require that a writ petition contain a specific pleading identifying the fundamental rights alleged to have been violated. In the absence of such a disclosure, the Registry may decline to list the petition. Courts have also imposed costs to deter such filings.

Have courts ensured meaningful compliance with the directives issued in PILs?

TAR: Ensuring compliance with the directives in PILs often depends on the Bench. Where a judge is inclined to see a matter through, the case is kept pending, interim directions are issued, and compliance is periodically monitored. However, there has been a growing tendency in the Supreme Court to step back once a final judgment is delivered, leaving enforcement to the High Courts and trial courts. This is where gaps begin to emerge. In my view, the Supreme Court ought to retain some degree of oversight post-judgment, including initiating contempt proceedings for non-compliance.

AB: There are clear violations of several important directives issued by the Supreme Court in PILs, often without any recourse to contempt proceedings. This tends to create a culture of impunity, allowing authorities to disregard court orders with little

consequence. That said, the problem is more endemic and not confined to the PIL jurisdiction.

Should guidelines be laid down on the role of the amicus curiae (a lawyer appointed to assist the court)?

AB: The role accorded to an amicus in PIL proceedings raises several concerns. In dealing with complex cases, courts have, at times, expanded the role of the amicus to an extent that risks diluting basic procedural safeguards, particularly the right of affected parties to be heard. For instance, in T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad vs Union of India, which originated as a PIL to protect forest areas in the Nilgiris and Kerala, the amicus, at various stages, was filing applications for directions and had effectively stepped into the role of the petitioner's counsel. The issuance of guidelines in this regard would be a welcome step.

TAR: Typically, courts appoint lawyers of a certain competence and integrity as amici, with the expectation that they will assist the court in navigating the pleadings and arguments in a case. However, the role of the amicus is not uniform and can vary across jurisdictions. In my view, an amicus should refrain from taking sides and instead assist the court by fairly presenting the arguments on all sides. Given how fluid the role is, clearer guidelines are needed.

What reforms are needed to strengthen the PIL jurisdiction?

TAR: One requirement for entertaining a PIL should be that it is well-researched and confined to challenging enacted laws or executive action or inaction, rather than inviting the court to make policy choices. For instance, a petitioner should not approach the court seeking the enactment of a Uniform Civil Code.

AB: We need to return to the fundamental idea that PILs are an extrapolation of the principle underlying habeas corpus —that parties who cannot, for unavoidable reasons, appear before the court are represented by someone else. Only then will PILs retain their legitimacy.

❖ Shah to attend first-ever exposition of Buddha's relics on Ladakh visit

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who arrived in Leh on Thursday, will attend the first international exposition of holy relics of Lord Buddha in India on the occasion of Buddha Purnima.
- Mr. Shah was welcomed by top officials, elected representatives and the local people, with many dressed in traditional attire. "He [Mr. Shah] will be paying respects to the holy relics of Lord Buddha tomorrow [May 1] on the occasion of the 2,569th Buddha Purnima. The Home Minister's visit and his vision for the development of Ladakh shall motivate us to work for fulfilling the aspirations of the people of Ladakh," the Union Territory's Lieutenant-Governor, Vinai Kumar Saxena said.
- This is Mr. Shah's first visit since street protests over the demands of Statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule left four protesters dead and over 80 injured last September.
- The Centre has already announced May 22 as a fresh date to resume Delhi-Ladakh talks on the demands of the Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance,

conglomerates of socio-religious-political groups of the region. The talks hit a roadblock after the protests and the arrest of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, who was championing the causes of Statehood and Sixth Schedule.

- Meanwhile, five more districts have been created in the region, in an apparent outreach ahead of the talks.
- “This visit marks a significant moment for Ladakh, underlining the continued focus and engagement of the Central leadership with the region’s development and aspirations,” Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, senior BJP leader and former MP from Ladakh said. He said Mr. Shah arrived in Leh to a rousing and heartfelt welcome from the people of Ladakh.
- The holy relics of Tathagata Buddha, which arrived in Leh a few days ago, will be on public display from May 1 to 15 across Leh and Zaskar, offering devotees a rare opportunity for prayers, officials said.

Letter to L-G

- Meanwhile, the LAB and the KDA have written a joint letter to the Lieutenant-Governor and expressed strong objections and key concerns regarding proposed power sector changes in Ladakh.
- “We submit this memorandum to express our strong objection and grave concern regarding the proposed formation of a Joint Venture between the Ladakh Power Development Department (49%) and the Rural Electrification Corporation (51%) for the power sector in Ladakh,” said the letter.

❖ SC issues notice on petition for ‘revenue judicial service cadre’

- The Supreme Court sought a response from the Centre and States on a plea to establish a separate ‘revenue judicial service’ cadre for adjudication of land disputes exclusively.
- A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant issued the notice to the Centre and States on the petition filed by petitioner-advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, which has also sought a direction to prescribe uniform minimum legal qualification and judicial training module for public servants adjudicating land cases.
- “The court may also direct and declare that the adjudication of title, succession, inheritance, possession and property rights by revenue officers without formal legal education and judicial training is legally impermissible,” the petition said.
- The plea sought a direction to the High Courts to “supervise and monitor” the adjudication. “The adjudication of complex land disputes by revenue/consolidation officers without formal legal education and judicial training is arbitrary, irrational and violates Article 14 of the Constitution. Presently, there is no minimum legal qualifications and judicial training for consolidation officers who exercise powers equivalent to civil courts,” Mr. Upadhyay submitted.

❖ EC set to implement QR code-based access at counting centres

- Poll body launches new photo identity cards with QR codes for persons authorised to enter counting halls, including officials and candidates
- The Election Commission on Thursday introduced a QR code-based photo identity card system to eliminate the possibility of any unauthorised persons entering counting centres.
- After its introduction during the counting to be held on May 4 for the Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry and the byelections in seven Assembly constituencies across five States, the system will be extended to all future general and byelections to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies, the EC said in a statement.
- A three-tier security mechanism has been prescribed for verification of identity at counting centres. At the first and second tiers, photo identity cards issued by the Returning Officer (RO) shall be checked manually. At the third and innermost security cordon near the counting hall, entry shall be permitted only after successful verification through QR code scanning.
- The new QR code-based cards will be applicable for categories of persons authorised by EC to enter counting centres and halls, including ROs, Assistant Returning Officers (AROs), counting staff, technical personnel, candidates, election agents and counting agents, among others.
- The EC has also introduced a module on the ECINET 2.0 platform for the QR code-based cards.
- A media centre will be set up near the counting halls in each centre for the facilitation of authorised presspersons. Entry of presspersons will continue to be permitted on the basis of authority letters issued by the EC in accordance with the existing instructions of the commission.
- All Chief Electoral Officers, District Election Officers (DEOs), ROs and AROs have been directed to ensure strict compliance with these instructions to uphold the highest standards of transparency, security and efficiency in the counting process.
- The DEOs and ROs have been directed to make all necessary arrangements for the effective implementation of this system, including deployment of trained personnel at designated checkpoints to ensure seamless and secure access control.

❖ **Lift abortion time limit for minor rape survivors: SC**

- SC says state and doctors cannot make decisions for minor rape survivors, it should be left to the parents or survivors; CJI calls for amendment to ensure such cases are completed within a week
- The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Union government to amend the abortion law to remove the time limit on medical termination of unwanted pregnancies in the case of minor rape victims.
- A Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi made the observation while refusing to entertain a curative petition filed by the government against a recent decision of the top court allowing a 15-year-old rape survivor to terminate a 30-week pregnancy.

- Additional Solicitor- General Aishwarya Bhati, accompanied by specialists from AIIMS, said they were against the termination considering the health and well-being of both the teenager and the “unborn child”. One of the specialist doctors said the court was wrong to consider this as a foetus-child (rape survivor) issue.
- “This is a child-child issue,” the doctor submitted in court.
- The court said it was not for the doctors or the state to choose what was best for the rape survivor. The decision should be left to the parents of the survivor and the survivor herself.
- “Let not medical personnel become the masters of the will of the people. The people would decide,” Justice Bagchi said.
- The state and the doctors could take them through the medical procedure and provide them expert help in the form of counsellors, the court said.
- “You will help parents and children by having an informed discussion on the medical procedure for ending the foetuses’ life and consequences... If anyone can come back to us for a review of our decision in this case, it is the parents or the child... The state cannot file a review. It has no locus standi. It is not for AIIMS to choose, it is for citizens to choose and the AIIMS to medically implement their choice,” Justice Bagchi told the Centre and the AIIMS doctors.

Severe trauma

- Chief Justice Kant said the 15-year-old had already undergone the trauma of rape. She cannot be compelled to carry and give birth to a child. Her victimisation cannot remain with her for the rest of her life as a permanent scar.
- “We are only protecting the child whose face is staring back at us. If she questions us, what answer would we give? What answer would the society have? The law cannot bow to momentary sentiments. The law has to see the whole life ahead for the victim. If law is required to be ruthless, it has to be that,” the Chief Justice addressed the law officer and the doctors.
- Ms. Bhati said the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Act of 2021 has increased the time limit for legal abortion from 20 to 24 weeks for survivors of rape, minors, and women with disabilities.
- “You should amend the law to remove any time limit on medical termination of unwanted pregnancy caused by the rape of a minor. You should also bring an amendment not only in the MTP Act, but also in the penal law, making it mandatory to complete the trial in such cases in a week. The entire property of the accused should be given to the victim,” Chief Justice Kant observed.

❖ India’s first green methanol plant to turn Kutch’s most invasive weed into marine fuel

- A plant that has been ranked as one of the “top 100 invasive species in the world” and has for decades threatened biodiversity in Kutch’s Banni grasslands, may soon be harnessed for the production of green methanol and fuel for ocean-going ships.

- The Mexican-origin shrub called *Prosopis juliflora*, known as Gando Baval in the region, Vilayati Keekar in North India and Seemai Karuvelam in Tamil, has crowded out native grasses over thousands of kilometres in Kutch. The plant was first introduced by the British in the 1920s to 'green' Delhi and by the Gujarat Forest Department in 1961 to halt the encroaching salt desert in the Rann. This weed is to become the feedstock for India's first green methanol production plant.
- Methanol is used as a fuel in shipping often as a replacement to what is called 'bunker oil'. Conventional methanol is produced from fossil fuels such as gas or coal gasification. Green methanol uses biomass from agricultural residue as source material as in the case with the *juliflora*.
- The project, sited at the Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) in Kandla, will produce five tonnes of methanol a day and is being built by Pune-based Thermax Energy with gasification technology from Vadodara's Ankur Scientific, and will be owned by the port authority. Both companies are betting that the Government of India's policy to convert ports along the western coast into "green ports" will create demand for a fuel that the global shipping industry is being obliged to adopt under International Maritime Organization (IMO) rules.

Greenhouse gas cuts

- Methanol made from renewable feedstocks can cut a vessel's CO₂ emissions by up to 95% and NO_x (nitrogen oxides) by up to 80%, according to the Methanol Institute, while eliminating sulphur oxides and particulate matter.
- Ankur Jain, who heads Ankur Scientific, said his company's role lies in the first stage of a two-step process. "The starting point for most fuels and chemicals is going to be syngas because syngas typically has hydrogen, CO and CO₂," he told The Hindu. Gasification, he explained, sits between combustion and pyrolysis. "You are heating it in the absence of oxygen, taking it out, improving its quality, burning them a bit and then breaking them down into hydrogen and CO (carbon monoxide) or syngas," he said. Thermax will handle the second step, converting that syngas into methanol.
- "It [*juliflora*] is one of the best feedstocks because it is hardwood, dense, has a good energy profile, and low in acids," Mr Jain said, adding Gujarat already wants the species cleared. The plant will be certified to run on other agricultural residues such as bagasse and cotton stalk, which Mr. Jain estimates could, at their maximum potential, displace up to a third of India's oil imports.

❖ Foreign investors dump ₹60,847 cr. in April, devaluing rupee

- This was the primary reason for the rupee depreciating further, touching a low of ₹95 a dollar before closing just short of that on Thursday
- Foreign investors sold ₹60,847 crore in stocks of Indian listed companies as of April 2026, continuing the two-year trend of capital outflow, data from the National Securities Depositories Ltd. (NSDL) show.
- The outflow makes it the third in the first four months of the calendar year. There was a net inflow of ₹22,615 crore in February 2026. It was then followed by the highest ever outflow of more than ₹1.1 lakh crore in March 2026. The April sell-off is, however, much lower than the month before.

- In the four months of calendar year 2026, ₹1.9 lakh crore worth of foreign money exited from Indian equities alone.
- This is what had primarily led to the rupee touching a low of ₹95 a dollar before closing just short of that on Thursday. The rupee-dollar pair depreciated 5.5% between January 2026 and April 2026, backed by increasing import bills due to the West Asia crisis and the continued foreign money outflow from domestic capital markets.
- “The interaction between portfolio outflows and exchange rate movements has exhibited self-reinforcing dynamics: rupee depreciation reduces dollar-denominated returns for foreign investors, prompting further outflows, which in turn exacerbates currency pressures. As India’s integration with global financial markets deepens, such episodes underscore the heightened sensitivity of capital flows to shifts in global risk sentiment,” the Ministry of Finance observed in its monthly Economic Review.
- A continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz would mean a heightened oil price and continued FII outflow would mean the foreign exchange rate can touch ₹96 a dollar. A break over that would lead to the rupee depreciating to ₹97 a dollar, said Anindya Banerjee, Head of Commodity and Currency Research, Kotak Securities. He further said that the rupee appreciating more than ₹94.8 is not likely without a “significant dip in oil prices.”
- The outlook for rupee and the foreign money’s sensitivity to India’s foreign exchange rate may make their immediate return unlikely in the context of global geo-politics.

❖ **DIPAM gives nod for NLC arm’s listing; ₹4,000 cr. IPO in FY27**

- The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has given the green light for listing of Neyveli Lignite Corp. India’s (NLC India) renewable energy arm, NLC India Renewables (NIRL), a senior government official privy to the development told.
- The official further said that NIRL would be debuting on the bourses with its ₹4,000-crore IPO within the ongoing financial year.
- “Last week, DIPAM had given their go-ahead for the listing of NIRL. We expect the listing to be completed within FY 2027 itself,” the official stated.
- As also confirmed by the senior official, the latest development implies that three of India’s State-owned mining companies — Bilaspur-headquartered South Eastern Coalfields Ltd. (SECL) and Sambalpur-headquartered Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd. (MCL), — and now NIRL, are all set to hit Dalal Street within the ongoing financial year.
- NLC India’s board had given its in-principle approval to list their renewable energy arm on January 12 this year.
- This was in line with the targets laid out as per the National Monetisation Pipeline.
- NIRL’s debut on the bourses is premised on further augmenting its current renewable energy capacity.
- The renewable energy arm of NLC India is eyeing 10.11 GW of renewable capacity by 2030 and 32 GW by 2047.

❖ Invest India facilitated grounding of \$6.1 bn projects in 2025-26

Invest India, the national investment promotion and facilitation agency of the Government, has facilitated the grounding of 60 projects worth over \$6.1 billion during 2025-26, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade of India (DPIIT) Secretary Amardeep Singh Bhatia said.

Chemicals, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, and food processing sectors accounted for approximately 65% of the grounded investments, he added.

“The \$6.1 billion grounded by Invest India in FY 2025-26 reflects the strength of India’s regulatory environment and the depth of its economic transformation,” Mr. Bhatia said at a press briefing.

“DPIIT remains committed to further simplifying processes and ensuring that investments translate into jobs, innovation, and long-term value,” he said.

❖ ‘Auto PLI puts startups at cost disadvantage’

- EV startups have once again called for a tweaks to the auto production linked incentive (PLI) scheme, urging more flexible eligibility criteria that reward innovation rather than reinforcing an imbalance that leaves them at a cost disadvantage compared with legacy OEMs.
- “An EV policy architecture that defines champions primarily through legacy scale, not even scale within the EV industry, can create an unintended imbalance. It places emerging EV manufacturers at a 13 to 16% cost disadvantage at a stage where they are continuing to invest heavily in capability building,” wrote Tarun Mehta, co-founder & CEO at Ather Energy.
- His post on X comes in response to a report in The Hindu that the government does not plan to introduce a separate auto PLI scheme for startups, citing their limited capital, market access, R&D capabilities.
- He underlined that a significant share of innovation in indigenous platforms, battery technologies, software, and local value creation is being driven by EV-focused firms well-positioned to set global standards in design and technology.
- Tweaks to PLI scheme, through more flexible eligibility criteria, aligned with localisation and the intensity of R&D efforts, would help build “long term capability, not just near-term scale,” he said.
- The Centre earmarked about ₹42,500 crore for the PLI. To qualify, vehicle makers must meet a minimum global revenue threshold of ₹10,000 crore and commit ₹3,000 crore for investment in India.

❖ How is the next UN chief being chosen?

The election of the next UN Secretary-General is underway. On April 21-22, four candidates — two women and two men — pitched their records of public service and leadership to the UN General Assembly in “informal, interactive dialogues”.

Why is the role of Secretary-General important?

The UN Charter defines the Secretary-General as the UN’s Chief Administrative Officer, who oversees the work of the UN Secretariat and fulfils “any other functions and duties

entrusted” to them by the organisation’s principal organs, including the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council. The Secretary-General also has the mandate to bring to the Security Council’s attention any issue that threatens global peace and security.

Where needed, the Secretary-General has the authority to appoint “Personal Envoys” (as Antonio Guterres has now done for the current West Asia conflict).

Often described as the world’s “chief diplomat,” the Secretary-General is the face and voice of the UN, speaking as the world’s conscience on issues ranging from the arms race in space and climate change to persistent inequality that hampers economic growth.

How is the Secretary-General elected?

The UN Charter states that the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. This means that the Permanent Members of the Security Council — China, France, Russia, the U.K., and the U.S. — have a significant say in who gets elected.

What considerations play a role?

While the term of a Secretary-General is technically “discretionary,” incumbents have, since 1981, voluntarily limited themselves to two terms. By custom, the post rotates among five regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the turn of the latter. Within the region, there are dynamics at play, with Spanish-speaking Latin American countries and English-speaking Caribbean nations supporting different candidates.

Who are the candidates?

The four candidates now officially in the race are: Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; Macky Sall, former President of Senegal; Rafael Grossi, Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency; and Rebecca Grynspan, Head of the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

Why is this election crucial?

Eighty years after its founding, the UN is facing a deep financial and political crisis. The Secretariat relies on mandatory “assessed contributions” collected from member states. Still, non-payment, partial payment, and delay in payment of dues by leading contributors have triggered an unprecedented financial situation.

The Security Council is paralysed by acrimony and persistent vetoes by the permanent members. The UN is also struggling to mobilise funds and troops for missions in places such as Haiti, and with host country relations in cases such as in Mali, where the UN mission was forced to withdraw.

Over the past decade, the UN played a key role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, advancing climate action through the Paris Agreement, and promoting sustainable development via the 2030 Agenda. However, recent conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Ukraine, and Iran have raised questions about its ability to prevent war — a central idea of the UN Charter. There are increasing calls for the UN to “return to basics” by focusing more on conflict resolution. The Sustainable Development Goals are now universal markers of developmental progress but there is rising concern that only 18% of the targets are on track to be met by 2030. Meanwhile, the humanitarian system is under severe strain due to multiple conflicts, intensifying disasters, and

pressures on international humanitarian law. The next Secretary-General will have the unenviable task of not just administering, but rejuvenating the organisation.

What are the candidates' campaign priorities?

During their interactions with the General Assembly, Ms. Bachelet, Ms. Grynspan, and Mr. Sall all emphasised preventive diplomacy — the UN term for preventing conflicts through adroit behind-the-scenes parley with the stakeholders to the conflict. However, their approaches differ. Ms. Bachelet prioritised field presence, while Ms. Grynspan focused on merging the UN's work in the prevention of conflict with its work on human rights. Ms. Grynspan was arguably the most vocal on UN reform, proposing restructuring the Secretary-General's office within the first 100 days if elected. Among areas for priority action, Ms. Bachelet highlighted climate, Mr. Sall highlighted migration, and Mr. Grossi highlighted UN-World Bank relations. Ms. Grynspan stressed the need to protect least-developed nations from funding cuts.

All candidates committed to gender parity, while Ms. Bachelet emphasised improving geographic diversity within the UN workforce, a longstanding demand of developing countries. On the stasis in the Security Council, Ms. Grynspan and Mr. Sall said they would publicly call out permanent members of the council who violate international law, while Mr. Grossi promised to uphold the UN Charter. Ms. Bachelet said she will use the Secretary-General's office to build political viability for Security Council reform.

What happens next?

In the next phase, the Security Council will hold closed-door deliberations and straw polls before recommending a candidate to the General Assembly around October. Once the latter confirms the choice through a simple majority vote, the new Secretary-General will take office on January 1, 2027.

❖ What happened to Komagata Maru passengers in 1914?

Why was the Komagata Maru denied entry into Canada? What happened to the passengers?

In the spring of 1914, a Japanese steamship called the Komagata Maru sailed from Hong Kong toward Vancouver, British Columbia, carrying 376 passengers: 340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, and 12 Hindus from Punjab in British India. They were British subjects hoping to build new lives in Canada. What awaited them was a two-month standoff in the harbour, a brutal denouement on the docks of Calcutta, and a place in the history of both India's anti-colonial movement and Canada's long reckoning with its own past. The episode was recently mentioned by singer Diljit Dosanjh on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.

Why was Punjab central to events leading up to the voyage?

By 1914, Punjab had become the primary recruiting ground for the British Indian Army. The British had cultivated Punjab as a loyal province populated by a "martial race," but the relationship was both lopsided and extractive. Rapid agricultural growth combined with easy credit had created a crisis of rural indebtedness, and epidemics of malaria and plague in the early 1900s pushed families toward emigration as the only way out.

Among those who left were the founders of the Ghadar movement, established in 1913 among expatriate Punjabis on the U.S. West Coast, dedicated to the armed overthrow of British rule in India.

The Komagata Maru voyage was freighted with this politics from the start. Ghadar activists boarded the ship in Yokohama, delivering lectures and distributing anti-colonial literature, and British intelligence was watching closely.

What led to the standoff?

The voyage was organised by Gurdit Singh, a Punjabi entrepreneur based in Singapore, who chartered the ship specifically to challenge Canada's exclusionary laws. Canada had enacted a "continuous journey regulation" in 1908, barring entry to anyone who had not travelled by a single unbroken journey from their country of birth, while also pressuring shipping companies not to sell direct tickets from India.

When the ship arrived at Vancouver's Burrard Inlet on May 23, 1914, immigration officials refused to let it dock. Prime Minister Robert Borden kept the ship anchored offshore, cutting off communication and stalling proceedings. The local South Asian community raised over \$20,000 to take over the ship's charter and hired a lawyer to bring a test case, but the British Columbia Court of Appeal unanimously upheld the discriminatory laws. Officials then withheld food and water. On July 19, an armed police force of 150 men attempted to board the ship; the passengers fought them off. Borden dispatched a naval cruiser. Only 22 passengers, mostly those who could prove prior Canadian residence, were ultimately permitted to disembark. The ship departed under escort on July 23. British colonial authorities, suspicious of the passengers' politics, refused to let the ship dock in Hong Kong or Singapore. When it finally anchored near Calcutta in late September, police tried to force the exhausted passengers onto trains bound for Punjab. They refused, marched toward the city, and were fired upon. Twenty passengers were killed; many more were imprisoned. Gurdit Singh evaded capture for years before surrendering in 1920 and serving five years in prison.

What happened when the ship returned to India?

In the aftermath, the Ghadar movement surged in recruitment. Some members returned to Punjab in 1915 to attempt an armed uprising, which failed due to informers and mass arrests. Dozens were sent to the gallows. But the movement's martyrs became folklore.

Canada was slow to acknowledge what it had done. An apology delivered at a community festival by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2008 was rejected by many as insufficient. It took until 2016 for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to deliver a formal apology on the floor of the House of Commons. The Komagata Maru remains a sharp demonstration of what colonial subjects had long understood: that the British Empire's promises of equal subjecthood were never meant for everyone.

❖ A century after legal recognition, workers still lack real protection

- Since the Trade Union Act first gave workers legal recognition and protection, the law has not lived up to its intent; it preserves rights on paper but, through procedural constraints and silence on platform workers, continues to limit the ability of workers to organise and act
- In 1918, Bahman Pestonji Wadia founded the Madras Labour Union, India's first trade union with regular membership and a relief fund, established to address what he called the "mal-treatment of workers" by European officers. The union he helped build was, in the eyes of British common law, a conspiracy to restrain trade.
- In 1921, a Madras court put a price on the act of organising workers against unfair working conditions. £2,000 was awarded against Wadia and fellow unionists for

leading a strike against the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. The management agreed to waive the payment on the condition that Wadia sever all associations with the union he had built. There was no law to protect him. The unionists complied.

- But even in compliance, the unionists showed defiance. One of the union leaders, Vengal Chakkarai Chettiar, told the judge in open court: “I am an evangelical worker for the Wesley Mission. I am getting ₹10 per week, with which I am living. I have only my clothes, which I am wearing, and a few spare clothes at home. If necessary, I will remove my clothes and give them to the court. But the amount of compensation ordered by you cannot be recovered from me. At the same time, I cannot be stopped from working for the trade union of workers. Even if my clothes are removed in execution of a decree, I will continue to work for the trade union by wearing my loincloth. If necessary, we will go for work stoppages to win our demands.”
- The judgment brought into the open something that had been gnawing at the labouring classes for decades. By 1921, India had hundreds of trade unions, yet not one had legal recognition. N.M. Joshi, co-founder and General Secretary of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), understood the specific nature of the problem. In March 1921, the same month as the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills judgment, he moved a resolution in the Central Legislative Assembly recommending that the government introduce legislation to register and protect trade unions. Five years of legal and political pressure followed before the Act was finally passed in 1926. The Royal Commission on Labour in India, reporting in 1931, described what the struggle had been for: to give trade unions the necessary protection from civil suits and criminal laws relating to conspiracy to enable them to carry on their legitimate activities.

Letter and spirit

- The Trade Union Act of 1926 emerged from five years of sustained pressure from the labour movement, from nationalist leaders who understood that organised workers were essential to the freedom struggle, sharpened by the colonial state’s calculation that legal frameworks for managing workers’ grievances were safer than the revolutionary alternative.
- Section 18 of the Act answered the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills judgment directly: “No suit or other legal proceeding shall be maintainable in any Civil Court against any registered Trade Union or any office-bearer or member thereof in respect of any act done in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute” including inducing breach of employment contract, or interfering with the employer’s trade or business. The weapon used to silence Wadia was removed from the employer’s hands. Section 17 addressed the criminal threat: no office-bearer or member of a registered union shall be liable under the IPC’s criminal conspiracy provision, Section 120B, for agreements made to further legitimate union objects, “unless the agreement is an agreement to commit an offence.”
- An Indian worker now had legal recognition and legally recognised rights. A union was no longer a conspiracy.

- By 1928, the Girni Kamgar Union in Bombay had over 70,000 members. That year saw 203 strikes involving over five lakh workers. The left wing of the labour movement, strengthened by the Act's protections, was growing fast and fusing with nationalist politics, as it had in 1908, when Bombay's workers struck for six days over Lokmanya Tilak's imprisonment. Two responses came simultaneously from the colonial state.
- The Meerut conspiracy case arrested 33 labour organisers, men working openly, in unions the 1926 Act had made legal, and charged them not under Section 120B, where the Act's immunity held, but under sedition provisions the Act had never touched. Then came two bills together. The Trade Disputes Bill banned sympathetic strikes, built in notice periods long enough to make sustained action practically impossible, and made illegal any strike that extended beyond a purely industrial dispute. What had electrified Indian politics since 1908, the joining of workers' grievances to nationalist ones, was now a criminal act. Motilal Nehru named it plainly: "the Slavery of India Bill." The Public Safety Bill went further, giving the executive power to act not on what people did but on what they were deemed to intend, with the Governor General as judge of intention.
- On October 30, 1928, months before the bills came to a vote, Lala Lajpat Rai, who had presided over the AITUC's founding session in 1920, led a peaceful protest in Lahore against the all-British Simon Commission. Police Superintendent James Scott ordered a lathi charge. Rai was beaten across his chest. That same evening, still standing, he addressed the crowd at Mochi Gate: "I declare that the blows struck at me today will be the last nails in the coffin of British rule in India." He died eighteen days later.
- At the Bombay Presidency Youth Conference in December 1928, Jawaharlal Nehru told the students: "Ally yourself to the masses of the country, the peasantry and the industrial worker... And if you do so, you will automatically avoid the pitfalls of reformism and petty compromise." By July 1929, with both bills passed and the Meerut accused in custody, his analysis of the Public Safety Bill was unsparing: "This is dangerous enough at any time and in any country to make the Executive Government the judge of what is in the mind of those opposed to it. It is far more dangerous in India, where there is a foreign government." When the government's spokesman claimed that foreign agitators had caused the country's labour unrest, Nehru was contemptuous. The actual cause was economic distress. "A strike is always unfortunate and deplorable, just as a fever is unfortunate and deplorable, but it is no good cursing the fever. The wise man treats it and tries to remove the causes of it."
- Three months before that analysis, on April 8, 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw smoke bombs and leaflets from the visitors' gallery of the Central Legislative Assembly. The pamphlet named three provocations: the Meerut arrests, the bills, and the death of Lajpat Rai. "The indiscriminate arrests of labour leaders working in the open field clearly indicate whether the wind blows," it read. Then came the sentence that named the whole situation: "It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear."

- Singh was hanged in 1931, aged 23. Dutt was transported to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans to serve a life sentence. The Meerut accused spent years in prison. The Girni Kamgar Union was broken. The 1926 Act's protections remained on the statute book. The letter never came to match the spirit.

Past as prologue

- The Trade Union Act survived independence and was absorbed into the constitutional settlement. Article 19(1)(c) gave every Indian citizen the right to form associations or unions. Registered trade unions increased by 625% between 1951 and 1979. The ideological fire of the early movement cooled, over time, into wage bargaining. Then in 1991, the New Economic Policy arrived with its logic that labour flexibility was the price of growth.
- In 2020, during a Monsoon Session of Parliament conducted under pandemic restrictions, with the Opposition protesting procedural irregularities, the government passed four labour codes consolidating 29 existing laws. One of them, the Industrial Relations Code 2020, absorbed the Trade Union Act 1926. It came into force on November 21, 2025.
- The new Code preserves Sections 16 and 17, successors to the 1926 Act's immunity provisions, in language almost identical to the original. A century's worth of protective words, freshly reprinted. But the dissonance between the letter and the spirit continues.
- To be recognised as such, a negotiating union must now demonstrate 51% support among workers on the muster roll. In industries characterised by high turnover, casual labour, fixed-term contracts, achieving and maintaining this numerical ceiling is nigh impossible for most unions, and this is precisely in sectors where workers need protection the most. Section 62 requires 60 days' notice before a strike can begin, four times the 15 days the 1929 Trade Disputes Act demanded, the bill Motilal Nehru had already called the "Slavery of India Bill." Workers cannot strike during conciliation proceedings, or for seven days after, or during Tribunal proceedings, or for 60 days after those conclude. Between notice periods and cooling-off clauses, an employer can keep a workforce in procedural suspension without end.
- Then there is the silence that reveals more than any provision. The words 'gig' and 'platform' do not appear once in the Industrial Relations Code 2020. NITI Aayog estimated 7.7 million platform workers in 2020. Yet a law that came into force five months ago contains not a single word about the workers who run errands across every city in the country. They are legally classified as independent contractors.

The struggle continues

- Despite the hurdles thrown their way, workers continue to organise. The Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union, the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers, and the All-India Gig Workers Union continue to exist, organise meetings on WhatsApp, and occasionally win. In March 2024, platform worker unions forced Zomato to reverse a policy that segregated delivery fleets by food type. This decision was understood to endanger religious minority and lower-caste riders by making their identities visible in a society marked by discrimination.

- The Fairwork India Report 2024 assessed 11 major platforms operating in India and found that none recognised a collective body of workers or a trade union. Four States have now passed social security laws for platform workers, welfare benefits designed, with some care, to make the struggle for collective bargaining seem unnecessary.
- The deaf have not learned to hear. The loud voices are still necessary.

❖ **GST revenue hits record ₹2.43 lakh crore in April**

- The government's Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue in April 2026 surged to an all-time high of ₹2.43 lakh crore, up 8.7% over April last year. Growth was once again driven by collections on imports, with revenue from domestic sales growing slower.
- Tax experts, however, note that collections in April, which represent activity in March, typically come in higher as both industry and the tax administration make a final push to achieve the financial year-end targets.
- Data show that there has been a record collection every April ever since the GST was rolled out in 2017, except for April 2020, which was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown.
- "April 2026 GST collections cap off a resilient FY26 for the GST regime, with gross revenues rising 8.7% year-on-year to about ₹2.43 lakh crore compared to April 2025, despite continued global uncertainty and West Asia-related geopolitical headwinds," Mahesh Jaising, partner & indirect tax leader at Deloitte India, said.
- The data show that net collections, once refunds are accounted for, stood at ₹2.11 lakh crore in April 2026, up 7.3% over April last year.
- Notably, the data also show that the growth in collections was once again driven by imports.
- Gross collections from imports grew nearly 26% in April 2026 to ₹57,580 crore. Collections from domestic sales grew at 4.3% to ₹1.85 lakh crore in the period.
- "Post GST 2.0, a steady 7-8% monthly growth seems to be emerging as the norm which is broadly in line with budget estimates," Pratik Jain, partner, Price Waterhouse & Co., said. "Notably, growth in import-led revenues continues to outpace domestic transactions, which could indicate some softness in consumption."
- Manoj Mishra, partner and tax controversy management leader at Grant Thornton Bharat, said that the growth in tax revenue from imports also "points to resilient external demand linkages and supply chain normalisation".
- Mr. Jaising, on the other hand, pointed out that the growth in revenues from domestic sales has remained steady, which reflects the nature of consumption activity in the economy.
- That said, Saurabh Agarwal, tax partner at EY India, did warn that the coming months are not likely to replicate these record collections. "A note of caution for the quarter ahead: April's record figures reflect the year-end push for targets by both industry and administrators," he said. "As we transition into the new fiscal year, we should anticipate a stabilisation in the coming months."

❖ **State govt. launches digital grievance redressal system for gig workers**

- In a move to secure the rights of the growing platform-based labour force, the Government of Karnataka has officially operationalised a specialised grievance redressal mechanism for platform-based gig workers. The mechanism — a first of its kind in India — has been developed by the Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers' Board in collaboration with the Department of e-Governance.
- With the new initiative coming into force, gig workers can now officially lodge grievances, including regarding pay, working conditions, and platform-specific disputes, through the Integrated Public Grievance Redressal System (IPGRS) portal. This creates a formal bridge between the lakhs of gig workers in Karnataka and the technology aggregators they serve. This is expected to bring transparency and legal recourse for a workforce that has so far operated without a formal dispute resolution framework.
- Under The Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act and Rules, every aggregator platform must constitute an Internal Dispute Resolution Committee (IDRC). Platforms such as Namma Yatri and Yulu have already integrated their IDRC contact details with the government portal. "Platforms, including Amazon, are in the process of onboarding," said G. Manjunath, Additional Labour Commissioner and CEO of the Board.

Accountability

- Grievances filed on the IPGRS will be automatically routed to the respective platform's IDRC to be addressed and settled within a strictly defined timeframe.
- The government will act as a central facilitator, monitoring the process to ensure a smooth and transparent flow of communication between workers and platforms. Labour Minister Santosh Lad said that Karnataka, technology capital of the country, is leveraging this potential for worker welfare as well. "By launching this system, we are ensuring that the gig economy is no longer an informal space, but a structured one where every worker's voice is heard," he said.
- "We are proud to be the first State in India to facilitate a smooth, government-backed grievance handling mechanism that balances innovation with human dignity," he added.
- So far, details of 12 lakh active gig workers have been shared by platforms, according to Mr. Manjunath. However, given that many gig workers work with multiple platforms, he did not rule out overlaps. "We will weed out duplicate entries through our software by giving each gig worker a unique identification number," he said. The software enablement is currently under process.
- Schemes for gig workers, depending on the platform they are working for, will be placed for deliberation in the next board meeting.
- "The schemes will vary based on the type of platforms. For example, cab rides are mostly undertaken by men whereas urban domestic activity is undertaken mostly by women. It may also be based on the contribution made, and the quantum of gig work done by a gig worker. Some gig workers work for more than eight hours, while some may work on a few gigs. So, workload, nature of work, and time period of work could vary," Mr. Manjunath explained.

- “It has to be scientifically structured based on their effort and labour. We are working with experts, including academicians from Briston University, King’s College, and IISc, and other stakeholders, including board members,” he stated. The aggregator platforms will be liable to pay the 1% welfare contribution with the allotted cap for the second quarter from July 5.

❖ **India’s first State-led CoE for space tech launched in Bengaluru**

- Karnataka has launched the country’s first State-led Centre of Excellence for Space Technology (CoE SpaceTech Foundation) in Bengaluru. The initiative aims to strengthen India’s capabilities to translate space innovation into scalable, commercial outcomes.
- The centre has been established by the State government through the Karnataka Innovation and Technology Society in collaboration with SIA-India. The idea is to drive advanced research and innovation in space technologies, industry-aligned training, and talent development, start-up incubation and ecosystem building and cross-sector applications of space technologies.
- Speaking at the launch, Minister for Electronics, IT/BT, and Rural Development & Panchayat Raj Priyank Kharge said that the focus is not just on advancing research, but on creating an ecosystem where innovation can translate into real-world applications, economic growth, and high-quality jobs.
- The Minister also noted that a common technical facility is needed to support the evolving requirements of the ecosystem.

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