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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

MAY WEEK 2

04-05-2026 TO 09-05-2026

**NEPAL RAISES
LIPULEKH ISSUE;
INDIA SAYS NO
'HISTORICAL'
RECORD**

MISSION DRISHTI

**OPEC+ HIKES OIL
PRODUCTION**

**PIXXEL TO LAUNCH
INDIA'S FIRST
ORBITAL DATA
CENTRE**

**QUAD FOREIGN
MINISTERS MEET**

❖ Nepal raises Lipulekh issue; India says no 'historical' record

- Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's upcoming visit to Nepal came under a shadow on Sunday with Nepal expressing "concerns" to both India and China over the next season of Kailash Manasarovar Yatra through the Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh region. It reiterated that the region is part of Nepal's sovereign territory.
- In response to Kathmandu's remarks, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that Nepal's claims on the Lipulekh Pass are not based on "historical facts".
- The Ministry had announced on April 30 the next round of Kailash Yatra would take place in coordination with China in June-August.
- Earlier, Mr. Misri's plans to visit Kathmandu were in focus because of uncertainties in securing a meeting with the new Prime Minister, Balendra Shah, who has refused to meet foreign envoys as he has been following a restrictive diplomatic protocol since taking charge in March.
- In an announcement, Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "The Government of Nepal is completely clear and steadfast in the fact that Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani east of the Mahakali river are integral parts of Nepal since the Treaty of Sugauli of 1816."

❖ Govt. issues guidelines on childhood diabetes care

- New framework provides for universal screening, district-level diagnosis and free lifelong care, including insulin, regular monitoring, and emergency response under public health system
- Integrating childhood diabetes care into the public health system, the Union Health Ministry has, for the first time, introduced a structured and standardised national framework for the screening, diagnosis, treatment and long-term management of diabetes in children.
- Releasing the Guidance Document on Diabetes Mellitus in Children recently, the Ministry said this aims to ensure universal diabetes screening of all children in India from birth to 18 years of age.
- "Suspected cases will undergo immediate blood glucose testing, followed by timely referral to district-level health facilities for confirmatory diagnosis and treatment," a senior Health Ministry official said.
- He added that a key feature of the framework is the provision of a comprehensive, free-of-cost care package at public health facilities. This includes screening, diagnostic services, lifelong insulin therapy, monitoring devices such as glucometers and test strips, and regular follow-up care. The approach is designed to reduce financial burden and ensure uninterrupted treatment for children diagnosed with diabetes.

Integrated care

- While the initiative positions India among a select group of countries that have integrated childhood diabetes care into the public health system, the document also introduces an integrated continuum of care, linking community-level screening with district hospital-based management and advanced care at medical colleges.
- “This convergence ensures that no child is lost in the system and that care continues seamlessly from detection to long-term follow-up,” the Health Ministry noted in a release issued on Sunday.
- According to the World Health Organization, diabetes is a chronic disease that occurs either when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces. Insulin is a hormone that regulates blood sugar. Hyperglycaemia, or raised blood sugar, is a common effect of uncontrolled diabetes and over time leads to serious damage to many of the body’s systems, especially the nerves and blood vessels.

“4Ts” framework

- The initiative seeks to support early detection and promote the “4Ts” awareness framework — Toilet, Thirsty, Tired, and Thinner — enabling parents, teachers and caregivers to recognise early warning signs of Type 1 diabetes.
- In addition to clinical protocols, the document emphasises family and caregiver empowerment, providing structured training on insulin administration, blood glucose monitoring, emergency response and daily disease management. It also outlines evidence-based treatment guidelines, regular monitoring schedules, and protocols for preventing complications.
- The initiative is expected to deliver public health benefits, including reduced mortality due to early detection, prevention of complications, and improved quality of life for affected children. Over the long term, it will contribute to lowering healthcare costs and strengthening health system capacity for managing non-communicable diseases among children.

❖ Mission Drishti, world’s first OptoSAR satellite, launched

- Mission Drishti, the world’s first OptoSAR satellite developed by the Bengaluru-based space start-up GalaxEye has been successfully launched on Sunday aboard a Falcon 9 by SpaceX from Vandenberg, California. Weighing 190 kilograms, it is India’s largest privately developed earth observation satellite. “It is the first satellite globally to integrate Electro-Optical (EO) and Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) sensors into a single operational platform, enabling all-weather, day-and-night imaging capabilities. This approach addresses long-standing limitations of conventional systems and enables more reliable and consistent data acquisition across diverse environmental conditions,” GalaxEye said.

❖ OPEC+ hikes oil production quotas without mentioning UAE pull-out

- Saudi Arabia, Russia and five other OPEC+ countries increased their oil production quota on Sunday in an expected move aimed at demonstrating continuity at the cartel after the shock withdrawal of the United Arab Emirates.
- The seven major producers will add 188,000 barrels per day to their total production quota for June amid the price pressure unleashed by the West Asia war, as part of “their collective commitment to support oil market stability”, according to a statement published by OPEC+.
- The statement, following an online meeting of Algeria, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Oman, Russia and Saudi Arabia, made no mention of the United Arab Emirates, which quit the body on Friday, three days after announcing its withdrawal.

‘Tense relations’

- Rystad Energy analyst Jorge Leon said that the silence on the UAE’s departure was a sign of tense relations.
- Oil market analysts had widely expected the increase of 188,000 barrels, similar to the 206,000-barrel daily increases OPEC+ announced in both March and April when the portion allotted to the UAE was subtracted.
- But raising the quota on paper may not have much impact on actual production, which is already short of the limit.
- Untapped OPEC+ reserves are mainly located in the Gulf region, and exports there are trapped by the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, imposed by Iran in response to the U.S.-Israeli strikes since February 28.

❖ SC weighs risk of misuse of benefits for trans people

- The Supreme Court on Monday flagged the “danger” of those masquerading as transgender persons to get welfare benefits, while hearing multiple petitions challenging a law that removes the right to self-identification.
- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026 requires a government-appointed medical Board’s favourable recommendation for a District Magistrate to certify an individual as a transgender person. The petitioners said the Act disregards transgender identity as an “authentic human identity, freely chosen” and violates their rights.
- “Does it not pose a danger that there are people who would masquerade this qualification for grabbing reservation or privileges?” Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, asked.
- Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, appearing for the petitioners, said the “danger” of people faking transgender identity to secure benefits was hardly .001%.
- The court issued notice to the Centre and the States on the pleas, noting that the question of staying the Act did not arise as the law had not yet been notified.

❖ SC brings survivors of forcible ingestion of acid in RPwD Act

- The Supreme Court on Monday included persons who were forcibly administered acid within the definition of “acid attack victims” under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.
- The 2016 law recognised only victims of acid-throwing, and not forcible acid ingestion. It accepted both the act of acid-throwing and the administration of acid as offences punishable with imprisonment from 10 years to a life sentence under Section 124 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt).
- A Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi said the reading into of survivors of forcible administration of acid in the category of “acid attack victims” would be deemed to be operative retrospectively from the inception of the Act in 2016.

Benefits apply

- The deemed recognition would aid victims of forcible acid ingestion to claim disability benefits due under the 2016 Act.
- Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Union government, said the nodal Ministry had already forwarded the proposed amendment in the Schedule of the 2016 Act to the Ministry of Legislative Affairs.
- Though Mr. Mehta urged the court to wait for the Ministry to initiate the amendment, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for petitioners, successfully pleaded the court to flex its plenary powers under Article 142.
- “The victims mostly, if not all, are women. Till the Schedule of the 2016 Act is changed, the Supreme Court must pass an order under Article 142 to include not only persons on whom acid was thrown but also those who suffered the extreme agony of having to forcibly ingest acid in the category of ‘acid attack victim’. There is some monetary support given to them under the Act and they are issued an identity card...,” Mr. Rohatgi submitted.
- The court had suggested framing a comprehensive policy framework to protect the survivors, who require extensive and continuous medical treatment.

❖ SC asks Centre to examine plea on revising Aadhaar issuance norms

- The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Union government to examine a plea seeking issuance of new Aadhaar cards only to children, and that the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) frame “stringent guidelines” for the grant of the identity document to adults and adolescents.
- A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant asked the Centre to consider a petition filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, which said easy accessibility to Aadhaar cards should be restricted to prevent infiltrators from disguising themselves as Indian citizens.
- Mr. Upadhyay said a signed rental agreement and a 182-day stay in one location would make a person statutorily eligible to apply for an Aadhaar card.
- He said Aadhaar was being used as an entry document to “infiltrate” and obtain other Indian records, from ration cards to passports.

- Mr. Upadhyay said that as per UIDAI records, there were already 144 crore Aadhaar holders. The authority had stated that 99% of citizens had Aadhaar, including 55 crore Jan Dhan account holders and 85 crore recipients of free ration.
- The court pointed out that not only Aadhaar, but other government documents were also being forged, with many of the criminal hubs behind such acts located abroad.
- Mr. Upadhyay said a cache of 87,000 fake documents had been found in Mumbai, terming it “infiltration through the Aadhaar framework”.
- “Infiltration is an economic offence in so far as it is done to take unlawful benefits of the resources of a country. It is done in an organised manner... The sole intent of infiltration is to settle in a country such as India and live off its resources. Almost 80 crore people are being given free ration, in which a large number of infiltrators are also present,” the plea said.
- The petition also sought the installation of display boards at common service centres stating that Aadhaar is only proof of identity and not of citizenship.

❖ **National Stock Exchange unveils Electronic Gold Receipt**

- The National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) on Monday launched Electronic Gold Receipts (EGRs) as a new segment, in a bid to create a more transparent and efficient price discovery of the yellow metal.
- The move is expected to bridge the age-old gap between physical gold and the financial markets by offering a regulated, secure, and technologically-advanced platform for trading in the precious commodity, the exchange said in a statement.

❖ **OPEC exit ‘part of long-term plan, not directed against anyone’: UAE oil chief**

- The UAE’s departure from OPEC, dominated by ally-turned-rival Saudi Arabia, was not targeted at anyone but is part of a broader plan to future-proof its economy, the country’s oil chief said on Monday.
- The move was part of the long-term project to diversify beyond fossil fuels, said Sultan Al Jaber, CEO of state oil giant ADNOC and the UAE’s industry and advanced technology Minister.
- The shock decision, which took effect on Friday, followed months of tensions with Saudi Arabia, the world’s top oil exporter and OPEC’s de facto leader, over foreign policy, oil output and war in West Asia, which has strained Gulf economies.

Strained ties

- The Gulf neighbours also had a public fall-out in December over Yemen, where they back rival militias.
- The UAE had been frustrated with OPEC’s quotas, which sought to cap Emirati production at 3.4 million barrels a day, while Abu Dhabi seeks to raise production capacity to five million barrels a day by 2027.
- But Mr. Jaber said the decision to withdraw had purely national considerations in mind.
- “The UAE’s sovereign decision to reposition itself within the global energy landscape, and to exit OPEC and OPEC+, is not a decision directed against anyone,” he said.

- The exit of the UAE, which was OPEC’s fourth-largest producer, deals a blow to the cartel’s ability to control oil prices.
- Leaving OPEC “serves our national interests and long-term strategic objectives, aligns with our industrial, economic, and developmental ambitions”, Mr. Jaber said.
- UAE Energy Minister Suhail Al Mazrouei also said the country had left OPEC “on good terms”.

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❖ State signs pact to 'double' Bengaluru Metropolitan Region economy by 2032

- The State government on Tuesday signed a Statement of Intent with ISEG Foundation to jointly prepare an economic masterplan for the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region, with the blueprint expected to chart Bengaluru's growth priorities up to 2032 and 2037. Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar was present during the agreement.
- The plan, officials said, aims to more than double Bengaluru's economy by 2032 and improve quality of life, employment generation and sustainability standards, making Bengaluru a global peer alongside Tokyo, London, and Singapore.
- The initiative is being developed on the lines of the NITI Aayog-led G-Hub programme, under which economic masterplans have already been prepared for regions, including Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Visakhapatnam, Varanasi, Bhubaneswar, Surat and Pune.
- The proposed masterplan will cover economic growth, infrastructure, liveability and sustainability across the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region (BMR) – across Bengaluru Urban, Bengaluru Rural and Bengaluru South districts. According to government estimates, the region has a population of around 16 million and contributes to over 43% of Karnataka's Gross State Domestic Product.
- For implementation, the State government has constituted a steering committee chaired by the Chief Secretary, with representatives from various departments. The GBA Chief Commissioner has been designated as the senior nodal officer for day-to-day coordination. The Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister are expected to review progress on a quarterly basis.
- The blueprinting phase of the plan is expected to take four to five months and is targeted for completion by mid-September, officials said. This will include an assessment of the region's current economic profile, benchmarking against other cities, preparation of a long-term vision for 2032 and 2037, and identification of key investment interventions across sectors such as technology, advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, tourism, housing, infrastructure and sustainability.

❖ Pixxel to launch India's first orbital data centre satellite this year

- Space startup Pixxel on Monday said that it has entered a strategic partnership with Sarvam to develop and build India's first orbital data centre satellite — Pathfinder.
- Under the partnership, Pixxel will design, build, launch, and operate the satellite, and Sarvam will provide the AI backbone, handling both training and inference directly in orbit, with full-stack language models running on board the satellite.
- The Pathfinder, a 200 kg-class satellite, is scheduled to reach orbit as early as Q4 2026.

The differences

- Pixxel said that unlike conventional satellite computing, which relies on low-power edge processors optimised for survival rather than performance, the Pathfinder satellite will host datacenter-class Graphics Processing Units (GPUs), the same generation of hardware as on-ground data centres that power frontier AI training and inference.
- The demonstrator will also carry Pixxel's hyperspectral imaging camera, making it among the first satellites in the world capable of capturing high-fidelity hyperspectral data and analysing it directly in orbit using foundation models.

- Pixxel added that instead of sending large volumes of raw imagery back to Earth for processing, the system can identify patterns, detect changes, and generate insights in real time.
- “This significantly reduces the delay between data capture and decision-making, enabling faster responses across environmental monitoring, resource management, and critical infrastructure tracking. It points to a new paradigm for Earth observation, where satellites don’t just collect data for later analysis; they think for themselves and deliver conclusions,” it said.

New frontier

- Awais Ahmed, CEO, Pixxel, said, “Ground-based data centres are facing increasing constraints around energy, land, regulation, and scale, and the current model is becoming harder to sustain environmentally. Orbital data centres open up a new frontier, where computation can be powered by abundant solar energy, operate closer to space-based data, and move beyond some of the limits faced on Earth. For Pixxel to build the next generation of space infrastructure, we have to help shape this shift, not watch it happen from the sidelines. With Sarvam, this mission is our first step toward making orbital data centres real, operational, and scalable from India.”
- The satellite will be developed at Gigapixxel, Pixxel’s upcoming facility.

❖ Govt. releases additional ₹72 cr. To mitigate rural drinking water scarcity

- In a step towards mitigating the drinking water scarcity in rural areas of the State, the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) Department on Monday released an additional ₹72 crore, bringing the total allocation for drinking water-related works since March 2026 to ₹208.67 crore.
- Announcing this, RDPR Minister Priyank Kharge said this total amount is being utilised for emergency drinking water projects as well as for clearing the pending payments of works previously approved by the Drinking Water Task Force committees.
- “Karnataka is fundamentally a semi-arid region. During summer, existing water sources dry up and the yield of borewells decreases, causing significant hardship to the public,” the Minister explained. He noted that the cumulative allocation of ₹208.67 crore for the current year aims to resolve these persistent issues.
- The Minister said that district-level officers are continuously conducting task force meetings to ensure seamless water supply and prevent scarcity in rural areas during summer, while the situation is being regularly reviewed at the government level.

❖ Cabinet approves four more judges for Supreme Court

- The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved an increase in the number of judges of the Supreme Court from 34, which includes the Chief Justice of India, to a total of 38.
- Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the top court currently has a sanctioned strength of 33 judges and the Chief Justice of India (CJI). A Bill would be brought in the next session of Parliament to raise this strength by four.
- The Cabinet approval is a step towards tiding over the continuing crisis of pendency plaguing the court for years now, especially after the pandemic, when the facility of e-filing increased the inflow. The current backlog is 92,385 cases, and threatening to

reach six figures even as the court is going into summer recess or “partial working days” in June.

- The government’s approval for more judges on the Supreme Court is after a six-year hiatus. Parliament last amended Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 in 2019, raising the sanctioned strength from 31 to 33 (excluding the Chief Justice of India).
- The Cabinet approval would be followed by an amendment to the 1956 Act. Article 124(1) gives Parliament the sole authority of increasing the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court. Once the amended law comes into force, the Supreme Court Collegium would recommend judges to the government for appointment to the top court.
- At present, there are two judicial vacancies in the Supreme Court. These are of the current Chief Justice of India Surya Kant’s immediate predecessor, Justice B.R. Gavai, who retired in November 2025, and Justice Rajesh Bindal, who completed office in April 2026. Three more judges are scheduled to retire in 2026.
- Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Pankaj Mithal will complete their tenure in June, and Justice Sanjay Karol in August 2026.

❖ 3 railway projects get Cabinet panel’s nod

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Tuesday approved three multitracking projects of the Railway Ministry with a total cost of ₹23,437 crore. These projects will be implemented in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- The projects that include Nagda–Mathura 3rd and 4th Line, Guntakal–Wadi 3rd and 4th Line as well as Burhwal–Sitapur 3rd and 4th Line will be completed up to 2030-31.

❖ Cabinet gives nod to make insult to Vande Mataram an offence

- The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 will have to be amended to bring the move into effect and add clauses on punishment
- The Union Cabinet on Tuesday gave the go-ahead to amend the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 to make any insult or obstruction to the singing of National Song Vande Mataram a punishable offence, a government source told The Hindu.
- At present, insults to the National Anthem Jana Gana Mana, the National Flag and the Constitution is mentioned in the 1971 Act and is punishable by imprisonment of up to three years or a fine or both.
- The Cabinet decision comes a day after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured a landslide victory in West Bengal winning 207 out of 293 contested Assembly seats and was all set to form the government for the first time in the State.
- Vande Mataram, the salutation of India imagined as a mother, was written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and published with his novel Anandamath in the early 1880s.
- In 1937, leaders of the Congress, which was leading the national movement, decided to use the first two stanzas at its gatherings, and the Constitution of the modern Republic of India accorded it the status of the National Song.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has accused the Congress of truncating the song to appease the Muslim League during the British rule.

Set of instructions

- On February 6, the Union Home Ministry, in a set of instructions to States and government bodies, said that all the six stanzas of Vande Mataram, that comes to a little over three minutes long, should be sung or played at official events. It said that the National Song should be given precedence before the National Anthem, written and composed by Rabindranath Tagore, when both the songs are played at an event.
- The Ministry guidelines on Vande Mataram are advisory in nature and did not have a statutory backing.
- The Cabinet's decision to amend the 1971 Act would make any insult to the national song a punishable offence.

❖ Govt. hikes sugarcane FRP by ₹10 per quintal

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Tuesday increased the Fair and Remunerative Price of sugar cane for the sugar season 2026-27 by ₹10 a quintal from the last crop year. The new price will be ₹365 a quintal for a basic sugar recovery rate of 10.25%.
- There will not be any deduction in case of sugar mills where recovery is below 9.5%. "Such farmers will get ₹338.3 per quintal," a press release stated.
- The Cabinet also approved ₹5,659.22 crore for "Mission for Cotton Productivity" (2026-27 to 2030-31) to address bottlenecks, declining growth, and quality concerns in the cotton sector.

❖ 30 banks integrated with UDGM portal to help legal heirs trace funds

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that 30 banks have been integrated into its centralised web portal, UDGM (Unclaimed Deposits – Gateway to Access InforMation), to enable legal heirs to trace funds belonging to deceased account holders.
- A three-judge Bench headed by Justice Vikram Nath was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by journalist Sucheta Dalal, contending that funds lying in dormant or inoperative accounts were increasingly being transferred to government-managed pools.
- The petitioner sought directions for the creation of a centralised platform to provide information on financial assets held by deceased persons.
- Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, appearing for the RBI, submitted that the UDGM portal had already been operationalised to address the petitioner's concerns. "The UDGM portal is an interactive platform. There are around 20 lakh registered users who have carried out around 44 lakh searches on the portal as of April 1," he said.
- Mr. Kumar added that the 30 banks integrated into the portal account for nearly 90% of the funds held in the Depositors' Education and Awareness Fund (DEAF), a corpus set up by the RBI in 2014 to house unclaimed deposits from commercial and co-operative banks.

- The RBI clarified that the UDGAM portal that enables individuals to look up unclaimed deposits and accounts, but does not function as a claims settlement mechanism. “The object of the portal is to facilitate the identification and tracing of unclaimed deposits, so that the concerned depositor or claimant may approach the respective bank for settlement of the claim in accordance with the applicable procedure,” it said.

Challenges for heirs

- Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner pointed out that deposits held in post offices, provident funds, and insurance schemes had not yet been integrated into the portal, thereby posing challenges for legal heirs seeking to claim such assets.
- Taking note of the submissions, the Bench granted one week to the Centre and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to place on record the relevant circulars and outline the steps taken to enable the return of unclaimed funds of deceased persons held with banks and financial institutions.

❖ ‘Fraudulent financial ads on Meta evading SEBI guidelines’

- Large portion of ads targeted at Indian users may be fraudulent, Bard College researchers say; Meta says distinction between ads crucial
- Despite an advisory by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) that advertising of investment and financial products must be done only by SEBI-registered firms, more than 97% of financial ads sampled in a study turned out to be from unregistered entities, showed a new report by researchers from New York-based Bard College, the Forum for Developing Communities and consumer watchdog group Ekō.
- The report, Money from Misery, shared with The Hindu, said there was no sign Meta was doing even little vetting of such ads on Facebook and Instagram, allowing proliferation of fraudulent ads that could cheat targets of money.

Only checkbox

- Many ads had telltale signs of being from unregistered or even fraudulent advertisers but all Meta did was provide a checkbox at the time of ad creation, allowing advertisers to self-disclose if registered by SEBI.
- SEBI did not respond to questions on the system. The regulator indicated in a February 2026 circular the aim of its social media norms was to “distinguish content related to securities market uploaded/posted by the persons regulated by the Board and their agents on social media platforms from those uploaded/posted by other unregistered persons.”
- A Meta spokesperson told The Hindu the checkbox was part of a “voluntary commitment” the firm “proactively partnered with SEBI” to enable SEBI-regulated firms to comply.
- “Meta combines advertiser self-declaration with automated systems to proactively identify and enforce against violating ads, even when advertisers do not self-declare,” the firm told The Hindu.

- The firm sought to put distance between the ads surfaced by the researchers and the kind, it says, the SEBI advisory and Meta's checkbox cover. "It is important to distinguish securities and investment ads from the broader universe of financial services advertising in India, which encompasses categories governed by other regulators," it said.

97% ads undeclared

- "97% of financial advertisers avoided all verification steps by simply failing to make the declaration," researcher Hamza Farooqui and Bard College Human Rights Project's associate director Inayat Sabhikhi wrote. "We found over 400 scam ads still active on Meta platforms months if not years after they had been reported in the media."
- The researchers examined two batches of over 3,000 ads associated with over 1,300 pages on two days in 2025 and 2026. Only 2.5% to 2.7% were registered with SEBI, they said.

❖ Govt. sets 12-week limit to process FDI applications

- To expedite and bring transparency to foreign direct investments (FDI) coming into India, the Ministry of Commerce issued an updated Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) document laying out the timeline and norms for processing foreign firms' investment applications.
- Apart from specifying heightened scrutiny by mandating approvals from the Ministry of Home Affairs on investments in sensitive sectors and from particular countries, the document sets a maximum limit of 12 weeks for the processing of applications. Large investments would first have to be cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.
- The previous 2017 SOP laid out a maximum period of 10 weeks.
- "This SOP aims to make the FDI application filing process completely paperless," the document said. "Therefore, the applicant will not be required to file physical copies of any documents required to process FDI proposals."
- As per the rules, all applications for foreign investment into India will have to be filed on the Foreign Investment Facilitation or National Single Window System portals.
- Once a proposal is made, the Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade (DPIIT) will have two days to identify the concerned administrative Ministry or department and assign the proposal to them, along with sharing it with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Two-week scrutiny

- These bodies will have two weeks for the initial scrutiny of the proposal and to seek any relevant additional information or documents from the applicant. The DPIIT will have a maximum of two additional weeks to submit any clarification on the FDI policy.
- The MHA, MEA and other Ministries or departments, sector regulator, or stakeholders, will have an additional four weeks for comments.

- “In case comments are not received within the prescribed time, it shall be presumed that they have no comments to offer,” the SOP said. After this, the competent authority will have four weeks to decide on the applications taking the total processing time to 12 weeks.

❖ **Govt. brings external hard drives under registration regime**

- The Union government added “standalone hard disk drives” to a compulsory registration regime following concerns of used and substandard storage devices being sold in retail.
- A senior official told The Hindu the move was aimed at stemming flow of such dodgy hard drives from being imported and sold here. Hard drives are generally imported in India.
- While hard drives have seen a twofold spike in prices on ongoing memory and storage crisis due to AI hyperscaler-based demand, the official said talks with the industry had long been on to bring about this move, which will be applicable from November.
- The Compulsory Registration Scheme allows the government to require certain goods to be tested by Indian labs and registered with the Bureau of Indian Standards. Most high value consumer electronics, like phones, laptops and TVs fall under the CRS, for electrical safety compliance.
- On the top of substandard/used drives, the move may impact spurious devices being peddled on e-commerce platforms. Since earlier this year, many e-com platforms started listings for drives with unrealistically high capacities at low prices. This is a software-based scam where the drive signals to computers it supports more data storage than is the case.

❖ **Govt. approves fifth edition of credit guarantee scheme**

- In response to the crisis in West Asia, the Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved the fifth edition of its Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme, under which it will provide additional credit guarantees to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and non-MSMEs, including airline companies.
- The total outlay of the scheme is expected to be ₹18,100 crore and it is expected to generate additional credit flows worth ₹2.25 lakh crore, the government said.
- “The scheme aims to enable businesses to tide over the challenges arising from the West Asia conflict,” the government said in a release.

❖ **Consider Teesta water deal under ‘current circumstances’: Bangladesh**

- In the wake of the Bharatiya Janata Party’s victory in the West Bengal Assembly election, Bangladesh has issued an urgent call to consider the long-pending Teesta water sharing agreement under the “current circumstances.”
- Outgoing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has long been seen as a hurdle in efforts to resolve the dispute between India and Bangladesh.
- In Dhaka’s first-high level response to the poll results, Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman on Tuesday reiterated Bangladesh’s demand for a greater share of the Teesta’s waters.

- In case of any further “push in” from the Indian side, he said, Bangladesh will take “whatever measures are necessary”.
- India and Bangladesh had reached an in-principle agreement to seal the deal on the Teesta’s waters in 2011 during the Manmohan Singh-era, but the matter remained unresolved for several reasons including an alleged lack of coordination between the Centre and the Trinamool government in West Bengal led by Ms. Banerjee.
- Referring to the 2011 agreement, Mr. Rahman said, “We hope that the agreement reached at that time can be ‘considered’ again under the current circumstances.”

Talks with Beijing

- Mr. Rahman was speaking to journalists in Dhaka before leaving for Beijing, where he is expected to meet his counterpart Wang Yi. He indicated that, during his meetings there, he would discuss the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project that China has been campaigning for.
- “Of course, Teesta will be discussed This is a matter of life and death for the people of that region”.
- Earlier on Monday, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaid had described the election as a “domestic development” of India.
- This was followed by Bangladesh Nationalist Party’s Media Cell member Syrul Kabir Khan, who had expressed hope for positive developments in Dhaka-Delhi relations.
- Meanwhile, commentators in Dhaka have expressed concern about the role played by the BJP’s Suvendu Adhikari, who has complained about illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in West Bengal. Mr. Adhikari had earlier supported ousted Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina, saying she had received a death sentence in October 2025 due to influence of Pakistan in Bangladesh.



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❖ Deep tech event sees good response

- The first cohort of ELEVATE NxT, the national grant-in-aid programme for deep tech startups by the Department of Electronics, IT, and BT in Karnataka, has attracted a significant number of applications from outside Karnataka. Of the 983 applications received, 213 are from outside Karnataka, accounting for nearly 23% of the total.

ELEVATE NxT sees strong interest from start-ups across the country

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- The first cohort of ELEVATE NxT, the national grant-in-aid programme for deep tech start-ups by the Department of Electronics, IT, and BT in Karnataka, has attracted a significant number of applications from outside Karnataka. Of the 983 applications received, 213 are from outside Karnataka, accounting for nearly 23% of the total.
- Out of the total applicants, 661 deep tech start-ups have been shortlisted. The selected candidates began pitching to the jury on Wednesday, following which a final cohort will be selected after a three-week pitching process.

Casting a wide net

- The ₹150-crore Elevate Nxt was announced in January 2026 to back deep tech start-ups. Launched under the Local Economy Accelerator Programme (LEAP), the programme invited applications from start-ups that work in advanced technology sectors such as AI/ML, IoT, quantum technologies, cybersecurity, spacetechnology, aerospace and defence, nanotechnology, agritech, robotics, and so on. While ELEVATE looks at start-ups from Karnataka, ELEVATE NxT is open to deep-tech start-ups across the country. “We have opened up ELEVATE NxT specifically nationally with the idea that anything deep tech should find its place in Bengaluru,” said sources in the Department.
- Minister for IT-BT Priyank Kharge, during Bengaluru Tech Summit 2025, had announced an investment pool of ₹600 crore to power the State to enter the ‘Deep Tech Decade’ and drive various initiatives aimed towards it.
- “Building on 22 successful ELEVATE rounds over the last nine years and aligned with our Department’s Deeptech Decade Programme focusing on frontier technologies, for the first time we have opened up ELEVATE NEXT to start-ups across the country, with enhanced grant-in-aid support of up to ₹1 crore,” Mr. Kharge wrote on his X handle. he further highlighted how the State has moved early on frontier technologies, backing it with policy and programmes that bring capital and opportunity at scale.

No cap set

- The selected start-ups will be eligible for up to ₹1 crore in grant-in-aid support. According to department sources, no cap has been fixed for the final cohort size which would depend on the quality of the start-ups.
- “The evaluation has been very strict, and it has been done with the help of industry partners. It will be pure play deep tech and anybody who is not will be redirected to the next cohort of the ELEVATE programme,” Department sources said.

- ELEVATE, a Government of Karnataka initiative to support and fund innovative start-ups in Karnataka, has so far held 22 cohorts.

❖ **Nicobar gram sabhas signed off on infra project without 50% quorum**

- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&NI) administration did not achieve the mandated 50% quorum at the gram sabha meetings held to get consent for the Centre's ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project. Instead, it claimed to have done so by attendance figures ranging from 2% to 15% of the population, which, it argued in the Calcutta High Court, counted as "proper quorum". The submissions were made by the administration in an affidavit to the Bench that is hearing a batch of petitions alleging that procedures under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) had been violated in obtaining consent for the project.
- Quorum is the minimum number of members needed in such a meeting to reach a decision. According to the rules issued by the Centre for the implementation of the FRA, a quorum at a gram sabha is achieved only if 'one-half' or 50% of the adult population of that village is in attendance, of which one-third must be women.
- The administration submitted that meetings were held for Campbell Bay, Laxmi Nagar, and Govind Nagar gram panchayats, covering seven villages, on August 12, 2022. The Campbell Bay meeting was attended by 105 people, the one in Laxmi Nagar by 163 people, and the Govind Nagar sabha had 81 people. The administration said all three meetings passed "unanimous" resolutions consenting to the project.
- Compared to the population of these gram panchayats as per the 2011 Census, the strength of the Campbell Bay meeting was 1.83% of the total population of 5,736, that of the Laxmi Nagar was 14.72% of the population of 1,107, and the attendance at the Govind Nagar meeting was 11.98% of the population of 676. Put together, 349 people (4.6%) signed off on the project at these three gram sabhas meant to represent seven villages, whose total population stood at 7,519 as of 2011.
- The submissions, which were taken on record by the High Court on Wednesday, came after the Centre sought time from the court to "demonstrate that consent has been taken from the tribal people".
- In the supplementary affidavit filed by an official of the Tribal Welfare Department, the A&NI administration has argued that due process was followed under the FRA to hold special gram sabhas, with "prior notice and proper quorum", which passed resolutions on forest rights of the people and consented to the diversion of forest land for the project. The administration also justified its prior notice of one day for such meetings .
- "It is irrelevant to say that tribal communities were excluded from the FRA process," the administration said, because their "adequate representation" had been ensured in the Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC), which had accepted the gram sabha resolution and recommended for clearance under the FRA.
- Responding to this, the petitioner, in an affidavit has further made the point that regardless of the quorum at these gram sabhas, the Nicobarese and Shompen tribal communities are not covered under the gram sabha structure and are represented through the Tribal Council instead, which should have been the appropriate body to consult with and seek consent from. The petitioner also pointed out that dozens of

names of attendees appeared in all three gram sabha meetings and in some cases, names were found repeated in the list of attendees of the same gram sabha as well.

❖ **State's disability reservation Bill faces opposition even as Labour Dept. pushes for Cabinet nod**

- The Karnataka Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Education and Employment (Draft) Bill, 2025, one of the State's most ambitious attempts to mandate inclusion in private employment and higher education, is likely to come up before the Cabinet soon. Released by the Labour Department in November 2025, the Bill proposes 5% reservation for persons with disabilities in private companies with 20 or more employees, and reservation in educational courses.
- However, even before reaching the Cabinet, the Bill has run into resistance from within the government, with many Ministers questioning its practicality and implementation. At the centre of the opposition is the proposed reservation in private companies, with Ministers arguing that making it mandatory could create compliance pressure for businesses and lead to push back from the industry.

Push back

- Sources in the department said Ministers and representatives from the Industries Department have argued that Karnataka is already under pressure to remain 'investment-friendly' and that imposing reservation requirements on private establishments could send the 'wrong message' to businesses. They have pointed out that for startups and smaller firms, meeting a fixed quota may not always be easy, particularly where roles require specific technical or physical skills and that this could discourage hiring.
- The education quota has also drawn objections. The Bill initially proposed 10% and later revised to 5% reservation course-wise not at the institution level. Ministers have argued that this could reduce flexibility for colleges, mostly in competitive and limited-seat programmes such as medicine, engineering and law.

Separate law

- Another major point of disagreement is whether Karnataka needs a separate law at all.
- Some Ministers have argued that disability rights are already addressed under the central Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which provides for accessibility, non-discrimination and reasonable accommodation, and that the State should focus on stricter implementation of the existing law instead of introducing a fresh legal framework.
- Questions were also raised about the State's capacity to enforce the proposed law, which would require monitoring compliance across thousands of private establishments and educational institutions.
- However, if implemented, Karnataka will lead, becoming the only state to do so.
- Defending the Bill, Labour Minister Santosh Lad said concerns over the reservation percentage can be addressed.
- He said the proposed quota could be revised to 2% or 3% for both education and employment, if needed.

- “Article 14 guarantees equality. How can we deny that? We are not saying posts must be filled at any cost.
- We are saying persons with disabilities should be given priority and reservation must be there to ensure that implementation across private companies,” he said, adding that he would continue to try to ensure the Bill is passed.

❖ **CJI’s role in CEC, EC appointments was temporary, pending new law: SC**

- Court’s observation was in response to pleas challenging a 2023 Act, which replaced the CJI with a Union Minister on the selection panel; petitioners argue this law overrides a Constitution Bench judgment which sought a panel of PM, LoP, CJI
- The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the Chief Justice of India’s involvement in the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) was only meant to last until Parliament came up with a law.
- The court’s observation was in response to multiple petitions challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act of 2023.
- The petitioners, who include the Association for Democratic Reforms and activist Jaya Thakur, said the 2023 law clothed the political executive of the day with a dominant, if not “exclusive”, control over the appointment of the CEC and ECs.
- The law was introduced in December 2023, ostensibly to countermand a Constitution Bench judgment in March the same year. This judgment had declared that CEC and EC appointments should be made on the recommendation of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha (LoP) or the leader of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- The court had ordered that its judgment would remain operative till “Parliament makes a law in consonance with Article 324(2) of the Constitution”.
- Consequently, the government brought the 2023 Act, replacing the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister in the committee. The current CEC, Gyanesh Kumar, was the first to be appointed to the office under the new law.

‘Prime Minister’s man’

- On Wednesday, senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for the petitioners, said the Constitution framers and the Supreme Court itself had never intended the CEC to be the “Prime Minister’s baby or the Prime Minister’s man”.
- Mr. Hansaria submitted that both the Constitution framers and the Supreme Court had warned against leaving the appointment of Election Commissioners exclusively in the hands of the executive.
- He referred to the Supreme Court’s own observations in the March 2023 Constitution Bench judgment (Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India) that the “fierce independence, neutrality and honesty” envisaged in the institution of the Election Commission required an end to government monopoly and “exclusive control” over appointments to the highest poll body.
- Prior to the judgment, the CEC and ECs were appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. The judgment had brought the appointment process on par with that of the CBI Director.

- However, Justice Datta highlighted that even the Supreme Court had only intended the judgment to be operative till Parliament passed a law.
- “Are you saying Parliament did not have the power to make the law? Or can a mandamus be given to Parliament to make a law only in a certain way?” Justice Datta asked.
- Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, also for the petitioners, said their case was not just about the replacement of the CJI with a Cabinet Minister in the committee. It was also about the constitutionality of an Act which had effectively reverted the control over the appointment of CEC and ECs to the Executive.
- “The point is Election Commission appointments cannot be under the control of the executive,” he submitted.
- Mr. Sankaranarayan said the Anoop Baranwal judgment had addressed a “legislative vacuum”. Before March 2023, appointments of the CEC and ECs were made by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. The “arrangement” had ensured that the power of appointment rested with the Political Executive.
- “This mechanism ought to have stopped in the 1950s, but whichever parties came to power found the arrangement convenient,” Mr. Sankaranarayanan said.
- Arguments would continue on Thursday.

❖ **Rubio may visit India for talks, Quad Foreign Ministers meet in May end**

- In a visit expected to shore up India-U.S. ties, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is set to travel to India for bilateral talks and to attend the Australia-India-Japan-U.S. Quad Foreign Minister’s Meeting (FMM).
- U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor said that he hoped to welcome Mr. Rubio to India “soon”. Sources told The Hindu Mr. Rubio is expected to be in Delhi from May 24 to 26, his first since taking over as U.S. Secretary of State in January 2025.
- “The United States deeply values our growing partnership with India, and we are excited to build even stronger ties that will benefit both our nations and the world,” Mr. Gor, who is also U.S. President Donald Trump’s Special envoy for South and Central Asia, said in a post. “See you soon, Mr. Secretary!” he added.
- In a separate post after meeting with Delhi Lieutenant-Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu, Mr. Gor announced that several U.S. Governors would visit India in the months ahead.
- Mr. Rubio’s visit will include a public reception in Delhi on May 24 to celebrate 250 years of the United States Declaration of Independence. He will hold talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in discussions that are expected to set the course for India-U.S. ties after several ups and downs over tariffs and sanctions, as well as the impact of the war in West Asia.
- On May 26, Mr. Rubio and Mr. Jaishankar will be joined by Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Japan’s Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi for the Quad FMM. Mr. Motegi and Ms. Wong have both visited Delhi in the past few months, and are expected to travel to India just for the Quad talks. All eyes will be on whether the Quad meet agrees on a date for the Summit, which the government hopes to hold later this year, after trying unsuccessfully to host it for the past two years. In particular, a visit to India

by Mr. Trump, who faces mid-term elections in November, will be key to scheduling the Summit.

Major trade deal

- Indian and U.S. officials are also expected to review the progress in the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) during Mr. Rubio's visit. Although an interim agreement was announced by Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi in February this year, it has missed several finalisation deadlines, and remains unfinished due to uncertainty over the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to strike down Mr. Trump's "liberation day tariffs".

❖ Vietnam major pillar of India's Act East Policy, says Modi as defence, rare-earth ties renewed

- India's relation with Vietnam is a partnership that does not aim at any other country in the Indo-Pacific region, said senior officials on Wednesday.
- The remarks came soon after India welcomed General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Central Committee To Lam, who is also the current Vietnamese President.
- During a bilateral discussion at Hyderabad House between To Lam and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the two sides elevated the bilateral relation to the level of "enhanced comprehensive strategic partnership" and signed at least 13 documents, including one on cooperation in critical minerals.
- "Vietnam is a major pillar of India's Act East Policy and Vision MAHASAGAR. We have a common outlook in the field of Indo-Pacific. With our strengthening ties in the field of defence and security, we are helping rule of law, peace, stability and prosperity. India will expand ties with ASEAN through its relation with Vietnam," said Mr. Modi, welcoming Mr. Lam.
- Mr. Modi said India-Vietnam trade has touched \$16 billion and would touch \$25 billion by 2030.

Recalls Nehru's visit

- Delivering a speech at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) after being hosted at Hyderabad House by Mr. Modi, Mr. Lam referred to India's support to Vietnam's liberation and said, "We will never forget that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the first foreign leader to visit Vietnam in 1954, just one week after the liberation of Hanoi."
- In a joint statement, the two sides welcomed the steady progress in the implementation of the defence Lines of Credit (LoC) extended by India to Vietnam, acknowledging that the LoC helped "Vietnam's defence capabilities" and advanced bilateral defence cooperation.
- The Ministry of Public Security in Vietnam also firmed up plans to enhance work with the National Security Council Secretariat of India.
- The visiting side also sealed thirteen documents with India, including an MoU between the Reserve Bank of India and the State Bank of Vietnam on cooperation in the area of Payment Systems and innovation in digital payments as well as an MoU on radioactive and rare earth minerals.

- Earlier in the day, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a bilateral meeting with Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence, Phan Van Giang in New Delhi reaffirming the strong momentum in India-Vietnam defence relations.
- The discussions focused on expanding cooperation in maritime security; defence industry collaboration; and joint research. The two sides also stressed the need to enhance regular military interactions

❖ **India, Algeria hold first joint defence commission meet**

- India and Algeria held their inaugural Joint Commission meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday, marking a significant step forward in bilateral defence ties. According to the Defence Ministry, the discussions focused on enhancing cooperation in key areas such as training, joint military exercises, medical collaboration, and defence industry engagement.
- Both sides signed the Rules of Procedure to oversee the implementation of India-Algeria defence cooperation. The meeting was co-chaired by Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) Amitabh Prasad and Algeria's Chief of Staff of the Naval Forces, Major General Kaid Nour Eddine.

❖ **Overall crime rate drops 6%; cybercrime up by 17%: NCRB**

- Deaths due to drug overdose saw a 50% increase in 2024 from the previous year's figures; T.N. records the most fatalities; 5,194 cases of offences 'against the state' registered, a rise of over 6%
- The overall crime rate in India declined in 2024 from the 2023 figure, but there was an increase of over 17% in cybercrime cases, show the Crime in India, 2024 report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) on Wednesday.
- A total of 1,01,928 cybercrime cases were registered in 2024 over 86,420 such cases in the previous year.
- "During 2024, 72.6% of cybercrime cases registered were for the motive of fraud (73,987 out of 1,01,928 cases) followed by sexual exploitation with 3.1% (3,190 cases) and extortion with 2.5% (2,536 cases)," the report said.
- The NCRB recorded 58.86 lakh cognisable crimes across the country in 2024, marking a 6% decline from the previous year's figure. Of these, 35.44 lakh cases were registered under the Indian Penal Code and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and 23.41 lakh cases under special and local laws. There were 5,194 cases of offences "against the state" registered in 2024 as against 4,873 in 2023, showing a rise of 6.6%.
- "Out of 5,194 cases, 4,395 (84.6%) cases were registered under The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, followed by 649 (12.5%) cases under The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act," the report said.

Crime against SC/ST

- The report revealed that a total of 55,698 cases were registered for crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs), showing a decrease of 3.6% over the 2023 figure of 57,789 cases. Crimes against Scheduled Tribes showed a sharp decline of 23.1%, dropping to 9,966 cases from 12,960 in 2023.

- The NCRB released the Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI), 2024 report according to which 1,70,746 suicides were recorded in 2024. Those associated with the agriculture sector, the unemployed, and daily wage workers accounted for a substantial share of suicidal deaths.
- A total of 10,546 persons involved in the farming sector (consisting of 4,633 farmers/cultivators and 5,913 agricultural labourers) died by suicide in 2024, accounting for 6.2%.
- Out of 4,633 farmer/cultivator suicides, a total of 4,481 were by men and 152 by women, the report said. Around 31% of the total suicides were reported among the daily wagers, the report said. The number of unemployed people who died by suicide was 14,778 while the number of students and homemakers who ended their lives stood at 14,488 and 22,113, respectively.
- Deaths due to drug overdose saw a 50% increase in 2024 from the previous year's figure. The report stated that 978 people died due to drug overdose in 2024, up from 650 deaths in 2023.
- Tamil Nadu reported 313 deaths, the highest number of drug overdose deaths, followed by Punjab with 106, Madhya Pradesh 90, Rajasthan 69 and Mizoram 65, according to the NCRB data.

❖ Centre mandates local committees to oversee and govern schools

- In a move to decentralise school governance and align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the Ministry of Education has issued comprehensive new guidelines mandating the formation of school management committees (SMCs), and granting them financial and operational powers to oversee and govern schools.
- The guidelines, which supersede all previous instructions under schemes such as the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act, were launched by Union Minister for Education Dharmendra Pradhan on Wednesday.
- They require every school across the country — including secondary institutions up to Class 12 — to constitute an SMC within one month of the start of the academic year. “The SMC will replace the existing School Management Development Committees (SMDC) to create a unified, streamlined approach to school leadership,” the guidelines said.
- The new framework emphasises that education is a “shared responsibility”. To ensure grassroots involvement, 75% of an SMC's members must be parents or guardians and 50% must be women. The remaining 25% will include elected local officials, teachers, alumni, and local experts such as Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and academicis.
- “Furthermore, proportionate representation must be given to Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups, including SC, ST, OBC, and Children with Special Needs,” the guidelines state.
- The SMC is not just an advisory body but holds significant financial and operational power. “Committees are authorised to execute all school civil works costing up to ₹30 lakh. For projects exceeding this amount, SMCs will participate in the public tendering process (per CPWD/PWD manuals) to ensure quality and transparency,” the guidelines

said. The SMC will be responsible for reviewing the school budget, preventing financial irregularities, and maintaining accurate records of receipts and expenditures.

- They must lead drives to bring out-of-school children back into the mainstream and ensure the distribution of uniforms, textbooks, and scholarships.

❖ **India to host first Big Cat Summit in June; 95 countries set to participate**

- The inaugural International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) Summit, to be held here from June 1 to 3, is expected to adopt the first-ever global declaration on big cat conservation. Titled the 'Delhi Declaration', it will articulate shared priorities, strengthen transboundary cooperation, and promote a landscape-based approach for conserving big cats and their habitats.
- Representatives from 95 countries are expected to participate, the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change said on Wednesday.
- The IBCA is an association of countries that host, or have itinerant populations of at least one of the seven 'big cats' — lions, tigers, leopards, snow leopards, cheetahs, jaguars, and pumas — and are committed to the conservation of these animals.

Collective action

- There are 24 member countries, three observer countries, and several other 'range' countries in the alliance. Member countries are expected to coordinate action through programmes and activities aimed at improving the state of habitats, prey, and big cats, including big cat protection and conservation, innovation, research, development, and capacity building. They also share relevant information about big cat protection and conservation programmes.
- Summit participants are likely to include heads of State/Government of member and observer countries, Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said on Wednesday at an event to launch the summit website and unveil its logo. The summit will be guided by the theme 'Save big cats, save humanity, save ecosystem', and will bring together over 400 conservationists, policymakers, scientists, multilateral agencies, financial institutions, corporate leaders, and community representatives from across the globe.
- Launched in 2023
- The IBCA, piloted and conceived by India, was officially launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2023. The alliance, Mr. Yadav said, reflects India's belief that conservation challenges must be addressed "collectively" through cooperation, knowledge sharing, and mutual support.

❖ **Russia's share in Indian oil imports jumped in March**

- Outbreak of West Asian crisis hit India's Gulf oil supplies, making it turn to Russia; however, India is now getting Russian oil at a premium of 2.5% compared with a discount of 3.9% in 2025-26
- The West Asia crisis and the resultant supply constraints have meant that not only has Russia's share in India's oil imports jumped once again, but this time India is paying a substantial premium for Russian oil rather than the discount it was enjoying earlier.
- An analysis by The Hindu of the latest data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows that Russia's share in India's oil imports stood at 33.3% or one-third

in March 2026, the first months after the West Asia crisis began. Simultaneously, the shares of the Gulf countries as well as the U.S. have fallen.

- However, India is now getting Russian oil at a premium of 2.5% as compared with an average discount of 3.9% it had received earlier in 2025-26.

Dynamic strategies

- In the run-up to the West Asia crisis, India was in the process of cutting back on Russian oil in an effort to align with U.S. interests and push forward a trade deal with that country. In February, Russia's share had been 25% and in January, it had fallen to a 41-month low of 19%.
- However, once the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on February 28 and Iran retaliated by closing the crucial Strait of Hormuz, India had little choice but to look back to Russia as a major oil supplier. In fact, in early March, the U.S. Treasury Department, too, issued an order to "allow" India to buy Russian oil for a period of 30 days. While India has maintained throughout that it retains the autonomy to decide where it imports oil from and how much.

Russia dependence

- The data shows India substantially cut back on the volume of its overall oil imports in March 2026, likely because about a third of India's crude oil supplies depended on the Strait of Hormuz.
- Total oil imports came in at 15.8 million metric tonne (MMT), down nearly 23% over February, and 41% lower than in March last year. However, out of this, Russia's share jumped to 33.3% even as India's Gulf supplies fell sharply.

❖ To minimise AI's impact on jobs, ILO bats for lifelong learning

- Given the tumultuous trends reshaping labour markets across the world, lifelong learning needs to be a central pillar of governments' economic and social policies, the International Labour Organization said. Growing digitalisation, artificial intelligence (AI), green transition and demographic shifts were identified as some of the factors driving this shift.
- In a report released in Geneva on Tuesday, the ILO emphasised that lifelong learning was about more than employability and productivity. "It underpins decent work, genuine innovation, active citizenship, and social inclusion, making it a cornerstone of any effective strategy for sustainable growth and development," the report noted.
- Lifelong learning is the bridge between today's jobs and tomorrow's opportunities, added ILO Director-General Gilbert F. Houngbo.

Strategic policy priority

- ILO argues lifelong learning should be elevated as a strategic policy priority, not just as a tool to raise productivity and facilitate sustainable growth but also as a systemic enabler of personal and societal advancement, equity, and decent work in 21st century.
- It flags a 'striking gap' in comprehensive, authoritative, up-to-date research that captures the full scope of lifelong learning.

❖ Invasive species may be the wrong enemy in a changing subcontinent

- India supports roughly 500 million cattle and other livestock, one of the largest such populations in the world, placing heavy grazing pressure on forests and the commons; in such conditions, ‘palatable’ species are suppressed while thorny, chemically defended, disturbance-tolerant plants persist
- Across India, campaigns against invasive alien species (IAS) are gathering administrative and judicial force. Authorities now identify, map, classify, and remove species deemed ecological threats.
- In the last year alone, India’s English-language press has carried sustained coverage of ecological-loss studies, State eradication drives, and human-wildlife conflicts linked to such species. What was once a niche scientific concern has become a visible public issue and priority.
- A recent Tamil Nadu court order even portrayed *Prosopis juliflora* shrubs as a near-Statewide threat. Government submissions have reported its clearance from 517 villages across 32 districts while the academic literature has recorded the species across the State. The plants *Lantana camara* and *Senna spectabilis* face similar campaigns elsewhere in India.
- The prevailing assumption is simple: remove the invasive species and ecological recovery will follow.
- Before accepting that, however, one must first ask: what condition was the landscape in before these species spread, and what conditions now sustain them?
- Three patterns emerge from the evidence.
- Physical changes usually came first
- Throughout India, native ecological communities had already been transformed before invasive plants became dominant.
- Colonial forestry, plantation expansion, and settlement removed vast tracts of forest cover. Millions of hectares were converted to tea, coffee, rubber, teak, and eucalyptus plantations. Diverse habitats gave way to simplified commercial landscapes, with lasting effects on soil biology, shade regimes, and water cycles. Logging, roads, mining, fire suppression, and chemical agriculture fragmented habitats further.
- In places like Wayanad, forest edges had already degraded before species like *L. camara* spread into them. Biodiversity and its supporting conditions had already been decimated.
- Removing a species alone can’t restore what came before. Without functioning ecological relationships, more clearing creates new vacancies, often the very conditions in which another invasive species, or the same one, can quickly return.
- *P. juliflora* was introduced to India in 1877 as part of a misguided ecological experiment. At first seeded from the air, it spread through the guts of cattle that browsed its pods. Then came the ‘Green Revolution’ and the wider post-independent agricultural intensification. Canals expanded. Borewells multiplied. Fertilizer use surged.
- As a result, waterlogging and seepage increased in some regions, depleted aquifers in others, and productivity began to decline on abandoned lands. *P. juliflora* is a deep-rooted phreatophyte that can exploit such altered water and soil regimes. In parts of Tamil Nadu, researchers have linked its surge to irrigation-related moisture conditions.

- In other words, the plant was present for decades — what changed was the landscape around it.
- Climate change, nutrient loading, land-use change, freshwater disruption, biodiversity loss, and chemical pollution are reshaping ecosystems worldwide. These are largely the effects of a globalised industrial culture pushing rapid urbanisation and infrastructure expansion.
- Over three decades, India's urban governance footprint has roughly doubled, marking a systemic expansion of fragmented, high-disturbance landscapes that extend far beyond city boundaries into peri-urban and rural ecologies.
- India also supports roughly 500 million cattle and other livestock — one of the largest such populations in the world — placing continuous and heavy grazing pressure on forests and the commons. In such conditions, 'palatable' species are repeatedly suppressed while thorny, chemically defended, disturbance-tolerant plants such as *L. camara* persist or even expand.
- Studies have revealed increasing woody cover across many open landscapes worldwide, partly associated with rising atmospheric carbon and other interacting factors. Fertilizer inputs remain high — India alone uses 35-40 million tonnes of urea per year — and atmospheric nitrogen deposition now adds 10-30 kg per hectare annually across many regions. Woody nitrogen-fixing species such as *S. spectabilis* and *P. juliflora* benefit from such altered conditions.

A deeper invasion

- Chemical pesticides have further altered soils and microbial networks. Over time, they can disrupt genes, reduce resilience, intensify pest cycles, and weaken the ecological foundations on which productivity itself depends.
- These changes were driven less by individual choice than by policies, infrastructure, and economic systems designed to maximise production at scale. The result: food production must continue yet the same hydrological, chemical, and atmospheric systems that increase output are also exhausting the land and degrading ecosystems now slated for restoration.
- When multiple factors shift together, plant communities reorganise. *P. juliflora* growth is part of wider hydrological and chemical change across the subcontinent. Similar dynamics may apply, in differing ways, to other IAS. These plants may function as ecological first responders — species whose physiology suits rapid changes in landscape conditions.
- Given time, other species follow these pioneer species. In the early stages, many may be exotic and fast-moving. Eventually, native species may also re-establish themselves. However, such ecological succession does not guarantee a return to earlier ecological states. As the underlying conditions continue to shift, new ecological assemblages are likely to emerge among the species able to thrive within them.

Life is conditional

- Evolutionary and palaeoecological evidence suggests that the world's native biomes developed under very different climatic and nutrient regimes. Grasslands expanded during drier phases of history while rainforests arose and diversified in warmer, wetter

conditions. Many species can't easily tolerate the nutrient-rich soils, altered climate or hydrologically changed landscapes of the present.

- Some IAS species may also perform compensatory ecological roles. They can accumulate heavy metals, nitrogen, and carbon in biomass, provide cover for smaller wildlife in disturbed landscapes, create conditions into which other species later enter, provide windbreaks, and bind soil. There are, of course, real consequences. Dense thickets of invasive plants can reduce accessible forage for elephants and other herbivores in forests such as the Western Ghats. But these effects unfold in landscapes already altered by logging, plantations, and nutrient enrichment.
- Conservation efforts that target only the visible plant thus risk misdiagnosing the problem. It is easier to count acres of IAS removed than to measure shifts in moisture regimes or soil chemistry. Removal alone does not address the underlying drivers. Restoration requires that we read the land comprehensively, understand its history and interacting processes, and work with the ecological and human communities that remain.

What it will take

- This does not mean certain species should never be removed but that restoration is difficult and requires attention to ecological processes and biodiversity. It is local, patient, and continuous. Large-scale mechanical removal brings complications of its own. While clearing vast acreages may serve a burgeoning biomass economy, there is little proof that it supports ecological recovery, which needs time.
- Fears that invasive species will take over often accompany business opportunities for earthmovers and new employment schemes. A villain, it seems, can animate an economy faster than restoration can.
- Communities and practitioners embedded in these habitats are often best placed to undertake careful removal where it makes ecological and cultural sense. Success, however, remains uncertain and can only be judged over years. Restoration should proceed with least harm, phased planting, intergenerational care, and meaningful human livelihoods.
- Otherwise, India risks spending much of its conservation energy removing plants that are symptoms of a wider civilisational transformation that it has yet to confront.

❖ Expanding AI gets its biggest testing ground in China

- On a recent weekday, around 50 people gathered outside the headquarters of a Chinese mobile Internet company, waiting to get help with installing an artificial intelligence (AI) assistant.
- The scene in Beijing, China's capital, was repeated for days at several events and was also seen in the southern technology hub Shenzhen in March, as engineers helped crowds trying to set up the popular AI "agent" OpenClaw on their laptops. "I'm worried about falling behind in technological developments," said Sun Lei, a 41-year-old human resources manager at the Cheetah event. She said she hoped the tool might help her source and screen resumes across various recruitment platforms.

- More than a year after OpenAI's Chinese rival DeepSeek stunned the world with its advanced AI model, China has become a testing ground for mass use of AI tools. Chinese people and businesses have rapidly embraced AI for all sorts of things, from booking and planning travel, ordering food and hailing rides. Of its 1.4 billion population, more than 600 million were using generative AI as of December, a 142% increase from a year earlier, according to a report by the government-controlled China Internet Network Information Centre.
- With the recent surge in the use of "agentic" AI like OpenClaw, the consumption of data by AI models has also risen. Measured in what computer scientists call tokens, or units of data such as part of a word, the weekly share used by Chinese AI models has recently surpassed U.S. models, according to OpenRouter, an AI "gateway platform" that tracks data and enforces security across different AI models. "The (AI) competition is clearly shifting from models to ecosystems," said Lizzi Lee, a fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute's Center for China Analysis focused on economics and technology. "Chinese users are basically acting as real-time testers at scale."
- Chinese technology companies like Tencent, Alibaba and Baidu are also racing to commercialise AI. Tencent integrated OpenClaw into WeChat, China's own "super-app" which is a messaging tool that can also be used to order food and make payments.
- OpenClaw, originally created by Austrian software developer Peter Steinberger last year, won quick and enthusiastic use thanks to its ability to use various tools to complete complicated tasks. Zhao Yikang, a Chinese college student in Macao, uses OpenClaw in both his studies and daily life. "AI can understand things in a second," Zhao said. "You just need to act as a commander and tell it what to do."
- Preparing to start a photo services business after graduation, Zhao asked AI to build a company website. Within 10 minutes, it had generated a fully functional site for less than 5 yuan (₹70).
- Chinese companies increasingly are setting internal targets for boosting use of AI to improve efficiency, said Janet Tang, a partner & managing director focused on technology at consultancy AlixPartners.
- There are "a lot of application scenarios," said Wang Xiaogang, co-founder of the Chinese AI software company SenseTime and chairman of ACE Robotics. "The industry is developing very fast and the people, they are very open and they're eager to try the AI in a lot of scenarios."

❖ When does a CM cease to hold office?

Can a Governor remove a Chief Minister? What does 'pleasure of the Governor' mean? When is a floor test required? What happens after the Assembly's tenure ends? Can election results be challenged in court?

A day after the Trinamool Congress lost the West Bengal elections to the BJP, party chairperson Mamata Banerjee on May 5 said she would not resign as Chief Minister, alleging that the verdict was the result of a "conspiracy" rather than the people's mandate. Addressing a press conference, Ms. Banerjee claimed the elections had not been conducted fairly and accused the BJP of misusing central forces to "forcibly capture" booths and influence the outcome. She added that the party would challenge the results and continue its political fight.

Can a Governor remove a CM?

Article 164(1) of the Constitution provides that “the Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Governor and the other Ministers shall be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister, and the Ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor.” On a literal reading of the provision, therefore, the Governor appears to possess the authority to remove a CM from office. However, members of the Constituent Assembly had cautioned that such a provision could potentially lend itself to an arbitrary exercise of gubernatorial discretion.

Constituent Assembly member Mohammad Ismail Khan had moved an amendment to the provision (then Article 144 of the Draft Constitution) proposing that the phrase “during the pleasure” be replaced with the words “so long as they enjoy the confidence of the Legislative Assembly of the State.” He contended that once the constitutional scheme envisaged the Governor as a nominee of the President, the Constitution ought to have made it explicit that the Council of Ministers would hold office not at the Governor’s pleasure, but only so long as it continued to enjoy the confidence of the Legislative Assembly.

Addressing this concern, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, affirmed that the Council of Ministers shall hold office only so long as it enjoys the confidence of the majority. “The reason why we have not so expressly stated it,” he explained, “is because it has not been stated in that fashion or in those terms in any of the Constitutions which lay down a parliamentary system of government.”

Over the years, the Supreme Court has also interpreted the Governor’s powers as flowing primarily from the “aid and advice” of the Council of Ministers. In *A.G. Perarivalan v. State Through Superintendent of Police* (2022), the apex court observed that the “Governor” is “but a shorthand expression for the State government”. While recognising the Governor as “the formal head and sole repository of the executive power”, the court held that the office is ordinarily bound by the aid and advice of the State’s Council of Ministers.

When is a floor test required?

If a Governor asks a Chief Minister to step down and invites another candidate for the post while the tenure of the Legislative Assembly is still on, there has to be a floor test — a constitutional mechanism used to determine whether the executive enjoys the confidence of the legislature. Under this process, the Chief Minister must prove majority support in the House. Failure to do so requires the CM to resign.

If no party or coalition can form a stable government, President’s Rule under Article 356 may be imposed as a measure of last resort.

What happens after the Assembly’s tenure ends?

Article 172 of the Constitution deals with the duration of a State Legislative Assembly and stipulates that, “unless sooner dissolved”, an Assembly “shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer, and the expiration of the said period of five years shall operate as a dissolution of the Assembly.”

According to the Election Commission, the current West Bengal Assembly commenced its term on May 8, 2021, and is set to expire on May 7. Thereafter, the Governor will have to initiate the process for constituting a new Assembly.

What happens next?

According to former Lok Sabha Secretary-General P.D.T. Achary, a formal resignation following defeat in an Assembly election is largely a matter of convention. “Even if Ms. Banerjee does not resign, it would make no material difference. The tenure of the present Assembly ends on May 7, and with its dissolution, she will automatically cease to hold office as Chief Minister,” he said.

He, however, pointed out that an election petition may be filed before the Calcutta High Court within 45 days from the declaration of the results of the concerned candidate. Section 100 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 enumerates the grounds on which the election of a candidate may be challenged and declared void, including corrupt practices by the candidate and non-compliance with statutory provisions by the returning officer, among other grounds. He noted that a writ petition may be maintainable where the challenge concerns the integrity of the electoral process itself, including allegations of arbitrary voter deletions during the special intensive revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal.

“Large-scale deletion of voters in an election constitutes a violation of fundamental rights and can therefore be challenged through a writ petition,” he said.

❖ What is Karnataka’s new gig worker grievance system?

What gap does Karnataka’s new system address? How will the welfare fee be used?

On May 1, 2026 — International Workers’ Day — the Karnataka government announced the operationalisation of a specialised grievance redressal mechanism for platform-based gig workers in the State. Claimed to be the first government-backed grievance handling mechanism for gig workers in India, it allows workers to officially lodge complaints through the Integrated Public Grievance Redressal System (IPGRS), the State’s centralised digital platform for addressing citizen grievances related to government schemes.

How does the system work?

Platform-based gig workers can now officially lodge grievances, including those related to pay, working conditions, and platform-specific disputes, via the IPGRS.

Under the Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act, every aggregator platform must constitute an Internal Dispute Resolution Committee (IDRC). Grievances filed on the IPGRS will be automatically routed to the respective platform’s IDRC. Upon receiving a complaint, the IDRC is expected to attempt resolution within 15 working days, and is allowed up to 45 days to issue a final order. Any party aggrieved by the final decision can escalate the matter to the Karnataka Gig Workers Welfare Board within 30 days.

What concerns can a gig worker raise?

Gig workers can raise complaints related to suspension, blocking, or deactivation of accounts, termination from the platform, reduction or withholding of payments, unfair penalties, discrimination, unsafe working conditions, or other violations of rights guaranteed under the Act.

What gap does it address?

While many platforms have internal grievance redressal mechanisms, these systems exist outside a formal dispute resolution framework. As a result, gig workers have often reported a lack of resolution to their grievances. Many have complained that platforms quite often turn a blind eye to the workers’ woes.

The Karnataka government’s move seeks to bring more structure and transparency into the process and ensure legal recourse for these workers outside the formal economy. Gig workers can now officially lodge grievances through the portal, which will then be routed

to the respective platform's IDRC. The government, as a central facilitator, will monitor the process.

Why is the mechanism being implemented now?

The Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2025, was officially notified in September 2025.

In March 2026, Karnataka became the first Indian State to notify the Rules to enact the law for gig workers. The grievance-redressal mechanism for gig workers in the State forms a crucial part of the Act. It is considered a major deterrent that would hinder arbitrary terminations or account deactivation of gig workers and address their concerns.

What are the other key developments related to the Act?

In January 2026, the Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Development Board was constituted to implement welfare measures.

Platforms have been mandated to furnish details of both the company and their gig workers — including name, age, phone number, Aadhaar number, UAN, and bank account details — to the Board. This data will be integrated into the Board's portal.

According to the government, so far, around 12 platforms/aggregators have provided details of 12 lakh active gig workers in the State.

However, given that several workers are associated with multiple platforms, the numbers could contain overlaps. This is expected to be sorted once the government comes up with unique IDs for each worker.

In February, the government announced that 1% of every transaction will be collected from aggregator platforms to provide social security benefits to platform-based gig workers.

What will the welfare fee be used for?

The welfare fee will go to the Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers' Fund to provide social security and welfare benefits to platform-based gig workers in the State.

According to government officials, schemes for gig workers, depending on the platform they work for, are being developed and will be put forward for deliberation at the next board meeting. The schemes being considered include life insurance, accidental benefit, disability benefit, medical benefit, maternity benefit, and old-age protection, depending on the nature of gig work.

❖ State's 'Adopt a Monument' sees muted response

- Three years after the launch of Karnataka's 'Namma Smaraka — Adopt a Monument' initiative, the programme has struggled to meet its stated objective, with only 23 of the over 800 State-protected monuments drawing interest so far. Of these, approval is still pending for five sites while 18 sites have been adopted.
- Poor publicity, limited connectivity to several heritage locations, lack of detailed development plans, and the absence of stronger government outreach, have been pointed as some of the main reasons for the slow uptake by the stakeholders.
- The initiative was launched in September 2022 and moved online in 2023 to simplify applications and reduce paperwork. It was introduced as part of the government's effort to encourage private participation and divert CSR funds towards maintaining monuments, and to showcase the State as not just 'One State, Many Worlds' but 'One State, Many Monuments'. Karnataka has more than 20,000 heritage structures, and 844 of these sites are currently under the State government.
- Among the monuments already taken up under the programme are Venkatappa Art Gallery in Bengaluru, Yadgir Fort, Taj Bawdi in Vijayapura and Basavakalyan Fort in Bidar, among other sites.

Low publicity

- A company that has been using its CSR funds for maintaining lakes and parks in Bengaluru said it had not considered monument adoption because many heritage sites attract limited footfall and offer little public visibility. The representative said poor connectivity to monuments in several districts and low public awareness reduce the appeal for private organisations.
- Another organisation that has adopted a monument said visibility and public engagement are key factors for most private organisations. "While there is a desperate need for private participation in heritage maintenance, companies look for outcomes such as increased visitor numbers or stronger public recognition after investment as the annual maintenance costs for each site exceed ₹5 lakh," the representative said.
- Devaraju, Commissioner, Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage (DAMH), acknowledged the challenges and said publicity for the initiative has not been adequate.
- "The gap has been mainly about working on preparing more detailed development plans and improving outreach to attract organisations, particularly those willing to invest CSR funds," he said.
- According to the DAMH, the cost of adopting a monument is about ₹50 lakh for three years.
- This includes providing basic visitor infrastructure, based on estimates prepared using a toolkit developed by the Indian Institute of Architects (IIA), Karnataka Chapter.
- Under the scheme, selected applicants — Smaraka Mitra — are entrusted with developing, upgrading and maintaining visitor facilities at the site.
- The agreement is initially for at least five years and is subject to regular monitoring and review by the department.

Up for adoption

- Of the monuments currently up for adoption, temples account for the largest share at 534, followed by 100 archaeological sites, 45 forts, and 16 tombs, among other sites.

❖ City records second highest crime rate against women

- Karnataka recorded a decline in overall crime in 2024 after a spike the previous year, but the latest “Crime in India – 2024” report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has flagged a sharp rise in crimes against senior citizens, raising concerns over the safety of the elderly population in the State.
- According to the report, Karnataka registered 1,98,331 cognisable crimes under IPC/BNS and Special and Local Laws in 2024, down by 7.4% from 2,14,234 cases in 2023. The State had recorded 1,80,742 cases in 2022.
- The most alarming trend was the steep rise in crimes against senior citizens. Karnataka recorded 4,247 such cases in 2024, compared to 1,840 cases in 2023 and 1,583 in 2022 — marking an increase of nearly 130% year-on-year.
- The report showed a marginal rise in crimes against Scheduled Castes in the State, with 2,016 cases registered in 2024 compared to 1,923 in 2023.
- In Bengaluru, the crime profile reflected the challenges of policing a rapidly expanding metropolitan city and growing industrial and technology hub. The city registered 34,715 IPC/BNS crimes in 2024.
- Bengaluru recorded 9,229 theft cases in 2024, making it the third-highest metro in the country after Delhi and Mumbai. It also reported 176 murder cases in 2024, placing it second among all metropolitan cities after Delhi. However, the figures showed a decline from 206 murder cases reported in 2023.
- Economic offences, including fraud and cheating, stood at 3,477 cases in Bengaluru in 2024, making it the third-highest among Indian metros after Mumbai and Delhi. The number, however, declined from 3,858 cases reported in 2023.
- Tech capital tops India’s cybercrime charts: NCRB
- Of the 20,587 cybercrimes reported from 19 metros in 2024, 17,561 cases were from Bengaluru
- Bengaluru, the tech capital of India, tops the list of metropolitan cities in reported cybercrime cases, as per the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data.
- According to the Crime in India 2024 report published by NCRB, of the total 20,587 cybercrimes reported in 2024 from 19 metros in the country, 17,561 cases were from Bengaluru.
- While marginally lower than the 17,631 cases reported in 2023, it was still a significant jump from the 9,940 cases reported in 2022.
- The city also registered an alarming cybercrime rate of 206.6 crimes per one lakh population, the highest among all metro cities. On the other hand, the chargesheeting rate remained at 24.2%, one of the lowest among all the 19 metropolitan cities considered and lower than other cities such as Delhi and Chennai.

Online impersonation

- Among the types of cybercrimes recorded in the city, the highest number of cases were registered under 'cheating by personation using computer resources', i.e., online impersonation fraud.
- As many as 16,657 such cases were registered from the city, pushing the total number of similar cases across all metros to 18,131. This comes at a time when an increasing number of 'digital arrest' frauds are being reported from across the country.

Low conviction rate

- The data shows that despite the high number of reported cybercrime cases in the city, only a minuscule portion of them result in convictions. While 5,431 cybercrime cases came up for trial before the court in 2024, only three resulted in convictions. As many as 45 cases ended in acquittals, while 3,640 were disposed of without trial. The conviction rate stood at a mere 6.3%, among the lowest recorded across metros.
- With reference to law enforcement, the total number of cybercrime cases under investigation stood at 31,745 (including those pending from previous years), while 18,843 cases were disposed of by the police. The chargesheeting rate was recorded at 24.2%, lower than that of counterparts such as Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata.

Karnataka

- Among Indian States and Union Territories, Karnataka recorded the second-highest number of cybercrime cases, behind only Telangana. Although the State recorded 21,993 cybercrimes in 2024, this marks a marginal drop from the figures in 2023 and a significant drop from the cases in 2022.
- With a cybercrime rate of 32.2 per one lakh population, the State, however, treads well above the national average of 7.3. Despite recording the second-highest number of cybercrime cases, Karnataka's chargesheeting rate stood at only 22.1%
- Marking another grim reality, the State reported the highest number of cybercrimes against women. Of the 18,615 cybercrimes against women nationally, 6,325 were reported from Karnataka. As many as 96 cases of cybercrimes against children were also reported from the State.
- The motive for the majority of cybercrimes from the State as well as the city was reported as 'fraud.' The other prominent motives included extortion, sexual exploitation, and even 'developing own business.'

❖ Crime rate decreases in State; rate of violent crimes up in 2024

- The crime rate in Karnataka saw a marginal decline in 2024 compared to 2023, according to data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) on Wednesday. Bengaluru, too, recorded a drop in crime rate. However, it remains marginally higher than the number of cognisable crimes registered in 2022.
- However, the rate of violent crimes in the State and Bengaluru has gone up, data indicates. NCRB clubs rape, attempt to rape, foeticide, infanticide, dowry deaths, murder, culpable homicide, attempt to murder, attempt to culpable homicide, hurt, kidnapping and abduction, rioting, robbery, dacoity and arson as violent crimes.

- A senior police official said that the data indicated that the most violent crimes like murder and abduction had come down, and rape cases remained high due to cases being registered in cases of minor elopement.
- “Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, came into force midway through 2024. Certain definitions changed. This could have led to some distortion of data, and it will be difficult to compare data from 2023 and 2024,” he said. NCRB data shows the chargesheeting rate is low in the State, particularly in Bengaluru. It is pegged at 72.9% for the State and 54.4% in Bengaluru, which means in just over half of the cases registered in Bengaluru, chargesheets were filed.

❖ **Was a ‘proper debate’ held in Parliament on CEC and ECs appointment law, asks SC**

- The Supreme Court asked if there had been a “proper debate” in Parliament about the “ethos” of its 2023 judgment that took the appointment of members of the Election Commission out of the exclusive hands of the political executive, namely, “the party which not unnaturally has an interest in perpetuating itself in power”.
- In a 2023 judgment in Anoop Baranwal versus Union of India, a Constitution Bench of the court had replaced the mechanism of the President appointing the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) on the sole advice of the Prime Minister with a more participatory appointment process involving a three-member selection committee of the Prime Minister, the Opposition Leader in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India. The court had said the committee would be in place till Parliament brought in a law to replace it.
- The Union government had brought in a law which reverted to the dominant role of the executive in the appointments of the CEC and ECs. Under the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act of 2023, the CJI was replaced in the selection committee by a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- “But was there a proper debate in Parliament about the Anoop Baranwal judgment? Is the ethos voiced in the judgment reflected in the Parliamentary debates... That is not clear,” said Justice Dipankar Datta, heading a Bench comprising himself and Justice Satish Chandra Sharma.
- Senior advocate Shadan Farasat, appearing for an intervenor, said the passing of the law had been preceded by an en masse suspension of Opposition MPs. “There was no proper debate in the Parliament,” he said.
- “A majority of the Opposition was suspended. [AIMIM MP Asaduddin] Owaisi was the sole objector,” advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for Association for Democratic Reforms, submitted.

❖ **‘Compliance norms could derail EU FTA deal benefits’**

- Calling the agreement the ‘mother of all deals’, EU’s Ambassador to India Hervé Delphin says it is, however, missing a chapter on investments; the deal could be implemented by early 2027, he says

- While hailing the India-European Union (EU) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as creating a joint market comprising one quarter of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the EU’s ambassador to India Hervé Delphin also struck a note of caution over regulatory hurdles and “unfinished business” that could overshadow the benefits of the deal.
- Speaking at an event organised by the Federation of European Business in India, Mr. Delphin also said that the FTA would likely be implemented in “early 2027”, a timeline that sources in the Indian government also confirm.

❖ Negotiations on the FTA were concluded in January this year.

- “Both sides must ensure that the agreement is implemented smoothly and in good faith,” he said. “For this to materialise, we need to align on a pro-FTA mindset and approach across our systems: customs procedures or conformity requirements should serve their purpose and not be used as trade barriers.”
- “If administrative procedures are too burdensome businesses may consider that cost of compliance outweighs the benefits of preferential tariffs, in which case the FTA potential would be lost,” Mr. Delphin added. “That would be a missed opportunity.”
- Speaking a little more about the opportunity created by the FTA, the Ambassador said that the agreement would create a free trade zone covering nearly two billion people and a quarter of global GDP. “It will be the largest FTA ever signed by either side. For all these reasons it has been rightly billed the ‘mother of all deals,’ he said.
- However, he also pointed out some of the shortcomings in the deal.
- “The FTA does not cover all relevant areas,” he said. “We need to look at ‘unfinished business’ and ‘beyond FTA’. Investment is the main case in point... There is regrettably no FTA chapter on investment liberalisation in non-services sectors, which would have given investors more assurance and predictability.”

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❖ U.S. court rules against 10% tariff, but no relief for traders

- The U.S. Court of International Trade (CIT) has ruled that the 10% temporary tariff President Donald Trump imposed on all U.S. trade partners, including India, was “unauthorised by law”, striking a further blow to his attempts at using tariffs as tools to advance his policy priorities.
- However, while the ruling sets a precedent, it does not translate into immediate relief for exporters around the world. The court on Thursday provided relief to only the plaintiffs — two small companies in the U.S. and Washington State — with the tariff remaining on all other importers.
- The U.S. government is expected to appeal the judgment at the federal level, which could extend the process by several months.
- Mr. Trump, on February 24, 2026, used Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to impose a 10% tariff on imports from around the world for 150 days.
- This was in response to the U.S. Supreme Court striking down his country-wise reciprocal tariffs, which were based on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977.
- The CIT, in a 2-1 decision, ruled that, although the U.S. Congress had originally passed Section 122 to give the President the authority to address balance of payments deficits, this did not include the trade deficit and current account deficits cited by Mr. Trump when he levied the 10% tariff.
- The court ordered the U.S. government to stop collecting the tariff from the plaintiffs — Washington State, spice importer Burlap & Barrel, and toy maker Basic Fun! — and to refund the amount collected. It stopped short, however, of ordering the same for all U.S. importers.
- “The CIT did not issue a universal injunction or give relief to anyone other than the named plaintiffs,” Peter E. Harrell, visiting scholar at Georgetown Law School’s Institute of International Economic Law, said in a social media post following the ruling. “Other companies may well now decide to sue, though many will probably hold off while this decision winds its way through the appeals process,” Mr. Harrell noted.
- Impact on deal
- Sources in the government said the CIT ruling strengthened India’s negotiating position with regard to the Interim Agreement on trade between India and the U.S., as well as a larger Bilateral Trade Agreement between the two countries. However, they added that the matter was too nascent for any real impact to be felt on negotiations.

❖ State ranks third in corruption cases in 2024

- National Crime Records Bureau data for the year 2024 shows that Karnataka stood third in recorded corruption cases with 334 cases. Maharashtra, at 721 cases, had the highest followed by Tamil Nadu with 374 cases. However, there is a marginal drop in cases in Karnataka, which recorded 362 cases in 2023 and 389 cases in 2022.

Karnataka among top three States in corruption: NCRB

- The State has the most number of Disproportionate Assets cases at 75, followed by Odisha with 62 and Assam with 44 cases

- Karnataka had the third-largest number of registered corruption cases at 334 for the year 2024, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data released on Thursday. Maharashtra topped at 721 cases, followed by Tamil Nadu, which recorded 374 cases, and Karnataka stood third.
- However, Karnataka stands out when it comes to Disproportionate Assets (DA) cases, topping the list at 75. It is followed by Odisha with 62 cases, and Assam with 44 cases.
- Marginal dip
- When the numbers of Karnataka are considered over the years, however, there is a marginal drop, as the State recorded 362 cases in 2023 and 389 cases in 2022.
- A senior Lokayukta official explained that since the restoration of the Lokayukta, the ombudsman had been gathering local and grassroots-level intelligence, supplementing it with ground-level research, and consistently launching raids on suspected corrupt officials. These regular raids have led to the increase in numbers.
- Among the 334 cases, 237 cases (60.9%) are trap incidents, revealing the willingness of people to approach the ombudsman in cases of bribery demands.
- Lokayukta sources, however, say that these numbers are but a tip of the iceberg across States.
- “The cases will always be multifold than what we see on paper because citizens are still unwilling to report bribery demands. It’s a slow process, but strengthening the Lokayukta’s grassroots reach will increase people’s confidence, which requires more awareness,” the official said.

Hike since 2025

- The source said that 2025 is the year that has actually seen the registration of a substantial number of cases, with consistent raids and follow-ups, which will be reflected in the 2025 NCRB data. He added that even suo motu cases are being taken up regularly.
- “For the first two years after the restoration of the Lokayukta in 2022, the problem was staff shortage, but now that has been addressed. The increase in staff has also led to a more focused approach towards DA cases, allowing in-depth investigations,” the officer explained.
- Srinath K., secretary to B.S. Patil, Karnataka Lokayukta, told The Hindu that setting up police stations in every district has led to the registration of more cases.
- “Now, people are slowly coming forward to file complaints because our staff have reached the grassroots. We also have targets for staff to ensure the time-bound handling and disposal of cases,” he said.
- However, he acknowledged that there is a need for more awareness and a more proactive approach, which the Lokayukta is now focusing on.

❖ State Planning Commission proposes ‘Wisdom Valley’ in Bengaluru Airport City

- The Karnataka State Policy and Planning Commission (KSPPC) has proposed establishment of Wisdom Valley, a world-class Knowledge City dedicated to promoting education, research, innovation and sustainable urban development at the Bengaluru Airport City, which is located near the Kempegowda International Airport.

- “The project seeks to create a globally recognised ecosystem for knowledge creation, dissemination and application by integrating international institutes, research centres, innovation hubs, and knowledge-based industries within a single integrated urban framework,” said KSPPC Vice-Chairman B.R Patil in a letter to the Principal Secretary, Department of Planning, Programme monitoring and Statistics. He added that the project estimated at approximately ₹15,500 crore will be implemented in phased stages comprising planning, infrastructure development, institutional establishment, and operationalisation.
- In another communication to Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh, KSPPC member S. Mohanadass Hegde said that the project is envisioned as an innovative urban development centered around fostering knowledge creation, dissemination and application. He said that this project should come up in the Bengaluru Airport City.
- Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL) Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Hari Marar in a letter to Ms. Rajneesh said, “We would appreciate the opportunity to engage further to assess how Wisdom Valley and the Airport City development may be aligned to maximise benefits for the State.” Spread over 463 acres, the project is said to include a business park, a global innovation hub, an education and health district, a retail dining entertainment village, a concert arena, a convention centre, and a knowledge park, among other development features.

❖ **Human-centric AI solutions to transform health claims showcased**

- Artificial Intelligence-driven solutions aimed at transforming healthcare claims management under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) were showcased at the AB PM-JAY Auto-Adjudication Hackathon Showcase 2026 that began here on Friday. The hackathon was organised by the National Health Authority (NHA) in collaboration with the IndiaAI Mission and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- A key focus of the event was the presentation of AI and Machine Learning (AI/ML)-based solutions developed under the hackathon to improve the speed, accuracy and transparency of claims adjudication while reducing fraud and manual intervention.
- Teams presented AI-powered systems aimed at identifying tampered discharge summaries, manipulated medical bills, fabricated reports and ghost identities submitted during claims processing.
- The showcase also featured discussions on the role of Small Language Models.

❖ **‘GER in secondary level up by 22.46% in the past decade’**

- It has exceeded 100% in Chandigarh (110.1%), Goa (107.5%), Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu (104.9%), Himachal Pradesh (102.6%), Karnataka (101.3%), and Delhi (101.1%): NITI Aayog report
- The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in the secondary level enrollment (middle school) in Karnataka has crossed 100% and is currently at 101.3%. The State’s GER has increased by 22.46% in the past decade, according to the NITI Aayog’s new report, ‘School Education System In India: Temporal Analysis and Policy Roadmap for Quality Enhancement.’

- The GER exceeded 100% in Chandigarh (110.1%), Goa (107.5%), Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu (104.9%), Himachal Pradesh (102.6%), Karnataka (101.3%), and Delhi (101.1%). States nearing universal levels include Telangana at 99.9%, West Bengal 99.4%, and Kerala 98.7%. At the lower end were Bihar 51.1%, Nagaland 61.8%, Uttar Pradesh 64.3%, Jammu & Kashmir 66.1%, Madhya Pradesh 68.2, and Arunachal Pradesh 69.3% in 2024-25, with the GER levels slipping further below the national average. The report highlighted that the past decade witnessed significant relative GER improvements in West Bengal from 75.26% to 99.4%, Telangana 76.7% to 99.9% and Karnataka from 78.84% to 101.3%. “The decadal movement highlights that secondary education remains the most fragile link in the schooling cycle, where economic constraints, social factors, and weak institutional support converge to limit participation,” stated the report.

Higher secondary

- The State-level data shows that higher secondary GER is highest in Chandigarh 107.4%, followed by Puducherry 95.5%, Goa 93.8%, Kerala 89.5%, Andaman & Nicobar Islands 85.8%, Himachal Pradesh 84.7%, Tamil Nadu 83.4%, Delhi 82.7%, and Uttarakhand 80.9%.
- In contrast, the lowest levels are observed in Bihar 38.1%, Meghalaya 39.7%, Nagaland 39.8%, Assam 43.5%, Arunachal Pradesh 43.7%, Jammu & Kashmir 44.8%, Madhya Pradesh 45.0%, Gujarat 47.3%, Jharkhand 48.6%, and Sikkim 49.6%.
- The largest relative improvement in enrollment during the past decade was observed in Karnataka from 29.68% to 61.4%. In Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu 38.21% to 68.4%, Bihar 22.38% to 38.1%, and Assam 28.55% to 43.5%. The steepest relative declines were in Lakshadweep from 75.75% to 51.1%, Arunachal Pradesh 54.67% to 43.7%.

GER for girls

- Several States and Union Territories have registered notable improvements in the GER for girls at the upper-primary stage. Gains are most visible in Chandigarh from 111.65% to 131.2% and Meghalaya 105.13% to 126.8%.
- In southern States, Karnataka’s improvements in the GER for girls is 90.58% to 103.9% and in Andhra Pradesh 81.47% to 102%.

Decline

- The report also points out to the broad decline in learning outcomes across the country. A cluster of States/UTs, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Daman & Diu, experienced particularly sharp reductions across subjects.
- In contrast, a larger group of States such as Assam, Bihar, Chandigarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Manipur, Mizoram, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal recorded moderate decline.

Dropouts

- The dropout rates in secondary level is highest in West Bengal (20.0%), followed by Arunachal Pradesh (18.3%), Karnataka (18.3%), and Assam (17.5%).
- The transition from secondary to higher secondary has reached 100% in Delhi and Chandigarh. High transition levels are also observed in Andaman & Nicobar Islands (92.5%), Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu (91.4%), and Lakshadweep (91.3%). However, transition rates remain lowest in Meghalaya (47.8%), followed by West Bengal (57.4%), Mizoram (58.5%), and Karnataka (62.5%).
- Computer facility
- Despite being a capital of Information Technology (IT), the NITI Aayog report revealed that only 55% of schools have computer facility in Karnataka.
- However, the availability of computers in schools has reached full coverage in Lakshadweep (100%), and is virtually universal in Delhi (99.9%), Puducherry (99.5%), Chandigarh (99.5%), Kerala (99.5%), and Punjab (99%).
- Over the past decade, the sharpest gains were recorded in Assam from 9.8% to 78.7%, Jharkhand 9.7% to 76%, Odisha 13.7% to 76.7%.
- In contrast, the smallest improvements were observed in Karnataka from 38.7% to 55.7% and in Goa from 43.5% to 57.1%.
- Government orders procurement of sunflower seeds at ₹7,721 a quintal
- The State government has ordered the procurement of sunflower seeds for the 2025-26 rabi season at a support price of ₹7,721 per quintal in 11 districts under the support price scheme.
- Sugar, Textiles and Agricultural Marketing Minister Shivanand Patil has directed authorities to open procurement centres in Bagalkot, Belagavi, Ballari, Vijayapura, Chamarajanagar, Chitradurga, Gadag, Kalaburagi, Vijayanagara, Raichur, and Dharwad districts, in accordance with the Union government's support price guidelines.
- The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India and the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Ltd. have been appointed as the Union government's procurement agencies, while the Karnataka Cooperative Oilseed Growers' Federation will serve as the State government's procurement agency.
- Farmers must complete registration within the next 50 days, while procurement will be carried out over the following 60 days. Deputy Commissioners, who head the District Task Force Committees, have been instructed to begin the registration and procurement process immediately.
- To facilitate farmers in rural areas, procurement centres will be opened in collaboration with organisations that have warehouses equipped with the necessary technical and scientific facilities.
- He directed officials to ensure that traders and procurement agencies do not misuse the support price procurement centres in the name of farmers.
- Mr. Patil said officials have been asked to provide details of the procurement progress daily to the State government and the Karnataka State Agricultural Marketing Board.

❖ **MGNREGS scale, workdays fell in 2025-26, finds study**

- Despite rise in registered households, employment generation has dropped, leading to an average income loss of ₹1,221 for each household; 40% fewer households completed 100 days of work.
- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) saw a sharp contraction in its scale and reach in 2025–26, according to a report on the final operational year of the scheme introduced by the Congress-led UPA regime.
- The report points to a paradoxical trend in which the number of registered households rose marginally, but fewer households and workers found employment, total workdays declined significantly, and fewer families completed the guaranteed 100 days of work.
- The report was released by the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, a coalition of non-profit bodies working with MGNREGS workers, and was prepared by LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists.
- LibTech estimates that the contraction resulted in an average income loss of ₹1,221 for each MGNREGS household during the financial year.

Uncertain transition

- The Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, which was passed in Parliament last December, is expected to come into force soon, replacing MGNREGS. The Union government has allocated only ₹30,000 crore for MGNREGS for the transitional period. This decline is deeply worrying, the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha said, especially since the new employment scheme was brought in with no public consultation. “The employment guarantee programmes play a critical role in rural livelihood security and any major restructuring of such programmes must involve meaningful consultation,” it said in a statement.

Fewer working days

- The number of registered households under the scheme increased by 3.2%, from 14.98 crore in 2024–25 to 15.46 crore in 2025–26. However, this did not translate into greater employment. The report notes that 44 lakh fewer households and 67 lakh fewer workers were employed compared to the previous year, representing declines of 8.2% and 9.1% respectively.
- The number of persondays of work generated under the programme fell sharply by 21.5%, from 268.44 crore in 2024–25 to 210.73 crore in 2025–26. Average persondays per household dropped by 14.5%, from 50.18 to 42.92. The impact of this decline is evident in the sharp fall in the number of households completing the full 100 days of guaranteed employment, which declined by 40.5%, from 0.37 crore to 0.22 crore.
- The contraction was geographically widespread. Fifteen out of 20 States recorded a fall in persondays during the year. West Bengal generated no persondays in either 2024–25 or 2025–26 and was excluded from the comparative analysis. Tamil Nadu recorded the steepest decline at 42.8%, followed by Haryana at 41.7%. Only four States registered an increase in persondays.

❖ **Calcutta HC rejects govt. objections to Nicobar plea**

- The Calcutta High Court has overruled the Union government's preliminary objections to a batch of petitions alleging that it violated the Forest Rights Act while obtaining consent for its ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project.
- In an order made public on Friday, a Bench of Chief Justice Sujoy Paul and Justice Partha Sarathi Sen dismissed the Centre's argument that Meena Gupta, the petitioner in the case, did not have the locus standi to approach the court in this matter. It directed the case to be listed for final hearing on June 23.
- Ms. Gupta is a retired IAS officer who has served as Secretary to both the Tribal Affairs and Environment Ministries.
- Over the last two years, she has filed a series of petitions challenging the Gram Sabha resolutions consenting to the diversion of forest land for the mega-infrastructure project under the 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA); the constitution of a sub-divisional level committee under the same law; and the notifications reducing the buffer zones for both the Campbell Bay and Galathea Bay National Parks.
- The petitions also question the validity of a certificate issued by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration claiming that all rights under the FRA have been identified and settled.
- On Wednesday, Additional Solicitor General of India Ashok Kumar Chakraborty argued that Ms. Gupta did not have authorisation from the tribal population of Great Nicobar Island to file the petition, adding that the petition was not maintainable because her place of residence was in Hyderabad.
- The court ruled that in this case, it was "clear that the petitioner has sufficient interest in the matter", and that "she is espousing the cause of the vulnerable tribal community". The Centre argued that the project was of "great national importance" and that "such project of national importance cannot be called in question in a [public interest litigation] PIL petition".

❖ **NITI Aayog flags low student retention, learning outcomes**

- A decadal analysis of India's school education system by NITI Aayog reveals that while India has achieved a near-universal access to school at the primary level, it faces challenges in retaining students at the secondary level. There is also a persistent crisis in achieving learning outcomes.
- The report, titled "School education system in India — temporal analysis and policy roadmap for quality Enhancement", highlights the "pyramid" problem.
- The education system currently resembles a sharp pyramid, housing 14.71 lakh schools and 24.69 crore students.
- While the country boasts 7.3 lakh primary schools, that number plummets to 1.64 lakh at the higher secondary level.
- Four out of every 10 children who enter the system drop out before completing higher secondary education.
- To add to this, close to 7,993 schools across the country reported zero student enrolment, with the highest numbers seen in West Bengal (3,812) and Telangana (2,245).

- “While these schools appear operational in administrative records, they no longer serve any student population. These schools continue to receive financial and human resources due to the lack of updating of records,” the report said.
- The report recommends “cylindrical” schooling to fix the “leaky pipeline” of student dropouts, which involves creating composite schools that cover Grades 1-12 under one roof.
- It points to the fact that the RTE Act ends at age 14, leaving families to bear the costs of tuition, books, and transport for older children.

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

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy