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WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

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MAY WEEK 3

11-05-2026 TO 16-05-2026

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\$43.6 BILLION**

❖ Eight MoUsinked during Jaishankar's Trinidad visit

- India and Trinidad and Tobago have signed eight agreements in sectors including tourism, healthcare, infrastructure and Ayurveda during External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's two-day visit to the Caribbean nation, according to an official statement.
- Mr. Jaishankar, who visited the Caribbean nation on May 8 and 9, held talks with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and other senior leaders on expanding bilateral cooperation and reviewed progress on announcements made during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Trinidad and Tobago last year, the External Affairs Ministry said in a statement.

❖ India-Trinidad pact to help diaspora trace ancestral roots: Jaishankar

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said here on Sunday that an archival cooperation agreement between India and Trinidad and Tobago would help members of the Indian diaspora trace their ancestral roots and reconnect with families, as he underlined New Delhi's efforts to preserve the legacy of the Girmitya community.
- Girmitya refers to Indian indentured labourers transported by the British to colonies in Fiji, South Africa, Mauritius, and the Caribbean between the 19th and early 20th centuries. Addressing a gathering at the historic Nelson Island on Saturday, Mr. Jaishankar recalled the arrival of the first Indian indentured labourers in Trinidad and Tobago 180 years ago. He paid tribute to their "fortitude, determination and resolve" in building new lives under difficult circumstances.
- He said the immigrants had carried with them their traditions, faith and way of life, adding that it was fitting for such history to be preserved as a heritage site.
- Mr. Jaishankar said Prime Minister Narendra Modi attached high importance to creating a database of the Girmitya community and conducting research on its legacy.
- He said India was working towards establishing a dedicated Girmitya Studies Centre on Mr. Modi's directions.
- Referring to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the National Archives of India and Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Jaishankar said he hoped the agreement would help many people in the Caribbean nation in "tracing their ancestral roots and reconnecting with their families in India".
- He also noted that the Indian High Commission in Trinidad and Tobago was receiving a growing number of applications for Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) cards after Mr. Modi announced the extension of OCI eligibility up to the sixth generation.

❖ 'Maritime security is of primordial importance to Indian Ocean Region'

- Any disruption in the Indian Ocean will have a deep impact on the economy across the region, says Sanjiv Ranjan, Secretary-General of the Indian Ocean Rim Association; India chairs the 23-nation grouping; a summit marking its 30th anniversary is expected to be held next year, he adds
- Navigating maritime security in the wake of the war in West Asia will be at the top of the agenda as India chairs the 23-nation Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), with a

leaders' summit expected next year, says the organisation's Secretary-General Sanjiv Ranjan.

- In addition to raising the profile of the IORA, the government is expected to focus on the specific challenges arising from the war in West Asia, including the violence in the region and the Hormuz Strait blockades by Iran and the U.S.
- Last week, Mr. Ranjan had co-hosted the Indian Ocean Dialogue in Delhi, which was attended by Ministers from India, Mauritius and Yemen, besides representatives from both Iran and the United Arab Emirates.
- Speaking to The Hindu, he said while bilateral differences are not discussed at the grouping, the Gulf war has raised issues of "primordial importance" for the IOR countries.
- "The increasing realisation from the contemporary situation is that maritime safety and security is of primordial importance for our energy security, our food security, [and] many livelihoods, which are involved as a result of the developments in Indian Ocean littoral areas," he said, referring to all countries with coastlines on the Indian Ocean.

Two-day dialogue

- Delivering a keynote address to the two-day dialogue, Mauritius Foreign Minister Dhananjay Ramful said that the "ideal of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace" has been negated and "war has come" to the ocean. Mr. Ramful called the U.S.'s sinking of the Iranian naval ship IRIS Dena, in which 100 sailors were killed in March, as "outrageous" and also expressed concern over retaliatory Iranian attacks using Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) on the U.S.'s Diego Garcia base on Mauritius's Chagos Islands.
- "They might not have reached their target, but they have nonetheless breached our comfortable status quo. They have introduced in our region of the Indian Ocean an intent of aggression hitherto unknown," Mr. Ramful added.
- According to the IORA charter, "bilateral and other issues likely to generate controversy and be an impediment to regional co-operation efforts will be excluded from deliberations". However, they will discuss the "socio-economic" impact of the conflict in talks on eight priority areas: maritime safety and security, trade and investment, fisheries management, disaster risk management, tourism, cultural exchanges, blue economy and women's economic empowerment, Mr. Ranjan said.
- "Without a doubt, any disruption in the Indian Ocean will have a deep impact on the economy across the region. The tourism sector is affected badly especially due to airline disruptions. Fuel prices in many of our member countries have increased considerably, some have had to shut down offices and schools. In the long term, inflation, agricultural output and productivity — impacted due to fertilizer shortages — will all hurt the region. A big worry is that [due to the war] situations where fisherman are unable to go out to the sea for fishing will affect livelihoods," Mr. Ranjan told The Hindu.
- The IORA Summit in 2027 will mark the organisation's 30th anniversary, said Mr. Ranjan, adding that the last time such a summit had been held was in 2017, when Indonesia marked the IORA's 20th anniversary in Jakarta. In the run-up to that, India will host the Senior Officials Meeting, in June this year, while the IORA Council of Ministers would meet towards the end of 2026.

Series of meetings

- The Indian Ocean dialogue, which was a “track 1.5” conference for officials, academics and experts, co-hosted by the IORA and the Ministry of External Affairs and organised by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), will kick off a series of meetings expected over the coming year, as India seeks to recharge the IORA.
- The grouping was formed in 1997 with former South African leader Nelson Mandela amongst those leading it. However, the IORA has not received the relevance that other regional groupings have, such as the now-defunct SAARC, BIMSTEC, SCO or Quad, over three decades.
- In addition to its salience in India’s MAHASAGAR maritime policy and Indo-Pacific strategy, the IORA is less contentious for India as Pakistan has never been admitted to its ranks. Pakistan had requested membership in the early 2000s, but the fact that it refused to grant India “MFN status” for trade violated the IORA charter that calls for “sovereign equality” or equal treatment of all states, according to officials.
- The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) currently comprises 23 member states, including Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

❖ Govt. to see if schools teaching religion are charitable bodies: SC

- The Supreme Court on Monday left it to the government to consider whether schools which impart religious instruction should be brought within the ambit of constitutional provisions dealing with charitable or religious establishments, rather than being recognised as ‘secular or professional’ educational institutions.
- A Bench headed by Justice Dipankar Datta said the issue was within the domain of the Ministry of Education, and the court need not intervene for now.
- The petition filed by petitioner-advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay sought a direction to declare that “any institution which imparts religious instructions to promote any religion is covered under Article 26(a) and not under Articles 19(1)(g) or Article 30(1) of the Constitution”.
- Article 26(a) is one of the ‘freedom-of-religion’ rights. It says that a religious denomination or ‘any section thereof’ would have the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes. This, if done, would mean that schools imparting religious instruction would be subject to the restrictions of public order, health and morality.

School curriculum

- The petition has argued that schools which impart religious instructions must not come under the right to profession or occupation enshrined in Article 19(1)(g), nor should they be brought within the ambit of the right given to minority communities to establish and administer “educational institutions”.

- The petition has clearly sought a dichotomy based on whether or not religious instruction was part of a school's curriculum. It is not clear where schools imparting both secular and religious education, latter being left to the choice of the students, would fit.
- Article 30(1) allows minority religious communities to establish educational institutions which impart secular and religious education. The Article reads as, "All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice".
- The petition said the court must declare that 'educational institutions of their choice' in Article 30(1) should be interpreted as 'secular/professional educational institutions of their choice' and not 'religious educational institutions of their choice'.

Monitoring mechanism

- Mr. Upadhyay said the Centre must have a mechanism to "register, recognise, supervise and monitor institutions imparting education to children up to 14 years". "This is an issue of national security as young kids form the future of the nation, and can be brainwashed/manipulated in unregistered institutions," the petition said.
- It also raised doubts if the quality of education could be ensured by unregistered and unrecognised institutions.
- "The safety and security of children is paramount. It is the State's onus to prevent trafficking of children by unregistered and unrecognised institutions at the threshold," the petition said.

❖ VB-G RAM G to take effect on July 1

- All 'rules, notifications, schemes, orders and guidelines' made under MGNREGA will stand repealed from July 1; however, the government did not clarify crucial aspects, including objective parameters and formula for deciding the normative budget, which will determine the share of each State
- Sounding the final bugle on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, the Union government on Monday notified that from July 1, all "rules, notifications, schemes, orders and guidelines" made under the law will stand repealed, and the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G] will come into force.
- Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed confidence that the move marks the dawn of a "new era in the lives of labourers". He said the scheme would prove to be a milestone in fulfilling the resolve to build "developed villages" as a foundation for a "developed India".
- He also noted that the process of framing the rules for the new Act is under way following consultations with the States. "No labourer is deprived of employment during this transition phase. Comprehensive arrangements have already been put in place to guarantee this," the Minister said. Most States will have a maximum of six months to complete the necessary preparations, he added.

- The MGNREGA, enacted under the Congress-led UPA, was part of a set of welfare laws that emerged from the National Advisory Committee. The new rural employment scheme upends several MGNREGA frameworks, including its demand-based approach stretching the budget to match the demand on the ground.

No clarity on details

- Though the government issued a note answering frequently asked questions, it did not clarify crucial aspects, including the objective parameters and formula for deciding the normative budget, which will determine how much each State receives. Under MGNREGA, the Centre paid 100% of the wage bill; under the new scheme, the expenditure will be split between the Centre and the States in a 60:40 ratio for most States.
- The VB-G RAM G legislation was passed by Parliament in December last year, without pre-legislative consultations. After its passage, the government has held weekly meetings with State rural development departments to build the infrastructure required for implementation.
- The new scheme increases the statutory employment guarantee from 100 days to 125 days in every financial year.
- The government clarified that existing job cards that are e-KYC verified will remain valid until Gramin Rozgar Guarantee cards are issued. As per a recent study by LibTech, a consortium of activists and academics, as of May 7, 2026, 11.58 crore registered workers (45.4%) and 0.95 crore active workers (9.5%) are yet to complete e-KYC. “Workers shall not be denied employment merely due to pending e-KYC, and facilitation mechanisms have been provided for completion of e-KYC, including at worksites, wherever necessary,” the government note said.
- It also clarified that workers may continue to demand employment orally, in writing through the existing Form-6 framework, or through digital platforms. Provisions carried over from MGNREGA, such as unemployment compensation in case of failure to provide work, will continue.
- Attendance will continue to be captured through the National Mobile Monitoring System, despite concerns over reliance on digital systems in areas with patchy internet coverage. Ongoing works under MGNREGA as on the date of commencement may continue under the new Act. Where ongoing works are insufficient to meet demand, new works consistent with Schedule I of the new Act may be taken up.

Blackout period

- The legislation provides for a blackout period of up to 60 days, to be notified by the States, ostensibly to ensure the availability of agricultural labour during peak sowing and harvesting seasons. This clause has drawn criticism for reducing workers’ bargaining power.

❖ SC launches 'One Case One Data' and 'Su Sahay' chatbot

- Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Monday announced in open court the launch of a major digital initiative — “One Case One Data” — to integrate the judicial administration at every level, from the taluk court to the top court, into a unified system.
- The CJI said the mechanism is aimed at creating a more comprehensive and interconnected digital database across courts. The CJI also announced the launch of ‘Su Sahay’, an artificial intelligence (AI)-powered assistance chatbot integrated with the Supreme Court website to facilitate easier access to justice and court-related services for litigants.

❖ 2 cheetahs released into wild in Kuno National Park

- Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Monday released two female cheetahs brought from Botswana into an open forest in the Kuno National Park following the completion of their quarantine period.
- The reintroduction of cheetahs brought from Nigeria, South Africa, and now Botswana is achieving consistent success, and today Madhya Pradesh has earned nationwide recognition as the ‘Cheetah State’, the CM said on the occasion.
- This will give impetus to ‘Project Cheetah’ and add another important chapter to India's wildlife conservation history, an official said.
- The objective of the project is to restore the endangered animal species in the state, increase their numbers, and prepare them for free hunting and roaming.

❖ China may not join alliance on conservation of big cats

- China is unlikely to be a part of the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA), a global initiative spearheaded by India to focus concerted attention on conserving big cats, according to senior officials in the Environment Ministry.
- The big cats consist of the tiger, lion, leopard, cheetah, puma, jaguar, and snow leopard.
- Saudi Arabia has confirmed its membership of IBCA, an official said.
- “We have sent an invitation to China but there has been no development on it yet,” an official told The Hindu.
- The IBCA, which is being spearheaded by India, is to hold its first-ever summit here from June 1-3, with representatives from 95 countries expected to participate. As of now, there are 24 member countries, three observer countries and several other ‘range’ countries as part of the alliance.
- Independent scientific assessments indicate that China, at present, has a very small wild tiger population, with nearly all of them restricted to the northeast borderlands with Russia. These are largely Amur (Siberian) tigers.
- Camera-trap and landscape studies by Chinese and international researchers estimate roughly 50-70 wild Amur tigers in China.
- India had about 3,167 wild tigers in 2022 — overwhelmingly the Bengal tiger. The tigers are spread across a network of reserves and forest landscapes from the Himalayas to the Western Ghats and central India.

- Though IBCA members have no financial commitments, countries will be expected to, among other things, coordinate action through programmes and activities aimed at improving the state of habitats, prey, including big cat protection and conservation, innovation, research, development and capacity building; share relevant information about big cat protection and conservation programmes.

Price pressures

Retail inflation continued its accelerating trend in April 2026, with food and restaurant costs driving the uptick



❖ Pricey food, dining out push retail inflation to a 13-month high of 3.5%

- Retail inflation quickened to a 13-month high of 3.5% in April 2026, although still coming in lower than what was expected by most economists. The price rise was largely driven by higher food inflation as well as higher prices at restaurants as they passed on higher fuel prices to consumers.
- Data on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for April showed that inflation quickened from the 3.4% registered in March, the first month following the start of the war in West Asia.
- “The April inflation reading came in softer than expectations,” Upasna Bhardwaj, chief economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank, said, a sentiment echoed by Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda as well as Rajni Thakur, chief economist at L&T Finance.
- “However, the outlook remains clouded with upside risks amid supply side disruptions from geopolitics and El Nino,” Ms. Bhardwaj said.
- Inflation in the food and beverages category climbed to 4% in April from 3.7% in March.
- Simultaneously, inflation in the restaurant and accommodation services sector quickened sharply to 4.2% in April from 2.9% in the previous month.

Ease in transport

- Notably, inflation in the transport sector stood at -0.01% in April as compared to 0% in the previous month.
- This, according to Ms. Thakur, was more because of the passenger transport services sector rather than the price at which goods were transported.
- “While food prices have gone up by around 30 basis points, overall transportation prices have actually eased,” Ms. Thakur said. “This is largely on account of easing prices for the services sector, while prices of transport of goods have increased by 7.6% in the month.”

❖ HPV vaccination drive in State crosses 2 lakh mark; Kalaburagi leads, Bengaluru trails

- Karnataka's Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign for adolescent girls has crossed the two-lakh mark, with 2,00,028 beneficiaries covered so far. This accounts for 29% of the total target population of 6.89 lakh girls aged between 14 years and 15 years in the State.
- Official data available till Monday showed that 39.4% of the 5,08,025 single-dose vaccine vials stock allotted to the State had been utilised so far.
- The HPV vaccine is considered a key preventive intervention against cervical cancer, one of the leading cancers affecting women in India.
- On February 28, the Union government formally launched a nationwide HPV vaccination programme, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ajmer, Rajasthan. Following this, Karnataka initiated its State-level rollout on the same day at K.C. General Hospital.
- In Karnataka, the vaccine is being administered through Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Primary Health Centres), Community Health Centres, taluk and district hospitals, and government medical colleges.
- The campaign, aimed at protecting girls against HPV, has shown sharp regional variation, with northern Karnataka districts leading the campaign, while Bengaluru and some southern districts have recorded slower progress.

HPV vaccination coverage in Karnataka

(% of target achieved)

| Highest coverage areas | Lowest coverage areas |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Kalaburagi: 68.5% | GBA: 10.4% |
| Yadgir: 60.7% | Bagalkot: 17.5% |
| Shivamogga: 50.9% | Dakshina Kannada: 20.9% |
| Hassan: 45.7% | Belagavi: 21.7% |
| Ballari: 41.5% | Tumakuru: 22.0% |



| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Target population: 6.89 lakh girls aged 14 and 15 years | Total coverage till May 11: 2,00,028 beneficiaries (29%) | Vaccine stock allocated to Karnataka: 5,08,025 single-dose vaccine vials |
|--|--|--|

Highest in Kalaburagi

- Kalaburagi has emerged as the best-performing district, covering 20,511 beneficiaries and achieving 68.5% of its target. It has also utilised 94.2% of the vaccine stock allocated to it. Yadgir followed with 8,658 beneficiaries and 60.7% target achievement. Shivamogga stood third with 50.9%, while Hassan (45.7%) and Ballari (41.5%) completed the top five districts in terms of coverage.
- Other districts that crossed the 35% mark include Koppal (39.2%), Bengaluru South (38.1%), Chikkamagaluru (37.8%), Raichur (37.4%), Bengaluru Rural (36.8%) and Kolar (35.8%). Health officials attributed the stronger performance in these districts to effective mobilisation, better coordination between district administrations and health officials, and regular follow-up by Deputy Commissioners and local field staff.

Lowest in GBA area

- At the other end, the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) region recorded the lowest progress in the State.
- Against the highest target of 1,18,339 beneficiaries, only 12,257 girls had been vaccinated till May 11, translating to 10.4% target achievement and 14.3% stock utilisation.
- Bagalkot (17.5%), Dakshina Kannada (20.9%), Belagavi (21.7%) and Tumakuru (22%) were also among the areas with slower progress.

- Mysuru, despite a relatively high target of 32,946 girls, had covered 7,777 beneficiaries, or 23.6%. Bengaluru Urban stood at 26.7%.

Beneficiaries

- The average number of beneficiaries vaccinated per session across Karnataka was seven. Raichur recorded the highest session productivity with 18 beneficiaries per session, followed by Vijayapura with 15. Kalaburagi, Koppal and Bagalkot averaged 12 beneficiaries per session.
- In contrast, Bengaluru Urban averaged only three beneficiaries per session, while GBA, Kodagu, Chickballapur and Dakshina Kannada averaged four.

Urban vs. rural

- Officials said urban areas may be facing challenges such as parental hesitancy, school vacations, migration and scheduling constraints, unlike rural districts where outreach through community networks has been smoother.

Vaccine stocks

- Of the 5,08,025 single-dose vaccine vials received so far, nearly 61% of stocks are still available.
- The Health Department is expected to intensify the campaign in low-performing districts in the coming weeks.

❖ AI, GIS-enabled Kartavya-KAAMS app launched for attendance of school teachers, non-teaching staff

- The Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL) has launched the 'Karnataka Advanced Attendance Management System (Kartavya-KAAMS) to identify and monitor the attendance of permanent teaching and non-teaching staff and officers.
- The Kartavya-KAAMS is an artificial intelligence (AI) and geographic information system (GIS) enabled facial recognition mobile app.
- It is mandatory for teaching and non-teaching staff to register attendance twice a day on the app from the place where they are on duty from the academic year 2026-27.
- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, in the State Budget for 2025-26, had announced that the Kartavya-KAAMS would be implemented in all departments. State government employees can download this mobile application and register with the KGID number registered in HRMS and record attendance at their place of duty.
- The DSEL is the largest department of the State government, and a large number of permanent teachers are working in government primary and high schools, and as staff in offices. However, the monitoring of attendance, which is being done through a physical or decentralised mechanism, is not administratively efficient and consistent.
- For the continuous professional development of teachers and to ensure improvement in the quality of education, effective implementation of government policies and educational reforms, training programmes are being implemented to enhance subject knowledge, academic skills and professional competencies. These training programmes are conducted at various centres at the State, District and Block levels. In addition, the

DSEL conducts the secure evaluation process of SSLC exam answer sheets at the district level at various evaluation centres.

- Using this mobile app ensures the identification of the attendance of authorised permanent staff through secure login with facial recognition of the staff, officials said, adding that the attendance is reflected on the department dashboard, and reports are sent to the higher authorities of the department swiftly.
- “Steps have been taken to identify the attendance in a way that leaves no room for irregularities and corrections, with the help of modern technologies such as GIS and AI,” reads the order. In addition, the departmental competent authorities have been asked to use the data reports for teacher performance analysis, assignment of teachers, rationalization of staff, and payment of salaries.
- This move has been welcomed by teachers and the School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC). “The government’s move to implement the Kartavya-KAAMS mobile app for the attendance of teachers and staff is right. However, the government should take appropriate steps to ensure that the personal information of teachers is not leaked or hacked in any way,” the headmaster of a government school in Bengaluru said.
- G. Umesh Gangavadi, State president of SDMC, said, “The government is also planning to implement a facial recognition attendance system for school children. However, teacher attendance is important in schools, and the government was urged to implement a facial recognition system for teacher attendance before students. It is good that the government is now implementing attendance of teachers and staff through a separate mobile app.”

❖ **China’s Foreign Minister set to skip BRICS meet in Delhi**

- Beijing cites ‘scheduling reasons’ and states that Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong will be present; it expresses readiness to work with all BRICS members to support India as the Chair
- There will be no high-level representation from Beijing at Thursday’s meeting of BRICS Foreign Ministers in New Delhi because of “scheduling reasons”, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.
- The May 14-15 meeting coincides with the visit to China by U.S. President Donald Trump, who lands in the Chinese capital on Wednesday. Foreign Minister Wang Yi will be in Beijing for Mr. Trump’s visit. China will not be sending any other high-level official for the meeting, the Foreign Ministry indicated.
- “Due to scheduling reasons, Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong will represent Foreign Minister Wang Yi at this Foreign Ministers’ Meeting,” the Foreign Ministry said, adding that “China attaches great importance to and actively participates in BRICS cooperation, and is always committed to deepening the BRICS strategic partnership and consolidating the positive momentum of unity and cooperation among BRICS countries.”
- “We stand ready to work with all BRICS members to support India, as the Chair, in successfully hosting the BRICS Foreign Ministers’ Meeting and promoting the high-quality development of ‘BRICS Plus’ cooperation,” the statement said.
- Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs Randhir Jaiswal said on Tuesday at a weekly press briefing that the meeting scheduled for May 14-15 will be chaired by

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. Visiting Foreign Ministers and heads of delegations from member and partner countries, including Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, will also call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

- “The discussions will focus on pressing global and regional issues of mutual concern among member states of BRICS,” Mr. Jaiswal said, adding that the second day would see discussions on reviewing the group’s evolution and future direction, and reforms of global governance and the multilateral system.
- The gathering this week takes place against the backdrop of the crisis in West Asia and divisions within the grouping, leading to doubts over whether the meeting will yield a joint statement. A meeting in New Delhi last month of Deputy Foreign Ministers and Special Envoys of the 11-nation BRICS grouping ended without a joint statement, as delegates from the United Arab Emirates and Iran sparred over the war in West Asia.

❖ **IMD unveils ‘block-level’ monsoon forecast model**

- It has been a long-standing aim of IMD to provide hyper local forecasts to help farmers time their sowing precisely; however, the system might face a formidable test this year in light of El Nino
- Ahead of the monsoon, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday unveiled a new forecast system that will, for the first time, generate “block-level” forecasts of the season’s arrival over 15 States. The system comprises about half of India’s roughly 7,200-odd blocks.
- Historically, such estimates are available, at best, over States or at the level of districts. For instance, it is known that the monsoon arrives in Mumbai around June 10 and in Delhi, around June 29. However, the inherent variation of the monsoon is such that even within a district, several blocks and villages remain rainless despite the monsoon having officially “arrived” in the district.
- It has been a long-standing aim of the IMD to provide hyper-local forecasts to address this shortcoming to enable farmers to time their sowing precisely. At the new system’s core are two forecasting models whose predictions are “blended” to sharpen accuracy. From the date of the monsoon’s onset in Kerala, it can use AI-based analysis, the IMD’s trove of nearly a century of detailed meteorological data and global weather models, to give the monsoon’s itinerary with unprecedented granularity, Science Minister Jitendra Singh said at a press briefing.

Forecasts for 4 weeks

- This was a system specifically developed at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, whose existing advisory system is built to deliver forecasts in a roughly weekly format. The blending framework, developed by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, a research institute of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, is designed to feed directly into the Ministry’s pipeline and issue probabilistic forecasts for four weeks.
- Currently, this system can be used to provide forecasts to 3,196 blocks across 15 States and one Union Territory. Two trial runs have already been completed successfully, according to a press statement. “These States are part of the monsoon core zone, which

are the regions that are largely rainfed and are most sensitive to southwest monsoon dynamics,” M. Ravichandran, Secretary to the Ministry, said at a press briefing. “Of course, going ahead we aim to extend this all over India but that requires more observational data.”

- Mr. Ravichandran told The Hindu that the system would face a formidable test this year given that the IMD and global models were expecting “below normal” rainfall in light of a developing El Nino — frequently causing weak monsoon rain in India — from July.
- On Tuesday, the IMD launched a monsoon forecast model specifically for Uttar Pradesh with a 1-km resolution (indicative of granularity) that is valid for 10 days. This, Mr. Singh said, was because of a very extensive coverage of automatic weather stations in the State that allowed a weather model called Mithuna (which works at a 12.5-km resolution) to be “downscaled” to 1 km.
- “We are encouraging other States to share their data with us that will allow their forecasts to be generated with higher resolution,” Mr. Ravichandran added.

❖ **Fresh push for implementation of PM SHRI in Bengal, Kerala, and T.N.**

- The Union Ministry of Education has issued a fresh reminder regarding the pending implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) scheme to West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu after Assembly elections concluded in the three States.
- Launched in September 2022, this five-year initiative aims to transform over 14,500 schools into “exemplar institutions” that lead the way in implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Union School Education Secretary Sanjay Kumar stated in his letter to the States, emphasising that 34 States and Union Territories have already moved forward with the scheme.
- Despite the scheme running well into its third year, West Bengal is yet to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The Centre has sent 11 letters to West Bengal, including three letters in 2022, another three in 2023, three in 2024 and two letters in 2025 pushing for implementation of PM SHRI.
- “The delay in signing the MoU has resulted in postponement of selection and development of PM SHRI schools in the State, affecting the intended benefits to students and consequent strengthening of the education system at large. It may be noted that only a limited time is left for the scheme to complete its five-year duration,” the Ministry of Education’s letter stated.
- The letter to Kerala states that as of November 12, 2025, the Kerala government has kept the MoU in abeyance. The State previously moved to constitute a committee to examine specific implementation concerns.
- “The communication has led to undue delay in the selection of State government schools... I hope that the matter has been resolved now, as only a limited time is left for the scheme to complete its duration,” Mr. Kumar’s letter to the Kerala government stated. In the letter addressed to Tamil Nadu, Mr. Kumar said the State had previously provided an undertaking to introduce the PM SHRI scheme for the 2024-25 academic session. However, the process remains incomplete despite 12 official requests from the Centre.

❖ **‘India-Oman FTA on track for June 1 start even as deal with Chile hit hurdles’**

- The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) will “probably” be implemented on June 1, 2026, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday, following a meeting with the negotiating team from Oman.
- He added that the India-Chile Free Trade Agreement negotiations have hit some hurdles due to the difference in the sizes of the economies involved.
- “I had a very good meeting with the Oman team today and most probably the Oman FTA will come into effect from June 1, 2026,” Mr. Goyal told reporters on Tuesday on the sidelines of the CII Annual Business Summit 2026.

‘Productive meeting’

- Earlier in the day, he posted on social media that he had held a “productive” meeting with Pankaj Khimji, Adviser for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Oman.
- “Discussions focused on strengthening India-Oman economic cooperation, enhancing connectivity & logistics linkages, facilitating trade flows, and exploring new avenues for bilateral partnership under the India-Oman CEPA framework,” Mr. Goyal had posted. The India-Oman CEPA was signed on December 18, 2025.
- However, in contrast, the Commerce Minister indicated that talks with Chile were running into some trouble.
- “With regard to Chile, I had a very good meeting with the foreign minister,” Mr. Goyal said.

‘Some challenges’

- “There are some challenges, given the very different sizes of the economies and different scales of opportunities that both countries offer to each other.”
- While he said that the two sides were trying to bridge that gap through “innovative solutions”, he also did specify certain things that Chile could offer India to encourage it.
- “If we get a good deal on critical minerals and other important concessions, then maybe there is a very good possibility that we should be able to finalise an FTA with Chile too,” Mr. Goyal said.

❖ **‘Power, Finance ministries have accepted policy for linking fiscal incentives with RE adoption’**

- Seeking to encourage States to sign power purchase agreements (PPAs), renewable energy adoption would be linked to fiscal incentive for States, Prahlad Joshi, Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) said at the Confederation of Indian Industry’s Annual Business Summit 2026.
- “Renewable energy adoption is being linked with the fiscal incentives for the States,” he said, adding, “The new policy which has been accepted by [Union] finance and power ministries both. Broadly, this is encouraging States to [sign] more PPAs.”
- Mr. Joshi also mentioned that the government was working “very seriously” on addressing present issues relating to power generation from renewable sources.

- “This energy is affordable, reliable and that is why we are working it out. Some of the constraints we are facing today, with respect to grid and transmission, we are working on that too.”
- The Union MNRE Minister also said that while global investments in the renewable space had declined 7%, India had observed “strong investment flows” in the sector.

Bullion burden

The decision comes soon after Prime Minister Modi’s austerity appeal to the public to reduce gold purchases

| Tax | Earlier | Now |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| Basic customs duty | 5% | 10% |
| Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess | 1% | 5% |
| Integrated Goods and Services Tax* | 3% | 3% |
| Total | ~9.2% | ~18.4% |



Note: IGST is applicable on the assessable value of the gold, which includes the Cost, Insurance, and Freight (CIF) value and the basic customs duty

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy

❖ **Government doubles duty on imports of gold, silver**

- Government doubles duty on imports of gold, silver
- The Centre has doubled the effective tax paid on the import of gold and silver to a total of 18.4% from the previous 9.2%. The changes, which came into effect on Wednesday, were made through two separate notifications issued late on Tuesday night.
- According to sources in the government, the decision was taken against the backdrop of the impact of the West Asia crisis on India's current account deficit (CAD). The CAD is the margin by which a country's total imports of goods, services, and transfers exceeds its exports.
- However, industry players and experts, said this "retrograde" and "blunt" decision is not likely to impact Indians' demand for gold.
- It will not only encourage a shift to smuggling, since the Indian appetite for gold is largely cultural, but will also have other negative effects on employment, they said.
- The Ministry of Finance has not yet released an official statement on the duty hikes or its justifications.
- Previously, the basic customs duty on gold and silver stood at 5%, with a 1% Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC), and a 3% Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) rate on the total assessable value of the imports, which includes the cost, insurance, and freight price, and the applicable basic customs duties, taking the effective import tax to about 9.2%. Now, the customs duty has been hiked to 10%, and the AIDC has become 5%, taking the effective tax rate, including the IGST, to about 18.4%.
- The decision comes soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's exhortations to the public to reduce gold purchases for at least a year, among other actions, to help protect India's foreign exchange reserves and the rupee exchange rate.

'Prudent management'

- "The current geopolitical situation has created significant volatility in global crude oil markets and international shipping routes," a government source explained. "As a large importer of crude oil, India remains vulnerable to elevated energy prices and supply-side disruptions, which can increase the import bill, exert pressure on inflation, and the CAD."
- "In such circumstances, prudent management of the country's external sector becomes essential," they added.
- They further said that the government was prioritising India's foreign exchange resources towards essential imports such as crude oil, fertilizers, industrial raw materials, defence requirements, critical technologies, and capital goods. "In contrast, precious metals, while culturally and financially significant, are predominantly consumption and investment driven in nature," they said. "Such imports involve substantial outflow of foreign exchange."

❖ State government unveils its sixth promise 'Bhu Guarantee'

- It includes a reduction in the percentage of the guidance value to be paid for conversion from B-Khata to A-Khata
- Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Development in-charge D.K. Shivakumar unveiled the “sixth guarantee” — Bhu Guarantee — of the Congress government in Karnataka.
- The major announcements made on May 13 included a reduction in the percentage of the guidance value that needs to be paid as a fee for conversion from B-Khata to A-Khata, regularisation of “illegal” buildings constructed on BDA lands before 2008, and notification of setback relaxations.
- However, the guarantee repackages existing schemes with discounts on the fees, especially for those that did not meet the desired outcome. Incidentally, it comes close on the heels of discussions on holding the long-pending civic elections in Bengaluru this year.
- Under the scheme for conversion of B-Khata into A-Khata within the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) limits, which was introduced in November 2025, the government has now announced a discount of nearly 60%. This means citizens will now have to pay only 2% of the guidance value of the particular area.
- The discounted rate will be available from May 16 for a period of 100 days, after which citizens will once again have to pay a 5% guidance value fee for conversion.
- When the scheme was first introduced, Mr. Shivakumar had stated that 5% of the guidance value of the area would be collected as a fee and used for the development of the respective locality. However, in the last five months, a meagre 7,000 applications have been received, accounting for just 1% of the total estimated properties.
- According to official data, Bengaluru has around 23 lakh properties, of which 16 lakh are A-Khata properties and seven lakh are B-Khata properties.
- The primary reason for the poor response from beneficiaries is the high conversion cost, as 5% of the guidance value often translates into fees running into lakhs of rupees.

Regularisation scheme

- In addition, for properties constructed on Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) land before 2008, the government plans to reduce the regularisation cost by 50%. For instance, if a property owner earlier had to pay 5% of the guidance value for regularisation, they can now pay just 2.5% and get the property regularised. Bengaluru has early one lakh such properties.
- “In 2020, the BJP government introduced a law called ‘38D’. Only 570 people had submitted applications under the scheme. The law provided for payment of charges based on the guidance value—10% for plots measuring 200 to 600 sq ft, 25% for 600 to 900 sq ft, 40% for 1,200 to 2,400 sq ft, and 50% for 2,400 to 4,000 sq ft,” Mr. Shivakumar said.
- At the time, applicants were given six months to apply. However, hardly anyone came forward to pay the fee. According to Mr. Shivakumar, the charges were considered too high and the scheme failed to benefit people.
- “Now, applicants will be given a total of three months from June 15 to submit applications. A One-Time Settlement (OTS) scheme will also be implemented. The first

100 days will be provided for the submission of applications, the next 100 days for the scrutiny of applications, and thereafter time will be given for payment. The scheme will be concluded within a one-year timeframe, that is, by June 2027,” he said.

- “If people fail to make use of the benefits under this scheme, legal action will have to be initiated. Already, BDA has taken possession of properties worth ₹2,000 crore,” he warned.

Setback relaxation

- Earlier this year, the Urban Development Department (UDD) had issued a draft notification proposing amendments to the Town Planning Act. The draft notification allowed regularisation of setback violations of up to 15%. Confirming the notification, Mr. Shivakumar said that the government would permit the 15% relaxation.
- Defending the move, Mr. Shivakumar said that the law provides for relaxation of up to 50%, but the government has limited it to only 15%.

❖ Protection to religion not just for ‘essential practices’, says Centre

- The Constitution presumes that every religious practice is protected unless it violates public order, morality, and health, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Wednesday.
- Appearing before a nine-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant in the Sabarimala review hearing, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the protection afforded to religion was not restricted to “essential religious practices” alone, but had a wider ambit.
- Mr. Mehta, who opened the rejoinder in the constitutional reference hearing, said the burden was on the challenger to show that a religious practice breached public order, morality, and health.
- He further submitted that fundamental rights in the Constitution have been interpreted expansively by the court in the past. Only Article 25 (right to religion and freedom of conscience) and Article 26 (freedom of denominations or any section thereof to manage their own religious affairs) were given restrictive meanings by the court. “Articles 25 and 26 were the only fundamental rights the court gave restricted meanings, saying the rights would be protected to the extent of ‘essential religious practices’ only,” Mr. Mehta submitted.
- He pointed out that the phrase ‘essential religious practices’ is absent in the text of the Constitution, arguing that it was sheer judicial creativity at work.

Interconnected rights

- Mr. Mehta added that Articles 25 and 26 are interconnected, not isolated silos, submitting that an individual’s freedom of conscience and the right of a denomination to manage its own affairs are interconnected. Article 26 is only a manifestation of the individual right in a collective form, he said.
- “Fundamental rights are not islands,” he said.
- The full day hearing also saw the Supreme Court observe that people need not go to a temple to be religious. A small lamp lit in a hut was an equally poignant expression of faith, Chief Justice Kant said.

- Justice B.V. Nagarathna added Hinduism was a way of life, and did not depend on ritualistic practices or frequent visits to temples.
- Legal scholar and former director of the National Judicial Academy, Mohan Gopal, submitted that what Justice Nagarathna referred to was called ‘auto-theism’ or the individual freedom of conscience to explore one’s own inner conscience.

❖ **Nicobarese oppose proposal for three wildlife sanctuaries**

- Even as the Calcutta High Court is set to hear challenges to the Centre’s Great Nicobar Island (GNI) project over allegations that the Forest Rights Act was violated while obtaining locals’ consent for it, the tribal council in Nicobar has now flagged further violations of the law in the government’s notification of three wildlife sanctuaries in the Little Nicobar, Menchal, and Meroe islands.
- While acknowledging that its ₹92,000-crore development project to build an international container transshipment port, an airport, and a greenfield tourist township on the Great Nicobar Island would impact coral colonies, and nesting habitats of the leatherback turtle and the megapode, the Union government, in October 2022, notified the three sanctuaries to conserve these species, in parts of the Little Nicobar Island, Meroe Island and Menchal Island – all north of GNI.

Community in the dark

- However, since August 2022, the Tribal Council of Little and Great Nicobar has been writing to the Union government and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&NI) administration, flagging that the process to notify these sanctuaries had been initiated without giving notice to members of their community who have lived on and maintained these islands for generations.
- In a letter to the Assistant Conservator of Forests of the Nicobar Forest Division, the tribal council on April 23 this year, reiterated that the three sanctuaries on Little Nicobar Island and the Meroe and Menchal islands were announced without any consultation with the residents and traditional owners and caretakers of the islands. The council noted that of these three sites, Meroe and Menchal islands are of “high cultural and spiritual significance” to the Nicobarese; they believe the sites are home to the spirits of their ancestors.
- The council was responding to a notice for a meeting of the committee constituted to determine the eco-sensitive zone around these three sanctuaries — the Leatherback Turtle Sanctuary in parts of LNI, the Megapode Sanctuary in all of Menchal Island, and the Coral Sanctuary on the entire Meroe Island. In the letter, the council said its chairman was not consulted before the committee was formed — he was merely informed that he was part of the committee, that too a month later.

‘Scrap decision’

- The council said the notification for these sanctuaries should be revoked and the committee on eco-sensitive zones be dissolved, as they were against the wishes of the community. The sanctuaries would encroach upon their pre-existing rights on these lands, which they have been exercising to hold ritual hunts, maintain plantations, worship their ancestors, and conserve wildlife species around them, it said.

- In response to the concerns raised by the tribal council, the Nicobar administration, in May 2025, issued a “clarification” noting that the declaration of the three sanctuaries would not affect the “hunting rights conferred on the Scheduled Tribes of the Nicobar Islands”.

Appeal to Minister

- Meanwhile, on Wednesday, Congress leader and former Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh wrote to Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram, asserting that consent procedures under the Forest Rights Act were violated in the case of the GNI project.
- He noted that the consent should have been obtained from the Tribal Council and not the Gram Sabhas, and also questioned how the government-controlled Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti could grant consent for the project on behalf of the Shompen, a particularly vulnerable tribal group. Mr. Ramesh asked Mr. Oram to direct the A&NI administration to withdraw the clearances issued under the law.

❖ PCOS gets a new name; change seeks to aid faster diagnosis and treatment

- The Endocrine Society, a global organisation of scientists and physicians devoted to hormone-related conditions, has decided to rename Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) as Polyendocrine Metabolic Ovarian Syndrome (PMOS).
- What’s in a name, you might ask. But there is good reason why this name change is important. In an article published in *The Lancet*, the authors Helena J. Teede et al, argue that the term PCOS is inaccurate as it refers to cysts in the ovaries and, if diagnosis is based on this, contributes to delays in diagnosis, treatment, and stigma. Instead, they explain that “accuracy is improved by omitting cysts and by capturing endocrine, metabolic, and ovarian dysfunction”. A “global implementation strategy, including a transition period, education, and alignment with health systems and disease classification” is reportedly under way.
- Jaishree Gajaraj, senior obstetrician-gynaecologist based in Chennai, says this is a welcome move that will definitely help improve the perception of this condition, and will help clinical practice as well. “Unfortunately even doctors seem to think cysts in the ovary alone is PCOS, and there is a lot of erroneous self-diagnosis as well these days,” she said.
- PCOS is estimated to affect 170 million women during their reproductive years alone. It is diagnosed, based on women over 20 meeting at least two of the following International Guideline criteria: irregular or absent ovulation (oligo-anovulation), meaning periods that are infrequent, too long between cycles, or absent; high male hormone levels (hyperandrogenism), with either visible signs such as excess hair growth, acne, or hair loss; or blood tests; and polycystic ovaries detected as small follicles, on ultrasound scans or high Anti Müllerian Hormone levels in the blood.
- However, as the paper says: “The broad clinical features of the condition are not captured in its current name, as although arrested follicular development is common, ovarian cysts are not increased. These factors delay diagnosis — with up to 70% of the affected individuals remaining undiagnosed.

- The authors write that PCOS has long been “primarily perceived as a gynaecological or ovarian disorder”. The reproductive focus of the name can reinforce stigma, particularly in sociocultural contexts where fertility carries high value.
- However, mounting research, evidence synthesis, and International Guidelines have shown that PCOS is underpinned by “endocrine disturbances in insulin, androgens, and neuroendocrine and ovarian hormones.” Further, they emphasise that the multi-pronged features that underline the condition must be folded in for a diagnosis. They can be metabolic, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and abnormal levels of fats in the blood, they could also be reproductive — causing irregular menstrual cycles, infertility, pregnancy complications, and endometrial cancer. They can also manifest as psychological features.

❖ **Cabinet approves ₹37,500 cr. package to boost coal gasification**

- Providing a fillip to India’s pursuit of coal gasification, the Union Cabinet Wednesday approved a ₹37,500-crore package to boost the sustainable alternate mining method.
- The package seeking to promote surface coal gasification entails conversion of coal into syngas or synthetic gas, which could also be further used to produce downstream products like urea – about one-fifth of whose requirement is met through imports.
- “India’s import bill for key substitutable products LNG, urea, ammonium nitrate, ammonia, coking coal, methanol, DME and others stood at approximately ₹2.77 lakh crore in FY2025, a vulnerability further exposed by the ongoing geopolitical situation in West Asia,” according to a Cabinet announcement.
- With the scheme, India is targeting gasification of approximately 75 million tonnes of coal and lignite. This would contribute to the 100 MT target set for 2030. Further seeking to provide long-term certainty for investment in this sector, the government also extended the coal linkage tenure up to 30 years within an accompanying component of the scheme entailing production of syngas leading to coal gasification.
- More importantly though, the scheme would accord a financial incentive of up to one-fifth of the cost of plant and machinery.
- In terms of project size, the scheme caps a financial incentive of ₹5,000 crore for a single project, and for any single product-centred project, except that for SNG and urea, it extends up to ₹9,000 crore.
- A single entity would be able to avail a maximum of ₹12,000 crore across all project categorisations.

❖ First-of-its-kind digital drug surveillance system launched

Context: One digital platform will automatically block the sale of medicines found to be Not of Standard Quality and the other will track dispensing of drugs covered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.

- Karnataka has rolled out, what is being described as, the country's first technology-driven surveillance system to monitor the pharmaceutical market, enabling real-time detection of substandard medicines and tighter regulation of narcotic and psychotropic drugs.
- Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, who launched the new digital platforms in Bengaluru on Thursday, said the initiative would strengthen drug quality control, improve transparency in the supply chain and protect patients.
- The State Food Safety and Drug Administration (FDA) has introduced two separate digital systems — one to automatically block the sale of medicines found to be Not of Standard Quality (NSQ) and another to track dispensing of drugs covered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.
- Mr. Rao said ensuring the quality of medicines in the market was a critical responsibility, but tracing substandard drugs after they entered circulation had long been a challenge.
- “When medicines of poor quality enter the supply chain, it is difficult to identify and stop their movement immediately. About a year ago, I had written to the Union Minister requesting a national framework. As that has not materialised, Karnataka has taken the initiative and introduced this system,” he said.

Real-time lock

- According to the department, around 450 drug samples on average are found every year to be NSQ, meaning they fail to meet prescribed legal and quality standards.
- Such medicines cannot be sold and must be recalled from manufacturers, wholesalers and stockists. In 2025-26, medicines worth around ₹1.85 crore were recalled after being identified as substandard.
- Under the new portal, once a drug batch is declared NSQ, it will be uploaded into the system and immediately locked, preventing any further sale or transaction.
- Alerts will be sent instantly to wholesalers and distributors across the State. The Minister said nearly 15,000 wholesalers have already been registered on the platform.

Data on stock

- The portal will also provide real-time data on stock availability, stock-in-hand, and quantities returned to suppliers, helping regulators track compliance and speed up recalls. The move would significantly reduce the risk of poor-quality medicines reaching patients, he said

Tighter monitoring

- The second portal focuses on medicines regulated under the NDPS Act, which are vulnerable to misuse and diversion.
- Retailers dispensing such medicines will now be required to mandatorily upload and verify patient details, doctor details and prescription information before sale.

- Mr. Rao said the system would help identify unusual patterns such as repeated prescriptions issued by the same doctor or suspicious purchases by the same person.
- The mechanism was intended to ensure responsible dispensing, prevent misuse of controlled medicines and strengthen accountability at the retail level.
- The two initiatives mark a shift towards digital and data-driven regulation in the pharmaceutical sector, where authorities can act faster against unsafe medicines while also checking abuse of prescription drugs.
- Food Safety and Drug Administration Commissioner Srinivas said Karnataka's model could become a template for wider adoption.

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy

❖ India backs two-state solution for Palestine issue, says Jaishankar at BRICS meeting

Context: Highlighting India's traditional approach to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday presented the "National Statement" at the BRICS ministerial, reiterating India's call for a "two-state solution" to the issue and calling for an end to "risks to maritime traffic, and disruptions to energy infrastructure" in the Gulf region.

- Supporting the need for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve conflicts in the region and in North Africa, Mr. Jaishankar sought "coordinated diplomatic efforts" to deal with the situations in Lebanon, Syria, Sudan and also in Libya.
- The day-long BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting witnessed several speeches, including one by Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi who said that Iran will defend its sovereignty while "advancing diplomacy", adding that the U.S.-Israel attack against Iran will not have a "military solution".
- "The wider region also gives rise to serious concern. The conflict in Gaza has grave humanitarian implications. A sustained ceasefire, humanitarian access, and a credible pathway towards a durable and peaceful resolution remain essential," Mr. Jaishankar said. "India supports a two-state solution where the Palestine issue is concerned." Mr. Jaishankar referred to the impact of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran and highlighted the risks that the conflict has posed to shipping and energy infrastructure.
- Referring indirectly to the recent actions by the U.S. against multiple members of the United Nations, Mr. Jaishankar drew attention to the "increasing" tendency towards "unilateral coercive measures and sanctions", terming them "inconsistent with international law".
- Earlier, Mr. Jaishankar welcomed the dignitaries that included Mr. Araghchi who made an emphatic call to resist the U.S. Referring to U.S. military and trade practices, Mr. Araghchi said the international community is facing "variations" of the "same repugnant coercion".
- At the end of the engagements, visiting dignitaries Mr. Araghchi, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Brazil's Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

❖ Free and fair elections are dependent on a truly independent poll body: SC

Context: Top court questions neutrality of Prime Minister-led selection panel for Election Commissioners, highlights absence of even 'one absolutely neutral person'; Attorney-General says the court cannot become a 'second chamber of Parliament'; Bench suggests referring petitions to Constitution Bench.

- The Supreme Court nudged the Union government to address concerns over its dominant role in the appointment of Chief Election Commissioners and Election Commissioners, observing that free and fair elections depend on a truly independent Election Commission.
- The court highlighted the absence of even "one absolutely neutral person" on the Prime Minister-chaired selection committee. It questioned the presence of a Cabinet Minister on the panel, observing that such a Minister could not be expected to defy the Prime

Minister. The court also asked whether the presence of the Leader of the Opposition on the committee was merely “ornamental” as appointments could be made without a unanimous vote.

- The court was hearing a batch of petitions challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023.
- The petitioners contended that the Act “defeated” a Constitution Bench judgment in the Anoop Baranwal versus Union of India case, which had constituted a selection panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India. The 2023 Act, passed within months of the judgment, replaced the Chief Justice with a Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.

‘Judicial restraint’

- Describing the Anoop Baranwal judgment as a “classic example of judicial restraint and statesmanship”, the court indicated that the 2023 Act handed the power to the Executive to “call the shots” in the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).
- “Judgments of this court from 1950 are eloquent on the point that the Executive cannot call the shots as far as elections are concerned... Free fair elections are an important part of the Basic Structure. It can only be accomplished by having an independent Election Commission of India. The Election Commission can only be independent if it has independent Commissioners,” Justice Dipankar Datta, heading a Division Bench, told Attorney-General R. Venkataramani, appearing for the Union government.
- Mr. Venkataramani said one cannot make a “hugely hypothetical assumption” that the Act would result only in subservient CECs and ECs unless there was an actual lapse on the ground.
- “Unless you taste the pudding, how can you say the pudding is bad,” Mr. Venkataramani asked.
- Justice Datta replied that it was not enough for the Election Commission to be independent, and that the poll body should also appear to be independent.
- The judge asked the top law officer which law he thought occupied the “pride of place” immediately after the Constitution.
- “After the Constitution, which law occupies the prime place? There are thousands of legislations, which one would you place right next to the Constitution... I would say, the election laws. Would I be wrong? Without democracy, there is nothing,” Justice Datta said.

A-G’s argument

- Mr. Venkataramani argued that the Supreme Court could not become a “second chamber of Parliament”. The petitioners, he said, cannot expect Parliament to enact laws blindly in consonance with Supreme Court judgments.
- “Can somebody come to the court and say Parliament disregarded your judgment when it was bound entirely to the word of the court? The court can declare the law while examining the legality of a legislation or a state action. But the court cannot decide

what a law should look like and expect Parliament to follow suit by enacting a law faithfully mirroring the court's vision," the Attorney-General submitted.

- Mr. Venkataramani said the court did not declare any law under Article 141 in the Anoop Baranwal judgment. It had merely put in place a stop-gap arrangement for the CEC and EC appointments until Parliament enacted a law under Article 324(2).
- Towards the end of the hearing, the Bench suggested referring the petitions to a Constitution Bench. The petitioners strongly opposed the move, arguing that the pleas involved a "conventional" challenge to the 2023 Act and not a "substantial question of law" warranting reference to a larger Bench under Article 145(3).

❖ WPI more than doubles to 8.3% in April

Context: India's WPI inflation rises to its highest level in 3.5 years on the impact of the West Asia crisis on prices in India; experts say that this jump in wholesale prices could soon be passed on to consumers, and could also start hurting the profitability of companies if it is not passed on.

- In the first sign of the impact of the West Asia crisis on prices in India, wholesale inflation in India jumped to 8.3% in April 2026, its highest level in 3.5 years, driven by the sharp rise in crude oil and natural gas prices. Inflation in this category stood at 67.2% in April.
- Data on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Thursday showed that the last time wholesale inflation in India was higher than this was in October 2022. It had stood at 3.9% in March 2026.
- Notably, food inflation at the wholesale level remained relatively low, at 2% in April 2026, compared with 1.9% a month earlier. "The first sign of the impact of war on the Indian economy has been seen in the WPI inflation number for April which came at 8.3%," Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda said.
- "This is a direct result of the global developments which have manifested on the oil front."
- Shashwat Singh, Fundamental Analyst at Bajaj Broking too said that the rise in wholesale inflation was largely driven by higher crude oil prices, fuel and power costs, imported inflation, and elevated input prices amid the ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
- Within the index, inflation in the crude oil and natural gas sectors stood at a 46-month high of 67.2% in April 2026, coming on the back of a 39-month high in March.
- While the higher international prices of both products are a driving factor for this, there is also a significant base effect pushing the inflation numbers up. That is, the sector witnessed deflation of 7.6% and 15.5% in March and April of last year.

Fuel inflation

- The fuel and power category, too, saw inflation rise to 24.7% in April 2026, the highest since October 2022. This was driven by inflation in the mineral oils category, which rose to 39.5% in April 2026.

- Mr. Singh pointed out that this elevated wholesale inflation could soon pass on to the retail level and directly affect consumers. He added that it could also hurt the profitability of companies.
- “Higher logistics, freight, and commodity prices are now increasingly getting reflected in wholesale inflation, which could eventually pass through to consumer inflation as well,” Mr. Singh said.
- “The spike also suggests margin pressure for manufacturing and industrial companies if cost increases cannot be fully passed on to consumers.”

❖ India back on EU approved list of aquaculture exporters

Context: In a major boost for India’s seafood industry, the country has been re-included in the list of nations that can export aquaculture products to the EU from September 2026, as it has proven its compliance with EU restrictions related to use of antimicrobials in animals used for food.

- In October 2024, the EU omitted India from the list of countries allowed to export aquaculture products to the EU from September 2026, raising concerns in the domestic industry, as the EU is a major export destination for Indian seafood. Aquaculture covers finfish, including eels, and products of finfish (such as roes and caviar), and crustaceans.
- “Under EU rules, the use of antimicrobials in livestock for growth or yield purposes is not allowed, nor can animals be treated with antimicrobials reserved for human infections,” the European Commission said in its statement. “The countries on the list have proven their compliance with the EU restrictions on antimicrobial use in food-producing animals.”
- It added that the list will be formally adopted “in the coming days”, with the rules on imports applying from September 3, 2026.
- The development builds on the fact that in September 2025, the EU added 102 new Indian fisheries to its list of approved establishments that can export to EU member countries.

❖ Govt. bans sugar exports till Sept. 30; U.S., EU excluded

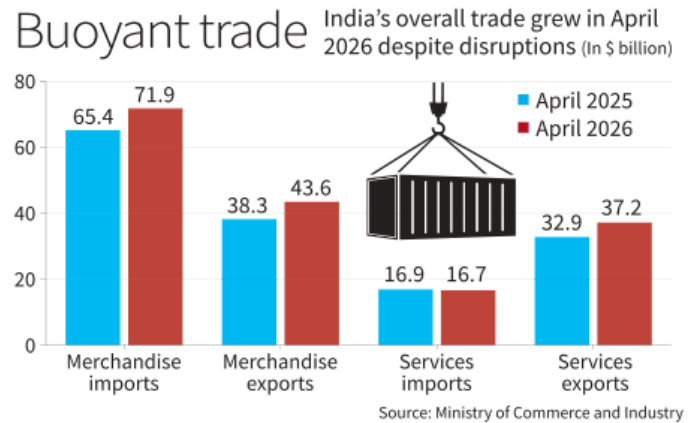
Context: The Department of Commerce issued a notification moving sugar from 'restricted' to 'prohibited' list of items for exports.

- Export of raw, white and refined sugar is banned till September 30, 2026.
- The ban, however, does not apply to exports to the United States and the European Union under the CXL and TRQ quota, and exports under the advance authorisation scheme.
- It will also not apply to government-to-government exports. If the shipping bill has been raised or the consignment loading has commenced or handed over to the Customs, the exports will be permitted, according to the notification.
- The Indian Sugar and Bio-energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) had said in February this year — almost three months after the commencement of the sugarcane crushing season — that sugar production was expected to be 324 lakh tonnes in the 2025-2026 sugar season and that 31 lakh tonnes would be diverted for ethanol.
- The net sugar production was expected to be still 30 lakh tonnes more than last sugar season at 293 lakh tonnes.
- The Association said on Thursday that exports were permitted by the Government last November based on the then prevailing production estimates and an encouraging outlook for the sugar season.
- However, as the season progressed, sugar production in certain key states, particularly Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, was impacted resulting in a moderation of overall actual production.

❖ India's goods exports climb to \$43.6 billion

- Despite significant headwinds to trade due to the West Asia crisis, the value of India's merchandise exports grew nearly 14% in April 2026 to \$43.6 billion, official data released showed.
- This performance was due in part to the overall rise in prices as well as to the efforts by Indian exporters to diversify their markets, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Friday. The overall trade deficit, counting merchandise and services, fell 30% in April 2026 to \$7.8 billion.
- "The positive growth in value can have some contribution from prices because prices of many things are going up," Mr. Agrawal said at a press briefing. "It is also to the credit of our industry, which has been able to maintain the supply chains and look at new markets and diversify their exports."

India's goods exports climb to \$43.6 billion



- He added that growth in exports in April has come from multiple countries where such high growth rates have not been seen in the past, such as Tanzania.
- Merchandise exports to Tanzania grew 158% in April 2026 to \$1.2 billion, while exports to several other historically smaller export destinations countries such as Sri Lanka (215%), Singapore (179%), Bangladesh (64%), and Vietnam (53%), also saw relatively strong growth.
- The West Asia crisis did have an impact on India's exports to the region, however. "Exports to West Asia dived in March and declined in April as well, but now the decline is only 28%," Mr. Agrawal noted. "Our export to West Asia has been \$4.16 billion as compared to \$5.78 billion in April 2025." "On imports from West Asia, we see there has been a significant fall in merchandise imports, which has reduced from \$15.3 billion in April last year to \$10.5 billion, down 31.6%, for reasons that are well known," he added.
- The data shows that exports to the UAE, one of India's biggest export destinations, fell 36.4% in April 2026 to about \$2.2 billion. Notably, India's exports to the U.S. also grew during this period, albeit by a relatively smaller 1.1% to about \$8.5 billion in April 2026.

❖ 'Nanna e-Khata, Nanna hakku' campaign to begin at 52 places today

- The initiative is aimed at promoting both issuance of e-Khatas and the conversion of B-Khata to A-Khata, which Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar has been championing
- The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) will operationalise e-Khata open houses under the title "Nanna e-Khata, Nanna Hakku" at 52 different locations across the city, covering all five city corporations.

- The open houses will function every Saturday, where people can get their khata-related works done. The initiative is aimed at promoting both issuance of e-Khatas and the conversion of B-Khata to A-Khata, which Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar has been championing.
- The details of the locations where the open houses will be set up can be obtained from the GBA website. The two major services that will be extended at the venues include applying for and obtaining e-Khata, and B to A Khata conversion. At every location, at least 100 people can access the services every Saturday.
- Earlier this week, Mr. Shivakumar announced a 60% discount on the B to A khata conversion fee. Originally, the government had fixed the conversion cost at 5% of the guidance value of the area where the plot is located.
- However, among the 7 lakh B-Khata properties in the city, a meagre 7,000 applications were received and processed. Against the backdrop of poor public response, the GBA has now rolled out a 100-day window, starting Saturday, during which the conversion cost will be 2% of the guidance value of the area where the plot is located.
- As per a government order dated May 14, the concession will apply only to applications for conversion of B-Khata to A-Khata submitted during the 100-day window.
- It will also benefit applicants who had already applied for conversion but are yet to pay the required amount. Such applicants can avail the reduced 2% rate if payment is completed on or before August 23. For these pending cases where payments are pending, but applications are approved, revised demand notices will be generated through the online system.

Past payments in limbo

- However, the order does not clarify whether applicants who have already paid the earlier 5% fee will receive any refund or adjustment following the temporary reduction to 2%.
- Moreover, the concession will not apply to fresh A-Khata issuance under single-site approvals. In such cases, the existing requirement of paying 5% of the property's guideline value will continue as per prevailing norms, the order said.

❖ After 50 years, State pushes to bring Lakkundi artefacts home

- Nearly 50 years after a rare collection of artefacts from Karnataka's heritage town of Lakkundi was handed over to the Centre, Minister for Tourism H.K. Patil has initiated efforts to bring them back from the National Museum in New Delhi.
- The artefacts were formally handed over in October 1976 by D.K. Hebboor and T.K. Nayak to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, following which they were placed under the National Museum's protected custody.
- Mr. Patil said he has begun the process of seeking the return of more than 150 artefacts currently showcased at the National Museum in New Delhi. The move gathered momentum after his recent visit to the National Museum, where he reviewed the collection and held discussions with museum authorities on its preservation, documentation and the possibility of returning it for public exhibition in Karnataka, with Lakkundi itself emerging as the proposed final destination.

- The collection includes ancient weapons, gold and silver coins, jewellery, inscriptions and manuscripts linked to the historic town in Gadag district.
- Mr. Patil said the government is currently exploring both legal and administrative routes to secure their return. The process is expected to involve consultations with the Union Ministry of Culture, the National Museum administration and the Archaeological Survey of India.
- The first stage will involve establishing formal institutional dialogue with the Centre to determine the legal status of the artefacts, verify ownership records and examine archival documents related to their transfer nearly five decades ago. The exercise will also require a review of provisions under antiquities and heritage conservation laws that govern the custody and relocation of protected objects.

❖ Many parts of State to receive rainfall over the next few days

- Many parts of Karnataka are expected to receive rainfall over the next couple of days.
- According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) a well-marked low-pressure area over southwest and adjoining west central Bay of Bengal persists over the same region and the associated cyclonic circulation extends upto 5.8 km above mean sea level tilting southwestwards with height.
- IMD Scientists C.S. Patil said that due to these factors there will be rainfall across the State.
- The forecast said that there will be heavy rain and thundershowers with gusty wind (40 to 50 kmph) at one or two places over Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Shivamogga, Mysuru, Chamarajanagar districts.
- Light to moderate rain/thundershowers with gusty wind (40 to 50 kmph) is likely to occur at a few places over Ballari, Vijayanagara, Davangere, Chitradurga, Tumakuru, Mandya, Bengaluru South, Bengaluru Rural, Bengaluru Urban, Chickballapur and Kolar districts.
- In north interior Karnataka, there would be light to moderate rain and thundershowers with gusty wind (40 to 50 kmph) at one or two places over Raichur, Yadgir, Vijayapura, Kalaburagi, Gadag, Koppal, Bagalkot districts.
- It added that dry weather is likely in the remaining districts.

❖ CBI launches AI-powered verification system 'Abhay'

- The CBI has launched an AI-based helpbot called "Abhay" for authentication of CBI notices, a system designed to protect citizens from the growing menace of digital arrest scams.
- In the digital arrest scam, fraudulent notices are used to trap victims. "Once the victim is deceived into compliance, fraudsters initiate a sham legal process, keeping the victim under surveillance for days under the guise of a 'digital arrest', a concept that has no legal existence in Indian law," the CBI said. "Citizens can access 'Abhay' at any time through the CBI's official website," the agency said.
- State's duty is to ensure living wages for workers, not label them as 'terrorists', says SC

- The Uttar Pradesh government should not think of those who protested for higher wages in Noida on April 13 as “terrorists”, the Supreme Court said on Friday, reminding the State of its obligation to provide a “living wage” to workers, in accordance with the Constitution’s Directive Principles of State Policy. “They were asking for higher wages... Don’t think they are terrorists,” Justice B.V. Nagarathna, heading a two-person Bench including Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, told the Uttar Pradesh counsel.
- Appearing for the petitioners — who are family members of protesters detained and jailed by the U.P. police under the National Security Act — senior advocate Colin Gonsalves and advocate Shahrukh Alam said the authorities have registered multiple FIRs against the protesters without any preliminary enquiry. Ms. Alam said the only tag the authorities could find against the detainees were that they were “left-wing sympathisers”.

Directive Principles

- “Is it not that the Directive Principles of State Policy require the State to ensure that living wages are paid to workers?” Justice Bhuyan asked. Ms. Alam pointed to Article 43 of the Constitution which mandates that the State “shall endeavour”, through law or economic organisation or any other legitimate way, to secure to all workers a “living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities”. Instead of fulfilling its obligations, the advocate noted, the State has detained them as “agent provocateurs” of the protests in Noida.
- The Bench directed the State of Uttar Pradesh to produce the two young men, said to be detained in Kasna jail, on May 18 in the Court. The Court also stopped them from being moved out of judicial custody into police remand. The brothers of one of the detainees had alleged that the detainees had been tortured in police custody.

❖ India, UAE sign pacts on energy, defence as Modi visits West Asian nation

- India and the UAE concluded a framework defence cooperation agreement and signed agreements on building India’s strategic petroleum reserves and LNG supplies as Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a brief stopover in Abu Dhabi on Friday and met UAE President Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MbZ).
- Mr. Modi travelled to the UAE as the first stop in his week-long, five-nation trip to the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy.
- Expressing support for the UAE, that has received the brunt of attacks by Iran in retaliation for attacks by the U.S. and Israel, Mr. Modi said the targeting of the UAE was “unacceptable.”
- “We condemn the attacks on the UAE,” Mr. Modi said in his opening remarks. “The way the UAE has been targeted is not acceptable,” he added, praising the UAE’s “restraint” in responding to the attacks. Mr. Modi offered India’s support for all peace efforts in the region.
- In a video address, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said the Strategic Defence Cooperation Framework that was concluded during the visit had been proposed during a visit by MbZ to Delhi in January.

- “Under this [agreement] the two sides will strengthen their collaboration in defence manufacturing, defence technology, defence equipment, industrial collaboration and cooperation and in coordination across various areas,” Mr. Misri said.
- A External Affairs Ministry release expanded on the areas of cooperation, including training, military exercises, special operations and interoperability, indicating the armed forces would engage with each other closely, including in “maritime security, cyberdefence and information exchanges”.
- Boosting India’s Strategic Petroleum Reserves was another outcome of the visit, said officials, as the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company signed two MoUs for crude oil storage in India of up to 30 million barrels with the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd., and for potential crude oil storage facilities in UAE.

❖ BRICS members agree on creation of ‘independent, viable’ state of Palestine

- The BRICS Foreign Ministers’ meeting that concluded here on Friday reaffirmed the grouping’s call for the creation of an “independent and viable state of Palestine” within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.
- While consensus emerged on the Statehood for Palestine, several other issues saw the members disagreeing among themselves, which prevented the emergence of a Joint Statement, leading instead to the release of a ‘Chair’s Statement and Outcome Document’.
- Sources said there were several significant disagreements between delegations of the United Arab Emirates and Iran, whose Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi addressed a press conference here on Friday, asserting Tehran’s position on multiple issues like the bitterness with the UAE and the control over the Strait of Hormuz, which he described as a maritime region that falls within the “territorial waters of Iran and Oman”.
- “They reaffirmed their support for the State of Palestine’s full membership in the UN in the context of the unwavering commitment to the two-state solution in accordance with international law, including relevant UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the Arab Peace initiative, that includes the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine within the internationally recognized 1967 borders, which included Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital, to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security,” the Chair’s Statement said.
- While the segment on Palestinian statehood did not draw any objection from members, there were indications about the UAE’s objection from Mr. Araghchi, who, in response to a question on a reported objection from a BRICS member state on the paragraph on Gaza Strip, said, “Everybody knows which country blocked anything against Israel. This country provided in-depth help to the U.S. and Israel with their military bases. As far as we are concerned, they are a direct party to this aggression and should be held responsible.”
- The paragraph on the Gaza Strip described the territory as an “inseparable part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory” while calling for “unifying the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the Palestinian Authority”.

- Sources also indicated that the paragraph in the document that highlights the importance of Bab Al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea, where the Iran-backed Houthi militias have increased obstructive activities, also drew resistance from Iran. A source, who was present inside the main conference hall in Bharat Mandapam on both days, said the exchanges between Iran and the UAE were extensive and candid and “both sides believed that they were right in dealing with the war in the way that they did.”
- In his press conference, Mr. Araghchi highlighted the maritime situation in the Gulf region, saying the “situation in the Strait of Hormuz is complicated” and blamed the United States for the blockade. The Chair’s Statement and Outcome Document placed it on record that “There were differing views among some members as regards the situation in West Asia’/Middle East region.”

❖ **Disputed Bhojshala complex a temple, says M.P. High Court**

- Court quashes a 2003 ASI order that allowed Muslim community to offer Friday prayers at the 11th Century monument; rejects argument that a 1935 proclamation had declared the site as a mosque
- The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Friday ruled that the disputed site of Bhojshala complex and Kamal Maula Mosque in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh is a temple dedicated to goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati). The court allowed the Hindu community to worship at the site, while dismissing the Muslim community’s claim.
- In a 242-page order, a Division Bench of Justices Vinay Kumar Shukla and Alok Awasthi in Indore dismissed the petitions of the Muslim and Jain communities, filed recently, while saying that the Muslim representatives can seek an alternate piece of land in Dhar district from the Madhya Pradesh government.
- The court quashed a 2003 order of the Archaeology Survey of India (ASI) that allowed the Muslim community to offer Friday prayers at the site. The ASI order also permitted the Hindus to offer worship within the Bhojshala complex on Tuesday and Basant Panchami.
- “The disputed area of Bhojshala and Kamal Maula Mosque is held to be a protected monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958, with effect from March 18, 1904. The religious character of disputed area is held to be a Bhojshala with a temple of goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati),” the court order said. The court took inspiration from the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid verdict in 10 principles.
- While the Hindu side termed it a “historic verdict”, the representatives of the Muslim community said they would challenge it in the Supreme Court.
- The High Court directed the Union government to make efforts to bring back an idol of goddess Saraswati from the London Museum as it had been taken to the United Kingdom in the late 1800s and re-establish in the 11th-Century monument.
- The Bench rejected the Muslim side’s argument that an August 1935 Ailaan (official proclamation) by the then princely State of Dhar declared the site as a mosque under provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935. The court noted that the Act was only enforced in April 1937, while rejecting the validity of the Ailaan.

- “In order to secure the religious rights of the Muslim community and to ensure complete justice between the parties, in case if the respondent No.8 submits an application for allotment of a suitable land within the Dhar district for the construction of a Mosque or a place for prayer, the State Government may consider the said application in accordance with law...,” it said.
- It directed the Union government and the ASI to take a decision on the administration and management regarding the affairs of the Bhojshala temple and Sanskrit learning at the site, while granting the ASI management and administration control of the property.
- “The ASI shall have full supervisory control over the preservation, conservation and regulation of religious access,” it said.
- During the hearings, the Muslim side had alleged that the ASI survey report was “biased” and prepared to back the Hindu side’s claims. Claiming that the ASI ignored historical texts and its own records, the Muslim side said the survey findings “have no legal basis”.
- The court said the ASI had used scientific methods in its survey, including carbon dating and palaeography to determine the age and historical period of the structure, and XRF spot analysis and compositional testing to examine the construction material. “The findings scientifically supported the conclusions recorded in the report.”
- The order follows daily hearings that concluded on May 12, based on a report of a court-ordered scientific survey conducted by the ASI.

❖ **Monsoon likely to reach Kerala on May 26, says IMD**

- The southwest monsoon is expected to advance into Kerala on May 26, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday. The “normal” date for the monsoon’s advent over the State is June 1.
- The monsoon has nearly arrived over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Bay of Bengal, the IMD said. From here, it is typically a 10-day journey onto mainland India though there can be various factors, such as a fomenting cyclone that can impede this development.
- Last year, the monsoon set in over Kerala on May 24, its earliest arrival since 2009. Though the date of arrival does not correlate with the quantum of rainfall, the latter is a cause of concern this year with the IMD and other weather agencies having warned of “below normal” rainfall.

El Nino year

- The IMD has an elaborate criteria for declaring the monsoon’s onset over Kerala that includes a minimum number of meteorological stations spanning Kerala and parts of Karnataka registering a prescribed quantity of rain, wind speed, and cloud density exceeding a certain threshold.
- “What we know so far is that after the monsoon onset, there will be a good amount of rain for the next five days after. The subsequent progress and advance can only be reliably known after the [forecasting] models are run subsequently,” M. Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, told The Hindu.
- India last experienced reduced monsoon rainfall in 2023 — when the IMD had warned of “near normal” rainfall at 96% of the long period average (LPA) — but in 2015, the

IMD's warning of below normal rain, at 93% of the LPA, ended up being an overestimate with the actual rainfall being only 86% of the LPA. The main reason for this is the likely development of an El Nino — a periodic warming of the central equatorial Pacific.

❖ Centre extends bid timeline for rare earth magnet scheme

- The Ministry of Heavy Industries on Friday extended the bid timelines for its ₹7,280 crore scheme to develop rare earth magnet manufacturing in India. The bid due date has been extended from May 28 to June 29, while the opening of technical bids has been rescheduled to June 30. The Ministry said the revision of timelines was in response to demand from industry stakeholders. It held a pre-bid consultation with the industry on April 7.

❖ Marginal unemployment rate rise, shows Union govt. report

- The unemployment rate for persons of age 15 years and above in the country stood at 5.2% in April, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) released by the National Statistics Office on Friday.
- The unemployment rate (UR) in rural areas stood at 4.6% and in urban areas, it was 6.6%. The UR or joblessness recorded for March 2026 and April 2025 was 5.1%. Urban UR was observed as 6.8% in March 2026, while the rural UR was 4.3% in the same period.

❖ India-U.K. trade deal hits late-stage 'sticking points'

- The implementation of the India-U.K. trade deal has hit a late-stage hiccup due to a new regulation on steel imports the U.K. has said it will implement from July 1, which was not part of the trade negotiations.
- The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) was expected to come into force in May 2026, but now the two sides are trying to work out a "creative solution" to ensure the deal is implemented "at an early date", Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal told reporters on Friday.
- The U.K., as part of its overall Steel Strategy, earlier this month announced that from July 1, it will significantly cut the volume of steel to be imported into the country tariff-free.
- "Overall quota volumes will be cut by approximately 60% compared with the current safeguard arrangements," the U.K. government said. "Once the reduced quotas are exhausted, imports will be subject to a 50% tariff, an increase from the current 25% above-quota tariff."
- That is, the quota for duty-free steel imports would be cut by 60% and tariff on above-quota imports would be doubled to 50%.
- "We are very near to operationalising the India-UK FTA," Mr. Agrawal said.
- "There are a few sticking points. The U.K. has come with a steel measure recently which was not factored in while negotiating the FTA. We are working together to find a creative solution around this trade measure also so that we can operationalise the CETA at an early date."

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