



**DR. RAJKUMAR ACADEMY  
BENGALURU**

AN INITIATIVE BY DR. RAJKUMAR FAMILY

# WEEKLY NEWS COMPILATION

A CRISP AND COMPREHENSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS CAPSULE

**JULY WEEK 3**

13-07-2026 TO 18-07-2026

**STATE LAUNCHES  
HI-TECH  
TRAVELLERS  
NOOKS IN  
HAMPI**

**MODI LAUNCHES  
HYDROGEN TRAIN**

**INDIA-U.K. FTA A  
BOOST**

**GOVT. PRESENTS  
DRAFT APARTMENT  
BILL**

**WPI INFLATION  
RISES TO 9.87% IN  
JUNE**

**❖ Iran attacks West Asian nations after U.S. strikes**

- Tehran targets Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, and Oman, says Strait of Hormuz is closed; U.S. says strikes will weaken Iran's ability to threaten shipping, insists traffic flowing through vital waterway
- The U.S. attacked Iran early on Sunday over an Iranian strike on a container ship in the Strait of Hormuz that left one Indian sailor missing. Iran responded with attacks on several countries in West Asia, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, and Oman.
- The U.S. struck again later on Sunday. Iran's state-run IRNA news agency cited the Governor of Qeshm island near the strait as saying projectiles had been fired at military targets, with no casualties. It said explosions were heard in the coastal city of Bandar Abbas and Hajiabad city to the north.
- The U.S. military's Central Command (CENTCOM) said it hit 140 targets, including missile and drone launch sites, ammunition dumps, communication equipment, and other sites. It said the attacks, heavier than in recent days, would weaken Iran's ability to threaten shipping. "We bombed the hell out of them last night," President Donald Trump said.
- Iranian state media later reported U.S. strikes across the country, including military sites in a province near Tehran. Semi-official news agencies said that a Navy officer was killed.
- Iran retaliated by attacking nations in the region hosting U.S. military forces, while insisting it alone must control the strait.
- The U.S. military and Mr. Trump asserted that the strait remained open on Sunday. Iran said the strait would be closed until calm is restored.
- The fighting raised new questions about the interim deal Iran and the U.S. reached on June 17, beginning a 60-day period aimed at reaching a permanent end to the war. "The era of one-sided deals is OVER," Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Speaker of Iran's parliament and a key negotiator, wrote. "We told you: keep your word or pay the price. Reality is knocking."
- Tehran added that it would consider targeting "additional enemy bases in the region" if it faced more attacks.
- Missile alerts sounded in Bahrain which houses the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. Kuwait's military also said it was intercepting incoming fire. The Omani state news agency said drones struck sites in an area that sits on the Strait of Hormuz and issued a shelter-in-place warning for residents in the region. The attack came a day after Oman and Iran held talks on the strait.
- Oman summoned the Iranian Ambassador to protest the strikes, the first such move since the war began, calling Iran's acts "irresponsible."
- Three Iranian missiles struck areas across Jordan, causing minor damage but no injuries, Jordan's state news agency reported. Sirens also sounded in the UAE, but the government said missiles did not cross into its territory.

- Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said multiple vessels "disregarded our warnings" and ignored instructions to follow what it called an approved route. One "was struck by a warning shot and brought to a stop".
- Oman on Saturday said it and Iran agreed to continue discussing the Strait "at the technical and political levels." Iran offered no statement about the Strait being open to all, something sought by the Trump administration.

#### ❖ **One Indian seafarer missing in attack on Cyprus-flagged vessel**

- 10 of the crew rescued; authorities are coordinating with Omani agencies and Indian Embassy in Muscat to assist the seafarers and keep kin informed; New Delhi condemns the strike on vessel; the U.S. blamed an Iranian body for the attack
- The Indian government has condemned the attack on a Cyprus-flagged commercial vessel off the coast of Oman that left one of its 11 Indian crew members missing.
- "We condemn the attack on the commercial vessel GFS Galaxy off the coast of Oman, earlier today. Of the 11 Indian nationals on board, 10 have been rescued so far, while one Indian national is reportedly missing," the External Affairs Ministry said in a statement.
- The U.S. Central Command blamed Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), saying it had "blatantly attacked" the ship.

#### **Evacuation and rescue**

- The container vessel, MV GFS Galaxy, with a cargo carrying capacity of about 88,000 tonnes, was sailing near Omani waters when it was hit by a projectile around 2 a.m. (UAE time). The impact reportedly caused a fire in the engine room, leaving the ship without propulsion or steering. The crew anchored the vessel before evacuating into lifeboats and liferafts.
- Heramb Karmarkar, the ship's third engineer, remains missing, and search and rescue operations are continuing. His family has been informed, sources said. Three rescued crew members sustained burns and minor injuries and have been admitted to hospital in Oman. The remaining crew members are being accommodated there while formalities are completed.
- The ship had a crew of 24, comprising 11 Indians, four Ukrainians, four Filipinos, three Indonesians and two Sri Lankans. Twenty-three crew members were rescued about two hours after the evacuation by the Royal Navy of Oman under the coordination of the Oman Maritime Security Centre. The vessel's condition and the extent of the damage are yet to be ascertained. The incident occurred about nine nautical miles east of Dahit, Oman, within the Strait of Hormuz transit corridor.
- Indian authorities are coordinating with Omani agencies, the ship's management company and the Indian Embassy in Muscat to monitor the situation and assist the affected crew. The families of the Indian seafarers have been contacted and are being kept informed of developments and counselled.
- The Ministry said the Indian Embassy in Oman was closely monitoring the situation and coordinating with Omani authorities in the ongoing search and rescue operation. "We thank the Omani authorities for their support," it said, adding that the continuing attacks on commercial shipping in the region were "deeply worrisome".

- “We reiterate our call for immediate de-escalation of tensions, and the conclusion of ongoing negotiations for a diplomatic solution so that peace and stability can return to the region,” the Ministry said.
- “The targeting of commercial shipping and civilian infrastructure in the region must end, and free and unimpeded navigation and commerce through the international waterways, in keeping with international law, must be restored at the earliest,” it said.
- Meanwhile, the IRGC Navy said the Strait of Hormuz was “closed until further notice” and that no vessel would be permitted to transit it until U.S. intervention in the region ended.
- The attack came a day after talks between Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Omani officials on bilateral ties and the Strait of Hormuz. The two sides agreed to continue discussions, but the talks did not appear to produce a breakthrough.
- Oman had publicly declared a route along its coast to transit the Strait of Hormuz, which has become increasingly popular among ships. But Iran has been warning that vessels should not take the route near the Omani coast, dubbing it “unauthorised and dangerous”.
- The attack on GFS Galaxy is the third attack on ships taking the Omani route in the last five days.

#### ❖ **ISRO successfully carries out tests of Gaganyaan systems**

- One of the tests involved separation of the ‘umbilical mechanism’ that serves as a link between the crew module, where astronauts live, and the service module that provides propulsion, agency says
- The Indian Space Research Organisation on Sunday said it had successfully carried out three major tests of the Gaganyaan crew module systems.
- The first test pertained to ensuring an upright position of the crew module after splashdown in the sea, considered one of the most important crew safety requirements. To do this, a stored cold-gas-based uprighting system was developed and tested.
- “A system-level qualification test set-up consisting of all the elements of CMUS (crew module uprighting system) was realised,” the ISRO said, adding it successfully conducted inflation tests “for the primary inflation module wherein stored gas in the high-pressure gas bottle was made to inflate the floatation by operating the control valves.”
- The second test involved examining the separation of the umbilical mechanism that serves as a link between the crew module, where astronauts live, and the service module, which provides power and propulsion. The mechanism consists of two parts, each located at the crew module side, called CSU-1, and the service module side, called CSU-2.

#### **Clean separation**

- During the crew module’s earth re-entry stage, the service module first separates from the crew module after the CSU-1 disconnects. Subsequently, just before re-entry, the CSU-2 is also separated.

- “Separation test of CSU-2 from simulated crew module was carried out. The test demonstrated the clean separation of CSU-2 as well as structural stability of the crew module panel and their interfaces,” the space agency said. The third test validated the structural integrity of the crew module during the apex cover separation event. The apex cover protects the parachutes and associated subsystems during the mission. It is separated before parachutes are deployed to decelerate the crew module.

#### ❖ **India, Canada conclude third round of talks on trade pact**

- India and Canada concluded the third round of negotiations for the proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in Ottawa on Friday as the two sides look to wind up the talks this year.
- The issues that figured in the five-day talks include trade in goods, services, intellectual property, rules of origin, sanitary measures, and technical barriers to trade, among others.
- The negotiations are important as the two sides seek to increase bilateral trade to \$50 billion by 2030. In 2025-26, the two-way trade dipped 8.22% to \$7.95 billion (\$4.67 billion exports, \$3.28 billion imports) from \$8.66 billion in 2024-25 (\$4.22 billion exports, \$4.44 billion imports).

#### ❖ **Hamad bin Khalifa, former leader and key architect of modern Qatar, dies aged 74**

- Qatar’s government on Sunday announced the death of former leader Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who led the country from 1995 to 2013. He was 74, according to a government website.
- “With hearts steadfast in faith in God’s decree and destiny, the Bureau of the Emir mourns the great loss to the nation of the late His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani,” read a statement published by the Emir’s office on social media.
- The former leader was seen as one of the key architects of modern Qatar and led the country during a period of rapid economic growth.
- Sheikh Hamad took power in 1995, overthrowing his father in a bloodless coup while the latter was abroad. He inherited a small, largely marginal emirate with nearly empty coffers and transformed it into a major player on the international stage.
- The emirate became a leading producer and exporter of liquefied natural gas. It also rose to become one of the wealthiest countries on the planet in terms of GDP per capita.
- During his time in office, Al Jazeera was launched in 1996. Also under his reign, Qatar began paying hundreds of millions of dollars to the Gaza Strip.
- In 2013, Sheikh Hamad surprised many by voluntarily abdicating in favour of his son, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

### **Modi pays condolences**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the passing away of the former Emir, and described him as a visionary leader. India has declared a one-day national mourning as a mark of respect.
- “We deeply mourn the passing of HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. A visionary leader who led Qatar to great levels of development and prosperity,” Mr. Modi said in a post on X.

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy

### ❖ **Citizenship decisions must be 'fair, reasoned', says SC**

- Top court sets aside 27 judgments of Gauhati HC on 'foreigners', asks tribunals to adjudicate afresh; Citizenship declarations can't be sustainable if 'procedure adopted is mechanical', says the court
- The Supreme Court on Monday held that the determination of citizenship and foreigner status must be undertaken through a "fair, lawful, and reasoned" process, as it set aside a batch of 27 Gauhati High Court judgments declaring the appellants to be foreigners, and remanded the cases to the Foreigners' Tribunals concerned for fresh adjudication.
- A Bench of **Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta** observed that while the state has a legitimate interest in ensuring that persons who are legally ineligible for an Indian citizenship do not obtain such a status through "false claims", the "grave consequence" of being declared a foreigner must follow a procedure that adheres to constitutional guarantees.

#### **Fair opportunity**

- **"A state action which is arbitrary cannot claim the protection of law merely because it is clothed in statutory form. A proceeding which may result in a person being declared a foreigner cannot be sustained if the procedure adopted is mechanical, one-sided, or devoid of application of mind," the judgment, authored by Justice Nath, said. The Tribunal must examine whether the person had a "fair opportunity, whether the main grounds were disclosed, whether the evidence before it was capable of supporting the reference, and whether the conclusion follows from the material on record,"** it added.
- The HC had dismissed the appeals against the orders of the Foreigners' Tribunals declaring the appellants to be foreigners after noting that none of them had appeared before the tribunals despite having been served notices. It had observed that, in the absence of any written statement, documents, or evidence from the appellants, the tribunals had "no option" but to affirm the references.
- The top court, however, clarified that the remand should not be construed as an affirmation of the appellants' claim to Indian citizenship.
- The remand was intended solely to ensure that the serious civil consequences of being declared a foreigner flow only from an adjudication that is legally sustainable and consistent with the principles of fairness, the top court said.
- Accordingly, the Bench set aside both the High Court judgments and the corresponding opinions of the Foreigners Tribunals concerned, directing the tribunals to decide the matters afresh without being influenced by their earlier findings or those of the High Court.
- It said the fresh adjudication must involve an independent assessment of the evidence and the rival claims in accordance with law and should, as far as possible, be completed within six months.

- The court further directed that no coercive steps be taken against the appellants until the **Foreigners Tribunals** render fresh opinions. Justice Nath also acknowledged that questions of citizenship and foreigner status occupy a field of “high constitutional and legal significance”, particularly because a declaration that a person is a foreigner carries far more than ordinary civil consequences.

#### ❖ Governor suspends KPSC chief over ‘illegal’ selection of daughter for post

- In a first in the history of the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC), Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has suspended KPSC chairman Shivashankarappa S. Sahukar, pending an inquiry into alleged misconduct linked to the “illegal” selection of his daughter through the commission’s examination process.
- The Governor has recommended to the President to make a reference to the Supreme Court under **Article 317(1) of the Constitution** for an inquiry into the allegations.
- “To further ensure a fair, impartial and uninfluenced investigation while protecting the integrity and credibility of KPSC, the Governor has placed the chairman under suspension until further orders from the President’s office,” according to a statement from the Karnataka Lok Bhavan on Monday. The suspension order was issued on July 10.
- Of the two daughters of the now-suspended chairman, Suma S. Sahukar is alleged to have claimed reservation benefits under the 3B category by producing a false Income and Asset certificate that declared her family’s annual income as ₹40,000.
- She had secured the 3B certificate for reservation on March 3, 2020. A FIR has been filed against her. The other daughter, Anuradha Sahukar, who is married, has been selected in the Hyderabad-Karnataka cadre under general merit category.
- The KPSC conducts competitive examinations and recommends the list of successful candidates to the government in recruitment for Group A, B and C posts in State civil services.
- This is not the first time that the KPSC is in the news for the wrong reasons. Over the last two decades, there have been allegations of nepotism, corruption and recruitment scams.
- At the centre of the controversy over the irregularity reported at the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) is Suma S. Sahukar, daughter of KPSC chairperson Shivashankarappa Sahukar, who has been permanently debarred by the commission from taking part in any future examinations.
- The daughter of the KPSC chairperson, who has now been placed under suspension by the Governor pending inquiry, is accused of falsely claiming reservation benefits under OBC Category 3B to facilitate her selection as Junior Engineer (Civil) in the Department of Industries and Commerce earlier in March 2024.
- The **KPSC had invoked Rule 20 of the Karnataka Civil Services (General Recruitment) Rules, 1977**, for misconduct that includes impersonation, or submitting fabricated documents, or documents that have been tampered with, or making statements which are incorrect or false, or of suppressing material information, which is liable for criminal action, be debarred either permanently or for a specific period of time.

- Earlier, the Vidhana Soudha police registered an FIR against Ms. Suma Sahukar on Friday.
- The FIR was registered based on a complaint from the KPSC, after verification revealed that the income certificate was false, as during the selection process, the candidate's father was the chairperson of KPSC, a Constitutional post, drawing a monthly salary of ₹2.25 lakh apart from other allowances.
- Being a dependent of her father, she falls under the creamy layer category, with an annual income of over ₹8 lakh.

### **What the Governor said**

- The communication from Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot's office said that Ms. Suma Sahukar obtained an income and caste certificate declaring the family's annual income as ₹40,000 and claimed OBC reservation and creamy layer exemption despite the family's income allegedly exceeding the prescribed limit.
- It stated that, under a Karnataka government order dated March 30, 2002, children of the chairperson of a Public Service Commission are not eligible to claim reservation under the backward classes quota.

### **❖ Retail inflation climbs past RBI target to 4.4%**

- **India's retail inflation has crossed the Reserve Bank of India's 4% target** for the first time since January 2025, touching 4.4% in June. It stood at 3.93% in May.
- **Inflation, as measured by the new series of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), was driven by rising food and fuel prices amid the crisis in West Asia as well as a weaker-than-normal monsoon. Food inflation touched 5.05% in June, the highest in the new series of the CPI. The transport segment saw inflation rising to 4.3% in June, compared with 1.7% in May, following rise in fuel prices.**
- "The June **CPI inflation of 4.4%**, exceeding the RBI's medium-term target of 4%, reflects persistent pressures from global geopolitical uncertainties and supply chain disruptions," said Vivek Rathi, national director of research at Knight Frank India.
- "On the domestic front, food inflation has remained a key driver, due to weather-related disruptions to agricultural output, and uneven monsoon distribution across certain regions," Vivek Rathi, national director of research at Knight Frank India said.
- Looking ahead, Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ICRA, said retail food prices have continued to harden in July too when compared to June as well as July 2025, suggesting that the inflation in this segment is likely to be even higher in July 2026. "In addition to food items, the non-food component may also exert pressure on the headline CPI print in the month, partly owing to the pass-through of higher fuel prices into prices of other items," she added.
- The other area that witnessed high inflation was the "personal care, social protection and miscellaneous goods & services" category, which saw inflation of 16.7% in June 2026, although this was the lowest since January 2026, the earliest period for which the new series has data. Inflation in this segment was propelled by the rising prices of gold and silver in June, which was exacerbated by the higher import duties imposed on the two metals.

### ❖ **Trade deficit jumps 430% as imports surge: Trade deficit jumps fourfold in June on surging imports**

- India's trade deficit grew over fourfold to \$15.3 billion in June primarily due to high growth in merchandise imports, which were skewed by a spurt in the value of imports of crude oil, and gold.
- Commerce Ministry data showed India's overall exports, including goods and services, grew 9.5% to \$73.4 billion in June 2026; total imports, on the other hand, grew nearly 27% to \$88.8 billion

### • **India's trade deficit grew over fourfold to \$15.3 billion in June 2026 primarily due to high growth in merchandise imports, which were skewed by a spurt in the value of imports of crude oil, electronic and electrical goods, and gold, according to official data.**

- Data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Monday showed India's overall exports, including both goods and services, grew 9.5% to \$73.4 billion in June 2026. Total imports, on the other hand, grew nearly 27% to \$88.8 billion.
- "Looking at the data, you would see that merchandise imports in particular have grown by a significant amount and think that this is a matter of concern, but the fact is that these imports are being driven by just a few commodities such as petroleum products and crude oil, gold, and electronics," Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said during a press briefing.
- **"Gold and oil have increased in value because of higher prices due to the prevailing geopolitical situation, and electronics imports are rising because of higher consumption within the economy and also inputs being used for manufacturing," he added.**
- **Merchandise imports grew 31% to \$70.8 billion as opposed to exports, which grew at a relatively slower 15.5% to \$40.4 billion in June 2026. As a result, the merchandise trade deficit stood at \$30.4 billion, about 59% higher than in June 2025.**
- **On the services front, India's trade surplus shrank in June 2026 as imports outpaced exports. Services exports grew 2.9% in June 2026 to \$33 billion, while imports grew 12.7% to \$17.9 billion. As a result, the services trade surplus fell 6.8% in June 2026 to \$15.1 billion.**
- "The widening of the June trade deficit is largely led by higher net imports of oil and electronics," said Upasna Bhardwaj, Chief Economist, Kotak Mahindra Bank.

### ❖ **U.S. 'taking over' Strait of Hormuz, says Trump**

- U.S. President Donald Trump said on Monday that his country was reinstating its blockade of Iranian ports and "taking over" the Strait of Hormuz, where it would levy charges on shipping, as the two sided traded strikes in a scale unseen since an April ceasefire. Iran's military command, meanwhile, insisted on Monday it would not allow the U.S. to "interfere" in the key conduit for oil and gas, while also warning its Gulf neighbours against cooperating with Washington.
- Trump restores Iran blockade, says U.S. will be 'paid' to guard Hormuz

- Iran's military command says it would not allow the U.S. to 'interfere' in the key conduit for oil and gas, while also warning its Gulf neighbours against cooperating with Washington; U.S. hit targets in Iran while Tehran struck U.S. bases in the region
- President Donald Trump said on Monday the U.S. was reinstating its blockade of Iranian ports and "taking over" the Strait of Hormuz, where it would levy charges on shipping.
- The President's declaration came after U.S. and Iranian attacks of a scale unseen since an April ceasefire, adding to doubts about efforts to bring a permanent end to the war that has curtailed shipping through the strait.
- "The Hormuz Strait is OPEN, and will remain OPEN, with or without Iran. We are reinstating the THE IRANIAN BLOCKADE, so named because it is only stopping Iran's ships or customers from entering or leaving," Mr. Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.
- "The U.S.A. will be, from this point forward, known as 'THE GUARDIAN OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT,'" he added.
- Hours later, the U.S. Central Command said it would resume the blockade on Tuesday.
- Iran started blocking the strait after the U.S. and Israel launched attacks in late February, which prompted Washington to stop shipping to and from Iranian ports. Those restrictions were eased after the two sides agreed on a memorandum of understanding in June aimed at ending the war.
- Mr. Trump said that the U.S. "will be reimbursed, at the rate of 20% on all cargo shipped, for any and all costs necessary to do the job of providing safety and security to this very volatile section of the World." Iran's military command insisted on Monday it would not allow the U.S. to "interfere" in the key conduit for oil and gas, while also warning its Gulf neighbours against cooperating with Washington.
- Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi mocked Mr. Trump over his vow to impose hefty charges, saying Iran would charge a lower rate. "POTUS is absolutely right. Whoever provides safe passage of vessels through the strait should be compensated. Iran has always been the GUARDIAN of the Strait and will remain so FOREVER. 20% is too much. We will be fair," Mr. Araghchi wrote in a social media post.
- The U.S. military said it hit dozens of targets on Monday, while Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced new strikes in response on Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and Oman and insisted that the strait is "closed".

#### **❖ 'Rainfall strongest environmental factor linked to elephant occurrence in southern Western Ghats'**

- The Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS), in a new research study conducted in the southern Western Ghats region of Karnataka and Kerala, has found that rainfall was the strongest environmental factor linked to reported elephant occurrence in both States.
- The study titled 'Integrating Ecological Modelling and Local Knowledge to Understand Elephant Occurrence and Human-Elephant Interactions in the Southern Western Ghats' examines where people and Asian elephants are most likely to overlap across the southern Western Ghats and how that overlap may shift by 2030.

- In 2022, 507 community residents were interviewed across villages surrounding the **Bandipur and Nagarhole National Parks and the Palakkad and Mannarkkad forest divisions.**
- The CWS said rainfall emerged as the single strongest environmental factor linked to reported elephant occurrence in both States, and that the relationships were often complex rather than following simple straight lines.
- “Human land use mattered too, but in revealing ways. In Karnataka, areas of human settlement were positively associated with reported elephant presence, suggesting that elephants there continue to use landscapes close to people.
- The authors interpret this cautiously: elephants appear to tolerate a certain amount of human pressure, but likely only up to a threshold beyond which they retreat,” the CWS said.
- The study also found that land-cover mapping showed an increase in human settlements and a decline in dense vegetation between 2012 and 2022.
- **“In the Karnataka study area, the area classified as human settlement rose by about 31% while dense vegetation declined slightly. In Kerala, settlement area increased by roughly 16%.** When the researchers projected these trends forward to 2030, the modelled patterns of elephant occurrence became more fragmented and harder to predict, and in Kerala, the proximity to protected areas was strongly associated with where elephants were likely to occur,” the CWS said.
- What stood out was how well and deeply local communities understand elephant movement, often noticing shifts in their behaviour and responses. “By bringing these two aspects together, we were able to build a much richer picture of where and why elephants move through these landscapes. The same conditions that make an area attractive to elephants, including rainfall, water, and proximity to forests for food requirements, are often the conditions people extensively depend on to survive,” said the CWS.
- “As these landscapes continue to change, the challenge is not just predicting where elephants will go, but ensuring that people and elephants can continue to share these spaces safely, for generations to come,” said Simran Prasad, lead author and postdoctoral fellow at the CWS.

#### ❖ **Guidelines laid down for setting up 10,000 Bharat Jodo Yuva Sanghas**

- The Karnataka government on Monday began the process of setting up 10,000 **Bharat Jodo Yuva Sanghas in 6,000 gram panchayats and 4,000 wards in urban local bodies across the State by laying down guidelines and the calendar for release of funds for them.**
- Each of the sanghas will get ₹10 lakh funding from the government annually, and its activities will be focused on sports and cultural activities. A total of ₹1,010 crore will be spent annually for the project.
- The activity framework of the sangha includes sports and fitness, community development, cultural and skill development, forest and environment conservation, health and wellness and youth empowerment.

- The project earlier approved by the **State Cabinet will be implemented by the Sports and Youth Empowerment Department. Each sangha will have a coach whose monthly remuneration has been fixed at ₹24,000. The guidelines say that the sangha should be registered under the Karnataka Societies Act and should have at least 100 members and members should be between 16 and 35.**
- Different population parameters have been laid down to set up the sangha in the local bodies.
- While the reservation roster has been fixed for the formation of executive committee of each Sangha, the committee will have a tenure of two years. The Chief Minister will head the State level implementation committee.

#### ❖ **All Ladakh districts to get autonomous hill councils**

- Ladakh administration announces creation of 17 new tehsils; Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra says several rounds of talks were held with regional representatives over constitutional safeguards
  - The Ladakh administration on Monday announced 17 new tehsils “to strengthen grassroots governance” in the Union Territory and said the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act will be extended to all seven districts of the region.
  - “The administration is working on an institutional framework suited to Ladakh’s unique requirements and is also taking steps to extend the benefits of the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act to all seven newly created districts through appropriate legal provisions,**” said Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra.
- **Earlier, Ladakh had only two districts of Leh and Kargil. However, five new districts of Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass were notified in April. With 17 additional tehsils, Ladakh has a total of 32 tehsils now. “These initiatives would bring government services closer to the people, reduce travel for citizens living in remote villages and strengthen infrastructure and development across regions, including Zaskar, Drass, Nubra, Changthang and Sham,”** said Mr. Kundra.
- He said the administration has issued posting orders for tehsildars in 17 newly created tehsils. “Four new divisions under the Public Health Engineering (PHE) and Flood Control Department, along with five new divisions under the **Public Works Department (PWD) and PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana),** have been created to strengthen service delivery in remote areas,” he added.
  - He said significant progress has been made in government recruitment, decentralised governance, and ongoing discussions on constitutional safeguards for Ladakh.
  - On the issue of constitutional safeguards, Mr. Kundra said several rounds of discussions have been held with representatives of religious organisations and civil society bodies. “The minutes of the meetings held on May 22 and July 3 have been shared in the public domain to ensure transparency. There is broad consensus on protecting Ladakh’s land, culture and identity while promoting inclusive development,” said Mr. Kundra.

### **Glaring imbalance: KDA**

- In July, the draft shared by a team from the Union Home Ministry in Leh suggested that the Centre was considering a customised sui generis model, most suitable for Ladakh, under the provisions of **Article 371 for the Union Territory**.
- The **Kargil-based civil society organisation, the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), said the tehsil figures “reveal a glaring imbalance”**. **“While the erstwhile Leh district has been allotted 12 new tehsils, the erstwhile Kargil district has received only five,” said KDA leader Sajjad Kargili. He said this disparity was difficult to reconcile with objective parameters.**
- “Kargil has a larger population and a greater number of villages than the other five newly created districts combined. Yet its administrative needs appear to have been overlooked. Even more striking is the fact that Drass has not been granted a single additional tehsil, despite its substantial population, large number of villages, and genuine administrative requirements,” he said.
- He said there were instances where a new tehsil was created for a single village. “It has raised serious questions about the criteria adopted for this exercise. This also shows the absence of a sense of justice from the administration and also shows discriminatory approach towards the people of Kargil and Drass,” he added.

### **❖ India, Japan review defence ties, prepare ground for 2+2 dialogue**

- India and Japan on Monday reviewed the entire spectrum of their expanding defence cooperation and agreed to deepen collaboration in emerging domains such as defence industry, cybersecurity, space and advanced technologies during the eighth India-Japan Defence Policy Dialogue held in Tokyo.
- The dialogue was led by Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Japan’s Vice-Minister of Defence for International Affairs, Kano Koji.
- According to Ministry of Defence, the two sides assessed the progress made since the previous round of talks and reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening the **India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership**.
- The discussions covered the regional and global security environment. They also reviewed ongoing defence engagements, including military-to-military exchanges, cooperation between the two countries’ joint headquarters, maritime cooperation, bilateral and multilateral exercises, capacity building, and defence equipment and technology collaboration, particularly in the maritime domain. They also discussed preparations and expected outcomes of the India-Japan ministerial engagements, including the next **India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministers’ Dialogue** scheduled later this year.

### **❖ User data exposed due to flaws in UMANG portal: researchers**

- UAN of PF subscribers, LPG booking details, and Aadhaar numbers among the exposed data; IT Ministry acknowledges vulnerabilities, says necessary measures are being implemented; initial fixes do nothing to fix the system, says researcher

- Multiple vulnerabilities in the UMANG, or Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance, portal that aggregates hundreds of public services offered by the Union and State governments are leaving data of potentially millions of Indians exposed across a variety of databases, including those from the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), according to two security researchers who shared their findings with The Hindu.
- The vulnerabilities, which have likely existed for years, affect several services tested on the UMANG portal, which has onboarded over 2,400 services. It stems from the architecture of the portal itself, said the researchers, Akshay C.S. and Viral Vaghela. "Almost everything is broken by design," Mr. Vaghela said.
- The data exposed included **Unique Account Numbers (UAN) with the EPFO, LPG cylinder booking details with at least one major oil marketing company, and Aadhaar numbers across several services where a user's ID details are saved. The Aadhaar numbers were found across many services in plain text, though such storage is disallowed by the Aadhaar Act, 2016. The Aadhaar module itself within UMANG was not vulnerable.**
- **The EPFO module is UMANG's most-used service, recording over 40 crore transactions over the past three months.**
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology acknowledged the vulnerabilities in a statement to The Hindu. "Our development and security teams have carefully examined the observations and are implementing the necessary corrective and preventive measures," the Ministry said. "The plaintext information in the concerned APIs has been appropriately encrypted."

#### **API review**

- The Ministry added that it has "reviewed the API transaction logs for the past three months" and found that "transaction volumes" were consistent and that it continued to keep a watch on activities on the UMANG portal.
- The Hindu is withholding the precise technical details of the vulnerabilities, as they remain active despite the above interventions. The encryption the IT Ministry referred to is "flawed and inadequate", Mr. Akshay said, adding that a simple workaround allowed it to be cracked anyway. At The Hindu's request, the researchers shared their findings with Karan Saini, another independent security researcher, who termed the vulnerabilities "significant".
- "Considering that rate limiting was implemented and the large number-space of EPFO UANs, it is unlikely that the vulnerability could have been exploited to mirror the entire EPFO database," Mr. Saini said, referring to the steps taken by the site to limit the number of requests a user can make. Still, he added, it "could potentially have been abused by cybercriminals in possession of UANs to siphon funds at scale by allowing for both changing of bank account details and initiating payouts, which is very concerning".
- "The fixes initially implemented following the disclosure appear to do nothing to secure the system and instead confuse obscurity with security, while also introducing another vulnerability in the process," Mr. Saini said.

- Mr. Akshay and Mr. Vaghela reported both vulnerabilities to the IT Ministry and the Computer Emergency Response Team, India (CERT-In), which issues alerts and helps organisations across the country with fixes for vulnerabilities like these. Shortly after the pair reported the vulnerabilities, the EPFO took down its online portal for a “migration”, and some services remained unavailable this week.
- The researchers said they suspected this was in response to their alerts, which were also sent to the organisation. The Ministry of Labour and Employment did not respond to a request for comment.
- **“It is worth examining whether the fixes deployed on the UMANG portal were simultaneously deployed across the services for which UMANG acts as a proxy,”** Mr. Saini said.

#### ❖ Universities call for clear framework for disbursal of grants under VBSA Bill

- Appearing before the ***Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025***, institutes and universities across the country have sought a clear framework from the Centre to continue the grant disbursal commitments currently under the University Grants Commission.
- This came even as members of the **JPC, including from the ruling BJP, flagged concerns that the Bill “does not expressly create a mechanism for institutional financial support”**. The panel is headed by BJP MP D. Purandeswari.
- The **VBSA Bill was introduced by the government to overhaul the higher education regulatory framework and intends to replace the UGC, the All India Council for Technical Education, and the National Council for Teacher Education with a single umbrella Commission, under which separate regulatory, accreditation, and standards councils will operate.**
- The Bill notably divorces grant-disbursal powers currently held by the UGC from the regulator under the new structure. BJP MPs, including Bansuri Swaraj and Bhartruhari Mahtab, and other members suggested setting up a separate funding agency or council under the VBSA structure in addition to the regulatory, accreditation, and standards councils.
- Ms. Swaraj further submitted that the legislation should have a provision mandating that a “successor grant mechanism” should be established within a year of its implementation.

#### **‘Grant-giving powers’**

- Further, institutions like Jamia Milia Islamia, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, Gauhati University, and Central University of Gujarat have said that removing grant-giving powers from the regulator “may create uncertainty for public universities, especially State institutions dependent on Central support”, calling for a specific framework to ensure these grants continue uninterrupted.
- The Higher Education Department of the Congress-ruled Telangana government also added to this argument, noting that the UGC’s general development grants — as they stand now — are the “primary statutory channel” of Central funding to State Universities.

### **Seeks assurances**

- Noting that the **VBSA Bill calls for the repeal of the UGC Act without providing for a replacement for this, the Telangana government has sought assurances from the Union government to specify how these grants and funds to State Universities will be replicated under a new proposed structure.**
- The Union government has maintained its position during the JPC deliberations that divorcing grant-giving powers from the regulatory body was essential to avoid conflicts of interest and make funding to institutes more transparent and “performance-based”.

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy

### ❖ SC weighs SOP for urgent cases affecting life, liberty

- Constitutional remedies must be accessible at all time, says petition in top court; Bench headed by CJI Kant says an SOP could be put in place to reduce 'response time' to urgent requests for justice.
- The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to consider framing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to allow citizens to knock on the doors of the courts any time, day or night, in cases affecting life and liberty, including illegal detentions, imminent demolition of homes, deportations, custodial violence, or other state actions.
- A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant was hearing a petition filed by a top court advocate, Maheravish Rein, who said the courts cannot afford to close especially against the background of credible reports of late-night arrests, early-morning demolition drives, and deportation or executive actions undertaken during weekends or holidays. "The absence of a structured and institutionalised mechanism ensuring continuous judicial accessibility may result in irreversible consequences before affected persons are able to approach constitutional courts... **The protection of liberty cannot remain dependent upon the temporal boundaries of court schedules. In a constitutional democracy governed by the rule of law, the Constitution cannot fall silent at night, nor can the protection of liberty await the morning bell of the courts,**" Ms. Rein submitted. **Access to justice cannot exist merely in theory. Constitutional remedies must be practically accessible at all times,** she said.
- The Bench noted that an SOP could be put in place to reduce the "response time" to urgent requests in cases of life and liberty. "Maybe the response from the court should come within an hour of such an urgent mention," Chief Justice Kant noted.
- Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said the preparation of an SOP should be undertaken by the top court on its administrative rather than judicial side.
- In response to the law officer, the Chief Justice noted that High Courts did not come within the administrative ambit of the top court in a federal set-up, indicating that the petition may have to be heard and orders passed on the judicial side.
- Justice Joymalya Bagchi, a part of the Bench, said there was a difference in approach in accessing justice during office hours and after office hours. The judge said a "graded approach" to access to justice after court hours cannot be interpreted as a denial of justice.
- The judge pointed out that courts never "close-up" when there was digital access to justice through e-filing. "A letter, an email or a phone call would be enough to activate the justice system," Justice Bagchi said.
- Ms. Rein agreed with Justice Bagchi that technological advancements, including digital filing, electronic court records and virtual hearing infrastructure had significantly enhanced the capacity of courts to provide remote access to justice.
- **"The present institutional framework of courts largely restricts access to judicial remedies to designated court hours, working days and limited vacation benches. As a result, individuals facing urgent violations of liberty and fundamental rights often encounter significant practical difficulty in obtaining immediate judicial protection during nights, weekends, public holidays and court recesses,"** Ms. Rein submitted.

- “However, these technological capabilities have not yet been integrated into a uniform institutional framework enabling emergency judicial access for urgent constitutional matters outside regular court hours,” she submitted.

#### ❖ **Govt. summons Iran envoy after missile hit kills Indian sailor**

- Following the death of an Indian sailor after Iranian attacks on tankers in the Strait of Hormuz early on Tuesday, India summoned the Iranian Deputy Chief of Mission and registered a “strong protest”. **One Indian sailor was killed and several were seriously injured when Iranian cruise missiles hit two UAE-flagged energy tankers carrying Indian seafarers.**
- External Affairs Ministry spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, said the Indian side had conveyed “deepest concerns” about the incident and called for “de-escalation”. “We strongly condemn these attacks and acts of violence targeting seafarers and disrupting free and safe navigation through international waters like the Strait of Hormuz. We also reiterate our deep concern on account of resumption of attacks and escalation of hostilities in the West Asian region and call for immediate cessation of violence and a return to dialogue and diplomacy in the interests of peace,” he said.

#### ❖ **Stakeholders’ meeting on Karnataka’s Apartment Bill today**

- The **Karnataka government has finally called for a meeting with apartment owners to consult them on The Karnataka Apartment (Ownership and Management) Bill, 2025**, on Wednesday.
- The apartment owners have been urging the government for the enactment of the Bill to bring more clarity regarding ownership and management of apartments in the State. **Currently, there is a lot of ambiguity as apartments are governed by the outdated Karnataka Apartment Ownership Act, 1972, and the Karnataka Cooperative Societies Act, 1959.**
- Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar had held the first such meeting on December 13, 2025, as Bengaluru Development Minister and promised a stakeholders’ consultation meeting before the Bill was tabled in the Assembly. However, for over six months, such a meeting never happened. At least two city MLAs had written to Mr. Shivakumar urging him to convene the meeting.
- Greater Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on Tuesday announced that a draft of the Bill was ready and before taking it forward, the government would like to seek the views and suggestions of all stakeholders.
- He said Mr. Shivakumar would also be present at the Wednesday meeting scheduled to be held from 11 a.m. at the Conference Hall, Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium. Mr. Gowda appealed to all apartment owners to participate in large numbers and submit their suggestions.

### ❖ Energy Dept. adds 'opt-out' option to Gruha Jyothi form

- The Energy Department has made one more addition to the Gruha Jyothi door-to-door verification form. In Part 2, beneficiaries can choose not to provide details such as their Aadhaar card, voter ID, ration card, PAN card, caste details, mobile number and profession.
- However, if consumers refuse to provide these details, their Gruha Jyothi benefits will also be discontinued.

### Reluctant consumers

- An official said, "When meter readers, wearing their ID cards, have been going door to door for verification, consumers have been reluctant to provide important details such as their Aadhaar card, voter ID and other information. Therefore, this clause has now been added to the form."
- In such cases, beneficiaries can sign Part 2, which states: "I do not wish to participate in the survey related to the Gruha Jyothi scheme. I have no objection to the discontinuation of benefits under the Gruha Jyothi scheme for the electricity connection provided to my house."
- Earlier, the form had 11 elements and Part 1 — a statement, signed by the beneficiary, saying the details furnished are correct.

- **The 11 elements, which continue to remain in the form, include the name of the Escom, electricity connection account ID, beneficiary's Aadhaar number, beneficiary's name as per the Aadhaar card, registered mobile number, owner/tenant status, ration card category (APL, BPL or no ration card), voter status and EPIC number, caste category (SC/ST, OBC, minorities and others), PAN number (if the beneficiary is an income-tax payer), and profession.**

### Caste details optional

- On July 3, Bescom had also clarified that furnishing caste details to meter readers during the survey is purely optional.
- Until now, the option to "refuse to provide information" was available only for caste-related details on the Seva Sindhu app.

### ❖ Hearing on KPSC chief's suspension deferred

- The High Court of Karnataka on Tuesday adjourned till July 15 further hearing on a petition by Shivashankarappa S. Sahukar challenging the legality of the Governor's order of suspending him as Chairperson of the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) on allegation of misbehaviour.
- Justice Suraj Govindaraj adjourned further hearing till Wednesday to ascertain the legal interpretation of the Governor's power under **Article 317(2) of the Constitution to suspend the chairperson or a member of a State Public Service Commission (SPSC) pending enquiry into the allegations.**

- While appearing for Mr. Sahukar, senior advocate Aruna Shyam M. contended that the Governor had no power to suspend the chairman/member till the President, acting on the **Governor's recommendation, makes reference to the Supreme Court under Article 317(1) of the Constitution for holding an enquiry against the chairperson/member of a SPSC.**
- Mr. Shyam cited a 2017 judgment of the High Court, which had set aside the then Governor Hansraj Bhardhawaj's action of suspending Mangala Sridhar, then member of KPSC on the allegation of corruption, before the President referred the Governor's recommendation for enquiry to the Supreme Court.
- However, senior advocate Uday Holla, appearing for Mr. Gehlot, and Additional Advocate General Ruben Jacob, contended that the apex court, in its 2007 judgment in the case related to misbehaviour by a member of the Maharashtra Public Service Commission, had found no fault in the action of the Maharashtra Governor in suspending the member.
- The court adjourned further hearing till Wednesday afternoon.

#### ❖ **CM seeks Central team to assess drought situation in Karnataka**

- 'The State is among country's most drought-prone regions because of its agro-climatic and hydrological characteristics'
- Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Tuesday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to depute a Central team to assess the emerging drought situation in Karnataka.
- In his letter, the Chief Minister cited a widespread rainfall deficit, low reservoir storage and growing concerns over agriculture, drinking water availability and rural livelihoods.
- Mr. Shivakumar said an assessment by a Central team would help evaluate the severity of the evolving drought situation on the ground, reassure the farming community and facilitate timely assistance from the Union government.
- Karnataka is among the country's most drought-prone States because of its agro-climatic and hydrological characteristics, the Chief Minister said. **Nearly 77% of the State falls under arid and semi-arid regions, while about 84.79 lakh hectares of agricultural land is rain-fed, making crop production heavily dependent on the southwest monsoon.**
- **Around 74% of the State's annual rainfall is received during the monsoon season, making it highly vulnerable to rainfall variability and prolonged dry spells,** he said.
- Referring to the India Meteorological Department's forecast of below-normal rainfall due to El Niño conditions, Mr. Shivakumar said Karnataka had received only 203 mm of rainfall against the normal 292 mm as on July 11, recording a deficit of 30%.
- Mr. Shivakumar said the rainfall deficiency was widespread, with 18 of the State's 31 districts and 141 of its 240 taluks recording deficit to large-deficit rainfall. The Malnad region, which forms the principal catchment of the Cauvery, Tunga and Bhadra river systems, recorded the highest rainfall deficit of 34%, followed by the coastal region (30%), North Interior Karnataka (24%) and South Interior Karnataka (18%).

- The deficient monsoon has also affected agricultural operations, with Kharif sowing covering only 28.36 lakh hectares, or 34% of the seasonal target of 84.10 lakh hectares, during the first week of July.
- Farmers were reluctant to continue sowing because of inadequate soil moisture and uncertainty over rainfall, he said.
- Mr. Shivakumar also expressed concern over the State's hydrological situation. **As of July 10, storage in Karnataka's 14 major reservoirs stood at 303 tmcft, only 34% of their combined gross capacity of 895.65 tmcft. The shortfall in rainfall over the upper catchments could adversely affect reservoir inflows, irrigation, drinking water supply and hydropower generation in the coming months,** he said.
- The Chief Minister said Karnataka was one of the country's leading producers of pulses, particularly tur, and warned that any significant decline in production could affect the availability and prices of pulses across the country.

### ❖ 'Gold standard' India-U.K. trade deal is coming into effect today

- Commerce Secretary describes pact as one of the 'most ambitious and aspirational free trade agreements' signed by the country; he adds that it will benefit farmers, fisherfolk; officials in U.K. welcome deal and highlight its multi-sectoral impact.
- The **India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) that will come into force on Wednesday are a "gold standard" and one of the "most ambitious and aspirational free trade agreements"** signed by India, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Tuesday.
- He added that the deals benefit India's farmers, fisherfolk, workers and women entrepreneurs. The India-U.K. CETA and the DCC were signed in July last year.
- "This is one of the first free trade agreements (FTAs) of its kind, which establishes a future-oriented economic architecture between two major economies of the world," Mr. Agrawal said at a press briefing. "This is also one of the most ambitious and aspirational FTAs of India, which we are operationalising as till date."
- "It is a gold standard and the first of its kind because of its wide sectoral coverage and deep reduction in both tariff and non tariff barriers," he added.
- Under the deal, the U.K. will immediately eliminate tariffs on 96.8% of its tariff lines, accounting for 97.7% of the trade value. An additional 2% of tariff lines, amounting to 1.8% of trade value, will see reduced tariffs based on quotas. In total, this covers 98.8% of tariff lines and 99.5% of trade value.
- **India, on the other hand, will immediately eliminate tariffs on 30.3% of the trade value, with 47% more seeing tariffs eliminated in a phased manner. It will also provide reduced quota-based tariffs on 12.1% of the trade value. In total, this would cover 89.5% of tariff lines and 89.4% of trade value.**

#### Terms of trade

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) are set to come into force on Wednesday

■ Under the CETA, the U.K will immediately eliminate tariffs on **96.8%** of its tariff lines, accounting for **97.7%** of the trade value

■ India will immediately eliminate tariffs on **30.3%** of the trade value, with **47%** more seeing tariffs eliminated in a phased manner

■ The DCC will exempt Indian workers and their employers from paying social security contributions in the U.K. for **5 years** if contributions are being made in India

■ India has protected **sensitive sectors** such as dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers



- Officials in the U.K. have also welcomed the deal, highlighting a multi-sectoral impact. “For the City of London, the agreement provides a strong platform to unlock even greater collaboration in financial and professional services, insurance, fintech, sustainable finance and infrastructure investment,” Chris Hayward, Policy Chairman of the City of London Corporation, told The Hindu.
- **“As India continues its remarkable economic growth story, London stands ready to support the mobilisation of global capital and expertise needed to help deliver those goals,”** he added.
- Mr. Agrawal said that the 30 chapters across which negotiations have taken place under this pact extend beyond conventional tariff liberalisation to cover digital trade, government procurement, SMEs, innovation, labour, environment, and gender.
- He added that the deal addresses non-tariff barriers as well, so that issues like **Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) “do not become unjustified trade restrictions for our businesses in the future”.**
- He further explained that the deal protects India’s sensitive sectors such as dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers.

### **‘Game changer’**

- On the DCC, he said that the agreement was a “game changer” for India’s services sector and skilled workforce. “Indian employees and their employers contribute around 25% of their salary to the U.K.’s national insurance system,” he said. “Their contribution is like a tax of 25% as employees are unable to draw benefits. These are like sunk costs.”
- He said that the DCC will ensure that workers will not need to pay double contributions towards their social security. That is, if they are paying social security in India, then they will not have to pay it in the U.K. as well for a period of five years.
- According to Mr. Agrawal, this will benefit over 75,000 Indian workers and over 900 employers.

### **❖ India bans import of goods made using forced labour amid pending U.S. probe**

- The Government of India has issued a notification banning the import of goods manufactured using forced labour, a significant step towards clearing the path towards the signing of an interim trade agreement with the U.S.
- **The U.S. is currently in the process of releasing its final decision on the tariffs it plans to levy on countries that it says have not done enough to stop the import of goods made using forced labour.**
- “The import of goods produced or manufactured, wholly or in part, through the use of forced labour is prohibited,” the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in its notification. It added that the Union government may, from time to time, specify the goods whose import shall be prohibited under this paragraph.

- “The **procedure for conducting an enquiry by the Director General of Foreign Trade into the use of forced labour in the production of such goods shall be as prescribed in the Handbook of Procedures, 2023,**” it added. Under its draft proposal following an investigation, the U.S. found that India and 53 other countries “**failed to impose and effectively enforce**” prohibitions on the import of goods produced using forced labour. As such, it proposed a tariff of 12.5% on imports from these countries.
- Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal confirmed on Monday that India had made its submissions to the U.S. on the matter and protested the tariffs.
- This pending decision has led to significant uncertainty surrounding the India-U.S. trade deal, with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and Mr. Agrawal separately saying India would sign a deal only once it is established that it will receive a comparative advantage over its competitors.
- One key factor in establishing this comparative advantage is to see what tariffs the U.S. plans to levy under its various investigations. The second investigation is into whether the U.S.’s trade partners are using excess capacity to export to the U.S. to the detriment of the American economy
- According to the notification by the Commerce Ministry, “forced labour” means “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily, as defined under the **ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)**”.
- According to Manoj Mishra, Partner and Tax Controversy Management Leader, Grant Thornton Bharat, the introduction of a prohibition on imports of goods produced through forced labour marks a significant policy shift in India’s trade framework. “While India has so far relied largely on labour and criminal laws to address forced labour domestically, the **Foreign Trade Policy** now incorporates a dedicated trade measure aligned with international standards under the **ILO Forced Labour Convention,**” Mr. Mishra said.

#### ❖ **Can’t English be considered an Indian language, asks top court**

- Court questions the use of the colonially loaded term ‘native’ in CBSE circular, says push for three-language scheme may be in the spirit of constitutional goal to use Indian languages for official purposes; petitioners point to human resource crunch
- The Supreme Court on Tuesday questioned the categorising of English as a “non-native language” by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in the three-language scheme, teaming the tongue spoken in India for over 300 years and used for official communication in at least five States with those such as German, Spanish, Arabic, and French.
- “Can India consider English as an indigenous Indian language,” Justice Joymalya Bagchi, part of a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, asked.
- The latest circular issued by the CBSE on July 10 differentiates between “Bharatiya Bhashas” such as Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi, and so on from the “non-native” languages. The three-language scheme, which is under dispute, requires Class 9 students to study at least two languages “native to India”.

- Justice Bagchi said the term “native” used by the CBSE was loaded with colonial meaning. “What does this word ‘native’ mean? Can it be understood as indigenous Indian language,” Justice Bagchi asked.
- The judge pointed out that neither the Constitution nor the statute books used the term “native”. It was either “mother tongue”, “regional language”, or “Indian language”.
- Justice Bagchi, however, said the push for the three-language scheme may be in the spirit of the constitutional goal to use Indian languages for official purposes throughout the country.
- Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for parents and students, said neither books nor teachers were available in schools. Out of the 22 Scheduled languages, books were available only for three though the three-language scheme came into force from July 1.
- The senior counsel said teaching 22 languages in CBSE schools would mean 22 teachers more, with one for each language.
- “This is true as all 22 languages should be made available to students... This creates a complete impossibility of human resources for schools in the country,” Mr. Sankaranarayanan said.
- The court issued notice in his petition highlighting the impact of the three-language scheme on children in Classes 5 and 6, and listed the next hearing on July 22.
- Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for parents and students of Class 9, said it was far too much to expect students to take up a new language, be proficient and appear for exams. He focused on the human resource crunch staring at schools. “Which teacher can teach 22 languages,” Mr. Rohatgi asked.
- Senior advocate Shyam Divan, also for Class 9 students, said the scheme was originally meant for 2030, but was advanced to 2026-27.

### **Retired teachers: CBSE**

- In an affidavit filed on July 13, the CBSE has acknowledged the possibility of a resource crunch in the implementation of the three-language scheme, but said retired teachers and “suitably qualified postgraduates” could pitch in.
- The CBSE considered this a “very practical and enabling approach” to address the availability of teachers and learning resources for implementation of the language policy.
- “Recognising that schools may require time to build full teaching capacity in different Bharatiya Bhashas, the Board has permitted flexible staffing arrangements as an interim measure... It has been suggested that schools may, as an interim measure, engage 25-26 existing teachers with functional proficiency, retired teachers and suitably qualified post-graduates, and may use Sahodaya clusters and virtual/hybrid teaching,” it said.
- The Board reasoned that out of the 28,848 schools sponsoring Class 9 candidates, 47.3% already offer two or more native Indian languages and were fully compliant without the need for any additional teachers.

- The CBSE said that 99.9% of schools already had at least one Indian language teacher.
- In a separate affidavit, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) said it had already undertaken the preparation, review, vetting, finalisation and dissemination of textbooks in 22 Scheduled languages as part of the implementation of the three-language formula.

#### ❖ **Draft health research policy proposes overhaul of India's research ecosystem**

- The Centre has released the **draft National Health Research Policy, 2026, that seeks to align the country's scientific research more closely with its disease burden and public health priorities, proposing a wide-ranging restructuring of India's health research ecosystem with a sharper focus on indigenous innovation, evidence-based policymaking, and measurable outcomes.**
- Prepared by the Department of Health Research, the draft is the first attempt at a unified national framework spanning biomedical science, clinical medicine, public health, epidemiology, digital health, health systems, behavioural sciences, and emerging technologies.
- The Ministry has invited stakeholder feedback before the policy is finalised. It aims to address long-standing problems, including fragmented research efforts, wide regional disparities in research capacity, and the slow translation of scientific findings into actual healthcare delivery and policy.
- While India has built considerable scientific capability through institutions such as the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), universities, medical colleges and other research bodies, the policy points out that this capability remains concentrated in a handful of institutions and States.
- Research priorities, it notes, do not always track the country's real disease burden, health-system gaps, equity concerns or its preparedness for future public health emergencies. Administrative and regulatory delays, it adds, continue to slow down research even when funding is not the constraint.
- **Among the key proposals is a system for periodically identifying priority research areas, based on disease burden, scientific opportunity, equity, pandemic preparedness and strategic national interest — an agenda to be drawn up in consultation with States, Union Territories, researchers, health professionals, patients and community representatives.**

#### **Three-tier structure**

- The draft also lays out a three-tier governance structure: a National Health Research Stewardship Committee for overall strategic coordination, the Department of Health Research as the nodal implementing agency, and the ICMR as the scientific and technical lead. States, in turn, will be expected to weave research more tightly into local health programmes and service delivery.
- **Ethics, research integrity, data governance, cybersecurity and community participation have been placed at the core of this framework. Long-term national targets have also been proposed for research investment, medical science Ph.D., publications, and patents.**

#### ❖ Acid ingestion included in amended Act: Centre to SC

- The Union government informed the Supreme Court on Tuesday of amending the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD) of 2016** to extend the definition of “acid attack victim” to mean persons who have internal injuries caused by the ingestion of acid or any other similar corrosive substances.
- Appearing before a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre, said a notification was issued on May 22 by which the Act’s schedule was amended to define an “acid attack victim” as anyone “disfigured externally or internally due to violent assault, self-infliction, accident by throwing, administering, or spilling of acid or similar corrosive substance”.
- The **amendment would have a retrospective effect, which would allow victims with internal injuries that occurred prior to May 22, 2026 to also claim benefits under the 2016 Act.**
- The 2016 law had previously recognised only victims of acid-throwing, and not forcible acid ingestion. The Act had remained unchanged although the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaced the Indian Penal Code, accepted both the act of acid-throwing and administration of acid as offences punishable from 10 years’ imprisonment to a life sentence under Section 124 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt).**
- In May, the top court had flexed its plenary powers to include survivors of forcible administration of acid in the category of ‘acid attack victims’ under the 2016 Act. **The court took the extraordinary step in May to judicially intervene under Article 142 of the Constitution after senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the petitioners, successfully urged the Bench that “those who suffered the extreme agony of having to forcibly ingest acid” must not be left out.**
- In previous hearings, the court had even gone to the extent of indicating to the Centre to change the penal and bail laws to punish the perpetrators of this “most ruthless, most heinous” of crimes.

#### ❖ India’s imports from China soar to \$80 bn in first half of 2026

- Two-way bilateral trade was up to \$91.72 bn after six months, a 23.6% rise from last year, on track to surpass record \$155.62 bn figure from 2025
- **India’s imports from China rose 21.8% in the first half of 2026 to a record \$79.41 billion, according to data released by China’s General Administration of Customs on Tuesday.**
- Two-way bilateral trade was up to \$91.72 billion after six months, a 23.6% rise from last year, and on track to surpass the record \$155.62 billion trade figure from 2025, when China was again India’s biggest trade partner in goods.
- While the **trade deficit reached \$67.1 billion after the first half of the year — also on track to exceed last year’s record \$116.12 billion figure — India’s exports to China have also registered strong growth, up by 37.2% to \$12.31 billion.**

## **Trade deficit**

- India's official data on Monday showed the overall trade deficit in the month of June 2026 rose over fourfold year-on-year to \$15.3 billion in June 2026, on the back of high growth in merchandise imports and a rise in the value of crude oil, electronics and gold imports.
- Indian officials are less concerned by the quantum of the trade deficit with China than by the nature of the basket of goods. **India imports not only large quantities of finished electronics and other equipment from China, but also intermediates that are needed for Indian manufacturing and fuel India's own exports. A particular concern is the nature of India's exports to China, which in the past have been dominated by low value-added products such as organic chemicals, ores and seafood.**
- Earlier this month, India's Ambassador to China Vikram Doraiswami pitched for greater Indian exports to China, especially in areas where India is globally competitive such as pharmaceuticals. "Obviously, we would like to be able to export more to China. This is nothing unreasonable about suggesting that," he said, speaking at the **World Peace Forum**, an annual foreign policy forum in Beijing.
- "How do we find ways in which **India and China** can be connected, with a widening basket of goods that both sides can provide each other, but also a sense that reasonable mechanisms to protect consumers can be applied in a way that enables India also to export more of the goods that it can export elsewhere in the world also to China?" he said. "In other words, it would be easier to consider that the trade wouldn't be exactly 50-50 balanced, but one side would have more exports, provided that exports consist of goods that we can also add value. If it is pure consumption goods, that becomes a little harder to sell as a reasonable mechanism for the deficit."

## **❖ Inaugural Index of Services Production shows 14 sectors grew in double digits in April**

- As many as 14 of the 19 sub-sectors in the trial and inaugural release of the government's new **Index of Services Production (ISP) witnessed double-digit growth in April 2026, with the best-performing sectors including accommodation and food, retail trade, administrative and support services, and real estate.**
- The 19 sub-sectors measured account for about 60% of India's services sector.
- **The ISP is meant to be the services sector counterpart to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). While the IIP is released on the 28th of every month unless it is a weekend or holiday, the ISP will be released on the 29th henceforth.**
- "The ISP represents an important milestone in strengthening India's statistical system and improving the measurement of the services sector, which accounts for more than half of the country's economic activity," the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation said in a release.
- While the inaugural release does not provide a composite growth rate for the entire index, this growth rate can be calculated using the sector-wise growth rates and weightages, said D.K. Srivastava, chief policy advisor at EY India.
- "Considering the year-on-year growth in April 2026 over that in April 2025, the 19-services sector growth is at 20.8%," Mr. Srivastava said.

- The **base year of the trial ISPs has been set as 2024-25, and the index sources its data from several areas, including administrative data, Goods and Services Tax data, and the Annual Survey of Incorporated Services Sector Enterprises (ASISSE) data.**

#### ❖ **WPI inflation rises to 9.87% in June**

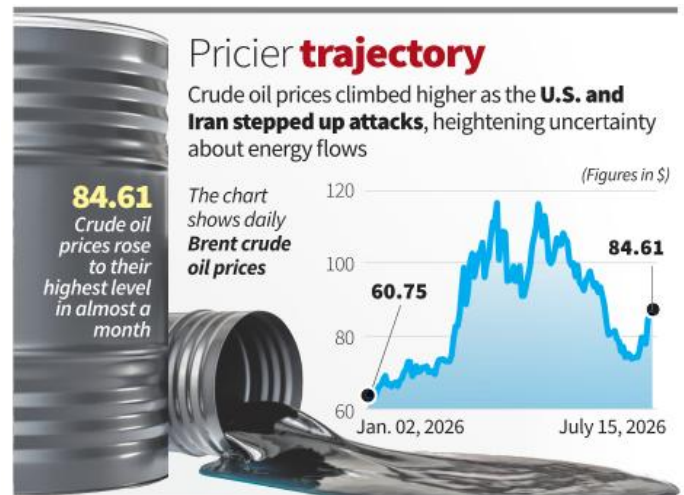
- Wholesale price inflation rose to 9.87% in June, from 9.68% in May, led by a sharp spike in prices of non-food and food products.
- **The latest wholesale price index (WPI) inflation data is based on the 2022-23 base year.**
- As per the data, food inflation rose to 5.49% in June, from 3.60% in May, as food prices rose during the month following a rainfall deficit due to the El Niño impact.
- **Non-food articles WPI inflation was also higher at 11.07%, while in minerals it was 9.45% in June.**
- “Mineral Oils (containing Petroleum Products), Food Articles, Manufacture of Basic Metals, and Manufacture of Chemicals and Chemical Products have been major drivers of WPI inflation in June 2026,” the Commerce and Industry Ministry said.

#### ❖ **NASA astronaut Anil Menon embarks on 8-month stint to International Space Station**

- NASA astronaut Anil Menon and two Russian cosmonauts on Tuesday lifted off onboard a Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft from Kazakhstan on an eight-month mission to the International Space Station.
- The Roscosmos spacecraft carrying Mr. Menon and Russian cosmonauts Pyotr Dubrov and Anna Kikina lifted off from the Baikonur cosmodrome.
- **After a two-orbit, three-hour trip to the station, the spacecraft will automatically dock to the Prichal module. This marks Mr. Menon’s first spaceflight and the second flight for the Russian cosmonauts, according to NASA.**
- Once aboard, the trio will join NASA astronauts Jessica Meir, Jack Hathaway, and Chris Williams, European Space Agency astronaut Sophie Adenot, and Roscosmos cosmonauts Sergey Kud-Sverchkov, Sergei Mikaev, and Andrey Fedyaev.
- Mr. Menon, Mr. Dubrov and Ms. Kikina's mission will last about eight months, and they are scheduled to return to Earth in April 2027.
- Mr. Menon’s father, K.P. Shankaran Menon, hails from Ottapalam in Kerala’s Palakkad district.
- He is the great-grandson of former Indian National Congress chief Sir C. Sankaran Nair.

## ❖ Iran threatens regional oil blockade over U.S. actions

- Oil and gas 'will either be for everyone or no one', says Iran as U.S. claims 'wave of strikes'; U.S. blockade has 'dismantled' the peace MoU, says Tehran; Brent crude price nears \$85 a barrel.
- Returning to war nearly a month after signing a memorandum of understanding towards peace in West Asia, the U.S. and Iran on Wednesday launched strikes on targets across the region.
- While the U.S. Central Command said it launched "a wave of strikes... designed to further degrade military capabilities Iranian forces have used to attack commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz", Iranian state media reported explosions near the port city of Bandar Abbas, on the island of Qeshm, and on Bandar Imam Khomeini. Iranian media later said new U.S. strikes hit the southern port city of Bushehr, home to the country's only civilian nuclear plant.
- Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they targeted the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, where the military said it had intercepted attacks against civilian targets, while Jordan's armed forces said they had downed three missiles from Tehran. Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said the renewed U.S. blockade on Iranian ports "has, in a way, dismantled the Islamabad memorandum", referring to the interim deal reached last month to halt hostilities and pursue peace talks.
- The Guards also threatened on Wednesday to halt all energy exports from West Asia over the blockade. "The export of oil and gas from the region will be either for everyone or for no one," it said.
- The Brent crude oil, the international standard, traded close to \$85 a barrel on Wednesday — more than 15% higher than the price before the war, but still below the nearly \$120 reached at the height of the conflict. Analysts with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have warned that while a surplus of oil had kept prices low, "much of that room has now been used up".
- "As tensions flare again in the Strait of Hormuz, that room [from oil surplus] is now smaller and shrinking further as spare capacity has been deployed, demand has compressed, and inventories have been drawn down," Azim Sadikov and Jean-Marc Natal from the IMF wrote in a blog post. "Unless inventories are replenished, the world will start from a weaker position when the next shock comes."
- At the heart of the resumption of hostilities has been the dispute over the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway that is crucial for global oil and gas flows.
- Iran blockaded Hormuz after the U.S. and Israel launched their massive attack on February 28, using it for leverage against its foes for months before briefly reopening it, and then again vowing it would be closed "until the U.S. ends its aggression".
- The U.S., in turn, has reimposed its own blockade of Iran's ports, though Mr. Trump has backed down on a planned 20% levy on ships using the strait.



- Since the war began, Iran has asserted its control over the strait and opened fire on ships for taking routes it says are unauthorised.
- “The retaliatory operations of the fighters will continue, and the strait will remain closed until the U.S. ends its acts of aggression,” the Guards have said.
- A Norwegian tanker was hit by an explosion caused by an unidentified device off the Omani coast early on Tuesday, the crisis response company MTI Network said.

#### ❖ **Kudankulam nuclear plant data leak sparks ‘commotion’**

- The leak of highly sensitive files of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP), reportedly accessed by a ransomware group from a contractor’s server, has triggered “absolute commotion” in the plant, KKNPP sources said on Wednesday.
- After commissioning two 1,000 Mwe VVER reactors, KKNPP is building four more such units with Russian collaboration.
- Sources said the top brass of the upcoming nuclear park is “completely clueless” about the development that poses a security threat as it may let an adversary map the support system and identify vulnerabilities.
- According to Reuters, more than 19,000 files dating between 2016 and mid-2025, and linked to KKNPP’s engineering blueprints on control, cooling and ventilation systems, list of vendors and suppliers, etc. had been accessed by World Leaks.
- Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited said the information claimed to be available in public domain pertains to “conventional balance of plant common service facilities” and does not relate to any nuclear safety or nuclear security-related systems.
- The leak originated from a server hosted by third party provider Yotta. The plant’s contractor, Anil Ambani’s Reliance Group, has admitted that a “partial breach” had happened and the government had been informed.
- “Suspicious activity on Yotta’s server was noted on May 29 last and it was reported in June-end. Investigations by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited, the project proponent, and Computer Emergency Response Team are on,” the sources said.
- Reliance Group’s Reliance Infrastructure bagged the contract in 2018 to build infrastructure for reactors 3 and 4, both under construction.
- When the KKNPP encountered a similar incident in 2019, wherein a North Korean malware infection on its administrative network exposed the plant’s vulnerability, NPCIL had dismissed it saying that their “unbreachable standalone network” was intact and no data could be accessed by any dark web.
- Neither KKNPP’s site director Ashok Bhatiya, nor V.P. Sunil, Station Director (1 and 2), could be reached for their comments on this sensitive issue.
- The senior manager of human resources and public relations Kannan, who would usually be in touch with the media for occasional press statements, also did not pick up repeated calls.

#### ❖ **After a decade, govt. presents draft Apartment Bill**

- One of the key provisions of the Bill is the assignment of a competent authority to oversee the proposed Act, which was previously not established. The proposed Bill will be implemented by the UDD

- The Karnataka government has proposed a comprehensive overhaul of the legal framework governing apartments in the State by introducing the Karnataka Apartment (Ownership and Management) Bill, 2026, which seeks to repeal two five-decade-old laws and bring apartment ownership, management, and redevelopment under a single piece of legislation. The Bill will be tabled in the upcoming monsoon session of the Legislature starting August 6.
- The major overhaul has been proposed in terms of fixing the competent authority, the safety of older apartment complexes, dispute resolution, and accountability.
- The proposed Bill will replace the Karnataka Apartment Ownership Act, 1972, and the Karnataka Ownership Flats (Regulation of the Promotion of Construction, Sale, Management, and Transfer) Act, 1972, which the government said no longer address the complexities of modern apartment housing.
- “The existing laws have led to prolonged litigation, uncertainty for homebuyers, and disputes between promoters and apartment owners. Several provisions of those laws also overlap with the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA),” said Tushar Giri Nath, Additional Chief Secretary, Urban Development Department.

### **Accountability**

- The proposed legislation will apply to apartment projects with more than eight units. One of the key provisions of the Bill is the assignment of a competent authority to oversee the proposed Act, which was previously not established. The proposed Bill will be implemented by the Urban Development Department (UDD).
- Another major inclusion is the transfer of ownership of project land and common areas to apartment owners. While apartment associations will continue to manage and maintain common facilities, ownership of these areas will have to be transferred to the apartment owners. The Bill also provides clarity on the calculation of the undivided share of land attached to each apartment.
- It also seeks to fix the calculation of maintenance costs that need to be paid by the apartment owners, which is now divided equally among everyone.

### **Mandatory audit**

- The Bill introduces mandatory structural safety audits for ageing apartment buildings.
- Apartment complexes that are more than 30 years old will have to submit a structural stability certificate, with fresh certification required every five years thereafter.
- It also creates a common capital fund through contributions from apartment owners to finance major renovations and redevelopment works. However, redevelopment can only be taken up when 75% of the flat owners consent to it.
- “Owners who do not consent to redevelopment will be entitled to compensation of at least twice the prevailing market value of their property,” the Bill says.
- To resolve disputes, the legislation proposes a dedicated dispute resolution mechanism with a two-stage appellate system.
- Both the competent authority and the appellate authority will be vested with powers equivalent to those of a civil court.
- Thereafter, apartment owners can move the court.

## **Association**

- It mandates the formation of an association of allottees within three months of more than 50% of apartments in a project being booked.
- Existing apartment associations registered under the current law will automatically be recognised as associations under the new legislation. The upcoming associations will automatically be formed and governed as per the new law.
- In many instances earlier, association members were held responsible in cases of accident, which are now streamlined, and specific accountability has been fixed.

## **Responsibilities**

- The proposed law also specifies the responsibilities of promoters, including handing over original project documents, facilitating the formation of associations in accordance with RERA, maintaining common areas until associations are formed, and transferring unpaid funds to the association.
- Flat owners, meanwhile, will be required to comply with association bylaws, pay maintenance charges and capital contributions, maintain their flats, and avoid any alterations that compromise the structural safety of the building.
- Apartment associations will be responsible for maintaining common areas and buildings, ensuring structural safety, maintaining accounts and records, preparing and registering bylaws, and obtaining the approval of at least 75% of the apartment owners before undertaking any modifications to common facilities.
- The UDD will have powers to inquire into complaints, approve bylaws, register and regulate apartment associations, resolve disputes, and ensure compliance by promoters, associations, and apartment owners.
- They may also take over the functioning of an association if more than two-thirds of apartment owners submit a written request.
- The Bill also proposes the constitution of a State consultation and advisory committee comprising representatives of apartment owners' associations, federations, and State government officials to advise on matters relating to apartment governance.
- The government has invited suggestions from the stakeholders through email at kaomabl@gmail.com.

## **❖ Panel backs re-incorporation of 'Bauddha' word in Naada Geete**

- A committee headed by Purushothama Bilimale, Chairman of the Kannada Development Authority (KDA), has recommended that the State government re-incorporate the reference to Buddhism by adding the word 'Bauddha' in the Naada Geete (State anthem) — Jai Bharata Jananiya Tajujate — composed by poet Kuvempu.
- Buddhist religious leaders, along with various organisations, had urged the State government to re-incorporate the word in the Naada Geete. The government had then constituted a committee to study this and submit a report.
- The committee has now taken a unanimous decision to include the word "Bauddha" and has submitted a report to the Department of Kannada and Culture to change the lines "Parasika Jainarudhyana" in the Naada Geete to "Parasika Jaina Baudharudhyana."

- Speaking to The Hindu, Mr. Bilimale said, “Buddhism is also an important religion of the State. Kuvempu clearly had no disdain for Buddhists. The word ‘Bauddharudhyana’ was mentioned in the draft of the poem written by Kuvempu in 1924. When it was published in the collection Kolalu in 1930, the word was dropped.”
- He noted that while Buddhist monuments and historical traces of the Ashoka era were found in Sannati in Kalaburagi district, indicating that Buddhism was widespread in the State earlier, the influence of Ambedkar had led to a large number of people taking to Buddhism in recent times.
- He said that while the recommendation to include the word was unanimous, the final decision was up to the government.
- H.C. Mahadevappa, former Minister for Social Welfare, had written to the then Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in November 2025, stating that the original draft of the Naada Geete contained the word “Bauddha.”
- Earlier, the word “Madhwa” was added to the Naada Geete, at the behest of the late Vishvesha Tirtha Swami of Udupi Pejavar Mutt and other leaders of the Madhwa sect of the Brahmin community. Some people, including Kuvempu’s son and the late writer Poornachandra Tejaswi, had then opposed it, saying it was against the wishes of Kuvempu.

#### ❖ Karnataka ranks last among peer States in per capita urban grants: Report

- Now, Karnataka ranks last among comparable States in per capita State Finance Commission (SFC) grants to cities, according to ‘A Story of Reversal of Karnataka’s Fiscal Decentralisation’, a report by Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy. Comparing Karnataka’s per capita allocation with that of its peer States, the report noted that Kerala’s per capita SFC grant to urban residents in 2026-27 is ₹6,251, while Karnataka’s is only ₹2,244.
- “Karnataka once led India in devolving funds and powers to local governments. However, its recent decisions point in the opposite direction. The 5th State Finance Commission (SFC) submitted its report in November 2025 for the award period from FY 2026-27 to FY 2029-30,” the report said.
- It further stated that peer States such as Tamil Nadu and Odisha have more than doubled these grants over the eight years since 2018-19.
- Per capita urban grants in Tamil Nadu and Odisha increased by 203% and 214%, respectively, while Karnataka’s rose by only 25%, with no growth in the last three years.
- This comes despite Karnataka’s urban population accounting for 46% of the State’s total population, a figure projected to rise to 51% by 2036, according to the analysis.
- The report indicates that Karnataka’s stagnation in fund allocation has left its cities under stress, forcing average citizens to grapple with poor roads, garbage accumulation, and drainage and water supply issues, among other challenges.

#### Per capita allocation for ULBs

|            | 2018-19 | 2026-27 |
|------------|---------|---------|
| Tamil Nadu | ₹1,556  | ₹3,157  |
| Odisha     | ₹2,006  | ₹4,293  |
| Kerala     | ₹3,276  | ₹6,251  |
| Haryana    | ₹350    | ₹4,504  |
| Karnataka  | ₹1,791  | ₹2,244  |

| National FC      |  | Grants         |
|------------------|--|----------------|
| XIV FC (2015-20) |  | ₹ 4,686 crore  |
| XV FC (2020-26)  |  | ₹ 6,409 crore  |
| XVI FC (2026-31) |  | ₹ 18,483 crore |
|                  |  | 188% jump      |

| Allocation for SFC Untied Grants (₹Crore)                                          |         |         |                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------|
| Untied grants from State FC to major cities have fallen more than 90% in 12 years. |         |         |                           |
| City                                                                               | 2014-15 | 2026-27 | Decrease in untied grants |
| Mysuru                                                                             | 43      | 3       | -93%                      |
| Hubballi-Dharwad                                                                   | 47      | 3       | -94%                      |
| Davangere                                                                          | 22      | 2       | -91%                      |
| Mangaluru                                                                          | 22      | 1       | -95%                      |
| Kalaburagi                                                                         | 27      | 2       | -93%                      |



### **'Fell short'**

- Emphasising the total funds reaching urban local governments for development, the report stated, "The 5th State Finance Commission recommended a bold package but fell short of giving urban areas their due share. The commission recommended that 60% of the State's revenue be devolved to local governments (LGs), the highest share so far. Of this, 25% was allocated to urban areas and 75% to rural areas. The urban share is significantly lower than the current urbanisation level of 46%."
- "However, on paper, the State government accepted only 50% devolution of State revenues to local governments, of which 30% will be allocated to urban areas. Ultimately, only ₹4,972 crore reaches city governments," it said.
- With SFC grants hollowed out, Karnataka's cities are critically dependent on XVI Finance Commission grants, said Janaagraha. The XVI Finance Commission has put ₹18,483 crore on the table for Karnataka's cities over the next five years.
- However, the lack of municipal elections threatens even that lifeline for some ULGs.
- Across Karnataka, 13 of the 18 city corporations, including all five under the new Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), are functioning without an elected council.

### **'Karnataka slipping'**

- Santosh Nargund, Senior Advisor (Policy Engagement), Janaagraha, said, "Once regarded as a pioneer in decentralised local governance, Karnataka is slipping. The allocation to city governments in the State's revenues has remained stagnant for years, while elections to over 200 urban local governments — including the GBA — are overdue. If the Chief Minister's vision of building 'more Bengalurus beyond Bengaluru' is to become a reality, Karnataka must urgently restore meaningful fiscal and democratic decentralisation to its city governments."
- Manisha Marulasiddappa, Senior Manager (Public Finance), Janaagraha, said unlike other States, Karnataka hasn't been tabling Action Taken Reports on State Finance Commission recommendations in the Assembly, leading to lack of accountability. "It is about time that Karnataka makes this a norm," she said.

### **❖ NDA renews push to muster numbers for delimitation Bill**

- Both the ruling alliance and Opposition INDIA bloc are firming up strategies ahead of the Monsoon Session of Parliament; NDA banks on splits in Trinamool, Sena, realignment in T.N.; Congress's parliamentary group is scheduled to meet today
- With the Monsoon Session of Parliament beginning on July 20, the ruling National Democratic Alliance and the Opposition Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance are firming up strategies with regard to the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, which proposes to raise the number of Lok Sabha seats to 850 and initiate the delimitation process.
- The issue acquired a sense of urgency on Wednesday as Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi, while leaders of both factions of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) met Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in Mumbai.

- Amid speculation that NCP MPs of the Sharad Pawar faction may also switch sides, the party's working president, Supriya Sule, clarified that her party had not taken any decision on the Bill. Earlier in the day, she was reported to have said that if the proposed delimitation Bill was based on a uniform 50% increase in seats across all States, "there would be little reason to oppose it".
- The NDA government's sustained effort to secure a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha to pass the Constitution amendment Bill gained momentum after 20 Lok Sabha members of the Trinamool Congress and six MPs of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) aligned themselves with the BJP-led NDA. Alliance managers claim that its strength in the Lok Sabha has risen from 298 in April to 329, though it remains short of the two-thirds majority mark of 362.
- The Congress's parliamentary strategy group is scheduled to meet on Thursday morning, but sources said the party's top leadership is upset that the government is trying to secure a two-thirds majority through the "defection route". "The Home Minister will not get the two-thirds majority he is desperate for in the Lok Sabha. After his humiliation on April 17, he will suffer a second defeat," Congress leader Jairam Ramesh told The Hindu.

### **Outreach to INDIA allies**

- The BJP has, meanwhile, stepped up its outreach to parties in the INDIA bloc in an effort to secure the numbers required to pass the amendment Bill, which also forms the basis for implementing women's reservation from the 2029 Lok Sabha election.
- According to BJP leaders and government sources, the realignment following the recent Assembly elections in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu has opened fresh channels of communication with Opposition parties. Sources said the BJP has also reopened talks with the DMK after its break with the Congress.
- Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Tuesday had said that the government was trying to woo both the DMK and the NCP (SP). Against this backdrop, Ms. Sule's comments that there would be "little reason to oppose" a proposal based on a uniform 50% increase in Lok Sabha seats across all States fuelled speculation that the NCP (SP) could support the Bill. "The formula for implementation should be given in writing," she said.
- In the Rajya Sabha too, the BJP's numbers are set to improve after three Trinamool members joined the BJP. After July 24, the BJP's strength in the Upper House is expected to rise to 117, its highest ever. With the support of seven nominated members, three Independents and NDA allies, the ruling alliance expects to reach 153 members, still 11 short of the two-thirds majority of 164 required to amend the Constitution.

### **❖ Marginal dip in number of rural job scheme workers**

- The analysis finds a dip in registered and active workers coinciding with shift from MGNREGS to VB-G RAM G; govt. counters the claim saying it does not reflect the continuous verification

- In the fortnight following the transition from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-G RAM G), the number of registered workers fell from 27 crore to 26.33 crore, a net reduction of 67.6 lakh workers, or 2.5% of the total workforce enrolled under the rural employment programme, according to an analysis by LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists.
- The number of active workers — those who have worked at least once in the last three years under the programme — also fell from 10.84 crore to 10.57 crore, a decline of about 26.3 lakh workers (2.43%).
- The VB-G RAM G 2025 came into force on July 1, 2026.

### **‘Dynamic figure’**

- Rural Development Ministry officials, however, disputed the findings, saying the analysis covered only a short period and did not reflect the continuous verification, updating and renewal of worker and job card records undertaken by States and Union Territories. The number of registered and active workers is a dynamic figure and changes as records are updated, the officials said.
- The Ministry officials also put the onus on the States, arguing that they have to follow the Standard Operating Procedures prescribed by the Centre for any deletions. They added that no complaints had been received regarding denial of employment due to non-completion of e-KYC or face authentication and that about 84,000 Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Cards covering 1.91 lakh workers had already been issued under the new law.
- According to LibTech India, three States — Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and Telangana — accounted for a large portion of the net fall in registered workers and the decline in active workers. Bihar saw 5.98 lakh workers removed from the rolls, Uttar Pradesh 8.06 lakh and Telangana 7.2 lakh.

### **E-KYC in question**

- The group said that although transition guidelines provided that e-KYC-verified MGNREGA Job Cards would remain valid and workers should not be denied employment because of pending e-KYC, there was little clarity on how workers unable to complete e-KYC or facial recognition-based verification would be protected from omission.
- “The publicly available framework did not explain in comparable operational detail how workers unable to complete e-KYC or Face Recognition System (FRS) would be carried over, how omissions would be identified, or how prompt restoration would work,” said Venkateswarlu Kuruva, researcher at LibTech India.
- LibTech described the latest decline as the fourth major reduction in worker numbers in recent years to coincide with a digital compliance measure, following Aadhaar-based payments in 2022-23, mandatory e-KYC in 2025 and facial recognition-based attendance verification in 2026.

- The organisation noted that publicly available data do not indicate why workers were removed, whether they had pending e-KYC or facial recognition verification, whether prior notice was issued, whether Gram Sabha verification was conducted or whether an appeal mechanism was available. It also does not reveal the gender, age or caste of those affected.

#### ❖ **In meeting with House panel, Ladakh villagers seek access to grazing lands along the LAC**

- Residents of villages along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh told a parliamentary panel visiting the Union Territory that they had lost access to their traditional grazing grounds following the border tensions with China in 2020.
- The 15-member delegation, representing the border villages of Maan Pangong A and B, Leh, Ladakh, requested that nomadic pastoralists be permitted controlled access to India's traditional grazing lands in coordination with security agencies, emphasising that the continued presence of local communities in these frontier regions contributes significantly to national security, Konchok Stanzin, former councillor, Chushul, said.
- "The nomads of the border villages depend on these grazing grounds to rear their livestock. Whenever they go there, the Army stops them. We are not even allowed to bring loose earth from these no-go zones to build our huts, and collecting firewood is also not permitted. Before May 2020, we had free access to these areas," Mr. Stanzin, who briefed the parliamentary panel, told The Hindu.
- Since April 2020, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has amassed a large number of troops and armaments in eastern Ladakh and other areas along the 3,488 km LAC. The PLA moved into Indian territory and built fortified structures and defences in an attempt to permanently alter the status quo on the ground.
- While there are differences in perception on the alignment of the LAC, both sides have concluded a series of agreements to maintain peace on the border, and a moratorium on patrolling was implemented following the June 15, 2020, violent clashes at Galwan.
- The parliamentary panel has assured that it would look into their issues, Mr. Stanzin said

## ❖ Cabinet okays Semicon 2.0, mobile, urea manufacturing schemes, highways

- Projects cleared by the CCEA include two major highway projects worth ₹25,400 crore to ease congestion in Varanasi; 9 new gas-based urea plants with a production capacity of 10 MT; ₹1.27 lakh crore for the second edition of India Semiconductor Mission; and 62,500 crore for MPMS'
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has cleared several projects, including ₹1.27 lakh crore for the second edition of India Semiconductor Mission and ₹62,500 crore for the mobile phone manufacturing scheme (MPMS) as part of efforts to localise manufacturing amid global geopolitical uncertainties.
- The Cabinet also accorded approval to two major highway projects worth ₹25,400 crore to ease congestion in Varanasi and as many as nine new gas-based urea plants nationwide with a production capacity of 10 million tonnes.

**Big ticket**

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by PM Modi, cleared several projects across sectors

NHAI project under Hybrid Annuity Model to include a **43.218-km** corridor linking NH-31 with Varanasi Ring Road for **₹10,998.32 crore**; a **46.039-km** corridor connecting NH-19 with the ring road at **₹14,447.64 crore**

New National Investment Policy for Urea (NIPU-2026) to set up **8-9 new gas-based plants** with a production capacity of 10 MT to make the country self-reliant

**₹1.27 lakh crore** for Semicon 2.0 through which **₹4 lakh crore** investments, production worth **₹2 lakh crore** are expected

**₹62,500 crore** for mobile phone manufacturing scheme, aimed at building Indian brands, scaling up local production

### Semicon Mission 2.0

- The Cabinet has accorded approval for the ₹1.27 lakh crore for the second edition of India Semiconductor Mission through which the government expects to attract investments of around ₹4 lakh crore and lead to semiconductor production of ₹2 lakh crore during the scheme period.
- The new edition of the semiconductor programme — which has provisions to incentivise even suppliers of raw material in the chip manufacturing industry, including minerals and gases — has come at an appropriate time when the world is reeling under a memory chip shortage, and companies are working on plans to enhance production capacity. It also expects to attract investment from other chip segments to meet chip requirements for artificial intelligence devices.
- Highlighting that “Semicon 2.0 will have six pillars. The first pillar will be the design of chips”; Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the programme will focus on design, development and production of indigenous chips. “We will be self-reliant in the production of indigenous chips by the end of this programme,” the minister said.
- The government had allocated ₹76,000 crore for the first edition, under which it had approved 12 projects with cumulative investments of around ₹1.64 lakh crore.
- The majority of the investment in the sector has come from technology firm Tata Electronics and its semiconductor arm.

### **Mobile manufacturing**

- The Cabinet also approved an outlay of ₹62,500 crore for the MPMS, aimed at building Indian brands to achieve technological sovereignty and scale up local mobile production to capture the significant economic value, and create Indian patents in design and research and development.
- “The scheme provides incentive support on eligible sales for manufacturing of mobile phones in India at differentiated rates ranging from 2.25% to 5%. Scheme also provides additional incentive of up to 1.5% linked to domestic sourcing of key components/sub-assemblies. For building Indian brands, an additional incentive at 3% on eligible sales for design and R&D of the product,” an official release said.
- During the scheme tenure, the cumulative mobile phone production in the country is expected to reach about ₹39 lakh crore with significant increase in exports of mobile phones. The scheme is also expected to generate around 60,000 direct jobs thereby contributing to economic growth, the release added.

### **Highways**

- The highway projects, to be implemented by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM), include a 43.218 kilometre (km) corridor linking NH-31 with the Varanasi Ring Road along Varuna River at a total capital cost of ₹10,998.32 crore and a 46.039 km corridor connecting NH-19 with the ring road along the Ganga River at a cost of ₹14,447.64 crore. The NH-19 project will feature a six-lane elevated carriageway, a cable-stayed bridge, an extradosed foot over bridge-cum-major bridge, loops, ramps, link roads and service roads. The NH-31 corridor will comprise a predominantly elevated four and six lane carriageway with flyovers, loops, ramps and service roads.
- Designed for operating speeds of 80-100 kmph, the projects are expected to significantly reduce travel times across the city. The NH-19 corridor will cut travel time between NH-19 and Kashi Railway Station from around 50 minutes to 25 minutes, while the NH-31 project will halve the journey between NH-31 and Kashi Railway Station from 40 minutes to 20 minutes. The government said the corridors are part of the Varanasi Decongestion Plan and aligned with the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.

### **Urea demand**

- The Cabinet also approved the National Investment Policy for Urea (NIPU 2026) to set up “eight-nine” new gas-based plants with a production capacity of 10 million tons to make the country self-reliant in the most widely consumed fertiliser. The new investment framework, which assumes significance as it will encourage new investments in the sector, is an extension of the 2012 New Investment Policy (NIP) with revisions.
- Mr. Vaishnaw said the urea demand is rising 5% annually and the policy approved aims to create additional urea capacity of 10 million tonnes.

- Key changes compared with NIP 2012 include the separation of fixed and variable costs for greater transparency, the introduction of a viable return on equity (RoE) band with a floor at 12% and a ceiling at 16%, and mitigation of foreign exchange risk through conversion of fixed costs into the rupee after four years based on prevailing exchange rates.
- “These measures are estimated to result in savings of over ₹250 crore for each plant established under NIPU-2026 compared with NIP-2012,” the Fertilizers Ministry said.
- The minister said the country imports 10 million tons of urea to meet the domestic shortages. The annual domestic production is around 30 million tons against the requirement of 40 million tons.
- The objective of the new policy is to become self-reliant in urea amid a rise in demand due to a change in cropping patterns, increased sowing area and record production.
- “The incentive under the policy will be the same for private, government and cooperative projects,” Vaishnav said.
- Under the 2012 NIP, which expired in October 2019, six new urea units were set up, including four through joint venture firms of nominated public sector undertaking, and two units by private companies.

#### ❖ **Global bids invited under PLI for 10 GWh ACC batteries**

- The Ministry of Heavy Industries has invited global bids to set up advanced battery manufacturing plants with a total capacity of 10 gigawatt-hours (GWh) in India under the government’s Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) batteries.
- These batteries will be used for grid-scale energy storage, helping store electricity generated from renewable sources such as solar and wind.
- In 2021, the Centre approved an ₹18,100-crore PLI scheme to build 50 GWh of battery manufacturing capacity in India. Of this, 40 GWh has already been allocated to domestic manufacturers, with the remaining 10 GWh now open for bidding.
- The objective of the scheme is to reduce India’s dependence on imported ACCs by strengthening domestic manufacturing capabilities and incentivising large domestic and international players to establish a globally competitive ACC battery-manufacturing ecosystem in the country.

#### ❖ **India-U.K. FTA a boost for farmers and small,medium firms, says PM**

- PM Narendra Modi said the India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), taking effect Wednesday, will boost Indian farmers’ incomes, entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- “The CETA will give fresh momentum to farmers, entrepreneurs and MSMEs,” he posted on X.
- “Several vibrant sectors will gain stronger access to U.K. market. It will deepen cooperation in technology, professional services and innovation, while supporting greater mobility for skilled Indian talent.”

- He said the Double Contribution Convention will provide “invaluable support to Indian professionals” working temporarily in the U.K. and boost ‘our firms’ competitiveness.’
- “All the U.K. cities are looking at India with great excitement,” Harjinder Kang, the U.K.’s Trade Commissioner for South Asia and British Deputy High Commissioner for Western India and one of the lead negotiators of the trade pact, said, adding the bilateral trade between the two countries stood at £45 billion in 2024 and rose to £48 billion in 2026 even in the absence of a deal.
- Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said, “It [the deal] opens new frontiers for IT, professional, financial, education and business services sectors while expanding mobility for Indian talent.”
- Meanwhile, Maharashtra CM symbolically flagged off the first consignment of goods from India to the U.K. under CETA.
- Rajeev Singh, DG, Indian Chamber of Commerce said, “Securing duty-free access for 99% of exports is no small achievement. Textiles stand out in particular. Our exporters in Tiruppur and Surat have long operated at a duty disadvantage against Bangladesh and Cambodia in the U.K. and that gap now closes, giving an entire manufacturing ecosystem room to grow.”

### **Services also to gain**

- Chandrajit Banerjee, DG, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), said, “Enhanced market access across IT, financial, professional, education and healthcare services with improved mobility provisions and Double Contribution Convention, will boost global competitiveness of Indian firms and professionals in the U.K..”

### **❖ Indian government set to invest ₹200 cr. in Ather Energy**

- The Government of India will invest ₹200 crore in Ather Energy through India-Japan Fund (IJF), a joint investment vehicle backed by the Government of India and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.
- Founders Tarun Mehta and Swapnil Jain are also participating in the fundraising round, investing ₹20 crore each, along with other existing promoters and IJF. Hero MotoCorp (HMC) is set to invest ₹960 crore as part of the fundraise, according to Ather Energy’s regulatory filing.
- All promoter investments in the round are being made at a premium of ₹85 to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)-mandated floor price. The firm would issue 79.36 lakh warrants at ₹1,260/warrant to HMC and promoters and 16.26 lakh equity shares at ₹1,230 per share to IJF.
- The board had okayed preferential allotment of about ₹1,000 crore.

### **❖ RBI issues data governance guidance framework for banks**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued the ‘Guidance on Regulatory Expectations for Data Governance’ for banks and other Regulated Entities (REs) prescribing a comprehensive framework to strengthen governance of data across the banking system.
- The objective is to improve data quality, accountability, risk management and security while ensuring compliance with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, and other applicable laws.

- This has become important because with the increasing digitalisation of the financial sector and growing adoption of technology-driven business models, data has emerged as a critical asset for REs.
- As the volume, variety and velocity of data continue to rise, effective data governance has become crucial to ensure data stays accurate, consistent, secure and fit for purpose across functions and systems, the RBI said. Weaknesses in data governance and its management can lead to broader financial, operational, compliance and reputational risk for the REs, it said.

### **Draft released**

- Recognising this, this draft has been released to support REs in strengthening their data governance framework and promoting sound practices relating to data management across the data lifecycle.
- All REs have been directed to establish a comprehensive Data Governance Framework (DGF) aligned with overall risk management framework.
- The framework needs to be proportionate to the size, complexity, business model and technology infrastructure of each bank, while covering all aspects of data governance, including organisational structure, policies, processes, technological systems, audit mechanisms and the entire data lifecycle.
- The Reserve Bank of India has also asked banks to review the framework annually or more frequently whenever required.

### **❖ SEBI bans board from new stock, related instruments**

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has classified investments allowed for board members, including chairperson into permitted and non-permitted investments in its now stricter Code of Conduct Rules for Board Members 2026.
- The entirely new code was released on July 15 after the capital market watchdog said the board made the announcement of the release after the first quarter meet on June 19.
- According to the new code, equity or convertible-to equity instruments and derivatives fall under non-permitted investments. Investment via a regulated pooled investment vehicle such as a SIP or SIF among others and buying units of InVIT and REITs are permitted investments, the regulator said.
- Moreover, Whole Time Members will now come under insider trading rules and be considered a person with price sensitive information. The 2008 code stopped with mandating disclosure for members' and families' ownership/other investments in listed, to-be-listed and regulated intermediaries of SEBI.

### **❖ India-U.K. social security pact is not retrospective**

- The India-U.K. Double Contributions Convention (DCC), allowing temporary Indian and British workers an exemption from paying social security contributions in their host countries for 60 months, is not retrospective, i.e., it will not apply to Indians already working in the U.K. and Britons working in India before July 15.

- The DCC came into effect on Wednesday alongside the India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Normally, temporary foreign workers — called “detached workers” in the U.K. — are exempt from U.K. social security contributions known as National Insurance (NI) for the first 12 months. The India-U.K. DCC has increased this exemption from 12 to 60 months for detached workers.
- However, guidance issued by the U.K. clarifies that individuals already working in the U.K. immediately before Wednesday are not considered “detached workers” under the DCC and are hence subject to U.K. law on social security contributions.
- National Insurance contribution is paid by both the employee and employer, normally. The employee could pay up to 8% of gross salary generally and the employer up to 15% of gross salary as NI contributions.
- The DCC applies only to employees arriving in the U.K. on or after Wednesday and who are not expected to remain in the U.K. for more than 60 months.
- His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) adds that in these cases those seeking an exemption should get a “certificate of coverage” from India’s Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) as evidence that they are making social security contributions in India and are exempt from U.K. NIC.

### ❖ SC opposes use of SIR data for non-poll tasks

- The top court issues notice to the Election Commission and Bengal government after Congress leader's petition says the State is denying welfare benefits to people excluded from electoral rolls.
- The Supreme Court stated on Friday that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is only linked to elections as a petition said the West Bengal government is using SIR data to delete names from schemes ensuring food security, women's welfare and Backward Caste certifications.
- Justice Joymalya Bagchi, one of the three judges on the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, said the Supreme Court, in its May 27 judgment in the Bihar SIR case, had made it very clear that the SIR outcome cannot be used for any other purpose, least of all to conclusively determine citizenship.
- **"The Election Commission has a corresponding duty to refer the matter to the government for adjudication under the Citizenship Act... Until and unless that is done, for all other purposes, the status must go on. The EC is not a constitutional authority regarding Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12 [dealing with citizenship rights] of the Constitution," Justice Bagchi observed. The court issued notice to the EC, West Bengal government, and the Chief Electoral Officer of the State on a petition filed by Congress leader Prasenjit Bose that deletion from electoral roll has resulted in serious civil consequences extending beyond the right to vote.**
- Mr. Bose, represented by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan and advocate Neha Rathi, drew the court's attention to three orders passed by the West Bengal government. The petition said the State issued a notification on May 19 that purged voters must not remain beneficiaries of the Annapurna scheme for cash transfer to women unless they had filed appeals before the SIR tribunal.
- On June 4, the State directed the deletion of beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System (PDS) on the basis of the outcome of the SIR. On May 14, it issued an order calling for authorities to re-verify and cancel caste certificates of names deleted from the SIR list.
- "They have even linked the PDS to voting," Mr. Sankaranaraynan submitted. The petition sought directions for streamlining the appellate process before the SIR tribunals, disclosure of data, publication of standard operating procedure and a time-bound disposal mechanism.
- He said these orders coincide with the snail's pace at which the tribunals are hearing appeals of persons excluded from the electoral rolls of the State. Only 38,000 appeals have been disposed of out of a total 34 lakh filed in West Bengal.
- The petition flagged the absence of publicly available guidelines on the filing of documents, issuance of notices, conduct of hearings, entitlement of excluded electors to file appeals, supply of reasoned orders or timelines for disposal of the appeals. "These adversely affect those whose names have been deleted in the SIR process and could possibly lead to their names being deleted as beneficiaries," the senior counsel contended.

- “Civil rights of voters are at risk here. Many of the voters excluded from the electoral rolls are poor, illiterate and uneducated. It is impossible for them to file appeals either online or offline unless ground-level legal assistance is provided and comprehensive guidelines are issued in local languages,” the petition said.
- Considering the issues involved, the court agreed to hear the case at an early date.

#### ❖ **U.S. targets bridges in Iran as attacks widen**

- The U.S. expanded its airstrike campaign against Iran early on Friday by hitting more bridges, energy sites and collapsing a tower at Chabahar port, backing U.S. President Donald Trump’s threats to start striking infrastructure to pressure Tehran to ease its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.
- Iran launched missile attacks against U.S.-allied nations in West Asia, including Qatar, a mediator in the war, and Kuwait, where a power and water desalination plant was damaged.
- The interim ceasefire agreed to last month has collapsed, and the region has endured days of back-and-forth attacks by the U.S. and Iran as they battle for control of the strait.
- Speaking in a primetime address to the American public on Thursday, Mr. Trump insisted the war was going well. “We are likewise winning big in Iran, and you will see the fruits of that labour very, very shortly.”
- The U.S. air strikes hit bridges overnight into Friday in Iran’s southern Hormozgan province, killing at least seven people, Iranian state TV reported. The attacks hit Bandar Khamir, a city on Iran’s coast on the Strait of Hormuz.
- The highway and railway bridge strikes appeared to be aiming at cutting off Bandar Abbas, Iran’s main port, from roads leading into the Islamic Republic’s central region onward to Tehran.
- Iran acknowledged “attacks on power infrastructure” during the U.S. airstrike campaign for the first time on Friday when its Energy Ministry issued a call for people to use less power in the southern provinces.
- On Friday, Iranian missile barrages triggered multiple public shelter warnings in Qatar and targeted Bahrain. An attack on a Kuwaiti desalination plant heavily damaged a facility supplying 90% of the nation’s drinking water.

#### ❖ **Vikram-1: India’s first privately developed orbital-class rocket set for lift-off today**

- **India’s first privately developed orbital-class rocket, Vikram-1 will be launched on Saturday from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota.**
- **Private space launch company Skyroot Aerospace on Thursday announced that it will attempt to launch Vikram-1 from the space port’s first launch pad at 11.30 a.m.**
- “We have done everything that could be done to test Vikram-1 on the ground. On July 18, we are eager to see how Vikram-1 performs in a real flight environment for the first time. This is our first test flight, and we will be getting valuable data from it. This will be foundational to Skyroot’s aspirations of establishing a launch cadence. We are excited to see this through,” Pawan Kumar Chandana, co-founder & CEO, Skyroot Aerospace, said.

- Skyroot said all stages of Vikram-1 have been successfully integrated and stacked on the launch pad. Following this, the final integrated checks of the vehicle on the launch pad from Skyroot's launch control centre have been completed along with the interface checks with all the telemetry ground stations and tracking radars.
- **Vikram-1 is a seven-storey-tall, multi-stage orbital launch vehicle built with an all-carbon composite structure and powered by in-house-developed propulsion systems, including 3D-printed engines and high-thrust solid-fuel rocket boosters. Designed to carry small satellites weighing up to 350 kg to Low Earth Orbit (LEO), its first test flight is targeting a 450 km orbit at 60° inclination.**
- **Vikram-1, will carry technology demonstration payloads from Grahaa Space, Cosmoserve, DCubed and Skyroot's own SCOPE, along with Cosmos Diamonds' artwork "Cosmic Bloom" and a micro-art piece.**
- "The small satellite launch market is deeply constrained on the supply side. At the same time, the demand for services enabled by satellites in space will only continue to grow, and that is where Skyroot's opportunity lies. The clearance of Vikram-1 for flight following rigorous testing is a defining milestone in India's space journey. This first test flight marks the beginning of Skyroot's aspiration to open space for all," Mr. Chandana said.

### **Contributions**

- Naga Bharath Daka, co-founder & COO, Skyroot Aerospace, said that the launch represents the hopes and hard work of around 1,000 people, the contributions of over 400 suppliers, and nearly 3,000 days of resolve to build a global offering from India.
- "This test flight will show us how every technology we have developed over the years performs in real-world conditions.
- With the in-flight data gathered from this mission, we will return to the shop floor to learn, improve, and build further.
- This test flight is the first step towards creating a reliable, on-demand launch company for the world from India," he said.

### **❖ 'Mapping exercise is related to citizenship'**

- The Election Commission's ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is fundamentally a citizenship verification exercise mandated by the Constitution and electoral laws, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar said on Friday.
- He asserted that the commission was only identifying electors who were absent, shifted, dead, duplicated or otherwise ineligible.
- Addressing more than 380 media professionals from States and union territories at the Election Commission of India's national media conference, Mr. Kumar said the mapping exercise stemmed directly **from Article 326 of the Constitution, which restricts voting rights to Indian citizens aged 18 years or above who are ordinarily residing in a constituency.**
- "Mapping is related to citizenship," Mr. Kumar said. **"Article 326 lays down three conditions for voting — citizenship, age and ordinary residence. The commission has to ensure that electoral rolls comply with these constitutional requirements," he said.**

- **“Nothing goes beyond the Constitution, electoral laws and the commission’s instructions,”** he said.

#### ❖ **State launches hi-tech Travellers Nooks in Hampi**

- Tourism Dept. officials say the move aims to help tourists spend time with ease at Hampi
- After continuous complaints from tourists about lack of basic facilities including clean and hygienic toilets, baby feeding rooms, waiting rooms in Hampi, the Department of Tourism has decided to fill this gap.
- Recently, one such hi-tech facility, Travellers Nook was inaugurated near Shri Krishna Swamy Temple in Hampi by the Minister of Tourism, K. J. George in Hampi. These facilities are being established under Swadesh Darshan Scheme 2.0.

#### • **Swadesh Darshan**

The Swadesh Darshan Scheme is a centrally funded initiative by the Union Ministry of Tourism, to develop sustainable and responsible tourism. The programme provides financial assistance to States, Union Territories, and Central agencies to build world-class tourism infrastructure across the country.

- Officials from the Tourism Department said that this move aims to help tourists spend time with ease at Hampi, which is also proposed to be one of the global tourist destinations along with Mysuru and Lakkundi.
- Speaking to The Hindu, K. J. George, Minister for Energy and Tourism, said, “Hampi is one of India’s greatest civilisational treasures and Karnataka’s proud global heritage destination. Our vision is to make every visitor’s experience as memorable as the destination itself. The Traveller Nooks developed under Swadesh Darshan 2.0 represent a new benchmark in visitor-centric tourism infrastructure by providing clean, safe, accessible and world-class amenities without compromising Hampi’s unique heritage character.”
- Ram Prasath Manohar, Commissioner, Tourism department, said the Department of Tourism through the Karnataka Tourism Infrastructure Limited (KTIL), has already operationalised one such facility of Traveller Nooks.
- “Twenty more such facilities will be built and made functional in the first phase of Traveller Nooks under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0. Of these five such facilities will be made functional in few months time. The project, sanctioned at a cost of ₹25.63 crore, aims to transform Hampi into a world-class heritage destination by providing modern, visitor-centric amenities while preserving the sites’ rich cultural and historical legacy,” he said.

#### **Three categories**

- The department has further classified these Travellers Nook into three categories depending on the visitor footfall, location requirements etc.
- As per the details from Tourism Department, these three categories include Noble, Royal, and Imperial Travellers Nook. The Noble Traveller Nook offers essential amenities such as safe drinking water, hygienic public toilets, vending machines, retail outlets, public Wi-Fi and way-finding facilities for tourists to navigate easily.

- The Royal Travellers Nook expands these services by incorporating an ATM, café, tourist information kiosk, souvenir store, and feeding and diaper-changing room, in addition to the core visitor amenities.
- The Imperial Traveller Nook, designed as a G+1 facility (security services), represents the highest level of visitor service and includes a cloak room, sanitary pad vending machine, enhanced retail spaces, café, tourist information centre, souvenir outlets, and other premium facilities, providing a comprehensive hospitality experience for visitors.

#### ❖ **India rejects former Japan Minister's remarks on bullet train project delay**

- Japan will provide its next-generation E10 series Shinkansen trains to India for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail (MAHSR) project, official spokespersons from the Ministries of External Affairs and Railways said on Friday, addressing queries on the status of the project.
- "India-Japan discussions on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed train are progressing well. Japan will provide E10 series train in the early 2030s. The train is still under development. Meanwhile, construction work is rapidly progressing. First section will be opened in 2027," a spokesperson from the Ministry of Railways said.
- The clarification comes in response to a recent critical social media post by a former Japanese Minister regarding the project, which will be India's first bullet train network. In the post, Hideki Makihara, a member of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, had blamed New Delhi for the timeline delays. He had also flagged concerns over the Japanese side allegedly being "excluded from the signalling system" of the high-speed network.
- The MEA clarified that the statement represented an "individual opinion" that stands at "considerable variance with facts."

#### **Launch in 2027**

- Japan has been playing a key role in the implementation of the mega project in terms of financing it as well as sharing technology, and engineering expertise. Railway officials said that India and Japan had agreed to start the operations with an Indian high-speed train, which is slated to run at an operational speed of 280 kmph. The train is currently being developed indigenously by BEML Limited and the Integral Coach Factory. "We will start off by using the indigenous train because India wants to make the Surat-Bilimora section in Gujarat operational by August 2027, and the Japanese E10 trains will only arrive in 2030," officials said.
- Civil construction work along the 508-km corridor has accelerated rapidly, officials said. The Railway Ministry has awarded a tender to German multinational Siemens for installation of signalling systems along the bullet train corridor stretch, with a view to start the operations by 2027.

#### ❖ **Modi launches hydrogen train, targets Cong., AAP**

- PM says the railway network has undergone major transformation, with electrification reaching nearly 99% in past 12 years; he accuses earlier governments of neglecting railway development

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday flagged off the country's first hydrogen-powered train, even as he took a dig at the Congress governments at the Centre before 2014, accusing them of ignoring the country's railway sector, as the middle class and the poor were never on their priority list.
- Mr. Modi also made a sharp attack on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab, accusing it of betraying the people of the border State as the party failed on every front and was now using advertisements to conceal their betrayal and failures.
- The Prime Minister addressed different gatherings in Haryana's Jind, Punjab's Jalandhar, and Chandigarh. In Jind, after flagging off the country's first hydrogen-powered train between Jind and Sonipat, he said that had the "Hormuz" situation occurred before 2014, the Indian Railways would have come to a standstill. However, owing to transformations in Indian Railways in the past 12 years of the BJP's regime, railway operations in the country have been going on smoothly, he added.
- "... A war has been going on in West Asia, in the region of Hormuz and through the sea route via Hormuz, India receives a large portion of its petrol, diesel, LPG gas and fertilizers. But for the past three to four months, this route has turned into a battlefield... Had this situation occurred before 2014, the operations of Indian Railways would have come to a standstill. Because at that time, in 2014, in a large part of the country, our trains ran solely on diesel," said Mr. Modi.
- "The electrification of Indian Railways began in 1925, nearly a century ago. From 1925 to 2014, in about 90 years, only 30% of the railway network was electrified and 70% ran on diesel. But in the past 12 years, nearly 99% of India's railway network has been electrified," he added.
- In Jalandhar, Mr. Modi said, "Indian Railways is the transporter of poor and middle-class families. The Congress government used to sit back comfortably after making false announcements about new trains. Railway development work being done today should have been done 30-40 years ago. But this work was simply not on the priority list of the previous governments," he said.
- Hitting out at the AAP, Mr. Modi alleged that drug traffickers are roaming freely and pushing the youth of Punjab into the swamp of drug addiction. "The people who are sitting in power in Punjab used to very arrogantly claim that they would change the politics of the country. But today, the country is witnessing its reality," he said.
- "Extortion, illegal collection, unauthorised possession, all of these have become the trademark of their politics. In Punjab, the person who was made the Health Minister had to be dismissed due to bribery. Their MLAs are being caught red-handed accepting bribes," he said.
- "The Central government is making efforts so that the people of Punjab receive the benefits of every central scheme. In the past 12 years, crores of rupees were sent from the Centre to Punjab, but the Punjab government did not spend that money in the right places. The situation is such that every developmental work in Punjab has come to a standstill," Mr. Modi said.

### ❖ Panel defers adoption of report on Bill for removal of Prime Minister, CMs

- The Joint Committee of Parliament reviewing the legislation on the removal of the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers on serious charges decided to defer the adoption of a draft report that had been circulated nearly a week ago, after voting had been completed on two of the five recommendations made by the panel at a meeting on Friday.
- **The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill seeks the automatic removal of a Prime Minister, Chief Minister or Minister after 30 consecutive days in judicial custody, in order to address what the government describes as a vacuum in cases where public functionaries continue in office during prolonged incarceration.** The panel, headed by BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi, made five recommendations in its draft report, including replacing the Bill's provisions for a Minister's "removal" or requirement to "cease to be a Minister" with "suspension". The report was circulated to members on July 10.
- On Friday, when the committee was voting on each of the recommendations separately, it was decided that more consultations with stakeholders and discussions among members were required.
- "The Joint Parliamentary Committee unanimously said this Bill has a far-reaching impact on our country. Everyone felt that the government's intentions in bringing the Bill were good, but we need more consultations. So we will keep the report pending for now," Ms. Sarangi told presspersons at the end of the meeting.
- According to sources, voting on two of the recommendations had already been completed when Ms. Sarangi received a phone call and stepped out of the meeting.
- Upon her return, the decision was taken to defer the adoption of the draft report. Sources said that a few ruling party members had also voted against the first two recommendations.
- AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi and NCP(SP) MP Supriya Sule had submitted dissent notes but withdrew them after the panel decided to defer adoption of the report.
- It is learnt that Ms. Sule, who is the only representative from the INDIA bloc on the panel after other Opposition parties declined to join it, argued that triggering automatic removal on a 30-day period of incarceration is arbitrary and has no correlation with either the guilt of the accused or the gravity of the offence.
- She is learnt to have argued that the Bill weaponises the criminal justice system for political vendetta by creating a parallel system of disqualification without establishing the guilt of the accused.
- She reportedly rejected the recommendation made in the draft report to replace "removal" with "suspension", arguing that elected representatives cannot be equated with bureaucrats and that such a provision disregards their constitutional status and democratic mandate.
- The panel had recommended that the Prime Minister, Union Ministers and Chief Ministers be suspended, rather than permanently removed from office, if they are detained for 30 consecutive days on charges relating to serious offences, pending the outcome of legal proceedings. It had also proposed an automatic reversal clause if such persons are acquitted or if the prosecution does not proceed within a specified period.

- The committee further proposed that the term “serious criminal offences”, as mentioned in the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill, be defined as offences punishable with imprisonment for a term that may extend to five years or more.

#### ❖ **Raising LS strength to 815 will make it ineffective, says Karti**

- The proposal to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha by 50% will make the House “ineffective” and further reduce the political weight of the southern States, Congress MP Karti Chidambaram said on Friday.
- Mr. Chidambaram, the Lok Sabha member from Tamil Nadu’s Sivaganga constituency, told The Hindu that expanding the House from 543 to 815 members would further reduce MPs’ opportunity to participate in debates or raise constituency issues.
- He also contended that a larger Lok Sabha would widen the representation gap between the northern and southern States, making the South “less relevant in the electoral calculus” and further marginalising the region. “Any increase in seats will be disadvantageous to the southern States,” he said. He said one-third of the existing 543 seats should instead be reserved for women.
- He also urged the Centre to consult all political parties before taking any decision on the issue, alleging that the government could “hide behind technicalities and procedures” to avoid wider consultations.

#### ❖ **U.S. delivers another MH-60R Seahawk to the Indian Navy**

- The **Indian Navy has received another MH-60R Seahawk multi-role naval helicopter from the United States**, further strengthening its anti-submarine warfare and maritime surveillance capabilities.
- This brings the total number of helicopters delivered to 21, out of 24 ordered under a \$946 million deal.
- The latest helicopter was delivered at Kochi last week, while two more helicopters are expected to arrive in India this week, the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi said on Friday.
- U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor described the development as “excellent news” for bilateral ties, saying the advanced helicopter would enhance maritime security.

#### ❖ **Govt. orders strict scrutiny of digitised birth, death records**

- Registrar General of India flags issuance of fake certificates, tells registration units in States to take measures to prevent misuse of the system; surge witnessed in request for digital copies amid SIR
- Amid a surge in demand for digitised birth certificates, the office of the Registrar General of India (RGI) is implementing stringent checks to prevent fraudulent digitisation of old records. The RGI informed the States in June that in certain instances, the credentials of registrars have been compromised due to user IDs, passwords, or one-time passwords (OTPs) being shared with unauthorised persons. On July 6, the RGI asked States to identify “Registration Units showing unexplained spikes in registrations”.

- **“As a result, complaints have been received regarding issuance of fake or unauthorised digitised certificates in some instances. Such incidents not only undermine the integrity of the Civil Registration System but also threaten the reliability of vital records,” the June 12 letter by A.K Pandey, Deputy Registrar General (CRS), said.**
- On July 6, the RGI urged registration units in States to take measures to “enhance the security, transparency, traceability, and authenticity of the digitisation process and to prevent misuse of the system”.
- The measures include mandatory verification of online applications for digitisation of old birth and death certificates by the registrar against the original birth and death registers; uploading of supporting documents, including the applicant’s certificate and the relevant register page; forwarding of all applications to the district registrar for approval; submission of additional documents such as the application form when the registrar enters a request on behalf of an applicant; mandatory scrutiny and approval by the district registrar before any digitised certificate is issued; compulsory use of e-signatures by district registrars to ensure authenticity, accountability and an audit trail; and the return of approved applications to the registrar for final issuance of the digital certificate.
- **The RGI has asked State committees to review the status of digitisation and preservation of legacy birth and death records, emphasising the need to maintain original registers and related documents securely and to ensure that all manual certificates are duly verified against the corresponding registers before digitisation.**

#### **Uptick in digital copies**

- Due to the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls where birth certificates are among the accepted identity documents, several birth and death registration units are seeing an upsurge in requests for digital copies.
- **The Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, which was amended in 2023 makes online registration of births and deaths compulsory on the Central Civil Registration System (CCRS) portal.**
- For children born on or after October 1, 2023, the digital birth certificate is the single document to prove the date of birth for various services such admission to educational institutions, government jobs, marriage registration among others. Hospitals are required to report each birth within 21 days.
- The Union Home Ministry is set to introduce a Bill in the Monsoon session of Parliament to amend the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 2023, to make provisions of delayed registration more stringent.

#### **❖ Declare intersex persons a distinct class, says plea in SC**

- The Supreme Court sought responses from the Centre and States on Friday on a petition seeking a declaration that persons born with congenital variations in sex characteristics constitute a distinct and identifiable class.

- A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant issued notice on the petition filed by advocate Shamshravish Rein to direct the Union government to frame separate statutory guidelines within six months to provide distinct recognition, protection and an affirmative support framework for intersex persons, that is, individuals born with congenital variations in sex characteristics (differences of sex development).
- These children face traumatic challenges, including pressure for forced medical interventions, social abandonment, lack of documentation clarity and exclusion from inheritance, education and employment structures.
- The petition urged the court to direct the government to constitute a **National Medical Protocol Committee for Intersex Care and order a nationwide prohibition of medically unnecessary, irreversible surgical or hormonal interventions on intersex infants and children unless necessary to address a life-threatening medical condition.**
- Ms. Rein said recognition and legal safeguards for intersex persons would include reservations in education and public employment and administrative inclusion in birth and identity documentation.

#### ❖ **Animated film gets SC nod for release after Rath Yatra**

- The Supreme Court on Friday permitted the exhibition of an animated film, Mahaprabhu Jagannath, prohibited for not strictly adhering to the Skanda Purana and Brahma Purana, saying animated fiction cannot diminish piety.
- “Devotion is something internal for everyone. Can an animated film bring down devotion? How can fiction be in accordance with the Skanda Purana and the Brahma Purana... It is only imagination at work,” Justice B.V. Nagarathna, heading a Division Bench, addressed the Odisha government and trustees of the Lord Jagannath Temple in Puri who have objected to the film.
- The Bench took the middle path by allowing the movie to be released, but only after the completion of the ongoing Lord Jagannath Rath Yatra on July 27, 2026. The court directed that the film could be released on or after July 28.
- The court was hearing an appeal filed by the film’s makers, Ele Animations, against an Orissa High Court ban on its screening. The film was scheduled for release on July 17 in 300-odd theatres across the country.
- Significantly, the High Court had stopped the release of the film even after the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) had cleared the movie.
- Senior advocate Devadatt Kamat, for the film makers, said the intent of the film was to instil devotion in children and the fictional form was adapted to make the divine origin and stories of the deity “palatable” to young minds.
- Mr. Kamat said the film was only a movie adaptation of a TV series which has been running successfully to 100 crore views on YouTube for over two years. He said the ban, besides causing economic losses and mass cancellation of theatres and bookings, had struck a telling blow on the fundamental freedom of speech and expression.
- Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the State of Odisha, said the trustees and Gajapati of the Lord Jagannath Temple had found certain portions of the film objectionable.

#### ❖ **Govt. unveils scheme for settlement of provident fund cases**

- The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has launched "Vishwas 2026", a one-time dispute resolution initiative, effective from June 29.
- In a statement here on Friday, the **Union Labour Ministry said the scheme would facilitate amicable settlement of disputes relating to levy of damages or penalty on employers under Section 14B of the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 and Section 128 of the Code on Social Security, 2020.**
- **"The Scheme provides employers with an opportunity to settle eligible cases through a transparent, fully digital and time-bound process," the Ministry said. The government had notified the scheme as part of the EPF Scheme, 2026. "It will remain operational for a period of six months from the date of notification,"** it added.
- The Ministry said the objective of the scheme was to promote voluntary compliance, reduce litigation, and enable speedy resolution of long-pending disputes relating to penalty/damages while safeguarding the interests of employees.
- **Under the scheme, damages or penalty for defaults prior to June 14, 2024 would be recalculated at 0.25% per month for defaults up to two months, 0.50% per month for defaults from two to less than four months, and 1% per month for defaults exceeding four months. "These rates are intended to encourage employers to resolve pending disputes expeditiously,"** it added.

#### ❖ **Core Industries Index set to get an upgrade**

- The **Ministry of Commerce and Industry will on July 20 release an updated Index of Core Industries (ICI) with a new base year of 2022-23 and recalibrated industries and weightages.**
- The revised series will replace the existing ICI series which has a base year of 2011-12. The release on July 20 will include the provisional ICI for June 2026 along with the back series from April 2023 to May 2026.
- "As per the established methodology, the weights for the ICI (2022-23) series have been derived from the weights of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) 2022-23 series released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation," the Commerce Ministry said.

#### ❖ **Sugar production estimated to be higher than that of last season**

- Sugar production during the current marketing season (October 2025 to September 2026) will be better than the last sugar season but lower than the initially estimated production.
- Director General of the Indian Sugar and Bio Energy Manufacturers Association Deepak Ballani told The Hindu that the production was expected to be about 280 lakh tonnes.
- Nearly eight lakh tonnes were exported during the current season and the government stopped exports last month. The committed supply of molasses for ethanol production (about 29 lakh tonnes of sugar) will be maintained, he said.

- The season was expected to end with a stock of 42 lakh tonnes that would meet the domestic demand for two months.
- **The ISMA and the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCSF)** said in a press statement on Friday that India's sugar availability remained comfortable and there were adequate stocks to meet domestic requirements.
- Mr. Ballani said good rains in the first 10 days of this month had made up for the deficit last month.

#### ❖ **China pitches AI governance model for Global South**

- It is the clearest signal yet of China's global leadership ambitions in Artificial Intelligence. On Friday, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled a new initiative on global AI governance, pitched largely at the Global South and developing countries. China, along with 29 other countries, mostly from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, has established a World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO) based in Shanghai.
- Mr. Xi described the effort as "a major move by China to answer the call of the Global South and unite the international community together to promote vigorously AI development and governance."
- "It will be an important milestone in the history of AI development," he told a summit on AI governance in Shanghai.
- **He announced that in the next five years, China would provide developing countries "with 5,000 opportunities in AI training and seminar programmes", as well as set up joint AI application cooperation centres with ASEAN, the League of Arab States, the African Union, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and BRICS.**
- The broader context is China's push to both develop its alternatives to Western AI models and to offer them to developing countries. Beijing is concerned about the security implications of relying on models based in the West such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Anthropic's Claude.
- Mr. Xi hinted at these concerns in his speech, saying countries "should jointly oppose overstressing the national security concept in the field of AI and placing one country's security over that of others". He did not name the U.S., but Chinese officials have previously hit out at Washington for what they have described as securitisation of technologies, including AI.
- A day before the launch of WAICO, Chinese AI firm Moonshot announced its latest Kimi K3 model that has surprised Western analysts with its capabilities. Chinese companies like Moonshot and DeepSeek are offering open-source models, which Beijing sees as giving them an edge in developing countries seeking technology for AI adoption. Mr. Xi said China would "encourage open source, openness, collaboration and sharing."
- If security implications of using Western AI models are one concern, ideology is another. Chinese officials have also spoken of what they see as an "infiltration" of Western values through AI platforms and an erosion of sovereignty. This is a message that, Beijing believes, will find resonance in many developing countries and in the Global South.

- “We should tend to the garden of civilisations with great care to ensure that the beauty of each civilisation is appreciated and shared,” Mr. Xi said. “We often say in China, ‘A single string cannot make music, and a single tree does not make a forest.’ AI development should not be a solo performance by a single country, but a symphony of international cooperation.”
- Among the nations signed on to WAICO are Brazil, Russia, South Africa, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Venezuela. India, which was present at the Shanghai summit and sent a Joint Secretary-level delegation, is alone among the five founding BRICS countries in its absence in WAICO.

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

Dr. Rajkumar IAS/KAS Academy