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India's GDP is estimated to grow by 7.3%, says NSO

- The National Statistical Office (NSO) has projected the Indian economy to grow at 7.3 % in 2023-2024, which is higher than the Reserve Bank of India's estimate of 7%, assuming an investment-led recovery in the world's fifth largest economy.
- Most economists have assumed India's gross domestic product (GDP) to grow between 6.5 per cent and 6.7 per cent during the ongoing financial year. In FY23, GDP expanded 7.2 per cent.
- The Indian economy grew 7.7 per cent in the first half (April-September) of FY24, data for which was released on November 30.
- With the government shifting the date of the presentation of the Union Budget to February 1 from the last day of February, starting with the FY18 Budget, the statistics department has advanced the release of the First Advance Estimates so that the government has an annual estimate of GDP that could be incorporated in the Budget calculations even at the cost of accuracy.





Union Cabinet approved the proposal to rename Ayodhya airport

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal to declare Ayodhya Airport as an international airport and name it "Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, Ayodhyadham".
- According to an official release, elevating Ayodhya Airport to international status is paramount for realising Ayodhya's economic potential and its significance as a global pilgrimage site, opening doors to foreign pilgrims and tourists.
- The airport's name, "Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, Ayodhyadham," pays homage to Maharishi Valmiki, the sage attributed to composing the epic Ramayana, adding a cultural touch to the airport's identity.
- On December 30, 2023, the Prime Minister inaugurated the newly built Ayodhya Airport.

Kohli and Jadeja nominated for Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy

- The International Cricket Council (ICC) announced the nominees for the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy.
- Australia's Travis Head, Pat Cummins, India's stalwart batter Virat Kohli, and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja have been nominated for the coveted accolade.
- Australia's match-winner Travis Head became the second nominee on the back of his sensational performances in red-ball cricket.
- The Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy is a Cricket trophy that is awarded annually by the International Cricket Council to the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year.
- It is considered to be the most prestigious of the annual ICC Awards and was first awarded in 2004 to Rahul Dravid.
- The trophy is named after former West Indies cricket captain Sir Garfield Sobers.
- The recipient of the annual award is selected by an "academy" of 56 individuals (expanded from 50 in 2004), including the current national team captains of the Test-playing nations (10), members of the elite panel of ICC umpires and referees (18), and certain prominent former players and cricket correspondents (28).





NIIFL appoints Sanjiv Aggarwal as chief executive officer

- Government-backed National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited (NIIFL) has appointed Sanjiv Aggarwal as its chief executive officer and managing director.
- Aggarwal joins NIIFL from UK-based private equity firm Actis, where he was a partner and most recently in charge of its energy investments in Asia, including in India.
- At NIIFL, Aggarwal succeeds Rajiv Dhar, who served as interim CEO and MD from May.
- NIIF, which is 49% owned by the government, manages over \$4.9 billion of equity capital commitments across its four funds—master fund, fund of funds, strategic opportunities fund, and India-Japan Fund.





PhonePe appoints Ritesh Pai as CEO of International Business

- Digital payments major PhonePe announced the appointment of Ritesh Pai as CEO of International Payments Business.
- He earlier worked as the President-Products and Solutions at TerraPay and was responsible for launching and implementing payment products and solutions globally.
- Prior to that, he served as the senior group president and chief digital officer at Yes Bank.
- PhonePe currently has 50 crore registered users and 3.7 crore merchants on its platform, covering over 99 per cent of the postal codes across the country.
- The company has also expanded into financial services as well as tech-enabled businesses such as Pincode for hyperlocal shopping and Indus App Store which is India's first localised App Store.

Vikas Sheel appointed as Executive Director of Asian Development Bank

- Senior bureaucrat Vikas Sheel was on Friday appointed as Executive Director, Asian Development Bank in Manila, according to a Personnel Ministry order.
- Sheel, a 1994-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Chhattisgarh cadre, is currently Additional Secretary and Mission Director, Jal Jeevan Mission under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- He has been appointed as ED, Asian Development Bank (ADB) for a period of three years from the date of assumption of the charge.





Indian Olympic Association (IOA) appointed Raghuram Iyer as its Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

- The Indian Olympic Association on Friday announced the appointment of Raghuram Iyer as the Chief Executive Officer of the sports body.
- Raguram's wealth of experience and proven track record in sports management and administration makes him an ideal candidate to lead the IOA in its mission to promote and develop Olympic sports in India.
- Iyer comes with the experience of having served as CEO for Indian Premier League teams Rajasthan Royals, Lucknow Super Giants and Rising Pune Supergiant. He also worked in that same position for Indian Super League team ATK Mohun Bagan and Ultimate Table Tennis team RPSG Mavericks.



Virat Kohli named Pubity Athlete of the year 2023

- Indian cricketer Virat Kohli was named the Pubity Athlete of the Year for 2023 after he defeated Lionel Messi 78-22 in the final vote count.
- Pubity is an online community, spanning 20 channels. The popular Instagram page has over 35 million followers and their subsidiary channel - Pubity Sport - hosted the online poll between the legends of the sport, Virat Kohli and Lionel Messi.
- Sixteen athletes including the likes of Novak Djokovic, Pat Cummins, LeBron James, Erling Haaland, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Max Verstappen were pitted against one another in a knockout setup for online voting.
- It came down to Kohli and Messi in the final, with the former claiming 78% of the votes to win the Pubity Athlete of the Year 2023 title.



Lanjia Saura paintings, Dongaira Kondh Shawl of Odisha got GI Tag

- Bhubaneswar, Lanjia Saura painting, Dungaria Kondh embroidered shawl and Khajudi Guda (jaggery) were among seven products from Odisha to have received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.
- The Chennai-based GI Registry accorded the tag also on Dhenkanal Magji (food), Similipal Kai Chutney, Nayagarh Kanteimundi Brinjal and Koraput Kalajeera Rice.
- The art form belongs to the 'Lanjia Saura' or 'Lanjia Savara/Sabara' tribe, one of the PVTGs of Odisha's Rayagada district.
- The women of Dungaria Kondh particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) living in Niyamgiri Hills of Rayagada and Kalahandi districts craft embroidery shawls, which are gifted to guests as a mark of respect and affection.
- 'Kalajeera Rice' is grown by tribal farmers in Koraput district. This particular variety is in demand as locals believe it has medicinal properties such as improving memory, controlling diabetes and increasing haemoglobin levels.
- 'Kai Chutney', made from red weaver ants, is consumed by tribals in Mayurbhanj district who believe it is rich in valuable proteins, calcium, zinc, Vitamin B12, iron, magnesium, potassium, sodium, copper and 18 amino acids and boosts the immune system.
- Kanteimundi Brinjals, which has seeds and prickly thorns, is said to have originated in Badabanapur and Ratnapur areas of Nayagarh district and has a unique taste.
- Odisha 'Khajuri Guda' or jaggery originated in Gajapati district and is a natural sweetener obtained from date palm trees.
- Magji, a sweet item from Dhenkanal district, is made of buffalo milk cheese.



France becomes first European country to issue digital Schengen visas

- France has become the first European Union member to introduce fully digital Schengen visas for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris.
- The newly launched “Olympic Consulate” system operates through the France-Visas portal, streamlining the application process for 15,000 international athletes, 9,000 journalists, and foreign delegations.
- Applications for the 70,000 visas will be exclusively processed online, preventing them from being inundated among other visa requests.
- This groundbreaking initiative aligns with the EU’s digitalization plans for Schengen visas, marking a significant shift in visa application procedures.
- France’s proactive approach aims to ensure timely visa issuance, crucial for the smooth organization of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Three Indian Cities Nominated for Wetland City Tag

- India has nominated Indore, Bhopal and Udaipur for the Wetland City Accreditation (WCA) scheme under the Ramsar Convention, which helps cities gain international recognition for their efforts to protect their natural or human-made wetlands.
- These are the first three Indian cities nominated for WCA based on the proposals received from state wetlands authorities in collaboration with municipal corporations.
- The wetlands situated in and around these cities provide a plethora of benefits to their citizens in terms of flood regulation, livelihood opportunities, and recreational and cultural values.
- This will also provide an opportunity for cities that value their natural or human-made wetlands to gain international recognition and positive branding opportunities for their efforts in demonstrating strong positive relationships with wetlands.
- Sirpur Wetland (Ramsar site in Indore), Yashwant Sagar (Ramsar site closer to Indore), Bhoj Wetland (Ramsar Site in Bhopal), and several wetlands in and around Udaipur are lifelines to these cities.





India to import 10,000 MW of Hydroelectricity from Nepal over 10 years

- India and Nepal inked an agreement setting the target to reach 10,000 megawatts of electricity export to India in the coming ten years.
- Secretary for the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Gopal Sigdel (Nepal) and Indian Energy Secretary Pankaj Agarwal signed a memorandum of understanding on the deal during a meeting at the Yak and Yeti Hotel in Kathmandu.
- Nepal, which is mostly covered by mountains, currently only has a capacity of about 2,600 megawatts of electricity but has several hydroelectricity projects that are being built or planned.
- India has also agreed on Rs10 billion financial aid to Nepal for the reconstruction in Jajarkot and Rukum West which were worst hit by the earthquake in November.



Country's First Multi-Sports Games 2024 Inaugurated In Diu

- The country's first 'Beach Games 2024' started on 4th January 2024 at Ghoghla beach in Diu. Diu is part of the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu. Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Thakur was the event's chief guest. Anurag Thakur participated in the 'My Bharat program' at Malala Auditorium Diu.
- **Beach Games 2024 to be held:** This 'Beach Games 2024' will be organized from 4 to 11 January 2024. Meanwhile, a total of eight sports are being organized in the games. The closing ceremony of the Beach Games 2024 will be held INS Khukri Memorial.

- This year's edition in Diu will showcase sports disciplines that are less prevalent in our country, such as Beach Volleyball, Beaching Boxing, Beach Soccer, Beach Kabaddi, Tug of War, Sea Swimming, Malkhamb, etc.
- More than 1,200 participants from more than 20 states and union territories of the country are participating in this event. The seven-day-long event sees players competing in 8 sports across different age groups. This first ever beach games 2024 a dolphin named 'pearl' is announced as mascot to represent the abundant marine life near Diu, adds charm to the event's identity.