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Losar Festival 2026 is being celebrated in McLeod Ganj, Himachal Pradesh



- Losar is the Tibetan New Year, celebrated by Tibetans and Himalayan Buddhist communities across India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet.
- The festival generally takes place in February or March, depending on the lunar calendar. It features religious ceremonies, family reunions, traditional dances, and the preparation of special festive dishes.
- In India, grand celebrations are mainly held in Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, and Sikkim.
- Losar represents purification, fresh beginnings, and the commencement of a new zodiac cycle in Tibetan tradition.

Losar Festival 2026 Celebrations in McLeod Ganj:

- The Losar Festival 2026 has begun from 18 to 20 February in McLeod Ganj, Himachal Pradesh, marking the start of the Fire Horse Year.
- McLeod Ganj, often called “Little Lhasa,” becomes a center of spiritual and cultural vibrancy during this time.
- The Tibetan exile community is celebrating its traditional New Year with prayers, rituals, and cultural activities.

- Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama has arrived in McLeod Ganj, adding to the festive spirit.
- During the Losar Festival 2026, families prepare khapse, a traditional Tibetan sweet made from deep-fried dough, as part of the celebrations.
- Monasteries perform special rituals, light incense sticks, and hold collective prayers.

Devotees offer prayers for:

- The long life of the Dalai Lama
- Peace and prosperity
- Freedom of Tibet

Significance of Fire Horse Year in Losar Festival 2026:

- The **Losar Festival 2026** ushers in the **Fire Horse Year** according to the Tibetan lunar calendar.
- In Tibetan astrology, the **Fire Horse** is seen as a symbol of **power, energy, strength, passion, and transformation.**
- This **Fire Horse Year appears only once every 60 years** within the Tibetan zodiac cycle.
- Beyond celebrating the new year, **Losar signifies renewal, spiritual growth, and the preservation of Tibetan cultural identity** across the world.

Union Agriculture Minister Launches farmers' digital companion 'Bharat Vistaar' in Rajasthan

- Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare and Rural Development, inaugurated the AI-based '**Bharat VISTAAR**' scheme in Jaipur, Rajasthan, in the presence of Bhajanlal Sharma, Chief Minister of Rajasthan.
- On the occasion, the Minister also launched a **farmer-centric AI Hackathon** and unveiled the **Agri Kosh AI Strategy Roadmap**.
- The scheme has been introduced by the Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare to provide farmers with agriculture-related information using Artificial Intelligence and digital technology.
- Farmers can access services through the toll-free helpline **155261** powered by the AI voice assistant **Bharati** on basic phones, via MoAFW web portal.
- farmers can register their problems, receive immediate solutions, and also check mandi market prices across the country.
- The service provides instant responses in the farmer's local language; it is currently available in Hindi and English, with plans to expand to 11 languages.
- A **Farmer Identity Card (ID)** is being created under the scheme to store comprehensive farmer-related information.
- Initially, schemes such as the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana** and **Soil Health Card** have been integrated, with plans to include all farmer welfare schemes and connect the entire agricultural ecosystem to Bharat VISTAAR in the future.



IDFC First Bank Launches FD-Linked Credit Card 'Hello Cashback Credit Card'

- On February 16, 2026, IDFC First Bank launched the 'Hello Cashback Credit Card', an FD-backed credit card designed for first-time users and individuals without any credit history.
- The card does not require a credit score or income proof. Customers can obtain it by opening a minimum Fixed Deposit (FD) of ₹10,000, with the credit limit equal to 100% of the FD amount.
- It offers standard credit card features such as contactless payments, EMI conversion options, and enhanced security facilities.
- The card provides 3% cashback on the first ₹10,000 of online spending per billing cycle and 5% cashback on online spends above ₹10,000, along with 1% cashback on UPI payments made through IDFC FIRST Bank's mobile app.
- A joining fee of ₹1,000 is applicable but waived until March 31, 2026. The annual fee of ₹1,000 is fully waived on annual spends of ₹2 lakh or more and 50% waived on annual spends of ₹1 lakh.
- Additional benefits include ₹2 lakh personal accident cover, ₹25,000 purchase protection, and fuel surcharge waivers.



India's Unemployment Rate Rises to 5% in January 2026 – Periodic Labour Force Survey



- India's unemployment rate rose to 5% in January 2026, marking a three-month high.
- The data was released under the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) by the National Statistics Office (NSO).

According to NSO's PLFS:

- **Urban unemployment rate:** 7% (up from 6.7% in December)
- **Rural unemployment rate:** 4.2% (three-month high)
- **Overall unemployment rate:** 5%
- The rise in urban unemployment suggests mild pressure in city job markets, while rural unemployment reflects seasonal adjustments following agricultural harvest cycles.
- Labour force participation rate also softened, indicating fewer individuals actively seeking work.

The increase in rural unemployment is attributed to:

- **Post-harvest slowdown:** Reduced agricultural activity after harvesting season
- **Seasonal rural factors:** Fewer temporary farm jobs
- **Soft labour force participation:** Some individuals exiting the job search temporarily
- The unemployment rate is measured under the **Current Weekly Status (CWS) framework.**

Under CWS:

- A person is considered employed if they **worked for at least one hour during the previous seven days.**
- A person is classified as **unemployed if they did not work even one hour but were available or seeking work during that week.**
- This method captures short-term employment fluctuations and is useful for tracking monthly labour market trends.
- An unemployment rate of 5% remains moderate compared to global standards, but the upward movement signals caution.
- However, this rise may be temporary, as job opportunities usually improve when **agriculture and construction activities restart** in the coming months.

Periodic Labour Force Survey:

- The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) is carried out by the National Statistics Office (NSO) to regularly track employment and unemployment trends in India.
- It was launched in April 2017 by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), replacing the earlier five-year (quinquennial) employment surveys.
- PLFS provides both annual and monthly estimates, with urban data released monthly and rural-urban combined data quarterly.

- The Current Weekly Status approach helps policymakers assess short-term labour market conditions and design targeted interventions.

About National Statistics Office (NSO):

- Established: **2019**
- Created by merging: National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO)
- Headquarters: New Delhi, India
- Under: **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**

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Ramalingam Sudhakar steps down as President of the National Company Law Tribunal



- Ramalingam Sudhakar stepped down as President of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) after completing a notable and impactful tenure.
- He assumed office in November 2021 and led the Tribunal for more than four years.
- During his leadership, the institution witnessed considerable strengthening, particularly in handling corporate disputes and insolvency cases efficiently.
- His tenure was characterized by sincerity, integrity, and a strong dedication to upholding high judicial standards.
- Speaking at his farewell, he emphasized that improved coordination and teamwork among stakeholders significantly boosted the Tribunal's case resolution rate.
- Over the past four years, around 54,800 cases were filed before the Tribunal.
- Of these, more than 48,000 cases were successfully resolved, reflecting a disposal rate exceeding 85%.

- Beyond judicial responsibilities, he also worked on enhancing administrative processes and upgrading infrastructure.
- These reforms contributed to the Tribunal's effective functioning and fostered a supportive environment for lawyers, litigants, and staff members.

About National Company Law Tribunal:

- The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is a quasi-judicial body in India that adjudicates issues relating to Indian companies.
- It was established under the Companies Act, 2013, to handle corporate legal and insolvency matters.
- The Tribunal was constituted on 1 June 2016 by the Government of India.
- Its formation was based on the recommendations of the V. Balakrishna Eradi Committee on laws relating to insolvency and winding up of companies.

First Indigenous Cadet Training Ship 'Krishna' Launched at L&T Kattupalli, Chennai

- In February 2026, the first indigenously designed and built Cadet Training Ship (CTS) 'Krishna (Yard 18003)' of the Indian Navy was launched.
- The launch took place at the Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Shipbuilding facility at Kattupalli near Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
- The ship was launched by Anupama Chauhan, President of the Defence Wives Welfare Association (DWWA), in the presence of Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), and other senior officials.
- The ship is the first of three Cadet Training Ships being constructed by L&T.
- It is named after River Krishna, the third-longest river in India.
- The ship is 122 metres long with a displacement of 4,700 tonnes.
- It can achieve a maximum speed of nearly 20 knots.
- The vessel has an endurance of about 60 days at sea.
- The ship is primarily designed to provide basic training to naval cadets.
- Training will include seamanship, navigation drills, ship handling, and practical onboard naval experience.



INS Tarangini to Participate in IFR 2026 and MILAN Exercises at Visakhapatnam



- Indian Navy's sail training ship INS Tarangini is one of the key vessels reaching Visakhapatnam for the International Fleet Review 2026 (IFR 2026) and the multinational naval exercise Exercise MILAN 2026, beginning February 18, 2026.
- Nearly 75 naval ships, including about 20 foreign warships, are set to participate, reflecting India's growing naval outreach in the Indo-Pacific region.
- INS Tarangini was commissioned in 1997 and became the first Indian naval vessel to circumnavigate the globe in 2003–2004.
- The ship represented India at the International Fleet Review during the Sri Lankan Navy's diamond jubilee in December 2010, being the only tall ship present and the first reviewed by the Sri Lankan President.
- INS Vikrant, India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, will be the centrepiece of IFR 2026, showcasing the nation's self-reliance and blue-water naval strength.

- IFR 2026 serves as a major platform to display India's naval capabilities, operational preparedness, and advancements in defence production.
- Participating foreign vessels include BRP Miguel Malvar of the Philippine Navy, CGS Huravee of Maldives, SCGS Zoroaster of Seychelles, and VNPS 17 from Vietnam.
- The involvement of 20 foreign navies highlights India's commitment to cooperative maritime security, improved interoperability, and stronger partnerships across the Indian Ocean Region and Indo-Pacific.
- The simultaneous conduct of IFR 2026 and MILAN underscores India's emphasis on strategic maritime engagement and promoting regional stability.

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Google announces a \$15 billion America-India Connect subsea cable initiative at the India AI Impact Summit 2026

The America-India Connect Initiative Announced during the India AI Impact Summit 2026

- At the India AI Impact Summit 2026, Google announced a \$15 billion investment over five years under the new “America-India Connect” initiative.
- The initiative aims to strengthen digital and AI connectivity between India and the United States through new subsea cable infrastructure.
- Subsea cables are fibre-optic cables laid beneath oceans to transmit telecommunications and internet data between countries.
- More than 95% of global international data traffic travels through subsea cable networks, making them critical for trade, financial systems, cloud services, and AI operations.
- A major component of the project is the establishment of a new international subsea gateway in Visakhapatnam (Vizag).
- The programme includes three new subsea cable routes linking India with Singapore, South Africa, and Australia.
- It also involves the development of four strategic fibre-optic land corridors to enhance domestic and international connectivity.
- The expanded infrastructure will boost bandwidth capacity, improve network redundancy, and enhance AI-related data exchange between India and global digital hubs.

- Sundar Pichai stated that the project will expand subsea cable routes to strengthen AI connectivity between India, the United States, and regions across the southern hemisphere.
- He highlighted India's rapid progress in artificial intelligence and described the country as being on an extraordinary AI growth path.
- Improved connectivity will support AI model training, cloud computing expansion, and cross-border digital services.
- The Vizag landing station will strengthen digital infrastructure along India's east coast and ease congestion at existing cable landing points.
- The gateway is expected to promote regional economic growth and integrate India more deeply into global data networks, benefiting AI research, fintech, startups, and cloud services.
- The investment aligns with India's emergence as a major global AI hub and supports high-speed internet, data centers, secure digital trade, and AI deployment.
- By expanding subsea fibre-optic routes, the initiative enhances India-US digital cooperation and improves resilience against network disruptions.
- At the summit, Google also highlighted its partnership with All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to apply AI solutions in healthcare.
- The collaboration aims to allow patients to digitally input symptoms, enabling AI systems to generate structured medical reports to assist doctors.

Rajnath Singh Presents Inaugural Bhavya Bharat Bhushan Awards

- In February 2026, Rajnath Singh, Union Minister of the Ministry of Defence (MoD), presented the inaugural Bhavya Bharat Bhushan Award during the Mahashivaratri celebrations at the Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.
- The Bhavya Bharat Bhushan Award was instituted in 2026 by the Isha Foundation under the guidance of Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev as a national-level annual honour.
- The award recognises excellence across seven categories: Science and Technology, Arts and Culture, Sports, National Security, Corporate Leadership, Literature, and Community Welfare.
- In 2026, Nambi Narayanan and A. S. Kiran Kumar were honoured for their contributions to space research.
- Alarmel Valli and N. Rajam received recognition for their work in classical arts.
- Vikram Sampath was awarded for his contribution to literature.
- Saina Nehwal was honoured in the sports category.
- The Indian Armed Forces were recognised for their service during Operation Sindoor.

