HEADLINES

- ❖ Uttarakhand has been named the Best State for Promotion of Aviation Ecosystem at Wings India 2026

- ❖ India Launches First AI-Enabled University Pilot at CCSU

- ❖ India and the UAE will co-chair the second India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi

- ❖ Numbeo's Cost of Living Index 2026

- ❖ European Union has formally designated Iran's powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization

- ❖ Ayush Ministry Partners with Zepto to Boost Online Access to AYUSH Medicines and Wellness Products

- ❖ PFRDA Launches NPS Swasthya Pension Scheme As Proof Of Concept For Medical Expenses

- ❖ New Aadhaar App dedicated to the nation

- ❖ Meghalaya's Living Root Bridges Nominated to UNESCO World Heritage List

- ❖ Reliance Industries Limited and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited Ink Deal to Share Offshore Energy Assets

Uttarakhand has been named the Best State for Promotion of Aviation Ecosystem at Wings India 2026

➢ Uttarakhand has been conferred the national award for 'Best State for Promotion of Aviation and Ecosystem' at WINGS INDIA 2026.

➢ The award recognises the state's strategic use of aviation to enhance connectivity, boost tourism, and strengthen public services in its challenging mountainous terrain.

➢ The three-day aviation event, WINGS INDIA 2026, began on January 29 and will conclude on January 31 at Begumpet Airport in Hyderabad.

➢ The award was presented by the Union Civil Aviation Minister to Uttarakhand's Additional Secretary Ashish Chauhan in the presence of Civil Aviation Secretary Sachin Kurve and other senior officials.

- Uttarakhand was selected due to its consistent policy support, infrastructure expansion, and focus on regional air services.
- The state government has worked through the Uttarakhand Civil Aviation Development Authority (UCADA) to improve airports, heliports, and air routes.
- Officials highlighted that aviation development in Uttarakhand is not limited to commercial flights but also includes heli services for remote and mountainous areas.
- These efforts have improved access to difficult regions, reduced travel time, and supported economic activities like tourism and emergency services.

Wings India 2026

- Wings India 2026 is India's largest civil aviation conference and exhibition.
- It brings together policymakers, aviation companies, investors, and global stakeholders on a single platform.
- Awards given at this event are considered highly credible as they reflect real progress in aviation policy and infrastructure.
- Uttarakhand's recognition here is important because it places the state alongside major aviation hubs despite its challenging terrain.

Uttarakhand

- Chief Minister: Pushkar Singh Dhami
- Governor: Gurmit Singh
- National Parks: Jim Corbett National Park, Rajaji National Park, Valley of Flowers National Park, Nanda Devi National Park, Gangotri National Park, and Govind Pashu Vihar National Park.

India Launches First AI-Enabled University Pilot at CCSU

➢ India has taken a decisive step towards transforming higher education with artificial intelligence.

➢ In a first-of-its-kind initiative, an Indian university will now test AI-powered teaching, learning, and administration systems.

➢ India has launched its first AI-enabled university pilot at Chaudhary Charan Singh University (CCSU) Meerut in partnership with Google Cloud.

➢ The initiative is being led by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in collaboration with Google Cloud and Chaudhary Charan Singh University.

➢ CCSU has been selected as the pilot campus where AI tools will be tested before being scaled to institutions across India.

➢ The project was announced at Google's AI for Learning Forum in New Delhi.

➢ Under the programme, Google Cloud's Gemini AI platform will be deployed across academics and administration.

➢ Students will have access to personalised AI tutors, including support in regional languages, enabling self-paced learning and identification of skill gaps aligned with job market needs.

➢ Faculty members will use AI tools to create teaching material, simulations, and multilingual content, helping improve classroom engagement and teaching efficiency.

➢ The aim is to shift from one-size-fits-all education to personalised and outcome-oriented learning.

India and the UAE will co-chair the second India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi

➢ India is set to host a major diplomatic event that signals a renewed focus on the Arab world.

➢ On January 31, 2026, New Delhi will host the second India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM)

➢ The India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting is taking place after a gap of 10 years. The first meeting was held in Bahrain in 2016

➢ The India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting is a high-level dialogue mechanism between India and the League of Arab States.

➢ It provides a collective platform for political dialogue, strategic coordination, and cooperation across multiple sectors.

➢ The meeting includes Foreign Ministers of Arab League member countries along with the Secretary General of the Arab League.

➢ The revival of this format reflects India's intent to institutionalize its engagement with the Arab world beyond bilateral relations and strengthen multilateral cooperation.

- The United Arab Emirates is co-chairing the meeting alongside India, highlighting the deep strategic partnership between the two countries.
- The UAE has emerged as one of India's most important partners in the Middle East, with strong ties in trade, energy, investment, diaspora engagement, and defense.
- Co-chairing the meeting places the UAE in a leadership role within the Arab grouping and reflects trust in its ability to bridge India-Arab cooperation.
- This also aligns with India's broader West Asia policy of working with key regional anchors.
- The second meeting is expected to build on the five priority verticals identified earlier. Economic cooperation will focus on trade expansion, investment, and supply chain resilience.
- Energy discussions are likely to include oil, gas, renewables, and green hydrogen. Education and culture aim to promote people-to-people ties, student exchanges, and cultural understanding.
- Media cooperation is expected to enhance information exchange and counter misinformation. Together, these areas underline a shift from symbolic diplomacy to practical and outcome-oriented engagement.

Numbeo's Cost of Living Index 2026

➢ Global living costs continue to rise amid inflation, currency movements, and demand for premium urban lifestyles.

➢ Against this backdrop, the Cost of Living Index by City 2026, released by Numbeo, highlights a clear trend Swiss cities dominate the world's most expensive rankings, while Indian cities remain among the most affordable globally.

➢ The rankings offer key insights into global urban economics.

➢ The Cost of Living Index measures average expenses for a family of four, including food, transport, utilities, and rent. Numbeo uses New York City as the baseline (index = 100).

➢ Cities with scores above 100 are more expensive than New York, while those below are cheaper. The index helps compare affordability and purchasing power across global cities.

➢ Switzerland has emerged as the global epicentre of high living costs in 2026. Zurich, with a cost-of-living index of 118.5, retains its top position.

➢ Other Swiss cities such as Geneva, Basel, Lausanne, Lugano, and Bern also feature prominently.

➢ High wages, strong currency, premium housing, and high-quality public services contribute to these elevated costs.

➢ New York, previously ranked 4th in 2025, has fallen to 7th, reflecting relative stabilisation in rents and currency effects. San Francisco also slipped to 10th place, while Honolulu ranked 9th.

➢ This shift suggests that while US cities remain costly, their pace of cost escalation has slowed compared to Europe.

➢ Singapore remains the only Asian city in the top 20, ranking 14th, while Tel Aviv-Yafo climbed sharply but narrowly missed the top 10.

➢ Indian cities continue to feature among the world's lowest-cost urban centres. In 2026, Indore, Bhopal, and Patna ranked 477, 473, and 470, respectively.

European Union has formally designated Iran's powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization

➢ The European Union has designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation, citing human rights abuses and regional destabilisation.

➢ The move signals a sharp hardening of Europe's stance towards Tehran and places the IRGC in the same legal category as globally recognized terror groups.

➢ It also fundamentally altering the EU's security, legal, and diplomatic engagement with Iran.

➢ The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was established in 1979 following Iran's Islamic Revolution to protect the clerical political system.

➢ Over time, it evolved into a parallel power structure, wielding influence across Iran's military, intelligence agencies, missile programme, economy, and foreign operations.

➢ Beyond Iran's borders, the IRGC operates through regional proxies and allied militias, making it a key actor in Middle East security dynamics.

- EU foreign ministers reached consensus after weeks of deliberation, triggered by reports of a violent crackdown on nationwide protests in Iran.
- European officials cited thousands of alleged deaths, mass arrests, and systematic repression of civilians.
- The EU concluded that the IRGC plays a central role in enforcing state violence at home while simultaneously supporting destabilizing activities abroad.
- This dual role, according to EU officials, crossed the threshold from sanctionable conduct to terrorist activity under European law.
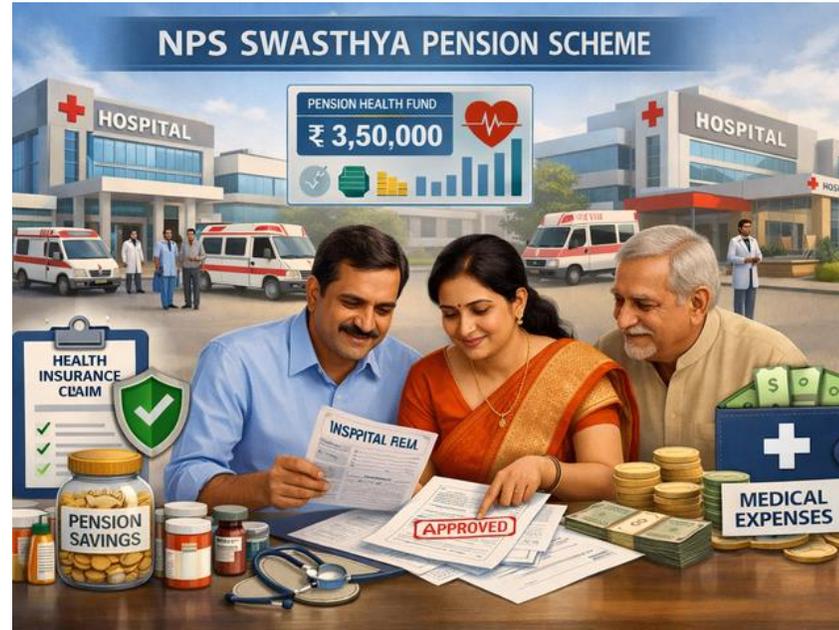
Ayush Ministry Partners with Zepto to Boost Online Access to AYUSH Medicines and Wellness Products

➢ The Ayush Ministry signed an MoU with Zepto Limited via its Export Promotion Council to facilitate online access to Ayush medicines and wellness products across India.

➢ The partnership aims to strengthen digital discovery, ensure quality compliance, and build consumer trust in traditional healthcare products.

➢ Zepto, a quick-commerce platform, will help connect AYUSH manufacturers—especially MSMEs—to digital consumers, improving last-mile access to trusted wellness products.

PFRDA Launches NPS Swasthya Pension Scheme As Proof Of Concept For Medical Expenses

- The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) has notified the launch of the 'NPS Swasthya Pension Scheme' as a Proof of Concept (PoC) under its Regulatory Sandbox Framework.
- The scheme, launched for a limited and controlled period, is designed to provide financial support for out-patient and in-patient medical expenses.
- The scheme will function as a sector-specific contributory pension scheme within the Multiple Scheme Framework (MSF) of NPS and will be offered to Indian citizens on a voluntary basis.
- It will be launched by Pension Funds after obtaining prior approval from PFRDA.
- As it is being implemented as a pilot project, only a restricted number of subscribers will be enrolled during the PoC phase.
- To facilitate the pilot, certain provisions of the PFRDA (Exits and Withdrawals under NPS) Regulations, 2015, have been relaxed.

- ➢ Pension Funds may also collaborate with FinTech firms and health service administrators to implement the scheme.

NPS Swasthya Pension Scheme (NSPS) Features:

- ➢ Any Indian citizen is eligible to join the scheme, but a Common Scheme Account under NPS is mandatory.
- ➢ Subscribers can contribute any amount, in line with existing NPS guidelines applicable to the non-government sector.
- ➢ Subscribers aged above 40 years (excluding government sector subscribers) may transfer up to 30% of their contributions from the Common Scheme Account to the Swasthya Pension Scheme.
- ➢ Partial withdrawals are permitted for medical expenses up to 25% of the subscriber's own contributions, with no limit on the number of withdrawals, subject to a minimum accumulated corpus of ₹50,000.
- ➢ In cases of critical inpatient treatment, where medical expenses exceed 70% of the available corpus, subscribers may opt for 100% premature withdrawal solely to meet such medical costs.

Claim Settlement and Safeguards:

- ➢ Amounts withdrawn under the scheme will be paid directly to the Health Benefit Administrator (HBA), Third Party Administrator (TPA), or hospital, based on valid claims and supporting bills.
- ➢ Any surplus remaining after settlement of medical expenses will be transferred back to the subscriber's Common Scheme Account.

New Aadhaar App dedicated to the nation

Aadhaar App Dedication to the Nation

➢ Recently, the Minister of State for Commerce and Industry and Electronics and Information Technology dedicated the new Aadhaar App to the nation, marking a significant milestone in the field of identity verification in the public interest.

➢ The app has been developed by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).

➢ It is a next-generation, privacy-first mobile application for Aadhaar number holders.

➢ The app enables users to securely carry, show, share and verify their Aadhaar digitally.

➢ The app gives residents greater control, consent and convenience over their identity data.

➢ The app supports multiple real-life use cases such as hotel check-ins via QR code, optional face verification, age verification for cinema tickets, hospital visitor verification and gig worker verification.

➢ It includes features like face verification for proof of presence, single-click biometric lock and unlock, and viewing of authentication history.

➢ A QR-based contact card is provided for easy sharing of contact details.

- The app allows management of up to five Aadhaar profiles on one device, enabling the concept of "One Family – One App."
- Users can update their address and registered mobile number through the app, with more services planned.
- Residents can share only required identity fields through customised QR codes generated by requesting entities.
- Aadhaar numbers are not stored by verifiers and only digitally signed credentials are shared.
- The app aligns with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act by ensuring data minimisation.
- The launch reinforces India's digital public infrastructure vision of being resident-centric, inclusive and trust-based.

Meghalaya's Living Root Bridges Nominated to UNESCO World Heritage List

➢ India has officially placed Meghalaya's living root bridges on UNESCO's nomination list under the title "Jingkieng Jri / Lyu Chrai Cultural Landscape" for consideration in the 2026–27 World Heritage cycle.

➢ The nomination dossier was formally handed over by Vishal V. Sharma, India's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to UNESCO, to Lazare Assomo Eloundou, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

➢ The proposed heritage site covers regions of the Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills in the state of Meghalaya.

➢ The cultural landscape showcases an ancient, living tradition nurtured and maintained over generations by the indigenous Khasi and Jaintia communities.

➢ At the heart of the nomination are the living root bridges, which symbolise the communities' deep-rooted belief in coexisting sustainably with nature and their respect for Mei Ramew (Mother Earth).

➢ The submission recognises the guidance and support of the Prime Minister of India, the Union Minister for Culture, and the Chief Minister of Meghalaya.

➢ It also acknowledges the role played by the Archaeological Survey of India, the Ministry of External Affairs, and local communities in protecting and sustaining this heritage.

➢ Overall, the nomination highlights India's dedication to preserving living cultural landscapes and strengthening global heritage conservation efforts through UNESCO.

Reliance Industries Limited and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited Ink Deal to Share Offshore Energy Assets

➢ During India Energy Week (IEW) 2026, held in Goa from 27–30 January 2026, Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) entered into a resource-sharing pact aimed at improving operational efficiency and reinforcing India's energy security framework.

➢ the agreement enables delivery of specialized logging, well services, subsea equipment, and emergency response by jointly leveraging offshore assets to optimize performance.

➢ The framework covers operations in the Krishna Godavari (KG) Basin and Andaman offshore blocks.

➢ Shared assets include Offshore Supply Vessels (OSVs), Multipurpose Support Vessels (MSVs), tugs, drilling rigs, platforms, pipelines, processing facilities, and power systems.

➢ The agreement is governed by the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Act, 2025 (ORDA Act 2025), and foreign-flagged OSVs require approvals from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and Director General of Shipping (DGS), with shared-use allowing seamless movement.

➢ Key benefits include reduction in duplication, lower Capital Expenditure (CAPEX), lower Operating Expenditure (OPEX), improved asset utilization, accelerated project execution, enhanced safety, and strengthened domestic energy security.

SAIL earns great place to work certification for third consecutive time

➢ Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), one of India's largest public sector steelmakers, has earned the coveted Great Place to Work certification for the period from February 2026 to February 2027.

➢ The Ministry of Steel informed that this is the third consecutive time the company has received the certification, following a comprehensive assessment by the Great Place to Work Institute of India.

➢ The Ministry added that the recognition reflects SAIL's enduring commitment to nurturing a workplace culture that is contemporary, agile, and closely aligned with the professional and personal growth of its employees.

➢ On the occasion, SAIL Chairman Amarendu Prakash said that securing the certification is a proud moment for the organization.

➢ He added that the recognition reflects the trust employees place in the company and the culture that its leadership is collectively building.

सेल SAIL