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**MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS
EBOOK
FEBRUARY 2026**

**YOUR GUIDE TO
MOST IMPORTANT
CURRENT AFFAIRS
AND EVENTS OF THE
MONTH.**

IAS | BANKING | SSC | NDA/CDS | AND OTHER COMPETITIVE EXAMS

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US-Iran War: Trump Launches 'Operation Epic Fury' as Massive Strikes on Tehran

US-Iran Open: On the morning of February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched a massive, coordinated military offensive against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The operation, dubbed "Operation Epic Fury" by the Pentagon and "Operation Roaring Lion" by Israel, has targeted Iranian nuclear infrastructure, ballistic missile sites, and senior leadership. Iran has responded with retaliatory missile strikes across the region, targeting Israel and US military installations in several Gulf states

Latest Update:

Trump announced an 8-minute video on Truth Social and X, urging the Iranian people to "take over your government" while vowing to "annihilate" the Iranian Navy.

Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed "Operation Roaring Lion," focusing on existential threats located in Isfahan and Qom.

The IRGC has launched "True Promise 4," a wave of drones and missiles aimed at northern Israel and US military installations in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar.

"Operation Epic Fury"

President Donald Trump officially announced the start of "major combat operations" via a video message, stating the objective is to eliminate "imminent threats" from the Iranian regime. Strikes have been reported in Tehran, Isfahan, Qom, Tabriz, and Karaj. Reports indicate that strikes specifically targeted areas near the offices of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Masoud Pezeshkian. Khamenei has reportedly been moved to a secure, undisclosed location.

Iranian Retaliation Across the Region

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has activated its regional response doctrine:

- **Strikes on US Bases:** Missiles and drones have targeted US assets in Bahrain (5th Fleet HQ), Qatar (Al Udeid Air Base), the UAE, and Kuwait.
- **Barrage on Israel:** Air-raid sirens are sounding across northern and central Israel as the IDF intercepts a "massive wave" of Iranian missiles.
- **Civilian Impact:** Tragically, a girls' school in southern Iran was reportedly hit, with state media claiming dozens of casualties. In the UAE, shrapnel from an interception reportedly caused one fatality in Abu Dhabi.

Airspace and Logistics Shutdown

A massive "no-fly zone" has effectively been established over the heart of the Middle East:

- **Airspace Closed:** Iran, Israel, Jordan, Qatar, and the UAE have all shuttered their airspace to civilian flights.
- **Global Travel:** Major international airlines have diverted or canceled all flights through the region, causing a global logistics crisis.

Global Impact:

The outbreak of open war has sent shockwaves through the global economy:

- **Oil Prices:** Brent crude has spiked as markets fear a closure of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Cryptocurrency:** Major assets like Bitcoin and XRP saw sharp, sudden declines immediately following the announcement of the strikes.

What is Operation 'Ghazab lil-Haq'?

Pakistan's Decisive Strike Against Taliban, Afghanistan Border

Pakistan-Afghanistan Open War: On February 27, 2026, Pakistan initiated Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, a significant military response to unprovoked aggression by Afghan Taliban forces. This operation marks a departure from localized border skirmishes, evolving into a full-scale military campaign involving the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and ground troops. As the two neighbors trade heavy fire, the international community watches with growing concern over the stability of South Asia.

Key Highlights:

Operation Name: Ghazab lil-Haq (Righteous Fury).

Trigger: Alleged unprovoked firing by the Afghan Taliban on several Pakistani border sectors, including Chitral, Khyber, Mohmand, Kurram, and Bajaur.

Major Targets: Military installations in Kabul, Kandahar, Paktia, and an ammunition depot in Nangarhar.

Reported Casualties: Pakistan claims over 133 Taliban operatives killed and 200+ injured; two Pakistani security personnel lost their lives.

Political Stance: Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif declared an "open war," stating that Pakistan's patience with cross-border attacks has run out.

Infrastructure Impact: Destruction of multiple Taliban brigade headquarters, corps headquarters, and logistics bases.

Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions escalate: Afghan Forces kill 55 Pakistani soldiers, Pakistan retaliates with Operation 'Ghazab Lil Haq'

Read @ANI Story | <https://t.co/6kCLLVdaKf#Pakistan #Afghanistan #GhazabLilHaq pic.twitter.com/0BXmIT0rCg>

— ANI Digital (@ani_digital) February 27, 2026

What is Operation Ghazab lil-Haq?

Operation Ghazab lil-Haq is a military offensive launched by the Pakistan Armed Forces aimed at neutralizing Afghan Taliban positions and infrastructure. The operation was authorized following a spike in hostilities along the Durand Line, the disputed 2,640-kilometer border between the two nations.

According to the Pakistan Information Ministry official the conflict escalated on the evening of Thursday, February 26, when Afghan Taliban forces allegedly opened fire on multiple Pakistani posts in the sectors of Chitral, Khyber, Mohmand, Kurram, and Bajaur were hit, resulted in the martyrdom of two Pakistani soldiers.

In response, the Pakistani military command ordered an immediate and "crushing" counter-offensive. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar confirmed that 27 Taliban posts were destroyed and 9 were captured during the initial phases of the operation.

Strikes on Kabul and Kandahar: In a significant escalation, the [Pakistan Air Force \(PAF\)](#) conducted precision airstrikes deep inside Afghan territory.

- **Kabul:** Two Taliban brigade headquarters were reportedly destroyed.
- **Kandahar:** Strikes targeted a corps headquarters and a major ammunition depot.
- **Paktia:** Military facilities were neutralized to prevent further cross-border mobilization.

The humanitarian and diplomatic crisis, the "open war" declaration has led to the immediate suspension of border activities. Afghan families waiting for repatriation at the Torkham border were sent back to holding centers in Landi Kotal as the area became a combat zone.

Pakistan maintains the strikes are a necessary response to protect its sovereignty and counter-terrorism specifically targeting the TTP's alleged safe havens, the Taliban government has condemned the action

as "cowardly," claiming the strikes hit civilian areas.

Also Read: [PM Modi Conferred With Israel's Prestigious 'Speaker of the Knesset Medal'](#)

Mental Health Crisis India's Young Adults Rank 60th In Global Mental Health

Global Mind Health report 2026: According to the Global Mind Health 2025 report released by US-based non-profit Sapien Labs, Indian young adults (ages 18–34) have ranked 60th among 84 nations in mental well-being and a new global report suggests that its youngest workforce is facing an unprecedented internal struggle.

Key Highlights:

This ranking is not merely a reflection of post-pandemic stress but points to a "structural, multi-year generational shift." While older Indians continue to show high levels of mental resilience, the younger cohort is struggling with core mental functions, including emotional regulation and relationship stability.

The report highlights a stark "generational divide," with individuals aged 55+ scoring nearly three times higher on the Mind Health Quotient (MHQ) than those aged 18-34 a metric that aggregates 47 cognitive, emotional, and social capacities.

- **Young Adults (18-34):** Scored an average MHQ of 33, ranking 60th globally.
- **Seniors (55+):** Scored an average MHQ of 96, ranking 49th and aligning with normal functional norms.

This nearly 3x difference in scores suggests that the mental "baseline" for younger generations has shifted significantly downward compared to their parents and grandparents.

Why Are the Youth Struggling?

Researchers identified four primary lifestyle and environmental factors that are unique to the modern "internet-enabled" generation:

- **Early Smartphone Exposure:** India ranks 71st in the age of first smartphone ownership. On average, Indian youth received their first device at 16.5 years. Early immersion is linked to diminished social

and emotional development.

- **Ultra-Processed Food (UPF) Consumption:** 44% of young adults in India consume UPFs like packaged snacks, sugary drinks, instant noodles etc. High UPF intake is increasingly linked to poor cognitive resilience.
- **Fading Family Bonds:** India performs well globally in family closeness (ranking 28th), the generational gap is widening. Only 64% of youth report being close to family, versus 78% of seniors.
- **Decline in Core Functioning:** The report also reflects a decline in the ability to maintain focus, build stable relationships, and recover from life's inevitable stressors.

Interestingly, the study found that young adults in economically developed nations like Japan, the UK, and Taiwan often rank lower than those in less-developed regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa. This suggests that the "modern" way of life characterized by high digital consumption and processed diets may be at odds with human biological needs for mental health.

Source: [Sapien Labs](#)

Also Read: [Kalari Leap Exercise: Southern Air Command's Strategic Maneuver](#)

What is the Druzhba Oil Pipeline? Outage Stalls New EU Sanctions Against Russia

EU Sanctions on Russia Grinded by Druzhba Pipeline Disruption. That is how Russian oil supply has been interrupted through the Soviet-era Druzhba pipeline since January 27, 2026, has created an international rift, which Hungary and Slovakia have used to veto new EU sanctions on Russia and aid to Ukraine.

This stalemate, during the fourth year of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, highlights the European energy dependency.

What is the Druzhba Pipeline?

The friendship, as it is called in Russian, [Druzhba](#), is 4,000 km long, traversed by West Siberia, through Belarus, Ukraine and into Central Europe, initially supplying about 1 million barrels per day (bpd) of oil 1 per cent of the world.

It has been operating since 1964, supplying refineries in Germany, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine until the majority of EU countries shut Russian oil down after the invasion of 2022.

By the beginning of 2026, the flow to the exempt Hungary and Slovakia is averaged at 200,000 bpd through the southern branch through Ukraine.

Recent Damage

On January 27, Ukraine did report Russian drone attacks on a pumping station in the Brody area and support equipment, stopping flow to the southern branches. Kyiv uses the threat of shelling as an excuse to slow down the rebuilding, and President Zelensky states that it is not a fast undertaking.

Russia, Hungary's Viktor Orban, and Slovakia accuse Ukraine of not acting because of politics, both EU outliers have pro-Russian relations with reference to the increased alternative costs.

What was the reason behind the Geopolitical Fallout?

Hungary blocked the most recent round of Russia sanctions and Ukraine loan worth EUR90-106 billion, making it look like revenge against an oil blockade. Slovakia cut off emergency power supply to Ukraine, which is putting pressure on pro-Kyiv unity.

Negotiations at the EU collapsed and the Croatian Adria pipeline was proposed as an alternative of 280,000 bdp at non-Russian tanker oil-tests pending with observers.

Energy Security Measures

None of the shortages that came off immediately: Hungary and Slovakia discharged strategic stocks; MOL refineries are based on Druzhba compatibility.

US waivers permit Lukoil phase of crude into 2026, yet exemptions seek to phase-out by 2027.

Sanctions cuts March-April flows to India/Turkey, Ukrainian refinery strikes, and shadow fleet targeting compound US sanctions, increase Brent beyond 70/bbl to 60 forecasts. Most seaborne crude is sucked up by China, but output turns to a cut.

Adria tests might be finalizing supplies, breaking vetoes; EU regards anti-circumvention of previous packages. The saga of Druzhba underscores the issues of sanction enforcement, energy diversification requirements and intra-EU divisions during the Ukrainian war.

PM Modi Conferred With Israel's Prestigious 'Speaker of the Knesset Medal'

Speaker of the Knesset Medal: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was bestowed with the 'Speaker of the Knesset Medal' in his two-day state visit to Israel. The Medal was presented by Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana following the Prime Minister's address to the parliament and the award marks a significant milestone in bilateral relations.

This honor highlights the deep and evolving bond between India and Israel which has seen substantial growth in defense, technology, security, and strategic cooperation since the partnership was elevated in 2017.

[#WATCH](#) | Jerusalem, Israel: Israel Parliament confers "Speaker of the Knesset Medal" upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi

This is the highest honour of the Knesset. The medal is being conferred in recognition of PM's exceptional contribution – through his personal leadership – to... pic.twitter.com/RAR1AO6n1j

— ANI (@ANI) [February 25, 2026](#)

Key Highlights:

The 'Speaker of the Knesset Medal' is a newly instituted, prestigious distinction designed to honor individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the State of Israel and the Jewish people by receiving this award, Prime Minister Modi has become the first recipient, further cementing his reputation as a transformative figure in international diplomacy.

Israeli [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#) welcomed [PM Modi's](#) visit to Israel and described him as a "great champion of the Indian-Israeli alliance" and a "dear friend." The event underscored the shared commitment of both nations to counter extremism and foster stability.

During this address, PM Modi emphasized that the partnership is built on

a natural foundation India's economic growth and Israel's innovation and stated his commitment to further expanding trade and investment through an ambitious free trade agreement.

- PM Modi reaffirmed India's policy of zero tolerance for terrorism, referencing both the 26/11 Mumbai attacks and the October 7, 2023, attacks in Israel. He called for "sustained and coordinated global action" to maintain regional peace and stability.
- Expressed his support to the The Gaza Peace Initiative that it holds the promise of a just and durable peace for all the people of the region, including by addressing the Palestine Issue.
- Committed to expanding trade, strengthening investment flows, and promoting joint infrastructure development. The Bilateral Investment Treaty signed last year will provide confidence and predictability to our businesses.

Prime Minister Modi is among a select group of world leaders to have received top recognition from both Israel and Palestine. In 2018, he was conferred the 'Grand Collar of the State of Palestine', the highest honor awarded to foreign leaders by the Palestinian Authority. This reflects India's balanced approach to diplomacy in the region.

Also Read: [India and Israel Relations](#)

NAMASTE Scheme Awareness Programme to Be Held in Pilibhit

Pilibhit NAMASTE Scheme Awareness Drive Launches. One of the main outreach events that will be held as part of the National Action for Mechanized Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) will be held on February 26, 2026, in Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, to strengthen the safety and dignity of sanitation workers.

Honored at the Gandhi Prekshagrih which is located at Gandhi Stadium, Nakhasa, it sheds light on the push by India against manual scavenging by mechanization and welfare.

What is the NAMASTE Scheme ?

Launched by the [Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment](#), NAMASTE aims at Sewer and Septic Tank Workers (SSWs) and waste pickers, to ensure mechanization of sanitation to get rid of dangerous manual work.

The major aspects are, the digital profiling of 1 lakh SSWs, PM-JAY health insurance, safety training, the provision of PPE, capital subsidies to a maximum of 5 lakh on equipment, and the IEC campaigns.

It replaces the now-gone Self Employment Scheme of Rehabilitation of the Manual Scavengers (SRMS) with an urban-targeted 500 AMRUT cities.

Pilibhit Event Highlights

The programme will also disperse PPE kits to curb the occupational risks such as toxic exposure and infections in the course of sewer cleaning.

Ayushman Cards will provide the beneficiaries with the health coverage under PM-JAY, which ensures that the beneficiaries receive medical assistance in a timely manner.

Sewing machines are given to workers who are trained to have

alternative livelihood and promote diversification of skills as well as economic autonomy.

What is the Role of NSKFDC?

The established funds are channeled through state agencies, RRBs and banks at the concessional rates by the National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) which was formed in 1997 under the ministry.

It promotes NAMASTE through low-interest loans (5-6% of projects), initial subsidies, and non-loan programs in the upliftment of safai karamcharis.

The event will be attended by NSKFDC representatives, Union/State ministers and MLA, as well as the district officials.

The Sanitation Environment of Pilibhit

One of the areas that face sanitation problems is Pilibhit district in the Rohilkhand region of Uttar Pradesh, which shares borders with Nepal, as of late it witnesses laxes of outsourcing workers who report to suspended workers to perform their duties.

- It has various communities and forests such as Pilibhit Tiger Reserve and thus requires strong interventions in terms of urban rural hygiene.
- Such level of awareness coincides with the national objectives, tackling the weaknesses of smaller towns.
- NAMASTE helps Swachh Bharat by prioritizing the needy areas, deaths (more than 600 deaths every year due to manual scavenging prior to programs) due to mechanization.
- It fosters financial inclusion, and subsidies allow the purchase of vehicles to clean them safely. The occurrences such as Pilibhits enhance reach, create coordination towards a lasting transformation.

The involvement of the multiple stakeholders will guarantee penetration of the schemes and empower the SSWs to dignity. The next stages are to new cities, using technology to monitor and train. Such Pilibhit activity is a good example of an inclusive development essential to the

sanitation equity of India.

Kalari Leap Exercise: Southern Air Command's Strategic Maneuver

Exercise Kalari Leap: The Southern Air Command (SAC) of the Indian Air Force recently conducted a high-intensity joint maritime exercise, "Kalari Leap," in the strategically vital Lakshadweep and Minicoy archipelago. The exercise underscored India's commitment to securing its island territories and enhancing interoperability between different wings of its security forces.

As regional maritime dynamics evolve, the Indian Air Force's Southern Air Command (SAC) has intensified its focus on the "island domains" of Lakshadweep and Minicoy. The Kalari Leap exercise serves as a powerful demonstration of India's "jointmanship" the ability of different military branches to operate as a single, cohesive unit.

Named after the "leaps" of Kalaripayattu (the ancient martial art of Kerala), the exercise mirrors the agility and precision required for modern island warfare.

Key Highlights of Operational & Participating Assets

The exercise was a "high-tempo" event, meaning it involved rapid, back-to-back operations to simulate a real-world conflict scenario.

1. Multi-Domain Air Operations

The IAF deployed a versatile fleet to cover everything from combat to logistics:

- Su-30MKI: Provided air superiority and maritime strike capabilities.
- AN-32 & Mi-17V5: Handled airborne and air-landed insertions, ensuring troops and equipment reached remote islands quickly.
- Dornier 228 (ICG): Acted as the "eyes in the sky" for search and rescue (SAR) and shepherding fighter jets during maritime strikes.

2. Special Operations & Amphibious Assault

The Armed Forces Special Operations Division (AFSOD) played a

critical role by executing:

- Combat Free Fall (CFF): High-altitude parachute jumps to insert elite teams behind simulated enemy lines.
- Special Heliborne Missions: Using helicopters for rapid deployment in rugged terrain.
- Amphibious Assaults: Coordinated beach landings in conjunction with Coast Guard Gemini boats.

3. Maritime Security & SAR

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) provided the naval backbone, deploying ships and specialized Gemini boats to practice anti-ship strikes and maritime search and rescue operations.

Strategic Significance: Why Lakshadweep?

The Lakshadweep and Minicoy islands are situated near major international shipping lanes. The Kalari Leap exercise validates HQ SAC's ability to:

- Protect Sovereignty: Ensuring a permanent and ready response to any threat in the Arabian Sea.
- Rapid Force Projection: Proving that India can move significant military power to its furthest outposts in hours, not days.
- Jointness: Refining the communication and tactical protocols between the IAF and the Coast Guard.

The Bigger Picture: A Season of Drills

Kalari Leap was part of a broader surge in Indian military activity in early 2026, which included:

- Exercise Vayushakti-26: A massive firepower demonstration at the Pokhran Range.
- Exercise Agni Varsha: An Indian Army drill in the desert sector focusing on long-range precision fires.
- Exercise Vajra Prahar: A joint Special Forces drill with the U.S. in Himachal Pradesh.

New Jasmine Blossom Midge Discovered in India

In India, a new pest species, *Contarentinia icardiflores* sp.nov., has been identified to infest jasmine flower buds, by the scientists in the ICAR-Directorate of Floricultural Research (ICAR-DFR) in Pune.

The team headed by Dr. D.M. Firake gave it its name, ICAR-DFR, in commemoration of its contribution in the field of floriculture. This is a recent development that will deal with the increasing threats to the jasmine industry in India.

The New Species of Zone: Its Essentials

The *Contarinia icardiflores* is a member of the family Cecidomyiidae, which are gall or blossom midges, which cause harm to ornamental and food crops all over the world. It attacks *Jasminum sambac*, which is leading to losses of the farmers in terms of budgeting of the buds.

Morphologically close to *Contarinia maculipennis* but characterized by female flagellomeres, cerci, male aedeagus and COI gene sequencing using integrative taxonomy.

What is Jasmine's Role in India?

India is on the forefront of production of jasmine, which is important in perfumery, religious practices and exports. In 2021-22 Tamil Nadu leads (180,670 tonnes), then comes Karnataka (23,880 tonnes), and Andhra Pradesh (22,240 tonnes).

Gujarat, Assam and Madhya Pradesh also play smaller roles supplying livelihoods in the southern and western states.

Life Cycle and Damage

The 16-21 day cycle of the pest allows it to grow fast increasing infestations in jasmine buds. Larvae consume the interior of the buds, preventing the development of flowers and cutting off harvests.

This brief generation time is also a problem with the old traditional controls that require close observation.

Identification and Research Methods

In 2009, ICAR-DFR was founded and in 2014 moved to Pune, where it leads research in floriculture with 21 AICRP centres.

The morphology and the barcoding of the mitochondrial COI gene were used in the study to make precise distinctions. Such a diagnosis is enhanced by a new central lab opening in December 2025.

This finding raises new pest threats in floriculture, a business that employs millions. Early molecular surveillance contributes to the surveillance and environmentally friendly measures such as biopesticides.

In the high-yield locations such as Tamil Nadu, farmers are in dire need of resistant varieties and IPM guidelines.

This biology suggests targeted interventions that can ensure farmers can get jasmine farming to be sustainable. The varietal development requires collaboration in the current AICRP workshops done by ICAR-DFR. The intensification of diagnostics will protect exports, cultural applications of jasmine throughout the country.

Also Read: [What is PM Rahat Scheme? Benefits, Eligibility, How to Apply and Other Details](#)

NO UPI Data: New GDP Series Will Not Use UPI Transaction Data

New GDP Series: The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) will not include Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transaction data to calculate India's Gross Development Product (GDP) in the new revised series due to unstable numbers and broader payment categories and new base year will be based on the base year 2022-2023 and new GDP series will be released by 27 February.

The new GDP series, featuring a revised base year of 2022-23, is scheduled for release on February 27, 2026.

What is India's GDP?

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total monetary value of all finished goods and services produced within a country's territory during a specific time period. It serves as a comprehensive scorecard of the country's economic health.

The Union government under the [Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation \(MoSPI\)](#) periodically updates the 'base year' to ensure the country's economic growth. This allows the GDP to reflect modern consumption patterns, new industries like the gig and digital economy and current price levels rather than relying on outdated data. The current series used a base year of 2011-12, which many experts argued failed to capture the digital and post-pandemic transformation of the Indian economy.

Why UPI Data Didn't Make the Count

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transaction data from India's upcoming revised GDP series. Despite the massive surge in digital payments across the country, the government has cited instability in the numbers and classification limitations as the primary reasons for this exclusion are

Classification Challenges (The "Broad Category" Issue): UPI transactions are often grouped into broad buckets. For example, a payment at a supermarket might include groceries (food), toiletries (non-food) and a plastic bucket (household item). Since GDP calculation requires item-wise tracking of Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE), the "clubbed" nature of UPI data makes it difficult to bifurcate spending into specific categories.

Lack of Stability: A significant portion of the population is still transitioning from cash to digital. MoSPI noted that until UPI transaction data stabilizes and more accurately represents the entire population's spending habits not just those of early adopters and it remains an unreliable primary indicator for GDP.

Non-Consumption Payments: Many UPI transfers are not consumption for instance, payments to debt collection agencies or person-to-person (P2P) transfers for loan repayments do not represent the production of a new good or service, yet they appear in the total transaction volume.

Key Features of the New GDP 2022-23 Series:

- **Capturing the Gig Economy:** For the first time, the series will more accurately track workers on digital platforms like delivery partners and freelancers using GST records and company annual audits or reports.
- **Double Deflation Method:** Moving away from single deflation the new series will adjust both input and output prices for inflation, providing a much clearer picture of the "Value Added in manufacturing.
- **New Consumption Basket:** The items used to measure the economy have been updated and outdated items like VCRs and DVDs have been replaced with OTT subscriptions, mobile data, and prepared restaurant meals.
- **High-Frequency Indicators:** Instead of UPI, the ministry will lean on more stable digital footprints like GST compliance rates, Vahan (vehicle registration) data, and fuel consumption to estimate economic activity.

Timeline of Releases

Consumer Price Index (CPI): Base Year- 2024 | Released on February 12, 2026

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): base Year-2022-23 | Will be released on Released on February 27, 2026

Index of Industrial Production (IIP): Base Year- 2022-23 | Will be Released on May 2026

Why This Matters to You

A more accurate GDP series influences everything from monetary policy such as interest rates set by the RBI) to foreign investment. By rebasing to 2022-23, India aligns its statistics with international standards, potentially improving its global credit rating and providing a more "human" look at how Indians actually spend their money in 2026.

Exercise Dharma Guardian: 7th Edition of Exercise Commences in Chaubattia, Uttarakhand

Exercise Dharma Guardian 2026: The 7th edition of the Joint Military Exercise 'DHARMA GUARDIAN' officially commenced on February 24 to 9th March 2026. It is set against the rugged backdrop of Chaubattia in Uttarakhand, this annual event serves as a cornerstone of the burgeoning defense cooperation between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF).

The 2026 edition of the exercise is scheduled to take place over two weeks (February 24 to 9th March 2026). This year together a 120-member contingent from each side, with the JGSDF represented by troops from the 32nd Infantry Regiment and the Indian Army contingent drawn from the Ladakh Scouts. The exercise is held alternately in India and Japan and remains a key pillar of defence cooperation between the two nations.

Key Objectives

The Core aim of Exercise Dharma Guardian is to foster Military Cooperation, enhance interoperability and synchronize tactical procedures between the two forces and enhance combined capabilities to execute joint operations in semi-urban environments under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter. The Exercise would focus on a high degree of physical fitness, joint planning, joint tactical drills and basics of special arms skills.

Training Modules

During the two-week duration, the troops will engage in a variety of high-intensity tactical activities, including:

- **Intelligence & Surveillance:** Development of an integrated Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) grid.

- **Tactical Drills:** Establishment of Temporary Operating Bases and mobile Vehicle Check Posts (VCP).
- **Specialized Missions:** Cordon and search operations, heliborne missions, and house intervention drills in hostile environments.
- **Physical Conditioning:** Rigorous fitness regimes to ensure operational readiness in challenging terrains.

Source: [PIB](#)

Significance:

The 6th edition of Exercise Dharma Guardian's 6th edition was held at the East Fuji Training Area in Japan in 2025, while the 5th edition took place in Rajasthan, India in 2024.

The institutionalization of this exercise reflects a growing professional alignment and mutual trust between both countries beyond tactical combat skills, the exercise underscores a shared vision for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" which allows both nations to exchange best practices and refine joint planning processes, which is crucial for addressing non-traditional security threats and regional instability. As global security dynamics evolve, the 7th edition of Dharma Guardian stands as a testament to the enduring friendship and military synergy between India and Japan, fostering a stable, rules-based order across the continent.

The 7th edition of Exercise Dharma Guardian, a joint military drill between the Indian Army and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, has commenced in Chaubattia, Uttarakhand. Running from February 24 to March 9, 2026, the exercise focuses on enhancing interoperability, tactical procedures, and joint operations in semi-urban environments. It underscores the growing defense cooperation and shared vision for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," addressing regional security threats.

MHA Launches 'PRAHAAR': A Unified 7-Pillar Blueprint for India's Internal Security

On February 23, 2026, the Ministry of Home Affairs of India published the first National Counter-Terrorism Policy and Strategy in the country called PRAHAAR.

This preventive model deals with the changing challenges such as cross-border terrorism, drones, computer attacks, and radicalization with a zero-tolerance policy.

PRAHAAR Policy Introduction

The eight-paged document, which is posted on the MHA site, solidifies the united counter-terror activities in India.

The name '[PRAHAAR](#)' or strike, consists of seven pillars, Prevention of terror attacks, Rapid Responses, Aggregating internal capabilities, Human rights and Rule of Law, Attenuating conditions that enable terrorism (such as radicalization), Aligning international activity and Recovery with societal resilience.

Evolving Terror Threats

PRAHAAR mentions the main threats, such as state-sponsored cross-border assaults, international organizations, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS attacking India through sleeper cells, and technological issues such as drones, encrypted applications, the dark web, cryptocurrencies, and cyber infiltrations.

It notes the overlap between terror networks and organized crime in the provision of arms, logistics and funding, and the threat to critical infrastructure such as rail, ports, and nuclear facilities.

PRAHAAR Policy: Strategies and Pillars

Prevention focuses on intelligence-led activities through Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) and Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI) to provide

real-time dispersal and disruption of overground workers and funding.

Reaction: Tier local police shall serve as first responders with state units and NSG to assist with large-scale incidents, and NIA to spearhead the investigation of high-conviction crimes. Capacity-building brings agencies together, invests in technology partnerships and defends borders/infrastructure.

India is against the connection of terrorism to religion/ethnicity and drives world opinion against state-sponsored terror and ICT abuse.

The major agencies that take part in the PRAHAAR implementation are the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) as the head of it, Multi Agency Centre (MAC), Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI), National Investigation Agency (NIA), National Security Guard (NSG), Intelligence Bureau (IB), state police forces, and state special counter-terror units.

Central Coordination Hubs

MAC and JTFI under IB are nodal platforms used in real-time exchange of intelligence, threat evaluation and coordinated agency action. MHA controls the whole structure with standardization of processes to close the gaps in operations.

Response and Investigating Roles

First responders, local and state police, are assisted by state special forces when responding to an incident, and the major attack is dealt with on the nodal national force level by NSG. High conviction with legal expertise integration is the priority of NIA in investigations of terror offences.

Supporting Entities

Intelligence units cut off finances and networks, and border security agencies use surveillance technology. The policy promotes the notion of a whole-of-government approach, in which all the central/state agencies would take part in prevention, response, and de-radicalization.

The policy encourages whole-of-society resiliency, legal reforms and future threat futuristic investments. PRAHAAR is a transition to preemptive challenge, which improves the security of India in the context

of instability in the region.

Kerala to be Renamed 'Keralam' as Union Cabinet Approves Bill Ahead of Assembly Elections 2026

The Union Cabinet has granted its approval to change the official name of the state of 'Kerala' to 'Keralam'. This was a long-standing demand which is rooted in the linguistic and cultural identity of the Malayali people. It aimed to rectify a colonial-era naming convention and restore the traditional name used in the Malayalam language. The change will be formalized through the "Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026," which will be introduced in Parliament following a mandatory review by the state legislature.

The name "Kerala" is widely considered a derivative of the Sanskrit word Keralam while the world has known the state as Kerala since its formation on November 1, 1956, the people of the state have always referred to it as 'Keralam' in their native tongue, Malayalam.

[#Cabinet](#) approves the proposal for alteration of the name of the State of 'Kerala' as 'Keralam': I&B Minister [@AshwiniVaishnaw](#)
[#CabinetDecisions](#) [#CabinetBriefing](#) [@MIB_India](#)
pic.twitter.com/AkPNbsiNal

— All India Radio News (@airnewsalerts) [February 24, 2026](#)

The Origins of the Name

The etymological roots of "Keralam" are multifaceted, blending linguistic evolution with deep-seated folk tales of Kerala, historians and linguists generally explore the name through

The Chera Connection: The most widely accepted historical origin links the name to [the Chera Dynasty](#), one of the foundational kingdoms of ancient South India. Evidence from the 3rd-century BCE rock edicts of Emperor Ashoka cites the region as "Keralaputra" (Sanskrit for "son of the Chera"). It is believed that the name evolved phonetically over time

from the archaic Cheram to the modern Keralam.

The "Land of Coconuts": A pervasive folk etymology decomposes the word into two Malayalam roots: Kera (the coconut palm) and Alam (land or abode), translation, "Land of Coconuts," reflects the geographical reality of the state's landscape and is a point of significant cultural pride.

The "Joined Land" Theory: Some linguistic interpretations suggest the root Cher means "to join", aligns with the mythological legend of Sage Parashurama, who is said to have cast his axe into the sea, forcing the waters to recede and creating or "joining" the land to the coast.

Historical and Cultural Significance

For Malayali People Keralam has always been the native name for their homeland. The existing English title, "Kerala," is an anglicized version that omits the anusvara (the "m" sound), which is a crucial grammatical feature in the Malayalam language by adopting the full name restores the phonetic integrity of the state's identity.

The name represents the culmination of the [Aikya Kerala](#) (United Kerala) movement, which fought to consolidate various Malayalam-speaking regions into a single, unified political entity. Officially adopting Keralam serves as a symbolic nod to the historical struggle for regional unity and linguistic recognition.

The move demonstrates a rare moment of bipartisan political alignment in the state. By ensuring that the official administrative name matches the daily vernacular, the government aims to strengthen the emotional bond between the people and their state identity.

Resolution Passed by Kerala Legislative Assembly:

On June 24, 2024, the [Kerala Legislative Assembly](#), led by [Chief Minister](#) Pinarayi Vijayan, moved a second resolution to change the name, following a similar resolution in 2023 was returned by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs due to procedural and technical issues. The resolution urged the Union Government to take immediate steps under Article 3 of the Indian Constitution to change the name of the state in all languages listed in the Eighth Schedule.

Can the Central Government Change the Name of Any State Name?

The Central Government has the power to change the name of any state but cannot unilaterally rename a state; it must follow a structured constitutional process. In the case of renaming the state of Kerala to Keralam the Union Cabinet may signal its intent however the final authority rests with Parliament.

What is the Constitutional Process?

Renaming a state requires an amendment to the [First Schedule of the Indian Constitution](#), which lists the states and their territories which is governed by Article 3 and Article 4. The procedure for altering the name of a state is not treated as a constitutional amendment under [Article 368](#), but rather as a routine legislative process. Here is how it unfolds:

- **Presidential Referral:** Under the proviso to Article 3, the President refers the proposed bill to the concerned State Legislature to ascertain its views within a specified timeframe.
- **State Assembly:** Once the State Assembly reviews and provides its feedback(advisory in Nature) on the Bill the proposal returns to the Central Government.
- **Introduction in Parliament:** The bill such as the hypothetical Kerala Alteration of Name Bill is introduced in either House of Parliament on the recommendation of the President.
- **Simple Majority:** The Bill must be passed by both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha by a simple majority (more than 50% of the members present and voting).
- **Presidential Assent:** Once passed by Parliament, the Bill is presented to the President. Upon receiving the President's assent, the Act becomes law, and the state's name is officially changed.

What Is PRAHAAR? India's First Comprehensive Anti-Terror Policy

Anti-Terrorist Policy PRAHAAR: India has been at the forefront of the global struggle against terrorism, navigating a complex landscape of cross-border infiltration, internal insurgencies, and emerging digital threats while various laws like the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) provided the legal teeth, the nation lacked a singular, cohesive strategic doctrine to align all state and central agencies.

On February 23, 2026, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs filled this gap by releasing **PRAHAAR** meaning "Strike". The Seven pillar of doctrine based on the zero-tolerance approach serves as India's first comprehensive National Counter-Terrorism Policy formalizing "whole-of-government" and "whole-of-society" approach to safeguard national sovereignty and protect its citizens.

India's First Counter-Terrorism Policy: The Seven Pillars of PRAHAAR

The name 'PRAHAAR' is an acronym representing the seven core strategic pillars that form the foundation of this new policy which aimed at strengthening the country's fight against extremist violence and criminalizing all terrorist acts through a coordinated intelligence-driven approach. And the Seven Pillar of PRAHAAR represents

1. **P - Prevention of Terror Attacks:** Shifting the focus to an "intelligence-guided" approach where threats are neutralized before they materialize. This involves real-time data sharing through the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC).
2. **R - Responses:** Establishing standardized operating procedures for first responders (local police) and specialized units (NSG/State CT units) to ensure a rapid, decisive reply to any incident.
3. **A - Aggregating Capacities:** Creating synergy between central and state agencies, modernizing weaponry, and closing infrastructure gaps to build a unified national security architecture.

4. **H - Human Rights and Rule of Law:** Ensuring all counter-terror operations are conducted within the legal framework, maintaining transparency and accountability to uphold democratic values.
 5. **A - Attenuating Enabling Conditions:** Addressing the root causes of radicalization through community engagement, de-radicalization programs, and socio-economic interventions for vulnerable youth.
 6. **A - Aligning & Shaping International Efforts:** Strengthening global cooperation, intelligence sharing, and extradition treaties to deny safe havens to terrorists on foreign soil.
 7. **R - Recovery and Resilience:** Implementing a "whole-of-society" approach to help communities recover quickly from attacks and build long-term social resilience against extremist ideologies.
- [#REPORT](#) | Home Ministry has unveiled PRAHAR, India's first comprehensive anti-terror policy, addressing threats such as cross-border terrorism, cyberattacks, drone strikes, and organized crime.

The policy reiterates a zero-tolerance stance and states that terrorism is not... pic.twitter.com/snjSvJGtOj

— DD News (@DDNewslive) [February 23, 2026](#)

Key Features and Strategic Shift

The PRAHAAR policy introduces several critical shifts in India's security posture:

- The policy moves beyond killing terrorists to dismantling the entire terror ecosystem, support structure, including Overground Workers (OGWs), illegal arms syndicates, and hawala networks.
- It specifically addresses 21st-century technical modernised challenges such as the misuse of drones for smuggling, encrypted communication, the Dark Web, and cryptocurrency-based terror funding.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs aims to standardize anti-terror structures across all states and adopt Uniform Anti-Terror Structure to ensure that a threat in one corner of the country is met with the same level of expertise and coordination as in any other.
- The document explicitly states that India does not link terrorism to

any specific religion, ethnicity, nationality, or civilization, reinforcing the principle that "terrorism in any form is unjustifiable."

PRAHAAR is designed to be a dynamic framework. It calls for periodic legal reforms and continuous investment in emerging technologies like AI-driven surveillance and cyber-countermeasures. By associating legal experts at every stage from the registration of an FIR to final prosecution the policy also aims to maintain India's high conviction rate in terror-related cases, ensuring that justice is both swift and certain.

Source: [Ministry of Home Affairs](#)

What is the Indian Embassy Advisory for Iran (February 2026)?

A second wave of precautionary actions occurred when the embassy of India in Tehran on February 23, 2026, issued a fresh warning to all Indian nationals, including students, pilgrims, business travelers and tourists to leave Iran immediately by any available commercial flights or land transport.

The order is based on previous warnings of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on January 5 and the embassy on January 14, as domestic protests continued to escalate and the situation in the region became unstable.

Having approximately 10,000 Indians coming and going to Iran, the government has launched special hotlines and called on the people to prepare their passports to have an easy way out.

What is the History of the US-Iran Tensions?

Should another failure of nuclear negotiations happen in Geneva, President Donald Trump, who is reelected in 2024, is considering targeted military actions on the most important Iranian targets such as nuclear enrichment centers, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) leadership bases, and ballistic missile launchers.

[Top US officials](#) have indicated that a first precision attack may become reality within the coming days and possibly leading to wider operations to make the regime yield on its nuclear restraint and aid proxy militias.

The US in its turn has rushed naval forces, warships, submarines and carrier groups into the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea indicating the seriousness of the confrontation.

Indian Advisory

The advisory issued on 23 February clearly says that all Indian nationals are urged to depart Iran as soon as possible using available commercial flights or using any other mode of transport.

- Protest hotspots that nationals should avoid: Nationals should avoid areas of protest; they should keep in touch with the local development through official means and they should seek the services of the embassy via cons.tehran.to to mea.gov.in or helplines.
- Visa holders that have been living in the country long enough are urged to enroll in the embassy to obtain specialized assistance, and everyone is not recommended to travel unless it is necessary.

Impact on Indian Community

Iran has a rich Indian diaspora of about 10,000, most of them medical students in Tehran and Mashhad, Shia pilgrims to holy places, and trade workers in such industries as pharmaceuticals and oil.

The alerts increase the anxieties of interrupted studies, stopped pilgrimages, and business disruptions, as companies are advised to deploy remote work and evacuation operations. Possible US attacks would lead to airspace shutdowns and fuel deficiencies, making those who have no immediate departure harder.

Efforts to diplomacy are Geneva negotiations that require Iran to limit uranium enrichment to medical needs and eliminate proxies in Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria. The internal conflict in Iran is characterized by the active protests against economic problems and the regime and can lead to the additional instability.

Balancing its relationship with both countries, India made a call through PM Modi speaking to the president of Iran by highlighting the need to de-escalate, although protecting expatriates. There is no new MEA webpage update up to February 23, so directly follow along embassy channels.

Also Read: [What is IndiaAI Mission 2.0? Features, Objectives and Other Details](#)

What is One Voter List ? The Election Commission of India's Unified Voting Plan

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is hosting a National Round Table Conference at Bharat Mandapam chaired by [Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar](#) for the first time in nearly three decades that election authorities from all States and Union Territories have gathered to synchronize their efforts. The core objective of this gathering is the transition to a "One Voter List," a unified system designed to ensure that every citizen's right to vote is consistent across all levels of government.

Key Highlights

- National Round Table Conference held in Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. The first meeting of its kind in 27 years, bringing together 36 State Election Commissioners and Chief Electoral Officers.
- The conference aims to synchronize Unified Electoral Roll, the lists managed by the ECI for Parliament/State Assemblies and State Election Commissions for Panchayats/Urban local bodies.
- ECINET Digital Platform a new technical initiative designed to streamline electoral services and improve data management.
- Resolving addressing discrepancies like gaps in voter numbers, such as the current variations seen in states like Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.
- Cooperative Federalism strengthens coordination between central and state authorities to ensure the integrity and efficiency of the democratic process.

What is One Voter List?

The One Voter List is a strategic proposal to create a single authoritative electoral roll for every election held in India. The aim of "One Voter List" is to merge these efforts into a single digital database to prevent the common problem where a voter is registered for the General Election but finds their name missing from the Municipal or Panchayat list.

It is a move toward a "single source of truth" for voter eligibility, reducing the administrative burden and eliminating the confusion caused by having multiple registration processes.

How it Changes Your Vote

The ECI introduced [ECINET](#), a digital platform intended to serve as the backbone for electoral services, allow for real-time updates and better synchronization between different state jurisdictions, making the process of updating your voter details faster and more transparent.

To Eliminate Data Discrepancies, recent data from the [Special Intensive Revision \(SIR\)](#) has highlighted the need for a unified list. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, there has been a noted difference between the SEC's list (12.7 crore voters) and the ECI's draft roll (12.5 crore). A "One Voter List" ensures these numbers match perfectly, removing "ghost voters" and ensuring no legitimate voter is excluded.

The ECI has been conducting door-to-door verification drives. The results of these revisions are already visible:

- In Gujarat, the SIR process led to the deletion of 68 lakh entries to ensure accuracy.
- In Kerala, a final list for 2026 has been released with 2.69 crore electors after rigorous cleaning. This means your vote is more secure, as the system is actively being purged of duplicates and deceased entries.

The ECI manages national and state polls and the SECs manage local polls, the new plan pushes for a shared legal and operational framework under the Representation of the People Act, 1950. It will change vote by ensuring that a single registration covers every ballot box, from local ward to the national parliament.

Opposition leaders have raised concerns regarding "anomalies" during the revision process and have sought clarifications on how deletions are handled. Ensuring that "One Voter List" remains inclusive and does not accidentally disenfranchise valid voters during the "cleaning" phase remains a top priority for the Commission.

Also Read: [What are the new changes in the appointment of CEC &](#)

ECs?

Bafta Awards 2026: India's 'Boong' Wins Best Children's & Family Film

BAFTA Awards 2026: 79th British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA 2026) organised at the Royal Festival Hall in London hosted by Alan Cumming. The ceremony celebrated the year's most exceptional cinematic achievements and celebrated global storytelling, with a particularly momentous highlight for Indian cinema. The historic victory of 'Boong', a Manipuri film securing the award for Best Children's & Family Film, marking a historic breakthrough for Indian regional cinema on the international stage.

India's Historic Moment: 'Boong' Takes the World Stage

Manipuri-language film 'Boong' won the award for Best Children's & Family Film the directed by Lakshmipriya Devi and backed by producers Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment. Boong has become the first-ever Indian production to win the BAFTA for Best Children's & Family Film, "small film with a big soul" beating high-profile nominees including Zootopia 2 and Lilo & Stitch.

The film follows the story of a young boy named Boong who embarks on a journey to find his missing father to surprise his mother during her emotional acceptance speech, director Lakshmipriya Devi dedicated the win to the children of Manipur, praying for peace and the restoration of innocence in her home state. The award was notably presented by Paddington Bear adding a touch of whimsy to the historic win.

Alia Bhatt's BAFTA Debut: Represents India as Presenter

The Indian presence was further bolstered by Bollywood star Alia Bhatt, who made her debut as a BAFTA presenter. She presented the award for Best Film Not in the English Language. She won hearts by beginning her speech in Hindi, saying, "Namaskar! Agla award ek aisi film ke liye hai, jo angrezi mein nahi hai," emphasizing the importance of global linguistic diversity.

The BAFTAs paid a moving tribute to the legendary Dharmendra, who passed away in late 2025 and his inclusion alongside global icons like Diane Keaton and Val Kilmer was a significant nod to his massive contribution to world cinema.

Top Winners: 'One Battle After Another' and 'Sinners'

While Boong stole the spotlight for India, the night belonged to 'One Battle After Another'. The film secured six trophies: Best Film, Best Director (Paul Thomas Anderson), Best Supporting Actor (Sean Penn) and Best Adapted Screenplay, Cinematography, and Editing.

Ryan Coogler's 'Sinners' and Guillermo del Toro's 'Frankenstein' were also big winners, with Sinners taking home Best Original Screenplay and Frankenstein sweeping the technical categories including Production Design and Costume Design.

The 2026 BAFTAs will be remembered as a turning point for Indian regional cinema. The success of 'Boong' proves that stories rooted in specific cultural landscapes can resonate powerfully on a global scale. As the industry looks toward the Oscars, this win places Manipur and Indian storytelling firmly in the international spotlight.

What is the Vanjeevi Didi Initiative?

Empowering Women in Palamu Tiger Reserve, Jharkhand

Palamu Tiger Reserve: India's one of the oldest tiger habitats is rewriting this narrative with the Vanjeevi Didi initiative launched by the Jharkhand government. It is a community-centric program that recognizes that for conservation to be truly sustainable, it must be inclusive by training local women (the "Didis") as ambassadors of the wild Palamu Tiger Reserve. It is bridging the gap between the forest department and the 191 villages that call the reserve home.

The Objective of Vanjeevi Didi Initiative : Women as Forest Ambassadors

The initiative, primarily active in the South Division of [Palamu Tiger Reserve](#), specifically the Garu range, identifies and trains educated women to act as a bridge between the forest administration and local families.

The target group is women, many of these women are college graduates or postgraduates who live in remote hinterlands. Their role is to motivate community members to stop harming the forest, discourage the use of country-made guns for hunting, and prevent habitat destruction.

The aim behind the Vanjeevi Didi is Change starts at home. If a mother, sister, or wife discourages the men of the family from poaching or illegal timber felling, the impact is more immediate and lasting than any legal penalty.

Vanjeevi Didis are not just "forest guards" without uniforms; their responsibilities are multi-dimensional:

- **Education:** They provide primary teaching in villages to increase school enrollment.

- **Awareness:** They disseminate information about government employment schemes and developmental plans to ensure locals can access legal livelihoods.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Following the model of Sakhi Mandals, they help organize internal micro-banking and financial literacy.

Vanjeevi Didi receives a monthly incentive of 3,000 to support their efforts. Currently, the project has implemented in about 18 women per village across 17 identified villages, including high-priority areas like Henar, Surkumi, and Kotam. This stipend not only validates their authority but also provides a much-needed economic boost to tribal households.

The "Pink Panthers" of Palamu the initiative has also sparked related community movements. Groups like the "Pink Panthers of Palamu Tiger Reserve" women of various ages have taken up cleanliness drives at the confluence of the Auranga and Koel rivers, cleaning up plastic and waste left by tourists, further showcasing the grassroots commitment to the ecosystem.

Key Facts about Palamu Tiger Reserve

- [Palamu Tiger Reserve](#) established in 1974, one of the first nine tiger reserves in India launched under the "Project Tiger" scheme.
- It is located on the western side of the Chhotanagpur Plateau in Jharkhand.
- The reserve spans approximately 1,129 sq km. It features a mix of Sal forests, bamboo groves, and undulating hilly terrain.
- The reserve serves as a vital catchment area for three major rivers: North Koel, Auranga, and Burha.
- Palamu Tiger Reserve holds a unique global distinction; it is the first place in the world where a First Tiger Census was conducted based on pugmark counts, as early as 1932.
- The reserve is also home to Asiatic Elephant, Leopard, Grey Wolf, Gaur (Indian Bison), and Sloth Bear.
- It Reserve is also even includes the Mahuadanr Wolf Sanctuary, India's first sanctuary dedicated to wolves.
- It is also Part of Betla National Park a popular tourism hub, Betla

National Park (226 sq km) is nestled within the core area of the reserve.

The Vanjeevi Didi initiative is more than just a protection program; it is a movement toward inclusive stewardship. By validating the traditional knowledge and social power of women, the Palamu Tiger Reserve is ensuring that the roar of the tiger and the voices of the community can coexist in harmony.

Also Read:

What is Door-to-Door Housing Census 2027 ?

First Phase to Start in Ludhiana

Census 2027: The Government of India has officially notified the schedule for the Door-to-Door Housing Census, the first phase of the upcoming Census 2027 with Ludhiana, Punjab set to begin field operations in May 2026. This critical exercise will involve trained enumerators visiting every dwelling unit to collect comprehensive housing and household data conducted under the supervision of the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The [phase of Census 2027](#) lays the groundwork for the full national census. The survey will cover 33 detailed questions about household structure, amenities, assets, and demographic characteristics. This foundational data will guide national planning and policymaking for the coming decade.

What is the Door-to-Door Housing Census?

The Door-to-Door Housing Census is the house listing and housing phase of the national Census of India. It focuses on the structural, socio-economic, and amenity-related characteristics of households rather than counting individuals. Enumerators will record [33 questions](#) covering:

- Building identification details (census house number and structure type)
- Material of construction (floor, wall, roof)
- Usage and physical condition of the dwelling
- Ownership status and number of rooms
- Household head's details (name, gender, social category)
- Access to civic amenities (water, lighting, sanitation, bathing facility, kitchen)
- Cooking fuel and energy sources
- Digital and physical assets (internet, phones, vehicles)
- Main cereal consumed and mobile contact for census

communication

Which Authority Conducts It?

[The Census 2027](#) will be conducted by the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India under the Ministry of Home Affairs under the Census Act, 1948, which makes it a statutory obligation for citizens to provide truthful information and for the government to keep individual data confidential.

Ludhiana is among the first districts where the phase will begin. Preparatory activities, including awareness campaigns and training, have already started. Field operations are expected to start in mid-May 2026, after preparatory work in April.

Why is the Housing Census Important?

The data from this phase is essential for policy and development planning and helps design schemes for housing, sanitation, health, digital inclusion, and infrastructure.

Welfare Targeting by identifies households needing government support and social security interventions. Accurate data strengthens evidence-based decision-making for the next decade.

Resource Allocation to assist central and state governments in budget planning and urban/rural development programs.

How Will Data Be Collected?

Data will be captured and uploaded using digital tools like mobile apps/handheld devices for faster processing and higher accuracy. Every house is assigned a unique census number to prevent duplication and answers to the [33 key questions](#), assign unique census identifiers to dwellings and follow standard protocols to ensure data quality and confidentiality.

Citizens are urged to cooperate fully to ensure accurate reporting after the housing phase concludes, the Population Enumeration Phase will begin, focusing on individual demographic data such as age, education, occupation, and migration.

Vibrant Villages Programme-II Launch In Assam's Cachar District

Union Home Minister Amit Shah launched Vibrant Villages Programme-II (VVP-II) in the Cachar district of Assam. The programme focuses on improving the border villages and creating sustainable livelihood opportunities, fostering secure border communities in alignment with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. This initiative is a strategic effort to develop border areas while strengthening national security.

Union Home Minister [@AmitShah](#) will launch the Vibrant Villages Programme-II in Cachar, Assam, today.

The programme focuses on improving border villages and creating sustainable livelihood opportunities, fostering secure border communities in alignment with the vision of Viksit... pic.twitter.com/BuG6RRlrz

— All India Radio News (@airnewsalerts) [February 20, 2026](#)
Vibrant Villages Programme-II

[Vibrant Village Programme](#) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with the aim of comprehensive development of villages and remote blocks on the northern border area to improve the quality of life of people living in the remote border areas and create sufficient incentives for people to stay on in the selected villages.

The programme is to be implemented across 15 States and 2 Union Territories across the country through a saturation-based and convergence-driven approach.

- Developed 2,967 villages across 46 blocks and 19 districts along India's northern border, covering Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and Ladakh by improving infrastructure and opportunities.

The initiative seeks to encourage residents to remain in their native communities and reverse outmigration and stabilisation of local populations is a strategic move to enhance border security and maintain

a vigilant presence in these critical regions.

- It aims to enable residents to act as the eyes and ears of the nation, thereby contributing significantly to border security, preventing cross-border crimes and strengthening internal security.

Under the [Vibrant Villages Programme-II](#) a budget of over 6,800 crore has been allocated to fund the project through the financial year 2028-29.

- Strategic Objectives of the programme:
 - **Sustainable Livelihoods:** Creating local jobs to prevent migration and boost the rural economy. The creation of opportunities for livelihood generation through promotion of tourism & cultural heritage, skill development & entrepreneurship and development of cooperative societies including agriculture/horticulture, cultivation of medicinal plants/herbs etc.
 - **Infrastructure Growth:** Focusing on essential services like housing, water, electricity, and providing road connectivity to unconnected villages, housing & village infrastructures, energy including renewable energy, television & telecom connectivity.
 - **National Security:** Empowering border residents to act as the "eyes and ears" of the nation to help curb cross-border crimes and strengthen security.

District administrations will collaborate with Gram Panchayats to develop Village Action Plans, ensuring 100% saturation of both Central and State schemes without overlapping with the existing Border Area Development Programme.

The Vibrant Villages Programme-II marks a strategic shift by transforming remote border areas into prosperous, self-reliant hubs. By combining significant financial investment with a focus on local infrastructure and livelihoods, the initiative ensures these communities become a resilient, secure "first line of defense." Ultimately, this programme is essential to fostering national integration and achieving the broader vision of a secure Viksit Bharat 2047.

[Also Read: INS Aridhaman India's 3rd Indigenous Nuclear Ballistic Missile](#)

What is Pax Silica? The Alliance Redefining Global Power Through Semiconductors

India actively participated in the Pax Silica coalition led by the US, with a declaration signed at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi, which is a milestone in ensuring AI and semiconductor supply chains.

This is a strengthening of strategic technology relationships between India and the United States in the context of the world making strong technology environments.

What is Pax Silica?

Pax Silica is an American-led strategic alliance that aims at securing the entire silicon stack, including critical minerals, semiconductors, data centres, and advanced AI systems. It was initiated on the [occasion of a summit](#) in Washington, D.C., on 12 December 2025 to address supply chain vulnerability and mitigate economic coercion and enhance innovation among democratic countries.

The program focuses on the collaborative project in mineral refining, chip production, logistics, and energy infrastructure in favor of AI-oriented development.

India's Entry in the Agreement

On [February 20, 2026](#), the signing took place at the India AI Impact Summit, where Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, the US Under Secretary Jacob Helberg and US Ambassador Sergio Gor attended.

Vaishnaw presented the semiconductor development in India, such as the creation of 2nm chip design by engineers and the requirement of one million skilled people. It was what Helberg referred to as a roadmap of a common future that promised economic security as national security.

Founding Members

The main signatories are the US, Australia, Japan, South Korea,

Singapore, UK, Israel, Netherlands, UAE, Greece and Qatar. European partners that are non-signatories include Canada, European Union, Taiwan and OECD.

The inclusion of India makes it an important entity with its engineering strength and its emerging semiconductor potential.

Pax Silica encourages co-investment and coordinated policies on export controls, foreign investments, and anti-dumping to safeguard the critical tech against enemies. To India, it is in line with its national ambitions in AI, semiconductors, and critical minerals, improving its supply chain resilience and global technological leadership.

The executives of industry giants, such as Micron CEO Sanjay Mehrotra and Tata Electronics MD Randhir Thakur, stressed the need to collaborate in order to advance AI.

Compounding growth opportunities of the youth in India in tech Vaishnav emphasized the role of India as key and strategic towards 21st century tech order. US Ambassador Gor explained the role as India being a key strategic country towards the 21 st century tech order. S. Krishnan, Secretary MeitY observed consistent partnership with value sharing partners.

Also Read: [What is IndiaAI Mission 2.0? Features, Objectives and Other Details](#)

IPC Lifts Russian Paralympics Ban for 2026 Games

IPC imposes restrictions on Russian and Belarus players to participate in the 2026 Winter Paralympics, although they will be allowed to play in the name of their countries and with a quota.

The [International Paralympics Committee \(IPC\)](#) has lifted the ban on previous years and allowed Russian and Belarusian Paralympian athletes to attend the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympics under their full national identity, including flags and anthems.

Russia is allocated six slots: two in Para-alpine skiing, Para cross-country skiing and Para-snowboard each having gender balance. Belarus receives four places in Para cross country skiing which is seen as the same as any other country.

What is the Reason Behind IPC Suspension?

The Paralympic Committee of Russia was partially suspended from 2023 due to improper constitutional violations related to the 2022 geopolitical events and the previous doping abuse.

In September 2025, [IPC members](#) of the Seoul General Assembly voted against suspensions (Russia: 91-77 against partial; Belarus: 103-63), and IPC members returned to full membership. The first doping penalties were based on a scandal in 2014 sponsored by the state, which excluded Russia in 2016 Summer Paralympics.

Quota Allocation

[Assignments](#) are also made to focus on most important winter sports with limited qualification. Russian competitors to be expected are in the form of alpine skier Aleksey Bugaev (champion three times), cross-country participants Ivan Golubkov and Anastasiia Bagiiian.

These quotas only refer to Paralympics, and not the parallel Winter Olympics.

Qualification Challenges

IPC reinstatement International federations (FIS, IBU, World Curling, World Para Ice Hockey) affirm no feasible way of qualifying Belarusian or Russian competitors to competitions since they remain barred.

FIS barred entry to Para skiing/snowboard qualifiers, IBU bans biathlon federations, curling ban continues until 2024-25. IPC President Andrew Parsons focused on the federation's autonomy and turned to other competitors.

What were the International Reactions?

In November 2025, more than 30 countries and the European Commission criticized the continued war in Ukraine and breaches of Olympic Truces, and greeted further Olympic bans by IOC. The sports minister of Ukraine signed the statement, calling on no state representation. Critics point to threats to Paralympics togetherness, but IPC focuses on governance development.

Milano-Cortina 2026

The Games will take place in Italy (March 6-15, 2026) and will be the 50th anniversary of Paralympics Winter sports and have 79 medal events in six sports.

On the official site you can find the venues in Milano and Cortina d'Ampezzo to do alpine, cross-country, snowboard, biathlon, ice hockey, and curling. This issue is a test of IPC balance of inclusion in the global tensions.

Also Read: [What is IndiaAI Mission 2.0? Features, Objectives and Other Details](#)

MeitY Rolls Out VoicERA for Next-Gen Multilingual Voice AI

VoicERA is Launched by MeitY to Multilingual Voice AI Access. VoicERA came out of stealth mode at the second edition of the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, on 18 February, 2026, organized by MeitY as part of the IndiaAI Mission.

The platform was launched by Amitabh Kant (former CEO of NITI Aayog) and Amitabh Nag (CEO of Digital India BHASHINI Division) with partners such as EkStep Foundation, Centre for Open Source Software (COSS) at IIIT Hyderabad (not Bengaluru as originally reported) and AI4Bharat.

It was an international AI governance, ethical AI, and sovereign tech stack summit attended by policymakers, researchers, and industry leaders.

Evolution of BHASHINI

In 2022, Digital India BHASHINI Division was created, which constructs the language translation and voice infrastructure of India based on open-source AI models. The previous milestones are the VoicERA beta that takes place on BHASHINI in November 2025 to be tested.

BHASHINI is now serving more than 22 scheduled Indian languages and dialects, and is able to provide smooth text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and translation using APIs available to developers and governments. VoicERA signals the transition to full voice AI stack, bridging the gap in full-scale conversational systems, multilingual systems.

What are the Technical Specifications of VoicERA?

VoicERA has Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR), Neural TTS, Large Language Models (LLM), and Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) pipes, all designed to run on low-latency telephony and real-time interactions.

Its main elements are domain-specific language models, barge-in detection of natural conversations and integration with UAP (Unified API Platform) of BHASHINI. It can be deployed on Kubernetes to scale to the cloud or an air-gapped environment, and assure the sovereignty of data and adherence to the India DPDP Act.

The ready-made models are made available to developers in the GitHub repositories under the BHASHINI.

Applications and Use Cases

Voice-based and specifically designed to serve the purposes of the government, VoicERA serves as an energy source to interactive voice Response (IVR) with schemes such as PM-KISAN, Ayushman Bharat, and skill development helplines in local languages.

They have voice-based crop recommendations to farmers, multilingual redressal of grievances amongst citizens, and chatbots to educate students in remote locations.

E-commerce customer support and banking queries are also used in the private sector and already piloted in such states as Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

VoicERA's Future in India

VoicERA helps India fulfil its objective of AI-based digital public goods, which can stand to 1.4 billion users by linking with the pillars of Digital India such as DigiLocker and UMANG.

Future capabilities are emotion recognition, exemption of dialect up to 100 and more variants, and federated learning to achieve privacy enhancement. It has created a startup ecosystem through grants under IndiaAI Mission that attempts to export the model as a global public good to emerging economies.

Kiren Rijju launched NIGRANI App, AI Chatbots & Haj Wrist Band, All You Need to Know

Union Minister of Minority Affairs and Parliamentary affairs Kiran Rijju in National 'Chintan Shivir' at Nalanda University, Rajgir, Bihar. It aimed to deliberate on a policy-driven roadmap for minority welfare and socio-economic empowerment. The three major tech pillars launched NIGRANI App, the Haj Smart Wrist Band, and AI Chatbots.

Kiran Rijju launched NIGRANI App under [Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram](#) (PMJVK) Scheme which contributes in bridging infrastructural gaps across India. He also launched the Haj Wrist Band and AI Chatbots designed to bridge the gap between policy and last-mile execution.

What is National Chintan Shivir?

The [National Chintan Shivir 2026](#) was a high-level strategic summit held at Nalanda University, Rajgir, Bihar to brainstorm a policy-driven roadmap for minority welfare. The 2026 edition was chaired by Union Minister Kiran Rijju.

It focused on shifting from "deliberation to solution" by addressing infrastructural gaps and socio-economic empowerment. It served as a collaborative platform for Union and State officials to align local development with the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 through Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishvaas and Sabka Prayaas.

NIGRANI App: Bridging India's Infrastructural Gaps

The NIGRANI App (monitoring) is a cutting-edge mobile application launched under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK) scheme. It aims to enhance the transparency and pace of infrastructure projects across the country.

Key Objectives and Features:

Real-time Monitoring: The app allows officials and stakeholders to track the physical and financial progress of community assets like schools, hospitals, and skill centers in real-time.

Enhanced Transparency: the app ensures that funds are utilized efficiently, reducing delays and "ghost" projects by using geo-tagging and digital reporting.

Data-Driven Governance: It provides a centralized dashboard for the Ministry to identify regions with developmental deficits, ensuring the Prime Minister's visions of Viksit Bharat and Atmanirbhar Bharat by 2047.

Hon'ble Minister of Minority Affairs formally inaugurated Chintan Shivir today.

Shri Rijju launched NIGRANI App under PMJVK Scheme of Ministry which is instrumental in bridging infrastructural gaps across India.

He also launched Haj Wrist Band , Haj Suvidha App and AI Chatbots...
pic.twitter.com/3aidYcJY7X

— Ministry of Minority Affairs (@MOMAIndia) [February 19, 2026](#)
Haj Smart Wrist Band: Safety in Every Step

Indian Haj pilgrims will benefit from wearable technology designed to ensure their safety and health in the challenging environment of the pilgrimage for the first time through the Haj Smart Wrist Band.

Features of the Haj Wrist Band:

It has SOS and Emergency alerts, Pilgrims can trigger an emergency signal if they are lost or in distress.

Integrated with GPS to track location, it helps the Indian Haj Mission locate pilgrims in crowded areas like Mina and Arafat.

The band track health monitoring, vital signs such as heart rate and activity levels, alerting medical teams if a pilgrim shows signs of exhaustion or heatstroke.

It works in sync with the [Haj Suvidha App 2.0](#), providing a seamless

layer of protection.

AI Chatbots: 24/7 Citizen Support

The Ministry introduced AI-powered Chatbots on its official portal to make government services more accessible. These digital assistants are designed to provide instant support to citizens without the need for manual intervention and supports

The chatbots can communicate in multiple Indian languages, breaking down the linguistic barriers often faced by minority communities.

These Chatbots will provide scheme awareness whether it's a scholarship under PM-VIKAS or a query about Waqf management. The AI provides instant, accurate information on eligibility and application processes.

Chatboats have grievance redressal, and acts as a first point of contact for lodging complaints and checking the status of previous requests, significantly reducing the turnaround time for citizen queries.

Also Read: [Google Largest Full-Stack AI Hub in Visakhapatnam With \\$15 Billion Investment](#)

Google Largest Full-Stack AI Hub in Visakhapatnam With \$15 Billion Investment

Google CEO Sundar Pichai announced a full-stack AI hub in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh at the India AI Impact Summit 2026. It is Google's largest AI hub with the investment of \$15 Billion to major digital infrastructure commitment to India and transforming Visakhapatnam into a global node for artificial intelligence.

Key Highlights:

- Google is establishing a full-stack AI hub as part of our \$15 billion infrastructure investment Visakhapatnam (Vizag) in India.
- The hub will house gigawatt-scale computers and a new international subsea cable gateway, bringing jobs and cutting-edge AI to people and businesses across India.
 - Gigawatt-Scale Compute will house a purpose-built data center campus with massive computing capacity to power Google's AI models like Gemini and Veo and support Indian enterprises.
 - Vizag will serve as a landing point for a new international subsea cable, establishing a high-speed fiber-optic route that connects India directly to the global network.
 - Full-Stack AI hub will provide the entire AI stack from custom hardware (TPUs) to advanced software frameworks enabling startups and businesses to build and scale AI solutions locally.
- It will expand Google's footprint in India and transform Visakhapatnam into a global node for artificial intelligence.
- Google is collaborating with AdaniConneX and Airtel to build out the physical infrastructure and connectivity for the hub.

What is Significance?

The AI hub will provide foundational "full-stack" infrastructure which is necessary to next-generation power AI services and reinforcing India's position as a pivotal player in the global technology ecosystem.

Democratizing Innovation by providing accessible, high-performance

computing power and localized data sets, the hub will give more access to startups and researchers and cutting-edge AI development will be available to any innovator with a viable idea.

Developing India's own infrastructure reduces reliance on foreign cloud providers and proprietary stacks which allows India to maintain control over its data privacy standards and Data Sovereignty:

A robust local ecosystem discourages "brain drain" by providing world-class facilities for India's massive pool of engineers and data scientists. It transforms India from a back-office service provider into a global laboratory for R&D and high-value intellectual property creation.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai announced a \$15 billion full-stack AI hub in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, at the India AI Impact Summit 2026. This largest AI hub will feature gigawatt-scale computing and a new international subsea cable, transforming Vizag into a global AI node. It aims to democratize AI innovation, support Indian enterprises, and bolster India's position in the global technology ecosystem, collaborating with AdaniConneX and Airtel.

Also Read: [What is IndiaAI Mission 2.0? Features, Objectives and Other Details](#)

Charax Spasinou Rediscovering Alexander the Great's Lost City and Its Archaeological Significance

The recent identification of Charax Spasinou, an ancient port city associated with the Hellenistic world and traditionally linked to Alexander the Great, marks a significant milestone in archaeological research. Located near the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present-day Iraq, the city once functioned as a major commercial and cultural hub. This discovery is related to ancient civilisations, Hellenistic expansion, maritime trade, and the role of archaeology in reconstructing history.

Historical Background of Charax Spasinou:

Charax Spasinou was founded in the late 4th century BCE during the period of Hellenistic expansion following Alexander's eastern campaigns. Over time, it became the capital of the Characene Kingdom, which prospered due to its strategic location near the Persian Gulf. Its rediscovery confirms classical accounts about the city's prominence in ancient trade and administration.

The city served as:

- A key maritime trade port
- A political centre in southern Mesopotamia
- A bridge between Greek and local Mesopotamian cultures

Hellenistic Influence and Cultural Exchange:

The era of Alexander witnessed the spread of Greek political institutions, urban planning, and cultural practices across West Asia. The city stands as evidence that ancient civilisations were interconnected rather than isolated entities.

Charax Spasinou reflects:

- Grid-based city planning typical of Hellenistic settlements

- Cultural syncretism between Greek and indigenous traditions
- Expansion of trade networks connecting East and West

Role in Ancient Trade Networks:

Due to its strategic location, Charax Spasinou became a major node in trade routes connecting Mesopotamia, The Persian Gulf and The Indian subcontinent. For examination purposes, this can be linked with topics such as ancient maritime trade, economic history, and early globalisation.

It facilitated the movement of spices, textiles, precious stones, and other goods. This aligns with historical evidence of Indo-Mesopotamian and Indo-Roman trade, highlighting early global economic integration.

Archaeological Significance:

Excavations provide tangible evidence through pottery, coins, inscriptions, and settlement patterns. Such findings strengthen the scientific foundation of historical narrative. Archaeological discoveries like Charax Spasinou are crucial for:

- Validating historical texts and classical writings
- Understanding urban planning and material culture
- Reconstructing political and economic systems

The rediscovery of ancient cities underscores the need for protecting cultural heritage, especially in regions affected by conflict.

Archaeological heritage contributes to Academic research and global historical understanding, cultural tourism and international cooperation in heritage preservation. Safeguarding such sites is essential for preserving humanity's shared legacy.

The rediscovery of Charax Spasinou revives scholarly interest in the interconnected nature of ancient civilisations. Associated with the Hellenistic period and linked to Alexander the Great, the city represents cultural fusion, maritime trade expansion, and administrative development.

Also Read: [*What is Exercise MILAN 2026? Objectives, Participating Countries & Warships*](#)

Bee Corridors: NHAI's First-Ever Pollinator Initiative Along National Highways

NHAI launches India's first Bee Corridors along National Highways to support pollinators, enhance biodiversity, and boost agricultural productivity through year-round flowering plantations.

the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has announced the development of India's first-ever Bee Corridors along National Highways. This initiative marks a significant shift from ornamental roadside plantations to ecologically functional green corridors designed to conserve pollinators such as honeybees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects with pollinator populations declining globally due to habitat loss, climate change, and pesticide use, NHAI's move integrates infrastructure development with biodiversity conservation aligning with India's sustainable development commitments.

What Are Bee Corridors?

A Bee Corridor is a continuous linear stretch of bee-friendly vegetation planted along highways. These corridors include: Flowering trees, Native shrubs, Nectar-rich plants and Seasonal flowering species. The aim is to ensure year-round availability of nectar and pollen, supporting pollinators across seasons. Unlike ornamental landscaping focused primarily on aesthetics, this initiative prioritizes ecological functionality and biodiversity enhancement.

Why Are Bee Corridors Important?

1. Addressing Pollinator Decline

Pollinators play a crucial role in maintaining ecosystem balance. However, they face increasing threats due to habitat fragmentation, monoculture farming, pesticide exposure, urbanization. By converting highway stretches into pollinator-friendly habitats, NHAI provides safe foraging and breeding spaces for bees and other insects.

2. Boosting Agricultural Productivity

Bees are essential for pollination of crops such as fruits, vegetables, oilseeds, and pulses. Healthy pollinator populations contribute to Higher crop yields, improved quality of produce, enhanced horticultural productivity Thus, Bee Corridors indirectly support India's agricultural economy and farmer incomes.

3. Enhancing Biodiversity

National Highways traverse diverse ecological zones. Roadside plantations offer a unique opportunity to create biodiversity linkages between fragmented habitats. Bee Corridors can act as ecological connectors, support native flora and fauna and strengthen ecosystem resilience

4. Climate and Environmental Benefits

Flowering plantations along highways also contribute to carbon sequestration, dust reduction, microclimate regulation, improved air quality and this initiative complements India's broader green infrastructure and climate goals.

Why Highways Are Ideal for Pollinator Corridors

India has an extensive network of [National Highways](#) managed by NHAI. These highways span thousands of kilometers, pass through rural and agricultural landscapes and have designated green belts. Utilizing these stretches for ecological plantations transforms passive green cover into productive ecological infrastructure.

Shift from Ornamental to Ecological Plantations Traditionally, roadside plantations focused on ornamental species for visual appeal. The Bee Corridor initiative emphasizes native species selection, staggered flowering cycles, pollinator-attracting plants and ecological sustainability. This represents a paradigm shift in highway landscaping policy.

The Bee Corridor initiative supports biodiversity conservation targets, sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate resilience strategies and sustainable infrastructure development. It reflects India's growing emphasis on integrating ecology with infrastructure planning.

NHAI's first-ever Bee Corridor initiative represents an innovative blend of infrastructure and environmental stewardship. By transforming highways into ecological lifelines for pollinators, India is taking a significant step toward biodiversity conservation, agricultural sustainability, and climate resilience.

India-France Rafale Deal: India Plans to Acquire 3.6 Lakh Crore 114 Rafale Fighter Jets

French President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to India, marks a landmark moment in bilateral relations with a focus on global security and artificial intelligence. New Delhi has signaled its strategic preference by greenlighting the acquisition of 114 Dassault Rafale fighter jets. It includes 18 jets in fly-away condition and 96 to be manufactured domestically under the 'Make in India' initiative and marking a new chapter in "Horizon 2047"—the roadmap for the bilateral relationship. France to raise the indigenous component in the upcoming 114-jet Rafale deal (the MRFA program) to at least 50%.

Key Highlights Rafale Deal

The First Mumbai Summit: [President Emmanuel Macron](#) has chosen Mumbai as the gateway for his state visit for the first time, On February 17, the two leaders held bilateral discussions at Lok Bhavan, focusing on: The Rafale MRFA Deal to finalizing the industrial modalities for the 114-jet contract and Maritime Security strengthening the Indo-Pacific axis, with Mumbai serving as the symbolic naval hub.

[The Defence Acquisition Council \(DAC\)](#) chaired by the [Defence Minister Rajnath Singh](#) has cleared the 3.60 lakh crore (approx. \$39.7 billion). While this includes other procurements like Boeing P-8I surveillance aircraft and anti-tank mines, the lion's share is dedicated to the 114 Rafale jets and their sophisticated weapons suites. The Deal emphasizes indigenous production includes

- **Fly-away Condition:** 18 aircraft will be delivered directly from France to meet immediate operational gaps.
- Domestic Production:** 96 aircraft will be built in India through a partnership between Dassault Aviation and Indian private sector giants.
- Indigenization Goal:** It aims for over 50% indigenous content, fostering a local

- supply chain for high-end aerospace components.
- India has formally requested France to increase the "Made in India" component to 50% for the upcoming 114-jet Rafale deal, shifting from a buyer-seller relationship to a co-production model to push the Indigenization in defence.
 - A major focus is on establishing local Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facilities for the Safran M88 engines to ensure the fleet can be serviced and overhauled entirely within India.
 - A new Joint Venture between [Bharat Electronics Limited \(BEL\)](#) and Safran has been signed to manufacture HAMMER precision-guided missiles domestically to boost the domestic missile production and achieve self-sufficiency in missiles.
 - Both nations have renewed their Defence Cooperation Agreement for another 10 years, which includes co-developing a high-thrust engine for India's 5th-generation fighter (AMCA) and a strategic roadmap ahead.

The 2026 deal focuses on the advanced Rafale F4 variant, featuring such as Enhanced Radar: Upgraded RBE2 AESA radar, Network-Centric Warfare: Advanced "Combat Cloud" capabilities, Integration of Meteor (beyond-visual-range), SCALP (cruise missiles), and the newly indigenized HAMMER precision-guided munitions.

The Indo-French strategic partnership amid evolving global security challenges and the recent India-EU Security and Defence Partnership provides a broader framework for enhanced bilateral and regional cooperation strengthens bilateral ties, focusing on defense and AI. India greenlights acquiring 114 Rafale fighter jets, with 96 to be 'Make in India', under a 3.6 lakh crore deal. The visit also launched the India-France Year of Innovation 2026 and included an AI Impact Summit, deepening cooperation in emerging technologies and marking a new chapter in the "Horizon 2047" roadmap.

Also Read: [What is Exercise MILAN 2026? Objectives, Participating Countries & Warships](#)

SAHI And BODH India's AI Health Care Launch At India AI Summit 2026

In India AI Summit 2026 the Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Shri JP Nadda, unveiled two transformative AI-driven initiatives 'SAHI' and 'BODH'. These initiatives represent a significant milestone in India's journey toward integrating artificial intelligence into the public healthcare ecosystem, aiming to make medical services more accessible, efficient, and data-driven.

The launched two [key initiatives](#); the Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India (SAHI) and the Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI (BODH) at the India AI Summit at Bharat Mandapam. These initiatives serve as the foundational pillars for India's future healthcare strategy and India's commitment to moving beyond experimentation into a structured, safe, and population-scale deployment of Artificial Intelligence.

[#HealthForAll](#)

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare Shri Jagat Prakash Nadda Launches SAHI and BODH Initiatives to Strengthen Responsible Health AI Ecosystem at the India AI Impact Summit 2026

SAHI to Guide Ethical, Transparent and People-Centric Use of AI in Healthcare:... pic.twitter.com/HCeIETC5SB

— Ministry of Health (@MoHFW_INDIA) [February 17, 2026](#)

SAHI: Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India

SAHI is not a software tool, but a national guidance framework designed to enable the safe, ethical, evidence-based, and inclusive adoption of Artificial Intelligence across India's healthcare system. It aims to provide strategic direction on governance, data stewardship, validation, deployment, and monitoring of AI solutions.

- **Governance & Ethics:** Establishes clear guardrails to ensure AI

assists doctors rather than replacing them, maintaining the sanctity of the physician-patient relationship.

- **Data Stewardship:** Provides a standardized approach for how health data should be managed and protected across states.
- **Standardization:** Offers a national direction for validating and monitoring AI tools to prevent fragmented or biased implementations.
- It will support States governments and private institutions in responsible adoption aligned with public health priorities like maternal health and infectious disease screening.

BODH: Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI

BODH is developed by Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur in collaboration with the National Health Authority (NHA). BODH is the technical engine that ensures AI tools actually work as promised before they reach the public. Its primary objective is a privacy-preserving benchmarking platform that enables rigorous evaluation of AI models using diverse, real-world health data without sharing underlying datasets. The key features includes:

- **Real-World Testing:** Allows developers to test their AI models against diverse, high-quality Indian datasets to ensure accuracy across different demographics.
- **Privacy-First Health Care Architecture:** Utilizes advanced technical frameworks to evaluate models without ever exposing or sharing the underlying sensitive patient data.
- **Digital Public Good:** Integrated under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), making it a transparent resource for startups and researchers.
- **Quality Assurance:** Acts as a "certified seal" of reliability, building trust among healthcare providers and citizens.

The launch of both SAHI and BODH initiatives marks a shift towards 'Responsible AI' and globally competitive health AI ecosystem. India is positioning itself as a global leader in Health AI, particularly for the Global South. These frameworks aim to reduce diagnostic errors, optimize hospital management, and extend high-quality care to the remotest corners of the country.

Also Read: [India-France Rafale Deal: India Plans to Acquire 3.6 Lakh Crore 114 Rafale Fighter Jets](#)

Smriti Mandhana Bags BBC Top Honor as 2025 Marks Golden Year for Women's Cricket

Smriti Mandhana, the Indian star batter has recently become the BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year 2025 on the back of her contributions in the success of women in cricket.

The award honors her role as India won the historic Women world cup and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) won the second title of Women premier league (WPL).

When was the Award Announced?

On 16 February 2026 at a ceremony in New Delhi, BBC declared her the winner and her mother Smita picked the award in Mandhana's presence as she continued her tour of Australia.

The video message reinforces the fact that Mandhana gave the thanks and pointed out 2025 as a year of women and cricket, particularly World Cup.

Key Achievements in 2025

Mandhana was a vice-captain of the 2025 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup winning team who then defeated South Africa by 52 runs in the final, in DY Patil Stadium on November 2, 2025, the first title by India.

Against New Zealand, she had made her 14th ODI century, tied with Meg Lanning, and previously, was the winner of BCCI Best International Women Cricketer, in recognition of numerous large ODI scores.

Who are Smriti Mandhana's Competitors?

Mandhana won over four other shortlisted contenders put forward by a [BBC panel](#): captain Harmanpreet Kaur (cricket), chess grandmaster Divya Deshmukh (who won in the Emerging Player category), hurdler Jyothi Yarraji, and shooter Suruchi Singh.

What is the Selection Process for Winners?

The winner among the nominees was selected by a renowned grand jury consisting of tennis legend Leander Paes, para-athlete Deepa Malik and long jumper Anju Bobby George.

BBC News CEO Jonathan Munro applauded the winners of the honors as they were able to demonstrate the excellence of sport.

Impact on Women's Cricket

Mandhana had a 87 on 41 balls making RCB pursue 204 off Capitals of Delhi in the final of the WPL, and they won their second title after 2024.

Her success has made Indian women cricket a world famous sport, which has been inspirational to young talents as they grow in popularity.

AIIMS Conducts First Remote Ultrasound in Antarctica

AIIMS set an innovative record when it performed the first remote ultrasound on a patient in a Maitri research station in the Antarctic in India, which is almost 12,000 km away.

The tele-robotic project is a real-time diagnostics tool created by AIIMS New Delhi, IIT Delhi, NCPOR, and startups that provides the opportunity to carry out diagnostics in challenging conditions.

Who Organised the First Remote Ultrasound?

Physicians of AIIMS New Delhi operating remotely the ultrasound system at Maitri station confirmed the continuity of connectivity and technical viability of the system at Antarctic conditions.

The show with [NCPOR](#) backing on logistics in Goa supports emergency care to 25-30 personnel to live in severe winters. NCPOR Director Dr. Thamban Meloth pointed out the Indian leadership in polar medical technology.

What is Tele-Robotic Technology?

It is a remote ultrasound control system in which a robotic arm is used and was first successfully tested in the COVID-19 pandemic in AIIMS.

IIT Delhi and AIIMS partnered with Addverb Technologies by allowing physical-less scans supported by specialists. It aids quick imaging on trauma or injuries to assist in evacuation decision-making.

India's Maitri Station

The second permanent Antarctic base opened in 1989 by India, Maitri, functions all year long, conducting multidisciplinary research under NCPOR.

It is a remote polar research station that accommodates scientists in East Antarctica. It is planned to be substituted with Maitri-2 by 2029 with

an improved capacity of 90 researchers.

NCPOR Role

Since 1998 NCPOR which has been under the [ministry of Earth Sciences](#) co-ordinates the Antarctic program of India and maintains stations such as Maitri and Bharati.

It deals with expeditions, transporting and polar research assignments and is headquartered in Goa. This trial necessitated the use of the agency to transport and connect equipment.

This innovation is extended to high-altitude, offshore and disaster-prone locations and to rural India, filling healthcare gaps. It builds upon the expansions of telemedicine during the post-COVID period and establishes India as the leader in extreme-environment medicine. The future applications may improve global polar operations and remote diagnostics.

Who was Geeta Patnaik? Check Odia Singer's Career and Achievements

The Odia music industry has deprived itself of a gem with the death of the great playback singer Geeta Patnaik aged 73. She was known to rule the Odia film songs in the 1970s and was famous with her soulful voice and decades long duet with Akshaya Mohanty.

Geeta Patnaik was an artist who came to the limelight of Odishi music in the 1970s and became one of the major All India Radio artists.

She was born in Odisha where she developed her versatility of voice in regional places, and she then conquered playback singing. There is limited information in trusted sources regarding the birth records, but her origins were closely connected with the cultural center of Cuttack.

Geeta Patnaik's Career

In the early seventies, Patnaik started her career in Akashvani, and she established a base in live performances. Towards the mid-1970s, she switched to Odia, and performed hits with her unique voice in collaboration with Akshaya Mohanty.

This was the period when she went through a transition of radio to the cinema radium for almost thirty years.

Her breakthrough was that of making prolific film contributions where she has voiced 15+ Odia movies, which have everlasting melodies.

Works with Mohanty launched her to stardom and combined melodies with emotion in regional hits. The artistry of Patnaik was in Hindi, Gujarati, Rajasthani as well as Marathi tracks as a way of demonstrating her versatility.

Awards and Honors

She won Odisha State Film Award -Best Playback Singer in 1982 in Asanta Graha. Her effort was recognized later in the Odisha Sangeet

Natak Akademi Award. These awards solidified her as a pillar of the culture.

Personal Life

Geeta Patnaik married Krishna Gopal Batra and lived in the Mohantipada district of Cuttack. Her family was of support to her career as she had a brother-in-law and a journalist by the name Pradosh Patnaik. She was active in events till the end of her days.

Death and Legacy

Patnaik took ill on February 12, 2026, at an event at Bhubaneswar literary festival, and she had a brain stroke; she was emergency taken to Capital Hospital, which was at the time a private hospital in Cuttack. She was declared dead on February 15 (some reports date it to 16), and her last rites were performed at Sati Chaura crematorium. Odisha chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi called it an irretrievable loss; Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan celebrated her lifelong inspiration.

Geeta Patnaik songs resonate in Odia hearts and are affecting generations. Her life lives on through tributes and playlists.

Sarvam AI and Bulbul V-3: Redefining Indian Digital Public Infrastructure at Global Level Out perform Gemini and Chat GPT

Sarvam AI's latest large language model, Bulbul V-3, represents a major leap in India's AI ecosystem. Designed for multilingual intelligence, governance applications, and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), Bulbul V-3 aims to bridge the linguistic and digital divide in India. Positioned against global AI leaders like Google's Gemini and OpenAI's ChatGPT, Bulbul V-3 focuses on Indic language depth, affordability, and sovereign AI capabilities. It marks a shift from dependency on foreign AI platforms toward India-led digital innovation aligned with the country's DPI model.

The rise of sovereign AI initiatives, companies like Sarvam AI are pushing India into the next frontier of AI-powered public infrastructure. Their flagship model, Bulbul V-3, is designed not merely as a chatbot but as a multilingual, governance-ready AI engine tailored for India's scale, diversity, and developmental priorities.

This development signals India's ambition to build AI systems that serve its 1.4+ billion citizens not just English-speaking elites while competing globally. Sarvam AI is an Indian artificial intelligence startup focused on building foundational AI models optimized for Indian languages and Digital Public Infrastructure use cases.

Key Focus Areas:

- Multilingual AI models for Indic languages
- AI integration into government services
- Voice-first technology for rural India
- Scalable AI infrastructure aligned with India Stack

Sarvam AI's mission aligns with India's push for AI sovereignty — reducing reliance on foreign LLMs and ensuring that AI systems are trained on local contexts, dialects, and governance frameworks.

What is Bulbul V-3?

Bulbul V-3 is a next-generation large language model (LLM) developed by Sarvam AI with a primary focus on:

- Deep Indic language understanding
- Code-switching (Hindi-English, Tamil-English, etc.)
- Governance and citizen service applications
- Low-cost, scalable deployment

Unlike generic global AI systems, Bulbul V-3 is trained extensively on Indian linguistic datasets and socio-administrative contexts.

How Bulbul V-3 Competes with Gemini and ChatGPT

While global models like Gemini (by Google) and ChatGPT (by OpenAI) dominate the international AI landscape, Bulbul V-3 differentiates itself in the following ways:

- **Multilingual Depth in Indic Languages:** Global AI systems primarily optimize for English and major global languages. Bulbul V-3 focuses on:
 - 20+ Indian languages
 - Regional dialects
 - Mixed-language communication (Hinglish, Tanglish, etc.)
- **DPI Integration Readiness:** Bulbul V-3 is designed to integrate with:
 - Aadhaar-enabled services
 - UPI-based digital transactions
 - Government grievance redressal systems
 - Agricultural and health advisory platforms
- **Cost-Efficiency and Accessibility:**
 - Optimized for low-bandwidth environments
 - Designed for smartphone-first users
 - Voice-enabled interactions for non-literate populations
- **Data Sovereignty:** Unlike foreign AI systems hosted and governed outside India, Bulbul V-3 supports:
 - Data localization
 - Compliance with Indian IT and data protection laws
 - Reduced geopolitical dependency

Strengthening India's Digital Public Infrastructure

- India's DPI is built on open APIs that allow startups and private players to build services over public digital rails like payments and identity. This encourages innovation, reduces entry barriers, and

- ensures scalable digital growth.
- Interoperability, Different platforms banking, identity, welfare, and documentation—work seamlessly together. This integration reduces duplication, improves efficiency, and enhances citizen convenience.
 - Public-Private Collaboration the government builds core infrastructure while private firms innovate on top of it. This hybrid model combines public accountability with market-driven efficiency.
 - AI-Powered Citizen Helpdesks, Bulbul V-3 can provide 24/7 multilingual assistance for government schemes, document support, and grievance filing, reducing bureaucratic delays and improving service delivery.
 - Smart Public Grievance Systems, AI can automatically categorize complaints, detect urgency, and identify recurring governance issues, enabling faster and more accountable administrative responses.
 - AI-Driven Agricultural Advisory by integrating weather, soil, and market data, Bulbul V-3 can guide farmers on crop choices, pest alerts, and price updates in regional languages.
 - Vernacular Legal and Health Assistance the model can simplify legal rights and basic health guidance in local languages, making essential services accessible to rural and digitally underserved populations.

Global Implications:

India's AI-for-DPI approach offers a new development model for the Global South, Countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America could adopt similar AI-DPI frameworks, positioning India as a global AI governance leader.

- Affordable AI for emerging economies
- Open, scalable digital governance models
- Linguistic inclusivity at population scale

Challenges Ahead

Despite its promise, Bulbul V-3 faces several challenges:

- Competing with massive R&D budgets of global tech giants
- Ensuring data quality across diverse languages
- Avoiding algorithmic bias

- Scaling infrastructure sustainably

Odisha To Introduce QR Codes On Land Records

Odisha is set to take an important step in ensuring that its land governance is fraud-proof with the introduction of QR code enabling Records of Rights (RoR or pattas) that will enable immediate mobile verification of ownership and history.

This is part of statewide digitization, which was announced by Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari on February 12, 2026, and integrates with this.

The project will help curb land scam, which is rampant with forged documents used to sell off land illegally and lead to millions of litigation. Customers will use QR to get complete information, transforming the process of transactions into clear and fast.

When was this Step Announced?

Minister Suresh Pujari disclosed in a press engagement on February 12 that all the new RoRs will bear QR code, which will be developed in partnership with the central government.

All codes open up digital land profiles, which are not limited to a 30-year Encumbrance Certificate (EC) to all historical information.

Pujari focused on the frauds of selling plots and scans alerted tehsildars and inspectors on the anomalies. Introduction will coincide with continuous surveys; no specific time is specified, but soon was mentioned.

How QR System Works?

Individuals read the [QR on physical/digital patta](#) using any smartphone application, and immediately get a secure portal. It has data on ownership chain (sales, gifts, mortgages), specific location through GIS maps of boundaries and sizes, type of land (agricultural, homestead), current use, irrigation facilities and neighboring parcels.

It offers long histories (50 or more years) of records, mutation history, and dispute warnings as opposed to paper ECs. Digital RoRs are closed polygons based on plot IDs to be represented.

What are the Objectives and Benefits of QR Code System?

Core objective: Do away with fraudulent dealings through real time verification, which will reduce the sale of fake patta that is affecting Odisha. Increases trust in buyers- ECs are no longer required to go to tehsil.

The advantages go to the officials in fast audits, farmers in safe allotments and government in efficient allotments. Minimizes court proceedings, increases clear title revenue.

Technical Features

RoRs have embedded digital signatures and electronic chips in their multi-verification; any form of modification sends revenue authorities the red flag immediately. Associated with the national database of DILRMP featuring biometric-like unique identifiers.

QR connects to tamper-evident blockchain-inspired logs, and features integrity of data between devices. Offline caching of rural support.

Central scheme since 2016, DILRMP provides funding to computerize, remake cadastral survey, GIS mapping in 90 or more districts. Odisha is almost completely digitalized; QR becomes "smart RoRs."

Signing of digital records is mandatory; an upgrade of Odisha comes after pilots in high-fraud regions.

Associated Land Survey

Extensive survey puts satellites, Survey of India topomaps, Forest Department data, and historical cadastrals over a common GIS. Registers all government/ private lands, past leases, encroachments.

Outputs in a master database with each parcel being a georectified polygon attached to QR-enabled RoR, and spatial queries. Covers Odisha's 1.5 crore+ plots.

Challenges and Implementation

Challenges: Survey implementation on 30 districts requires skilled manpower; villages lack digital divide, which could be a barrier to adoption. Information transfer mistakes pose conflict.

Implementation stages: Pilot in a few blocks, training of 10,000+ revenue employees, general awareness through applications/portals. Success metrics: 50 percent reduction of fraud targeted.

Defence Ministry Pledges 2,312 Crore for HAL-Made Dornier Jets

On February 12, 2026, the Ministry of Defence of India signed a contract of eight Dornier-228 aircraft to the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) in a contract worth a sum of Rs 2,312 crore with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).

Inked under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat, this "Buy (Indian-IDDMM)-deal boosts maritime security amidst the increasing threats in the Indian Ocean Region.

Where was this Contract Signed?

The contract is on procurement of eight Dornier-228s with operational role equipment to perform coastal surveillance, search-and-rescue (SAR) and pollution monitoring.

It was signed in New Delhi in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, and helps HAL in the Kanpur division and enhances the networks of MSMEs by providing employment and MRO facilities.

The delivery schedule is in line with the widened EEZ patrols by ICG.

Dornier-228 Overview

The Dornier-228 is a short take-off/landing (STOL) twin-turboprop manufactured by Germany's General Atomics (which was formerly Dornier) and is perfect in maritime applications.

Variants of [228-100](#) and [228-201](#) already exist in variants of patrol by ICG. It has also acquired two modernized units in the past, in 2023, at a cost of Rs 458 crore.

Strategic Role of these Planes

These planes contribute to the domain awareness of ICG in the Indian 7,500 km coastal waters in terms of anti-smuggling, disaster management, and EEZ security. They allow rapid role changes in

surveillance, medevac and pollution control to overcome hybrid threats of piracy and trafficking. The procurement is fitting the recent naval buildups and regional tensions.

The Dornier-228 deal of Rs 2,312 crore is an illustration of the move that India makes towards self-reliance in defence production under Aatmanirbhar Bharat. Not only will it provide the Indian Coast Guard with essential elements of surveillance by empowering HAL and its MSME ecosystem but also enhance the scope of maritime security in the vast coastline and EEZ.

The strategic infusion will bring about improved disaster response, anti-smuggling and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

Also Read: [India AI Impact Summit 2026: First Global AI Summit in Global South](#)

Indian Navy Assumes First Ever Command of Combined Task Force 154

Combined Task Force(CTF) 154: The Indian Navy has assumed command of Combined Task Force (CTF) 154, a key multinational training task force under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). India's commitment to collaborative maritime security and capacity building in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond and delivering high-impact training initiatives and reinforcing global maritime partnerships for peace, prosperity, and security.

Key Highlights:

- The **CTF 154** is specifically oriented towards training and capacity building of member nations of CMF. It reflects the region's growing trust in India's professional expertise, operational experience, and a role as a Preferred Security Partner among the 47 nations of the **Combined Maritime Forces**(CMF).
- The CTF 154 established in May 2023, is dedicated to enhancing maritime security through multinational maritime training at locations across the Middle East, enabling more CMF partner nations to participate in training opportunities without ships or aircraft, particularly during courses that are facilitated ashore.
- the CTF 154 operates alongside CMF's other task forces: CTF 150 (Maritime Security), CTF 151 (Counter-Piracy), CTF 152 (Maritime Security in Arabian Gulf) and CTF 153 (Maritime Security in Red Sea).
- The training focuses on five core pillars:
 - Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)
 - Law of the Sea
 - Maritime Interdiction Operations
 - Maritime Rescue and Assistance
 - Leadership Development.
- The task force conducts regular Maritime Security Enhancement Training (MSET) events, exercises like Compass Rose and

Northern/Southern Readiness, and outreach to build partner nations' operational capabilities against common threats such as illegal trafficking, piracy, and irregular migration.

The Indian Navy has taken [command of Combined Task Force \(CTF\) 154](#), a multinational training force under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). This move underscores India's commitment to collaborative maritime security and capacity building in the Indian Ocean Region. CTF 154, established in May 2023, focuses on enhancing operational capabilities against threats like piracy and illegal trafficking through specialized training and exercises for member nations.

Also Read: [India AI Impact Summit 2026: First Global AI Summit in Global South](#)

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Goa Unveils First Biodiversity and Cultural Map

The attempt to combine environmental consciousness with cultural heritage among school going children is made in Goa with the first biodiversity and cultural map created by WWF India.

Revealed on February 13-14, 2026, in the International Centre Goa, this child-oriented visual guide will include 48 representatives of common species and traditional forms of art, and will be distributed in print and electronic copies, free of charge to schools.

The map identifies 48 species that can be found in the various [ecosystems of Goa](#) such as birds, mammals, reptiles, marine species, mangroves and insects and some of the species are catfish, tigers, mangrove varieties like *Rhizophora mucronata* and *Avicennia officinalis*.

It specifically aims at ordinary meetings in localities, mangroves, coastal waters, and forests of the Western Ghats so as to promote local identification and interest.

WWF Goa coordinator Aditya Kakodkar stressed the need to tie map images to actual observations and created a sense of curiosity but not the rarities that belonged to researchers.

What are the Cultural Factors Integrated in this Map?

It combines ecology and identity and describes kaavi art (red laterite murals), Kunbi female attire, Ghoddemodni folk dance, and crocodile veneration (manngetapnni). The folk-indica style of artist Sudarshan Shaw does not use cartoons, and does not demean Goan traditions; this has been found to be appealing to students.

How is it related to NEP 2020?

Coupled with the Class VI experiential/vocational learning of National Education Policy, WWF provided 450 teachers in government/aided schools with training on links between the environment and vocation.

This wall map transforms education as a disjointed event (e.g. scoped bird views) into everyday conversations, which produce biodiversity dialogues.

Goa's Biodiversity Context

Goa is nestled in the Western Ghats and coastal areas and has mangroves essential in protection/fisheries, a variety of avifauna and endangered species.

Earlier efforts have been the 2023 atlas of Mayem village (250 pages on flora/fauna in the area) and a push at 2026 by CM Pramod Sawant towards 191 panchayat atlases, with Goa subsequent to Himachal Pradesh.

In 2023, National campaigns update People Biodiversity Registers (PBRs) and use them as the basis of community-led conservation.

What is the Conservation Significance of this Map?

The device overcomes the urbanization menaces to the nearby pulses, vegetables and medicinals, fostering grassroots keenness to land grabbing. It links Goa to SDGs by making it a model of biodiversity by sparking youth involvement, which enhances eco-tourism and cultural pride.

CM Rekha Gupta Launches Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana; Phase-out of Ladli Scheme Announced

On February 9, 2026, the Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta introduced the Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana to renovate the existing Ladli Scheme in order to offer girls more financial stability in education until graduation.

The scheme provides maximum deposits of Rs 56,000 in form of phased deposits in bank accounts linked to Aadhaar, which matures in over 1 lakh with interest, after fulfilling important milestones. It will help to close the Ladli Scheme by March 31, 2026, and it will spend 190 crores on benefiting every deserving girl.

What is Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana?

This welfare program is based on national programs under the title of Lakhpati Didi, where funds are invested in girls as future wealth makers. They are deposited in the education levels: birth/registration, Class I, VI, IX, XI and graduation/diploma.

After age 21 or degree attainment, maturity opens Rs 1 lakh+ to encourage school and higher school retention. It was highlighted by CM Gupta as an investment towards the future of the country.

Who is Qualified to the Scheme?

Girls who are born in Delhi, and with their families living in the city throughout 3+ years and an annual income less than Rs 1.20 lakh are eligible. Only two surviving daughters per family. Late registration permitted in Class I/VI/ IX/ XI entry or college. Broadened to include girls in government-registered institutions in India, such as the orphans in child care homes.

What is Better about it than the Ladli Scheme?

Last Ladli gave Rs 36,000; new scheme with increased Rs 56,000 with

interest, resolves the problem of unclaimed funds. The entire digital application/payment process does not require office visits.

Stricter protection: compulsory vaccinations, none are allowed to marry off (before 18 loses rights), only recognized institutions are allowed. Leftover amounts are returned to government.

Procedure of Application and Implementation

Completely on-line through Aadhaar-based portals to transparency. Parents enroll infants within 1 year or at school/college milestones.

Deposits were automatically triggered on checked progress (admission proofs, health records). Rs 190 crore paid to recover past dues and this has covered 100 percent.

Effect on Female School Education in Delhi

Intends to reduce financial-based dropouts, which will result in empowerment. Similar to Beti Bachao Beti Padhao in that aid depends on compliance with health/education.

It can help millions of people, and there will be more women who will be able to study higher and make themselves self-sufficient Lakhpati. Fraud is reduced through digital tracking.

Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana changes the picture of welfare of girl child in Delhi by providing girls with a corpus of 1 lakh maturity to guarantee future and education.

Through digitization and scaling up Ladli, it is an example of focused, responsible assistance, making the daughters the power of the society.

DMRC Phase V: Magenta Line Set to Overtake Pink Line as Delhi's Longest Corridor

Delhi Metro Magenta Line (Line 9) will become the longest line of the network with an approximate length of 89 kilometers (Noida Botanical Garden to Inderlok) after Phase V approvals. Having 65 stations and the largest number of interchanges and undergrounds, it will help to increase the connectivity on the Delhi-NCR.

This was announced by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on February 11, 2026, as it entails complete driverless operation.

Which Extensions are the Longest at Magenta Line?

Phase V comprises an underground extension of Ramakrishna Ashram Marg (RKAM) to Indraprastha via Central Vista, which has nine new stations.

Excluding a portion of 29-km Janakpuri West-RKAM that is part of Phase IV, the Inderlok-RKAM corridor will be fully integrated and the line will extend to 89 km, surpassing the 72 km of the Pink Line.

What is the Status of Magenta Line?

In service since 2018 (Botanical Garden-Janakpuri West, 37 km, 25 stations Phase IV extensions) (Phase IV extensions) such as Janakpuri West-RKAM (approaching a March 2026 opening) include underground tunnels up to 25.9m depth.

It already crosses at Chirag Delhi (Yellow), Hauz Khas (Yellow/Yel./Pink) and others and it increases the number of ridership as a result of NCR expansion.

What are the Main Characteristics of the Widened Corridor?

The [89km line](#) will have 65 stations (maximum interchange: 10+), and most of them will be underground at Central Vista to cause as little disturbance as possible.

The CBTC signaling is fully driverless and therefore efficient. It is the first direct Metro to Central Vista (new parliament, offices) and thus there is less traffic congestion.

Influence on Delhi-NCR

It connects with Noida, South/Central Delhi, West Delhi (Pitampura), and North Delhi (Inderlok), and the Violet (to Ballabhgarh), Pink, Yellow, Blue lines.

It has such benefits as shorter commutes (e.g., Botanical Garden-Inderlok in about 90 mins) and can support 40-lakh+ commutes daily, as well as reduce road congestion, such as the Ring Road. The prices of the property also increase around new stations.

Challenges and Timeline

The land acquisition delays (e.g. Keshopur) moved Janakpuri-RKAM by a year to 2026. The tunneling of TBM goes under old buildings, which is controlled digitally.

Full Phase V work begins after sanction, with completion of 2027-28 during an investment of Rs 25,000+ crore.

The addition of 89 km to Magenta Line makes the Delhi Metro world-class, transforming the NCR mobility with the technology of driverless trains and Central Vista.

It offers to generate low emissions, economic development, and urbanization, which is an example of an infra push of India.

Vande Mataram New Guidelines: All Six Stanzas of National Song to be Sung Before National Anthem

Union Ministry of Home Affairs issued the new guidelines that all six stanzas of the National Song Vande Mataram written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay shall be sung first when the national Song and National Anthem Jan Gana Man are scheduled to be played/sung together and requires all persons to stand up when 'Vande Mataram' is played.

Key Highlights of the New MHA Guidelines

According to the [The Ministry of Home Affairs](#) periodically reviews the protocols surrounding national honors to ensure the dignity of the nation. The key highlights includes:

Mandatory Sequence: In any formal ceremony where both the National Song and the National Anthem are featured Vande Mataram (3 minute 10 Seconds) must be performed first followed by Jana Gana Mana.

Full Rendition: the new guidelines mandate the singing of all six stanzas of the poem unlike previous practices where often only the first two stanzas were sung.

Standardized Protocol: The guidelines aim to bring uniformity across all government departments, educational institutions, and public sector undertakings during state functions and national holidays.

Preservation of Spirit National Song: The guidelines emphasize that the performance must maintain the "utmost dignity and solemnity" befitting the symbols of Indian independence, and requires all persons to stand up when 'Vande Mataram' is played.

Historical Significance of Vande Mataram

[Vande Mataram](#) (meaning "I bow to thee, Mother") was composed by

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in the 1870s. It was later included in his 1882 novel, *Anandamath*. *Vande Mataram* was sung at the 1896 Calcutta session of the Congress by [Rabindranath Tagore](#).

- '*Vande Mataram*' was first used as a political slogan on August 7, 1905, during the Anti-Partition and the [Swadeshi movements](#) in Bengal.
- In 1905, at the [Varanasi Session](#) of the Indian National Congress, the song '*Vande Mataram*' was adopted for all-India occasions.
- *Vande Mataram* was also sung by [Bande Mataram Sampradaya](#) in the Prabhat Pheris during the partition of Bengal to promote the concept of the Motherland as a mission.
- On 20 May 1906, in Barisal (now in Bangladesh), over ten thousand participants, both Hindus and Muslims, marched through the main streets carrying *Vande Mataram* flags to spread the message of self-reliance, unity, and political consciousness.
- In August 1906, an English daily titled *Bande Mataram* was launched under the editorship of Bipin Chandra Pal, with Sri Aurobindo later joining as joint editor.
- On 27 February 1908, Coral Mills in Tuticorin (Tamil Nadu) went on strike. They marched through the streets chanting '*Vande Mataram*' as a mark of protest and patriotism.
- In June 1908, thousands gathered outside the Bombay police court during [Lokmanya Tilak's](#) trial, singing *Vande Mataram* in a powerful display of solidarity.

What were the Important Stanzas of *Vande Mataram* Dropped?

The original poem was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, from which the national song was adopted by the Constitutional Assembly on January 24, 1950, which included six stanzas, with the later verses referencing Hindu goddesses such as Lakshmi and Durga. In the 1937 Faizabad session of the Indian National Congress, only the first two stanzas of the poem were adopted for public use.

The Union Home Ministry has issued new guidelines for the National Song, *Vande Mataram*. It mandates singing all six stanzas, and crucially, *Vande Mataram* must precede *Jana Gana Mana* if both are performed. The directives aim for uniformity across institutions, emphasizing dignity

and requiring standing during its rendition. This updates previous practices where often only two stanzas were sung, reinforcing the song's historical significance.

Also Read: [*What is the recent Vande Mataram debate? Know more here*](#)

EPFO 3.0: New UPI Withdrawal App, Easy PF Access And Other Details

EPFO 3.0: the Central Board of Trustees(CBT) has approved new reforms in the provident fund systems named as EPFO 3.0 a comprehensive digital transformation framework will bring a new portal which will allow Provident Fund(PF) members to withdraw their saving using ATM cards, a new software at the backend to implement the changes, and also announced the withdrawal norms and proposes a UPI-linked withdrawal facility.

Objectives:

- EPFO 3.0, [CBT](#) approved a comprehensive member-centric digital transformation framework to modernize provident fund services to provide faster and easier access to Provident Funds(PF).
- Core Banking Solution with cloud-native, API-first, micro services-based modules for account management, EPF, compliance, Launching New app for UPI withdrawals and a unified customer experience.
- The initiative will enable faster, automated claims, instant withdrawals, multilingual self-service and seamless payroll-linked contributions, reaffirming [EPFO's](#) commitment to transparent, efficient and technology-driven service delivery for over 30 crore members.
- Implementation will proceed in phases, ensuring secure, scalable and uninterrupted services across the India.

Also Read: [Cabinet Extended the Atal Pension Yojana Till 2030-31: Key Details](#)

What are the Key Features of the EPFO 3.0?

The EPFO 3.0 framework is built on a "Digital First" approach. Here are the core features and reforms introduced under this comprehensive digital transformation:

- **Simplified Withdrawal Framework:** [EPFO](#) brought the most member-centric change is the consolidation of complex rules to

enhance Ease of Living of EPF members simplify the partial withdrawal provisions of EPF Scheme by merging 13 complex provisions into a single, streamlined rule categorized into three types

- **Essential Needs:** illness, education, and marriage.
- **Housing Needs:** For the purchase, construction, or renovation of a home.
- **Special Circumstances:** Covers job loss, natural calamities, or unforeseen financial stress.
- **New Withdrawal Limits:** the CBT has increased the frequency and amount of withdrawals to provide better liquidity to employees for Members can now withdraw up to 100% of eligible balance including employee and employer share.**Education:** Members can now withdraw up to 10 times .**Marriage:** Facility increased to 5 withdrawals during the membership period.
- **Service Requirement:** Requirement of minimum service has been uniformly reduced to only 12 months for all partial withdrawals.
- **UPI-Linked Withdrawals:** It is a first-of-its-kind move for a retirement funds where members can
 - withdraw funds using the BHIM app.
 - The system will display the "Available Balance" vs. "Eligible Withdrawal Balance" in real-time.
 - Initial transaction caps (likely around 25,000) will be placed to ensure security.
 - UPI-linked withdrawal facility which will be expected to apply by April 2026.
- **EPFO New App:** The EPFO is launching a dedicated mobile app in April 2026 to enable direct EPF withdrawals of members via UPI
- **72-Hour Turnaround & Auto-Settlement:** The new backend architecture (CITES 2.0) enables 100% auto-settlement for many claim types.
 - No Documentation is required under the "Special Circumstances" category, members no longer need to provide reasons or upload documents.
 - Claims up to 5 lakh can now be settled automatically, with funds often reaching bank accounts within 72 hours.
- **Core Banking Solution (CBS):** Moving away from decentralized

databases, EPFO 3.0 uses a centralized system such as

- **All India Service:** you can now resolve PF issues at any EPFO office nationwide.
- **AI Translation (Bhashini):** The new portal will integrate Bhashini AI to provide information and services in multiple Indian languages making it accessible to workers in remote areas in their regional languages.
- **Minimum Balance:** earmarking 25% of the contributions in the Members' account as Minimum Balance to be maintained by the member at all times, will enable member to enjoy a high rate of interest offered by EPFO (presently 8.25% pa) along with compounding benefits.

Source: [EPFIndia](#)

EPFO 3.0 is a structural overhaul designed to make the Provident Fund a more flexible financial tool rather than a locked-in asset. The EPFO is bridging the gap between traditional social security and modern fintech

PM Modi Unveils \$175 Million Economic Package to Bolster India-Seychelles Ties

On February 8, 2026 a joint press conference between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Patrick Herminie was announced as a special USD 175 million financial package to Seychelles.

This aid which includes USD 100million Line of Credit and USD 75 million grant focuses on key areas to promote sustainable development and the creation of jobs.

The promise will be made in connection with the state visit of Seychelles President (February 5-10) dedicated to 50 years of diplomatic relations.

What Led to the announcement?

The package was announced after bilateral negotiations in Hyderabad House which focused on the development partnership between [India-Seychelles](#) based on Seychelles priorities.

The president of Herminie was on his inaugural visit to India in August 2025, with seven ministers, with the aim of improving the relationship through the new Joint Vision SESEL (Sustainability, Economic Growth, Security through Enhanced Linkages).

PM Modi declared Seychelles a reliable partner and made aid consistent with common interests in the Indian Ocean Region.

What is this Fund Used For?

Funds are used to fund projects in social housing, e-mobility, vocational training, health infrastructure, defense and maritime security.

Details are USD 125 million credit line on infrastructure, USD 50 million grants on capacity building, delivery of 1,000 tonnes of grains/lentils, provision of affordable medicines and digital public infrastructure such as payments.

It is geared towards creating employment, particularly among the youth,

and skills.

What are the Key Agreements Signed?

Seven MoUs touch on digital transformation (India sharing expertise), capacity building (training civil servants, training defense personnel cybersecurity, climate, MSMEs, renewables), and health.

Seychelles is part of the Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) of India. Trade agreements increase collaboration in marine protection as well as economic connections.

The 50th anniversary of India-Seychelles is a relation that has India as one of the leading development partners.

Some of the past aid is infrastructure such as the Supreme Court and National Assembly buildings. The promotion of maritime security is a measure to address challenges in the region, which makes SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision stronger.

The two leaders were committed towards climate action and people-to-people connections.

The package strengthens the Indian presence in the Indian Ocean, which contributes to the small island insecurities of Seychelles to climatic changes and security risks.

It enhances the strategic relationship in global changes, which leads to economic resilience and mutual gains such as tourism and fisheries trade.

The USD 175 million package by Modi is an illustration of India's adherence to the policy of Neighborhood First and SAGAR which gives Seychelles the power to develop in specific ways. It focuses on sustainability, security, and skills, thereby enhancing long-term relationships, which enables mutual prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

Also Read: [Who is Rouble Nagi? Indian Won Global Teacher Prize 2026](#)

World's Longest Snake Recorded in Indonesia's Sulawesi Forests

The longest wild snake ever to be formally measured and documented is a female reticulated python, Ibu Baron, which is 7.22 meters (23 feet 8 inches) in length.

The gigantic snake found in the thick shrubberies of the Sulawesi island of Maros in the Indonesian region towards the end of 2025 has a weight of around 96.5 kilograms and is a monumental discovery in the herpetological world.

Budi Purwanto, a conservationist, came in to save her when she was reported to have been mishandled and measured by the locals to avoid possible damage by the villagers.

The snake was affectionately named Ibu Baron or The Baroness, and on January 18, 2026, she was humanly evaluated and freed into her natural habitat with no injuries.

Where has the World's Longest Snake been found?

The [giant python](#) was discovered in the rocky wooded habitats of the Maros region of Sulawesi, one of the biodiversity hot spots in Indonesia, with its distinctive karst scenery and abundance of wildlife.

Ibu Baron was initially noticed by the local communities when they began hearing about the disappearance of livestock and this led to immediate intervention by the wildlife professionals.

Limestone caves, thick tropical vegetation, seasonal rivers found in this area make the habitat of reticulated pythons ideal as they grow to exceptional sizes because of the large prey animals such as wild pigs, deer and monkeys.

The discovery highlights the importance of Sulawesi as a global repository of megafauna as human activity in Sulawesi is minimal in comparison to more densely populated islands such as Java.

The team of Purwanto maneuvered through difficult terrain to access her and play on the point of remoteness and purity of the location that ensured this snake was able to develop to maturity unhindered.

How was the snake weighed and confirmed?

Scientific accuracy was applied to measurement to prevent historical exaggeration that is usually found in the records of snakes.

A professional surveyor tape that was used to measure her head-to-tail length in a straight line on several occasions confirmed the measurements of 7.22 meters by experts Diaz Nugraha, a certified wildlife handler, and photographer Radu Frentiu.

At capture she weighed her at 96.5 kg on calibrated scales of rice, fasting. Verification of the process was done by [Guinness World Records](#) by video recording, photographs and professional testifications and followed very rigid ethical standards, no anesthesia, no stretching and complete liberation after the procedure. This scientific procedure outshines anecdotal arguments and sets an unquestionable standard of wild reptile records.

What is the Longest Snake in the world?

Ibu Baron is a species of the Malayopython reticulatus reticulated pythons (the largest species of snakes in the world), native to Southeast Asia, Indonesia to the Philippines.

Her size and that of females like her is often larger than that of the males who are always bigger in size, and her size stretched the limit of the biological world.

Their unusual net-like (reticulated) scale patterns give them camouflage(s) in the forest and strong muscles are found to constrict large prey.

Pythons Reticulated pythons are ambush predators that can feed on animals as large as their own bodies, including in some isolated instances human beings as well, which supports the cautionary advice in endemic areas.

Why is this Biological Discovery Important?

This record indicates a positive predator-prey relationship in the Sulawesi ecosystems where there is plenty of food and little disturbance by humans, thus giants such as Ibu Baron grow to full size.

It outweighs previous confirmed wild records (around 7 meters) and competes with captive records, such as Medusa (7.67m in 2016), confirming unverified historical records of 10-meter pythons.

The discovery offers plenty of information on growth rates, genetics and habitat requirements and contributes to conservation with the threats of deforestation and illegal trade of pets.

The fact that she is of a good size means that she has healthy populations and there is hope that the species can withstand it.

What were the Old Snake Records?

Ibu Baron is the highest known verified wild measurement, surpassing a 7-meter Burmese python in 2016 and massively surpassing the average reticulated measurements (4-5m).

Optimized feeding causes the records of captives to be greater, whereas wild verification is more infrequent and prestigious.

The Guinness-registered length of Ibu Baron does not only re-write the records of reptiles but glorifies the ecological marvels of Sulawesi and the strength of conservation through ethics. This story breathes awe to the world by combining local vigilance with scientific rigor and it calls on the world to protect the wild spaces where the giants of nature still exist in their freedom.

Also Read: [Who is Rouble Nagi? Indian Won Global Teacher Prize 2026](#)

Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority: A Steps Towards Inclusive Development & Governance

Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA): A landmark tripartite agreement was signed in New Delhi by the Government of India, the Government of Nagaland, and the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) for the creation of the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA). The agreement represents a significant development in addressing long-standing demands for a peaceful and prosperous North East to enhance governance and equitable development in Eastern Nagaland, while staying within India's constitutional framework.

The tripartite Agreement paves way for the formation of the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority(FNTA) for Six districts of Nagaland The FNTA was created to address the long standing political, economic and developmental grievances of Nagaland. It is aimed to ensure equitable development, local decision making and financial autonomy and a peaceful and prosperous Northeast.

Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority(FNTA):

The Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA) is an autonomous administrative body established within the State of Nagaland to provide enhanced local governance for six districts in the eastern region of Nagaland. The authority is the outcome of a historic tripartite agreement between the Government of India, the Government of Nagaland, and The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO). Under this [arrangement](#):

- The FNTA will cover six eastern districts such as Tuensang, Mon, Kiphire, Longleng, Noklak and Shamator.
- It will be empowered with the devolution of powers related to 46 administrative and development subjects, enabling localized decision-making.

- A dedicated mini-Secretariat will be established to manage its functions, headed by an Additional Chief Secretary or Principal Secretary.
- The agreement explicitly ensures that the creation of FNTA does not affect the provisions of Article 371(A) of the Constitution of India, which provides special protections to the State of Nagaland.

Also Read: [Who is Rouble Nagi? Indian Won Global Teacher Prize](#)

2026

Why Was FNTA Created?

The establishment of FNTA responds to long-standing concerns and development people of Eastern region of Nagaland. Historically, this region has felt that development initiatives and administrative attention have not kept pace with areas in other parts of the state. Over many years, the ENPO campaigned for greater autonomy and even a separate administrative identity originally [seeking](#) statehood to bridge the gaps in governance and growth in the region.

However through sustained dialogue and deliberation involving the Union Government, the Nagaland Government and ENPO representatives, a consensus was reached that balances the need for responsive local governance with the territorial integrity of Nagaland and the constitutional framework of India.

What is ENPO?

The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) is an apex civil body representing eight major Naga tribes residing in Eastern region of Nagaland. It acts as a collective platform to articulate regional concerns related to developmental issues, governance, and political representation. ENPO has played a key role in sustained dialogue with the Nagaland Government and the Government of India, leading to the agreement for the creation of the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority through constitutional and democratic means.

Significance of the FNTA:

- Localised governance and decision making by devolving powers over 46 subjects to the authority, FNTA empowers local leaders and communities to tailor policies and developmental initiatives to

regional needs improving responsiveness and efficiency.

- Financial autonomy and development focus, the agreement ensures annual allocations and budgetary support assigned proportionally based on population and area which aimed at accelerating infrastructure, education, healthcare and economic development in Eastern Nagaland.
- The arrangement provides constitutional safeguards under Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution a special protections related to customary laws, land ownership and social practices in Nagaland remain unaffected.
- Strengthening peace and stability by settling long-standing governance grievances through dialogue and constitutional processes, the agreement reinforces trust between communities, state and central institutions. This contributes positively to peace and stability in the broader Northeast region.

The Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA) marks a historic and developmental governance model that respects regional aspirations while safeguarding constitutional norms of the country and state integrity through shared decision-making powers, financial autonomy and focused administrative structures, the FNTA aims to usher in an era of inclusive growth and empowered local governance for Eastern Nagaland.

Also Read: [RBI Repo Rate: Check Current Rate, Meaning & Impacts](#)

India and GCC Begin FTA Negotiations to Boost Economic Cooperation

India-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) signed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for Free Trade Agreement. India started the officially comprehensive free trade agreement with the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The ToR mentioned the scope and modalities of a proposed trade pact, making a renewed push to deepen economic ties with the Gulf countries.

GCC and India have shared historic trade relations and that the signing of ToRs marks the commencement of negotiations towards a mutually beneficial FTA. He highlighted that the FTA will further reinforce relations between India and GCC, particularly in the context of prevailing global uncertainties.

Key Objectives:

- FTA holds significant potential to unlock and expand trade with an important region, with which India has longstanding historical ties in trade and commerce.
- The FTA will be a force multiplier for the global good and bring predictability and stability between two economies.
- FTA will enable seamless flow of goods, and services and attract investments while expanding job opportunities and fostering food and energy security for the region, elevating our deep economic ties.
- Security and Employment, fostering food and energy security for both regions while expanding job opportunities and elevating overall economic cooperation.

What is Significance?

The relationship between India and the [GCC](#) is built on a foundation of robust people-to-people ties and massive economic exchange. The GCC is also home to nearly ten million members of the Indian community. These strong and enduring people-to-people ties are further reinforced by the substantial presence of Indian companies across the region.

India's trade with GCC stood at USD 178.56 billion, accounting for 15.42% of India's global trade. In the last five years, India's trade with the GCC has expanded steadily, registering an annual average growth rate of 15.3 per cent.

The GCC region is also a significant source of FDI for India, with cumulative investments exceeding USD 31.14 billion as on September 2025.

- India's Export: Key exports from India to GCC include engineering goods, rice, textiles, machinery, gems and jewelry an total Exports: USD 56.87 billion in FY 2024-25.
 - The GCC region is also a significant source of FDI for India, with cumulative investments exceeding USD 31.14 billion as on September 2025.
- India Imports : from GCC primarily comprise crude oil, LNG, petrochemicals, and precious metals such as gold. Total Imports: USD 121.68 billion) in FY 2024-25

Source: [PIB](#)

Also Read: [Winter Olympics 2026: Check Full Schedule of Milano Cortina Games](#)

What are the Terms of Reference?

The Terms of Reference(ToR) serve as the foundational blueprint for the FTA negotiations. It is formally outlined in the scope, structure and modalities of negotiations for the proposed India-GCC Free Trade Agreement. The agreement enables both countries to begin structured discussion on free market access, regulatory cooperation and Tariff reduction.

The ToR formally outlines the:

- **Scope:** Defining which sectors and products will be covered.
- **Structure:** Establishing the framework for how meetings and discussions will proceed.
- **Modalities:** Setting the rules for negotiations regarding free market access, regulatory cooperation, and the systematic reduction of tariffs.

By establishing these "ground rules," both Indian and GCC can now engage in structured discussions to remove trade barriers and

harmonize regulatory standards.

More about the Gulf Cooperation Countries(GCC):

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was [established](#) by an agreement concluded on 25 May 1981 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia among Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE in view of their special relations, geographic proximity, similar political systems based on Islamic beliefs, joint destiny and common objectives.

Collectively, the GCC countries represent a market of 61.5 million people (2024) and US\$ 2.3 trillion in terms of GDP at current prices, ranking 9th globally in this category. Energy Hub the region remains the world's primary hub for energy exports, playing a crucial role in India's energy security.

As negotiations move forward, the India-GCC FTA is expected to transform the Middle East-South Asia corridor into one of the most dynamic trade zones in the world. The GCC is also home to nearly ten million members of the Indian community. These strong and enduring people-to-people ties are further reinforced by the substantial presence of Indian companies across the region.

Also Read: [RBI Repo Rate: Check Current Rate, Meaning & Impacts](#)

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India Strikes Gold: Esha Singh Wins 10m Air Pistol Title

Esha Singh won the gold medal in the individual event of 10m air pistol in the women category in the Asian shooting championships 2026, which was organized in New Delhi between February 3-14, 2026.

The 21-year-old athlete also rose one of the challenges at mid-final to get 239.8 and propel India into the first individual win of the tournament and team triumph in the host country. This is her second senior Asian Championship individual gold, and her victory was in 2024.

Esha Singh's Final and Key Performances

- Chinese Taipei had to settle for silver (Cheng Yen-Ching, 235.4) and bronze (Yu Ai-Wen, 217.7) in a hectic eight-woman final, where Esha charged up, and fended off her Chinese Taiwanese competition.
- Suruchi Singh, who is compatriot, came in fourth place with a score of 197.7 and Manu Bhaker came in the seventh position following an initial setback.
- [Esha](#) had a qualification mark of 575 that contributed to the team gold (1,726 marks) of India with Rhythm Sangwan and Suruchi.

Team Achievements

India won the team event of 10m air pistol among the women with 1,726 points, compared to other competitors. Samrat Rana, the world champion in men's 10m air pistol, won individual bronze (220.3) together with the team silver (1,732 points) behind Uzbekistan.

The championships have 311 participants; they consist of 20 countries competing in Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range.

Esha Singh's Background

- Esha grew to the top in Bhopal with junior world records and three golds at the age of 14 in 2019.
- She has won 2024 Asian gold, ISSF World Cup gold in China and

silver in Asian games.

- She is chosen to compete in the Paris Olympics; she still exhibits her successes in the pistol events.
- Asian Shooting Championships 2026 (pistol/rifle) are considered an Olympic to some of the games such as ISSF World Cups and Asian Games.
- India was the host in good anticipation, and initial medals were an uplifting factor. The team of Iran pulled out at the last moment on visa grounds.

The golden command of Esha Singh highlights the warrior position of the Indian pistol champion, and the combination of strength and accuracy to win history.

These victories are a booster to the shooting trends in India, telling the upcoming generations of talents and proving to the world that India is a country with an Olympic prospect.

Also Read: [*Which State IS the Renewable Energy Powerhouse Of India?*](#)

ECI to Revive National SEC Conference at Bharat Mandapam After 25-Year Gap

After more than twenty-five years, the Election Commission of India (ECI) will host a historic National Conference of State Election Commissioners (SECs). All significant and minor details are arranged in this structured draft into a distinctive, thorough article format designed for readability and interest.

The conference will take place at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on February 24, 2026. It is the first national assembly of SECs since 1999, reviving an important platform to improve electoral coordination that has lain dormant for more than 25 years.

It is hosted by the ECI and focuses on common electoral procedures and logistics in order to promote cooperation between the ECI and SECs within constitutional frameworks.

What Is The History Of National SEC Conference

This event highlights changing needs in India's federal electoral system following the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, reviving institutional discourse following the 1999 conference. In contrast to ECI's parliamentary and assembly functions, SECs were created under these amendments to supervise Panchayat and municipal elections.

The conference expanded further in 2012 with the addition of Missouri and Texas A&M, and most recently in 2024 with the addition of Texas and Oklahoma, two longstanding powerhouses, bringing the total to 16 teams.

The SEC is now characterized by a cultural "Tipping Point" leadership that brought university presidents together to emphasize athletic excellence as the main factor influencing institutional prestige, in addition to its 14-year run of football dominance in the early 21st century.

Who Are The Key Participants In the 2026 National SEC

Conference?

The top leadership of the Election Commission of India will preside over the next National Conference of State Election Commissioners (SECs), which is set for February 24, 2026.

- The first meeting of its kind in more than 25 years will be presided over by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.
- Election Commissioners Dr. Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Dr. Vivek Joshi will accompany him, and together they will speak to the delegates during the first meeting in order to create a plan for improved coordination between the federal and state electoral authorities.
- State Election Commissioners from all 36 States and Union Territories are expected to participate in this historic event.
- These commissioners will be accompanied by specialized experts to discuss modernizing electoral processes, including the deployment of the ECINET digital platform, in order to guarantee high-level technical and legal coordination.

Additionally, all 36 States and UTs' Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) from the ECI will be present to offer cooperative input, guaranteeing that the talks reflect a cohesive, national endeavor to simplify local and national election logistics.

Also Read: [Which State IS the Renewable Energy Powerhouse Of India?](#)

NCDC Implements Yuva Sahakar And Swayamshakti Schemes

The National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) is in the process of establishing an innovation and empowerment program in the cooperative industry of India through the scheme of Yuva Sahakar and Swayamshakti Sahakar (NCDC, 2008).

These are fully-funded programs, which are under the ministry of Cooperation and aim at empowering young entrepreneurs and women led groups to propel sustainable livelihoods and financial inclusion.

What is the Yuva Sahakar Scheme?

This plan favors the establishment of new cooperative communities by young entrepreneurs and gives financial aid to start-ups that offer new ideas.

It provides long-term credit of up to five years with 2% interest subvention to enable it to overcome the initial capital barrier and scale-based project according to the needs of the locality.

According to the [latest statistics](#), NCDC has already approved major funding, including Rs 4,734.97 lakh that served 18,915 members by the end of 2024.

What is Swayamshakti Sahakar Yojana?

It targets self-help groups of women (Self-Help Groups) to provide access to low-cost bank credit on collective socio-economic endeavors.

It facilitates economic inclusion of the economically disadvantaged groups allowing viable business and trusted services.

The focus on female cooperatives enhances community-based development in the country.

The Role and Recent Disclosures of NCDC

Both schemes are funded entirely by the NCDC, and as a statutory body

of the Ministry of Cooperation, the information on assistance in 2022-25 is posted by Union Minister Amit Shah in the Rajya Sabha.

The transparency represents a continuing support of cooperatives, both primary to the apex levels, within the vision of Sahakar-se-Samriddhi.

The example of NCDC implementation of Yuva Sahakar and Swayamshakti schemes is a case of cooperative-led development which supports youth and women by funding them and providing innovation.

These initiatives enhance economic resiliency and inclusiveness, which outlines an expandable framework of the cooperative ecosystem in India.

Also Read: [*India-US Trade Deal: Check Latest Updates, Significance & Challenges for Indian Economy*](#)

World Government Summit 2026 Opens in Dubai

On February 3, the World Government Summit 2026 was launched in Dubai as its biggest edition in 13 years welcoming more than 6,000 leaders representing 150+ countries. This is under the theme, Shaping Future Governments, and it brings together 35 heads of state, 500+ ministers, CEOs and experts to address global governance challenges.

What are Summit Dates and Where is the Venue?

The event will be held between February 3-5 at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai, the UAE and will include 320+ sessions, 24 global forums, 35 ministerial meetings, and 36 strategic reports by various partners such as UN-Habitat.

It is arranged by the World Governments Summit group with Mohammad Abdullah Al Gergawi in the role of the chairperson, focusing on the cooperation between the government and business to produce sustainable change.

Theme: The Future of Governments

The main theme deals with the reconsideration of governance in the face of AI, climate change, human population, and geopolitics.

The major pillars are Global Governance and Effective Leadership; Societal Wellbeing and Building Capacities; Economic Prosperity and Strategic Investments; Urban Future and Evolving Demographics; Future Realities and Emerging Frontiers to create resilient, future ready models.

Who are the Participants and Key Speakers?

It lists over 450 luminaries, one of which is the Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum of the UAE, the President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio, the WTO leader Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and tech powerhouse Palantir's Alexander Karp.

Sessions are Arab Fiscal Forum, Youth Minister roundtable, and Global SDG Councils, with GCC Secretary General Jasem Albusdaiwi noting the visionary role of UAE.

Agenda Highlights

Debates on next-gen governments, retail/sports/tourism futures, urban innovation, and AI ethics should be expected. Bilateral ties are promoted by high level forums such as Arab Youth Ministers and round tables of ministerial CEOs.

Topics of policy innovations will be published at the summit, and the sessions moderated by India Today anchors on economic prosperity and urban futures.

India's Participation in this Summit

Indian representatives, think leaders, and policymakers participate in SDGs, digital governance and Global South priorities. In the wake of previous versions, India boasts of achievements in UPI, digital public goods, and climate action, among discourses on how to maximize global summit ROI, as Davos.

Since 2013, the summit has influenced policies through 70 plus partners, which has impacted the UN agendas and created alliances.

According to GCC leaders, it is applauded as having methods of sustainable solutions that improve life. Results may transform governance, hastening SDGs through polycrises.

Also read: [*India Overtakes Japan to Become the World's Fourth Largest Economy*](#)

India Joins BRICS Centre For Industrial Competencies to Support Manufacturing & MSMEs

India has joined the BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies (BCIC) to provide integrated support services to manufacturing companies and MSMEs. India joined the BCIC at an event organised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in New Delhi.

Key Highlights:

- The BRICS Centre for Industrial **Competencies** (BCIC) launched in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development **Organization** (UNIDO), serves as a one-stop centre providing integrated support services to manufacturing companies and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) across BRICS countries with a focus on strengthening Industry 4.0 competencies.
- The Trust Fund Agreement a formal agreement was signed between the **DPIIT** and UNIDO, establishing the financial and operational framework for the center's activities in India.
- The National Productivity **Council** (NPC) has been designated as the India Centre for BRICS Industrial Competencies. It will act as the nodal agency to implement programs and provide technical expertise.
- The BCIC will offer a "one-stop" solution for MSMEs, providing access to international best practices, digital tools, and technical training.

Also Read: [India-US Trade Deal: Check Latest Updates, Significance & Challenges for Indian Economy](#)

Objectives of BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies(BCIC):

India's participation in the BCIC is not just about diplomacy; it is about tangible economic growth and empowering India's MSMEs. The objectives include:

- Strengthening **Industry 4.0** Competencies and helping small

businesses adopt technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, and Cloud Computing to improve productivity.

- Facilitating the transfer of skills and technology between **BRICS** member states to solve common industrial challenges and Global Knowledge Exchange.
- Reducing operational inefficiencies in the MSME sector, allowing Indian goods to meet international quality standards more effectively to enhance competitiveness at global level.
- Working with **UNIDO** to implement green manufacturing practices that align with global sustainability goals.

Why This Matters for the Indian Economy

MSMEs are the backbone of the Indian economy, contributing significantly to the GDP and providing employment to millions. However, they often face hurdles in upgrading technology due to high costs and lack of technical "know-how."

Also Read: [*Which State IS the Renewable Energy Powerhouse Of India?*](#)

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Current Affairs One-Liners 03 Feb 2026: India-US Trade Deal

Current Affairs One-Liners 03 Feb 2026: Today's one-liner current affairs are presented here in a new format. These updates are important from an examination perspective and will prove helpful in your preparation. Today's main highlights include topics related to Budget 2026-27, India-US Trade Deal, etc.

The tariff on Indian goods under the India-US Trade Deal has been reduced from 25 percent to how much- 18 percent

What is the total allocation for the Ministry of Education in Budget 2026-27- 1,39,289.48 crore

How many crores did the Ministry of Health receive in the Union Budget 2026-27- 1.06 lakh crore

Which helicopter will the Indian Air Force display at the Singapore Airshow 2026- ALH 'Dhruv'

Air Marshal Inderpal Singh Walia has recently been appointed as the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of which Command of the Indian Air Force- Eastern Air Command

The Asian Rifle and Pistol Shooting Championship 2026 is being organized in which city- New Delhi

Who recently launched 'My Bharat Budget Quest 2026', a nationwide youth-centric initiative- Union Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya

Globally acclaimed spiritual guru Dalai Lama won his first Grammy Award in which category- Best Audio Book, Narrative & Storytelling Recording

With whom has the United Arab Emirates signed an agreement to help with emergency humanitarian efforts in Sudan- United Nations World Food Programme

T20 World Cup 2026 Quiz
Current Affairs Quiz 02 Feb 2026

Migration Survey 2026: NSO To Conduct A Nationwide Comprehensive Survey, Check Highlights

The National Statistics Office (NSO) under the ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation will conduct a Survey on Migration across the country aimed at generating comprehensive and updated data on migration patterns in India. It will be conducted between July 2026 to June 2027.

Key Highlights:

- The survey will be [conducted](#) by The National Statistics Office (NSO) under the ministry of Statistics during July 2026 to June 2027.
- It will cover detail information on the extent and nature of migration which include
 - Rural-urban migration
 - inter-state movement
 - Reasons for migration
 - Return and seasonal migration
- The employment profiles of migration

Also Read: [Budget 2026: Check New Tax Slabs, Income Tax Rates and What is New Tax Act](#)

Currently [MoSPI](#) using the migration related data were collected through the Periodic Labour Force [Survey](#) (PLFS) 2020-2021 and Multiple Indicator Survey 2020-21. According to PLFS 2020-2021 current overall migration rate in India is 28.9% from which 10.7 accounts for male and 47.9% among females where a sharp gender gap exists. Marriage accounted for 86.8% of female migration and employment or better employment opportunities constituted the largest share at 22.8% for male migration.

It highlights the gender-specific nature of migration in India, with women's migration largely driven by social factors and men's migration

primarily influenced by labour market opportunities.

What is the significance?

The Ministry has highlighted the data generated will help policymakers, planners, researchers and development practitioners design more targeted interventions in key areas such as urban planning, housing, transport infrastructure, employment generation, social security and skill development.

The National Statistics Office (NSO) will conduct a comprehensive nationwide migration survey from July 2026 to June 2027. This initiative aims to gather updated data on India's migration patterns, covering rural-urban shifts, inter-state movements, and reasons like employment or marriage. The findings will be crucial for policymakers to design targeted interventions in urban planning, housing, employment generation, and social security, addressing the diverse needs highlighted by current migration trends.

Also Read: [*Which State IS the Renewable Energy Powerhouse Of India?*](#)

CIAL to Operate Hydrogen-Powered Buses

Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL) will become the first operator to use hydrogen-driven buses in India and will introduce three hydrogen-powered buses within 12 months in order to reduce airport emissions.

This step through the Hydrogen Valley program of Kerala is in line with the National Green Hydrogen Mission of sustainable transport.

What is MoA About?

On February 1, 2026, [Kerala Electricity Minister K. Krishnankutty](#) and Industries Minister P. Rajeeve signed the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between CIAL and foundation of the Kerala Hydrogen Valley Innovation Cluster (HVIC) in Kochi.

The agreement guarantees a maximum subsidy of up to 2.90 crore per bus with a maximum of 8.7 crore to be reported in installments, making CIAL the owner of operations, maintenance and routes.

What is the National Green Hydrogen Mission?

Introduced in 2023, this flagship plan aims to achieve 5 million tonnes of green hydrogen annually by 2030 with the support of 19,744 crore to decarbonize sectors such as steel, shipping and mobility.

Kerala uses it via HVIC to launch pilot projects to promote the production of electrolyzers and fueling facilities around the country. The buses of CIAL are the start of hydrogen mobility in aviation, to complement electric shuttles.

CIAL-BPCL Green Hydrogen Plant

CIAL also collaborates with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) to own a 1,000 KW plant at an airport in Nedumbassery which is already approved to be supplied.

It is projected to start its operations in the near future and generate as much as 200 kg of green hydrogen per day through the electrolysis process using solar energy that is available to fuel the buses and could

soon serve the Water Metro services.

By 100 percent, this hydrogen hub is the first hydrogen hub to be located next to the airport, which reduces logistics costs and emissions caused by diesel.

Preliminary Hydrogen Tests at CIAL

Tests started in 2025 with a 9-meter, 30+ seater prototype by EKA Mobility, KPIT Technologies, and BPCL - on display at the Global Hydrogen Summit in Kochi.

The three-year Proof of Concept (PoC) fuel cell technology in intra-airport and short-haul routes proved successful and became the step towards expanding the fleet.

Based on this, the net-zero targets in 2050 have CIAL, which is the first fully solar-powered airport in the world (50 MW capacity).

Also Read: [Census 2027: Full List of 33 Questions for Phase I](#)

The Hydrogen Valley Leadership in Kerala

The HVIC of Kerala focuses on the innovation of the whole state of Kochi, introducing hydrogen to transport, industry, and aviation - synthetic fuels and hydrogen electrolyser zones.

It makes the state the green hydrogen pioneer in India, which brings investments into the country in the face of global demand.

This achievement would be extended to other airports, and this will help India with its net-zero commitment by 2070.

Every bus will recover approximately 50 tonnes of CO₂ annually and improve the air quality of 10 million people who will travel by the bus every year and generate green employment in the manufacturing and refueling sectors.

It enhances the easiness of passengers by using zero-emission shuttles, which correlates with the SDGs on clean energy and climate action.

Also Read: [Most Congested Cities 2026: Why Bengaluru and Delhi Rank at the Top](#)

India Adds Two New Ramsar Wetlands Ahead of World Wetlands Day

In February 2026, India included two new wetlands on its Ramsar list, Patna Bird Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhari-Dhand, Gujarat, becoming 98 sites in total.

This increase as announced by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav before the World Wetlands Day on February 2 highlights the growing interest of India in biodiversity protection.

What is the Ramsar Convention?

[Ramsar Convention](#), signed in 1971 in Iran is the international treaty on the protection of wetlands of international importance, in which India became a signatory on 1 st February, 1982.

These areas preserve ecosystems that help in purifying water, managing floods, and keeping inactive carbon and supporting the habitat of migratory birds and animals.

With PM Narendra Modi in charge, the Ramsar network in India has increased by 276 per cent since 26 sites were reported in the year 2014 to 98 currently, thus a global leader.

Patna Bird Sanctuary Information

This sanctuary was created in 1990 in the Jalesar tehsil in the Etah district of Uttar Pradesh on 108.86 hectares and contains more than 178 bird species, 18 of them found only on the Indian subcontinent and harbors 100,000+ waterbirds during the winter season.

It has 252 water plants and is a main destination of foreign migrants. It was greeted as a biodiversity boost by PM Modi who praised locals in conservation efforts.

Also Read: [Census 2027: Full List of 33 Questions for Phase I](#)

Highlights of Chhari-Dhand Wetland

On the border of Banni grasslands and Rann of Kutch, in the Kutch district of Gujarat, this seasonal desert wetland of 22,700 hectares, the first Conservation Reserve in Gujarat since 2008, fills in the case of rivers and hills.

It harbors 250 and more species of birds such as flamingos, cranes, pelicans, and storks and mammals such as chinkara, wolves, caracals, desert foxes, and cats. Gujarat currently controls more than 21 per cent of the wetlands in India, as a leader in the country.

What is the importance of the New Features Introduced?

The new features increase the ecological resilience during climate change and promote the UN SDGs on life below water (SDG 14) and life on land (SDG 15).

They sponsor eco-tourism, research, and livelihoods and they set the example of prudent wetland exploitation. Uttar Pradesh obtains its 11th location, which strengthens local initiatives.

The relocation is in accord with the national policies such as the National Wetland Conservation Programme which focuses on community participation to be sustainable.

Since wetlands are increasingly being endangered by urbanization and pollution, these types of recognition are the motivation behind restoring them which makes India a global custodian.

Also Read: [*Most Congested Cities 2026: Why Bengaluru and Delhi Rank at the Top*](#)

Ladakh Red Sky Signals Rare Solar Radiation Storm

On the night of January 19-20, 2026, a gorgeous blood-red aurora appeared over Hanle in Ladakh, marveling people and social media users who likened it to the Northern Lights.

It was caused by a strong X-class solar flare on January 18 and a high speed coronal mass ejection (CME) at 1,700 km/s, which caused a G4 severe geomagnetic storm and S4 solar radiation storm the strongest since 2003.

What Caused This Storm?

The solar flare burst out at approximately 2330 UTC on January 18 in an active part of the sun and the CME was directed directly to the earth. It hit the magnetosphere on earth on January 19 at 19:38 UTC (01:08 IST) with the auroral oval extending southward to the mid-latitudes such as Hanle at 32°N.

The charged particles entered the atmosphere heating atoms of oxygen more than 300 km above the Earth to light up the red lights instead of the green light found in the normal aurora.

This was the first well documented red aurora in India captured by the Dark Sky Reserve of Hanle, at 4,500 meters, with little light pollution, and high-skilled all-sky cameras in the Indian Astronomical Observatory.

Scientific Significance of this Storm

The flare was detected by the Aditya-L1 mission in L1 Lagrange point which compressed the magnetosphere of the Earth exposing satellites to intense radiation, and gave the earth 24-48 hours notice.

With Solar Cycle 25 approaching maximum, ISRO cautions that there will be increased events, with Aditya-L1 instruments such as VELC monitoring CMEs to make more forecasts.

It is the sixth major red aurora of Cycle 25, which provides data on the low-latitude auroras and magnetosphere-ionosphere coupling.

India and Global Tech Effects

Geomagnetic storms cause the currents which pose a threat to power grids, transformers and blackouts and the heating of atmosphere raises the drag of satellites and crashes GPS, communications and banking.

The incident led to slight GPS glitches and no significant outages; the astronauts on ISS took shelter against radiation.

In the case of India, as the country increases its dependence on satellites, the alerts of Aditya-L1 secure resources in the presence of increasing risks of solar maximum.

Key Facts

- X-class flares: The strongest solar eruption.
- G4 storms: Thunderstorms with intense, growing equatorial auroras.
- Red auroras: Oxygen emissions on high altitudes, uncommon to the south of poles.
- Peaks 2025-2026 Solar Cycle 25, increasing events.

This exhibition highlights the vulnerability of the planets, increasing space weather preparedness in India by spacecraft missions such as Aditya-L1.

NITI Aayog Launches Sampoornata Abhiyan 2.0

NITI Aayog has also introduced Sampoornata Abhiyan 2.0, a countrywide movement to enhance development in the most underdeveloped regions in India.

This is a three months program, which will be implemented between January 28 and April 14, 2026, and aims at full saturation of critical indicators in Aspirational Districts and Blocks.

Sampoornata Abhiyan 2.0 is based on the achievements of 2024 when active work resulted in rapid positive results in the social areas.

It includes 112 Aspirational Districts, which were initiated in 2018 and 513 Aspirational Blocks, which were added through the 2023 programme, so that everyone is left behind in health, nutrition, education, sanitation, and animal welfare.

The campaign was launched by NITI Aayog CEO B.V.R. Subrahmanyam who complimented district leaders as torchbearers in their ownership and exhorting them to make a long-term commitment to being a torchbearer to Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas.

Key Performance Indicators

The motivation concentrates on saturation 100 percent achievement of customized KPIs to correct the gaps in the grassroots.

In the case of Aspirational Blocks (6 KPIs)

- Consistent additional nutrition to children between the age of 6 months and 6 years under ICDS.
- Effective enrolled Anganwadi children measurement.
- Operational Anganwadi Centres have functional toilets and drinking water.
- Sufficient toilets in schools in the form of girls.
- Vaccination of cows against Foot and Mouth Disease.

In the case of Aspirational Districts (5 KPIs)

- Percentage of live births at birth.
- Public and private notification of Tuberculosis cases.
- Village/Urban health sanitation and nutrition days held.
- School toilets of functional girls.
- The coverage of animal vaccination.

These indicators are in line with such UN Sustainable Development Goals as good health (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), and clean water (SDG 6).

What is the Implementation Strategy for Sampoornata Abhiyan 2.0?

Districts and Blocks should develop three-month action plans and monitor monthly progression and initiate awareness campaigns to change behavior.

Monitoring by the officers in the field will be performed simultaneously and NITI Aayog will coordinate the Central Ministries, States and UTs to plan, build capacity and sustainable systems.

Further Secretary Rohit Kumar emphasized on mission mode implementation to intensify the effects of 2024.

The campaign reflects "Jan Bhagidari"- people's participation in governance, forcibly driving the Antyodaya ideals to the last mile. The fact that it creates inter-departmental synergy serves as an example in the creation of result-focused development in difficult regions.

Previous attempts revealed that saturation drives are able to quickly change the results, which can ensure fair development as India is on the path of Viksit Bharat.

India's First Household Income Survey Starts in 2026: Check Details Here

In order to close a long-standing disparity in income, inequality, and taxation data, India will introduce its first statewide Household Income Survey in February 2026. This survey will provide policymakers with direct data on earnings from salaries, farms, enterprises, investments, and informal jobs.

The initiative is being led by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MoSPI) through the National Sample Survey (NSS). Previous attempts in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1983–84 were unsuccessful because of poor reporting and faulty methodology.

ALSO READ: [What are the New ITR Rules? Check All Details Here](#)

Who will Conduct this Survey?

This time, the process is being guided by an eight-member Technical Expert Group (TEG), which is chaired by economist Dr. Surjit S. Bhalla, a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and a former IMF Executive Director.

The committee comprises Dr. Tirthankar Patnaik, Chief Economist at NSE; Dr. Rajesh Shukla, Managing Director and CEO of PRICE; Prof. Ram Singh, Director of the Delhi School of Economics and an external member of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee; Prof. Sonalde Desai from NCAER; Prof. Praveen Jha from JNU; Prof. Srijit Mishra from the University of Hyderabad; and Aloke Kar, a former professor at ISI Kolkata.

How will the Survey be Conducted?

The committee must work together to establish definitions, create tools, improve sampling techniques, estimate income measures, and integrate best practices from nations such as the US, Australia, Canada, and South Africa.

The following survey will make use of digital techniques, concentrate on gathering income from both the wealthy and unorganized sector workers, and may cross-reference replies with tax records for verification.

Household Income Survey Objective

If done correctly, it will show how household incomes have been impacted by welfare programs, reforms, and digitalization. Additionally, it can reveal hidden or underreported sources of income, particularly in high-income or informal households.

The results may change how India targets welfare programs and formulates tax laws. Social support will be more accurate if low-income households are distinguished from low-spending households. Particularly in the run-up to elections, the statistics may also spark more incisive discussions on class mobility, inequality, and pay disparities.

Difficulties while Conducting this Survey

However, conducting this survey poses a lot of difficulties for the survey committee. While earnings in the informal sector are unpredictable and difficult to record, wealthy households frequently underreport their income. There is an additional layer of complexity in striking a balance between privacy and transparency. The challenge is further complicated by India's extensive informal sector and highly uneven income structures.

The Current Population Survey has been used for this purpose by the US for many years. Such data also form the basis of a large portion of South Africa's progressive social spending.