

MAHITHI MONTHLY SNIPPETS

JANUARY 2025

NAMMAKPSC SPECIAL EDITION



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NEWS IN SHORT

- India has just experienced its warmest year since 1901, with 2024 taking the top spot. The average annual temperature in 2024 was 25.75 degrees Celsius, which is 0.65 degrees Celsius above the normal temperature range.¹ This surpasses the previous record held by 2016, which had an average temperature 0.54 degrees Celsius above normal. What's more, the average minimum temperature in 2024 was the highest in the last 124 years, at 20.24 degrees Celsius, while the average maximum temperature was the fourth highest since 1901, at 31.25 degrees Celsius. This warming trend is not just limited to India, as the World Meteorological Organisation is likely to announce 2024 as the warmest year on record globally, capping a decade of unprecedented heat fuelled by human activities.
- Air Vice Marshal R Guruhari assumed charge as commandant of the Software Development Institute (SDI), Air Force Bengaluru
- Veteran writer and folk scholar Go Ru Channabasappa has been selected for Siddaganga Shri award for the year 2024. The award, instituted by Sri Siddaganga Mutt Alumni and Well-wishers' Association, carries a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh, memento and citation. The award will be given away to Go Ru Channabasappa at an event to mark the 6th Punyasmarane (death anniversary) of Shivakumara Swamiji at the Siddaganga Mutt on January 21.
- Twelve trucks carrying 337 tonnes of toxic waste from the Union Carbide factory site in Bhopal, where it had been lying for 40 years since the gas tragedy that killed over 5,000 people, left for Pithampur industrial area near Indore. A 250-km green corridor was prepared to ensure the spill-free trucks, loaded by over 100 specially trained workers under the supervision of the CPCB, MPPCB, and scientific experts, reached the Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facility (TSDF) without stops. The waste will be incinerated at high temperatures over three to nine months, beginning with a small batch to monitor environmental impacts. This follows a December 3 Madhya Pradesh High Court order mandating disposal within four weeks, with the government planning to submit an affidavit on January 3. However, protests by locals and activists in Pithampur and Indore, fearing environmental pollution, continue despite government assurances refuting such claims.
- Bhuvnesh Kumar took charge as the Chief Executive Officer of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), which administers Aadhaar. Mr. Kumar, a 1995-batch IAS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, is an Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, a post he will continue to hold after this appointment
- The 5000m and 10,000m Olympic champion Beatrice Chebet smashed the women's 5km world record with a time of 13 minutes 54 seconds at the Cursa dels Nassos road race in Barcelona

- The Keladi Shivappa Nayaka University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences here has developed the state's first high oleic acid groundnut variety to help growers get high crop yield and benefit heart and diabetics. It is named 'Sahyadri Durga. The new variety has been developed in association with Hyderabad-based International Crops Research Institute for Semi-arid Tropics at the farm of the Zonal Agricultural & Horticultural Research Station at Babbur in Hiriyur taluk of the district.
- Bellatrix Aerospace's Rudra High-Performance Green Propulsion System has fired flawlessly onboard the POEM-4 in the recently launched PSLV C-60 mission, marking a significant milestone for the Bengaluru-based space start-up. The system, which was replicated from January 2024's space qualification, demonstrated dependable and repeatable performance, with all sub-systems being 100% made at Bellatrix. During the 60-second firing, the system imparted a disturbance of 1.4 deg/s on the POEM body in the Yaw axis, achieving an 80-degree angular rotation of the POEM platform, setting a new benchmark for performance.
- The Karnataka State Cabinet has approved the bifurcation of the Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation (HDMC) to establish a separate municipal corporation for Dharwad city, aiming to enhance governance and secure more funds for Dharwad's development, which is home to key institutions like the University of Agricultural Sciences and IIT. This decision follows demands from the Dharwad Separate Corporation Agitation Committee and Congress leaders for an independent urban body. Additionally, the Cabinet increased the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board's (KIADB) borrowing limit from ₹500 crore to ₹5,000 crore to support land acquisition and compensation, crucial for developing 24 industrial areas. Approvals were also granted for a ₹120 crore modern bus stand in Mysuru, a revised ₹209.13 crore fisheries port plan at Kodi in Udupi, ₹84.57 crore for fishery port modernization under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, ₹10.5 crore for developing goshalas in 14 districts, and ₹149.75 crore for constructing an engineering college in Chickballapur district.
- World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) Reference Laboratory for Leptospirosis was inaugurated, January 2, 2025, at ICAR National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics campus, in Ramagondanahalli, Yelahanka.
- Labani Jangi, a research scholar from Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Kolkata, became the first recipient of the TM Krishna-PARI award for her work in art that "reflects the resilience and complexities of rural India, combining artistic expression with critical social commentary", said a statement from People's Archive of Rural India. The award honours individuals whose works bridge the worlds of art and journalism and includes a cash prize of ₹1 lakh.
- Researchers from the Centre for Advanced Studies in Botany, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong discovered a new plant species and named it as *Stellaria bengalensis*.

- Dhaatu's International Puppet Festival, scheduled for January 4 and 5, will feature a diverse range of puppet shows from India and Austria, including rod, string, and hand puppet performances, as well as a baroque show and a seminar on the art and craft of puppetry, showcasing traditional and modern techniques, including 3D printing, at the Mandala Cultural Centre in Bengaluru.
- China is experiencing an outbreak of human metapneumovirus (HMPV), with hospitals overwhelmed and crematories struggling to keep up, amid reports of multiple viruses circulating, including influenza A, HMPV, Mycoplasma pneumoniae, and Covid-19, with HMPV causing flu-like symptoms, primarily affecting the upper respiratory system.
- Telangana aims to boost its renewable energy capacity from 11,399 MW to 20,000 MW, with a comprehensive green energy policy in the works. The state's current renewable energy mix includes 7,889 MW of solar power, 2,518 MW of hydropower, 771 MW of distributed renewable energy, and 221 MW of wind power, among others. With a wind power potential of 54,717 MW, Telangana is poised for significant growth in the renewable energy sector, and is also promoting the development of electric vehicles with over 872 EV charging stations already available.
- Bengaluru ranks second among cities witnessing a surge in under-construction premium residential property prices, with a 25% year-on-year (YoY) increase in 2024, according to a Savills India report. Gurgaon led with a rise of 5% to 55% YoY, while Bengaluru's completed projects saw a comparatively lower 19% YoY growth. Central Bengaluru recorded a 31% annual increase in capital values, with East, South, and North Bengaluru seeing YoY price hikes of 24%, 21%, and 20%, driven by high demand for luxury properties and rising input costs. Additionally, average rental values in Bengaluru rose by 10% YoY, with East and North micro markets experiencing the highest rental growth at 20% and 19% YoY, respectively.
- Senior IAS officer Faiz Ahmed Kidwai is the new Director-General (D-G) of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).
- India, a global leader in banana production, has achieved a tenfold increase in banana exports over the past decade, with the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) setting an ambitious target of \$1 billion in exports within the next five years. Bananas, the second most important fruit crop after mango, thrive in tropical climates with temperatures between 15°C and 35°C and relative humidity of 75-85%. They are grown from sea level to elevations of up to 2000m in deep, rich loamy soils with a pH of 6.5-7.5, ensuring good drainage and fertility. Saline or calcareous soils are unsuitable. India's diverse climate, ranging from humid tropical to dry mild subtropics, supports various banana varieties, including Dwarf Cavendish, Robusta, Monthan, Poovan, and Grand Naine. Key producing states include Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Kerala. This robust growth in exports reflects India's capacity to capitalize on its agricultural potential while aiming to dominate the global banana market.

- Scientists have discovered that the dark markings on the Brazilian Velvet Ant, a species of fluffy wasp, reflect less than 1% of light, making them ultrablack. Velvet ants, a group of parasitic wasps, are recognized for their defensive traits, including bright coloration and a powerful sting. Their unique appearance includes distinct black and white markings, with some species being wingless. Found in the Caatinga, a shrub desert in Brazil, these wasps are highly mobile, covering vast distances in search of hosts and are most active during early morning and late afternoon when sunlight is less intense. The ultrablack pigmentation in female velvet ants absorbs nearly all visible light, a rare trait in the animal kingdom. This pigmentation provides advantages such as camouflage from predators, temperature regulation, and enhanced visual appeal for mating through contrast with brighter colors, making this finding particularly unique.
- Scientists have demonstrated that a nano-formulation of melatonin exhibits enhanced antioxidative and neuroprotective properties, positioning it as a promising therapeutic candidate for Parkinson's disease (PD). Melatonin, a neurohormone secreted by the pineal gland in response to darkness, plays a critical role in regulating sleep-wake cycles by aligning with the body's internal clock. It induces sleepiness typically within 30 to 45 minutes of secretion and peaks during the night before tapering off as the body prepares to wake. This natural rhythm of melatonin production underscores its importance in maintaining sleep quality, and its therapeutic potential, especially in neurodegenerative disorders like PD, represents a significant advancement in medical research.
- The Territorial Army has recently formed a dedicated task force for the rejuvenation and protection of the Gomti River, a vital tributary of the Ganga flowing entirely through Uttar Pradesh. Originating from Gomati Taal (Fulhaar Jheel) near Madho Tanda in Pilibhit district, the Gomti drains the region between the Ramganga and Sharda rivers before flowing through districts like Lucknow, Barabanki, Sultanpur, Faizabad, and Jaunpur, eventually merging with the Ganga. Spanning approximately 900 km with a drainage basin of 18,750 square km, the Gomti is a perennial river known for its sluggish flow, except during monsoons when heavy rainfall boosts runoff. Its significant tributaries include the Sai, Chowka, Kathina, and Saryu rivers, underscoring its ecological and cultural importance.
- DFS Secretary launches revamped 'BAANKNET' e-auction portal for e-auction of properties as one-stop destination. Listings on the e-auction portal include residential properties such as flats, independent houses, and open plots, as well as commercial properties, industrial land and buildings, shops, vehicles, plant and machinery, agricultural and non-agricultural land
- The 'Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) 2024' report, an indigenous, data-driven index, assesses logistics infrastructure, services, and human resources across all 36 States and Union Territories (UTs) of India. The report serves as a guide for identifying interventions to improve logistics efficiency at the state and UT level. LEADS also positively impacts international indices such as the Logistics

Performance Index and encourages healthy competition among states and UTs. The report is based on the Logistics Performance Index developed by the World Bank in 2018 and has evolved to reflect changes in logistics practices. LEADS 2024 provides a regional performance overview, classifying states and UTs into groups like 'Achievers', 'Fast Movers', and 'Aspirers' based on their logistics performance. The report also highlights the LEAPS 2024 Awards, recognizing excellence across multiple logistics categories, including Core Logistics, Startups, MSMEs, and Institutions. Additional initiatives featured include the PM GatiShakti course to promote infrastructure planning and the unveiling of the Logistics Cost Framework report by NCAER to assess logistics costs in India.

- China has approved the construction of the Yarlung Zangbo hydropower dam in Tibet, which is set to become the largest hydropower dam in the world upon completion. The dam, spanning 31 miles along the Yarlung Zangbo River, will generate 300 billion kWh of power and is crucial to China's carbon neutrality goals for 2060. While the dam aims to increase green energy production, it has raised environmental and social concerns, especially for neighboring countries like India and Bangladesh, which rely on the river for water. India has expressed concerns about the downstream impact on water supplies, urging China to ensure the protection of downstream states. Additionally, the project's massive cost of over \$34 billion and the displacement of local populations raise further worries. The dam's expected energy output will triple that of China's existing Three Gorges Dam, making it a significant step in the country's energy future.
- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has amended rules regarding the selection of experts for the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC). Established under the "Rules for the Manufacture, Use/Import/Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells (Rules, 1989)" as part of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the committee was renamed from the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee in 2010. It functions under the supervision of MoEF&CC and is tasked with several critical functions including the environmental appraisal of activities involving hazardous microorganisms, regulating genetically modified organisms (GMOs), enforcing compliance under the Environment Protection Act, and overseeing GM crops. The GEAC also requires mandatory approval for the environmental release of GM crops. The committee is chaired by the Special Secretary/Additional Secretary of MoEF&CC, with a co-chair from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), and comprises 24 members, including experts from various ministries and institutions like ICAR, ICMR, and CCMB. Recently, new rules have been introduced for the selection of experts, including the disclosure of any conflicts of interest, ensuring experts recuse themselves from discussions where a conflict exists, and providing a background of professional affiliations over the past 10 years.
- India recently submitted its Biennial Update Report (BUR) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), detailing the nation's

progress on climate action and its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The BUR, a mandatory report under the Paris Agreement, provides an inventory of national emissions, outlines mitigation actions, and discusses support received for climate efforts. India's BUR-4, submitted in December 2022, highlighted a GHG emissions inventory of 2,959 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2020, with a 36% reduction in emission intensity from 2005 levels. The report focuses on energy, agriculture, and industrial emissions, with the energy sector contributing the largest share. India is committed to ambitious climate goals, including a 45% reduction in emission intensity by 2030, 50% non-fossil fuel power generation capacity by 2030, and a net-zero target by 2070. The country is making significant strides towards these goals, with 46.52% of installed power generation capacity already from non-fossil sources. India's mitigation efforts include the Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) Scheme, which has led to energy savings and emission reductions in various sectors. However, India faces challenges in adopting advanced technologies for low-carbon growth and urges enhanced technology transfer, particularly in energy, industrial, and water sectors, to overcome barriers to achieving climate goals.

- The government has formed an 18-member panel led by NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand to revise the base year of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and propose a roadmap for transitioning to the Producer Price Index (PPI). The panel's key mandates include updating the base year for WPI from 2011-12 to 2022-23, developing a revised commodity basket for both WPI and PPI, and recommending methodologies for their computation. Additionally, the panel will review the current price collection system and propose necessary improvements. The members of the panel comprise economists from various sectors including government, rating agencies, asset management firms, banks, and the RBI. The panel is required to submit its report within 18 months to the Office of the Economic Adviser, DPIT.
- A comparative study by the Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department found that 60% of signs and 90% of graffiti marks in Tamil Nadu's excavation sites have parallels with those found in the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), suggesting literacy and exchanges between settlements, with majority of graffiti-inscribed potsherds unearthed in South India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, and pushing the introduction of iron in South India to mid-third-millennium BCE.
- Singapore authorities are concerned over the increase in "sham marriages or marriages of convenience" between Singaporean men and foreign women, which most of the time involves a syndicate and could lead to social problems.
- Union Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari hailed the completion of the Banihal bypass in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district as a significant milestone for strengthening "national security logistics" and boosting the "tourism prospects of the region." Announcing the completion of the 2.35-km, four-lane stretch to Banihal town, built at a cost of ₹224.44 crore, he highlighted its strategic importance on the Ramban–Banihal section of National Highway 44, alleviating

persistent traffic bottlenecks caused by roadside markets and shops. Initially, two-lane traffic will be allowed, with four-lane traffic to follow after "junction development" in 15 days. This critical infrastructure ensures uninterrupted traffic flow, reducing travel time and congestion for both tourists and defense vehicles traveling to the Kashmir Valley. The ongoing upgrade of the 32-km stretch between Ramban and Banihal will further reduce travel time, making the Kashmir Valley more accessible.

- Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to inaugurate "Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0" which seeks to give insight into the Constitution and parliamentary procedures to over 500 women representatives from Panchayati Raj institutions from across the country. Organised to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of tribal icon Birsa Munda, the programme will have workshops and sessions, a guided tour of the new Parliament House, Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya, and Rashtrapati Bhavan for the participants, offering them a deeper understanding of India's legislative process and the functioning of democratic institutions. PTI
- ISRO recently said the cowpea seeds it had sent to space onboard the PSLV-C60 POEM-4 platform have germinated under microgravity conditions within four days of the launch of the mission.
- In a remarkable discovery, a member of the Team of Research on Culture and Heritage (TORCH) recently uncovered a three-foot idol of the 13th-century saint Narahari Tirtha. Narahari Tirtha, a prominent Dvaita Vedanta philosopher and scholar, was a disciple of Madhvacharya, the founder of the Dvaita philosophy, and played a crucial role in spreading the doctrine, especially in the Kalinga region (modern Odisha and Andhra Pradesh). Hailing from Chikakolu (present-day Srikakulam), he was instrumental in supporting the kings of the Eastern Ganga dynasty and helped oversee temple administration, ensuring the protection of Sanatana Dharma. Narahari Tirtha's influence on the region, particularly in strengthening the Madhva tradition, is evident through epigraphical records from Simhachalam and Srikurmam temples. He was known for composing works like the Gita Bhasya and Bhavaprakasika, along with pioneering Devaranamas in Kannada. His legacy extends to art forms like Yakshagana Bayalata and Kuchipudi dance, and he contributed significantly to the temple traditions of Puri Jagannath.
- Researchers at the Centre for Peninsular Aquatic Genetic Resources in Kochi, part of the National Bureau for Fish Genetic Resources (NBFGR), have developed a captive breeding protocol for the black-collared yellow catfish, an endangered species endemic to the Chalakudy river in Kerala. This species, characterized by its greenish-brown mottled coloration, shorter barbels, and distinct genetic traits, coexists with the endangered Horabagrus Nigricollaris. Listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List, the black-collared yellow catfish's breeding program began in 2020, and the first generation was successfully bred. The development of this breeding technique is crucial for the species' conservation.
- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras has partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare on Project VISTAAR (Virtually Integrated System

to Access Agricultural Resources), a digital platform integrating data on over 12,000 start-ups in agriculture and allied sectors. The initiative aims to enhance the agricultural extension system's efficiency through digitalisation, enabling farmers and stakeholders to easily access technological solutions and services offered by start-ups. By expanding outreach, the platform provides high-quality advisory services on crop production, marketing, value addition, and supply chain management, while also delivering information on government schemes in agriculture and rural development. This digitalisation ensures timely, accurate support, empowering farmers and improving agricultural productivity.

- The State Bank of India has introduced two innovative deposit schemes, Har Ghar Lakhpati and SBI Patrons, aimed at providing enhanced financial value and flexibility to customers. The Har Ghar Lakhpati Scheme is a pre-calculated recurring deposit plan enabling customers, including minors, to accumulate Rs 1 lakh or multiples thereof, with tenures ranging from 12 to 120 months, promoting early financial planning and disciplined savings. Meanwhile, the SBI Patrons Scheme, designed exclusively for senior citizens aged 80 and above, offers an additional 10 basis points interest over standard senior citizen rates, rewarding their loyalty and catering to their financial needs.
- The US Presidential Medal of Freedom is the country's highest civilian honor, recognizing individuals who have made significant contributions to national security, world peace, or cultural endeavors. Established by President Harry S. Truman in 1945 and renamed by President John F. Kennedy in 1963, the medal is awarded by the President, who has the discretion to select recipients. The medal's design features a white star on a red pentagon, surrounded by five gold eagles, with a blue circle and 13 gold stars at its center. Notable recipients include Steven Spielberg, Bill Clinton, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen
- Na D'Souza (1937–2025), an acclaimed Kannada writer, was known for his literary and social contributions. Born on June 6, 1937, in Sagar, his family originated from Murudeshwar and moved to Sagar for stone-carving work. After completing his education at Sahyadri College, Shivamogga, he worked in various administrative roles before retiring. D'Souza authored 46 novels, short stories, plays, and children's stories, with notable works like Mulugadeya Oorige Bandavaru, which won the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award. He presided over the 80th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana in 2014 and highlighted themes like regional transformation and social struggles of the Malnad people in his works. He actively protested against unscientific projects, including the Sharavathi water diversion, and opposed quarrying in Malnad. His novels, Dweepa and Kadina Benki, were adapted into films, reflecting his impact on literature and cinema.
- The draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, released under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, aim to safeguard citizens' rights while balancing regulation and innovation. Key features include the establishment of a "born digital" Data Protection Board for online complaints and adjudication, a transition period for stakeholders to adapt systems, and consent-based data

processing until compliance is achieved. Citizens can provide feedback on the MyGov portal until February 18, 2025, with structured interactions organized for stakeholder input. The rules emphasize minimal compliance burden through digital platforms and awareness initiatives to educate citizens about their data rights. Final rules, incorporating feedback, will be presented to Parliament.

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has launched the Open Data Kit (ODK) to improve transparency and accountability in government schemes. Integrated with the CAG's operating system (OIOS), ODK enables secure data collection and management, with multilingual capabilities for surveys. It was recently used for patient satisfaction surveys at AIIMS Mangalagiri and Bibinagar during a performance audit of government healthcare, as well as beneficiary surveys to support audit planning and evidence gathering. By improving data accuracy and directly engaging beneficiaries, ODK enhances transparency in public spending and ensures schemes deliver their intended outcomes. However, it has also faced political criticism for alleged misinformation.
- Groundwater exploitation in Karnataka increased by 2.22% in 2024 compared to 2023, with annual extraction rising from 11.32 billion cubic meters (bcm) to 11.55 bcm, and usage as a percentage of available resources increasing from 66.26% to 68.44%. Over-exploited districts include Bengaluru Urban, Bengaluru Rural, Kolar, Chitradurga, Chikkaballapur, Tumakuru, and Davangere. Groundwater recharge decreased from 18.93 bcm in 2023 to 18.74 bcm in 2024, and extractable resources fell from 17.08 bcm to 16.88 bcm. Of Karnataka's 237 taluks, 18.99% are over-exploited, 6.33% critical, 13.92% semi-critical, and 60.76% safe, with none classified as saline. Nationally, groundwater extraction averages 60.47%, with 11.13% of units over-exploited and 3.05% critical. Concerns include fluoride and nitrate contamination, with excessive nitrate levels attributed to nitrogen-based fertilizers and animal waste.
- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah launched the KSRTC Arogya scheme, offering free medical treatment in government and private hospitals for KSRTC employees and their dependents. The scheme, benefiting around 1.5 lakh people, will be expanded to BMTC, NWKRTC, and KKRTC within three months, according to Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy. It covers over 275 hospitals and four diagnostic centers across Karnataka, with employees only paying for consumables. KSRTC will reimburse hospitals within 30 days, and there is no cap on inpatient treatment expenses, including coverage for eye, dental, and alternative treatments. Employees will contribute Rs 650 monthly, with an annual increase of Rs 50. The corporation will allocate Rs 20 crore annually for the scheme, increasing it by 5% each year, and provide health cards to all employees. Previously, employees had to pay upfront for treatment and later claim reimbursement.
- The United States has updated its export control policies under the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) to enhance commercial space cooperation with India. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval hosted his US counterpart Jake Sullivan, who shared that the outgoing US administration had reduced tech

barriers, enabling cooperation between private entities in both countries. This policy shift, approved by President Biden in a national security memorandum, will facilitate high-tech collaboration, particularly in the commercial space sector, marking a significant step in strengthening US-India space ties. The MTCR, established in 1987, aims to control the export of dual-use technologies related to weapons of mass destruction delivery systems. The easing of restrictions follows a broader effort to improve US-India cooperation, starting with the 2008 civil nuclear agreement that ended India's "nuclear pariah" status. Doval and Sullivan have led initiatives under the iCET to drive progress in areas like AI, quantum computing, semiconductors, defense, and space.

- Indian stock market experienced a significant slump, with both the BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty dropping by around 1.6%. This decline was driven by multiple factors, including growing concerns over the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), a weak earnings outlook for Q3, and continued outflows of foreign capital. The depreciation of the rupee and weakness in Asian markets further compounded the negative sentiment. The BSE lost nearly Rs 11 lakh crore, reversing gains made earlier in the year. The market saw widespread sell-offs, particularly in banking and midcap stocks, while only a few stocks like Titan and Sun Pharma managed to post gains. Analysts believe that markets are likely to remain volatile, with investor sentiment heavily impacted by the virus scare and global uncertainties, including US economic policies and the Federal Reserve's stance on interest rates.
- After a delay, a batch of cowpea seeds taken into orbit by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has recently sprouted and unveiled its first leaves. The achievement was announced by ISRO on Monday, highlighting the milestone of the CROPS (Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies) aboard PSLV-C60 POEM-4. The cowpea seeds, which had successfully sprouted a few days earlier, have now shown their first leaves in space. Developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), the CROPS payload is part of ISRO's efforts to advance its capabilities in growing and sustaining plants in extraterrestrial environments.
- Titagarh Rail Systems Ltd. has officially delivered the first Made-in-India driverless trainset for Bengaluru's Yellow Line to the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd. (BMRCL) after a delay. The fully automated, stainless steel train was manufactured in Titagarh's Uttarpara facility in West Bengal and was unveiled in a virtual ceremony attended by Manohar Lal, Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs. The 18.82 km Yellow Line, connecting Electronics City to the rest of Bengaluru, is now set to open in January 2025, delayed from its original December 2024 schedule due to setbacks in rolling stock delivery. Although a prototype train from China arrived in February 2024, delays in receiving additional trainsets have pushed back the timeline, with two more expected by April 2025 and production ramping up to two per month by September. The Yellow Line, an elevated corridor with 16 stations, aims to improve southern Bengaluru's connectivity and serve key commercial areas. However, the project faced challenges when China Railway Rolling Stock

Corporation (CRRC) struggled to meet contract terms, leading to a partnership with Kolkata-based Titagarh Wagons to fulfill the remaining orders. Despite alleviating some concerns, delays continue to affect the project's progress.

- The Supreme Court recently ruled that offences in a chargesheet cannot be based solely on unsupported assertions of connivance. A chargesheet is a final report filed by police after completing an investigation, detailing everything from the FIR lodging to the completion of the probe. It is mandatory for initiating court proceedings and contains vital information such as the nature of the offence, the accused, witnesses, and arrest details. It helps the accused in obtaining bail, as it specifies the charges. A chargesheet must be filed within 60 days for lower courts and 90 days for sessions courts. Failing this, the accused is entitled to default bail. Filing a chargesheet is compulsory in cognizable offences but not in non-cognizable ones unless ordered by the court.
- The Tamil Nadu Forest Department, in collaboration with an NGO from Kanniyakumari, is conducting a pilot project to remove *Mucuna bracteata* from rubber plantations and forest areas in the district. *Mucuna bracteata*, a leguminous vine, was initially introduced to rubber plantations as a weed protectant and nitrogen regulator due to its drought tolerance. However, it has since become invasive, spreading across parts of the Western Ghats in areas like Kaliyal, Kadayalumoodu, Aarukani, Kodayar, and Kulasekaram. Originally intended to protect rubber trees, it now threatens them by overpowering and covering them. The creeper has also begun to climb native trees, hindering their growth, and it is spreading rapidly in the Kodayar region, which borders the Kalakkad-Mundanthurai tiger reserve, a critical tiger habitat.
- The Centre appointed V Narayanan as the new chairman of Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro). He will have a tenure of two years and succeed S Somanath on Jan 14, said a notification issued by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet. Narayanan is currently director of Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre, Valiamala.
- In a setback for the Central government's net-zero 2070 goal, the Karnataka High Court struck down the Electricity (Promoting Renewable Energy Through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2022 (GEOA Rules), deeming them beyond the Centre's legislative competence under the Electricity Act, 2003. The court emphasized that regulating open access, including transmission and determination aspects, falls exclusively within the State Electricity Commission's purview under Sections 42(2) and 181 of the Act. While partly allowing petitions from hydropower companies, the court also invalidated Karnataka's corresponding 2022 regulations as they were based on the now-defunct GEOA Rules. Although the court granted the state commission the option to create new regulations or maintain its 2004 open access rules, it rejected the Centre's argument that Article 253 of the Constitution (implementing international agreements) allowed it to override existing law.
- India and the U.S. have announced a landmark agreement to co-produce U.S. sonobuoys, advanced undersea technology for submarine tracking, to enhance the

Indian Navy's undersea domain awareness (UDA). This partnership between Ultra Maritime (UM) and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), formalized during U.S. NSA Jake Sullivan's visit to India, reflects growing concerns about China's naval expansion in the Indian Ocean Region. The co-production, aligned with "Make in India" principles, will involve joint manufacturing and supply of sonobuoys meeting U.S. Navy standards, with production split between the two countries. This initiative is significant for interoperability, as the co-produced sonobuoys will be compatible with U.S., Indian, and allied (including Quad members) maritime aircraft like the P-8, MH-60R, and MQ-9B Sea Guardian, strengthening strategic cooperation and addressing shared security challenges.

- The Karnataka government has launched a new initiative, Mission Zero Preventable Deaths, to improve maternal health outcomes. This program introduces 24x7 services at taluk hospitals, ensuring round-the-clock care for pregnant women with additional specialists and staff. With approval from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, the initiative focuses on eliminating preventable maternal deaths by recruiting 1,205 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) and 300 Health Inspectors to fill key vacancies. Hospitals with high delivery rates will receive obstetricians and anaesthetists, while doctors from low-demand areas will be redeployed. ANMs and ASHA workers will conduct regular home visits to identify risks early, with gynaecologists overseeing monitoring. These measures have already contributed to a reduction in the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) from 69 per lakh in 2018-20 to 55 in 2022-24, placing the state below the national average. The health department has utilized ₹6,593 crore of its ₹11,182 crore budget, with plans for transparent medicine procurement through the Karnataka State Medical Supplies Corporation Limited, now managed by an IAS officer.
- The Karnataka Forest Department is set to implement the 'Garudakshi' software to streamline the registration and tracking of forest and wildlife crime cases. Initially rolled out in Bengaluru Urban, Bengaluru forest mobile squad, Bhadravati, Sirsi, and Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Division, this software automates FIR filing and document generation (excluding Mahajar), significantly reducing processing time. Developed by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) with support from NTT DATA, Garudakshi was formerly named HAWK. The system includes four key modules: Legacy Module (uploading case data from 1993), Online FIR Module (user-friendly FIR registration), Investigation Module (document generation and follow-up), and Reporting and Analytics Module (monitoring progress). It also provides timely prompts and reminders to increase conviction rates. WTI is conducting workshops to train forest officers, with the initiative aiming to combat the growing number of forest and wildlife crimes effectively.
- The Bharatpol portal, launched by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and developed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), aims to revolutionize international police cooperation in combating transnational crimes such as cybercrime, organized crime, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. Acting as a broadcast hub, it connects central and state law enforcement agencies with Interpol, replacing

traditional communication methods with a real-time interface for seamless communication. The portal enhances efficiency in sharing data, accessing Interpol databases, and issuing Red Corner Notices. Key features include accelerated investigations, improved fugitive apprehension, and enhanced interoperability among Indian police forces as extensions of Interpol's National Central Bureau (NCB-New Delhi). Bharatpol's five modules—Connect, Interpol Notices, Broadcast, References, and Resources—streamline international collaboration, strengthen India's crime-fighting capabilities, and foster better coordination between law enforcement agencies and Interpol.

- The Rural Community Immigration Class (RCIC), launched by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) in December 2024, offers a promising pathway to permanent residency (PR) for international students and foreign workers willing to settle in designated rural communities. The initiative addresses labor shortages in rural areas and promotes economic development in smaller towns outside major Canadian cities like Ontario and Vancouver. This scheme is particularly significant for the 7.66 lakh international students whose Post-Graduation Work Permits (PGWPs) are set to expire by 2025, leaving many at risk of losing their status in Canada. To be eligible, applicants must meet criteria including a minimum education level (10+2 or graduation), language proficiency (CLB 4–6 based on NOC TEER levels), and a job offer from a designated rural employer. Financial proof and intent to reside in rural areas are also required. International graduates who studied for at least 18 months in these communities enjoy streamlined PR access. The RCIC program benefits Indian students, who make up nearly 40% of international students in Canada, by reducing competition and offering employer assistance in rural settings, thus creating a viable alternative to urban-centric PR pathways.
- Bengaluru has surpassed Chennai as India's top city for women, according to the 'Top Cities for Women in India 2024' report by The Avtar Group, a workplace culture consulting firm. Bengaluru moved up from the second spot in 2023 to become the number 1 city for women in India in 2024, followed by Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Pune, based on an overall 'City Inclusion Score' assigned to every city.
- The much-awaited 'Flamingo Festival 2025' is all set to be conducted at Sullurpeta in Tirupati district of Andhra Pradesh from January 18 to 20
- A release issued by Cornell University said that AnemiaPhone would enable access to rapid screening, and diagnosis of iron deficiency at the point of need. Iron deficiency is a leading cause of anaemia, which affects 50% to 70% of pregnant women in India. The technology requires a small finger stick, a drop of blood on a test strip similar to a COVID-19 home test, and a few minutes for the reader to assess. The information is uploaded to a clinical database via mobile phone, wireless tablet or computer. Healthcare workers can interpret the test and provide guidance, triage and referral, or intervention on the spot.

- The Hockey India League has significantly increased its prize money, with the men's competition winner receiving ₹3 crore, runner-up ₹2 crore, and third place ₹1 crore, while the women's competition winner will secure ₹1.5 crore, with partial pay parity for individual awards, and a total prize money distribution of ₹10 crore.
- The Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA) scheme, launched in 2015, has revolutionized energy efficiency in India by distributing 36.87 crore LED bulbs, achieving ₹19,153 crore in annual electricity savings as per Ministry of Power data. Implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), UJALA is the world's largest zero-subsidy LED lamp distribution initiative, aiming to replace 77 crore traditional bulbs and CFLs and 3.5 crore streetlights with LEDs, saving 85 lakh kWh of electricity and reducing 15,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions. Eligible households with metered electricity connections can purchase LEDs either upfront or via EMI payments on electricity bills. The program also engages Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to ensure inclusive growth and accessibility for lower-income communities. Achieving 47,883 million kWh of annual energy savings, reducing peak demand by 9,586 MW, and cutting 3.87 crore tonnes of CO2 emissions annually, the scheme has driven down LED bulb prices from ₹300-350 to ₹70-80 through e-procurement and bulk purchasing, making energy-efficient lighting affordable for millions.
- Recently, the Toda tribe residing in the Nilgiris Hills of Tamil Nadu, celebrated their traditional 'Modhweth' festival to mark the New Year.
- In a recent study published in Nature, researchers unveiled Twigstats, a groundbreaking tool for time-stratified ancestry analysis, and applied it to ancient whole-genomes from Europe. Twigstats significantly enhances the statistical power of existing methods while minimizing errors, enabling unprecedented precision in determining individual-level ancestry at high resolution. Developed in C++ with integration of the statistical language R, it offers fine-grained analysis for specific historical periods, providing researchers with a powerful means to delve deeper into the complexities of ancient population dynamics.
- Amid increasing leopard-human conflicts, a Rs 70-crore state-of-the-art Leopard Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre is proposed in Mysuru, designed to accommodate 100 leopards, making it the largest in India. Located on 92 acres in the Yelawal Residency Compound Sandal Plantation, it aims to enhance the survival rate of injured leopards by providing advanced veterinary facilities, mobile rescue units, and rehabilitation infrastructure. The centre will serve as a hub for treating rescued leopards, housing permanently disabled animals, and rewilding fit leopards after observation. Proximity to Bandipur, Nagarahole, and BRT Tiger Reserves enhances its strategic importance. Karnataka, which rescues over 250 leopards annually, currently relies on limited facilities such as Bannerghatta Rescue Centre, which is 150 km away. Features include a veterinary hospital, forensic centre, and awareness initiatives for communities to reduce conflicts. Compared to existing facilities like Gir National Park in Gujarat (50 leopards), the proposed centre addresses critical challenges like injury management, data collection on

interactions, and community trust-building, offering long-term benefits for wildlife conservation and human coexistence.

- The Supreme Court reaffirmed that the right to appeal against a conviction is integral to the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution. Referencing Dilip S. Dahanukar vs Kotak Mahindra Co. Ltd. (2007), the Court recognized the right to appeal as a statutory and fundamental right under Article 21, expanding its interpretation to include access to justice. In Rajendra vs State of Rajasthan (1982), it emphasized that courts must evaluate delays in filing appeals rather than dismissing them outright. Recently, the Supreme Court condoned a 1,637-day delay and restored an appeal dismissed by a High Court on technical grounds, critiquing the lack of substantive review. The judgment highlighted that procedural fairness is essential to safeguard individual liberty, prevent miscarriages of justice, and ensure that courts prioritize substantive reasons over procedural technicalities.
- Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas (PBD) is a biennial event celebrated to honor the contributions of the Indian diaspora, with the 18th edition inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bhubaneswar, focusing on the theme "Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat." The event commemorates Mahatma Gandhi's return to India on January 9, 1915, symbolizing his influence as a "non-resident Indian" in the freedom struggle. PBD aims to strengthen ties with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs), and organizations led by the diaspora, celebrating their cultural, economic, and political contributions. Instituted in 2003 on the recommendation of the LM Singhvi Committee, it transitioned to a biennial format in 2015. The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, the highest honor for the diaspora, recognizes efforts in enhancing India's global image and promoting bilateral ties, with President Droupadi Murmu set to honor 27 awardees in 2025. With significant economic contributions, including \$125 billion in remittances in 2023, and increasing political and cultural influence globally, the diaspora remains pivotal in India's development and international outreach.
- Astronomers from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, and other institutions have discovered a new ultra-diffuse galaxy forming 430 million light years away in the Leo constellation. The galaxy is located at the end of the tidal tail of galaxy NGC 3785, which was formed due to gravitational interaction with a neighboring galaxy. This discovery provides insights into galaxy evolution and the formation of ultra-diffuse galaxies, which are less bright and massive than typical galaxies like the Milky Way.
- A report by Bengaluru-based NGO Hasiru Dala, titled Nagara Pravaha, highlights the need for community-led flood mitigation efforts, particularly among vulnerable waste picker communities. The report suggests long-term solutions such as flood-resistant housing designs and community engagement, citing examples of proactive measures taken by waste picker communities, including constructing stormwater channels and digging recharge wells. Experts emphasize the

importance of sustainable infrastructure and community involvement in addressing urban flooding.

- Kempegowda International Airport (BLR Airport) has surpassed 40 million passengers in a calendar year, solidifying its status as a "large airport" under Airports Council International (ACI) standards. In 2024, the airport recorded 40.73 million passengers, a 9% increase from 2023, with expanded connectivity to 75 domestic and 30 international destinations, and notable growth in cargo operations, handling 4,96,227 metric tonnes, a 17% increase from 2023.
- Mandya is set to become home to Karnataka's first Moodalapaya Yakshagana training centre, courtesy of the Karnataka Sangha. The centre, recognized by Mysuru-based Dr Gangubai Hanagal University of Music and Performing Arts, will offer a 10-month diploma course starting February 8, with eligibility restricted to those between 18 and 40 years old who have passed their SSLC. Classes will run from Saturday to Sunday, with free food and accommodation provided, and a certificate awarded upon completion. Interested individuals can call 94481 94456 for more information.
- The Department of School Education and Literacy has extended the Child Care Leave (CCL) facility to female teachers working in aided primary schools, following a similar extension to high schools in January 2024. Although the order was issued in November 2024, officials have yet to implement it, and the department's director still needs to frame rules and issue a separate circular regarding CCL, as per teachers working with aided schools.
- Multilingual actor Kishore has been named the ambassador of the 16th Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFes). The festival is scheduled to be held from March 1 to 8.
- India's GDP growth is expected to decline to 6.6% in 2025 from an estimated 6.9% in 2024, marking three consecutive years of sub-7% growth after an 8% rise in 2023, according to the UN's World Economic Situation and Prospects report. Growth for 2026 is projected at 6.7%, reflecting a return to pre-Covid trends following the pandemic-driven pent-up demand surge. Factors contributing to the slowdown include sluggish private investment, possibly influenced by high interest rates, and weaker manufacturing activity, which dragged GDP growth to 5.4% in July-September 2024. The National Statistics Office (NSO) forecasts GDP growth at 6.4% for the fiscal year ending March 2025, down from 8.2% the previous year, though second-half improvement may raise the figure to 6.5%. Despite this deceleration, India remains the fastest-growing major economy, while global growth is projected at 2.8% in 2025, with risks such as geopolitical tensions and elevated borrowing costs impacting vulnerable countries.
- Residents of Champu Khangpok, India's only natural floating village in Manipur, will soon receive identity cards, enabling them to benefit from government schemes. The village, home to around 400 fishermen in 134 houses, has been excluded from these benefits due to a lack of identity cards. A recent enrolment camp, organized as part of the National Fisheries Digital Platform, aims to address this issue and

empower the residents, who rely heavily on traditional fishing practices and are deeply connected to the Loktak Lake's ecosystem.

- Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) plans to establish a fourth assembly line to accelerate production of the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), aiming to compensate for delays caused by General Electric's (GE) failure to deliver F-404 engines, which has stalled the manufacturing of Tejas Mk-1 for the Indian Air Force (IAF), struggling with dwindling squadron numbers. GE, which has a backlog of 26 engines, has assured delivery of the first engine by March 2025, with plans to ramp up production. HAL currently operates two assembly lines in Bengaluru and one in Nashik, each capable of producing eight aircraft annually, with the first Nashik-built Tejas expected by March. A second Nashik line is planned but will require 1.5 years to establish after consistent engine supply begins. The Defence Ministry's 2021 deal with HAL for 83 Tejas Mk-1 aircraft at ₹45,696 crore depends on GE's timely delivery of 99 engines. Despite HAL delivering 38 out of 40 initial Tejas aircraft since 2016, IAF's fleet remains critically low at 31 squadrons against the sanctioned 42, set to dip further with the MiG-21's phase-out. Using reserve engines, HAL has completed the first LCA Mk-1A, now undergoing trials and expected to feature at Aero India 2025.
- The Department of Skill, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood has proposed converting government-run polytechnics into Government Tool Room and Training Centres (GTTCs) to address the low employability of engineering and polytechnic passouts. Minister Dr. Sharan Prakash Patil emphasized that GTTCs offer practical knowledge and hands-on experience, whereas engineering and polytechnic courses are theory-based, resulting in 100% placement for GTTC students. He suggested revising the curriculum to 60% practical and 40% theory. IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge endorsed this view, highlighting that only 26% of engineering graduates in India are employable, and stressed the need for government and industry collaboration to address the skill gap.
- The 217th iconic flower show for Republic day at Bengaluru's Lalbagh Botanical Garden, themed around Maharshi Valmiki, is set to begin on January 16, expecting over 10 lakh visitors, with 25 lakh flowers, including 85 varieties, decorating the Glass House, featuring a 15 feet tall floral tribute to Valmiki, alongside replicas of his Nepal house and Dandakaranya, and floral tributes to poets and authors inspired by the Ramayana.
- Bengaluru is set to house the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) first Infectious Disease Research and Diagnostic Laboratory (IRDL) in South India, which will be hosted by the Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI). This laboratory is part of seven proposed IRDLs being set up across the country and will enable quick testing of infectious disease samples, in-depth research, and improved medical institution capabilities. The lab will focus on capacity building in bacteriology, mycology, and parasitology, and will also improve diagnostic accuracy, identify and treat infections, and research new strains. This development is expected to significantly enhance disease surveillance activities in the state.

- The minister for Skill, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Dr Sharan Prakash Patil said that state government will be setting up a Skill Park in Ballari. The minister said the skill park will come up at a cost of Rs 300 crore and sought suggestions from industries on skills needs to be concentrated on.
- The 129-year-old iconic Attara Kacheri, or the old Deputy Commissioner's office in Mysuru, is set to transform into a state-of-the-art museum, "Mysuru through the Ages," showcasing the city's history, architecture, heritage, and cultural evolution. The museum will feature literature, rare photographs, digital exhibits, traditional artworks, and a sound and light show projected onto the building's facade. The project, detailed in a DPR submitted by the state tourism directorate to the union ministry of tourism, includes restoring the colonial-style building while adding an art precinct, thematic gardens, and a war memorial. The initiative will also include a tourist arrival center with shops, cafes, and promotional videos of Mysuru's attractions. Plans for the surrounding area include a 'vista street' with beautification of Krishnaraja Boulevard, a historic artifacts garden with laser light shows, and open-air exhibition spaces. Constructed in 1895 during Chamaraja Wadiyar X's reign, the building—once home to 18 public departments—boasts Corinthian and Tuscan pilasters, high-ceilinged rooms, and a wrought iron crown atop its pyramid-like central block. Once part of a 92-acre Gordon Park, the site is now reduced to 2 acres, with much of the land repurposed by the University of Mysore. This adaptive reuse project aims to make the heritage structure a centerpiece of Mysuru's cultural tourism.
- The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has introduced a new module allowing banks and financial institutions to apply for e-khata, facilitating the sale of mortgaged properties under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act (SARFAESI), 2002. This move addresses challenges faced by banks following the government's mandate of e-khata for land transactions and registration of deeds from October 1. The application process involves logging into the citizen module, identifying the property, uploading required documents, and completing eKYC. After verification, the Assistant Revenue Officer will review and process the mutation, issuing the e-khata, which will enable banks to register the sale certificate at the sub-registrar's office in favor of the purchaser
- Krishna Ella, co-founder and executive chairman of Bharat Biotech International, was earlier this week conferred the India Fellowship of the Indian National Science Academy for 2025. It is the first time that the INSA has awarded fellowships to representatives from the industry.
- In preparation for Mahakumbh 2025, Prayagraj has created around 56,000 sq. meters of dense forests in just two years using the Miyawaki Technique, a revolutionary method developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki that involves planting trees and shrubs close together to accelerate growth, resulting in plants growing 10 times faster.

- The Henley Passport Index 2025 has revealed a drop in India's ranking, falling from 80th to 85th among the world's most powerful passports. The index, established in 2006 by London-based Henley & Partners, ranks passports based on the number of destinations their holders can access visa-free, using exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and enhanced by the firm's research team. Covering 199 passports and 227 destinations, the index assigns a 'visa-free score' to each passport. In 2025, Singapore continues to hold the top spot, allowing visa-free travel to 195 destinations, while Indian passport holders can travel visa-free to 57 destinations, sharing the 85th rank with Equatorial Guinea and Niger. EU nations, including France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, share third place with Finland and South Korea, granting visa-free access to 192 destinations. Fourth place is occupied by seven EU countries offering visa-free travel to 191 destinations, while Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, the UK, and New Zealand share the fifth spot with visa-free access to 190 destinations.
- The long-awaited ban on nimesulide is now officially in place in India after scientific researches confirmed its toxic impact on the endangered vultures. It is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) is widely used to relieve pain and inflammation.
- Recently, the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP) signed a Multi-Donor Trust Fund with the International Solar Alliance (ISA) to mobilize \$100 million for high-impact solar energy projects. GEAPP, an alliance of philanthropists, governments, technology, policy, and financing partners, works to transition economies to a clean energy, pro-growth model that promotes universal energy access, inclusive economic growth, and climate goals. It aims to reduce 4 gigatons of carbon emissions, expand clean energy access to one billion people, and create 150 million jobs. Key initiatives include the Multi-Donor Trust Fund, which supports ISA with governance, fundraising, and energy transition expertise; DUET, a grid digitalization program integrating smart sensors for real-time data to reduce energy losses; and ENTICE 2.0, a platform to scale innovative energy solutions, expand India's startup ecosystem, and achieve sustainability goals, building on the 2023 launch of ENTICE.
- Bengaluru has emerged as India's top city for working women in 2024, securing a City Inclusion Score (CIS) of 47.15, as per a report by workplace culture consultancy Avtar. The city improved from its 2nd place ranking in 2023 to clinch the top spot, surpassing Chennai, which scored 46.31. Other cities such as Mangaluru (ranked 24th), Belagavi, Hubballi-Dharwad, and Mysuru were also included in the survey. The CIS is derived from two components: the Social Inclusion Score (SIS), which includes factors like city livability, safety, women's employment, and empowerment, and the Industrial Inclusion Score (IIS), which focuses on inclusive organizations and career enablers. Bengaluru's CIS of 47.15 is bolstered by an IIS of 81.33, ranking first in this category, though its SIS of 36.72 indicates areas for improvement in social inclusion, particularly regarding safety and empowerment.

In the broader rankings, Chennai secured the 2nd position, followed by Mumbai, Hyderabad, Pune, and other cities in the top 10. The Ease of Living Index for Bengaluru stands at 66.7/100, indicating strong livability across quality of life, economic ability, and sustainability factors. Additionally, South Indian cities dominate the rankings, with 16 out of the top 25 cities coming from the region, including eight from Tamil Nadu and three from Kerala.

- Madikeri, Karnataka, has been recognized as India's cleanest city with PM10 levels recorded at 32 micrograms per cubic meter, according to a study by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA). The study assessed the impact of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) on pollution reduction across the country, revealing that 25 cities in Karnataka met National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). While 61 cities reported some reduction in pollution, many cities still exceeded NAAQS, with 206 out of 253 cities surpassing standards in 2024. Karnataka outperformed other states, with 21 out of 25 cities meeting the PM10 standards, leading the nation's list of cleanest cities
- The draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules (2025) aim to protect citizens' rights under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, balancing regulation and innovation while ensuring the protection of personal data. Key features include the establishment of a Digital Data Protection Board, which will function entirely through a digital platform and app, allowing citizens to submit complaints and have them adjudicated without needing to be physically present. The rules also provide adequate time for stakeholders, from small enterprises to large corporations, to transition and comply with the new law, allowing data processing based on previous consent until systems are adapted. Citizens can submit feedback on the draft rules via the MyGov portal until February 18, 2025, with structured interactions organized for various stakeholders, including civil society, industry, and government organizations. The rules emphasize minimal compliance burdens for data fiduciaries, digital compliance, and awareness initiatives to educate citizens on their rights regarding personal data. After considering all feedback, the final rules will be placed before Parliament for approval. Key aspects also include consent-based data processing and simplified compliance through digital platforms, minimizing regulatory prescriptions.
- The Anji Khad Bridge, located in the Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir, is a significant milestone in Indian Railways' engineering history, being the country's first cable-stayed rail bridge. Part of the Udampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) Project, it aims to enhance regional connectivity and foster economic growth. The bridge spans a total of 725.5 meters and features a 193-meter-high main pylon. Designed to withstand winds up to 213 km/h and accommodate trains running at speeds up to 100 km/h, it includes a 120-meter approach viaduct, a 38-meter bridge at the Katra end, a 473.25-meter cable-stayed portion, and a 94.25-meter central embankment. Built in the challenging Himalayan terrain, the project faced geological and seismic challenges, with site investigations by IIT Roorkee and IIT Delhi ensuring structural safety. The bridge employs 96 cables and a hybrid

foundation at the Katra end for slope stabilization. Advanced construction techniques, including DOKA Jump form shuttering and pump concreting systems, were used, with international collaboration from ITALFERR (Italy) for design supervision and COWI (UK) for proof-checking. The bridge is expected to significantly improve connectivity between the Jammu region and Kashmir Valley, boosting tourism and local economic growth. It is ready for use, pending final inspection by the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS).

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research - National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (ICAR-NBAGR) has officially recognized the Gaddi as an indigenous dog breed from the Himalayas. Named after the Gaddi shepherds of Himachal Pradesh, the breed has traditionally been used to guard flocks of sheep and goats against predators, including powerful ones like the Snow Leopard. Often referred to as the 'Indian Panther Hound' or 'Indian Leopard Hound,' the Gaddi is primarily found in the Himalayan region. It is the fourth indigenous breed to be recognized by ICAR-NBAGR, following the Rajapalayam (Tamil Nadu), Chippiparai (Tamil Nadu), and Mudhol Hound (Karnataka). The breed is known for its distinctive appearance, predominantly black with occasional white markings, and features a massive, arched neck to protect it from predators. Its medium stature, robust, muscular body, and harmonious build make it well-suited for guarding flocks. The recognition ensures the maintenance of the breed's purity and highlights its significance among indigenous breeds.
- La Niña conditions were officially declared on January 9, 2025, by NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), with below-average sea surface temperatures recorded along the central and eastern Pacific Ocean in December 2024. La Niña is a phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which has three phases: El Niño (warm phase), La Niña (cool phase), and neutral. These phases occur irregularly every 2-7 years and significantly impact global weather patterns. La Niña is characterized by strengthened trade winds pushing warmer waters to the western Pacific, while cooler waters replace the displaced warm waters in the eastern Pacific. In comparison, El Niño is marked by weakened trade winds and warmer waters in the eastern Pacific, while the neutral phase sees cooler eastern Pacific waters and normal wind activity. La Niña generally brings increased rainfall and lower temperatures to regions like India, unlike El Niño, which results in reduced rainfall and higher temperatures. The previous La Niña occurred from 2020 to 2023, followed by the recent El Niño in 2023-2024. The current La Niña is forecasted to be weak, with the Nino 3.4 index unlikely to drop below -0.1°C . The delayed emergence of La Niña, caused by warmer-than-usual ocean temperatures for over a year, may lessen its impact. Typically peaking during the northern hemisphere winter, La Niña has limited time left this season to fully manifest its effects.
- In January 2025, wildfires erupted across Los Angeles, resulting in 10 fatalities, displacing over 130,000 people, and destroying numerous homes. Several factors contributed to the severity of these fires. First, the region experienced unusually

wet winters in 2022 and 2023, leading to a surge in vegetation growth, followed by an exceptionally dry winter in 2025, which turned the vegetation into dry kindling. Southern California recorded negligible rainfall since October, with Los Angeles airport reporting only 0.03 inches of rain since October 1, marking the driest start to the water year since 1944. Additionally, the seasonal Santa Ana winds, which blow from the Great Basin deserts toward the coast, became particularly strong this year. As these winds descend over the Sierra Nevada and Santa Ana mountains, they lose humidity, heat up, and accelerate, exacerbating the fire's intensity and spreading it rapidly. Climate change has further aggravated the situation, as rising global temperatures have extended and intensified wildfire seasons, with peak burn periods now occurring earlier. The combination of past wet seasons, current dryness, and strong winds created the perfect conditions for a winter wildfire. The fires' severity highlights the growing impact of climate change on extreme weather events, underlining the increasing vulnerability of regions like California to such disasters.

- India has launched the "Genome India" project, releasing a compilation of 10,000 human genomes representing 83 population groups, accounting for approximately 2% of the country's 4,600 population groups. The database, housed at the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC) in Faridabad, Haryana, aims to serve as a resource for future research into diseases and drug therapy. It is globally accessible to researchers and is designed to support investigations into human health and genetics. The database includes around 27 million low-frequency genetic variants, 7 million of which are not found in other reference databases. It focuses on precision medicine, disease risk analysis, adverse drug reactions, and population-specific genetic diversity. Researchers must submit proposals for access, with adherence to data privacy and sharing policies, and all data is anonymized to ensure privacy, with no classifications based on caste or tribe. The project holds strategic significance, contributing to targeted clinical interventions, advancements in precision medicine, and strengthening India's biotechnology economy. While the current scope of the project is limited to 10,000 genomes, there is potential to expand to 1 million genomes for deeper insights into India's genetic diversity, though costs remain a limiting factor. The project promises significant benefits for healthcare, enhancing disease research, improving drug development, and fostering healthcare equity through more personalized treatment plans.
- Devajit Saikia and Prabhtej Singh Bhatia were elected secretary and treasurer, respectively
- Kerala's maternal mortality ratio (MMR), once the lowest in the country at 19 per one lakh live births, is now increasing due to a decline in childbirths, not an actual spike in maternal deaths. With near 100% institutional deliveries, the State Health Department's estimates put the MMR at 29, while the number of live births has plummeted from an average of 5-5.5 lakh annually to 3,93,231, pushing the MMR

up due to a smaller denominator, with the decline in fertility levels and changing demographics having a significant impact on the State's social fabric.

- Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) has achieved a significant milestone ahead of Aero India 2025 by successfully conducting the engine ground run of the Combat Air Teaming System (CATS) - Warrior, a full-scale demonstrator. This demonstrates the synergy between HAL's R&D centres, with contributions from the Aircraft Research & Design Centre, Systems and Laboratory Research and Development Centre, and Aero Engine Research and Development Centre. The CATS programme involves the Light Combat Aircraft Tejas as the mother-ship platform, along with components like the Hunter, Alpha, and Warrior, which can inflict strikes deep inside enemy territory. The prototype aircraft is set to be unveiled at Aero India 2025, marking a significant step towards operational readiness
- The Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTc) has launched its first fleet of air-conditioned electric buses on a trial basis, with five buses supplied by OHM Global Mobility, a subsidiary of Ashok Leyland, deployed on the route between Kempegowda bus station and Kadugodi. The BMTc aims to replace its aging Volvo buses with these eco-friendly buses, which will operate under a gross cost contract model at ₹65.8 per kilometre. The full fleet of 320 buses is expected to be delivered by March 2025, and will feature low floors, retractable ramps, and integrated headrests, with passengers praising the comfort and design of the new buses, although some have suggested reducing the fare since they are electric buses
- The Gangasagar Mela, held at the confluence of the Ganga with the Bay of Bengal in West Bengal, has announced several initiatives to enhance the pilgrimage experience, including a certificate for participating pilgrims in three languages through the Bandhan initiative. Other initiatives include e-Anushandhan for accessing facilities and e-Parichay, a QR code-enabled identity band to prevent missing people. As of now, around 42 lakh pilgrims have visited the island, with hopes to surpass the record of one crore set in 2023. To ensure a smooth experience, elaborate arrangements have been made for transportation, including 2,500 buses, 21 jetties, and 120 launches, along with 13,000 policemen for safety and security. The mela also features a 'Ganga Aarti' ceremony from January 11 to 13, similar to the one held in Varanasi. This year's event is particularly significant, with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee pushing for "national mela" status, highlighting the contrast with the Union government's support for the Kumbh Mela
- India and the US are set to jointly manufacture sonobuoys, a crucial technology for detecting submarines underwater, with the final assembly taking place in India and an operational production line expected to be ready by 2027. The sonobuoys will be co-produced by US-based Ultra Maritime and Indian defence public sector undertaking Bharat Dynamics Ltd (BDL) in Vishakhapatnam, meeting US Navy standards and aligning with the 'Make in India' principles. These sonobuoys will be interchangeable and interoperable between the US Navy, Indian Navy, and allied

naval platforms like P-8, MH-60R, and MQ-9B Sea Guardian aircraft. The partnership aims to enhance undersea domain awareness for the Indian Navy, allowing for tracking of submarines in deep seas and oceans, and strengthen cooperation within the Quad grouping (India, US, Japan, and Australia)

- China's Shi Yuqi, the World No. 1, claimed the Malaysia Open men's singles badminton title, while South Korea's An Se-young, also the World No. 1, successfully defended her women's singles crown
- The vibrant Boda Tyohar festival, the largest annual celebration for the Hatti tribes of the Trans-Giri region in Himachal Pradesh, kicked off recently with much enthusiasm and traditional fervour.
- Over 30 dermatologists have proposed renaming *Trichophyton indotineae*, a fungus causing skin infections, arguing that despite being named after India, it has been reported in over 40 countries with no confirmation of India being its country of origin. The fungus, which causes difficult-to-treat skin infections, was named after India in 2020 based on two isolates from India and Nepal, but its widespread presence globally, including its documentation in over 40 countries, has led to the proposal for a name change. *Trichophyton indotineae* belongs to the dermatophyte group, causing inflammatory and itchy dermatophytosis affecting various body parts, and is resistant to first-line antifungal agents, making treatment challenging.
- A rare and unique carnivorous plant '*Utricularia*' has been found in Rajasthan's Keoladeo National Park in large numbers this season.
- State-owned Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL) has successfully commissioned the first two units of the 6x170 MW Punatsangchhu-II Hydroelectric Project (PHEP-II) in Bhutan. Located in the Wangdue Phodrang district on the right bank of the Punatsangchhu River, PHEP-II is a 1 GW run-of-the-river hydroelectric facility developed by the Punatsangchhu II Hydroelectric Project Authority under an Inter-Government Agreement (IGA) between Bhutan and India. The project features a 91m-high, 223.8m-long concrete gravity dam, an 877.46m-long diversion tunnel with a discharge capacity of 1,118 cubic meters per second, and a powerhouse equipped with six 170 MW Francis turbines. Once fully operational, the project is expected to generate 4,357 million units of electricity annually. Funded by the Government of India through a 30% grant and a 70% loan at 10% annual interest, the project will export all surplus power to India, enhancing regional energy cooperation.
- India recently joined the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD), a body established in 2014 to explore the potential and challenges of Big Data in monitoring and reporting sustainable development goals (SDGs). Initially chaired by Australia, UN-CEBD operates under a governance structure comprising an Advisory Board, which provides strategic direction, and a Bureau, responsible for daily operations. Its mandate includes providing global coordination and vision for using Big Data in official statistics, promoting cross-border data utilization, capacity building, and training, and fostering

communication for policy applications, particularly in monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also focuses on addressing challenges, leveraging precedents, and building public trust in Big Data's application to official statistics.

- Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) is a highly contagious viral disease that affects cloven-hoofed livestock such as cattle, swine, sheep, goats, and other ruminants, but not horses, dogs, or cats. The disease is caused by an aphthovirus from the Picornaviridae family and has significant economic consequences, as it disrupts livestock production and international trade in animals and animal products. FMD is not a human health or food safety concern and is unrelated to the common childhood illness, hand, foot, and mouth disease. It is estimated that FMD circulates in 77% of the global livestock population, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and parts of South America, with seven strains (A, O, C, SAT1, SAT2, SAT3, and Asia1) endemic in different regions. Transmission occurs through excretions and secretions, with infected animals releasing large amounts of aerosolized virus that can spread via respiratory or oral routes. Though rarely fatal in adults, it causes high mortality in young animals, and symptoms include fever, blister-like sores, extreme lameness, and a drop in milk production. While vaccines are available, they must match the specific virus strain, and immunity to one type does not protect against others. Recently, Germany reported its first FMD outbreak in nearly 40 years, affecting water buffalo near Berlin.
- At an event held at NIT Warangal, the indigenous know-how of silver nanowire-based conductive ink technology was transferred to two startups. Developed under a project funded by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India, this technology promises to reduce India's dependency on foreign sources while tapping into the rapidly growing demand for advanced electronic materials. Silver nanowire-based conductive ink is versatile, used in flexible electronics such as foldable devices, touchscreen displays, and computer keyboards, as well as wearable devices, sensors, solar panels, display technologies, RFID tags, and windshield defrosters. The global market for this ink and adhesive is expected to exceed \$16.87 billion by 2032, driven by robust demand across sectors like electronics, semiconductors, solar photovoltaics, and RFID. Currently, India imports conductive ink worth approximately \$15.72 million annually from countries including the USA, China, the Netherlands, the UK, and Taiwan.
- The fourth edition of Project 'Veer Gatha 4.0', launched as part of the Republic Day celebrations, has received an overwhelming nationwide response. Initially launched in 2021 during 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' to mark India's 75th year of Independence, the project aims to raise awareness about the gallantry awardees' acts of bravery and their inspiring life stories, fostering patriotism and civic values among students. A collaborative initiative by the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education, the project has grown from its first edition to the fourth, expanding its reach across the country. In Veer Gatha 4.0, students were provided with

thought-provoking topics for essay and paragraph writing, encouraging them to focus on Gallantry Award recipients and delve into the lives of notable freedom fighters like Rani Laxmibai, the 1857 First War of Independence, and the role of Tribal Uprisings in India's struggle for freedom.

- Kerala's Kappad beach in Kozhikode and Chal beach in Kannur have been awarded the prestigious Blue Flag certification by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), a Denmark-based organization. The Blue Flag certification, which aims to promote sustainable development in both freshwater and marine areas, is globally recognized as an eco-label. The certification was first launched in France in 1985 and expanded to non-European countries in 2001. The award criteria include high standards of water quality, effective environmental management, environmental education, and safety measures. Indian beaches that have earned the Blue Flag certification include Shivrajpur Beach (Gujarat), Ghoghla Beach (Diu), Kasarkod and Padubidri Beaches (Karnataka), Rushikonda Beach (Andhra Pradesh), Golden Beach (Odisha), Radhanagar Beach (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), Kovalam Beach (Tamil Nadu), Eden Beach (Puducherry), Minicoy Thundi Beach (Lakshadweep), and Kadmat Beach (Lakshadweep).
- Mumbai-based Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) recently achieved a significant milestone in India's defense capabilities with the delivery of INS Vaghsheer, the sixth and final Scorpene-class submarine, to the Indian Navy. INS Vaghsheer is part of the Kalvari-class submarines, named after the sandfish, a lethal deep-sea predator found in the Indian Ocean. Launched in April 2022, the submarine underwent extensive trials focused on endurance, stealth, and combat capabilities. The Kalvari-class also includes INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj, and INS Vela. INS Vaghsheer boasts advanced stealth technology with reduced radiated noise levels, making it one of the quietest submarines globally. Equipped with precision-guided weapons, including torpedoes and anti-ship missiles, it enhances both offensive and defensive naval operations. Additionally, it is capable of a broad range of missions, such as anti-submarine warfare and intelligence gathering, in various maritime environments. The submarine also incorporates indigenous systems like the air-conditioning plant, internal communication network, and Ku-Band SATCOM system.
- Interpol has launched its first-ever "Silver Notice" to trace assets laundered across international borders, marking a significant step in global efforts to recover criminally obtained assets. The pilot project, involving 52 countries including India, is scheduled to run until November 2025. It was initiated following Italy's request to locate assets linked to a senior mafia member. The Silver Notice is part of Interpol's color-coded alerts system and targets assets related to crimes such as fraud, corruption, drug trafficking, and environmental violations. Participating nations can request information on laundered assets, including properties, vehicles, financial accounts, and businesses, with the possibility of legal actions like asset seizure. India's involvement in the project offers the potential to address

financial crimes and recover illicitly transferred assets, particularly with regard to fugitive economic offenders and offshore black money transfers.

- Indonesia has officially joined BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) as its 11th member, with the announcement made by Brazil, which holds the BRICS presidency in 2025. BRICS is a coalition of emerging economies that focuses on three main pillars: political and security cooperation, economic and financial cooperation, and cultural and people-to-people cooperation. The group aims to promote global stability, enhance economic resilience, and foster mutual understanding among nations. Indonesia's membership follows the recent expansion of BRICS, which included Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE in 2023. BRICS was originally formed in 2009, with South Africa joining in 2010, and it continues to play a significant role in shaping global economic and political dynamics. BRICS contributes 24% of global GDP and over 16% of global trade, advocating for a multipolar world order and South-South cooperation. It also works to reduce dependency on Western financial systems through initiatives like the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).
- Namma Metro has received its first Chinese-made train for the Purple Line, consisting of six coaches, which will undergo 37 statutory tests over the next six months before being introduced for passenger service. The train, manufactured by CRRC Nanjing Puzhen Co Ltd, is part of a Rs 1,578-crore contract to supply 216 coaches to BMRCL, with 15 trains for the Yellow Line and 21 for the Purple and Green lines. While the prototype train for the Yellow Line is already undergoing trial runs, the first India-made train for the Yellow Line is expected to arrive in Bengaluru by January 20, with TRSL promising to deliver two trains by April and two trains per month from September.
- Karnataka's Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has launched the 'Library for Every Home' project, aiming to establish libraries in one lakh homes across the state. The project's main objective is to foster a love for books among youth and save the fading book culture. The Kannada Book Authority will coordinate with individuals to set up libraries in their homes, invite literary figures for inauguration, and issue certificates. Additionally, the authority has released Kumaravyasa Bharata, a seminal work, in two volumes priced at Rs 500. This initiative is part of a broader effort to promote literacy and a love for reading in Karnataka.
- A new study on human-leopard conflict in Himachal Pradesh, conducted over 11 years, found that 74% of leopard attacks on humans were non-predatory and resulted in minor injuries, with predatory attacks rare, especially on adolescents who were more likely to experience fatal or grievous injuries. The study, which documented 344 leopard attacks, revealed that most attacks occurred at night during routine activities, disproportionately affecting low-income individuals, and had significant intangible impacts, including fear, anxiety, and behavioral changes, highlighting the need for mitigation strategies to reduce human-leopard conflict.
- The Z-Morh Tunnel, a 6.5 km bi-directional structure connecting Gagangair and Sonamarg in Jammu and Kashmir, aims to ensure uninterrupted connectivity

between Srinagar and Kargil, particularly during harsh winter months. Built at an altitude of 2,637 meters using the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM), it includes a parallel escape tunnel and accommodates up to 1,000 vehicles per hour with an 80 km/h speed limit. The project, costing ₹2,700 crore, was completed in 2024 after commencing in 2015. It is strategically significant for military logistics, boosts tourism and trade in the region, and addresses challenges like heavy snowfall and avalanches that previously disrupted road access for seven months annually. The tunnel also supports economic growth by reducing travel time and promoting Sonamarg's winter sports and tourism.

- The National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), launched in 2001 by the Ministry of Commerce & Industries, aims to develop India's organic agriculture sector by promoting sustainable farming and opening opportunities for farmers and exporters. Implemented by APEDA, NPOP sets high standards for organic products, accredits certification bodies, and promotes organic farming and marketing. The recently released 8th edition focuses on easing operations, enhancing transparency, and simplifying certification for organic grower groups. New portals like the NPOP Portal, Organic Promotion Portal, TraceNet 2.0, and redesigned APEDA and AgriXchange Portals enhance visibility, traceability, training, and global trade connectivity for stakeholders.
- The Nag Mk 2, a third-generation indigenously developed fire-and-forget guided anti-tank missile, underwent successful field trials conducted by DRDO at Pokhran Field Range, Rajasthan. The trials, observed by senior Indian Army officers, validated the missile's precision and operational effectiveness at maximum and minimum ranges and tested the Nag Missile Carrier (NAMICA) version-2. Designed to neutralize fortified armored threats, the missile operates under all weather conditions, with a range of 500 meters to 4 kilometers. It features a lock-on-before-launch infrared seeker for high precision and is launched from NAMICA, capable of carrying six combat-ready missiles.
- The United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025 report, prepared by UN DESA with UNCTAD and regional commissions, forecasts India's economy to grow by 6.6% in 2025 and 6.7% in 2026, driven by infrastructure development, manufacturing and services expansion, robust exports, and improved agricultural output due to favorable monsoons. Globally, growth is expected to remain steady at 2.8% in 2025. South Asia's growth, led by India, is projected at 5.7% in 2025 and 6% in 2026, while resource-rich countries could leverage rising demand for critical minerals to enhance growth, jobs, and public revenues.
- The National Turmeric Board (NTB) is finally a reality for Telangana farmers, with Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal inaugurating the NTB office in Nizamabad. This move comes over a year after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement in 2023, and is a significant development for turmeric farmers in Telangana, who have been facing challenges due to wide price fluctuations. The NTB aims to promote the welfare of turmeric farmers across 20 states, including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, and will focus on deciding the extent of crop

growth and ensuring proper marketing of the produce. With India responsible for over 70% of global turmeric production, this initiative is expected to boost the livelihoods of farmers and enhance the country's position in the global market

- Sri Lanka's unique digital identity project, assisted by India, is set to begin by the end of January, with the aim of collecting biographic and biometric information, including facial, iris, and fingerprints, to issue identification cards. The project, a crucial step in Sri Lanka's digitalization program, is being implemented with Indian grant assistance, with India advancing Rs 450 million for the project in August 2023. The Sri Lankan government has addressed concerns over data privacy, ensuring that access to the data will be restricted to Sri Lanka, and not shared with any Indian firm
- The Union Minister of Commerce & Industry has launched the Bharat Cleantech Manufacturing Platform, an initiative aimed at enhancing India's cleantech value chains in solar, wind, hydrogen, and battery storage sectors. The platform will facilitate collaboration, co-innovation, financing, and resource sharing among Indian firms, positioning India as a global leader in sustainability and cleantech. This move aligns with India's clean energy targets, which include achieving 500 GW of clean energy sources by 2030, building on its success in meeting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and installing 200 GW of renewable energy by 2022, eight years ahead of schedule.
- Bengaluru has lost a staggering Rs 1,788 crore to cybercrimes between 2021 and September 2024, with nearly 78.7% of the total losses attributed to six major fraud categories, including investment and job frauds, courier scams, and phishing. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has supercharged these scams, with scammers leveraging AI for voice cloning and creating advanced setups to enhance courier scams, making it challenging for investigators to recover the stolen funds, with only 20% of the lost amount retrieved
- Just days before a new US administration took office, the US government removed restrictions on three Indian nuclear entities: the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), the Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Centre (IGCAR), and Indian Rare Earths (IRE).
- This action, announced by the US Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), followed National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's statement at IIT-Delhi that the US was finalizing steps to ease regulations hindering civil nuclear cooperation between Indian and American companies. This move was widely interpreted as an effort by the outgoing administration to bolster the implementation of the landmark India-US civil nuclear agreement, initially unveiled in 2005 and finalized around 2008. The BIS stated that this modification to the Entity List, which removed the three entities after an inter-agency review, aimed to facilitate closer US-India cooperation in securing resilient critical minerals and clean energy supply chains, aligning with the broader strategic direction of the US-India partnership.

- Third edition of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS), which celebrates the timeless bond between Tamil Nadu and Kashi, will be held from February 15 to 24 at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh
- A new international commission has redefined obesity, urging assessments to move beyond the traditional Body Mass Index (BMI) and focus instead on the amount of body fat and any related medical complications, as reported by NYT News Service and published in *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*. This new definition, endorsed by 76 organizations, proposes using BMI as a screening tool to identify individuals needing further testing for excess body fat, suggesting that those with a BMI over 25 and excess fat, but no other health issues, may not require treatment. This shift in focus could significantly alter how doctors identify and treat obesity, potentially impacting the use of prescription obesity medications like Wegovy and Zepbound.
- Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* bagged a nomination for the Best Film Not in English Language at the 2025 BAFTA Film Awards. The Malayalam-Hindi movie is pitted against *Kneecap* (Ireland), *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* (Germany), *Emilia Perez* (France) and *I'm Still Here* (Brazil) in the category
- Off-spinner Kaushalya Choudhary (four for 38), leg-spinner Prema Rawat (four for 54), and opener D. Vrinda (71, 65b, 10x4) helped Team-C defeat Team-A by two wickets in the final of the BCCI senior women's one-day Challenger Trophy in Chennai
- A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launched two lunar landers, one built by U.S.-based Firefly Aerospace (Blue Ghost) and the other by Japan's ispace (Resilience), on a "rideshare" mission to the moon, highlighting the increasing role of the private sector in space exploration. This launch follows Intuitive Machines' successful lunar landing last year and aims to build upon that achievement under NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) program, which seeks to reduce costs and foster a lunar economy in support of the Artemis program's goal of establishing a sustained human presence on the moon. Blue Ghost, carrying 10 NASA instruments for scientific investigations and technology demonstrations, will be deployed first and aims for a 45-day journey to Mons Latreille, while Resilience, carrying ispace-Europe's "Tenacious" micro rover designed to collect lunar regolith, will take four to five months to reach Mare Frigoris; both missions face the challenging task of achieving a soft landing using thrusters for a controlled descent in the absence of an atmosphere
- The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) has partnered with the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT Delhi) to develop "Building Blocks for THz Communication Front Ends" for 6G technology under the Telecom Technology Development Fund (TTDF), an initiative of the Department of Telecom's (DOT) Universal Services Obligation Fund (now Digital Bharat Nidhi). The TTDF aims to foster research, design, prototyping, and manufacturing in the telecommunications sector, specifically focusing on rural-specific applications and promoting indigenous technology ownership, co-innovation, and intellectual

property creation by funding eligible Indian entities such as domestic companies, startups, MSMEs, academic and R&D institutions, and government entities involved in telecom R&D.

- The S N Bose Centre for Basic Sciences (SNBCBS), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology, has established a new observatory in Purulia district, West Bengal. Located on Panchet Hill at a height of 600 meters above ground level and approximately 86° E longitude, the Purulia Observatory is equipped with a 14-inch diameter telescope for scientific observations. Its strategic location along the 86° East longitude, which has few existing observatories, positions it as a significant facility not only in eastern India but globally, filling a crucial observational gap. The observatory will facilitate astronomical research and provide training for students in telescope operation and data recording, joining other prominent Indian observatories such as ARIES Observatory in Nainital, Vainu Bappu Observatory in Kavalur, and the Indian Astronomical Observatory (IAO) in Hanle, Ladakh
- Bengaluru remains the leading destination for global capability centres (GCCs), hosting nearly 300 Forbes Global 2000 companies and employing approximately 5,60,000 professionals as per ANSR's Q3 report for October-December 2024. GCCs, fully owned subsidiaries of multinational companies, focus on data, R&D, and product innovation. While Hyderabad and Chennai emerge as strong competitors, Bengaluru dominates due to its infrastructure and talent pool. Banking, financial services, retail, healthcare, and emerging technologies like AI and cybersecurity drive GCC growth, with projections suggesting employment of nearly 2 million professionals in India by 2030. Despite challenges like infrastructure and connectivity issues, Bengaluru leads in Grade-A office space demand, accounting for 55% of the city's leasing activity. GCCs largely originate from North America, Europe, and Japan, with increasing interest from the Middle East, particularly UAE and Saudi Arabia.
- Japan's Takeda Pharmaceutical Company has inaugurated its first Innovation Capability Centre (ICC) in Bengaluru, marking its debut ICC in the Asian region. The centre aims to focus on Research and Development (R&D) and digital health solutions, with a vision to transition into a digital biopharmaceutical company within 3-5 years. Bengaluru was chosen for its skilled talent pool in artificial intelligence, robotics, and software engineering, as well as government incentives under Karnataka's GCC policy. Currently employing 275 professionals in advanced technology areas, the centre emphasizes skill development alongside hiring niche talent. Unlike traditional GCCs, the Bengaluru ICC prioritizes high-impact areas, such as plasma-derived therapy donor systems and scalable tools for patient support, rather than traditional verticals like finance or HR. Additionally, it collaborates with global tech leaders like AWS, Salesforce, and SAP, ensuring that innovations developed in Bengaluru are implemented across Takeda's global operations. The company plans to expand its workforce to 750 by the end of 2025.

- The Indian Navy achieved a historic milestone with the first-ever tri-commissioning of naval platforms—INS Nilgiri, INS Vaghsheer, and INS Surat—at a ceremony in Mumbai on Wednesday, symbolizing a major stride toward the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. INS Nilgiri, the lead ship of Project 17A frigates, boasts enhanced firepower, a concealed deck, and accommodations for women officers. INS Vaghsheer, the sixth and final submarine of the Project 75 Kalvari class, is celebrated as the most advanced diesel-electric stealth submarine globally. INS Surat, the fourth and final ship of Project 15B destroyers, exemplifies advancements in design, construction efficiency, and combat capabilities across air, surface, and underwater domains.
- India's Union government has introduced a new program to promote battlefield tourism, aimed at allowing tourists to visit iconic war sites for educational purposes and to inspire patriotism. The initiative was launched by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during Army Day in Pune, and it will make 77 historic battlefields accessible to the public. Some of the key locations include Rezang La in Ladakh, the site of the 1962 battle between India and China, Galwan Valley, the location of recent India-China hand-to-hand combat, and Doklam in Sikkim, which was the site of the 2017 standoff. Other notable locations include Nathu La and Bum La in Arunachal Pradesh, Pangong Tso in Ladakh, Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand, Gurudongmar Lake in Sikkim, and the Longewala war site in Rajasthan. The initiative focuses on improving infrastructure, communication, tourism, and education, with plans for technological support such as the Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan App, which provides comprehensive information about historical battlefields and related sites. The program also aims to promote awareness of India's military heritage by allowing tourists to relive historical battles and gain insight into the soldiers' experiences.
- India has successfully tested the Bhargavastra, its first micro-missile system designed to counter the growing threat posed by swarm drones. Developed by Economic Explosives Ltd., this indigenous micro-missile system boasts impressive features such as mobility, with the ability to be deployed on mobile platforms, and a range capable of engaging targets over 2.5 km. Its detection capability is highly advanced, allowing it to spot small flying objects from over 6 km away. The system uses micro-munitions that can be guided towards targets, and it can fire over 64 micro missiles simultaneously, offering a significant advantage in dealing with large swarms of drones. It is operable in challenging terrains, including high-altitude areas. The Bhargavastra is designed for military integration, specifically for Army Air Defence, marking India's first counter-drone system that utilizes micro missiles for swarm drone defense.
- Blue Origin, founded by billionaire Jeff Bezos, successfully launched its New Glenn rocket into orbit for the first time, marking a significant step in the commercial space race. The rocket blasted off from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida, with the second-stage engine reaching its final orbit and the Blue Ring advanced spaceship prototype performing well. Although the first-stage booster

was lost during descent. The successful launch puts Blue Origin in competition with Elon Musk's SpaceX, which dominates the commercial space industry.

- The Indian government has approved the construction of a third launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, with a budget of ₹3,984.86 crore and a completion timeline of four years. This new launch pad will serve as a standby for the existing two pads and support the launch of newer vehicles, including the Next Generation Launch Vehicles (NGLVs) starting in 2031. It will also facilitate Indian-manned spaceflight missions, with a target launch date of 2026. The third launch pad is designed to be versatile and adaptable, accommodating various launch vehicles and configurations. Its establishment is crucial for meeting India's evolving space transportation needs for the next 25-30 years.
- V.K. Singh sworn in as Governor of Mizoram
- The Indian government has reconstituted the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) with new members, including T V Somanathan, Manoj Govil, and Pankaj Kumar Mishra . Ajit Kumar Mohanty, Secretary of the Department of Atomic Energy, will serve as the Chairman. Other members of the commission include National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, and former chairpersons of the AEC. The AEC is responsible for formulating policies for the Department of Atomic Energy.
- According to a study by the climate attribution group ClimaMeter, the three wildfires that have devastated large parts of Los Angeles are primarily attributed to a phenomenon known as 'hydroclimate whiplash.' This rare meteorological condition occurs when an extremely wet season is followed by an extremely dry one. The process is driven by global warming, which enables the atmosphere to hold significantly more water vapor for extended periods before releasing it as intense precipitation. This dual capability of the atmosphere—holding more water and creating more prolonged water vapor deficits—leads to extended dry spells and intensified rainfall when it does occur. The impacts of hydroclimate whiplash are profound, including increased droughts and floods, heightened respiratory and cardiovascular diseases caused by wildfire smoke, and a rise in waterborne illnesses such as cholera and leptospirosis during floods. Since the mid-20th century, such conditions have surged globally, with a 31–66% increase in three-month periods (sub-seasonal) and an 8–31% increase in 12-month periods (inter-annual). These findings underscore the critical role of climate change in amplifying extreme weather events and their cascading consequences.
- The BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) has launched a campaign to promote the harmonious coexistence of community animals within Bengaluru. The primary objective of this campaign is to raise awareness about community animals, focusing on the importance of public health through animal health. The campaign will cover 250 locations across the BBMP jurisdiction and is themed "Public Health through Animal Health." Key areas of focus include educating citizens about laws related to community animals, promoting responsible handling of issues related to

them, and preventing acts of cruelty towards animals. The campaign will feature street performances, such as dramas and dances, across the city's eight zones, along with informational pamphlets and online resources. Legal actions against animal cruelty include prohibitions on relocating animals, denying food or water, or inflicting harm. Penalties for cruelty can include up to five years of imprisonment and fines under IPC Section 325, and harassment of animal feeders could lead to up to seven years of imprisonment.

- Bengaluru is set to host the fifth US consulate in India, with the site-dedication ceremony scheduled for January 17, 2025. The consulate aims to strengthen political and economic ties between the US and Karnataka, with a particular focus on leveraging the state's investment and trade opportunities. The new consulate will work to promote economic opportunities, such as export prospects from Karnataka to the US, as well as providing services for US companies exploring South Indian markets. Karnataka, known as India's IT hub, contributes \$51 billion annually to exports, with Bengaluru hosting 750 multinational companies, 370 of which are headquartered in the US. The consulate will also ease the burden of consular services on Chennai and Hyderabad by providing more accessible services to South Karnataka residents, who currently have to travel 300 km to Chennai for consular services. Initially, the consulate will operate from the US Commercial Service office at JW Marriott Hotel, focusing on economic and political initiatives rather than visa services.
- The Fast Track Immigration – Trusted Traveller Programme (FTI-TTP) was inaugurated by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on January 16 at several major airports in India. Initially launched at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport in New Delhi in June 2024, the programme aims to simplify and secure international travel by utilizing automated e-gates for quicker and smoother immigration clearance. It is designed to facilitate faster movement for Indian Nationals and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) and will later be expanded to foreign travellers. The registration process involves submitting an online application along with biometric verification, with the registration valid for five years or until the passport expires. The programme will be implemented in two phases, with the first phase covering Indian citizens and OCI cardholders at 21 major airports. The overall objective is to enhance India's global mobility as part of the country's vision for becoming a developed nation by 2047 (Viksit Bharat @2047).
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently liberalized regulations under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) to encourage the use of the Indian Rupee (INR) for cross-border trade and investments. Key changes include allowing Indian exporters to open accounts in any foreign currency overseas for settling trade transactions, including export proceeds, which can also be utilized for import payments. Overseas branches of authorized dealer banks can open INR accounts for non-residents, enabling them to facilitate current and capital account transactions with residents in India. These balances can be used for bona fide transactions. Additionally, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) can use funds in repatriable

INR accounts for foreign investments, including foreign direct investment (FDI) in non-debt instruments. The aim of these reforms is to promote the global use of the INR, strengthen the rupee, and boost investor confidence. However, challenges such as volatile export performance and geopolitical risks remain, as seen in the contraction of merchandise exports and global uncertainties. FEMA, enacted in 1999, regulates cross-border trade and payments, and its objectives are to facilitate external trade, develop an orderly foreign exchange market in India, and govern foreign exchange dealings through authorized persons. The scope of FEMA covers all of India and overseas entities managed by Indian citizens, including NRIs, overseas companies with Indian ownership, and cross-border transactions.

- ISRO has successfully conducted its Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission, marking a significant achievement as India joins the ranks of the U.S., Russia, and China in satellite docking. The operation involved two satellites, SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target), which docked under the management of ISRO's Mission Operations Complex at ISTRAC. The docking procedure started with a 15-meter hold point and proceeded to a 3-meter final approach, followed by precision alignment, spacecraft capture, close positioning, and rigidisation for stability. After the docking, the satellites function as a single object, and upcoming steps will include undocking and power transfer checks. The SpaDeX mission serves to develop satellite manoeuvring and docking technologies, with future applications in Indian astronaut missions to the Moon, space station management, and in-space robotics. Post-docking, the satellites will demonstrate power transfer and support payload activities for a mission life of up to two years.
- Prof. Urbasi Sinha, a faculty member at Raman Research Institute, was awarded the Gates-Cambridge Impact Prize 2025 in Cambridge, UK, for her pioneering work in quantum computing, recognized as one of eight impactful contributors, with achievements including leading the Quantum Information and Computing lab, key roles in India's National Quantum Mission, Rashtriya Vigyan Yuva Puraskar, Canada Excellence Research Chair, and establishing the Open Quantum Institute at CERN.
- India's economic growth slowed more than expected, dropping from 8.2% in 2023 to 6.5% in 2024, and is projected to remain at 6.5% till 2026, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which attributes the slowdown to a decline in industrial activity, but expects growth to remain solid driven by private consumption and investment.
- A high-level meeting chaired by Minister for Minor Irrigation, Science, and Technology N.S. Boseraju resolved to propose the construction of a state-of-the-art planetarium and a modern regional science centre in Raichur city. The Minister prioritised establishing science centres in every district and directed the architectural team to present a design within 90 days, prepare a detailed project report, and expedite construction. The Budget will allocate land for science centres in Kolar, Chitradurga, Ramanagara, and Vijayanagar, while efforts to operationalise centres in Chikkamagaluru, Shivamogga, Kodagu, and Belagavi will be accelerated.

- A recent study published in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition challenges the notion that iron deficiency is the primary cause of anaemia in India, pointing instead to factors like Vitamin B12 deficiency, air pollution, and other unknown causes. Conducted by researchers from institutions such as St. John's Medical College, Bengaluru, and the National Institute of Nutrition, the study involved venous blood testing of approximately 4,500 individuals across eight states. It found that while 34.9% were anaemic, only 9% had iron-deficiency anaemia, with 22% attributed to unknown causes. The study highlights discrepancies in anaemia prevalence between its findings and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), which relied on capillary blood tests, potentially inflating anaemia estimates. For women aged 15-49, anaemia prevalence in the study was 41.1% compared to 60.8% in NFHS-5, and for adolescent girls (15-19 years), it was 44.3% versus 62.6%. Researchers suggest this variance underscores the impact of blood collection methods on anaemia estimates.
- Recently, a private Indian telecom firm equipped the Siachen Glacier with 4G and 5G services. Located in the Karakoram Range, Siachen is a piedmont glacier in the heavily glaciated Himalayan region known as the "Third Pole" due to its vast freshwater reserves, second only to the polar ice caps. It lies between the Saltoro Ridge to the west and the main Karakoram Range to the east, making it the world's second-longest nonpolar glacier after Tajikistan's Fedchenko Glacier. Originating at the base of Indira Col West, Siachen strategically dominates the Shaksgam Valley (ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963), routes from Gilgit-Baltistan to Leh, and the Karakoram Pass. It is the primary source of the Nubra River, a tributary of the Shyok River, and is regarded as the world's highest battleground, secured by India during Operation Meghdoot in 1984.
- India's 'unity in diversity' will take center stage at the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2025 in Davos, with the country sending its largest-ever delegation, including five union ministers, three chief ministers, state ministers, and nearly 100 CEOs, alongside leaders from civil society and arts. Highlighting India's achievements, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw emphasized discussions on inclusive growth, investment in infrastructure, and digital transformation driven by initiatives like Digital India. The delegation features prominent figures like CMs Devendra Fadnavis, N Chandra Babu Naidu, and A Revant Reddy, as well as ministers from states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, reflecting the nation's vibrant diversity and progress.
- G.P. Singh appointed chief of Central Reserve Police Force
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently praised Indian space startup Digantara for the successful launch of its inaugural mission, SCOT (Space Camera for Object Tracking), dedicated to space surveillance. SCOT, one of the world's first commercial Space Situational Awareness (SSA) satellites, was launched aboard SpaceX's Transporter-12 mission. Deployed in a sun-synchronous orbit, SCOT is designed to track Resident Space Objects (RSOs) in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) with greater efficiency than traditional systems, overcoming limitations like restricted

fields of view, weather conditions, and geographic constraints. Capable of tracking objects as small as 5 cm, SCOT enhances safer space operations and supports national security. Backed by Aditya Birla Ventures and SIDBI, the mission marks a significant milestone in India's private space sector.

- The Trajan 155 mm towed artillery gun system, jointly developed by India's Larsen & Toubro and France's KNDS, has secured an export order from Armenia. This 52-calibre artillery system incorporates several indigenously developed components, including the auxiliary power unit, control panel, and rolling gear assembly. Designed for modern combat, it boasts a range exceeding 40 kilometers depending on the ammunition used, with a modular design for easy transport and deployment. Equipped with an automated loading system for rapid firing, the Trajan operates effectively across diverse terrains, from marshy lowlands to high-altitude cold deserts, and features advanced targeting and fire-control systems integrated with modern military networks.
- Recently, a rare celestial event known as a "planet parade" occurred, where Venus, Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars formed a stunning arc across the night sky. This phenomenon happens when several planets in our solar system are visible simultaneously, creating the illusion of closeness or alignment from Earth's perspective, known as a conjunction. While the planets are not physically in a straight line, their varying motions and positions occasionally align to make multiple planets visible at once. Such events, especially involving four or more planets, are rare and do not happen every year, making them significant according to NASA.
- The Rubber Board has launched two initiatives, the Indian Sustainable Natural Rubber (iSNR) Platform and INR Konnect, to enhance sustainability and productivity in the rubber sector. The iSNR platform aims to streamline compliance with the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) for the Indian rubber supply chain by issuing traceability certificates to verify product origin and EUDR compliance. This initiative positions Indian natural rubber as a sustainable and competitive global choice, promoting long-term industry growth. INR Konnect, a web-based platform, connects growers of untapped rubber holdings with adopters to maximize productivity. It certifies participating parties, provides training in production management and sustainable practices, and offers a database of certified tappers.
- The La Pérouse is a biennial multilateral maritime exercise conducted by the French Navy in the Indian Ocean Region, currently in its fourth edition. This iteration involves participation from various maritime partners, including the Royal Australian Navy, French Navy, Royal Navy, United States Navy, Indonesian Navy, Royal Malaysian Navy, Republic of Singapore Navy, and Royal Canadian Navy, showcasing a diverse array of personnel and surface and sub-surface assets.
- Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge has inaugurated the 'British Council Corner' at Arivu Centres, gram panchayat libraries in Karnataka, to provide children with access to high-quality English language learning resources.

The British Council will provide 500 children's books to 10 Arivu Centres and free premium memberships to the British Council's Digital Library for 5,000 rural Arivu Centres. This initiative aims to inspire curiosity, build skills, and open doors to bigger opportunities for children in rural Karnataka.

- The Karnataka state Cabinet has approved free bone marrow transplants (BMTs) in empanelled hospitals under the Ayushman Bharat Arogya Karnataka (ABArK) scheme, as first reported by DH in November 2024. This move will cover both autologous and allogeneic transplants at institutions like Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology (KMIO) and select private super-speciality hospitals, with the government covering the procedure's high cost (₹10 lakh to ₹30 lakh or more). This initiative aims to provide significant relief, particularly to those below the poverty line suffering from severe blood and immune disorders like blood cancers and thalassemia.
- The Union government partially lifted the ban on sugar exports, authorizing one million tonnes for export in the 2024-25 season (ending September), a move announced by Union Food Minister Pralhad Joshi to stabilize prices, benefit five crore farmer families and five lakh workers, and strengthen the sugar sector. This reversal of the October 2023 ban, implemented to control domestic prices, aims to ensure timely payments to farmers, improve sugar mill liquidity, and balance sugar availability and prices, allowing millers to export all sugar grades directly or via traders until September 30. The Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) praised the decision, anticipating it will resolve surplus stock issues and significantly improve sugar mill financial stability.
- The Union agriculture ministry has launched its first-ever survey to assess edible oil consumption patterns in India, aiming to effectively implement the New Mission on Edible Oils-Oilseeds, a senior official said. The initiative comes as India, the world's largest consumer and importer of edible oils, lacks recent data on consumption patterns.
- India is set to host the FIDE World Cup 2025, marking the country's first major international chess tournament since the 2022 Chennai Chess Olympiad.
- Poovanahalli, a village in K.R. Pet taluk of Mandya district, has been selected for the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) scheme. Announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2023 and detailed by Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy, the scheme aims to empower tribal communities socially and economically through comprehensive development across India. With a budget of ₹24,104 crore (noted discrepancy in sources mentioning ₹79,000 crore), it targets the upliftment of 63,000 villages through over 25 programs spanning 18 departments. These programs focus on education, health, housing, sanitation, infrastructure, clean drinking water, skill development, nutrition, roads, telecommunication, sustainable livelihood opportunities, and tribal cottage industry training. Launched in 2023, the scheme covers Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), benefiting 75 such communities under the Ministry of Tribal

Affairs, with implementation running from 2023-24 to 2025-26 under Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

- The National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI) launched the Internet Governance Internship and Capacity Building Scheme to enhance awareness and expertise in internet governance among Indian citizens. This initiative aims to equip participants to engage effectively in global internet governance processes involving organizations like ICANN, ISOC, IEEE, and IETF while fostering domestic talent to address emerging issues. The scheme includes bi-annual internships with six-month and three-month tracks, offering mentorship by international organization experts, retired officials, and academic advisors. Interns receive a ₹20,000 monthly stipend and participate in mandatory outreach programs. Established in 2003 under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, NIXI is a not-for-profit company focused on increasing internet penetration in India by providing services such as Internet Exchange Points (IXPs), the .IN Registry, and IRINN (IPv4 and IPv6 address adoption).
- The Indian Institute of Architects' Karnataka Chapter will host Latitude 2025, an international architecture and design event, on January 24-25 in Bengaluru, featuring renowned architects and designers from around the world to discuss contemporary challenges, emerging trends, and innovative solutions, alongside the IIA-KC Latitude Design Awards and the launch of the Compendium of Impressions publication.
- GAIL India is planning to set up a compressed natural gas (CNG) plant at the Kudlu wet waste unit in Bengaluru, with an estimated project cost of Rs 65 crore. The plant, which will be built on an 18-acre site, aims to process around 300 tonnes of wet waste daily, producing 10.7 tonnes of CNG and 31.39 tonnes of organic manure. Initially, the plan was to establish the plant at the defunct landfill site in Mandur, but due to opposition from local residents, the state government provided an alternative site at Kudlu
- The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) is set to establish small animal rescue centres in three city zones—Dasarahalli, East, and South—to rescue and treat stray and abandoned dogs and cats, marking a first for a civic body in Karnataka. These centres, integrated with existing Animal Birth Control (ABC) facilities, will include dedicated spaces to house at least 20 animals and deploy staff for treatment. BBMP, which currently relies on NGOs for such rescues, plans to independently manage the process, including coordinating with NGOs for pet adoption. The initiative, long overdue as per Section 59(11) of the Karnataka Municipal Corporation Act, 1976, is part of BBMP's broader animal welfare programme and aims to address a decades-old gap in urban animal care.
- Taiwan recently announced that its newly acquired National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) will be deployed in North Taiwan to safeguard Taipei, the nation's capital. NASAMS, a medium-range, ground-based air defense system, was jointly developed by Raytheon (US) and Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace (Norway) and became operational in 1994, initially deployed by

Norway's Royal Air Force. Currently in service in 13 countries, including the US, Spain, and Australia, NASAMS is designed to identify, engage, and destroy a range of threats like aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles, and UAVs, protecting critical assets and population centers. It integrates a 360-degree phased-array X-Band radar with a 75-kilometer range, three launchers (each carrying six AIM-120 AMRAAM missiles), and can simultaneously engage up to 72 targets. The system, operational in the US National Capital Region since 2005, offers enhanced survivability with network-centric, open architecture and electronic countermeasure resistance.

- India's first indigenous surgical tele-robotic system, SSI Mantra, successfully performed two complex heart surgeries with the patient in Jaipur and the surgeon in Gurgaon. Developed by SSI Ltd., SSI Mantra is the first-of-its-kind system in India, approved by the CDSCO under Class B and Class C surgical devices, ensuring safety, efficacy, and compliance for hospital use nationwide. It enables advanced procedures like Totally Endoscopic Coronary Artery Bypass (TECAB) with benefits such as reduced operation time, enhanced precision, minimal trauma, quicker recovery, and lower infection risks. However, challenges include latency, connectivity, preparedness for medical and technical issues, and high capital and operating costs, with availability primarily in metro and tier-1 cities.
- India has emerged as a major exporter of French Fries, which owes much contract farming through which companies procuring potato directly from growers and deepening farmer engagement.
- Researchers from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) have identified 23 species of blood-sucking flies (Midges), 13 of them recorded for the first time in the country, in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- The Karnataka Health Department launched the "Maatrutva Suraksha Abhiyaan" (Maternal Safety Campaign), a state-wide antenatal care initiative addressing maternal deaths through free monthly health check-up camps held on the 9th and 24th of each month at state-run facilities. Launched by Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao in Raichur, the campaign focuses on promoting maternal safety and well-being for all pregnant women in Karnataka. Key measures include quality healthcare for high-risk pregnancies, regular screenings, awareness of nutrition and supplements, mandatory tests like OGTT for gestational diabetes, and systematic follow-ups. The initiative also emphasizes family education on recognizing danger signs and ensuring access to emergency care, with provisions for immunizations, folic acid, calcium supplements, and infection control.
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has launched the Entity Locker platform to revolutionize business document management in India. This platform offers secure 10GB cloud storage, real-time document access and verification through government databases, digital signature authentication, Aadhaar-based role access, and consent-based sharing. It streamlines compliance, reduces administrative tasks, enhances efficiency, and integrates with organizations like MCA, GSTN, and DGFT. With applications in vendor verification,

loan processing, FSSAI compliance, and corporate filings, Entity Locker is a strategic initiative under the Digital India Programme to create a digitally empowered business environment, foster productivity, and unlock economic opportunities.

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) achieved a major breakthrough in hypersonic missile technology with the successful ground testing of a scramjet engine by DRDL in Hyderabad for 120 seconds, a significant step in next-generation hypersonic missions as highlighted by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Scramjet engines, essential for hypersonic missiles exceeding speeds of Mach 5, enable supersonic combustion without moving parts, offering rapid, high-impact strikes while bypassing air defense systems. The test showcased successful ignition, stable combustion, and innovative flame stabilization at airspeeds over 1.5 km/second, achieved through years of research. The scramjet fuel, jointly developed by DRDL and industry, enhances cooling and ignition efficiency, while a thermal barrier coating developed with the Department of Science and Technology ensures durability under extreme temperatures during hypersonic flight, paving the way for advanced operational capabilities.
- A suspected case of Mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, was reported in Bengaluru, marking the likely first case in the state this year. A 40-year-old man with a travel history to Dubai has been admitted to Victoria Hospital for treatment, with investigations ongoing to confirm further details. Mpox, a viral zoonotic disease caused by the monkeypox virus of the Orthopoxvirus genus, is similar to smallpox but generally less severe. It spreads through close contact with infected individuals, contaminated objects, or animals and presents symptoms like fever, rash, swollen lymph nodes, and fatigue. The disease gained international attention last year after cases surged in Africa and spread to other countries, leading the WHO to declare it a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' in August 2024. India reported its first case in September 2024, with two recent cases recorded in Kerala last month.
- Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) has become the first airport in India to receive Level 1 Accreditation under the Airports Council International (ACI) Accessibility Enhancement Accreditation (AEA) programme, recognizing its efforts to create an inclusive and accessible environment for passengers with reduced mobility and disabilities. The AEA programme focuses on improving accessibility and inclusion at airports, catering to the needs of persons with disabilities and older travellers. At KIA, a dedicated committee oversees initiatives to enhance facilities, services, and transportation options for such passengers, supported by continuous staff training to provide empathetic and personalized assistance, alongside infrastructure upgrades to ensure a seamless and stress-free travel experience, according to Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL).
- The Jammu and Kashmir Forest Department, in partnership with the J&K Forest Research Institute (FRI), has launched an ambitious initiative to digitally document and preserve the iconic Chinar trees, a symbol of Kashmir's natural heritage. Using

Geographic Information System (GIS) and Quick Response (QR) code technology, the project, which began in 2021, aims to geotag Chinars, catalog their characteristics, and create a central online repository for monitoring and protection. With nearly 29,000 Chinars surveyed so far, the Ganderbal district leads with the highest concentration and boasts the third-largest Chinar in the world. Renowned for their majestic size, vibrant foliage, and cultural significance, Chinars can live up to 700 years and play a crucial role in the ecosystem by providing shade and oxygen. This effort underscores the importance of safeguarding these historic trees against threats and ensuring their legacy endures for future generations.

- The Coffee Board of India, in collaboration with the National Livelihood Mission (NLM) in Karnataka, has launched a transformative project to empower 1,00,000 women from NLM Self-Help Groups (SHGs) through training in coffee brewing techniques and rural café management. The initiative, supported by a ₹25 crore allocation in the 2024-25 State budget, aims to promote women's entrepreneurship and gender equality. An MoU was signed between K.G. Jagadeesha, CEO of the Coffee Board, and P.I. Sreevidya, Mission Director of NLM, to kickstart the program. In the first phase, 400 women will be trained as master trainers in Bengaluru, who will then train others at taluk and hobli levels. The project envisions the establishment of 2,500 coffee kiosks, offering authentic filter coffee experiences and fostering economic opportunities for marginalized women. Through partnerships with experts and the Atal Incubation Centre, the initiative aims to reduce poverty and create lasting social impact.
- Raman Rajamannan, the head of the Mannan tribe and the only tribal king in Kerala, will become the first tribal king from the state to attend the Republic Day parade in Delhi. This historic event will take place with the support of the Scheduled Tribes (SC) Development Department, which will cover the travel expenses for Rajamannan and his wife, Binumol. The couple will not only attend the parade but also meet with the President and other prominent leaders, while also visiting significant historical sites like Agra. The Mannan community, which is primarily based in the buffer zone of the Idukki Wildlife Sanctuary, has 48 settlements and is unique in southern India for its tribal monarchy. The king plays a vital role in the community's cultural traditions, and his participation in the Republic Day parade is seen as a significant honor for the Mannan people.
- The Commerce Ministry recently launched the Diamond Imprest Authorization (DIA) Scheme to boost the global competitiveness of India's diamond industry. Introduced by the Department of Commerce, Government of India, the scheme allows duty-free import of natural cut and polished diamonds, less than ¼ Carat (25 Cents), specifically for export purposes, effective from April 1, 2025. It mandates a 10% value addition export obligation and is available to diamond exporters with a Two Star Export House status and above, and annual exports of US \$15 million. The scheme also addresses beneficiation policies in diamond mining countries like Botswana and Namibia, requiring manufacturers to set up cutting and polishing

facilities for a certain value addition percentage. Furthermore, it provides support to MSME exporters, creating a more competitive landscape for smaller players while ensuring India's continued leadership in the global diamond industry value chain.

- Recent archaeological excavations in Tamil Nadu have revealed that the use of iron dates back to 5,300 years ago, making it the oldest evidence of the Iron Age in India, as per the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology's report, Antiquity of Iron. This finding, supported by AMS and OSL dating validated by experts, challenges the notion that iron technology was imported to India, suggesting it was home-grown. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin declared that Tamil Nadu's role in the subcontinent's history is foundational, asserting that the Iron Age began in Tamil Nadu. Experts like Dr. Rakesh Tewari and Prof. Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti have validated the findings, which propose that the Copper Age of North India and the Iron Age of South India may have been contemporaneous, offering a new perspective on India's ancient history.
- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced the establishment of a dedicated agricultural university in Mandya to support farmers from Karnataka's agricultural heartland, including Mandya, Hassan, Mysuru, and Chamarajanagar. Speaking at the inauguration of the International Trade Fair 2025-Organics and Millets in Bengaluru, he said the university will feature departments of horticulture and animal husbandry, with a focus on millet farming. Stressing the importance of Minimum Support Price (MSP), he urged the Union government to ensure its implementation and highlighted India's progress in farming, noting the country ranks second globally in organic farming and has exported 2.61 lakh tonnes of organic produce worth ₹4,008 crore. Karnataka, under initiatives like the Savayava Bhagya scheme and the Karnataka Organic Farming Policy, has promoted organic farming and incentivized millet cultivation through the Raita Siri scheme, offering ₹10,000 per hectare. The state plans to establish dedicated markets for organic farmers via the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) in the upcoming budget, reiterating its commitment to organic and millet farmers' welfare.
- A sculpture of a Jain Tirthankara and a stone pillar were discovered near Basaveshwara Temple in Sulugodu village, Hassan district, during agricultural activities. The village, which has a history of Jain-related artefact discoveries, has seen similar finds, including sculptures, stone lamps, and a statue of Kalabhairava in recent years. Villagers have preserved some artefacts, such as a Mahavira-like statue placed near the temple. Residents, relocated to Sulugodu in 1963 after their villages submerged in the Hemavathi backwaters, lack historical knowledge of the area and have called for official excavations to uncover and protect the site's rich heritage.
- Bengaluru's Neole Anna Cornelio achieved double glory at the State Games in Mangaluru and Udupi by emerging as the fastest woman in the athletics competition, clocking 11.93 seconds in the sprint, and earning 1,005 points to secure the best female athlete award.

- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced that from the next financial year, Karnataka's Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC) will implement a market system for organic products, while urging the Union government to sanction a minimum selling price (MSP) for millets, a long-standing demand of farmers. Speaking at the International Trade Fair - Organics and Millets 2025, he emphasized the government's commitment to promoting millet farming through support for cultivation, marketing, and related facilities, noting that Karnataka ranks third nationally in millet cultivation and production. Highlighting the state's initiatives, he recalled the introduction of the organic farming policy in 2017 and the Organic Bhagya Yojana in 2013 to raise awareness among farmers. Adding a technological edge, this year's fair features an AI tool named Mili, which guides visitors through stalls and activities via a QR code at the entrance.
- Space start-up GalaxEye announced the successful deployment of its GLX-SQ payload aboard ISRO's PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM) platform on December 30, 2024, marking a groundbreaking achievement as the world's first in-orbit fusion of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) and optical imagery. This innovation addresses critical needs across Defence, agriculture, and disaster response by offering enhanced remote sensing capabilities that surpass traditional methods, processing and compressing large data volumes into digital formats within 10 minutes. GalaxEye's CEO, Suyash Singh, highlighted this milestone as a new benchmark for earth observation and a step toward redefining space-based solutions, with the start-up also preparing for Mission Drishti, its flagship multi-sensor satellite promising all-weather, high-resolution imaging.
- The European Commission plans to propose a ban on PFAS, or "forever chemicals," in consumer products, with exemptions for essential industrial uses. PFAS (Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances) are toxic, hazardous, man-made chemicals known for their persistence in the environment, earning them the nickname "forever chemicals." These substances can contaminate soil, water, and air during production and use and are listed under the Stockholm Convention. Widely used in products like cosmetics, non-stick pans, aircraft, and wind turbines due to their resistance to extreme temperatures and corrosion, PFAS pose significant health risks, including decreased fertility, developmental issues in children, hormonal disruptions, increased cholesterol levels, and a higher risk of certain cancers.
- Researchers in Switzerland have developed a potential gene-editing technique to treat Stargardt disease, a genetic condition also known as Stargardt macular degeneration. This inherited disease, caused by mutations in the ABCA4 gene that affect Vitamin A processing, leads to progressive vision loss in children and young adults, usually affecting both eyes. It results in an excessive buildup of lipofuscin over the macula, the central part of the retina responsible for sharp central vision. Symptoms include gradual central vision loss, hazy or dark spots in vision, light sensitivity, and sometimes color blindness. More common in males, Stargardt disease affects 1 in 8,000–10,000 people and can lead to legal blindness. While

there is no cure currently available, advancements in gene-editing offer hope for future treatments.

- India and China are resuming top-level diplomatic talks as face-offs along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) subside, with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visiting Beijing to address key bilateral issues, including renewing agreements on sharing hydrological data for transboundary rivers like the Brahmaputra and Sutlej. Misri will express India's concerns over China's planned mega hydropower project on the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, which could impact water flow into India, and urge for an early meeting of hydrological experts under a 2006 mechanism.
- The first bird census at Gadag on January 23 recorded nearly 230 bird species, while the survey at Ankasamudra Bird Sanctuary identified 130 varieties of migratory and resident birds; the forest department plans another count at Male Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary on February 1 and 2, prompting calls for a Karnataka bird atlas to aid conservation. Experts stress that synchronized surveys across diverse habitats, conducted twice a year for at least five years, are essential to establish a scientific baseline, as birds are bioindicators of ecological health. Despite citizen scientists contributing data on platforms like eBird, which reports 552 bird species in Karnataka, the forest department must lead coordinated efforts due to the lack of systematic studies, staff, and expertise. A bird atlas, akin to efforts in Kerala and Goa, could help map bird abundance and distribution, enabling better conservation strategies for migratory and resident birds amid declining populations and habitat challenges.
- Manipur secured the first gold of the 38th National Games as Sarungbam Athouba Meitei triumphed in the men's individual triathlon
- The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has allocated ₹40 crore to provide custom-designed e-vehicles for street vending at a 90% subsidy, with applications invited from January 4. The Social Welfare Department is finalizing five e-vehicle designs tailored for various trades, such as food vending with stoves and gas cylinders or display vehicles for clothes and shoes. Vendors must pay at least 10% of the vehicle cost, with the base price set at ₹1.45 lakh, and smaller manual pushcarts priced at ₹20,000 will also be distributed. While the number of vehicles to be distributed is undecided, BBMP aims to maximize coverage within the allocated budget, planning annual distributions alongside existing welfare schemes. However, street vendors' unions raised concerns about inadequate vending zones, restrictive identification processes, lack of charging infrastructure, and parking issues. Civic officials clarified that while registered vendors will get priority, registration is not mandatory, similar to the PM SVANidhi Scheme for small loans.
- Two years after a study highlighted the epidemic dropsy threat, new research has identified a life-threatening fungal infection, chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (CPA), affecting tuberculosis (TB) survivors in Assam's tea plantation workers. TB has been a major public health issue in the region, with 217 cases per 1,00,000 people, due to factors like poverty, poor nutrition, and overcrowded living conditions. A team

from Assam Medical College and Hospital discovered that CPA, caused by the *Aspergillus fumigatus* fungus, often affects individuals with compromised immune systems, particularly post-TB patients. Their study, published in PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases, found that 17.18% of 128 patients visiting hospitals in Dibrugarh district had CPA, with the prevalence spiking to 48.9% in those who had completed TB treatment. Assam's CPA rate of 60 per 1,00,000 exceeds the global average of 42 and is worse than in several African countries. The researchers suggest early diagnosis through *Aspergillus* antibody testing and advocate for awareness campaigns to help healthcare providers recognize CPA symptoms and improve workers' respiratory health. This follows a two-year-old study on epidemic dropsy caused by contaminated edible oils, further highlighting the need for improved health and hygiene in Assam's tea gardens.

- Czech Republic's Katerina Siniakova, right, won her 10th Grand Slam women's doubles title when she and American partner Taylor Townsend clinched the Australian Open crown.
- Jannik Sinner has won his second consecutive Australian Open title with a comfortable straight sets win over Alexander Zverev at Rod Laver Arena
- The 5,000-seater Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Stadium here was packed to the rafters to witness history unfold as Odisha Warriors took on JSW Soorma Hockey Club in the summit clash of the inaugural season of the only commercial women's hockey league in the world.
- Manush Shah and Diya Chitale joined the elite list of men's and women's national champions after outclassing Payas Jain and top seed Sreeja Akula in the singles finals of the 86th senior table tennis championship, which concluded at the Pandit Dindayal Upadhyay Indoor Stadium, Surat
- Jyothi Yarraji clinched gold in her first race of the season, that too with a national record, winning the 60m hurdles in 8.04 seconds at the Elite Indoor Meeting in Nantes (France). She broke her own earlier national record of 8.12 twice
- Dinosaurs once dominated Earth's land ecosystems in various forms, from plant-eating giants like *Argentinosaurus* to meat-eating predators like *Tyrannosaurus* and even peculiar species like *Therizinosaurus*, with its Wolverine-like claws. However, the exact origin of dinosaurs remains unclear. Researchers now propose a surprising birthplace for these creatures, suggesting that they likely emerged in the low-latitude regions of Gondwana, an area that today includes northern South America and northern Africa, which were once part of the supercontinent Pangaea. The earliest-known dinosaur fossils, dating back around 230 million years, include species like *Eoraptor* and *Herrerasaurus* from Argentina, *Saturnalia* from Brazil, and *Mbiresaurus* from Zimbabwe. These fossils show that dinosaurs evolved over millions of years, but the true origin remains elusive due to gaps in the fossil record, especially in regions like the Sahara desert and the Amazon rainforest. Despite being challenging areas for palaeontologists to explore, these regions may hold clues to where the first dinosaurs lived during the hot, dry, and harsh conditions of the Triassic Period, approximately 245-230 million years ago.

- India has officially joined the €7.1 billion Eurodrone programme as an observer state, marking a significant step in enhancing its defense cooperation with Europe. Managed by the Bonn-based Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR) and led by Airbus Defence and Space, Eurodrone is a four-nation initiative involving Germany, France, Italy, and Spain. India's formal request to join the programme was made in August 2024, with acceptance granted just before Aero India 2025. The programme, aimed at developing a Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (MALE RPAS), includes major subcontractors like Leonardo (Italy), Dassault Aviation (France), and Airbus (Spain). This partnership demonstrates India's intent to explore collaborative defense opportunities with Europe, following Japan, which became the first official OCCAR observer in November 2023. Becoming a full-time observer could require India to bear costs for technical expertise.
- The Pangsau Pass International Festival, celebrated annually in Nampong, Arunachal Pradesh, highlights the rich cultural exchange between India and Myanmar. Located at an altitude of 3,727 feet on the India-Myanmar border, Pangsau Pass is named after the nearby Burmese village of Pangsau and has historical significance, having been a route for the 13th-century Ahom invasion of Assam. During World War II, it was a key obstacle for American General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell's forces trying to establish a land route to China. The pass, often referred to as the "Hell Gate" due to its challenging terrain, offers views of Myanmar's Lake of No Return. The festival serves as a platform for cross-border trade and cultural exchanges, showcasing Myanmar's culture and products.
- Wildlife conflicts in Karnataka have been steadily rising over the past five years, signaling an emerging crisis that demands urgent attention. An analysis of 14 years of conflict data (2010-11 to 2023-24) highlights the growing intensity of these issues, with the Forest Department struggling due to limited resources and personnel. Forest loss has been significant, with over 11,500 acres destroyed, including 4,228 acres due to mining. The shrinking of wildlife habitats is further exacerbated by invasive plant species. This habitat destruction has led to an increase in conflicts, with key indicators like cattle kills, crop damage, and human impacts showing alarming trends. Cattle kills, which remained around 2,000 five years ago, reached over 5,000 in recent years, while crop damage has steadily risen to over 38,000 in 2023-24. Compensation paid to farmers for crop damage, amounting to Rs 31.61 crore, is considered inadequate, especially for commercial and horticultural crops. Additionally, the human toll has been rising, with more injuries, deaths, and property damage reported.
- The inaugural issue of NITI Aayog's "Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2025" report, launched in New Delhi, provides a comprehensive assessment of the fiscal health of 18 major Indian states. It is based on five key sub-indices: Quality of Expenditure, Revenue Mobilization, Fiscal Prudence, Debt Index, and Debt Sustainability. The report offers insights into state-specific challenges and areas for improvement, shedding light on the fiscal status at the sub-national level and guiding policy

reforms for sustainable economic growth. Odisha topped the ranking with a cumulative score of 67.8, followed by Chhattisgarh (55.2) and Goa (53.6), demonstrating strong fiscal health. Jharkhand showed improvement in fiscal prudence and debt sustainability, while Karnataka declined due to weaker expenditure quality and debt management. The report also highlighted interstate disparities and the need for targeted reforms, categorizing states into aspirational (Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala), front-runners (Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka), and performers (Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana).

- The Kerala Government has launched KaWaCHaM (Kerala Warnings Crisis and Hazards Management System), one of the world's fastest weather alert systems. Developed by the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) with funding from the National Disaster Management Authority and the World Bank, this system aims to unify Kerala's early warning mechanisms. KaWaCHaM integrates alerts, sirens, and global weather models to provide hazard assessments, issue alerts, and plan actions based on threat levels. It features 126 sirens and strobe lights on tall structures, pre-recorded voice messages, and audio alerts to warn communities. The system operates at the taluk level and collects data from various sources, including weather networks, social media, and the internet. Warnings cover risks like sea attacks, heavy rainfall, strong winds, and extreme heat. It also ensures that information reaches vulnerable populations, such as people with disabilities, and includes a documented shelter network capable of housing 400,000 people. The system enhances communication, rescue, and rehabilitation efforts, addressing Kerala's vulnerability to climate-related disasters.
- India's space agency, ISRO, has successfully rolled out its Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) rocket carrying the NVS-02 satellite, a crucial part of the NavIC navigation system. The launch, scheduled for January 29, 2025, from the Second Launch Pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, will place the satellite into a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit. NVS-02 is the second satellite in India's new generation of navigation satellites and aims to improve services in areas like navigation, precision agriculture, emergency services, and mobile device location. It features advanced navigation payloads operating across three frequency bands (L1, L5, and S), a precise atomic clock for accurate timekeeping, and new L1 band signals to improve global compatibility. The satellite, which weighs 2,250 kg and has a power capacity of about 3 kW, will replace the older IRNSS-1E satellite. This mission marks the eighth operational flight of GSLV with an indigenous Cryogenic stage and the 100th launch from Sriharikota.
- Recently, the Minister of Defence flagged off "SANJAY - The Battlefield Surveillance System (BSS)," an automated surveillance system designed to enhance battlefield monitoring. SANJAY integrates data from various ground and aerial sensors to ensure accuracy, eliminate duplication, and create a Common Surveillance Picture of the battlefield. It transmits this data securely over the Army Data Network and

Satellite Communication Network. Equipped with advanced sensors and utilizing cutting-edge analytics, the system can monitor vast land borders, prevent intrusions, assess situations with high accuracy, and act as a force multiplier in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR). It supports both conventional and sub-conventional operations within a Network Centric Environment and will be inducted in phases into operational Brigades, Divisions, and Corps of the Indian Army. The system has been indigenously developed in collaboration with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

- India and China have agreed to restart the annual Kailash Mansarovar Yatra from this year, marking a significant breakthrough in bilateral relations. The pilgrimage, organized by the Indian government, will take place in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. This development comes after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong in Beijing, resuming dialogue between top diplomats that was discontinued due to the military stand-off. In addition to the yatra's resumption, India and China have also agreed in principle to restart direct flights and will negotiate an updated framework for this purpose at an early date. Furthermore, the two nations will have a meeting of experts soon to discuss reviving the mechanism for sharing hydrological data on transboundary rivers
- Uttarakhand has made history by becoming the first state in India to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami launched the UCC portal, notification, and rules
- The BBMP climate action cell has announced BluGreen awards, an initiative dedicated to recognising individuals, communities, and academic institutions that are making significant contributions towards Bengaluru's climate action goals.
- Organophosphorus poisoning is suspected to have caused the deaths of 17 people in Badhaal village, Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir, between December 7, 2024, and January 19, 2025. The mysterious illness, which affected three families, puzzled health authorities, including the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). Organophosphorus compounds, commonly found in pesticides and nerve agents, can cause severe poisoning. A senior doctor stated that atropine injections, an antidote for organophosphorus poisoning, showed positive effects on hospitalized patients, though over 200 potential toxins are still being investigated. Symptoms included gastrointestinal distress, neurological issues like restlessness, altered sensorium, agitation, and sudden collapse leading to death. Preliminary investigations ruled out viral, bacterial, fungal, or zoonotic infections. A crucial Forensic Science Laboratory report from Chandigarh is expected within days. The incident, which gained national attention, led to the deployment of a high-level inter-ministerial team for further investigation.
- Former cricketer GR Vishwanath and spiritual leader Madhusudan Sai unveiled the 'One World One Family' Cup on Monday ahead of the exhibition T20 match between retired players of India and Sri Lanka on February 8 at the Saikrishnan Cricket Stadium in Muddenahalli, Chikkaballapur district. The trophy bears the

inscription 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' to reflect the event's message. Vishwanath emphasized that cricket is about winning hearts, not just scoring runs, and highlighted the humanitarian purpose of the match. Sadhguru Madhusudan Sai shared insights into the hospital and service initiatives of the 'Madhusudan Sai Global Humanitarian Trust' in India and abroad.

- The State government has extended the eligibility for the Ambedkar Sahaya Hasta Scheme, which now allows newspaper distributors aged between 16 and 70 to register online. Previously, the age limit was between 16 and 59. The scheme provides financial aid in case of accidents, ₹2 lakh compensation for death, and ₹1 lakh for serious illness or disability. The Karnataka State Newspaper Distributors' Union urged all eligible distributors to take advantage of the scheme.
- An elephant has been camera-trapped in India's easternmost tiger reserve after 12 years, fuelling conservation hopes. Officials manning the 1,985-sq. km Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh said an adult male elephant was recorded in the Kathan region of Namdapha's northwestern part.
- Bird enthusiasts recently documented the white-naped tit (*Machlolophus nuchalis*) for the first time in North Karnataka's Kappatagudda hills, identifying it by its call. This passerine bird, belonging to the tit family (Paridae), is endemic to India, with two disjunct populations—one in the northwest (Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan) and the other in the south (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu). It inhabits dry thorn scrub forests and is India's only pied (black-and-white) tit. Its glossy black upperparts extend from forehead to tail, with a distinct white patch on the lower nape and upper mantle. The cheeks and underparts are white, with a black central band running from throat to vent, and the wings feature a large white patch with black bars. Typically found in pairs or small family groups, the species is classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List due to habitat loss and fragmentation.
- Indian cricketers dominated the ICC Awards as Jasprit Bumrah was named the Men's Test Cricketer of the Year, while Smriti Mandhana secured the Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year title. Bumrah's stellar performance over the past year saw him claim 71 wickets in just 13 Test matches at an impressive average of 14.92, playing a crucial role in India's series wins against England and Bangladesh. He became only the fourth Indian bowler to take 70+ wickets in a calendar year, joining legends Kapil Dev, Anil Kumble, and R. Ashwin. Smriti Mandhana, continuing her exceptional form, amassed 747 runs in 13 ODI innings in 2024, adding another accolade to her previous ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year titles in 2018 and 2022. Expressing gratitude, both players acknowledged their teammates, coaches, and family for their support. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's Azmatullah Omarzai won the Men's ODI Cricketer of the Year award.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has released new guidelines recommending lower-sodium salt substitutes containing potassium to reduce sodium intake, which should be less than 2 grams per day. This applies to adults, excluding pregnant women, children, and individuals with kidney impairments or conditions

affecting potassium excretion. Excess salt intake forces the body to retain water, raising blood pressure and increasing the risk of cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) and strokes. With 1.9 million deaths annually linked to high sodium intake, reducing salt consumption is a proven strategy to lower risks of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) like chronic kidney disease and gastric cancer. The guidelines advise replacing table salt with sodium-reduced alternatives for home use but not for packaged or restaurant foods, urging policymakers and health professionals to promote sodium reduction. Experts highlight India's high salt consumption habits, emphasizing that making low-sodium salt widely available and affordable is a more effective strategy than targeting individuals. However, concerns remain about the potential risks for individuals with undiagnosed kidney disease using potassium-enriched salt.

- The 38th National Games commenced in Uttarakhand with a modest yet vibrant opening ceremony highlighting the state's religious heritage and biodiversity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the guest of honor, reiterated his commitment to bringing the 2036 Olympics to India. The event, held at Dehradun's Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium, saw an estimated 25,000 spectators braving the chilly weather. Modi, who also inaugurated the last two editions, arrived on a decorated golf cart with Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami before declaring the Games open. The ceremony featured the torch relay, with Uttarakhand's own Lakshya Sen handing the flame to Modi. Indian Olympic Association President P.T. Usha and Commonwealth Games Federation chief Chris Jenkins were in attendance. Around 10,000 athletes will compete in 32 disciplines across seven cities until February 14, with 450 gold, silver, and bronze medals up for grabs
- Nagoba Jatara, the eight-day holy pilgrimage event of Mesram clan Adivasi Gonds, is slated to start at Keslapur village in north Telangana's tribal heartland of Indervelli mandal in Adilabad district.
- Scientists have detected supersonic winds traveling at 33,000 km/h on WASP-127b, a large gaseous exoplanet located 520 light-years away in the Milky Way. Orbiting its star every four days at just 5% of Earth's distance from the Sun, WASP-127b is scorched by stellar radiation. It is tidally locked, with one side always facing the star (day side) and the other in perpetual darkness (night side). With an atmosphere around 1,127°C, its polar regions are relatively cooler. Though 30% larger than Jupiter, it is only 16% of Jupiter's mass, making it one of the puffiest planets observed. Composed mainly of hydrogen and helium, its atmosphere also contains carbon monoxide and water. As a gas giant, it lacks a solid surface. The equatorial jet stream on WASP-127b is the fastest ever recorded on any known planet.
- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has launched the upgraded Certificate of Origin (eCoO) 2.0 System to streamline the certification process for exporters and improve trade efficiency. This new system introduces features like multi-user access under a single Importer Exporter Code (IEC) and Aadhaar-based e-signing, in addition to digital signature tokens, offering greater flexibility. Exporters can access an integrated dashboard for eCoO services, Free Trade

Agreement (FTA) information, and trade event updates. The platform also allows for the easy online correction of previously issued certificates. Processing over 7,000 eCoOs daily, the system connects 125 issuing agencies, including national and regional chambers of commerce. The electronic filing of Non-Preferential Certificates of Origin is now mandatory via the eCoO 2.0 platform, available on the DGFT website. The system was developed by DGFT and the Regional & Multilateral Trade Relations (RMTR) Division of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

- A 25-foot tall bronze statue of Goddess Bhuvaneshwari, named 'Nadadevi Bhuvaneshwari', was unveiled at the west entrance of Vidhana Soudha to commemorate Karnataka Suvarna Mahotsava. The statue is designed with artistic styles from the Chalukya, Kadamba, and Hoysala dynasties and features symbols like the Hoysala emblem, Vaijayanti garland, Kanthihara necklace, and the mythical Ganda Bherunda bird. Behind the statue, the Karnataka flag and a relief sculpture will be placed, while the front will display a geographical map of Karnataka, and the rear will depict the state's seven regions. Special lighting arrangements and a viewing platform have been set up, with public viewing available throughout the day.
- The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has announced guidelines for trade license renewal for the financial year 2025-26. The Chief Commissioner, Tushar Giri Nath, issued a circular detailing the process, which emphasizes online renewals to ensure transparency. New trade licenses will not be granted to shops established after 2015 on roads less than 40 feet wide in residential zones, while businesses on wider roads will only have licenses renewed for their approved activities. Licenses will not be renewed for businesses in unauthorized locations like rooftops or parking areas. Businesses generating over 100 kg of waste daily must show proof of waste processing or disposal agreements with approved vendors. Additionally, compliance with the plastic ban and waste segregation regulations is required for renewal. Businesses can renew licenses for one to five years, with fees payable online or via bank challans at Canara Bank. The renewal process has deadlines: no penalty from February 1-28, a 25% penalty from March 1-31, and a 100% penalty for late renewals after April 1, 2025.
- Karnataka has made remarkable progress in combating tuberculosis (TB), achieving a 40% reduction in TB incidence compared to 2015. This reduction aligns with India's target of eliminating TB by 2025, five years ahead of the global Sustainable Development Goal. TB incidence has dropped from 176 cases per lakh in 2015 to 104 per lakh in 2024, and TB-related deaths have decreased from 5,115 in 2023 to 3,711 in 2024. Despite a slight dip in TB notifications, the state continues to maintain a consistent reporting trend. Challenges remain, including underreporting by private practitioners and the high prevalence of TB-HIV co-infection, but Karnataka's strategies, such as the 100-day TB case detection campaign and proactive outreach under the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP), aim to tackle these issues. The state is halfway toward its TB eradication

goals, which include an 80% reduction in TB incidence, a 90% reduction in TB deaths, and zero catastrophic expenditure due to TB.

- Indore and Udaipur have been recognized as Wetland Accredited Cities under the Ramsar Convention, joining 31 other cities globally. This recognition highlights India's commitment to balancing urban growth with nature conservation. Indore's contributions include Sirpur Lake, a Ramsar site, and efforts to develop it into a bird sanctuary. Udaipur, known as the "City of Lakes," has five major wetlands, which are vital for heritage, climate stability, and protection against extreme weather. The Ramsar Convention, to which India has been a signatory since 1982, has seen increased site designations, especially after 2014. Wetlands provide essential ecosystem services such as flood control, water purification, and wildlife habitats, crucial for sustainable urban development and ecological balance. This recognition strengthens India's global position in wetland conservation and sets an example for other cities to follow.
- The 14th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024, released by Pratham Foundation, provides key insights into the status of education across India, with particular focus on recovery post-pandemic. Learning outcomes have largely recovered or are on track to recover, thanks to students returning to school and the emphasis on foundational skills under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. However, recovery is uneven across states and school types, with government schools showing faster improvements than private schools, although still lagging in comparison. The NIPUN Bharat Mission, designed to improve foundational literacy and numeracy, has contributed significantly to faster improvements, particularly in government schools. Despite some progress, learning outcomes remain low, and many states are yet to return to pre-pandemic reading levels. Income levels are recovering, with a rise in private school enrollment and a slight decline in government school enrollment, indicating improved rural incomes. Additionally, there are notable variations across states, with some showing significant recovery, while others still face stagnation. The report also highlights challenges in specific areas such as digital literacy, with a notable gender gap in smartphone ownership and usage, though students are generally proficient in basic digital skills. Karnataka's specific findings reveal a concerning decline in government school enrollment, alongside gaps in literacy and numeracy, particularly in comparison to private schools. Overall, ASER 2024 emphasizes the need for targeted interventions, particularly in underperforming states and regions, to ensure a more equitable recovery in the education sector.
- American long jump great Greg Bell, who had been the oldest living Olympic gold medallist in athletics, has died at the age of 94. At the 1956 Olympic Games, a 26-year-old Bell jumped 7.83m in challenging conditions to win by 15cm ahead of his compatriot John Bennett. Bell was inducted into the US National Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1988.
- Tripura has become the first state in Northeast India to leverage artificial intelligence for digital inclusion by adopting advanced text-to-speech technology

under the BHASHINI initiative. BHASHINI (BHASHa INterface for India) is an AI-driven language translation platform designed to break language barriers and enhance internet accessibility in Indian languages. Launched in July 2022 under the National Language Translation Mission (NLTM), it supports 22 scheduled Indian languages, enabling voice-based functions and content creation. It provides AI and NLP resources for MSMEs, startups, and innovators, and is implemented by the Digital India BHASHINI Division under the Ministry of Electronics and IT. The platform is accessible via Android and iOS apps and includes a 'Bhasadaan' section for crowdsourced language contributions.

- A joint committee constituted by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has found that the Ghaggar River water contained from two to three times the prescribed limit of biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), making it unfit for outdoor bathing.
- Researchers at IIT-Madras have successfully extracted silicon carbide from simulated moon soil. Silicon carbide (SiC) is a synthetically produced crystalline compound of silicon and carbon, first discovered by American inventor Edward G. Acheson in 1891. It is the hardest non-oxide ceramic, known for its excellent thermal conductivity, low thermal expansion, superior mechanical properties, and resistance to wear and oxidation. Additionally, SiC functions as a semiconductor, with electrical conductivity between that of metals and insulators.
- A recent study shows that the bacterial strain *Labrys portucalensis* F11 (F11) can breakdown the strong carbon-fluorine bonds in polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) or forever chemicals.
- India's biodiversity-rich coastline faces a rising threat from Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)—excessive algae growth triggered by environmental conditions like warm temperatures and nutrient runoff from fertilizers or sewage. While algal blooms occur in fresh, marine, and brackish waters and are often beneficial as a food source, some, caused by cyanobacteria, dinoflagellates, and diatoms, can harm ecosystems and human health. HABs become visible in shades of green, blue-green, red, or brown, posing risks to aquatic life and water quality.
- As per the Asian Waterbird Census 2025, a record 39,725 birds from 106 species were sighted in the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary and adjoining wetlands. The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), initiated in 1987, is a citizen-science program supporting wetland and waterbird conservation worldwide. Conducted annually as part of the International Waterbird Census (IWC) coordinated by Wetlands International, it monitors waterbird populations across Asia, Southeast Asia, Australasia, and covers the East Asian–Australasian and Central Asian Flyways. In India, it is organized by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) every January.
- A massive landslide in October 2023 sent 14.7 million cubic meters of frozen sediment—enough to fill 10 football fields—into Sikkim's South Lhonak Lake, triggering a tsunami-like wave and releasing water equivalent to 20,000 Olympic swimming pools downstream, according to an international team of scientists led by IIT-Bhubaneswar's Ashim Sattar. Published in *Science*, the study highlights the

inadequacy of current glacial-lake outburst flood (GLOF) models and stresses the need for early warning systems in vulnerable Himalayan regions. The flood, caused by intense rainfall on October 3, destroyed the 1,200-MW Teesta-III hydropower dam, killed 55 people, left 74 missing, and damaged nearly 26,000 buildings—around 17,000 in Bangladesh—along with over 50 bridges. Researchers from IISc, IITs, Indian universities, and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police used satellite imagery, seismic and weather data, field observations, and computer simulations to reconstruct the disaster, revealing that the landslide had been showing signs of displacement since 2016. The collapse generated a 20-meter-high wave that breached the lake’s natural barriers, carrying 270 million cubic meters of debris into the Teesta river valley, with precise measurements capturing the exact timing of the flood.

- Two young Indian Navy officers, Lieutenant Commander Dilna K and Lieutenant Commander Roopa A, crossed Point Nemo, the most remote location on Earth, in the southern Pacific as part of their circumnavigation of the globe on INSV Tarini. Located 2,688 km from the nearest landmass, Point Nemo is renowned for its extreme isolation, often with the closest human presence being aboard the International Space Station. The officers successfully passed through the point at 0030 hours on January 30 while sailing from Lyttelton, New Zealand, to Port Stanley, Falkland Islands, during the third leg of Navika Sagar Parikrama II. They collected water samples from the area for analysis by scientists at the National Institute of Oceanography, Goa, contributing to global oceanographic research. Point Nemo, known as the oceanic pole of inaccessibility, also serves as a spacecraft cemetery where defunct satellites and space stations are directed to re-enter Earth’s atmosphere. Since a Spanish research vessel, Hespérides, first sailed through the point in 1999, few vessels have passed it, and INSV Tarini navigated purely on sails. Lt Cdrs Dilna and Roopa embarked on their journey from Goa on October 2, braving harsh conditions, including the 'Roaring Forties', 'Furious Fifties', and 'Screaming Sixties'—strong westerly winds—alone for over eight months before their scheduled return in May 2025. This marks the Indian Navy’s second all-women circumnavigation attempt, following the first by a six-member crew aboard the same sailboat seven years ago.
- Indian Air Force officer Shubhanshu Shukla is set to make history as the first Indian astronaut to travel to the International Space Station (ISS) as the pilot of Axiom Mission 4, scheduled for launch aboard a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft no earlier than spring 2025. This joint effort between NASA and ISRO marks India's first crewed ISS mission. Former NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson will command the mission, with Shukla as the pilot, alongside mission specialists Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski of Poland and Tibor Kapu of Hungary. Expressing excitement about experiencing microgravity, Shukla emphasized his desire to share the journey with fellow Indians by capturing and sharing images and videos from space. He sees the mission as a collective achievement for India's 1.4 billion people and plans to carry items representing different parts of the country, even hoping to serve Indian food

aboard the ISS. Rakesh Sharma was the first Indian in space, traveling aboard the Soviet Soyuz T-11 mission in 1984.

- The Western Railway is installing AI-powered intrusion detection devices along railway tracks passing through the Gir sanctuary to prevent lion collisions. This initiative is part of broader efforts to protect Asiatic lions, as railway officials reported that 135 lions were saved from accidents by loco pilots in the past year. However, at least a dozen lions have died in train accidents over the past two years, prompting the Gujarat High Court to intervene, leading to a reduction in train speeds from 80 kmph to 40 kmph at night. This speed restriction applies to the Pipavav-Surendranagar railway line, managed by Pipavav Railway Corporation, and the Mahua-Rajula line under the Bhavnagar division of Western Railway. To further enhance safety, the Bhavnagar division recently issued tenders worth Rs 8.77 crore for installing an "Intrusion Detection System" in Damnagar, Pipavav, Rajula, and Mahua, where lion sightings are frequent. Officials stated that these devices will help loco pilots detect lion movements along the tracks and take preventive measures. Due to a rise in their population from 523 in 2015 to 674 in 2020, Asiatic lions, once restricted to Gir National Park, have been moving into nearby forests and human settlements across the Saurashtra region.
- The Karnataka Cabinet has approved key policies, including the Karnataka Micro Finance (Prevention of Coercive and Inhuman Actions) Bill, aimed at protecting borrowers from harassment by microfinance companies. The bill proposes penalties for coercive practices, such as imprisonment and fines, while mandating the registration of microfinance institutions and prohibiting them from using security in loans. Additionally, the New PPP Policy for Asset Monetization has been introduced, with the goal of generating revenue by monetizing government assets across 15 sectors. This policy will focus on public-private partnerships for infrastructure projects, offering government land at concessional rates to encourage private sector participation. The Cabinet also approved projects like the Greater Bengaluru Integrated Townships to address urban congestion and initiatives such as the Ugrappa Committee Report to prevent exploitation of women and children.
- In Karnataka, the overall prevalence of leprosy has slightly increased from 0.31% in 2022-2023 to 0.33% in 2023-2024, while the national average stands at 0.6%. Certain districts, such as Koppal, Vijayanagara, and Ballari, have higher rates than the national average, with Koppal having the highest at 0.78%. In contrast, districts like Hassan and Chikkamagaluru have the lowest prevalence rates, with values of 0.04% and 0.07%, respectively. The rate of Grade II deformities has risen steadily from 2.5% in 2019-2020 to 3.64% in 2023-2024. In terms of multibacillary (MB) leprosy cases, there has been a slight decrease in their percentage among new cases, from 71% in 2019-2020 to 78% in 2023-2024, which is still higher than the national average of 60.88%. Leprosy control efforts emphasize early detection and treatment, with Multi-Drug Treatment (MDT) being provided free of charge at public health facilities. The Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC) is

conducted annually to raise awareness about leprosy. Migrants from states like Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal contribute to a higher incidence of the disease, with treatment discontinuation and drug resistance being significant concerns. Symptoms include light, white, or copper-colored skin patches, loss of sensation, and absence of sweat in affected areas, particularly on the back and thighs.

- The Union Cabinet has approved the National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM), aimed at strengthening India's critical minerals value chain. The mission focuses on developing a technological, regulatory, and financial ecosystem to ensure the availability of critical minerals, both domestically and through international sourcing. This initiative will help boost access to raw materials for sectors like clean energy, electronics, defense, and agriculture. With a budget of Rs 16,300 crore over seven years, the mission includes provisions for exploration, foreign sourcing, and risk coverage. It aims to complete 1,200 exploration projects and auction over 100 mineral blocks by 2030-31. Additionally, it targets acquiring 50 foreign mineral mines, recycling 400 kt of material, and establishing mineral processing parks and recycling guidelines. Partnerships with resource-rich countries and integration into trade agreements will also be a key feature of the mission.
- The Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme (MCGS-MSMEs), approved by the Central Government, aims to guarantee loans for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to help them purchase equipment or machinery. The National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) will provide a guarantee coverage of 60% to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs). MSMEs eligible for the scheme must have a valid Udyam Registration Number. The loan guarantee limit is up to ₹100 crore, with a minimum project cost allocation of 75% for equipment/machinery. Repayment terms vary, with loans up to ₹50 crore having a repayment period of up to 8 years and a maximum 2-year moratorium on principal, while loans above ₹50 crore may have higher repayment schedules and moratoriums. The upfront contribution is 5% of the loan amount at the time of guarantee application. The annual guarantee fee is nil for the first year, 1.5% for the next 3 years, and then 1% thereafter. The scheme will be applicable for 4 years or until a cumulative guarantee of ₹7 lakh crore is issued, whichever comes first.
- The MSME Trade Enablement and Marketing (TEAM) program has been launched by the Ministry of MSME in partnership with the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC). This initiative is aimed at enabling small and micro enterprises (MSMEs) to join ONDC and adopt digital commerce, thereby enhancing their visibility and operational efficiency. Under the Raising and Accelerating MSME Productivity (RAMP) program, the TEAM initiative will focus on connecting MSMEs to the ONDC network, providing digital storefronts, integrated payment systems, and logistics support. With a budget of ₹277.35 crore over three years, the program is set to benefit around 5 lakh micro and small enterprises, 50% of which will be women-led. Key activities include reducing operational barriers, expanding market presence, and formalizing operations. Workshops will also be conducted across



Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities to assist MSMEs, particularly women, SC/ST-led enterprises, and MSME clusters. This program aims to enhance MSME credibility, trust, and customer reach by guiding businesses through the process of creating digital catalogs and utilizing the ONDC ecosystem.

