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Railway Recruitment Board (RRB)

# NTPC

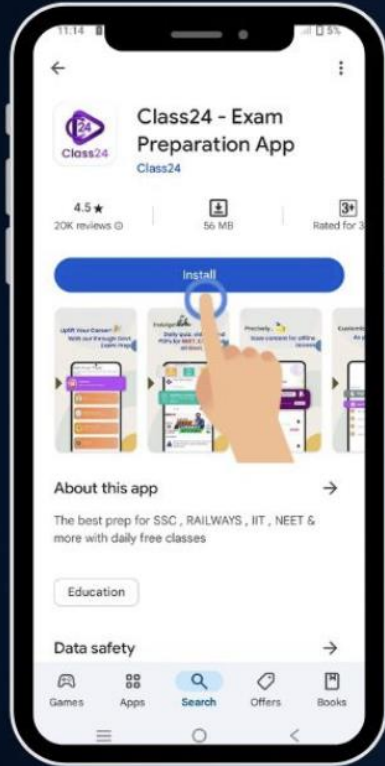
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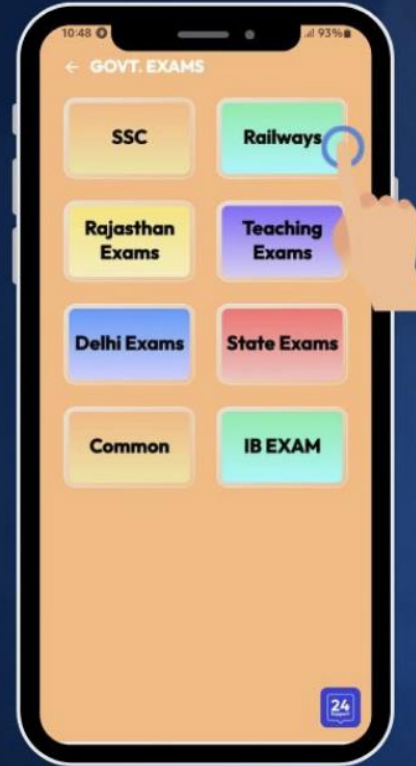
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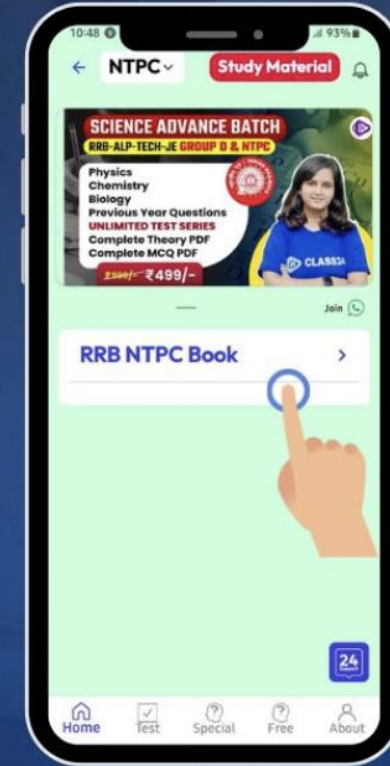
# Step 2



# Step 3



# Step 4



BELIEVE IN YOURSELF AND  
DO YOUR **KARMA** (ACTION),  
SUCCESS WILL FOLLOW YOU  
AUTOMATICALLY.

DOING KARMA  
IS IN OUR HANDS ONLY,  
**RESULT**  
IS NOT IN OUR HANDS.

– LORD KRISHNA

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**BROAD STROKES**  
**Who is the Indian art collector?**  
The 2025 India Art Fair saw buying trends evolving, and a buyer profile that is as diverse as it has ever been  
MAGAZINE PAGE 2



Congolese militia: rebels who lost their cause  
PROFILES PAGE 9

What is the cancer vaccine Russia is offering?  
FAQ PAGE 8

Sinner accepts WADA's three-month ban for doping  
SPORT PAGE 13

**INSIDE**  
**Jaishankar to meet Bangladeshi counterpart**  
External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will meet Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain on the sidelines of the eighth Indian Ocean Conference here on Sunday, sources said. He will also meet with a number of other Foreign Ministers from countries taking part. PAGE 3

**3 govt. employees dismissed in J&K over 'militant ties'**  
A special court in Bengaluru on Saturday handed over the Tamil Nadu government assets, including gold and land, confiscated from the late Jayalithaa, former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, and others in the disproportionate assets case. PAGE 3

**Manipur to build two camps for UNF cadres**  
The Manipur administration will construct two camps for 416 cadres of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the oldest armed Meitei insurgent group, which signed a peace deal with the Union Home Ministry and State government in 2023. PAGE 3

**Zelenskyy warns U.S. against desks 'behind backs'**  
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday warned the U.S. not to strike deals with Russia "behind our backs", as he urged Europe to make its voice heard. He also issued a rallying cry for Europe to take responsibility for its own security. PAGE 12

# 116 deportees arrive from U.S. in second batch

Sixty-five of those who landed in Amritsar are from Punjab; 33 from Haryana, 8 from Gujarat | Most of the deportees aged between 18 and 30, say sources; another aircraft expected today | First flight after the crack down began in U.S. on illegal immigrants had brought in 104 people

**Vikas Vasudeva**  
CHANDIGARH  
A United States aircraft carrying 116 undocumented Indian migrants deported from the U.S. landed at the Amritsar International Airport on Saturday night. This was the second group of Indian citizens to be sent back from the U.S. after President Donald Trump started a crackdown on illegal immigrants. Sources said that most of the deportees are aged between 18 and 30. Some of their family members arrived at the airport to receive them. Another flight carrying more deportees is expected on Sunday. Earlier in the day, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann slammed the Centre over the U.S. planes with illegal Indian immigrants landing at the Amritsar airport, and asked the Union government not to make the holy city a "deportation centre". The Bharatiya Janata Party hit back at the Chief Minister and accused him of playing politics over the deportations. A large number of people, especially youth from Punjab, travel abroad in hope of a better life.



Unfolding tragedy: Relatives of deportees wait outside the airport in Amritsar on Saturday. PTI

**Deportation fuels political slugfest in Punjab**  
CHANDIGARH With a U.S. aircraft carrying a fresh batch of deported Indians arriving in Amritsar on Saturday, the politics over the issue is heating up in Punjab. As Indian citizens continue to be deported from the U.S. with the AAP, Congress, and the BJP involved in a heated exchange of words over the matter. PAGE 4

# Amid Kumbh rush, 15 feared dead in stampede at New Delhi railway station



Pilgrims' plight: Passengers crowded to board a train for Maha Kumbh from the New Delhi railway station on Saturday. PTI

**Alaha Datta**  
NEW DELHI  
Fifteen people, including three children, were feared dead in a stampede at the New Delhi railway station on Saturday night. Giving the figure, the Chief Casualty Medical Officer of LNP Hospital said 11 people were injured. Speaking to The Hindu, Delhi Fire Services chief Atul Garg said the cause of the stampede was unclear, but initial reports suggested that cancellation of two trains to Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh led to chaos on two platforms around 9:55 p.m., prompting an emergency response with the despatch of rescue teams and four fire tenders. After the incident, the Railway, operated four special trains to Prayagraj to clear the "unprecedented" rush, a Ministry official said. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh termed the incident "devastating", "I am extremely pained by the loss of lives due to stampede on railway platform. In this hour of grief, my thoughts are with the bereaved families," he said in a post on X. Delhi Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena consoled the loss of lives. The L-G said he had spoken to the Chief Secretary and the Police Commissioner and asked them to take charge of relief measures. "All hospitals are in readiness to address the exigencies," he posted on X. Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the situation at the station was under control. "Injured taken to hospital. Special trains

being run to evacuate sudden rush," his post read. Eyewitnesses said owing to the huge rush at the station, several passengers fainted because of suffocation. In an official statement, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (railways) said many people were present on platform number 14 when the Prayagraj Express train was standing at the platform. The Swatantra Sena-Chief Secretary and Bhubaneswar Rajdhani Express were delayed and the passengers were also present on platform numbers 12, 13 and 14, he said. "Every hour, 1,500 general tickets were sold by the Railways due to which the station got overcrowded and became uncontrolled. There was a stampede at platform no. 14 and near escalator near platform no. 16," the DCP said. One of the passengers, Dharmendra Singh, said, "I was going to Prayagraj but many trains were running late or were cancelled. The station was overcrowded. There were far more people than I have ever seen at this station. In front of me, six or seven women were taken away on stretchers." Another passenger, Pramod Chaurasia, said, "I had a sleeper-class ticket for Prayagraj but even though I had with confirmed tickets could not board the train. There was too much pushing and jostling." (With PTI inputs)

**U.P., ACCIDENT KILLS 10**  
PAGE 5

# Truce holds as Hamas frees 3, Israel releases 369 prisoners

**Associated Press**  
KHAN YOUNIS  
Hamas-led militants released three male Israeli hostages on Saturday and Israeli forces freed 369 prisoners in return, in the latest indication that a fragile ceasefire that had tattered in recent days is holding. Militants in the southern Gaza Strip paraded the three hostages — Irit Horn, 46, a dual citizen of Israel and Argentina; American-Israeli Sagol Deled, 36; and Russian-Israeli Alexander (Sasi) Trotskiy, 29 — before a crowd before releasing them. They were transported to Israel to be reunited with their families and to receive medical evaluation. All three of them had been abducted from kibbutz Nir Oz, a community that was hit in the October 7, 2023, attack that ignited the war. They appeared pale and worn but seemed in better physical condition than the three men released last Saturday. A tense dispute had surrounded the four-week-old truce in recent days and threatened to renew the fighting. U.S. President Donald Trump's controversial proposal to remove more than two million Palestinians from Gaza has cast even more doubt on the future of the ceasefire. But Hamas said on Thursday it would move ahead with the release of more hostages after talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators had pledged to "remove all barriers to ensure Israel would allow more tents, medical supplies and other essentials into Gaza."

# General Manager of Mumbai bank held for ₹122-crore fraud



People gather outside a New India Cooperative Bank branch in Mumbai on Saturday after the RBI imposed restrictions. PTI

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI  
The Mumbai Police on Saturday arrested Hitesh Mehta, General Manager and Head of Accounts of the New India Cooperative Bank, for allegedly misappropriating ₹122 crore from the bank, officials said. Mr. Mehta was arrested by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the city police after being questioned for more than three hours, an official said. He will be produced before a local court on Sunday, the police official added. During the investigation, it came to light that the misappropriation of funds had started soon after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. The accused allegedly embezzled ₹122 crore from the safe in Prabhadevi while ₹10 crore was siphoned off from the Goregaon branch, police officials said. According to the information on its website, the New India Cooperative Bank was founded in 1968, modelled on the lines of the German Labour Bank. It was initially called the Bombay Labour Cooperative Bank, and was started for the support of trade unionist leader and former Defence Minister George Fernandes. The bank website also mentions Ranjit Bhambhani, a noted criminal lawyer, trade unionist and an MLA, as being a co-founder. (With PTI inputs)

PAGE 13



## Three Kashmir govt. employees dismissed over 'militant links'

The Hindu Bureau  
SRINAGAR

Involving special provisions under Article 311 of the Constitution, the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) of Jammu and Kashmir, Manoj Sinha, on Saturday terminated the services of three more government employees over alleged links to militants in the Union Territory.

Firdous Ahmad Bhat, a police constable; Mohamud Ashraf Bhat, a teacher; and Nisar Ahmad Khan, an orderly in the Forest Department, lost their jobs.

The L-G's administration has terminated the services of 63 employees under provisions of Article 311 since 2020.

Opposition parties targeted Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for his failure to defend the employees and end such terminations. The ruling National Conference, in its 2024 election manifesto, had promised to review the orders. "As per the law, everyone is innocent until proven guilty. If there is evidence against them and they fail to justify themselves after being given a chance, then the action is justified. However, if

**L-G's administration has dismissed at least 63 employees under provisions of Article 311 since 2020**

they are dismissed without being heard, it goes against the principle that everyone is innocent until proven guilty," Mr. Abdullah said. The Peoples Democratic Party targeted the State government for its failure to safeguard the jobs of employees.

Arbitrary and summary dismissals of government employees has become a daily occurrence since 2019. What is perplexing is that it continues unabated despite an elected government in power that had promised to put an end to such practices once in office. People had pinned their hopes on the new government, expecting at least some relief to review the orders. "As per the law, everyone is innocent until proven guilty. If there is evidence against them and they fail to justify themselves after being given a chance, then the action is justified. However, if

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## Amidst strained ties, Jaishankar to meet Bangladeshi counterpart

The meeting on the sidelines of the Indian Ocean Conference to be held at Muscat is particularly significant as it comes at a time of tensions between the Modi government and the caretaker government in Dhaka led by Muhammad Yunus

Subhasini Halder  
MUSCAT

Amid troubled ties with Bangladesh, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will meet Bangladeshi Foreign Affairs Adviser Toshihiko Hosain on the sidelines of the eighth Indian Ocean Conference here on Sunday, sources said.

Mr. Jaishankar, who will inaugurate the regional conference, co-hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Omani government, and organised by the India Foundation, will also meet with a number of other Foreign Ministers from 27 countries that are taking part. The Foreign Ministers of Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Nepal and Bangladesh will be attending the annual conference.

In a sign of the government's normalisation process of ties with China after the October agreement between the militaries at the Line of Actual Control, Mr. Jaishankar will address the inaugural session of the Indian Ocean Conference on Sunday along with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi and Mr. Balakrishnan.



Regional Inauguration: Last year, S. Jaishankar had addressed the Indian Ocean Conference that was held in Perth, Australia. FILE PHOTO

the first time an official from the country has been invited since the conference was held in 2019. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan and Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong will address the inauguration as it comes amidst spiralling ties between the Modi government and the caretaker government in Dhaka led by Muhammad Yunus, said sources.

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While India has expressed alarm over the attacks on minorities after the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, as well as the treatment of Indian businessmen by the new government, the Yunus government has demanded that India ensure that Ms. Hasina, who has taken shelter in Delhi, does not make political statements or address public rallies of the Awami League via video conference. A number of other irritants, over border security, water sharing and flood management, trade issues, the release of radicals and those accused on terror charges in Bangladesh have also been discussed between both sides.

Mr. Jaishankar's meeting with the Bangladeshi Foreign Affairs Adviser is particularly significant as it comes amidst spiralling ties between the Modi government and the caretaker government in Dhaka led by Muhammad Yunus, said sources.

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ence in Bangkok on April 2-4.

Mr. Jaishankar will also have a chance to interact with other counterparts from the region, and tackle issues testing ties with them.

Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Affairs Vijitha Herath will be in Muscat days after the Adani Group pulled out of a renewable energy contract after the Dissanayake government ordered a second review against it.

Maldives' Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel is expected to discuss talks for a Free Trade Agreement with India, after the Muzaffar government has already operationalized an FTA with China.

Nepal's Foreign Minister Arzu Deuba is expected to discuss dates for a bilateral visit by Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, who was sworn in in July last year, but has not so far received an invitation.

## CBI seizes cash, gold after searches in cyber case

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has searched 11 locations in Delhi and neighbouring Haryana in connection with a cybercrime case, resulting in the seizure of ₹1.08 crore and 18,000 in cash, and 252 grams of gold.

The operation, carried out on Friday, was a follow-up to the case registered under Section 420B read with Section 420 of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code and Section 66D of the Information Technology Act.

It is alleged the suspects were engaged in illegal activities by impersonating government officials and committing crypto fraud using computer resources and crypto devices. Officials were found to be cheating people in India and abroad by offering fake technical support consultations, and inducing them to transfer money as cryptocurrency.

The funds were traced through multiple crypto wallets and converted into cash. The CBI has already filed a chargesheet against three accused.

## Manipur to build two camps for surrendered cadres of UNLF

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

The Manipur administration will construct two camps at two locations at a cost of ₹1 crore for 400 cadres of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the oldest armed Meitei insurgent group, which signed a peace agreement with the Union Home Ministry and State government on November 29, 2023.

Nearly 80 cadres of the Pambel faction of UNLF surrendered in 2023 with 31 weapons. A few more cadres laid down arms subsequently.

The group advocates for the secession of Manipur and largely operates from Myanmar.

**Ethnic violence**  
The surrender came months after ethnic violence between the upcoming



Peace deal: The UNLF, the Centre, and the Manipur government signed a peace agreement in November 2023. FILE PHOTO

and Meitei people erupted in the State on May 3, 2023.

The Manipur Police has identified two more tenders on February 12 for "construction of pre-fabricated infra-structure for 285 cadres at Kaching and an estimated cost of ₹3.45 crore.

The second tender is for Kaching district for the accommodation of UNLF cadres (Under Peace Agreement). The first tender is for the construction of pre-fabricated infra-structure for 285 cadres at Kaching at an estimated cost of ₹3.45 crore.

## Govt. begins survey to set up daycare cancer centres

Bindu Shalan Peravaranan  
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry has begun a nationwide survey to assess gaps in district hospitals which will now facilitate the upcoming daycare cancer centres.

In her recent Budget speech, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced that Centre would set up such facilities in all district hospitals in three years. In a senior Health Ministry official said 200 centres will be set up in 2025-26. This will bring essential cancer services closer to home, particularly for those in underserved rural areas. It will also focus on providing essential cancer services and conducting cancer prevention and awareness programmes.

He added that the aim is to increase access to quality cancer care for more people and reduce the burden on tertiary care centres, allowing them to focus on more complex cases by offering essential services at the district level.

The total estimated expenditure in the next three years for the project is ₹3,200 crore," he added. Data from the Health Ministry shows that India is experiencing a rapid rise in cancer cases, largely due to lifestyle changes, tobacco use, poor dietary habits, and inadequate physical activity. According to estimates, approximately 8,00,000 new cancer cases are expected each year, with tobacco-related cancers accounting for as much as 35% to 50% of all cancer cases, and 17% in women.

the construction of semi-pucca buildings for 16 ranking cadres at a cost of ₹7.72 crore."

The construction cost will be borne out of the security-related expenditure (SRE), which is reimbursed by the Home Ministry.

A Manipur Police officer said that the UNLF cadres were at present staying at a temporary accommodation set up at Vathibi Lokoin on Thoubal-Kaching district border and Nongshun in Imphal East, adding that there were space constraints.

According to the ground rules signed by the UNLF, the group will honour the "Agreement". The first tender is for the construction of pre-fabricated infra-structure for 285 cadres at Kaching at an estimated cost of ₹3.45 crore.

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Dinakar Peri  
NEW DELHI

India and the U.S. are scaling up cooperation in underwater domain awareness (UDA) with a new initiative, the Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA), announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Washington.

The alliance, aimed at scaling up industry partnerships and production of the Indo-Pacific region, has identified a range of UDA technologies for co-production in India, official sources said.

Maritime domain awareness (MDA) is a bilateral level and among the Quad group of India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S., especially given the rapid expansion of the Chinese Navy and its increasing presence in the Indian Ocean region.

The Kerala Nursing and Midwifery Council (KNMC) has decided to debar five senior nursing students of the Government College of Nursing in Kottayam who have been accused of torturing their juniors.

The organisation conveyed its decision to the Health Department and the State government on Saturday. According to the council, the names of the accused will be removed from its registry and hence they would be unable to continue their nursing studies in the State.

Those who engage in such behaviour pose a serious threat to the nursing profession which requires treating people with humanity. Those who commit such acts do not deserve to be in the profession," said an official from the KNMC.

The Directorate of Medical Education has placed Principal Sulekha and the Assistant Professor and in-

## Kerala nursing council to debar senior students involved in ragging

The Hindu Bureau  
KOTTAYAM

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A view of the Government College of Nursing in Kottayam where juniors were subjected to brutal ragging by seniors. WISNU PRATHAP

charge of the hostel Ajeesh P. Mani under suspension pending an investigation by the housekeeper-cum-security person of the boys' hostel has been ordered to be removed immediately. These actions follow a preliminary inquiry conducted by the DME on the direction of Health Minister Veeva George. The report confirmed lapses on the part of these officials in report-

ing and preventing the ragging incidents.

Meanwhile, four more junior students came forward with complaints against ragging. During inspection at the boys' hostel and on the college premises, the police recovered weapons, including a knife and compass, allegedly used by the accused against the junior students.

According to the victim's statement, the ragging incident on December 13, captured on a mobile phone, was triggered by their failure to contribute to a birthday celebration.

The police arrested five senior students on February 12 in connection with the case. Police registered a case after three first-year students lodged a complaint alleging that ragging had been going on for nearly three months at the institute.

## India, U.S. up dealings in underwater domain awareness

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Maritime domain awareness (MDA) is a bilateral level and among the Quad group of India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S., especially given the rapid expansion of the Chinese Navy and its increasing presence in the Indian Ocean region.

few co-production and co-development opportunities for UDA technologies, sources in the know said. "India is the very first country with which the U.S. defence industry has offered to work with on these sensitive technologies," a source said.

The technologies include the Sea Picket autonomous surveillance system with sonar acoustic array produced by Thyair Mahan; Wave Glider unmanned surface vehicle systems; low-frequency active-towed sonar; multi-static active (MSA) sonobuoys; large diameter autonomous underwater vehicles produced by Arundel; and Triton autonomous underwater and surface vehicle produced by Ocean Aero.

The joint statement issued by the talks between Mr. Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump said the leaders pledged to accelerate defence technology cooperation across space, air defence, missile,

partnership with the defence public sector undertaking Bharat Dynamics Ltd.

**Breaking new ground**  
According to the joint statement, the leaders pledged to elevate military cooperation across all domains — air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace — through enhanced training, exercises, and operations, incorporating the latest technologies.

In this regard, they committed to break new ground to support and sustain the overseas deployment of the U.S. and Indian militaries in the Indo-Pacific region, including enhanced logistics and intelligence sharing, as well as force mobility for joint humanitarian and disaster relief operations, along with other exchanges and security cooperation engagements.

At the Quad level, the statement said that India looks to host the group's

maritime and undersea technologies, with the U.S. announcing a review of its policy on release of the U.S. and Indian militaries in the Indo-Pacific region, including enhanced logistics and intelligence sharing, as well as force mobility for joint humanitarian and disaster relief operations, along with other exchanges and security cooperation engagements.

For the MSA sonobuoys, a high-end technology used to track and locate submarines in the deep seas and oceans, India and the U.S. had announced co-development with the U.S. company Boeing's Liquid Robotics and Sugar Defence Engineering for the co-production of 60

platforms in India. Similarly, for the low-frequency active-towed sonar, discussions are on between Mr. Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump said the leaders pledged to accelerate defence technology cooperation across space, air defence, missile,

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# India, U.S. up dealings in underwater domain awareness

**Dinakar Peri**  
NEW DELHI

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The alliance, aimed at scaling up industry partnerships and production in the Indo-Pacific region, has identified a range of UDA technologies for co-production in India, official sources said.

Maritime domain awareness and increasingly, underwater domain awareness have become key focus areas both at a bilateral level and among the Quad group of India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S., especially given the rapid expansion of the Chinese Navy and its increasing presence in the Indian Ocean region.

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**High flyer:** The MQ-9B Sea Guardian has a maximum flying altitude of 40,000 feet. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

maritime and undersea technologies, with the U.S. announcing a review of its policy on releasing fifth-generation fighters and undersea systems to India.

Discussions are on between the U.S. companies and potential Indian partners regarding the identified technologies, sources said.

For the Wave Glider unmanned surface vehicle systems, negotiations are on between Boeing's Liquid Robotics and Sagar Defence Engineering for the co-production of 60

platforms in India. Similarly, for the low-frequency active-towed sonar, discussions are on with L3 Harris for co-development with Bharat Electronics Ltd.

For the MSA sonobuoys, a high-end technology which can be used to track submarines in the deep seas and oceans, India and the U.S. had announced a "first-of-its-kind partnership on co-production" in January.

As part of this, Ultra Maritime's sonobuoys will be co-produced in India in

partnership with the defence public sector undertaking Bharat Dynamics Ltd.

## Breaking new ground

According to the joint statement, the leaders also pledged to elevate military cooperation across all domains – air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace – through enhanced training, exercises, and operations, incorporating the latest technologies.





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At the Quad level, the statement said that as India looks to host the group's





summit later this year, the leaders will activate new Quad initiatives on "shared airlift capacity" to support the civilian response to natural disasters, and "maritime patrols" to improve interoperability.





While these technologies improve UDA, various other military platforms that India has procured from the U.S. augment its anti-submarine warfare capabilities in the Indian Ocean region, as well the interoperability among Quad partners as they have commonality.

These platforms include 12 P-8Is which are already in service; 24 MH-60R multi-role helicopters being inducted; 15 MQ-9B Sea Guardian high-altitude long-endurance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles that were contracted as part of a deal for 31 MQ-9Bs last October, with deliveries to begin from January 2029; and six more P-8Is that the leaders signed off on during the discussions earlier this week.

-  India and the U.S. are increasing cooperation in Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) through the Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA).  
 भारत और अमेरिका 'स्वायत्त प्रणाली उद्योग गठबंधन' (ASIA) के माध्यम से पानी के नीचे डोमेन जागरूकता (UDA) में सहयोग बढ़ा रहे हैं।
-  The initiative aims to scale up industry partnerships and production in the Indo-Pacific region, focusing on advanced underwater and maritime technologies.  
 यह पहल इंडो-पैसिफिक क्षेत्र में औद्योगिक साझेदारी और उत्पादन को बढ़ाने के लिए समुद्री और पानी के नीचे की तकनीकों पर केंद्रित है



-  UDA is significant due to China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean and its maritime expansion in the Indo-Pacific.  
 चीन के हिंद महासागर और इंडो-पैसिफिक में समुद्री विस्तार के कारण UDA रणनीतिक रूप से महत्वपूर्ण है।
-  The U.S. has offered India rare co-production and co-development opportunities for advanced maritime security systems.  
 अमेरिका ने भारत को समुद्री सुरक्षा प्रणालियों के सह-उत्पादन और सह-विकास के दुर्लभ अवसर प्रदान किए हैं।






-  The technologies include autonomous surveillance systems, low-frequency towed sonar, multi-static sonobuoys, and unmanned underwater vehicles.  
 इस सहयोग में स्वायत्त निगरानी प्रणालियाँ, कम-आवृत्ति टो सोनार, बहु-स्थैतिक सोनार बाँय और मानव रहित पानी के नीचे वाहन शामिल हैं।
-  This partnership strengthens India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities, enhances interoperability among Quad partners, and improves maritime intelligence.  
 यह साझेदारी भारत की पनडुब्बी रोधी युद्ध क्षमताओं को मजबूत करती है, क्वाड भागीदारों के बीच इंटरऑपरेबिलिटी बढ़ाती है, और समुद्री खुफिया में सुधार करती है।

- **◆ Strategic Importance | रणनीतिक महत्व**
- **✓ Strengthening Maritime Security | समुद्री सुरक्षा को मजबूत करना**
- **India and the U.S. are enhancing defense cooperation in response to China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific.**
- **भारत और अमेरिका, चीन के बढ़ते प्रभाव के जवाब में रक्षा सहयोग बढ़ा रहे हैं।**
- **✓ Advancement in Underwater Technology | पानी के नीचे तकनीक में प्र**




- The partnership allows India access to advanced maritime surveillance and anti-submarine technologies.
- यह सहयोग भारत को उन्नत समुद्री निगरानी और पनडुब्बी रोधी तकनीकों तक पहुंच प्रदान करता है।
- ✓ QUAD & Indo-Pacific Strategy | क्वाड और इंडो-पैसिफिक रणनीति
- UDA aligns with the larger QUAD strategy to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific region.
- UDA, इंडो-पैसिफिक क्षेत्र को स्वतंत्र और खुला बनाए रखने की क्वाड रणनीति के साथ मेल खाता है।


- **Co-production of UDA technologies will strengthen India's defense manufacturing sector and technological expertise.**
- **UDA तकनीकों का सह-उत्पादन भारत के रक्षा निर्माण क्षेत्र और तकनीकी विशेषज्ञता को मजबूत करेगा।**

-  Implications for India's Defense & Security | भारत की रक्षा और सुरक्षा के लिए प्रभाव
-  Enhances India's maritime intelligence capabilities, enabling better tracking of submarines and naval threats.  
 भारत की समुद्री खफिया क्षमताओं को बढ़ाता है, जिससे पनडुब्बियाँ और नौसेना खतरों को बेहतर ढंग से ट्रैक किया जा सकता है।
-  Improves interoperability with the U.S. and QUAD allies, enhancing joint operations and security engagements.  
 अमेरिका और क्वाड सहयोगियों के साथ इंटरऑपरेबिलिटी में सुधार करता है, जिससे संयुक्त अभियानों और सुरक्षा सहयोग में वृद्धि होती है।



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-  Strengthens India's defense production sector through co-production of cutting-edge underwater technologies.

-  उन्नत जलमग्न प्रौद्योगिकियों के सह-उत्पादन के माध्यम से भारत के रक्षा उत्पादन क्षेत्र को मजबूत करता है।

-  Counters China's increasing influence in the Indo-Pacific and safeguards India's maritime borders.

-  चीन के बढ़ते प्रभाव का मुकाबला करता है और भारत की समुद्री सीमाओं की सुरक्षा करता है।

## Deportation fuels political slugfest in Punjab

With U.S. plane carrying 116 deportees, 65 of them from Punjab, arriving in Amritsar on Saturday night, Chief Minister says Centre hurting Punjabis by allowing the planes to land in the holy city; Congress says Mann failed to check human trafficking, while BJP says he is politicising the matter

Vikas Vasudeva  
CHENNAI

With a U.S. aircraft carrying a fresh batch of 116 deported undocumented Indian migrants arriving at the Amritsar International Airport on Saturday, the politics over the issue is heating up in Punjab.

As Indian citizens continue to be deported from the U.S. after President Donald Trump started a crackdown on illegal immigrants, the Aam Aadmi Party, Congress, and Bharatiya Janata Party were involved in a heated exchange of words over the matter.

On February 5, a U.S. military plane brought as many as 104 illegal immigrants, in handcuffs and chains to Amritsar, inviting sharp criticism.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann went to receive the deportees in Amritsar, where he hit out at the BJP-led government at the Centre, and accused it of resorting to "conspiracy to defame Punjab". He said the Centre was attempting to turn the holy city of Am-

ritsar into a "detention or deportees" centre by repeatedly sending planes carrying deportees.

"The Modi government was indulging in dirty tantrums by landing the planes of deportees repeatedly on this revered land with the sole motive of defaming Punjab and Punjabis... I ask the Union government, can anyone do such mischief at Vatican City, the holy city of Christianity or the city of Christ the community? If not, then why the sentiments of Punjabis are being hurt by repeatedly landing the planes carrying deportees here at Amritsar?" he said.

"It is unfortunate that under the present regime, the country is bereft of an effective foreign policy due to which the inhuman treatment is being given to deportees. What stopped the Prime Minister from raising this issue in front of Donald Trump during his meeting with him?"

Mann said the rationale behind the External Affairs Ministry's decision of resorting to "conspiracy to defame Punjab" was that there are hundreds of other airports in the country

but Amritsar has been chosen just to defame Punjab. He said that the Centre is not only hurting Punjabis but also the country's image. He said that the Centre is not only hurting Punjabis but also the country's image. He said that the Centre is not only hurting Punjabis but also the country's image.

On alert: Security personnel outside the Amritsar airport ahead of the arrival of second batch of undocumented Indian migrants from the U.S. on Saturday. PM

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The Congress, meanwhile, criticised the AAP government in Punjab, blaming it for failing to curb "human trafficking". Senior Congress leader Parag Singh Bajwa, the Leader of the Opposition in the Punjab Assembly, hit out at the Punjab Chief Minister for his "failure" to curb human trafficking and organ donation in Punjab in the past three years.

He said the Punjab Prevention of Human Smuggling Act, 2012 regulated the profession of human trafficking and curbed the illegal and fraudulent activities among the people by travel agents and those involved in organised human smuggling in Punjab.

"Can Mr. Mann, who also holds the Home portfolio, let Punjabis know how many travel agents have been booked under the same law in the past three years," he asked.

"Mr. Mann had said that

OPCC president remained vacant for several months following the party's 2024 poll debacle. Mr. Das is an experienced leader who has steered the party's electoral fortunes and organisational decline over the years, has announced a 60-km *padayatra* to Puri to seek the blessings to retake the party under the leadership of its newly appointed State chief, Bhakta Charan Das.

Mr. Das, a former Union Minister, recently took the mantle after the post of

OPCC president remained vacant for several months following the party's 2024 poll debacle. Mr. Das is an experienced leader who has steered the party's electoral fortunes and organisational decline over the years, has announced a 60-km *padayatra* to Puri to seek the blessings to retake the party under the leadership of its newly appointed State chief, Bhakta Charan Das.

Mr. Das, a former Union Minister, recently took the mantle after the post of

## Odisha Congress to embark on a 60-km *padayatra* to Puri

The Hindu Bureau  
Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC), which has witnessed a steady electoral and organisational decline over the years, has announced a 60-km *padayatra* to Puri to seek the blessings to retake the party under the leadership of its newly appointed State chief, Bhakta Charan Das.

Mr. Das, a former Union Minister, recently took the mantle after the post of

OPCC president remained vacant for several months following the party's 2024 poll debacle. Mr. Das is an experienced leader who has steered the party's electoral fortunes and organisational decline over the years, has announced a 60-km *padayatra* to Puri to seek the blessings to retake the party under the leadership of its newly appointed State chief, Bhakta Charan Das.

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## Travel advisories coming in the way of investments: Assam CM

The Hindu Bureau  
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said the threat perception prompting many countries to withdraw their citizens against travelling to Northeast India comes in the way of attracting foreign investments.

He said foreign embassies were being told to treat Assam in isolation from other northeastern States "because we cannot be influenced" by what happens elsewhere in the re-

gion. The ethnic conflict in Manipur has been one of the factors behind the travel advisories issued by several countries, deterring their citizens from visiting the northeast in India. Assam is one of the States clubbed together as the "northeast".

"We interceded our efforts to have travel advisories lifted and we have received inquiries from foreign embassies within three months," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to inaugurate the business summit

are not withdrawn. How can people invest in Assam if they cannot visit the State freely? Australia and Japan have taken steps to exempt travellers from through some initiatives. Assam is one of the States clubbed together as the "northeast".

"We interceded our efforts to have travel advisories lifted and we have received inquiries from foreign embassies within three months," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to inaugurate the business summit

## Amir of Qatar to pay state visit to India on Feb. 17-18

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

The Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, will pay a state visit to India on February 17 and 18, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Saturday.

He will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering various aspects of bilateral ties. His visit will give "further momentum to our growing multifaceted partnership", it said.

It will be accompanied by a high-level delegation, including Ministers, senior officials and a business delegation, the Ministry said in a statement.

This would be the second state visit of the Amir to India. He earlier visited India in March 2015, the statement said.

India and Qatar have deep-rooted historical ties of friendship, trust and mutual respect. In recent years, the ties between the two countries, including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, technology, culture and people-to-people ties, have continued to strengthen, it said.

The Indian community residing in Qatar forms the largest expatriate community of Qatar and is "appreciated for its positive contribution in the progress and development of Qatar", it said.

## Karnataka tops in Devolution Index ranking of Panchayat Raj system

Nagesh Prabhu  
BENGALURU

Karnataka tops the overall Devolution Index (DI) ranking of the Panchayat Raj system among States in India, while Kerala and Tamil Nadu are in the second and third spot, respectively.

The report titled "Status of Devolution to Panchayats in States: An Indicative Evidence-Based Ranking" (2024) released by the Centre on February 13 says that Karnataka tops the chart in the DI and in the key sub-indices of

performance across nearly all identified indicators. Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh were ranked highest in the overall pan-India DI and six key dimensions of framework, functions, finances, functionalities, capacity enhancement, and accountability. The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, prepared the report.

Overall score Karnataka ranks first with an overall index score of 72.23 followed by Kerala (70.59), Tamil Nadu (68.38), and Maharashtra (61.44). While BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh ranks fifth (60.07), Gujarat

Six key criteria

■ **Framework:** Kerala ranks first followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Haryana

■ **Functions:** Tamil Nadu tops the list followed by Karnataka, Odisha, and Rajasthan

■ **Finances:** Karnataka has secured the top place followed by Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan

■ **Accountability:** Karnataka tops followed by Kerala, Maharashtra, and Haryana

■ **Functionaries:** Gujarat ranks first followed by Tamil Nadu and Kerala

■ **Capacity building:** Telangana has secured the top place followed by Tamil Nadu and Gujarat

is ranked sixth (58.26). Bihar along with the northeastern and hilly States of Assam, Sikkim, and Uttarakhand emerged as moderate scorers but with varying regular pan-India average of 43.89.

In the "Framework" dimension, Kerala ranks first with a score of 83.56 followed by Maharashtra (74.74), Karnataka (74.43), and Haryana (73.3). This dimension includes legal requirements such as holding regular panchayat elections, reserving seats for women, SCs, and STs, and establishing State Finance Commission and State Finance Commission (SFC).

The report notes that Karnataka has secured the top place with a score of 81.33 in the indicators of 'social audit' and 'gram sabha'. Karnataka is fol-

lowed by Kerala, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh with the score of 81.88, 80.36, and 76.54, respectively. Criteria adopted in this category are accountability, functions, financials, social audit of panchayats and gram sabha, transparency and anti-corruption, panchayat assessment and decentralisation. Overall, the GP system in Karnataka has served as a vital institution for promoting local self-governance, participatory democracy, and sustainable development in rural areas, the report noted.

In the "Functionaries" dimension, Karnataka has one of the maximum number of panchayat officials working as per the sanctioned positions prescribed by the State. Gujarat tops the list with a value of 90.04, followed by Tamil Nadu (84.25), and Kerala (82.99).

Among top 10 States in the "Capacity Building" dimension, Karnataka is among the top 10 States. It is found that most States in this category are training and implementing the activities of elected representatives and officials.

Telangana has secured the first rank (86.19) followed by Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat, with the score of 84.29 and 83.96, respectively.

Notwithstanding the re-

legal immigration is not only a problem in Punjab but also a national problem. True, but, is his government not responsible for acting if any illegality has been taken place? It seems to be running away from his responsibilities. It was one of the main election planks of the AAP to stop the brain drain by motivating youngsters to explore careers in the home State," he said.

The BJP hit out at Mr. Mann, saying he was playing politics. The party's Punjab unit vice-president, Fatehjung Singh Bajwa, said that Mr. Mann was politicising the issue and detaching his own State. Instead, Mr. Mann should tell what action has been taken by his government against those who were involved in illegal immigration.

Union Minister of State for Railways and Food Processing and Textiles Singh Bittu said the Chief Minister should act against fraudulent agents who sent youth to the U.S. as "illegal donkey routes".

"Mr. Mann had said that

## Members free to air opinion, but party is paramount: Congress

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday said its members had absolute freedom of speech to express their views but the party's view was paramount.

The Indian National Congress is our country's ONLY political party where there is absolute freedom of speech as well as freedom of speech," Congress's communications chief Jaaram Ramesh said on the social media platform X.

"Members give their views on issues which are, on occasion, their own and do not reflect the opinion of the party as a collective entity. It is the party's stance that is paramount," Mr. Ramesh said.

Though he did not name any particular leader, the party's statement comes a day after senior leader and Lok Sabha member Shashi Tharoor's comments on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. and joint press conference with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Tharoor's comments Mr. Tharoor had hailed the PM's visit as "a significant development since Mr. Modi was the fourth head of government to have been given an appointment by President Trump".

His comments on Friday were at odds with the position taken by Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who has criticised the PM's visit as "a political ploy to act against fraudulent agents who sent youth to the U.S. as 'illegal donkey routes'".

Defending his position, Mr. Tharoor asserted that he could not always speak in the terms of the party's interest. He said that he had spoken in national interest and as a "responsible stakeholder in Indian democracy and an elected Member of Parliament".

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## Waqf Bill amendments for welfare of poor: Naidu, Nitish back them: Rijju

The Hindu Bureau  
SRINAGAR

Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs in Bihar, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, said the amendments proposed to the Waqf Bill were in the "interest of poor Muslims and the GP system in Bihar".

Speaking at an event titled "Budget 2025: Welfare of Poor Muslims" in Srinagar, Mr. Rijju advocated amendments to the Waqf Bill. These amendments are not aimed at taking away Waqf property but for efficient management. Why should a poor Muslim see any outside Waqf property? The Waqf GP system is spread across the country but the benefits do not reach poor Muslims," he said.

The Union Minister said Mr. Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Chief Minister of the J&K, Mr. Kumar, said the amendments proposed to the Waqf Bill were in the "interest of poor Muslims and the GP system in Bihar".

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Mr. Tharoor said he believes that India had done well in terms of getting the U.S. to the negotiating table on tariffs, while raising concerns about the manner in which illegal immigrants were treated.

He said in his 16-year-long political career, he had applauded when a government, be it a Congress government or some other party's, did the right thing.

"I have been on both sides. I have criticised and praised in fairness and justice, always on the basis of specific points. We can't only speak in terms of party interest. I am not a party spokesman," he told reporters.

On Friday, welcoming the Prime Minister's visit, the Thiruvananthapuram MP had said: "The press statements by both the Prime Minister and President Trump are very encouraging. The big concerns we all had have been addressed. For example, on the question of trade and tariffs, they have decided to sit down with the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who has criticised the PM's visit as "a political ploy to act against fraudulent agents who sent youth to the U.S. as 'illegal donkey routes'".

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# Karnataka tops in Devolution Index ranking of Panchayat Raj system

**Nagesh Prabhu**

BENGALURU

Karnataka tops the overall Devolution Index (DI) ranking of the Panchayat Raj system among States in India, while Kerala and Tamil Nadu are in the second and third spot, respectively.

The report titled 'Status of Devolution to Panchayats in States - An Indicative Evidence-Based Ranking' (2024) released by the Centre on February 13 says that Karnataka tops the chart in the DI and in the key sub-indices of 'finances' and 'accountability'. Overall, the State has commendable performance across nearly all identified metrics.

States/UTs were ranked according to the overall panchayat DI and six key dimensions of framework, functions, finances, functionaries, capacity enhancement, and accountability. The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, prepared the report.

## Overall score

The report notes that Karnataka ranks first with an overall index score of 72.23 followed by Kerala (70.59), Tamil Nadu (68.38), and Maharashtra (61.44). While BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh ranks fifth (60.07), Gujarat

## Six key criteria

■ **Framework:** Kerala ranks first followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Haryana

■ **Functions:** Tamil Nadu tops the list followed by Karnataka, Odisha, and Rajasthan

■ **Finances:** Karnataka has secured the top place followed by Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan

■ **Accountability:** Karnataka tops followed by Kerala, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh

■ **Functionaries:** Gujarat ranks first followed by Tamil Nadu and Kerala

■ **Capacity building:** Telangana has secured the first spot followed by Tamil Nadu and Gujarat

is ranked sixth (58.26). Bihar along with the north-eastern and hilly States of Assam, Sikkim, and Uttarakhand emerged as moderate scorers but with values above the national average of 43.89.

In the 'Framework' dimension, Kerala ranks first with a score of 83.56 followed by Maharashtra (74.74), Karnataka (74.43), and Haryana (73.3). This dimension includes legal requirements such as holding regular panchayat elections, reserving seats for women, SCs, and STs, and establishing State Election Commission and State Finance Commission (SFC).

In the 'functions' dimension, Tamil Nadu tops with an index value of 60.24. Karnataka (57.62), Odisha (57.46), and Rajasthan (56.13) are marginally separated from each other. This criterion stipulates States to assign local functions to panchayats, ena-

bling them to act as institutions of self-government. Karnataka delegates a significant number of functions to panchayats and GPs enjoy maximum power to levy taxes and non-taxes, it said.

Under the criterion of 'Finances', Karnataka has secured the top place with a score of 70.65 followed by Kerala (62.89), Tamil Nadu (55.78), and Rajasthan (54.56). In this indicator, States have been evaluated based on the release of funds in time under the 15th Finance Commission. It is found that most States are not serious about the constitution of the SFCs and implement their recommendations.

**Accountability category** Karnataka has topped in the 'Accountability' dimension with the highest score (81.33) in the indicators of 'social audit' and 'gram sabha'. Karnataka is fol-





lowed by Kerala, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh with the score of 81.18, 80.36, and 76.07, respectively. Criteria adopted in this category are accounting and audit of panchayats, social audit of panchayats, functioning of gram sabha, transparency and anti-corruption, panchayat assessment, and incentivisation. Overall, the GP system in Karnataka has served as a vital institution for promoting local self-governance, participatory democracy, and sustainable development in rural areas, the report noted.




In the 'Functionaries' dimension, Karnataka has one of the maximum number of panchayat officials working as per the sanctioned positions prescribed by the State. Gujarat tops the list with a value of 90.94, followed by Tamil Nadu (84.25), and Kerala (82.99).








## Among top 10 States

In the 'Capacity building' dimension, Karnataka is among the top 10 States. Key indicators included in this category are training institutions, and training activities of elected representatives and officials. Telangana has secured the first rank (86.19) followed by Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat, with the score of 84.29 and 83.96, respectively.



-  Karnataka has topped the Devolution Index (DI) ranking of the Panchayati Raj system, followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu.  
 कर्नाटक ने पंचायत राज प्रणाली के विकेंद्रीकरण सूचकांक (DI) में पहला स्थान प्राप्त किया, इसके बाद केरल और तमिलनाडु का स्थान रहा।
-  The report, released by the Centre, evaluates panchayats based on six key dimensions – framework, functions, finances, functionaries, accountability, and capacity building.  
 इस रिपोर्ट में पंचायतों को छह प्रमुख मानकों – ढांचा, कार्य, वित्त, कार्मिक, जवाबदेही और क्षमता निर्माण – के आधार पर मूल्यांकित किया गया है।

-  Karnataka scored 72.23 overall, ahead of Kerala (70.59), Tamil Nadu (68.38), and Maharashtra (61.44).
-  कर्नाटक को कुल 72.23 अंक मिले, जो केरल (70.59), तमिलनाडु (68.38) और महाराष्ट्र (61.44) से अधिक है।
-  The Accountability category was topped by Karnataka with a score of 81.33, followed by Kerala, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh.

-  जवाबदेही श्रेणी में कर्नाटक ने 81.33 अंकों के साथ शीर्ष स्थान प्राप्त किया, इसके बाद केरल, महाराष्ट्र और उत्तर प्रदेश रहे।
-  Under the Finances category, Karnataka ranked first, followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu.  
 वित्तीय मानकों में कर्नाटक पहले स्थान पर रहा, इसके बाद केरल और तमिलनाडु का स्थान रहा।
-  The Functionaries category was led by Gujarat, followed by Tamil Nadu and Kerala.  
 कार्मिक श्रेणी में गुजरात पहले स्थान पर रहा, इसके बाद तमिलनाडु और केरल रहे।
-  Telangana topped the Capacity Building category, followed by Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.  
 क्षमता निर्माण श्रेणी में तेलंगाना पहले स्थान पर रहा, इसके बाद तमिलनाडु और गुजरात रहे।



- **◆ Governance and Development Aspects | शासन और विकास के पहलू**
- **✓ Decentralization and Panchayati Raj | विकेंद्रीकरण और पंचायत राज**
- The Devolution Index evaluates how well states have empowered Panchayati Raj institutions.
- विकेंद्रीकरण सूचकांक यह आकलन करता है कि राज्यों ने पंचायत राज संस्थाओं को कितनी शक्ति प्रदान की है।
- **✓ Fiscal Devolution | वित्तीय विकेंद्रीकरण**
- Proper allocation of funds ensures grassroots development and efficient governance.
- उचित वित्तीय आवंटन जमीनी स्तर पर विकास और कुशल शासन को सुनिश्चित करता है।

- **✓ Social and Economic Impact | सामाजिक और आर्थिक प्रभाव**
- Strong Panchayati Raj institutions can drive rural development and inclusive growth.
- मजबूत पंचायत राज संस्थाएं ग्रामीण विकास और समावेशी वृद्धि को प्रोत्साहित कर सकती हैं।
- **✓ Role of Capacity Building | क्षमता निर्माण की भूमिका**
- Training and education for local representatives enhance decision-making and governance.
- स्थानीय प्रतिनिधियों के लिए प्रशिक्षण और शिक्षा निर्णय लेने और शासन को बेहतर बनाती है।
- **✓ Accountability and Transparency | जवाबदेही और पारदर्शिता**
- Mechanisms such as social audits, gram sabha meetings, and financial assessments are crucial.
- सामाजिक ऑडिट, ग्राम सभा बैठकें और वित्तीय मूल्यांकन जैसे तंत्र महत्वपूर्ण हैं।

## What is the cancer vaccine Russia is offering?

**Why does an mRNA-based vaccine hold promise? What have pre-clinical trials shown about its efficacy?**

**Zubeda Hamid**

**The story so far:** In December last year, Russia announced that it had developed a new, mRNA-based personalised 'vaccine' for cancer which would be available free for patients by early 2025. Media reports state that Andrey Kaprin, General Director of the Radiology Medical Research Center of the Russian Ministry of Health, spoke to Radio Rossiya about the vaccine. Reports also say that Alexander Ginzburg, Director of the Gamaleya National Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology, said the vaccine's pre-clinical trials had shown that it suppresses tumour development and potential metastases.

**What is an mRNA cancer 'vaccine'?** mRNA or messenger RNA vaccines provide genetic information that teaches the body's cells to produce an antigen (protein or other substance that triggers immune response), training the immune system to produce antibodies against it. When these antigens are detected on cancer cells, the immune system can potentially launch an attack against them.

**How do these 'vaccines' work?** An mRNA cancer 'vaccine' is a form of immunotherapy. Cancer cells often develop mechanisms to avoid being detected and destroyed by the immune system. This immune evasion mechanism has now been understood, and the idea of immunotherapy, therefore, is to target and 'teach' the immune system to find and destroy cancer cells, preventing their spread. The advantages of this treatment are that, unlike chemotherapy, only the cancer cells are killed, and the side effects are lower.

**While 'vaccines' are one form of immunotherapy, other include the use of antibodies, CAR-T cell therapy, immune checkpoint inhibitors and cancer vaccines.** In order to target and 'teach' the immune system to find and destroy cancer cells, preventing their spread, the advantages of this treatment are that, unlike chemotherapy, only the cancer cells are killed, and the side effects are lower.

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**Is Russia's the only research into a 'vaccine' for cancer?** No, it is not. Last year, the U.K.'s National Health Service launched the Cancer Vaccine Launch Pad, a trial programme, to "speed up access to mRNA personalised cancer vaccines for clinical trials for people who have been diagnosed with cancer" and "accelerate the development of cancer vaccines as a form of cancer treatment," according to its website.

**What does it portend?** Doctors stress that unlike infectious diseases, since cancer, in general, is not caused by a single organism, the use of the word 'vaccine' may be misleading. In terms of prevention of cancer, the Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine can prevent cervical cancer since over 90% cases are known to be caused by this virus, says Prasad Swaran, senior medical oncologist, Apollo Proton Cancer Centre, Chennai. Also, the Hepatitis B vaccine that is given to prevent the Hepatitis B viral infection, may have a protective role in the prevention of liver cancer, says Dr. Manickavasagam. "Patients must understand that these immunotherapy treatments are not preventive in nature," he emphasised.

**At the moment, there is very little information available about the Russian treatment being offered. Any new drug goes through multiple stages of clinical trials, a process that takes years, before it can finally reach the market. Without all of this data being available publicly, it is difficult to say what this treatment is at and how safe and effective it will be, Dr. Prasad points out.**

**While immunotherapy has shown promising results for certain cancers, it may not be suitable for all kinds of cancers or for every cancer patient. Research is ongoing, and time will tell how effective this may be, say doctors.**

## Why is a new Bill on foreigners coming?

**What are the contours of the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025? What obligations do universities, educational institutions, and hospitals have when admitting foreign nationals? How does the Bill penalise the use or supply of forged passports, visas, or other travel documents?**

**Vilaita Singh**

**The story so far:** The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is all set to introduce the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025 in the second half of the Budget session that begins on March 10. The Bill replaces all four existing legislations – The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, The Foreigners Act, 1946, and The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000 – that deal with immigration and the movement of foreigners.

**What are the significant provisions?** The Bill has six chapters comprising 35 clauses and bunches of existing laws into a single document. It clearly defines the functions of the Immigration Officer, the requirements of passport and visa, and matters relating to foreigners and their registration. Though the Bureau of Immigration (BoI) already exists, the Bill seeks to provide legal backup for immigration functions. The Immigration Officer and the BoI.

**It defines provisions relating to the obligations of universities and educational institutions, hospitals, nursing homes, and medical institutions to admit any foreigner. Earlier, foreigners were asked to register with the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO). Presently, it is mandatory for hotels and guest houses to share the passport details of foreigners with the police.**

**The Bill also has provisions relating to foreigners whose movements are restricted, the power of civil authority to control places frequented by foreigners and the provisions relating to the liability of carriers and their**

**The penalty for entering India without a passport or travel document is imprisonment for five years**

**obligations. The Bill retains the provision on the "burden of proof" to prove that a person is not a foreigner on the person.**

**What is the provision for entry and stay of foreigners?** The Bill introduces the clause – "threat to national security, sovereignty and integrity of India and relations with a foreign State" among the grounds to refuse the entry or stay of a foreigner in the country.

**The proposed law states, "... no foreigner shall be allowed to enter into or stay in India if he is found inadmissible to do so on account of threat to national security, sovereignty and integrity of India, relations with a foreign State or public health or on such other grounds as the Central Government may specify," adding that the decision of the Immigration Officer shall be final and binding. Earlier too, many foreigners and persons of Indian origin have been denied entry based on excessive stay on account of Foreigners Order, 1948, a foreigner may be denied entry if he or she is a threat to public safety, if the foreigner carries an infection or is affected by mental illness, if the passport or visa is forged, false or has been used for purposes previously denied entry into the country. The Bill mentions the power of the Centre to issue orders for the removal of foreigners to delegate and exempt. Presently, Section 3 of the Foreigners Act empowers the Central government to prohibit, regulate or restrict the entry of foreigners into India or, their exit or stay. Section 5 of the Passport Act 1920 also has the provision for the removal of a foreigner who has entered without documents or a visa.**

**What are the penal provisions in the Bill?** The penalty for entering India without a passport or travel document in the proposed legislation is imprisonment for five years or a fine up to ₹5 lakh or both. For carrying documents or visas shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term not less than two years, but may extend to seven years, and a fine up to ₹1 lakh, but which may extend to ₹10 lakh, the Bill proposes.

**Using or supplying forged or fraudulently obtained passport or other travel documents or visas shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term not less than two years, but may extend to seven years, and a fine up to ₹1 lakh, but which may extend to ₹10 lakh, the Bill proposes.**

**Overstaying beyond the visa limit shall be punishable by three years and a fine up to ₹3 lakh.**

**Does the Bill allow States to detect and deport undocumented migrants?** Yes. The Ministry of Home Affairs informed the Parliament High Court last year since the Central Government does not maintain a



**Identify measures:** The MHA has asked States to constitute two committees to identify foreigners who have stayed beyond the visa period. FILE PHOTO

## When can President's Rule be imposed?

**What are the conditions? What happened in the case of Manipur, and what led to the crisis? Why has the Assembly been kept in suspended animation, and what are the implications? What does the Constitution say? What have the courts ruled? What did the Bommai judgment signal?**

**Priscilla Jebaraj**

**The story so far:** Our days after Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh resigned, the State was put under President's Rule on February 13. Though the ruling BJP still holds a majority in the Manipur Assembly, the party was unable to find a consensus Chief Minister candidate. The State has also been wracked by ethnic violence since May 2023, and Mr. Singh faced criticism for his handling of the conflict from many sides, including from within his own party. This is the 11th time that President's Rule has been imposed in Manipur, the highest in any State.

**What is President's Rule?** President's Rule is a provision under Article 356 to be imposed in case of the failure of the constitutional machinery in a State. In such situations, based on a report by the State's Governor or other inputs, the President can issue a Proclamation taking over the functions of the State's government and Governor – effectively transferring them to the Union government – and transferring the powers of the State Assembly to Parliament. The President cannot, however, exercise any of the powers vested in a High Court. The President's proclamation must be laid before Parliament,

**Since 2014, President's Rule has been imposed 11 times, including four times in J&K**

**and will expire in two months unless both Houses ratify it. It may be renewed by Parliament every six months, for a maximum period of three years. After the first year, renewal can take place under certain conditions, of emergency being declared in the State or the State, or the Election Commission declaring that State elections cannot be held. Article 356 does not list the various specific circumstances under which President's Rule can be imposed, leaving it to the discretion of the President (and the Union Council of Ministers advising her) to satisfy herself that "a situation has arisen in which the government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the Provisions of this Constitution." A comprehensive assessment of President's Rule published by the Lok Sabha Secretariat in 2016 listed situations in which it has been imposed, apart from military and law and order: defections by MLAs, break-up of coalitions, non-attendance of members, resignations of Chief Ministers, absence of legislatures in newly formed States and sub-judicial matters leading to instability. The Supreme Court's judgment in the 1994 S.R. Bommai vs Union of India case also listed the circumstances in which President's Rule could and could not be imposed, though it made it clear this was not exhaustive.**

**What are some previous instances of the imposition of President's Rule?** President's Rule has been imposed 135 times, in 53 States and Union Territories, including some that no longer exist. The first instance was in June 1951, in Punjab, when the State's Chief Minister Gopi Chand Bhargava resigned due to internal differences in the Congress party. In all, Punjab has been under central control for well over a decade. The only State which has spent more time under central control is J&K, which has had President's Rule imposed for almost 15 years (including in the Union Territory of J&K), the longest continuous stretch of more than six years each from 1990 to 1996 and from 2019 to 2024. After Manipur, the most frequent imposition of President's Rule has been 10 times in Uttar Pradesh.



**Lingering chaos:** Manipur has been wracked by ethnic violence between the Meiteis and Kuki-Zo communities since May 2023. ANI

**separate federal police force exclusively dedicated to the task of detection and deportation of foreigners staying illegally, action in this regard has been entrusted to the State police.**

**According to guidelines issued on April 24, 2014, and July 1, 2019, a foreigner can be deported after completion of the sentence/court proceedings by the State government if he/she has a valid travel document/passport and no other court case pending. In case the foreigner does not have a valid travel document, it should be obtained from the embassy of High Commission.**

**What about detention centres?** The Bill does not use the term 'detention centres'. Clause 13 says foreigners are "required to reside at a place set apart for the residence of foreigners." The Centre may regulate access to places in India where foreigners whose movements are restricted are lodged. In 2019, following a Supreme Court directive, the MHA finalised the "Detention Centre Manual" for restricting the movement of foreign nationals who are awaiting deportation due to non-possession of valid travel documents and to ensure that they are physically available at all times for expeditious repatriation and deportation. The manual notes that States require "no specific approval" from the Home Ministry to set up "detention centres (holding centres/camps)" it lays down that centres should be set up outside the jail premises and their numbers and size should be decided by the States keeping in view the actual number of foreigners to be housed as well as the progress in deportation proceedings.

**What are the other mechanisms in place to track the movement of foreigners?** The MHA has asked States to constitute two committees to identify foreigners who entered India pre- and post-January 1, 2011, and have stayed on beyond the visa period. The details of foreigners who entered legally and had to flout visa regulations are uploaded on the e-FRRO portal, which can be accessed by the local police. Their details are also shared with government departments running flagship welfare schemes, driving licenses, and PAN databases so that action can be taken if documents have been obtained fraudulently.

**The MHA asked the Unique Identification Authority of India to create a negative list of Aadhaar cards if a police investigation shows that they were procured fraudulently. The MHA has also operationalised a Foreigners Identification Portal, which is accessible by the State police to upload the biometrics and other details of "illegal foreigners." The purpose of the portal is to enable the States to identify illegal migrants for deportation and to prevent them from procuring documents such as Aadhaar.**

**There have also been several instances of Article 356 being applied in cases where the same party is in power at both Centre and State, including in Andhra Pradesh in 1975, Assam in 1981, Gujarat in 1974, Karnataka in 1990, and now in Manipur in 2025.**

**In 1977, the newly elected Morarji Desai government imposed President's Rule on nine Congress-ruled States at one go, claiming that they no longer held the confidence of the electorate which had voted out the Congress at the Centre. When Indira Gandhi returned to power in 1980, she returned the favour, imposing President's Rule in nine States for the same reason. The Supreme Court at the time refused to interfere in the matter.**

**Why has it become less frequent?** A nine-decade later, the Bommai judgment marked a shift in the courts' stance. The nine-Judge Bench said that courts could review the President's proclamation by "examining whether it was issued on the basis of any material at all or whether the material was relevant or whether the proclamation was issued in the mala fide exercise of the power." former Attorney-General Late Soli Sorabjee had said in a critique of the 1994 judgment. This means the proclamation can be struck down if found to be unconstitutional. "The clear deterrence to the government," said P.D.T.

**Acharya, a former Lok Sabha Secretary General. Between 1950 and 1994, President's Rule was imposed 100 times, an average of 2.5 times a year. In the three decades, it has been imposed 30 times or about once a year. In fact, the imposition in Manipur is the first since Puchabery in February 2021, almost four years ago. Since the Narendra Modi-led NDA government came to power in 2014, President's Rule has been imposed 11 times, including four times in J&K. Of these, the courts have struck down the proclamation twice, in Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.**

**What does it mean to keep a legislature in suspended animation?** Though Manipur has been placed under President's Rule, its Assembly has not been dissolved. Instead, it has been kept under suspended animation. When the Assembly is placed under suspended animation, it can be revived whenever it becomes possible to form a popular government. President's Rule.



# What is the cancer vaccine Russia is offering?

Why does an mRNA-based vaccine hold promise? What have pre-clinical trials shown about its efficacy?

Zubeda Hamid

The story so far:

In December last year, Russia announced that it had developed a new, mRNA-based personalised 'vaccine' for cancer which would be available free for patients by early 2025. Media reports state that Andrey Kaprin, General Director of the Radiology Medical Research Center of the Russian Ministry of Health, spoke to Radio Rossiya about the vaccine. Reports also say that Alexander Ginsburg, Director of the Gamaleya National Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology, said the vaccine's pre-clinical trials had shown that it suppresses tumour development and potential metastases.

**What is an mRNA cancer 'vaccine'?**  
mRNA or messenger RNA vaccines provide genetic information that teaches the body's cells to produce an antigen (protein or other substance that triggers an immune response), training the immune system to produce antibodies against it. When these antigens are detected on cancer cells, the immune system can potentially launch an attack against them.

**How do these 'vaccines' work?**

An mRNA cancer 'vaccine' is a form of immunotherapy. "Cancer cells often develop mechanisms to avoid being detected and destroyed by the immune system. This immune

The mRNA cancer vaccine mechanism has been evaluated. Vaccines are meant to be used in patients who already have cancer, in order to target and treat the tumours' immune system to find and destroy

cancer cells, preventing their spread. The advantages of this treatment are that, unlike chemotherapy, only the cancer cells are killed, and the side effects are lowered," said M. Manickavasagam, professor and head of medical oncology, Sri Ramachandra Medical College, Chennai.

While 'vaccines' are one form of immunotherapy, others include the use of antibodies, CAR T cell therapy, immune checkpoint inhibitors, etc.

The mRNA cancer vaccines therefore, are not meant for healthy patients to prevent disease like other vaccines; they are meant to be used in patients who already have cancer, in order to target and treat the tumours, says Arvind Krishnamurthy, professor and head, surgical oncology, Cancer Institute, WIA, Chennai.

This treatment is tailored to target specific antigens that each patient's tumour has, making them personalised and potentially more effective. Unlike, say, the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine that targets one antigen, the cancer mRNA 'vaccines' may also be designed to target multiple antigens.

**Is Russia's the only research into a 'vaccine' for cancer?**

No, it is not. Last year, the UK's National Health Service launched the Cancer Vaccine Launch Pad, a trial programme, to "speed up access to mRNA personalised cancer vaccine clinical trials for people who have been diagnosed with cancer" and "accelerate the development of cancer vaccines as a form of cancer treatment," according to its website.

In the U.S., global biopharmaceutical company CarVax, announced in September last year that its CVGBM cancer vaccine showed promising immune responses in a phase 1 study in patients with glioblastoma (brain cancer).

Currently, more than 120 clinical trials are underway in various parts of the world.





**What does it portend?**







Doctors stress that unlike infectious diseases, since cancer, in general, is not caused by a single organism, the use of the word 'vaccine' may be misleading. In terms of prevention of cancer, the Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine can prevent cervical cancer since over 90% cases are known to be caused by this virus, says Prasad Eswaran, senior consultant, medical oncology, Apollo Proton Cancer Centre, Chennai.

Also, the Hepatitis B vaccine that is given to prevent the Hepatitis B viral infection, may have a protective role in the prevention of liver cancer, says Dr. Manickavasagam. "Patients must understand that these immunotherapy treatments are not preventive in nature," he emphasised.

At the moment, there is very little information available about the Russian treatment being offered. Any new drug goes through multiple stages of clinical trials, a process that takes years, before it can finally reach the market. Without all of this data being available publicly, it is difficult to say what stage this treatment is at and how safe and effective it will be, Dr. Prasad points out.

While immunotherapy has shown promising results for certain cancers, it may not be suitable for all kinds of cancers or for every cancer patient. Research is ongoing, and time will tell how effective this may be, say doctors.






-  Russia has developed a personalised mRNA-based cancer vaccine, which is expected to be available for free by early 2025.  
 रूस ने एक व्यक्तिगत एमआरएनए-आधारित कैंसर वैक्सीन विकसित की है, जो 2025 की शुरुआत में निःशुल्क उपलब्ध होगी।
-  The vaccine aims to suppress tumour growth and prevent metastasis (spread of cancer).  
 यह वैक्सीन ट्यूमर के विकास को रोकने और कैंसर के फैलने (मेटास्टेसिस) को रोकने का लक्ष्य रखती है।

-  Pre-clinical trials have shown positive results, but further research is ongoing.
  -  प्री-क्लिनिकल परीक्षणों में सकारात्मक परिणाम मिले हैं, लेकिन आगे का शोध जारी है।
-  Unlike chemotherapy, this mRNA-based immunotherapy targets only cancer cells, reducing side effects.
  -  कीमोथेरेपी के विपरीत, यह एमआरएनए-आधारित इम्युनोथेरेपी केवल कैंसर कोशिकाओं को लक्षित करती है, जिससे दुष्प्रभाव कम होते हैं।
-  Over 120 clinical trials for mRNA cancer vaccines are ongoing worldwide.
  -  दुनिया भर में एमआरएनए कैंसर वैक्सीन के 120 से अधिक क्लिनिकल परीक्षण चल रहे हैं।











- **◆ What is an mRNA Cancer Vaccine? | एमआरएनए कैंसर वैक्सीन क्या है?**
- **✓ mRNA vaccines teach the body's cells to produce specific proteins (antigens) that trigger an immune response.**
  - ✓ **एमआरएनए वैक्सीन शरीर की कोशिकाओं को विशिष्ट प्रोटीन (एंटीजन) बनाने का निर्देश देती है, जिससे प्रतिरक्षा प्रतिक्रिया उत्पन्न होती है।**
- **✓ Once the immune system detects these antigens on cancer cells, it attacks and destroys them.**
  - ✓ **प्रतिरक्षा प्रणाली इन एंटीजन को कैंसर कोशिकाओं पर पहचानकर उन्हें नष्ट कर देती है।**

- ✓ This personalised treatment approach allows the vaccine to be tailored to each patient's specific tumour.  
✓ यह व्यक्तिगत उपचार विधि प्रत्येक रोगी के ट्यूमर के अनुसार वैकसीन को अनुकूलित करने की अनुमति देती है।
- ✓ Unlike chemotherapy, which affects all rapidly dividing cells, mRNA therapy specifically targets cancerous cells, minimising side effects.  
✓ कीमोथेरेपी के विपरीत, जो सभी तेजी से विभाजित होने वाली कोशिकाओं को प्रभावित करती है, एमआरएनए थेरेपी विशेष रूप से कैंसर कोशिकाओं को लक्षित करती है, जिससे दुष्प्रभाव कम होते हैं।

-  Why is this Important? | यह क्यों महत्वपूर्ण है?
-  A major breakthrough in personalised medicine, which could revolutionise cancer treatment.  
 व्यक्तिगत चिकित्सा में एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रगति, जो कैंसर उपचार में क्रांतिकारी बदलाव ला सकती है।
-  If successful, it could provide an alternative to chemotherapy and radiation therapy.  
 यदि सफल रही, तो यह कीमोथेरेपी और विकिरण चिकित्सा का एक विकल्प प्रदान कर सकती है।



-  Could lead to similar mRNA-based treatments for multiple types of cancer.  
 यह विभिन्न प्रकार के कैंसर के लिए एमआरएनए-आधारित उपचारों का मार्ग प्रशस्त कर सकता है।
-  Potentially more effective with fewer side effects compared to traditional cancer treatments.  
 पारंपरिक कैंसर उपचारों की तुलना में अधिक प्रभावी और कम दुष्प्रभाव उत्पन्न करने की संभावना।

-  The U.K. has also launched the Cancer Vaccine Launch Pad for mRNA-based cancer vaccine trials.  
 य.के. ने भी एमआरएनए-आधारित कैंसर वैक्सीन परीक्षणों के लिए 'कैंसर' वैक्सीन लॉन्च पैड' शुरू किया है।
-  U.S. pharmaceutical company CureVac has shown promising results in early-stage trials for glioblastoma (brain cancer).  
 अमेरिकी फार्मास्यूटिकल कंपनी क्योरवैक ने ग्लियोब्लास्टोमा (मस्तिष्क कैंसर) के प्रारंभिक परीक्षणों में उत्साहजनक परिणाम दिखाए हैं।

**IN BRIEF**

**Volvo Trucks unveils India's first road train for logistics**

Volvo Trucks has introduced India's 'first' road train solution aimed at optimising efficiency in the high-volume logistics industry. Operated by logistics firm Delhiwary, the road train was on Saturday flagged off by Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari. The concept was formally incorporated into regulations in 2020, allowing for vehicle lengths of up to 25.25 metre. A road train consists of a tractor unit towing two or more trailers.

**Bank of India raises ₹2,690 cr through infrastructure bonds**

Bank of India said it raised 10-year infrastructure bonds of ₹2,690 crore at 7.50% p.a through the NSE Electronic Bidding Platform. The issue size was ₹1,500 crore with a green shoe option of ₹3,500 crore. "The bank received a total of 94 bids amounting to ₹8,845 crore, 5.9 times issue size. The bank accepted bids at cut-off coupon of 7.50% of ₹2,690 crore," the bank said. The funds will be used for affordable housing and projects in infrastructure sub-sectors.

**India to be linked with longest undersea cable project: Meta**

Social media major Meta tagged India as one of its largest markets to be connected with the firm's longest undersea cable "Project Waterscan" expected to be operational by the end of this decade. Meta has announced "Project Waterscan", which will reach five major continents and span over 30,000 kilometre. The project was part of the U.S.-India Joint Leaders' statement released on February 13 following the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to U.S.

**Reliance Infra Q3 net loss widens to ₹3,298 cr.**

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI  
Reliance Infrastructure Ltd. has reported widening of consolidated net loss to ₹3,298 crore in Q3FY25. It had clocked a net loss of ₹421 crore in the year-ago period, the company said in an exchange filing. "The firm's total income, however, rose to ₹5,129 crore from ₹4,717 crore in the year ago period. Its expenses declined to ₹4,963 crore from ₹5,068 crore in the Q3FY24. Reliance Infrastructure provides engineering and construction services for power, roads, metro rail, and allied sectors.

**Shiksha Financial's new verticals turn profitable**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI  
Hit by COVID-19, Chennai-based education finance company Shiksha Financial Services branched into two new verticals to stay afloat and now aims for a threefold increase in its disburseals, said a top company executive. Shiksha, an educational loan financier to poor students since 2015, was forced to look at alternatives as educational institutions were the first to shut and last to open due to the pandemic. This was followed by students' drop outs, migration, a slide in collections and teachers' attrition. "Till COVID-19, we were

**AI could allow people converse with departed loved ones: Google X founder**

**Mini Tejaswi**  
BENGALURU  
At could one day allow people to continue conversations with their loved ones after their death, Sebastian Thrun, founder of Google X, said here recently. With a digital twin, people would also be able to attend meetings and work from remote locations, said Mr. Thrun, who led the development of the Google's self-driving car. He also knows how his work on artificial intelligence algorithms in robotics with applications including robot localisation and robotic mapping. Participating in a session on "Pioneering AI: From Imagination to Real-World Impact" at the Global Investors' Meet organ-

**Insurers agree on Bima Vistaar plan**

Composite cover was mooted by IRDAI, which holds quarterly review; insurance companies advised to boost risk mitigation amid cyber threats

**N. Ravi Kumar**  
HYDERABAD

India's insurance companies have agreed on a simple yet comprehensive and customer-friendly model for Bima Vistaar, the composite cover mooted by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI). It will be the first ever such product covering death, personal accident, property and surgical hospitalisation with each line of the risk co-insured between all insurers of that corresponding line of business within an omnibus co-insurance arrangement. IRDAI said on the deliberations at the Bima Manthan quarterly meeting with CEOs of insurers held here.

**Risk shield**  
Bima Vistaar is set to offer a customer-friendly insurance coverage  
**COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE:** Protects against death, personal accident, property loss, and surgical hospitalisation  
**OMNIBUS CO-INSURANCE:** Risk is shared among all insurers with a business arrangement  
**INDUSTRIE-SECTORED PREMIUMS:** Developed through IRDAI-led discussions at the Bima Manthan meeting

channel to complete rest of the technology build for Bima Vistaar, which together with the women-centric insurance field sales force Bima Vistaar insurance e-marketplace Bima Sugam form Bima Trinity in which India is betting big to achieve "Insurance for All by 2047" goal. On of insurers held here.

**Steady progress**  
The Bima Trinity is progressing steadily toward implementation. Portal for Bima Vistaar is almost complete and gearing up for soft launch for onboarding women agents from April. "Implementation of Bima Vistaar is going as planned... to be established as a robust digital public infrastructure enabling seamless integration with various service providers for purchase, sale, servicing of insurance policies," said the regulator said. With the project reaching a crucial juncture, the team concerned has upgraded the operating mechanism to complete rest of the technology build for Bima Vistaar, which together with the women-centric insurance field sales force Bima Vistaar insurance e-marketplace Bima Sugam form Bima Trinity in which India is betting big to achieve "Insurance for All by 2047" goal.

**IPO timeline**  
Discussions centred around various issues, including need for stress testing, scenario analysis and effective asset liability management. "Emphasis was laid on the need for insurers to have a roadmap for [public] listing," IRDAI said. The push to public-listing in the backdrop of Union Budget 2025, which allows 100% foreign direct investment in insurers and LIC scouting for partners among stand-alone health insurers for its proposed health insurance foray.

**Steel maker SAIL to invest \$800 mn in new rail mill, says chairman**  
**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI  
SAIL is bullish on the demand for rails in the country and has decided to set up a new rail mill at an investment of \$800 million, the company's chairman, Amarendra Prakash said.

The company has decided to go ahead with the investment plan despite not having any order from its largest buyer Indian Railways, Mr. Prakash said at a panel discussion at the Global Business Summit (GBS) in the national capital. The chairman said such kind of confidence is a result of growth oriented policy of the government. "Last week, we decided to put up an \$800 million investment into mill, because I am confident Railways will go nowhere and they will have to buy from me if I put up a mill. So, I have taken a decision like that. So, that is the kind of confidence that comes when the policies we know are growth oriented, and they are bound to continue," he said.

He said SAIL had been following 60% of current ways for the past seven years for their future demands, to accede to the plan rail production. "The last seven years, we have been serving under Indian Railways' track will you buy from us? Should we start a new mill? Should I make an investment into a new mill? Should we start a new mill? I am not going to give you any comfort about what I will buy in the future," the chairman said.

**Sugar mills demand hike in minimum selling price**

**M. Soundararya Preetha**  
COIMBATORE

Sugar mills have sought an increase in the minimum selling price (ex-mill) of sugar to ₹30 a kg from ₹31 a kg now. Deepak Ballani, director general, Indian Sugar & Bio Energy Manufacturers Association (ISBMA) told *The Hindu* the retail price of sugar had been almost flat for the last two years. However, the fair and remunerative price (FRP) paid to farmers and the conversion costs were on the rise.

There was an almost 11.5% increase in the FRP in the last two years. The production cost was almost ₹41 a kg. Further, the price of ethanol has not been revised for the supplies made by the sugar mills, he said. The payment arrears to farmers by the sugar mills in the country as on February 6, 2025 for the current sugar season that started in October 2024 were ₹13,850 crore. In Karnataka, only ₹1.5 crore of the total amount payable to the farmers was paid while in Maharashtra 84% was paid till February 6.

The government permit for export of 10 lakh tonne of sugar helped the mills to export to United Pradesh usually had a slightly higher realisation for sugar in the local market compared with those in Maharashtra. Almost 75% of the sugar sold in the local market was bought by LIC, scouting for partners among stand-alone health insurers for its proposed health insurance foray.



**Less taxing:** Makers of 'kit' pumps do not pay any tax, says Karthik of Indian Pump Manufacturers Association. THE HINDU

**With 18% GST, farms opt for unbranded 'kit' pump sets now**

**M. Soundararya Preetha**  
COIMBATORE

Agricultural pump sets manufactured by the organised sector are losing out to 'kit' or, unbranded pumps made in the unorganised sector because of the 18% GST being levied on them for the last three years, say manufacturers in Coimbatore. According to K.V. Karthik, president of the Indian Pump Manufacturers Association, sales of kit pumps slid to less than 10% of the total agriculture pump set sales after the introduction of 12% GST.

**Hike in GST**  
However, following the hike in GST to 18% in October 2024, the share of kit pump sales rose to almost 25%. The gap between the pump-sets sold as cost of the pump sets surged by six percentage points and farmers were unable to spend more on them. "It is not some of the pump

set manufacturers had problems related to the refund of input tax credit, the rate was increased to 18% from 12%.

**'No tax paid'**  
Mr. Karthik said manufacturers of kit pumps buy components in the morning, assemble, and sell the pumps by evening and do not pay any tax. In several States, free power is supplied to agriculture connections and hence, farmers do not look for energy efficient pump sets. Mithun Ramdass, president of the Southern India Engineering Manufacturers' Association, added that the manufacturers of branded pump-sets have been badly hit for the last two years because of the hike in the GST rates. The gap between the cost of branded pump sets and unbranded ones had widened leading to almost tripling in the sales of unbranded pump sets across the country, he said.

**Board of OpenAI rejects Elon Musk's \$97.4 billion offer**

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

OpenAI on Friday rejected Elon Musk's \$97.4-billion bid for a consortium led by billionaire Elon Musk for the chatbot giant, saying the start-up is not for sale and the offer would be disingenuous. The unsolicited approach Mr. Musk's latest attempt to block the start-up he founded with CEO Sam Altman — but later left — from becoming a for-profit firm, it looks to secure more capital and stay ahead in the AI race.

When the policies we know are growth oriented, and they are bound to continue," he said. He rejected the offer on Friday. Other investors in the consortium include Valor Equity Partners, Baron Capital and Hollywood power broker Ari Emanuel. Mr. Altman and Mr. Musk have been at loggerheads over the firm's plan to become a for-profit company. "After Mr. Musk's departure in 2023, OpenAI created a for-profit arm that has drawn billions of dollars in funding, including investments from Mr. Musk that the board is not prepared to take on behalf of its board. Mr. Musk's lawyer Marc Toberoff is not for sale, and the board has unanimously rejected Mr. Musk's latest attempt to disrupt his competition. Any potential sale of OpenAI will strengthen our non-profit and its mission to ensure the benefits of AI for all of humanity," it said on X, quoting Musk as saying the firm must prepare itself on behalf of its board. Mr. Musk's lawyer Marc Toberoff said in a response to a request for comment. "Should we start a new mill? Should I make an investment into a new mill? Should we start a new mill? I am not going to give you any comfort about what I will buy in the future," the chairman said. The consortium, includ-



**Battle for All:** This is Musk's latest attempt to block the start-up he founded with Altman from becoming a for-profit firm.

**Cupid Q3 net profit rises 25% to ₹11.04 crore**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

Cupid Ltd. for the third quarter reported a net profit of ₹11.04 crore compared with ₹8.86 crore in the year ago period, up 24.60%. The total income of the company for the period ended December 31, 2024 increased 24.47% to ₹50.76 crore against ₹40.78 crore in the year ago period. Operating income stood at ₹46.35 crore compared with ₹40.05 crore of year ago, up by 15.73%. The board has appointed Aditya Kumar Halwasiya, managing director of the company, as chairman and managing director.

Commenting on the results, Mr. Halwasiya said, "We are expanding our market presence and keeping bringing new high quality products to the market." "We are honoured to receive continuous orders from our customers in India and beyond. It is a testament to our consistent quality and the strong commitment to supporting global health initiatives," he said. "Our new manufacturing facility at Palava, near Mumbai, is shaping up well and should be operational by the end of the current calendar year," he added.



# Insurers agree on customer-friendly Bima Vistaar plan

Composite cover was mooted by IRDAI, which holds quarterly review; insurance companies advised to boost risk mitigation amid cyber threats

**N. Ravi Kumar**  
HYDERABAD

India's insurance companies have agreed on a simple yet comprehensive and customer-friendly model for Bima Vistaar, the composite cover mooted by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).

It will be the first ever such product covering death, personal accident, property and surgical hospitalisation with each line of the risk co-insured between all insurers of that corresponding line of business within an omnibus co-insurance arrangement, IRDAI said on the deliberations at the Bima Manthan quarterly meeting with CEOs of insurers held here.

"Discussions dwelled into operating model and implementation strategy... touched all aspects including compliance, operational simplification and ease of operations despite navigating different risk. A compliant, simple, comprehensive and customer friendly model has now been signed off by the top brass of the industry," the regulator said.

With the project reaching a crucial juncture, the team concerned has upgraded the operating me-



**Risk shield**

Bima Vistaar is set to offer a customer-friendly insurance coverage

- **COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE:** Protects against death, personal accident, property loss, and surgical hospitalisation
- **OMNIBUS CO-INSURANCE:** Risk is shared among all insurers with a business arrangement
- **INDUSTRY-BACKED INITIATIVE:** Developed through IRDAI-led discussions at the Bima Manthan meeting

chanism to complete rest of the technology build for Bima Vistaar, which together with the women-centric insurance field sales force Bima Vahak and insurance e-marketplace Bima Sugam form Bima Trinity on which India is betting big to achieve 'Insurance for All by 2047' goal.

## Steady progress

The Bima Trinity is progressing steadily toward implementation. Portal for Bima Vahak is almost complete and gearing up for soft launch for onboarding women agents from April.





"Implementation of Bima Sugam is going as planned... to be established as a robust digital public infrastructure enabling seamless integration with various services to facilitate purchase, sale, servicing of insurance policies, settlement of





insurance claims and grievance redressal," IRDAI said in a release. Bima Sugam India Federation, which will build and operate the platform, completed foundational actions and is ready to be capitalised by "enthused industry participants," it said.

## IPO timeline


Discussions centred around various issues, including need for stress testing, scenario analysis and an effective asset liability management. "Emphasis was laid on the need for insurers to have a roadmap for [public] listing," IRDAI said. The push to go public comes in the backdrop of Union Budget 2025-26 allowing 100% foreign direct investment in insurers and LIC scouting for a partner among stand-alone health insurers for its proposed health insurance foray.



-  Bima Vistaar is a new composite insurance model proposed by IRDAI to provide comprehensive coverage.
  -  बीमा विस्तार एक नया समग्र बीमा मॉडल है जिसे IRDAI द्वारा व्यापक कवरेज प्रदान करने के लिए प्रस्तावित किया गया है।
-  It will cover death, personal accident, property loss, and surgical hospitalisation under a single policy.
  -  यह मृत्यु, व्यक्तिगत दुर्घटना, संपत्ति की हानि और सर्जिकल अस्पताल में भर्ती को एक ही पॉलिसी के तहत कवर करेगा।












-  Risk will be co-insured by multiple insurers under an "Omnibus Co-Insurance" arrangement.  
 जोखिम को "सर्वसमावेशी सह-बीमा" व्यवस्था के तहत कई बीमा कंपनियों द्वारा साझा किया जाएगा।
-  IRDAI is promoting 'Insurance for All by 2047' and has introduced technology-based solutions like Bima Sugam and Bima Vahak.  
 IRDAI '2047 तक सबके लिए बीमा' को बढ़ावा दे रहा है और बीमा सुगम और बीमा वाहक जैसी तकनीक आधारित समाधान पेश कर रहा है।

-  Push for 100% FDI in health insurers & listing of insurance companies as per Union Budget 2025-26.

 केंद्र सरकार 2025-26 के बजट में स्वास्थ्य बीमा कंपनियों में 100% विदेशी निवेश (FDI) और सार्वजनिक सूचीबद्धता को प्रोत्साहित कर रही है।

- |
- **◆ Features of Bima Vistaar | बीमा विस्तार की विशेषताएँ**
- **✓ Comprehensive Coverage | व्यापक कवरेज**
- Death, personal accident, property loss, and surgical hospitalisation.
- मृत्यु, व्यक्तिगत दुर्घटना, संपत्ति की हानि और सर्जिकल अस्पताल में भर्ती को कवर करेगा।
- **✓ Omnibus Co-Insurance | सर्वसमावेशी सह-बीमा**
- Multiple insurers will share the risk, making insurance more affordable.
- कई बीमा कंपनियाँ जोखिम साझा करेंगी, जिससे बीमा सस्ता होगा।



-  Why is this Important? | यह क्यों महत्वपूर्ण है?
-  Aims to increase insurance penetration in rural and semi-urban areas.  
 ग्रामीण और अर्ध-शहरी क्षेत्रों में बीमा कवरेज बढ़ाने का लक्ष्य।
-  Provides a simple and affordable insurance solution for middle- and low-income groups.  
 मध्यम और निम्न-आय वर्ग के लिए सरल और किफायती बीमा समाधान प्रदान करता है।
-  Encourages financial inclusion and promotes social security.  
 वित्तीय समावेशन को बढ़ावा देता है और सामाजिक सुरक्षा प्रदान करता है।
-  Supports the government's goal of 'Insurance for All by 2047.'  
 सरकार के '2047 तक सबके लिए बीमा' लक्ष्य को समर्थन देता है।
-  Boosts the insurance sector's growth and aligns with India's economic development goals.  
 बीमा क्षेत्र की वृद्धि को बढ़ावा देता है और भारत के आर्थिक विकास लक्ष्यों के साथ मेल खाता है।

-  **Government & Regulatory Push | सरकार और नियामक पहल**
-  **Union Budget 2025-26 allowed 100% FDI in standalone health insurers.**  
 **केंद्र सरकार ने 2025-26 के बजट में स्वतंत्र स्वास्थ्य बीमा कंपनियों में 100% एफडीआई की अनुमति दी।**
-  **IRDAI plans to make insurance more customer-friendly and transparent.**  
 **IRDAI बीमा को अधिक ग्राहक-अनुकूल और पारदर्शी बनाने की योजना बना रहा है।**
-  **Bima Sugam digital platform will be a one-stop marketplace for all insurance needs.**  
 **बीमा सुगम डिजिटल प्लेटफॉर्म बीमा आवश्यकताओं के लिए वन-स्टॉप मार्केटप्लेस बनेगा।**
-  **IPO roadmap for insurance companies to ensure financial stability and investor confidence.**  
 **बीमा कंपनियों के लिए आईपीओ रोडमैप, जिससे वित्तीय स्थिरता और निवेशकों का विश्वास बना रहे।**





## WASHINGTON

**Grok 3 chatbot from Musk-led start-up xAI to be unveiled Monday**



REUTERS

Elon Musk said his startup xAI will release its Grok 3 chatbot on Monday and billed it as the "smartest AI on Earth" in a fiercely competitive market. Grok 3 was trained on synthetic data and is capable of reflecting on errors it makes by going over data in order to reach logical consistency. **AP**

**Israeli strike kills three policemen in Gaza Strip**

Agence France-Presse  
GAZA CITY

Hamas said an Israeli strike on Sunday killed three police officers near the southern Gaza city of Rafah, a day after Israel and militants carried out a hostage-prisoner swap.

The Hamas-run Interior Ministry initially reported that two officers were killed and a third was critically wounded in a strike while they were deployed in the Al-Shouka area, east of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, to secure aid.

The third officer later succumbed to his wounds, the ministry said in an updated statement.

The Israeli military said in a statement that its air force struck "several armed individuals moving toward troops in the southern Gaza Strip".

**Rubio leaves truce on shaky ground by calling for eradication of Hamas**

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio says 'as long as it [Hamas] stands as a force that can govern, peace becomes impossible'; in a sign of the allies closing ranks, Israel said it received a shipment of 900 kilograms of MK-84 munitions from the U.S.

Associated Press  
JERUSALEM

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday fully endorsed Israel's war aims in the Gaza Strip, saying Hamas "must be eradicated" and throwing the future of the shaky ceasefire into further doubt.

Mr. Rubio met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem at the start of a regional tour, where he is likely to face pushback from Arab leaders over Trump's proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of the Gaza Strip and redevelop it under U.S. ownership.

Mr. Netanyahu has welcomed the plan, and said he and Mr. Trump have a "common strategy" for Gaza's future.

Echoing Mr. Trump, he said the gates of hell would be opened if Hamas does not release dozens of remaining hostages ab-

## TAIPEI

**Taiwan welcomes 'positive' words on U.S. govt. website about island**



REUTERS

Taiwan praised the "positive and friendly" wording about the island on the U.S. State Department's updated website, which has removed the phrase that Washington does "not support Taiwan independence". The U.S. has long been Taiwan's most important backer, while risking the wrath of China. **AP**

## BUKAVU

**M23 rebels reach the centre of eastern DRC's second major city**



GETTY IMAGES

Rwanda-backed rebels reached the centre of eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo's second largest city, Bukavu, on Sunday morning and were pressed in most parts of the city after little resistance from government forces in an unprecedented expansion of their reach in their years-long fighting. **AP**

## MOSCOW

**Russians flock to visit Navalny's grave on his death anniversary**



AP

At least 3,500 Russians came to the grave of Alexei Navalny in Moscow on Sunday, risking reprisals and braving freezing temperatures to pay their respects to the opposition leader on the first anniversary of his death in prison. Navalny was Vladimir Putin's main opponent whom Russia had declared an "extremist". **AP**

**European nations to meet in Paris today to discuss security**

Agence France-Presse  
PARIS

France's President Emmanuel Macron will host leaders from key European countries on Monday to discuss the continent's security. Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said, amid growing concerns over U.S. efforts to end the Ukraine war.

U.S. President Donald Trump blindsided Ukraine and its European backers this week by starting discussions on Russia's invasion in a call with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

The new U.S. administration has also warned its NATO allies that Europe will no longer be its top security priority and it may shift focus to Ukraine, a European diplomatic source said.

"The President will



Emmanuel Macron

bring together the main European countries tomorrow to discuss the continent's security," Mr. Barrot told the France Inter radio broadcaster on Sunday.

The meeting in Paris on Monday afternoon was to include Britain, Germany, Poland, Italy, Denmark and NATO chief Marc Rutte. EU chief Ursula von der Leyen, a European diplomatic source said.

**Cook Islands signs agreement for closer relations with China**

Agence France-Presse  
WELLINGTON

The Cook Islands says it has signed a deal to expand relations with China, stressing that the accord does not impinge on ties with former colonial power New Zealand.

Prime Minister Mark Brown said he signed an "action plan for the comprehensive strategic partnership" with Chinese Premier Li Qiang in the northern city of Harbin during a five-day state visit to China.

He promised to publish the accord, after New Zealand expressed concern about a lack of transparency over the trip and complained it had not properly consulted.

The self-governing Cook



Mark Brown

Islands, a country of 17,000 people, has a "free association" relationship with New Zealand, which provides budgetary assistance as well as help on foreign affairs and defence. New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters' spokesperson has complained of a lack of transparency over the trip, describing it as "a matter of significant concern".

**24 Chinese military aircraft transit Taiwan Strait**

Agence France-Presse  
TAIPEI

Taiwan said it detected 24 Chinese military aircraft near the island on Sunday as a Canadian warship passed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait.

It was the first Canadian naval vessel to transit the waterway this year, Taiwan's Foreign Ministry said, and came days after two U.S. ships made the passage.

The U.S. and its allies pass through the 180-km Taiwan Strait to reinforce its status as an international waterway, angering China. Beijing has never ruled Taiwan, but it claims the democratic island as part of its territory and has threatened to bring it under its control by force.

**Mother's love**



Indra, right, a one-year-old male Sumatran rhinoceros, feeds on leaves with his eight-year-old mother, Dehlah at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park in Lampung province in Indonesia on Sunday. **AP**

**One killed, five injured, in Austria stabbing incident**

Associated Press  
VIENNA

A 23-year-old man stabbed six passersby in southern Austria on Saturday in what police said was a random attack that left a 14-year-old dead and five others injured.

The suspect was detained in the city of Villach, where the attack took place, the police said. He is a Syrian national with legal residence in Austria, they said. Interior Minister Gerhard Karner called the incident an "Islamist attack with IS connections," and added that the Syrian asylum seeker held was radicalised online "in a short



In memoriam: People mourn on Sunday at the site where stabbing attack happened in Villach in Austria. **AP**

space of time". The Police spokesperson said a motive was not immediately known. He added that police were investigating the attacker's personal background. "We have to wait until we get more information," he said. A 42-year-old man who

works for a food delivery company witnessed the incident from his car, police said. He drove toward the suspect and helped to prevent things from getting worse, Dionisio told Austria's public broadcaster ORF.

The victims were all men, with two seriously injured and two sustaining minor injuries, police said. Later on Saturday, police said a fifth person, also a man, was injured in the attack.

Peter Kaiser, the governor of the Austrian province of Carinthia, expressed his condolences to the family of the 14-year-old victim. "This outrage-

ous atrocity must be met with harsh consequences. I have always said with clarity and unambiguously: Those who live in Carinthia, in Austria, have to respect the law and adjust to our rules and values."

Far-right leader Herbert Kickl said on the X social media platform that he is "appalled by the horrific act in Villach" and wished the family of the 14-year-old victim who was killed in the attack "much strength."

Conservative party leader Christian Stocker said on X that the attacker "must be brought to justice and be punished with the full force of the law."

**Musk-led DOGE Department cuts \$21 million grant allotted for India**

Press Trust of India  
NEW YORK

The U.S. Department of Government Efficiency led by billionaire Elon Musk has announced a series of expenditure cuts, including \$21 million allocated for "voter turnout in India" and \$22 million for "inclusive and participatory political process" in Moldova.

The department said, "U.S. taxpayer dollars were going to be spent on the following items, all of which have been cancelled..." The list included \$486 million in grants to the "Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening" including \$21 million for "voter turnout in India" and \$22 million for "inclusive and participatory political process" in Moldova.

Senior BJP leader Amit Malviya terms the grant "external interference in India's elections"

ya termed the grant as "external interference" in India's elections. He questioned who the beneficiary was, asserting that it was not a ruling party for sure. "USD 21M for voter turnout? This definitely is external interference in India's electoral process. Who gets from it? The ruling party for sure!" the BJP's IT department head said on X. He claimed that the now cancelled programme was a pointer to the previous Congress-led UPA government allegedly establishing a network of Indian institutions.



# Cook Islands signs agreement for closer relations with China

**Agence France-Presse**

WELLINGTON

The Cook Islands says it has signed a deal to expand relations with China, stressing that the accord does not impinge on ties with former colonial power New Zealand.

Prime Minister Mark Brown said he signed an “action plan for the comprehensive strategic partnership” with Chinese Premier Li Qiang in the northern city of Harbin during a five-day state visit to China.

He promised to publish the accord, after New Zealand expressed concern about a lack of transparency over the trip and complained it had not been properly consulted.

The self-governing Cook



Mark Brown

Islands, a country of 17,000 people, has a “free association” relationship with New Zealand, which provides budgetary assistance as well as helping on foreign affairs and defence.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters’ spokesperson has complained of a lack of transparency over the trip, describing it as “a matter of significant concern”.



# OCEANIA



















<b>Capital</b> and largest city	<span><span><span></span></span></span> <span>Avarua</span> <span><span><span></span></span></span> <span><span><span><span><span>21°12′S</span> <span>159°46′W</span></span></span></span></span>
<b>Official languages</b>	English Cook Islands Māori (including <span>Pukapukan</span> <sup>[a]</sup> )
<b>Spoken languages</b>	English (86.4%) Cook Islands Māori (76.2%) other (8.3%) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Ethnic groups</b> (2016 census <sup>[2]</sup> )	78.2% <span>Cook Island Māori</span> 7.6% Part-Māori 14.2% other
<b>Demonym(s)</b>	<span>Cook Islander</span>
<b>Government</b>	Unitary <span>constitutional monarchy</span> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <span>Monarch</span> <span>Charles III</span></li><li>• <span>King's Representative</span> <span>Sir Tom Marsters</span></li><li>• <span>Prime Minister</span> <span>Mark Brown</span></li><li>• <span>President of the House of Ariki</span> <span>Tou Travel Ariki</span></li></ul>
<b>Legislature</b>	<span>Parliament</span>
<b>Free association with New Zealand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <span>Self-governance</span> <span>4 August 1965</span></li><li>• <span>UN recognition of independence in foreign relations</span> <span>1992</span><sup>[3]</sup></li></ul>
<b>Area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <span>Total</span> <span>236.7 km<sup>2</sup> (91.4 sq mi)</span> <span>(<span>unranked</span>)</span></li></ul>
<b>Population</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <span>2021 census</span> <span>15,040</span><sup>[4]</sup> <span>(<span>223rd</span>)</span></li><li>• <span>Density</span> <span>63.3/km<sup>2</sup> (163.9/sq mi)</span> <span>(<span>138th</span>)</span></li></ul>
<b>GDP</b> (nominal)	2020 estimate <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <span>Total</span> <span>US\$384 million</span><sup>[5]</sup> <span>(<span>not ranked</span>)</span></li><li>• <span>Per capita</span> <span>US\$21,994</span> <span>(<span>not ranked</span>)</span></li></ul>

-  The Cook Islands signed an "action plan" to strengthen strategic ties with China.

 कूक आइलैंड्स ने चीन के साथ रणनीतिक संबंध मजबूत करने के लिए "एक्शन प्लान" पर हस्ताक्षर किए।

-  New Zealand has raised concerns over transparency and lack of prior consultation.

 न्यूजीलैंड ने पारदर्शिता की कमी और पूर्व परामर्श न किए जाने पर चिंता व्यक्त की।

-  Despite closer ties with China, Cook Islands maintains a "free association" with New Zealand.  
 चीन के साथ घनिष्ठ संबंधों के बावजूद, कुक आइलैंड्स न्यूजीलैंड के साथ "मुक्त संघ" बनाए रखता है।
-  New Zealand provides financial assistance, foreign policy, and defense support to Cook Islands.  
 न्यूजीलैंड कुक आइलैंड्स को वित्तीय सहायता, विदेश नीति, और रक्षा सहायता प्रदान करता है।
-  The agreement is part of China's increasing engagement in the Pacific region.  
 यह समझौता प्रशांत क्षेत्र में चीन की बढ़ती भागीदारी का हिस्सा है।

- **Geopolitical & Strategic Significance | भू-राजनीतिक और रणनीतिक महत्व**
- **✓ China's Expanding Pacific Influence | प्रशांत क्षेत्र में चीन का प्रभाव**
- China is strengthening its presence in the Pacific through economic and diplomatic deals.
- चीन आर्थिक और कूटनीतिक समझौतों के माध्यम से प्रशांत क्षेत्र में अपनी उपस्थिति मजबूत कर रहा है।



- ✓ **New Zealand's Concerns | न्यूजीलैंड की चिंताएँ**
- New Zealand is worried about its diminishing influence over the Cook Islands.
- न्यूजीलैंड को कुक आइलैंड्स पर अपने घटते प्रभाव की चिंता है।
- ✓ **Economic & Trade Impact | आर्थिक और व्यापारिक प्रभाव**
- The deal could bring Chinese investments into infrastructure and tourism in Cook Islands.
- यह समझौता कुक आइलैंड्स में बुनियादी ढांचे और पर्यटन में चीनी निवेश ला सकता है।

# Musk-led DOGE Department cuts \$21 million grant allotted for India

## Press Trust of India

NEW YORK

The U.S. Department of Government Efficiency led by billionaire Elon Musk has announced a series of expenditure cuts, including \$21 million allocated for “voter turnout in India”. The DOGE announced cancelling many programmes costing hundreds of millions of taxpayers’ dollars.

The department said, “U.S. taxpayer dollars were going to be spent on the following items, all (of) which have been can-





## Senior BJP leader Amit Malviya terms the grant ‘external interference’ in India’s elections





celled...” The list included \$486 million in grants to the “Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening” including \$21 million for “voter turnout in India” and \$22 million for “inclusive and participatory political process” in Moldova.

Reacting to the post, senior BJP leader Amit Malvi-

ya termed the grant as ‘external interference’ in India’s elections. He questioned who the beneficiary was, asserting that it was ‘not the ruling party for sure’.“USD 21M for voter turnout? This definitely is external interference in India’s electoral process. Who gains from this? Not the ruling party for sure!” the BJP’s IT department head said on X. He claimed that the now cancelled programme was a pointer to the previous Congress-led UPA government allegedly enabling infiltration of Indian institutions.




-  The U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, announced the cancellation of a \$21 million grant meant for "voter turnout in India".  
 एलन मस्क के नेतृत्व में अमेरिकी सरकारी दक्षता विभाग (DOGE) ने भारत में "मतदाता मतदान बढ़ाने" के लिए निर्धारित 21 मिलियन डॉलर की अनुदान राशि को रद्द करने की घोषणा की।
-  This move is part of a larger \$486 million budget cut on political and electoral process grants globally.  
 यह निर्णय वैश्विक स्तर पर राजनीतिक और चुनावी प्रक्रियाओं के लिए दी जाने वाली 486 मिलियन डॉलर की अनुदान राशि में कटौती का हिस्सा है।

-  Senior BJP leader Amit Malviya termed the grant as "external interference" in India's electoral process.
  -  वरिष्ठ भाजपा नेता अमित मालवीय ने इस अनुदान को भारत की चुनावी प्रक्रिया में "बाहरी हस्तक्षेप" करार दिया।
-  Malviya questioned who the actual beneficiary of this grant was, claiming it was not the ruling party.
  -  मालवीय ने सवाल उठाया कि इस अनुदान का असली लाभार्थी कौन था, यह दावा करते हुए कि यह सत्तारूढ़ पार्टी नहीं थी।



-  He alleged that such external funding pointed to past interference under the Congress-led UPA government.

 उन्होंने आरोप लगाया कि इस तरह की बाहरी वित्तीय सहायता कांग्रेस के नेतृत्व वाली यूपीए सरकार के समय संस्थानों में कथित घुसपैठ का संकेत देती है।

- Geopolitical & Electoral Significance | भू-राजनीतिक और चुनावी महत्व
- ✓ Foreign Influence in Indian Elections | भारतीय चुनावों में विदेशी प्रभाव
- External funding for electoral processes raises concerns about sovereignty and fair elections.
- चुनावी प्रक्रियाओं के लिए बाहरी वित्त पोषण संप्रभुता और निष्पक्ष चुनावों पर सवाल उठाता है।

- ✓ U.S. Policy on Foreign Electoral Aid | विदेशी चुनावी सहायता पर अमेरिकी नीति
- The U.S. provides funds globally for democratic participation but has faced allegations of interference.
- अमेरिका वैश्विक स्तर पर लोकतांत्रिक भागीदारी के लिए धन प्रदान करता है, लेकिन इसे हस्तक्षेप के आरोपों का सामना करना पड़ा है।

- **✓ Impact on India-U.S. Relations | भारत-अमेरिका संबंधों पर प्रभाव**

- The decision to cancel funds may reduce tensions regarding foreign involvement in Indian democracy.

- अनुदान रद्द करने का निर्णय भारतीय लोकतंत्र में विदेशी हस्तक्षेप को लेकर तनाव को कम कर सकता है।

- **✓ Internal Political Debates | आंतरिक राजनीतिक बहसें**

- The ruling party views the move as evidence of past interference, while the opposition may question transparency.

- सत्तारूढ़ पार्टी इसे पिछले हस्तक्षेप का प्रमाण मानती है, जबकि विपक्ष पारदर्शिता पर सवाल उठा सकता है।



# Smartphone exports soar to record ₹1.5 lakh crore

● iPhones lead with 70% share

**RISHI RAJ**  
New Delhi, February 16

**SMARTPHONE EXPORTS FROM** India hit ₹1.55 lakh crore during the April-January period breaking yet another record. Coming on the back of the government's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, they topped ₹1.31 lakh crore during FY24. Moreover, January reported the highest-ever monthly exports of ₹25,000 crore, an increase of 140% over January 2024.

The exports in the 10 months to January are 56% higher than the ₹99,120 crore worth of smartphone exports achieved by the industry in the

## A GOOD SHOW

Mobile phone exports (₹ cr)



\*Apr'24 to Jan25  
Source: Department of commerce, industry figures

corresponding period of FY24. Nearly 70% of this was contributed by some of Apple's iPhone vendors with Foxconn, which operates out of Tamil

Nadu, contributing about half. Exports from Foxconn exhibited a growth of 43% over the corresponding period of FY24.

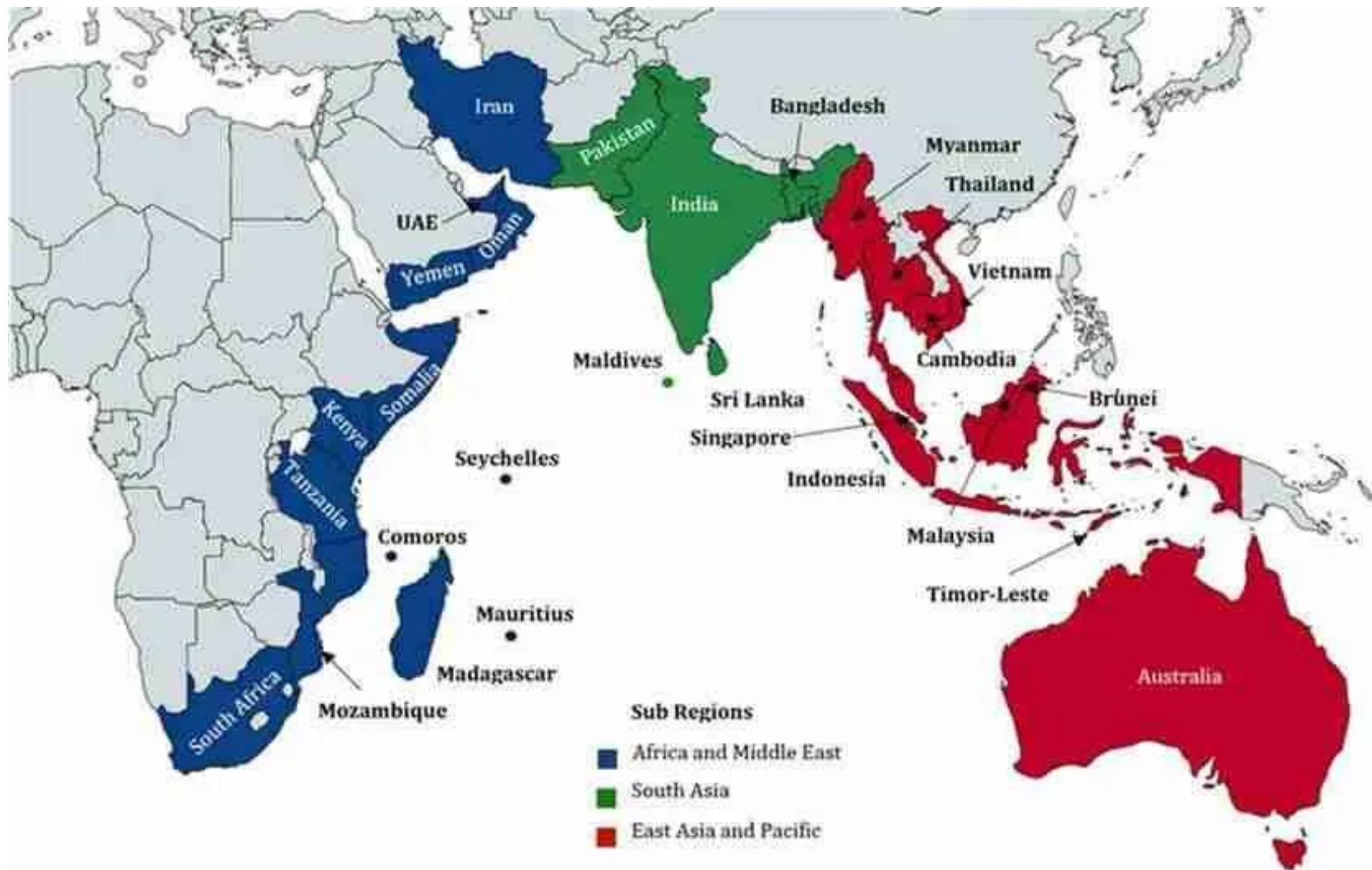
Nearly 22% came from iPhone vendor Tata Electronics, which has been accelerating production at its Karnataka unit after taking over from Wistron, while 12% came from Tamil Nadu-based Pegatron, in which Tata Electronics has recently acquired a stake. About 20% of the total smartphone exports were contributed by Samsung. The remainder is attributed to domestic companies and merchant exports.

Minister for electronics and information technology Ashwini Vaishnaw has said he expects smartphone exports to reach \$20 billion during FY25.

**Continued on Page 5**

# India in Indian Ocean Region

- India, along with Singapore and Oman, is hosting the 8th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) in Muscat, where foreign ministers from 30 nations are discussing regional security and economic cooperation.





- **What is the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)?**
- The **third-largest ocean in the world**, covering **70.56 million sq km** and connecting Asia, Africa, and Australia.
- A **natural trade corridor** historically influenced by Indian civilization and maritime networks.
- **Nations Surrounding IOR:**
- **26 coastal nations**, including **India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Oman, Indonesia, Australia, South Africa, and Somalia**.
- **Landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan** also depend on IOR trade routes.

- **Importance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR):**
- **Global Trade Hub:** Facilitates **70% of global container traffic** and **90% of India's energy imports**, making it a key economic corridor.
- **Maritime Security:** Critical sea lanes like the **Strait of Malacca, Hormuz, and Bab el Mandeb** ensure uninterrupted global trade.
- **Resource-Rich Waters:** Contains vast fisheries, oil, gas, and mineral deposits, crucial for regional economies.
- **Strategic Significance:** Hosts naval bases of **major powers (US, UK, China, France)**, influencing global security dynamics.
-

- **India's Role in Managing the Indian Ocean Region:**
- **SAGAR Initiative (2015):** Launched by PM Modi to promote Security and Growth for All in the Region, ensuring maritime stability.
- **Naval Capabilities & Regional Security:** Indian Navy conducts joint exercises (MILAN, Malabar, Varuna) to strengthen regional defense cooperation.
- **Economic & Trade Leadership:** India develops ports via Sagarmala and promotes the Blue Economy for sustainable ocean resource utilization.

- **Disaster Relief & Humanitarian Assistance**: Plays a leading role in HADR operations, assisting countries during natural disasters and emergencies.
- **Diplomatic & Strategic Alliances**: Strengthens regional partnerships through IORA, BIMSTEC, and QUAD for collective maritime governance.



- **Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region:**
- **China's Expanding Influence:** String of Pearls strategy and growing naval presence challenge regional stability and India's interests.
- **Piracy & Maritime Crimes:** Somali piracy, illegal fishing, and arms smuggling disrupt trade and security operations.
- **Climate Change & Rising Sea Levels:** Small Island nations face existential threats due to coastal erosion and submergence risks.

# Missing Children in India

- The Supreme Court was informed that nearly 36,000 children remain untraced across India since 2020, despite police recovering the majority of 3 lakh missing children.
- **Total Missing (2020-24)**: Nearly 3 lakh children went missing.
- **Untraced Children**: 36,000 children remain missing, highlighting gaps in law enforcement.
- **State-wise Data**:
  - **Madhya Pradesh**: 58,665 missing, 45,585 recovered, 3,955 still missing.
  - Bihar and Odisha are next highest in order.
  - **Non-reporting States**: Delhi, Punjab, Nagaland, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, J&K, Andhra Pradesh failed to provide data.

- **Government & Legal Measures**

- **Khoya-Paya Portal**: Centralized online tracking system for missing children.
- **Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs)**:
  - ₹100 crore allocated for strengthening AHTUs in every district.
  - Untraced cases (4+ months) must be transferred to AHTUs.

# The J. C. Bose Grant (JBG)



- The Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) has launched the J. C. Bose Grant (JBG) to support senior Indian scientists and engineers in advancing cutting-edge research.

# Call for Proposals: J.C. Bose Grant (JBG)



## OBJECTIVE

- This prestigious grant under ANRF is intended to provide extra-mural support to senior Indian scientists & engineers for their outstanding performance and contributions in advancing frontiers of Science & Technology (S&T)

## ELIGIBILITY

- Proven scientific track record in the STEM areas along with humanities and social sciences at the interface of S&T
- Outstanding performance demonstrated through indicators like:
  - Research Outcomes and Publication Records
  - Patents and Technology Transfers
  - Awards, Fellowships, Grants etc.

Start Date: 11 February 2025

End Date: 31 March 2025



₹25 Lakhs p.a. Research Grant (+ overheads) for 5 years

Visit: [www.anrfonline.in](http://www.anrfonline.in)  
For Nominations

- **Key Features:**

- **Funding Amount:** Provides **25 lakh per year** for **five years** to support **research activities**.
- **Institutional Support:** Additional **1 lakh per year** granted to the implementing institution.
- **Multi-Disciplinary Scope:** Covers science, technology, agriculture, medicine, humanities, and social sciences at S&T interfaces.
- **Superannuation Clause:** If the **Principal Investigator (PI) retires**, the grant can continue if the host institution agrees to retain them.
- **Enhancing R&D Ecosystem:** Strengthens India's research infrastructure and innovation landscape.

# U.S.-India TRUST Initiative

- India and the US have launched the “**Transforming Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology**” (TRUST) initiative.
- **About TRUST Initiative**
- It builds on national programs like the US [Critical Minerals](#) and Materials (CMM) program and India’s National Critical Minerals Mission to boost exploration, recycling, and R&D in critical minerals.
- It focuses on cooperation in the recovery and processing of critical minerals, including lithium and rare earth elements (REEs).



# India-US 123 Agreement

- India-US 123 Agreement of 2007 could finally achieve its full potential.
- **About**
- India and the United States affirmed their commitment to furthering a bilateral Energy Security Partnership.
- The announcement signals their commitment to “fully realise” the US-India 123 Civil Nuclear Agreement, alongside a pledge to move forward on plans to work together to build American-designed nuclear reactors in India.
-

MCQ

- . India and the U.S. are enhancing cooperation in Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) through which initiative?
- भारत और अमेरिका पानी के नीचे डोमेन जागरूकता (UDA) में सहयोग किस पहल के माध्यम से बढ़ा रहे हैं?
- A. QUAD Naval Pact / क्वाड नौसेना संधि
- B. Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA) / स्वायत्त प्रणाली उद्योग गठबंधन (ASIA)
- C. Strategic Indo-Pacific Maritime Accord / रणनीतिक इंडो-पैसिफिक समुद्री समझौता
- D. Maritime Defense Initiative (MDI) / समुद्री रक्षा पहल (MDI)

- Which Indian state has topped the Devolution Index (DI) ranking of the Panchayati Raj system?
- किस भारतीय राज्य ने पंचायत राज प्रणाली के विकेंद्रीकरण सूचकांक (DI) में पहला स्थान प्राप्त किया है?
- A. Kerala / केरल
- B. Maharashtra / महाराष्ट्र
- C. Karnataka / कर्नाटक
- D. Tamil Nadu / तमिलनाडु



- . Russia has developed a personalized mRNA-based vaccine for which disease?
- रूस ने किस बीमारी के लिए एक व्यक्तिगत एमआरएनए-आधारित वैक्सीन विकसित की है?
- A. Tuberculosis / क्षय रोग
- B. Diabetes / मधुमेह
- C. Cancer / कैंसर
- D. HIV/AIDS / एचआईवी/एड्स

- The 'Bima Vistaar' model proposed by IRDAI aims to provide coverage for which of the following?
- IRDAI द्वारा प्रस्तावित 'बीमा विस्तार' मॉडल निम्नलिखित में से किन क्षेत्रों को कवर करता है?
- A. Life insurance and pension plans / जीवन बीमा और पेंशन योजनाएँ
- B. Death, personal accident, property loss, and hospitalization / मृत्यु, व्यक्तिगत दुर्घटना, संपत्ति की हानि और अस्पताल में भर्ती
- C. Crop and livestock insurance / फसल और पशुधन बीमा
- D. Only health insurance / केवल स्वास्थ्य बीमा

- The Cook Islands recently signed an 'action plan' to strengthen ties with which country?
- कक आइलैंड्स ने हाल ही में किस देश के साथ संबंध मजबूत करने के लिए 'एक्शन प्लान' पर हस्ताक्षर किए हैं?
- A. United States / संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका  
B. Australia / ऑस्ट्रेलिया  
C. China / चीन  
D. United Kingdom / यूनाइटेड किंगडम

- The U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) recently canceled a \$21 million grant meant for what?
- अमेरिकी सरकारी दक्षता विभाग (DOGE) ने हाल ही में \$21 मिलियन की अनुदान राशि किस उद्देश्य के लिए रद्द की?
- A. Defense modernization in India / भारत में रक्षा आधुनिकीकरण
- B. Infrastructure projects in Africa / अफ्रीका में बुनियादी ढांचा परियोजनाएँ
- C. Voter turnout programs in India / भारत में मतदाता मतदान कार्यक्रम
- D. Educational scholarships for Asia / एशिया के लिए शैक्षिक छात्रवृत्तियाँ

- The 8th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) is being hosted in which city?
- 8वां हिंद महासागर सम्मेलन (IOC) किस शहर में आयोजित हो रहा है?
- A. New Delhi / नई दिल्ली
- B. Singapore / सिंगापुर
- C. Muscat / मस्कट
- D. Jakarta / जकार्ता



- The J. C. Bose Grant (JBG) is launched by which Indian research foundation?
- J. C. बोस अनदान (JBG) किस भारतीय अनुसंधान फाउंडेशन द्वारा शुरू किया गया है?
- A. Indian Council of Scientific Research (ICSR) / भारतीय वैज्ञानिक अनुसंधान परिषद (ICSR)  
B. Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) / अनुसंधान राष्ट्रीय अनुसंधान फाउंडेशन (ANRF)  
C. Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS) / भारतीय उन्नत अध्ययन संस्थान (IIAS)  
D. Technology Innovation and Research Board (TIRB) / प्रौद्योगिकी नवाचार और अनुसंधान बोर्ड (TIRB)

- The India-U.S. TRUST Initiative focuses on cooperation in which sector?
- भारत-अमेरिका TRUST पहल किस क्षेत्र में सहयोग पर केंद्रित है?
- A. Defense technology / रक्षा प्रौद्योगिकी
- B. Critical minerals and strategic technology / महत्वपूर्ण खनिज और रणनीतिक प्रौद्योगिकी
- C. Renewable energy / नवीकरणीय ऊर्जा
- D. Cybersecurity and digital infrastructure / साइबर सुरक्षा और डिजिटल बुनियादी ढांचा

- The India-U.S. 123 Agreement of 2007 is related to which sector?
- भारत-अमेरिका 123 समझौता 2007 किस क्षेत्र से संबंधित है?
- A. Bilateral trade / द्विपक्षीय व्यापार
- B. Civil nuclear energy cooperation / नागरिक परमाणु ऊर्जा सहयोग
- C. Defense and military collaboration / रक्षा और सैन्य सहयोग
- D. Space exploration and satellite technology / अंतरिक्ष अन्वेषण और उपग्रह प्रौद्योगिकी

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# Word of the day

## **Peripatetic:**

a person who walks from place to place;  
traveling especially on foot

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**Synonym:** wayfaring

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**Usage:** *They are a group of peripatetic country preachers.*

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**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/  
peripateticpro

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**International Phonetic**

**Alphabet:** /ˌpɛɪ.ɪ.pəˈtɛt.ɪk/, /ˌpɛɪ.ə.pəˈtɛt.ɪk/

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- गणित
- सामान्य बुद्धि और तर्कशक्ति

20 OMR SHEETS सहित

— विशेषताएँ —

- परीक्षा की दृष्टि से अतिमहत्वपूर्ण प्रश्नों का व्याख्या सहित हल
- नवीनतम पाठ्यक्रम पर आधारित प्रश्नों का समावेशन
- विगत वर्ष के प्रश्नपत्रों के विश्लेषण पर आधारित प्रश्न



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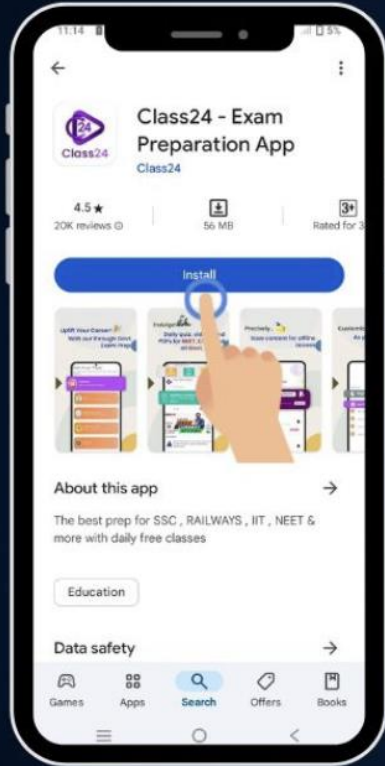
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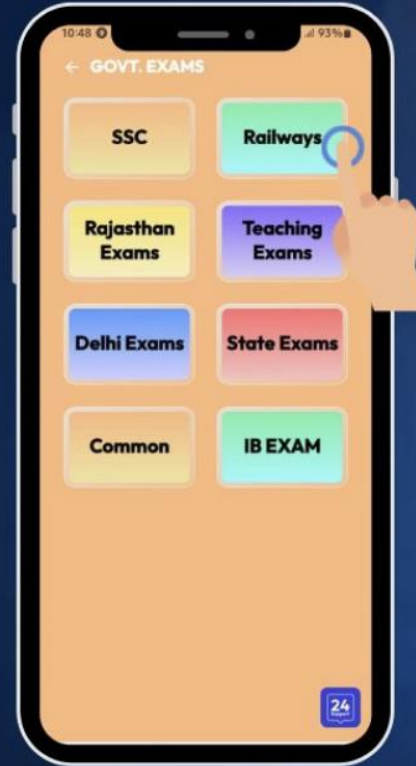
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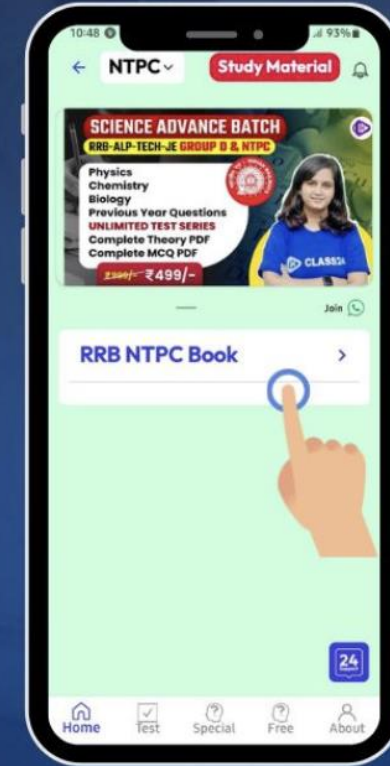
# Step 2




# Step 3



# Step 4







Thank you  
guys.

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