

WEEKLY
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AFFAIRS
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February 2025



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NATIONAL AFFAIRS / GOVERNMENT SCHEME

1. Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh inaugurates India's inaugural Organic Fisheries Cluster in Sikkim.

In January 2025, Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying (MoFAH&D) and Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Rajiv Ranjan Singh (also known as Lalan Singh), introduced India's first Organic Fisheries Cluster in Soreng district, Sikkim, during the North Eastern Region (NER) State Meet 2025, held in Guwahati, Assam.

- The National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) plays a key role in developing the organic fisheries cluster in Sikkim.
- This initiative focuses on promoting fish farming using organic methods, which avoid harmful chemicals and support environmentally friendly practices.
- The goal of these projects is to improve the competitiveness of the fisheries sector.

Key Points:-

- (i) The initiative was launched with the presence of Ministers of State (MoS) Prof. S.P. Singh Baghel and George Kurian from MoFAH&D.
- (ii) Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh also launched 50 new projects under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), with a total investment of Rs 50 crores, benefiting all states in the North Eastern Region, except Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.
- (iii) In 2016, Sikkim became India's first state to be fully certified as organic.

2. PM Narendra Modi Inaugurates 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025' in Bhubaneswar.

In January 2025, Prime Minister (PM) of India, Narendra Modi inaugurated the 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025' and the 'Make in Odisha Exhibition' in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

- The two-day event, held from January 28 to 29, 2025, brought together industry leaders, investors, and policymakers from over 16 countries, including partner countries Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia, to explore investment opportunities in Odisha.
- The event was attended by Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Ministry of Education (MoE), Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, Ministry of Railways (MoR), Hari Babu Kambhampati, Governor of Odisha, and Mohan Charan Manjhi, Chief Minister (CM) of Odisha, along with other dignitaries.

Key Points:-

- (i) A total of 145 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed during the conclave, attracting investment commitments worth Rs 16.73 lakh crore across various sectors, including chemicals & petrochemicals, textiles, mining & metallurgy, renewable energy (RE), Information Technology/Information Technology Enabled Services (IT/ITeS), tourism, and food processing.
- (ii) Apart from the signed MoUs, the Government of Odisha received 448 investment intention forms, reflecting a proposed investment of Rs 3.84 lakh crore.

3. PM Modi Inaugurates 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025' and 38th National Games During His Visit to Odisha and Uttarakhand.

On January 28, 2025, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi visited Odisha and Uttarakhand to

inaugurate the 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025' and the 38th National Games.

- PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the two-day Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025 at Janata Maidan in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, held from January 28 to 29, 2025.

- Odisha received investments worth ₹16.73 lakh crore, covering 593 industrial projects across 20 sectors.

- 145 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed, totaling ₹12.89 lakh crore across 16 sectors.

Key Points:-

(i) PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the 38th National Games at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, marking the 25th anniversary of the state's formation.

(ii) The theme for the National Games 2025 is 'Green Games', emphasizing sustainability.

(iii) Yoga and Mallakhamb were included in the National Games for the first time.

4. Union Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya Presides Over National Conference with State & UT Labour Ministers and Secretaries in New Delhi.

Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, Ministry of Labour & Employment (MoL&E) and Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (MYAS), chaired a two-day National-level conference with Labour Ministers and Secretaries of States and Union Territories (UTs) in New Delhi, Delhi.

- The meeting was held from 29th January to 30th January 2025, aiming to align the efforts of the central

government, states, and UTs in creating a unified legal and administrative framework for labour reforms benefiting workers and employers.

Key Points:-

(i) The conference highlighted that 18 States/UTs have already implemented most of the labour reforms, while the remaining States/UTs have made significant progress. All 36 States/UTs are expected to complete the pre-publication of unified draft rules in line with the labour codes by 31st March 2025.

(ii) During the meeting, Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya launched two key initiatives under the e-Shram initiative: State & UT Microsites and Occupational Shortage Index (OSI).

5. Dr. Jitendra Singh Celebrates CSIR-IITR's Diamond Jubilee in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

On January 28, 2025, Union Minister of State (MoS) (Independent Charge, IC), Dr. Jitendra Singh, Ministry of Science and Technology (MoS&T) commemorated the 60th anniversary (Diamond Jubilee) of CSIR-Indian Institute of Toxicology Research (CSIR-IITR), a constituent laboratory of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), at its headquarters in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh (UP).

- During the event, he emphasized the institute's remarkable achievements and its crucial role in tackling public health concerns, advocating for a 'toxin-free India' by 2047, aligning with the vision of Viksit Bharat.

- Dr. Jitendra Singh also serves as the Union Minister of Earth Sciences and Minister of State for Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Department of Atomic Energy,

Department of Space, Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions.

- The Union MoS emphasized CSIR-IITR's efforts in supporting startups and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through initiatives such as the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR)-led Common Research and Technology Hub (CRTDH) Environmental Monitoring Hub and the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC)-led Bioincubators Nurturing Entrepreneurship for Scaling Technologies (BioNEST) in New Delhi.

Key Points:-

- (i) During the event, Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurated key facilities at CSIR-IITR, including the Diamond Jubilee Arches, the new Diamond Jubilee Block, the NaMo-ATAL facility, and VV Sansa, a state-of-the-art reference material hub.
- (ii) The minister also launched WARMEST (Water, Air, Radiation Monitoring for Environment Safety Technologies), the third edition of the WARM series, and EARTH-25 (Environmental Awareness Research Towards Health) conferences, reinforcing the institute's commitment to environmental safety and scientific progress.
- (iii) Highlighting CSIR-IITR's contributions to public health and environmental research, Dr. Jitendra Singh reiterated the institute's vital role in fostering innovation and sustainable solutions, aligning with the vision of a 'toxin-free India' by 2047.

6. MOMSME and ONDC have launched a Rs. 277 crore initiative aimed at empowering 5 lakh small businesses.

On January 28, 2025, the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MoMSME) partnered with the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), based in New Delhi, to launch the Trade Enablement and Marketing (TEAM) Initiative. This program is designed to help Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) join ONDC and grow in the digital world.

- The initiative has a budget of Rs. 277.35 crore for the next 3 years and aims to onboard 5 lakh micro and small businesses, with 50% of them being women-led.
- Its goal is to empower Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to embrace digital commerce and increase their market reach.
- The TEAM Initiative is a part of the Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) program. It focuses on supporting women-owned MSMEs, particularly in smaller cities (Tier 2 and Tier 3).

Key Points:-

- (i) The initiative will provide MSMEs with services like logistics, account management, packaging, design, catalog creation, and help with digital operations.
- (ii) It will also provide tools such as digital storefronts, integrated payment systems, and logistics support to help businesses overcome operational challenges and reach more customers.
- (iii) With other programs like Startup India, Pradhan Mantri (PM) Vishwakarma Scheme, and the Digital MSME scheme already supporting the MSME sector, the TEAM Initiative will further strengthen these efforts.

7. 4 New Wetlands Added to Ramsar List: 2 from Tamil Nadu, 1 from Jharkhand, and 1 from Sikkim.

On 31 January 2025, Union Minister Bhupender Yadav, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), announced the inclusion of four new wetlands from India in the Ramsar Convention list, increasing the total number of internationally recognized Ramsar sites in India to 89.

- The newly designated sites are Sakkarakottai Bird Sanctuary and Therthangal Bird Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu (TN), Khecheopalri Wetland in Sikkim, and Udhwa Lake in Jharkhand. This marks the first-ever Ramsar sites for both Sikkim and Jharkhand.
- With this addition, Tamil Nadu now has 20 Ramsar sites, the highest in India, followed by Uttar Pradesh (UP) with 10.
- Globally, there are 2,529 Ramsar wetlands. Wetlands are vital ecosystems that support diverse species of plants and wildlife, both aquatic and terrestrial.

Key Points:-

- (i) India holds the highest number of Ramsar sites in Asia and ranks third globally, following the United Kingdom (UK) with 176 sites and Mexico with 144 sites.
- (ii) A wetland must meet at least one of the nine criteria outlined in the Ramsar Convention of 1971 to be designated as a Ramsar site.
- (iii) Over the past decade, India's Ramsar sites have significantly increased from 26 to 89, with 47 of them added in the last three years. World Wetlands Day is observed globally on February 2.

8. IIT Indore, in Collaboration with MeitY, Launches 'AgriHub' as a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Agritech.

In January 2025, the Indian Institute of Technology Indore (IIT-I), Madhya Pradesh (MP), in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), launched 'AgriHub', an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven Centre of Excellence (CoE) to foster technological innovation, startup incubation, and industry collaboration in the agritech sector.

- The CoE will leverage AI, Machine Learning (ML), and Deep Learning (DL) to address critical agricultural challenges such as drought, floods, and low productivity while promoting sustainable agriculture in India.
- The inauguration event of AgriHub was graced by S. Krishnan, Secretary, MeitY, as the Chief Guest.
- The project is jointly funded by MeitY and the Government of Madhya Pradesh for a period of five years. It is supported by the MP government, ICAR-IISR Indore (MP), ICAR-CIAE Bhopal (MP), and C-DAC Pune (Maharashtra).

Key Points:-

- (i) The event was attended by K.K. Singh (Joint Secretary, MeitY), Sanjay Dubey (Additional Chief Secretary, MP), Dr. C.R. Mehta (Director, ICAR-CIAE, Bhopal), Magesh Ethirajan (Director General, C-DAC), and Dr. Kunwar Harendra Singh (Director, ICAR-IISR, Indore).
- (ii) AgriHub is a collaborative platform, jointly funded by MeitY and the MP government for 5 years, led by Professors Aruna Tiwari and Pavan Kankar from IIT-I. It aims to develop innovative solutions for Indian agriculture, focusing on resource optimization, drought-resistant crops,

precision farming, and AI-driven disease diagnosis, using big data analytics and genome research to support data-driven agriculture.

(iii) The project aims to fast-track the varietal development program by providing an integrated platform for genome sequencing and big data analysis. This will assist in developing new crop varieties capable of withstanding adverse climatic conditions and boosting crop production.

9. PM Narendra Modi Inaugurates Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, Held from January 17 to January 22, 2025.

In January 2025, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi inaugurated Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, India's largest mobility expo, held at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, Delhi. It has also become the world's 2nd largest automotive expo.

- The expo took place from January 17 to January 22, 2025, across three different venues: Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhoomi India International Convention and Expo Centre (IIC), Dwarka, New Delhi (Delhi), and India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP).

- Theme: "Beyond Boundaries: Co-creating Future Automotive Value Chain".

Key Points:-

(i) During the event, more than 239 launches took place across all concurrent events. Additionally, 90 vehicles were launched at the Auto Expo Motor Show 2025.

(ii) Pune (Maharashtra)-based Vayve Mobility Private Limited (VMPL) launched India's 1st solar-powered Electric Vehicle (EV), named "Vayve

EVA".

(iii) Pune-based EKA Mobility, a leading electric vehicle manufacturing company in India, launched "EKA COACH", India's 1st fully stainless-steel luxury electric bus for long-distance travel.

10. CZA Approves Proposal for Establishing India's White Tiger Breeding Centre in Madhya Pradesh.

In January 2025, the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), based in New Delhi (Delhi) under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), approved the proposal to establish India's 1st white tiger breeding centre in the Govindgarh area of Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh (MP).

- This approval came after recommendations from the expert committee of CZA during its 114th meeting in December 2024, followed by the technical committee's approval during its 112th meeting in December 2024.

- The new white tiger breeding facility will be developed as part of the revised Master (Layout) Plan for the Maharaja Martand Singh Judeo White Tiger Safari and Zoo, located in Mukundpur, Satna (MP).

- In 2011, the Government of India (GOI) had given its in-principle approval for establishing a white tiger breeding centre in MP as part of conservation efforts.

Key Points:-

(i) The first white tiger was spotted in the Vindhya region of Madhya Pradesh (MP) in 1915 but sadly died in 1920. In 1951, Maharaja Martand Singh, the former ruler of Rewa, discovered a white tiger in the Govindgarh jungle and named it 'Mohan.' This discovery led to the initiation of conservation

efforts, which resulted in the protection and breeding of white tigers in the area.

(ii) The white tiger is not a separate subspecies but a color variant of the Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), Siberian tiger (*Panthera tigris altaica*), or a hybrid of the two. It is characterized by white fur, dark brown or black stripes, and blue eyes, with the white coloration resulting from a genetic mutation known as 'leucism.'

(iii) As per the 2022 tiger census, Madhya Pradesh (MP) has the highest number of tigers, followed by Karnataka, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra. Additionally, MP is home to the world's first white tiger safari, established in 2016 at Mukundpur in Satna district.

11. Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan Launches Nationwide Campaign "Watershed Yatra."

In February 2025, Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), launched the nationwide campaign "Watershed Yatra" to promote public participation and raise awareness about watershed development initiatives under the Watershed Development Component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (WDC-PMKSY 2.0).

- During the launch event, the Union Minister also introduced the 'Watershed-Janbhagidari Pratiyogita' under WDC-PMKSY 2.0 for the years 2025 and 2026.

Key Points:-

(i) The campaign will feature van movements spanning approximately 60 to 90 days, covering 805 projects across 6,673 Gram Panchayats (GPs), including 13,587 villages in 26 states and 2

Union Territories (UTs).

(ii) As part of the "Watershed ki Panchayat" initiative, experts from various fields will discuss sustainable soil and water management practices, and around 8,000 individuals who have significantly contributed to WDC-PMKSY project implementation will be honored.

12. India's First Ferret Research Facility Inaugurated at THSTI, Haryana, to Boost Biomedical Innovation.

On February 3, 2025, Dr. Rajesh Gokhale, Director General (DG) of the Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) and Secretary of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology (MoS&T), inaugurated India's first Ferret Research Facility at the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI) in the National Capital Region (NCR) Biotech Science Cluster, Faridabad, Haryana.

- This milestone marks a significant step in advancing biomedical research and innovation.

- The newly established THSTI Ferret Research Facility is a state-of-the-art center adhering to the highest safety and research standards.

Key Points:-

(i) A new data platform, GARBH-INI-DRISHTI, was also launched under the GARBH-INI program, providing an extensive repository of clinical data, images, and biospecimens collected from over 12,000 pregnant women, newborns, and mothers.

(ii) To accelerate the transition of research into practical applications, THSTI signed a Technology Transfer Agreement (TTA) with Sundyota

Numandis Probioceuticals Private Limited, an Ahmedabad (Gujarat)-based company, to facilitate the commercialization of THSTI's innovative technologies.

13. INCOIS Marks 26th Foundation Day with New Initiatives and Strategic Collaborations.

On February 3, 2025, the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), a unit of the Earth System Science Organization (ESSO) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), celebrated its 26th Foundation Day in Medchal-Malkajgiri, Telangana.

- During the event, Dr. Kalaiselvi, Director-General (DG) of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), launched two new services—'Hilsa Fishery Advisory (HIFA) Services' and 'INCOIS Global Ocean Reanalysis (IGORA) Version 1'—to enhance ocean and fishery management.

- Dr. M. Ravichandran, Secretary of MoES; Dr. T.M. Balakrishnan Nair, Director (in charge, I/c) of INCOIS; Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, former Chairman of the Space Commission; and Dr. Shailesh Nayak, Director of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), were present at the event.

Key Points:-

(i) INCOIS launched two new services: The Hilsa Fishery Advisory (HiFA) Service, which utilizes machine learning to predict Hilsa fish availability along the West Bengal coast, and The INCOIS Global Ocean Reanalysis (IGORA) Version 1, which provides crucial ocean climate data for research and forecasting.

(ii) INCOIS signed MoUs with key institutions,

including CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad (Telangana); Directorate General of Shipping (DGS); and ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE), Mumbai (Maharashtra), to enhance research and collaboration in ocean and fisheries studies. Additionally, INCOIS signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) with the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), aiming to promote collaborative research and outreach activities at both national and international levels.

(iii) A stakeholder meeting on "Science for Blue Economy Services" was conducted, highlighting the crucial role of INCOIS in providing disaster management and ecosystem services to maritime and coastal communities.

14. Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi Unveils 'Bikashita Gaon, Bikashita Odisha' Scheme for Rural Development.

In February 2025, Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi launched the 'Bikashita Gaon, Bikashita Odisha' (BGBO) Scheme with a budget of Rs 5,000 crore for five years to enhance rural infrastructure in Odisha. The scheme focuses on improving basic village infrastructure and connectivity in rural areas.

- The BGBO scheme aims to implement development projects in all 53,845 villages of Odisha, with an annual budget allocation of Rs 1,000 crore from FY 2024-25 to FY 2028-29. The Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water Department, Government of Odisha, is responsible for implementing, clarifying, and modifying the scheme's guidelines when necessary.

- The fund distribution under the scheme includes up to 35% for road development, 40% for Integrated

Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) blocks, and a maximum of 5% for innovative community projects.

Key Points:-

- (i) The scheme primarily focuses on linking unconnected roads and improving existing village roads while also investing in civic services, sports, education, and small-scale tourism to improve rural living standards.
- (ii) The initiative supports Odisha's goal of becoming a developed state by 2036 and aligns with India's national vision of 'Viksit Bharat by 2047.'

15. Maharashtra to Establish India's First AI University.

Maharashtra is set to establish India's first Artificial Intelligence (AI) University, aimed at becoming a Center of Excellence (CoE) for AI education and innovation. The university will focus on AI research, innovation, and skill development.

- The Maharashtra government has formed a task force, chaired by **Parrag Jaiin Nainutia**, the **Principal Secretary (Information Technology, IT), Government of Maharashtra**, to oversee planning and implementation.
- The establishment of the AI University aims to promote research and development in AI and related fields, making Maharashtra a leading hub for technology and AI-driven innovation. It will also drive technological advancements and formulate policies in AI and emerging technologies.

Key Points:-

- (i) The task force is a collaborative effort, bringing together expertise from academia, industry, and

government to create an institution focused on AI education, research, and innovation.

- (ii) The task force members include the Directors of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, Mumbai, and the Indian Institutes of Management-Mumbai (IIM-M), Mumbai. It also includes representatives from Google India Private Limited (GIPL), Mahindra Group, and Larsen & Toubro Limited (L&T), along with officials from the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY).
- (iii) Additionally, experts from the Rajiv Gandhi Science and Technology Commission (RGSTC) of the Government of Maharashtra and the Data Security Council of India (DSCI) are part of the task force.

16. MEA Recognizes IBCA as an Inter-Governmental International Organization.

In February 2025, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced that the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) and its Secretariat, based in New Delhi, have officially become a full-fledged treaty-based inter-governmental international organization and legal entity, effective from January 23, 2025.

- The MEA, acting as the Depository of the Framework Agreement on behalf of the Government of India (GoI), confirmed that five countries—Republic of India, Republic of Nicaragua, Kingdom of Eswatini, Federal Republic of Somalia, and Republic of Liberia—have officially deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance, or approval under Article VIII (1) of the Framework Agreement.

- Currently, 27 countries, including India, have agreed to join IBCA, along with several international and

national organizations dedicated to wildlife conservation.

- In April 2023, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) during the 'Commemoration of 50 Years of India's Project Tiger' event. In February 2024, the Government of India (GoI) approved IBCA's establishment with its headquarters in New Delhi and a one-time budgetary support of Rs. 150 crore for five years (2023-24 to 2027-28).

Key Points:-

- (i) IBCA was established through the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the nodal organization under the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC). It aims to conserve seven big cat species—Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma—by promoting conservation initiatives worldwide.
- (ii) Membership in IBCA is open to all United Nations (UN) member countries, including range countries that host these big cats and non-range countries that wish to support global big cat conservation efforts.
- (iii) IBCA fosters international collaboration by uniting expertise and best practices to enhance global protection efforts, ensuring a coordinated approach to big cat conservation across different regions.

INTERNATIONAL

1. Union Minister Piyush Goyal Visits Oman, Participates in India-Oman Joint Meetings and Discusses CEPA and DTAA Amendment.

Union Minister Piyush Vedprakash Goyal, from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I), visited the Sultanate of Oman from January 27 to 28, 2025.

- During his visit, he took part in the 11th session of the India-Oman Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) and the India-Oman Joint Business Council (JBC) meeting in Muscat, Oman.

Key Points:-

- (i) India and Oman discussed the bilateral India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which is in its final stages of negotiation.
- (ii) Both countries signed a Protocol to amend the India-Oman Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA). This amendment aims to make cross-border taxation easier, simplify tax processes, and encourage cooperation in tax matters.

2. WHO Announces Guinea's Success in Eradicating Sleeping Sickness as Public Health Issue.

In January 2025, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that Guinea has successfully eradicated the gambiense form of Human African Trypanosomiasis (HAT), commonly known as sleeping sickness, as a public health issue.

- HAT has become the first Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) to be eradicated in Guinea. This achievement was announced just ahead of the global observance of World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day (WNTDD) on January 30, 2025.

- HAT cases in Guinea have fallen below the WHO threshold of one case per 10,000 inhabitants in all

endemic areas, marking the disease's successful elimination as a public health concern.

- Guinea is a country in West Africa, bordered on the west by the Atlantic Ocean. It's known for the Mount Nimba Strict Nature Reserve, in the southeast.

Key Points:-

(i) Human African Trypanosomiasis (HAT), also known as sleeping sickness, is a vector-borne parasitic disease endemic to sub-Saharan Africa, caused by protozoan parasites of the *Trypanosoma* genus and transmitted by infected tsetse flies.

(ii) It exists in two forms: *Trypanosoma brucei gambiense* (responsible for over 92% of cases) and *Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense* (responsible for the remaining cases). The disease can cause fever, headaches, joint pain, neurological symptoms, and, if untreated, can be fatal.

(iii) HAT is classified as a Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD), with WHO playing a key role in assisting countries to eliminate the disease. This effort stems from the adoption of WHO resolutions 50.36 in 1997 and 56.7 in 2003, focusing on eradicating HAT in endemic countries.

3. WHO Declares Niger as the First African Country to Eliminate Onchocerciasis.

On January 31, 2025, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Niger as the first African country to achieve the elimination of Onchocerciasis, also known as river blindness.

- Niger's success marks the second time the country has eliminated a Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD),

having previously been certified free of dracunculiasis (Guinea-worm disease) transmission in 2013.

- Niger joins four other countries—Colombia (2013), Ecuador (2014), Mexico (2015), and Guatemala (2016)—that have been verified by WHO for eliminating onchocerciasis.

- As of December 2024, 54 countries worldwide had successfully eliminated at least one NTD. WHO's goal is to see 100 countries eliminate at least one NTD by 2030.

Key Points:-

(i) To eliminate Onchocerciasis, a country must show 95% statistical confidence in stopping transmission before ending Mass Drug Administration (MDA). Caused by the *Onchocerca volvulus* parasite and spread by black fly bites, it is the second leading infectious cause of blindness after trachoma, mainly affecting rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, Yemen, and Latin America.

(ii) Niger's fight against Onchocerciasis began in 1976 under WHO's OCP with vector control measures like insecticide spraying. In 2008, it launched MDA with ivermectin and albendazole to treat Onchocerciasis and lymphatic filariasis. By 2014, these efforts reduced prevalence from 60% to just 0.02%.

(iii) On January 31, 2025, WHO declared Niger the first African country to eliminate Onchocerciasis, following its 2013 elimination of dracunculiasis. Niger joins Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Guatemala in achieving this milestone. As of December 2024, 54 countries had eliminated at least one Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD), with WHO aiming for 100 by

2030.

4. Elon Musk's X Corp Unveils 'X Money', Its First Digital Wallet, in Partnership with Visa.

In January 2025, Elon Musk's social media platform, X Corp (formerly known as Twitter, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of X Holdings Corp), introduced its first digital wallet, 'X Money', a peer-to-peer (P2P) payment service, in partnership with Visa. The initiative aims to create a real-time payment system, contributing to the development of an "everything application (app)."

- **Visa, one of the largest credit card networks in the United States, will be the first partner for X Money's Money Account service, set to launch later in 2025.**

Key Points:-

(i) The company will use Visa Direct, Visa's real-time money transfer solution, to fund X Money's wallet, link to a debit card for payments to other users, and enable smooth transfers back to bank accounts.

(ii) X Money will allow users to instantly transfer funds to their bank accounts using Visa Direct.

5. Forbes 2025: USA Tops List of Most Powerful Countries with USD 30.34 Trillion GDP.

According to the list of the Top 10 Most Powerful Countries in the World 2025 released by the American business magazine Forbes, the United States of America (USA) secured the top spot as the most powerful country with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of USD 30.34 trillion.

- The USA was followed by China in the 2nd position with a GDP of USD 19.53 trillion, and Russia ranked 3rd with a GDP of USD 2.2 trillion.

- India secured the 12th position with a GDP of USD 4.27 trillion in the list as of February 2025.

- In terms of global GDP, India holds the 5th position, behind the USA, China, Germany, and Japan.

Key Points:-

(i) The USA remains a global leader in technology, finance, and entertainment, while China excels with its Belt and Road Initiative and advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and 5G technology.

(ii) Russia maintains strong geopolitical influence with its vast natural resources and military strength, while the United Kingdom (UK) excels in forging new trade agreements and economic partnerships, with London serving as a major hub for startups.

(iii) Germany leads in renewable energy initiatives, while India's ranking reflects its growing economy, strong international alliances, and military strength.

6. According to IATA Report India Leads Global Domestic Passenger Load Factor in 2024.

In January 2025, Montreal (Canada)-based International Air Transport Association (IATA) released its 'full-year and December 2024 international passenger market performance data,' highlighting record-high demand for air travel.

- As per IATA's domestic full-year traffic report, India's domestic flights recorded a Passenger Load Factor (PLF) of 86.4% in 2024 (down by 0.6 percentage points

compared to 2023), making it the highest among all domestic markets.

- India surpassed the United States of America (USA) (84.1%) and China (83.2%), which ranked 2nd and 3rd, respectively.
- As per Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) data, India's aviation sector witnessed 163 million passengers boarding domestic flights in 2024.

Key Points:-

- (i) The report revealed that domestic full-year demand in 2024 reached record highs in passenger numbers and load factors, with traffic increasing by 5.7% and capacity rising by 2.5% compared to the previous year.
- (ii) The report showed that total full-year traffic in 2024, measured in Revenue Passenger Kilometers (RPKs), increased by 10.4% compared to 2023.
- (iii) As per the report, international full-year traffic increased by 13.6% in 2024, while capacity increased by 12.8% compared to 2023.

7. "ECOWAS Acknowledges Official Withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from Regional Bloc in January 2025.

In January 2025, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), headquartered in Abuja (Nigeria), officially acknowledged the withdrawal of three West African countries—Republic of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Republic of Niger—from the regional economic bloc.

- The departure followed the rejection by these countries of ECOWAS's demands to restore civilian

rule. Their leaders have criticized ECOWAS for being overly influenced by France, their former colonial power.

- ECOWAS has urged the remaining 12 member states to continue recognizing the passports of the departing nations and maintain trade relations with them until further notice.

Key Points:-

- (i) The relationship between Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and ECOWAS deteriorated following the July 2023 coup that ousted Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum. ECOWAS strongly opposed the military takeovers and imposed sanctions on the countries.
- (ii) In response, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso decided to formally withdraw from ECOWAS in January 2024, accusing the bloc of failing to protect its members and being overly influenced by foreign powers.
- (iii) In September 2024, the three countries established the Alliance of Sahel States to enhance security cooperation. They remain under military rule following coups in recent years. The Sahel states are located in Africa's Sahel region.

8. Panama Becomes the First Latin American Country to Withdraw from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In February 2025, the President of Panama, José Raúl Mulino Quintero, announced that Panama will not renew its participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), making it the first Latin American country to exit the global infrastructure program.

- The decision was made following a visit from United States (US) Secretary of State Marco Antonio Rubio, during which Panama faced pressure over its economic ties with China.
- Panama originally joined the BRI in 2017, but concerns over the high costs of projects and the financial strain of repaying loans led to increasing criticism of the initiative.
- India has strongly opposed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) due to its route passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), a region that is an integral part of India.

Key Points:-

- (i) The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was launched by China's President Xi Jinping in 2013 as a global infrastructure and investment project aimed at expanding China's global influence. It focuses on developing extensive land and sea trade routes connecting Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa, and Europe.
- (ii) The BRI involves over 140 countries, making China a key trading partner for many nations. Its flagship project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is a USD 60 billion venture linking Gwadar Port (Pakistan) to Xinjiang (China), spanning 3,000 km with infrastructure, railways, and energy developments.
- (iii) In 2023, Italy withdrew from the BRI amid concerns from the United States (US) over China's growing economic influence. Recently, Panama also exited the BRI, becoming the first Latin American country to do so.

9. UNICEF Unveils National Roadmap for Child and Adolescent Road Safety in India.

On February 4, 2025, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in partnership with the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre (WHOCC) for Injury Prevention and Safety, launched the 'National Roadmap to Address Road Traffic Injuries (RTIs) Among Children and Adolescents in India' at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS) in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

- RTIs remain the leading cause of death among children and adolescents, accounting for 10% of all road crash fatalities in India.
- The roadmap outlines a multi-sectoral action plan focusing on road safety management, vehicular regulations, school safety initiatives, and improved post-crash care to enhance child and adolescent road safety in India.
- On average, 45 children under 18 years old lose their lives in road crashes daily, with 16,443 fatalities recorded in 2022 alone. Additionally, 5 million children suffer non-fatal injuries annually, requiring hospitalization.

Key Points:-

- (i) Between 2011 and 2022, approximately 1.98 lakh children and adolescents lost their lives in road crashes, with 75% of fatalities occurring among 14-17-year-olds. Head injuries remain the leading cause of death, with 50% of deaths occurring at the scene.
- (ii) Unsafe road conditions, lack of helmet use, and low adoption of Child Restraint Systems (CRS) significantly contribute to the crisis. Additionally, over half of safety-rated cars in India

have a child-occupant safety rating of 3 stars or less, posing further risks.

(iii) Only 20% of large government hospitals in India have pediatric ICU facilities to handle road crash injuries. NIMHANS plans to establish a polytrauma center in North Bengaluru, which will serve as a state-of-the-art Level 1 trauma center to enhance emergency care.

10. GAL Partners with UNGC Initiative to Advance Sustainable Aviation.

On February 03, 2025, GMR Airports Limited (GAL), formerly known as GMR Airports Infrastructure Limited (GIL) and India's largest airport operator, joined the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, reinforcing its commitment to becoming a global leader in sustainable aviation.

- As a member of UNGC, GAL has pledged to align its strategies and operations with the ten principles of UNGC, encompassing human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption, while actively promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- GMR Airports Limited (GAL) operates major airports, including Delhi International Airport Limited (DAL) in New Delhi, Hyderabad International Airport in Telangana, Manohar International Airport in Goa, Bidar Airport in Karnataka, and Kualanamu International Airport in Indonesia. It also provides technical services for Mactan Cebu International Airport (Philippines) and is developing Bhogapuram Airport (Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh) and Crete Airport (Greece).

- GAL manages the airport segment and security solutions business through its wholly owned

subsidiary, RAXA Security Services Limited (RAXA). All GAL-operated airports are certified as green buildings by either the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) or the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC).

Key Points:-

(i) The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) is a voluntary initiative that promotes corporate sustainability by encouraging businesses worldwide to adopt responsible and ethical practices. With a network of over 20,000 participating companies across 160+ countries, it aims to drive global progress in sustainability and social responsibility.

(ii) The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) offers a platform for businesses to support the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Participating companies commit to transparency, accountability, and annually reporting their progress toward sustainable and responsible business practices.

11. India Recognized in UN's Honour Roll for Timely Payment of Regular Budget Contributions.

In February 2025, the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations (UN-PMI) in New York announced that India has once again been listed in the UN's 'Honour Roll' of 35 member states that have paid their regular budget assessments in full within the 30-day period specified in the UN's financial regulations.

- As per the UN Committee on Contributions, India contributed USD 37.64 million to the 2025 UN Regular Budget as of January 31, 2025.

Key Points:-

The UN Regular Budget is approved annually by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in December. Each member state's contribution is determined based on the scale of assessment approved by the UNGA, with corresponding payment notes issued in early January.

12. 13th Edition of India-Maldives Joint Military Exercise 'Ekuverin' Kicks Off in Maalifushi.

The 13th edition of the joint military exercise 'Ekuverin' between the Indian Army (IA) and the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) commenced in the island nation of Maldives. On February 2, 2025, the inaugural ceremony was held at the Official Composite Training Center of the MNDF in Maalifushi, Maldives. The event was attended by Major General Ibrahim Hilmy, Chief of the MNDF, and G Balasubramanian, High Commissioner of India (HCI).

- The 14-day exercise is scheduled to take place from February 2 to February 15, 2025.

- The Ekuverin exercise is a bilateral annual military exercise between India and the Maldives, conducted since 2009 to enhance defense cooperation and interoperability. The word "Ekuverin" means "Friends" in the Dhivehi language. The 12th edition of the exercise was held in Chaubatia, Uttarakhand, India, from June 11 to 24, 2023.

- The Ekuverin exercise is conducted alternately between India and the Maldives, involving platoon-level contingents from both nations. It aims to enhance interoperability in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations while also facilitating joint humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

Key Points:-

(i) India and the Maldives have maintained strong political and defense ties, with defense and security cooperation being a key focus since 1998.

(ii) In 2016, both nations signed the 'Comprehensive Action Plan for Defence' to further strengthen their military partnership.

(iii) India and the Maldives also conduct the military exercise 'Katha,' involving the Indian Navy (IN) and the Naval wing of the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF). The 6th edition of this exercise was held in the Maldives from June 4 to July 3, 2023.

BANKING & FINANCE

1. Air India and Kenya Airways have entered into a codeshare partnership to enhance connectivity.

In January 2025, Air India, based in Gurgaon (Haryana) and owned by the Tata Group and Singapore Airlines, formed a codeshare partnership with Kenya Airways Limited. This collaboration aims to expand Air India's network and provide passengers with more travel options. The two airlines will also continue their interline partnership.

- A codeshare partnership allows an airline to book its passengers on flights of a partner airline, making the travel experience smoother with just one ticket.

- Under this codeshare agreement, Air India will assign its Artificial Intelligence (AI) designator code to Kenya Airways' twice-daily flights between Nairobi (Kenya) and Mumbai (India).

Key Points:-

(i) Passengers can also travel on Air India flights via Mumbai to destinations like Bangkok (Thailand), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Malé (The Maldives), Melbourne (Australia), and Singapore (Singapore).

(ii) Kenya Airways will assign its code to Air India flights operating between Delhi (India) and Nairobi (Kenya).

(iii) Both airlines plan to gradually expand this agreement by adding more destinations in their networks.

2. "CCI Approves Renew Exim DMCC's Stake Acquisition in ITD Cementation".

On January 29, 2025, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) approved the proposal of Renew Exim DMCC, based in Dubai (United Arab Emirates, UAE), to acquire up to 72.64% stake in ITD Cementation India Limited, an Engineering & Construction Company, for Rs. 5,757 crore.

- Renew Exim DMCC, an Adani group affiliate owned by Vinod Adani, will purchase approximately 46.64% of ITD Cementation India Limited's total equity (around 8,01,13,180 shares) for Rs. 3,204 crore.

Key Points:-

(i) In accordance with the SEBI (Substantial Acquisition of Shares and Takeovers) Regulations, 2011, Renew Exim DMCC has made an open offer to acquire up to 4,46,64,772 fully paid-up equity shares, which constitute approximately 26% of the company's shares, for Rs. 2,553 crore, subject to full subscription.

(ii) ITD Cementation India Ltd, based in Mumbai (Maharashtra), specializes in engineering,

procurement, and construction (EPC) projects such as dams, bridges, tunnels, and airports.

3. Canara Bank has introduced the 'Canara Crest Program' to provide a premium banking experience.

In January 2025, Canara Bank, based in Bengaluru (Karnataka), one of India's top Public Sector Banks (PSBs), launched the 'Canara Crest' membership program. This unique initiative offers a personalized and premium banking experience for its customers.

- The program provides exclusive benefits for eligible customers, including access to service lounges, dining rewards, exclusive hotel stays, unlimited fitness memberships, and more.

- The program has two membership segments: CREST and CREST PLUS.

- CREST membership is available for customers with a Quarterly Average Balance (QAB) ranging from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 50 lakh, while CREST PLUS membership is offered to customers with a QAB of Rs 50 lakh or more.

Key Points:-

(i) The membership is offered at zero cost in two ways: through an invitation for existing eligible customers or by opening a new savings account under the Canara CREST segment. There are no minimum balance maintenance charges.

(ii) Eligible customers can join the program via a simple digital process, assisted by a Relationship Manager (RM).

4. ABHFL has secured an investment of Rs 830 crore from the IFC through Non-Convertible Debentures (NCDs).

In January 2025, Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited (ABHFL), a subsidiary of Aditya Birla Capital Limited based in Varavel, Maharashtra, secured an investment of Rs 830 crore from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) through non-convertible debentures (NCDs).

- This investment aims to improve financial inclusion and support affordable housing communities.
- IFC is a member of the World Bank Group, based in Washington, USA.

Key Points:-

- (i) The funding will be used to provide housing loans to low- and middle-income groups, with a special focus on encouraging women to own homes.
- (ii) Part of the funds will also support small and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs), especially those led by women, to promote economic growth.

5. RBI Ombudsman Successfully Resolved 95% of Complaints in FY24.

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released its latest Annual Report of the Ombudsman Scheme, 2023-24. As per the report, RBI resolved 95% (i.e., 2.84 lakh) of complaints received under the Reserve Bank-Integrated Ombudsman Scheme (RB-IOS) between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, achieving a disposable rate of 95.10%.

- Under the RB-IOS, 2021 Act, complaints are handled by 24 Offices of the RBI Ombudsman (ORBIOS) and the

Centralised Receipt and Processing Centre (CRPC) during F.Y. 2023-24.

- The report revealed that a total of 9,34,355 complaints were received by the ORBIOS and CRPC, compared to 7,03,544 complaints in F.Y. 2022-23, marking an increase of 32.81%.

Key Points:-

- (i) Out of the 9,34,355 complaints, 2,93,924 (31.46%) were received at ORBIOS, while 6,40,431 (68.54%) were received at CRPC. As per the report, 88.77% of the complaints received at ORBIOS came through digital modes, including the online Complaint Management System (CMS) portal and the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS).
- (ii) The report highlighted that ORBIOS resolved 57.07% of maintainable complaints through mutual settlement, conciliation, or mediation, while 40.78% were dismissed due to the absence of any service deficiency.
- (iii) CRPC witnessed a sharp increase in complaints, receiving 7,66,957 complaints (including those assigned to ORBIOS/Consumer Education and Protection Cells (CEPCs)), reflecting a 30.10% rise compared to the previous year.

6. New Investment Announcements Jump 39% to Over ₹32 Lakh Crore in 9M FY25.

According to the Economic Research Department (ERD) report of the State Bank of India (SBI), new investment announcements in India surged by 39% Year-on-Year (Y-o-Y) to over ₹32 lakh crore in the first nine months of FY 2024-25 (9MFY25), up from ₹23 lakh crore during the same period last year.

This growth signifies the continued momentum in investment activities across the country.

- The report also highlighted that domestic investment announcements in India increased significantly by ₹37 lakh crore over the last two financial years (FY23 and FY24).

Key Points:-

(i) The report noted that the government's share in new investment announcements declined to 31.33% in FY23, while the private sector's share increased to 68.67%.

(ii) However, in FY24, the government's share rose to 40.43%, while the private sector's share decreased to 59.57%.

(iii) The manufacturing sector recorded the highest number of investment announcements, with 1,493 projects worth ₹5,97,921 crore during 9MFY25.

7. SBI Launches New Term Deposit Scheme for Super Senior Citizens.

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based State Bank of India (SBI) introduced a new Term Deposit (TD) scheme called 'SBI Patrons' for Super Senior Citizens (residents aged 80 years or above).

- The scheme offers additional interest benefits, providing an interest rate 10 basis points (0.10%) higher than the rates offered to senior citizens.
- As per Section 194P of the Income Tax Act, 1961, resident individuals aged 80 years or more are classified as Super Senior Citizens.

Key Points:-

(i) The scheme offers interest rates ranging from

4.10% to 7.60% for Super Senior Citizens. Specifically, the 1-year TD rate is 7.4%, while the 5-year TD rate is 7.6%.

(ii) The scheme includes Term Deposit Receipt (TDR) and Short-Term Deposit Receipt (STDR), with a minimum deposit of ₹1,000 and a maximum deposit of up to ₹3 crore. The deposit tenure ranges from 7 days to 10 years.

(iii) SBI imposes a penalty for premature withdrawals—0.50% for amounts up to ₹5 lakh, and 1% for amounts exceeding ₹5 lakh.

8. KAMAMC Launches India's First Kotak MSCI India ETF.

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Limited (KAMAMC), the asset manager of Kotak Mutual Fund, launched the Kotak MSCI India Exchange-Traded Fund (ETF), India's first ETF designed to track the Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) India Index.

- The New Fund Offer (NFO) opened on January 29, 2025, and will close on February 12, 2025. The scheme is set to reopen for continuous trading on or before February 27, 2025.
- This ETF is designed for investors seeking long-term capital growth, particularly those looking for exposure to companies listed in the MSCI India Index.

Key Points:-

(i) It provides diversified exposure across sectors such as consumer discretionary, finance, healthcare, and real estate, offering a cost-effective way to invest in Indian equities.

(ii) The minimum application amount during the NFO is ₹5,000, with the option to invest any

amount thereafter. The cost per unit during the NFO is ₹10, with no exit load.

(iii) The MSCI India Index is a global benchmark comprising 156 large and mid-cap companies, covering approximately 85% of the Indian equity market.

9. NPCI Introduces New Guidelines for UPI Transaction IDs Effective February 1, 2025.

In February 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) implemented new rules for Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions, effective from February 1, 2025. As per the new regulation, all UPI Transaction Identifications (IDs) containing special characters (@, #, \$, %, and others) will be declined, and only alphanumeric characters must be used.

- This directive ensures compliance with the UPI technical specifications introduced in March 2024.

Key Points:-

(i) The decision follows NPCI Operating Circular (OC 193), issued in March 2024, which required UPI participants to generate transaction IDs exclusively using alphanumeric characters for technical standardization.

(ii) All banks, payment service providers, and third-party applications (apps) must update their systems before the enforcement date.

10. IPPB (India Post Payments Bank) and PNB MetLife have partnered to expand access to life insurance in India.

On January 30, 2025, India Post Payments Bank Limited (IPPB) based in New Delhi and PNB MetLife India Insurance Company Limited (PNB MetLife) based in Mumbai, announced a bancassurance partnership to make life insurance more accessible across India.

- This collaboration combines PNB MetLife's life insurance products with IPPB's large network of 650 banking outlets and its customer base of 110 million people.
- The goal is to provide life insurance to households across India, offering financial protection and supporting financial inclusion.

Key Points:-

(i) IPPB and PNB MetLife aim to make life insurance accessible to more families, including those in rural areas that are usually underserved.

(ii) They offer a variety of products like Child Education, Family Protection, Long-term Savings, and Retirement plans.

(iii) The partnership ensures that even remote areas are covered, supporting the Government of India's mission to promote financial inclusion.

11. Finvasia Joins Forces with YES Bank to Launch AI-Powered Super App 'Jumpp'.

In January 2025, Finvasia, a fintech company based in Chandigarh, Punjab, partnered with YES Bank Limited, headquartered in Mumbai, Maharashtra, to launch 'Jumpp', an AI-enabled super application (app) designed to simplify personal finance.

- The 'Jumpp' app combines banking, savings, payments, investments, and borrowing into a unified,

seamless platform. It allows users to effortlessly open savings accounts with YES Bank in just a few minutes.

- Jumpp is specifically designed for online shoppers in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, delivering a smooth and user-friendly financial experience.
- The app is connected to India's Account Aggregator (AA) framework, which has exceeded 100 million consents, ensuring secure and streamlined sharing of financial data.

Key Points:-

- (i) Jumpp offers multilingual AI-driven assistance in English and Hindi, enabling voice-based interactions for users with limited digital literacy. It also features an AI-powered chatbot that provides personalized financial advice while incorporating advanced fraud prevention mechanisms.
- (ii) The app prioritizes data security, strictly complying with regulatory guidelines to protect user information and ensure privacy.
- (iii) Finvasia aims to onboard one million users by January 2026, focusing on expanding digital financial services beyond metro cities to reach a wider audience.

12. Gujarat CM Launches Sensex F&O Contracts on India INX at GIFT City.

In February 2025, Bhupendra Patel, Chief Minister (CM) of Gujarat, launched Sensex Futures & Options (F&O) contracts on the India International Exchange (India INX), India's first international stock exchange and a subsidiary of Bombay Stock Exchange Limited (BSE), at Gujarat International Finance Tech-City - International Financial Services Centre (GIFT-IFSC) in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

- This initiative enables international investors to trade and settle BSE derivatives in United States Dollar (USD), promoting greater participation from global traders and investors.
- It also allows global investors to trade India's benchmark equity index without currency conversion risks.
- India INX, established in 2017 at GIFT City, is India's first international exchange. It provides global investors with diverse investment opportunities in a regulated, tax-efficient, and technologically advanced environment.

Key Points:-

- (i) The contracts will be traded for 22 hours daily, aligning with global markets and enhancing access to Indian equities through GIFT City's tax-friendly regime.
- (ii) Foreign investors, including Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), can participate in this new product offering without the need for an Indian tax identification number, i.e., Permanent Account Number (PAN).
- (iii) Futures & Options (F&O) derivatives allow traders to speculate on asset price movements without owning the underlying asset, which may include stocks, bonds, and commodities.

13. RBI Imposes Penalties on ESFBL and IPPB for Regulatory Violations.

In February 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) imposed penalties on Chennai (Tamil Nadu) based Equitas Small Finance Bank Limited (ESFBL) and New Delhi (Delhi) based India Post Payments Bank

Limited (IPPB) for non-compliance with regulatory guidelines.

- ESFBL was fined Rs 65 lakh for violating directions on 'Levy of Foreclosure Charges/Pre-payment Penalty on Floating Rate Term Loans' and 'Credit Flow to Agriculture – Collateral-free Agricultural Loans.'

Key Points:-

- (i) IPPB was penalized Rs 26.70 lakh for deficiencies in adhering to 'Customer Service in Banks' norms.
- (ii) Additionally, a penalty of Rs 3.10 lakh was imposed on Chennai-based Aptus Finance India Private Limited for contravening certain provisions related to Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).

14. 'The 1% Club' Becomes the First Finfluencer Firm to Receive SEBI RIA License.

In February 2025, The 1% Club, a financial advisory startup founded by internet personality Sharan Hegde, became the first finfluencer-led company to obtain a Registered Investment Advisor (RIA) license from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

- The 1% Club is now officially authorized to provide personalized financial planning services under its Personal Chief Financial Officer (CFO) division. This division, which was previously launched to offer customized financial guidance, currently manages assets worth Rs. 750 crore (approximately USD 90 million) in assets under advisory (AUA), showcasing its strong foothold in wealth management.
- After undergoing a rigorous 6-month evaluation process, The 1% Club has secured the Registered

Investment Advisor (RIA) license from SEBI. This license enables the firm to broaden its technology-driven, cost-effective advisory services, making professional financial guidance more accessible to a larger audience.

- To strengthen its presence in India's wealth management sector, The 1% Club plans to expand its advisory team beyond its current 40 members and establish operations in major cities across India. With an existing membership base of 85,000 individuals, the company also intends to launch additional SEBI-approved investment products, further enhancing its service offerings.

Key Points:-

- (i) The firm has already made significant strides in financial literacy through its workshops, including "Money School," which has impacted 250,000 users. These initiatives reflect The 1% Club's commitment to empowering individuals with financial knowledge while fostering a community of informed investors.
- (ii) With the RIA license, The 1% Club is set to monetize its advisory services and tap into India's growing retail investing market, aiming to revolutionize financial advisory and make wealth management more accessible.
- (iii) To obtain an RIA license from SEBI, a firm must be a company or LLP, with at least one graduate director/partner—preferably holding CFA or MBA (Finance) qualifications. Advisors must pass the NISM-Series-X-A (Level 1) exam, and the firm must maintain a minimum net worth of Rs. 25 lakh. As of January 2025, India has only 1,300 RIAs, highlighting the exclusivity of this certification.

15. NaBFID Approves ₹2,000 Crore Loan for Blackstone-Backed Data Centre.

In February 2025, Mumbai-based National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) announced a ₹2,000 crore loan to Gramercy Techpark Private Limited, a Mumbai-based firm backed by New York-based Blackstone Inc., for establishing a 120 MW data centre at Mahape, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- This marks Gramercy's second data centre in Navi Mumbai, with construction set to commence in mid-2025.

- Data centres play a crucial role in meeting the growing demand for computing and storage infrastructure, driven by the rapid digital transformation of businesses and the increased accessibility of high-speed internet. With enterprises shifting to digital platforms and internet usage rising, the demand for robust data centre facilities has surged.

- The advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) further accelerates the need for data centres, as AI applications require higher computational power and lower latency compared to traditional cloud computing. This growing reliance on AI-driven technologies is expected to significantly boost data centre expansion in India.

Key Points:-

- (i) Data centre projects are capital-intensive, with an estimated debt-to-equity ratio of 80:20. These projects require highly automated infrastructure, including advanced power and cooling systems, to ensure operational efficiency and scalability.
- (ii) According to CRISIL Ratings Limited, an estimated ₹55,000 crore to ₹65,000 crore

investment will be required over the next three financial years (FYs) to meet India's increasing data centre demands. The investment will primarily be allocated to land acquisition, building development, power equipment, and cooling solutions.

- (iii) In February 2025, NaBFID planned to raise ₹5,000 crore via 15-year bonds (7.25%), while PFC raised ₹3,950 crore through 10 & 20-year bonds (7.24%-7.25%), boosting funding for infrastructure and tech development in India.

16. Beacon Introduces India Bill Pay Service for NRIs in Canada.

On February 5, 2025, Beacon, a Toronto-based fintech firm specializing in financial services for immigrants, launched 'India Bill Pay', enabling Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in Canada to pay bills directly in India using Canadian dollars through their Beacon Money account via the Beacon Money app.

- This first-of-its-kind service simplifies bill payments for NRIs in collaboration with Bharat Connect (formerly Bharat Bill Payment System - BBPS) and Mumbai-based YES Bank Limited. With this launch, Beacon becomes the first North American company to integrate with Bharat Connect.

Key Points:-

- (i) Enables NRIs to pay over 21,000 Indian billers, covering utilities, loans, school fees, and hospital charges.
- (ii) The service ensures a seamless and secure process, utilizing the Rupee Drawing Arrangement (RDA) regulated by the Reserve Bank of India

(RBI).

(iii) Offers 100% digital Know Your Customer (KYC) with onboarding in just 10 minutes, auto-fetches bill amounts, and provides timely payment reminders for convenience.

three years; unlimited free RTGS (Real Time Gross Settlement) / NEFT (National Electronic Funds Transfer) transactions via digital channels; premium debit cards with exclusive benefits, including airport lounge access.

17. South Indian Bank Launches Startup-Focused Current Accounts.

In February 2025, Thrissur (Kerala)-based South Indian Bank Limited (SIB), one of India's leading Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs), introduced two innovative startup Current Account (CA) products: 'SIB Business Startup Current Account' and 'SIB Corporate Startup Current Account.' This initiative aims to strengthen India's startup ecosystem.

- These new offerings were unveiled in the presence of P.R. Seshadri, Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SIB, at the Andromeda auditorium in Rajagiri Valley, Kochi, Kerala.
- Tailored for sole proprietorships and partnerships, this account provides essential banking services to help new businesses establish a strong financial foundation.

Key Points:-

- (i) Designed for larger business entities such as private limited companies, public limited companies, one-person companies, and limited liability partnerships (LLPs), addressing their complex financial needs.
- (ii) Businesses must be incorporated or registered within the last three years to qualify.
- (iii) Zero minimum balance requirement for up to

18. Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) Joins Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials as a Signatory.

Chennai (Tamil Nadu, TN)-based Indian Overseas Bank (IOB), one of India's leading Public Sector Banks (PSBs), has recently become a signatory of the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF). With this move, IOB has joined the ranks of early adopters in the Indian banking sector, reaffirming its commitment to combating climate change and promoting responsible banking practices.

- As a PCAF signatory, IOB will measure and disclose the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions associated with its financed activities. The bank will adopt globally harmonized methodologies for GHG accounting, aligning itself with international best practices in the financial industry.
- This initiative strengthens IOB's commitment to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles and enhances its responsible banking strategies.

Key Points:-

- (i) PCAF is a global initiative established in 2015 by 14 Dutch financial institutions (FIs) under the leadership of The Hague (Netherlands)-based ASN Bank and was launched globally in 2019. As of January 2025, more than 550 financial institutions (FIs) have joined the PCAF initiative.

(ii) PCAF provides a standardized framework for financial institutions to measure and disclose GHG emissions from their lending and investment portfolios, helping them assess climate risks and align with global climate targets.

(iii) Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Union Bank of India (UBI) was the first major Indian bank to sign the PCAF framework in September 2016. Later, New Delhi (Delhi)-based Punjab National Bank (PNB) joined this initiative in November 2024.

19. RBI Releases Payment System Report for December 2024, Highlighting Surge in Digital Transactions.

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the Payment System Report, December 2024, which analyzed trends in payment transactions conducted through various payment systems over the last five calendar years (CY) up to CY-2024.

- The report highlights key developments in the payment ecosystem and provides in-depth insights into the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).
- Going forward, this report will be published bi-annually on the RBI website.
- As per the report, 222 crore digital transactions valued at ₹772 lakh crore were recorded in CY-2013. This figure has surged 94 times in volume and more than 3.5 times in value to over 20,787 crore transactions valued at ₹2,758 lakh crore in CY-2024.

Key Points:-

(i) The report also revealed that retail digital payments in India have grown from 162 crore transactions in Financial Year 2012-13 (FY13) to 16,416 crore transactions in FY24, reflecting a

nearly 100-fold increase over 12 years.

(ii) In January 2025, RBI released its Annual Report of the Ombudsman Scheme, 2023-24, revealing that 95% (2.84 lakh) of complaints received under the Reserve Bank-Integrated Ombudsman Scheme (RB-IOS) between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, were resolved, achieving a disposal rate of 95.10%.

(iii) The report also disclosed that a total of 9,34,355 complaints were received by the Offices of the RBI Ombudsman (ORBIOs) and the Centralized Receipt and Processing Centre (CRPC).

20. CA Grameen Secures USD 50 Million Loan from IFC to Support Women Borrowers.

In February 2025, CA Grameen Limited, based in Bengaluru (Karnataka), India's largest Non-Banking Financial Company-Microfinance Institution (NBFC-MFI), secured a USD 50 million loan from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), which is based in Washington, D.C., USA, and is part of the World Bank Group.

- The funding will help improve financial access for small entrepreneurs and support an additional 3-4 million women borrowers, especially those involved in agriculture and related activities.

Key Points:-

(i) The loan will help strengthen India's financial sector by supporting CA Grameen's strategy for the financial year 2027-2028, which aims to get 25%-30% of its funds from international sources while keeping borrowing costs low.

(ii) It will also work to include more people in

agriculture and related fields into the formal economy, helping women-owned small businesses grow, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

21. 121 Finance becomes the first lender on GeM Sahay 2.0, which is built on the OCEN framework.

In January 2025, 121 Finance Private Limited, based in Jaipur (Rajasthan), India's first Reserve Bank of India (RBI) registered Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) Factor, partnered with Government e-Marketplace (GeM), an initiative by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I). Along with Perfios Software Solutions Private Limited, based in Bengaluru (Karnataka), and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) from Mumbai (Maharashtra), they developed GeM Sahay 2.0.

- GeM Sahay 2.0 aims to improve financial inclusion by making the platform easier to use and more effective for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), while providing a smooth experience for lenders.
- 121 Finance played an important role in the pilot phase of GeM Sahay, setting a standard for digital lending with real-time, technology-driven financing, making it more accessible and useful for MSMEs.

Key Points:-

- (i) 121 Finance, India's largest independently owned NBFC-Factor, focuses on solving B2B (Business to Business) trade credit challenges faced by MSMEs.
- (ii) This partnership creates specialized loan products with smaller amounts, and works as key partners in the Open Credit Enablement Network

(OCEN) framework.

- (iii) The OCEN framework demonstrates how digital platforms can change lending in India. Its flexibility and scalability will support more projects, helping MSME growth and financial inclusion.

22. RBI Harmonizes HFCs' NCD Private Placement Guidelines with NBFC Regulations.

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the alignment of regulations for the private placement of non-convertible debentures (NCDs) by housing finance companies (HFCs) with those applicable to non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

- This change replaces the existing framework under Chapter XI of the Master Direction Non-Banking Financial Company Housing Finance Company (Reserve Bank) Directions, 2021, with new guidelines in line with Paragraph 58 of the Master Direction NBFC Scale Based Regulation) Directions, 2023.
- As a result, HFCs will now follow the same rules and guidelines as NBFCs when issuing NCDs, and previous HFC-specific guidelines on NCD issuance have been repealed.
- The updated guidelines will take effect on January 29, 2025, and will apply to all new private placements of NCDs issued by HFCs with maturities exceeding one year.

Key Points:-

- (i) Under the NBFC Scale-Based Regulation, companies must formulate a board-approved policy for resource planning, specifying the planning horizon and frequency of private placements. The minimum subscription per

investor is set at ₹20,000, and private placements of NCDs are categorized into two segments: those with a maximum subscription of less than ₹1 crore per investor and those with a minimum subscription of ₹1 crore and above per investor.

(ii) For NCDs with a maximum subscription of less than ₹1 crore per investor, the total number of subscribers is limited to 200 per financial year, and these subscriptions must be fully secured.

(iii) Non-convertible debentures (NCDs) are fixed-income instruments issued by high-rated companies to raise long-term capital. They offer higher interest rates than convertible debentures and can be invested in by individuals, banks, and institutions but cannot be converted into equity or stock.

23. RBI Infuses USD 5.1 Billion Liquidity Through FX Swap Auction.

In January 2025, the Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Reserve Bank of India (RBI) conducted a dollar-rupee buy/sell FX swap auction for USD 5.1 billion. The auction witnessed significant oversubscription, with total bids reaching USD 25.59 billion from 253 participants, surpassing the offered amount by five times.

● **This initiative aims to infuse rupee liquidity into the banking system and aligns with the central bank's broader strategy to inject approximately Rs. 1.5 trillion into the financial system.**

Key Points:-

(i) The transaction will be reversed on August 4, 2025, when the RBI will sell the USD 5.1 billion—acquired through 28 accepted bids—back to the market at the forward rate (currency exchange

spot rate plus 96.71 paise) and absorb approximately Rs. 43,784 crores.

(ii) Following the auction results, dollar-rupee forward premiums experienced a slight decline, with the 1-year implied yield moderating its rise to settle at the last quoted rate of 2.24%.

(iii) In an FX swap, the RBI purchases dollars from financial institutions in exchange for rupees, simultaneously increasing rupee liquidity and reducing excess dollar circulation.

24. SEBI Proposes New Combined Offering: Mutual Funds (MFs) with Term Life Insurance (TLI).

In January 2025, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), based in Mumbai (Maharashtra), announced plans to launch a new financial product that merges Mutual Funds (MFs) investments with Term Life Insurance (TLI).

● **SEBI Chairperson, Madhabi Puri Buch, made the announcement with the aim of promoting Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) in rural areas.**

Key Points:-

(i) The product would allow customers to combine life insurance with Mutual Fund investments, providing an affordable and attractive solution that fosters financial inclusion in underserved areas.

(ii) Additionally, SEBI is developing the "Pay Right" initiative to enable investors to verify the authenticity of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payments through Know Your Customer (KYC) checks, thereby minimizing the risk of digital fraud.

25. RBI Approves Findi's 100% Acquisition of TCPSL for ₹330 Crore.

In February 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approved the acquisition of Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Tata Communications Payment Solutions Limited (TCPSL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Communications that operates white-label Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) in India, by Transaction Solutions International (TSI), the Indian subsidiary of Australian fintech firm Findi.

- This acquisition strengthens Findi's position in India's financial services sector, expanding ATM accessibility, particularly for underbanked regions.
- Initially announced in November 2024, the ₹330 crore (USD 59.1 million) deal includes an additional performance-based payment of up to ₹75 crore (USD 13.4 million), contingent on interchange rate changes.

Key Points:-

- (i) The acquisition grants Findi control over TCPSL's white-label ATM platform, White Label ATM (WLA) license, and payment switch, adding 3,000 ATMs to its network, expanding its total to over 12,000 ATMs, and making it one of Asia's largest ATM operators.
- (ii) TSI plans to deploy these ATMs at 180,000 FindiPay and BankIT merchant locations, while integrating them into Indicash franchises to enhance financial accessibility across India.
- (iii) TCPSL pioneered India's first white-label ATM network, Indicash, in 2013 to support RBI's mission of improving ATM access and remains one of India's largest white-label ATM operators.

26. RBI Introduces Regulatory Sandbox to Test Offline Digital Payment Solutions.

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) launched a Regulatory Sandbox (RS) to test the "On Tap" application under the theme of 'Retail Payments.'

- Chennai (Tamil Nadu) based Exto India Technologies Private Limited was chosen to participate in the 'Test Phase' of this project.

Key Points:-

- (i) The company tested an offline digital payment solution that uses Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT) and private biometric authorization, allowing card-to-card and card-to-phone transactions without internet.
- (ii) The key features of this innovation include using cryptography in distributed ledgers, on-card biometric authentication, and time-limited balances, which helps prevent problems like double spending.
- (iii) After testing, the product was found to be acceptable under the Regulatory Sandbox (RS) and may be adopted by regulated entities, as long as they comply with the necessary regulatory requirements.

MOUs and Agreement

1. DIID, MOSPI, and IIIT-Delhi Sign MoU to Enhance India's Statistical Ecosystem.

The Data Informatics and Innovation Division (DIID) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology

(IIT-Delhi) as part of the Data Innovation Lab (DIL) initiative. This collaboration aims to modernize India's National Statistical System (NSS).

- The partnership seeks to bridge government and academia, using academic expertise to address real-world challenges and bring fresh ideas into India's statistical system.

- As the statistical landscape evolves, new methods such as data integration, real-time analytics, and predictive modeling are being introduced to tackle emerging issues.

Key Points:-

(i) In July 2024, MOSPI launched the DIL initiative to foster innovation in official statistics and create a research-driven ecosystem.

(ii) The DI Lab serves as a platform for leveraging emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), and Big Data Analytics (BDA) to improve data collection, processing, and dissemination.

(iii) The DI Lab has partnered with top academic institutions, reaching over 100 institutions, and has signed MoUs with several reputed institutions, including prominent Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

2. SIDBI and TIDITSSIA Ink MoU to Boost Local Industries.

In January 2025, the Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh-based Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with The Tiruchirapalli District Tiny & Small

Scale Industries Association (TIDITSSIA) to foster mutual cooperation and support local industries.

- The signing ceremony was attended by Pyda Rama Krishna, Assistant General Manager (AGM) of SIDBI, J.P. Jagadish, Branch Manager of SIDBI, P. Rajappa, President of TIDITSSIA, along with other dignitaries.

Key Points:-

(i) Under the MoU, SIDBI will conduct capacity-building training for selected office-bearers and staff of TIDITSSIA, offer support to the association's members, and organize buyer-seller meetings.

(ii) The initiative will assist around 450 members in securing business loans at an interest rate approximately 1% lower than those offered by other financial institutions.

3. T-Hub and ITFA Ink MoU to Strengthen India-Turkiye Trade and Cultural Relations.

In January 2025, Hyderabad (Telangana)-based startup incubator Technology Hub (T-Hub) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indo-Turkiye Friendship Association (ITFA) at ITFA's inaugural event held at the Turkish Consulate General in Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad, Telangana. The MoU aims to enhance collaboration between India and Türkiye's innovation ecosystems as both nations position themselves as global leaders in economy and technology.

- As part of this partnership, T-Hub and ITFA will jointly work on various initiatives, including the Türkiye Tourism Roadshow, scheduled to take place on February 26, 2025, in Hyderabad.

- The signing ceremony was attended by Orhan Yalman Okan, Consul General of Türkiye, and M.A. Faiz Khan, Chairman of ITFA.
- The MoU enables cross-border mentorship, market access, and collaboration in key sectors such as IT, software, pharmaceuticals, defense, aerospace, cybersecurity, green and renewable energy, and critical minerals, while also emphasizing health, food security, logistics, supply chain management, agriculture, textiles, and machinery.

Key Points:-

- (i) The MoU promotes joint academic and accelerator programs, emphasizing technology-driven initiatives in Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and critical minerals.
- (ii) ITFA will support Indian startups in accessing Turkish markets and connecting with suitable partners, while T-Hub will assist Turkish startups in integrating into the Indian ecosystem.
- (iii) In 2024, bilateral trade between India and Türkiye reached USD 13 billion, with both governments setting a mid-term target of USD 20 billion.

4. IICA and CMAI Ink MoU to Strengthen India's Carbon Market.

On February 4, 2025, the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA), based in Gurugram, Haryana, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Carbon Markets Association of India (CMAI), headquartered in New Delhi, during the IICA-CMAI Masterclass on Global & Indian Carbon Markets. This event was part of India Climate Week 2025 (February 3–7, 2025), held in New Delhi.

- The MoU aims to enhance India's carbon markets, facilitate decarbonization efforts, and equip industry professionals, policymakers, and academics with essential knowledge to navigate the evolving carbon market landscape in India.
- The event was attended by Union Minister Nitin Jairam Gadkari (Minister for Road Transport & Highways), Garima Dadhich (Head of the School of Business Environment at IICA), and Manish Dabkara (President of CMAI).
- The Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA) and the Carbon Markets Association of India (CMAI) will collaborate on various initiatives to advance carbon markets, promote low-carbon industrial solutions, and support sustainable finance. CMAI will act as a knowledge partner to IICA, contributing expertise and insights to these efforts.

Key Points:-

- (i) They will jointly develop training programs focused on carbon markets, low-carbon industrial strategies, and sustainable finance, equipping professionals with essential skills. Additionally, they will conduct joint research and publish findings on decarbonization strategies and carbon trading mechanisms.
- (ii) The partnership will also involve hosting workshops and conferences to facilitate discussions among industry leaders, policymakers, and academics. These events will provide a platform for knowledge exchange and strategic planning in the field of carbon markets.
- (iii) Furthermore, both organizations will engage in policy advocacy to support the development of regulatory frameworks that align with India's net-zero goals. Their efforts aim to shape policies that

drive sustainable economic growth while reducing carbon emissions.

SPORTS

1. Australia Clinches ICC Women's Championship Trophy for the Third Time.

Australia secured the ICC Women's Championship title for the third consecutive time. This was the third edition of the tournament, where each team played three One Day International (ODI) matches against all other teams. The team finishing at the top of the points table at the end of the cycle was declared the winner.

- Australian captain Alyssa Healy received the championship trophy in Melbourne, Australia. The trophy was presented on behalf of the ICC by Cricket Australia Chair and ICC Director Mike Baird.
- Australia finished the championship with the highest total of 39 points, securing 17 wins, three no-results, and three losses in 24 matches. India finished in second place with 37 points.
- The top six teams from the points table have secured direct qualification for the 2025 Women's Cricket World Cup, which will be hosted by India. Australia topped the standings with 39 points, followed closely by India with 37 points. England secured third place with 32 points, while South Africa finished fourth with 25 points. Sri Lanka and New Zealand also earned direct entry with 22 and 21 points, respectively. These teams will compete in the upcoming World Cup, aiming for the prestigious title on Indian soil.

Key Points:-

(i) Australia holds the record for winning the most ICC Women's Cricket World Cups in the 50-over

format, with titles in 1978, 1982, 1988, 1997, 2005, 2013, and 2022.

(ii) The Australian women's team has also dominated the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, winning the tournament six times in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2018, 2020, and 2023.

(iii) With this latest ICC Women's Championship win, Australia continues to establish itself as the most dominant force in women's cricket, setting high standards for excellence in the sport.

2. BCCI Awards 2025: Jasprit Bumrah & Smriti Mandhana Honored as Best International Cricketers of 2023-24.

On February 1, 2025, Jasprit Bumrah won the Best International Cricketer of the Year (also called the Polly Umrigar Award) 2023-24 in the Men's category, and Smriti Mandhana won the Best International Cricketer of the Year 2023-24 in the Women's category at the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) Awards 2025 (Naman Awards).

- Former Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar, fondly known as the "God of Cricket" or "Master Blaster," was honored with the Colonel CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award of the Year 2024.

Key Points:-

(i) Sachin Tendulkar is the 31st recipient of the Colonel CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award from the BCCI.

(ii) The Colonel CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award was instituted in 1994 in honor of India's first cricket captain, Colonel Cottari Kanakaiya (CK) Nayudu.

(iii) The BCCI also presented a special award to Indian cricketer Ravichandran Ashwin, who retired from all forms of international cricket in December 2024.

3. India Clinches ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup 2025, Defeating South Africa for the Second Consecutive Time.

On February 02, 2025, India emerged victorious in the 2nd edition of the International Cricket Council (ICC) Under-19 (U19) Women's T20 World Cup 2025, clinching the title for the second consecutive time by defeating South Africa by 9 wickets in the final at Bayuemas Oval, Kuala Lumpur (KL), Malaysia.

- The Indian women's cricket team was captained by Niki Prasad, while the South African team was led by Kayla Reyneke.
- Following this victory, Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) Secretary Jay Shah announced a prize money of Rs 5 crore for India's U-19 women's team.
- South Africa, batting first, scored 82 runs in 20 overs. India chased down the target easily, reaching 84 runs in just 11.2 overs, winning by 9 wickets with 52 balls to spare.

Key Points:-

(i) Gongadi Trisha was awarded both the 'Player of the Match 2025' and 'Player of the Series 2025' awards for her outstanding performance in the tournament. She had an exceptional run, scoring 309 runs at an average of 77.25 and a strike rate of 147.14. In the final, she scored an unbeaten 44 runs off 33 balls and took 3 wickets for 15 runs, playing a key role in leading India to victory.

(ii) Sanika Chalke supported with an unbeaten 26 off 22 balls, while Vaishnavi Sharma led the bowling with 17 wickets, followed by Aayushi Shukla. Sharma, Shukla, and Parunika Sisodia each claimed 2 wickets, contributing to a well-rounded team effort in both batting and bowling.

(iii) The ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup is an international cricket competition organized by the ICC since 2023, featuring 16 teams and 41 matches in a T20 format. In the inaugural edition in 2023, India defeated England by 7 wickets in the final held in South Africa. The third edition is scheduled to be hosted by Bangladesh and Nepal in 2027.

4. R Praggnanandhaa Clinches 'Tata Steel Chess Masters 2025' Title, Defeats World Champion D Gukesh in Tiebreaker.

On February 2, 2025, Indian Chess Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa triumphed in the 'Tata Steel Chess Masters 2025' by defeating the 2024 World Chess Champion, D Gukesh, in a tiebreaker at Wijk aan Zee, Netherlands. With this remarkable victory, Praggnanandhaa became the first Indian chess player since Viswanathan Anand in 2006 to claim the prestigious Tata Steel Masters title.

- Praggnanandhaa had previously reached a career-high World Ranking of 8 in July 2024 and was a runner-up in the 2023 Chess World Cup, where he lost to Magnus Carlsen in the final.
- The Tata Steel Chess Tournament 2025, held from January 17 to February 2 in Wijk aan Zee, Netherlands, was the 87th edition of the prestigious event, known as the "Wimbledon of Chess," with past winners including legends like Anand and Carlsen.

- The tournament, the first elite chess event of the year, featured 5 of the 14 participants ranked in the top 10 globally and showcased chess legends in a classical 14-player round-robin format across the Masters and Challengers categories.

Key Points:-

- (i) R Praggnanandhaa (ranked 14th in the world) performed admirably with six wins, five draws, and two losses, including a defeat to Germany's Vincent Keymer in the final round.
- (ii) Newly crowned World Chess Champion 2024, D Gukesh, faced his first loss as World Champion, falling to Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi in 31 moves.
- (iii) The tournament was concluded with a blitz tiebreaker, where each player competed in two fast-paced games, resulting in a 1-1 draw.

5. Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers Clinch 6th Men's HIL 2024-25 Championship Title.

In February 2025, Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers won their first-ever title in the Men's Hockey India League (HIL) 2024-25 by defeating Hyderabad Toofans 4-3 in the final. The championship match took place at the Birs Munda International Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, Odisha. This victory marked a historic moment for the Bengal-based team in the tournament's history.

- The 6th edition of the Men's HIL 2024-25 featured eight teams and was held from December 28, 2024, to February 1, 2025. The competition showcased high-intensity hockey action, with top domestic and international players participating. Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers were captained by Rupinder Pal Singh, while Hyderabad Toofans were led by Sumit Walmiki.

- As part of the prize distribution, Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers received Rs 3 crore for winning the title, whereas Hyderabad Toofans, the runners-up, were awarded Rs 2 crore. The financial incentives were aimed at encouraging competitive performance and boosting the league's popularity.

- The final match saw Jugraj Singh's brilliant hat-trick (25', 32', 35') and a decisive goal from Sam Lane (54') securing the victory for Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers. Hyderabad Toofans put up a strong fight, with Gonzalo Peillat scoring twice (9', 39') and Amandeep Lakra contributing (26'), but they ultimately fell short in the 4-3 contest.

Key Points:-

- (i) Key individual awards of the Men's HIL 2024-25 included Jugraj Singh (Top Scorer), Sukhjeet Singh (Player of the Tournament), and Bikramjit Singh (Best Goalkeeper). Arshdeep Singh was named Upcoming Player, while UP Rudras won the Fairplay Award.
- (ii) The Men's Hockey India League (HIL), organized by Hockey India, began in 2013 and ran until 2017 before returning with its 6th edition in 2024-25. Kalinga Lancers were the previous champions in 2017.
- (iii) In January 2025, Odisha Warriors won the inaugural Women's HIL 2024-25, defeating Soorma Hockey Club 2-1 in Ranchi, Jharkhand, marking a milestone in Indian women's hockey.

6. Romanian Tennis Star Simona Halep Announces Retirement from Professional Tennis.

On February 4, 2025, Romania's Simona Halep, a two-time Grand Slam champion and former world

No. 1 in the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) rankings, announced her retirement from professional tennis at the age of 33.

- Her decision followed a 6-1, 6-1 first-round defeat to Lucia Bronzetti at the 2025 Transylvania Open in Romania.

- In 2017, she achieved the world No. 1 ranking in the WTA, holding the position for a total of 64 weeks.

Key Points:-

(i) Simona Halep won two Grand Slam singles titles—first at the 2018 French Open, where she defeated Sloane Stephens, and then at the 2019 Wimbledon Championship, securing victory over Serena Williams.

(ii) She finished as the runner-up in three Grand Slam finals: the 2018 Australian Open, as well as the French Open in 2014 and 2017. Over her career, she secured 24 WTA singles titles and earned more than USD 40 million in prize money. At the time of her retirement, she was ranked No. 870 in the world.

(iii) In the 2022 United States (US) Open, Simona Halep tested positive for Roxadustat following her first-round loss. Initially handed a four-year ban, her suspension was later reduced to nine months by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in 2024.

AWARDS

1. Hardeep Singh Puri Announces Winners of Avinya'25 & Vasudha Startup Challenges at ONGC HQ During 'Energize India' Conclave.

At ONGC headquarters, Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri announced the winners of the Avinya'25 and Vasudha startup challenges. UrjanovaC Pvt

Ltd won Avinya'25, while Latin Energy Partners Inc. (Paraguay) topped Vasudha. IIT (ISM) – Dhanbad won the Hackathon, with IIT-Guwahati as the runner-up.

- The Energize India conclave saw strong participation, with Avinya'25 receiving 173 applications from across India and Vasudha attracting global innovators. The winners will showcase their innovations at India Energy Week 2025, where over 70,000 energy professionals from 120 countries will attend.

- Minister Hardeep Singh Puri highlighted India's energy diversification, increasing imports from 27 to 39 countries. He also announced that India has reached 19% ethanol blending, nearing its 20% target ahead of schedule, with plans for further expansion.

Key Points:-

(i) The Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas has supported 303 startups with ₹286.36 crore through a ₹547.35 crore fund, fostering India's startup ecosystem of 110+ unicorns.

(ii) Panel discussions featured Shri Pankaj Jain (Petroleum & Natural Gas Secretary) and Shri S.C.L. Das (MSME Secretary), addressing energy startup opportunities and regulatory support.

(iii) The winners will gain global exposure at India Energy Week 2025, scheduled in New Delhi from February 11-14, 2025, featuring 700+ companies, 500 speakers, and 6,000+ delegates.

2. Noel Naval Tata Awarded Honorary Doctorate by University of Sussex.

In January 2025, the University of Sussex, based in England (The United Kingdom, UK), awarded an honorary doctorate to Noel Naval Tata, a prominent

business leader from the Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Tata Group and a distinguished alumnus of the university, in recognition of his exceptional contributions to global business leadership.

- Professor Sasha Roseneil, Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Sussex, presented the honorary doctorate to Noel Tata during a private ceremony in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- Noel Naval Tata currently serves as the Chairman of Trent Limited, Tata International Limited, Voltas Limited, and Tata Investment Corporation Limited. He also holds the position of Vice Chairman at Tata Steel Limited and Titan Company Limited.

Key Points:-

(i) Noel Tata graduated in Economics from the University of Sussex in 1978.

(ii) With over 40 years of leadership experience at the Tata Group, Noel Tata has been instrumental in expanding Trent Limited, the group's fashion retail arm, through brands such as Westside, Star Bazaar, and Zudio.

(iii) In 2024, Noel Tata, Ratan Tata's half-brother, was appointed Chairman of Tata Trusts Limited, the philanthropic arm of the Tata Group.

3. South Africa's Tshego Gaelae Crowned Winner of the 40th Mrs. World Title.

On 31 January 2025, Tshego Gaelae from South Africa (SA), a 33-year-old model, created history by becoming the first Black South African woman to win the 40th edition of the Mrs. World title.

- The grand finale was held in Las Vegas, United States of America (USA), where Gaelae was crowned by Viktoria Horshkova, the reigning Mrs. World 2024.

- Sri Lanka's (SL) Ishadi Amanda secured the first runner-up position, while Thailand's Ploy Panperm was named second runner-up.

- The Mrs. World Competition, established in 1984, is the first beauty pageant exclusively for married women.

Key Points:-

(i) Born in Soweto, South Africa (SA), Tshego Gaelae is a model, lawyer, and labor relations manager, actively advocating for women and children affected by domestic violence through her organization, We Are Our Children's Keepers.

(ii) Tshego Gaelae is the second South African to win the Mrs. World title, following Candice Abrahams, who won in 2016.

(iii) She also holds the title of Mrs. South Africa 2024.

IMPORTANT DAYS

1. World Cancer Day Observed on 4 February 2025.

World Cancer Day (WCD) is observed annually on February 4 worldwide to raise awareness about cancer-related issues and promote efforts in prevention, early detection, and treatment.

- The campaign theme for WCD 2025-2027 is "United by Unique," highlighting the significance of personalized, patient-centered care in the fight against cancer.

- On February 4, 1999, the 'Charter of Paris', consisting of 10 articles, was adopted at the World

Summit Against Cancer for the New Millennium in Paris, France.

Key Points:-

- (i) Under Article X, WCD was officially designated to be observed annually on February 4.
- (ii) The first-ever WCD was observed on February 4, 2000.
- (iii) February 4, 2025, marks 25 years since the signing of the Charter of Paris Against Cancer.

2. International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation Observed on 6 February 2025.

The United Nations (UN) observes the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) annually on February 6 to raise awareness and strengthen global efforts to eliminate FGM. The day serves as a platform for stakeholders to highlight progress, advocate for the abandonment of FGM, and protect girls and women from this harmful practice.

- The 6th of February 2025 marks the 14th observance of this UN-recognized day. The theme for the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM 2025 is: "Stepping Up the Pace: Strengthening Alliances and Building Movements to End Female Genital Mutilation."
- Countries with the highest prevalence of FGM among girls aged 15 to 49 include Somalia (98%), Guinea (97%), and Djibouti (93%).

Key Points:-

- (i) On February 6, 2003, Stella Obasanjo, the First Lady of Nigeria and a prominent advocate against FGM, officially declared "Zero Tolerance for FGM"

in Africa at a conference organized by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC). The first observance of the day took place in 2003.

(ii) Following this declaration, February 6 was officially recognized by the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM.

(iii) On December 20, 2012, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted resolution A/RES/67/146, formally designating February 6 as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation to accelerate efforts to eliminate the practice worldwide.

3. Indian Coast Guard Day Celebrated on 1st February 2025 .

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) Day is celebrated annually on 1st February across India to commemorate the establishment of the ICG, India's maritime armed force under the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

- 1st February 2025 marks the observance of the 49th Raising Day of the ICG.
- In 1977, the Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the ICG, with 2 frigates and 5 patrol boats transferred from the Indian Navy (IN).

Key Points:-

(i) The ICG was formed on February 1, 1977, by the Coast Guard Act of 1978 of the Parliament of India to combat sea-based smuggling that affected India's economy.

(ii) The 1st Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS),

Kuthar (Pennant No. 31), was transferred from the IN to the ICG in 1978.

(iii) The Indian Parliament declared ICG Day on August 18, 1978. ICG was formally inaugurated by the then Prime Minister (PM) Morarji Desai on 19th August 1978.

fragmented rocket ammunition and ADM will be produced at a cost of ₹5,700 crore and ₹4,500 crore, respectively.

DEFENCE

1. CCS Approves ₹10,000 Crore+ Project for Procurement of Ammunition for Indian Army's Pinaka MBRL.

In January 2025, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), chaired by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, approved a project worth over ₹10,000 crore for the procurement of ammunition for the Indian Army (IA)'s Pinaka Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher Systems (MBRLs).

- The ammunition under this project will be manufactured domestically to fulfill the IA's requirements over the next 10 years.
- The contract includes the production of two types of ammunition: Pinaka Mk-I (Enhanced) Rocket System (EPRS) and Area Denial Munitions (ADM).
- These will be manufactured by Pune (Maharashtra)-based Munitions India Limited (MIL) and Nagpur (Maharashtra)-based Economic Explosives Limited (EEL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Solar Industries India Limited (SIIL).

Key Points:-

- (i) The project will be divided between EEL and MIL in a 60:40 ratio, as both emerged as the lowest bidders.
- (ii) Under this project, high-explosive pre-

2. Indian Armed Forces Conducts TROPEX 25 to Assess Combat Readiness.

In January 2025, senior military officers observed the Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX-2025), which involved joint operations aboard several Indian Navy Ships (INS). The exercise aimed to assess the operational capabilities and readiness of the Indian Armed Forces—comprising the Indian Navy (IN), Indian Army (IA), and Indian Air Force (IAF)—in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The exercise was conducted over two days, from January 30-31, 2025.

- The senior military officers who participated in the exercise included Lieutenant General Johnson P. Mathew (Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (CISC)), Lt Gen NS Raja Subramani (Vice Chief of the Army Staff (VCOAS)), Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan (Vice Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS)), Air Marshal Sujeet Pushpakar (S.P.) Dharkar (Vice Chief of the Air Staff (VCAS)), and Lt Gen Ajay Kumar (Director General (DG) of Infantry).
- TROPEX is the Indian Navy's (IN) largest biennial exercise aimed at enhancing coordination among the armed forces and testing readiness against potential threats in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- The previous exercise, TROPEX 23, included extensive operations such as coastal defense operations (Sea Vigil) and amphibious maneuvers (AMPHEX).

Key Points:-

(i) Senior officers aboard INS Vikrant, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier, observed fighter jets and helicopters in action, with demonstrations that featured bomb drops, rocket firing, and aerobatic displays.

(ii) On INS Jalashwa, the officers watched Army soldiers and Navy Commandos perform amphibious landing drills, including bunker breaches, combat jumps, and landing troops and vehicles on the shore using specialized boats.

(iii) Air Marshal SP Dharkar participated in a MiG-29K trainer, demonstrating the joint capabilities of the Indian Navy (IN), Indian Army (IA), and Indian Air Force (IAF). Additionally, the officers visited the Naval Base at Karwar (Karnataka) to receive updates on the ongoing construction of new facilities aimed at supporting future naval operations.

3. Indian Navy Launches LSAM 23, the 9th ACTCM Barge, to Enhance Logistics Capabilities.

In January 2025, the Indian Navy (IN) launched its 9th Ammunition Cum Torpedo Cum Missile (ACTCM) Barge, named Landing Ship Ammunition 23 (LSAM 23) (Yard 133), at M/s Suryadipta Projects Private Limited in Thane, Maharashtra. The launching ceremony was presided over by Commodore (Cmde) Rakesh Anand (Retd.), Group Head of Marine Division.

- The barges facilitate the transportation, embarkation, and disembarkation of articles and ammunition to IN platforms, both alongside jetties and at outer harbors.

- The barges have been indigenously designed and constructed by the MSME Shipyard in collaboration

with an Indian ship designing firm and the Indian Register of Shipping (IRS).

Key Points:-

(i) Model testing was conducted at the Naval Science and Technological Laboratory (NSTL), Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh (AP), to ensure the seaworthiness of the barges.

(ii) In March 2021, the contract was signed with M/s Suryadipta Projects Private Limited, a Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Shipyard, for the construction of 11 ACTCM Barges.

(iii) The shipyard has successfully delivered eight of these barges to date, which are being used by the Indian Navy for operational evolutions.

4. US Navy Conducts HELIOS Laser Weapon Test to Enhance Naval Capabilities.

In February 2025, the United States Navy (USN) announced the successful testing of the High-Energy Laser with Integrated Optical Dazzler and Surveillance (HELIOS) system aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Preble (DDG-88) in open waters.

- The test, conducted in 2024, aimed to evaluate the functionality, performance, and effectiveness of the HELIOS system against an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) target.

- According to the United States Department of Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E) annual report, the Center for Countermeasures (CCM) assisted the USN by collecting imagery and data to validate the HELIOS system's capabilities.

Key Points:-

(i) The HELIOS system, developed by Lockheed Martin, is a cutting-edge high-powered laser weapon designed to neutralize threats like drones, missiles, and fast attack boats. It features two attack modes: Hard Kill, which destroys targets with high-intensity laser beams, and Soft Kill, which disrupts enemy electronics.

(ii) Using a 60-kilowatt (kW) laser, with upgrade potential to 120-150 kW, HELIOS ensures continuous, cost-effective defense with an unlimited magazine. Its speed-of-light precision, silent operation, and stealth capabilities make it nearly impossible to detect or counter.

(iii) As a key part of the U.S. Navy's Aegis Combat System, HELIOS strengthens real-time threat response, enhances situational awareness, and fortifies naval defense operations, making it a game-changing weapon in modern warfare.

- The MoU was signed between Commodore Shantanu Bose, Indian Navy (IN) (Retired), Director of Shipbuilding, GRSE Limited, and Karunakar Reddy Baddam, Managing Director (MD), AMS Private Limited, in the presence of Commodore P R Hari, IN (Retired), Chairman and Managing Director (MD), Subrato Ghosh, Deputy Inspector General (DIG), Indian Coast Guard (ICG) (Retired), and other senior officials from both companies.

- The collaboration is focused on meeting the current and future requirements of the Indian Defence Forces (IDFs), Paramilitary Forces (PMFs), Police Organizations, Government Agencies at both Central and State levels, the Civil Sectors, and Global Export Markets.

Key Points:-

(i) A crucial aspect of this partnership is the enhancement of both companies' manufacturing infrastructure to produce critical components and sub-assemblies for advanced defence and aerospace systems.

(ii) The collaboration includes services for the modernization and upgrade of existing systems, ensuring they align with evolving technological requirements and remain state-of-the-art.

(iii) Through this partnership, GRSE reinforces its commitment to strengthening indigenous capabilities and advancing the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. GRSE Ltd & AMS Pvt Ltd Forge Partnership for Defence and Aerospace Collaboration.

On January 30, 2025, Kolkata, (West Bengal, WB) based Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Limited (GRSE) and Hyderabad (Telangana) based Apollo Micro Systems (AMS) Private Limited signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a 5-year collaboration to enhance cutting-edge technologies and boost India's Defence and Aerospace capabilities.

- The partnership aims at joint Research and Development (R&D), co-production, and the supply of advanced Underwater Weapons and Vehicles, Underwater Mines, Underwater Communication Systems, and Air Defence Systems and Vehicles.

2. "ISRO Astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla to Pilot NASA's Private Axiom Mission 4 and Becoming First Indian to Travel to ISS".

In January 2025, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) astronaut and Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter pilot, Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, was named the pilot for Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4), a private spaceflight to the International Space Station (ISS).

- With this announcement, he will become the first Indian astronaut to travel to the ISS on a private mission and the first Indian in the past 40 years to journey into space.
- Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla was commissioned into the IAF on June 17, 2006, and is a fighter combat leader and test pilot with nearly 2000 hours of flying experience, having flown a variety of aircraft including the Su-30 MKI, MIG-21, MiG-29, Jaguar, Hawk, Dornier, and more.
- He was promoted to Wing Commander in June 2019 and Group Captain of the IAF in 2024, and is also one of the four astronaut-designates selected for India's ambitious Gaganyaan mission.

Key Points:-

- (i) In 2023, NASA signed a mission order with Texas-based Axiom Space, an American space infrastructure developer, for the 4th private astronaut mission, Axiom Mission (Ax-4) to the ISS, with Axiom Space contracting SpaceX as the launch provider for transportation to and from the space station.
- (ii) The mission is scheduled to launch from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, USA, in 2025, and will dock with the ISS for 14 days to conduct scientific experiments, educational outreach, and commercial activities as part of the collaboration between NASA and ISRO.
- (iii) The Ax-4 mission crew includes Peggy

Whitson (USA), a former NASA astronaut and director of human spaceflight at Axiom Space, as the mission commander, along with Sławosz Uznański-Wiśniewski (Poland, ESA) and Tibor Kapu (Hungary) as mission specialists.

3. DRDO Successfully Conducts Three Flight Trials of Indigenous VSHORADS off Odisha Coast.

On February 01, 2025, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted three consecutive flight trials of the Very Short-Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, off the coast of Odisha.

- These tests were conducted against high-speed targets flying at very low altitudes.

Key Points:-

- (i) During these tests, the surface-to-air missiles intercepted and completely destroyed targets with reduced thermal signatures, simulating low-flying drones in different flight conditions.
- (ii) These flight tests were conducted in the final deployment configuration, where two field operators performed weapon readiness, target acquisition, and missile firing.

4. Sunita Williams Breaks Record for Longest Spacewalk by a Female Astronaut During 92nd U.S. Spacewalk.

In January 2025, Indian-origin astronaut Sunita "Suni" Williams from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) set a new record for the longest total spacewalking time by a female astronaut, reaching 62 hours and 6 minutes. This

milestone was achieved during the 92nd United States of America (USA) spacewalk.

- The spacewalk was part of Expedition 72, which commenced on September 23, 2024.
- This was her ninth spacewalk, surpassing the previous record of 60 hours and 21 minutes held by former astronaut Peggy Whitson.

Key Points:-

- (i) During the spacewalk, Sunita Williams and her mission partner Butch Wilmore conducted maintenance on the International Space Station (ISS) and collected material samples from the Destiny laboratory and Quest airlock for scientific analysis.
- (ii) Both astronauts have been aboard the International Space Station (ISS) since June 2024.

5. Russia Successfully Launches 'Soyuz-2.1v' Rocket Carrying Military Satellites into Orbit.

On February 5, 2025, Russia successfully launched a Soyuz-2.1v rocket carrying multiple payloads from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in the Arkhangelsk Region. The mission, conducted in the interest of the Russian Ministry of Defence, aimed at deploying military satellites into orbit. The Soyuz-2.1v is a light-class rocket specifically designed for such operations.

- This launch was carried out by the Russian Aerospace Forces (Vozdushno-kosmicheskiye sily, VKS) with support from their space troops. Notably, this marks the 13th and final mission of the lightweight Soyuz-2 variant.

- The Soyuz-2.1v rocket is a light-class, two-stage launch vehicle derived from the Soyuz-2.1b model. Developed by the Progress Rocket and Space Center, it is designed to deploy spacecraft into low circular and elliptical orbits. This mission used a three-stage version, featuring the Volga upper stage, which placed the payload into an orbit with an inclination of 82.4 degrees—similar to its first mission in 2013.
- Following the launch, the Volga space tug, serving as the third stage, was scheduled to be deorbited approximately 12 hours later, with reentry planned over a southern section of the Pacific Ocean.

Key Points:-

- (i) The successful deployment of these military satellites further strengthens Russia's space capabilities, enhancing its defense sector and ensuring strategic superiority.
- (ii) Between 2006 and 2024, a total of 72 Soyuz-2.1b rocket launches were conducted, placing 665 spacecraft into near-Earth orbits and various flight trajectories.
- (iii) This mission underscores Russia's continued advancements in space technology and military satellite deployment, reinforcing its presence in global space operations.

6. SpinLaunch Successfully Deploys Satellites Into Space Using Kinetic Launch System.

In February 2025, SpinLaunch, a California-based aerospace company, introduced an innovative method to launch satellites into low Earth orbit (LEO) without using traditional rocket fuel. The system relies on a ground-based, electric-powered kinetic launch mechanism—a massive rotating arm

that catapults satellites into space—reducing both costs and environmental impact.

- The technology involves placing a satellite inside a vacuum-sealed centrifuge, spinning it at high speeds, and then releasing it through a launch tube. Once reaching a specific altitude, the satellite activates its own propulsion system to achieve the desired orbit.
- SpinLaunch has successfully tested its kinetic launch system as a fuel-free alternative to conventional rockets. Supported by NASA, Airbus, and the U.S. Department of Defense, the company aims to launch operational satellite constellations by 2026 to advance sustainable spaceflight.

Key Points:-

- (i) The company plans to deploy LEO satellite constellations for communication, Earth observation, and defense purposes, offering an efficient and cost-effective solution for satellite deployment.
- (ii) By eliminating the need for chemical propellants, this method provides an environmentally friendly alternative to conventional rocket launches, potentially revolutionizing space access.
- (iii) The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SpinLaunch is Jonathan Yaney.

7. JAXA Successfully Launches 'Michibiki 6' Navigation Satellite into Orbit.

On February 2, 2025, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), based in Tokyo, Japan, successfully launched 'Michibiki 6', a navigation satellite, aboard its H3 rocket from the

Tanegashima Space Center (TNSC) in Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan.

- This launch marks Japan's first satellite launch of 2025 and the fourth consecutive successful launch for the H3 rocket, reinforcing its role as Japan's new flagship launch vehicle.
- The 1,900-kilogram (kg) 'Michibiki 6' satellite, also known as the Quasi-Zenith Satellite (QZS-6), is part of Japan's Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS)—a positioning satellite network operational since 2018, designed to enhance location accuracy for smartphones, navigation systems, and drones by operating in multiple orbits to ensure continuous satellite coverage over Japan.
- 'Michibiki 6' is the fifth satellite in the QZSS constellation, with plans to expand the system to seven satellites by March 2026 and 11 satellites by the late 2030s, aiming to improve positioning accuracy from 5-10 meters (m) to within 1 meter (m).

Key Points:-

- (i) The H3 rocket, developed jointly by JAXA and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Limited, based in Tokyo, Japan, is positioned to replace the H-2A rocket.
- (ii) The H3 rocket serves as the successor to the H2A series and the Epsilon system, a smaller launch vehicle.
- (iii) In 2024, Japan conducted five rocket launches, including three H3 launches and two H-2A launches.

OBITUARY

1. Olympic Gold Medalist and Long Jump Legend Greg Bell Passes Away at 94.

In January 2025, Gregory Curtis Bell (Greg Bell), the American long jump legend and the world's oldest living Olympic gold medalist in athletics, passed away at the age of 94 in Indiana, United States of America (USA). He was born on November 7, 1930, in Indiana.

- Greg Bell was the world's leading men's long jumper during the 1950s.
- At the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, Greg Bell won the gold medal in the long jump with a leap of 7.83 meters (m) under challenging conditions, finishing 15 centimeters (cm) ahead of his compatriot John Bennett.
- He set a personal best of 8.10 m in Austin, USA, in 1957, which was just 3 cm short of the world record set by Jesse Owens in 1935.

Key Points:-

- (i) In 1959, Greg Bell won the silver medal at the Pan American Games in Chicago, USA. He retired after finishing fourth at the 1960 U.S. Olympic Trials.
- (ii) He served as the director of dentistry at Logansport State Hospital, USA, for 50 years before retiring in 2020 at the age of 89.
- (iii) In 1982, he was inducted into the Indiana University (IU) Hall of Fame and later into the USA Track and Field (USATF) Hall of Fame in 1988.

2. Former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Navin Chawla Passes Away.

On February 1, 2025, former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India, Navin Chawla, passed away at the age of 79 in New Delhi. Born on July 30, 1945, in New Delhi, Chawla was a retired 1969-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre.

- Chawla served as Election Commissioner from May 16, 2005, to April 20, 2009, and as CEC from April 2009 to July 2010. He oversaw the 2009 Lok Sabha elections and implemented key reforms, including the introduction of a third-gender voting category.
- He received the Mazzini Award from the Government of Italy in 2005 for strengthening relations between India and Italy. In 2014, he was honored with the Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai Award for his exemplary work in election processes in India.

Key Points:-

- (i) In 1992, he authored the "Authorized Biography of Mother Teresa," which was later translated into 14 languages both in India and internationally.
- (ii) Chawla's contributions in both administrative and electoral processes have left a lasting impact on the nation.

ENVIRONMENT

1. "New Phytopathogenic Fungus Species 'Epicoccum indicum' Discovered.

On February 1, 2025, a new species of phytopathogenic fungus, *Epicoccum indicum* (Ascomycota, Didymellaceae), associated with an emerging leaf spot disease in *Chrysopogon zizanioides* (vetiver), was discovered by

researchers at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Uttar Pradesh (UP).

- The discovery was made by Raghvendra Singh, Senior Assistant Professor, and Soumyadeep Rajwar, a research scholar, from the Department of Botany at BHU, UP.

- The species name is derived from India, where it was first discovered.

Key Points:-

(i) This new species was identified based on morpho-cultural traits and molecular phylogenetic analyses, which involved multilocus sequencing.

(ii) Phytopathogenic fungi are responsible for causing 70-80% of plant diseases, leading to substantial economic losses in agriculture and horticulture, and can be either necrotrophic (feeding on dead tissue) or biotrophic (colonizing living tissue).