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WEEKLY — Current Affairs

NATIONAL NEWS

The Cabinet approved the Insurance Amendment Bill 2025

- **Increase in FDI Limit to 100%:** The bill proposes to raise the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) cap in the insurance sector from the existing 74% to 100%. This is expected to attract significant foreign capital and global expertise, which is crucial for the capital-intensive nature of the insurance business.
- **Introduction of Composite Licensing:** The new law introduces the concept of composite licensing, which allows an insurer to sell both life and non-life insurance products (including health and general insurance) under a single entity.
- **Lowering of Minimum Capital Requirements:** The Bill proposes to reduce the minimum paid-up capital requirement for certain categories of insurers.
- **Empowerment of LIC Board and Other Amendments:** The legislation includes amendments to the Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956 and the IRDAI Act, 1999, alongside the Insurance Act, 1938.

MGNREGA gets a name change: Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Yojana

- **Change of Nomenclature:** The flagship rural employment scheme, formerly the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), has been renamed to Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Yojana. This is a major legislative move that replaces the existing law.
- **Increase in Guaranteed Employment Days:** The most impactful change is the increase in the minimum number of guaranteed workdays from 100 days to 125 days per financial year for every rural household whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work. This is expected to provide greater income security.
- **Hike in Minimum Daily Wage:** Alongside the increase in workdays, the minimum daily wage under the scheme has also been revised upward, from approximately ₹205 to ₹240 per day. This aims to boost the purchasing power of the rural poor.
- **Significant Financial Allocation:** The government has allocated a substantial corpus, reportedly ₹1.51 lakh crore, for the renamed scheme. This allocation is intended to ensure the expanded guarantee of 125 days of work can be effectively funded across the states.
- **Focus on Strategic Works and Unemployment Allowance:** The revamped scheme will prioritize work and projects aligned with the 'Viksit Bharat National Infra Stack,' specifically focusing on water security and core infrastructure creation.

Maharashtra Govt Partners with Microsoft to Launch MahaCrimeOS AI

- **AI for Cybercrime Investigation:** MahaCrimeOS AI is India's first state-wide, AI-powered platform dedicated to tackling the surge in cybercrime. It functions as an "AI Copilot" for police officers, augmenting human expertise to resolve complex digital cases faster and more efficiently.

- **Microsoft Technology and Collaboration:** The platform is built on Microsoft Azure OpenAI Service and Microsoft Foundry. It is a collaboration between the Maharashtra government's Special Purpose Vehicle (MARVEL), Microsoft India Development Center (IDC), and cybersecurity firm CyberEye.
- **Significant Operational Impact:** The platform is designed to dramatically improve efficiency and citizen service. Microsoft's team has stated that the AI tool will reduce the investigation turnaround time by up to 80% by automating administrative tasks like sending subpoenas and analyzing digital trails.
- **Statewide Expansion:** Following a successful pilot in 23 police stations in Nagpur, the Maharashtra Chief Minister announced plans to expand MahaCrimeOS AI to all 1,100 police stations across the state.

India Ranks Third in Global AI Index after US and China

- **Massive Jump in Ranking:** India vaulted four spots, climbing from 7th place in 2023 to 3rd place in 2024. This notable rise places India ahead of major advanced economies like South Korea (4th) and the United Kingdom (5th), signifying its accelerating momentum in the global AI race.
- **Strength in AI Talent and Skill:** India ranks among the top globally for AI talent concentration and AI skill penetration. This is fueled by its large, young technology workforce and a booming startup ecosystem, which has resulted in India becoming the second-largest contributor to AI-related GitHub projects in 2024.
- **Policy and Investment Boost:** The government's renewed focus, particularly through the IndiaAI Mission (with a substantial budget commitment of approximately USD \$1.25 billion over five years), has been a key driver. This initiative aims to increase computational capacity and develop a framework for safe AI, directly improving India's standing in the policy and infrastructure pillars.
- **Leading among Emerging Economies:** India is the clear frontrunner among lower- and middle-income countries in the index, demonstrating that its AI growth is not solely dependent on high-value private investment but also on widespread digital adoption and government policy.
- **Focus on Societal Impact and Optimism:** The report notes that public opinion in India is highly optimistic towards AI, viewing it primarily as a developmental leapfrog tool to solve societal challenges in healthcare, education, and agriculture, driving a utility-based adoption curve.

HECI Bill renamed the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan Bill

- **Creation of a Single Regulator:** The Bill's central feature is the establishment of a single, overarching regulator for all non-medical and non-legal higher education institutions. This new body is set to replace the existing fragmented system governed by

the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE).

- **Alignment with NEP 2020:** The Bill directly implements a core vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which called for a "light but tight" regulatory structure. It seeks to separate the functions of regulation, accreditation, and funding to reduce regulatory overlap, bureaucracy, and micromanagement.
- **Focus on Quality and Outcomes:** The new framework shifts the focus from an "inspection-based" and "permission-driven" system to one based on academic quality, learning outcomes, and accreditation. Institutions will be given more operational autonomy but will be held strictly accountable for their educational performance and financial probity.
- **Exclusion of Key Streams and Funding:** Importantly, the Bill explicitly excludes Medical and Legal education from its purview, which will continue to be regulated by their respective professional councils (like the National Medical Commission and the Bar Council of India). Furthermore, the function of funding and grants will remain with the administrative ministry (Department of Higher Education), separating it from the new regulatory body.

The Union Cabinet approved the Insurance Amendment Bill, 2025

- **100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** The most significant provision is the raising of the FDI limit in Indian insurance companies from the current 74% to 100%. This enables full foreign ownership, which is expected to attract long-term global capital, facilitate technology transfer, and boost the government's vision of 'Insurance for All by 2047'.
- **Enhanced Powers for IRDAI:** The Bill grants the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) stronger enforcement capabilities, including disgorgement powers (similar to SEBI) to recover wrongful gains. It also introduces a formal Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for regulation-making to increase transparency and predictability.
- **Operational Autonomy for LIC:** The amendments to the LIC Act, 1956, are aimed at giving the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) greater operational freedom. This includes empowering its Board to take faster decisions on matters like setting up new zonal offices and managing its overseas operations without prior government approval.
- **Focus on Policyholder Protection:** The Bill strengthens consumer safeguards by introducing clearer and more rational criteria for levying penalties, making enforcement more transparent. It also mandates that at least one key member of the top management (Chairman, MD, or CEO) must be an Indian citizen as a guardrail.

MSME Ministry Signs MoU with Amazon For Vishwakarma Artisans

- **Digital Market Access:** The core objective is to integrate traditional artisans into the e-commerce ecosystem. Amazon will onboard eligible PM Vishwakarma artisans onto its online marketplace, enabling them to sell their handmade products to a wider, national, and global customer base.
- **Leveraging 'Karigar' Initiative:** The partnership will specifically strengthen the visibility of traditional crafts through Amazon's 'Karigar' initiative. This program is dedicated to showcasing India's rich handicraft heritage and supporting the digitization of artisan communities.
- **MSME Ministry's Support Role:** The MSME Ministry will actively support the artisans by assisting them in obtaining necessary approvals, registrations, and clearances from relevant government departments. This aims to simplify the compliance process and reduce entry barriers to the digital economy.
- **Boosting PM Vishwakarma Scheme:** The collaboration complements the PM Vishwakarma Scheme's pillar on market linkages. The scheme provides comprehensive support—including skill training, toolkits, and credit access—and the Amazon partnership provides the crucial platform for market expansion and better value realization.
- **Alignment with National Vision:** This public-private partnership is viewed as a significant step towards achieving the national goals of 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India) by empowering grassroots artisans and strengthening the MSME sector through technology adoption.

India Ranks 3rd in Stanford's Global AI Vibrancy Tool 2025

- **Remarkable Leap:** India jumped four spots from 7th in 2023 to 3rd in 2025, surpassing advanced economies like the United Kingdom, South Korea, Singapore, and Japan.
- **Top 3 Global Rankings:** With a score of 21.59, India now trails only behind the United States (78.60) and China (36.95), solidifying its role as a leader among emerging economies.
- **Talent Hub:** India recorded the world's highest year-on-year growth in AI hiring and is the second-largest contributor to AI projects on GitHub, reflecting its deep pool of skilled engineers.
- **Government Support:** The IndiaAI Mission, with a budget of approximately ₹10,300 crore (\$1.25 billion), has been a critical driver in strengthening infrastructure, particularly through plans to deploy over 10,000 GPUs.
- **Seven Pillars of Success:** The ranking is based on seven key pillars: Research & Development, Economy, Infrastructure, Talent, Policy & Governance, Responsible AI, and Public Opinion.

India Launches Its First 1.0 GHz, 64-bit Dual-Core Indigenous Microprocessor 'DHRUV64'

- **Development & Ownership:** The DHRUV64 was developed entirely in-house by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) under the Microprocessor Development Programme (MDP) of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- **Technical Specifications:** It features a 64-bit dual-core architecture with a clock speed of 1.0 GHz. Built on a 28nm process node, it supports "out-of-order" processing and superscalar execution for enhanced multitasking and efficiency.
- **Open-Source Foundation:** The chip is based on the RISC-V open-source architecture. This is a strategic move to eliminate expensive licensing fees and avoid dependence on proprietary foreign technologies like x86 or ARM.
- **Target Applications:** Designed for both commercial and strategic use, it is ideal for 5G infrastructure, automotive electronics, industrial automation, and Internet of Things (IoT) devices where reliability and security are prioritized over raw speed.
- **Strategic Roadmap:** As the third chip under the Digital India RISC-V (DIR-V) Programme, its success paves the way for the next generation of processors—Dhanush (1.2 GHz) and Dhanush+ (2.0 GHz)—which are already under development.

PM Modi Becomes First World Leader to Receive Ethiopia's Top Award

- **The Honor:** PM Modi was conferred with "The Great Honour Nishan of Ethiopia" by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali during a special ceremony in Addis Ababa.
- **Historic First:** While the award is steeped in tradition, PM Modi is the first world leader to be bestowed with this specific top-tier recognition, signaling a new era in India-Africa relations.
- **28th International Award:** This marks the 28th international state honor received by PM Modi, further cementing his position as one of the most decorated global leaders.
- **Strategic Milestone:** The conferment coincided with the elevation of India-Ethiopia ties to a "Strategic Partnership," focusing on digital capacity, healthcare, and education.
- **A Shared Tribute:** In his acceptance speech, PM Modi dedicated the award to the 1.4 billion people of India and the generations of Indian teachers and traders who have contributed to Ethiopia's growth for over a century.

SP Balasubrahmanyam Statue Unveiled in Hyderabad

- **The Location:** The 7.2-foot bronze statue was installed on the premises of RavindraBharathi, a premier state-run cultural and performing arts center in the heart of Hyderabad.
- **Dignitaries Present:** The statue was formally unveiled by former Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu and Telangana Industries Minister D. Sridhar Babu, in the presence of SPB's son SP Charan and other family members.

- **Artistic Tribute:** Crafted in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, the statue is placed adjacent to the statue of another musical titan, Ghantasala, fulfilling a symbolic wish often expressed by fans.
- **Commemorative Event:** The ceremony featured a grand musical tribute where 50 artists performed 20 of SPB's most iconic songs, celebrating a career that spanned over 40,000 songs in 14 languages.
- **Significance:** Despite minor regional protests regarding the location, the government proceeded with the installation to recognize SPB as a "multi-dimensional genius" whose voice transcended linguistic and geographical boundaries.

The Viksit Bharat–Gramin Bill, 2025 introduced

- **Replacement of MGNREGA:** The Bill seeks to repeal and replace the 20-year-old Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005. It aims to shift rural employment from a purely "welfare-centric" model to a "development-centric" one aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.
- **Increased Employment Guarantee:** The Bill enhances the statutory guarantee of wage employment from 100 days to 125 days per financial year for every rural household whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work.
- **Agricultural "Pause" Period:** To address the shortage of farm labor during busy seasons, the Bill introduces a provision for a 60-day pause in public works during peak sowing and harvesting periods. This ensures that labor is available for essential agricultural operations.
- **Focus on Durable Assets:** Unlike the sometimes fragmented works under MGNREGA, the new framework mandates that all projects be aggregated into the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack. It prioritizes four thematic areas: water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood-related assets, and climate-resilient works.
- **Modern Governance & Tech:** The Bill institutionalizes a high-tech monitoring system, including biometric authentication for attendance, GPS/Geospatial tracking of worksites, and the use of AI-enabled analytics.

The Repealing & Amending Bill 2025 passed

- **Repeal of 71 Obsolete Laws:** The Bill formally scraps 71 outdated Acts that have lost their relevance or utility. This includes colonial-era regulations like the Indian Tramways Act, 1886, and later laws like the Levy Sugar Price Equalisation Fund Act, 1976.
- **Removal of Discriminatory Probate Rules:** It amends the Indian Succession Act, 1925, to remove a discriminatory colonial-era requirement where Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, and Parsis were forced to "probate" (validate) wills in Chennai, Mumbai, and Kolkata, while other communities were exempt.
- **Modernizing Communications:** The Bill updates legal terminology in the General Clauses Act, 1897, and the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908. It replaces outdated references

to "registered post" with modern systems like "speed post" to align with current administrative practices.

- **Correcting the Disaster Management Act:** A critical drafting error in the Disaster Management Act, 2005, was rectified. The Bill replaces the word "prevention" with "preparation" (or vice versa, depending on the specific clause context) to better reflect the operational intent of the law.
- **Ongoing Legal "De-cluttering":** Since 2014, the government has now repealed or amended a total of 1,577 archaic laws. This process aims to reduce the "compliance burden" for citizens and businesses, supporting the vision of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

M S Patiyal appointed as the next Ambassador of India to the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste

- **Official Appointment:** The appointment was formally announced by the MEA on December 15, 2025. He is expected to take up the assignment in the capital, Dili, shortly.
- **Professional Background:** M.S. Patiyal is a seasoned diplomat belonging to the 2007 batch of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS).
- **Previous Posting:** Before this elevation, he was serving at the Embassy of India in Tunis, Tunisia.
- **Strengthening Ties:** His appointment comes at a crucial time as India seeks to deepen its footprint in Southeast Asia. Notably, India established its Resident Mission in Dili very recently (September 2024), following an announcement by PM Modi at the 2023 ASEAN-India Summit.
- **Strategic Cooperation:** As Ambassador, Patiyal will oversee growing cooperation in areas such as health, capacity building, and digital infrastructure. Timor-Leste is also a consistent supporter of India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

India and Brazil Sign Tripartite MoU on Maintenance of Scorpene Submarines

- **The Signatories:** The agreement is a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the Indian Navy, the Brazilian Navy, and India's premier defense shipyard, Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL).
- **Maintenance & Life-cycle Support:** The deal focuses on the exchange of technical information and expertise to enhance the long-term maintenance, repair, and life-cycle support of Scorpène-class submarines operated by both nations.
- **Operational Readiness:** By sharing "maintenance philosophies" and industrial practices, both navies aim to improve the operational availability of their underwater assets and reduce downtime for repairs.

- **Duration & Scope:** Signed on December 9, 2025, in Brasilia, the MoU is valid for 10 years and covers not just submarines but also other naval platforms, logistics, and personnel training.
- **Strategic Convergence:** The partnership highlights the growing defense synergy between two major powers of the Global South, leveraging India's experience with the Kalvari-class (Scorpène) and Brazil's experience with the Riachuelo-class.

Chile José Antonio Kast as its next President

- **Decisive Victory:** Kast secured a "thumping" victory with 58.16% of the vote, defeating his rival, Jeannette Jara of the Communist Party, who received 41.84%.
- **Shift to the Right:** His win marks the first time a leader who openly supports the legacy of the military regime (Augusto Pinochet) has been elected since 1990, replacing the leftist administration of Gabriel Boric.
- **Core Campaign Pillars:** Kast ran on a platform of "Order and Security," pledging an "iron fist" against crime, mass deportation of undocumented migrants, and the construction of border barriers (walls and trenches).
- **Economic Reforms:** He has promised to revitalize the economy by cutting \$6 billion in public spending within 18 months, reducing corporate taxes, and shrinking the state payroll.
- **Inauguration:** Kast is scheduled to be sworn in as Chile's 38th president on March 11, 2026, for a four-year term.

PM Modi Conferred Oman's Highest Civilian Honour

- **29th International Honour:** This award marks the 29th highest civilian honour conferred upon PM Modi by foreign nations during his tenure. It follows other recent 2025 honours from countries like Ethiopia, Namibia, and Brazil.
- **Symbol of 70-Year Ties:** The conferment coincides with the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Oman, highlighting the deep historical and strategic "maritime bridge" between the two nations.
- **Presented by Sultan Haitham:** The award was personally presented by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik at the Al Baraka Palace. It recognizes PM Modi's "exceptional contribution" to strengthening bilateral relations and his global statesmanship.
- **Dedication to Seafarers:** Upon receiving the honour, PM Modi dedicated it to the 1.4 billion people of India and specifically to the ancestors and seafarers who built the foundational trade links between Mandvi (Gujarat) and Muscat over centuries.
- **Strategic Outcomes:** The visit was not just ceremonial; it saw the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which includes a landmark provision for the inclusion of India's AYUSH (traditional medicine) products in the Gulf market.

India & Saudi Arabia Sign Visa Waiver Agreement

- **Targeted Visa Waiver:** The agreement provides a mutual exemption from short-stay visa requirements, specifically for holders of diplomatic, special, and official passports. It does not currently apply to ordinary tourist or business travelers.
- **Facilitating Official Exchange:** The primary goal is to eliminate bureaucratic "red tape" and administrative delays (like the note-verbale process), allowing government officials and diplomatic envoys to travel on short notice for high-level meetings.
- **Strategic Partnership Framework:** The pact was signed under the aegis of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council. It is designed to speed up the execution of joint projects in key sectors like defense, energy, fintech, and infrastructure.
- **90-Day Stay Limit:** Eligible passport holders can now enter each other's territory without a visa for stays of up to 90 days, making long-term diplomatic coordination and institutional interaction much more seamless.
- **A "Confidence-Building" Precedent:** Analysts view this as a major step in bilateral trust. While limited to officials now, it is seen as a precursor to broader travel facilitation that could eventually benefit the 2.4 million-strong Indian diaspora and business professionals in the future.

Deepinder Goyal Tops 2025 Hurun-IDFC First Self-Made Entrepreneurs

- **Dethroning a Retail Legend:** For the first time, Deepinder Goyal has overtaken Radhakishan Damani (founder of Avenue Supermarts/DMart), who slipped to the second spot. This marks a significant symbolic shift from traditional retail to a digital-first economy.
- **Surge in Valuation:** Goyal's company, Eternal, saw its valuation grow by 27% over the past year, reaching ₹3.2 lakh crore. In contrast, Avenue Supermarts experienced a 13% decline, bringing its valuation to ₹3 lakh crore.
- **High Entry Barriers:** The competition has intensified; the minimum valuation required to enter the Top 200 rose by 1.5 times, from ₹3,000 crore to ₹4,500 crore. This indicates that India is producing high-value enterprises at an unprecedented pace.
- **Top 3 Debut for IndiGo:** The founders of InterGlobe Aviation (IndiGo), Rahul Bhatia and Rakesh Gangwal, made a powerful debut on the list, entering straight into the Top 3 with a company valuation of ₹2.2 lakh crore.
- **A "Problem-Solving" Ecosystem:** The list underscores a shift in entrepreneurial strategy. Founders are moving away from traditional business pitches toward "problem-solving" models that address specific consumer pain points, particularly in fintech, food-tech, and healthcare.

Nvidia Tops Hurun Global 1000 as World's Most Valuable Company

- **New Global #1:** Nvidia climbed two spots to claim the top position, overtaking tech giants Microsoft and Apple. As of the report's cut-off date (November 14, 2024), Nvidia's value was recorded at approximately \$4.6 trillion, marking a massive 49% increase over the last year.
- **AI-Driven Dominance:** The primary driver for this surge is the unprecedented global demand for Artificial Intelligence (AI). Nvidia's dominance in GPUs (Graphics Processing Units) and data-center computing has made it the backbone of the generative AI revolution.
- **Massive Wealth Creation:** Nvidia was the biggest "wealth creator" on the list this year, adding roughly \$1.5 trillion in value—more than the total valuation of many entire industries. Over the last five years (since the pandemic), it has added a staggering \$4.3 trillion to its market cap.
- **Shift in the "Top Three":** For the first time, Apple and Microsoft have been displaced from the top spot. Apple retained the second position (valued at \$4 trillion), while Microsoft—last year's number one—slipped to third place (valued at \$3.8 trillion).
- **Semiconductor Sector Boom:** Nvidia's rise highlights a broader trend where semiconductors have become one of the most valuable industries globally. Other chip-related companies like Broadcom (entering the Top 10 for the first time) and TSMC also saw significant gains, reflecting the strategic importance of hardware in the AI era.

Abhishek Singh accredited as the next Ambassador of India to the Republic of Benin

- **Concurrent Accreditation:** While serving as the next Ambassador to Benin, Abhishek Singh will continue in his primary role as the High Commissioner of India to Nigeria. He will remain based in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, while overseeing diplomatic relations with Benin.
- **Career Diplomat:** Singh is a 2003-batch officer of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS). His career spans over two decades with significant experience in both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy across diverse geographies.
- **Regional Leadership:** In addition to Nigeria and Benin, he was also recently accredited (in November 2025) as India's Permanent Representative to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), positioning him as a central figure in India's diplomatic outreach in West Africa.
- **Focus on Bilateral Ties:** His appointment to Benin is aimed at strengthening cooperation in key sectors such as trade, healthcare, education, and capacity building. India is one of Benin's largest trading partners, particularly in the export of rice and pharmaceuticals.

Singapore Changi Airport Wins World's Best Airport Title 2025

- **Record-Breaking 13th Win:** Changi Airport has now won the "World's Best Airport" title a record 13 times. It regained the top position after being ranked second in 2024, overtaking Qatar's Hamad International Airport.

- **A "Destination" Airport:** The award highlights Changi's unique ability to serve as more than just a transit hub. Its Jewel Changi complex—featuring the Rain Vortex (the world's tallest indoor waterfall), lush indoor forests, and over 280 retail and dining outlets—is a major factor in its high customer satisfaction scores.
- **Multiple Accolades:** In addition to the top overall prize, Changi won several category-specific awards in 2025, including World's Best Airport Dining and the inaugural award for World's Best Airport Washrooms, reflecting its attention to even the smallest details of the passenger experience.
- **Asian Dominance:** The 2025 rankings underscore a broader trend of Asian excellence in aviation. Three of the top five airports globally are located in Asia: Singapore Changi (#1), Tokyo Haneda (#3), and Seoul Incheon (#4).
- **Indian Context:** While Changi led globally, Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGI) was once again named the Best Airport in India & South Asia, moving up to the 32nd position globally. Other regional winners included Bengaluru (Best Regional Airport) and Hyderabad (Best Airport Staff).

Air India Wins Best Domestic Airline 2025

- **Second Consecutive Win:** This marks the second year in a row that Air India has secured this top title, signaling consistent improvement in passenger perception since its privatization.
- **Decided by Reader Vote:** Unlike jury-based awards, this was determined entirely by a reader's choice poll. It reflects actual feedback from travelers regarding service quality, reliability, and the overall "new Air India" experience.
- **Validation of "Vihaan.AI":** The award is seen as a major milestone for Air India's 5-year transformation plan, Vihaan.AI. The airline noted that the win validates its efforts in fleet modernization and service consistency.
- **Massive Fleet Upgrades:** The recognition comes as Air India reaches a critical stage in its \$400 million retrofit program. As of late 2025, approximately 83% of its narrowbody fleet (used for domestic routes) is either brand new or completely refurbished with modern interiors.
- **Focus on Service & Food:** The airline attributed the win to specific initiatives, including upgraded food and beverage offerings and the efforts of frontline staff who have been retrained to deliver "world-class Indian hospitality."

DEFENCE NEWS

Joint Military Exercise DESERT CYCLONE 2025 commenced

- **Location and Duration:** The exercise is being conducted in Abu Dhabi, UAE, from December 18 to 30, 2025. This follows the inaugural edition (Desert Cyclone-I) which was held in the deserts of Rajasthan, India, in early 2024.

- **Participating Units:** The Indian Army contingent consists of 45 personnel, primarily from a battalion of the Mechanised Infantry Regiment. The UAE Land Forces are represented by a contingent of similar strength from the 53 Mechanised Infantry Battalion.
- **Focus on Urban Warfare:** The primary objective is to enhance interoperability in urban environments. Training focuses on sub-conventional operations, including Fighting in Built-Up Areas (FIBUA), which is critical for modern peacekeeping and counter-terrorism missions.
- **Advanced Tactical Drills:** Over the two-week period, troops will engage in high-intensity drills such as heliborne operations, detailed mission planning, and—for the first time in this series—the integration of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and counter-UAS techniques.
- **Strategic Diplomacy:** The exercise is conducted under a United Nations mandate for peacekeeping operations. It serves as a cornerstone of the deepening strategic partnership between India and the UAE, following high-level visits by the UAE Land Forces Commander and Presidential Guard to India earlier in 2025.

Indian Navy to Commission INAS 335 (Ospreys)

- **Venue and Leadership:** The commissioning ceremony will take place at INS Hansa in Goa. The event will be presided over by Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi, the Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS).
- **The Aircraft (MH-60R Seahawk):** Manufactured by the U.S. firm Lockheed Martin, the MH-60R is a highly versatile, multi-role helicopter. It is often referred to as a "submarine hunter" due to its advanced sonar and sensor suites.
- **Strategic Role:** The "Ospreys" are designed for a wide array of missions, including Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Anti-Surface Warfare (ASuW), Search and Rescue (SAR), and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC). They are equipped with advanced torpedoes and missiles.
- **Fleet Integration:** These helicopters have already been fully integrated with the Indian Navy's fleet operations. They are intended to operate from frontline warships and aircraft carriers, significantly extending the Navy's "blue-water" reach and surveillance across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **Expansion of Capability:** This is the Navy's second MH-60R squadron. The first, INAS 334 (Seahawks), was commissioned in March 2024 at INS Garuda, Kochi. The addition of INAS 335 at Goa strengthens the Navy's presence on the western seaboard.

BANKING NEWS

DBS Named Global Bank of the Year 2025

- **Triple Global Accolade:** The 2025 award is the third time DBS has clinched the prestigious Global Bank of the Year title from The Banker, highlighting its sustained, long-term leadership in the global financial industry.
- **Innovative Use of Technology (AI and Blockchain):** A key factor in the win was the bank's exceptional and innovative use of technology.
- **Dual Global Best Bank Status:** DBS now concurrently holds the top global bank awards from two major financial publications, The Banker and Euromoney ("World's Best Bank"), cementing its position as one of the most globally decorated banks.
- **Strong Financial and Operating Performance:** The bank stood out among 294 participating institutions due to its exceptional performance, including a high Return on Equity (ROE) and continued robust financial results, demonstrating strategic resilience.
- **Commitment to Sustainable Practices and Customer-Centricity:** The award acknowledges DBS's commitment to push boundaries, embrace sustainable practices, and focus on providing useful innovation that helps customers with their financial needs and day-to-day lives.

Bank of Baroda Wins 'Best Bank in India' 2025

- **Digital and 'Phygital' Transformation:** The award recognizes BoB's successful digital transformation journey, particularly the implementation of the 'Phygital' banking model. This blended approach combines digital convenience (like video KYC, mobile banking 'bob World') with the physical reassurance of an expanded branch network (including 184 new branches) to enhance customer experience and accessibility, especially in semi-urban and rural areas.
- **Robust Financial Performance:** The bank was chosen based on its superior financial performance over the evaluation period. This includes strong growth in its balance sheet, profitability, and asset quality, demonstrating resilience and sustainable growth in the competitive Indian banking landscape.
- **Support for MSMEs and Financial Inclusion:** A key area of strength was the bank's initiative to support small businesses. This includes the launch of products like Smart OD (Overdraft), which provides easy working capital access, and the use of digital verification (like B2B sales data and GST returns) for fast, under-24-hour loan approvals, thereby boosting financial inclusion.
- **Innovative Retail Products:** BoB was recognized for introducing innovative, customer-friendly retail products. An example is the launch of liquid fixed deposits, which offer the high interest of a fixed deposit combined with the withdrawal flexibility of a savings account, catering to the liquidity needs of households.
- **Strengthened Risk Management and Governance:** The bank was acknowledged for strengthening its governance frameworks and risk management processes. Its focus on operational efficiency and building a resilient, future-ready institution through technological advancement and strategic initiatives.

Ravi Ranjan appointed as the MD of SBI

- **Tenure:** His appointment is effective immediately and will run until his superannuation on September 30, 2028, or until further orders from the government.
- **Succession:** He succeeds Vinay M. Tonse, who completed his tenure as Managing Director on November 30, 2025.
- **Key Responsibilities:** As one of the four Managing Directors at SBI, Ranjan will oversee critical verticals including Risk Management, Compliance, and the Stressed Assets Resolution Group (SARG).
- **Extensive Career:** A veteran "career banker," he joined SBI as a Probationary Officer in 1991. Before this elevation, he served as the Deputy Managing Director (DMD) for Global Markets and previously headed the Corporate Accounts Group (CAG).
- **Global & Diverse Experience:** His background includes over 33 years of experience across retail banking, corporate banking, and international operations, including significant overseas assignments in Hong Kong and Los Angeles.

Govt. Extends Tenure of SBI MD Ashwini Kumar Tewari

- **New Tenure and Superannuation:** The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has extended Tewari's term beyond its previous end date of January 27, 2026. He will now serve until December 31, 2027, which coincides with his date of superannuation (retirement).
- **Leadership Stability:** This is the second extension granted to Tewari (the first being in 2024). The move is seen as a strategic decision by the Ministry of Finance to ensure "leadership continuity" at India's largest public sector bank during a period of significant digital expansion and financial reforms.
- **Portfolio Responsibilities:** As one of the four Managing Directors at SBI, Tewari currently oversees the critical Corporate Banking and Subsidiaries portfolio. This includes supervising large-scale commercial credit and managing non-bank businesses like SBI Card, Mutual Funds, and Life Insurance.
- **Career Banker Background:** Tewari is a veteran of the SBI group, having joined as a Probationary Officer in 1991. Before becoming MD in 2021, he served as the MD & CEO of SBI Cards and Payment Services Ltd. and held international leadership roles, including Country Head of SBI's US operations.

Malavika R. Harita appointed as Additional Independent Director of Axis Bank

- **Extensive Experience:** Harita brings over 43 years of experience in marketing, communication, and entrepreneurship. She is well-known for her 25-year tenure as the CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi Focus in India.

- **Tenure and Approval:** Her appointment is for a period of four years, effective from December 18, 2025, until December 17, 2029. This is an "additional" role, meaning it is subject to final approval by the bank's shareholders.
- **Trailblazing Background:** She was the first woman to receive the Distinguished Alumni Award from IIM Bangalore and currently serves on the Board of Governors for both IIM Bangalore and IIM Visakhapatnam.
- **Strategic Value for Axis Bank:** Her expertise as a "Communication Evangelist" and Brand Strategist is expected to strengthen the bank's digital-first marketing strategies and its engagement with the startup ecosystem.
- **Corporate Governance:** Her appointment aligns with SEBI's diversity and governance mandates. She is also currently an independent director for Symphony Limited and a mentor for several non-profits and startups.

SPORTS NEWS

Germany won a record-extending 8th Men's Junior World Cup title

- **Record-Extending Title:** The win secured Germany's eighth Men's Junior World Cup title, extending their record as the most successful nation in the tournament's history. This victory also made them the defending champions, having won the previous edition in 2023.
- **Final Opponent and Score:** Germany defeated first-time finalists Spain in the championship match. The game was a tense affair that ended 1-1 in regulation time, with Germany ultimately winning the penalty shoot-out 3-2.
- **Venue and Host Nation:** The tournament was held in Tamil Nadu, India, with matches played in the cities of Chennai and Madurai. The final was played at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium in Chennai on December 10, 2025.
- **Goalkeeping Heroics:** The victory was heavily attributed to the exceptional performance of German goalkeeper Jasper Ditzer, who was instrumental in the penalty shootout, making crucial saves to deny Spain their maiden title. Ditzer was recognized for his performance throughout the tournament.
- **Host Nation's Performance:** Host nation India also finished on the podium, securing the bronze medal after defeating Argentina 4-2 in a dramatic third-place play-off match.

India Crowned Champion of WSF Squash World Cup for the First Time

- **Maiden Title and Clean Sweep:** India won the WSF Squash World Cup for the first time, achieving a decisive 3-0 clean sweep victory over the top-seeded team, Hong Kong, China, in the final. This victory upgraded India's previous best finish, a bronze medal in the 2023 edition.
- **First Asian Country to Win:** With this triumph, India became the first Asian country to win the prestigious Squash World Cup title, breaking the traditional dominance of squash powerhouses like Australia, England, and Egypt.

- **Boost for Indian Squash:** This landmark achievement significantly elevates India's profile on the global squash stage, especially as the sport is set to make its Olympic debut at the Los Angeles 2028 Games.
- **Unbeaten Run:** India showcased exceptional form throughout the tournament, remaining undefeated and not losing a single tie on their way to the championship, which included a decisive 3-0 victory over two-time champions Egypt in the semi-finals.

Manu Bhaker & Simranpreet Kaur Brar Win Gold at 68th National Shooting Championships

- **Dual Gold in 25m Pistol:** Manu Bhaker clinched the gold medal in the Senior Women's 25m Sports Pistol event, while Simranpreet Kaur Brar secured the gold in the Junior Women's 25m Sports Pistol category.
- **Commanding Scores:** Manu shot a score of 36 in the final to finish four hits ahead of Karnataka's Divya T.S. (32). Simranpreet displayed exceptional form in the junior final, shooting a high score of 39 to take the top spot.
- **Venue:** The events were held at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi. This championship is a key event for national rankings and future selection trials.
- **Podium Finishers:** In the senior category, Divya T.S. won silver and Anjali Choudhary took bronze. In the junior category, Dwaram Pranavi of Andhra Pradesh won silver, while Palak of Haryana claimed the bronze.
- **Continued Momentum:** For Simranpreet, this win follows her recent gold at the ISSF World Cup Final 2025 in Cairo. For Manu Bhaker, the victory reaffirms her status as India's premier pistol shooter following her historic double bronze at the Paris Olympics.

WWE Icon John Cena Retires After 20-Year Career

- **The Final Match:** Cena's last match took place at Saturday Night's Main Event in Washington, D.C. He faced Gunther in the main event, losing via submission to a sleeper hold. This was a historic moment, as Cena—famous for his "Never Give Up" mantra—had rarely tapped out in his career.
- **Record-Breaking Legacy:** He retires as a 17-time World Champion (14 WWE Championships and 3 World Heavyweight Championships), a record that stands as the highest in WWE history.
- **Grand Slam Achievement:** During his 2025 retirement tour, Cena checked off the final box of his career by winning the Intercontinental Championship for the first time, making him a WWE Grand Slam Champion.
- **Farewell Gesture:** Following the match, in a traditional wrestling sign of respect, Cena left his signature sneakers and wristbands in the center of the ring. The entire WWE locker room, led by stars like Cody Rhodes and CM Punk, emerged to pay tribute to him.

- **Future Role:** While his days as an active wrestler are over, Cena has signed a five-year contract as a WWE Brand Ambassador. He will continue to mentor younger talent while focusing on his expanding Hollywood career.

MRF Tyres Bags 2025 FIA European Rally Championship Title

- **Historic Third Title:** This win marks MRF Tyres' third ERC Teams Championship in the last four years. The company previously secured consecutive titles in 2022 and 2023, and this 2025 victory cements its position as a dominant force in European rallying.
- **Dramatic Finale in Croatia:** The title was decided during the final round of the season at the Croatia Rally (October 2025). Team MRF Tyres finished with 208 points, narrowly defeating the M-Sport Ford World Rally Team by just two points in a tense season-ending battle.
- **Diverse Driver Lineup:** The championship was a collective effort featuring a roster of international talent. Key contributors in the final round included Lauri Joona (Finland), who finished 6th, Erik Cais (Czech Republic) in 7th, and Simone Tempestini (Romania) in 10th.
- **FIA Gala Recognition:** The official championship trophy was presented to Arun Mammen, Vice Chairman and Managing Director of MRF Ltd., during the FIA Awards Gala held on December 12, 2025, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
- **Technological Milestone:** The victory is highlighted as a major boost for Indian manufacturing, as MRF is one of the few non-European/Japanese firms to succeed in this elite category. The team's performance across diverse surfaces—including tarmac in Hungary and gravel in Poland—demonstrated the high-performance capabilities of Indian-made racing tyres.

GS Delhi Aces Clinches Maiden TPL Title

- **Dominant Victory in the Grand Finale:** GS Delhi Aces clinched the Season 7 title by defeating Yash Mumbai Eagles with a decisive aggregate score of 51–36. This margin is recorded as one of the largest in TPL final history since the introduction of the current 100-point format.
- **Sofia Costoulas' Unbeaten Streak:** Belgian sensation Sofia Costoulas was the standout performer. She set the tone in the final by defeating Riya Bhatia 18–7 in the women's singles, maintaining her incredible unbeaten record in singles throughout the entire season.
- **Debut Season Success:** The victory was particularly significant as it was the GS Delhi Aces' maiden TPL title in their very first season of the league. With this win, Delhi became the fourth city—after Pune, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru—to lift the prestigious trophy.
- **Legendary Support & Prize Money:** The team benefited from the mentorship of Indian tennis icon Leander Paes, who served as the franchise's brand ambassador. For their

triumph, the GS Delhi Aces were awarded a winner's cheque of ₹25 lakh, while the runners-up, Yash Mumbai Eagles, received ₹10 lakh.

Anantjeet Singh & Darshna Rathore win Senior Skeet Mixed Team Gold

- **Defeating the Favorites:** Representing Rajasthan, Anantjeet and Darshna defeated the Uttar Pradesh pair—comprising two-time Olympian Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Areeba Khan—in a tense final with a score of 45–43.
- **Individual Performance:** In the gold medal match, Darshna Rathore led the scoring for the winning team with 24 hits, while Asian Games silver medalist Anantjeet Singh Naruka contributed 21 hits.
- **Qualification Dominance:** The duo entered the final in top form, having led the qualification standings earlier in the day with a combined total of 143 hits (Anantjeet 73, Darshna 70).
- **The Venue:** The competition was held at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi, which is currently hosting the 68th edition of the National Championships for shotgun events.
- **Podium Finishers:** While Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh took Gold and Silver respectively, the Bronze medal was secured by Haryana (Raiza Dhillon and Ishaan Singh Libra), who defeated Madhya Pradesh 41–39 in the third-place playoff.

AWARD NEWS

CRPF Officer Dinesh Khatak Awarded UHM's Efficiency Medal

- **Recipient and Designation:** The awardee is Dinesh Khatak, a senior officer (Second-in-Command or 2-IC) of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) 196 Battalion. The medal is one of the highest honours instituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for security personnel.
- **Recognition Criteria:** The medal is awarded for exemplary leadership, operational achievements, discipline, and a long-standing contribution to national security. It is a recognition of exceptional efficiency and dedication in service.
- **Contribution to Training:** Beyond field operations, he was recognized for his role as an excellent instructor at the CIAT (Counter Insurgency and Anti-Terror) Shivpuri, one of the CRPF's premier training institutions, where he contributed significantly to strengthening commando training standards and tactical preparedness.
- **About the Medal:** The Union Home Minister's Efficiency Medal was established to promote high professional standards and boost the morale of officials/officers across the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and other security organizations.

DMRC Wins Best Performing Unit Award at NECA 2025

- **Specific Awardee:** The award was won by the East Vinod Nagar Metro Station on the Delhi Metro's Pink Line, in the Metro Stations sector category. The award was presented by President Droupadi Murmu on National Energy Conservation Day (December 14th) at Vigyan Bhawan.
- **Focus on Energy Conservation:** The recognition is for the station's exemplary and sustained efforts in energy efficiency and performance over the last three financial years. It was selected by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power, Government of India.
- **Major Renewable Energy Contribution:** A key factor was the installation and operation of a 150 kilowatt-peak (kWp) rooftop solar power plant. This solar plant meets a substantial portion of the station's energy needs, reducing dependence on grid electricity.
- **Triple Recognition for Sustainability:** The NECA award reaffirms the station's high environmental standards, which also holds a 'Platinum' rating from the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), underscoring DMRC's commitment to environmentally responsible urban mobility.

NTPC, NETRA & CSIR Scientist Receive Awards for Technological Innovations

- **Inaugural Award Ceremony:** These marks the first-ever edition of the awards instituted by the D.V. Kapur Foundation, named after the founder-chairman of NTPC. The ceremony was presided over by Prof. Ajay Kumar Sood, the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India.
- **Winner in Category 1 (Young Innovators):** Dr.AchuChandran, a Principal Scientist at CSIR-NIIST (National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology), won the award for young innovators (under 38 years). He was recognized for his pioneering research on "Nano Electricity Generators."
- **Winner in Category 2 (Organizations):** NETRA (NTPC Energy Technology Research Alliance), the R&D wing of NTPC Ltd., secured the top honors for organizational technological innovation. The award recognized their advancement in "Green Use of Coal Technologies."
- **Leadership and Recognition:** The award for NETRA was received by ShriShaswattam, Executive Director (NETRA), along with his team. The ceremony also featured notable dignitaries like former Union Minister Dr. Suresh Prabhu and Dr. Anil Kakodkar, former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Miyana Railway Station Receives National Energy Conservation Award 2025

- **Prestigious Ceremony:** The award was presented by the President of India, Smt. DroupadiMурmu, at VigyanBhawan, New Delhi. It was received on behalf of the station by Smt. ShobhanaBandopadhyaya, the General Manager of West Central Railway.

- **Quantifiable Impact:** The station was selected for its impressive achievement in saving 9,687 units of electrical energy. This reduction in power consumption was a key factor evaluated by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power.
- **Strategic Model:** The recognition highlights how even smaller railway stations can serve as demonstration sites for scalable green practices. This aligns with Indian Railways' broader mission to achieve Net-Zero Carbon Emissions by 2030.
- **Smart Lighting Systems:** Implementation of a 30–70% circuit operation mode, where lights dim automatically during off-peak hours to prevent unnecessary power usage.

‘PonduruKhadi’ Awarded Geographical Indication (GI) Tag

- **Geographical Origin:** Produced exclusively in Ponduru village of Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh, this fabric is locally known as "Patnulu" and is a centerpiece of the region's textile identity.
- **Unique Cleaning Process:** It is world-renowned for a unique ginning process where the cotton is cleaned using the jawbone of the Valuga fish. This specific technique makes the fiber exceptionally soft and durable.
- **Manual Craftsmanship:** Ponduru is the only place in India where artisans still use a single-spindle charkha (often called the "Gandhi Charkha") with 24 spokes. Every stage, from cleaning to weaving, is performed entirely by hand without any mechanization.
- **Gandhian Legacy:** Mahatma Gandhi was a great admirer of this fabric, famously mentioning its superior quality in his journal Young India after being gifted a PonduruKhadi stole in 1921.
- **Economic & Legal Protection:** The GI tag, issued under Classes 23, 24, and 25, names the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) as the registered proprietor. This ensures that only authentic Ponduru-made khadi can use the name, protecting the livelihoods of local weavers.

OusmaneDembele won FIFA Best Men’s Player Award 2025

- **A "Golden Year" Triple Crown:** Dembélé completed a rare individual "triple crown" in 2025, winning The Best FIFA Men’s Player, the Ballon d’Or (in September), and the UEFA Champions League Player of the Season.
- **Champions League Heroics:** His award was largely fueled by his role in leading PSG to their first-ever UEFA Champions League title, where he scored 8 goals in the competition, including a brace against Brest and key strikes against Liverpool and Arsenal.
- **Positional Transformation:** Under manager Luis Enrique, Dembélé transitioned from a traditional winger to a central forward/No. 9 mid-season. This shift made him significantly more lethal, resulting in 35 goals and 16 assists across all competitions.

- **Domestic Dominance:** He led PSG to an unprecedented haul of five trophies in 2025: the UEFA Champions League, Ligue 1, the Coupe de France, the Trophée des Champions, and the UEFA Super Cup. He also finished as the top scorer in Ligue 1 with 21 goals.

HPCL Wins Multiple Honours at PRSI Awards 2025

- **Diverse Recognition:** HPCL won awards across a wide spectrum of categories, including House Journal (Hindi) for its publication HP Samachar, Corporate Website Excellence, and both Internal and External Communication Campaigns.
- **CSR Leadership:** The company was named the "Best PSU Implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)". This award specifically recognized impactful initiatives like "HPCL Super 50" (supporting medical/engineering aspirants) and various healthcare outreach programs.
- **Empowerment & Skill Development:** HPCL secured top honours for Women Empowerment & Community Development and was recognized for the "Best Skill Development Initiative by a PSU," highlighting its role in enhancing employability and supporting livelihoods.
- **Transparency & Governance:** In a significant win for corporate accountability, HPCL was awarded for being the "Best PSU Implementing the Right to Information (RTI)," underscoring its commitment to transparency and good governance.
- **Digital and Social Outreach:** The PRSI also recognized HPCL's digital transformation, specifically its Corporate Website and digital engagement strategies, which were lauded for being user-friendly and effective in reaching stakeholders in the energy sector.

APPOINTMENT & PERSON IN NEWS

PNB Housing Finance appoints Ajai Kumar Shukla as New MD & CEO

- **Extensive Industry Experience:** Ajai Kumar Shukla brings over 30 years of comprehensive experience in the housing and mortgage lending business. His vast background spans key institutions, including significant tenures at LIC Housing Finance Ltd., ICICI Bank, and most recently, as the Chief Business Officer at Tata Capital Housing Finance Ltd.
- **Focus on Strategic Growth Areas:** His previous roles covered critical functions like Credit, Risk, Valuation, Digital Transformation, and Affordable Housing Finance. This diverse expertise positions him to lead PNB Housing Finance's strategy, particularly in leveraging digital channels and tapping into the higher-yield, less-competitive affordable housing segment.
- **Mandate for Operational Transformation:** Shukla's leadership is expected to focus on strengthening the company's growth strategy, improving operational efficiency, and guiding the long-term expansion of its footprint in the competitive Indian housing finance market. The market views him as a leader capable of driving organizational change.

- **Term and Shareholder Confidence:** The appointment, which was approved by the Board on December 12, 2025, is for a term of five years. The announcement was immediately followed by an increase of approximately 5-6% in the share price of PNB Housing Finance, reflecting a positive investor sentiment and confidence in his ability to steer the company.
- **Strengthening Governance and Risk Management:** The transition highlights the company's continuous effort to strengthen its management team and internal controls. His experience in Risk and Governance is crucial for a large Housing Finance Company.

B. Sairam appointed Chairman-cum-Managing Director of Coal India

- **Vast Experience:** A mining engineer from NIT Raipur with an MBA in Energy Management, Sairam brings over 35 years of experience in the coal sector, spanning mine operations, logistics, and regulatory affairs.
- **Leadership Transition:** He succeeds Sanoj Kumar Jha, an Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Coal who had been holding the interim charge since November 1, 2024, following the retirement of P.M. Prasad.
- **Proven Track Record:** Before this elevation, Sairam served as the CMD of Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL) and Director (Technical) at Central Coalfields Limited (CCL), where he spearheaded major infrastructure and rehabilitation projects.
- **Tenure:** His appointment is valid until his superannuation on March 31, 2028, or until further orders, providing long-term leadership stability to the coal behemoth.
- **Strategic Vision:** Upon taking charge, he emphasized a dual focus: meeting the nation's energy demand through increased production and diversifying into solar power, coal gasification, and critical mineral acquisitions.

Retired IPS Officer Prashant Kumar appointed chairman of UPESSC

- **Distinguished Law Enforcement Career:** A 1990-batch IPS officer, Prashant Kumar retired on May 31, 2025, after serving as the acting Director General of Police (DGP) of Uttar Pradesh. He is widely recognized for his "zero-tolerance" policy against organized crime and for leading over 300 successful police operations (encounters) during his tenure.
- **Highly Decorated & Academic Background:** Kumar is one of India's most decorated officers, holding four President's Gallantry Medals. Beyond policing, he has strong academic credentials, including an MSc in Applied Geology (Gold Medalist), an MBA in Disaster Management, an MPhil in Defence and Strategic Studies, and an honorary D.Litt from Lucknow University.
- **Tenure and Eligibility:** He has been appointed for a term of three years or until he reaches the age of 65, whichever comes first. His appointment was made by Governor Anandiben Patel under the UPESSC Act, 2023 (as amended in 2025).

- **Mission to Restore Recruitment:** The UPESSC was formed by merging various recruitment boards to streamline teacher hiring. Since the resignation of the previous chair (Prof. Kirti Pandey) in September 2024, the commission's work had stalled. Kumar's primary goal is to restart delayed examinations for TGT, PGT, and Assistant Professor posts with improved transparency.
- **Administrative Heavyweight:** Often referred to as "The Enforcer" in administrative circles, Kumar's appointment to an educational body is seen as a strategic move by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to bring strict discipline and "clean" recruitment processes to the state's massive education sector.

Raj Kumar Goyal sworn in as new Chief Information Commissioner

- **Filling a Vacancy at the Helm:** Raj Kumar Goyal was sworn in to fill the post of the Chief Information Commissioner, which had been vacant since September 2025 following the retirement of the previous CIC, Heeralal Samariya. The CIC is the apex body for the implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005.
- **Senior Bureaucratic Experience:** Goyal is a 1990-batch (retired) IAS officer of the Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram-Union Territories (AGMUT) cadre. He superannuated as the Secretary, Department of Justice under the Ministry of Law and Justice, bringing extensive legal and administrative experience to the transparency watchdog.
- **Appointment by High-Level Panel:** His name was recommended by the three-member selection committee mandated by the RTI Act. This committee is headed by the Prime Minister and includes the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- **CIC Attains Full Strength:** Alongside the appointment of the CIC, the selection panel also recommended the names of eight new Information Commissioners (ICs). With these new appointments, the Central Information Commission is set to operate at its full sanctioned strength of 11 members (one CIC and ten ICs) for the first time in over nine years, which is crucial for reducing the backlog of RTI appeals and complaints.

Meta India appoints Aman Jain as Head of Public Policy

- **Top Leadership Role:** Aman Jain has been appointed the new Head of Public Policy for Meta India, where he will be responsible for leading the company's policy strategy and engagements in the country. He will also be a member of the Meta India leadership team.
- **Extensive Industry Experience:** Jain brings over 20 years of public policy and business strategy experience from major technology companies and the government. His previous senior roles include Director of Public Policy at Amazon and Country Head for Government Affairs & Public Policy at Google India.
- **Reporting Structure:** He is slated to join Meta early next year and will report directly to Simon Milner, Vice President of Policy for the Asia Pacific (APAC), underscoring the strategic importance of the India market.

- **Strategic Focus on Key Areas:** His appointment comes at a crucial time when the Indian government is focused on regulating technology. His role will be central to navigating and shaping policy discussions around key areas like Artificial Intelligence (AI), emerging technologies, the creator economy, digital safety, data governance, and platform accountability.
- **Succession in a Strategic Market:** The appointment fills a key vacancy (the previous VP of Public Policy, Shivnath Thukral, stepped down earlier) and signals Meta's intent to strengthen its engagement with regulators and stakeholders in India, one of its largest and most strategic global markets.

Press Club of India Elects Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty as Its First Woman President

- **First Woman President in PCI History:** Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty made history by becoming the first woman to be elected as the President of the Press Club of India since its establishment. This is a landmark achievement for gender diversity in the leadership of the country's prominent media institutions.
- **Clean Sweep Victory:** She led a panel that achieved a massive victory, winning all 21 office-bearer and managing committee positions with an emphatic mandate, signaling widespread support for her leadership and vision within the PCI membership.
- **Experienced Journalist and Author:** Pisharoty is a highly regarded journalist and writer, currently serving as the National Affairs Editor at the digital news publication The Wire. She previously spent 14 years as a special correspondent with the national newspaper, The Hindu.
- **Awards and Published Works:** Her professional reputation is bolstered by several accolades, including the Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Award (2017) for her reportage. She is also the author of the critically acclaimed book, Assam: The Accord, The Discord (2019).
- **Focus on Journalistic Values:** In her post-election remarks, Pisharoty emphasized that the mandate reflected the members' faith in her panel's commitment to upholding the values of free, fair, and responsible journalism.

Suresh Goyal appointed as NCAER Director General

- **Official Appointment & Tenure:** Suresh Goyal is scheduled to assume his new role on January 5, 2026. He succeeds Poonam Gupta, who led the institution from July 2021 to April 2025 and was subsequently appointed as a Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- **Extensive Career Background:** Goyal brings over 30 years of experience across both public and private sectors. He joins NCAER from the National Highway Infra Trust (NHIT), where he served as the Managing Director and CEO, overseeing the government's National Monetisation Pipeline.

- **Private Sector Expertise:** Before his public sector roles, he spent much of his career at Macquarie Infrastructure and Real Assets, serving as Senior Managing Director and Head of India and Southeast Asia while based in Singapore.
- **Expansion Mandate:** Under his leadership, the NCAER Governing Board—chaired by Nandan Nilekani—aims to establish new research centers in emerging areas such as Health Economics, Finance, Advanced Data Insights, and States' Growth.
- **Strategic Vision:** Goyal's appointment is aligned with the national vision of "Viksit Bharat@2047." His mandate includes strengthening the institution's endowment base and deepening research engagement with both central and state governments to influence economic policy.

Harish Singh Papola appointed as Officer to the Minister for Communications and Development

- **Official Designation:** Harish Singh Papola has been appointed as the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, the Union Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).
- **Officer Profile:** He is an Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS) officer (formerly listed in some records as IRPFS) of the 2015 batch, bringing a decade of administrative experience to the role.
- **Level & Tenure:** The appointment is at the Deputy Secretary level. His tenure is set to last until August 10, 2028, which marks the maximum permissible period of seven years away from his parent cadre.
- **Co-terminus Basis:** As is standard for OSD roles, his appointment is co-terminus with the Minister, meaning it will remain valid as long as Jyotiraditya Scindia holds the office, or until further orders.
- **Strategic Role:** Papola will provide high-level policy and coordination support, acting as a crucial bridge between the Minister's office and the administrative machinery of the Ministry of Communications and DoNER.

IMPORTANT DAYS

National Energy Conservation Day observed on 14th December

- **Mandate and Objective:** The day has been celebrated since 1991 and is championed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), an agency under the Ministry of Power, Government of India. The primary objective is to drive mass awareness about the necessity of energy conservation and the efficient use of energy in daily life.
- **2025 Theme (Advancing Sustainability):** The theme for National Energy Conservation Day 2025 is focused on "advancing sustainable energy innovation and citizen participation." This highlights the dual need for technological leaps in sustainable energy and collective responsibility from the public.

- **National Energy Conservation Awards (NECA):** A key event of the day is the presentation of the National Energy Conservation Awards (NECA) by the BEE. These prestigious awards recognize and honor industries, institutions, and establishments that have demonstrated outstanding efforts and achievements in reducing energy consumption and promoting efficiency.
- **Key Government Initiatives Highlighted:** The day serves as a platform to promote the effectiveness of India's major energy efficiency schemes, such as the Standards and Labeling Program (star ratings on appliances) and the Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) Scheme (a market-based mechanism for large industries).
- **Focus on Youth and Future:** Through nationwide activities like the National Painting Competition on Energy Conservation (which saw over 80 lakh student participants in 2025), the observance emphasizes educating and engaging children and youth.

International Migrants Day observed on 18th December

- **2025 Theme:** "My Great Story: Cultures and Development": This year's theme, led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), shifts the narrative from migration as a "problem" to migration as a human story. It emphasizes how individual journeys of mobility drive economic growth, spark innovation, and enrich the cultural fabric of both host and home countries.
- **Historical Significance:** The date marks the anniversary of the 1990 adoption of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families by the UN General Assembly. The day was officially designated in 2000 to raise awareness about the increasing number of migrants worldwide.
- **A "Defining Force" of the Century:** UN reports for 2025 highlight that migration is no longer an outlier but a central economic pillar. Remittances to low- and middle-income countries are projected to reach a record \$685 billion this year, providing a critical lifeline that often exceeds foreign direct investment (FDI) in many developing nations.
- **Focus on Health and Safety:** The World Health Organization (WHO) and IOM used this day to call for "migrant-inclusive" health systems. In 2025, the focus is on removing legal and language barriers that prevent migrants—especially those in irregular situations—from accessing Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Goa Liberation Day 2025 observed on 19 December

- **64th Anniversary of Freedom:** The day commemorates the success of Operation Vijay in 1961. While most of India gained independence in 1947, Goa remained under Portuguese control for an additional 14 years until this decisive 36-hour military action.
- **A "Defining Chapter":** Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the day as a "defining chapter in our national journey," emphasizing that Goa's liberation completed India's

territorial integrity and signaled the final end of European colonialism on the subcontinent.

- **State-Level Celebrations:** Chief Minister Pramod Sawant hoisted the national flag at multiple venues, including the main state event at the Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium in Dona Paula. The day featured vibrant parades, torchlight rallies, and traditional Goan folk performances.
- **Honouring the "Satyagrahis":** Special tributes were paid to freedom fighters like Mohan Ranade and T.B. Cunha (the father of the Goan freedom struggle), as well as the 22 Indian soldiers who lost their lives during the 1961 operation.
- **Focus on Self-Reliance:** Under the theme of "Swayampurna Goa," the 2025 celebrations highlighted the state's transition from a colonial outpost to one of India's most prosperous states, leading in tourism, per capita income, and social development indicators.

OBITUARY NEWS

Author Sophie Kinsella passed away

- **Cause of Death:** Sophie Kinsella, whose real name was Madeleine Sophie Wickham, died following a battle with glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer. She was first diagnosed with the condition in late 2022 and publicly revealed the diagnosis in April 2024.
- **The Shopaholic Series:** She achieved international fame with her Shopaholic book series, which introduced the much-loved, flawed heroine Becky Bloomwood. The first book, *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* (also published as *Confessions of a Shopaholic*), was released in 2000 and the series later inspired a major Hollywood film adaptation.
- **Global Bestseller Status:** Kinsella was one of Britain's most successful novelists, selling over 50 million copies of her books worldwide. Her works have been translated into more than 40 languages and are credited with helping to popularize the genre of romantic comedy fiction (often referred to as 'chick lit').
- **Literary Output:** She was a prolific writer who wrote more than 30 books, including the Shopaholic series and numerous standalone bestsellers like *Can You Keep a Secret?* and *The Undomestic Goddess*. She also published several novels under her real name, Madeleine Wickham, before adopting her well-known pen name.
- **Final Work and Legacy:** Her final novel, *What Does It Feel Like?*, published in 2024, was a semi-autobiographical work that drew inspiration from her cancer journey, detailing a novelist learning to walk, talk, and write again after major brain surgery.

Former Union Minister Shivraj Patil passed away

- **Former Lok Sabha Speaker:** Shivraj Patil served as the 10th Speaker of the Lok Sabha from 1991 to 1996 during the tenure of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. During this

period, he was credited with introducing significant parliamentary reforms, including the establishment of 17 Departmentally Related Standing Committees in 1993 to enhance legislative scrutiny.

- **Union Home Minister:** He held the crucial post of Union Minister of Home Affairs from 2004 to 2008 in the UPA-I government led by Dr. Manmohan Singh. His tenure as Home Minister, however, concluded when he resigned in November 2008, taking moral responsibility for the security lapses that led to the devastating 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.
- **Seven-Time Parliamentarian:** Patil was a political heavyweight in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, winning the Latur Lok Sabha seat seven consecutive times from 1980 to 1999. He also served as a Member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly (MLA) for two terms and held the position of Speaker of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly (1978–1979).
- **Key Ministerial Roles:** Throughout the 1980s under Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, he held a wide range of significant portfolios as Minister of State, including Defence, Commerce, Science and Technology, and Atomic Energy, demonstrating his vast administrative experience.
- **Later Constitutional Role:** After resigning as Home Minister, he later served a full term as the Governor of Punjab and Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh from 2010 to 2015, continuing his service in a constitutional role.

Veteran Indian National Congress Leader Shamanur Shivashankarappa passed away

- **Oldest Sitting Legislator:** At the time of his passing, he was the oldest sitting MLA in India, representing the Davanagere South constituency. He was elected to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly six times and served one term as a Member of Parliament (MP).
- **Community Leadership:** He served as the National President of the Akhil Bharat Veerashaiva Mahasabha for over a decade, acting as a powerful and influential voice for the Lingayat community across party lines.
- **Educational Visionary:** He was the chairman of the Bapuji Educational Association, transforming Davanagere into a major educational hub by establishing numerous medical, engineering, and dental colleges.
- **Political Stalwart:** A lifelong Congressman, he served as the Treasurer of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) for nearly three decades and held the Horticulture and APMC portfolios as a Cabinet Minister.

Sculptor Ram Sutar, Designer of Statue of Unity passed away

- **The Mind Behind the Statue of Unity:** Sutar gained global fame as the chief sculptor of the Statue of Unity in Gujarat. Standing at 182 meters, the bronze tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel remains the world's tallest statue and is considered Sutar's crowning achievement.

- **Master of the "Gandhi Bust":** He is arguably the most prolific creator of Mahatma Gandhi's likeness. His specific design of a meditating Gandhi has been replicated and installed in over 450 cities across the globe, making his art a symbol of Indian diplomacy and peace worldwide.
- **A Century of Artistry:** Born on February 19, 1925, in Maharashtra, Sutar was a gold medalist from the prestigious Sir J.J. School of Art. His career spanned over seven decades, during which he created more than 200 monumental sculptures, including the GyarahMurti in Delhi and the Statue of Prosperity (KempeGowda) in Bengaluru.
- **Highly Decorated Legend:** For his immense contribution to Indian art and culture, he was honored with the Padma Bhushan (2016) and the Padma Shri (1999). He also received the Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony and, most recently in 2024, the Maharashtra Bhushan, the state's highest civilian honor.

Pulitzer Prize Winning War Correspondent Peter passed away

- **Pulitzer Prize for Vietnam:** Arnett won the 1966 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting for his work with the Associated Press (AP). His gritty, boots-on-the-ground dispatches from the front lines of the Vietnam War often challenged official U.S. government narratives and helped redefine modern war journalism.
- **The Voice of the Gulf War:** He became a household name globally in 1991 as a correspondent for CNN. He was the only Western journalist to remain in Baghdad during the initial Allied bombing campaign, famously reporting live via satellite phone while air-raid sirens wailed in the background.
- **Interviews with History:** Throughout his 45-year career, Arnett conducted high-stakes interviews with some of the world's most controversial figures, including Saddam Hussein during the First Gulf War and a rare, early interview with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in 1997.
- **"Live From the Battlefield":** Over his career, he covered 17 different wars across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America. His memoir, Live From the Battlefield, is considered essential reading for aspiring journalists and historians.

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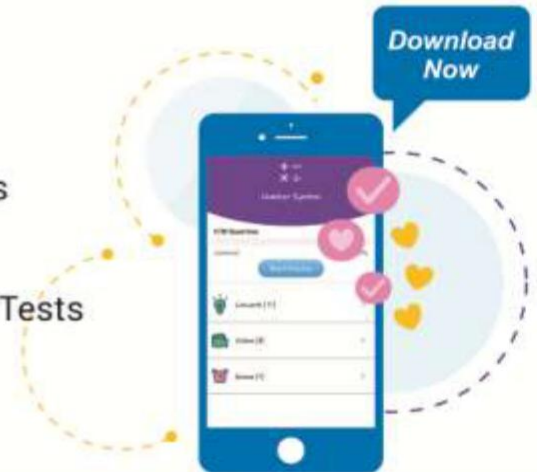
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