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WEEKLY —
Current
Affairs



NATIONAL NEWS

AP Legislative Assembly became 1st legislature to adopt AI-based attendance system

- **Facial Recognition & Precision Seating:** The system uses nine advanced AI cameras equipped with facial recognition. Crucially, attendance is only recorded once a member is actually seated in their designated seat inside the House, preventing "proxy" signatures or members signing and immediately leaving.
- **Real-Time Tracking & Transparency:** Beyond just marking presence, the AI monitors the duration each legislator remains in the Assembly. This data is displayed digitally within the premises to ensure transparency regarding the active participation of elected representatives.
- **"No Work, No Pay" Policy:** The initiative reinforces legislative discipline by supporting a potential "no work, no pay" rule. Under existing rules, continuous absence (recorded by the AI) for 60 days can also lead to the disqualification of a member.

Footnotes: AP's Governor: Syed Abdul Nazeer, CM: N. Chandrababu Naidu, Capital: Amaravati

PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the India AI Impact Expo 2026

- **Launch of "Inya VoiceOS":** PM Modi unveiled Inya VoiceOS, India's first sovereign 5-billion-parameter voice-to-voice AI model. This foundational model is designed to provide high-quality AI services in multiple Indian languages, focusing on digital inclusion for citizens who prefer voice-based interactions.
- **National AI Showcase ("AI in Action"):** The Expo spans over 70,000 square meters and features over 600 high-potential startups and 300 curated pavilions. It is structured around the "Three Chakras"—People, Planet, and Progress—showcasing real-world AI applications in healthcare, agriculture, and governance.
- **Focus on Global South Leadership:** The Prime Minister emphasized India's vision of "Sarvajana Hitaya, Sarvajana Sukhaya" (Welfare for All, Happiness for All), positioning India as a leader in "Responsible AI" that serves the specific needs of developing nations and bridges the global AI divide.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah Launches CBDC Based PDS in Gujarat

- **Programmable Digital Food Currency:** Beneficiaries now receive "Digital Food Coupons" in RBI-enabled digital wallets. These tokens are programmable, meaning they can only be redeemed for specific food items at Fair Price Shops (FPS), effectively preventing the diversion of subsidies for non-food purposes.
- **Elimination of Biometric Hassles:** The system allows for seamless transactions using QR codes or SMS-based OTPs, removing the need for repeated biometric (fingerprint) authentication, which often fails in rural areas due to connectivity or physical labor-worn prints.

- **Inauguration of 'Annapurthi' Grain ATMs:** Alongside the digital currency, Shah inaugurated the 'Annapurthi' Grain ATM, a Made-in-Gujarat machine capable of dispensing up to 25 kg of grain in just 35 seconds, ensuring accurate weight and 24/7 access for beneficiaries.

Union Minister Inaugurates Mountain Fire Control Radar & BEL's AI Policy

- **Mountain Fire Control Radar Unveiled:** This is a compact, indigenous radar system designed specifically for high-altitude, mountainous terrain. It enables the automatic detection and tracking of hostile projectiles (like mortars and rockets) and provides precise fire control to neutralize threats in difficult geographical conditions.
- **Launch of BEL's AI Policy:** The Minister formally launched BEL's first Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy. This strategic framework is designed to integrate AI into defense manufacturing and R&D, focusing on "threat prediction, early warning, and response mechanisms" to enhance the operational confidence of soldiers.
- **Establishment of CoE-AI:** Alongside the policy, a Centre of Excellence for Artificial Intelligence (CoE-AI) was remotely inaugurated in Pune. This center will serve as the hub for developing next-generation autonomous systems, cyber defense, and real-time decision-making tools to modernize India's battlefield dynamics

NITI Aayog's Vice Chairman Released 6th Edition of TWQ

- **Robust Export Growth:** India's total exports (merchandise and services combined) recorded a strong growth of approximately 8.5%, significantly outpacing import growth. The report highlights that services continue to outperform goods globally, and India's trade is increasingly aligning with the "Global South rebalancing."
- **Electronics as a Major Export Pillar:** The thematic focus of this edition was the electronics sector, which has now emerged as the second-largest item in India's export basket. Driven by a fivefold increase in exports between 2016 and 2024 (reaching \$42.1 billion), the report stresses shifting from "final assembly" to "high-value component manufacturing" like semiconductors and PCBs.
- **E-commerce as a Future Catalyst:** The report projects that e-commerce exports could contribute 20–30% of India's total merchandise exports by 2030. With India currently ranked among the top six global e-commerce markets, the report identifies digital trade as a key driver for MSME participation in global value chains.

India's First National Biobank Launched in Ahmedabad

- **Focus on Rare Diseases:** This is the first biobank in India specifically dedicated to Lysosomal Storage Disorders, a group of over 70 rare genetic metabolic conditions. It currently integrates clinical and genetic data from 530 patients across 15 states.

- **Lead Institution:** The initiative is led by the Foundation for Research in Genetics and Endocrinology (FRIGE) – Institute of Human Genetics in Ahmedabad and is funded by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).
- **Objective of Precision Medicine:** The facility aims to bridge the gap in rare disease research by providing a centralized repository of biological samples (DNA, plasma, urine). This will help scientists develop affordable, indigenous screening tools and therapies, reducing the current reliance on extremely expensive imported treatments.

Footnotes: Ahmedabad's Mayor: Pratibha Jain

Supreme Court Declares 'Menstrual Health' as a Fundamental Right

- **Constitutional Protection (Articles 21 & 14):** The Bench, led by Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan, ruled that "period poverty" and the lack of hygiene facilities violate a girl's right to live with dignity and substantive equality. The Court emphasized that a biological process should never become a "structural exclusion" that hinders education or bodily autonomy.
- **Mandate for Free Sanitary Products:** The Court directed all states and Union Territories to provide free, oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins to adolescent girls (Classes 6–12) in all schools—both government and private. It also ordered the installation of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) corners and safe disposal mechanisms (like incinerators) across institutions.
- **Strict Accountability for Schools:** The ruling makes infrastructure like gender-segregated toilets and clean water a mandatory requirement. Crucially, the Court warned that private schools could face derecognition if they fail to comply with these hygiene standards, ensuring the right is enforceable rather than just a policy goal.

India Introduces Comprehensive Framework for AI Governance

- **The "Seven Sutras" of AI:** The framework is built on seven core principles—Trust, People First, Innovation over Restraint, Fairness & Equity, Accountability, Understandable by Design, and Safety. These "Sutras" shift the focus from rigid, "one-size-fits-all" laws to a flexible, principle-based approach that prioritizes human agency and socio-economic progress.
- **New Institutional Oversight:** To implement these guidelines, the government is establishing three new bodies: the AI Governance Group (AIGG) for inter-ministerial coordination, the India AI Safety Institute (AISII) to set technical standards and conduct risk assessments, and a National AI Incidents Database to track and mitigate harms like deepfakes and algorithmic bias.
- **Techno-Legal & Graded Accountability:** Rather than creating a standalone "AI Act," India is integrating AI rules into existing laws (like the DPDPA and IT Rules). It introduces a graded liability system, where the level of accountability depends on the risk

level of the AI application (e.g., healthcare or surveillance) and the specific role of the developer or deployer in the value chain.

Delhi Announces Bhu-Aadhaar: Unique ID for Land Parcel

- **14-Digit Digital Identity:** Every land parcel in Delhi will be assigned a Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN), a 14-digit alphanumeric code. Often called "Aadhaar for land," this ID will store comprehensive details including ownership, land size, and precise longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates.
- **Advanced Geospatial Mapping:** The project utilizes approximately 2 terabytes of high-quality geospatial data and drone-based imaging provided by the Survey of India. This geo-referencing ensures that boundaries are digitally fixed, significantly reducing the risk of property fraud, multiple registrations, and boundary disputes.
- **Phased Rollout and Integration:** Following a successful pilot in Tilangpur Kotla (West Delhi), the system is being expanded citywide in a phased manner. It integrates with the Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP) and will cover all areas, including 48 villages already mapped under the SVAMITVA scheme, to create a unified digital land database.

Footnotes: Delhi's CM: Rekha Gupta, Governor: Vinai Kumar Saxena

UP Govt launches District-Level Manuscript Digitisation initiative

- **Implementation of 'Gyan Bharatam Mission':** This initiative is a key part of the national Gyan Bharatam Mission (announced in the Union Budget 2025-26). It aims to identify, survey, and digitize rare manuscripts and historic texts that are more than 75 years old, ensuring they are preserved for future generations.
- **District-Level Governance:** To ensure thorough coverage, the Chief Development Officer (CDO) of each district has been appointed as the nodal officer. They are tasked with documenting manuscripts held not only in government institutions but also in private collections, temples, monasteries, and libraries.
- **Digital Accessibility & Ownership:** While the government will perform high-quality scanning and host the digital copies on the Gyan Bharatam portal for global research access, the original ownership remains with the individual collectors or institutions. This ensures that private heritage is protected while the knowledge within is democratized.

Footnotes: UP's Governor: Anandiben Patel, CM: Yogi Adityanath, Capital: Lucknow

Kerala to launch India's first graphene policy to become global tech hub

- **Strategic Infrastructure Development:** The policy centers on the establishment of a Grefine Park in Palakkad and a Digital Innovation Centre (backed by a ₹200 crore investment). These facilities will work alongside the existing ₹87-crore Graphene Innovation Centre in Kalamassery to create a complete ecosystem from lab research to mass manufacturing.

- **Major Industrial Incentives:** To attract global and domestic investors, Kerala is offering a 50% subsidy on lease payments for manufacturing units established in government-managed industrial parks. Additionally, the state will provide capital expenditure support of up to 45%, along with exemptions from stamp duty and power duty for graphene-based startups and industries.
- **Global Academic-Industry Linkages:** The policy emphasizes bridging the "lab-to-market" gap by fostering direct collaborations with world-renowned institutions, including Oxford and Manchester Universities (where graphene was first isolated).

Footnotes: Kerala's CM: Pinarayi Vijayan, Governor: Rajendra Arlekar, Capital: Thiruvananthapuram

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

India's Passport Climbs 10 Ranks in 2026

- **Significant Rank Jump:** The Indian passport climbed 10 places, rising from 85th in 2025 to 75th in the February 2026 update. This is India's best ranking in over a decade, driven by new bilateral agreements and the rollout of advanced chip-embedded e-passports.
- **Access to 56 Destinations:** Despite the jump in rank, the number of visa-free/visa-on-arrival destinations for Indians settled at 56. While India lost easy access to Iran and Bolivia due to new security restrictions, it gained fresh access to destinations like The Gambia and extended 60-day visa-free stays in Thailand.
- **Regional Dominance:** India now holds the strongest passport in South Asia (excluding the Maldives), significantly outperforming neighbors like Bhutan (83rd), Sri Lanka (91st), and Pakistan (97th). This reflects India's growing "soft-power footprint" and its expanding influence in international travel and trade.

Mia Mottley Secures Historic Third Term in Barbados

- **Third Consecutive "Clean Sweep":** For the third election in a row (2018, 2022, and 2026), Mottley led the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) to a total victory, winning all 30 seats in the House of Assembly. This leaves the country without an official elected opposition in parliament for yet another term.
- **Historic Leadership Milestone:** Mottley is the first woman in Barbadian history to serve three terms as Prime Minister. She also remains one of the longest-serving female heads of government globally, further cementing her status as a powerhouse in Caribbean and international politics.
- **Mandate for "Global-Facing" Policy:** Her victory is seen as a strong public endorsement of her dual focus: tackling domestic issues like infrastructure and the cost of living, while continuing her high-profile international advocacy for climate justice and global financial reform for developing nations.

NIPL Signs Agreement with Malaysia's PayNet

- **Cross-Border QR Interoperability:** The agreement enables travelers to make seamless merchant payments using their domestic apps. Indian travelers in Malaysia can now pay at over 2.9 million DuitNow QR touchpoints using UPI, while Malaysian travelers in India will eventually be able to scan UPI QR codes using their local DuitNow apps.
- **Phased Implementation:** The rollout is happening in two phases. The first phase (currently active) focuses on Indian tourists visiting Malaysia—aligning with the "Visit Malaysia 2026" campaign. The subsequent phase will open up the reciprocal service for Malaysian visitors in India.
- **Economic Connectivity:** Beyond tourism, this partnership strengthens the digital and economic ties between the two nations. It provides a low-cost, secure, and real-time alternative to traditional currency exchange or international credit cards, supporting small businesses and the wider financial ecosystem in both markets.

Bulgaria appoints Andrey Gyurov as acting PM

- **Technocratic Mandate:** Gyurov, a 50-year-old economist and former lawmaker, was chosen as a neutral, "non-partisan" figure to lead a caretaker government. His primary responsibility is to maintain macroeconomic stability—critical as Bulgaria recently adopted the euro at the start of 2026.
- **Preparation for Snap Elections:** The main task of this interim government is to organize and oversee free and fair national elections, which are scheduled for April 19, 2026. This will be Bulgaria's eighth parliamentary election in just five years, reflecting the country's deep political fragmentation.
- **Response to Civil Unrest:** His appointment follows the resignation of the previous coalition government (led by Rosen Zhelyazkov) in December 2025, which was triggered by widespread nationwide protests over corruption, social injustice, and the influence of oligarchs.

Footnotes: Bulgaria's President: Iliana Iotova, Capital: Sofia

International Conference on Dam Safety 2026 Held in Bengaluru

- **Dam Safety as a National Security Imperative:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, while inaugurating the event, emphasized that dam safety must be treated as a national security issue. He highlighted that nearly 70% of India's 6,000+ large dams are over 25 years old, necessitating urgent modernisation and cooperative federalism for cross-border water governance.
- **Launch of "DAMCHAT" AI Platform:** A major highlight was the launch of DAMCHAT, an AI-powered platform developed by the International Centre of Excellence for Dams (ICED) at IIT Roorkee. It serves as a real-time decision-support

tool, allowing dam owners and engineers to query technical and regulatory documents instantly.

- **Digital & Data-Driven Governance:** The Union Ministry of Jal Shakti unveiled the Jal Shakti Data Management Platform (developed by the National Water Informatics Centre). This platform integrates remote sensing, real-time instrumentation, and structural health monitoring.

Tarique Rahman Sworn in as 11th PM of Bangladesh

- **Return from Exile & Landslide Victory:** After spending 17 years in self-imposed exile in London, Tarique Rahman returned to Bangladesh in late 2025. He led the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to a landslide victory in the 13th parliamentary elections, securing 212 of the 300 directly elected seats.
- **End of "Battle of the Begums":** His appointment ends a 35-year era (since 1991) where the premiership rotated exclusively between two women: his mother, Khaleda Zia, and her rival, Sheikh Hasina. He is the first male Prime Minister of Bangladesh in over three decades.
- **Transition from Interim Rule:** His government officially replaces the interim administration led by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, which had governed the country for 18 months following the 2024 student-led uprising and the ouster of Sheikh Hasina.

Footnotes: Bangladesh's President: Mohammed Shahabuddin, Capital: Dhaka, Currency: Bangladeshi Taka

Lalduhoma inaugurated Lengtekai Bridge over the Tlawng River

- **Strategic Connectivity (The "Faith Bridge"):** Officially named the Faith Bridge, the 100-meter-long steel arch structure provides a crucial link between the state capital, Aizawl, and the state's only airport at Lengpui. It also serves as a vital corridor for the Mamit district, facilitating trade and movement toward Tripura and Bangladesh.
- **Replacement of Outdated Infrastructure:** The bridge replaces aging, single-lane Bailey bridges that were frequently damaged and had strict load restrictions. The new structure is designed to carry much heavier loads—up to 385 metric tons—eliminating the need for vehicles to unload before crossing and ensuring uninterrupted traffic flow.
- **Engineering and Investment:** Built at a cost of ₹43.83 crore (funded by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways), the bridge is an engineering milestone for the region. It utilized specialized carbon steel tension rods from Thailand and steel fabricated in Rourkela, overcoming significant technical delays caused by a major equipment failure during its initial launching phase in late 2024.

Japan reappoints Sanae Takaichi as PM

- **Landslide Mandate and Supermajority:** Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) secured a massive two-thirds "supermajority" (316 out of 465 seats) in the Lower House. This commanding position allows her administration to pass key legislation and override potential rejections from the Upper House, where the ruling coalition is less dominant.
- **Hard-Right Policy Shift:** As Japan's first female Prime Minister, Takaichi has pledged to use her new mandate for a significant right-wing shift. Her priorities include revising Japan's pacifist Constitution, establishing a National Intelligence Agency, and increasing military spending to 2% of GDP to counter regional security threats.
- **"Sanaenomics" and Economic Relief:** To combat inflation and sluggish wages, she has proposed a two-year suspension of the consumption tax on food. Her economic strategy, often called "Sanaenomics," focuses on aggressive government spending and "crisis management investment" in sectors like AI, semiconductors, and nuclear fusion.

Footnotes: Japan's Prime Minister: Sanae Takaichi, Capital: Tokyo

Google Unveils \$15B America–India Connect Subsea Cable Project

- **Strategic \$15 Billion Investment:** Google is committing \$15 billion over five years (2026–2030) to strengthen India's AI infrastructure. This includes building a "gigawatt-scale" full-stack AI data center hub and an international subsea gateway in Visakhapatnam (Vizag), marking its largest investment in India to date.
- **Expansion of Global Connectivity:** The project will establish three new subsea cable paths connecting India directly to Singapore, South Africa, and Australia. These routes will link the American east and west coasts to India via the Southern Hemisphere, creating a high-capacity, redundant data corridor that bypasses traditional bottlenecks.
- **Addressing the "AI Divide":** By diversifying landing points beyond Mumbai and Chennai to include Vizag, the initiative aims to increase the resilience of India's digital backbone. The goal is to ensure reliable, high-speed internet access that prevents a "digital divide" from becoming an "AI divide," while also training 20 million public servants in AI tools through the Karmayogi Bharat mission.

Footnotes: Google's CEO: Sundar Pichai, HQ: California, Estd: 1998

L&T, Nvidia set up gigawatt-scale AI data centre infrastructure in India

- **Sovereign "AI Factory" Model:** Unlike traditional data centers, this "AI Factory" is specifically engineered for high-density GPU clusters. It is designed as a sovereign infrastructure, ensuring that critical Indian data, AI models, and workloads are built, trained, and stored within national boundaries while remaining interoperable with global systems.
- **Gigawatt-Scale Roadmap:** The initiative targets a massive gigawatt-scale (GW) capacity over the long term. Initial phases involve scaling the NVIDIA GPU cluster at L&T's Chennai campus to 30 MW and developing a new 40 MW AI-ready facility in

Mumbai, providing the massive compute power needed for large-scale AI training and inference.

- **Full-Stack Integration for Industry:** The partnership combines L&T's infrastructure expertise with NVIDIA's complete technology stack (GPUs, CPUs, and AI Enterprise software). This will enable L&T group companies to deploy "Agentic AI" and "Lights-Out Factories"—fully automated industrial operations—across sectors like energy, healthcare, and financial services.

Footnotes: Nvidia's President & CEO: Jensen Huang, HQ: California, Estd: 1993

India Sets Guinness World Record with 2.5 lakh AI Pledges in 24 Hours

- **Record-Breaking Scale:** India achieved the Guinness World Records title for the "Most pledges received for an AI responsibility campaign in 24 hours," recording exactly 250,946 valid pledges between February 16 and 17, 2026.
- **Youth-Driven Movement:** The initiative focused heavily on the younger generation, with over 2.5 lakh students and faculty members from colleges across the nation participating. The campaign was led by the IndiaAI Mission in collaboration with Intel India.
- **Focus on Ethical AI:** Beyond the numbers, the pledge required participants to engage with scenario-based modules covering data privacy, transparency, accountability, and the fight against misinformation, reinforcing India's commitment to a "human-centric" AI ecosystem.

DEFENCE NEWS

First Indigenous Cadet Training Ship 'Krishna' Launched

- **A "Floating Classroom" for Future Officers:** Designed as a dedicated training platform, the ship features specialized classrooms, a training bridge, and a chart house. It can accommodate 20 officers, 150 sailors, and 200 cadets simultaneously, providing hands-on experience in navigation and seamanship for both Indian (including women) and friendly foreign country cadets.
- **Indigenous Design & Private Partnership:** The vessel is a major milestone for 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', as it was entirely designed and constructed by Larsen & Toubro (L&T). This highlights the growing role of private Indian shipyards in building complex, large-scale naval defense assets.
- **Versatile Secondary Roles:** Beyond training, 'Krishna' is equipped to serve as a Hospital Ship and can be deployed for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), and Search and Rescue (SAR) missions.

BANKING NEWS

EximPe gets RBI approval for PA-CB Licence

- **Direct UPI Acceptance for Global Merchants:** The license allows EximPe to enable international businesses to collect payments from Indian customers using UPI, cards, and net banking without needing a local Indian entity. Funds can be settled directly into the merchants' offshore accounts in their preferred foreign currencies.
- **Transition to Licensed Infrastructure:** Previously, EximPe operated only as a Technology Service Provider (TSP) for banks. With this final approval, it transitions into a fully regulated aggregator, allowing it to manage end-to-end cross-border "pay-ins" and "pay-outs" independently under the RBI framework.
- **Targeting \$1 Billion in Transactions:** Following the approval, EximPe has set an ambitious goal to process \$1 billion in annualized UPI-led cross-border transactions by 2028. The company is primarily focused on trade corridors such as India-China, India-Singapore, and India-ASEAN.

SBI Life Wins at 6th ICC Emerging Asia Insurance Conclave & Awards

- **Best Life Insurance Company (India):** SBI Life was honored with the top award for the "Best Life Insurance Company – India" category, recognizing its consistent financial performance and market leadership.
- **Excellence in Risk Management:** The company received the award for "Best Risk Management Strategy – India," underscoring its robust framework for mitigating operational and financial risks while protecting policyholder interests.
- **Focus on Innovation & Inclusion:** The awards celebrated SBI Life's commitment to its "Apne Liye. Apno Ke Liye" philosophy through the use of AI-driven automation and customer-centric digital solutions to bridge the insurance protection gap.

Footnotes: SBI Life's MD & CEO: Amit Jhigran, HQ: Mumbai, Estd: 2001

RBI's Digital Payment Index for September 2025 increased

- **Significant Surge in Value:** The RBI-DPI for September 2025 climbed to 516.76, showing a substantial increase from 493.22 in March 2025. This represents a more than fivefold growth in digital payment adoption since the index's inception in 2018.
- **Key Growth Drivers:** The rise was primarily fueled by two parameters: Payment Performance (which has the highest weightage of 45%) and Payment Enablers (25%). This indicates a massive jump in actual transaction volumes and improved digital infrastructure like internet and mobile connectivity.
- **Expansion Factors:** The growth is attributed to the widening merchant acceptance network, the robust popularity of UPI (which now accounts for nearly 50% of global real-time payments), and the increasing shift toward a "less-cash" economy in both urban and rural areas.

Footnotes: RBI's Governor: Sanjay Malhotra, HQ: Mumbai, Estd: 1935

Pankaj Gupta appointed as CDO at USFB

- **Digital Transformation Leadership:** As CDO, Pankaj Gupta will spearhead Unity Bank's digital roadmap, focusing on scaling its microservices-based architecture and enhancing its "digital-first" banking ecosystem to compete with traditional banking giants.
- **Focus on AI and Automation:** His mandate includes the integration of AI/ML for process automation and advanced data analytics. This follows the bank's record for one of the fastest Core Banking System (CBS) implementations globally.
- **Background and Expertise:** Gupta brings extensive experience in digital banking and marketing (previously serving in leadership roles at Karnataka Bank). His expertise will be critical in driving customer acquisition and engagement through digital products like the recently integrated JioFinance FD platform.

Footnotes: USFB's MD & CEO: Sanjeev Nautiyal, HQ: India, Estd: 2017

Indian Overseas Bank introduces digital death claim portal

- **15-Day Guaranteed Timeline:** IOB has committed to a strict, time-bound processing window, ensuring that all death claims submitted through the portal are settled within 15 days, significantly reducing the waiting period for bereaved families.
- **No Third-Party Surety for Claims up to ₹15 Lakh:** To ease the financial and administrative burden on claimants, the bank has waived the requirement for a third-party surety for claims amounting to ₹15 lakh or less, making the process more accessible and less procedural.
- **Real-Time Digital Tracking:** The portal allows claimants to initiate the entire process from home by uploading documents digitally. It features a real-time tracking system, enabling users to monitor the status of their application at every stage without needing to visit a physical branch repeatedly.

SPORTS NEWS

Kishorakumar wins gold in Open Masters Games 2026

- **Gold in Hammer Throw:** Kishorakumar secured the gold medal in the men's Hammer Throw (30+ age category) with a winning distance of 37.92 meters.
- **India's Double Podium:** His victory was part of a strong showing for India in the event, as he shared the podium with fellow countryman Mohammad Ansar, who clinched the bronze medal.
- **Historic Event Debut:** His win occurred during the inaugural Open Masters Games in Abu Dhabi, which is the first major multi-sport masters event ever hosted in West Asia, featuring over 25,000 competitors.

Hoesflot Klaebo wins 9th gold in cross-country skiing

- **All-Time Winter Record:** With this win, the 29-year-old Klæbo now stands alone as the most successful Winter Olympian in history. He broke the long-standing record of eight gold medals previously shared by Norwegian legends Marit Bjørgen, Bjørn Dæhlie, and Ole Einar Bjørndalen.
- **The Decisive Race:** The record-breaking ninth gold came in the men's 4 × 7.5 km relay. Klæbo anchored the Norwegian team (including Emil Iversen, Martin Løwstrøm Nyenget, and Einar Hedegart), crossing the finish line 22.2 seconds ahead of France to secure his fourth gold medal of the 2026 Games alone.

India Beat Pakistan in T20 World Cup 2026 Thriller

- **Biggest Winning Margin:** India defeated Pakistan by 61 runs, marking their largest-ever victory by run margin against their arch-rivals in T20 World Cup history. This win took India's head-to-head record against Pakistan in T20 World Cups to a staggering 8–1.
- **Kishan's Batting Masterclass:** After the early loss of Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan played a blistering "Player of the Match" innings, scoring 77 off 40 balls (including 10 fours and 3 sixes). His performance powered India to a competitive total of 175/7 on a challenging, slow surface.
- **Clinical Bowling & Super 8 Qualification:** India's bowling unit dismantled the Pakistan lineup, bowling them out for just 114 in 18 overs. The attack was led by Hardik Pandya (2/16) and Jasprit Bumrah (2/17), who rattled the top order early. With this win, India became the second team (after West Indies) to officially qualify for the Super 8 stage.

Lucas Pinheiro Braathen Wins First-Ever Winter Olympics Medal

- **First Medal for Brazil & South America:** By winning the Gold Medal in the Men's Giant Slalom, Braathen became the first athlete in history to win a Winter Olympic medal for Brazil and the entire continent of South America.
- **Triumph Over the Defending Champion:** Braathen finished with a combined time of 2:25.00, defeating the reigning champion and world number one, Marco Odermatt of Switzerland, by a significant margin of 0.58 seconds.
- **A Historic "Comeback" for Heritage:** Formerly representing Norway, Braathen came out of a one-year retirement in 2024 specifically to represent his mother's home country, Brazil. His victory, achieved during the Brazilian Carnival season, has turned him into a national icon.

India's Tejaswin Shankar Strikes Gold in Men's Heptathlon

- **New National and Championship Record:** Shankar clinched the gold with a total of 5,993 points, shattering his own previous national indoor record of 5,650 points (set in 2021). This performance also established a new Asian Indoor Athletics Championship record.

- **India's Only Gold Medal:** His victory was the sole gold medal won by India during the 2026 championships. His dominant performance across the seven events—including a towering 2.23m high jump—helped India finish 6th in the overall medal tally.
- **Ending a 16-Year Drought:** This win ended India's long wait for a medal in the heptathlon at this event, marking the first time an Indian has stood on the podium for this multi-event discipline since PJ Vinod won bronze in 2010.

Magnus Carlsen won FIDE Freestyle Chess World Championship 2026

- **Historic 21st World Title:** With this win, Carlsen secured his 21st official world title across all chess formats. His tally now includes 5 Classical, 6 Rapid, 9 Blitz, and his first-ever Freestyle Chess (Chess960) world title.
- **Dramatic Comeback against Caruana:** Carlsen defeated American Grandmaster Fabiano Caruana with a final match score of 2.5–1.5. The turning point was Game 3, where Carlsen pulled off a stunning win from a "dead lost" position after Caruana failed to convert a winning advantage under time pressure.
- **First FIDE-Recognized Freestyle Event:** This tournament marked the first time the Freestyle format (where starting piece positions are randomized to eliminate opening theory) was officially recognized as a World Championship by FIDE. The victory also earned Carlsen the top prize of \$100,000 and automatic qualification for the 2027 edition.

AWARD NEWS

Oil India Limited Wins FIPI Award 2025

- **Production Excellence:** Oil India Limited won the prestigious award for "Oil & Gas Production Company of the Year" in the category of companies producing more than 1 MTOE (Million Tonnes of Oil Equivalent).
- **National Recognition:** The award was presented by the Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, and received by OIL's Chairman and Managing Director, Dr. Ranjit Rath. The honor recognizes the company's "outstanding performance and sustained contribution" to India's energy security.
- **Strategic Milestone:** The award highlights OIL's success in enhancing domestic hydrocarbon production and its commitment to the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) initiative through the adoption of innovative technologies and expanding exploration in mature fields.

Prof. Charu Gupta won Anand Kentish Coomaraswamy Prize 2026

- **Award-Winning Work:** The prize was awarded for her book, "Hindi Hindu Histories: Caste, Ayurveda, Travel, and Communism in Early Twentieth-Century India" (published by Permanent Black and SUNY Press). The work explores the

plurality of Hindu life in North India through the lens of vernacular print culture and autobiographies.

- **Prestigious Global Recognition:** Conferred by the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), this international award is considered one of the highest honors in the field of South Asian Studies. It recognizes distinguished scholarly works that "define or redefine" the understanding of major subject areas.
- **Focus on Marginalized Narratives:** Prof. Gupta's research was lauded for uncovering a dynamic, pluralistic "Hindi Hindu universe." By examining diverse figures—such as anti-caste crusaders, women Ayurvedic practitioners, and Leftist journalists—she challenged monolithic perspectives on religious and national identity during a transformative period of Indian history.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev inaugurated Bhavya Bharat Bhushan Award

- **Launch of a New National Honour:** The award was instituted by the Isha Foundation as a national-level recognition to celebrate "extraordinary nation-builders." It aims to honour individuals whose dedication and commitment have significantly strengthened India's social, cultural, and technological fabric across seven key categories, including Science, Arts, Sports, and National Security.
- **Felicitations by Union Defence Minister:** While Sadhguru launched the initiative, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh attended as the Chief Guest and presented the inaugural awards. He specifically highlighted that the honour bridges the gap between culture and science, acknowledging stalwarts like former ISRO Chairman S. Kiran Kumar and scientist Nambi Narayanan.
- **Diverse First-Edition Recipients:** The inaugural ceremony saw high-profile achievers being honoured, including Olympic medalist Saina Nehwal (Sports), legendary violinist N. Rajam (Arts), and historian Vikram Sampath (Literature).

IDBI Bank Honoured with MSME Leadership Award

- **Excellence in Sector Growth & Asset Quality:** The award, presented by Enqube (a leading authority in MSME excellence), highlighted IDBI Bank's ability to drive growth in the MSME segment far beyond industry benchmarks. Notably, the bank achieved this while maintaining exemplary asset quality, with a Net NPA (Non-Performing Asset) ratio standing at a record low of 0.21%.
- **Commitment to Financial Inclusion:** The accolade reflects the bank's deep alignment with government initiatives like Mudra (where it achieved 101% of its target) and PM Vishwakarma.

Footnotes: IDBI Bank's MD & CEO: Rakesh Sharma, HQ: Mumbai, Estd: 1964

Subodh Gupta Conferred 'CEO of the Year' at Business Leader of 2026

- **Strategic Healthcare Innovation:** The award recognizes Gupta's leadership in pivoting the company toward advanced cancer diagnostics and genetic testing, significantly strengthening India's oncology and genomics ecosystem.
- **National Expansion:** Under his tenure, the company has expanded its footprint across India through a structured franchise model (Lord's Path), aimed at making high-quality, standardized pathology services accessible to the masses.
- **Operational Excellence:** An independent jury selected him for combining business growth with strong corporate governance and a commitment to CSR, including the association of cricket legend Rahul Dravid as a brand ambassador to build trust in preventive healthcare.

APPOINTMENT & PERSON IN NEWS

Uday Kotak appointed Chairman of GIFT City

- **Succession of Leadership:** Uday Kotak, the founder and former CEO of Kotak Mahindra Bank, succeeds Hasmukh Adhia, a retired IAS officer and former Union Finance Secretary. Adhia had held the position since June 2023.
- **Industry-Led Strategy:** The appointment marks a shift toward industry-veteran leadership for India's first International Financial Services Centre (IFSC). Kotak is expected to use his decades of experience in building financial institutions to enhance GIFT City's global competitiveness against hubs like Dubai and Singapore.
- **Expansion Mandate:** This leadership change coincides with significant growth for GIFT City, including a recent 20-year tax holiday extension in the Union Budget 2026 and banking assets exceeding \$100 billion. Kotak's role will focus on attracting global capital and scaling sectors like aircraft leasing, fintech, and offshore banking.

Puneet Agrawal appointed as Ambassador to Kingdom of Thailand

- **Senior Diplomatic Profile:** Puneet Agrawal is a seasoned diplomat and a 1997-batch Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer. Before this appointment, he served as the Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi.
- **Strategic Experience:** He brings extensive international experience to the role, having previously served in high-profile positions such as Consul General of India in Hong Kong and as Ambassador/Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in Geneva.
- **Focus on Regional Connectivity:** His appointment comes at a time when India and Thailand are deepening ties through the convergence of India's "Act East" policy and Thailand's "Act West" policy. He is expected to lead efforts in maritime security, trade, and regional cooperation within frameworks like BIMSTEC and ASEAN.

GAIL appoints Shri Deepak Gupta as Chairman & MD

- **Official Succession:** Shri Deepak Gupta will take charge on March 1, 2026. He succeeds the incumbent CMD, Sandeep Kumar Gupta, who is scheduled to retire on February 28, 2026.
- **Established Tenure:** His appointment, approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), is set for a term lasting until his superannuation on February 28, 2029, or until further government orders.
- **Strategic Internal Promotion:** Gupta is currently GAIL's Director (Projects). With over 35 years of experience in the oil and gas sector—including a significant stint at Engineers India Limited (EIL)—his elevation is seen as a move to prioritize large-scale infrastructure execution, such as pipeline expansions and the transition to green energy.

CA Prasanna Kumar D Elected as President of ICAI

- **74th President of ICAI:** CA Prasanna Kumar D has been elected as the 74th President of the ICAI, succeeding CA Charanjot Singh Nanda. A Fellow Member since 1984, he brings over four decades of experience and previously served as the Vice-President during the 2025–26 term.
- **New Vice-President:** Alongside the President, the 26th Council elected CA Mangesh Pandurang Kinare as the Vice-President for the 2026–27 term. Kinare is a seasoned professional with over 33 years of experience and is currently serving his third term as a Central Council Member.
- **Strategic Vision:** Under this new leadership, the ICAI aims to position India as a "Global Accounting Hub." Their mandate includes strengthening professional standards, enhancing member welfare through funds like the Chartered Accountants Benevolent Fund (CABF), and fostering digital innovation within the profession.

Footnotes: ICAI's President: CA. Charanjot Singh Nanda, HQ: New Delhi, Estd: 1949

OBITUARY NEWS

Doordarshan News Reader Sarla Maheshwari passed away

- **Icon of the "Golden Era":** Sarla Maheshwari was one of the most recognized faces of Indian television in the 1980s and 1990s. She was a pioneer who helped define the "retro era" of Doordarshan, known for her calm, dignified presentation and impeccable Hindi pronunciation during a time when DD was the nation's primary news source.
- **Three-Decade Career:** Her broadcasting journey spanned nearly 30 years, from 1976 to 2005. She joined Doordarshan as an announcer while pursuing her PhD at Delhi University and witnessed the historic transition of Indian television from black-and-white broadcasts to color programming.

- **Academic and Global Footprint:** Beyond her iconic role at Doordarshan, she was a scholar who served as a lecturer at Hansraj College, Delhi University. She also had international experience, having worked briefly as a newsreader for the BBC in the United Kingdom during the mid-1980s before returning to India.

Legendary Odia Singer Geeta Patnaik passed away

- **Iconic Musical Legacy:** Known as one of the most soulful voices in Odisha, she lent her vocals to timeless classics, most notably the hit song "Phur Kina Udigala Bani" from the film Jajabar. She was highly celebrated for her frequent and successful collaborations with the legendary composer and singer Akshaya Mohanty.
- **Distinguished Career:** Over a career lasting more than 50 years, she recorded numerous popular tracks in films like Akhi Trutiya and Naga Phasa. Her contributions earned her high esteem within the All India Radio (AIR) circuit and the broader Ollywood (Odia film) fraternity.
- **Final Tributes:** She passed away while undergoing treatment for a brain stroke at a private hospital. Her demise was mourned by top leaders, including Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who described her passing as an "irreplaceable loss to Odisha's culture."

Veteran Actress Pravina Deshpande passed away

- **Prolific Career Across Mediums:** Deshpande was a versatile performer known for her impactful supporting roles in major Bollywood films such as "Ready" (alongside Salman Khan), "Ek Villain", and "Parmanu: The Story of Pokhran". She was also a staple of Indian television, featuring in popular shows like Ghar Ek Mandir, Kumkum, Karam ApnaaApnaa, and Kulfi Kumar Bajewala.
- **A Long Battle with Cancer:** Her family confirmed that she passed away following a long and resilient battle with multiple myeloma (a type of blood cancer), a diagnosis she had been fighting since 2019. Despite her illness, she continued to work, demonstrating immense dedication to her craft.
- **Final Screen Appearance:** Her last professional contribution was in the OTT series "Taskaree", starring Emraan Hashmi, which premiered shortly before her demise. The Cine & TV Artistes' Association (CINTAA), of which she had been a member since 2008, led the industry in paying tribute to her professional grace and talent.