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Daily Current Affairs

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BANKING, FINANCE & BUSINESS

### Reserve Bank of India Conducts Inaugural Payments Regulatory Board Meeting in Mumbai Under Governor Sanjay Malhotra

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** held the **first meeting of the Payments Regulatory Board (PRB)** in **Mumbai**, chaired by **Governor Sanjay Malhotra**.

- The **Payments Regulatory Board (PRB)** was constituted following an **amendment to the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**, which came into force on **9 May 2025**.
- The **PRB reviewed the functions** of the **Department of Payment and Settlement Systems (DPSS)** and examined **key focus areas of domestic and global payment systems**.
- The **Draft Payments Vision 2028** was presented before the Board, and **strategic guidance** was provided to strengthen and advance **India's payment ecosystem**.
- The RBI shared findings from its **Survey on Digital Payments**, highlighting **emerging trends and developments** in **digital transactions**.
- Members who attended the meeting included **S. Krishnan**, **Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**, **Nagaraju Maddirala**, **Secretary, Department of Financial Services**, **Aruna Sundararajan (IAS Retd.)**, **T. Rabi Sankar**, **Deputy Governor, RBI**, and **Vivek Deep**, **Executive Director, RBI**.
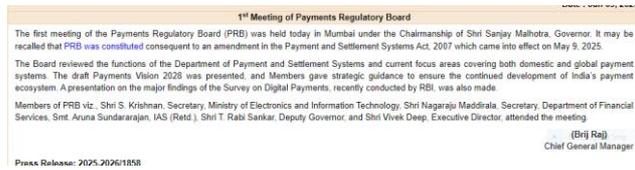
Reserve Bank of India Signs Agreement with Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Under Section 21A(1) of RBI Act, 1934

- **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** signed an agreement with the **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD)** under **Section 21A(1) of the RBI Act, 1934**.

- From **9 January 2026**, **RBI** will manage the **banking operations and rupee public debt** of **GNCTD**, marking a major financial reform for Delhi.
- The agreement was formalised through an **MoU at the Delhi Secretariat**, chaired by **Chief Minister Rekha Gupta**, who also holds the **Finance portfolio**.
- Under the new arrangement, **Delhi will raise funds through State Development Loans (SDLs)** at lower interest rates of around **7%**, replacing earlier high borrowing costs of **12–13%**, thereby improving **fiscal efficiency**.
- **RBI oversight** will strengthen **cash management**, enabling **automatic investment of surplus funds**, and providing access to **Ways and Means Advances (WMA)** and **Special Drawing Facilities (SDF)** for temporary cash requirements.
- A **Central Government notification dated 2 January** has formally **separated Delhi's public accounts from the Government of India**, granting Delhi an **independent banking and borrowing structure** for the first time, with support from the **Union Government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi**.
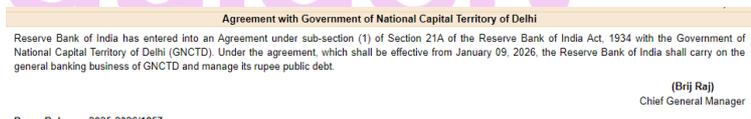
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank Ties Up with TechFini to Strengthen UPI Infrastructure

- **Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (TMB)** entered into a **strategic partnership with TechFini**, a **Unified Payments Interface (UPI) infrastructure and fintech solutions provider**, to **strengthen its UPI acquiring and issuing capabilities**.

- Under the collaboration, **TechFini** (provided by **Fin Meadows Technologies**) will act as a **Technology Service Provider (TSP)** for **TMB**, managing **UPI switching operations** through the **TechFini UPI Switch**.
- The partnership aims to create a **faster, secure, and scalable UPI infrastructure** to support **Payment Aggregators (PAs)**, **Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), merchants, and fintech partners** across India.
- A key focus of the collaboration is **lending automation**, expanding **UPI-based use cases** in **loan disbursements, collections, and repayments**.
- Through **UPI Autopay**, the partnership will enable **automated Equated Monthly Instalment (EMI) payments and loan repayments** directly from **customers' UPI handles**.
- The **TechFini UPI Platform** is a **cloud-native solution** offering **Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP) services**, **UPI Plugin Software Development Kit (SDK)**, and **end-to-end acquiring and issuing infrastructure**.
- The platform is designed to handle up to **10,000 transactions per second (TPS)**, ensuring **high scalability and future-readiness** for upcoming **UPI innovations.**

NATIONAL AND STATE NEWS

European Union Leaders Likely to Be Chief Guests at India's Republic Day 2026

- **India's Republic Day celebrations on 26th January 2026** are expected to have strong diplomatic significance, with **European Union (EU) leaders likely to attend as chief guests**.
- As per media reports, the **European Union has officially accepted India's invitation**, highlighting the growing importance of the **India–EU Strategic Partnership** amid changing global economic and geopolitical conditions.
- The expected chief guests include **Ursula von der Leyen**, **President of the European Commission**, and **António Costa**, **President of the European Council**.
- Their joint presence reflects the **EU's identity as a unified political and economic bloc**, rather than representation by individual member countries.
- **Ursula von der Leyen** has led major EU initiatives such as the **European Green Deal** and the **Competitiveness Compass**, aimed at enhancing the EU's economic resilience in the face of competition from the **United States and China**.
- **António Costa**, who assumed office as **President of the European Council in 2024**, plays a central role in coordinating EU summits and building diplomatic consensus among member states, drawing on his experience as **former Prime Minister of Portugal**.
- The visit of EU leaders is expected to coincide with the **India–EU Summit**, tentatively scheduled for **27th January 2026**, though official confirmation is awaited.

plans to encourage participation in the events by integrating its campaign portal with the My Bharat portal, which has an rore people. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

With European Union (EU) leaders Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa expected to arrive in India next month on the occasion of Republic Day, the government is going ahead with plans to highlight the National Song *Vande Mataram* during the festivities.

- The summit would come at a crucial time as **India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations** have resumed after a prolonged pause.
- The renewed FTA talks focus on **market access, services, investment, and supply-chain resilience**.
- **EU Trade and Economic Security Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič**, who visited India in **December 2025**, played a key role in reviving and accelerating negotiations.
- The presence of top EU leadership during Republic Day could act as a **political push toward a breakthrough in FTA talks**.
- The proposed **India–EU FTA** is strategically important for **India**, as it provides access to one of the **world's largest markets** and helps address regulatory challenges such as the **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**.
- Cooperation under the FTA could help ease **CBAM-related carbon taxes** on Indian exports such as **steel and aluminium**.
- For the **EU**, closer trade ties with India support **supply-chain diversification away from China**, enhance **economic security**, and advance **green transition goals**.
- The agreement is also expected to promote **green technology transfers**, including **hydrogen energy, electric vehicles, and clean manufacturing**, and boost **renewable energy investments**.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) Completes 9 Years

- The **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** completed **nine years of implementation on 1st January 2026**, marking a significant milestone in India's efforts to strengthen **maternal health, nutrition, and women's welfare**.
- PMMVY was **launched on 1st January 2017** as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)** by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD)**.
- The scheme is implemented in accordance with **Section 4 of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**, which mandates maternity benefits for eligible women.
- The primary objective of PMMVY is to provide **partial wage compensation** to pregnant women and lactating mothers and to promote **safe pregnancy and institutional childbirth**.
- The scheme aims to reduce **maternal and infant malnutrition** and improve **overall maternal and child health outcomes**.
- PMMVY also envisages the provision of **free, nutritious meals through Anganwadi Centres** during pregnancy and for **six months after childbirth**, as per prescribed nutritional norms.
- In **2022**, PMMVY was brought under **Mission Shakti**, an umbrella initiative for **women's safety, security, and empowerment**.
- Under Mission Shakti, PMMVY is part of the **Samarthya component**, which focuses on **economic empowerment and financial inclusion of women**.
- This integration improved **scheme convergence, monitoring efficiency, and targeted delivery of benefits** at the grassroots level.
- Under PMMVY, benefits are provided for the **first two living children**, with the condition that the **second child must be a girl**, promoting **gender equity and the value of the girl child**.
- **Ineligible beneficiaries** include pregnant women and lactating mothers who are in **regular employment with Central Government, State Governments, or Public**

Sector Undertakings, or those receiving **similar maternity benefits under any other law**.

- For the **first child**, PMMVY provides **₹5,000 in two instalments**.
- For the **second child**, **₹6,000 is provided in one instalment**, only if the child is a **girl**.
- The **first instalment of ₹3,000** is released upon **registration of pregnancy** and completion of **at least one antenatal check-up within six months** from the date of the **last menstrual period**.
- The **second instalment of ₹2,000** is provided after **birth and registration of the child**, subject to completion of **mandatory vaccinations up to 14 weeks** under the **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)**.
- Financial assistance under PMMVY is transferred through **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** directly into the **bank or post office accounts** of beneficiaries.
- The scheme follows a **Centre–State funding pattern**: **60:40** for most States and Union Territories with legislature, **90:10** for **North Eastern and Special Category States**, and **100% Central funding** for Union Territories without legislature.
- As of **December 2025**, PMMVY has benefited **over 4.05 crore women** across India.
- More than **₹19,000 crore** has been disbursed to support **maternal nutrition, healthcare access, and immunisation**.
- To strengthen monitoring, the government launched **PMMVY Software (PMMVYSoft)** in **March 2023**.
- PMMVYSoft enables **real-time monitoring** at **national, state, district, block, and village levels**, ensuring **effective supervision and timely grievance redressal**.

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation Unveils New Logo and Official Mascot 'Sankhyiki (सांख्यिकी)'

- The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** unveiled its **new logo and official mascot 'Sankhyiki (सांख्यिकी)'** in **New Delhi, Delhi**, marking a step towards **modernising its institutional identity** and strengthening **public outreach**.

  The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation today unveiled its new logo and mascot.

  The ministry said the launch marks a significant milestone in the ministry's efforts to modernise its institutional identity, enhance public outreach, and reinforce the role of official statistics in nation-building.

  The new logo reflects the importance of data in the development of the nation.

  The Ministry has introduced its new mascot named Sankhyiki. As per the Ministry, the new mascot is a citizen-centric character created to make statistics simple, relatable, and engaging for people across the country.

- The launch aligns with the central theme **"Data for Development"**, highlighting the growing importance of **reliable, timely, and transparent data** in **evidence-based policymaking and governance**.
- The initiative aims to reposition MoSPI as a **modern, citizen-centric institution** in the era of **data-driven governance**.
- With increasing reliance on statistics for **planning, monitoring, and evaluation**, MoSPI seeks to make **official data more accessible, understandable, and trustworthy** for **citizens, researchers, and policymakers**.
- The launch also focuses on enhancing **public engagement**, presenting statistics not just as technical numbers but as tools influencing **economic growth, social development, and public welfare**.
- The theme **"Data for Development"** underscores that **accurate data and robust statistical systems** are essential for **effective policy design**, **tracking development outcomes**, and ensuring **inclusive growth**.
- The theme aligns with India's broader governance approach, where **data-backed decision-making** is central to **national planning and reform implementation**.
- The **new MoSPI logo** blends **India's civilisational values** with **modern statistical science**.

- The **Ashoka Chakra** at the core symbolises **truth, integrity, and good governance**, which are foundational to **credible official statistics**.
- The **Indian Rupee symbol (₹)** highlights the role of statistics in **economic planning, fiscal management, and national growth**.
- The logo integrates **numerical elements such as ९, statistical symbols (=, S, Σ)**, and an **upward growth bar (↗)**, representing **analytical rigour, modern data systems, and progress through evidence-based insights**.
- The colour palette of **saffron, white, green, and deep blue** reflects **growth, truth, sustainability, stability, and knowledge**, reinforcing **national identity and institutional purpose**.
- MoSPI introduced its **first-ever mascot 'Sankhyiki (सांख्यिकी)'**, designed as a **friendly and approachable character** to represent the ministry.
- The mascot aims to **simplify complex statistical concepts** and make them **relatable and engaging** for the general public.
- By **humanising data**, Sankhyiki seeks to bridge the gap between **technical statistical processes and everyday citizens**.
- Sankhyiki will be used in **National Sample Surveys (NSS)**, **awareness programmes**, **educational material**, **digital platforms**, and **public events**.
- Through these channels, the mascot will promote **statistical literacy**, encourage **public participation**, and strengthen **trust in official data**.
- The initiative supports **transparent and data-driven governance**, helping citizens understand the role of data in policies related to **health, education, employment, infrastructure, and economic growth**.
- The launch reflects India's shift towards **modern institutional communication**, where **clarity and engagement** complement **technical accuracy**.
- **MoSPI** is an executive ministry of the **Government of India** responsible for ensuring the **coverage, quality, and credibility of official statistics** through **scientifically designed surveys and data systems**.
- The ministry functions through two wings: the **Statistics Wing (National Statistical Office – NSO)**, which coordinates national statistical activities and sets standards, and the **Programme Implementation (PI) Wing**, which monitors infrastructure projects and oversees **MPLADS** through divisions such as the **Infrastructure and Project Monitoring Division (IPMD)**.
- MoSPI is headed by the **Minister of State (Independent Charge), Rao Inderjit Singh**, Member of Parliament from **Gurgaon, Haryana**.

Kalai-II Hydropower Project in Arunachal Pradesh and Concerns Over White-Bellied Heron

- The **Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC)** of the **Union Environment Ministry** has recommended **environmental clearance** for the **1,200-MW Kalai-II hydropower project** on the **Lohit River** in **Anjaw district, Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The clearance has triggered concerns from **environmentalists and conservation experts** over shortcomings in the **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)**.
- The **Kalai-II project**, to be developed by **THDC India Ltd**, involves a **128.5-metre**

A white-bellied heron in Namdapha Tiger Reserve. (Expres photo by Rohit Naniwadekar)

A Union Environment Ministry expert panel has recommended environmental clearance (EC) for the 1,200-MW Kalai-II hydroelectric project on Lohit River in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw even as environmentalists and project-affected persons flagged glaring omissions about the presence of the critically-endangered white-bellied heron bird in the Lohit River Basin from the proposal's environmental impact assessment (EIA) report.

concrete gravity dam, **pondage**, and an **underground powerhouse**, with an estimated cost of **₹14,176 crore**.

- The **EIA report**, prepared by **WAPCOS Ltd**, documented **28 bird species** but did **not mention the critically endangered white-bellied heron**, despite its known presence in the region.
- Conservationists highlighted that the project area falls within the **known range of the white-bellied heron**, including river stretches near **Namdapha Tiger Reserve** and **Kamlang Tiger Reserve**.
- The **white-bellied heron** is listed as **Critically Endangered** on the **IUCN Red List**.
- Global population estimates suggest **fewer than 250 individuals**, with possibly **around 60 birds remaining**.
- In India, **key nesting and habitat areas** are located along the **Lohit River**, particularly near **Walong** and **Namdapha**, making habitat protection highly critical.
- The species enjoys the **highest level of legal protection** as a **Schedule-I species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.
- Any development project affecting its habitat requires **stringent ecological assessment** and **robust conservation planning** to prevent **irreversible biodiversity loss**.
- The white-bellied heron is a **rare and elusive bird**, the **second-largest living species of heron**, characterized by a **plain dark grey body**, **distinct white belly**, **long neck**, and **extreme sensitivity to human disturbance**.
- Its distribution is limited to **Bhutan, Myanmar**, and parts of **Arunachal Pradesh**, with confirmed records from **Namdapha Tiger Reserve** and **Kamlang Tiger Reserve** (including camera-trap evidence).
- The issue highlights ongoing tensions between **large hydropower development** and **wildlife conservation** in ecologically fragile regions of the **Eastern Himalayas**.

RECENT NEWS

- In a significant step toward democratizing access to space science education, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has inaugurated a state-of-the-art space laboratory at Mechuka Government Higher Secondary School in the remote Shi-Yomi district of Arunachal Pradesh.

About Arunachal Pradesh:

- **Chief Minister:** Pema Khandu
- **Governor:** B. D. Mishra
- **Capital:** Itanagar
- **National Parks**: Namdapha National Park, Mouling National Park, Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary, Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary,
- **Wildlife Sanctuaries:** Pakke Tiger Reserve, Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary, Dampa Tiger Reserve, Daying Ering Wildlife Sanctuary

India Becomes World's Largest Rice Producer

- **India has achieved** a major agricultural milestone by becoming the **world's largest producer of rice**, overtaking China.
- The announcement was made by **Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan**.
- **India's rice production** reached **150.18 million tonnes**, surpassing **China's production of 145.28 million tonnes**.
- This achievement reflects the success of

India has become the world's largest producer of rice, surpassing China. This was stated by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in New Delhi yesterday. He said India's rice production has reached 150.18 million tonnes, compared to China's 145.28 million tonnes. Mr Chouhan said India is now supplying rice in overseas markets.

- improved irrigation facilities, adoption of high-yielding varieties, and strong policy support for farmers.
- Increased rice production has strengthened domestic food security and enhanced India's role in global agricultural markets.
- India is now supplying rice to overseas markets, boosting its position as a major global food supplier and contributing to export earnings.
- During an event in New Delhi, the minister launched 184 improved crop varieties developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.
- These include 122 cereals, 6 pulses, 13 oilseeds, 11 fodder crops, 6 sugarcane varieties, 24 cotton varieties, and one variety each of jute and tobacco.
- The newly released varieties are designed to provide higher yields, better quality produce, and improved climate resilience.
- High-quality and climate-resilient seeds help reduce crop losses, improve resistance to pests and weather stress, and support sustainable farming across diverse agro-climatic regions.
- This progress is the outcome of collective efforts by All India Coordinated Research Projects of ICAR, state and central agricultural universities, and private seed companies, strengthening innovation and technology transfer in agriculture.

Andhra Pradesh Emerges as India's Top Investment Destination in FY26

- Andhra Pradesh has emerged as India's leading investment destination in the current financial year, reflecting strong investor confidence.
- According to a Bank of Baroda report, the state secured 25.3% of India's total proposed capital investments during the first nine months of Financial Year 2025–26, the highest share among all states.

Andhra Pradesh has firmly established itself as India's leading investment destination, securing 25.3% of all proposed investments in the first nine months of FY26, according to a recent report by Bank of Baroda. The state now stands ahead of Odisha (13.1%) and Maharashtra (12.8%), signalling a shift in India's industrial and investment momentum toward the eastern and southern corridors.

- Andhra Pradesh moved ahead of Odisha (13.1%) and Maharashtra (12.8%) in terms of proposed investments.
- Nationwide, investment announcements reached ₹26.6 lakh crore, registering an 11.5% year-on-year growth.
- Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Maharashtra together accounted for over 51% of total proposed investments, indicating rising investor interest in eastern and southern India.
- The power sector emerged as the largest contributor with a 22.6% share, driven largely by renewable energy projects.
- The metals sector accounted for 17.3% of proposed investments, supporting demand from infrastructure, housing, and automobile industries.
- The construction sector maintained a stable 4% share of total proposals.
- Increased investments were also seen in roads, ports, logistics, manufacturing, electronics, data centres, and mobility sectors, supported by the Government of India's capital expenditure push.
- Government policy reforms played a crucial role in boosting investment intentions, including higher public capital expenditure, lower income tax rates, and Goods and Services Tax reforms (GST 2.0).
- A soft interest rate environment encouraged borrowing and project expansion, while predictable regulations reduced uncertainty for long-term investors.

- These measures helped offset the impact of **higher United States tariffs on exports**.
- The **Andhra Pradesh Government** adopted a strategy focused on **speed, scale, and certainty**, with emphasis on **fast-track approvals** and **investor-friendly policies**.
- **Sector-specific policies**, along with investments in **ports, industrial corridors, energy, and digital infrastructure**, improved connectivity, logistics efficiency, and export potential.
- The state's focus on **job creation** and **time-bound project execution** continues to support sustained investment momentum.

About Andhra Pradesh:

- Chief Minister: N. Chandrababu Naidu
- Governor: S. Abdul Nazeer
- Capital: Amaravati
- National Parks: Sri Venkateswara National Park, Papikonda National Park
- Wildlife Sanctuaries: Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, Pulicat Lake Bird Sanctuary, Kambalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary, Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary

RECENT NEWS

- The government of Andhra Pradesh has approved the creation of three additional districts, increasing the total number of districts in the state from 26 to 29.

Karnataka Records First Sighting of Rare 'Sandalwood Leopard'

- **Karnataka** has recorded its **first-ever sighting of an ultra-rare strawberry-coloured leopard**, popularly named the **"Sandalwood Leopard"**, drawing **national and global attention**.
- This is only the **second recorded sighting in India**, with the earlier instance reported from **Ranakpur, Rajasthan, in 2021**.

In a remarkable wildlife discovery, researchers in Karnataka have documented an ultra-rare leopard colour morph in the Vijayanagara district, marking only the second confirmed sighting of such a big cat in India and the first in the state. The elusive animal, named the "Sandalwood Leopard" by conservationists, is distinguished by a pale reddish-pink coat with light-brown rosettes, a striking deviation from the typical tawny coat of Indian leopards. The discovery has drawn fresh attention to Karnataka's rich biodiversity and the diversity of its leopard population.

Globally, this colour morph has been recorded only five times—twice in South Africa, once in Tanzania, and twice in India (Image: Holematthi Nature Foundation)

- Leopards usually have a **tawny-yellow coat with black rosettes**, whereas the **Sandalwood Leopard** displays a **pale reddish-pink or strawberry-coloured coat with light-brown rosettes**.
- Internationally, such leopards are referred to as **"strawberry leopards"**.
- Scientists attribute this rare coloration to unusual genetic conditions such as **hypomelanism (reduced dark pigmentation)** or **erythrism (excess red pigmentation)**, making the animal **extremely rare**.
- The leopard was documented in **Vijayanagara district, Karnataka**, using **camera traps**.
- The discovery was made by **conservation scientist Sanjay Gubbi** and his team from the **Holematthi Nature Foundation**.
- The animal is believed to be a **seven-year-old female**, and one camera trap image captured her along with a **cub of normal coat colour**.
- At the **global level**, this colour morph has been documented only **five times**: **twice in South Africa**, **once in Tanzania**, and **twice in India**.
- Naming the animal the **"Sandalwood Leopard"** reflects **Karnataka's cultural and ecological association with sandalwood forests**.
- **Karnataka** is already known for having one of the **highest densities of melanistic leopards**, commonly called **black panthers**.

- The discovery further highlights the **genetic diversity and adaptability of leopards** in the region.
- Such rare findings are important for understanding **evolutionary biology, biodiversity conservation**, and **long-term wildlife management strategies**.

About Karnataka:

- Capital: Bengaluru
- Chief Minister: Siddaramaiah
- Governor: Thaawarchand Gehlot
- National Parks: Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, Kudremukh National Park, Anshi (Kali) National Park, Bannerghatta National Park
- Wildlife Sanctuaries: Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

RECENT NEWS

- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has launched the upgraded e-Swathu 2.0, a digital platform aimed at regularising rural properties in Karnataka. The system is expected to generate up to Rs 2,000 crore in revenue by bringing 95 lakh properties in gram panchayats under the tax net.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque Sworn In as 24th Chief Justice of Sikkim High Court

- **Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque Ayumantakatha**, the **senior-most Judge of the Kerala High Court (HC)**, was **sworn in as the 24th Chief Justice (CJ) of the Sikkim High Court**.
- The **oath of office** was administered by **Om Prakash Mathur**, the **Governor of Sikkim**, at **Lok Bhawan, Gangtok, Sikkim**.
- The **swearing-in ceremony** was attended by **Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang**, his **council of ministers**, and **senior state officials**.
- **Justice Mustaque succeeded Justice Biswanath Somadder**, who **retired as Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court on 14 December 2025**.
- The appointment of **Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque** was **recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium**, headed by **Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice Surya Kant**.
- Following the recommendation, the **Department of Justice (DoJ)** under the **Ministry of Law and Justice (MoL&J)** announced that the **President of India, Droupadi Murmu**, approved his appointment under **Article 217(1) of the Constitution of India**.
- At present, **Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai** is serving as the **Acting Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court**.
- **Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque** was **enrolled as an advocate in 1989** and primarily **practised in Kannur**, appearing before **various courts and statutory authorities**.
- He was appointed as an **Additional Judge of the Kerala High Court in 2014** and became a **Permanent Judge in 2016**.
- He served as the **Acting Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court** from **July 2024 to September 2024**.
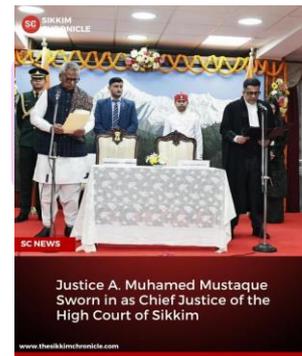
- Justice Mustaque also served as the **Chairman of the Kerala High Court Computerisation Committee** from **18 September 2019** until his **elevation as Chief Justice**, highlighting his role in **judicial digitalisation**.

DEFENCE NEWS

Indian Army to Debut Remount & Veterinary Corps Animal Contingent at Republic Day Parade Showcasing Strategic Military Roles

- The **Indian Army** will showcase a **special animal contingent of the Remount & Veterinary Corps (RVC)** at the **Republic Day Parade on Kartavya Path** for the **first time**, highlighting the strategic use of animals in military operations.

- The **animal contingent** will include **Bactrian camels, Zanskar ponies, Army dogs, and raptors**, reflecting the Army's capability in **logistics, mobility, surveillance, and combat support**.

- **Ladakh's double-humped Bactrian camels**, popularly known as **"silent warriors,"** are set to **debut at the 77th Republic Day Parade**, symbolizing endurance and adaptability.

Key Highlights :

- **Bactrian camels**, inducted into the **Indian Army in 2020**, are deployed in **Ladakh's cold deserts** and can **carry up to 250 kg** at **altitudes above 15,000 feet** with **minimal food and water requirements**.

- **Zanskar ponies**, an **indigenous breed of Ladakh**, can **carry 40–60 kg** and **cover up to 70 km in a single day**, even in **high-altitude and extreme cold conditions**.

- The **double-humped Bactrian camel**, scientifically known as **Camelus bactrianus**, is a **large even-toed ungulate** adapted to harsh climatic conditions.

- The **two humps** act as **fat reservoirs**, which can be converted into **energy and water** during long treks when food is scarce.

- They possess **thick, shaggy seasonal coats** that help them survive temperatures as low as **–40°C**, making them well-suited for extreme cold environments.

- Their **sealable nostrils** protect against **frozen dust**, and their **broad feet** function like **natural snowshoes**, aiding movement on snow and sand.

- Bactrian camels are among the **few land animals** capable of **meeting hydration needs by eating snow** in water-scarce regions.

- These camels are **native to Central Asia**, with a distribution ranging from **Afghanistan to China**, mainly across the **Mongolian steppes and the Gobi Desert**, while **small populations** are found in the **high-altitude cold deserts of Ladakh's Nubra Valley**.

- In terms of diet, **Bactrian camels are primarily herbivorous**, though sometimes described as **omnivores** because they feed on a wide variety of plant species (and occasionally carcasses in extreme desert conditions).

- The **IUCN Red List** classifies the **wild double-humped Bactrian camel** as **Critically Endangered**, underscoring the importance of conservation efforts.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Commissions ICGS Samudra Pratap, India's First Indigenous Pollution Control Vessel by Goa Shipyard Limited

- **Defence Minister Rajnath Singh** commissioned **Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) 'Samudra Pratap'** in **Goa** on **January 05, 2026**, marking a major boost to **Aatmanirbharta in shipbuilding**.

Key Highlights :

- **ICGS Samudra Pratap** is the **first indigenously designed and built Pollution Control Vessel** of the **Indian Coast Guard (ICG)** and the **largest ship in the ICG fleet** to date.
- The vessel has been built by **Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL)** with **over 60% indigenous content**, reflecting India's **mature defence industrial ecosystem**.
- The ship is **114.5 metres long**, has a **displacement of about 4,170–4,200 tonnes**, **speed exceeding 22 knots**, and an **endurance of 6,000 nautical miles**.
- **Samudra Pratap** is powered by **two 7,500 kW diesel engines** with **indigenously developed Controllable Pitch Propellers**, ensuring superior **manoeuvrability and flexibility**.
- Although primarily designed for **marine pollution control**, the vessel will also support **fire-fighting**, **search and rescue**, **maritime law enforcement**, **environmental protection**, and **surveillance of India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**.
- The ship is equipped with advanced **pollution response systems** such as **side-sweeping arms, floating booms, high-capacity skimmers, portable barges**, and a **pollution control laboratory**.
- It features an **External Fire-Fighting System (Fi-Fi Class 1)** and modern automation systems including **Dynamic Positioning**, **Integrated Bridge System**, **Integrated Platform Management System**, and **Automated Power Management System**.
- The armament includes a **30 mm CRN-91 gun** and **two 12.7 mm stabilised remote-controlled guns**, supported by **modern fire-control systems**.
- **ICGS Samudra Pratap**, meaning **"Majesty of the Seas"**, symbolises the ICG's commitment to **safe, secure, and clean seas** and safeguarding **India's maritime interests**.
- The ship will be **based at Kochi**, under the **operational control of the Commander, Coast Guard Region (West)** via **Coast Guard District Headquarters No. 4 (Kerala & Mahe)**.

About Indian Coast Guard (ICG) :

- It is India's **maritime law enforcement and search & rescue agency**, established on **August 18, 1978** under the **Coast Guard Act, 1978**.

Defence Research and Development Organisation Develops 'SWaDeS' Portable Seawater Desalination System for Armed Forces

- The **Defence Laboratory Jodhpur (DLJ)**, under the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**, developed a **portable water purification system** named **Sea Water Desalination System (SWaDeS)** to provide **safe drinking water** to **soldiers deployed in remote, coastal, and water-scarce regions**.

- **SWaDeS** is available in **manual-operated and engine-driven variants**, offering flexibility for deployment in **diverse and challenging terrains**.
- The **engine-operated variant** can **desalinate seawater** with **Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) up to ~35,000 mg/L** to **below 500 mg/L**, sufficient to meet the needs of **20–25 soldiers**.
- The **manual-operated unit** is **lightweight and portable**, designed to support **10–12 personnel**, especially in **power-scarce and remote locations**.
- The **engine-operated SWaDeS** can be **set up within 2–3 minutes**, enabling **rapid deployment during operations**, while **manual units** are suited for **long-range patrols**.
- Both variants have **successfully passed Acceptance Test Procedures (ATPs)**, confirming their **field reliability and operational readiness**.
- **SWaDeS** is suitable for **naval operations, coastal installations, inland saline water bodies such as Pangong Tso, and long-range military patrols**.
- The system is equipped with a **Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) water purification module**, ensuring **safe drinking water even in contaminated and high-risk environments.**

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Indian Researchers Develop Indigenous 3D-Printed Automatic Weather Stations Under Mission Mausam

- **Indian scientists**, led by the **Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune**, under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**, developed **indigenously manufactured 3D-printed Automatic Weather Stations (AWS)** under **Mission Mausam**, strengthening **India's weather observation and forecasting capabilities**.

Key Highlights :

- The **first batch of 3D-printed AWS** is scheduled to be **deployed in Delhi from February 2026**, marking the beginning of **large-scale urban implementation**.
- The **AWS units** are **fully manufactured in India** using **3D-printing technology** under the **Make in India initiative**, reducing **production costs** and enabling **flexible and precise designs**.
- The **key features** of these **indigenous AWS** include being **low-cost, lightweight, and quick to deploy**, supporting **real-time and high-density weather data collection**, especially in **remote and disaster-prone regions**.
- These **automatic stations** continuously record and transmit **temperature, wind speed, humidity, and rainfall in real time**, and are **solar-powered**, making them suitable for **urban as well as remote areas**.
- The initiative aims to **fill observation gaps**, improve **hyper-local weather forecasting**, and enhance **sensor density** in **urban microclimates** and **complex terrains such as the Himalayas**.
- All instruments are **certified by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Surface Laboratory** and the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**, and will be installed alongside **existing observatories** for **testing, calibration, and accuracy verification**.

- After **Delhi**, deployment will extend to **Mumbai (Maharashtra)**, **Kolkata (West Bengal)**, and **Chennai (Tamil Nadu)** over the next **six months**, with an **initial production of 50 units** and **80 more planned**.
- **Mission Mausam**, approved by the **Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, has a total **budget allocation of ₹2,000 crore for 2024–2026** to **upgrade meteorological infrastructure**, address **urban and climate-sensitive observation gaps**, and enable **accurate hyper-local forecasts across India**.
- The programme is **led by IITM under MoES** and primarily implemented by the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** and the **National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF)**.
- Union Minister of State (**Ministry of Earth Sciences) : Dr. Jitendra Singh**

AYUSH Systems Gain Formal Recognition in India–Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement

- **Ministry of Commerce & Industry (MoC&I)** announced that **India's traditional medical systems under AYUSH**—Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy—have been **formally recognised in bilateral agreements**, including the **India–Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** and the **India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.
- The announcement was made during the **4th Establishment Anniversary celebrations of the AYUSH Export Promotion Council (AYUSHEXCIL)**, held in **New Delhi, Delhi**.
- **AYUSHEXCIL** has been designated as the **Anchoring Agency** to implement the **'Ayush Quality Mark Programme'**, which was **launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi** at the **2nd WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine**, held in **New Delhi**.
- **Exports of AYUSH and herbal products** rose from **USD 649.2 million in 2023–24** to **USD 688.89 million in 2024–25**, recording a **growth of 6.11%**, highlighting rising global demand for Indian traditional medicine.
- **AYUSHEXCIL** was **registered on 4 January 2022**, as a **Section 8 Company** with the **Registrar of Companies (Delhi)**.
- The council was **formally launched in April 2022** by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** during the **Global AYUSH Investment and Innovation Summit** held in **Gandhinagar, Gujarat**.

Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan Highlights 'Viksit Bharat – G Ram G' Law to Build Atmanirbhar Villages

- **Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan**, speaking in **Erode, Tamil Nadu**, stated that the **'Viksit Bharat – G Ram G' law** is a major initiative to build **self-reliant (Atmanirbhar) villages** through **employment generation, basic infrastructure, and public participation**.
- Under the **new employment guarantee provisions**, the number of guaranteed

workdays has been **increased from 100 days to 125 days**, strengthening **rural livelihood security**.
- The law provides for **unemployment allowance** if work is not provided and **interest on wages** if salary payments are **delayed beyond 15 days**, ensuring **worker protection and accountability**.
- **Administrative expenditure** has been enhanced from **6% to 9%** to ensure **timely salary payments** to field staff and improve **implementation efficiency** of rural employment schemes.
- In **Erode**, the Minister announced the establishment of a **testing laboratory for Turmeric City**, with support from the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**, boosting **value addition and quality testing** for turmeric.
- Efforts were also announced to set up a **regional office of the Turmeric Board**, aimed at strengthening **turmeric cultivation, marketing, and farmer support** in the region.

About Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) :
- It is India's **apex agricultural research body**, functioning under the **Ministry of Agriculture**, coordinating research and education in **agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, and animal sciences**, and was **established in 1929**.

System for Accounting and Management of Pension Digitises Pension Management to Enhance Services for Department of Telecommunications Pensioners

- **SAMPANN (System for Accounting and Management of Pension)** is an **integrated online pension management system** developed for **Department of Telecommunications (DoT) pensioners**.
- It provides a **single digital platform** for **processing, sanctioning, and direct disbursal of pensions** to the **bank accounts** of telecom retirees.
- The system offers **online grievance redressal**, **digital profile management**, and **complete transaction records**, ensuring **greater transparency and operational efficiency**.
- As part of the Government's **digital governance and paperless services** initiative, key pension documents are now integrated with **DigiLocker**.
- Pension-related documents available via **DigiLocker** include **Gratuity Payment Orders**, **Pension Certificates / ePPOs**, **Pension Commutation Payment Orders**, and **Form 16**.
- DigiLocker integration enables **secure access, storage, retrieval, authenticity, and long-term digital preservation** of pension records anytime and anywhere.
- **SAMPANN**, meaning **"सम्पन्न जीवन, निश्चिंत जीवन"**, aims to deliver a **secure, convenient, and worry-free pension experience** for **telecom pensioners**.

China Commissions Upgraded Guided Missile Destroyer to Accelerate Naval Expansion and Challenge US Maritime Power

- **China** has commissioned a new **upgraded guided missile destroyer** as part of its rapid **naval expansion** to narrow the gap with **United States maritime power**.
- The **People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)** inducted the **Type 052D destroyer "Loudi"**, reflecting China's focus on enhancing **blue-water combat capabilities** amid strategic competition in the **Indo-Pacific**.

- The **Type 052D class** is considered the **backbone of China's modern surface fleet**, with the **"Loudi"** entering **active service** to strengthen **naval modernization**.

- The destroyer incorporates a **new system architecture** with upgrades in **radar, weapons, and networking capabilities**, enhancing **air defence, anti-surface warfare**, and **task force coordination**.
- **Type 052D destroyers** are central to China's plan to operate **carrier strike groups** and conduct **sustained operations** far from its coastline.
- The warships are equipped with **phased-array radar**, **vertical launch systems**, and can deploy **surface-to-air, anti-ship, and land-attack missiles**.
- The induction of **upgraded variants** indicates **continuous design refinement** based on **operational experience**.
- China's **accelerating shipbuilding programme** aims to **match and challenge** the **United States Navy**, emphasizing **network-centric warfare, fleet integration**, and **high-intensity maritime operations**.
- The commissioning of **"Loudi"** highlights Beijing's priority on **advanced surface combatants** and influences the **regional balance of power** in **Asian and global waters**.

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- **India's Republic Day celebrations on 26th January 2026** are expected to have strong diplomatic significance, with **European Union (EU) leaders likely to attend as chief guests**
- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** held the **first meeting of the Payments Regulatory Board (PRB)** in **Mumbai**, chaired by **Governor Sanjay Malhotra**.
- **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** signed an agreement with the **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD)** under **Section 21A(1) of the RBI Act, 1934**.
- **Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (TMB)** entered into a **strategic partnership with TechFini**, a **Unified Payments Interface (UPI) infrastructure and fintech solutions provider**, to **strengthen its UPI acquiring and issuing capabilities**.
- **India emerged as the world's largest rice producer**, overtaking **China**, with **150.18 million tonnes** of rice production in **2024–25**, compared to **China's 145.28 million tonnes**.
- **Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque Ayumantakatha**, the **senior-most Judge of the Kerala High Court (HC)**, was **sworn in as the 24th Chief Justice (CJ) of the Sikkim High Court**.
- The **Indian Army** will showcase a **special animal contingent of the Remount & Veterinary Corps (RVC)** at the **Republic Day Parade on Kartavya Path** for the **first time**, highlighting the strategic use of animals in military operations.
- **Defence Minister Rajnath Singh** commissioned **Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) 'Samudra Pratap'** in **Goa** on **January 05, 2026**, marking a major boost to **Aatmanirbharta in shipbuilding**.
- The **Defence Laboratory Jodhpur (DLJ)**, under the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**, developed a **portable water purification system** named **Sea Water Desalination System (SWaDeS)** to provide **safe drinking water** to **soldiers deployed in remote, coastal, and water-scarce regions**.

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- **China** has commissioned a new **upgraded guided missile destroyer** as part of its rapid **naval expansion** to narrow the gap with **United States maritime power**.

- The **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** completed **nine years of implementation on 1st January 2026**, marking a significant milestone in India's efforts to strengthen **maternal health, nutrition, and women's welfare**

- The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** unveiled its **new logo and official mascot 'Sankhyiki (सांख्यिकी)'** in **New Delhi, Delhi**, marking a step towards **modernising its institutional identity** and strengthening **public outreach.**

- The **Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC)** of the **Union Environment Ministry** has recommended **environmental clearance** for the **1,200-MW Kalai-II hydropower project** on the **Lohit River** in **Anjaw district, Arunachal Pradesh**

- **Andhra Pradesh** has emerged as **India's leading investment destination** in the current financial year, reflecting **strong investor confidence**

- **Indian scientists**, led by the **Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune**, have developed **Automatic Weather Stations (AWS)** using **3D-printing technology**, marking a **major indigenous technological milestone**

- **Karnataka** has recorded its **first-ever sighting of an ultra-rare strawberry-coloured leopard**, popularly named the **"Sandalwood Leopard"**, drawing **national and global attention**