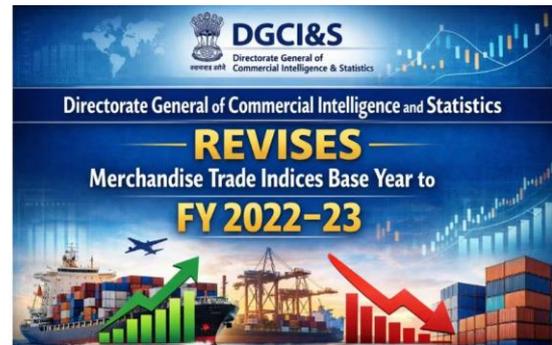# Daily Current Affairs

24th Feb 2026

BANKING, FINANCE & BUSINESS

Ministry of Commerce & Industry Updates Base Year of Merchandise Trade Indices to 2022–23

- The **Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S)** under the **Ministry of Commerce & Industry (MoC&I)** revised the **base year** of India's **merchandise trade indices** from **2012–13** to **2022–23**.
- The **revision** aims to better measure changes in the **unit values (prices)** of **exports and imports** over time and improve **relevance**, **reliability**, and **analytical usefulness** for policy-makers, researchers, and stakeholders.
- The **base year revision** was recommended by a **DGCI&S-constituted committee** headed by **Prof. Nachiketa Chattopadhyay** of the **Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)**, Kolkata, West Bengal.
- The **updated series** includes **monthly**, **quarterly**, and **annual** trade indices.
- It covers **trade indices** based on **Principal Commodity (PC)** classification, **Standard International Trade Classification (SITC)**, and **Broad Economic Category (BEC)**.
- It also includes **bilateral** and **region-wise** trade indices for India's **top 20** export and import **partner countries**.
- The **revision** incorporates **Terms of Trade** indicators, including **Gross Terms of Trade**, **Net Terms of Trade**, and **Income Terms of Trade**.
- **Merchandise Trade Indices** are used by key government bodies such as the **National Accounts Division (NAD)** under the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**.
- The **export and import unit value indices** are used as **deflators** for estimating **real exports and imports** in **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** compilation.

ICICI Prudential Launches India's First NPS-Based Swasthya Pension Scheme with Healthcare Benefits

- **ICICI Prudential Pension Funds Management Company Limited** launched India's first **Swasthya Scheme** named **"ICICI PF NPS Swasthya Equity Plus"**, integrating **retirement planning** with **healthcare benefits** under the **National Pension System (NPS)**.
- The scheme is launched as a **Proof of Concept (POC)** under the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) Regulatory Sandbox Framework**.
- The scheme was developed in collaboration with **Apollo HealthCo Limited** (**healthcare network partner**) and **KFin Technologies Limited** (**digital technology partner**).
- **Subscribers** can make **multiple withdrawals** up to **25%** of their own contributions specifically for **medical expenses**.
- The scheme aims to promote **financial discipline** by protecting **long-term retirement savings** while providing **healthcare financial flexibility**.

- The product is designed to **complement health insurance** rather than replace it and may be linked to **existing health insurance coverage** in the future to strengthen its **supplementary role**.
- The scheme is primarily a **retirement savings product** with **healthcare-linked withdrawal flexibility**.
- During the **POC phase**, the scheme offers **higher equity exposure** to support **long-term retirement wealth creation**.
- In **medical emergencies**, if expenses exceed **70% of the corpus**, **premature closure** is allowed, with payments made directly to **healthcare providers** and remaining funds transferred to the **regular pension scheme**.
- Compared to a **regular NPS account**, which allows only **four partial withdrawals**, this scheme provides **greater liquidity** for **medical needs**.

World Bank Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency Issues USD 197.67 Million Guarantee to Support SBI Rooftop Solar Refinancing via Citibank

- The **Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)**, the guarantee arm of the **World Bank Group (WBG)**, issued a **USD 197.67 million guarantee** for **five years** to **Citibank N.A.** for its **non-shareholder loan** to the **State Bank of India (SBI)**.
- The **guarantee** supports the **refinancing of investments** in India's **Grid-connected Rooftop Solar Photovoltaic (GRPV)** systems.
- The **GRPV systems programme** was launched by **SBI in 2016** with financing from the **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)**, part of the **World Bank Group**.
- The facility allows **refinancing** of the **remaining principal** of the **USD 500 million IBRD loan** for the **GRPV systems**.
- By transferring exposure to **Citibank's balance sheet**, the transaction **frees lending capacity** for additional **World Bank financing** to the **Government of India (GoI)**.
- The **guarantee** protects **Citibank** against the **risk of non-honoring of financial obligations** by a **state-owned enterprise**.
- The project promotes **clean energy** by providing **grid-connected rooftop solar installations**, reducing **greenhouse gas emissions** and displacing **carbon-intensive thermal generation**.
- The **loan** supports a **national programme** to deliver **GRPV systems** to **commercial and industrial customers** across India.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

India Becomes Part of United States-Led Pax Silica Coalition to Boost AI and Semiconductor Supply Chains

- **India** formally joined as the **12th country** in the **USA-led Pax Silica Coalition**, a strategic alliance focused on **secure**, **resilient**, and **innovation-driven supply chains** for **critical minerals**, **semiconductors**, and **Artificial Intelligence (AI) infrastructure**.
- The **Pax Silica Coalition** was launched on **12 December 2025** in **Washington DC, USA**, to strengthen **global technology security** and **supply chain resilience**.

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- The coalition aims to build security in **critical minerals**, **rare earth elements (REEs)**, **semiconductor manufacturing**, and **AI technology ecosystems** through **public-private partnerships** and **technology collaboration**.
- One of the major objectives is to reduce global dependency on **China** in **rare earth processing** and **semiconductor supply chains**, strengthening **technological and economic sovereignty**.
- **India's contributions** include a strong **engineering talent base**, advanced **chip design capabilities** including **2-nanometre (nm) technology**, and development of **10 semiconductor plants**.
- **India** also possesses **8.52 million tonnes (MT)** of **rare earth reserves**, aligned with the **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)** and **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)**.
- The **founding members** of the coalition include the USA, **Japan**, **South Korea (ROK)**, **Singapore**, **UK**, **Israel**, and **Australia**.
- Later expansions included **Greece**, **Qatar**, **UAE**, **Netherlands**, and **India**, strengthening the **trusted global technology partnership network**.
- The initiative supports **strategic economic security**, **advanced manufacturing**, and **next-generation technology development** globally.

South African Cheetah Gamini Gives Birth to Three Cubs at Kuno National Park

- Female cheetah **Gamini**, translocated from **South Africa**, gave birth to **three cubs** at **Kuno National Park**, Madhya Pradesh, marking the **9th successful cheetah litter** at the park.
- With the new births, **India's cheetah population** increased to **38**, including **27 India-born cubs** and **11 translocated adult cheetahs** from Namibia and South Africa.
- Earlier, Namibian cheetah **Aasha** gave birth to **five cubs**, showing increasing **reproductive success** under **Project Cheetah**.
- **Three adult cheetahs** were also relocated to **Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary**, Madhya Pradesh, expanding **cheetah habitat** beyond Kuno National Park.
- **Project Cheetah** was launched on **17 September 2022** by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** with the release of eight **Namibian cheetahs** to reintroduce the species that became **extinct in India in 1952**.

South African cheetah gives birth to three cubs in Kuno

Gamini, a South African cheetah at Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park, has given birth to three cubs, taking the total number of big cats in India to 38, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Wednesday. This was the ninth successful cheetah litter in Kuno, he added. Earlier this month, five cubs were born to Namibian cheetah Aasha. With the fresh litter, the cheetah population in India has risen to 38, comprising 27 India-born cubs and 11 adults translocated from African countries. Apart from Kuno, three adult cheetahs currently reside in the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in M.P.'s Mandsaur and Neemuch districts.

- Since the programme began, **21 cheetahs** (adults and cubs) have died, highlighting the challenges of **wildlife reintroduction** despite recent conservation successes.
- The project supports **biodiversity restoration**, **wildlife conservation**, and **ecosystem balance** in India's protected reserves.

European Union Opens Legal Gateway Office in New Delhi to Facilitate Legal Migration to EU Countries

- The **European Union (EU)** launched the **European Legal Gateway Office** in **New Delhi, India**, to serve as a **one-stop hub** for facilitating **safe and legal migration** of Indian **students, researchers, and professionals** to EU member countries.

- This is the **first such office** established by the EU in a **partner country**, primarily focusing on the **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** sector as part of the **India–EU mobility agreement**.

- The initiative is a **key outcome** of the **India–EU Summit** (held on 27 January 2026) and supports the **Joint Strategic Agenda** and **Skills Mobility Cooperation** between India and the European Union.
- The **Gateway Office** provides reliable information on **mobility pathways**, **skill requirements**, and **academic and professional qualification standards** across **27 EU member states**.
- The initiative operates through **three pillars**: the **Gateway Office** in India, a **Support Office** in the EU, and a **digital platform** providing verified mobility information.
- The **European Union**, founded on **1 November 1993** under the **Maastricht Treaty**, is a supranational political and economic union headquartered in **Brussels, Belgium**.
- The office was inaugurated by **EU Executive Vice-President Henna Virkkunen** along with India's **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar**.
- The platform aims to **simplify migration**, study, research, and employment opportunities for **Indian talent** by providing **transparent and structured guidance**.
- The **digital platform** will act as a **single access point** for information on **work visas**, **academic programmes**, and **research mobility routes**.
- The initiative also aims to strengthen **India–EU labour market cooperation**, especially in **high-demand technology sectors**.
- The **Gateway Office** promotes **skill mobility**, **global talent exchange**, and **economic collaboration** between India and the European Union.

NATIONAL AND STATE NEWS

Vice President Releases Tamil and Gujarati Editions of Constitution of India

- Vice President **C. P. Radhakrishnan** released the updated **Tamil and Gujarati editions of the Constitution of India** along with the **8th Edition of the Legal Glossary (English–Hindi)** at **Uprashtrapati Bhavan**.
- The initiative aims to enhance **constitutional awareness and linguistic inclusivity**.

P. Radhakrishnan, centre, with Union Minister of Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal and Secretary, Legislative Department and Legal Affairs Rajiv Mani during the release of the updated Tamil and Gujarati editions of the Constitution of India and the 8th edition of dictionary on the occasion of International Mother Language Day at the Vice President's Enclave in New Delhi on February 21, 2026. |

Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan on Saturday (February 21, 2026) released the updated versions of the Constitution of India in Tamil and Gujarati languages, along with the 8th Edition of the Legal Glossary (English-Hindi) at Uprashtrapati Bhavan (Vice President's Enclave) in New Delhi on the occasion of International Mother Language Day.

Key Highlights:

- Release made on the occasion of **International Mother Language Day (21 February)**.
- Objective is to promote **access to constitutional provisions in regional languages**.
- India has **22 officially recognised languages under the Eighth Schedule**.
- Constitution now available in multiple Indian languages including **Bodo, Dogri, Santhali and Nepali**.
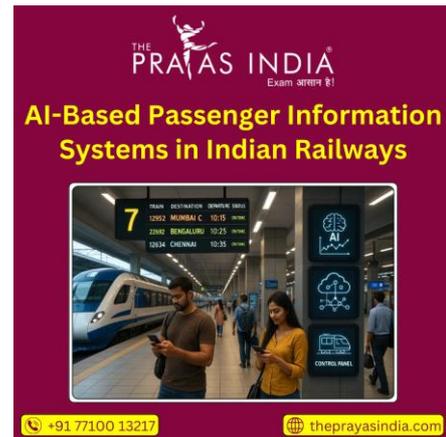
- Initiative strengthens **democratic participation and inclusive governance**.
  8th Edition of Legal Glossary (English–Hindi) aims to **simplify legal terminology**.
- Glossary will benefit **lawmakers, judicial officers, students and researchers**.
- Transition reflects India's commitment to **multilingual governance and cultural preservation**.
- Tamil recognised as one of the **oldest classical languages in the world**.
  Move enhances **awareness of constitutional rights and duties at the grassroots level**.

Indian Railways Integrates Artificial Intelligence into Passenger and Operational Systems

- **Indian Railways has integrated Artificial Intelligence** into key passenger facing and operational applications to improve grievance redressal, **ticket prediction, crowd management and freight planning.**
- The initiative is led by the **Centre for Railway Information Systems** and was highlighted at the **AI India Summit 2026 in New Delhi.**

Key Highlights

- **Artificial Intelligence integrated into RailMadad, RailOne and Coach Mitra applications to enhance passenger services.**
- In **RailMadad**, Artificial Intelligence classifies and prioritises complaints based on urgency and type, identifies complaint trends and analyses passenger sentiment.
- Integration with **Bhashini platform** enables voice to text conversion in 12 languages for multilingual grievance reporting.
- In **RailOne**, Artificial Intelligence improves waiting ticket confirmation percentage prediction.
- **Coach Mitra application operational in 74 trains**, supporting onboard housekeeping services through Artificial Intelligence enabled monitoring.
- The Centre for Railway Information Systems is embedding Artificial Intelligence into 15 additional systems including Generation of Optimised and Automated Loco Links and Coaching Crew Link Management System and Track Management System.
- **Artificial Intelligence based crowd management system will combine reserved ticket data, unreserved ticket data and train movement data to predict platform crowding on an hourly basis.**
- The system will identify potential bottlenecks at station entry points and foot over bridges and adjust predictions during festivals, special events and weekend travel surges.
- **Artificial Intelligence based incident prediction model is being developed for predictive maintenance of tracks, locomotives, wagons and signalling systems.**
- Indian Railways is leveraging Goods and Services Tax data to identify around **300 freight clusters** to enhance freight loading and shift cargo from road to rail.
- The integration of Artificial Intelligence marks a major step towards safer passenger flow, improved service delivery, predictive maintenance and efficient freight operations across Indian Railways.

Waaree Energies to Set Up India's Largest Lithium Ion Battery Gigafactory in Andhra

Pradesh

- **Andhra Pradesh has secured India's largest integrated lithium ion battery Gigafactory** by **Waaree Energies** with an investment **of ₹8,175 crore**.
- The 16 Gigawatt hour facility will be established at Rambilli in Anakapalli district and is expected to generate around 3,000 direct jobs.
- The project will significantly strengthen India's clean energy and battery manufacturing ecosystem and reduce dependence on imports.

: The Hindu

In a major boost to India's clean-energy manufacturing sector, Waaree Energies committed to establishing India's largest integrated lithium-ion battery gigafactory at Rambilli in Anakapalli district with an investment of ₹8,175 crore.

Key Highlights

- **Investment of ₹8,175 crore for setting up a 16 Gigawatt hour lithium ion battery Gigafactory.**
- The project will be located at **Rambilli in Anakapalli district, Andhra Pradesh.**
- The facility will cover the **entire battery value chain including cell manufacturing and battery pack assembly.**
- Large scale production of **Battery Energy Storage Systems** will be undertaken at the plant.
- The project received in principle approval from the **Andhra Pradesh State Investment Promotion Board.**
- The initiative aligns with Andhra Pradesh's **Integrated Clean Energy Policy.**
- The Gigafactory will generate **around 3,000 direct jobs** along with indirect employment in manufacturing, logistics and technical services.
- The facility will support **renewable energy storage, electric vehicle expansion, grid stability and energy security.**
- The project will reduce **dependence on imported battery cells** and strengthen domestic manufacturing capabilities.
- A Gigafactory is a large scale manufacturing unit designed to produce battery cells and packs at massive capacity measured in Gigawatt hours, essential for scaling clean energy and electric mobility

Cash Payments Discontinued at National Highway Toll Plazas from 1 April 2026

- The **Government of India** has decided to **discontinue cash payments at all National Highway toll plazas from 1 April 2026**.
- The **National Highways Authority of India** confirmed that toll payments will be accepted only through digital modes such as **FASTag** and **Unified Payments Interface**.
- The decision aims to improve traffic flow, reduce congestion and enhance transparency across more than 1,150 fee plazas nationwide.

The Government has proposed to discontinue cash payments at all National Highway fee plazas across the country from the 1st of April, this year. The move is aimed at creating a fully digital tolling ecosystem and strengthening operational efficiency.

Key Highlights

- **Cash payments will not be accepted at any National Highway toll plaza from 1 April 2026.**
- Toll payments will be processed exclusively through **FASTag and Unified Payments Interface.**

- India currently has **more than 1,150 toll plazas** on National Highways and Expressways.
- The move aims to ensure **faster traffic movement, reduced congestion and improved lane throughput.**
- Digital transactions will enhance **transparency, accountability and monitoring of toll revenue.**
- FASTag uses **Radio Frequency Identification technology** for automatic toll deduction from prepaid or linked bank accounts.
- Benefits of FASTag include **no stopping at toll plazas, automatic deduction of charges, reduced fuel consumption and real-time transaction alerts.**
- The nationwide rollout of FASTag began in 2019, and this step marks the **complete digitalisation of toll collection in India.**
- The initiative aligns with the Government's broader push towards **digital governance and smart mobility solutions.**

MOUS AND AGREEMENT

L and T Vyoma Signs Memorandum of Understanding with Gujarat for 250 Megawatt Green Artificial Intelligence Ready Data Centre

- At the India **Artificial Intelligence Impact Summit** 2026, **Larsen & Toubro** through its Vyoma unit signed a **Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Gujarat** to conduct a feasibility study for setting up a 250 Megawatt green Artificial Intelligence ready data centre at Dholera Special Investment Region.
- The **proposed project involves an investment of ₹25,000 crore** and is expected to be **operational by 2028**, strengthening Gujarat's digital and Artificial Intelligence infrastructure.

Key Highlights

- **Memorandum of Understanding signed between Gujarat Department of Science and Technology and L and T Vyoma under the Investment Promotion Activity of the India Artificial Intelligence Impact Summit 2026.**
- The proposed project involves **₹25,000 crore investment for a 250 Megawatt high scale Artificial Intelligence ready data centre.**
- The facility will be developed at **Dholera Special Investment Region in Gujarat.**
- The data centre will be designed as **green and sustainable digital infrastructure.**
- L and T Vyoma will conduct a **detailed feasibility study covering land suitability, infrastructure readiness, availability zones and sustainability parameters.**
- The Gujarat government will provide **policy support and infrastructure facilitation through relevant departments.**
- The project aligns with the **Gujarat Information Technology and Information Technology Enabled Services Policy 2022 to 2027 and India's digital transformation goals.**
- The proposed data centre is expected to generate **employment in construction, commissioning, long term operations and technology management roles.**
- The initiative aims to position **Dholera Special Investment Region as a major hub for Artificial Intelligence infrastructure, advanced analytics and cloud computing in India.**

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Slice Small Finance Bank Names Founder Rajan Bajaj as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer

- **Slice Small Finance Bank (Slice SFB)** appointed its founder **Rajan Bajaj** as **Managing Director (MD)** and **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**.
- He succeeded **Satish Kumar Kalra**, marking the bank's transition from a **fintech startup** to a **fully licensed Small Finance Bank (SFB)**.
- The appointment was approved by the **Board of Directors**, **shareholders**, and the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.
- **Rajan Bajaj** founded **Slice in 2016** and led its transformation into a **regulated banking entity** following its **merger** with **North East Small Finance Bank (2024)**.
- **Slice** has served over **20 million registered users**, employs more than **3,000 people**, and has raised over **USD 250 million** from investors such as **Tiger Global**, **Insight Partners**, and **Advent International**.
- **Bajaj** previously worked on the **product team at Flipkart** and served as **Executive Director (ED)** of Slice before becoming **MD & CEO**.
- In **2019**, he established **Quadrillion Finance**, a wholly owned **NBFC**, which provided **credit** to **retail customers** and **small businesses** using **technology-led underwriting** and **risk processes**; it was later merged into Slice's **banking entity**.

About Slice SFB :
- Headquarters : Guwahati, Assam
- Established : 2016

DEFENCE NEWS

Indian Army's Konark Corps Conducts Successful Live Firing of Strela-10 VSHORADS at Pokhran,Rajasthan

- The **Indian Army (IA)** under its **Konark Corps**, including the **Air Defence Warriors** of the **Blazing Skies Brigade**, successfully conducted a **high-intensity live firing test** of the **Strela-10 Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS)** at the **Pokhran Field Firing Range**, Rajasthan.
- The test demonstrated **precision targeting capabilities**, accurately engaging **aerial targets**, thereby strengthening **operational readiness** and **air defence preparedness** in **desert terrain**.
- Key objectives included enhancing **crew coordination**, validating **firing standards**, and reinforcing **combat preparedness** in challenging environments.
- The exercise showcased **seamless coordination** between **target surveillance systems**, **acquisition systems**, and **missile deployment units**, ensuring effective **air defence operations**.

- The **Strela-10** is a **very short-range air defence missile system** designed to counter **low-altitude threats** such as **helicopters**, **low-flying aircraft**, and **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)**.
- The system has an **engagement range** of approximately **6–10 kilometres (km)**.
- The successful **live-fire test** validated the **Indian Army's battlefield air defence capability** and the effectiveness of the **Strela-10 system** under **operational conditions**.

INS Sudarshini Makes Historic Port Visit to Safaga, Egypt Under Lokayan-26 Deployment

- **Indian Navy's Sail Training Ship INS Sudarshini** arrived at **Safaga, Egypt** as part of its **Lokayan-26 deployment**.
- The ship covered a distance of **1,832 nautical miles** in **16 days**, sailing from **Salalah to Safaga**, demonstrating **crew endurance**, confidence, and **operational resilience**.
- On arrival, the ship was welcomed by **Egyptian Navy officials** and **Indian Embassy representatives**, highlighting strong **diplomatic maritime relations**.
- The **Commanding Officer of INS Sudarshini** met **Rear Admiral Ramy Ahmed Ismail Mohamed**, Base Commander, **Red Sea and Safaga Naval Base**, strengthening **naval cooperation** and **interoperability**.
- During the **port visit**, the **Indian Navy** conducted **professional exchanges**, shared **sail training best practices**, and performed **community outreach activities** to promote **bilateral goodwill**.
- The transit through the **Gulf of Aden** and **Red Sea** was a critical **operational phase**, requiring navigation through **challenging weather conditions** and **dense shipping traffic**, showcasing advanced **seamanship skills**.
- The visit supports the **"Bridges of Friendship" initiative**, reinforcing **India–Egypt maritime cooperation** and **strategic naval partnership**.
- The deployment reflects the **Indian Navy's** commitment to **maritime diplomacy**, **training excellence**, and **international naval collaboration**.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Unique Identification Authority of India Launches AI-Based Biometric Deduplication Platform to Enhance Aadhaar Security and Authentication

- The **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)** launched an **AI-enabled biometric deduplication** and **document verification platform** to strengthen India's **digital security framework** and improve **Aadhaar authentication accuracy**.
- The platform is called the **"Invisible Shield"**, representing a **multi-layered AI-based digital defence system** that performs **crores of high-speed computations** using **accelerated computing technology** to protect citizen **data privacy** and trust.
- **UIDAI** operates one of the world's largest **biometric deduplication systems**, ensuring **one unique identity per resident** by cross-checking every new **Aadhaar enrolment** or update transaction against the entire Aadhaar database.

- **UIDAI** has developed **indigenous AI models** for **fingerprint, face, and iris** biometric modalities in collaboration with the **International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT), Hyderabad**.
- The system runs on **NVIDIA DGX High-Performance Computing Infrastructure**, enabling secure **population-scale biometric processing**.
- Each **deduplication transaction** involves **billions of computations**, improving **biometric matching accuracy** and system efficiency.
- **UIDAI** has completed **enhanced deduplication deployment** in several states and is working toward **nationwide implementation** in the coming months.
- For **fraud prevention**, **UIDAI** uses **AI-based document metadata extraction** and verification through **DigiLocker APIs** for checking **document authenticity**.
- The platform uses **NVIDIA AI inference infrastructure** for **semantic document analysis** and **identity verification**.
- The new system is expected to reduce **enrolment turnaround time**, improve **service delivery quality**, and enhance **authentication reliability** for **Aadhaar number holders**.
- The initiative strengthens India's **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** and promotes **secure, scalable, and trustworthy digital identity systems**.

Recent News :

- In Jan 2026, **Minister of State for Commerce & Industry and Electronics & IT Jitin Prasada** dedicated the **new Aadhaar App**, developed by the **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)**, to the **nation**.

About UIDAI:

- The Unique Identification Authority of India is a statutory authority established under the provisions of Aadhaar act 2016 by the Government of India under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology.
- It is a 12-digit unique identification number
- Chairman: Neelkanth Mishra
- CEO: Bhuvnesh Kumar
- Headquarters: New Delhi

Fractal AI Unveils Vaidya 2.0 Healthcare Reasoning Model at India AI Impact Summit 2026

- **Fractal AI** launched **Vaidya 2.0**, a next-generation **healthcare reasoning AI model**, at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026** in **Mumbai** (held at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi**).
- **Vaidya 2.0** integrates **healthcare decision-making actions** with **raw clinical data**, improving **real-world medical diagnosis support** and **patient care workflows**.
- The platform provides key healthcare use cases such as **Emergency Assist**, which helps in **rapid patient triage** and **critical medical decision support** during emergency time windows.
- **Fractal AI** claims **Vaidya 2.0** is the **first AI model** to score above **50 (specifically 50.1)** on **OpenAI's HealthBench (Hard) Benchmark**, outperforming models like **GPT-5** and **Gemini Pro 3**.
- The model supports **AI-driven healthcare innovation**, **clinical data analysis**, and **digital medical intelligence systems** for improved **healthcare delivery efficiency**.

Fractal unveils Vaidya 2.0 healthcare model

Mumbai: Fractal AI on Thursday launched Vaidya 2.0, the next generation of its healthcare reasoning models, at the India AI Impact Summit 2026. Vaidya 2.0 links healthcare action with raw data and enhances model capabilities for enabling real-world healthcare use-cases, including Emergency Assist for rapid triage and decision support in critical windows; symptom checker, providing high-fidelity reasoning for citizen-facing wellness; and patient journey assist. "It is the first AI model in the world to achieve 50+ score on OpenAI's HealthBench (hard)," said Fractal in a release. OUR BUREAU

- The launch strengthens **India's position** in **healthcare AI technology development** and **medical digital transformation**.

Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda Launches Indigenous Td Vaccine at CRI, Kasauli to Boost Health Self-Reliance

- Union Health and Family Welfare Minister **J.P. Nadda** launched the **indigenously manufactured Tetanus and Adult Diphtheria (Td) Vaccine** at the **Central Research Institute (CRI)**, Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, strengthening India's **healthcare self-reliance**.

Union Health Minister Shri Jagat Prakash Nadda Launches Indigenously Manufactured Tetanus & Adult Diphtheria (Td) Vaccine at Central Research Institute, Himachal Pradesh

Union Health Minister Commends Central Research Institute Team; Describes Td Vaccine Introduction as Milestone in Public Health Infrastructure

Indigenous Td Vaccine Reflects Government's Commitment to Health Sector Self-Reliance: Union Health Minister

India Achieves 99% Vaccine Coverage: A Transformative Leap in Public Health, Says Union Health Minister JP Nadda

With Formal Launch of Td Vaccine, Central Research Institute to Supply 55 Lakh Doses to Universal Immunization Programme by April 2026

Posted On: 21 FEB 2026 1:53PM by PIB Delhi

Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare Shri J.P. Nadda today launched the indigenously manufactured Tetanus and Adult Diphtheria (Td) Vaccine at the Central Research Institute (CRI), Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh.

- The launch supports the vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** in healthcare and pharmaceuticals, promoting **indigenous vaccine manufacturing** and **national health security**.

Key Highlights :

- The **Td vaccine** has been introduced under the **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)**, with **55 lakh doses** to be supplied by **April 2026**, and production expected to increase in future years.
- The **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)** is the world's largest immunization programme, currently providing **11 vaccines** protecting against **12 vaccine-preventable diseases**.
- **CRI** is the **first government institute** in India to manufacture vaccines under **Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)** standards.
- India is recognized as the **"Pharmacy of the World"** and has achieved **WHO Maturity Level 3** in global regulatory system benchmarking, reflecting strong **vaccine quality control** and safety standards.
- India's immunization system annually covers about **5 crore beneficiaries**, including approximately **2.5 crore pregnant women** and **2.5 crore children**.
- Through digital tracking platforms such as **U-WIN**, beneficiaries are monitored from **pregnancy registration** until the child reaches **16 years of age**, receiving **27 vaccine doses** under the programme.
- The **Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)** is the world's largest publicly funded health insurance scheme, covering over **62 crore people** with **₹5 lakh annual health coverage** per person.
- **Institutional delivery rates** in India improved from **79% to 89%**, reflecting better maternal healthcare access.
- Under the **Vaccine Maitri Initiative**, India supplied vaccines to nearly **100 countries**, with **48 countries** receiving vaccines **free of cost**.
- The **Td vaccine** replaces the **Tetanus Toxoid (TT)** vaccine, providing additional protection against **diphtheria**, as recommended by **WHO (2006, 2017)** and **NTAGI**, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- The initiative strengthens India's **global public health diplomacy**, **vaccine manufacturing capability**, and **public sector pharmaceutical ecosystem**.

OBITUARIES

Eminent Bengali Author Mani Shankar Mukhopadhyay Passed away

- **Mani Shankar Mukhopadhyay (Shankar)**, a renowned **Bengali novelist** and writer, passed away at the age of **93** in **Kolkata, West Bengal**.

About Mani Shankar Mukhopadhyay :

- He was born on **7 December 1933** in **Jessore** (present-day **Bangladesh**).
- He was honoured with the **Sahitya Akademi Award (2021)** for his **autobiographical work 'Eka Eka Ekashi'**.
- His **literary contributions** include **novels**, **short stories**, **biographies**, and **philosophical works**, marked by **sharp observation**, **rich characterisation**, and **empathy for ordinary people**.
- His **debut novel 'Kato Ajanare'** (**The Many Unknowns**) was **semi-autobiographical**, inspired by his experience as a **clerk**.
- Notable works include **'Chowringhee' (1962)**, **'Samrat O Sundari' (1961)**, and **'Charan Chhuey Jai' (1960)**.
- His novels **'Simabadhya' (1971)** and **'Jana Aranya' (1975)** were adapted into **landmark films** by **Satyajit Ray** as part of the **Calcutta Trilogy**, portraying **urban struggles** and **moral compromises**.
- The novel **'Chowringhee'** was adapted into a **film (1968)** by **Pinaki Bhusan Mukherjee**, starring **Uttam Kumar** as **Sata Bose**, a hotel executive.
- Filmmaker **Ritwik Ghatak** began adapting **'Kato Ajanare' (1959)**, but the project remained **unfinished**.
- Director **Basu Chatterjee** adapted his novel **'Maan Samman'** into the **Hindi film 'Sheesha' (1986)**, focusing on **corporate life**.
- His final major project was a **research-based book** on **Swami Vivekananda**.
- Apart from writing, he worked as an **executive** in a **Kolkata-based power company** for around **50 years**.

SPORTS NEWS

Norway Sets Record with 17 Gold Medals at 2026 Winter Olympics

- **Norway created history** at the **Milan Cortina Winter Olympics** by winning its **17th gold medal**, the highest number of gold medals won by any nation at a single Winter Games.
- The record was achieved after **Johannes Dale-Skjevdal** secured gold in the men's 15-kilometre biathlon mass start event.

Norway wins 17th gold medal, setting Winter Olympics record

Associated Press
Feb 20, 2026, 07:31 PM

ANTERSELVA, Italy -- Johannes Dale-Skjevdal was the only biathlete to hit all 20 targets in the 15-kilometer mass start race Friday and skied his way to Norway's 17th gold medal of the Milan Cortina Olympics -- breaking the record for the most golds won by a nation at a single Winter Games.

Key Highlights

- **Norway won 17 gold medals**, breaking its previous record of 16 gold medals set at the **Beijing Winter Olympics**.
- Johannes Dale-Skjevdal delivered a **perfect 20 out of 20 shooting performance** in the biathlon mass start.
- **Winning time: 39 minutes 17.1 seconds.**
- He took the lead after the first standing shooting round despite gusty winds and slow snow conditions.
- Silver medal was won by **Sturla Holm Laegreid**, finishing 10.5 seconds behind and securing his fifth medal of the 2026 Games.

- Bronze medal was claimed by **Quentin Fillon Maillet**, finishing 25.6 seconds behind the winner and earning his ninth Olympic medal overall.
- The biathlon men's 15 kilometre mass start includes **30 athletes, five 3 kilometre ski loops and four shooting rounds (two prone and two standing)** with penalty laps for missed targets.
- **Norway leads the all-time Winter Olympics medal tally with 405 medals.**
- Norway's medal tally: **148 Gold, 134 Silver, 123 Bronze (Total 405).**
- United States ranks second with **330 total medals (114 Gold, 121 Silver, 95 Bronze).**
- Germany ranks third with **267 total medals (105 Gold, 97 Silver, 65 Bronze).**
- The 17th gold medal at Milan Cortina 2026 reinforces Norway's dominance in Winter Olympics history, particularly in biathlon and Nordic skiing events.

Harmanpreet Kaur Becomes Most-Capped Player in Women's International Cricket

- India captain **Harmanpreet Kaur** created history by **becoming the most-capped player in women's international cricket.**
- She achieved the milestone during the second Twenty20 International match against Australia in Canberra, marking her 356th international appearance.
- With this, she surpassed New Zealand legend **Suzie Bates**, who previously held the record with 355 matches.

Harmanpreet Kaur. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

Harmanpreet Kaur became the highest-capped player in women's international cricket when she made her 356th appearance for India in Thursday's (February 19, 2026) Twenty20 match against Australia, surpassing New Zealand great Suzie Bates.
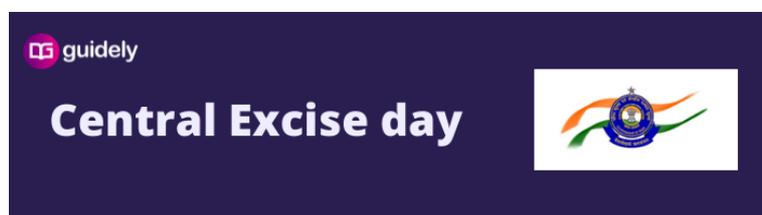
Key Highlights

- **Harmanpreet Kaur has now played 356 international matches, the highest in women's cricket history.**
- She broke the record during the second Twenty20 International against Australia in Canberra.
- The previous record of 355 matches was held by Suzie Bates of New Zealand.
- India head coach **Amol Muzumdar** described the achievement as historic and praised her consistency and leadership.
- Other leading players in international appearances include **Ellyse Perry** with 349 matches, **Mithali Raj** with 333 matches, and **Charlotte Edwards** with 309 matches.
- **Format-wise appearances of Harmanpreet Kaur include 6 Test matches, 161 One Day Internationals and 189 Twenty20 Internationals.**
- In One Day Internationals, she has scored 4,409 runs in 140 innings with an average of 37.05.
- In Twenty20 Internationals, she has scored 3,820 runs, while in Test cricket she has scored 200 runs.
- Her career tally includes **8 centuries and 38 half-centuries across formats.**
- Under her captaincy, India won the **ICC Women's Cricket World Cup** title in 2025, marking a historic achievement for Indian women's cricket.

IMPORTANT DAYS

24th February 2026 is to be celebrated as Central Excise Day

- Every year **February 24 is celebrated as the central Excise Day** all over the world.

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Central Excise day

- The day is being celebrated to honor the service of the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) to the country.
- The day is celebrated to honor the officers associated with CBEC and their services. This is done to encourage the officers to carry out their duties with utmost sincerity.

History

- The Central Excise Department was one of the oldest departments in India which was established in the year 1855, under the British Raj.
- "The Central Excise Act" or "The Central Excise and Salt Act" was regulated in the year 1944, in which year for the first time Central Excise Day was celebrated but later in the year 1996 these acts get some changes.
- For the Central Excise Officers under the Union Government the "Power to Arrest" was given in the year 1973, which in the year 2013 was given to the Service Tax Matters.
- In this act, at first, there were 67 items mentioned about the Excise Duties which now approximately reach the number 1000.
- After the year 2017, July, and the appearance of GST the Central Excise department only focus on Petroleum and Liquor products to get the tax on perfect assurances.
- In recognition of the establishment of laws, the CBEC has celebrated Central Excise day since the passing of the Salt Act which was signed into law on February 24, 1944.

Daily CA on Feb 24 :

- The **Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S)** under the **Ministry of Commerce & Industry (MoC&I)** revised the **base year** of India's **merchandise trade indices** from **2012–13** to **2022–23**.
- **ICICI Prudential Pension Funds Management Company Limited** launched India's first **Swasthya Scheme** named **"ICICI PF NPS Swasthya Equity Plus"**, integrating **retirement planning** with **healthcare benefits** under the **National Pension System (NPS)**.
- The **Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)**, the guarantee arm of the **World Bank Group (WBG)**, issued a **USD 197.67 million guarantee** for **five years** to **Citibank N.A.** for its **non-shareholder loan** to the **State Bank of India (SBI)**.
- **India** formally joined as the **12th country** in the **USA-led Pax Silica Coalition**, a strategic alliance focused on **secure**, **resilient**, and **innovation-driven supply chains** for **critical minerals**, **semiconductors**, and **Artificial Intelligence (AI) infrastructure**.
- Female cheetah **Gamini**, translocated from **South Africa**, gave birth to **three cubs** at **Kuno National Park**, Madhya Pradesh, marking the **9th successful cheetah litter** at the park.
- The **European Union (EU)** launched the **European Legal Gateway Office** in **New Delhi, India**, to serve as a **one-stop hub** for facilitating **safe and legal migration** of Indian **students, researchers, and professionals** to EU member countries.
- **Slice Small Finance Bank (Slice SFB)** appointed its founder **Rajan Bajaj** as **Managing Director (MD)** and **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**.
- The **Indian Army (IA)** under its **Konark Corps**, including the **Air Defence Warriors** of the **Blazing Skies Brigade**, successfully conducted a **high-intensity live firing test** of the **Strela-10 Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS)** at the **Pokhran Field Firing Range**, **Rajasthan**.
- **Indian Navy's Sail Training Ship INS Sudarshini** arrived at **Safaga, Egypt** as part of its **Lokayan-26 deployment**.

- The **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)** launched an **AI-enabled biometric deduplication** and **document verification platform** to strengthen India's **digital security framework** and improve **Aadhaar authentication accuracy**.
- **Fractal AI** launched **Vaidya 2.0**, a next-generation **healthcare reasoning AI model**, at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026** in **Mumbai** (held at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi**).
- **Mani Shankar Mukhopadhyay (Shankar)**, a renowned **Bengali novelist** and writer, passed away at the age of **93** in **Kolkata, West Bengal**.
- Vice President **C. P. Radhakrishnan** released the updated **Tamil and Gujarati editions of the Constitution of India** along with the **8th Edition of the Legal Glossary (English–Hindi)** at **Uprashtrapati Bhavan**.
- **Indian Railways has integrated Artificial Intelligence** into key passenger facing and operational applications to improve grievance redressal, **ticket prediction, crowd management and freight planning.**
- Union Health Minister **Jagat Prakash Nadda** launched the indigenously manufactured **Tetanus and Adult Diphtheria vaccine** at **Central Research Institute**.
- **Andhra Pradesh has secured India's largest integrated lithium ion battery Gigafactory** by **Waaree Energies** with an investment **of ₹8,175 crore**.
- The **Government of India** has decided to **discontinue cash payments at all National Highway toll plazas from 1 April 2026**.
- At the India **Artificial Intelligence Impact Summit** 2026, **Larsen & Toubro** through its Vyoma unit signed a **Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Gujarat** to conduct a feasibility study for setting up a 250 Megawatt green Artificial Intelligence ready data centre at Dholera Special Investment Region.
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