



Daily Current Affairs

27th February 2026



BANKING AND FINANCE

Slice Small Finance Bank Appoints Rajan Bajaj as MD & CEO

- **Slice Small Finance Bank** has appointed its founder **Rajan Bajaj** as the new **Managing Director (MD)** and **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**.
- The appointment has been approved by the **Board of Directors, shareholders, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.
- Rajan Bajaj founded Slice in **2016** as a Bengaluru-based fintech startup focused on **credit and payment solutions for young and underserved customers**.
- In **2024**, Slice merged with **North East Small Finance Bank**, transforming into a **fully regulated Small Finance Bank**. He earlier served as **Executive Director** post-merger and now succeeds **Satish Kumar Kalra** as MD & CEO.
- The bank has raised over **USD 250 million** from global investors including **Tiger Global, Insight Partners, and Advent International**.
- Slice SFB offers **digital-first banking products** such as savings accounts with daily interest credits, fixed deposits, UPI services, borrowing solutions, and India's first **UPI-led bank branch**.
- Under Bajaj's leadership, the bank aims to leverage **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** to deliver **personalised banking services**, strengthen **financial inclusion**, and expand access to affordable financial products, particularly in rural and underserved regions.



Slice Small Finance Bank has appointed its founder, Rajan Bajaj, to the role of Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer. The appointment received approval from the bank's board, shareholders, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), signifying strong confidence in Bajaj's vision for digital-first banking.

Asian Development Bank Signs USD 108 Million Financing Deal with Aavas Financiers Limited

- **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** signed a **senior secured debt financing package of up to USD 108 million (about ₹983 crore)** with **Aavas Financiers Limited**.
- The objective of the financing is to expand **affordable housing loans and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) lending** in underserved states across India.
- The funding will support **housing loans for self-built homes and green-certified houses**, promoting **climate-resilient and energy-efficient housing solutions** for lower-middle-income borrowers.
- The financing will also provide **business loans to MSMEs**, thereby improving access to credit in regions with limited formal financial penetration.
- The package includes **USD 8 million in concessional debt financing** through the **Canadian Climate and Nature Fund for the Private Sector in Asia (CANPA)**, administered by ADB.
- The concessional component is aimed at encouraging **green housing initiatives and sustainable development practices** in the housing finance sector.



New Delhi (India), February 24 (ADB) The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed a senior secured debt financing package of up to USD 108 million (₹983 crore equivalent) with Aavas Financiers Limited to expand access to affordable housing loans for lower-income households and business loans for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in underserved states across India.

- The transaction further includes **up to USD 150,000 in technical assistance**, which will be used to:
 - Strengthen institutional capacity
 - Promote awareness about green and climate-resilient housing
 - Enhance implementation of sustainable housing finance practices
- The initiative aligns with ADB's broader objective of promoting **inclusive growth, climate resilience and sustainable infrastructure development** in India.

About ADB

- The Asian Development Bank is a regional development bank to promote social and economic development in Asia. The bank is headquartered in the city of Mandaluyong, in Metro Manila, Philippines, and maintains 31 field offices around the world.

NATIONAL AND STATE NEWS

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology Launches Blockchain India Challenge

- The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** launched the **Blockchain India Challenge in New Delhi** to promote blockchain-based digital governance solutions.
- The initiative was launched by **Shri S. Krishnan, Secretary, MeitY**, in the presence of senior officials from MeitY and the **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)**.
- The objective of the challenge is to encourage **Indian startups** to develop **permissioned blockchain-based solutions** for government use cases.
- The focus areas of the challenge include:
 - **Regulatory control**
 - **Security and trust**
 - **Auditability**
 - **Tamper-proof records**
 - **Single source of truth across systems**
- The initiative aims to enhance **transparency, accountability and efficiency** in public service delivery through blockchain technology.
- Key governance domains covered under the challenge include:
 - **E-procurement**
 - **Supply chain management**
 - **Public Distribution System (PDS)**
 - **Education**
 - **Healthcare**
 - **Agriculture**
 - **Power sector**



- **Internet of Things (IoT)**
- **Land records**
- **Environment and sustainability**
- Startups are also allowed to propose **innovative blockchain solutions beyond the listed sectors** in collaboration with relevant government departments.
- The initiative is being implemented by **C-DAC with the support of MeitY**.
- Startups recognized under the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)**, in partnership with government departments, will receive **stage-wise funding support**.
- The challenge aims to develop **ten impactful blockchain-based use cases across ten categories**, which are expected to be **scalable and deployable across India**.
- Eligible startups can register and access detailed information, including **eligibility criteria, guidelines and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) provisions**, on the official challenge website.

Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) Celebrates 75th Foundation Year at New Delhi

- The **Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)** commenced its **75th Foundation Year celebrations at Bharat Mandapam**, marking over seven decades of service to workers and their families across India.
- The event was addressed by **Mansukh Mandaviya**, Union Minister for Labour & Employment and Youth Affairs & Sports, who highlighted ESIC's journey as a model of growth, reform and national service.
- ESIC was established in **1952** with around **1.2 lakh beneficiaries and a single dispensary**.
- At present, ESIC serves **over 15 crore beneficiaries** through:
 - **166 hospitals**
 - **17 medical colleges**
 - **Nearly 1,600 dispensaries**
- The Minister emphasized that ESIC has emerged as a **key pillar of India's social security system**.
- A **Commemorative Coin (ESIC@75)** and a **coffee table book** highlighting ESIC's legacy and achievements were released during the event.
- The **Swasthya Rath Initiative** was launched to expand outreach and bring healthcare services closer to beneficiaries.
- In line with Labour Code provisions, **mandatory annual health check-ups for workers aged 40 years and above** were introduced.
- An MoU was signed between ESIC and the **National Health Authority** to align the ESI Scheme with **Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**, ensuring coordinated healthcare delivery.

Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) Commences 75th Foundation Year Celebrations

Health is our mission, and service is our tradition: Union Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya

Labour Codes Strengthen Healthcare Provisions for Workers' Welfare, says Dr. Mandaviya; highlights provision for free annual health check-up through ESIC for workers aged 40 years and above

ESIC should emerge as a global example of health security: Dr. Mandaviya

Commemorative Coin, Coffee Table Book Released as ESIC Marks 75 Years of Service to Nation

MoU Signed Between ESIC-NHA and ESIC-NABL to Strengthen Healthcare Delivery and Quality Standards

- Another MoU was signed with the **National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL)** to strengthen quality assurance mechanisms in ESIC healthcare facilities.
- ESIC will observe a **Special Services Fortnight from 24 February to 10 March 2026** across its offices and hospitals nationwide.
- Activities during the fortnight include:
 - Health check-up camps
 - Hygiene and awareness drives
 - Yoga and AYUSH sessions
 - Grievance redressal drives
 - Settlement of pending claims
- Established under the **Employees' State Insurance Act**, ESIC provides **medical care and financial protection** in cases of:
 - Sickness
 - Maternity
 - Disability
 - Employment injury
 - Unemployment
- The 75th Foundation Year celebrations reaffirm ESIC's commitment to building a **healthy, secure and productive workforce** in line with the vision of **Viksit Bharat**.

7th All India Conference of Government Railway Police Chiefs Concludes in New Delhi

- The **7th All India Conference of Government Railway Police (GRP) Chiefs** was convened by the **Railway Protection Force** and successfully concluded at **Vigyan Bhawan**.
- The conference was presided over by **Sonali Mishra**, Director General of RPF, and attended by Directors General of Police (DGPs), Additional Directors General of Police (ADGPs), and senior GRP officers from various States and Union Territories.
- **Satish Kumar**, Chairman-cum-Chief Executive Officer of the **Railway Board**, along with Members of the Railway Board, also participated in the conference.
- The primary objective of the conference was to develop a **coordinated action plan** to strengthen the security of railway passengers and railway infrastructure across India.
- Key security concerns discussed included:
 - **Organized crime**
 - **Drug trafficking**
 - **Vandalism and stone pelting**
 - **Sabotage threats**
 - **Crowd management challenges**



The 7th All India Conference of Government Railway Police Chiefs concluded in New Delhi today. The Ministry of Railways said that the conference was aimed at enhancing the security of passengers, railway infrastructure and operators in view of emerging security challenges.

- Officials emphasized the need for a **holistic and technology-driven security framework**, considering the vast geographical spread and open-access nature of Indian Railways.
- Adoption of modern technologies by RPF was highlighted, including:
 - **Facial Recognition System (FRS)-based Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras**
 - **Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled video analytics**
 - **Drone surveillance systems**
- A senior officer from the **Narcotics Control Bureau** presented strategies to curb narcotics smuggling through railway networks, focusing on **proactive surveillance and real-time intelligence sharing**.
- The conference stressed preparedness measures such as:
 - **Regular mock drills and scenario-based emergency training**
 - **Strengthened first response and evacuation protocols**
 - **Enhanced coordination between State Police and RPF**
 - **Community outreach in vulnerable areas**
- Strict legal action and deterrent measures were recommended to address incidents of **stone pelting and sabotage**.
- The conference provided a unified platform for State Police Forces and RPF to align strategies, with outcomes expected to strengthen India's railway security architecture and make it more **resilient, responsive, and technology-driven**.

Uttar Pradesh CM Inaugurates IBM's AI GovTech Innovation Centre in Lucknow

- **Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath** inaugurated **IBM's AI GovTech Innovation Centre** in Lucknow to strengthen technology-driven governance in the state.
- The Centre has been established in collaboration with **IBM** to design and scale **AI-based solutions** aimed at improving governance, transparency, and public service delivery.
- The Chief Minister stated that the initiative will help Uttar Pradesh emerge as a leader in **Artificial Intelligence (AI), Deep Tech, and Quantum Computing**.
- Uttar Pradesh is advancing rapidly in the fields of:
 - **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**
 - **Robotics**
 - **Drone Technology**
 - **Medical Technology (MedTech)**
 - **Quantum Computing**
- The state budget has made provisions for setting up **Centres of Excellence in Robotics and Drone Technology**. Collaboration with IIT Kanpur is also underway in the **MedTech** sector.

IBM has inaugurated an AI GovTech Innovation Centre in Lucknow, signalling a sharper focus on embedding artificial intelligence as core infrastructure for public sector governance and service delivery in India.

The new centre, launched by Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, is positioned as a collaborative platform where government departments, academia and technology experts can design, test and scale AI-driven solutions for governance. Senior leaders present at the inauguration included IBM chairman and CEO Arvind Krishna, IBM India & South Asia Managing Director Sandip Patel, and Professor Manindra Agrawal, Director of Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur.

As governments grapple with rising citizen expectations, growing regulatory complexity and surging volumes of data, IBM believes AI is moving from experimentation to execution in the public sector. The Lucknow centre is intended to accelerate that transition by developing trained, reusable AI use cases that can improve production transparency and the quality of public services.

"AI will define the next era of government effectiveness and economic competitiveness," said Arvind Krishna. "In India in particular, we are seeing governments move decisively from exploration to execution. The Lucknow centre combines IBM's global AI expertise with a strong local talent ecosystem, enabling AI initiatives to be translated into measurable public impact."

- During the programme, IBM signed **two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs)** with the Uttar Pradesh Government:
 - With the **Department of IT and Electronics** to develop AI-based applications across government departments.
 - With the **Directorate of School Education** to introduce **AI literacy programmes** for students and teachers from **Classes 6 to 12**.
- The event was attended by senior officials from the Uttar Pradesh Government, IBM, and IIT Kanpur.

RECENT NEWS

- The Uttar Pradesh government has presented its first-ever Economic Survey 2025-26 in the state legislature, outlining a comprehensive roadmap to transform the state into a \$1 trillion economy over the medium term. The survey provides a data-driven framework focusing on investment-led growth, infrastructure expansion, industrial diversification, fiscal discipline, and human development.

About Uttar Pradesh:

- **Chief Minister:** Yogi Adityanath
- **Governor:** Anandiben Patel
- **Capital:** Lucknow
- **National Parks:** Dudhwa National Park
- **Wildlife Sanctuaries:** Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, Kaimoor Wildlife Sanctuary, Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary (Shahid Chandra Shekhar Azad Bird Sanctuary), Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary, Sur Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary, Mahavir Swami Wildlife Sanctuary, Ranipur Wildlife

Delhi to Implement 'Rah-Veer' Scheme to Encourage Road Accident Assistance

- The **Government of Delhi** has decided to implement the Centre's '**Rah-Veer**' Scheme in the national capital to encourage citizens to help seriously injured road accident victims.
- Chief Minister **Rekha Gupta** announced that individuals assisting accident victims to receive timely medical care will be rewarded.
- **Reward:** ₹25,000 cash incentive along with a **certificate of appreciation** for helping a seriously injured victim reach the hospital within the **golden hour**.
- **Maximum Reward:** ₹25,000 per accident, even if multiple victims are saved.
- **National Recognition:** 10 outstanding Rah-Veers will receive a **national award of ₹1 lakh annually**.
- **Objective:** To ensure treatment of seriously injured victims within the '**golden hour**', which is critical for saving lives after accidents.
- **Legal Protection:** The scheme provides safeguards under the **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019**, which includes **Good Samaritan provisions** protecting helpers from legal harassment.



Rah-Veer Scheme

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has announced that Delhi will adopt the Centre's 'Rah-Veer' scheme, a programme designed to encourage citizens to assist road accident victims. Under this initiative, anyone who helps transport a seriously injured person to a hospital or trauma centre within the crucial "golden hour" will be eligible for a cash reward of Rs 25,000. The golden hour refers to the first hour after an accident, when timely medical care can make the difference between life and death.

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- The initiative aims to **reduce road accident fatalities**, promote public participation, and encourage compassion and responsible citizen behaviour in emergency situations.

RECENT NEWS

- Delhi airport has been ranked the 5th-busiest airport in the Asia Pacific (Apac) region in 2025, according to the latest OAG data. With 46.18 million one-way departing seats, the airport made a dramatic jump from 9th position in 2019.

About Delhi:

- Chief Minister: Rekha Gupta
- Lieutenant Governor: Vinai Kumar Saxena
- Capital: New Delhi
- Wildlife Sanctuaries: Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, Yamuna Biodiversity Park, Aravalli Biodiversity Park

National Arogya Fair 2026 to be Held in Shegaon, Maharashtra

- The **Ministry of Ayush**, Government of India, in collaboration with the **All India Ayurvedic Congress**, will organise the **National Arogya Fair 2026** from **25–28 February 2026** at **Shegaon, Buldhana district**.
- The event will be inaugurated by President **Droupadi Murmu** on **25 February 2026** at Visava Maidan, Sant Gajanan Maharaj Sansthan, Shegaon.
- The programme will also be attended by the Governor of Maharashtra and Union Minister of Ayush **Prataprao Jadhav**.
- **Objective:** To expand access to **Ayush-based preventive and promotive healthcare** and enhance public awareness about traditional systems of medicine.
- Visitors will receive **free consultations, health check-ups, and free medicines** under various Ayush systems including **Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa, and Homoeopathy**.
- The fair will feature **yoga demonstrations, expert lectures, therapy showcases, and exhibitions** by reputed Ayush institutions.
- A special session titled **“Ayurvedic Farming: Production, Value Addition and Marketing”** will be held on **27 February 2026**, focusing on cultivation of medicinal plants, agroforestry, post-harvest management, and market linkages.
- The initiative aims to encourage farmers in the **Vidarbha** region to diversify into medicinal crops and strengthen the Ayush supply chain.
- The National Arogya Fair 2026 will serve as a **convergence platform for public healthcare services, knowledge sharing, and rural livelihood enhancement**, reinforcing the role of Ayush in improving public health and economic development.

President of India inaugurates national Arogya fair 2026 at Shegaon

Press Information Bureau | February 25, 2026

The President of India, Shri Droupadi Murmu, inaugurated the National Arogya Fair 2026 in Shegaon, Maharashtra, and stressed the need for accessible, affordable, and holistic healthcare for all. Referring to the rich heritage of traditional systems of medicine in India, it was highlighted that ayurveda, yoga, unani, and other traditional systems of medicine have been playing an important role in promoting preventive healthcare and well-being. The need to integrate modern advancements in medical science with traditional knowledge systems to develop a comprehensive healthcare framework was noted. Awareness and early intervention are the keys to improving health outcomes and reducing the burden of diseases. The continued efforts of the government in transforming the healthcare landscape through policy support and infrastructure development, especially in rural areas, The initiatives taken to promote preventive healthcare, wellness, and digital health solutions are bringing a revolution in the healthcare sector of India. The National Arogya Fair is an important platform where progress in the field of traditional medicine is showcased, and health awareness among the masses is promoted. The need for community engagement and collective efforts to build a healthier nation was also emphasised, while reiterating India's commitment to achieving universal health coverage.

About Maharashtra:

- Chief Minister: Devendra Fadnavis
- Governor: Acharya Devvrat

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- Capital: Mumbai
- National Parks: Tadoba National Park, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Chandoli National Park, Gugamal National Park, Navegaon National Park
- Wildlife Sanctuaries: Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnala Bird Sanctuary, Melghat Wildlife Sanctuary, Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs Approves Minimum Support Price for Raw Jute for Marketing Season 2026–27

- The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)**, chaired by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, has approved the **Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Raw Jute for the Marketing Season 2026–27**.
- The **MSP of Raw Jute (TD-3 grade) has been fixed at ₹5,925 per quintal** for the 2026–27 season.
- The approved MSP ensures a **return of 61.8 percent over the all-India weighted average cost of production**, in line with the Union Government's 2018–19 Budget principle of fixing MSP at **at least 1.5 times the cost of production**.
- The MSP has been **increased by ₹275 per quintal compared to the Marketing Season 2025–26**.
- Since 2014–15, the MSP for raw jute has increased from **₹2,400 per quintal to ₹5,925 per quintal**, marking a rise of **₹3,525 per quintal, which is about 2.5 times** the earlier level.
- During the period **2014–15 to 2025–26, a total of ₹1,342 crore was paid to jute farmers under MSP operations**, reflecting enhanced procurement support.
- In comparison, during **2004–05 to 2013–14, ₹441 crore was paid** to jute farmers, indicating a substantial increase in financial assistance in recent years.
- The **Jute Corporation of India (JCI)** will continue to function as the **Central Government's nodal agency for undertaking Price Support Operations**.
- Any losses incurred by the Jute Corporation of India during procurement will be **fully reimbursed by the Central Government**.
- The MSP revision aims to **ensure fair remuneration to jute farmers, promote jute cultivation, strengthen rural incomes, and support the jute industry supply chain**.
- The decision is expected to benefit farmers, particularly in major jute-producing states such as **West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar**.

Cabinet approves Minimum Support Prices for Raw Jute for 2026-27 Season

Posted On: 24 FEB 2026 14:49PM by PIB Delhi

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, today has approved Minimum Support Prices (MSP) of Raw Jute for Marketing season 2026-27.

The MSP of Raw Jute (TD-3 grade) has been fixed at ₹ 5,925 per quintal for 2026-27 season. This would ensure a return of 61.8 percent over the all India weighted average cost of production. The approved MSP of raw jute for Marketing season 2026-27 is in line with the principle of fixing MSP at a level of at least 1.5 times of the weighted average cost of production as announced by the Government in the Budget 2018-19.

The MSP of Raw Jute for Marketing season 2026-27 is an increase of ₹ 275 per quintal over the previous Marketing season 2025-26. Government has increased MSP of Raw Jute from ₹ 2,400 per quintal in 2014-15 to ₹ 5,925 per quintal in 2026-27, registering an increase of ₹ 3,525 per quintal (2.5 times).

The MSP amount paid to Jute growing farmers during the period 2014-15 to 2025-26 was ₹ 1,342 Crore while during the period 2004-05 to 2013-14, amount paid was ₹ 441 Crore.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Saudi Arabia Bans Poultry & Egg Imports from 40 Countries Including India

- **Saudi Arabia** has imposed a **complete ban on poultry meat and table egg imports from 40 countries**, including **India** and **Bangladesh**, to safeguard public health.

- The decision was taken by the **Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA)** following global epidemiological updates and concerns over **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)** and Newcastle disease.
- The ban applies to **poultry meat and table eggs**, and is part of Saudi Arabia's ongoing food safety monitoring mechanism.
- Apart from the full ban on 40 countries, **partial restrictions have been imposed on 16 countries**, limited to specific outbreak-affected regions.
- Major countries under the complete ban include **India, Bangladesh, China, United Kingdom, Germany, South Korea, Egypt, Japan, Indonesia and Vietnam**, along with several others across Asia, Africa and Europe.
- Countries under partial restriction include Australia, United States, Italy, Belgium, Poland, France, Canada, Malaysia, Philippines, Austria, Denmark, Romania, Zimbabwe, Bhutan, Togo and Democratic Republic of Congo.
- **Heat-treated and properly certified poultry products remain exempt**, provided they meet approved safety standards and originate from recognized facilities.
- The measure aims to **prevent the entry of infected poultry products, protect domestic agriculture, and ensure food safety** in the Kingdom.
- Some restrictions have existed since 2004, while others were introduced gradually based on updated veterinary and disease surveillance reports.

On February 26, 2026, the Saudi Food and Drug Authority announced a comprehensive ban on poultry and table-egg imports from 40 countries, with additional regional restrictions affecting 16 nations.

Full Ban Covering 40 Exporting Nations

The authority listed Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Djibouti, South Africa, China, Iraq, Ghana, Palestine, Vietnam, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Cameroon, South Korea, North Korea, Laos, Libya, Myanmar, United Kingdom, Egypt, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, India, Hong Kong, Japan, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Serbia, Slovenia, Côte d'Ivoire and Madagascar as full ban exporting countries.

About Saudi Arabia

- Capital: Riyadh
- Currency: Saudi Riyal
- King: Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

MOUS AND AGREEMENT

India-Israel Launch First Round of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations

- **India and Israel officially commenced the first round of negotiations for a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in New Delhi from 23 to 26 February 2026.**
- The **Terms of Reference (ToR)** for the negotiations were signed in **November 2025**, establishing a structured framework to strengthen bilateral trade and economic cooperation.
- **Total merchandise trade between India and Israel stood at USD 3.62 billion in Financial Year 2024-25**, reflecting steady economic engagement between the two countries.
- Both nations share strong complementarities in sectors such as:
 - Innovation and Science & Technology
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI)



- Cybersecurity
- High-tech manufacturing
- Agriculture
- Services sector
- The proposed FTA is expected to provide **certainty and predictability for businesses, including Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)**, and enhance overall trade flows.
- Negotiations are covering key areas including:
 - Trade in goods
 - Trade in services
 - Rules of Origin
 - Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures
 - Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)
 - Customs procedures and trade facilitation
 - Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)
- During the opening session, **Rajesh Agrawal, Commerce Secretary of India**, stated that the negotiations are taking place at an opportune time, coinciding with **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel on 25–26 February 2026**.
- **Ajay Bhadoo, Additional Secretary, Department of Commerce and India's Chief Negotiator**, emphasised the need for a **balanced and forward-looking agreement** aligned with national priorities.
- **Yifat Alon Perel, Senior Director Trade Policy & Agreements and Israel's Chief Negotiator**, highlighted that the FTA could strengthen **supply chains and open new market opportunities** for both countries.
- The proposed agreement reflects the growing **strategic partnership between India and Israel**, aiming to deepen economic engagement, improve supply chain resilience, and create long-term business opportunities.

APPOINTMENTS AND RESIGNATION

Hindustan Oil Exploration Company Appoints Baroruchi Mishra as Chief Executive Officer

- **Hindustan Oil Exploration Company (HOEC)** has approved a Chief Executive Officer transition, appointing **Baroruchi Mishra** as the new **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** with effect from **1 April 2026**.
- The decision was cleared by the **Board of Directors** as part of the company's structured **succession planning and strategic roadmap**.
- The leadership transition signals a **strategic shift aimed at strengthening oil and gas exploration operations, production efficiency, and long-term growth plans**.



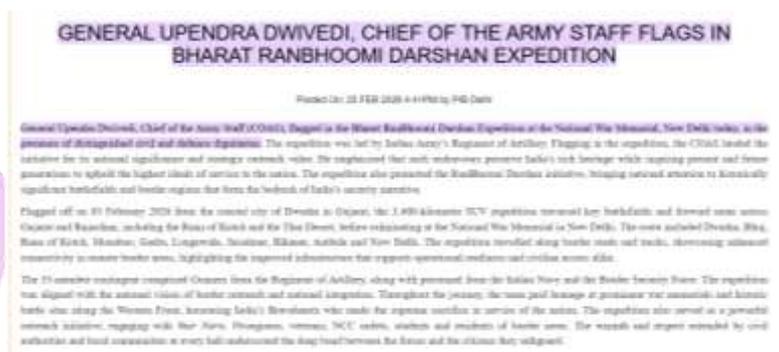
Hindustan Oil Exploration Company Ltd (HOEC) on Wednesday saw a change in its top leadership, with Managing Director Ramasamy

- Baroruchi Mishra is a **senior executive within HOEC's leadership structure**, with extensive experience in the **upstream oil and gas sector**, including operational management and strategic planning.
- The appointment is expected to enhance focus on:
 - **Strengthening upstream hydrocarbon production**
 - **Expanding the exploration portfolio**
 - **Improving operational efficiency**
 - **Driving long-term shareholder value**
- HOEC is an **Indian upstream oil and gas company** engaged in the **exploration and production of hydrocarbons**, operating both **onshore and offshore blocks** and contributing to domestic energy security.
- The Chief Executive Officer transition reflects **strong corporate governance practices and long-term leadership continuity**, positioning the company for future expansion in India's evolving energy landscape.

DEFENCE NEWS

Army Chief Flags In Bharat RanBhoomi Darshan Expedition at National War Memorial

- Chief of the Army Staff **General Upendra Dwivedi** flagged in the **Bharat RanBhoomi Darshan Expedition** at the **National War Memorial**, in the presence of senior civil and defence dignitaries.
- The **3,400-kilometre expedition** began from **Dwarka**, Gujarat, and covered key battlefields and border areas across Gujarat and Rajasthan before concluding in New Delhi.
- The initiative was led by the **Regiment of Artillery** and aimed to **honour India's war heroes, preserve military heritage, highlight border infrastructure development, and promote national integration**.
- The route covered strategically significant locations including **Bhuj, Rann of Kutch, Munabao, Longewala, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, and Ambala**, traversing remote desert terrain in the Rann of Kutch and the Thar Desert.
- The **35-member contingent** included personnel from the Regiment of Artillery, the **Indian Navy**, and the **Border Security Force**, reflecting joint cooperation among multiple security forces.
- During the expedition, homage was paid at major war memorials and historic battle sites along the Western Front. Engagement activities included interactions with **Veer Naris and Viranganas**, veterans, National Cadet Corps cadets, students, and residents of border villages.
- The expedition showcased **enhanced border connectivity and infrastructure development** in forward areas, reinforcing India's operational preparedness and outreach efforts in strategic regions.



- The Bharat RanBhoomi Darshan initiative connects **India's historic military sacrifices with present-day defence readiness**, inspiring youth and strengthening the bond between the Armed Forces and civilians, particularly in remote border areas.

7th India–Japan Joint Military Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' Held in Uttarakhand

- The **7th edition of the India–Japan Joint Military Exercise 'Dharma Guardian'** commenced at the **Foreign Training Node, Chaubattia, Uttarakhand** and is being conducted from **24 February to 9 March 2026**.
- It is an **annual bilateral military exercise** between the **Indian Army** and the **Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF)**, held alternately in India and Japan.
- **Participation:** Both countries have deployed a **120-member contingent**. The Japanese side is represented by troops from the **32nd Infantry Regiment**, while the Indian contingent is drawn from the **Ladakh Scouts**.
- **Objective:** The exercise aims to **strengthen military cooperation, enhance interoperability, and improve combined operational capabilities**, particularly in **semi-urban operational environments**.
- The drill focuses on **joint planning, synchronised tactical operations, and application of modern military technologies** to address emerging security challenges.
- **Key activities undertaken include:**
 - Establishment of a Temporary Operating Base
 - Creation of an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) grid
 - Setting up Mobile Vehicle Check Posts
 - Cordon and Search Operations
 - Heliborne operations
 - House intervention drills
- The exercise is designed to achieve **high physical endurance standards, seamless coordination, and enhanced joint combat readiness** under realistic operational conditions.
- 'Dharma Guardian' remains a **key pillar of India–Japan defence ties**, reinforcing mutual trust and preparedness to respond effectively to regional security concerns.



The 7th edition of the annual India–Japan joint military exercise 'Dharma Guardian' commenced on Tuesday at the Foreign Training Node in Chaubattia, Uttarakhand. The exercise will be held from February 24 to March 9.

According to the Ministry of Defence, the drill brings together 60 personnel each from the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF). The Japanese contingent is represented by troops from the 32nd Infantry Regiment, while the Indian side is represented by the Ladakh Scouts.

Kalari Leap: Southern Air Command Conducts Joint Maritime Exercise in Lakshadweep & Minicoy

- The **Southern Air Command** of the **Indian Air Force (IAF)** successfully conducted a high-tempo joint maritime exercise named **Kalari Leap** in the **Lakshadweep and Minicoy archipelago**.

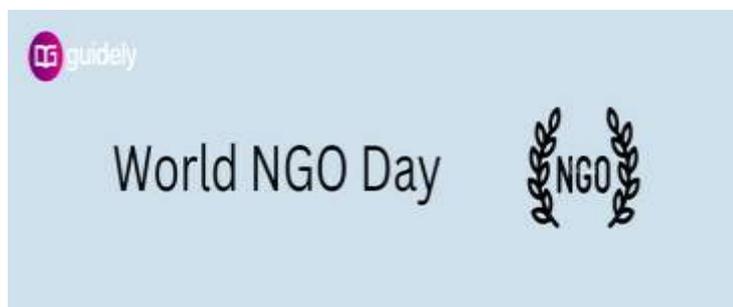
- The exercise aimed to validate **rapid force projection capability, joint operational planning, and precision strikes** in complex maritime conditions.
- The drill tested the IAF's ability to respond swiftly to emerging maritime threats in the **Arabian Sea region**, particularly in strategically sensitive island territories.
- The location is strategically significant due to its proximity to **major international shipping routes**, enhancing India's maritime security and surveillance capability.
- The exercise focused on:
 - Rapid deployment of air assets in island territories
 - Precision execution of air operations
 - Integrated planning among defence forces
 - Operational coordination in maritime environments
- The exercise witnessed participation from the **Armed Forces Special Operations Division (AFSOD)**, which conducted specialised mission simulations.
- The **Indian Coast Guard** deployed ships, Gemini boats and **Dornier 228 aircraft** for maritime surveillance and search-and-rescue operations.
- The IAF contributed air assets for **anti-ship strike simulations and operational air support**, enhancing combat readiness.
- A key highlight was the conduct of **anti-ship strike drills**, demonstrating the capability to neutralise hostile naval assets in maritime zones.
- The exercise also validated **maritime search and rescue (SAR) operations**, ensuring coordinated humanitarian response during sea-based emergencies.
- Kalari Leap showcased **integrated defence readiness, interoperability among air, maritime and special forces units**, and India's capability to safeguard its island territories and strategic sea lanes.



IMPORTANT DAYS

World NGO Day 2026 is observed on 27th February.

- **World NGO Day 2026 is observed on the 27th of February 2026**
- N.G.O. is an acronym for non-governmental organization.
- World NGO Day is a day set aside to recognize, celebrate, and honor the fundamental contributions and profound impact that these independent organizations have had on the world.



History

- **World NGO Day was originally founded in 2009** by Marcis Liors Skadmanis, a social entrepreneur.

- However, it was observed for the **first time on February 27, 2014**.
- It's a day set aside to honor all non-governmental and nonprofit organizations, recognizing their impact on the world.
- The holiday was officially declared back in 2010 by the 12 member countries of the Baltic Sea NGO Forum, recognized as a partner of the Council of the Baltic Sea States.
- However, it only received international recognition in 2014 from the European Union, the United Nations, and other international organizations.

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- **Slice Small Finance Bank** has appointed its founder **Rajan Bajaj** as the new **Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer**
- **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** signed a **senior secured debt financing package of up to USD 108 million (about ₹983 crore)** with **Aavas Financiers Limited**
- The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** launched the **Blockchain India Challenge in New Delhi** to promote blockchain-based digital governance solutions
- The **Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)** commenced its **75th Foundation Year celebrations** at **Bharat Mandapam**, marking over seven decades of service to workers and their families across India
- The **7th All India Conference of Government Railway Police (GRP) Chiefs** was convened by the **Railway Protection Force** and successfully concluded at **Vigyan Bhawan**
- **Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath** inaugurated **IBM's AI GovTech Innovation Centre** in Lucknow to strengthen technology-driven governance in the state
- The **Government of Delhi** has decided to implement the Centre's '**Rah-Veer**' **Scheme** in the national capital to encourage citizens to help seriously injured road accident victims
- The **Ministry of Ayush**, Government of India, in collaboration with the **All India Ayurvedic Congress**, will organise the **National Arogya Fair 2026** from **25–28 February 2026** at **Shegaon, Buldhana district**
- The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)**, chaired by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, has approved the **Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Raw Jute for the Marketing Season 2026–27**
- **Saudi Arabia** has imposed a **complete ban on poultry meat and table egg imports from 40 countries**, including **India** and **Bangladesh**, to safeguard public health
- **India and Israel** officially commenced the **first round of negotiations for a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** in **New Delhi** from **23 to 26 February 2026**

- **Hindustan Oil Exploration Company (HOEC)** has approved a Chief Executive Officer transition, appointing **Baroruchi Mishra** as the new **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** with effect from **1 April 2026**
- Chief of the Army Staff **General Upendra Dwivedi** flagged in the **Bharat RanBhoomi Darshan Expedition** at the **National War Memorial**, in the presence of senior civil and defence dignitaries
- The **7th edition of the India–Japan Joint Military Exercise ‘Dharma Guardian’** commenced at the **Foreign Training Node, Chaubattia, Uttarakhand** and is being conducted from **24 February to 9 March 2026**
- The **Southern Air Command** of the **Indian Air Force (IAF)** successfully conducted a high-tempo joint maritime exercise named **Kalari Leap** in the **Lakshadweep and Minicoy archipelago**
- **World NGO Day 2026** is observed on the **27th of February 2026**

