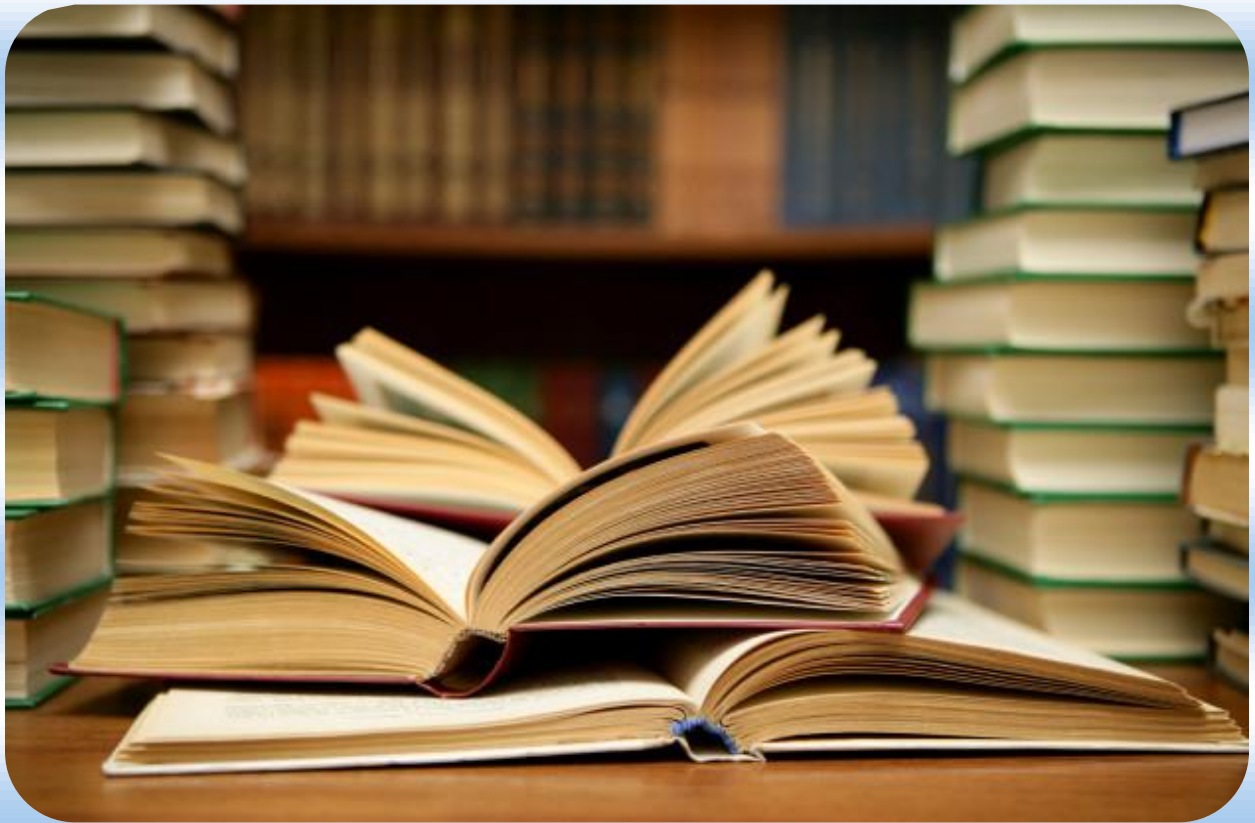


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GENERAL KNOWLEDGE MONTHLY



JANUARY-2025

NATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

Nitin Gadkari announces nationwide cashless treatment

Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, on Tuesday unveiled an updated version of the 'Cashless Treatment' scheme, aimed at extending financial assistance to victims of road accidents. Under this initiative, the government will cover medical expenses up to Rs 1.5 lakh for seven days of treatment, provided the accident is reported to the police within 24 hours.



Pranab Mukherjee Memorial at Delhi's Rajghat Complex

The Centre has earmarked a designated site at the Rashtriya Smriti complex, a part of the Rajghat precinct, for erecting a memorial for the late President Pranab Mukherjee. "The Competent Authority has approved the earmarking of a designated site within the 'Rashtriya Smriti' complex (a part of the Rajghat precinct) for erecting a Samadhi of Late Shri Pranab Mukherjee, former President of India," the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Development said in a letter to the late leader's daughter Sharmishtha Mukherjee, informing her of the decision.

RBI Lifts Lending Restrictions on Asirvad Micro Finance and DMI Finance

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday lifted restrictions imposed on Chennai based Asirvad Micro Finance and Delhi based DMI Finance, with immediate effect, after being satisfied with the actions taken by these companies to adhere to regulatory guidelines. "...having satisfied itself based on companies' submissions, and in view of their adoption of revamped processes, systems, and the companies' commitment to ensure adherence to the regulatory guidelines on an ongoing basis, especially for ensuring fairness in the loan pricing, the RBI has decided to lift the afore-mentioned restrictions placed on both, Asirvad Micro Finance and DMI Finance, with immediate effect", RBI said in a statement.

PhonePe, ICICI Lombard Launch Maha Kumbh Mela Insurance

PhonePe on Thursday announced a partnership with ICICI Lombard General Insurance to offer insurance cover for people travelling to the Maha Kumbh Mela. The insurance plan, available from January 13, 2024, to February 25, 2025, will be offered in two variants. "This comprehensive yet affordable insurance plan is available in two variants, catering to the needs of a broad spectrum of travellers: Rs 59 per traveller for individuals travelling by train or bus, and Rs 99 per traveller for individuals travelling by domestic flights," PhonePe said in its press release.

Swiggy's 'Snacc' App: 15-Minute Delivery Sparks Industry Debate

Swiggy has launched a new app, SNACC, aimed at delivering quick bites, beverages, and meals in just 15 minutes. The app went live on 7 January in select parts of Bengaluru and will expand to other regions soon. From what is understood, SNACC is designed to cater to the growing demand for fast food delivery, offering a menu that includes categories like Indian Breakfast, Coffee, Bakes, Cold Beverages, Eggs, and Protein.

Justice B.N. Srikrishna to Lead Advisory Board of Equal and OneMoney

Retired Supreme Court justice B. N. Srikrishna will chair the ID verification and data sharing platform Equal's newly formed Advisory Board. Equal provides identity authentication services for large firms, boasting digital integrations with several ID providers. The appointment comes as the government finalises the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, to implement the DPDP Act, 2023.

UP Govt Teams Up with Google Cloud for AI Agri Network

LUCKNOW The UP government has signed an MoU with Google Cloud (India) to launch the Gemini-powered and Beacon-enabled Uttar Pradesh Open Network for Agriculture. The agreement, aimed at revolutionising agriculture in the state, was signed by chief secretary Manoj Kumar Singh and Google Cloud (India) vice-president Anil Bhansali. "This agreement reflects our commitment to good governance and digital empowerment.

India to Invest ₹50,000 Crore in National Waterways Over 5 Years

An investment of Rs 50,000 crore will be made to boost infrastructure along national waterways in the next five years, according to an official statement on Friday. According to the statement, the investment proposals were announced in Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) meeting at Kohora in Kaziranga. "IWDC bats for major infra upgrade on National Waterways, to invest Rs 50,000 crore in five years," the statement said.

Centre Releases ₹1.73 Trillion to States to Boost Capital Spending

The Centre on Friday released tax devolution of Rs 1.73 lakh crore to the state governments to accelerate capital expenditure and finance welfare activities. "A higher amount is being devolved this month to enable states to accelerate capital spending and finance their development and welfare-related expenditures," the finance ministry said in a statement. The Union government has released tax devolution of Rs 1,73,030 crore to state governments on Friday, as against the devolution of Rs 89,086 crore in December 2024, the ministry added.

Rupee Hits Record Low of ₹86 Against US Dollar

The rupee declined 14 paise and touched the crucial 86.00-mark (provisional) for the first time against the U.S. dollar on Friday (January 10, 2025) as it failed to resist pressure from a stronger American currency and huge outflow of foreign funds.



India Sets New Record with 30 GW Green Energy in 2024

India logged a record high renewable energy capacity addition of about 30 GW in 2024, more than 113% higher than 13.75 GW recorded in 2023, according to the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy data. This assumes significance in view of India's ambitious plan to have 500 GW of renewable energy capacity in the country by 2030. Besides, India needs to add an average of 50 GW of renewable energy capacity per annum over the next six years to achieve its target.

Kumbhvani FM Channel Launched for Maha Kumbh 2025

Prasar Bharati has launched the OTT-based Kumbhvani FM channel to disseminate comprehensive information about the Mahakumbh. Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday inaugurated Prasar Bharati's FM channel 'Kumbhvani' at the Circuit House, on the concluding day of his two-day Prayagraj tour. Prasar Bharati has launched the OTT-based Kumbhvani FM channel to disseminate comprehensive information about the Mahakumbh. Broadcasting at a frequency of 103.5 MHz, the channel is on air from January 10 to February 26, operating daily from 5:55 am to 10:05 pm.

Adani's ₹75,000 Cr Boost for Chhattisgarh's Growth

Adani Group has committed investments worth Rs 75,000 crore in Chhattisgarh in sectors ranging from power, cement, education, health, skill, and tourism, announced the state's Chief Minister's Office. This comes after Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani had a meeting. CMO Chhattisgarh in post on social media platform X said that the Chairman of the Adani Group announced a planned investment of Rs 60,000 crore to expand the group's power plants in Raipur, Korba, and Raigarh.

Shreyas Iyer Appointed Punjab Kings Captain Ahead of IPL 2025 Season

Shreyas Iyer has been officially appointed as the captain of Punjab Kings for the 2025 season of the Indian Premier League. Iyer, who led Kolkata Knight Riders to victory in the 2024 IPL, was released by the franchise later that year. Punjab Kings secured his services for INR 26.75 Crore, making him the second-highest buy at the auction.



Uttar Pradesh's Strategic Move to Privatize Power Distribution Firms

Uttar Pradesh is looking to privatise two of its four power distribution companies, a State government tender showed, as the country's most populous state grapples with power losses and a lack of sufficient transmission infrastructure. The State is inviting private companies to form partnerships with or privatise state-owned Dakshinanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam and Purvanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam, per the tender dated January 12. A majority of State power distribution companies in India are suffering losses due to older power transmission systems and frequent power losses, prompting the government to bring in private players.

C-DOT & IIT Mandi to Develop Wideband Spectrum Sensor Chip

New Delhi: The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) on Monday said it has signed an agreement with the Indian Institute of Technology Mandi (IIT Mandi) -- in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology Jammu (IIT Jammu) -- for the development of "Wideband Spectrum-Sensor ASIC-Chip for Enhancing the Spectrum Utilisation". The project aims to develop a reliable and implementation-friendly wideband spectrum sensing (WSS) algorithm to improve spectrum

ISRO's SpaDeX Mission Achieves Satellite Docking Milestone

ISRO successfully completed the docking of satellites as part of its Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX), the space agency announced in the social media platform X. "Manoeuvre from 15m to 3m hold point completed. Docking initiated with precision, leading to successful spacecraft capture. Retraction completed smoothly, followed by rigidisation for stability. Docking successfully completed," ISRO wrote in the post.

Cabinet Nod for 8th Pay Commission Implementation

India has cleared the setting up of the 8th Pay Commission even before the term of the previous commission's term ends. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw clarified that the decision to form the 8th Pay Commission was not part of the formal agenda but received approval from the PM. Vaishnaw clarified that the term of recommendations of the 7th Pay Commission, implemented in 2016, ends in 2026.

India's Hydrogen Train Engine Sets a Power Benchmark

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday said that the hydrogen fuel-run train engine developed by Indian Railways has the maximum horsepower in the world. Vaishnaw, who is also the Union Minister in charge of Information and Broadcasting and Electronics & Information Technology, said this while speaking at a plenary session titled "Green Connections: Diaspora's Contribution to Sustainable Development" of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention here.

Maha Kumbh 2025: World's First Mahamrityunjaya Yantra Installed in Prayagraj

Prayagraj: With a few days left for the Maha Kumbh in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj district, the 'bhoomi puja' for the 'Mahamrityunjay Yantra', a spiritual tool to connect devotees to the Almighty, was held on Thursday. The Mahamrityunjay Yantra will be set up on the holy land of Triveni Sangam. It has been shaped on the basis of the 52 letters of the Shiva Mahamrityunjay Mantra. Presently, construction of a 3D Mahamrityunjay Yantra is underway.



Archaeological Experiential Museum Launched in Vadnagar

Vadnagar is a beautiful city in Gujarat with a legacy of over 2500 years. The city is now all set to show a new cultural landmark—the Archaeological Experience Museum. The city, which is also the birthplace of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with the new museum promises an immersive and educational experience. The inauguration of the museum will be graced by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Shriram Housing Finance Rebrands as Truhome Finance

Shriram Housing Finance (SHF) has rebranded itself as Truhome Finance following its acquisition by Warburg Pincus and its co-investors, including QIA (Qatar's sovereign wealth fund), from Shriram Finance. Last month, Shriram Finance had announced completion of the sale of its entire stake (84.44 per cent of the shareholding on a fully diluted basis) in its affordable housing finance subsidiary SHF to Warburg Pincus for a sale consideration of ₹3,929 crores.

PNB MetLife Joins Hands with Saraswat Bank for Financial Inclusion

PNB MetLife India Insurance Company Ltd (PNB MetLife) has forged a strategic bancassurance partnership with Saraswat Co-operative Bank Ltd, one of the largest urban co-operative banks in India. This collaboration aims to enhance financial inclusion by offering a comprehensive suite of life insurance solutions, including savings, protection, retirement, and group plans, to Saraswat Bank's extensive customer base of approximately 30 lakh individuals, across 302 branches nationwide.

Punjab National Bank and Indian Bank Appoint New MDs and CEOs

The government has appointed Ashok Chandra as the Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Punjab National Bank (PNB) and Binod Kumar as the MD and CEO of Indian Bank. Both have taken charge today. Prior to these appointments, Chandra was an executive director at Canara Bank, while Kumar was an executive director at PNB. Kumar (55) has been given a three-year term and will be eligible for an extension of up to two more years, following a performance review. Chandra (57) has also been appointed for a three-year term.

PV Sindhu Partners with PUMA India

Sports brand Puma India has expanded its sporting portfolio by partnering with Indian badminton icon and two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu in a multi-year collaboration, tapping into the sport's fan base of 57 million in India and its exponential growth potential. India will also be the first country within the Puma universe to promote the popular racquet-sport.

Govt Launches App to Boost Battlefield Tourism

In a historic move to showcase India's military heritage, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh unveiled the Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan app on January 15, 2025, during the 77th Army Day celebrations in Pune. Developed by the Ministry of Defence in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, this app opens the doors to India's most iconic battlefields, offering citizens a chance to explore the country's wartime history like never before.



India's FY25 Growth Forecast Cut to 6.5% by IMF

New Delhi: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has maintained its Indian growth forecast unchanged at 6.5% for FY25 and FY26 in an update to its World Economic Outlook released on Friday. However, in its latest quarterly update, the IMF said India's economic growth has slowed more than expected. "Growth in India also slowed more than expected, led by a sharper-than-expected deceleration in industrial activity," the IMF said in its latest update. On a calendar year basis, India's growth projections are 6.8% for 2025 and 6.5% for 2026, it added.

Yala Glacier in Nepal Set to Vanish by 2040s Due to Climate Change

DEHRADUN: Yala glacier, one of Nepal's most extensively studied glaciers, is expected to vanish by 2040s. It is the only glacier in the entire Himalayas to be included in the Global Glacier Casualty List, a project launched in 2024 through a collaboration between Rice University, University of Iceland, Iceland Glaciological Society, World Meteorological Organization (WMO), World Glacier Monitoring Service, and UNESCO.



Indian IT Giants Lead 2025 Brand Finance IT Services Rankings

India has secured the second position, contributing 36 per cent of the total brand value, a significant achievement fuelled by a 14 per cent increase in brand value, according to Brand Finance 2025 ranking. India follows the US, which maintains its dominant position in IT services brand value, holding 40 per cent of the total brand value.



Ayodhya Celebrates First Anniversary of Ram Lalla's Pran Pratishtha

Ayodhya is immersed in the colour of spiritualism and joy to mark a year of Ram Lalla's Pran Pratishtha ceremony held on January 22 last year. The occasion was celebrated by Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra as 'Pratishtha Dwadashi' on January 11, based on the Hindu calendar.



Kolkata's 'Boi Mela', India's Oldest Book Fair

At book fairs, one can see people strolling from one stall to another, searching for author-signed copies, unique covers, classic editions, and perhaps a tempting 10 per cent discount. For book lovers, it is a magical time of the year when book fairs spring up across the country, including Kolkata. The boi mela, or book fair, holds a uniquely special place in the hearts of Bengalis. More than just a marketplace for books, it is deeply rooted in the city's legacy of reading, intellectual exchange, and knowledge-sharing. Moreover, Kolkata boasts the honour of hosting the country's oldest book exhibition, a cornerstone of its vibrant cultural landscape.

Deloitte Projects Indian Economy to Grow 6.5-6.8% in FY 2024-25

Amid evolving economic conditions, Deloitte India, in its latest Economic Outlook, has revised its annual GDP growth projection for 2024-25 to 6.5-6.8 per cent, with expectations for 6.7-7.3 per cent in the following year. Multinational professional services firm Deloitte said the adjustment reflects the need for cautious optimism as the economy navigates a rising global trade and investment uncertainties.

Tata Tops India, Apple Leads Globally in 2025 Brand Rankings

Tata Group has maintained its position as the leading Indian brand in the Global 500 and ranked at 60 with its brand value up 10% to \$31.6 billion, according to a new report from Brand Finance, a global brand valuation consultancy. Larsen & Toubro Group (L&T) also made a debut in the sector, with brand value at \$7.4 billion while Bajaj Group's brand value was up 23% to \$6 billion. Mahindra Group has increased its brand value by 9% to \$7.2 billion, Wipro Group's brand value increased 2% to \$6.7 billion.

Reliance Industries to Build World's Largest Data Centre in Jamnagar, Gujarat

Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries is set to build the world's largest data centre in Jamnagar, Gujarat, according to a Bloomberg News report. This project marks a significant step in Reliance's entry into India's artificial intelligence (AI) sector. The company has reportedly procured AI semiconductors from Nvidia, a global leader in AI technology. This follows the October 2024 announcement at the Nvidia AI Summit.

CCPA Investigates Ola and Uber Over Alleged Differential Pricing Practices

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) on Thursday issued notices to Ola and Uber for allegedly charging different rates from consumers based on their mobile phone operating systems. "As a follow-up to the earlier observation of apparent #DifferentialPricing based on the different models of mobiles (#iPhones/#Android) being used, Department of Consumer Affairs through the CCPA, has issued notices to major cab aggregators #Ola and #Uber, seeking their responses," Pralhad Joshi.

Uniform Civil Code Rollout Begins in Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code: The Uttarakhand government on Monday rolled out the Uniform Civil Code. The rules manual for the UCC and a portal for applications under the new rules were inaugurated by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami at the CM's camp office in Dehradun. The Cabinet had approved the rules manual on January 20. On January 13, the Uttarakhand government began training its officials to help familiarise them with the UCC portal.

JioSoundPay: Simplifying UPI Payments for Small Businesses

Reliance-backed Jio today announced a new feature for its JioBharat device – a free, industry-first JioSoundPay for small-scale merchants across the nation. The new feature, JioSoundPay, provides instant, multilingual audio confirmations for every UPI payment, enabling seamless and efficient business operations for even the smallest kirana stores, vegetable vendors, and roadside eateries, according to company's press release.

CRED Launches e₹ Wallet, Advancing India's Digital Currency Adoption

Fintech major CRED has launched a beta version of its e-rupee (e₹) wallet, becoming the first fintech to integrate RBI's central bank digital currency. Yes Bank will be the first sponsor bank to enable CBDC issuance for a third party application provider like CRED. In April 2024, the RBI, in its monetary policy document, proposed making CBDC-Retail accessible to a broader segment of users in a sustained manner by enabling non-bank payment system operators to offer CBDC wallets.

Tata Steel Develops India's First Hydrogen-Transport Pipes

Tata Steel has claimed that it is the first Indian company to develop pipes designed for transporting hydrogen, marking an important step in India's clean energy efforts. The company's hydrogen-compliant API X65 pipes were processed at Tata Steel's Khopoli plant using steel produced at its Kalinganagar facility. In a press release, the company said these pipes meet all critical requirements for hydrogen transportation.

BIMTECH Launches BIMCOIN: India's First Campus Blockchain Currency

Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH) has introduced a blockchain-based digital currency, 'BIMCOIN', which is designed exclusively for the BIMTECH's ecosystem. The blockchain platform facilitates secure, transparent, and instant transactions among students, vendors, and administrators.



INTERNATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

Indonesia's Addition Strengthens BRICS Alliance

Indonesia has formally joined the BRICS group, a bloc of emerging economies featuring Russia, China and others that is viewed as a counterweight to the West. Brazil, which holds the rotating presidency of the group, declared on Monday that Indonesia was set to join as a full member. Indonesia said on Tuesday that it "welcomes" the announcement.



Sister Inah Lucas: The World's Oldest Living Person

A nun from Brazil has become the world's oldest person at the age of 116 years 210 days. Inah Canabarro Lucas has taken the titles of oldest woman living and oldest person living following the death of Japan's Tomiko Itooka, as confirmed by LongeviQuest. Tomiko died at her nursing home in Ashiya, Hyōgo Prefecture, on the night of 29 December 2024, although her death wasn't confirmed until today.



Japan Tightens Sanctions on Russia Over Ukraine War

Japan has expanded its sanctions targeting Russia over its war in Ukraine, banning Russian diamonds for non-industrial use and adding dozens of firms and organisations to its trade blacklist. The expanded export blacklist announced on Friday includes 57 organisations in Russia and six organisations in the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Uzbekistan and Armenia. The latest measures bring the total number of Russian organisations under sanctions to 494. Twenty-seven entities from Belarus, one of Russia's closest allies, have also been sanctioned.

Venezuela's Maduro Sworn in Amid Electoral Controversy

Venezuela's Maduro sworn in amid outrage over alleged fraudulent election US announces \$65m bounty for arrest of president, who has led country since 2013 and failed to prove he won recent vote Venezuela's authoritarian president, Nicolás Maduro, has been accused of a shameless and fraudulent power-grab after swearing himself in for a third term, despite domestic outrage and a chorus of international condemnation at his alleged theft of last year's election.



California's Wildfire Defense: The Use of Pink Fire Retardant

As multiple wildfires continue to torch Southern California on Saturday (January 11), authorities are using planes to drop a large amount of bright pink fire retardant to curb the blaze. Nine large retardant-spraying planes, and 20 water-dropping helicopters, were being deployed to fight the fires, the United States Forest Service said on Thursday, according to a report by The New York Times.



Singapore Confers Honorary Citizenship on Tarun Das

President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam on Wednesday bestowed the highest honour of the city-state on Tarun Das, the former director general of the Confederation of the Indian Industry (CII). Mr. Das was awarded the Honorary Citizen Award by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam who will start the official leg of his India tour on Thursday. The Honorary Citizen award is given for "outstanding contribution by a non-Singaporean to the country's growth and development," a press note released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Singapore declared.

US Removes Indian Entities, Adds Chinese Firms to Entity List

United States Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) has removed three Indian organizations from its Entity List, aiming to enhance bilateral energy cooperation. Simultaneously, the BIS has added eleven Chinese entities to the list, citing national security concerns. Indian Entities Removed from the List: Indian Rare Earths, Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Center (IGCAR), and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai, India. This development is being interpreted as a "clear message" of the United States' commitment to bolstering its partnership with India, particularly in areas like defense, technology, and trade. It aligns with broader initiatives to counterbalance growing regional challenges and create a more robust Indo-Pacific ..

India-Spain Declare 2026 as 'Dual Year' for Culture, Tourism, and AI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held an interaction event with the members of the Indian diaspora on Tuesday (local time) during his official visit to Spain. He lauded the diaspora for building a positive image of India, expressed confidence in boosting India-Spain trade ties and announced that India and Spain will mark 2026 as a 'dual year' to celebrate culture, tourism and AI in both the countries. In his speech he said that no foreign visit is complete without meeting diaspora and he brought to attention the successful meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Spanish PM Pedro Sanchez last year.

China launches Pakistan's satellite into space

China successfully launched a Pakistani satellite into space from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center on Friday. The satellite, named PRSC-EO1, was launched at 12:07 p.m. (Beijing Time) by a Long March-2D carrier rocket and entered its planned orbit successfully, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The rocket also carried two other satellites - Tianlu-1 and Lantan-1. This launch marked the 556th flight mission involving the Long March carrier rocket series. China has been launching satellites for Pakistan in the last few years broadening their all-weather alliance into the space arena. Last year, China launched a multi-mission communication satellite for Pakistan. In 2018, China sent two Pakistan satellites into orbit. The PRSS-1, Pakistan's first optical remote sensing satellite, and the PakTES-1A, a smaller observation craft.

TikTok Suspends Operations Following U.S. Ban

A new US law banning TikTok has come into effect, hours after the popular app stopped working across the country. Late on Saturday a message appearing on the TikTok for US users said a law banning TikTok had been enacted, meaning "you can't use TikTok for now". The video-sharing app was banned over concerns about its links to the Chinese government. It was given until 19 January to be sold to an approved US buyer to avert the ban. President Joe Biden had said he would leave the issue to his successor, Donald Trump. The president-elect has said he will "most likely" give TikTok a 90-day reprieve from a ban once he takes office on Monday.

Donald Trump Sworn in as 47th President of the United States

Donald Trump Oath Ceremony: Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47th president of the United States on Monday, ushering in a new term with sweeping promises to reshape the nation. The ceremony, held indoors at the Capitol Rotunda due to frigid weather, marked a historic moment as Trump overcame a tumultuous past four years — including impeachments, indictments, and assassination attempts — to return to the White House.



Russia and Iran Forge Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian arrived in Russia on Friday for the signing of a broad cooperation treaty as his country grapples with growing economic problems and other challenges. After laying a wreath at the Unknown Soldier's Tomb at the Kremlin Wall, Pezeshkian was to hold talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. It's their third meeting since Pezeshkian's election in July.



U.S. Withdraws from WHO and Suspends Foreign Aid

The administration of United States President Donald Trump has announced a freeze on almost all new funding for foreign assistance programmes, with exceptions for allies Israel and Egypt. The order from the US State Department on Friday also includes exceptions for emergency food programmes, but not health programmes that supporters say provide vital, life-saving services. In an accompanying memo, newly confirmed Secretary of State Marco Rubio directed senior officials to “ensure that, to the maximum extent permitted by law, no new obligations shall be made for foreign assistance”.

Trump Withdraws US from Paris Agreement Again

President Donald Trump has once again vowed to withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement, the world's most important effort to tackle rising temperatures. The first Trump administration made a similar move in 2017, but that step was promptly reversed on President Joe Biden's first day in office in 2021. The US will now have to wait a year before it will be officially out of the pact.

Usha Vance, The First Indian-American and Hindu Second Lady of the United States

Washington: Usha Vance became the first Indian-American and Hindu Second Lady after her husband J.D. Vance was sworn in as the 50th Vice President of the US on Monday. She held the Bible in one hand, and their daughter Mirabel Rose in the other, as Vance placed his left hand on the religious text, and raising his right hand took the oath of office.



Federal Judge Halts Trump's Birthright Citizenship Order

A federal judge in Seattle has temporarily blocked Donald Trump's attempt to end birthright citizenship in the US. US District Court Judge John Coughenour called Trump's executive order "blatantly unconstitutional" and issued a restraining order blocking it from going into force after a 25-minute hearing on Thursday. Under a long-standing interpretation of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, nearly anyone born inside the US is automatically given citizenship.



DeepSeek AI Surpasses ChatGPT on US App Store

A Chinese-made artificial intelligence (AI) model called DeepSeek has shot to the top of Apple Store's downloads, stunning investors and sinking some tech stocks. Its latest version was released on 20 January, quickly impressing AI experts before it got the attention of the entire tech industry - and the world. US President Donald Trump said it was a "wake-up call" for US companies who must focus on "competing to win". What makes DeepSeek so special is the company's claim that it was built at a fraction of the cost of industry-leading models like OpenAI - because it uses fewer advanced chips.

