

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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## INDIA'S 6-POINT PLAN TO STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC TIES WITH THE EU

### In Context

- India has unveiled a 6-point plan aimed at fostering a stronger economic partnership with the European Union (EU).

### About the 6-Point Plan

- Trusted Partnership:** Strengthen economic ties to create unprecedented opportunities for a combined population of 2 billion.
  - Build a foundation of trust for sustained cooperation.
- Fair Trade Agenda:** Develop a mutually beneficial Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers.
  - Ensure benefits for small enterprises, farmers, and fishermen, enhancing equitable trade practices.
- High-Quality Production:** Adopt EU best practices to harmonize standards and achieve "zero defect, zero effect" manufacturing, focusing on quality and sustainability.
- Technological Collaboration:** Jointly develop cutting-edge technologies and strengthen critical raw material supply chains.
  - Enhance resilience against non-market economies and promote fair practices in technology sharing.
- Sustainable Development:** Align trade with sustainable development goals under the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.
  - Cooperate in renewable energy, green technologies, and environmental protection.
- Mutual Growth:** Leverage India's talent pool to act as a "living bridge" for mutual development.
  - Enhance cultural and economic exchanges to boost innovation and shared prosperity.

### India-EU Relations: An Overview

- Political Cooperation:** Relations date back to the 1960s, with a significant boost from the 1994 cooperation agreement.
  - Key milestones:** 2000: First India-EU Summit.
  - 2004: Upgraded to a Strategic Partnership at the 5th India-EU Summit in The Hague.
- Economic Cooperation:** Bilateral trade reached USD 137.41 billion (2023-24), making the EU India's largest trading partner in goods. Bilateral trade in services was USD 51.45 billion (2023).

- Water Management:** The India-EU Water Partnership (IEWP), established in 2016, enhances frameworks in water management.
- Nuclear Energy:** Agreement in 2020 for R&D cooperation on peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
- Trade and Technology Council (TTC):** Established in 2023 to promote collaboration on trade, technology, and security.

### Challenges in India-EU Collaboration

- Legacy Trade Issues:** Persistent disputes over tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and standards harmonization.
- Technology Transfer:** Challenges in aligning intellectual property rights (IPR) and ensuring fair sharing of technology.
- Critical Raw Materials:** Geopolitical tensions and competition hinder securing vital resources for both parties.

### Way Forward

- Accelerate FTA Negotiations:** Focus on resolving issues related to market access, trade facilitation, and dispute resolution.
- Enhanced R&D Partnerships:** Establish joint research centers and innovation hubs to drive technological collaboration.
- Sustainability Focus:** Invest in green technologies and renewable energy to achieve long-term environmental and economic benefits.

### Conclusion

- India's 6-point plan offers a robust roadmap for deepening India-EU relations, addressing critical issues like trade, technology, and sustainability. By leveraging complementary strengths and addressing existing challenges, this partnership can play a transformative role in fostering global economic stability and resilience.

Source: TH

## INDIA'S STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY

### In Context

- External affairs minister S Jaishankar has met Japanese and Australian counterparts in Washington and reviewed bilateral ties as well Quad developments.

### Key Priorities for Jaishankar's Washington Visit

- Early Modi-Trump Meeting:** Building on the strong rapport between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump which was established during Trump's first term.

- ♦ Focus is on strengthening cooperation on defense, energy security, and counter-terrorism.
- ♦ Setting the tone for high-level bilateral engagements in the coming years.
- **Quad Summit and Regional Security:** Strengthening of the Quad by reinforcing collaboration among India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.
  - ♦ This would align with India's Act East Policy, promoting peace and connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Trade and Economic Collaboration:** Addressing long-standing tariff issues, including U.S. duties on Indian steel and aluminum. Advocating for fair trade practices to boost bilateral commerce.
- **Immigration and Talent Mobility:** Advocating for smoother visa processing and addressing restrictions affecting Indian professionals.
  - ♦ **Engaging the Indian Diaspora by** strengthening ties with the Indian-American community, a vital link in India-U.S. relations.

#### Strategic Significance of the Agenda

- **Addressing Global Geopolitical Shifts:** Counterbalancing China's growing assertiveness in Asia, particularly in the Indo-Pacific.
  - ♦ Strengthening the Quad to promote regional peace and stability.
- **Economic Synergy:** Expanding collaboration in emerging areas like artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and cybersecurity to capitalize India's position as a global tech hub.
- **Shared Democratic Values:** Reinforcing mutual commitment to democracy and a rules-based international order.

#### Challenges Ahead

- **Trade and Tariff Disputes:** Persistent disagreements on commodity tariffs and non-tariff barriers.
- **Immigration Restrictions:** Navigating U.S. visa caps and delays for Indian professionals.
- **Geopolitical Rivalries:** Divergent stances on global conflicts, such as Russia, may strain cooperation.
- **Technology Barriers:** Restrictions on sensitive technology transfers to India impact defense collaboration.
- **Domestic Pressures:** Political and economic challenges in both nations may influence policy priorities.

#### Way Forward

- **Streamlining Trade Agreements:** Reducing barriers to ensure mutual economic benefits.
- **Advancing Immigration Reforms:** Collaborating on frameworks to facilitate talent mobility and visa efficiency.
- **Enhancing Quad Engagement:** Strengthening regional connectivity and maritime security initiatives.
- **Promoting Renewable Energy Collaboration:** Exploring joint ventures in clean and sustainable energy technologies.
- **Frequent High-Level Dialogues:** Establishing regular interactions to address emerging opportunities and challenges.

#### Conclusion

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's Washington agenda underscores a strategic vision for bolstering India-U.S. relations.
- By addressing critical issues like trade, immigration, and regional security, the agenda seeks to transform challenges into opportunities for mutual growth. This comprehensive approach reaffirms India's commitment to a robust partnership with the U.S., ensuring a future of shared prosperity and global leadership.

Source: ET

## FIRST EXECUTIVE ORDERS BY DONALD TRUMP (47TH PRESIDENT OF US)

#### In News

- Recently, 47th President of US Donald Trump signed a series of executive orders on his first day in office.

#### About Executive orders

- They are official directives issued by the President to manage the federal government.
- They can instruct federal agencies, request reports, or implement major policies.
  - ♦ While some orders are minor, like granting holidays to federal employees, others set out significant policy changes, such as establishing regulations on artificial intelligence.
- Presidents often use executive orders to achieve goals that may not pass through Congress.



### Key Highlights of Trump's Executive Orders

- **Pardons:** Pardoned 1,500 individuals, including those involved in the January 6, 2021 Capitol riot, such as members of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers.
- **Immigration:** Reversed Biden-era policies, prioritizing deportation of all undocumented individuals.
  - ♦ Suspended the U.S. refugee resettlement program for four months.
  - ♦ Declared a national emergency on the **U.S.-Mexico border** and sent troops to assist immigration enforcement.
  - ♦ Proposed ending birthright citizenship, facing anticipated legal challenges.
- **Undoing Biden Policies:** Revoked 78 executive orders by Biden, covering topics such as COVID relief, diversity, and clean energy.
  - ♦ Directed federal agencies to preserve records related to alleged political persecutions.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Rescinded Biden's executive orders promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and LGBTQ+ protections.
- **Government Efficiency:** Created the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, to streamline federal operations, facing immediate legal challenges.
- **Climate and Energy:** Withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement. Reversed restrictions on oil drilling in the Arctic and on federal lands, focusing on energy independence.
  - ♦ Declared a national energy emergency to boost oil and gas production.
- **Inflation and Economy:** Ordered departments to take measures to reduce prices, citing Biden's policies as contributing to inflation.
  - ♦ Signaled plans for 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico and directed agencies to assess China's compliance with trade deals.
- **Foreign Policy and Aid:** Paused foreign development assistance for 90 days to assess its alignment with U.S. interests.
  - ♦ Rejected the OECD global minimum corporate tax deal, stating it requires Congressional approval.
- **Free Speech:** Signed an order aimed at restoring freedom of speech and ending federal censorship of online platforms.
- **Health Policy:** Withdrew from the World Health Organization (WHO), citing its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Implications for U.S.-India Relations

- **Trade Policies:** Trump's protectionist stance could result in increased tariffs on Indian exports, as the U.S. is India's largest export market.
  - ♦ Potential WTO rule violations could complicate bilateral trade relations.
- **Opportunities in Manufacturing:** Trump's aggressive stance on China may open doors for India's manufacturing sector, particularly through production-linked incentives (PLIs).
  - ♦ However, India needs to push structural reforms to capitalize on this opportunity.
- **Technology and Innovation:** India's STEM talent could benefit from U.S. investments in AI, quantum computing, and emerging technologies.
  - ♦ India's IT sector may see growth opportunities, although H-1B visa restrictions remain a risk.
- **Immigration and Visas:** Stricter immigration policies, including H-1B visa restrictions, could adversely affect Indian professionals working in the U.S.
  - ♦ India's IT firms may face challenges in deploying talent to U.S. markets.
- **Energy and Climate:** Trump's focus on fossil fuels contrasts with India's renewable energy ambitions, creating divergence in climate cooperation.

### Conclusion and Way Forward

- Donald Trump's presidency could reshape global economic dynamics, influencing business and geopolitical relations, including India's investments in the US.
- Despite the challenges, India's relationship with the US under Trump's second term could lead to a transformative period, requiring careful navigation of trade, immigration, and diplomatic issues.

Source: TH

## RBI ISSUED NORMS FOR ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANIES (ARCS)

### Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced revised norms for **Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs)** to streamline the settlement of dues with borrowers.

### Key Features of the Guidelines

- **Framework for Settlement of Dues:** ARCs must adopt a Board-approved policy to govern settlements.

- **Differentiated Approach Based on Loan Size:**
  - ♦ **For dues above ₹1 crore:** Approval requires recommendations by an Independent Advisory Committee (IAC), comprising experts in technical, financial, or legal domains.
  - ♦ **For dues up to ₹1 crore:** Settlement proposals can be approved by officials not involved in acquiring the concerned financial asset to avoid conflicts of interest.
- **Recovery Safeguards:** Settlements must ensure the Net Present Value (NPV) of the settlement is not less than the realisable value of securities.

#### Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC)

- It is a financial institution that **buys the NPA or bad assets from banks and financial institutions** so that the latter can clean up their balance sheets.
  - ♦ The **Union Budget 2021-22**, announced the setting up of Asset Reconstruction Companies in India.
  - ♦ ARCs play a critical role in the resolution of stressed financial assets of banks and financial institutions, thereby enhancing the overall health of the financial system.
- ARCs are regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under the **Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002**.

#### What are Non-Performing Assets (NPAs)?

- Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) are loans or advances issued by banks or financial institutions that no longer bring in money for the lender since the borrower has failed to make payments on the principal and interest of the loan for at least 90 days.

#### National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL)

- NARCL, a government entity, was incorporated in **2021** with majority stake held by Public Sector Banks and balance by Private banks with **Canara Bank** being the sponsor bank.
- It is registered with the Reserve Bank of India as an **Asset Reconstruction Company** under **Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002**.

#### Functions of ARCs

- **Acquisition of Bad Loans:** ARCs purchase NPAs from banks and financial institutions at a discounted price, allowing lenders to clean up their balance sheets.

- **Resolution of Stressed Assets:** After acquiring bad loans, ARCs use various strategies such as restructuring, one-time settlements, or asset liquidation to recover dues.
- **Securitization of Loans:** ARCs may issue securities or bonds to investors, backed by the underlying bad loans, to raise funds for further asset acquisitions.

#### Concluding remarks

- ARCs serve as a vital mechanism in India's financial ecosystem, addressing the pressing issue of non-performing assets (NPAs) and enhancing the health of the banking sector.
- By streamlining asset recovery and resolution, ARCs not only enable banks to focus on fresh credit but also contribute to financial stability and economic growth.

Source: TH

## GLOBAL ECONOMIC PROSPECTS (GEP) REPORT 2025

#### Context

- The World Bank has released the **Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report 2025**.
  - ♦ It is a **flagship biannual publication** of the World Bank Group that examines trends and projections in the global economy. It emphasizes emerging markets and developing economies.

#### Major Highlights

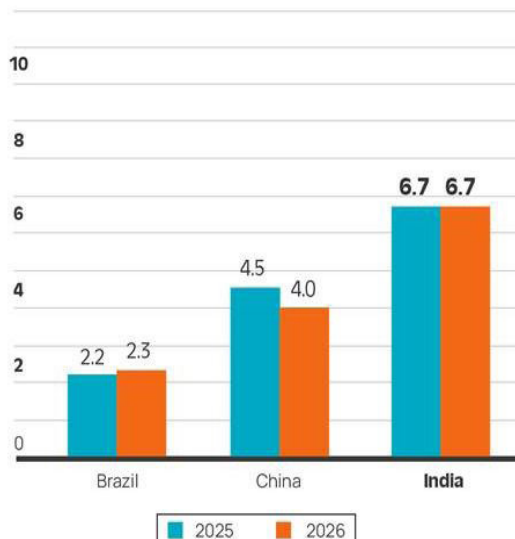
- **Global Economy:** It is projected to expand by 2.7% in both 2025 and 2026, the same pace as in 2024.
- **Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs)** have undergone significant transformation since 2000, now contributing about 45% of global GDP, compared to 25% at the start of the century.
  - ♦ India, China, and Brazil, the three largest EMDEs, have collectively driven approximately 60% of annual global growth since the start of the century.
- **Trade Restrictions:** New global trade restrictions in 2024 were five times the 2010-19 average.
  - ♦ As a result, overall economic growth dropped—from 5.9% in the 2000s to 3.5% in the 2020s.
- **Challenges and Recommendations:**
  - ♦ Rising trade tensions could reduce global growth. Persistent inflation could delay expected cuts in interest rates.

- ♦ With the right policies, these economies can even transform some challenges into significant opportunities.
- ♦ All countries, meanwhile, should work together to strengthen global trade governance, with the support of multilateral institutions.

### India Specific Highlights

- **Growth:** India is projected to remain the fastest-growing large economy for FY26 and FY27 (growth rate - 6.7%), reaffirming its dominance in the global economic landscape.
- ♦ Growth in India's services sector is expected to remain robust, while manufacturing activity will strengthen.

### Top EMDEs Projected GDP Growth Rates



- **Investments:** India's Investment growth is expected to remain steady, supported by rising private investments, improved corporate balance sheets, and favourable financing conditions.

### Reasons for the Growth

- Infrastructure development under the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan.
- Fostering innovation through initiatives like Startup India and the Production Linked Incentive Scheme, these reforms are transforming sectors such as **manufacturing, digital economy, and financial inclusion**.

### Conclusion

- The continued strength of India's economic performance, as projected by both the World Bank and IMF, underscores the country's resilience and highlights the sustained strength of its economic fundamentals, making India a crucial player in the global economic landscape.

### About World Bank

- It is an **international financial institution** that provides loans and grants to the governments of developing countries for the purpose of pursuing capital projects.
- It was established along with the **International Monetary Fund at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference**.
- **It comprises two institutions:** the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), and the International Development Association (IDA).
- **Mandate:** The World Bank Group has a mandate to reduce poverty and support sustainable development.
  - ♦ The institution focuses on a wide range of areas, including education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability.
- **Reports:** World Development Report (WDR), Global Economic Prospects (GEP), Business Ready (B-READY), Global Financial Inclusion (Findex) Database, Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report.

Source: PIB

## POPULATION THAT CANNOT AFFORD A HEALTHY DIET ON RISE

### Context

- As per a research, published in the journal Nature Food, the **share of the population that cannot afford a healthy diet has been on the rise**.
  - ♦ It was conducted under the Food Systems Countdown Initiative, led by United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition.

### Major Highlights

- The study evaluates **42 key indicators of food systems**, categorised into five themes:
  - ♦ Diets, nutrition and health;
  - ♦ Environment, natural resources and production;
  - ♦ Livelihoods, poverty and equity;
  - ♦ Resilience;
  - ♦ Governance.
- **Of the 42 indicators**, 20 have been trending in a desirable direction since 2000.
- There is also a rise in the population **experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity**.

- These indicators, which have worsened globally, **pull down the progress needed to achieve SDGs and other global targets.**

### Global Targets

- **Goal 2** of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is all about creating a **world free of hunger by 2030.**
- **The 2024 Global Hunger Index** score for the world is **18.3**, with 42 countries still experiencing alarming or serious hunger.
  - ♦ Hunger is most severe in **sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia** where the crisis has soared to humanitarian levels.
- Little progress has been made on reducing hunger since 2016, and the prospects for achieving Zero Hunger by the target date of 2030 are grim.

### Status in India

- **India** has been ranked **105th out of 127 countries** in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2024, placing it in the **"serious"** category for hunger levels.
- The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023 report states that around **224 million people in India** faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2021-22.

### India's Efforts to achieve zero hunger by 2030

- **Mid Day Meal Programme:** The Programme aims to boost enrolment, retention, and attendance while improving the nutritional status of children in government, local body, and government-aided schools.
- **Food Fortification:** The government promotes fortified rice, wheat flour, and edible oils as part of the public distribution system.
- **The National Food Security Act, 2013:** The Act provides for coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- **Poshan Tracker:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development developed the Poshan Tracker ICT application as a key governance tool.
  - ♦ It uses WHO's expanded tables with **day-based z-scores** to dynamically assess stunting, wasting, underweight, and obesity in children based on height, weight, gender, and age.
- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana** was launched to alleviate hardships faced by the poor due to economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak.

- **Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0** includes key schemes such as the POSHAN Abhiyaan, Anganwadi Services and Scheme for Adolescent Girls as direct targeted interventions to address the problem of malnutrition in the country.

Source: DTE

## INDIA BECAME THE 7TH LARGEST PRODUCER OF COFFEE

### Context

- As per the Commerce and Industry Ministry, India is now the **seventh-largest coffee producer globally**, with exports reaching 1.29 billion dollars in the last financial year.
  - ♦ This is nearly double the 719 million dollars worth of exports in 2020-21.

### About

- Top buyers include **Italy, Belgium, and Russia.**
- India primarily exports **unroasted coffee beans**, there is a growing demand for **value-added products like roasted and instant coffee.**
- **Domestic consumption** has also increased due to the rise of **café culture, higher disposable incomes, and a growing preference for coffee over tea in India.**

### Coffee Production

- **Brazil** is the world's largest coffee producer, contributing about 40% of global production, followed by **Vietnam.**
- India produces two **types of coffee: Arabica and Robusta.**
  - ♦ Coffee is predominantly an **export oriented commodity** and **65% to 70%** of coffee produced in the country is exported.
- **Areas:** Coffee is traditionally grown in the Western Ghats spread over **Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.**
  - ♦ It is also grown in the nontraditional areas of **Andhra Pradesh and Odisha** as well as in the **North East states.**
- **Leading States:** Karnataka leads in coffee production, followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

### Climatic Conditions

- Coffee plants thrive in **temperatures ranging from 15°C to 24°C.** Extreme temperatures outside this range can adversely affect growth and yield.
- India cultivates all of its coffee under a **well-defined two-tier mixed shade canopy**, comprising evergreen leguminous trees.



- ♦ Shade trees **prevent soil erosion** on a sloping terrain; they enrich the soil by recycling nutrients from deeper layers, protecting the coffee plant from seasonal fluctuations in temperature.

#### Coffee Board of India

- The Government of India established the 'Coffee Board' through a constitutional act "**Coffee Act VII of 1942**" under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- The Board comprises 33 members including the Chairman and the Secretary & Chief Executive Officer.
- It is an organisation that **promotes coffee production in India**.

Source: AI

## NEWS IN SHORT

### KONARK TEMPLE

#### Context

- The President of Singapore, Tharman Shanmugaratnam visited the Sun Temple at Konark in Odisha's Puri district.

#### Konark Sun Temple

- **Deity:** Konark Sun Temple is a 13th-century CE temple dedicated to the Hindu Sun God Surya.
- **History:** The temple was constructed during the reign of king **Narasimhadeva I** of the **Eastern Ganga dynasty** about **1250 CE**.
- **Cultural Significance:** It was declared a **UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984**. It remains a major pilgrimage site for Hindus, who gather here every year for the **Chandrabhaga Mela** around the month of **February**.
- **Other Names:** This temple was called the "**Black Pagoda**" in European sailor accounts because it looked like a great tiered tower which appeared black.
  - ♦ Similarly, the Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the "**White Pagoda**".
- **Architecture:** The temple was designed in the shape of a huge **chariot** drawn by **7 horses** on **12 pairs (total 24)** of gorgeously **decorated wheels** at its base.

Source: TH

### NARAYANA GURU

#### Context

- **The Narayana Guru Digital Research Resource Platform (NGDRRP)**, a comprehensive digital archive launched in 2023, is set to go fully online by May 2025.

#### About

- **Early Life:** Narayana Guru was born in 1856 in Chempazhanthy, Kerala, into a family belonging to the Ezhava caste, traditionally marginalized under the rigid caste system.
- **Teachings:** Narayana Guru emphasized the principles of equality, universal brotherhood, and spiritual upliftment.
  - ♦ His famous dictum, "**One Caste, One Religion, One God for All**," encapsulates his vision of an inclusive society.

#### Major Contributions

- **Temple Entry Movement:** Narayana Guru spearheaded efforts to ensure temple access for marginalized communities.
  - ♦ He consecrated the **Aruvippuram Shiva Temple in 1888**, challenging the orthodox norms that restricted temple entry based on caste.
- **Promotion of Social Equality:** He actively fought against untouchability, caste discrimination, and social evils, institutionalizing reforms through the **SNDP Yogam (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam)**.
- **Literary Contributions:** Texts like **Atmopadesa Satakam** and **Daiva Dasakam** reflect his philosophical insights and practical guidance for spiritual and ethical living.

Source: TH

### PRAJA MANDAL MOVEMENT IN PUNJAB

#### Context

- January 20 marks the death anniversary of **Sewa Singh Thikriwala**, who spearheaded the **Praja Mandal Movement in Punjab**.

#### About

- It was a **self-rule movement** against the rulers of Punjab's **erstwhile princely states**.
- **Aim:** To protect the civil liberties of the masses, protest against oppressive taxes, seek reforms



in the peasants' conditions, open educational institutions, and have a responsible government.

- **Areas:** The movement was active in the Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Malerkotla and Faridkot princely states initially.

Source: IE

## WOMEN IN CHOLA EMPIRE

### Context

- Historian Anirudh Kanisetti's book, **Lords of Earth and Sea: A History of the Chola Empire**, sheds light on facets of the Chola empire, including the pivotal role of women like **Sembiyan Mahadevi**.

### About

- **The Chola dynasty**, one of the longest-ruling empires in Indian history, flourished from the 9th to 13th centuries CE.
- **Karikala Chola**, laid the foundation of the dynasty, however it was during the **Vijayalaya Chola**, that the dynasty began its significant rise.
- The empire reached its zenith under **Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014 CE)** and his son **Rajendra Chola I (1014–1044 CE)**.

### Chola Administration

- **The empire was divided** into mandalams (provinces), valanadus (districts), and nadu (villages).
- **The local self-government system** in villages, known as the **ur, sabha, and nagaram**, was a hallmark of their administration.

### Contributions to Art and Architecture

- **Temple architecture:** The **Brihadeshwara Temple** (Thanjavur) is an architectural marvel built by Rajaraja Chola I and is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.
  - ♦ The **Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple** and the **Airavatesvara Temple** are other iconic examples.
- **Bronze Sculpture:** The Cholas excelled in bronze casting, particularly the creation of **Nataraja sculptures**, which depict Lord Shiva as the cosmic dancer.

### Maritime Trade and Expansion

- **The Cholas navy** was one of the most powerful in the world at the time.
- **Rajendra Chola I** undertook successful expeditions to Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, the **Maldives**, and the **Srivijaya Empire** (modern Indonesia), establishing trade and cultural links.

### Role of Women in the Chola Empire

- **Sembiyan Mahadevi, a queen of Gandaraditya Chola (around 950–957 CE)**, was a pivotal figure during a transformative period in the Chola dynasty.
  - ♦ After the untimely demise of Gandaraditya, she emerged as a regent for her son **Madhurantaka Uttama Chola**.
  - ♦ She is credited with commissioning the construction of numerous temples, including **Kailasanathar Temple in Tamil Nadu**.
- **Kundavai, the sister of Rajaraja I**, was a trusted advisor to her brother and played a crucial role in supporting his administration.
  - ♦ She donated generously for the establishment of Vedic schools and medical institutions.

Source: TH

## RATNAGIRI BUDDHIST EXCAVATION

### In News

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) resumed excavations at the 5th-13th Century Buddhist complex in Ratnagiri, Odisha, after 60 years.

### About Buddhist Excavation

- Ratnagiri is part of **Odisha's Diamond Triangle**, along with Udaygiri and Lalitgiri, known for ancient Buddhist sites.
- It was a major center of **Buddhist learning**, rivaling Nalanda, and hosted both **Mahayana and Vajrayana sects** of Buddhism.
- **Discoveries:** The team has **unearthed a colossal Buddha head**, a massive palm, an ancient wall, and inscribed Buddhist relics, dating back to the 8th and 9th Century AD.



## ODISHA & SOUTHEAST ASIA

■ Odisha has long enjoyed maritime and trade links with Southeast Asian countries. The state annually holds Baliyatra (voyage to Bali) – a festival to commemorate the maritime and cultural links between Kalinga and Bali and other South and Southeast Asian regions

■ Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, who invaded Kalinga in 261 BC but eventually embraced Buddhism after the war, helped spread the religion to Sri Lanka, and Central and Southeast Asia

- ♦ The last excavations occurred between 1958 and 1961, revealing a brick stupa, monastic complexes, and numerous votive stupas.
- ♦ Chinese monk Hiuen Tsang, who visited Odisha in the 7th Century, might have also visited the site.
- **Historical Significance:** Odisha's historical relationship with Buddhism dates back to Emperor Ashoka (304-232 BCE), who embraced Buddhism after his Kalinga invasion.
  - ♦ Odisha played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia, particularly through trade connections.
    - The state flourished under the Bhaumakara dynasty (8th-10th Century).
- **Excavation Goals:** The goals were to uncover more of the site and find evidence of Odisha's links to Southeast Asian culture.

Source :IE

## ENTITY LOCKER

### In News

- The **National eGovernance Division (NeGD)**, under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has developed **Entity Locker**, a cutting-edge digital platform designed to transform the management and verification of business/organisation documents.

### About Entity Locker

- Entity Locker is a secure, cloud-based digital platform designed to streamline the storage, sharing, and verification of business documents for a wide range of organizations in India.

### Key Features

- **Target Entities:** Large corporations, MSMEs, startups, trusts, societies, and other organizations.
  - ♦ Aligns with India's Digital Public Infrastructure initiative and the Union Budget 2024-25 vision for enhanced digital governance.
- **Secure Digital Infrastructure:** 10 GB encrypted cloud storage for safe document storage.
  - ♦ Legally valid digital signatures for authentication.
  - ♦ Aadhaar-authenticated, role-based access management for secure and accountable access.
- **Integration Capabilities:** Real-time access and verification via integration with government databases.
- Seamless connectivity with systems like:
  - ♦ Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)
  - ♦ Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN)

- ♦ Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)
- **Consent-based Sharing:** Ensures secure sharing of sensitive business information.

### Benefits

- **Operational Efficiency:** Reduces administrative overhead and document processing times.
  - ♦ Streamlines document sharing and compliance processes.
  - ♦ Tracks all document-related activities for enhanced accountability.
- **Enhanced Integration:** Direct integration with government platforms enables efficient compliance and reporting.
- **Strategic impact:** Entity Locker is part of India's Digital Public Infrastructure and aligns with the Digital India Programme, reflecting MeitY's commitment to leveraging technology for improving governance and fostering economic growth.

Source: PIB

## NEUROMORPHIC DEVICE

### In News

- Scientists at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR) in Bengaluru have developed a revolutionary **neuromorphic device** that emulates the human body's response to pain.

### Key Features

- **Pain Response Simulation:** Mimics the function of nociceptors, the sensors in our body that detect pain and trigger protective responses.
  - ♦ Emulates the habituation process, where repeated exposure to pain reduces sensitivity over time.
- **Adaptability:** Learns and adjusts its response dynamically, similar to how the human body adapts to chronic stressors.

Source: TOI

## WHITE GOODS

### In News

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has selected 24 companies for the third round of the **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for White Goods**.

### About

- White goods refer to large home appliances, typically used for household purposes, such as cooking, cleaning, and refrigeration. They were

originally manufactured in white enamel-coated steel, giving them their name, although they now come in various colors.

- **For example:** Kitchen Appliances, Laundry appliances etc.
- Also, Brown goods are lightweight electronic devices, mainly for entertainment and communication. **Examples:** TVs, Radios etc

**Source: PIB**

## VIKAS ENGINE

### In News

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully demonstrated the restart of its Vikas liquid engine at the Propulsion Complex in Mahendragiri .

### Vikas Engine

- It is the workhorse engine with a nominal thrust of 80 tonnes.
- It is a key component powering the liquid stages of ISRO's launch vehicles, including the second stages of **PSLV & GSLV, liquid strap-ons of GSLV, and the core liquid stage of LVM3.**
  - ♦ Liquid engines that can throttle thrust are crucial for enabling booster stage recovery in future launch vehicles.
- It is developed by ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre.

**Source : TH**

## EXERCISE LA PEROUSE

### In News

- The indigenously designed guided missile destroyer INS Mumbai is participating in the fourth edition of the Multinational Exercise LA PEROUSE.

### About the Exercise

- The exercise is scheduled from January 16 to 24, taking place in the strategic **straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok**, which connect the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.
- **Participating Countries:** Australia, Canada, France, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the U.K., and the U.S. are involved in the exercise.
- **Strategic Importance:** The exercise focuses on strengthening maritime safety, developing interoperability among navies, and enhancing collective action in maritime crises, particularly in the strategically important straits vulnerable to various risks.
  - ♦ India's participation highlights its strong synergy, coordination, and commitment to a rules-based international maritime order.
  - ♦ The exercise aligns with India's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), aiming to enhance maritime cooperation and ensure a safer Indo-Pacific region.

**Source :TH**

