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VOLUNTARY DRUG SCREENING FOR STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Context

- The Union Government has recently introduced **optional and confidential drug testing for students** enrolling top higher educational institutions like IITs and IIMs as part of the **Narcotics Control Bureau's Vision Document on Narcotics Control 2026-29** to control substance usage among the youth.

About Voluntary Drug Screening Initiative

- The **Department of Higher Education (Ministry of Education)** has urged **centrally sponsored higher educational institutions** to encourage voluntary urine drug screening of new admissions.
- The idea is being rolled out in a staggered way starting with IITs, IIMs and one Central University in the 2026-27 academic session.
- The programme forms part of the Government of India's broader strategy to reduce drug demand and promote preventive healthcare among students.

Key Features of the Initiative

- Voluntary and Confidential:** A urine drug screening is not needed, although students may choose to undertake a drug screening.
 - Tests screen for substances such as Amphetamines, Cocaine, Marijuana (Cannabis), Benzodiazepines, and Phencyclidine (PCP).
 - Reports need to be submitted in **sealed confidential envelopes** to designated student wellness committees.
 - Results are confidential, anonymised, meant solely for counselling and wellness support.
 - Not related to admissions or academic evaluation.
- Phased Rollout**
 - The objective is to cover nearly **170 centrally funded higher educational institutions** by 2029.
 - 2026–27:** IITs, IIMs, one Central University
 - 2027–28:** 32 NITs, 8 IISERs, 25 IIITs, 3 SPAs, 4 Centrally Funded Technical Institutions

- 2028–29:** 46 Central Universities and 4 Deemed-to-be Universities

- The institute's advisory focuses primarily on confidentiality and counselling while admission is not affected by the results.

Significance of the Initiative

- Public Health Approach:** The plan moves away from punishment towards early detection, therapy and rehabilitation in line with modern public health methods.
- Early Intervention:** Through screening, students can be identified in need of psychological or medical care before the reliance escalates.
- Evidence-Based Policy:** The program supports the Government's upcoming national survey on substance use that is expected to provide updated evidence for policy making.
- Campus Well-being:** Initiatives for a drug-free campus can promote student health, academic success, campus safety and mental health.

Factors Behind the Drug Menace

- Strategic location:** India's closeness to the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle make India vulnerable to cross-border drug trafficking.
- Organised crime:** Drug trafficking fuels organised crime, money laundering, and narco-terrorism.
- Evolving trafficking methods:** Greater use of maritime routes, commercial cargo, encrypted communication, and technology.

Related Government Initiatives

- Kashi Declaration (2025):** it provides a five-year roadmap for a youth-led drug de-addiction movement.
- Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA):** Promotes awareness through nationwide anti-drug campaigns.
- Nasha Mukh Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan:** The initiative is part of the Government's larger **Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA)**.
- National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR):** Implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, it supports de-addiction centres, preventive education, treatment and rehabilitation, skill development and reintegration.

- **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985:** It has the legislative framework for prevention of illicit drug trafficking, control of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and punishment for offences relating to drugs.
- **Law Enforcement:** Anti-Narcotics Task Forces (ANTFs), Joint Coordination Committee (JCC), and the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Concerns and Challenges

- **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Confidentiality must be maintained to avoid stigma and exploitation of sensitive health information.
- **Informed Consent:** Students should be assured that testing is voluntary and that they will not be coerced into participating.
- **Risk of Stigmatisation:** Even when screening is done confidentially, anxiety may be generated if therapy methods are insufficient or confidentiality is abused.
- **Institutional Capacity:** Higher education institutions will need to ensure they have the right number of skilled counsellors, mental health specialists, standard operating procedures and effective data protection measures.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Medical ethics requires respect for autonomy, confidentiality in handling health records, non-discrimination and actions that are supportive in nature.

Way Forward

- Guarantee free access to mental health and addiction counselling on campuses.
- Create effective data privacy and confidentiality procedures.
- Promote awareness programmes for parents, professors and peers.
- Campaign for life skills education and mental health in higher education.
- Evaluate the programme periodically for efficacy and unwanted outcomes.
- Use a multidisciplinary approach that includes education, health, law enforcement and community groups.

Source: TH

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS CLOSURE

In News

- A recent NITI Aayog report said some 94,000 government schools were closed over the past decade, an average of 25 a day, contributing to a 2.26 crore decline in government school enrolment.

Government schools Closure

- Government schools are the main source of education for the economically weaker sections, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and many minority communities.
 - ♦ Education is a **Concurrent List subject**, but the Centre also has a responsibility, as the RTE Act, 2009 is a Central law which makes it mandatory to have neighbourhood schools.
- The share of students in government schools has **drastically reduced from 71% in 2005 to 49.24% in 2024-25**, showing a significant shift from public education.

Scale of Closure

- State governments have closed down or merged thousands of government schools as part of their policies of **school rationalisation, consolidation and cluster development**.
 - ♦ The measures are aimed at better resource utilisation and are in tune with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
- The rationalisation of schools has resulted in **a substantial reduction in access to neighbourhood schools**, particularly for poor and rural children.
 - ♦ Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir are the most affected States.
 - ♦ In Madhya Pradesh, over 7.37 lakh children do not have school records, 11.38 lakh children are at risk of dropping out, and thousands of government schools have extremely low or zero admissions.
 - ♦ In Jammu & Kashmir, children have been forced to travel 4-6 km for school mergers, diluting the RTE neighbourhood school principle, raising questions of access and equity in education.
- According to **National UDISE+ data**, the number of government schools has come down from 11.07 lakh (2014-15) to 10.17 lakh (2023-24) while private schools have gone up.

Major Reasons for Closure of government schools

- **Resource Pooling under NEP 2020:** Many state Governments are merging low-enrolment schools into school complexes to share infrastructure, teachers and other resources.
- **Shift towards Private Schools:** Parents are opting for private schools due to poor infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, inadequate sanitation, and the demand for English-medium education.
- **Teacher Shortages:** Governments frequently merge or close down schools with low enrolment, particularly single-teacher schools, rather than fill teacher vacancies.
- **Governance Issues:** The problem of declining enrolment is often a consequence of administrative neglect and poor quality of schools and not lack of demand for education.

Impacts

- **Weakening of the Right to Education (RTE):** Mergers of schools increase travel distances, violating the RTE Act's promise of neighbourhood schools.
- **Girls are at greater risk:** Longer distances to school raise safety concerns, higher dropout rates and increased risks of early marriage.
- **Marginalised Communities:** SC, ST and Economically Weaker Families face greater barriers to education due to lack of access to transport and private schooling.
- **Rise in dropouts:** Big consolidation of schools has led to an increase in at-risk and untraceable students, increasing the chances of school dropouts.

Suggestions

- **Consolidations should meet the RTE Act, 2009** and offer safe, free transport where mergers are unavoidable.
- **Assess the impact of closures on girls, SC/ST communities,** children with disabilities and migrant children before taking decisions.
- **Fill teacher vacancies, strengthen early childhood education** and upgrade school infrastructure to increase enrolments.
- **Involve School Management Committees (SMCs), Gram Panchayats** and parents in decisions on merging or closing schools.

- The Union and the State governments should **jointly monitor school rationalisation to ensure that it is in conformity with NEP 2020** and at the same time protects equitable access to education.

Source: [TH](#)

CUSTODIAL DEATHS IN INDIA

Context

- The **Special Investigation Team (SIT)** took a suspended Inspector into **custody in the alleged custodial death case in Andhra Pradesh**.

What is Custodial Death?

- **Custodial death** refers to the death of an individual **while in police or judicial custody**. This may occur **before trial, during police interrogation, or after conviction**.
- The death may be caused by **torture, negligence, denial of medical aid**, or even under suspicious circumstances.
- **It Violates the Constitutional Rights of;**
 - ♦ **Article 20(1):** No person shall be punished beyond what is prescribed in law.
 - ♦ **Article 20(3):** Protection against self-incrimination; any confession made under duress is inadmissible.
 - ♦ **Article 21:** Ensures protection of life and personal liberty, including in police/judicial custody.
- **Custodial Death in India:** According to parliamentary data, **11,656 custodial deaths** were recorded between 2016-17 and 2021-22, across India.
 - ♦ Uttar Pradesh topped the list with **2,630 deaths**, while **Tamil Nadu** reported the highest number among the southern States.
 - ♦ As per the NCRB Data, A total of **170 custodial deaths** were reported across the country in the first 74 days of 2026, which has surpassed the previous year's figure of 140.
 - ♦ **Bihar** topped the list followed by Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Reasons of Higher Custodial Deaths in India

- **Procedural Flaws and Delays:** Supreme Court of India, in **K Basu vs. State of West Bengal (1997) Case**, laid down crucial guidelines to prevent custodial abuse.

- ♦ However, Courts often rely on magisterial inquiries, procedures riddled with procedural flaws and delays.
- **Weak Accountability:** Investigations into custodial deaths are typically conducted by the same department involved.
 - ♦ Even where judicial inquiries are initiated, they are often slow, opaque, and inconclusive.
- **Political Interference:** Policing in India is often influenced by political pressures, which weakens impartial action and shields errant officers.
- **Marginalisation and Vulnerable Groups:** Most victims come from weaker socio-economic backgrounds. Lack of legal literacy and resources prevents families from seeking justice.

Concerns

- **Erosion of Rule of Law:** It shows that constitutional safeguards that Article 21 Right to Life, Article 22 Protection against arbitrary arrest are being violated. This undermines public confidence in the justice system.
- **Human Rights Image:** Internationally, India faces criticism in UNHRC, Human Rights Watch reports. This weakens India's moral authority when it speaks about human rights issues in other countries.
- **Police-State Perception:** High custodial deaths may create a perception of India as a police state rather than a welfare-oriented democracy.
- **Weak Criminal Justice System:** This projects inefficiency in adopting modern policing, forensics, and technology-driven methods.

International Legal Frameworks for Protection

- **United Nations Charter (1945):** It sets out the purposes and principles of the UN, including the promotion of human rights.
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** It prohibits torture and ensures the presumption of innocence.
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966):** It protects right to life and prohibits torture.
- **The Nelson Mandela Rules**, officially known as the **UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners 2015**, establish minimum standards for the humane treatment of all individuals deprived of their liberty.

- **European Convention on Human Rights (1950):** It recognises individual dignity and access to justice mechanisms.

Recommendations for Reform

- **Law Commission Reports:**
 - ♦ **69th Report (1977) of Law Commission of India:** It proposed introducing Section 26A in the Indian Evidence Act to make confessions before senior police officers admissible.
 - ♦ **273rd Report of Law Commission of India** recommended an anti-torture law, affirming that India's existing legal safeguards are insufficient.
- **Police Reforms:** Implement the Supreme Court's **Prakash Singh vs. Union of India (2006) directives**, including:
 - ♦ Separation of the investigation and law and order functions of the police.
 - ♦ Establishment of Police Complaints Authorities.
- **Mandatory Use of Technology:** CCTV coverage in interrogation rooms, digital records of questioning, and body cameras must become the norm.
- **Judicial Reforms:** Fast-track courts for custodial crimes, along with stringent penalties for complicit officials, are essential.
- **Criminal Law Reforms (2023):** Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 (replacing CrPC) introduces provisions for greater transparency in arrests, use of forensic methods, and citizen-centric procedures.
 - ♦ Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023 and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023 modernise penal and evidentiary laws, reducing dependence on confession-based policing.

Conclusion

- Despite constitutional guarantees, legal safeguards, and judicial pronouncements, the use of torture and abuse in custody remains present.
- India must not only uphold its constitutional values but also fulfill its international obligations by enacting a comprehensive anti-torture law, strengthening institutions, and ensuring accountability.

Source: TH

REFORMING THE SUPREME COURT COLLEGIUM

Context

- The Supreme Court highlighted concerns over the lack of transparency in the recommendations of the Supreme Court Collegium, warning that unexplained appointments can undermine judicial quality.

Background

- The Supreme Court observed that the Collegium has stopped publishing reasons for recommending candidates for appointment or elevation to the constitutional courts, marking a departure from its earlier practice of issuing reasoned resolutions.
- The court also **defended live-streaming of court proceedings** while cautioning against the misuse of selectively edited clips that distort judicial proceedings.

Constitutional Provisions Governing Judicial Appointments

- Article 124** provides for the appointment of judges of the Supreme Court by the President after consultation with constitutional authorities.
- Article 217** deals with the appointment of judges of the High Courts.
- Article 222** empowers the President to transfer judges from one High Court to another after consultation with the Chief Justice of India.
- Article 50**, a Directive Principle of State Policy, directs the State to separate the judiciary from the executive in the public services of the State, thereby strengthening judicial independence.

What is the Collegium System?

- The Collegium System is the mechanism through which judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts are appointed and transferred by the judiciary itself **without any specific constitutional or statutory provision**.
- The system evolved through a **series of Supreme Court judgments known as the Three Judges Cases**, which established the primacy of the judiciary in judicial appointments.
- At the Supreme Court level**, the Collegium consists of the Chief Justice of India and the four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.

- At the High Court level**, the Collegium comprises the Chief Justice of the High Court and the two senior-most judges of that High Court.

What is the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP)?

- The MoP is the **list of rules and procedures for the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the high courts**. It is a document framed by the government and the judiciary together.
- The procedure was evolved through three Supreme Court judgments that are popularly known as the three judges cases.
 - These are: **SP Gupta v Union of India (1981)**, **Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v Union of India (1993)**, and **In re Special Reference No. 1 of 1998**.
 - After these judgments, the Union government framed an MoP in 1999.
- After the Supreme Court struck down the **National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) in 2015**, it directed to revise the MoP to improve transparency, accountability and efficiency in judicial appointments.
- However, despite several rounds of consultation, the revised Memorandum of Procedure has not yet been finalised.

Evolution of the Collegium System

- First Judges Case (1981):** The Supreme Court held that the Executive enjoyed primacy in judicial appointments and that the opinion of the Chief Justice of India was not binding.
- Second Judges Case (1993):** The Supreme Court reversed its earlier view and held that the Chief Justice of India, acting collectively with senior judges, would have primacy in judicial appointments, thereby creating the Collegium System.
- Third Judges Case (1998):** The Supreme Court clarified that the Collegium would consist of the Chief Justice of India and the four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, thereby institutionalising the current system.

Significance of Transparency in Collegium System

- Improves Accountability:** Public disclosure of reasons enables scrutiny of judicial appointments.
- Enhances Public Trust:** Transparent appointments strengthen confidence in judicial independence.

- **Promotes Merit-based Selection:** Helps demonstrate that appointments are based on competence, integrity and constitutional values.
- **Prevents Arbitrary Decisions:** Recording the reasoning helps to minimise the possibility of subjective or opaque decision-making.

Challenges Associated with the Collegium System

- Lack of statutory framework.
- No codified eligibility or evaluation criteria.
- Limited public disclosure of deliberations.
- No formal mechanism for independent review.
- Allegations of opacity and favouritism continue to persist.
- Delays in appointments leading to judicial vacancies.

Way Ahead

- Finalise the new Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) to bring more transparency, objectivity and accountability in judge nominations.
- Collegium recommendations should include short justifications, while protecting legitimately secret information.

Source: [TH](#)

INDIA STRUGGLING TO RETAIN SCIENTISTS

Context

- Recent reports of nearly 120 scientists resigning from the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** have raised concerns.

About

- Resignations have occurred **over the years** but the **scale of recent departures raises the question** of why some of India's brighter scientific minds are leaving the organisation.
 - ♦ **Similar cases** have been seen from laboratories under the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and several government-funded research organisations.
- **Brain Drain** refers to the emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals from one country to another, usually in search of better opportunities.
 - ♦ **In India** engineers, doctors, scientists, IT professionals, and academics move to developed countries like the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia.

- **Between 2015 and 2022**, 1.3 million Indians left the country, many of whom were highly educated professionals.
- **Top Destinations:** The United States, Canada, and Europe remain top destinations for these skilled workers.

Possible Reasons

- **Rigid Hierarchy:** Many of India's laboratories continue to operate within rigid hierarchies that would appear strange in leading scientific institutions elsewhere in the world.
- **Bureaucratic Culture:** Many Indian scientific gatherings continue to have a **bureaucratic rather than academic culture**. Distinguished speakers receive VIP badges, and special hospitality while students and junior participants are treated as an entirely different class.
- **Switch to Private Sectors:** Researchers are moving to private research organisations, emerging deep-tech companies, universities abroad, and/or international collaborations where scientific autonomy has more room than administrative strictures.
- **Low Spending on R&D:** India's Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) as a percentage of GDP remained between **0.6% to 0.7%** which is **below the global average** and lower than countries like **China, South Korea and the US**.
 - ♦ There is a **relatively low investment by India's private sector**, accounting for **only around 36%**, whereas in the aforementioned countries, **private sector contributions are more than 70%**.
- **Economic Factors:** Lower salaries compared to developed countries and limited job opportunities for highly specialized skills.
- **Educational and Professional Opportunities:** Limited access to world-class research infrastructure.
 - ♦ Better training, exposure, and career growth opportunities abroad.
 - ♦ Preference for global higher education for advanced degrees.

- **Lifestyle and Quality of Life:** Better healthcare, infrastructure, and living standards abroad. It offers global recognition and networking opportunities.

Government Initiatives

- **Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme:** Approved with a ₹1 lakh crore corpus, this scheme aims to energise private-sector R&D and deep-tech startups.
 - It offers long-term, low- or zero-interest loans, equity investments, and funds a new Deep-Tech Fund of Funds via the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF).
- **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF):** The ANRF established in 2023, provides high-level strategic direction for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship in science and technology.
 - The Foundation aims to mobilise funds amounting to ₹50,000 crore during 2023–28 through multiple streams, including the ANRF Fund, Innovation Fund, Science and Engineering Research Fund, and Special Purpose Funds.
- **National Geospatial Policy, 2022:** It seeks to position India as a global leader in the geospatial sector by 2035.
 - The policy liberalises access to geospatial data, encouraging its use in governance, business, and research.
- **Indian Space Policy, 2023:** It builds on the space reforms introduced in 2020, which opened the domain to non-governmental entities for end-to-end participation.
 - It aims to enhance space capabilities, promote a flourishing commercial space industry, and foster collaboration between public and private entities.
- **National Quantum Mission:** Allocated ₹6,003.65 crore for 2023–31, to advance quantum technologies through scientific and industrial R&D.
- **BioE3 Policy, 2024:** It encourages the creation of Biomanufacturing and Bio-AI hubs, along with a national Biofoundry network, to accelerate technology development and commercialisation.

- **National Supercomputing Mission (NSM):** Launched in 2015, the initiative empowers universities, research institutions, and government agencies with state-of-the-art supercomputing systems connected through the National Knowledge Network.
- **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM):** Established in 2021, the mission seeks to build a robust ecosystem for semiconductor and display manufacturing.
 - India has already approved 10 semiconductor projects across six states, including the first commercial Silicon Carbide fabrication facility in Odisha.
- **India AI Mission:** The IndiaAI Mission embodies the vision of “Making AI in India and Making AI Work for India.”
 - It is advancing rapidly, having already increased computing capacity from an initial target of 10,000 GPUs to 38,000 GPUs, ensuring accessible AI infrastructure for startups, researchers, and industries.
- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** To foster innovation at the grassroots level by providing support to students, startups, and entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

- India must increase administrative transparency in scientific institutions, and install robust systems to redress grievances.
- Repatriating talent is just the first step; India must create an ecosystem where brilliance can thrive, through robust institutions, academic autonomy, funding, and openness to challenging questions.

Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

MAITHILI SHARAN GUPT JAYANTI

Context

- Maithili Sharan Gupta Jayanti is celebrated every year on **3 August** to mark the birth anniversary of the legendary **Indian poet, Maithili Sharan Gupta**.

About

- **Birth Date:** August 3, 1886, in Chirgaon, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh.

- **Literary Contributions:** He popularised **Khari Boli Hindi** as a literary language, displacing the hegemony of Braj Bhasha in modern poetry.
 - ♦ His work included issues of **nationalism, social justice and Indian cultural values.**
- **Literary Works:** Saket (an epic depicting the Ramayana from Urmila's perspective), Bharat Bharati, Yashodhara, Panchavati, and Jayadrath Vadh.
- **Title:** Mahatma Gandhi granted him the title of “**Rashtrakavi**” (**National poet**) for his patriotic masterpiece **Bharat-Bharati (1912).**
- **Honors:** He was nominated member of **Rajya Sabha** from **1952-1964.**
 - ♦ For his outstanding contribution to literature and education, he was awarded Padma Bhushan in **1954.**

Source: [AIR](#)

ACHARYA PRAFULLA CHANDRA ROY

Context

- **2nd August** is observed as the **166th birth anniversary** of **Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy.**

About

- He was born on **2nd August 1861** in Khulna, now in Bangladesh, he rose to prominence as a **pioneering scientist, educator, and industrialist.**
- He was the founder of **India's first pharmaceutical company** Bengal Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals established in **1901.**
- He is widely regarded as the **father of modern chemical science in India** and played a **key role in promoting scientific education in the country.**
- He also established the **first modern Indian research school in chemistry.**
- He is remembered for his discovery of **mercurous nitrite** in 1896. It opened a new path for **research into metal nitrites** and established **modern chemical research in India.**

Source: [AIR](#)

PINGALI VENKAYYA

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to freedom fighter Pingali Venkayya on his 150th birth anniversary.

Pingali Venkayya

- He was born on 2 August 1876, in Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh.
- He was a freedom fighter and the designer of the Indian national flag, which later evolved into the present-day Tricolour.

Flag Design

- In 1921, he presented a flag design to Mahatma Gandhi at a Congress session in Vijayawada.
 - ♦ His design featured three stripes representing India's major communities and a spinning wheel (charkha) symbolizing self-reliance.
- In **1947**, the design was modified to include the **Ashoka Chakra, symbolizing law and progress.**

Recognition

- The Government of India has issued postage stamps in his honor and organized events like Tiranga Utsav to celebrate his legacy.

Source: [PIB](#)

SHIPKI LA PASS

In News

- India-China cross-border trade resumed through Shipki-La after six years.

Shipki La Pass

- It is a motorable mountain pass in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh at 3,930 m.
 - ♦ It enters Himachal Pradesh at Shipki La (3,930 m) and flows in the south-westerly direction through Kinnaur, Shimla, Kullu, Mandi, Solan and Bilaspur districts of the State.
- It has been a traditional trade route between **India and Tibet at least since the 15th century**, building up economic, cultural and civilisational linkages.
 - ♦ Trade included wool, horses, borax, turquoise and gold from Tibet, grains, spices, dried fruits, timber and metal goods from India.
 - ♦ These exchanges supported local livelihoods, crafts and cultural traditions.
- **The route was closed after the 1962 Sino-Indian War and was** disrupted during the Doklam standoff and the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Shipki La was more than a trade route. It was a shared Buddhist heritage, pastoral way of life, and cultural links between the people on the two sides of the border.

Source: [Air](#)

PRADHAN MANTRI VIKSIT BHARAT ROJGAR YOJANA (PM-VBRY)

Context

- The Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rojgar Yojana (PM-VBRY), the Centre's flagship employment-linked incentive scheme, has completed one year of implementation.

About PM-VBRY

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** launched in **2025** and implemented by the **Ministry of Labour & Employment**.
- Aim:** To promote employment generation, enhance employability, and strengthen social security across all sectors with a **particular focus on the manufacturing sector**.
- The scheme aims to **create more than 3.5 crore meaningful jobs across the country**.
- Features:**
 - First-time employees are eligible for **incentives of up to ₹15,000**.
 - For the employer's side**, the government offers a **reward of up to ₹3,000 per new employee after six months of stable employment**.



ONE YEAR OF PM-VBRY



Source: [DDNews](#)

LEPTOSPIROSIS

In News

- Kerala has witnessed a sharp rise in cases and deaths due to **leptospirosis in 2026**.

Leptospirosis

- It is a **zoonotic disease** caused by bacteria and spread to humans by contact with the urine of an infected animal or with contaminated water and soil.
 - The bacteria enter the body through cuts in the skin or through the eyes, nose and mouth.
 - It has been endemic in Kerala since 1989 and now has the highest mortality among communicable diseases in the State.
- The disease can range from mild to severe, sometimes fatal, with symptoms similar to those of influenza, dengue and other viral diseases.
- Mild leptospirosis is treated with **oral antibiotics**, while severe cases require hospitalisation.

Source: [TH](#)

U.S. INVITES BANGLADESH TO JOIN PAX SILICA INITIATIVE

Context

- U.S. Special Envoy for South and Central Asia Sergio Gor invited Bangladesh to join the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative.

About Pax Silica

- Pax Silica is a U.S.-led international economic security initiative to secure supply chains for semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure, and critical minerals among trusted partner nations.
- The **inaugural Pax Silica Summit** was held in December 2025 and the **signatories include** Australia, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the UK, the Netherlands, and the UAE.
 - ♦ Together, these countries are home to the most important companies and investors powering the global AI supply chain.
 - ♦ **India joined** the initiative in February 2026 during the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi.
- Its **objective** is to reduce coercive dependencies, protect the materials and capabilities foundational to artificial intelligence, and ensure aligned nations can develop and deploy transformative technologies at scale.
- **Countries will partner** on securing strategic stacks of the global technology supply chain, including, but not limited to, software applications and platforms.

Source: [TH](#)

WILD WATER BUFFALO**Context**

- The Chhattisgarh Forest Department is planning to translocate **wild buffaloes from Assam** and keep them in enclosures at the Pamed Wildlife Sanctuary.

About

- The **wild water buffalo (Bubalus arnee)**, also called **Asian buffalo, Asiatic buffalo and wild buffalo**, is a large **bovine native to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia**.



- **Distribution:** They are found in **India, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar**.
- **India** is home to **more than 90% of the global wild water buffalo population**, with **most found in Assam** and **smaller populations in Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra's Kolamarka forests**.
- Presently the population is **confined to small herds in Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra**.
- **Threats:** The biggest threat to wild water buffalo is the loss of genetic diversity due to intermingling with domestic cattle as well as hunting and animal diseases.
- **Conservation Status:** It is listed as **Endangered in the IUCN Red List** for threatened species.
 - ♦ It is placed under the highest protection under **Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.

Source: IE

