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EC extends deadline for SIR in 5 States, 1 U.T.

Election Commission (EC) has extended the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in five States—Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh—and one Union Territory, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It highlights that this comes after earlier insisting that 99–100% of enumeration forms had already been submitted and digitised, creating a perception of contradiction in EC's own position.

The core administrative change is an extension of time for house-to-house enumeration and for publication of draft electoral rolls, with different timelines for different States and the UT. T.N. and Gujarat get enumeration extended till December 14, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Andaman & Nicobar Islands till December 18, and Uttar Pradesh till December 26, with draft rolls now slated for staggered publication between December 19 and December 31. Politically, the move indicates pressure from State Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) who requested more time, suggesting that ground-level work was lagging behind the EC's optimistic data claims. This also reflects administrative caution: the EC appears keen to avoid allegations of exclusion or errors in electoral rolls, especially in large States like U.P. and M.P., ahead of any forthcoming elections. A key procedural reason for extension is to give Booth Level Agents (BLAs) of political parties more time to examine the draft lists being shared with them. This reflects the EC's attempt to institutionalise party scrutiny as a safeguard so that additions, deletions or corrections can be addressed before final rolls are frozen, thereby enhancing transparency and reducing post-publication disputes. The revised schedule also has downstream implications for the electoral calendar. With final rolls now expected only in February next year.

President Droupadi Murmu began her two-day visit to Manipur on Thursday amid a shutdown called by a conglomerate of banned armed organisations. The President's tour comes three months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Manipur on September 13 for the first time since the ethnic violence broke out in May 2023.

Kerala recorded a voter turnout of 73.69% in the two-phased 2025 polls to the local bodies held on December 9 and 11, as per the provisional figures released by the State Election Commission (SEC) on Thursday night. Thrissur, Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod went to the polls on Thursday (December 11) and 1.16 crore of the 1.53 crore voters in these districts exercised their right to vote.

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STATE

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Madras HC says no to sand mining anywhere near Adichanallur historical site

- Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court gave a clear directive that sand mining must not be permitted anywhere near the Adichanallur historical/archaeological site or within the village. This amounts to a blanket protection order aimed at preserving the integrity of one of Tamil Nadu's important Iron Age burial sites.
- The case stems from a 2016 petition by the Cauvery Neeravala Sutrusoosal Padhuvudamai Sangam, which alleged indiscriminate sand mining near the Adichanallur Iron Age urn burial site on the right bank of the Thamirabarani river in Srivaikuntam taluk, Thoothukudi district. The petitioners argued that such mining threatened both the physical stability and archaeological value of the site, necessitating judicial intervention.
- In response, the Thoothukudi Collector's counter-affidavit indicated that, following earlier directions from the court and the National Green Tribunal, sand mining in the area had already been halted. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had fenced the historical area and was conducting excavations, signalling that the site is under active scientific study rather than commercial use.
- The Collector further stated that no sand mining or quarrying licence had been granted in Adichanallur village, particularly in and around the archaeological site. This position suggests that any past or ongoing extraction activities were either unauthorised or had been stopped, and that the administration formally accepts the need for a mining-free zone around the site.
- The court, taking note of the absence of current mining activity and of assurances from the Thoothukudi Collector and senior engineers of the Water Resources and Public Works Departments, chose to dispose of the petition rather than keep it pending. However, by explicitly recording that no sand mining should be permitted near the site, the Bench converts administrative assurances into a judicially enforceable safeguard.
- Substantively, the order strengthens heritage conservation by prioritising archaeological protection over short-term resource extraction in a riverine area where sand is economically valuable. It also reinforces the role of public interest litigation in triggering both environmental regulation and heritage protection, creating a precedent for communities to challenge mining around other sensitive cultural landscapes.
- From a governance perspective, the case illustrates coordination between the High Court, National Green Tribunal, district administration and ASI.

Thailand to deport Luthra brothers, fugitives in Goa nightclub fire; court denies transit bail

Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra, co-owners of the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub in North Goa where a blaze claimed 25 lives, have been detained by the authorities in Thailand, officials said on Thursday, even as a Delhi court rejected their transit anticipatory bail pleas. An Interpol Blue Corner notice was issued against them on December 9 following a request from the Goa Police routed through the CBI.

What is the Interpol Notice System?

- Interpol serves as a vital information-sharing network for national police forces to combat transnational crimes.
- Interpol (General Secretariat) issues notices to member states for missing or wanted persons, which, while not mandatory for states to follow, are often treated as warrants for arrest and extradition.
- Requesting Authority: Notices are issued at the request of: A member country's Interpol National Central Bureau

Blue Notice Vs Red Notice:

- Blue Notice: Referred to as an "enquiry notice," enables police forces in member states to exchange crucial crime-related information, including verifying a person's criminal record and location, among other details.
- Blue Corner notices are issued before the filing of criminal charges.
- Red Notice: Issued by a member state to apprehend a wanted criminal through extradition or other lawful means, targeting individuals sought by national jurisdictions for prosecution or to serve a sentence following an arrest warrant or court ruling.

About International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)

- It was founded in 1923 as International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC) at the 2nd International Criminal Police Congress in Vienna, Austria.
- It is the only organization with the mandate and technical infrastructure to share police information globally.
- India joined Interpol in 1949, CBI is designated as National Central Bureau of India for ICPO-INTERPOL.

About the Silver Notice

- It is the newest addition to INTERPOL's suite of colour-coded Notices, targeting criminal assets . (See image)
- It will facilitate locating, identifying, and obtaining information about laundered assets including properties, vehicles, financial accounts and businesses.
- Silver Notice aids members in requesting information on assets linked to a person's criminal activities such as fraud, corruption, drug trafficking, environmental crime etc.

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Railways instructed to only deploy loco pilots who clear aptitude test

- This states that Indian Railways has been instructed to deploy only those loco pilots who have successfully cleared the mandatory aptitude test for operating Mainline Electric Multiple Unit (MEMU) commuter trains and associated services. The trigger is the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) inquiry into the 4 November MEMU–goods train collision in Chhattisgarh that killed 12 people, which has been linked to human-factor failures.

- CRS Brijesh Kumar Mishra's report to the Railway Board stresses that aptitude tests cover intelligence, memory, reaction time and personality traits, and that using pilots who fail to meet these parameters would compromise safety. He recommends that loco pilots be posted to MEMU operations only after passing these tests, implying that present deployment practices had allowed some unqualified or marginally qualified pilots onto critical commuter routes.

- This reveals capacity gaps: in the South East Central Railway (SECR) zone, only 102 out of 142 required loco pilots have cleared the test, yet services still have to be run. This indicates a tension between safety compliance and manpower shortages, and suggests that the Railway Board will need to either slow service expansion or accelerate testing and training to avoid putting untested personnel on MEMUs.

- A related safety concern discussed is the high incidence of Signal Passed At Danger (SPAD) cases, with six incidents already recorded in the first two months of 2025-26. The CRS recommends specific operational measures, such as directing assistant loco pilots to apply emergency brakes if the driver crosses a red signal or overspeeds after a yellow, emphasising team-based checks to contain SPAD-related accidents.

- Medical and alcohol-use norms also feature in the analysis. Citing the Indian Railway Medical Manual, the report reiterates that only a "zero" blood-alcohol level is acceptable for running staff, even though the SECR Principal Chief Medical Director noted that many readings up to 10 mg/dl were being treated as negative due to possible non-alcoholic causes. The CRS effectively argues for stricter interpretation and enforcement of the zero-tolerance standard to minimise any ambiguity that could affect safety-critical decision-making.

- Institutionally, this suggests that the Railway Board must now act on these recommendations by ensuring additional qualified manpower, tightening aptitude-based postings, and standardising medical and operational protocols across zones. The overall thrust is that systemic human-factor reforms—testing, staffing, alcohol control and cockpit procedures—are essential if Indian Railways is to prevent a repeat of collisions like the Chhattisgarh MEMU accident.

Aadhaar app to enable offline sharing by exposing minimal data: UIDAI CEO

- The new Aadhaar mobile app under testing that will allow users to share only minimal, selective data from their Aadhaar in offline contexts such as hotel check-ins or other public places. The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) CEO, Bhuvnesh Kumar, presents this as part of a broader push to reduce indiscriminate sharing of full Aadhaar details and to improve privacy.

- A central feature is a dense QR code generated within the app that contains all Aadhaar data, including the user's photograph, but can be shared and verified completely offline. The idea is that service providers scan this QR code using the Aadhaar app itself, which then reveals only the specific attributes required for that transaction rather than the complete demographic record.

- The QR code is described as "impossible to forge" because it is digitally signed by UIDAI using standard cryptographic techniques. This digital signature means that any tampering with the encoded data should be detectable, addressing a persistent problem of forged Aadhaar photocopies or manipulated PDF copies being used for identity fraud.

- This notes that UIDAI has, in recent rule amendments, introduced the concept of "Offline Verification Seeking Entities" (OVSEs) to formalise who can use such offline verification mechanisms. Typical OVSEs would be hotel receptions and similar venues, which authorities want to discourage from collecting and storing physical photocopies of Aadhaar, pushing them instead toward digital, verifiable records.

- By enabling offline verification, the new app would make Aadhaar the only ID in India that is cryptographically verifiable without an online connection, a significant design shift for environments with poor connectivity. It also potentially reduces the attack surface, since the verifying entity only receives attested attributes through the app rather than raw, reusable identity documents.

- The UIDAI CEO acknowledges, however, that the authority will not outright ban storage of physical ID details by establishments, because such a move could exclude people who do not own smartphones or are unable to use the app. This caveat shows the tension between ideal privacy-preserving practice and digital-divide realities, and suggests that for the foreseeable future, both digital and physical modes of Aadhaar use will coexist.

- Strategically, the initiative attempts to rehabilitate Aadhaar's privacy image by aligning it more closely with data-minimisation principles, especially after years of criticism about over-collection and centralised databases. At the same time, by tightening verification and reducing forgery risks, it reinforces Aadhaar's role as the default identity layer for both public and private transactions in India.

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PRELIMS CORNER :

1. He was a saint&social reformer of Medieval India who founded Gaudiya Vaishnavism. He popularised 'Sankirtan' or public singing of God's name and opposed the inequalities of the caste system. Which one of the following personalities is described above?

(a) Vallabhacharya

(b) Vidyaranya

(c) Nimbarka

(d) Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

2. The Tehran Convention, 2006 is an overarching legal instrument for the environmental protection of which one of the following water bodies?

(a) Red Sea

(b) South China Sea

(c) Caspian Sea

(d) Arabian Sea

3. Which of the following is Brunei's only land neighbour?

(a) Thailand

(b) Malayasia

(c) Indonesia

(d) Vietnam

4. Optical fibre cables work on the principle of:

(a) Doppler Effect

(b) Photoelectric Effect

(c) Quantum Tunnelling

(d) Total Internal Reflection

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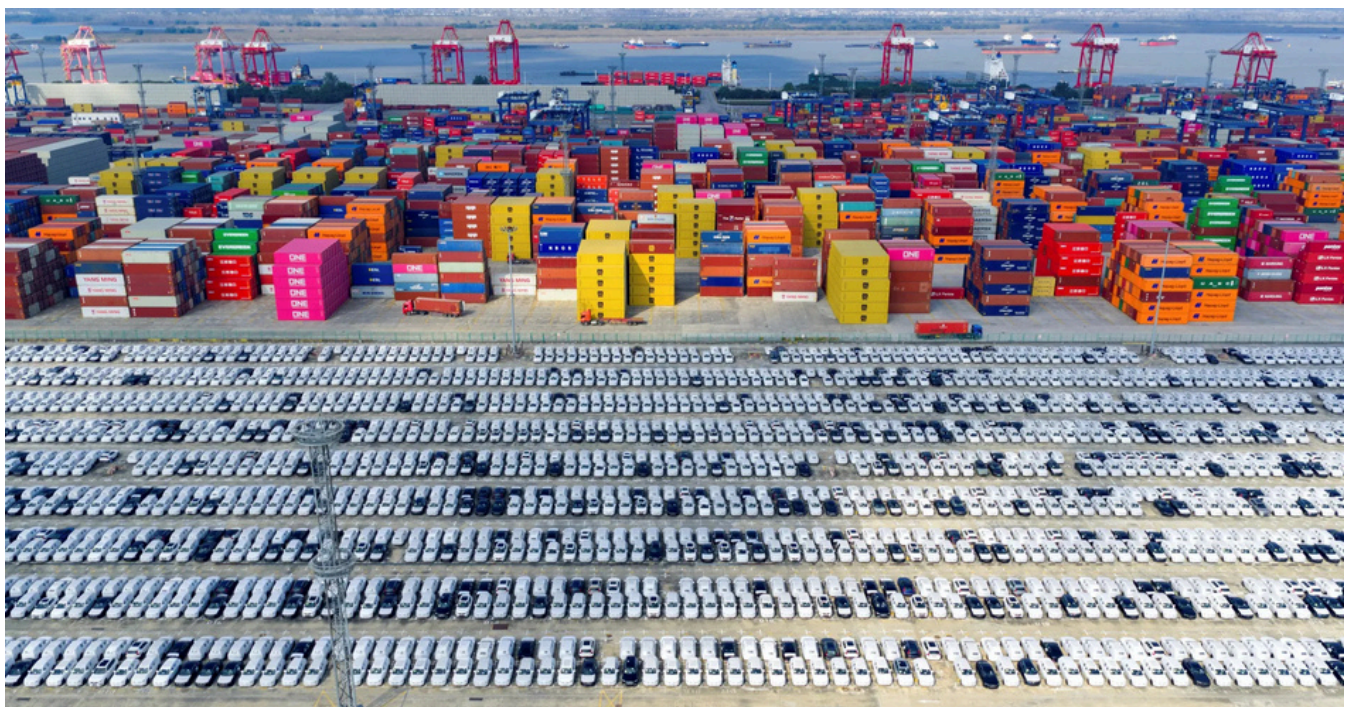
DPIIT signals Copyright Act changes to address AI issues

- This reports that the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) plans to amend India's Copyright Act within about three years to deal with how AI models, especially large language models (LLMs), use copyrighted content scraped from the internet.

- A DPIIT working paper proposes a "blanket licensing" or hybrid statutory licence, under which websites whose content is used to train LLMs like ChatGPT would receive royalties once the models are commercialised, with a copyright society distributing payments among rightsholders.

- The scheme would allow AI firms to freely crawl and use "lawfully accessed" online content for training, avoiding billions of individual permissions, but would make them pay compulsory royalties after monetisation, including potentially for past training already done on copyrighted works.

- A new body tentatively called the Copyright Royalties Collective for AI Training (CRCAT) is envisaged as a central, non-profit collection and distribution agency, designated under the Copyright Act and composed of rightsholder organisations from different sectors.

- DPIIT officials signal that this first paper deals only with training-data use and royalty flows; a second paper is planned on whether AI-generated outputs are themselves copyrightable and who, if anyone, should be recognised as the author.

- This situates the proposals against a backdrop of growing litigation abroad, where news publishers and others have sued AI firms for allegedly reproducing their work, and notes that Indian publishers want clear mechanisms to claim compensation, while AI companies seek legal certainty to avoid constant infringement risk.

- A major controversy highlighted is that publishers and some tech-industry voices argue for an explicit opt-out so they can refuse inclusion of their data in training sets, warning that a mandatory blanket licence without consent edges toward expropriation and could spark more disputes rather than less.

- This also records concerns from big-tech companies about the proposed burden of proof: under established copyright law, the plaintiff must prove copying, but industry groups fear that, in practice, opaque AI models might face a reversed or unworkable evidentiary standard because outputs are probabilistic and non-deterministic.

- For India's policy trajectory, the piece frames DPIIT's approach as an attempt to strike a balance between encouraging AI investment and protecting creative industries, positioning the country as one of the first major jurisdictions to design a bespoke AI–copyright royalty system rather than relying on broad text-and-data-mining exceptions.

- At the same time, the debates around opt-out rights, fairness of royalty distribution, and technical feasibility of tracing training data indicate that the eventual amendment process is likely to be contentious, with strong lobbying both from global tech platforms and domestic media and creator groups before any law is finalised.

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Behind China's $1 trillion record trade surplus is a weak domestic demand and export dominance

- China's record 11-month trade surplus in 2025 is framed as a milestone that reflects both its manufacturing strength and underlying structural imbalances, rather than being an unambiguous sign of economic health. The expert argues that persistent surpluses indicate weak domestic demand and over-reliance on external markets.

- The composition of exports has shifted up the value chain, with China dominating in electric vehicles, batteries, solar equipment and other advanced manufactures, not just low-end goods. This reveals how decades of state-backed industrial upgrading and supply-chain clustering have entrenched its competitiveness in sophisticated sectors.

- China has not fully replaced the US as the world's central demand engine; instead, it exports heavily to a diverse set of markets in Europe, Southeast Asia and the Global South. However, China's own domestic demand remains relatively subdued, so global rebalancing has not occurred even as its export footprint widens.

- Concerns about "dumping" and renewed "China shock" arise because Chinese firms, facing weak demand at home and intense competition, cut prices aggressively in foreign markets, especially for green tech goods. This puts pressure on foreign manufacturers and raises the risk of new protectionist responses.

- This questions the sustainability of China's export-led model when many trade partners are de-risking supply chains and tightening trade barriers. It suggests that unless Beijing boosts household consumption and reduces investment-heavy, credit-driven growth, the surplus will continue to signal macroeconomic distortion rather than balanced prosperity.

- China's surplus within global politics, noting that despite US tariffs and talk of decoupling, China's export machine has continued to gain global market share. This persistence fuels strategic anxieties in the US and other advanced economies about another wave of job-displacing "China shock."

- This emphasises that manufacturing dominance rests on a mix of state support, undervalued currency and subdued domestic consumption, which together suppress imports and keep the current-account surplus high. China produces a large share of global manufacturing output but consumes far less than its income level would predict.

- Weak domestic demand is identified as a core vulnerability: households' share of national income remains low, the social safety net is thin, and the property downturn has eroded household wealth and confidence. As a result, Chinese consumers do not absorb enough of the country's own production, pushing firms to depend on external markets.

- The piece links China's surplus to currency dynamics, arguing that a managed, relatively weak renminbi amplifies export competitiveness while making imports costlier, reinforcing imbalances. This invites criticism from trading partners, who see exchange-rate policy as part of an unfair competitive strategy.

- Together, this conclude that China's huge trade surplus is a symptom of deeper structural problems— excess capacity, investment-heavy growth, weak consumption and policy-driven price advantages—so it represents both economic power and macroeconomic fragility. They warn that without domestic rebalancing, the surplus will provoke more trade conflicts and financial risks, rather than providing a stable foundation for long-term growth.

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Mexico's 2024 tariffs could still hurt India's auto exports

- Mexico's Senate has approved tariffs of up to 50% on imports from several Asian countries, including India, for a two-year period starting April 2024, with formal application from January 1, 2026; these tariffs cover countries without a free trade agreement (FTA) with Mexico, which currently includes India. At a macro level, this notes that this surcharge is unlikely to significantly dent India's overall exports because Mexico accounts for only about 1.3% of India's total goods exports by value.

- The core concern lies in sectoral concentration: Mexico absorbs roughly 10% of India's total auto and auto-parts exports and about 12% of India's motorcycle exports, making it a critical market for specific firms despite its modest share in aggregate trade. This highlights that motor cars and parts alone make up about 25% of India's exports to Mexico, while motorcycles add another 7%, so any tariff hike disproportionately hits these segments.

- The tariff move is not entirely new: Mexico had already imposed duties ranging from 5–50% on a wide range of items from non-FTA partners in April 2024 for two years, and the Senate's December decision effectively extends and formalises that regime. From India's perspective, this means the elevated tariff environment will persist through at least 2026, increasing uncertainty for auto exporters planning investments and model allocations for the North American and Latin American markets.

- This argues that, while the aggregate impact on India's exports may remain limited, the higher tariffs could erode price competitiveness for Indian motor vehicles and components in Mexico relative to suppliers from FTA partners such as the US, EU or members of regional blocs. Given that Mexico is used by many global OEMs as both a domestic market and a production hub integrated into North American value chains, losing ground there could also weaken Indian firms' positioning in wider regional supply networks.

- Policymakers have reacted by signalling interest in exploring a bilateral FTA with Mexico: following the April 2024 tariff announcement, India's Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC) reportedly urged the Commerce Ministry to open talks, and this implies that this episode strengthens the case for a trade agreement to secure preferential access. Strategically, the situation underscores how India's lack of FTAs with key markets can translate into vulnerability for sector-specific champions, even when headline export exposure appears modest.

'Work closely to spur crude oil source diversification'

- This summarises recommendations from the Parliamentary Committee on Public Undertakings (2025-26), which urges the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) to work more closely with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and other agencies to diversify India's crude oil import sources.

- The committee views coordinated diplomatic outreach to oil-producing countries as essential for securing favourable investment terms and overcoming tax and regulatory hurdles faced by Indian public-sector enterprises (PSEs) operating abroad.

- It underscores that India imports nearly 89% of its domestic crude oil requirements, leaving the country highly exposed to external shocks and geopolitical disruptions.

- Recent events such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and tensions in the Middle East are cited as evidence of the vulnerability of India's energy supply chain and its dependence on international trade flows for critical fuels.

- The committee notes that, despite some proactive efforts at diversification, significant challenges persist due to sanctions, financial-market volatility and changing regulations in host countries where Indian companies invest in upstream projects.

- These factors complicate overseas exploration and production by central public-sector undertakings (CPSUs), constraining their ability to build long-term energy assets that could reduce import risks.

- A key concern highlighted is the impact of such constraints on India's overall energy bill: high import dependence, combined with difficulty in securing overseas equity oil, magnifies exposure to price spikes and supply disruptions.

- The committee warns that these issues not only strain public finances but also impede strategic efforts to achieve greater energy security and resilience.

- To address these risks, the report recommends intensifying diversification "geographically and contractually" by broadening the range of supplier countries and adopting more flexible contracting practices.

- This includes renegotiating rigid long-term deals where necessary, exploring alternative transport routes and logistics options, and using diplomatic channels more actively to secure stable, multi-source crude supply arrangements.

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Venezuela's exiled leader Machado will strive to return to end 'tyranny'

- This profiles Venezuelan opposition leader and Nobel Peace laureate María Corina Machado, who has been in hiding and then exile after challenging President Nicolás Maduro's rule, and describes her pledge from Oslo to return home to "end tyranny" and help achieve a democratic transition.
- It notes that she appeared publicly in Norway to accept the Nobel Peace Prize after nearly a year out of sight, underscoring both her personal risk and symbolic prominence.
- Machado's legal and political situation is precarious: she was barred from running in Venezuela's July 2024 election, which she and much of the international community regard as fraudulent, and she is described as a "fugitive" by Venezuelan authorities.
- Her escape route out of Venezuela and subsequent arrival in Norway remain deliberately unclear for security reasons, highlighting the repressive environment in which opposition figures operate.
- In remarks outside the Norwegian Parliament, she vowed to do everything possible to return to Venezuela and continue the struggle, while admitting she could not say how or when this would happen given the dangers involved.
- This conveys her message that the Nobel recognition belongs to the Venezuelan people and that her ultimate goal is a "free Venezuela," framing her return as part of a broader civic movement rather than a purely personal ambition.
- The Nobel Committee awarded her the Peace Prize for sustained efforts to secure a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy, signalling international endorsement of her non-violent political activism.
- This external validation increases diplomatic pressure on Maduro's government, but also raises the stakes for Machado, whose visibility makes her both harder to silence and a more tempting target for repression.
- The piece recounts that Machado has long accused Maduro of crimes against humanity, including kidnappings, torture and state-sanctioned repression, and in her acceptance speech (read by one of her daughters) she condemned these abuses. By publicising these allegations on the Nobel stage, the article suggests, she seeks to keep Venezuela's human-rights crisis high on the global agenda and to mobilise further international solidarity for domestic democratic forces.
- Overall, this portrays Machado as attempting to convert the moral capital of the Nobel Prize into political leverage, both to protect herself and to galvanise Venezuelans and foreign governments against what she calls a "tyranny."
- It also implicitly raises questions about whether symbolic victories abroad can translate into concrete change inside Venezuela, where Maduro still controls the security apparatus and key state institutions.

Europe's dilemma: how to finance Ukraine

- EU's pledge (October 2025) to finance Ukraine for two more years and the core dilemma of where new money will come from, given already high public debt and political fatigue in Europe.
- Most EU governments are reluctant to raise substantial new market borrowing because any fresh EU-level loan adds to the collective debt stock and requires unanimous approval, with Hungary already signalling opposition.
- Since Russia's 2022 invasion, EU states have spent about USD 230 billion on assistance to Ukraine, and the bloc has separately raised a USD 54 billion facility that uses EU budgets as collateral.
- With fiscal space narrowing and public opinion hardening in some capitals, key contributors such as Germany, France and Britain prefer to increase military aid rather than underwriting another large common loan package.
- Attention has therefore turned to roughly USD 244 billion in frozen Russian state assets held mostly in Euroclear in Belgium, with proposals to channel the windfall earnings—or even the principal—into a long-term loan or fund for Ukraine's reconstruction. Kyiv and the U.S. back this idea, arguing that Russia should help pay for the damage it has inflicted, but several EU members are cautious because of legal, financial and geopolitical risks.
- Belgium and the European Central Bank worry that outright seizure or aggressive use of these assets could violate property protections and invite retaliatory measures from Russia, potentially destabilising European financial markets and undermining trust in euro-denominated reserves.
- They want strong guarantees that other EU states will share any costs if litigation or counter-sanctions arise, and prefer a limited use of profits rather than the capital itself.
- A second obstacle is U.S. policy: the Trump administration, as described through its 28-point peace plan, opposes the EU moving ahead unilaterally on frozen Russian assets, arguing they should instead anchor a future joint international fund linked to a post-war settlement.
- If Europe pre-commits or immobilises the assets purely for Ukraine funding, it risks friction with Washington and reduces leverage over Moscow in any eventual negotiations.
- This concludes that Europe faces a lose-lose choice: if it does not find new, sustainable financing, Ukraine risks running out of resources and losing ground on the battlefield; but if the EU takes bold steps with Russian assets, it heightens financial and diplomatic exposure.
- In this framing, there are no cost-free options, only different configurations of legal risk, trans-Atlantic tension and potential strategic advantage for Russia.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

Q1. Ans d

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was Bengal's most prominent Vaishnava saint. He popularised Krishna-bhakti in many parts of Eastern India. The advent of Chaitanya marks the shifting of the focus of the Bengal Vaishnava bhakti from devotional literary compositions to a full-fledged reform movement with a broad social base. Chaitanya disregarded all distinctions of caste, creed and sex to give a popular base to Krishna-bhakti. His followers belonged to all castes and communities. One of his favourite disciples was Haridas, who was a Muslim. He popularised the sankirtan (group devotional songs accompanied by ecstatic dancing). Chaitanya's exposition of Rasalila is one of his most profound contributions to Indian philosophy.

Q2. Ans c

The Tehran Convention (formally the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea), which entered into force in 2006, is the overarching legal instrument for the environmental protection of the Caspian Sea. It is the first legally binding regional agreement signed by all five Caspian littoral states: the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan. The Caspian Sea is a unique natural reservoir on our planet. It is a land locked water body located between two major parts of the Eurasian continent. Economic activities in the Caspian Sea include oil production, fishing, and shipping.
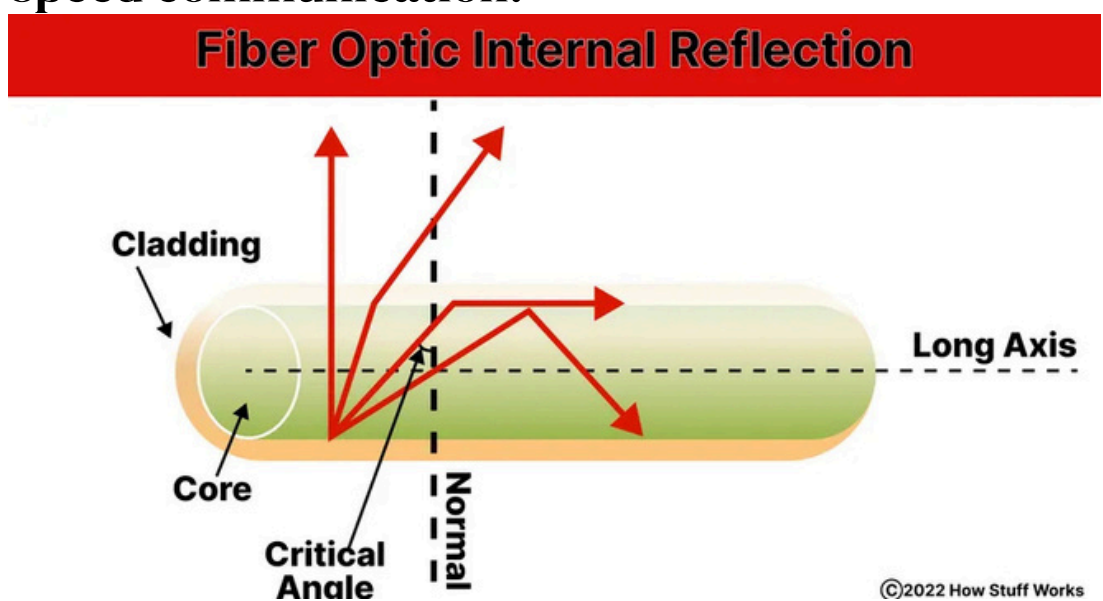
Q3. Ans b

Brunei is a sovereign state located on the northern coast of the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia. It is bordered by the South China Sea to the north and is completely surrounded by the Malaysian state of Sarawak on all other land sides. Brunei consists of two disconnected territories that occupy a total land area of 2,226 square miles and are separated by the state of Sarawak. The segment to the west is significantly larger than the part on to the east and is home to the nation's capital of Bandar Seri Begawan. The nation gained its independence from the British in 1984.

Q4. Ans d

Optical fibre cables work on the principle of Total Internal Reflection (TIR), where light signals, converted from digital data, bounce repeatedly within the fibre's core (a glass/plastic strand) by striking the boundary with the surrounding cladding at angles greater than the critical angle, allowing data transmission over long distances with minimal loss. This principle ensures that light signals, carrying vast amounts of data, stay trapped and travel efficiently from one end to the other, making fibre optics a superior choice for high-speed communication.

Fiber Optic Internal Reflection

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Case Study:

Haiti's Compas Music Wins UNESCO Recognition

UNESCO has added Haiti's beloved music and dance genre, Compas, to its cultural heritage list, prompting national pride and celebration in Haiti. It explores Compas's historical roots, social role, and emotional significance for Haitians at home and in the diaspora, while highlighting how the recognition affirms Haiti's cultural resilience. Compas, a syncopated rhythm developed in the 1950s and inspired by merengue and percussion, has been officially inscribed on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage, recognizing its deep cultural value for Haiti. The piece notes that this status is seen domestically as an "ode to joy" at a time of political instability and gang violence, giving Haitians a symbolic victory and source of collective pride. Compas is more than entertainment: its lyrics emerge from everyday life and are tied to themes of love, hope, freedom, peace, and resistance, helping people cope with hardship. It underlines how Compas "brings together people of all ages, genders and backgrounds," serving as a unifying force in a society fragmented by insecurity and economic crisis. Compas still dominates Haitian stages 70 years after its creation and is popular across parts of West Africa and the Caribbean.

The sixth edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB), claimed to be the largest contemporary art festival in India, will open on Friday with the hoisting of the Biennale ag at Aspinwall House in Fort Kochi at noon. The latest KMB, organised by the Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF), will be spread across 22 venues, in addition to seven collateral events.The 110-day event will conclude on March 31, 2026. Curated by Goa based artist Nikhil Chopra along with his art collective HH Art Spaces, this edition has 'For the Time Being' as its curatorial theme. "This edition of KMB is oriented around the body as a bearer of memory and materiality. The 'body' extends metaphorically into Kochi's landscape, built on human and non-human movements,"he said.

Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML) rolled out the prototype of its new driverless Metro trainset, developed for Bengaluru's Namma Metro's upcoming Phase-2, 2A and 2B corridors. The PSU unveiled the first six-coach driverless trainset meant for the Pink Line at its Bengaluru Rail Complex for the highly anticipated corridor, which is expected to open in two stages by the end of 2026, connecting Kalena Agrahara to Nagawara. The new trainset features contemporary interiors, energy-efficient systems, upgraded passenger information displays, wider gangways for easy movement, USB charging points, ergonomic seating and accessibility features. According to the BEML officials, these train sets, designed and engineered entirely in-house at the BEML's Bengaluru facility, will be subjected to rigorous testing and commissioning in line with the BMRCL's schedule.

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