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In Gujarat, India's 1st state-funded lab to study most lethal pathogens

The Indian Express : 16/01/2026 - Explained



Vande Bharat will offer local cuisine of origin stations, first on six routes

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India moves ahead on EU deal as US pact hangs fire

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What is a BSL-4 laboratory?

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PLFS: Labour Participation Force Rate ends 2025 at new high of 56.1%

India's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) has risen to a new high of 56.1% in December, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

This means more people are now seeking work or are willing to work, showing greater participation in the job market. At the same time, the unemployment rate increased slightly to 4.8% from 4.7% in the previous month. The rise in LFPR was mainly driven by more people in rural areas entering the workforce, with rural participation increasing. This situation suggests that more people are coming forward to look for jobs, which is positive for labour market participation, but job creation has not fully kept pace yet, leading to a small rise in unemployment.



Who are we to decide about someone's life: SC

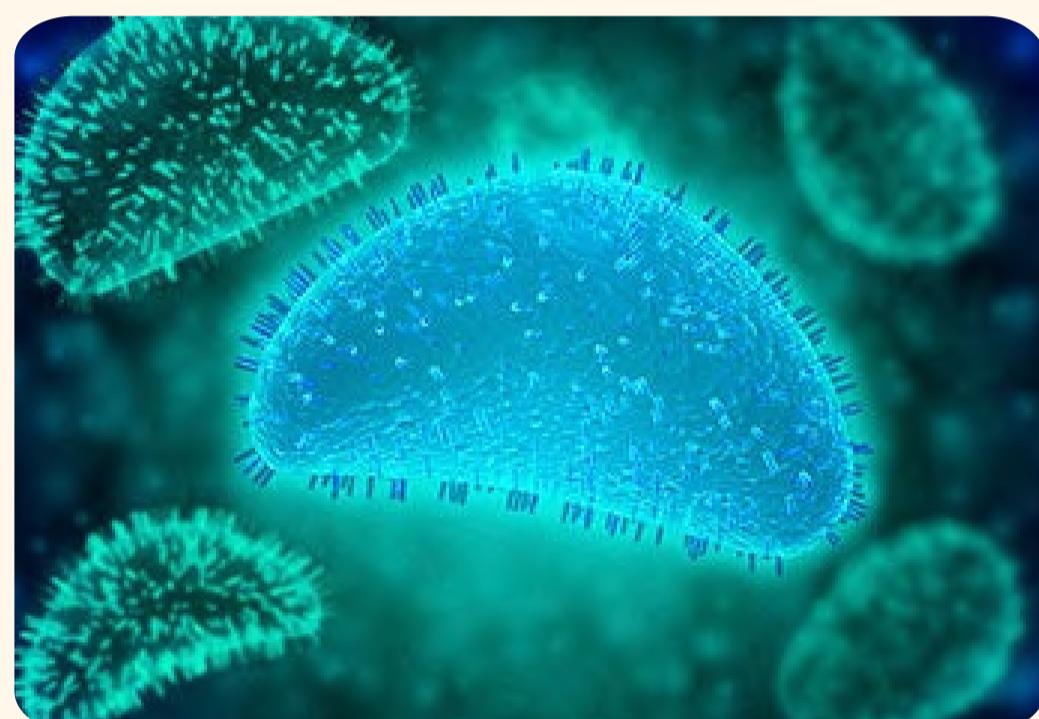
The Supreme Court has reserved its decision on a plea filed by a man seeking permission to withdraw medical support for his 32-year-old son, who has been in a vegetative state for nearly 13 years. The patient, Harish Rana, suffered serious head injuries after falling from the fourth floor of an apartment in Chandigarh in August 2013 and has been on artificial support since then. The family had earlier approached the Delhi High Court for permission to withdraw medical facilities, but the High Court rejected the plea. They then moved the Supreme Court in 2024 but did not get any relief. Last year, the family again approached the apex court.



While hearing the matter, the judges noted that such cases involve very delicate issues related to human life. When a court reserves its judgment, it means that after hearing the case, the judge postpones the final decision to allow time for careful thought and consideration of the facts, evidence, and law.

In Gujarat, India's 1st state-funded lab to study most lethal pathogens

The Union Home Minister laid the foundation stone for a Bio-Safety Level 4 (BSL-4) containment facility and laboratory in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. He described it as a “health shield” for India and said it marks the beginning of a new era of health security and biotechnology in the country. This facility will also include an Animal Bio-Safety Level (ABSL) laboratory.



The upcoming laboratory will be a strategic national asset for India. It will be used for research on some of the deadliest pathogens known to humanity. These include the Ebola virus, Marburg virus, Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever virus, and Nipah virus, among others. Research in this facility will be conducted under extremely controlled conditions that are inspected and monitored based on international standards. Scientists working here will carry out advanced research on high-risk pathogens, develop diagnostics, vaccines, and therapeutics, and support rapid outbreak investigation and response. India already has laboratories with lower levels of biosafety such as BSL-2 and BSL-3, and also ABSL facilities of different levels. The government has been working to create a network of 165 biosafety laboratories, including 11 BSL-3 labs and 154 BSL-2 labs.

Vande Bharats will offer local cuisine of origin stations, first on six routes



Indian Railways has started a new initiative to promote local cuisines on Vande Bharat trains. Under this initiative, different regional food items are being served on different routes. For example, the Mangaluru–Thiruvananthapuram route serves items like Idiyappam and Parippu Vada, the Katra–Srinagar route serves items like Kashmiri Pulao and Rajma, and the Nagpur–Secunderabad route serves items like Upma and Palakura Pappu. This initiative is part of the “52 reforms in 52 weeks” programme announced by the Union Minister for Railways, Ashwini Vaishnaw. Food has been identified as one of the important areas of reform.

At present, local cuisines are being served on six pairs of Vande Bharat trains on routes such as Nagpur–Secunderabad, Sabarmati–Veraval, Katra–Srinagar, Kasaragod–Thiruvananthapuram and Mangaluru–Thiruvananthapuram. All the food items introduced so far are vegetarian. The food served changes based on where the train starts from. For example, one direction may serve Dogri cuisine and the return journey may serve Kashmiri cuisine.

According to officials, this move will encourage local vendors, create employment, and expose people to the food and culture of other regions, acting as a bridge between different parts of India.

European troops arrive in Greenland as talks with US highlight 'disagreement'

Troops from France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden are being sent to Greenland to strengthen the island's security. France has already sent about 15 soldiers, and Germany is deploying a 13-member reconnaissance team. Denmark has announced that it will increase its military presence, with support from NATO allies. This comes after talks between Denmark, Greenland, and the United States revealed a "fundamental disagreement" between the Trump administration and European allies.

The disagreement is linked to US President Donald Trump's interest in taking over Greenland to access its mineral resources and to secure the Arctic region, especially amid rising interest from Russia and China. Russia has rejected Western claims that Russia and China threaten Greenland, calling such statements unacceptable and saying no evidence has been presented. The situation shows growing tensions over control and security in the Arctic region.



Trump sees Iran crackdown easing, Tehran says executions to be halted



US President Donald Trump said he had been informed that killings during Iran's crackdown on protests were easing and that there was no current plan for large-scale executions. He adopted a wait-and-see approach, though he did not rule out possible US action. Iranian state media reported that a 26-year-old protester, Erfan Soltani, would not be given the death sentence, and a previously reported execution order was postponed. Iran's foreign minister said there was no plan to hang people, and Iranian media stated that the death penalty does not apply to the charges in this case.

Iran's President said the government is trying to address economic problems, corruption, and foreign exchange issues. Tensions remain, as Iran warned neighbours about possible strikes on US bases if attacked, and the US withdrew some personnel. Analysts noted continued uncertainty about the situation.

India moves ahead on EU deal as US pact hangs fire

At a time when uncertainty over a trade deal with the United States is affecting investment and export prospects, India has made significant progress in its trade negotiations with the European Union (EU). According to the Commerce Secretary, India and the EU have closed 20 out of 24 chapters of the agreement and are trying to finalise the deal before the upcoming India–EU Summit.

The President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission will be chief guests at India's Republic Day and will co-chair the 16th India–EU Summit on January 27, giving political momentum to the talks. Both sides see urgency in concluding the agreement. India has already signed three trade deals in 2025, and the EU has also concluded a long-pending deal with the Mercosur bloc. Once signed, the India–EU trade deal will be one of the largest trade agreements for India and is expected to reduce the impact of steep US tariffs while opening new opportunities for labour-intensive Indian exports in the EU.



Agriculture, a highly sensitive issue for both sides, has been kept out of the agreement. This reflects the difficulties India has also faced in its trade talks with the US, where agriculture and genetically modified products remain a major sticking point. Within the EU too, agriculture is politically sensitive, as seen in protests by French farmers against the EU–Mercosur deal. However, several challenges remain in the India–EU talks. Key issues include the EU's carbon tax (CBAM), whisky, and automobiles.

The carbon tax is particularly important for India because it could impose additional duties on exports such as aluminium, iron, and steel, which form a large part of India's exports to the EU. Germany is pushing for greater access for its automobiles, while India is concerned about protecting its own fast-growing and employment-generating automobile sector.

The urgency of the EU deal has increased because US tariffs have already begun to affect Indian exporters, especially in sectors like apparel, where orders are shifting to other countries. In this context, the India–EU trade negotiations show how trade agreements are increasingly becoming tools of strategic and economic diplomacy in a changing global trade environment.

National Startup Day 2026: A decade that rewired India's economy



India is marking a decade of the Startup India initiative on January 16, 2026, a milestone that highlights how entrepreneurship has become an important part of the country's economic story. Launched in 2016, Startup India began as a policy effort to encourage new businesses and promote innovation. Over the years, it has grown into a nationwide movement, and National Startup Day is now observed as a formal recognition of this change.

The day matters because it reflects how entrepreneurship has spread beyond a few major cities and become visible across Tier II and Tier III towns as well. Today, a wide network of founders, investors, incubators, and supporters operates across the country, showing how deeply the startup culture has taken root. Risk-taking and innovation are no longer limited to a small group, and startups are now widely seen as drivers of job creation, innovation, and global competitiveness.

The 10-year milestone is therefore not just about one programme, but about a broader shift in India's economic mindset, where innovation and entrepreneurship are now central to growth and development.

India is getting rid of an outdated dataset for measuring inflation

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is used to measure retail inflation in India. The inflation figure for December 2025 (1.33%) is the last data point of the CPI series with base year 2012. From January 2026, it is updated to a new base year and with new weightages.

Relying on a data set that has not been updated in more than a decade leads to serious accuracy gaps. During April–December 2025, CPI accounted average inflation as 1.7%, much lower than 4.9% in the same period of 2024. However, RBI's inflation expectations survey (December) shows households perceive inflation at 6.6% and expect it to rise further. The feeling clearly is that not only are prices rising, but they are rising at a faster rate. Failing to capture this is where the official data let policymakers down.

One key problem is that CPI uses outdated weights based on 2012 consumption patterns, while consumption has changed significantly. The national CPI also averages prices across the entire country, which hides local differences. To fix this, the government will release a new CPI series with base year 2024, using new weights from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2023–24.



NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK - SPECIAL FEATURE

A Decade of Startup India

- Drive technological innovation and productivity
- Create large-scale employment opportunities
- Enhance financial inclusion and digital access
- Promote regional and grassroots entrepreneurship

21 lakh
jobs
created

**45% startups
with atleast
one woman
director/
partner**

- 2 lakh DPIIT-recognised startups (December 2025).
- full-lifecycle support system for ideation, funding, mentorship, and scale-up.
- Tier-II and Tier-III cities hold 50% of DPIIT-recognised startups

Flagship schemes

- **Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS)**
- **Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups**
- **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)**

(SVEP)
Startup Village
Entrepreneurship
Program for rural
Entrepreneurship

LLM oriented Enterprise Development

Prof. Tojo Jose, Alumnus, CSIP



(Source: Civil Service Institute, Pala – Current Affairs Handbook, March 2025)

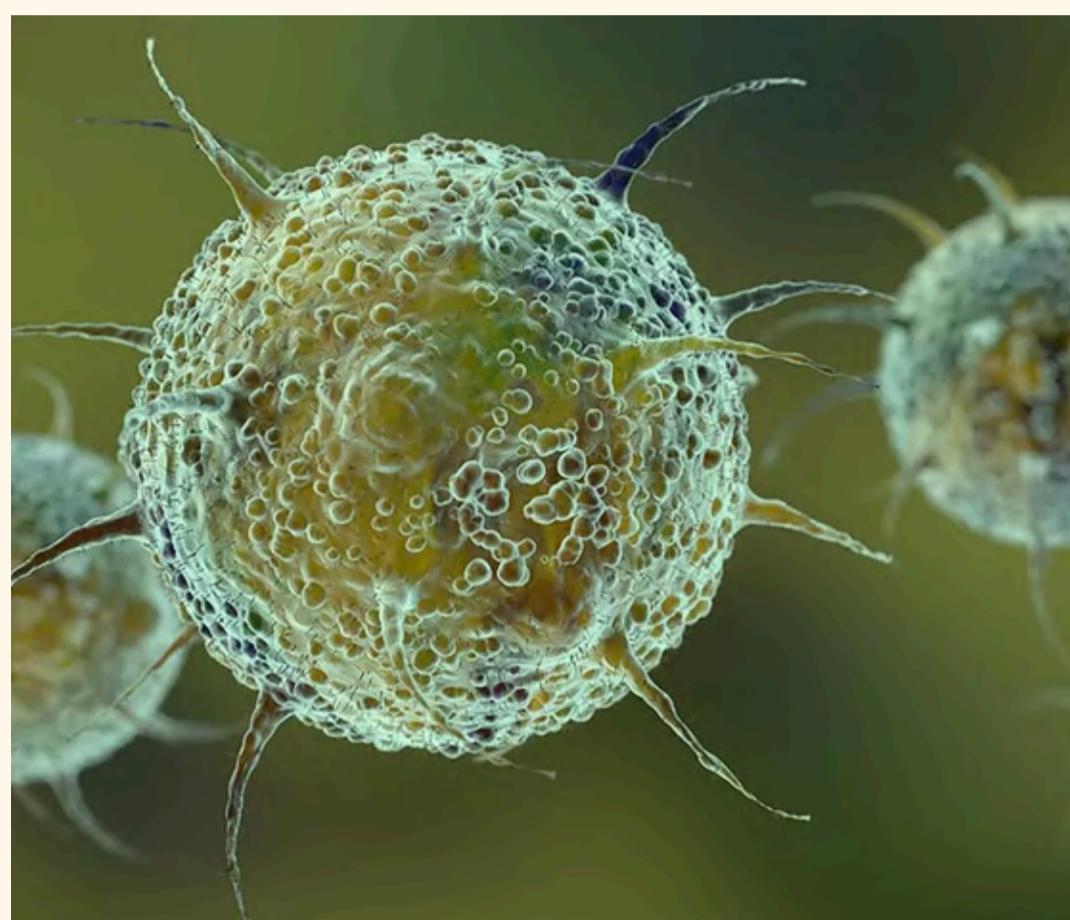
On the enterprise development arena, the LLMs are creating stronger impacts. The Open AI, Google NLP, Deep Seek, etc. have emerged as prominent large language model platforms. Their cognitive ability can be used to support new solutions to our socio-economic needs and tasks. Products and services can be configured based on these platforms. This means that in the near future, these entities will be transforming as Google-like platforms; the basis on which new business enterprises can be developed. Large Language Models (LLMs) have the potential to evolve into powerful platforms, reshaping the internet and business ecosystems in ways that challenge or even surpass the Google-based internet model. Another area of transformation is the potential rise of AI-driven operating systems rather than just a search tool. Here, the work or task can be completely controlled by the AI-driven operating systems. The job of the skilled people is to master such operating systems to meet the demand of the clients. In this context, a new and adaptive workforce becomes a necessity.

Already, LLMs like ChatGPT, Gemini, Google NLP, Claude, etc. are transitioning from mere tech tools to foundational platforms. Here, various vendors are developing a range of applications, products, and services based on the cognitive capabilities of LLMs. Unlike the typical Google-based model where just information is collected, LLMs offer customised answers, help task execution, and support intelligent automation. Understandably, there is a shift from search-based browsing to conversational computing and AI-driven interaction.

What the Chat GPT is doing and the Google is providing through its web browser are supportive of this new trend. If the current trend is an indicator, the bigger picture is that AI at the popular level is represented by LLMs and their applications at the end user level. For example, the Chat GPT's income comes mainly from ordinary users rather than from business enterprises. They were successful in depicting the platform as a tool that can help the usual individuals to complete their cognitive tasks. Even more powerful is the applicability of LLMs to deliver enterprise solutions. A disruption is already undergoing in the enterprise world where several of the services like web design, image, video and other content generation are taken over by AI tools. Here, the next phase will be the rise of small language models where more custom and task-specific AI models will be developed by leading players. In this context, the AI's rise is going to remarkably influence the way in which products and services are created and delivered.

What is a BSL-4 laboratory?

The term Bio-Safety Level 4 (BSL-4) represents the highest level of biological containment. These laboratories are designed to safely handle and study the world's most dangerous and life-threatening pathogens.



Such pathogens are highly infectious and often do not have effective vaccines or treatments. Work in BSL-4 laboratories is carried out under extremely strict and controlled conditions, which are inspected and monitored according to international standards. In these facilities, scientists conduct advanced research on high-risk pathogens. They also work on the development of diagnostics, vaccines, and therapeutics. Another important role of these laboratories is to support rapid outbreak investigation and response during serious disease outbreaks. Because of the nature of the pathogens studied, maximum safety and containment is required at every stage of research. This is what makes BSL-4 labs different from lower-level labs such as BSL-3 and BSL-2, which handle less dangerous organisms. A BSL-4 laboratory therefore plays a critical role in national health security by enabling safe research on the most dangerous diseases while preventing any risk of their accidental spread.

What is futuristic marine and space biotechnology?

Futuristic marine and space biotechnology focus on using underexplored environments like the deep ocean and outer space to develop new biological knowledge, materials, and manufacturing processes. Marine biotechnology studies microorganisms, algae, and other marine life to find useful compounds, enzymes, biomaterials, food ingredients, and biostimulants. These organisms survive in extreme conditions such as high pressure, high salinity, low light, and low nutrients. Space biotechnology studies how microbes, plants, and human biological systems behave under microgravity and radiation.

India has a long coastline of over 11,000 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone of over 2 million sq. km, giving it access to rich marine biodiversity. However, its share in global marine outputs is still low. Investing in marine biomanufacturing can help produce food, energy, chemicals, and biomaterials, while reducing pressure on land and freshwater resources. Space biotechnology is important for long-term space exploration, especially for food production and human health in extreme environments.

At present, India's marine biomass production is modest, with about 70,000 tonnes of seaweed cultivated annually, and the country still imports agar, carrageenan, and alginates. Initiatives like the Blue Economy, Deep Ocean Mission, and BioE3 are pushing the sector forward. Some private players and research institutions are working on this. In space biotechnology, ISRO is conducting microgravity experiments, but private participation is still limited.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Which one of the following ancient towns is well-known for its elaborate system of water harvesting and management by building a series of dams and channelizing water into connected reservoirs? (2021)

- (a) Dholavira
- (b) Kalibangan
- (c) Rakhigarhi
- (d) Ropar

2) With reference to the difference between the culture of Rigvedic Aryans and Indus Valley people, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2017)

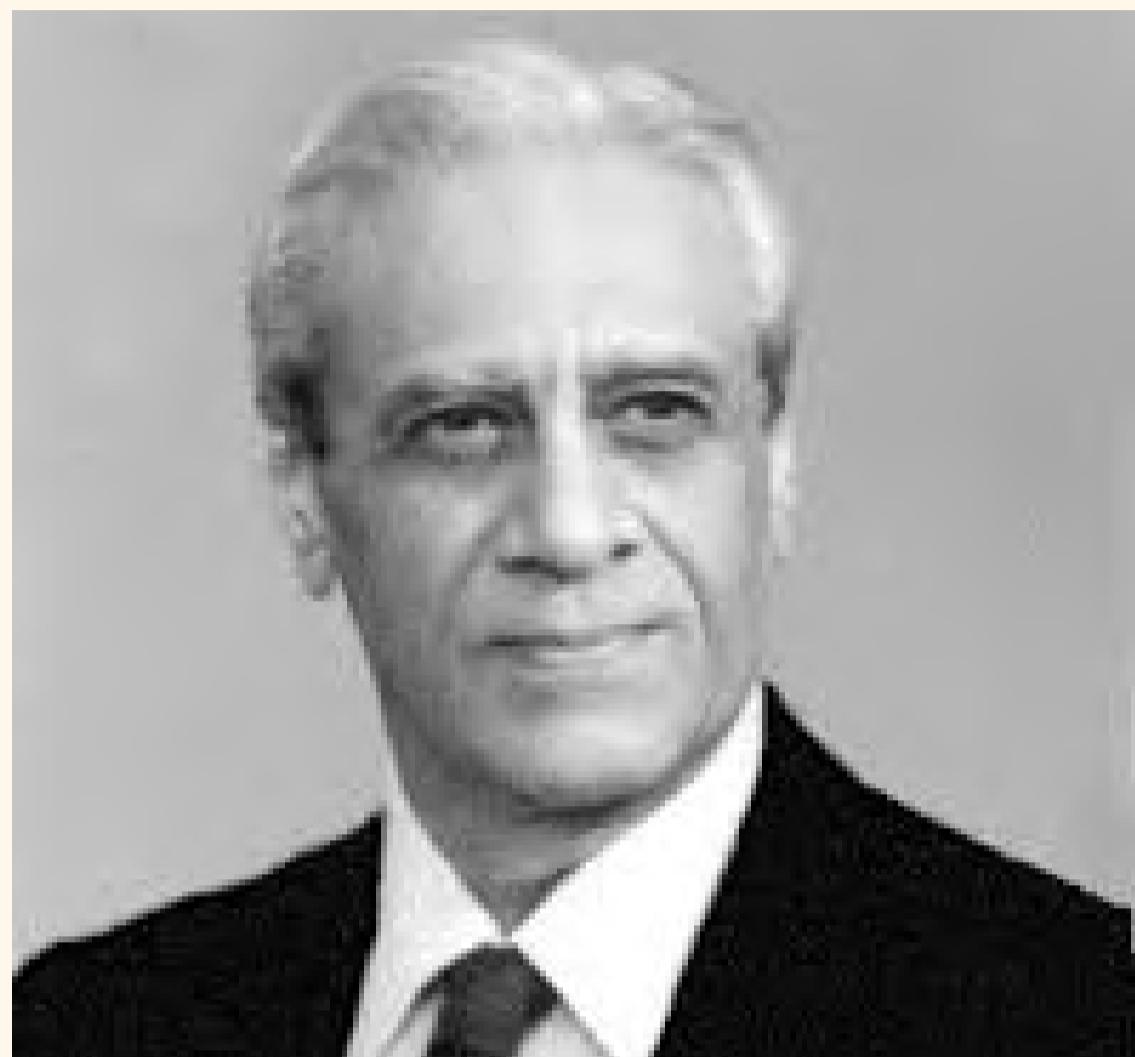
- 1. Rigvedic Aryans used the coat of mail and helmet in warfare, whereas the people of the Indus Valley Civilization did not leave any evidence of using them.
- 2. Rigvedic Aryans knew gold, silver, and copper, whereas Indus Valley people knew only copper and iron.
- 3. Rigvedic Aryans had domesticated the horse, whereas there is no evidence of Indus Valley people having been aware of this animal.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

HERITAGE

Satish Dhawan



Satish Dhawan, the former Chairman of ISRO, provided a memorable example of compassionate and responsible leadership during India's early space programme. Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam was the Project Director of the mission to place the Rohini satellite into orbit. In 1979, the launch failed and the satellite fell into the Bay of Bengal. The failure deeply affected Dr Kalam, who was anxious and distressed about the outcome.

At that moment, Satish Dhawan stepped forward and addressed the press conference himself. He told the nation that the team had worked very hard, but that more technological support was needed, and assured everyone that the mission would succeed the next year. By doing so, he took full responsibility for the failure on his own shoulders, shielding his team, especially the young project leader, from public criticism.

In 1980, when ISRO successfully placed the Rohini satellite into orbit, Satish Dhawan did something remarkable. He asked Dr Kalam to address the press and explain the success to the nation. In this way, he owned the failure as a leader but gave the credit of success to his team.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option A

Dholavira, located in the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, is a prominent Harappan site. It is renowned for its sophisticated water management system, which included a series of dams, step-wells, and interconnected reservoirs. The site features an intricate system to channel rainwater and store it in large reservoirs for domestic and agricultural use, which was crucial for sustaining life in the arid region. This advanced water harvesting system reflects the engineering and planning skills of the Harappan people.

Kalibangan : Kalibangan, located in Rajasthan, is known for its fire altars.

Rakhigarhi : Rakhigarhi, situated in Haryana, provides evidence of urban planning, including drains.

Ropar : Ropar, located in Punjab, is a Harappan site near the foothills of the Shivaliks is known for its burial practices but lacks evidence of extensive water management systems.

2) Answer is option C

Statement 1: Rigvedic Aryans used the coat of mail and helmet in warfare, whereas the people of the Indus Valley Civilization did not leave any evidence of using them. This statement is correct. The Rigvedic Aryans were familiar with advanced military equipment like coats of mail and helmets, as mentioned in the Rigveda. In contrast, there is no archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley Civilization indicating the use of such warfare equipment.

Statement 2: Rigvedic Aryans knew gold, silver, and copper, whereas Indus Valley people knew only copper and iron. This statement is incorrect. Both Rigvedic Aryans and Indus Valley people were familiar with gold, silver, and copper. However, the Indus Valley Civilization did not use iron, as it was introduced later during the Vedic period (Iron Age). The Rigvedic period primarily relied on copper and bronze, with iron becoming more prominent in the later Vedic period.

Statement 3: Rigvedic Aryans had domesticated the horse, whereas there is no evidence of Indus Valley people having been aware of this animal. This statement is correct. The Rigvedic Aryans were horse-centric, and horses played a significant role in their culture, warfare, and religious rituals. In the Indus Valley Civilization, there is no conclusive evidence of horses being domesticated or commonly used, though a few disputed findings of horse remains exist at some later Indus sites.

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