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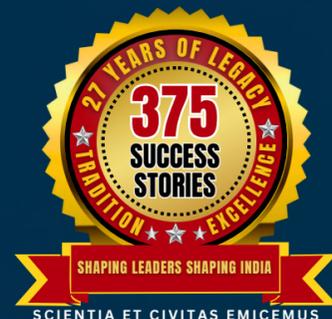
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Happy 70th birthday to our beloved Patron, Mar Joseph Kallarangat, Bishop of Palai. We admire and appreciate your leadership, unwavering dedication to faith and secular ideals, vision, and inspiration to countless young leaders. Wishing you roses, roses all the way in the years to come. Many more happy returns of the day!

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Nuclear power expansion is an R&D challenge

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India, EU close in on FTA as negotiations conclude

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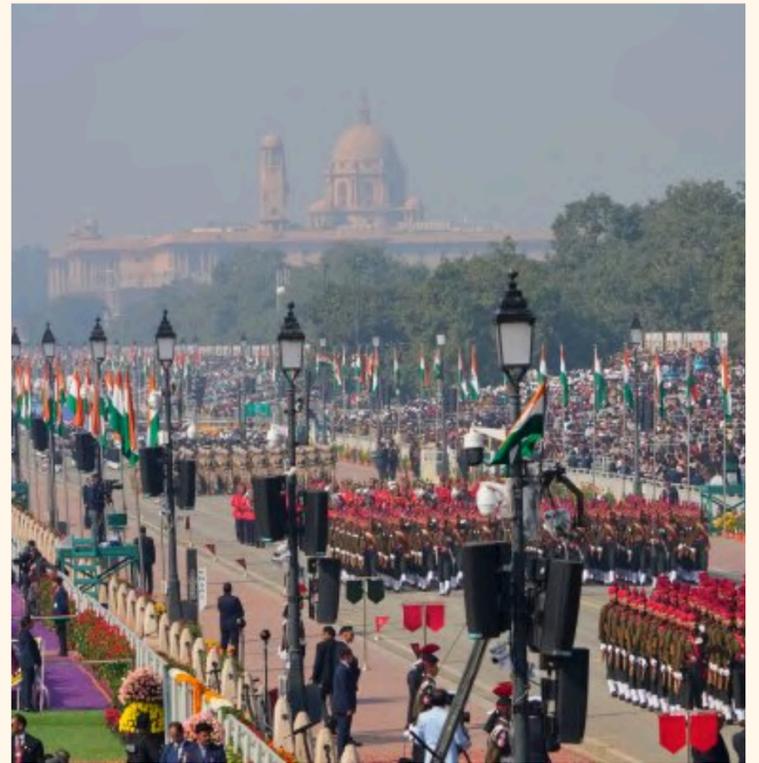
Carney denies FTA plans with China amid Trump's tariff threat

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Military might meets heritage of the nation on Kartavya Path

India celebrated its 77th Republic Day on Kartavya Path with a grand display of military strength and cultural heritage. The main theme was the 150th year of the National Song Vande Mataram. President Droupadi Murmu presided over the ceremony. The chief guests were European Council President Antonio Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. They arrived in traditional horse-drawn buggies and were received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The celebrations began with the President awarding the Ashoka Chakra to Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla for being the first Indian to set foot on the International Space Station.



Over 100 artists performed on the theme Vividata Mein Ekta using traditional musical instruments from across India. The parade was led by Lieutenant General Bhavnish Kumar, GOC Delhi Area. A tri-services tableau displayed replicas of major weapon systems used in Operation Sindoor in May 2025. The newly raised Bhairav Battalion, a specialised assault infantry unit, made its parade debut. A European Union military contingent also participated, marking the EU's first such participation outside Europe. Thirty tableaux took part, including 17 from States and Union Territories and 13 from Ministries and Departments. The theme of 150 years of Vande Mataram was celebrated on Republic Day at Kartavya Path through artwork and tableaux. The enclosures along the road displayed prints of old paintings showing the opening stanzas of the song. Floral artworks at the main stage paid tribute to its composer, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. Composed in 1875, Vande Mataram means "I bow to thee, mother" and was adopted as the national song in 1950. The tableau of the Ministry of Culture featured the complete manuscript of the song and traced its journey across generations. It showed Bankim Chandra composing the song and also showed artists in traditional and modern attire. Art installations behind them showed Vishnupant Pagnis recording the song and freedom fighters facing the gallows, with Bharat Mata holding the Tricolour in the background. The West Bengal tableau also paid tribute to Bankim Chandra and the freedom fighters. Another tableau by the Central Public Works Department showed a burning torch to mark the milestone year of the song. Kerala showcased India's first Water Metro and its achievement of 100% digital literacy and green mobility. Chhattisgarh highlighted tribal freedom fighters under the theme "The Mantra of Freedom, Vande Mataram". Gujarat's tableau honoured Vande Mataram and Bhikaji Cama. The parade enclosures were named after Indian rivers.



Nation honours 131 personalities with Padma awards



The Centre has announced the Padma Awards for 2026, one of India's highest civilian honours. This year, five Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan, and 113 Padma Shri awards have been declared. The list includes recipients from across the country, with eight from Kerala, 11 from West Bengal, and 13 from Tamil Nadu, showing wide regional representation.

Among the Padma Vibhushan awardees are the late former Kerala Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan and the late actor Dharmendra, both honoured posthumously. Former Supreme Court judge K.T. Thomas, educationist P. Narayanan, and noted violinist N. Rajam are the other recipients of this award. The late tribal leader and former Jharkhand Chief Minister Shibu Soren has been named for the Padma Bhushan posthumously. Other Padma Bhushan awardees include Mammooty, Alka Yagnik, Uday Kotak, and Vijay Amritraj. The Padma awards recognise distinguished service in fields such as social work, science, arts, sports, and public service, and continue to honour excellence and contribution to society.



Nuclear power expansion is an R&D challenge

The Ministry of Power announced the release of a new "Draft National Electricity Policy (NEP) 2026". The Draft NEP 2026 aims to transform the power sector for meeting the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047. The policy, once finalised, intends to replace the existing NEP which was notified in 2005. The draft National Electricity Policy seeks to align India's power sector with its long-term energy and climate goals. It reflects the target of reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 45 per cent by 2030 while also meeting growing development needs. The policy aims to rebalance the power mix and ensure reliable electricity supply, especially for emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence and data systems that require uninterrupted power.

Renewable energy remains central, but coal-based plants will continue as strategic buffers to manage the intermittency of solar and wind and to ensure grid stability. At the same time, the policy strongly pushes nuclear energy, with a plan to increase capacity tenfold by 2047. Nuclear power produces very low carbon emissions and is not affected by weather. The SHANTI Act has enabled expansion of the sector, including the use of advanced technologies such as small modular reactors and direct industrial use of nuclear power.

However, the target of 100 GW is ambitious. India has limited uranium and depends on imports. The long-term solution lies in expanding research and development to tap the country's large but underused thorium reserves.

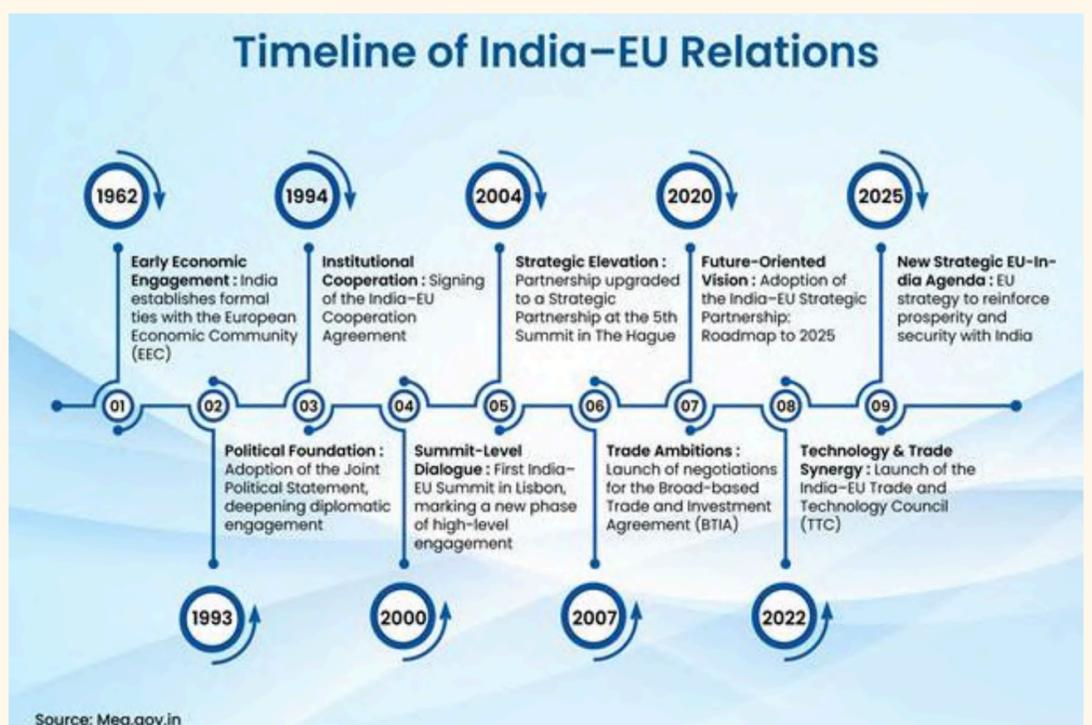
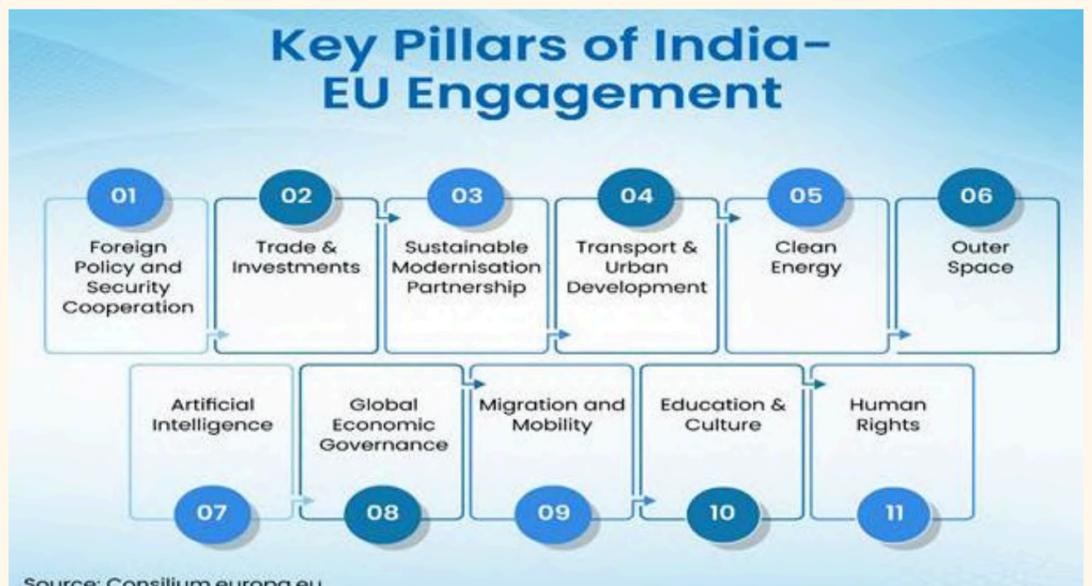


India, EU close in on FTA as negotiations conclude

European Union leaders who attended India's 77th Republic Day parade said that a "successful India" is in the world's interest, as Indian officials confirmed that negotiations for the EU-India Free Trade Agreement have been concluded. The Commerce Secretary said that official-level talks are over and both sides are ready to announce the agreement. Sources said the final text is being prepared after legal checking by both sides.

This announcement is part of a larger set of agreements expected to be signed at the EU-India summit. These include cooperation in security, defence, energy, and mobility. The summit will be attended by the Prime Minister of India, the President of the European Commission, and the President of the European Council. The EU leaders watched the Republic Day parade, where India displayed its military hardware and marching contingents, including those linked to Operation Sindoor. EU defence commanders also took part in the parade for the first time, and the leaders were later hosted at Rashtrapati Bhawan. The EU leaders said the partnership between India and the European Union is growing and important for global stability and security. They also spoke about the role of EU naval forces in protecting maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.

The EU-India FTA talks began in 2007 and faced many delays over issues like market access, environmental rules, investment, and immigration. The talks were paused between 2014 and 2022 and later restarted with more practical goals. Both sides agreed to set aside sectors where no agreement was possible. Once announced, the agreement will be legally checked, translated, and sent to all 27 EU states before approval by the European Parliament. With bilateral trade already crossing \$136 billion, this deal is expected to be one of the biggest in the world.



- India's engagement with the EU highlights its strategic focus on Europe, aligned with the upcoming India-EU Summit and the ongoing Free Trade Agreement.
- Bilateral trade volume reached approximately \$136 billion in 2024-25, making the EU India's largest goods trading partner.
- Between 2019 and 2024, India-EU bilateral trade in services grew steadily, with Indian exports rising from €19 billion to €37 billion and EU exports to India increasing to €29 billion.

INTERNATIONAL

Carney denies FTA plans with China amid Trump's tariff threat

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said that Canada has no intention of pursuing a free trade agreement with China. He made this statement after the US President threatened to impose a 100% tariff on Canadian goods if Canada moved ahead with a trade deal with Beijing. Mr. Carney said that Canada's recent agreement with China only reduced duties in a few sectors that were earlier hit by tariffs. He said that under the trade agreement Canada has with the United States and Mexico, there is a commitment to inform partners before pursuing free trade agreements with non-market economies. He added that Canada has no plan to do so with China and that the recent step only corrected some trade issues of the past few years.

Canada had earlier imposed a 100% tariff on Chinese electric vehicles and a 25% tariff on steel and aluminium, which led China to impose high import taxes on Canadian products. This month, Canada reduced its tariff on Chinese electric vehicles in return for lower tariffs on Canadian goods. The issue has increased tensions between the two sides and has added to the ongoing trade disagreements.

In a related diplomatic development, India's High Commissioner to Canada has said that Prime Minister Mark Carney is likely to visit India in the first week of March. The visit is expected to focus on signing agreements related to uranium, energy, critical minerals, and artificial intelligence. These areas are important for long-term economic and technological cooperation. The proposed agreements indicate an effort to strengthen bilateral ties in strategic sectors and to expand cooperation in resources, advanced technology, and clean energy.

How is China framing its Antarctic ambitions?



onomist; Gazprom; FT research

Cartogr

China has proposed a draft law titled the "Antarctic Activities and Environmental Protection Law" to regulate its activities in Antarctica. The draft was submitted for first reading to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in December 2025. The aim is to create a clear domestic legal framework for all China-related activities in the southern continent.

The draft law has seven chapters and 57 articles. It applies to Chinese citizens and organisations, and also to foreign entities that organise Antarctic activities from China or depart from Chinese ports. It sets rules for expeditions, scientific research, fisheries, tourism, and shipping. It stresses peaceful use and environmental protection in line with the Antarctic Treaty System. Military activities, mineral exploitation, and harmful practices are prohibited, except limited support for peaceful purposes. The law also introduces environmental impact assessments, supervision, and accountability mechanisms.

China has built a strong presence in Antarctica since 1984 and now operates five research stations and polar icebreakers. The draft law shows a move to formalise this presence through clear legal regulation within the treaty system.

ECONOMICS

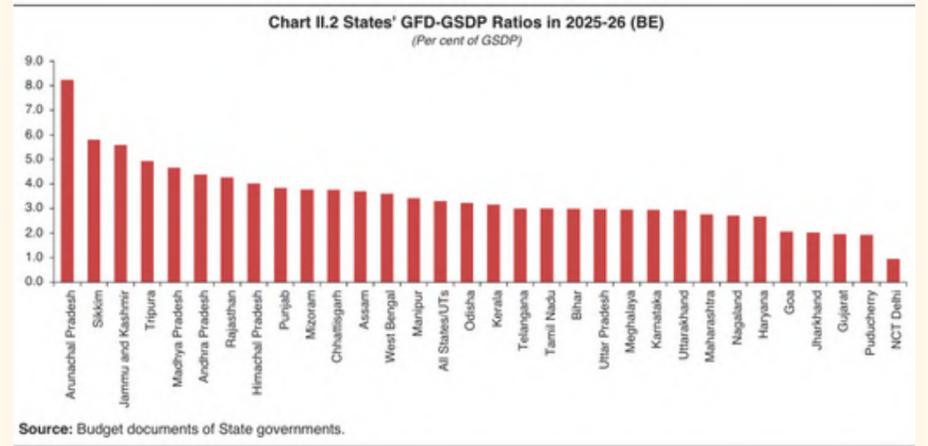
Textile exporters flag risk to jobs, market loss from US tariffs

Indian apparel exporters have warned that sustained US tariffs could permanently damage India's market share and cause job losses. In a letter to Vice President CP Radhakrishnan, they said the sector has no remaining shock-absorption capacity. The Tiruppur textile cluster in Tamil Nadu is the worst hit due to its dependence on the US market and exports garments worth nearly Rs 14,000 crore annually to the US. The US has imposed 25 per cent tariffs and an additional 25 per cent oil-related penalty, causing severe disruption. US buyers are withholding or cancelling orders due to fears of further tariff hikes. Even 25 per cent discounts are no longer viable.

India exported \$10.3 billion of textiles and apparel to the US in 2024. The share of T&A in India's world exports was 8.21 per cent in 2023-24. The supply chain is largely domestic, with about 90 per cent of inputs sourced domestically, showing the labour-intensive nature of the sector. According to the Apparel Export Promotion Council, market diversification is not a short-term option, as alternate markets need 2-3 years for buyer onboarding, compliance audits, and volume scaling. An abrupt loss of the US market would cause permanent customer displacement and allow competitor nations to replace India.



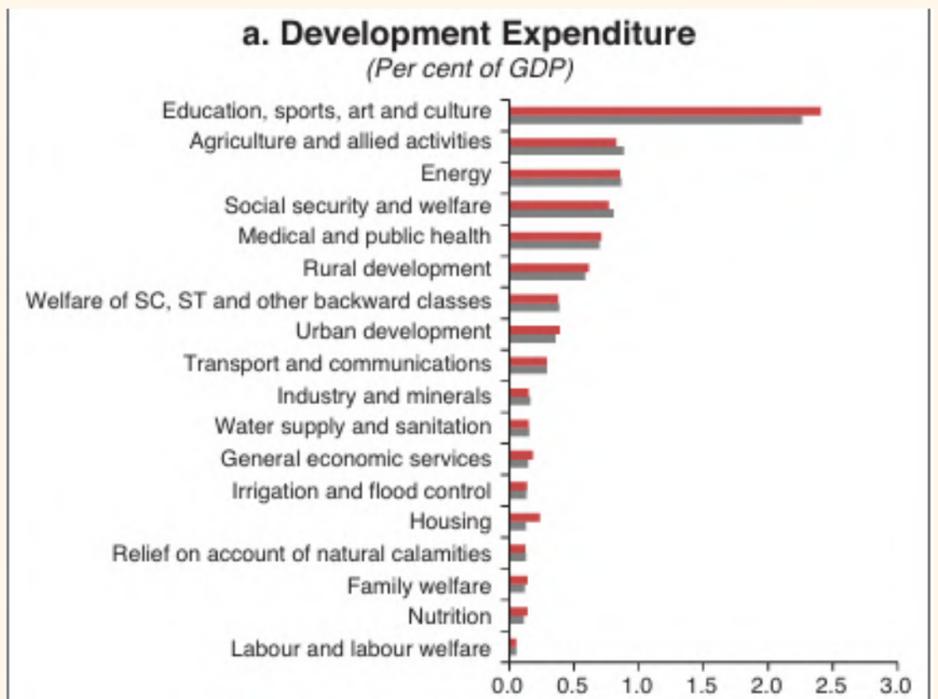
Poll-bound States spent carefully while cutting debt



According to the RBI State of State Finances report, Poll-bound States — Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry — have reduced outstanding liabilities as a share of GSDP while maintaining development expenditure. Data shows that these States cut debt by up to 4 percentage points since 2021.

West Bengal has the highest debt at 39% of GSDP in 2025-26, though it fell by 4.7 points. Kerala reduced debt to 35.5%, Tamil Nadu to 29.2%, Assam to 28%, and Puducherry to 26%. All remain above the FRBM limit of 20%, a trend continuing since 2016.

These governments came to power during the COVID slowdown and prioritised mitigation. Development and capital spending were maintained or slightly increased. West Bengal raised development spending to 12% of GSDP. Kerala and Tamil Nadu kept capital outlay near 1% and 1.9%. RBI said States face different fiscal pressures due to demographic stages, with Kerala and Tamil Nadu having one-fifth of their population above 60.

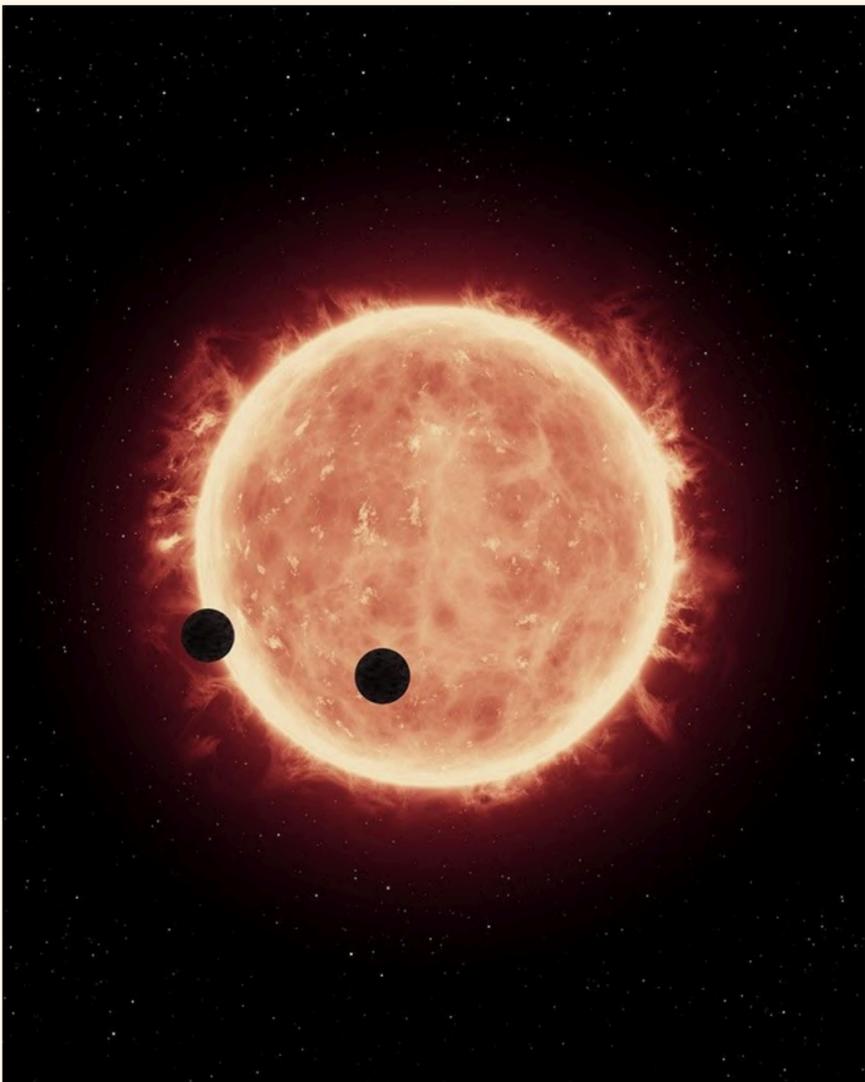


ExoMiner++: planet spotter

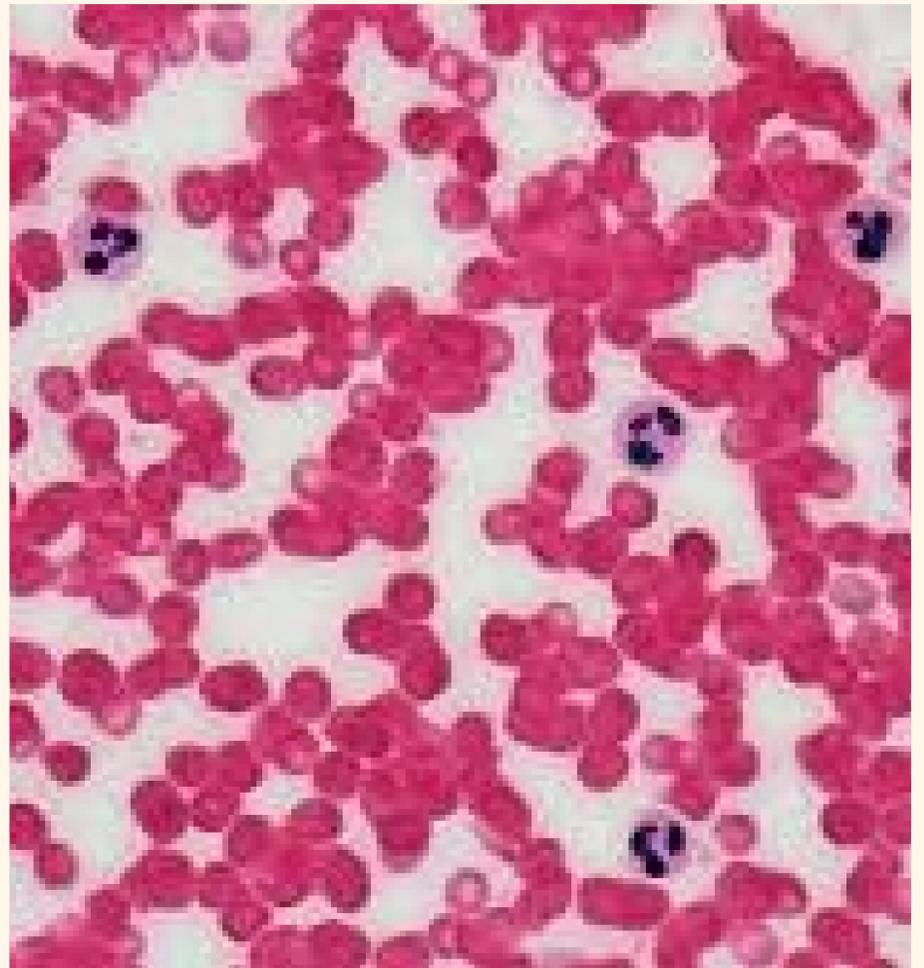
ExoMiner++ is a deep-learning artificial intelligence model developed by NASA to detect exoplanets in telescope data. It is the successor to ExoMiner, which worked on data from the Kepler telescope. ExoMiner++ will also analyse data from the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite mission.

The model studies graphs that show the brightness of a star over time. When a planet passes in front of a star, the brightness drops. The main challenge is to separate real planet signals from false signals caused by other stars or background objects.

ExoMiner++ is not a black-box model. It explains its decisions and gives a score showing how likely a signal is to be a planet. ExoMiner earlier confirmed 370 new exoplanets from Kepler data. ExoMiner++ is trained on both Kepler and TESS data and can study many more stars at once. So far, it has identified about 7,000 possible exoplanet candidates in TESS data. NASA has released it as open-source software and invited scientists to improve it and use it for future missions like the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope.



Life pays a 'heat tax' to run chemical reactions



Living things release a large amount of heat into their surroundings. This is linked to the need to balance a drop in entropy when cells organise themselves and work together. Scientists earlier thought this heat was only the entropy “tax,” but the amount of heat released is much higher than required. A new study by researchers from the University of Freiburg, STFC Daresbury Laboratory, and the University of Edinburgh explains this excess heat.

Cells run thousands of chemical reactions at the same time. These reactions must be fast, precise, and reliable. Cells must avoid errors in making proteins, must build structures of exact size, and must respond quickly to stress. To achieve this, cells use chemical cycles that are driven far from equilibrium. The study focuses on ATP hydrolysis. Cells maintain the ATP to ADP ratio about 10 billion times higher than the equilibrium level by constantly making ATP and using it. Such far-from-equilibrium reactions can do useful work and be controlled. Keeping these cycles running produces large amounts of heat. The calculations show that these cycles explain much of the heat released by living organisms, and evolution has accepted this cost.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to the Fourteenth Finance Commission, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2015)

1. It has increased the share of States in the central divisible pool from 32 percent to 42 percent.
 2. It has made recommendations concerning sector specific grants.
- Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

2) 'Basel III Accord' or simply 'Basel III', often seen in the news, seeks to (2015)

- a) develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity
- b) improve banking sector's ability to deal with financial and economic stress and improve risk management
- c) reduce the greenhouse gas emissions but places a heavier burden on developed countries
- d) transfer technology from developed countries to poor countries to enable them to replace the use of chlorofluorocarbons in refrigeration with harmless chemicals

CASE STUDY

Bihar's Pink Bus Pioneers



Six young women from the Musahar community in Bihar are set to become the first women drivers of the Pink Bus service run by the Bihar State Road Transport Corporation. The group includes Anita Kumari, Baby Kumari, Gayatri Kumari, Aarti Kumari, Saraswati Kumari, and Ragini Kumari, all aged between 21 and 22. Their participation in the Republic Day parade in Patna marks a symbolic recognition of their journey.

The Pink Bus service, meant only for women passengers, started in phases from May 2025. Although around 100 such buses already operate in different cities, they have so far been driven only by men. To change this, the Transport Department began a free training programme for women from eligible backgrounds. The programme provides structured training along with food and accommodation. The six women completed the required licensing and training process to qualify as heavy vehicle drivers.

They will be appointed on a contract basis, and 13 women are currently in training. For some, like Saraswati Kumari, joining the programme meant persuading family members who feared social judgment.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option a

Statement 1: It has increased the share of States in the central divisible pool from 32 percent to 42 percent.

The Fourteenth Finance Commission, chaired by Dr. Y.V. Reddy, significantly increased the share of states in the central divisible pool from 32% to 42%. This was done to empower the states financially and to provide them with greater fiscal autonomy. This is a key feature of its recommendations.

This statement is correct.

2) Statement 2: The Fourteenth Finance Commission focused primarily on increasing the States' share in the divisible pool and strengthening fiscal federalism. Unlike earlier Finance Commissions, it did not place much emphasis on sector-specific grants. Although it broadly recognised certain priority areas such as general administration (including judiciary and police), environment (forests), maintenance (irrigation, roads and bridges), and the social sector (education, health, drinking water and sanitation), its main approach was to recommend a larger share of untied funds. This was intended to give States greater flexibility to spend according to their own priorities and local needs.

This statement is incorrect.

2) Answer is option b

Basel III is a set of international banking regulations developed by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision. Basel III is an extension of the existing Basel II Framework, and introduces new capital and liquidity standards to strengthen the regulation, supervision, and risk management of the whole of the banking and finance sector. The key objectives include:

- Improving the banking sector's ability to handle financial and economic stress.
- Enhancing transparency and governance in banks.
- Increasing the minimum capital requirements and introducing new liquidity and leverage ratios.

The global capital framework and new capital buffers require financial institutions to hold more capital and higher quality of capital than under current Basel II rules.

**PRELIMS 2026
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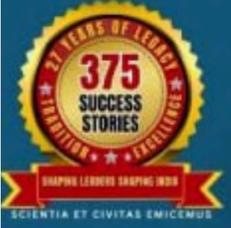


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