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## Make deal or next attack will be 'far worse': Trump to Iran

US President Donald Trump has urged Iran to negotiate a new nuclear deal, warning that failure to do so could lead to stronger US military action. He stated that a US naval force, led by the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, has been deployed to the region amid rising tensions.

Iran responded that it is open to dialogue based on mutual respect but will defend itself if pressured. Iranian officials also said no recent talks have taken place. The episode reflects continuing instability in US-Iran relations and highlights the limits of the post-2015 nuclear agreement framework.



At a broader level, it shows how coercive diplomacy, military posturing, and regional tensions continue to shape the global security order and affect stability in West Asia.

## Ajit Pawar, Maharashtra's Dy CM, killed in plane crash

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar died after a chartered aircraft carrying him and four others crashed while trying to land at Baramati airport.



Ajit Anantrao Pawar, Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister, leaves behind a complex political legacy marked by administrative ability, political ambition, and strong regional influence. A dominant figure in Baramati, he won eight consecutive elections and held the post of Deputy Chief Minister a record five times across different political alignments. Known for his disciplined work style and strong grip over administration, he was credited with financial management and key welfare initiatives. A powerful yet polarising leader, he remained a central figure in Maharashtra politics till his death.

## Glare on private, charter planes

A Parliamentary Standing Committee (August 2025), constituted after the June 2025 Air India crash, warned that India's rapid aviation expansion is outpacing safety oversight, especially in the private and charter segment. It noted uneven compliance, weak maintenance practices, limited safety staffing, and inadequate operational control systems among non-scheduled operators. The committee recommended mandatory Safety Management Systems, stricter DGCA surveillance, and surprise audits.

## New Solid Waste Management Rules notified, larger onus on bulk generators



The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026 to operationalise a new framework for urban waste governance. The Rules aim to strengthen source-level management, circular economy linkages, and accountability.

The new framework broadens responsibilities, promotes reuse of waste as fuel in boilers and cement kilns, and introduces clear penalties for non-compliance. A major shift is the stringent onus on bulk waste generators, which account for nearly 30% of total waste, to process waste at source. The Rules mandate four-stream segregation at source: wet, dry, sanitary, and special care waste. Bulk generators are defined using thresholds of built-up area, water use, or waste generation, covering government offices, institutions, commercial establishments and residential complexes.

Such entities must ensure environmentally sound collection, transport and processing of waste and are placed under centralised monitoring. They must process wet waste on-site or obtain a responsibility certificate. Given India generates 1.85 lakh tonnes of waste daily, the Rules seek to reduce pressure on urban local bodies and institutionalise sustainable waste management at source.

## Railways plans to manufacture 24-coach Vande Bharat sleeper

Indian Railways is planning to manufacture a 24-coach Vande Bharat sleeper train under the Make in India initiative at the Integral Coach Factory (ICF), Chennai. This project follows the launch of the 16-coach Vande Bharat sleeper train, which was flagged off in January 2026 on the Howrah–Guwahati and Kamakhya–Howrah routes. The new 24-coach version is currently in the design stage, with the prototype targeted for rollout by the end of 2026.

The proposed train is designed to increase passenger carrying capacity by about 49%, helping Indian Railways cater to rising long-distance travel demand and improve operational efficiency. It will include mini-pantries and linen storage spaces to improve onboard service management. Passenger amenities will include ergonomically designed berths, charging points, Wi-Fi-based information and infotainment systems, vacuum toilets, improved luggage space, and facilities for Divyangjan passengers, reflecting a focus on inclusiveness and service quality.

Technically, the train will feature advanced propulsion systems, regenerative braking, crashworthy stainless-steel coaches, fire safety systems, CCTV surveillance, intelligent diagnostics, and the Kavach collision avoidance system. The maximum operational speed will be 160 kmph. From a strategic perspective, indigenous manufacturing of such advanced trains strengthens domestic industrial capability and reduces dependence on imports.



## 66% sanitation workers in Central govt. from SC, ST, OBC groups: DoPT report



The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), in its Annual Report 2024–25, has released data on reservation and social representation in Union government services as of January 1, 2024. The report shows that over 66% of Group C safai karmacharis come from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Among Group A posts, 14.2% are held by SCs, 6.54% by STs, and 19.14% by OBCs, against mandated reservation norms of 15% for SCs, 7.5% for STs, 27% for OBCs, and 10% for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). However, the report provides no data on EWS representation. In Group C posts excluding sanitation workers, SCs account for 16.75%, STs 8.94%, and OBCs 27.29%, while in Group B posts, the shares are 16.2%, 7.63%, and 21.95% respectively. Overall, across 32.52 lakh employees in 80 Ministries and Departments, SC representation stands at 16.84%, ST at 8.7%, and OBC at 26.32%.

This is the first comprehensive dataset since 2018–19. Compared to that year, SC representation declined from 17.49% to 16.84%, ST rose marginally from 8.47% to 8.94%, and OBC increased significantly from 21.57% to 26.32%, indicating a clear upward trend for OBC representation.

## No discrimination under new UGC rules : Pradhan

The Union Education Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, has sought to reassure the public over the new 2026 University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations on promoting equity in higher education institutions, amid widespread protests and legal challenges.

The regulations, notified on January 13, define “caste-based discrimination” as discrimination against members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The final version removed a provision from the draft that would have penalised false complaints. Critics argue that the framework is itself discriminatory because it does not recognise students from the “general category” as potential victims and lacks a mechanism to address allegedly false complaints.

Several petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court, and protests have been held in cities including Lucknow, Indore, New Delhi, and Bareilly, with more demonstrations planned.

Student organisations and political actors have expressed differing views, with some describing the rules as well-intentioned but in need of greater clarity and balance, while others support them as a necessary step to address discrimination on campuses. The issue highlights the challenge of designing an anti-discrimination framework that is both effective and widely accepted. Going forward, the emphasis, as stated by the Minister, will be on fair, constitutional, and non-discriminatory implementation, while the courts and public debate will shape the final outcome.



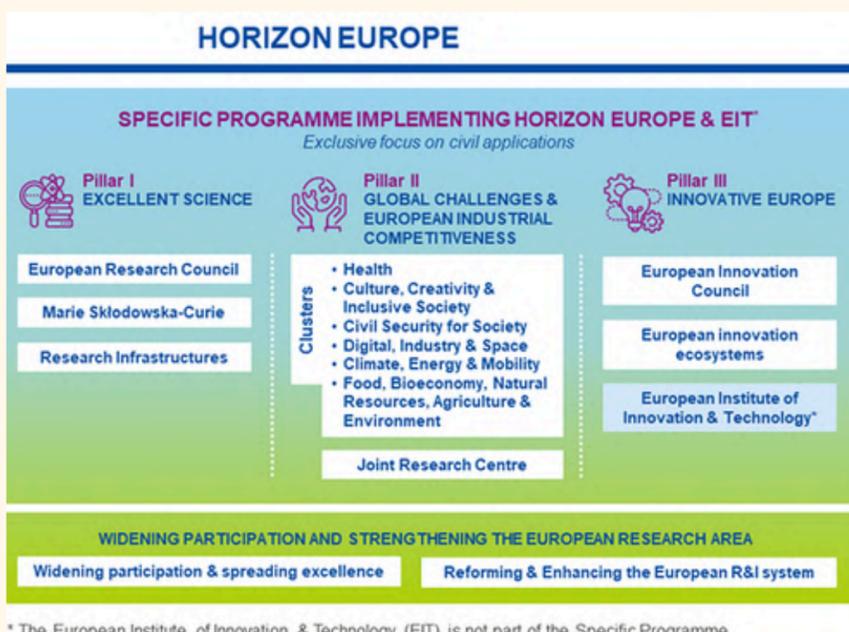
# INTERNATIONAL

## EU, India to collaborate on 'peaceful uses' of nuclear energy under Euratom deal

India and the European Union have committed to promoting collaboration on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy under the India–Euratom agreement, as noted in the Joint India–EU Comprehensive Strategic Agenda on tuesday. India and the EU had signed a research and development agreement on peaceful uses of nuclear energy with Euratom in July 2020.

The statement highlights cooperation in nuclear science and technology, including research on advanced materials for detectors, radiation safety, nuclear security, non-power applications of atomic energy such as radiopharmaceuticals, and strengthening collaboration in the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER). It also refers to deepening cooperation under the EU's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme in areas such as energy, water, agrifood, health, semiconductors, biotechnology and advanced materials, including through co-funding and coordinated calls.

A major sticking point remains the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which imposes additional tariffs on carbon-intensive iron and steel producers. India stated that assurances and flexibilities have been secured under the CBAM provisions.



## Bangladesh signs defence deal with China to set up UAV production plant



Bangladesh has signed a defence agreement with China to set up a manufacturing and assembly facility for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), marking an important step in its defence capability development. The agreement was signed between the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) and China's state-owned China Electronics Technology Group Corporation International (CETC). Under the deal, both sides will jointly establish a facility in Bangladesh to produce and assemble advanced UAVs.

A key feature of the agreement is technology transfer and capacity building. CETC will support the BAF in developing the capability to independently manufacture UAVs in the long term. Initially, Bangladesh will acquire the capability to produce Medium Altitude Low Endurance (MALE) UAVs and Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) UAVs. The UAVs are intended for both civilian and strategic uses, including humanitarian assistance and disaster management, as well as military operations. This makes the agreement relevant not only for defence preparedness but also for disaster response and surveillance.

Strategically, the deal strengthens Bangladesh's indigenous defence production base and deepens defence cooperation with China. It reflects a broader trend of countries seeking domestic manufacturing capacity in critical defence technologies rather than relying solely on imports. The agreement also reflects China's growing use of defence partnerships to consolidate its regional influence, with potential implications for the military balance in South Asia and the broader neighbourhood.

## India-EU trade deal: What it means for pharma sector

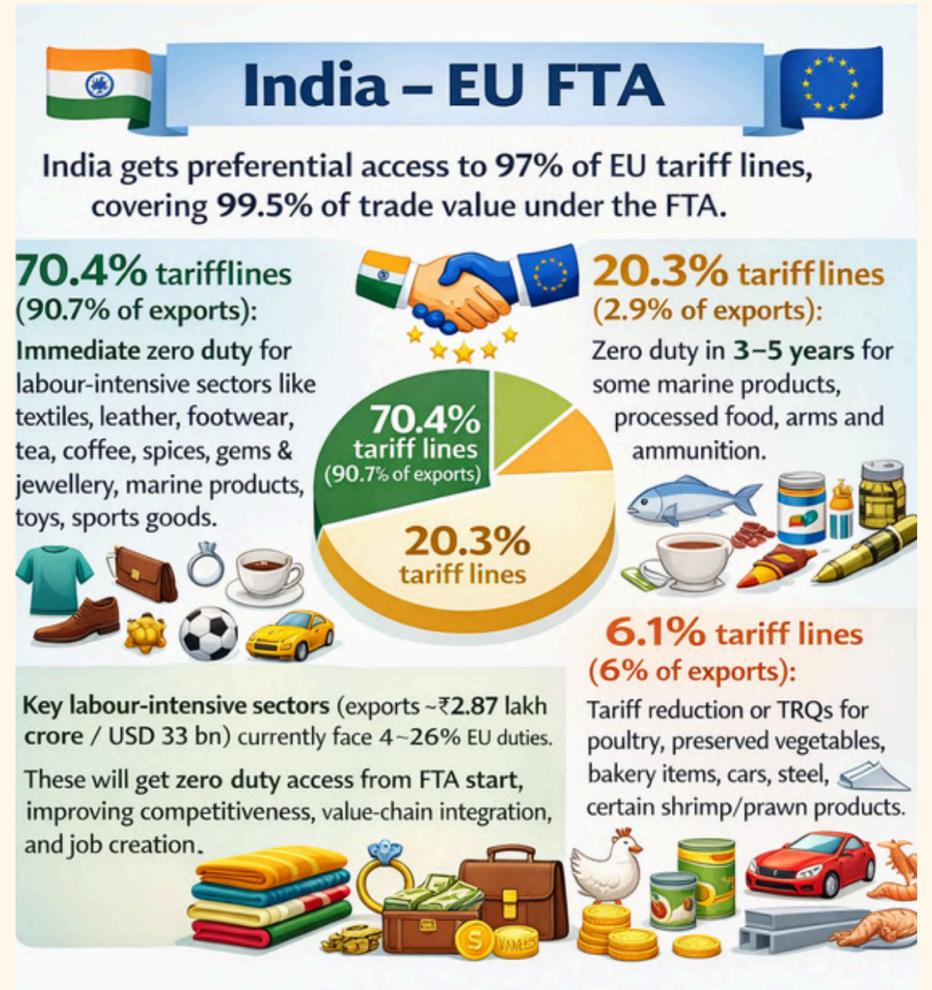
The proposed India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) aims to expand trade by eliminating tariffs on nearly all EU pharmaceutical products and over 90% of medical, surgical, and optical equipment. Duties of up to 11% on EU pharma imports will be largely removed. According to industry representatives, this will reduce the cost of high-end medical and diagnostic equipment, lower hospital input costs, enable wider adoption of advanced technologies, and improve clinical outcomes, thereby supporting affordable healthcare. The agreement is also expected to encourage EU investment in India's research-based pharmaceutical sector.

However, concerns have been raised regarding regulatory and industrial implications. India currently imports 70–90% of its medical devices, and only 23 devices are regulated under the existing legal framework. Many implantable devices remain unregulated, raising patient safety issues. Experts argue that the absence of a dedicated medical devices law and the inflow of second-hand equipment could undermine domestic manufacturing and slow indigenous production.

On intellectual property, India has resisted EU demands for stricter IP rules to protect its generic sector. Industry experts note that the impact on generic exports will be limited, as tariffs were already near zero, and most EU imports are proprietary drugs.



## FTA will anchor manufacturers into global value chain



Business leaders and industry associations have welcomed the India–European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA), calling it a strategic breakthrough in India's global trade engagement. According to CII, the pact deepens the partnership between two major democracies and economies that together account for nearly 25% of global GDP.

The proposed phased reduction of tariffs on cars and auto components and liberalisation of automotive parts is expected to foster technological innovation, sustainable growth and future mobility in the Indian automotive sector. In textiles, zero-duty access across all tariff lines will open the EU's \$263.5 billion import market, boosting exports of yarn, MMF apparel, home textiles and garments, with apparel exports projected to grow 20–25% annually.

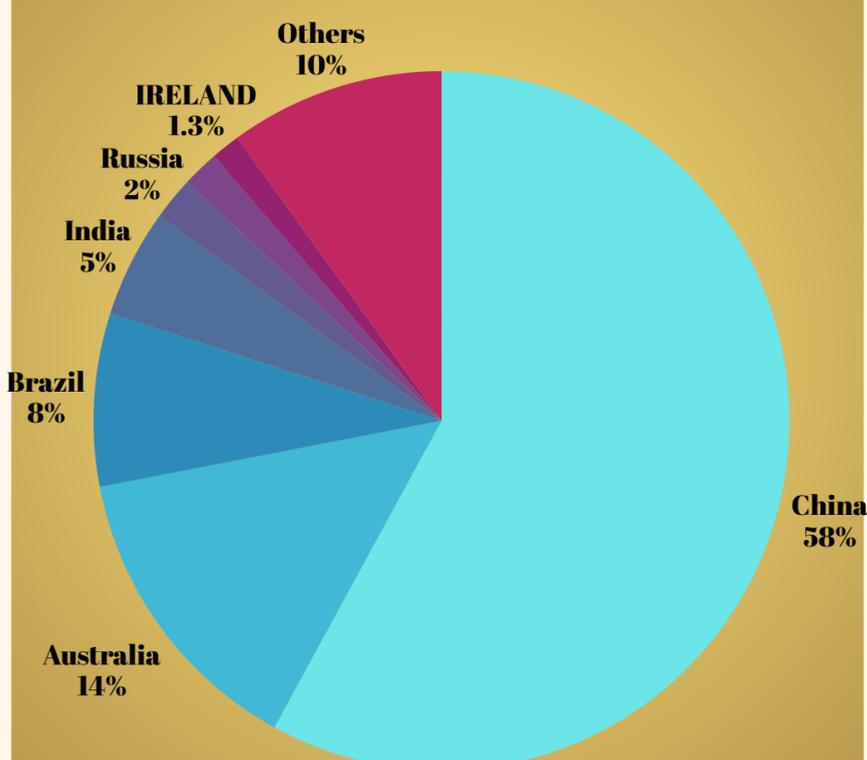
The FTA will improve EU market access for Indian IT services, enabling easier cross-border services and better professional mobility, while diversifying markets. In pharmaceuticals, near-zero tariff access strengthens the competitiveness of Indian formulations, APIs and MSMEs, ensuring stable and predictable long-term trade.

## Hindalco unveils \$2.3-billion aluminium smelter in Odisha

Hindalco Industries has announced a ₹210 billion (2.29 billion dollar) project to expand its aluminium smelter in Odisha as part of its broader capacity enhancement plan aimed at reducing dependence on imports. Along with this, the company has also commissioned a flat rolled products and battery-grade aluminium foil manufacturing facility worth ₹45 billion. The move strengthens domestic aluminium production and supports downstream manufacturing. Aluminium products are critical raw materials for lithium-ion batteries, which are widely used in electric vehicles and clean energy storage systems. The expansion is expected to support India's growing demand for advanced manufacturing and clean energy technologies.

The aluminium industry in India is strategically well placed and is one of the largest producers in the world with discernible growth plans and prospects for the future. India's rich bauxite mineral base renders a competitive edge to the industry as compared to its counterparts globally.

World's top aluminium producers 2022



## Amazon cuts 16,000 jobs in AI, efficiency push



Amazon has confirmed 16,000 corporate job cuts and has not ruled out the possibility of further reductions. This development comes in the context of a broader trend in which the threat of layoffs continues to affect the global job market. Large corporations, small businesses, and startups are increasingly using artificial intelligence to write software code and deploy AI agents to automate routine tasks in order to reduce costs and lower dependence on human labour.

Independent statistical studies show that in 2025, a total of 1,23,941 tech employees were laid off across 269 companies, compared to about 1,50,000 job cuts across 549 companies in 2024. While the total number of layoffs declined, 2025 was different because the role of AI in these job losses became more visible. Researchers have claimed that AI was linked to layoffs affecting at least 55,000 workers in the United States in 2025.

However, Amazon's leadership has offered a more nuanced explanation. During the company's third-quarter earnings call, CEO Andy Jassy stated that the job cuts were "not really financially driven and not really AI-driven." Instead, he indicated that excessive bureaucracy within the organisation was a major reason. This suggests that while AI is reshaping employment patterns, corporate restructuring and management inefficiencies also play an important role in current layoff decisions.

**PRELIMS CORNER :**

1) Which of the following are the key features of 'National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA)? (2016)

1. River basin is the unit of planning and management.
2. It spearheads the river conservation efforts at the national level
3. One of the Chief Ministers of the States through which the Ganga flows becomes the Chairman of NGRBA on rotation basis.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

2) The term 'M-STriPES' is sometimes seen in the news in the context of: (2017)

- a) Captive breeding of Wild Fauna
- b) Maintenance of Tiger Reserves
- c) Indigenous Satellite Navigation System
- d) Security of National Highways

**PRELIMS 2026  
 COUNTDOWN**



**115 DAYS TO GO**

**When a Village Walked for the Army**

In January 2026, a remarkable instance of civil–military solidarity was witnessed in the hilly Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir. Following heavy snowfall, more than 20 Army personnel were stranded at Morcha Top, located at an altitude of around 11,000 feet, while conducting anti-terror operations under Operation Trashi-1. With normal access routes blocked by 5–6 feet of snow, the situation posed a serious risk to the troops.

In response, local villagers displayed extraordinary courage and social responsibility. Despite limited resources, they trekked nearly 15 kilometres across treacherous mountainous terrain for almost five hours, carrying their own shovels to carve a narrow passage through the snow. Assisted with basic gear by the Army, they reached the stranded soldiers and safely guided them back by evening.

This episode illustrates the deep bond between civilians and security forces in border and conflict-prone regions. It highlights how community participation, trust, and collective resilience act as crucial force multipliers in national security and disaster response, reflecting the spirit of cooperative federalism and people-centric governance at the grassroots level.

# Prelims Corner: Explanations



1) Answer is option a

**Statement 1. River basin is the unit of planning and management: This is Correct.** The NGRBA adopts the river basin approach for planning and management, which considers the entire Ganga River Basin, including all tributaries and surrounding ecosystems, for coordinated efforts in river conservation and management.

**Statement 2. It spearheads the river conservation efforts at the national level: This is Correct.** The NGRBA is the key body responsible for overseeing and coordinating efforts for the conservation, cleaning, and management of the Ganga River and its basin. It formulates and implements policies and programs aimed at cleaning and rejuvenating the river.

**Statement 3 : One of the Chief Ministers of the States through which the Ganga flows becomes the Chairman of NGRBA on a rotation basis: This is incorrect.** The Chairman of NGRBA is not on a rotation basis. The Chairman of the NGRBA is the Prime Minister of India. However, the Chief Ministers of the states through which the Ganga flows (Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal) are part of the NGRBA as members.

2) Answer is option b

The term 'M-STRIPES' is associated with the maintenance of tiger reserves.

**M-STRIPES:** M-STRIPES stands for Monitoring System for Tigers - Intensive Protection and Ecological Status. It is a management tool developed for the monitoring of tiger reserves and the protection of tigers in India.

The system is used for the effective monitoring of tiger populations, their habitat, and the overall management of tiger reserves. It helps in ensuring the intensive protection of tigers and other wildlife within reserves. The system is part of India's Project Tiger initiative, which aims to conserve tigers and their habitats. Project Tiger, initiated in 1973, has been India's flagship conservation initiative, successfully completing 50 years in 2023. Focused on tiger conservation through dedicated reserves and strict protection measures, it has played a crucial role in reviving tiger populations.



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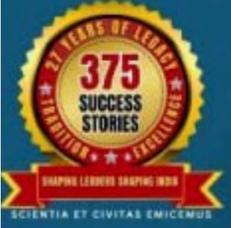
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