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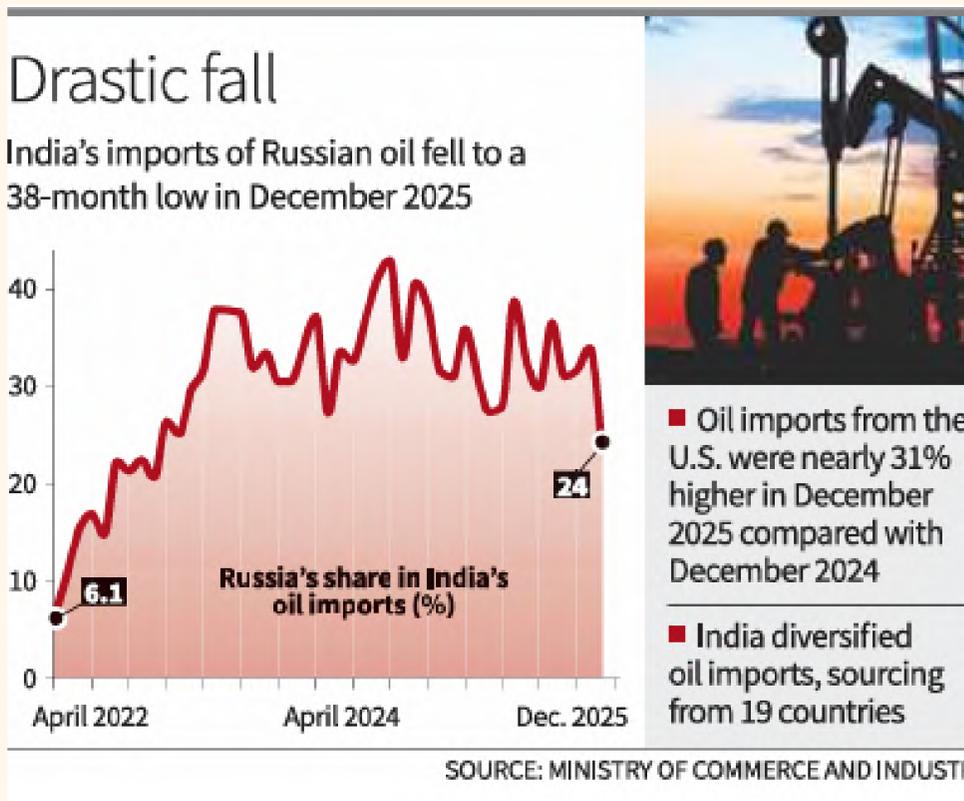
Kerala's adopted daughter Pepita Seth becomes an Indian citizen at 84
KERALA - REVIEW



India's oil imports from Russia hit 38-month low

India's crude oil import pattern witnessed a notable shift in December 2025, reflecting changes in sourcing amid evolving international dynamics. According to official data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the value of India's crude oil imports from Russia declined to a 38-month low of \$2.7 billion.

This represented a 15% fall compared to December 2024 and a 27.1% decline from November 2025. Consequently, Russia's share in India's total oil imports dropped to 24.9%, the lowest level in three years, down from 34% a month earlier. In volume terms, imports from Russia stood at 5.8 million tonnes, the lowest since February 2025. During the same period, India's crude oil imports from the United States showed an increase on a year-on-year basis. Imports from the U.S. were valued at \$569.3 million in December 2025, nearly 31% higher than in December 2024, though lower than November 2025 due to a surge in that month



In volume terms, India imported 1.1 million tonnes of crude oil from the U.S., marking a 58% increase over the corresponding period of the previous year.

\$120 million committed to Chabahar port in Iran completely paid: Centre

The Union government informed Parliament that it has fully met its financial commitment of USD 120 million for the Chabahar port project in Iran, ahead of the expiry of the U.S. sanctions waiver in April 2026. The Ministry of External Affairs stated that the amount was paid for procuring port equipment, in line with a 10-year memorandum of understanding signed with Iran in May 2024.

The government also noted that the United States had extended a conditional sanctions waiver till April 26, 2026, and that India remains engaged with all stakeholders to address the implications of these developments. The statement came amid questions over India's future involvement in managing the port, especially after the Union Budget discontinued annual allocations for Chabahar. Opposition MP Manish Tewari alleged that the government had acted prematurely in opting out of the project, arguing that Chabahar was strategically important for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.



Iran's Ambassador to India said that while India has fulfilled its financial commitment, New Delhi has not yet conveyed its plans regarding future management of the port. He expressed confidence that India would seek to resolve the issue without abandoning its interest. The issue unfolds against a backdrop of evolving U.S.–Iran relations and ongoing diplomatic engagements.

KERALA - REVIEW

Kerala to lay foundation for India's first dedicated public sector organ transplant institute

Kerala will establish India's first public sector institute exclusively dedicated to organ and tissue transplantation with the foundation stone of the Kerala Institute of Organ and Tissue Transplantation (KIOTT) laid at Kozhikode on the first week of February. The project is being funded by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) at a cost of ₹643.88 crore. KIOTT will integrate advanced treatment, research and training facilities, provide specialised transplant services at affordable costs, and strengthen Kerala's organ donation and transplantation ecosystem.



Kerala to launch school health programme to promote child well-being

Kerala Health Minister Veena George announced the launch of Aksharam Arogyam, a joint initiative of the State Health and General Education departments aimed at ensuring the physical and mental well-being of children. The programme will screen students for key health parameters, create comprehensive health records for every child, and issue health cards to enable systematic monitoring and review. Schools participating in the initiative will conduct health assemblies, set up health corners, and promote healthy lifestyles. Each school will designate a trained teacher as a health mentor to deliver structured health education covering 11 themes across four domains. A 24-hour toll-free helpline (104) has also been launched to provide parents information on child health services and immunisation schedules.

Kerala's adopted daughter Pepita Seth becomes an Indian citizen at 84



Celebrated writer and photographer Pepita Seth, known for bringing Kerala's art and culture to global attention, has formally acquired Indian citizenship, marking a significant personal milestone. A Padma Shri awardee (2012) in the field of art and culture, she has long been associated with Kerala's traditions. Settled in Thrissur, Seth extensively documented temple arts and rituals, including Theyyam and Kathakali, and iconic cultural symbols such as the Guruvayur Keshavan elephant. Her work has played a key role in preserving and internationally showcasing Kerala's rich cultural heritage.

Swadeshabhimani-Kesari award presented to Malayinkeezhu Gopalakrishnan

Senior journalist and author Malayinkeezhu Gopalakrishnan from Kerala has been selected for the 2024 Swadeshabhimani Kesari Award in recognition of his overall contributions to journalism. Instituted by the Kerala government, the award honours excellence in the media field and includes a cash prize of ₹1 lakh and a sculpture by Kanayi Kunhiraman.

SWADESSHABHIMANI RAMAKRISHNA PILLAI

Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai

- Represented the educated middle class that questioned and challenged the political weaknesses of the period
- Editor of the newspaper Swadeshabhimani
- Strongly criticised the policies and administration of Diwan P. Rajagopalachari

In 1910, he was deported to Kannur by the Travancore government

- Lived in exile until his death in 1916

Autobiography: My Banishment (Ende Nadukkadathal)

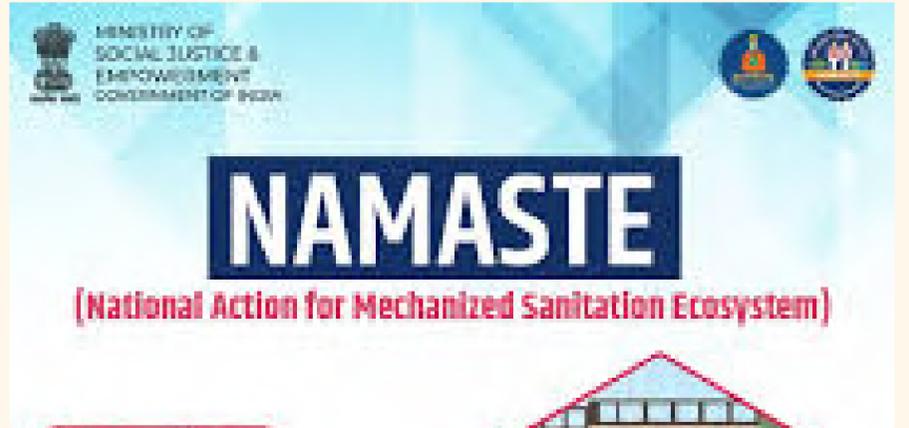
SC questions WhatsApp, Meta on personal data



What happened? The Supreme Court observed that WhatsApp and its parent company Meta cannot be allowed to compromise the privacy rights of millions of Indian users through the sharing and commercial exploitation of personal data. The case stems from WhatsApp's 2021 'take-it-or-leave-it' privacy policy, the CCI's finding of abuse of dominance, the NCLAT's partial relief to Meta, and the court's warning of "very strict conditions" unless data-sharing stops. The Bench questioned whether consent mechanisms, framed in complex language, genuinely enable informed choices, particularly for digitally or economically vulnerable users, despite claims of opt-out options and end-to-end encryption. The judges noted that personal data has economic value beyond privacy concerns and flagged that the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 primarily addresses privacy, not data monetisation. The Centre was impleaded as the court heard appeals against penalties imposed by the competition regulator.

Why it matters? The court highlighted that formal transparency does not necessarily translate into informed consent, especially in a society with uneven digital literacy. It indicated that Meta may be required to undertake to stop data sharing, failing which its appeal could face strict conditions or dismissal. As the case moves towards interim directions, the judiciary has signalled a stronger stance on protecting users who function as "silent consumers" in the digital economy.

84% waste-pickers from SC, ST, OBC groups: govt.



What happened? The Union government has, for the first time, released data on the ongoing enumeration of waste-pickers under the NAMASTE scheme. As of January 23, 1.52 lakh waste-pickers have been profiled and validated by urban local bodies across 35 States and Union Territories. The data shows that 84.5% of these workers belong to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, while 10.7% are from the General category. Women constitute 48.7% of the total workforce, men 51.3%, and a small number are transgender persons. At the State level, variations exist, with Delhi and Goa showing a higher proportion of General category waste-pickers, and West Bengal recording a relatively diverse social composition. The enumeration is part of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's effort to formally recognise waste-pickers and provide protective equipment.

Why it matters? The findings underline the strong social and caste dimensions of informal sanitation-related work in urban India. The predominance of SC, ST and OBC communities reflects the historical concentration of marginalised groups in hazardous and informal occupations. The significant participation of women points to gendered vulnerabilities within urban informal labour. State-level variations suggest that local socio-economic conditions influence workforce composition. Overall, the data highlights the importance of formal recognition, safety measures and targeted policy interventions to address occupational risks and social inequities faced by waste-pickers, reinforcing the broader objective of dignity, safety and inclusion in sanitation-related work.

Sunetra Pawar sworn in as Deputy CM of Maharashtra

What happened? A day after a three-day state mourning for the late leader Ajit Pawar, his wife, Sunetra Pawar, was sworn in as the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra in a brief ceremony in Mumbai, becoming the first woman to hold the post. She was assigned three portfolios: Excise, Minority Affairs, and Sports and Youth Welfare.

Why it matters? Sunetra Pawar's appointment is significant as she becomes the first woman Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra. The post of Deputy Chief Minister is not constitutionally mandated and is created at the discretion of the Chief Minister, largely for political or regional balancing. Deputy Chief Ministers hold cabinet rank but enjoy limited constitutional status. The Council of Ministers in some states may include a Deputy Chief Minister, though this post is not constitutionally mandated and is created mainly for political and regional balancing. Deputy Chief Ministers are appointed at the discretion of the Chief Minister and hold rank as cabinet ministers. In the Table of Precedence, a Deputy Chief Minister is placed below the President, Vice-President, Prime Minister, Governors (within their states), former Presidents, the Deputy Prime Minister, Chief Justice of India, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Union Cabinet Ministers, Chief Ministers, and certain other high dignitaries. The position thus carries political weight but limited constitutional status.



Mamata Banerjee announces support for any Opposition-led impeachment motion against CEC Gyanesh Kumar

What happened? West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said her party would support an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar if the Opposition moves it, though it lacks the numbers to pass such a motion. Speaking in Delhi, she criticised the Election Commission's special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, alleging wrongful deletions and targeting of minorities. Banerjee questioned the BJP's claim that the exercise aimed to remove infiltrators, saying no evidence had been produced.

Why it matters? The episode brings focus to the constitutional independence of the Election Commission. Under Article 324, the Chief Election Commissioner enjoys security of tenure and can be removed only through impeachment, in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court judge—by a special majority of both Houses of Parliament on proven misbehaviour or incapacity. This high threshold ensures that the CEC does not function at the pleasure of the executive, safeguarding the Commission's impartiality amid political contestation.



India's Strategic Dialogue with Arab Nations

What happened? External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, at the second India-Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting, emphasized the global priority of ending violence in Gaza, Sudan, Libya, and Lebanon. He highlighted the Sharm-el-Sheikh Peace Summit and UN Security Council Resolution 2803, supporting transitional administration and an International Stabilisation Force for Gaza. India's proactive diplomacy included hosting the UAE President, engaging with Saudi Arabia on security, and opening a facility in Aden, Yemen. Jaishankar noted that conflicts across the region have broader implications. The meeting brought together Arab foreign ministers and representatives to deliberate on regional challenges, prospects, and collaborative peace efforts.

Why it matters? The meeting assumed significance amid heightened instability across West Asia, with ongoing conflicts in Gaza and other parts of the region carrying wider geopolitical and security implications. India has substantial stakes in regional stability and has actively engaged key partners through high-level diplomatic outreach. The Delhi Declaration reinforces India-Arab League cooperation across economy, energy, education, media and culture, supported by trade exceeding US\$240 billion. More broadly, the engagement reflects India's West Asia approach of maintaining strong partnerships across geopolitical divides while adhering to long-standing normative positions aimed at preserving regional stability.



End of New START: What the World's Last Nuclear Arms Cap Means



What happened? The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), the last remaining nuclear arms control pact between Russia and the United States, expired on 5 January, ending decades-long limits on the world's two largest nuclear arsenals. Russia expressed regret over the expiry but signalled willingness to continue dialogue, with reports of discussions in Abu Dhabi on voluntarily observing key limits despite the absence of a legal framework. Moscow stated it remains open to negotiations, while the United States has proposed a revised framework that would include China, which Beijing has rejected.

Why it matters? Experts have warned that the expiry of the New START Treaty could lead to an unconstrained nuclear arms race and increased global instability. In the absence of treaty-imposed limits, both sides may be encouraged to expand the number of deployed nuclear weapons for the first time in decades. Analysts caution that this lack of predictability could incentivise worst-case planning, greater force posturing and attempts to gain negotiating leverage. Such developments may not remain limited to two countries, as they could open the door to a broader and more dangerous arms race involving additional nuclear powers, thereby increasing the overall risk of nuclear conflict.

SBI unveils CHAKRA Centre for financing sunrise sectors

What happened? State Bank of India (SBI) launched CHAKRA, a Centre of Excellence to support financing in sunrise sectors vital to India's economic development. The Centre will focus on renewable energy, advanced cell chemistry and battery storage, electric mobility, green hydrogen, semiconductors, decarbonisation, smart infrastructure, and data centre infrastructure. These sectors are projected to require substantial capital investment, estimated at over ₹100 lakh crore by 2030. By facilitating structured financial support and expertise, CHAKRA aims to accelerate growth and innovation in these high-potential industries, contributing to India's broader objective of sustainable and technologically advanced economic expansion.

why it matters? Sunrise industries are emerging sectors with high growth potential and strong investment interest, often attracting start-ups and venture capital. These industries drive innovation, generate employment and contribute significantly to economic growth. Over time, some sunrise sectors mature and may transition into sunset industries as technologies and market conditions evolve. By channelising capital into emerging sectors aligned with sustainability and technology, the economy can transition towards a more resilient, future-ready and diversified growth model while avoiding dependence on outdated or carbon-intensive industries.



Seismic study of blocks awarded done for OALP-X bidding plan'

What happened? Oil India Limited (OIL) has undertaken extensive seismic studies of the blocks awarded during the ninth round of the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) to develop a bidding strategy for the upcoming tenth round. According to CMD Ranjit Rath, 2D seismic acquisition for the blocks is complete, while 36% of 3D seismic studies, along with petroleum system modelling of the basins, has been conducted. These in-house studies are part of OIL's analysis of potential locations and formulation of strategic bids for OALP Round-X.

At present, the Maharatna company holds an operational acreage of a total of 110,000 square kilometres. The acquired blocks span multiple basins, including the Assam Shelf, Mahanadi, Krishna Godavari, and the Cambay basin, marking OIL's debut in the latter. The company aims to drill over 80 wells in the current fiscal year and 100 in the next. These efforts are aligned with OIL's broader objective to strengthen its presence in key hydrocarbon basins, optimize resource development, and enhance India's domestic energy production.

Why it matters? India's rapidly growing energy demand and continued reliance on petroleum for mobility, logistics and industry make strengthening domestic hydrocarbon exploration critical. With India expected to contribute significantly to global incremental energy demand, initiatives such as OIL's seismic studies and drilling plans support energy security by improving resource identification and production from domestic basins. Enhanced upstream activity under OALP helps reduce import dependence and supports a stable and orderly energy transition.

India is expected to account for over 23 per cent of global incremental energy demand by 2050

UNION BUDGET 2026-2027 : KEY TAKEAWAYS - SPECIAL FEATURE

Why carbon capture is key to achieving net-zero goal

Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) refers to a set of technologies aimed at preventing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from entering the atmosphere. It involves three sequential stages. First, CO₂ released during industrial processes—especially in power plants, steel, cement, refineries and chemical industries—is captured before being emitted. Second, the captured CO₂ is transported through appropriate systems to designated sites. Third, it is either stored for the long term in suitable geological formations beneath the Earth's surface or utilised by converting it into useful products such as chemicals, fuels or construction materials. CCUS is not a single technology but an umbrella term covering multiple methods across the entire pipeline. Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) is crucial for addressing climate change as CO₂, the primary greenhouse gas, continues to be emitted at very high levels globally. CCUS is especially important for hard-to-abate industries such as cement, steel, refineries and chemicals, where emissions arise from production processes and cannot be eliminated by renewable energy alone. Recognising this, India has allocated ₹20,000 crore over five years to advance CCUS technologies, support large-scale deployment, strengthen indigenous capacity and enable industrial decarbonisation, aligning development needs with its net-zero target of 2070.

In cement, steel and chemical industries, CO₂ is released as part of the production process itself; therefore, switching to renewable energy alone cannot eliminate emissions, making CCUS the only option for deep decarbonisation.

India's carbon emissions are expected to rise in the near and medium term due to infrastructure expansion, urbanisation and industrial growth, even as it has committed at COP26 (Glasgow, 2021) to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070. Given its developmental priorities, India cannot rely on emission cuts that constrain growth and therefore requires technology-based mitigation solutions, particularly for industrial decarbonisation. In this context, Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) has emerged as a critical component of India's long-term climate strategy.

Reflecting this, the Union Budget has allocated ₹20,000 crore over the next five years for advancing CCUS technologies, with focus on power, steel, cement, refineries and chemical industries. This marks India's first large-scale fiscal commitment in this domain. The allocation aims to bridge the technology readiness gap, as many CCUS solutions have been proven in laboratories but face high costs, technical risks and uncertainties at the commercial scale, limiting private investment. Budgetary support is intended to enable field demonstrations and scaling of technologies capable of capturing 100–500 tonnes of CO₂ per day, while also strengthening indigenous CCUS capabilities through research institutions and Centres of Excellence such as IIT Bombay and JNCASR Bengaluru.

Institutional support for CCUS in India includes pilot and demonstration projects in steel, cement and chemical sectors, along with mapping of potential geological storage sites. Further, the DST's CCUS R&D Roadmap 2030 identifies technology, financing and policy gaps, which the recent budgetary allocation seeks to address by enabling deployment and scaling.

• A LONG WAY TO GO**Global carbon capture status**

45 Commercial CCUS facilities operational

50 million tonnes CO₂ captured each year

435 million tonnes Expected CO₂ capture per year by 2030

1 BILLION TONNES

Annual capacity that needs to be in place by 2030 to meet 2050 global net-zero scenario

Status of these technologies in India

- A few pilot projects running
- Tata Steel, Dalmia Cements, NTPC, ONGC among those trying CCUS
- Dozens of research groups across institutions
- Centres of Excellence at IIT Bombay, JNCASR at the forefront



PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Which one of the following pairs of States of India indicates the easternmost and westernmost State? (2015)

- Assam and Rajasthan
- Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan
- Assam and Gujarat
- Arunachal Pradesh and Gujarat

2) At one of the places in India, if you stand on the seashore and watch the sea, you will find that the sea water recedes from the shore line a few kilometres and comes back to the shore, twice a day, and you can actually walk on the sea floor when the water recedes. This unique phenomenon is seen at: (2017)

- Bhavnagar
- Bheemunipatnam
- Chandipur
- Nagapattinam

HERITAGE**THYCAUD AYYA (1815 - 1909)**

Thycaud Ayya was a prominent social and spiritual reformer associated with the socio-religious awakening of Kerala in the 19th century. Born in 1814 at Nakalapuram in present-day Tamil Nadu, his original name was Subbarayan. He later came to be widely known as Thycaud Ayya, as well as by titles such as Sivarajayogi and Hadayogaupadeshta, reflecting his spiritual stature. He was a disciple of Vaikunda Swamikal and played a significant role in transmitting reformist ideas across regions. Thycaud Ayya is remembered as the guru of key social reformers of Kerala, including Chattampi Swamikal, Sri Narayana Guru, and Ayyankali, thereby influencing multiple strands of Kerala's reform movement.

A strong advocate of social equality, he introduced the practice of Panthibhojanam (inter-dining) in Kerala to challenge caste barriers. His well-known saying, "intha ulagathil oru jaathi, oru matham, oru kadavul" (in this world, one caste, one religion, one God), reflects his inclusive worldview. With the support of Manonmaniam Sundaram Pillai, the first MA degree holder of Travancore, he founded the Saiva Prakasha Sabha at Chalai, Thiruvananthapuram, which served as a centre for spiritual and intellectual discourse.

In administrative life, he was appointed as the manager of the Travancore Residency at Thycaud in 1873, earning him the name "Superintendent Ayyavu." Thycaud Ayya passed away in 1909. His literary contributions include works such as Brahmoothara Kandom, Pazhani Vaibhavam, Ramayanam Pattu, Ujjaini Mahakali Pancharatnam, Hanuman Pamalai, and Ente Kasiyathra, which together highlight his spiritual, literary, and reformist legacy.

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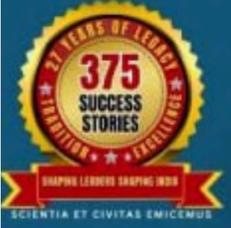
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