

January Edition

Monthly

CURRENT AFFAIRS

NEWS FROM DECEMBER, 2024



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Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh made history on December 12, 2024, by becoming the youngest world chess champion at 18 years after beating title-holder Ding Liren of China.

Gukesh is also the second Indian to clinch the title after Viswanathan Anand, who won the prestigious crown five times in his career. Gukesh also became the 18th world champion at the age of 18, four years younger than Garry Kasparov, who had been the youngest world champion since 1985 when he reigned supreme against Anatoly Karpov. Gukesh secured the requisite 7.5 points against 6.5 of his Chinese rival after winning the 14th and last classical time control game of the match, which seemed headed for a draw for the most part. As the title winner, he will get \$1.3 million from the \$2.5 million prize purse. President Droupadi Murmu, PM Modi, CM of Tamil Nadu and other tycoons & politicians expressed good wishes to Gukesh on his victory.



Former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh passed away at the age of 92 on December 26, 2024. Among those who paid tribute to Singh was Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who wrote on social media that "India mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished leaders". Singh was born on 26 September 1932, in a desolate village in the Punjab province of undivided India, which lacked both water and electricity. After attending Panjab University, he took a master's degree at the University of Cambridge and then a DPhil at Oxford. Manmohan Singh was the first Indian leader since Jawaharlal Nehru to be re-elected after serving a full first term, and the first Sikh to hold the country's top post. Singh rose to political prominence as India's finance minister in 1991, taking over as the country was plunging into bankruptcy. He was one of India's longest-serving prime ministers and he was considered the architect of key liberalising economic reforms, as premier from 2004-2014 and before that as finance minister.



The Indian women's junior hockey team won the 10th Women's Hockey Junior Asia Cup by defeating China 3-2 in the penalty shootout in Muscat, Oman, on December 15, 2024. India successfully defended their title, having also won the previous edition in 2023. The tournament, held from December 7 to 15, 2024, was for players under 21 and organized by the Asian Hockey Federation. The top five teams—India, China, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia—qualified for the 2025 International Hockey Federation (FIH) Women's Junior World Cup in Chile. Jinzhuang Tan (30') scored the first goal for China but Kanika Siwach (41') bagged the equaliser in the third quarter for India as the match went into a penalty shootout. India's goalkeeper Nidhi made three crucial saves during the penalty shootout to help her side lift the title. Hockey India, announced a reward of Rs 2 lakh for each player and Rs 1 lakh to each support staff for everyone's effort and winning the championship.



AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on December 21, 2024, announced a scholarship scheme named after Dr BR Ambedkar aimed at Dalit students in the run-up to the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls amid a row over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on the Dalit icon in the Rajya Sabha. Addressing a rally where he announced the scheme, Kejriwal said that the Delhi government will fund the Dalit students who have secured admission to foreign universities if AAP wins the Assembly polls slated for February next year. Mr Kejriwal also mentioned that the children of government employees would be eligible for the scheme, although details regarding the application process and timelines remain unspecified. He further noted that the initiative is inspired by Dr BR Ambedkar's belief in the transformative power of education, recalling that Ambedkar, despite facing numerous challenges, earned a PhD from the United States.



Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan launched PMeVIDYA Channel 31, a 24×7 platform dedicated to Indian Sign Language (ISL) on December 6, 2024. The channel promotes ISL as both a language and school subject, ensuring inclusivity for children with hearing impairments. This initiative aligns with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which calls for promoting and standardising ISL across India to create a more inclusive educational environment. NEP also emphasizes the respect and inclusion of local sign languages. ISL-based learning content covers school curricula, career guidance, skill training, and mental health, accessible on TV and YouTube. The initiative fosters inclusivity, aligns with constitutional rights, and aims to create global benchmarks and employment opportunities for the hearing-impaired community.



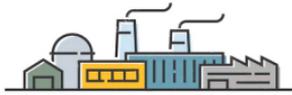
President Droupadi Murmu presented the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2024 on December 26, 2024, to 17 exceptional children from across India. These awards honor remarkable achievements in seven categories: art and culture, bravery, innovation, science and technology, social service, sports, and environment. During the ceremony, the President lauded the awardees for their exceptional contributions and emphasized the importance of providing opportunities to nurture children’s talents. She highlighted the courage and patriotism demonstrated by these young achievers, which inspire confidence in India’s future. The honourees, seven boys and ten girls selected from 14 states and Union territories — were presented with a medal, certificate and citation booklet. The President also paid homage to the unparalleled sacrifices of Guru Gobind Singh’s sons, commemorated as ‘Veer Bal Diwas’ on December 26, saying, “Their sacrifices for faith and self-respect continue to inspire countless generations”.



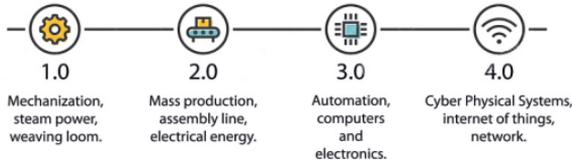
The Ministry of Textiles and Synthetic & Art Silk Mills' Research Association (SASMIRA) launched the Climate Smart Agro-Textile Demonstration Center in Navsari, Gujarat. The center aims to promote Agro-Textiles in agriculture, showcasing live demonstrations and practical training for farmers on December 21, 2024. It spans 15,000 sq. meters and will be maintained by SASMIRA for three years, covering eight crop cycles. The center features Agro-Textile technologies like shade nets, medicinal nurseries, vermicomposting, ground covers, pond liners, and crop covers. The initiative focuses on educating farmers to integrate these innovative solutions into daily farming practices. These are designed to educate and empower farmers, features live demonstrations of Agro-Textile products, their applications, and practical training modules to help integrate these innovations into daily farming practices. Spread across 15,000 sq. meters, the center will be maintained by SASMIRA for three years.



The Abathasagayeswarar Temple in Thukkatchi, Tamil Nadu won UNESCO's 2023 Award of Distinction for heritage conservation on December 6, 2024. Built by Kings Vikrama Chola and Kulothunga Chola, the temple originally had five prakarams and Lord Dakshinamurthy (Lord Shiva) is the presiding deity. It houses shrines for deities like Soundaryanayaki Ambal, Aadhi Sarabeshwarar, and others. The temple was restored using traditional and modern conservation methods, completing kumbhabhishekam in September 2023. UNESCO praised the project for blending engineering and traditional techniques while preserving vernacular artistry. Tamil Nadu's CM granted ₹100 crore annually for restoring ancient temples, ensuring no changes to their original features. The BJPCI (Sir Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsee Charitable Institution) Conservation project bagged the Merit Award of UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation 2024.



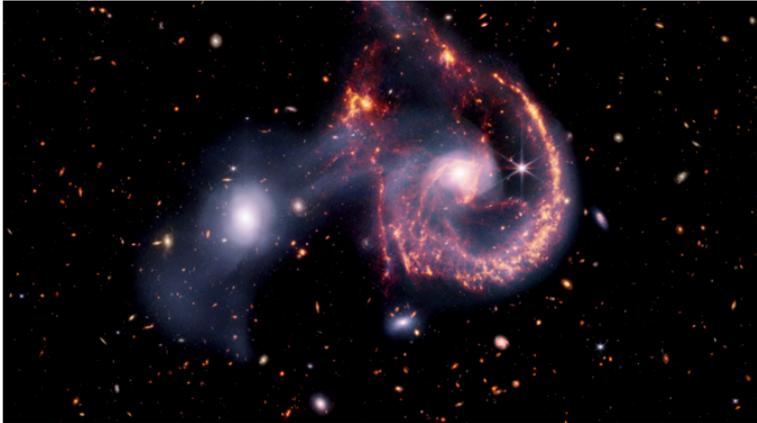
INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) under the Scheme for “Enhancement of Competitiveness in the Indian Capital Goods Sector” has set up 4 Smart Advanced Manufacturing and Rapid Transformation Hub (SAMARTH) Centres on December 13, 2024. It focuses on spreading awareness about Industry 4.0 technologies among manufacturers, vendors, and customers. Four SAMARTH Centres have been established: C4i4 Lab in Pune, IITD-AIA Foundation at IIT Delhi, I-4.0 India at IISc Bengaluru, and Smart Manufacturing Cell at CMTI Bengaluru. These centres assist industries, including MSMEs, by organizing seminars, providing training, and offering consultancy in IoT, software, and data analytics. No financial assistance is provided for adopting Industry 4.0 technologies under this initiative. No financial assistance is given to any industry including MSME for adopting Industry 4.0 enabled technologies under SAMARTH centre initiative of the Scheme.



The ISRO successfully launched its ambitious SpaDeX mission, aimed at demonstrating advanced space docking technology. The mission, which took place on December 30, 2024, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, features two spacecraft: SDX01, the Chaser, and SDX02, the Target. Both satellites weigh approximately 220 kg and are designed to operate in a low-Earth orbit at an altitude of 470 kilometers. The primary goal of the SpaDeX mission is to develop and validate the technology necessary for autonomous rendezvous and docking of spacecraft. This capability is crucial for future missions involving satellite servicing and the establishment of India's own space station, as well as potential lunar exploration endeavours. The spacecraft will utilize a differential GNSS-based Satellite Positioning System to ensure precise navigation and control during their maneuvers in orbit. ISRO will then arrest their drift in space and they will hover in the same orbit together. Engineers will have to wait for four days for the right sun orientation for docking to happen.



In the second week of December, 2024; NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) spotted a distant galaxy which gives a peek at what the Milky Way might have looked like in its infancy. The galaxy, named Firefly Sparkle due to its gleaming star clusters resembling the bioluminescent bugs (a group of fireflies is called a “sparkle”), is located some 13 billion lightyears away. Firefly Sparkle has a mass equal to about 10 million stars the size of our sun, and comprises 10 densely packed star clusters embedded in a diffuse arc of stars. Its main visible portion spans about 1,000 light-years across. It has two other relatively smaller galaxies as neighbors, dubbed Firefly-Best Friend and Firefly-New Best Friend. “The Milky Way began forming very early in the universe’s history, likely around the same time as Firefly Sparkle,” astronomer Lamiya Mowla, co-lead author of the study published in the journal Nature.



The Sahitya Akademi Awards for 2024 were announced on December 18, 2024, honouring 21 writers and poets from different Indian languages. Easterine Kire from Nagaland won the Sahitya Akademi Award 2024 for her novel ‘Spirit Nights’. Hindi poet Gagan Gill received the award for her poetry book ‘Main Jab Tak Aai Bahar’. The award honours outstanding books in 24 Indian languages, initiated in 1954, with the first awards given in 1955. Recipients receive a copper plaque (designed by Satyajit Ray), a shawl, and a cash prize. The list of winners includes eight poetry collections, three novels, two short story collections, three essays, three literary criticism works, one play, and one research work. The awards, approved by the Sahitya Akademi’s executive board, were announced by its president Madhav Kaushik. Eligible books had to be published between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2022.



The National Panchayat Awards 2024, honouring 45 exceptional Panchayats for their remarkable contributions to sustainable and inclusive growth. Held on December 11, 2024, at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi, the prestigious event was graced by the Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, and the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj, Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh. Key moments included the digital transfer of award funds, and a short film highlighting the innovative initiatives of the award-winning Panchayats. On the occasion a booklet 'Best Practices on Works of Awardee Panchayats' was unveiled. Traditionally celebrated on April 24, the 2024 ceremony was rescheduled due to the General Elections to the Lok Sabha. Maharashtra's Panchayats have made the state proud with their remarkable achievements in the National Panchayat Awards 2024. The awards commemorate the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, which granted constitutional status to Panchayats as institutions of local self-governance.



A powerful 7.3-magnitude earthquake hit Vanuatu on December 17, 2024; sparking a network outage, crushing vehicles and damaging multiple buildings, with reports of 14 people killed. A complex in the capital Port Vila that hosts the diplomatic missions of Western nations, including the United States, was among the buildings damaged. The quake struck 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) west of the Pacific island nation's capital at about 57.1 kilometers deep shortly after noon, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS). It was followed by a 5.5-magnitude aftershock. There have been 14 aftershocks at or above 4.0 magnitude. The initial quake caused buildings to collapse, crushing cars, with some feared trapped under the rubble. Landslides occurred near an international shipping terminal at Port Vila, blocking access. Vanuatu is home to about 330,000 people over a group of 80 islands.



At least 12 persons were killed in a massive fire that broke out following a truck collision outside a petrol pump in Rajasthan's Jaipur on December, 20, 2024. The incident took place around 5:30 am on Ajmer Road when a CNG tanker parked near the petrol pump caught fire after a truck collided with other vehicles. According to officials, more people are feared dead, while more than 40 people have been injured. At least 28 victims are in a critical condition. The explosion was so intense that several vehicles within a 300-meter radius were engulfed and completely burned, reported news agency IANS. Several drivers were reportedly burned in the incident, with some in critical condition. Visuals of the incident show a massive blaze and a cloud of black smoke above it - which can be seen from several kilometers away. According to locals, the explosion was heard up to 10 kilometers away. As per reports, there were also repeated explosions as many of the fuel tanks burst.



Shyam Benegal, the acclaimed Indian filmmaker who spearheaded a new wave cinema movement of the 1970s with films addressing social issues, has passed away at the age of 90 due to chronic kidney disease on December 23, 2024. He was celebrated for his contributions to cinema as a director, editor and screenwriter, and is credited with pioneering a new genre of filmmaking. He passed away at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital and cremation took place on December 24. He mentored top Indian actors, including Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, and Om Puri who made their mark in Bollywood's popular cinema as well. He was widely known for his series Bharat Ek Khoj, a landmark 53-episode television series based on the book Discovery of India, written by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and chronicled the country's troubled passages, from ancient times to modernity. He also directed a 2023 biopic on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led Bangladesh's freedom struggle against Pakistan in the 1970s.



The deadliest air accident ever in South Korea killed 179 people on December 30, 2024, when an airliner belly-landed and skidded off the end of the runway, erupting in a fireball as it slammed into a wall at Muan International Airport. Jeju Air (089590.KS), opens new tab flight 7C2216, arriving from the Thai capital Bangkok with 175 passengers and six crew on board, was trying to land shortly after 9 a.m. (0000 GMT) at the airport in the south of the country. Two crew members survived and were being treated for injuries. The twin-engine Boeing 737-800 was seen in local media video skidding down the runway with no visible landing gear before crashing into navigation equipment and a wall in an explosion of flames and debris. Under global aviation rules, South Korea will lead a civil investigation into the crash and automatically involve the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) in the United States where the plane was designed and built.



India's Lakshya Sen bowed out in the semifinals of the inaugural King Cup International Badminton Open, suffering a straight-game loss to reigning world junior champion Hu Zhe'an of China in the men's singles in Shenzhen on December 29, 2024. The 23-year-old from Almora fought hard but couldn't overcome the relentless Hu, losing 19-21, 19-21 in a thrilling contest. The match saw both shuttlers locked in a tight battle, with little separating them throughout. Hu took a slender one-point advantage at the break after Lakshya's backhand went into the net. The second game followed a similar pattern, with the score tied at 6-6 before Hu surged ahead to 12-10. The competition marked a milestone in his career, as he secured third place by defeating French player Alex Lanier. For his efforts, Sen earned a prize of approximately ₹36 lakh.

Quick Reads...

The Indian Army inaugurated the AI Incubation Centre (IAAIC) in Bengaluru on December 18, 2024. In a virtual inauguration led by Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Upendra Dwivedi, the initiative aims to revolutionize the Army's operational capabilities through Artificial Intelligence (AI). The centre reflects the Army's focus on using Artificial Intelligence for operational excellence. It aims to foster innovation in military technology with AI-driven solutions. The initiative seeks to enhance decision-making, operational efficiency, and preparedness for future conflicts.

The Indian government's intensive examination of gold import data was initiated following a dramatic increase in imports on December 19, 2024. In November 2024, gold imports soared to \$14.8 billion, marking a threefold rise compared to the same month a year earlier. This surge contributed to a record trade deficit of \$38 billion, which in turn led the rupee to depreciate to its all-time low.

The Prime Minister launched the Kumbh Sah'AI'yak chatbot for Mahakumbh Mela 2025. Mahakumbh Mela 2025 will be held in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26, 2025. The chatbot blends culture and technology to enhance devotees' experience. It offers text and voice interactions for a smooth and engaging experience. It aims to guide and update millions of attendees during the mega event.

Quick Reads...

Bhutan has conferred renowned Indian educationist Arun Kapur, who set up schools in India, Bhutan and Oman, with the 'Bura Marp' (red scarf) and 'Patang' (ceremonial sword) on December 19, 2024. Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel conferred the Red Scarf and the title 'Dasho' upon Kapur, who is currently the director at The Druk Gyalpo's Institute. The honour, which was conferred at the 117th Bhutanese National Day celebrations in Thimphu's Changlimithang stadium, is rarely given to non-Bhutanese residents.

The 2024 World Weightlifting Championships was held in Manama, Bahrain, from December 6 to 15, 2024. This marks the first time Bahrain hosted the event, having previously hosted the 2022 Asian Weightlifting Championship. More than 500 weightlifters, including world and Olympic champions, participated in the championships.

Tulsi Gowda, Padma Shri awardee, and renowned environmentalist known as the 'Vruksha Maate' (Mother of Trees), passed away on December 16, 2024; at her residence in Karnataka's Honnali village, Ankola Taluk, Uttara Kannada district. She was 86 and had been suffering from age-related ailments. Condoling her death, PM Narendra Modi said Tulsi Gowda will remain a guiding light for environmental conservation. Gowda has been credited with planting and nurturing over 1 lakh trees across Karnataka.

Quick Reads...

Osamu Suzuki, the long-serving chairman and CEO of Suzuki Motor Corporation, passed away at the age of 94 on December 25, 2024. Widely credited for transforming Suzuki into a global automotive powerhouse, he played a pivotal role in revolutionizing the Indian car market. Known for his frugality and astute business acumen. His death marks the end of an era for Suzuki, a company that he meticulously shaped into a global leader in small cars.

Glasgow-born artist of Indian heritage Jasleen Kaur, whose works are inspired by her life growing up in Scotland's Sikh community, has won Britain's prestigious Turner Prize 2024 for her considered weaving together of the "personal, political and spiritual". The artist was presented with the £25,000 prize by actor James Norton at Tate Britain on December 3, 2024. Turner Prize organisers noted Kaur's work explores how cultural memory is layered in the objects and rituals that surround us.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar was awarded the Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi National Eminence Award for Public Leadership by the South Indian Education Society (SIES) on December 22, 2024. Jaishankar expressed his gratitude for the recognition and brought into light the influence of Maha Periyavar, particularly through the song Maithreem Bhajatham, which advocates universal brotherhood.

Quick Reads...

The Ministry of Home Affairs has appointed Vitul Kumar as the acting Director General of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on December 31, 2024. This decision follows the retirement of Anish Dayal Singh. Kumar, a senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, will serve in this capacity until a permanent appointment is made. He has held various positions within the CRPF.

Maharashtra has received its first made-in-India surgical robot installed in Pune's Noble Hospitals and Research Centre in December 31, 2024. The SSI Mantra surgical robot, which recently received approval by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), is a 3 robotic system for performing intricate surgeries. The robotic system, inaugurated by Marathi actor Prasad Oak, is an advanced system featuring five lean robotic arms, an immersive 3D HD headset that delivers unparalleled optics for surgeons, and a vision cart that offers 3D 4K imaging for the entire surgical team.

A Rapid world champion in 2019, Koneru Humpy had contemplated retiring before she went on to pick the 2024 title at Wall Street in New York on December 28, 2024. The 37-year-old Humpy finished the tournament with 8.5 out of 11 points, and became only second woman since China's Ju Wenjun to clinch the title more than once. She played with black and said the title was nowhere on her mind.