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7. Short News

1. National Panchayat Awards 2025

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj announced the winners of the National Panchayat Awards (NPA) 2025, honouring 42 high-performing Panchayats across India.

1. **Administering Authority:** Institutionalized by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to incentivize outstanding performance among rural local bodies.
2. **Core Objective:** Aims to foster competitive federalism by encouraging local self-government institutions to excel in rural governance.
3. **SDG Localization:** The awards directly assess how effectively local bodies align their grassroots development with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
4. **Underlying Scheme:** Implemented under the *Incentivization of Panchayats* component of the Rastriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA).
5. **Financial Boosting:** Winners receive substantial financial incentives ranging from ₹50 lakh to ₹5 crore to invest back into local development projects.
6. **Top Performing States:** Karnataka secured the highest tally with 6 awards, closely followed by Andhra Pradesh and Odisha with 5 awards each.
7. **Evaluation Framework:** Leverages the objective, data-driven parameters of the *Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) 2.0* to evaluate performance.
8. **Women Leadership:** A notable 22 out of the 42 award-winning Panchayats are headed by women, showcasing grassroots gender empowerment.

2. Categories of National Panchayat Awards

The NPA 2025 was structured across distinct award categories designed to assess specific and holistic development achievements.

1. **DDUPSVP Category:** The Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar focuses exclusively on Gram Panchayats.
2. **Thematic Alignment:** It evaluates performance across 9 core themes of the Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs).
3. **Core LSDG Themes:** Includes vital verticals like Poverty-Free Livelihoods, Healthy Panchayats, Water-Sufficient Panchayats, and Clean & Green Panchayats.
4. **NDSPSVP Category:** The Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar evaluates absolute, all-around structural excellence.
5. **Three-Tier Recognition:** Unlike the DDUPSVP, this award recognizes performance across all three structural tiers of the Panchayati Raj System.
6. **Tiers Covered:** Conferred distinctively at the District Panchayat, Block Panchayat, and Gram Panchayat levels.
7. **Top Tier Winner:** For 2025, the Sepahijala District Panchayat of Tripura won the 1st position under the Best District Panchayat category (winning ₹5 crore).
8. **Best Gram Panchayat:** New Napam Gram Panchayat in Assam clinched the top honours for the best comprehensive overall performance at the village level.

3. Blue Helmets

A contingent of 565 Indian peacekeepers serving under the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was recently honoured with the prestigious UN Medal of Honour.

1. **Definition:** Blue Helmets are the military personnel, police officers, and civilian experts deployed under United Nations Peacekeeping operations.
2. **Mandate:** They are deployed globally to protect civilians, prevent conflict, and assist in implementing peace agreements.
3. **Diverse Field Responsibilities:** Their activities extend beyond armed security to community engagement, setting up veterinary camps, and offering women's self-defence training.
4. **Humanitarian Access:** They play a vital role in de-escalating local conflicts to improve safe passage for global humanitarian relief agencies.
5. **India's Major Contribution:** India stands as the second-largest uniform personnel contributor to UN peacekeeping missions globally, trailing only Nepal.
6. **Current Footprint:** India currently has over 4,200 personnel deployed across high-risk zones, including South Sudan, Abyei, Congo, and Lebanon.
7. **Gender Inclusivity:** The active Indian deployment contains a dedicated vanguard of 155 women peacekeepers.
8. **Ultimate Sacrifice:** Nearly 180 Indian peacekeepers have lost their lives in the line of duty, marking the highest casualties suffered by any single nation in UN history.

4. Nava char Mantra Initiative

The union minister recently launched the *Navachar Mantra Initiative* at IIT Delhi to support early-stage grassroots creators across rural areas.

1. **Institutional Framework:** A flagship national program initiated by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
2. **Executing Agency:** Being actively executed by the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD).
3. **Target Focus:** Specifically tailored to discover and upscale grassroots innovations coming from Tier-2, Tier-3 cities, and rural India.
4. **Geographical Demographics:** Open to citizens aged 18 to 55 years, prioritizing individuals residing in India's designated Aspirational Districts.
5. **Low Entry Barriers:** Applicants do not need a pre-registered corporate entity or a finished market product; early prototypes or raw ideas are eligible.
6. **Priority Sectors:** Heavily focused on socio-economically impactful verticals such as Agritech, HealthTech, EdTech, Climate Action, and MSME enablement.
7. **Incubation Period:** Offers a structured 1-year incubation cycle to transform local designs into commercially viable business units.
8. **Core Support Assets:** Provides comprehensive handholding in terms of expert mentorship, regulatory compliances, IP (Intellectual Property) structuring, and fund-raising paths.

5. ₹10,000 Crore ATF Price Stabilisation Fund

The Union Cabinet approved a one-time financial allocation of up to ₹10,000 crore to protect Scheduled Indian Airlines from extreme jet fuel price volatility.

1. **Strategic Cause:** The ongoing geopolitical crisis in West Asia has caused drastic fluctuations and sharp spikes in international crude oil indexes.
2. **Airlines Vulnerability:** Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) is highly volatile and accounts for an immense 35% to 40% of the total operating costs of an airline.

3. **Mechanism:** The fund provides financial support through Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to buffer sudden commercial price shocks.
4. **Objective:** Aims to infuse greater pricing predictability and operational stability within the domestic aviation market.
5. **Wide Scope:** The scheme covers price stabilization operations for both domestic networks and international routes operated by Indian carriers.
6. **Consumer Protection:** Indirectly safeguards passengers by preventing sudden, sharp spikes in commercial airfare tickets due to fuel surcharges.
7. **Financial Nature:** Designed as a targeted, one-time budgetary intervention rather than an ongoing open-ended subsidy mechanism.

6. E85 Fuel Adoption in India

The Union Government is formulating a policy framework to fast-track the affordable deployment of high-ethanol E85 fuel blends across India.

1. **Fuel Composition:** E85 is an eco-friendlier fuel blend consisting of 85% pure bio-ethanol and 15% traditional petrol.
2. **Powertrain Requirement:** Requires specialized Flex-Fuel Vehicles (FFVs) integrated with internal sensors that dynamically recalibrate engine parameters based on fuel composition.
3. **Import Reduction Strategy:** Shifting just 1% of annual petrol vehicle sales to E85 could reduce India's crude imports by approximately 0.28 lakh metric tonnes (LMT).
4. **Forex Reserves Preservation:** This nominal 1% migration is projected to save the country around ₹195 crore in foreign exchange outlays during a single supply year.
5. **Rural Economy Upliftment:** Widespread E85 adoption is estimated to push over ₹160 crore directly to farmers by generating demand for agricultural feedstocks.
6. **Carbon Abatement:** The deployment at targeted introductory levels offers a net reduction of nearly 0.86 LMT of greenhouse CO_2 emissions.
7. **Agricultural Source Base:** Bio-ethanol is refined from high-starch agricultural yields like sugarcane juice, broken food grains, maize, and wheat.
8. **Chemical Transition:** Production relies on fermenting sucrose (or complex starch converted to simple sugars) using yeast, followed by distillation and deep dehydration.

7. Ethanol Blending Commercial Grades

The government is standardizing various tiers of commercial ethanol blending to transition the automotive sector step-by-step.

1. **Definition:** The process of mixing pure, moisture-free ethyl alcohol with standard gasoline to optimize clean combustion.
2. **E10 Blend:** The basic standard mixture containing 10% ethanol and 90% petrol, widely supported by almost all legacy internal combustion engines.
3. **E15 Blend:** An intermediate stage containing 15% ethanol and 85% petrol, acting as a stepping stone to higher concentration limits.
4. **E85 Blend:** The advanced high-concentration blend (85% ethanol) designed exclusively for specialized, calibrated flex-fuel systems.
5. **Octane Boosting:** Ethanol possesses a higher-octane rating than pure gasoline, which increases engine knock resistance when blended correctly.
6. **Oxygenate Benefit:** It acts as an oxygenate, providing embedded oxygen molecules that lead to cleaner, more complete fuel combustion.

7. **Tailpipe Emissions:** Significantly minimizes the tailpipe release of harmful urban pollutants like carbon monoxide (CO) and unburnt hydrocarbons.

8. S-400 Air Defence System (Sudarshan Chakra)

India's long-range air defense capabilities received a boost with the delivery and induction of its fourth operational S-400 regimental squadron from Russia.

1. **Contract Layout:** Part of a landmark \$5.43 billion bilateral agreement inked between India and Russia in 2018 for five complete regimental systems.
2. **Indigenous Nomenclature:** Officially christened as the **"Sudarshan Chakra"** within the operational ranks of the Indian Air Force (IAF).
3. **Delivery Timeline:** With the fourth squadron deployed to the western front in Rajasthan, the fifth and final squadron is scheduled for delivery by 2027.
4. **Combat Specifications:** Capable of tracking and neutralizing incoming threats up to an operational range of 400 km and altitudes up to 30 km.
5. **Target Versatility:** Can simultaneously engage multiple threats, including 5th-gen fighter aircraft, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and low-signature drones.
6. **Layered Architecture:** Integrates into India's wider domestic network alongside intermediate systems like Akash and MRSAM for comprehensive aerospace defence.
7. **Battle Provenance:** The system demonstrated formidable tracking and interception metrics during the intense border face-off under Operation Sin door (2025).
8. **Inventory Expansion:** Following its performance in Operation Sin door, the government approved acquiring 5 additional squadrons, doubling the long-term target inventory to 10.

9. Newly Recorded Lakshadweep 'Potato Patch' Coral

Marine scientists confirmed the discovery of a giant, rare "potato patch" coral colony on the south-eastern flank of Kadmat Island in Lakshadweep.

1. **Biological Classification:** Corals are marine invertebrates belonging to the phylum *Cnidaria*, existing as colonies of tiny individual organisms called polyps.
2. **Exoskeleton Generation:** These polyps absorb calcium ions from seawater to secrete a hard calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) structure for baseline protection.
3. **Symbiotic Association:** Their vivid colours stem from a symbiotic relationship with microscopic photosynthetic algae called *zooxanthellae* residing in their tissues.
4. **Mutual Benefits:** Polyps provide a protected environment and metabolic waste to the algae, while the algae supply the coral host with vital glucose and oxygen.
5. **Geomorphological Typologies:** Coral reefs are classified into three architectural models: Fringing reefs (coastal lines), Barrier reefs (open lagoons), and Atolls (circular volcanic rings).
6. **Indian Geographical Matrix:** Major coral habitats in India are concentrated across the Gulf of Kutch, Gulf of Mannar, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, and Malvin.
7. **Ecological Cushion:** Occupying less than 1% of the ocean floor, they support over 25% of all marine life, earning the title "Rainforests of the Sea."
8. **The Bleaching Threat:** Thermal stress causes corals to expel their symbiotic *zooxanthellae*; this leaves them bone-white, vulnerable to starvation, and prone to rapid disease.

10. Kaziranga Records First Yellow-Throated Marten

Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve confirmed the first-ever physical documentation of a yellow-throated marten within its borders during routine camera-trap monitoring.

1. **Taxonomic Position:** Scientifically labelled as *Martes flavigula*, it belongs to the *Mustelidae* carnivore family (which includes otters, badgers, and wolverines).
2. **Trophic Level:** Functions structurally as a **macropredator**, occupying a middle position in the food chain right beneath apex predators like tigers.
3. **Behavioural Traits:** Characterized as a diurnal (active during daylight) and highly agile arboreal (tree-climbing) omnivorous mammal.
4. **Ecological Contribution:** Serves as a vital asset for forest regeneration due to its significant role in seed dispersal across its foraging territory.
5. **Geographical Spread:** Widely distributed across South Asia, the Himalayas, Southeast Asia, China, and eastern parts of Russia.
6. **Assam Context:** While native to the contiguous northeast mountain forests, its presence inside the alluvial grasslands of Kaziranga marks a unique habitat expansion.
7. **Legal Shielding:** Documented as a species of 'Least Concern' on the IUCN Red List, it enjoys strict domestic safety under Schedule II of India's Wildlife Protection Act.
8. **Kaziranga's Profile:** Established in 1908, it became a National Park in 1974, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, and holds the world's largest population of the Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros.

11. Padma Barrage

The Government of Bangladesh approved the construction of the 2.1-km-long *Padma Barrage* infrastructure project in the Rajbari district to manage river hydrology.

1. **River Identity:** The Padma River represents the massive geographic stretch of the Ganga River after it flows past the Indian boundary into Bangladesh.
2. **Hydrological Confluence:** It runs southeast to meet the Jamuna (the lower stretch of the Brahmaputra) and later combines with the Meghna before draining into the Bay of Bengal.
3. **Strategic Objective:** Designed to artificially re-engineer regional hydrology to combat severe seasonal droughts caused by depleted dry-season river inflows.
4. **Engineering Dimensions:** The mega-structure will span 2.1 kilometres, featuring 78 operational spillway gates, dedicated navigation locks, and specialized fish passes.
5. **Agricultural Coverage:** The project is planned to support irrigation networks covering an estimated 2.88 million hectares of arable farmland.
6. **Macro Impact:** Internal impact assessments indicate the barrage will directly alter or benefit nearly 37% of Bangladesh's total land area.
7. **Deltaic Importance:** The river system forms the backbone of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna Delta, the largest and most fertile deltaic plain globally.

12. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Elections

Austria, Kyrgyzstan, Portugal, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zimbabwe were successfully elected as non-permanent members of the UNSC for the upcoming 2027–2028 operational term.

1. **Baseline Core:** Established in 1945 under the UN Charter, the UNSC holds the primary global mandate for maintaining international peace and security.
2. **Binding Authority:** It stands as the solitary organ of the United Nations whose resolutions are legally binding upon all member states.
3. **Structural Division:** Features a rigid 15-member council framework split between 5 Permanent Members (P5) and 10 Non-Permanent rotating members.
4. **The P5 Guard:** The permanent tier consists of China, France, Russia, the UK, and the USA, with each holding individual unilateral veto powers.

5. **Geographic Distribution:** Non-permanent seats are distributed regionally: Africa (3), Asia-Pacific (2), Latin America (2), Western Europe & Others (2), and Eastern Europe (1).
6. **General Assembly Mandate:** Non-permanent representatives are chosen by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) using a secure secret ballot voting system.
7. **Supermajority Threshold:** To secure a seat, a competing nation must win a strict two-thirds majority of the votes cast within the General Assembly.
8. **Rotation Rules:** Five non-permanent seats rotate out annually for a fixed 2-year term, and retiring members cannot seek immediate consecutive re-election.
9. **India's Track Record:** India has been elected to and served within the UNSC as a non-permanent member eight times, with its latest tenure during 2021–2022.

13. India–Nepal Disputed Border Areas & UPI Linkage

Bilateral relations between India and Nepal saw dual developments: political debates regarding border management and a successful partnership linking cross-border digital payment networks.

1. **Border Baseline:** India and Nepal share a unique, porous 1,751-km-long international boundary that allows visa-free transit for citizens of both nations.
2. **Historical Genesis:** The modern alignment of the border traces its origin back to the *Treaty of Sugauli (1816)* signed after the Anglo-Nepalese War.
3. **Border States:** The international boundary is shared across 5 Indian states: Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Sikkim.
4. **The Kalapani Dispute:** Located near the India-Nepal-China tri-junction in Uttarakhand, this territory holds immense strategic value for monitoring Himalayan passes.
5. **Limpiyadhura & Lipulekh:** Nepal claims Limpiyadhura as the true source of the Kali River under historical maps, disputing India's control over the Lipulekh pass way used for the Kailash Man Sarovar Yatra.
6. **The Susta Core Dispute:** Located on the Bihar-Nepal border, this dispute stems from the Gandaki River changing its course over the decades, altering physical boundaries.
7. **Bilateral Resolution Stance:** India maintains that all border adjustments must be processed strictly via established bilateral diplomatic channels without external mediation.
8. **Fintech Linkage (UPI):** On the economic front, NPCI International partnered with Cambodia's ACLEDA Bank to launch cross-border UPI QR code payments.
9. **Regional Integration:** This digital expansion makes Cambodia the 9th international nation to adopt India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) framework, joining nations like Singapore, UAE, France, Mauritius, Nepal, Bhutan, Qatar, and Sri Lanka.