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Indonesia Joined the BRICS Group

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Context: Indonesia has formally joined the BRICS group, expanding the coalition of emerging economies that includes Russia, China, Brazil, India, and South Africa. This move is seen as part of a broader trend in global politics where countries are seeking to counterbalance Western dominance, especially in economic matters.

Reasons behind joining this group:

- Strengthening Global Influence: Indonesia joined BRICS to enhance its global governance role, as the group represents a significant portion of the world's population and economic power.
- Economic Growth and Trade Opportunities: BRICS offers Indonesia expanded trade relationships and improved access to markets, investments, and infrastructure development through increased economic cooperation within the group.
- De-dollarisation Efforts: As part of BRICS, Indonesia benefits from efforts to reduce reliance on the US dollar and explore alternative trading mechanisms and currencies, strengthening its economic sovereignty.
- Reforming Global Institutions: Indonesia aligns with BRICS in advocating for reforming global institutions like the IMF and World Bank, aiming for a more inclusive and fair global economic order.
- Global South Cooperation: Indonesia's membership emphasizes its commitment to working with other developing nations in the Global South, contributing to a collective voice for the needs of emerging economies.
- Multilateralism and Diplomacy: BRICS membership aligns with Indonesia's foreign policy, supporting multilateralism and cooperation on global issues such as climate change, poverty, and security.

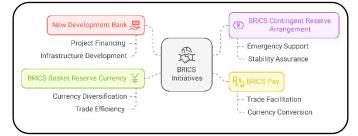
What is BRICS?

- BRICS is an intergovernmental organization made up of eleven countries. Initially focused on investment strategies, BRICS has evolved into a geopolitical and geoeconomic bloc that promotes multilateral policies and cooperation.
- The term "BRIC" was first coined in 2001 by economist Jim O'Neill to highlight investment opportunities in Brazil, Russia, India, and China. The first formal summit took place in 2009 in Russia, where these four countries met to discuss global economic issues and cooperation.

 South Africa joined the group in 2010, officially becoming a member on December 24, 2010. The organization was renamed "BRICS".

Core Objectives of BRICS:

- BRICS aims to promote economic cooperation and reform international financial systems, challenging the dominance of Western powers.
- Key areas of focus include multilateral development, trade cooperation, financial stability, sustainable development, and creating alternatives to the dollarbased financial system.



Main initiatives of BRICS:

BRICS has launched several key initiatives:

- New Development Bank (NDB): A global financial institution aimed at providing loans for development projects.
- BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement: A \$100 billion fund to assist member states during financial crises.
- **BRICS Pay:** A digital payment system for facilitating trade among members.
- BRICS Basket Reserve Currency: A proposed alternative to the dominance of the US dollar in international trade.

AnemiaPhone

Context: AnemiaPhone, a technology developed by Cornell University researchers to accurately, quickly, and cheaply, assess iron deficiency, has been transferred to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for integration into its programmes for anaemia, women's health, and maternal and child health throughout the country.

About AnemiaPhone:

 AnemiaPhone is designed to provide a quick, accurate, and cost-effective method of diagnosing iron deficiency,

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a primary cause of anemia. This technology will aid in rapid screening and diagnosis, especially in areas where healthcare resources may be limited.

 Iron deficiency anemia is a critical health issue in India, affecting 50% to 70% of pregnant women.

How AnemiaPhone Works:

- The test involves a small finger stick to collect a drop of blood.
- This blood is placed on a test strip similar to a home-use COVID-19 test.
- Within a few minutes, the results are available and can be uploaded to a clinical database via a mobile phone, wireless tablet, or computer.
- Healthcare workers can easily interpret the results, offering guidance, triage, referral, or immediate intervention on the spot.



Key Advantages of AnemiaPhone:

- The AnemiaPhone offers several advantages that make it an invaluable tool in India's battle against anaemia:
 - » Affordability: It is a low-cost alternative to traditional lab tests.
 - » **Portability:** The device is small, making it easy to transport and use in remote areas.
 - » **Quick Results:** It provides results within minutes, enabling immediate action.
 - » Wireless Integration: Results are uploaded directly to a clinical database, reducing the need for manual data entry.
 - » Ease of Use: The device is simple to operate, and healthcare workers do not require extensive training to use it.

Significance:

AnemiaPhone's integration into public health programs

in India will enhance access to timely diagnosis and help combat iron deficiency anemia, particularly among women and children, contributing to improved maternal and child health outcomes.

About Anemia:

Anemia occurs when you have low levels of healthy red blood cells, impairing your body's ability to carry oxygen. Common symptoms include fatigue, weakness, and shortness of breath. Anemia can range from mild to severe and may be life-threatening in some cases. The condition can have multiple causes, and treatment depends on the underlying cause.

The Iron Deficiency Problem in India:

- Anaemia, particularly iron deficiency anaemia, is a major public health issue in India. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), around 59% of women and 47% of children aged 6-59 months suffer from anaemia.
- The condition leads to severe consequences, including fatigue, shortness of breath, and in extreme cases, organ failure, complications during childbirth, and even death. India's high maternal and child mortality rates are closely linked to anaemia, making it a priority health concern for the country.

Genome India Project

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced the completion of the Genome India Project (GIP), marking a major milestone in India's biotechnology sector. The project unveiled a sequencing database of 10,000 genomes, showcasing India's vast genetic diversity. This database, accessible through managed access at the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC), is expected to drive advancements in healthcare, research, and policymaking.

About the Genome India Project:

- Launched in January 2020, the Genome India Project aimed to build a comprehensive genetic catalogue of India's population. By sequencing the genomes of 10,000 individuals from diverse population groups, it has created a reference database highlighting genetic variations unique to the Indian subcontinent.
- The initiative was executed by a consortium of over 20 institutions, including:

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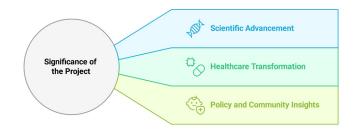
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- » Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in Delhi, Madras, and Jodhpur.
- » Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- » Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).
- » Biotechnology Research and Innovation Centre (BRIC).
- This collaboration underscores India's robust research ecosystem, capable of handling large-scale, multidisciplinary scientific projects.

The Role of Genome Sequencing:

 Genome sequencing, which decodes the complete genetic composition of an organism, is central to the project. It identifies genetic variations that influence traits, disease susceptibility, and adaptations, making it a cornerstone for precision medicine and populationspecific research.



Significance of the Project:

Scientific Advancement:

- » Provides a valuable dataset for researchers to explore genetic influences on health and disease.
- » Establishes a foundation for understanding the genetic makeup of India's diverse population groups.

Healthcare Transformation:

- » Facilitates development of precision medicine tailored to Indian genetic profiles.
- » Supports advancements in the treatment of genetic and infectious diseases.
- Policy and Community Insights:
 - » Offers data for evidence-based policymaking.
 - » Enhances understanding of the lifestyles and adaptations of diverse communities, aiding targeted health interventions.

Applications and Future Potential:

 The GIP positions India as a global leader in genomics and biotechnology. Its long-term applications include:

- » **Precision Medicine:** Customized treatments based on genetic profiles.
- » **Drug Development:** Identification of new drug targets and therapies.
- » **Public Health:** Insights to combat diseases more effectively, including genetic disorders.
- Additionally, the project aligns with the increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in biotech research, providing a strong foundation for innovative, data-driven solutions.

Conclusion

The Genome India Project is a groundbreaking initiative that showcases India's commitment to harnessing science for societal benefit. By creating a robust genetic database, the project not only elevates India's biotechnology capabilities but also lays the groundwork for significant improvements in healthcare, research, and policymaking. As Prime Minister Modi emphasized, this project symbolizes a transformative step in building an inclusive and scientifically advanced nation.

Same-Sex Marriage

Context: On January 10, 2025, the Supreme Court of India dismissed the review petitions filed against its October 17, 2023, ruling, which had rejected the legal recognition of same-sex marriages. The five-judge bench, comprising Justices B R Gavai, Surya Kant, B V Nagarathna, P S Narasimha, and Dipankar Datta, found no error in the majority judgment authored by Justice (retired) S Ravindra Bhat.

2023 Ruling on Same-Sex Marriage:

In its 2023 ruling, the Supreme Court declined to amend the provisions of the Special Marriage Act, 1954 (SMA), stating that there was no unqualified right to marriage in the Constitution. The Court emphasized that samesex couples could not claim marriage as a fundamental right under the Constitution. The bench left the task of recognizing same-sex unions to Parliament, urging legislative reform instead of judicial intervention.

About Same Sex Marriage:

Same sex marriage refers to the legal and social recognition of marriage between individuals of the same gender or sexual orientation. In such marriages,

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two people of the same sex come together in a formal union, just like opposite-sex couples, with the same legal rights and responsibilities.



The Legality of Same-Sex Marriages in India

- In India, marriage is not recognized as a fundamental right under the Constitution, but it is considered a statutory right. The right to marry has been shaped by judicial rulings, most notably the Supreme Court's decisions over time. While the Special Marriage Act, 1954, provides a legal framework for civil marriages irrespective of religion, the Court has yet to extend this to same-sex marriages, emphasizing that marriage is not an absolute constitutional right.
- Same-sex couples currently do not have the same legal recognition, and it remains up to the legislature to amend laws like the Special Marriage Act to accommodate same-sex unions.
- Although, In November 2018, the Supreme Court of India decriminalized homosexuality by striking off parts of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that criminalized consensual homosexual acts between adults. The judgment recognized that such provisions violated the fundamental rights of the LGBTQ community, particularly their right to equality, privacy, and liberty.
- It affirmed that the rights of LGBTQ individuals are protected under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantee equality, nondiscrimination, freedom of expression, and the right to life and personal liberty.

Future of Same-Sex Marriage in India:

 While the review petition has been dismissed, LGBTQ+ activists and allies continue to push for legislative changes that would grant legal recognition to same-sex marriages. As it stands, the onus remains on Parliament to amend existing laws and provide the legal framework necessary to recognize same-sex unions in India.

Cashless Treatment Scheme for Road Accident Victims

Context: On January 7, 2025, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari launched of new cashless treatment scheme for road victims. This scheme covers treatment costs up to ₹1.5 lakh per incident and aims to ensure that victims receive immediate medical attention during the critical "golden hour" after an accident.

Features of the scheme:

- The scheme applies to all road accidents involving motor vehicles. Victims must be treated at hospitals accredited under the Ayushman Bharat scheme.
- Victims can receive health benefits for trauma and polytrauma cases for treatment duration of up to seven days.
- The treatment will be covered only if a police report is filed within 24 hours of the accident.
- The NHA will oversee the implementation of the scheme, in collaboration with police, hospitals, and state health authorities.
- The NHA will manage the IT platform that integrates the e-Detailed Accident Report (eDAR) application with the Transaction Management System to facilitate seamless processing of claims and medical treatment.

Benefits of the Scheme:

- The scheme ensures that road accident victims receive immediate medical care during the critical "golden hour," improving survival chances.
- It provides financial relief by covering medical expenses up to ₹1.5 lakh, removing the financial barrier to urgent treatment.
- It is implemented nationwide, offering coverage and support for accident victims across all states and union territories.
- Timely medical care through the scheme reduces mortality rates and long-term health complications from road accidents, improving public health outcomes.

Road Safety and Accidents in India (2023):

• Total Accidents: 4.80 lakh road accidents, a 4.2%

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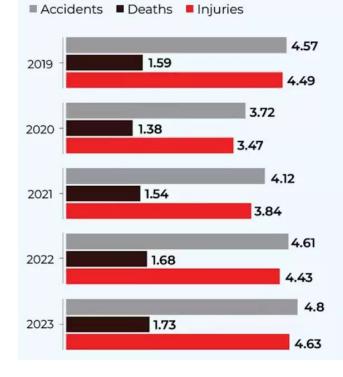
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increase from 2022.

- **Fatalities:** Over 1.72 lakh deaths, with 1,317 accidents and 474 deaths daily.
- State with Highest Fatalities: Uttar Pradesh recorded 23,650 deaths from 44,000 accidents.
- **Primary Cause of Fatalities:** Over-speeding responsible for 68.1% of fatalities.
- Lack of Safety Gear: 54,000 deaths due to no helmets; 16,000 deaths due to no seat belts.
- **Driving Violations:** Over 34,000 accidents from unlicensed driving; 12,000 deaths from overloading.
- Infrastructure Issues: Potholes, inadequate crossings, and poor vehicle braking systems.
- Behavioral Issues: Reckless driving, speeding, and weak traffic law enforcement.
- Economic Impact: Road accidents cost 5-7% of India's GDP annually.
- **Impact on Society:** The financial burden of accidents is disproportionate, especially on the poor.
- Healthcare Burden: Increased out-of-pocket expenses due to insufficient health insurance.

Rising Road Deaths

(All Figures in Lakh)



Road Safety Initiatives:

- National Road Safety Policy (2010).
- Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety (SCCoRS)
- Motor Vehicles Amendment Act (2019)
- National Road Safety Month/Week
- Good Samaritan Law to protect helpers
- Global Road Safety Goals: India signed the Brasilia Declaration and participates in the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021-2030).

Way Forward:

Improve road infrastructure, enforce traffic laws, promote awareness, and integrate AI-based traffic management systems.

World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP)

Context: The United Nations has released its World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2025 report, forecasting global economic growth to remain subdued at 2.8% in 2025, the same as the previous year.

Key Findings of the WESP 2025 Report:

- Global Growth Remains Subdued: Global economic growth is projected at 2.8% for both 2024 and 2025, reflecting ongoing uncertainty due to high debt levels, slow productivity growth, and weak investment. The rate is still below the pre-pandemic average of 3.2%.
- Resilience Despite Shocks: The global economy has displayed resilience against multiple economic shocks, but underlying structural issues such as slow productivity growth and high debt remain a drag on progress.
- Regional Growth Variations: Growth trajectories across regions vary. While developed economies like the US and Europe face slower growth, emerging economies like India, East Asia, and parts of Africa show more promising expansion rates.
- Inflation and Monetary Policy: Global inflation is projected to decline slightly from 4% in 2024 to 3.4% in 2025, providing some relief for households and businesses. Many central banks are expected to lower interest rates as inflation eases, although developing countries could still face inflation challenges.
- Trade and Geopolitical Risks: Global trade is

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expected to grow at a modest 3.2% in 2025, with tensions in trade policies and geopolitical conflicts posing risks to stability.

India's Prospective Growth in 2025:

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India is one of the standout performers in the WESP 2025 report, with a projected GDP growth rate of 6.6%, making it the fastest-growing major economy in South Asia. Several factors contribute to this positive outlook:

- Private Consumption and Investment: India's strong private consumption and increased investment, particularly in infrastructure, are key drivers of its economic growth. The government's push for capital expenditure (CapEx) in infrastructure is expected to yield significant long-term economic benefits, including improved connectivity, industrial growth, and job creation.
- Rupee Pressure Easing: The Indian rupee, which has been under pressure due to the strengthening US dollar, is expected to stabilize in the coming year. The report points to easing depreciation pressures on South Asian currencies, including the rupee, due to a loosening of US monetary policies, which will attract more investments into the region. This could help boost India's foreign exchange reserves and provide some breathing room for the economy.
- Sectoral Growth Drivers: India's manufacturing and services sectors are projected to continue expanding. In particular, India's growing presence in pharmaceuticals, electronics, and technology services will provide strong support for the country's export performance. Additionally, the favorable monsoon season in 2024 is expected to improve agricultural productivity in 2025, further bolstering the economy.
- Labor Market and Gender Gaps: While labor market indicators in India have remained strong, with urban unemployment stable at 6.6%, gender disparities persist. The report highlights that although women's participation in the labor force has improved, significant gaps remain, limiting the nation's overall productivity potential. Addressing these gender disparities could unlock further economic growth.
- Critical Mineral Resources: India possesses untapped reserves of critical minerals, such as rare earth elements, which could play a crucial role in the country's future economic development. The global demand for these minerals, essential for technology

and green energy industries, presents India with a significant opportunity to leverage its natural resources for economic growth.

Maha Kumbh Mela 2025

Context: The Maha Kumbh Mela, one of the largest religious gatherings globally, will begin in Prayagraj, India on January 13, 2025. This sacred festival, celebrated every 12 years, will run for 45 days and attract an estimated 45 crore (450 million) devotees, including 1.5 million from abroad. It starts with the Paush Purnima Snan and concludes on February 26, 2025.

The Mythological Origins of Kumbh Mela:

The term "Kumbh" means pitcher in Sanskrit and is central to the mythological story behind the festival. According to Hindu mythology, during the churning of the ocean to obtain the elixir of immortality (amrita), drops of the elixir fell at four locations: Haridwar, Prayagraj, Ujjain, and Nashik. These sites now host the Kumbh Mela, celebrated every 12 years to mark the 12 days of the gods' churning process, equivalent to 12 human years.

The Historical Evolution of Kumbh Mela:

The Kumbh Mela's roots lie in ancient scriptures, but its modern form evolved in the 12th century under the influence of Adi Shankaracharya. While religious fairs trace back to the 7th century, the Bhakti movement formalized the periodic gatherings at the four sacred sites, uniting ascetics and devotees.

The Four Sacred Cities:

The Kumbh Mela is held at four key locations:

- Haridwar: Held when Jupiter enters Aquarius, pilgrims bathe in the sacred Ganga.
- Prayagraj: Known for the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati, it hosts the Maha Kumbh every 12 years.
- Ujjain: The Kshipra River hosts the Mela when Jupiter is in Leo.
- Nashik-Trimbakeshwar: The Godavari River is central when Jupiter aligns in Leo.

Significance of Kumbh Mela:

• Spiritual Relevance: The Kumbh Mela is spiritually

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significant, especially the ritual bath at the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj. Pilgrims believe this dip in the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Sarasvati rivers purifies their sins and grants moksha (spiritual liberation).



- Cultural Showcase: The Kumbh Mela is also a celebration of Indian culture, featuring devotional kirtans, bhajans, and classical dances like Kathak, Bharatanatyam, and Kuchipudi. These performances highlight spiritual unity and divine devotion.
- Astrological Timing: The event is timed according to the alignment of the Sun, Moon, and Jupiter, which enhances the spiritual energy of the festival. This astrological connection adds to the Mela's sacred significance, making it a powerful time for spiritual activities.
- Simhastha Kumbh: When Jupiter is in the zodiac sign Leo, the Mela at Nashik and Ujjain is known as Simhastha Kumbh. This rare alignment increases the Mela's spiritual importance, drawing even more pilgrims for a grander celebration.

Kumbh Mela: A Symbol of National Unity and Cultural Heritage

 The Kumbh Mela symbolizes national unity and showcases India's rich cultural heritage. In 2017, UNESCO recognized it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, acknowledging its enduring ancient traditions and its significance in fostering spiritual and cultural connections across generations.

Pink Fire Retardant Used Against California Wildfires

Context: Pink fire retardants, including Phos-Chek, are being extensively used in Southern California to combat devastating wildfires. Thousands of gallons of this retardant are being dropped from planes to slow or halt the fires' spread, especially in Los Angeles and surrounding areas.

What is Pink Fire Retardant?

- Pink fire retardant refers to a chemical mixture used to slow or suppress fires, especially in wildland firefighting efforts. The most common brand of fire retardant used in the United States is Phos-Chek.
- Composition: Phos-Chek is primarily made up of three components:
 - » Water: The primary solvent in the mixture.
 - » Fertilizer: Typically contains ammonium salts, such as diammonium phosphate ([NH4]2HPO4) and ammonium polyphosphate ((NH4PO3)n).
 - » **Colorant:** The distinctive pink color added helps firefighters clearly see the areas that have been treated, ensuring precise application and effective fire line creation.
- The salts in Phos-Chek, particularly ammonium polyphosphate, are designed to remain in place longer than water, as they do not evaporate easily. This helps provide extended protection against fires.

How it Works:

The fire retardant is sprayed ahead of the fire to coat vegetation. The goal is to prevent oxygen from fueling the fire by creating a barrier of non-flammable material. When the retardant reacts with the cellulose in plants, it consumes the heat from the fire, converting the cellulose into non-flammable carbon.

What Are the Concerns?

- Despite its widespread use, there are several concerns surrounding the use of Phos-Chek as a fire retardant:
- Toxic Metals: A study in 2024 revealed that Phos-Chek contains harmful heavy metals, including chromium and

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cadmium, both of which are known carcinogens. These metals can cause serious health issues such as kidney and liver diseases. Additionally, the release of more than 400 tons of heavy metals between 2009 and 2021 has led to increased environmental pollution.

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- Water Contamination: Toxic metals from fire retardants can enter local waterways, contributing to pollution in rivers and streams. This poses a significant threat to aquatic life, potentially harming ecosystems.
- Effectiveness of Retardants: The effectiveness of aerial fire retardants like Phos-Chek depends on several factors such as slope, fuel type, terrain, and weather conditions. With climate change altering weather patterns, the narrow windows of conditions in which the retardants are most effective are becoming more limited. This makes fire suppression efforts increasingly challenging.

Causes of Devastating Wildfires:

The frequent and destructive wildfires in Southern California are influenced by multiple factors:

- Drought Conditions: The region has experienced prolonged droughts, with little to no rainfall in recent months, creating the perfect environment for wildfires to start and spread rapidly.
- Santa Ana Winds: Hot and dry winds, known as the Santa Ana winds, are common in the area and significantly contribute to the ignition and spread of fires.
- Climate Change: Climate change has been a significant factor in increasing the frequency, intensity, and season length of wildfires. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and changing weather patterns are all contributing to more devastating wildfires in California.

Power Packed News

India to host CSpOC conference in 2026

- India will host the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments of Commonwealth Countries (CSpOC) in 2026. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla announced the event at the CSpOC Standing Committee meeting in Guernsey.
- The main theme of the 28th CSpOC will focus on the use of artificial intelligence and social media in parliamentary processes. The CSpOC platform aims to exchange parliamentary practices and cooperation among member countries.
- India's hosting will provide an opportunity to showcase its rich traditions. India has previously hosted the event in 1970-71, 1986 and 2010.

Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award 2025

- Dr. Syed Anwar Khurshid received the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award 2025. The honour was given to him for his contributions to healthcare, community welfare, and strengthening India-Saudi Arabia relations.
- Dr Khurshid has served as Royal Protocol Physician for three decades at King Faisal Hospital and a decade at National Guard Hospital. He provided facilities such as healthcare, vaccine advocacy, and 24-hour consultation for Indian expatriates.
- He founded the International Indian School in Taif (a city located in Makkah Province, Saudi Arabia), which promotes educational excellence and cultural inclusion in the overseas Indian community. He is also the Vice President of the Saudi-Indian Healthcare Forum.
- This award is the highest honour given to the overseas Indians by the Government of India.

Henley Passport Index 2025

India's ranking in the Henley Passport Index 2025 has dropped to 85th, while it was 80th in 2024. Singapore topped the list

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for the second consecutive year.

- The index, released by Henley & Partners, is based on data from the International Air Transport Authority (IATA) and covers 199 passports and 227 travel destinations.
- According to the index, Indian passport holders are entitled to visa-free travel to 57 destinations.
- Pakistan is ranked 103rd and Bangladesh is 100th.
- The top five countries include Singapore, Japan, and various European countries. The index assesses the global strength of passports and is based on 19 years of historical data.

Joseph Aoun becomes President of Lebanon

- The Lebanese Parliament elected Army Commander Joseph Aoun as the President of the country. He is the fifth former army commander to become President.
- He was appointed Army Chief in March 2017 and his term was extended twice during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.
- In Lebanon, the President is elected by a two-thirds majority in the first round or a simple majority in the next round.
- This election was held after a gap of two years. Aun's tenure will focus on contributing to regional stability and national security.

Parth Yojana of Madhya Pradesh Government

- The Madhya Pradesh government has launched the Parth Yojana to prepare the youth mentally and physically before
 recruitment in the army, police and paramilitary forces.
- The full name of the Parth scheme is "Police Army Recruitment Training and Skills".
- Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav launched it at the closing ceremony of the state level youth festival. Under this
 scheme, the youth will get pre-training for physical fitness and preparation for the written examination. They will be given
 training in the infrastructure of the sports department.
- The government will create a youth portal, where interested youth can register themselves.
- A list of training centers will also be available on the portal. The aim of this scheme is to prepare the youth for a better future.

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