

## Part 1: National & International News

**Q1. Consider the following statements regarding India's Foreign Exchange (Forex) Reserves as of March 2026:**

1. India's Forex reserves cross the \$700 billion mark for the first time, reaching approximately \$709.75 billion.
2. The current reserve levels are sufficient to cover more than 12 months of India's imports.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?** [A] 1 only

[B] 2 only

[C] Both 1 and 2

[D] Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer:** [C] Both 1 and 2

**Detailed Explanation:** As per the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data released in mid-March 2026, India's foreign exchange reserves stood robustly at **\$709.75 billion**. This unprecedented cushion represents a historical peak for the country, placing India comfortably above external danger zones despite the ongoing geopolitical West Asian conflict. Economists evaluate a country's reserve adequacy via its import cover; India's current threshold accommodates well over 12 months of essential imports, significantly reinforcing its macroeconomic credibility and sovereign rating buffers against foreign portfolio investment (FPI) shocks.

**Q2. Which country has recently overtaken the Netherlands to become India's 3rd largest export destination as of early 2026?**

[A] USA

[B] China

[C] UAE

[D] Saudi Arabia

**Answer:** [B] China

**Detailed Explanation:** In a major geo-economic shift, China officially displaced the Netherlands to claim the spot of India's 3rd largest export destination. Driven by an explosive 32.4% surge in February/March shipments reaching \$1.67 billion, Indian traders tactically pivoted towards the Chinese market following heavy US tariff hikes imposed in late 2025. Key drivers of this export spike include electronics (specifically telephone components), marine products like frozen shrimp, and aluminum. Conversely, outbound shipments to the Netherlands crashed by over 31% due to reduced European off-take of refined petroleum products processed from Russian crude oil.

**Q3. The critical maritime chokepoint "Strait of Hormuz," which was recently in the news due to the escalation of the West Asian war crisis, connects which two major water bodies?**

[A] Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

[B] Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman

[C] Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea

[D] Black Sea and Sea of Marmara

**Answer:** [B] Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman

**Detailed Explanation:** The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most critical energy transit artery, linking the oil-and-gas-rich Persian Gulf with the open ocean via the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. In March 2026, the waterway became a geopolitical flashpoint following threats of complete closure by Iranian authorities if its onshore power infrastructure was targeted by foreign coalitions. Over 20 Indian-flagged Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and crude tankers (including ships like *Pine Gas*

and *Jag Vasant*) were briefly stranded or forced to sail cautiously near Larak and Qeshm islands to clear security protocols, underscoring India's vulnerability to supply-chain disruptions through this chokepoint.

**Q4. Which state's historic and vibrant spring festival "Chapchar Kut," marking the completion of the arduous Jhum (slash-and-burn) agricultural cycle, was celebrated across the state on March 23, 2026?**

- [A] Nagaland
- [B] Mizoram
- [C] Arunachal Pradesh
- [D] Manipur

**Answer:** [B] Mizoram

**Detailed Explanation:** Chapchar Kut is the most significant cultural and agricultural festival of Mizoram. Celebrated in the capital city of Aizawl and throughout the state, it marks the brief operational window between the clearing of forest lands for Jhum cultivation and the sowing of fresh crops. The festival features traditional community feasts and the world-renowned **Cheraw dance** (the intricate Mizo bamboo dance). It remains a crucial topic for Art & Culture modules in UPSC and SSC exams.

**Q5. The Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement, which has sparked intense strategic debates in India ahead of the WTO's MC14, is primarily a:**

- [A] Multilateral agreement signed by all WTO members
- [B] Plurilateral agreement open only to participating members
- [C] Bilateral trade framework between India and the EU

[D] Sub-regional treaty under the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)

**Answer:** [B] Plurilateral agreement open only to participating members

**Detailed Explanation:** The IFD agreement is a plurilateral initiative at the World Trade Organization (WTO) backed heavily by China and signed by roughly 128 out of 164 member nations. India has strongly opposed its formal integration into the WTO framework, citing that it bypasses the mandatory consensus-based multilateral rule-making structure and could lead to a "two-tier" WTO. Furthermore, strategic analysts point out that nearly 98 of the IFD signatories are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), causing concerns that standardizing global investment frameworks under this banner could indirectly expand Beijing's geo-economic leverage in developing neighborhoods.

**Q6. The traditional "Peth Festival" dedicated to Goddess Kelbai was celebrated with deep religious fervor in March 2026. This festival is indigenous to which Indian state?**

- [A] Maharashtra
- [B] Goa
- [C] Karnataka
- [D] Kerala

**Answer:** [B] Goa

**Detailed Explanation:** The Peth Festival is a highly revered local socio-religious event dedicated to Goddess Kelbai, celebrated predominantly in the state of **Goa**. It showcases unique Goan folklore, community rituals, and indigenous performance arts that draw thousands of regional devotees annually. Such localized cultural events are heavily tested in the General Awareness sections of SSC CGL and Railway recruitment boards.

**Q7. United States Special Envoy for South Asia, Sergio Gor, commenced his inaugural regional diplomatic visit in March 2026 by landing in which country?**

- [A] India
- [B] Bangladesh
- [C] Sri Lanka
- [D] Maldives

**Answer:** [C] Sri Lanka

**Detailed Explanation:** The newly appointed US Special Envoy for South Asia, Sergio Gor, chose **Sri Lanka** as his first official diplomatic stop in March 2026. Indian strategic circles and foreign policy think tanks monitored this "quiet strategic signal" closely. The high-level deployment in Colombo coincides with volatile operational shifts in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) stemming from commercial shipping redirections caused by the West Asian conflict.

## Part 2: Economics, Banking & Corporate Laws

**Q8. The Union Finance Minister launched "PRARAMBH 2026" as a nationwide outreach campaign. What does the acronym PRARAMBH stand for?**

- [A] Public Revenue and Reform Action for Modern Bharat
- [B] Policy Reform and Responsible Action for Mission Viksit Bharat
- [C] Progressive Regulation and Revenue Model for Bharat
- [D] Policy Roadmap for Revenue and Monetary Balance

**Answer:** [A] Public Revenue and Reform Action for Modern Bharat

**Detailed Explanation:** PRARAMBH (Public Revenue and Reform Action for Modern Bharat) was rolled out by the Ministry of Finance to educate corporate entities, digital platform operators, and high-net-worth individuals on the compliance baselines of the newly overhauled tax framework. The campaign ensures transition transparency before the major provisions come into operational force.

**Q9. Under the revised digital taxation rules taking effect on April 1, 2026, what are the threshold triggers for establishing a "Significant Economic Presence" (SEP) in India for foreign companies?**

- [A] Transactions exceeding ₹1 crore OR more than 1 lakh Indian users
- [B] Transactions exceeding ₹2 crore OR more than 3 lakh Indian users
- [C] Transactions exceeding ₹5 crore OR more than 5 lakh Indian users
- [D] Transactions exceeding ₹10 crore OR more than 10 lakh Indian users

**Answer:** [B] Transactions exceeding ₹2 crore OR more than 3 lakh Indian users

**Detailed Explanation:** To seal loopholes used by cross-border digital conglomerates operating without physical offices, the updated code cements the **Significant Economic Presence (SEP)** standard. Any foreign entity generating revenue from transactions with Indian users exceeding **₹2 crore** during the financial year, or interacting systematically with more than **3 lakh active Indian digital users**, will automatically fall within India's tax ambit.

**Q10. According to data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on March 23, 2026, India's core sector growth for February 2026 stood at 2.3%. Which industry recorded the highest individual growth?**

- [A] Crude Oil
- [B] Cement
- [C] Steel
- [D] Natural Gas

**Answer:** [B] Cement

**Detailed Explanation:** India's Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) calculated a moderate overall growth of **2.3%** for February 2026. The key drivers sustaining this index were Cement (surging by **9.3%**) and Steel (growing at **7.2%**), reflecting robust national infrastructure projects. Conversely, extractive sectors like Crude Oil and Natural Gas pulled down the index due to mature well field dynamics and logistical disruptions, making it an essential index for Banking and UPSC economic prelims.

**Q11. Which premier commercial bank has launched a first-of-its-kind UPI-linked overdraft facility targeted exclusively at women Self-Help Group (SHG) members holding PMJDY accounts?**

- [A] State Bank of India
- [B] HDFC Bank
- [C] Bank of Baroda
- [D] Punjab National Bank

**Answer:** [C] Bank of Baroda

**Detailed Explanation:** In a major push for micro-credit accessibility, **Bank of Baroda (BoB)** announced a tailored UPI-integrated overdraft facility. This micro-lending solution specifically caters to women Self-Help Group (SHG) functionaries who manage active Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) accounts. By allowing immediate overdraft drawdowns over a unified smartphone interface, the bank minimizes red tape and drives grass-root financial inclusion.

**Q12. The Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which was recently introduced in Parliament, fundamentally seeks to streamline regulatory frameworks across which two legislative Acts?**

- [A] Companies Act, 2013 and SEBI Act, 1992
- [B] Companies Act, 2013 and Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act, 2008
- [C] Banking Regulation Act, 1949 and RBI Act, 1934
- [D] Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 and Companies Act, 2013

**Answer:** [B] Companies Act, 2013 and Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act, 2008

**Detailed Explanation:** The Ministry of Corporate Affairs introduced the **Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** to simultaneously alter specific provisions within the **Companies Act, 2013** and the **Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act, 2008**. The primary objective is to decriminalize minor procedural filing lapses, introduce hybrid digital compliance formats, and drastically improve the "Ease of Doing Business" matrix for startups and mid-tier enterprises.

**Q13. What progressive data auditing reform has SEBI proposed for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) to optimize transaction speeds and capital safety?**

- [A] Transitioning to a mandatory 2-year cooling-off period
- [B] Implementing a 7-year digital audit trail with monthly reporting
- [C] Allowing the netting of funds for settlement purposes
- [D] Total prohibition of intraday equity exposures



**Answer:** [C] Allowing the netting of funds for settlement purposes

**Detailed Explanation:** The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has moved a progressive consultative proposal to permit **netting of funds for settlement** for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs). Instead of forcing institutional investors to lock up massive capital blocks across individual buy and sell orders independently throughout a trading session, they can settle the cumulative net financial obligations, optimizing market liquidity and reducing institutional operational costs.

**Q14. Which digital real estate monitoring platform has been rolled out by the National Housing Bank (NHB) to enhance institutional consumer lending transparency?**

- [A] PRISM-SG Portal
- [B] Gruh Sugam Portal
- [C] NETRA Housing App
- [D] Bhashini Housing Link

**Answer:** [B] Gruh Sugam Portal

**Detailed Explanation:** The **Gruh Sugam Portal** is a newly developed electronic marketplace initiative launched by the **National Housing Bank (NHB)**. The system enables public users to cross-verify affordable housing project clearances, assess standardized interest rates offered by diverse Primary Lending Institutions (PLIs), and track the real-time processing milestones of retail housing loans.

### Part 3: Appointments & Resignations

**Q15. Who has been appointed as the new Director (Commercial) of the state-run steel giant, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), in March 2026?**

- [A] T.N. Natarajan
- [B] Krishna Kumar Thakur
- [C] Aparna Garg
- [D] B.P. Singh

**Answer:** [A] T.N. Natarajan

**Detailed Explanation:** Senior corporate veteran **T.N. Natarajan** formally took charge as the **Director (Commercial)** of Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) on March 19/23, 2026. Natarajan joined the public sector undertaking back in 1993 and commands over 32 years of comprehensive experience in international metal marketing, supply-chain logistics, and long-term joint venture formulations.

**Q16. Senior Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS) officer Krishna Kumar Thakur has been appointed to which vital leadership post in a premier public sector mining enterprise?**

- [A] Director (Finance) at Coal India Limited
- [B] Director (Personnel) at NMDC Limited
- [C] Chairman & Managing Director at Steel Authority of India Limited
- [D] Managing Director at NALCO

**Answer:** [B] Director (Personnel) at NMDC Limited

**Detailed Explanation:** **Krishna Kumar Thakur**, a highly regarded 1998-batch Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS) officer, has assumed office as the **Director (Personnel)** at **NMDC Limited** (formerly National Mineral Development Corporation). Thakur is widely recognized within administrative circles for executing expansive human resource restructurings and handling the recruitment and skilling initiatives of over 12,000 corporate personnel during his previous government tenures.

**Q17. Who took oath as the new Chief Minister of Kerala in March 2026 following intense post-election leadership deliberations?**

- [A] Pinarayi Vijayan
- [B] V.D. Satheesan
- [C] K. Karunakaran
- [D] Ramesh Chennithala

**Answer:** [B] V.D. Satheesan

**Detailed Explanation:** Following the high-stakes Assembly Elections of 2026 in Kerala, senior Congress leader **V.D. Satheesan** was formally sworn in as the next **Chief Minister of Kerala**, successfully resolving days of internal legislative party suspense. Upon taking his oath of office, Satheesan announced that his cabinet's primary mandate would focus on alleviating the localized cost-of-living crisis driven by global fuel price fluctuations.

### Part 4: Awards, Honors, Books & Authors

**Q18. Which eminent historian has been awarded the prestigious "Mark Lynton History Prize 2026" for the critically acclaimed work titled "The Golden Road"?**

- [A] Ramachandra Guha
- [B] William Dalrymple
- [C] Shashi Tharoor
- [D] Irfan Habib

**Answer:** [B] William Dalrymple

**Detailed Explanation:** World-renowned historian **William Dalrymple** won the internationally coveted **Mark Lynton History Prize 2026** for his seminal literary masterpiece, *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World*. Dalrymple's book presents a compelling counter-narrative to

China's "Silk Road," arguing that from 250 BCE to 1200 CE, a massive maritime and overland trading network—the "Golden Road"—positioned India as the true civilizational exporter of mathematical systems (like zero and decimals), religious philosophies (Buddhism/Hinduism), and architecture across Asia.

**Q19. Veteran Indian actress Rituparna Sengupta was honored with a prestigious international "Women Empowerment Award" in March 2026. Which iconic global venue hosted this event?**

- [A] United Nations Headquarters, New York
- [B] UK House of Commons, London
- [C] UNESCO Headquarters, Paris
- [D] Élysée Palace, Paris

**Answer:** [B] UK House of Commons, London

**Detailed Explanation:** Acclaimed Indian actress and cultural ambassador **Rituparna Sengupta** was conferred with the **Women Empowerment Award** at the **UK House of Commons** in London. The ceremony was organized to recognize her multi-decade artistic contributions to cinema and her proactive advocacy for gender equity and social integration models for underprivileged women artists in South Asia.

### Part 5: Defense & Security News

**Q20. "Exercise Lamitiye 2026" is a high-intensity bilateral military joint training exercise conducted between the Indian Army and the defense forces of which country?**

- [A] Maldives
- [B] Seychelles
- [C] Mauritius
- [D] Madagascar

**Answer:** [B] Seychelles

**Detailed Explanation:** Exercise Lamitiye is a biennial joint military training exercise conducted between the **Indian Army** and the **Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF)**. The word "Lamitiye" translates directly to "Friendship" in the local Creole language. The 2026 edition focused heavily on tactical counter-insurgency, semi-urban warfare operations, anti-piracy drills, and reinforcing joint maritime security frameworks in the western Indian Ocean.

**Q21. INS Taragiri (F41), which was highlighted in defense dispatches ahead of its impending formal commissioning, belongs to which class of advanced stealth frigates?**

- [A] Shivalik-class
- [B] Nilgiri-class (Project 17A)
- [C] Talwar-class
- [D] Visakhapatnam-class

**Answer:** [B] Nilgiri-class (Project 17A)

**Detailed Explanation:** INS Taragiri (F41) is a state-of-the-art guided-missile stealth frigate constructed under the Indian Navy's ambitious **Project 17A (Nilgiri-class)**. Built with advanced radar-evading hull geometries, indigenous composite materials, and fitted with supersonic BrahMos anti-ship cruise missiles, these warships significantly enhance India's defensive and offensive capabilities across the blue-water reaches of the Indo-Pacific.

**Q22. The Ministry of Defence recently approved a dedicated contract package for the structural modernization and spare logistics of the "Tunguska" weapon system. The Tunguska is primarily a:**

- [A] Nuclear-powered attack submarine
- [B] Long-range intercontinental ballistic missile
- [C] Self-propelled Air Defence Gun-Missile System
- [D] High-altitude long-endurance drone

[D] High-altitude long-endurance drone

**Answer:** [C] Self-propelled Air Defence Gun-Missile System

**Detailed Explanation:** The **Tunguska** is a Russian-origin, highly lethal **Self-propelled Air Defence Gun-Missile System (SPAAGM)** operated by the Indian Army's Air Defence corps. It is engineered to provide point-defense protection for mechanized infantry columns against low-flying cruise missiles, strike aircraft, and tactical drones, making its operational update highly significant for SSC/Defense exams.

## Part 6: Government Schemes & Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs)

**Q23. Which state government introduced the "Indiramma Family Life Insurance Scheme" offering a universal cashless health envelope of ₹5 lakh per family?**

- [A] Karnataka
- [B] Telangana
- [C] Andhra Pradesh
- [D] Himachal Pradesh

**Answer:** [B] Telangana

**Detailed Explanation:** The Government of **Telangana**, within its state budget ecosystem, formally rolled out the **Indiramma Family Life Insurance Scheme**. This universal health and insurance safety net covers approximately **1.15 crore families** across the state. Administered via the Rajiv Aarogyasri Trust, it provides a comprehensive **₹5 lakh cashless medical insurance package** spanning 1,998 listed ailments. Furthermore, the scheme extends a **₹1.20 crore accidental insurance buffer** for state government employees.

**Q24. The National Productivity Council (NPC) signed a milestone governance agreement with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Under this framework, the NPC will operate as a certified:**

- [A] Carbon Credit Allocation Bureau
- [B] Environmental Audit Agency (EADA)
- [C] Wildlife Habitat Mapping Authority
- [D] Coastal Zone Regulation Desk

**Answer:** [B] Environmental Audit Agency (EADA)

**Detailed Explanation:** The National Productivity Council (NPC) signed a memorandum with the MoEFCC to act as an accredited Environmental Audit Agency (EADA) under the updated Environment Audit Rules. This positions the NPC as the premier statutory third-party authority to evaluate industrial units for ecological compliance, carbon emission reporting correctness, and industrial wastewater treatment efficiency, significantly strengthening green governance.

**Q25. The National District Mineral Foundation (DMF) Summit 2026 concluded with a prime directive to redirect unutilized mining royalty funds into which national socio-economic program?**

- [A] Smart Cities Mission
- [B] Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)
- [C] PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan
- [D] Stand-Up India Scheme

**Answer:** [B] Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)

**Detailed Explanation:** The National DMF Summit 2026 resulted in strict operational mandates ordering state authorities to align District Mineral Foundation (DMF) funds

directly with the developmental mandates of the Aspirational Districts and Aspirational Blocks Programmes (ADP/ABP). DMF funds are collected as a percentage of mining royalties to develop communities affected by mining operations; this policy pivot ensures these funds are systematically utilized to improve health, nutrition, and basic infrastructure in India's most socio-economically backward blocks.

**Q26. Which state government announced a ₹3,500 crore educational reform project called "Sikhya Kranti 2.0" co-funded with a ₹2,500 crore loan from the World Bank?**

- [A] Haryana
- [B] Punjab
- [C] Odisha
- [D] Chhattisgarh

**Answer:** [B] Punjab

**Detailed Explanation:** The Government of Punjab has rolled out the Sikhya Kranti 2.0 initiative, a 6-year educational reform program with a total layout of ₹3,500 crore. The project is heavily backed by the international community, with the World Bank extending a structural loan of ₹2,500 crore, while the state government provides the remaining ₹1,000 crore. The primary focus areas are integrating digital smart labs across rural public schools and training educators in AI-driven pedagogical tools.

## Part 7: Important Days, Public Health & Obituaries

**Q27. World Water Day is observed globally on March 22. What was the central theme designated for World Water Day?**

- [A] Water for Peace
- [B] Valuing Water

[C] Accelerating Change

[D] Groundwater: Making the Invisible Visible

**Answer:** [A] Water for Peace

**Detailed Explanation:** World Water Day is observed every year on **March 22** to advocate for the sustainable management of global freshwater resources. The theme highlighted by international bodies and reiterated by the Prime Minister in his March 2026 address was "**Water for Peace**". This theme stresses how transboundary water cooperation can act as a stabilizing diplomatic tool against regional climate-induced friction.

**Q28. According to a long-term public health study published by the *Lancet* journal in late March 2026, climate change and rising ambient temperatures could cause what health-related impact in India by 2050?**

[A] A 15% increase in respiratory allergies

[B] A 2% surge in physical inactivity leading to higher obesity and diabetes risks

[C] A complete eradication of water-borne vectors

[D] A drop in average life expectancy by 10 years across coastal cities

**Answer:** [B] A 2% surge in physical inactivity leading to higher obesity and diabetes risks

**Detailed Explanation:** In an alarming climate-health linkage study, the *Lancet* revealed that escalating global heat stress would drastically limit outdoor mobility. For India, the models project an additional **2% increase in physical inactivity** by 2050 as extreme ambient heat index thresholds are breached during daytime hours. This lifestyle shift is directly linked to an exponential surge in non-communicable lifestyle diseases, such as cardiovascular failures, clinical obesity, and type-2 diabetes.

**Q29. When is World Puppetry Day observed annually by the Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA) to celebrate the ancient art of cultural storytelling?**

[A] March 20

[B] March 21

[C] March 22

[D] March 23

**Answer:** [B] March 21

**Detailed Explanation:** World Puppetry Day is celebrated worldwide on **March 21**. Established originally in 2003 by the Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA), the day acts as a global platform to preserve folk theater, shadow puppetry, and string-puppet storytelling arts, which are vital components of traditional cultural heritage.

**Q30. Martial arts icon, pop-culture legend, and star of the famous television series 'Walker, Texas Ranger', who passed away in March 2026 at the age of 86, was:**

[A] Bruce Lee

[B] Chuck Norris

[C] Jackie Chan

[D] Jean-Claude Van Damme

**Answer:** [B] Chuck Norris

**Detailed Explanation:** The iconic American martial artist, actor, and media phenomenon **Chuck Norris** passed away in March 2026 at the age of 86. Norris was an undefeated **six-time World Professional Middleweight Karate Champion** before transitioning to Hollywood. He starred in legendary action cinema alongside Bruce Lee and headlined the long-running television series *Walker, Texas Ranger*, etching his name into modern pop-culture history