

## International

### Russia imposes new tourist tax.

In Russia, a new tourist tax has come into effect across the country from January 1, 2025 replacing the previous resort fee. Travelers staying in hotels and other accommodations will contribute an additional 1 percent of their lodging costs. This is intended to bolster regional tourism infrastructure.

Under the current framework, the tourist tax will begin at a rate of 1 percent in 2025 and gradually rise to 3 percent by 2027.

### Zimbabwe abolishes death penalty.

African nation Zimbabwe has abolished the death penalty, a widely expected move in a country that last carried out the punishment nearly two decades ago. President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who once faced the death penalty himself in the 1960s during the war of independence had approved the law this week after a bill passed through Parliament.

### Pakistan begins its two-year tenure as non-permanent member of UNSC.

Pakistan began its two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on January 1, 2025. From Wednesday, Pakistan will sit in the Security Council for the 2025-26 term as a non-permanent member — the eighth time that the country has had a seat on the 15-member body's horseshoe table.

In the June election in the General Assembly, Pakistan was elected along with Denmark, Greece, Panama and Somalia — to replace Japan, Ecuador, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland whose terms end on December 31, 2024.

### World Rings in 2025 with spectacular celebrations from Kiribati to Times Square.

People across the globe are bidding farewell to 2024 and welcoming 2025, as cities around the world prepare for New Year celebrations that highlight local cultures and traditions. The Pacific Island nation of Kiribati was the first country to ring in 2025, with its 133,500 citizens celebrating the new year. The Micronesian nation was soon followed into

2025 by the Chatham Islands in New Zealand. Auckland, New Zealand, was among the first major cities in the world to usher in the New Year 2025, as thousands enjoyed a dazzling fireworks display at the iconic Sky Tower.

Following Auckland, Sydney, Australia, has also welcomed 2025 with a spectacular fireworks display.

## National

### Total annual groundwater recharge in country increased by 15 BCM in 2024.

The total annual groundwater recharge in the country has increased by 15 Billion Cubic Meter substantially and extraction has declined by three Billion Cubic Meter in 2024. Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil released the Dynamic Ground Water Resource Assessment Report for the year 2024. According to reports the total annual groundwater recharge has been assessed as over 446 Billion Cubic Meter.

The report highlights that 100 per cent of ground water samples in North-Eastern States are in an excellent category for irrigation.

### GSLV mission planned in January would be 100th launch from Sriharikota.

ISRO is gearing up to achieve a significant milestone with a Geosynchronous Launch Vehicle mission scheduled in January set to become the 100th launch from the Sriharikota spaceport.

The 99th launch from Sriharikota was on December 30, 2024 PSLV-C60 mission which successfully placed two spacecraft for conducting the Space Docking Experiment in a circular orbit, ISRO Chairman S. Somanath said. ISRO chief also expressed hope that many more Space Docking Experiments would be taken up by the scientists in the coming days.

### Defence Ministry signs two contracts on AIP modules, heavy torpedoes for Scorpene submarines

The Union Ministry of Defence signed two contracts related to Scorpene-class submarines worth ₹2,867 crore. The first contract is for the construction of the air independent propulsion module (AIP) developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), and its integration onboard. The

second contract is for the integration of the electronic heavyweight torpedo (EHWT) being developed by the DRDO.

The contract for construction of AIP Plug and its integration was inked with Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, Mumbai [which is] worth around ₹1,990 crore, while the contract for integration of EHWT, being developed by DRDO, was signed with Naval Group, France at an approx. cost of ₹877 crore.

## **Business and Economy**

### **India's core sectors grow by 4.3% in November.**

According to the data released by the Ministry of Commerce, India's core sectors' output growth increased by 4.3 percent in November this year on an annual basis. The production of cement, coal, steel, electricity, refinery products, and fertilisers recorded positive.

Coal production increased by 7.5 percent, petroleum refinery products rose by 2.9 percent, fertilisers witnessed an uptick of 2 percent, steel increased by 4.8 percent, and cement surged by 13 percent, while electricity gained 3.8 percent in November of the current fiscal year.

### **Interest rates on small savings schemes remain unchanged for Q4 of FY 2024-25.**

The interest rates on various Small Savings Schemes has been kept unchanged for the fourth quarter of this financial year. Finance Ministry said, the rates of interest on Small Savings Schemes from 1st January to 31st March, 2025, will remain unchanged. This means, the interest rate for popular scheme, Public Provident Fund (PPF), will be unchanged at 7.1%. Similarly, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, aimed at promoting the welfare of the girl child, will continue to offer an attractive interest rate of 8.2%. The interest rate for sought-after Senior Citizen Savings Scheme will be 8.2% per annum.

### **NPCI allows WhatsApp Pay to extend UPI services to all users in India**

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has removed the UPI user onboarding limit for WhatsApp Pay (Third Party App Provider), with immediate effect.

With this, WhatsApp Pay can now extend UPI services to its entire user base in India. Previously, the service had a phased rollout with a cap of 100 million users.

WhatsApp Pay is an integrated UPI-based payments feature within Meta's instant messaging platform, enabling users to send and receive money.

Introduced in India in February 2018, it received NPCI approval on February 7, 2020, for a phased rollout of its digital payment services.

### **India's Space Economy will grow 5 times from \$8.4 billion to \$44 billion by 2033.**

The union government has said that the space economy will grow nearly five times in the next decade from 8.4 billion dollars to around 44 billion dollars, Minister of State for Atomic Energy and Space, Dr. Jitendra Singh, said.

He said the investments in the space sector reached one thousand crore rupees in 2023 alone, placing India as a frontline player globally.

Of the 220 million euros earned through launching foreign satellites, 85 percent of the total was generated in the last eight years.

### **India's fiscal deficit hits ₹8.47 Lakh Cr through November.**

India's fiscal deficit for the first eight months of this fiscal year through November stood at 8.47 lakh crore rupees or 52.5 percent of annual estimates, data from the Ministry of Finance showed. Total receipts stood at 18.94 lakh crore rupees, while overall expenditure in April to November was at 27.41 lakh crore rupees. These figures were 59.1 percent and 56.9 percent of this fiscal year's budget target. Tax revenue was 14.43 lakh crore rupees, and non-tax revenue was 4.27 lakh crore rupees.

The central government's fiscal deficit target is 4.9 percent of the gross domestic product for 2024-25.

## **Sports**

### **Magnus Carlsen & Ian Nepomniachtchi share World Blitz Chess Championship title 2024.**

In the World Blitz Chess Championship 2024, Magnus Carlsen and Ian Nepomniachtchi have

shared the title after their final match ended in a tie in New York. Carlsen, who led 2-NIL, needed a draw in the third game to win the title. However, Nepomniachtchi came back to level the score 2-2, forcing tiebreaks. After three draws in sudden-death games, Carlsen proposed sharing the title, which was accepted. In the Women's section, China's Ju Wenjun defeated her compatriot Lei Tingjie in the final

to win the World Blitz Championship, completing a double after drawing five games.

### **Football: West Bengal lifts Santosh Trophy.**

West Bengal has won the Santosh Trophy national football championship, clinching the title for a record 33rd time with a 1-0 win against Kerala in the final of the 78th edition at the GMC Balayogi Stadium .