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1. Ministry tells social media platforms to block 'obscene and pornographic' content

Why in the News?

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has issued an advisory to social media platforms directing them to proactively detect and remove "obscene" and "pornographic" content. This follows recent observations by the Supreme Court urging the Union government to curb online obscenity. Large platforms - defined as those with more than 50 lakh users - have been specifically asked to deploy technological tools for automatic detection and takedown of such content.



Background

Legal Framework

- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 regulate social media intermediaries.
- These rules mandate intermediaries to prevent the hosting or sharing of:
 - obscene and pornographic content
 - paedophilic material
 - harmful content relating to children
 - other unlawful content

Safe Harbour Principle (Section 79, IT Act)

- Social media intermediaries are protected from liability for user-generated content, provided they comply with due diligence rules.
- Failure to follow MeitY's advisory and the IT Rules may result in losing this protection.

Recent Developments

- Nearly 25 OTT platforms offering erotic content have already been blocked.
- The government has also proposed introducing broader prohibitions on "online obscenity" before the Supreme Court.

Features

Mandatory Proactive Detection

- Large platforms must use technology-based tools (like automated filters) to detect and remove obscene/pornographic material.

Due Diligence Requirements

- Platforms must ensure users do not upload, store, share, or display unlawful content.

Accountability Mechanism

- Non-compliance may lead to:
 - loss of safe harbour protection
 - potential prosecution under the IT Act

Focus on Enforcement

- The advisory suggests that platforms have not adequately screened such content so far.

Challenges

Ambiguity in Defining “Obscenity”

- The term lacks precise legal clarity, raising risks of over-censorship.

Balancing Free Speech and Regulation

- Excessive content moderation could impact constitutionally protected speech.

Technological Limitations

- Automated tools may:
 - mislabel content
 - fail to detect context (e.g., educational content, art)

Privacy and Surveillance Concerns

- Increased monitoring of user uploads may affect digital privacy.

Operational Burden on Smaller Firms

- Compliance costs may be high, particularly for emerging platforms.

Way Forward

Clearer Legal Definitions

- Establish objective standards for determining obscenity to reduce arbitrary enforcement.

Proportionate Regulation

- Safeguard fundamental rights while addressing legitimate public concerns.

Transparent Moderation Processes

- Platforms should publish regular transparency reports.

Independent Oversight

- Consider third-party audits to ensure fairness.

Digital Literacy Campaigns

- Promote awareness about responsible online behaviour.

Grievance Redressal Mechanisms

- Strengthen user complaint systems for faster resolution.

Conclusion

The advisory marks another step in India's evolving digital governance framework, seeking to address public concerns around obscene and harmful online content. However, the success of such measures will depend on achieving a careful balance between user safety, platform accountability, freedom of expression, and privacy protections. A nuanced approach - supported by clarity in law and transparency in implementation - will be essential for sustainable and rights-respecting regulation of the digital ecosystem.

2. India is now the fourth largest economy: Centre

Why in the News?

India has overtaken Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy with a GDP size of \$4.18 trillion, according to a government statement highlighting economic reforms in 2025. India is also projected to surpass Germany within the next 2.5–3 years, reaching a GDP of \$7.3 trillion by 2030, while retaining its position as the world's fastest-growing major economy.



Background

- India's economy has shown consistent high growth in recent years.
- Real GDP growth:
 - Q4 FY25: 7.4%
 - Q1 FY26: 7.8%
 - Q2 FY26: 8.2% (six-quarter high)
- The U.S. and China retain the first and second spots.
- Growth is being driven primarily by:
 - domestic demand
 - robust private consumption
 - reforms and structural improvements

Major international agencies have reaffirmed strong growth projections for India, generally ranging between 6%–7.5% over the next few years.

Features

India now ranks 4th globally in GDP size

- GDP: \$4.18 trillion
- Surpassed: Japan
- Likely to surpass: Germany by ~2030

Fastest-Growing Major Economy

- India continues to outperform most G20 economies in growth.

Domestic Demand as Growth Anchor

- Private consumption is a key driver.
- Strong urban demand is sustaining momentum.

Supportive Macroeconomic Indicators

- Inflation reportedly remains below tolerance thresholds
- Unemployment trends improving
- Credit growth healthy
- Exports strengthening

Development Vision

- India aims for a high middle-income status by 2047
- Strategy anchored in:
 - structural reforms
 - inclusive social progress
 - sustained economic expansion

Challenges

Per Capita Income Remains Modest

- Despite a large GDP, per-capita income trails developed economies.

Unequal Growth

- Urban-led growth risks widening rural-urban divides.

External Vulnerabilities

- Global trade uncertainty and geopolitical risks persist.

Inflation & Jobs

- Sustained price stability and employment creation remain critical.

Structural Bottlenecks

- Skill gaps, logistics inefficiencies, and regulatory hurdles continue.

Way Forward

Strengthen Human Capital

- Education, skilling, and health investment are key.

Deepen Manufacturing & Exports

- Leverage PLI-type reforms for scale and competitiveness.

Improve Rural Demand

- Support agriculture productivity and livelihoods.

Financial Inclusion & MSME Support

- Broaden credit access and digital infrastructure benefits.

Sustain Reform Momentum

- Ease of doing business
- Labour and land reforms
- Judicial and regulatory streamlining

Green & Digital Growth

- Invest in clean energy, innovation, and tech ecosystems.

Conclusion

India's rise to the position of the world's fourth-largest economy underlines its expanding economic strength and resilience amid global uncertainty. With sustained growth, structural reforms, and strong domestic demand, India is on course to become the third-largest economy in the coming years. However, translating GDP expansion into inclusive development, quality employment, and higher per-capita incomes will determine whether India can truly achieve its ambition of high-middle-income status by 2047.

3. Defence Ministry inks contracts for procurements for Army and Navy

Why in the News?

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has signed defence procurement contracts worth ₹4,666 crore to enhance the operational preparedness of the Indian Army and Navy. The contracts include the

acquisition of over 4.25 lakh Close Quarter Battle (CQB) Carbines for the Army and Navy, and 48 Heavyweight Torpedoes for the Navy's Kalvari-class submarines (Project 75).



Background

- India is pursuing rapid modernisation of its armed forces under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative.
- Earlier reliance on imports meant delays and operational gaps, especially in infantry weapons and underwater warfare systems.
- FY 2025–26 has already seen defence capital acquisition contracts worth ₹1.82 lakh crore, reflecting sustained focus on indigenisation and capability enhancement.
- CQB carbines have been a long-pending requirement for replacing legacy small arms within the Army's infantry units.

Features

CQB Carbines for Army & Navy

- Value: ₹2,770 crore
- Quantity: Over 4.25 lakh carbines with accessories
- Vendors: Bharat Forge Ltd. & PLR Systems Pvt. Ltd.
- Nature: Indigenously manufactured
- Operational Advantages:
 - Compact design
 - High rate of fire
 - Enhanced lethality
 - Ideal for urban warfare & close-combat environments
- **Industrial Impact:**
 - Strengthens private sector participation
 - Boosts MSMEs and the local defence ecosystem
 - Aligns with Make in India & Aatmanirbhar Bharat

Heavyweight Torpedoes for the Indian Navy

- Value: ~₹1,896 crore
- Supplier: WASS Submarine Systems S.R.L., Italy
- Quantity: 48 torpedoes
- Platform: Kalvari-class (Scorpene) submarines
- Delivery Timeline: April 2028 - early 2030
- **Capability Gains:**
 - Advanced underwater strike capability
 - Strengthens anti-ship and anti-submarine warfare
 - Enhances deterrence in the Indian Ocean Region

Strategic Significance

- Improves the combat readiness of frontline formations
- Bridges long-pending infantry weapon gaps
- Enhances underwater dominance
- Demonstrates public–private defence manufacturing synergy
- Supports India’s ambition of becoming a global defence production hub

Challenges

Technology dependence persists

- Torpedo acquisition remains import-dependent

Integration & training requirements

- New weapons demand logistics and training upgrades

Supply chain stability

- Timely delivery must be ensured.

Budgetary prioritisation

- Sustaining modernisation alongside welfare spending

Export competitiveness

- Defence production scaling remains a work-in-progress

Way Forward

- Deepen indigenisation of critical weapon systems
 - Especially underwater warfare technologies
- Enhance R&D ecosystem
 - Promote DRDO–industry partnerships
- Strengthen logistics & life-cycle support
- Promote export-oriented defence manufacturing
- Ensure transparent procurement & long-term planning
- Skill development for the defence manufacturing workforce

Conclusion

These procurement contracts mark an important step in modernising India's armed forces, particularly in infantry weapons and submarine warfare capability. By combining indigenisation with selective high-end imports, India is strengthening operational readiness while nurturing a self-reliant defence industrial base. Sustained reforms, investment, and technology partnerships will be key to ensuring long-term strategic autonomy.

4. Gig, platform workers to go on strike today to protest 'exploitation'

Why in the News?

Gig and platform worker unions across India have announced a strike to protest what they describe as systemic exclusion from core labour protections and "exploitation" by major food delivery and ride-hailing platforms. A letter has been sent to Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, urging urgent government action.

Background

- Gig and platform workers include delivery partners, ride-hailing drivers, and other app-based service workers.
- They are typically classified as independent contractors, which excludes them from:
 - minimum wage
 - social security
 - maternity benefits
 - job security
 - union protections
- A nationwide strike by delivery workers on December 25 highlighted the scale of worker grievances.
- **Multiple reports have documented:**
 - harassment
 - discrimination
 - unsafe working conditions

Workers argue that they contribute significantly to India's digital economy but remain outside formal labour entitlements.

Features

Core Issues Raised

- Systemic exclusion from labour rights
- Arbitrary platform practices
- Safety risks due to speed-based delivery models
- Declining income levels

Key Demands in Charter

End quick-delivery mandates

- Scrap 10–20-minute delivery timelines
- Prioritise worker & public safety

Fair Wage Structure

- ₹20 per km minimum rate

- Applicable to workers of:
 - Zomato
 - Swiggy
 - Blinkit
 - Zepto
 - Flipkart
 - BigBasket
 - ₹40,000 minimum assured monthly earning

Protection for Women Workers

- Workplace safety
- Emergency leave
- Full maternity protection

End Arbitrary Control Mechanisms

- Stop unjust ID blocking
- Reform punitive rating systems

Government Intervention

- Recognise gig workers' rights under labour law
- Ensure grievance redressal mechanisms

Challenges

Legal Classification Ambiguity

- Gig workers are currently treated as partners/contractors, not employees.

Platform Monopsony Power

- Workers have limited bargaining power.

Lack of Social Security

- No insurance, pension, paid leave.

Safety Risks

- Algorithmic pressure linked to fast-delivery deadlines.

Policy Gaps

- India lacks a comprehensive national gig-worker social security law (though discussions are ongoing).

Way Forward

Define Employment Status Clearly

- Consider "dependent contractor" category as used globally.

Minimum Earning Floors

- Ensure fair remuneration standards.

Universal Social Security Net

- Health, insurance, pension for gig workers.

Algorithmic Transparency

- Monitor rating, blocking & payment systems.

Worker Representation

- Recognise unions & collective bargaining.

Gender-Sensitive Policies

- Strong safety & maternity protections.

Balance Innovation with Rights

- Support startup ecosystem while ensuring fairness.

Conclusion

The nationwide strike reflects growing pressure to recognise gig and platform workers as a vital yet vulnerable workforce in India's digital economy. Ensuring fair wages, social security, and dignified working conditions will be essential to align economic growth with social justice, especially as India increasingly relies on platform-based services for urban livelihoods and consumer convenience.

5. HAL enters civil market with Dhruv NG helicopter

Why in the News?

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has successfully carried out the maiden flight of the Dhruv New Generation (NG) helicopter at its Helicopter Division in Bengaluru. This marks HAL's formal entry into the civil helicopter market, strengthening India's push toward self-reliance in civil aviation. The flight was inaugurated by Union Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammohan Naidu.

Background

- HAL has long been a leading defence aerospace manufacturer in India.
- India's civil helicopter market has been heavily import-dependent.
- The Dhruv NG builds on the experience of HAL's Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) Dhruv platform.
- HAL also received DGCA certification for indigenous manufacturing of the Shakti civil engine, developed with Safran support - the first aero-engine indigenously certified for civil use in India.
- The aircraft is expected to receive full DGCA civil certification in 3–4 months.

Features

Dhruv NG Helicopter

- Category: Light twin-engine, multi-role helicopter
- Weight class: 5.5 tonnes
- Designed & manufactured in India
- Engine: Indigenous Shakti civil engine (DGCA certified)

Operational versatility:

- Capable of flying across diverse and challenging terrains
- Suitable for civil & public service operations such as:
 - passenger transport
 - medical evacuation
 - disaster relief
 - logistics & charter services



Strategic Significance

- Represents HAL's entry into the civil aviation market
- Boosts Aatmanirbhar Bharat
- Enhances indigenous technology capacity
- Increases potential for exports and global presence

Economic & Industrial Impact

- Strengthens Indian aerospace manufacturing ecosystem
- Reduces reliance on foreign helicopter imports
- Encourages public-private and international technology collaborations
- Enhances employment & supply-chain participation, including MSMEs
- Supports Pawan Hans and other operators in fleet modernisation

Challenges

Certification & safety compliance

- Must meet stringent international aviation standards

Market competition

- Faces strong global players (Airbus, Bell, Leonardo)

Cost competitiveness & maintenance ecosystem

- Requires robust after-sales and MRO networks in India & abroad

Operational trust

- Civil operators may prefer established foreign brands.

Sustaining production scale

- Demand must be consistent to ensure viability.

Way forward

Accelerate DGCA & international certification

- including FAA/EASA alignment for export potential

Strengthen civil aviation partnerships

- with Pawan Hans, State Govts, private operators

Expand MRO & training infrastructure

- pilot & crew training, maintenance schools

Promote global marketing & exports

- Invest in R&D for future variants
- medical, tourism, logistics and coastal roles
- Ensure a high safety record & transparency

Conclusion

The successful maiden flight of the Dhruv NG marks a milestone in India's journey toward aerospace self-reliance and signals HAL's expansion beyond defence into the civil aviation sector. If supported by strong certification, service infrastructure, and competitive pricing, the Dhruv NG could become a flagship platform in India's civil helicopter fleet and a credible export product, advancing both national capability and industrial growth.

6. Himachal apple growers oppose reduced import duty on New Zealand.

Why in the News

Apple growers in Himachal Pradesh have opposed the Union government's proposal to reduce import duty on New Zealand apples from 50% to 25% under a trade agreement beginning 2026–27. They fear it will depress domestic prices and threaten their livelihoods. A memorandum has been submitted to Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla seeking his intervention.

Background

- Himachal Pradesh is one of India's leading apple-producing States.
- The apple economy contributes about ₹5,500 crore annually, supporting over 1.5 lakh families, mostly small and marginal farmers.
- Annual production is ~6.5 lakh tonnes, about one-fourth of India's apple output.

Growers already face:

- climate-change-induced variability
- rising input costs
- labour shortages
- shrinking profit margins

Apple growers argue that tariff protection is essential for sustaining the domestic market against lower-cost imports.

Concern

Livelihood Threat

- Apple cultivation is the primary income source in hilly regions with limited diversification options.

Precedent for Further Tariff Cuts

- Other major exporters (U.S., Chile, Italy, etc.) may demand similar concessions.

Rural Economic Impact

- Could destabilise the backbone of Himachal's rural economy.

Timing & External Shocks

- Climate uncertainty already affects yields and quality.

Wider Context

- India has previously imposed higher tariffs to protect domestic apple growers (e.g., Washington apples post-tariff phase).
- Trade negotiations are increasingly balanced:
 - consumer interests
 - inflation concerns
 - farmer protections

The proposed tariff cut is seen as prioritising trade relations over farmer security.

Challenges

Balancing Trade & Farmer Welfare

- Lower tariffs benefit consumers but may harm growers.

Competitiveness Gap

- Foreign apples often have:
 - better storage & logistics
 - economies of scale

Policy Coordination

- Agriculture is a State subject; trade policy is Union-controlled.

Structural Issues in Himachal Horticulture

- Fragmented landholdings
- High transport costs
- Cold-chain limitations

Way Forward

Impact Assessment before Implementation

- Study price effects & livelihood risk.

Safeguard or Trigger Mechanisms

- Temporary tariff protections if imports surge.

Improve Competitiveness

- Invest in cold-chains, grading, branding, and GI-based marketing.

Support for Small Farmers

- Input subsidies, orchard renewal, and insurance support.

Encourage Diversification

- High-value temperate crops are feasible.

Engage Stakeholders

- Consult farmer unions, State govt. trade experts.

Conclusion

The proposed reduction in import duty on New Zealand apples highlights the tension between free-trade commitments and agrarian livelihood security. For Himachal Pradesh—where apple cultivation anchors the rural economy, any tariff change must be approached with caution, consultation, and compensatory support, ensuring that integration into global trade does not disproportionately burden small farmers.

7. The India-New Zealand FTA — unlocking growth

Why in the News?

India and New Zealand have concluded negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), announced by Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Christopher Luxon on December 22, 2025. The agreement focuses strongly on services and labour mobility, marking a significant development in India's expanding global trade partnerships.

Background

- India is increasingly seen as a reliable and resilient global trading partner.
- The FTA with New Zealand follows recent FTAs with the United Kingdom and Oman.
- Negotiations concluded in just nine months, signalling strong political will.
- The deal aligns with India's vision for a just, equitable and rules-based trading system.

Features

Focus on Services & Mobility

- New Zealand offers its widest services access yet to India:
 - IT
 - education
 - tourism

- telecom
- fintech
- construction

Provisions for:

- mobility of skilled professionals
- Post-study work options for Indian students

This strengthens India's comparative advantage in services and skilled workforce supply.

Tariff Concessions

- New Zealand: eliminates duties on 100% tariff lines - full duty-free entry for Indian exports.
- India: offers access on 70% tariff lines.
- Likely beneficiaries:
 - textiles & garments
 - leather
 - engineering goods
 - pharmaceuticals
 - farm products

Duty-free imports of key inputs (e.g., coking coal, wood logs, metal scrap) may reduce manufacturing costs.

Investment Commitments

- New Zealand to invest USD 20 billion over 15 years in India.

Health & Traditional Medicine Annexe

- **Creates new export opportunities in:**
 - pharmaceuticals
 - healthcare services

Balanced Agricultural Approach

- **Sensitive items protected:**
 - dairy
 - sugar
 - spices
 - edible oil

Collaboration expected in:

- apples
- kiwifruit
- honey
- agri-technology & value chains

Challenges

- India's historic FTA utilisation rate is low (~25%) compared to developed nations (70–80%).
- Barriers include:
 - lack of business awareness
 - compliance issues
 - non-tariff barriers (NTBs)

Although the FTA includes mechanisms for regulatory cooperation and customs simplification, domestic capacity-building is essential.

Way Forward

Industry bodies such as CII, policymakers, and firms must:

- Create awareness programs
- Train exporters to use FTA provisions
- Deepen services and education linkages
- Leverage diaspora networks
- Focus on mobility-driven growth

The agreement should be seen not merely as tariff relief, but as a strategic services-led growth platform.

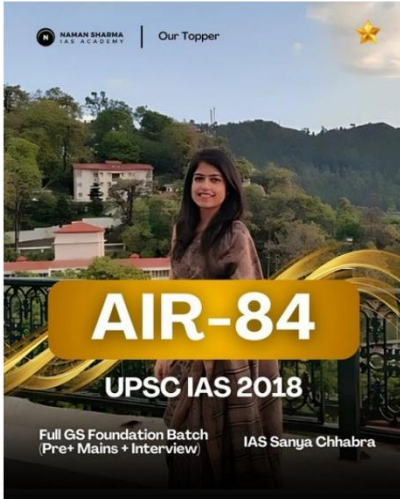
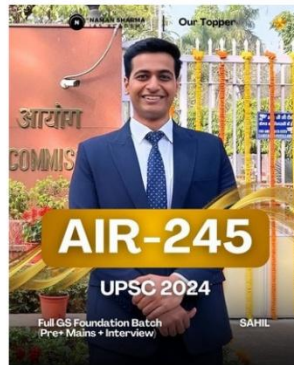
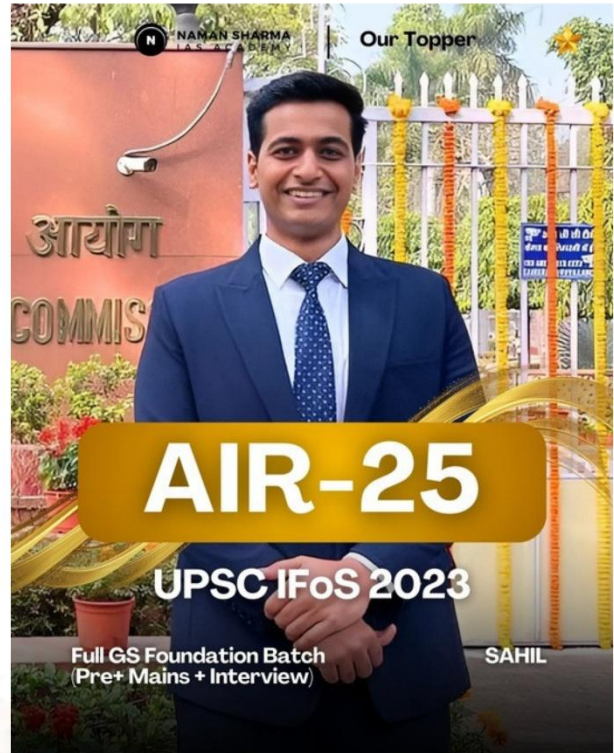
Conclusion

The India–New Zealand FTA is more than a trade deal - it reflects growing global confidence in India as a stable, rules-based and reliable economic partner. Despite modest current trade volumes, the agreement strengthens India's presence in global value chains, expands services trade, and reinforces strategic trust. Importantly, India has now concluded FTAs with all RCEP members except China, marking a significant milestone in its trade diplomacy. This FTA, with its strong emphasis on services and skilled mobility, may play a key role in advancing India's ambition of becoming a \$7 trillion economy by 2030, while safeguarding domestic agricultural sensitivities and strengthening India's global economic footprint.



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