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# Current Affairs Today – January 1, 2026

1 January 2026

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# Current Affairs Today — January 1, 2026

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## WHY IN NEWS

Gujarat launched India's first state-level AI research institution at GIFT City. Bihar approved a tiger reserve notification for Kaimur. The Ministry of Jal Shakti launched the Jal Seva Aankalan digital water assessment tool on the JJM portal. India Post discontinued outward small packet and surface letter mail services effective January 1.

## GUJARAT LAUNCHES INDIA'S FIRST STATE AI RESEARCH INSTITUTION — IAIRO

**Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel** approved the **Indian Artificial Intelligence Research Organization (IAIRO)** — India's first state-level AI research institution — commencing operations on **January 1, 2026**:

**Location:** GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City), Gandhinagar

**Legal structure:** Non-profit under **Section 8, Companies Act 2013** (public charitable purpose)

**Model:** Public-Private Partnership (PPP); partners include the State Government, Central Government, and **Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA)**

**Significance:** Gujarat is the first Indian state to establish a dedicated national-level AI research institution; focuses on applied AI for pharma, healthcare, and financial services aligned with GIFT City's profile

**UPSC Angle:** GS-3 S&T — India's AI policy (IndiaAI Mission; National AI Strategy 2018; INDIAai portal); GIFT City as an international financial services centre; public-private partnership models in research; Section 8 companies (non-profit corporates).

## JAL SEVA AANKALAN — DIGITAL WATER SERVICE ASSESSMENT TOOL

The **Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS)** under the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** launched **Jal Seva Aankalan** — a digital drinking water service assessment tool on the **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) portal**:

**Union Minister:** C.R. Patil; **MoS:** V. Somanna and Raj Bhushan Choudhary

**Process:** Structured village-level discussions involving VWSC members, Panchayat Secretaries, operators, and diverse water users → Gram Sabha presentation → 30-day public feedback window → results uploaded to JJM Panchayat Dashboard, eGramSwaraj, and Meri Panchayat App

**Deadline:** All **Har Ghar Jal (HGJ) Gram Panchayats** must complete assessments by **January 26, 2026**

**Purpose:** Enable community-owned self-assessment of water service delivery quality and sustainability

**UPSC Angle:** GS-2 Governance — Jal Jeevan Mission (Rs 3.6 lakh crore; 100% household tap connections target; 2024 revised deadline); VWSC (Village Water and Sanitation Committee); Gram Sabha's role; eGramSwaraj platform; decentralised service delivery.

## KAIMUR TIGER RESERVE — BIHAR'S PROPOSAL

The **Bihar government** approved notifying the **Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary** as a **Tiger Reserve** — pending formal clearance from the **NTCA (National Tiger Conservation Authority)**:

**Location:** Kaimur and Rohtas districts, Bihar

**Geography:** Kaimur Plateau and Rohtas Plateau (part of the Vindhyan hill range extending into Bihar)

**Area:** Bihar's largest wildlife sanctuary

**Significance:** Bihar currently has no tiger reserve; Kaimur would be the state's first; connects with tiger landscape of Central India (Bandhavgarh, Panna, Son Gharial Sanctuary)

**NTCA role:** Formal notification requires NTCA's site evaluation and clearance; a steering committee and management plan are required before notification

**UPSC Angle:** GS-3 Environment — Project Tiger (1973); NTCA (statutory body under Wildlife Protection Act 1972; amended 2006); Tiger Reserve notification process; tiger metapopulation conservation; Vindhyan ecology.

## INDIA POST — DISCONTINUATION OF INTERNATIONAL LETTER MAIL SERVICES

The **Department of Posts** (Ministry of Communications) discontinued several **international letter mail services** effective **January 1, 2026**:

### Discontinued:

Registered Small Packet (goods-containing; registration now only for documents per UPU norms)

Outward Small Packet via Sea, Surface Air Lifted (SAL), or Air

Surface Letter Mail for outward letter post

SAL Letter Mail for outward letter post

**Unchanged:** Registration for documents (Letters, Post Cards, Printed Papers, Aerograms, Blind Literature, M-bags) sent by air; Blind Literature and M-bags under existing UPU rules

**Recommended alternative:** International Tracked Packet Service (ITPS) and other international parcel services

**Reason:** Improve reliability, tracking, customs compliance, and security

**UPSC Angle:** GS-2/GS-3 – India Post’s mandate; UPU (Universal Postal Union – UN specialised agency, Geneva, 192 members); India Post network (1.56 lakh post offices); international postal standards.

## NMCG — INDIAN SKIMMER CONSERVATION PROJECT APPROVED

The **68th Executive Committee meeting of NMCG** (chaired by DG Rajeev Kumar Mital) approved a project to protect **sandbar-nesting birds** in the Ganga basin, with focus on the **Indian Skimmer (Rynchops albicollis)**:

**IUCN Status:** Endangered (EN)

**Habitat:** River sandbars — used as nesting grounds; highly sensitive to disturbance

**Focus areas:** Long-term monitoring, community participation, evidence-based conservation

**Key locations:** Chambal River (Madhya Pradesh/Rajasthan), Lower Ganga

**New activity zones:** Bijnor, Narora, and Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh)

**Programme alignment:** Namami Gange Mission-II; complements NMCG conservation of dolphins, turtles, and fish

**UPSC Angle:** GS-3 Environment — Indian Skimmer; Endangered species; Chambal River (National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary — MP/Rajasthan/UP; tri-state); NMCG (National Mission for Clean Ganga); Namami Gange Mission.

## 3D FLEX AQUEOUS ANGIOGRAPHY — INDIA’S FIRST MINIMALLY INVASIVE GLAUCOMA SURGERY

**Army Hospital (Research and Referral), New Delhi** performed **India’s first 3D Flex Aqueous Angiography with iStent** — a minimally invasive glaucoma surgery procedure:

**Equipment:** Stand-mounted Spectralis system + 3D operating microscope

**Application:** Real-time visualization of aqueous outflow pathways; enables precise placement of the iStent (a micro-implant that improves aqueous drainage in the eye)

**Significance:** Reduces dependence on glaucoma medications; Indian Army hospital leads in cutting-edge ophthalmic surgery

**UPSC Angle:** GS-3 S&T — Minimally invasive surgical techniques; glaucoma (leading cause of irreversible blindness globally); Indian Army health infrastructure.

## NFAP-2025 — NATIONAL FREQUENCY ALLOCATION PLAN

The **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** released the **National Frequency Allocation Plan 2025 (NFAP-2025)** — India’s master document for spectrum management:

**Coverage:** Frequency range from **8.3 kHz to 3000 GHz** — allocating spectrum across all radiocommunication services (mobile, satellite, broadcasting, defence, research)

**Key 5G/6G band:** **6425–7125 MHz** band identified for **IMT (International Mobile Telecommunications)** — critical for 5G mid-band and future 6G deployment

**Significance:** Aligns India’s spectrum allocation with international standards (ITU Radio Regulations); enables next-generation telecom infrastructure planning

**DoT:** Department of Telecommunications; under Ministry of Communications; spectrum managed by Wireless Planning & Coordination (WPC) Wing

**UPSC Angle:** GS-3 S&T — Spectrum allocation and TRAI; 5G rollout in India; IMT standards; electromagnetic spectrum governance; ITU (International Telecommunication Union); WPC Wing’s role; National Broadband Mission.

## SPREE 2025 — ESIC EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE REGISTRATION DRIVE

The **Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)** launched **SPREE 2025** — a special amnesty-type registration scheme for unregistered employers and workers:

**Full form:** Scheme for Promotion of Registration of Employers and Employees (SPREE 2025)

**Validity:** **January 1–31, 2026** (one-month window)

**Key benefit:** Unregistered establishments and workers can enrol in the **ESI (Employees’ State Insurance)** framework **without inspections, past contribution demands, or prior documentation**

**ESI coverage:** Health insurance, maternity benefits, disability compensation, dependent benefits for workers earning up to **Rs 21,000/month** (Rs 25,000 for persons with disabilities)

**ESIC:** Under Ministry of Labour & Employment; established under **ESI Act, 1948**; manages India’s largest worker health insurance scheme; ~3.5 crore families covered

**Goal:** Expand formal social security coverage for informal sector workers

**UPSC Angle:** GS-2 Governance — ESI Act 1948; ESIC as autonomous statutory body; social security for unorganised workers; Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PM-SYM); Code on Social Security 2020 (consolidates ESI Act + EPF Act + others); formal sector coverage.

## SJOERD MARIJNE — CHIEF COACH, INDIAN WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM

**Sjoerd Marijne** (Dutch coach) was appointed **Chief Coach of the Indian Women's Hockey Team** by **Hockey India**:

**Previous tenure with India:** Coached the Indian Women's Hockey Team to their **historic 4th-place finish at Tokyo Olympics 2020** (best-ever Olympic performance by the team)

**New assignment:** First assignment — **FIH Hockey Women's World Cup Qualifiers, March 2026**

**Significance:** Return of a familiar face to Indian women's hockey; builds on previous team development

**UPSC Angle:** GS-1 Sports — Women's hockey in India; FIH (International Hockey Federation); Hockey India's structure; India's hockey legacy; Tokyo Olympics performance.

## IFFCO SAHITYA SAMMAN 2025 — MAITREYI PUSHPA

The **IFFCO Sahitya Samman 2025** was awarded to eminent Hindi writer **Maitreyi Pushpa**:

**Award value:** Rs 11 lakh + citation + memento

**About Maitreyi Pushpa:**

Born: November 30, 1944; Sikurra village, Aligarh district, UP

Known for: Depicting **Bundelkhand's** rural life and women's experiences in Hindi fiction

Education: MA Hindi, Bundelkhand College, Jhansi

**Young Literary Award 2025:** Ankita Jain — for her book "**Oh Re! Kisan**"

**About IFFCO Sahitya Samman:**

Instituted: **2011** by **IFFCO (Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative)**

Objective: Recognise Hindi literature that reflects rural India and agricultural life

IFFCO Chairman: Dilip Sanghani; MD: K.J. Patel

IFFCO: India's largest cooperative; over 35,000 primary cooperative societies as members; founded 1967

**UPSC Angle:** GS-1 Art & Culture — Hindi literature; cooperative movement in India (especially IFFCO's role in fertiliser supply); Bundelkhand region; awards and honours for Hindi language promotion.

## POLAND DEPLOYS \$2.2 BILLION ANTI-DRONE DEFENCE SYSTEM

**Poland** announced deployment of a **\$2.2 billion multi-layered anti-drone defence system** along its **eastern border**:

**Components:** Electronic warfare tools, machine guns, anti-drone cannons, and missile interceptor units (not a physical fence)

**Context:** Response to security threats stemming from the **Russia-Ukraine conflict** and drone incursions across Eastern European borders

**Significance:** Highlights escalating drone warfare as a strategic concern for NATO's eastern flank

**Poland-India angle:** Poland is a NATO member; drone defence technology; India's own C-UAS (Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems) development (DRDO)

**UPSC Angle:** GS-3 Security — Drone warfare and counter-drone technologies; Russia-Ukraine conflict impact on European security; NATO's eastern flank; India's C-UAS capabilities; DRDO's anti-drone systems.

## BACTRIAN CAMEL TO DEBUT AT REPUBLIC DAY PARADE 2026

A **Bactrian camel contingent** was announced to debut at the **77th Republic Day parade** (January 26, 2026):

**Species:** Bactrian camel — **double-humped** camel; distinct from dromedary (single-humped)

**Habitat in India:** **Nubra Valley, Ladakh** — high-altitude cold desert (3,000 m+); extreme temperature range

**IUCN Status:** **Critically Endangered** — fewer than 1,000 mature animals; habitat loss + hunting

**Significance:** Represent Ladakh's unique natural and cultural heritage; historically used as "silent warriors" on mountain logistics routes

**Context:** Announcement highlights conservation awareness for this rare species

**UPSC Angle:** GS-3 Environment — Critically Endangered species in India; Bactrian vs Dromedary camels; Ladakh's Cold Desert Biosphere; Republic Day as platform for showcasing India's biodiversity; wildlife protection.

## KEY NEW YEAR LAUNCHES ALSO IN NEWS

**Bulgaria joined the Eurozone** (21st member; 1 EUR = 1.95583 BGN; dual currency until February 1) — covered in detail in the January 3, 2026 edition.

**SOAR initiative (Skilling for AI Readiness)** — launched by President Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan; Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship; Rs 500 crore Centre of Excellence in AI for Education — covered in January 3, 2026 edition.

**PMMVY completed 9 years** (launched January 1, 2017; Rs 5,000 first child; Rs 6,000 second girl child) — covered in January 3 edition.

**BSNL launched VoWiFi** nationwide across all telecom circles — covered in January 2, 2026 edition.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

*IAIRO Gujarat (GIFT City; PPP; Section 8; IPA; Jan 1 2026; India's first state AI research institution); Jal Seva Aankalan (DDWS/MoJ; JJM portal; VWSC; HGJ GPs by Jan 26); Kaimur Tiger Reserve (Bihar; Kaimur + Rohtas districts; Kaimur Plateau; NTCA clearance; Bihar's first TR if notified); India Post discontinued (Registered Small Packet/Outward Small Packet/Surface Letter Mail/SAL Letter Mail; ITPS as alternative; UPU); Indian Skimmer (Rynchops albicollis; Endangered IUCN; Chambal/Lower Ganga; NMCG 68th EC; Namami Gange II); NFAP-2025 (DoT; 8.3 kHz to 3000 GHz; 6425-7125 MHz for IMT/5G; WPC Wing); SPREE 2025 (ESIC; Jan 1-31 2026; ESI Act 1948; Rs 21,000/month wage ceiling; no past contributions/inspection); Sjoerd Marijne (Dutch; Indian Women's Hockey Coach; Tokyo 2020 4th place; FIH WC Qualifiers March 2026); IFFCO Sahitya Samman 2025 (Maitreyi Pushpa; Hindi; Bundelkhand; Rs 11 lakh; est. 2011; Young Award Ankita Jain); Poland anti-drone system (\$2.2 billion; eastern border; electronic warfare + cannons + missiles; Russia-Ukraine context); Bactrian camel Republic Day 2026 (Nubra Valley Ladakh; double-humped; Critically Endangered IUCN; <1,000 mature); Army Hospital R&R (India's first 3D Flex Aqueous Angiography with iStent; glaucoma surgery; Spectralis) **Mains GS-2:** ESIC and formal social security extension — SPREE amnesty model | JJM accountability mechanisms | Tiger Reserve governance and NTCA **Mains GS-3:** State-level AI institutions and India's AI governance framework | Drone warfare and counter-drone technology as national security concern | Spectrum governance and 5G rollout*

**★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA**
**IAIRO (INDIAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION):**

Launched: January 1, 2026; Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel

Location: GIFT City (GIFT-SEZ), Gandhinagar, Gujarat

Type: Section 8 company (non-profit; public charitable purpose under Companies Act 2013)

PPP partners: Gujarat State Government + Central Government + Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA)

Focus: Applied AI for pharma, healthcare, and financial services

GIFT City: India's only operational IFC (International Financial Centre); established under IFSCA (International Financial Services Centres Authority) Act 2019

**KAIMUR TIGER RESERVE (PROPOSED):**

State: Bihar; Districts: Kaimur and Rohtas

Geography: Kaimur Plateau and Rohtas Plateau (Vindhyan range extension)

Status: Bihar's largest wildlife sanctuary; no tiger reserve currently in Bihar

NTCA: Statutory body under MoEF&CC; established under Wildlife Protection Act 1972 (amended 2006); functions include approving tiger reserve boundaries and core/buffer zone delineation

Connected landscape: Central Indian tiger corridor (Bandhavgarh, Panna, Sanjay-Dubri)

India's total tiger reserves: 53 (as of 2023); total tiger population (2022 census): 3,167

**JAL JEEVAN MISSION (JJM):**

Launch: August 15, 2019

Target: Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household by 2024 (extended)

Outlay: Rs 3.60 lakh crore (Centre + State share)

Har Ghar Jal (HGJ) GPs: Gram Panchayats where all households have FHTCs — over 80% achieved by Dec 2025

Jal Seva Aankalan: Self-assessment tool on JJM portal; community-owned; linked to eGramSwaraj + Meri Panchayat App; HGJ GPs must complete by Jan 26, 2026

**INDIA POST INTERNATIONAL MAIL:**

Total post offices: ~1.56 lakh (largest postal network in India)

UPU (Universal Postal Union): Established 1874; UN specialised agency since 1948; 192 member countries; HQ Bern, Switzerland

UPU norms: Small Packets now only for documents (not goods) under registration — India aligning with updated UPU standards

ITPS (International Tracked Packet Service): Provides end-to-end tracking; customs compliant; recommended alternative

**INDIAN SKIMMER (RYNCHOPS ALBICOLLIS):**

Family: Laridae (same as terns and gulls)

Habitat: River sandbars and large river systems; nests in colonies on exposed sandbars

Distribution: South and Southeast Asia; India is a key range country

IUCN: Endangered (EN); key threats: sandbar disturbance, sand mining, flooding, predation

National Chambal Sanctuary: MP/Rajasthan/UP (tri-state); protects gharial, gangetic dolphin, Indian skimmer

**NFAP-2025:**

Full form: National Frequency Allocation Plan 2025

Issued by: Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications

Coverage: 8.3 kHz to 3,000 GHz (entire usable electromagnetic spectrum)

5G/6G key band: 6425–7125 MHz identified for IMT (International Mobile Telecommunications)

WPC Wing: Wireless Planning & Coordination Wing (under DoT) — manages spectrum licensing in India

ITU: International Telecommunication Union; UN agency; India aligns NFAP with ITU Radio Regulations

#### **SPREE 2025 (ESIC):**

Full form: Scheme for Promotion of Registration of Employers and Employees

Valid: January 1–31, 2026 (one month; no extension)

Benefit: No past contribution demands; no inspections; no prior documentation required

ESI Act 1948: Provides medical care, maternity, disability, dependent benefits to workers

Coverage eligibility: Establishments with 10+ workers; workers earning up to Rs 21,000/month (Rs 25,000 for PwD)

ESIC: Employees' State Insurance Corporation; under Ministry of Labour & Employment; founded 1952

#### **IFFCO SAHITYA SAMMAN 2025:**

Winner: Maitreyi Pushpa (Hindi literature; Bundelkhand; born Nov 30 1944; Aligarh, UP)

Award: Rs 11 lakh + citation + memento

Young Literary Award: Ankita Jain — for “Oh Re! Kisan”

IFFCO: Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative; founded 1967; HQ New Delhi; largest cooperative in India;

Chairman: Dilip Sanghani; MD: K.J. Patel

Award instituted: 2011; for Hindi literary works reflecting rural and agricultural India

#### **BACTRIAN CAMEL — KEY DATA:**

Species: *Camelus bactrianus* (Bactrian = 2 humps); *Camelus dromedarius* = Dromedary (1 hump)

Habitat in India: Nubra Valley, Ladakh (altitude 3,000+ m; cold desert)

IUCN Status: Critically Endangered; wild population: fewer than 1,000 mature individuals

Range: Central and East Asia (Mongolia, China's Gobi Desert); remnant domestic populations in India (Ladakh), Kazakhstan

Republic Day 2026: 77th Republic Day; Bactrian camels to debut in parade representing Ladakh

#### **POLAND ANTI-DRONE SYSTEM:**

Cost: \$2.2 billion

Deployment: Eastern border (adjacent to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine conflict zone)

Components: EW (Electronic Warfare) systems, anti-drone cannons, machine guns, missile interceptors

Context: Response to drone incursions; NATO member Poland's eastern flank reinforcement

India relevance: DRDO's counter-UAS systems (Mk-II RF jammers, Laser-Directed Energy Weapon); indigenous C-UAS

#### **OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:**

NMCG (National Mission for Clean Ganga): Under Ministry of Jal Shakti; established 2014; implements

Namami Gange (flagship clean river programme Rs 20,000 crore Phase I; Phase II: Rs 22,500 crore)

Army Hospital (R&R): Army Hospital Research and Referral, Delhi Cantonment — premier military medical institution; 1,000+ bed tertiary care referral centre for all three services

Glaucoma: Second leading cause of blindness globally (WHO); affects optic nerve; aqueous humour drainage impairment causes elevated intra-ocular pressure; 12 million affected in India

IndiaAI Mission: Launched March 2024; Rs 10,372 crore; 5-year plan; 10,000 GPUs compute infrastructure; India Datasets Platform; AI skilling; FutureSkills Prime

Sjoerd Marijne: Dutch coach; led Indian Women's Hockey Team to historic 4th place at Tokyo Olympics 2020; first match back: FIH Hockey Women's World Cup Qualifiers March 2026

Sources: PIB, GKToday, AffairsCloud

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