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WEEKLY ROUNDUP

Weekly Roundup — Week 1 (Jan 1–4, 2026)

4 January 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED

POLITY   ECONOMY   ENVIRONMENT   SCIENCE & TECH   IR   SECURITY & DEFENCE

SOCIAL ISSUES

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Weekly Roundup — Week 1 (Jan 1–4, 2026)

Week 1 — January 1–4, 2026   **Polity**   **Economy**   **Environment**   **Science Tech**

International Relations   **Security Defence**   **Social Issues**

📋 **WEEK OVERVIEW**

Week 1 (January 1–4) was a short New Year partial week but packed with landmark developments. India's economy made global headlines as the country officially surpassed Japan to become the world's **4th largest economy at USD 4.18 trillion**. *On the technology front, Kavach 4.0 was deployed on Western Railways while DRDO demonstrated Pralay's salvo capability at Chandipur. Internationally,* **Bulgaria became the Eurozone's 21st member** *on January 1. Defence news included major MoD contracts for CQB carbines and torpedoes. Bihar's Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary took a step toward becoming India's 54th tiger reserve, and the Indian Army launched India's first community radio station along the Line of Control at Rajouri.*

ECONOMY & DEVELOPMENT

India Becomes the World's 4th Largest Economy — Jan 2

India officially surpassed Japan to become the **world's fourth-largest economy with a GDP of USD 4.18 trillion**, ranking behind only the United States (~USD 28.8 trillion), China (~USD 18.5 trillion), and Germany (~USD 4.4 trillion). The milestone follows sustained growth averaging 7-8% annually over the last decade, supported by strong domestic consumption, infrastructure expansion, and manufacturing initiatives under PLI schemes. India is projected to surpass Germany within 2.5–3 years to become the third-largest economy. Per capita GDP, however, remains at approximately USD 2,900 — highlighting the gap between aggregate size and per capita prosperity, which requires manufacturing deepening, labour formalisation, and agricultural productivity gains to close. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: GDP rankings, USD 4.18 trillion, IMF World Economic Outlook. Mains GS-3: Structural transformation; per capita vs. aggregate GDP; Viksit Bharat 2047 roadmap.

SEBI Tightens Merchant Banker Regulations — Jan 4

SEBI notified amendments to the SEBI (Merchant Bankers) Regulations, introducing **phased net worth requirements** for investment banks handling IPOs and M&A transactions: Category-I merchant bankers must achieve Rs 25 crore net worth by January 2027 and Rs 50 crore by January 2028. The reforms respond to India's IPO boom — FY2024 saw 75+ mainboard IPOs including Hyundai India's Rs 27,870 crore listing (largest ever) — and concerns over SME IPO quality, grey market premium speculation, and due diligence standards. SEBI has broader powers under SEBI Act 1992 (Section 11, 11B) to regulate intermediaries. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: SEBI (SEBI Act 1992); merchant banker categories; net worth thresholds. Mains GS-3: Capital market regulation; IPO ecosystem; investor protection.

Small Savings Rates Unchanged — 8th Consecutive Quarter — Jan 3

The Ministry of Finance kept small savings scheme interest rates **unchanged for the 8th consecutive quarter** (Q4 FY2025-26): PPF at 7.1%, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana at 8.2%, NSC at 7.7%, and Senior Citizens Savings Scheme at 8.2%. Small savings instruments — governed by National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) — serve as a key source of retail financial inclusion and fund central government borrowing. The alignment of small savings rates with G-Sec yields (as recommended by Shyamala Gopinath Committee, 2011) ensures market-linked fairness. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: NSSF, PPF 7.1%, SSY 8.2%, NSC 7.7%, SCSS 8.2%. Mains GS-3: Financial inclusion; government borrowing; retail savings instruments.

Sagarmala Finance Corporation Incorporated — Jan 3

The Sagarmala Finance Corporation Ltd (SFCL) was incorporated as a **maritime sector NBFC** under the Sagarmala Programme (Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways). It will provide long-term project finance for port development, coastal infrastructure, inland waterways, and shipbuilding — addressing the gap in specialised maritime financing. Sagarmala Programme (launched 2015) aims to reduce logistics costs through port-led development, with a project portfolio of Rs 5+ lakh crore. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Sagarmala Programme (2015); MoPSW; SFCL; National Logistics Policy. Mains GS-3: Port-led industrialisation; logistics infrastructure; NBFC regulation.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Kavach 4.0 Commissioned on Western Railways — Jan 2

Western Railways' Vadodara division commissioned **Kavach 4.0** on the 96 km Bajwa (Vadodara)–Ahmedabad section — the first Kavach 4.0 deployment on Western Railways. Kavach is India's indigenous Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system using RFID tags, UHF radio communication, and SIL-4 (highest safety integrity level) certification. Key functions: SPAD (Signal Passed At Danger) prevention, over-speed control, automatic braking, and collision avoidance. Kavach 4.0 improves response times and data reliability over previous versions. The system was developed by RDSO in collaboration with three private vendors and

has been deployed on ~1,500 route-km nationally (target: 6,000 km on high-density routes). **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Kavach (ATP, SIL-4, RDSO), Balasore accident (June 2023), Kavach 4.0 (Western Railways). Mains GS-3: Railway safety technology; indigenisation; scale-up challenges.

ISRO SSLV — Third Stage Static Fire Completed — Jan 2

ISRO completed a **static fire test of the SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle) D3's third stage**, validating propulsion performance ahead of the next launch. SSLV is India's lightweight rocket for small satellites (up to 500 kg to SSO), designed for quick assembly (72 hours vs. 70 days for PSLV), low cost, and minimal infrastructure. SSLV-D1 (August 2022) failed; SSLV-D2 (February 2023) succeeded, placing EOS-07 in orbit. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: SSLV (3-stage, solid fuel, 500 kg to SSO, 500 kg to LEO); SSLV-D2 success; EOS-07. Mains GS-3: India's space commercialisation; NewSpace India.

BSNL Launches VoWiFi Nationwide — Jan 2

BSNL launched **Voice over Wi-Fi (VoWiFi)** nationwide, allowing subscribers to make calls over Wi-Fi networks — particularly useful in areas with weak cellular signal. VoWiFi uses **IMS (IP Multimedia Subsystem)** infrastructure and requires no additional hardware. The launch is significant for BSNL's revival narrative (Rs 1.64 lakh crore revival package approved 2022) and for improving telecom connectivity in rural and remote areas. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: VoWiFi, IMS (IP Multimedia Subsystem), BSNL revival package Rs 1.64 lakh crore (2022). Mains GS-3: Universal service; telecom infrastructure; digital inclusion.

SOAR — National AI Skilling Initiative Launched — Jan 3

President Droupadi Murmu launched the **SOAR (Skilling for Opportunities, Achievement and Resilience)** initiative — a national AI skilling programme with a Rs 500 crore Centre of Excellence (CoE). The initiative targets workforce upskilling for the AI era, connecting AI education with industry needs. This complements the IndiaAI Mission (Rs 10,372 crore, 2024) which focuses on compute, datasets, and applications, while SOAR addresses human capital. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: SOAR initiative; Rs 500 crore CoE; President Murmu. Mains GS-3: AI skilling; labour market transformation; India's AI readiness.

Gujarat Launches India's First State AI Research Institution — Jan 1

Gujarat launched the **India AI Research and Innovation Organisation (IAIRO)** at GIFT City, Gandhinagar — India's first state-level AI research institution, structured as a non-profit PPP (Public-Private Partnership). GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City) is India's first operational smart city and international financial services centre (IFSC), regulated by IFSCA. IAIRO focuses on applied AI research, industry collaboration, and building Gujarat's AI ecosystem aligned with India's Digital India and AI Mission objectives. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: IAIRO, GIFT City (IFSC, IFSCA), Gujarat. Mains GS-3: AI governance; federalism in innovation policy; PPP models in research.

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

Kaimur Tiger Reserve — Bihar's First Step Toward India's 54th — Jan 1

The Bihar government approved a proposal to notify **Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary** as a tiger reserve — which would make it **Bihar's first tiger reserve** and **India's 54th**, pending NTCA (National Tiger Conservation Authority) clearance under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Kaimur Plateau, part of the Vindhya range (bordering UP and Jharkhand), has a confirmed viable breeding tiger population as per the All India Tiger Estimation 2022 (which counted **3,167 tigers nationally**). Project Tiger, launched in 1973 by PM Indira Gandhi, is the world's largest tiger conservation programme — India hosts approximately 75% of the world's wild tiger population. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: NTCA (statutory body, WPA 1972); Kaimur (Vindhya, Bihar); AITE 2022 (3,167 tigers); Project Tiger (1973); Schedule I WPA. Mains GS-3: Tiger conservation; NTCA governance; human-wildlife conflict.

Jal Seva Aankalan — Digital Water Assessment Tool Launched — Jan 1

The Ministry of Jal Shakti launched **Jal Seva Aankalan** — a digital platform for village-level water service assessment under Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM). The tool enables real-time data capture on tap water connection functionality, water quality, and service hours at the household level — addressing the gap between "connections provided" and actual water service delivery. JJM (launched 2019) aims for **Har Ghar Jal** (piped water to every rural household) — original target of 100% by 2024, revised to 2026. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Jal Seva Aankalan; JJM (Jal Jeevan Mission, 2019); Har Ghar Jal; Ministry of Jal Shakti. Mains GS-2/3: Rural water supply governance; last-mile service delivery; monitoring mechanisms.

Galaxy Frog Spotted in Western Ghats — Jan 4

The **Galaxy frog (*Nyctibatrachus robinmoorei*)** — a rare, poorly-documented amphibian — was recorded in the Western Ghats, adding to knowledge of the region's extraordinary biodiversity. The Western Ghats is one of the world's **eight hottest biodiversity hotspots** (UNESCO World Heritage Site, 2012), home to over 5,000 flowering plant species, 139 mammal species, 508 bird species, 179 amphibian species — with very high endemism. India has approximately 450 amphibian species, of which ~70% are found in the Western Ghats. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Western Ghats (biodiversity hotspot, UNESCO 2012; states: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu); amphibian diversity; IUCN categories. Mains GS-3: Biodiversity conservation; endemic species; habitat protection.

SECURITY & DEFENCE

Pralay Missile — Successful Salvo Launch at Chandipur — Jan 3

DRDO conducted a **simultaneous salvo launch of two Pralay quasi-ballistic missiles** at the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, Odisha — a user evaluation trial for the Indian Army. Pralay specifications: **150–500 km range**, 500–1,000 kg warhead, **INS + GPS + NavIC** guidance, CEP ~10 metres, solid-fuelled, road-mobile. The salvo capability — firing two missiles near-simultaneously — is designed to **overwhelm Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM)** defences by saturating intercept windows. NavIC integration makes Pralay resistant to GPS denial. Pralay fills the gap between battlefield missiles (Prithvi, <150 km) and strategic missiles (Agni series, >700 km) for operational-level precision strike. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Pralay (150-500 km, INS+GPS+NavIC, ~10m CEP, DRDO, ITR Chandipur); NavIC (7 satellites, regional; IRNSS). Mains GS-3: Defence indigenisation; missile deterrence architecture; NavIC strategic value.

MoD Signs Rs 4,666 Crore Defence Contracts — Jan 2

The Ministry of Defence signed two significant contracts: (1) **CQB (Close Quarter Battle) Carbines** with **Bharat Forge** for the Indian Army — compact automatic weapons for urban/counter-terrorism operations, under Atmanirbhar Bharat; (2) **Heavyweight Torpedoes (HWT)** for **Kalvari-class submarines** — the AEW (Advanced Endurance Wire-guided) torpedo for underwater strike capability. Kalvari-class (Project 75) submarines are French Scorpène-design built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders (MDS), Mumbai — 6 submarines commissioned between 2017-2024. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Bharat Forge (Pune-based defence PSU); Kalvari-class (Scorpène, MDS Mumbai, Project 75); HWT; CQB carbine. Mains GS-3: Defence indigenisation; submarine warfare capability.

Radio Sangam — India's First LoC Community Radio — Jan 4

The Indian Army launched **Radio Sangam** on **88.8 FM** at Keri village, Doongi block, **Rajouri district, J&K** — India's first community radio station along the Line of Control. The station broadcasts local news, cultural content, government scheme awareness, and military-community dialogue in local languages. Community radio policy (2006) permits stations with 50–100W power with 10–15 km coverage radius. Radio Sangam serves a strategic WHAM (Winning Hearts and Minds) function — countering Pakistani media penetration and misinformation in an area with persistent cross-border tensions and mobile network gaps. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Radio Sangam (88.8 FM, Rajouri, J&K); Community Radio Policy 2006; Sadbhavana Mission; All India Radio. Mains GS-2/3: Civil-military relations; border area governance; information and communications policy.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Bulgaria Joins the Eurozone as 21st Member — Jan 1

Bulgaria adopted the Euro on January 1, 2026, replacing the Bulgarian Lev at the fixed conversion rate of **1 EUR = 1.95583 BGN** — becoming the **21st member of the Eurozone**, nineteen years after joining the EU in 2007. Bulgaria, which had operated a Currency Board Arrangement (CBA) pegging the Lev to the Euro since 1997 (following a devastating hyperinflation crisis), met the five **Maastricht Convergence Criteria**: inflation ≤1.5% above the three lowest EU states; fiscal deficit <3% of GDP; public debt <60% of GDP; stable exchange rate in ERM-II (at least 2 years); long-term interest rates ≤2% above the three lowest. Implications: loss of independent monetary policy, one-off price adjustment, but elimination of exchange rate risk and lower transaction costs. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Eurozone (21 members); Maastricht criteria (5 conditions); ECB; Bulgaria EU 2007, Euro 2026; 1 EUR = 1.95583 BGN. Mains GS-2: European integration; trade-offs of monetary union; developing world perspective.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

World Braille Day — RPWD Act 2016 and Disability Rights — Jan 4

World Braille Day (January 4) marks the **217th birth anniversary of Louis Braille** (born 1809, France), inventor of the Braille tactile writing system. In India, disability rights are governed by the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016** — which replaced the older PWD Act 1995, expanded the disability categories from 7 to 21, recognised the rights-based approach (vs. welfare approach), and implemented the UN CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by India 2007) in domestic law. Key provisions: 4% reservation in government jobs; barrier-free access mandates; inclusive education framework. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: World Braille Day (Jan 4); RPWD Act 2016 (21 categories, 4% reservation, rights-based); UN CRPD (2006, India ratified 2007); Louis Braille. Mains GS-2: Disability governance; inclusion policy; welfare vs. rights approach.

Goa Gets Third District — Kushavati — Jan 2

Goa notified the creation of **Kushavati** as its **third district**, carved from the former South Goa district — joining North Goa and South Goa (newly reorganised). Goa, India's smallest state by area (3,702 sq km), had only two districts since statehood (1987). District reorganisation is a state subject under the Constitution (no separate constitutional provision — done via state legislation and executive orders), with implications for administrative efficiency, development delivery, and political representation. **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Goa (statehood 1987; smallest state by area; 3 districts now); district reorganisation process. Mains GS-2: Administrative reorganisation; federalism; sub-state governance.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Kaamya Karthikeyan — Youngest Indian to Ski to South Pole — Jan 2

Kaamya Karthikeyan became the **youngest Indian to ski to the South Pole**, completing the feat at age 17 — a significant achievement in polar adventure sports. The South Pole is located in Antarctica (Indian Research Station: **Maitri** in Queen Maud Land and **Bharati** in Prydz Bay; India's first station: **Dakshin Gangotri**, 1984, now a supply base). India is a signatory to the **Antarctic Treaty (1959)** and its environmental Protocol (Madrid Protocol, 1991). **UPSC angle:** Prelims: Antarctic Treaty (1959); India's Antarctic stations (Dakshin Gangotri 1984, Maitri, Bharati); South Pole. Mains: Not a primary topic, but useful for international treaties.

PERSONS & AWARDS IN NEWS

Sjoerd Marijne — Dutch coach; appointed Head Coach of Indian men's hockey team (Jan 1); previously coached Indian women's hockey team (2017-20)

Kaamya Karthikeyan — 17-year-old; youngest Indian to ski to South Pole (Jan 2)

Meera Syal CBE — British-Indian actress/writer; appointed Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in UK New Year Honours 2026 (Jan 2)

President Droupadi Murmu — Launched SOAR AI skilling initiative (Jan 3)

UPSC RELEVANCE

PRELIMS: India 4th economy (USD 4.18T; USA, China, Germany ahead); Kavach 4.0 (ATP, SIL-4, RDSO; Bajwa–Ahmedabad 96 km, Western Railways); Pralay (150-500 km, INS+GPS+NavIC, CEP ~10m, salvo at ITR Chandipur); Bulgaria Eurozone (21st member, Jan 1 2026, 1 EUR=1.95583 BGN, Maastricht 5 criteria); Kaimur TR (Bihar's first, India's 54th pending NTCA; Vindhya range; AITE 2022 = 3,167 tigers); IAIRO (India's first state AI institute, GIFT City Gujarat); Radio Sangam (88.8 FM, Rajouri J&K, first LoC community radio); SEBI merchant banker (Rs 25 cr Jan 2027, Rs 50 cr Jan 2028); BSNL VoWiFi (IMS); Jal Seva Aankalan (JJM, Jal Shakti); SOAR (AI skilling, Rs 500 cr CoE, President Murmu); MoD contracts (CQB Carbines – Bharat Forge; HWT torpedoes – Kalvari-class, Project 75, MDS); Small savings unchanged 8th quarter (PPF 7.1%, SSY 8.2%, NSC 7.7%, SCSS 8.2%); Sagarmala Finance Corporation (NBFC, MoPSW); SSLV D3 static test; Goa 3rd district Kushavati; World Braille Day (Jan 4, Louis Braille 1809, RPWD Act 2016, 21 categories, 4% reservation).

MAINS GS-2: Community radio at LoC — civil-military relations, WHAM, information security; European monetary union — Maastricht criteria, fiscal discipline; Disability rights — RPWD Act 2016, CRPD, inclusive governance.

MAINS GS-3: India's GDP milestone — structural transformation, per capita gap, Viksit Bharat 2047; Kavach ATP — railway safety, SIL-4, scale-up challenges; Defence indigenisation — Pralay salvo, Bharat Forge CQB, Kalvari torpedo; Capital market regulation — SEBI merchant banker reform, IPO boom oversight; Tiger conservation — Kaimur, NTCA, Project Tiger milestones; AI skilling and governance — IAIRO, SOAR, IndiaAI Mission nexus.

📌 FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

INDIA'S ECONOMIC POSITION:

GDP (2025): **USD 4.18 trillion** — 4th largest globally

Behind: USA (~USD 28.8T), China (~USD 18.5T), Germany (~USD 4.4T)

India's per capita GDP: ~**USD 2,900**

Growth rate FY2024-25: **6.4%** (real GDP)

Target: 3rd largest (surpass Germany) by **2028-29**

Viksit Bharat 2047 vision: **high-income economy**

KAVACH ATP:

Version deployed: **Kavach 4.0** (Western Railways, Bajwa–Ahmedabad, 96 km)

Safety level: **SIL-4** (highest; probability of dangerous failure: $< 10^{-9}$/hr)

Developer: **RDSO** (Research Designs and Standards Organisation, Lucknow)

Deployed network: ~**1,500 route-km** (target: 6,000 km, high-density)

Cost: ~**Rs 30–50 lakh per km**

PRALAY MISSILE:

Range: **150–500 km** | Payload: **500–1,000 kg**

Guidance: **INS + GPS + NavIC** | CEP: **~10 metres**

Propellant: Solid-fuelled | Platform: Road-mobile

Developer: **DRDO** | Test range: **ITR, Chandipur, Odisha**

Unique: Quasi-ballistic trajectory (manoeuvrable mid-flight to defeat ABM systems)

BULGARIA EUROZONE:

Eurozone members (post-Bulgaria): **21**

Conversion rate: **1 EUR = 1.95583 BGN**

Bulgaria EU membership: **2007** | Euro: **January 1, 2026**

Maastricht Criteria: Inflation, fiscal deficit (<3% GDP), public debt (<60% GDP), ERM-II stability (2 yr), long-term interest rates

KAIMUR TIGER RESERVE:

Status: **Bihar's first; India's 54th** (pending NTCA)

Location: **Kaimur Plateau, Vindhya range** (bordering UP, Jharkhand)

AITE 2022: India's tiger population = **3,167** (75% of world total)

Project Tiger launched: **1973** by PM Indira Gandhi

NTCA: Statutory body under **WPA 1972 (amended 2006)**

KEY SCHEMES LAUNCHED/UPDATED:

Jal Seva Aankalan — JJM monitoring tool; Ministry of Jal Shakti

SOAR — AI skilling; Rs 500 crore CoE; President Murmu

Radio Sangam — 88.8 FM; Keri village, Rajouri, J&K; first LoC community radio

IAIRO — GIFT City, Gujarat; India's first state AI research institution; non-profit PPP

Sagarmala Finance Corporation — maritime NBFC; MoPSW

SMALL SAVINGS RATES (Q4 FY2025-26 — UNCHANGED):

PPF: **7.1%** | SSY: **8.2%** | NSC: **7.7%** | SCSS: **8.2%** | KVP: **7.5%**

KEY NUMBERS:

SEBI Merchant Banker net worth: **Rs 25 cr** (Jan 2027), **Rs 50 cr** (Jan 2028)

MoD contracts: **Rs 4,666 crore** (CQB Carbines + HWT torpedoes)

Kalvari-class submarines: **6 commissioned** (Project 75, Scorpène-design, MDS Mumbai)

RPWD Act 2016: **21 disability categories**, **4% government job reservation**

Western Ghats: **8th biodiversity hotspot** globally; UNESCO WHS **2012**; 6 states

Sources: Daily editions The Hindu, PIB, GKToday

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