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# Current Affairs Today – January 16, 2026

16 January 2026

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## WHY IN NEWS

National Startup Day (Startup India 10th anniversary) dominated the news alongside a cluster of policy announcements: Ponduru Khadi GI tag, NITI Aayog MSME convergence report, India-Israel fisheries declaration, 6th ASEAN-India Digital Ministers' Meeting outcomes, and India's first National Tribal Health Observatory — making January 16 one of the busiest news days of the month.

## PONDURU KHADI GETS GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION (GI) TAG

**Ponduru Khadi** from Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh, was granted a **Geographical Indication (GI) tag** by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

### Key distinguishing features:

Thread density: ~100–120 counts — among the finest handspun khadi globally

**Cotton cleaning process:** Uses jawbone of the *Valuga* fish (a local freshwater species) — a technique unique to the Ponduru region

Cotton varieties used: Hill cotton, Punasa cotton, and red cotton — all locally cultivated in the Ponduru region

Entirely hand-processed: cleaning → spinning → weaving; no machine intervention at any stage

The GI tag is registered in favour of KVIC (Khadi and Village Industries Commission)

**UPSC Angle:** GI tags protect traditional knowledge and give artisan communities economic rights; KVIC administers khadi support; Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.

## NITI AAYOG REPORT — MSME SCHEME CONVERGENCE

NITI Aayog released a report titled “**Achieving Efficiencies in MSME Sector through Convergence of Schemes**”, identifying 18 MSME schemes with overlapping objectives.

### MSME sector data:

Contribution to GDP: **27–30%**

Contribution to exports: **45%**

Employment: ~**28.13 crore workers** (62% of India's workforce)

MSMEs on Udyam Portal: **3.94 crore**

Informal micro enterprises on Udyam Assist Platform: **2.71 crore**

Rural MSMEs: **51%** of total

Government MSME spending: Rs 22,094 crore (2023–24), up from Rs 6,717 crore (2019–20)

**Key recommendations:** AI-powered centralised digital platform for all MSME schemes; two-pronged convergence — information convergence (common portal) + process convergence (aligned eligibility); dedicated Marketing Wing for MSME exports.

## INDIA–ISRAEL FISHERIES COOPERATION

At the **2nd Global Summit on “Blue Food Security: Sea the Future 2026”** in Eilat, Israel, India signed a **Joint Ministerial Declaration of Intent** on fisheries and aquaculture cooperation.

Indian delegation led by Minister **Rajiv Ranjan Singh** (Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, Dairying)

Meetings with Israeli Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter and Regional Cooperation Minister David Amsalem

Cooperation areas: Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS), biofloc technology, cage culture, aquaponics, mariculture, seaweed cultivation, genetic improvement, broodstock development

Visited: **National Centre for Mariculture (NCM)**, Eilat

India’s fish production: **184.02 lakh tonnes** (2023–24) — **2nd largest** fish producer globally (up from 95.79 lakh tonnes in 2013–14)

## 6TH ASEAN–INDIA DIGITAL MINISTERS’ MEETING (ADGMIN)

The **6th ASEAN–India Digital Ministers’ Meeting (ADGMIN)** was held virtually on January 16, 2026, on the sidelines of the 6th ASEAN Digital Ministers’ Meeting in **Hanoi, Vietnam**.

Theme: “Adaptive ASEAN: From Connectivity to Connected Intelligence”

Co-chaired by: **Amit Agrawal** (Secretary, Department of Telecommunications, India) + Vietnam’s representative

Key outcomes: **ASEAN–India Digital Work Plan 2026** approved; “**ASEAN–India Fund for Digital Future**” operationalised

India showcased: near-universal 4G coverage, world’s fastest 5G rollout, BharatNet, Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, Sanchar Saathi

11 ASEAN member states participated; cooperation focus on AI safety and telecom user protection

**UPSC Angle:** ASEAN-India relations; Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as India’s export; Act East Policy.

## NATIONAL TRIBAL HEALTH OBSERVATORY — INDIA'S FIRST

At the **National Capacity Building Programme for Tribal Health Practitioners** in Hyderabad, India's first **National Tribal Health Observatory (B-THO)** was established.

**MoU signed between:** Ministry of Tribal Affairs + **ICMR–Regional Medical Research Centre (ICMR-RMRC), Bhubaneswar**

~400 tribal doctors (healers/practitioners) attended from across India

Goal: Formally recognise and empower **1 lakh tribal doctors** as partners in public health delivery

Focus: Malaria, leprosy, and tuberculosis elimination in tribal areas

Minister: **Juel Oram** (Tribal Affairs); Secretary: Ranjana Chopra

Related schemes: PM JANMAN (PVTG welfare), DAJGUA

**UPSC Angle:** Tribal health, PVTG welfare, traditional medicine integration, ICMR programmes.

## 28TH CSPOC — WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The **28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC)** concluded in New Delhi (January 14–16, 2026).

Co-chaired by: Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman **Harivansh**

India highlighted: **1.5 million elected women representatives** in local self-governing bodies — described as “world's largest experiment in women's political representation”

73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments mandated 1/3 women's reservation in local bodies

**50% women's reservation** in rural local bodies in two-thirds of states

**106th Constitutional Amendment** (“Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam”): 33% reservation in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies (yet to be operationalised)

## PM INTERNSHIP SCHEME — IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The **PM Internship Scheme (PMIS)**, launched in Budget 2024-25, is reporting significant implementation gaps.

Budget allocation: over **Rs 11,500 crore** for FY26

Utilisation as of November 2025: only ~**4%** of budget

Monthly stipend: **Rs 5,000** + one-time grant **Rs 6,000**

Target: **1 crore internships** over 5 years in top 500 companies; eligible age: 21–24 years

Less than one-third of internship offers accepted; very few completed the programme

Under: Ministry of Corporate Affairs

Issues: Stipend inadequacy for urban living costs; credibility gap in targets vs. outcomes; low completion rates

## INDIA TEXTILE & APPAREL EXPORTS — DECEMBER 2025

India's textile and apparel exports for December 2025: **USD 3.27 billion** (+0.40% YoY).

Full-year 2025 exports: **USD 37.54 billion**

Growth segments (Dec 2025): Handicrafts +7.2%, RMG (Ready-Made Garments) +2.89%, MMF yarn/fabric +3.99%

Export growth in **118 countries** (Jan–Nov 2025)

New markets: Sudan (+182.9%), Cameroon (+152.9%), Argentina (+77.8%), Uganda (+75.7%)

## KAZIRANGA ELEVATED CORRIDOR ANNOUNCED

The **Kaziranga Elevated Corridor** project received announcement ahead of PM Modi's visit to Assam (January 17–18, 2026).

Cost: **Rs 6,950 crore**

Length: **86 km** with **35-km elevated wildlife corridor**; 21-km bypass + 30-km road widening

Districts covered: Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, Golaghat

Aim: Seamless wildlife movement, reduce human-animal conflict on NH-37

## JAPAN'S DEEP-SEA RARE EARTH MINING

Japan's research vessel Chikyu is conducting the **world's first experimental deep-sea rare earth extraction** at ~6,000 metres depth.

Location: Near **Minami Torishima** island (within Japan's EEZ)

Deposits: Over **16 million tonnes** of rare earth metals

Dysprosium: sufficient for **730 years**; Yttrium: sufficient for **780 years**

Strategic context: China controls ~67% of global mining, 90%+ of refining — Japan seeks to reduce dependence

Regulatory body: **International Seabed Authority (ISA)** developing global framework for deep-sea mining

**UPSC Angle:** Critical minerals, rare earths, ISA (Jamaica-based; UNCLOS body), China's rare earth dominance.

## PERSONS IN NEWS

**Aaryan Varshney** (21, Delhi) became India's **92nd chess Grandmaster** at the Andranik Margaryan Memorial Tournament in Armenia, achieving his final GM norm with a round remaining. He trained entirely at home under his father Gaurav Varshney (a physics teacher) without a professional coach.

### UPSC RELEVANCE

Ponduru Khadi (Srikakulam, AP; KVIC; GI tag; Valuga fish jawbone; Hill/Punasa/red cotton); GI tag Act (Geographical Indications of Goods Registration and Protection Act 1999); NITI Aayog MSME Report (18 schemes; 27-30% GDP; 45% exports; 62% workforce; Udyam Portal 3.94 cr); PMMSY (Blue Revolution); India fish production 2nd globally (184.02 lakh tonnes 2023-24); ADGMIN (ASEAN-India Digital Ministers; 6th edition; Hanoi, Vietnam — held virtually); B-THO (Bharat Tribal Health Observatory; ICMR-RMRC Bhubaneswar; Ministry of Tribal Affairs); 106th Constitutional Amendment (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam; 33% women reservation); 73rd/74th Amendment (local body women reservation); PM Internship Scheme (MCA; Rs 11,500 cr; 1 crore internships; top 500 companies; age 21-24; Rs 5,000/month); Kaziranga Elevated Corridor (Rs 6,950 cr; 86 km; 35 km elevated; NH-37); ISA (International Seabed Authority; Jamaica; UNCLOS); Japan rare earth (Minami Torishima; dysprosium; yttrium; Chikyū vessel)

### MAINS GS-3:

MSME sector as employment backbone — governance challenges and convergence reforms | Blue food economy and India-Israel fisheries cooperation | Deep-sea rare earth mining and India's critical minerals strategy

### MAINS GS-2:

Women's political representation — constitutional provisions and ground reality | Tribal health integration and traditional medicine within public health systems

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### ▮ PONDURU KHADI:

Location: Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh

GI tag: Registered in favour of KVIC (Khadi and Village Industries Commission)

Uniqueness: Fish jawbone (Valuga fish) used in cotton cleaning — unique to Ponduru, Srikakulam

Thread count: ~100-120 (among finest handspun khadi)

Cotton types: Hill cotton, Punasa cotton, red cotton (all local)

Statutory basis: GI of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999; administered by GI Registry, Chennai

### ▮ MSME SECTOR — KEY STATISTICS:

GDP share: 27-30%

Export share: 45%

Workers: 28.13 crore (62% of workforce)

Udyam Portal (formal): 3.94 crore MSMEs

Udyam Assist Platform (informal micro): 2.71 crore

Rural MSMEs: 51%

Govt MSME spending FY24: Rs 22,094 crore (vs Rs 6,717 crore in FY20)

### ▮ INDIA FISHERIES:

Global rank: 2nd largest fish producer

Production 2023-24: 184.02 lakh tonnes (up from 95.79 lakh tonnes in 2013-14)

Key scheme: PMMSY (Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana; launched 2020; Rs 20,050 crore)

Blue Revolution: 2015-16; predecessor to PMMSY

### ▮ PM INTERNSHIP SCHEME (PMIS):

Under: Ministry of Corporate Affairs

Budget FY26: >Rs 11,500 crore

Target: 1 crore internships in 5 years (in top 500 companies)

Eligibility: 21-24 years

Stipend: Rs 5,000/month + Rs 6,000 one-time grant

Status: ~4% budget utilised; low acceptance and completion rates

### ▮ KAZIRANGA ELEVATED CORRIDOR:

Total cost: Rs 6,950 crore

Length: 86 km; elevated section: 35 km

Purpose: Wildlife passage across NH-37; reduce elephant-vehicle conflict

Districts: Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, Golaghat (Assam)

### ▮ WOMEN'S RESERVATION IN INDIA:

73rd Amendment (1992): 1/3 reservation for women in Panchayats

74th Amendment (1992): 1/3 reservation in Urban Local Bodies

2/3 of states: 50% reservation in rural local bodies

Elected women in local bodies: 1.5 million+

106th Amendment (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023): 33% reservation in Lok Sabha + State Assemblies (not yet operationalised; requires delimitation)

#### **INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY (ISA):**

Established: 1994 (when UNCLOS entered into force)

Headquarters: Kingston, Jamaica

Mandate: Regulate all mineral-related activities in the international seabed area (The Area) — beyond national jurisdiction

Rare earth significance: Polymetallic nodules and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in The Area contain REE, cobalt, nickel, copper, manganese

Sources: PIB, KVIC, NITI Aayog, The Hindu, Indian Express

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