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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Current Affairs Today — January 21, 2026

21 January 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED

POLITY   ECONOMY   ENVIRONMENT   SOCIAL ISSUES   SCIENCE & TECH   IR   GEOGRAPHY

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✎ WHY IN NEWS

January 21, 2026 brought significant judicial, environmental, and demographic developments — the Supreme Court expanded the right to life to include menstrual health, the Centre notified an Eco-Sensitive Zone around Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary, India launched the Responsible Nations Index, and fresh data revealed India's demographic dividend is fracturing along a north-south fault line.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Lok Sabha Digital Attendance System

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla announced that a biometric seat-based digital attendance system will be implemented from the Budget Session 2026. The system authenticates MPs' physical presence within the Chamber and links attendance to daily allowances — addressing long-standing concerns about absenteeism.

Central Silk Board — Financial Approval Limit Raised

The government amended Rule 22 of Central Silk Board Rules, 1955, raising the Board's financial approval limit from ₹50 lakh to ₹1 crore. The Central Silk Board (CSB) was established in 1948 under the Ministry of Textiles and is headquartered in Bengaluru. India is the **world's second-largest silk producer** (after China); production rose from 31,906 MT (FY2017–18) to 38,913 MT (FY2023–24). Karnataka is the largest producing state.

Karnataka Bhoomi Project — 25-Year Milestone

The Bhoomi initiative — India's first fully digital land records system — completed 25 years. Launched in 2000, it computerises Records of Rights, Tenancy, and Crops (RTC), provides legally valid digital copies, and is integrated with the Kaveri property registration system and PM-Kisan.

JUDICIARY

Supreme Court — Menstrual Health as Fundamental Right

A Supreme Court bench ruled that inaccessibility of menstrual hygiene management measures undermines the dignity of a girl child. The right to life and personal dignity under **Article 21** of the Constitution includes the right to menstrual health. The ruling has significant implications for government obligations to provide menstrual hygiene products in schools and public facilities.

Supreme Court — UGC Equity Regulations 2026 Stayed

A Division Bench expressed prima facie concern over the definitional scope of "caste-based discrimination" in UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026, and stayed the regulations. The matter was referred to a three-judge bench; the 2012 Regulations remain in force.

NGT — Souparnika River Pollution

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed officials to file a report on wastewater flow into the Souparnika River, Karnataka. The river originates from **Kodachadri Hills** (Western Ghats), flows past Mookambika Temple at Kollur, and runs parallel to the Arabian Sea before merging near Maravanthe Beach.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Pax Silica Initiative

A US-led multilateral cooperation framework — the Pax Silica Initiative — focuses on semiconductors, critical minerals, and AI supply chain security. Current signatories include Australia, Greece, Israel, Japan, Qatar, South Korea, Singapore, UAE, and UK.

UPSC Angle: Critical minerals strategy, technology supply chain diplomacy, semiconductor ecosystem.

ECONOMY & FINANCE

Responsible Nations Index (RNI) — India Launches

India launched the Responsible Nations Index (RNI) at the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi. Developed by the World Intellectual Foundation (WIF) in collaboration with JNU, IIM Mumbai, and the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, the RNI covers **154 countries** across three pillars: Internal Responsibility (dignity, justice), Environmental Responsibility (climate action), and External Responsibility (peace, cooperation).

India's rank: 16th (Score: 0.551513). Top 3: Singapore (0.619), Switzerland (0.587), Denmark (0.584).

India's Coal Generation — First Decline in 50 Years

India recorded its first decline in coal-fired electricity generation in 50 years — output fell 3% (from 1,322 to 1,283 billion units year-over-year). Renewable generation rose 22% to 270 billion units in the same period. This is a structural shift reflecting the growing share of solar and wind power in India's grid.

Industrial Production Index (IPI) Modernisation

The Ministry of Statistics is pursuing a chain-based methodology to replace the traditional fixed-base approach for the IPI, allowing annual weight adjustments to better reflect dynamic market changes.

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary — Eco-Sensitive Zone Notified

The Centre declared a 0–1 km buffer around Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajsamand district, Rajasthan as an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ). The sanctuary covers 610.5 sq. km across the Aravalli Range and was established in 1971.

Notable fauna: Wolf, leopard, sloth bear, hyena, sambhar, nilgai, chausingha, chinkara. **River hydrology:** The Banas River (flows to the Bay of Bengal) originates here; Sukdi, Sumer, Mithdi, and Kot tributaries feed the Luni River (flows to the Arabian Sea).

Indian Skimmer — Conservation Project Launched

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) launched a conservation project for the **Indian Skimmer** (*Rynchops albicollis*) under the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG). IUCN Status: **Endangered**. Key habitat: Chambal River. Characteristic feature: lower mandible longer than upper; skims low over water to catch fish. Threats: river habitat loss, unplanned dam water releases, and sand mining.

State of India's Environment 2026 — CSE Report

The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and Down to Earth magazine released their *State of India's Environment (SOE) 2026* report at the Anil Agarwal Dialogue 2026. Key findings:

7 of 9 planetary boundaries have been breached (ocean acidification newly added as the 7th)

Extreme weather events occurred on **99% of days** in 2025

4,419 deaths from extreme weather in 2025; 17.41 million hectares of crop area affected

Invasive *Lantana camara* occupies ~50% of forest/scrublands, intensifying human–wildlife conflicts

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

ISRO Reusable Rockets Progress

ISRO's RLV-LEX-03 experiment validated landing under high-wind conditions in June 2024. The next-generation launch vehicle **NGLV Soorya** is designed for 30-tonne LEO payload capacity with a reusable first stage, using LOX/Methane engines — India's entry into the reusable rocket race.

Internet Governance Internship Scheme (IGICBS)

MeitY launched the Internet Governance Internship and Capacity Building Scheme (IGICBS) to train India's youth for participation in national and global internet policy forums.

Darwin's Bark Spider — Silk Research

Scientists studied the conditions under which *Caerostris darwini* (Darwin's Bark Spider, found in Madagascar) produces the world's toughest known biological silk — more than twice as tough as conventional spider silk, outperforming steel by weight. The spider produces webs spanning up to 25 metres across rivers.

SPORTS

India U-19 Men's Cricket World Cup — Sixth Title

India won the Men's Under-19 Cricket World Cup, defeating England by 100 runs. This is India's **sixth U-19 World Cup title** — the most by any nation. The tournament was held in early 2026.

Khelo India Winter Games 2026

The Khelo India Winter Games 2026 were held January 20–26 in **Leh and Gulmarg** under the Khelo India initiative to promote winter sports across India.

HISTORY & CULTURE

Parbati Giri — Birth Centenary

PM Modi paid homage to freedom fighter Parbati Giri on her birth centenary (born January 19, 1926). Known as the "Mother Teresa of Western Odisha" and "Badamaa" (Big Mother), she participated in the Quit India Movement at age 16 and was inspired by Gandhian philosophy.

MAPPING

Mount Aso, Japan

A helicopter disappeared near **Mount Aso**, Kumamoto Prefecture, Kyushu, Japan — the largest active volcano in Japan and home to the largest active crater in the world (circumference: 114 km; dimensions: 27 km N-S × 16 km E-W). The active vent is Naka-dake; last major eruption: 2021.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Kumbhalgarh Sanctuary (district: Rajsamand, Aravalli Range, est. 1971, key species: wolf, chausingha); Indian Skimmer IUCN (Endangered), habitat (Chambal); Central Silk Board (est. 1948, Bengaluru, India = 2nd silk producer); SOE 2026 (7 planetary boundaries breached, 4,419 deaths); India U-19 WC 6th title; NGLV Soorya; Pax Silica

MAINS GS-1:

India's demographic dividend fracturing along north-south divide — implications for delimitation, labour migration, geriatric care

MAINS GS-2:

SC ruling on menstrual health as fundamental right (Article 21); UGC Regulations stay; digital attendance in Parliament; RNI India rank 16

MAINS GS-3:

Coal generation decline and renewable growth; IPI modernisation; NGLV Soorya reusable rockets; Kumbhalgarh ESZ and Aravalli ecology

📌 FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

KUMBHALGARH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY:

Location: Rajsamand district, Rajasthan | Area: 610.5 sq. km | Established: 1971

Range: Aravalli hills | Four ranges: Kumbhalgarh, Sadri, Desuri, Bokhada

Key fauna: Wolf (large population), Leopard, Sloth Bear, Hyena, Sambhar, Nilgai, Chausingha, Chinkara

Hydrology: Banas River (Bay of Bengal tributary) originates here; Sukdi/Sumer/Mithdi/Kot feed Luni River (Arabian Sea)

ESZ: 0–1 km buffer notified January 2026

Adjacent: Kumbhalgarh Fort (UNESCO World Heritage Site, Great Wall of India — 36 km wall)

INDIAN SKIMMER:

Scientific name: Rynchops albicollis | Family: Laridae

IUCN Status: Endangered

Primary habitat: Chambal River, rivers in Terai, Bihar, Odisha coasts

Distinctive feature: Lower mandible longer than upper; flies with bill open, skimming water surface

Protected under: Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (Schedule I)

Conservation project: BNHS under NMCG (National Mission for Clean Ganga)

STATE OF INDIA'S ENVIRONMENT 2026 (CSE):

Released by: Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) / Down to Earth magazine

Platform: Anil Agarwal Dialogue 2026

9 Planetary Boundaries: Climate change, Biosphere integrity, Land system change, Freshwater depletion, Biogeochemical flows, Atmospheric aerosols, Stratospheric ozone, Novel entities, Ocean acidification

Breached (7): Climate change, Biosphere integrity, Land system change, Freshwater depletion, Biogeochemical flows, Novel entities, Ocean acidification (7th — newly breached)

Within safe limits (2): Stratospheric ozone, Atmospheric aerosols

CENTRAL SILK BOARD:

Established: 1948 | Ministry: Textiles | HQ: Bengaluru

India silk production: 38,913 MT (2023-24) — World's 2nd largest

Silk types in India: Mulberry (Karnataka, Andhra), Tasar (Jharkhand, Odisha), Eri (Assam), Muga (Assam — GI tag)

Karnataka: ~60% of India's silk output (Ramanagara district = "Silk City")

INDIA COAL & RENEWABLE DATA:

First coal generation decline in 50 years: 3% drop (1,322 → 1,283 billion units)

Renewable generation growth: 22% to 270 billion units

India's non-fossil fuel installed capacity: 46.8% (ahead of 40% NDC target for 2030)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Bhoomi (Karnataka): India's first fully digital land records project (2000); integrates with Kaveri registration system

Responsible Nations Index: India 16th/154; Singapore 1st; published by World Intellectual Foundation

IGICBS (MeitY): Internet Governance Internship and Capacity Building Scheme

Pax Silica: US-led; focuses on semiconductors, critical minerals, AI supply chains; 9 member countries

India U-19 WC: 6th title (most by any country); defeated England by 100 runs

Khelo India Winter Games 2026: Leh and Gulmarg, January 20-26

Sources: Insights on India, Vajiramandravi, Shankar IAS Parliament

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