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WEEKLY ROUNDUP

Weekly Roundup — Week 4 (Jan 19–25, 2026)

25 January 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED

POLITY ECONOMY ENVIRONMENT IR SECURITY & DEFENCE SOCIAL ISSUES

SCIENCE & TECH PERSONS & AWARDS

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Week 4 — January 19–25, 2026   Polity   Economy   Environment   International Relations

Security Defence   Social Issues   Science Tech   Persons Awards

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📋 WEEK OVERVIEW

A landmark week for India's international engagements and democratic milestones. The **BBNJ High Seas Treaty** entered force after the 60th ratification — a historic moment for ocean governance. India deepened ties with **Germany** (₹8 billion submarine deal, Project 75I AIP technology) and **UAE** ($200 billion trade target, $3 billion LNG deal). The **ECI celebrated 76 years** on National Voters Day, while **Padma Awards 2026** honoured 131 individuals. On the security front, **Operation Megaburu** neutralised 16–17 Maoists in Saranda, and **Netaji's 129th Parakram Diwas** was observed. India's deepening **demographic divide** between an ageing South and a young North raised alarm bells about post-2026 delimitation consequences.

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

BBNJ Treaty — High Seas Now Have Legal Protection

The **BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) Agreement** — formally the **"Agreement under UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction"** — entered force after securing its **60th ratification**.

Four pillars:

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in international waters — "30 by 30" goal (protect 30% of oceans by 2030)

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for activities in high seas

Marine Genetic Resources (MGR) benefit-sharing — access and equitable sharing of benefits from deep-sea biodiversity

Capacity Building & Technology Transfer for developing nations

India's stakes:

> India holds a **Pioneer Area** of ~1,50,000 sq km in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) for polymetallic nodule exploration — licensed by ISA
>
> Also holds exploration rights for **polymetallic sulphides** on the Carlsberg Ridge
>
> India operates through **NIOT (National Institute of Ocean Technology)** as its nodal ISA operator

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / IR: UNCLOS 1982 (India ratified 1995); ISA (International Seabed Authority); high seas = area beyond 200 nm EEZ; "common heritage of mankind" principle; India's deep-sea mission (Samudrayaan — Matsya 6000 submersible).

Gangetic River Dolphin — 2nd Nationwide Survey

India launched its **2nd nationwide Gangetic River Dolphin survey** from **Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh**, led by **WII (Wildlife Institute of India)**. The 2021–23 survey counted **6,327 dolphins** — population recovering from near-extinction in the 1980s.

Key facts:

Feature	Data
Species	*Platanista gangetica* — freshwater dolphin, blind
National Aquatic Animal	Declared 2009
IUCN status	Endangered
WPA schedule	Schedule I (highest protection)
Range	Ganga, Brahmaputra, Karnaphuli, Indus (Pakistan)
Project Dolphin	Launched June 5, 2020 (World Environment Day)
Primary threat	Poaching (oil used for fishing bait), bycatch, dams

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Environment: Echolocation; India's National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG); comparison with Irrawaddy dolphin; Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (Bihar).

Kumbhalgarh WLS — ESZ Notified

The **Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary** (Rajsamand district, Rajasthan; 610.5 sq km) received its **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) notification** of 0–1 km. Kumbhalgarh WLS lies in the **Aravalli Hills** — one of the world's oldest mountain ranges.

Flagship species: Indian Wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*) — largest wolf population in a protected area in India. Also home to: **Chausingha** (four-horned antelope — the **only 4-horned bovid** globally), leopard, hyena.

Water divide: The sanctuary straddles India's western water divide — rivers on the east flow to the **Bay of Bengal** (Banas system), those on the west to the **Arabian Sea** (Luni system).

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Environment: ESZ notification process under Wildlife Protection Act; Aravalli ecology; Indian wolf conservation status; Chausingha uniqueness; WPA 1972 Section 26A.

State of India's Environment 2026 — 7 of 9 Planetary Boundaries Breached

The annual **State of India's Environment (SoE 2026)** report noted that globally **7 of 9 planetary boundaries** have been breached. India is particularly affected by: biodiversity loss, freshwater change, land-system change, and novel entities (pollutants). **Coal power generation declined** for the first time in 50 years globally — a landmark transition signal.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India-Germany: Submarine Deal and G4 Partnership

India and Germany deepened their strategic partnership with a potential **₹8 billion (USD) Project 75I submarine deal** involving **TKMS (ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems)** providing **AIP (Air-Independent Propulsion)** technology for 6 conventional submarines — extending underwater endurance from 3–4 days (diesel-electric) to 21+ days.

G4 collaboration: India and Germany are both members of the **G4 group** (India, Germany, Japan, Brazil) — four nations seeking permanent seats on the UN Security Council. Germany actively supports UNSC expansion.

India-EU linkage: Germany is the EU's largest economy; India-Germany partnership accelerates India-EU FTA negotiations (stalled since 2013; relaunched 2022).

UPSC Angle — GS-2 / IR: Project 75I — Strategic Partnership Model under DPP; AIP technology countries (Germany, Sweden, Japan); G4 vs. Uniting for Consensus (Pakistan-Italy-led); UNSC reform dynamics.

India-UAE: $200 Billion Trade Target and LNG Deal

India and UAE set a **$200 billion bilateral trade target by 2032** (current: ~$85 billion). Key development: **ADNOC Gas (UAE) signed a $3 billion LNG deal with HPCL** for 10-year supply — India's largest single LNG supply agreement with a UAE entity.

UAE is also investing in **Dholera SIR** (Special Investment Region, Gujarat) — India's largest greenfield smart city project.

CEPA background: India-UAE **CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement)** signed February 2022 — concluded in **88 days**, making it the fastest FTA India ever negotiated. Covers: trade in goods, services, investment, digital trade.

UPSC Angle — GS-2 / IR + GS-3: India-UAE energy security; CEPA vs. FTA distinction; India's Gulf diaspora (3.5 million in UAE); remittances; Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) investments in India; HPCL's refining capacity.

Spain Joins IPOI

Spain became the **4th major European member** of India's **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)** — after UK, France, and Italy. IPOI has **7 pillars**: Maritime Security, Maritime Ecology, Maritime Resources, Capacity Building & Maritime Safety, Disaster Risk Reduction, Science Technology & Academia, Trade Connectivity & Maritime Transport.

IPOI background: Launched by PM Modi at the **East Asia Summit (EAS), Bangkok, November 2019**. Complements the **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** doctrine (2015). IPOI is **non-treaty, non-binding** — a collaborative framework.

UPSC Angle — GS-2 / IR: IPOI vs. QUAD; Indo-Pacific strategy; EAS role; SAGAR doctrine; India's maritime neighbourhood; Spain-India bilateral relations.

Gaza Peace Process — India Invited

India was invited to participate in discussions around the **Gaza Peace Board** — reflecting India's growing recognition as a neutral facilitator. India maintains diplomatic relations with both Israel and Palestine; supported a two-state solution consistently at the UN.

DEFENCE & SECURITY

Operation Megaburu — Saranda LWE Breakthrough

Operation Megaburu in **Saranda forest, West Singhbhum, Jharkhand** resulted in the neutralisation of **16–17 CPI(Maoist) cadres**, including **Patiram Manjhi alias Anal Da** (₹2.35 crore bounty). The operation was led by **CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action)** — CRPF's jungle warfare specialised force (10 battalions).

LWE context:

> Government's **target: eliminate LWE by March 2026**

Affected districts reduced: 126 (2010) → ~38 (2025)

Naxalbari uprising: **1967**, Darjeeling, West Bengal — origin of Naxalism

Saranda (Jharkhand) has been a Maoist stronghold due to dense sal forest cover and mineral wealth

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Security: LWE vs. insurgency distinction; SAMADHAN strategy; CoBRA mandate; development vs. security approach debate; Scheduled Areas governance (5th Schedule).

Exercise DOSTI 17 — India-Sri Lanka-Maldives

Exercise DOSTI 17 (trilateral coast guard exercise) was conducted in **Male, Maldives** among India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. DOSTI has been held since **1991** — originally India-Maldives bilateral, Sri Lanka joined in 2012. Focus: maritime security, search and rescue, humanitarian assistance.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

National Voters Day — ECI Turns 76

January 25, 2026 marked the **76th founding anniversary of the Election Commission of India (ECI)** and the **16th National Voters Day** (NVD — first observed January 25, 2011).

ECI constitutional basis — Article 324: ECI is a constitutional body; consists of CEC + ECs (as determined by Parliament).

CEC	Tenure	Notable
Sukumar Sen	1950–58	First CEC; conducted first two general elections
T.N. Seshan	1990–96	Transformed ECI enforcement; Ramon Magsaysay Award 1996
Gyanesh Kumar	March 2024–present	First CEC under new Chief Election Commissioner Act 2023

2026 Milestones:

Registered voters: 96.8 crore (2024 general election)

ECINET: 40+ ECI apps integrated into single platform

Delhi Declaration 2026: 5 pillars for global electoral governance (ECI hosted international conference)

EVMs: manufactured by BEL + ECIL; VVPAT slips as paper trail

Chief Election Commissioner Act 2023: Changed appointment committee — now PM + Home Minister + LoP (replacing the previous process of Presidential appointment on PM's recommendation). SC had ruled in *Anoop Baranwal v. UoI* (2023) that Parliament must legislate on appointment.

UPSC Angle — GS-2 / Polity: ECI independence debate; CEC appointment controversy; VVPAT counting; Model Code of Conduct (MCC); EVM security features.

Padma Awards 2026

131 Padma Awards announced (Republic Day eve): **5 Padma Vibhushan (PV), 13 Padma Bhushan (PB), 113 Padma Shri (PS)**; 16 posthumous awardees; 19 women.

Notable awardees:

Awardee	Award	Field
Dharmendra	Padma Vibhushan (posthumous)	Cinema (*Sholay*, *Sholay*, 1975)
V.S. Achuthanandan	Padma Vibhushan (posthumous)	Politics (Kerala CM 2006–11; CPI-M veteran)
Mammootty	Padma Bhushan	Malayalam cinema
Alka Yagnik	Padma Bhushan	Playback singing (most-streamed female artist globally 2023)
Rohit Sharma	Padma Shri	Cricket (India captain)
Harmanpreet Kaur	Padma Shri	Women's cricket
Praveen Kumar	Padma Shri	2024 Paris Paralympics (High Jump gold)

Background: Padma Awards instituted **1954**; suspended **1978–79** (Janata govt) and **1993–97** (P.V. Narasimha Rao govt). Civilian honours (not state honours) — cannot use as suffix/prefix. Announced on Republic Day eve; presented by President at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

UPSC Angle — GS-1 / Culture + GS-2: Padma Awards process (Ministry of Home Affairs nominates; committee screens; President awards); difference from Bharat Ratna (India's highest civilian honour).

Jan Vishwas Act 2023 — Decriminalisation Update

The **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act 2023** decriminalised **183 provisions** across 42 Acts — converting jail terms into monetary fines for minor/technical violations. Reduces ease-of-doing-business barriers and reduces courts' criminal caseload.

SOCIAL ISSUES

India's Demographic Divide — North vs. South

A landmark demographic analysis revealed India's deepening **North-South population divergence**:

Key projections (2051):

India's total population: **1.59 billion** (peak ~1.65 billion before stabilising)

Working-age population peak: **1.01 billion (2041)** — the "demographic dividend window"

North India (UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan): population share rising to **52.7%** of India total

South India (Kerala, TN, AP, Telangana, Karnataka): ageing rapidly — Kerala will have **23–25% population aged 60+** by 2036

The delimitation crisis:

Parliamentary constituency delimitation was frozen based on **1971 Census** (by constitutional amendment); freeze was to end in 2026

Post-2026 delimitation would give the North (higher population) many more Lok Sabha seats — politically contentious for the South

South Indian states that controlled population growth would be "penalised" with fewer seats

School closures: 80,000+ schools closed between 2019–25 due to declining enrolment — concentrated in low-TFR states, reflecting demographic decline.

UPSC Angle — GS-1 / Society + GS-2 / Polity: Demographic dividend timeline; Article 82 (delimitation after each census); Articles 330/332 (SC/ST reservations in proportion to population); federal fiscal transfers (Finance Commission) vs. Lok Sabha representation; North-South TFR divergence.

National Girl Child Day — BBBP at 11

National Girl Child Day (January 24) was observed. **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)** launched **January 22, 2015 (Panipat, Haryana)** — chosen as Haryana had the worst Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB). Progress: SRB improved from **918 girls/1,000 boys (2014–15)** to **~934 (2023–24)**. Still below natural SRB of 950+.

Key legislative tool: **PC-PNDT Act 1994 (Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques)** — bans sex-selective abortions and sex determination.

UPSC Angle — GS-2 / Social Issues: SRB vs. Sex Ratio (total population); BBBP 3 pillars (awareness, enforcement, education); PM Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana linkage; POCSO; MTP Act 1971 (Medical Termination of Pregnancy).

NEP 2020 — International Day of Education

International Day of Education (January 24, UN 2018). 2026 theme: **"AI in Education: Preserving Human Agency."**

NEP 2020 key structures (Prelims):

Component	Detail
Structure	5+3+3+4 (replaces 10+2)
Foundational (5 yrs)	Age 3–8; pre-school + Grade 1–2
Preparatory (3 yrs)	Grade 3–5
Middle (3 yrs)	Grade 6–8
Secondary (4 yrs)	Grade 9–12
NIPUN Bharat	Grade 3 foundational literacy/numeracy by 2026–27
ABC	Academic Bank of Credits — cross-institution credit transfer
PM SHRI	14,500+ upgraded model schools
PARAKH	National assessment regulatory authority

ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) gap: Despite NEP 2020, only ~50% of Grade 5 students can read a Grade 2 text. Foundational learning crisis persists.

Menstrual Health as Fundamental Right (SC)

The **Supreme Court** ruled that **menstrual health is a component of the fundamental right to health** under **Article 21** (Right to Life and Personal Liberty). The ruling directed States to ensure hygienic toilets and menstrual products in schools. This expands the Article 21 jurisprudence (Maneka Gandhi v. UoI, 1978 — right to life includes right to live with dignity).

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Kondagai Lake — 4,500 Years of Monsoon Memory

Scientists at **BSIP (Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences), Lucknow** (under DST) studied **Kondagai Lake, Uttarakhand** sediment cores spanning **4,500 years** — reconstructing monsoon variability. Key finding: the **4.2 Kiloyear Event (~2,200 BCE)** — a severe drought lasting ~200 years — is linked to the **decline of the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC).**

UPSC Angle — GS-1 / History + GS-3 / Environment: IVC decline hypotheses (drought, Ghaggar-Hakra River drying, internal trade collapse); palaeoclimatology as historical evidence; monsoon variability and Indian civilisation; BSIP's mandate.

S4 Solar Radiation Storm — Strongest Since 2003

An **X1.9 solar flare** on January 18 caused an **S4-class Solar Radiation Storm** (on a scale of S1–S5) — the strongest since the **Halloween storms of 2003**. Effects: high-frequency (HF) radio blackouts over sunlit hemisphere, satellite drag increase, GPS degradation. Relevant to India: ISRO monitors space weather for satellite operations; NAVIC and GAGAN affected.

ESIC-EPFO SPREE — 1 Crore New Formal Workers

The **ESIC-EPFO SPREE (Special Drive for Registration of Establishments and Enrolment of Employees)** enrolled **1.03 crore new formal sector workers** — waiving penalty damages under **Section 14B (EPF Act)** and **Section 85 (ESI Act)** for employers who voluntarily registered previously unregistered workers.

Thresholds: EPFO applies to establishments with **20+ workers**; ESIC applies to **10+ workers** (manufacturing; 20+ for others). Both are statutory bodies under Ministry of Labour & Employment.

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Economy: Social security architecture in India; formal vs. informal employment; EPFO's role as India's largest social security organisation; ESIC benefits (medical, maternity, disability, dependent benefit).

📌 FACTS CORNER — WEEK 4 KNOWLEDGEPEDIA (JAN 19–25, 2026)

INTERNATIONAL & TREATIES:

BBNJ Treaty: 60th ratification → entered force; 4 pillars: MPAs, EIA, MGR benefit-sharing, capacity building; "30 by 30" target

India Pioneer Area: ~1,50,000 sq km CIOB; also Carlsberg Ridge (polymetallic sulphides); NIOT operator

UNCLOS: 1982; India ratified 1995; ISA under UNCLOS Part XI; common heritage of mankind principle

India-UAE CEPA: Feb 2022; 88 days negotiation (fastest India FTA); current trade ~$85B; target $200B by 2032

ADNOC-HPCL LNG: $3 billion; 10 years; India's largest single UAE LNG deal

Project 75I: 6 submarines; AIP technology; TKMS (Germany); Strategic Partnership Model; Rs 8 billion

G4: India + Germany + Japan + Brazil; seek UNSC permanent seats

IPOI: 7 pillars; launched EAS Bangkok Nov 2019 by PM Modi; SAGAR doctrine 2015; Spain = 4th European member

Exercise DOSTI: since 1991; India-Maldives (+ Sri Lanka from 2012); coast guard trilateral; Male

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT:

Gangetic River Dolphin: Platanista gangetica; blind; Schedule I; Endangered; National Aquatic Animal 2009; Project Dolphin June 5, 2020; 6,327 counted 2021-23; 2nd survey from Bijnor, UP

Kumbhalgarh WLS: 610.5 sq km; Rajsamand, Rajasthan; Aravalli; Indian Wolf; Chausingha (world's only 4-horned bovid); ESZ 0-1 km; Banas (BoB) + Luni (Arabian Sea) water divide

Planetary boundaries: 7 of 9 breached globally; coal generation fell for 1st time in 50 years

Kondagai Lake: Uttarakhand; BSIP Lucknow (DST); 4,500 years sediment; 4.2 Kiloyear Event ~2,200 BCE → IVC decline

POLITY:

ECI: founded Jan 25, 1950; Article 324; NVD first Jan 25, 2011; 76 years 2026; Registered voters: 96.8 crore (2024)

CECs: Sukumar Sen (1st, 1950-58), T.N. Seshan (1990-96, Ramon Magsaysay 1996), Gyanesh Kumar (from March 2024)

Chief Election Commissioner Act 2023: appointment by PM + Home Min + LoP; SC: Anoop Baranwal v. UoI (2023)

ECINET: 40+ ECI apps integrated; Delhi Declaration 2026: 5 pillars; EVMs: BEL + ECIL

Lokpal limitation: no suo motu cognisance; PM jurisdiction limited (foreign affairs, security excluded)

PADMA AWARDS 2026:

131 total: 5 PV + 13 PB + 113 PS; 16 posthumous; 19 women; instituted 1954; suspended 1978-79 + 1993-97

PV: Dharmendra (posth., cinema), V.S. Achuthanandan (posth., Kerala CM/CPI-M)

PB: Mammootty (Malayalam), Alka Yagnik (most-streamed female globally 2023)

PS: Rohit Sharma (cricket), Harmanpreet Kaur (women's cricket), Praveen Kumar (2024 Paralympics HJ gold)

DEFENCE & SECURITY:

Operation Megaburu: Saranda, West Singhbhum, Jharkhand; 16-17 Maoists neutralised; Patiram Manjhi aka Anal Da (Rs 2.35 crore bounty); CoBRA (10 battalions CRPF); Naxalbari 1967; LWE target March 2026

Jan Vishwas Act 2023: 183 provisions decriminalised across 42 Acts

SOCIAL & DEMOGRAPHICS:

India population 2051: 1.59 billion; working-age peak: 1.01 billion (2041)

North India share rising to 52.7% by 2051; Kerala 23-25% aged 60+ by 2036

Delimitation freeze based on 1971 Census; ending 2026 → North gains seats, South loses

80,000+ schools closed 2019-25 (low-TFR states)

BBBP: Jan 22, 2015, Panipat; SRB: 918 (2014-15) → 934 (2023-24); PC-PNDT Act 1994

Menstrual health = fundamental right under Article 21 (SC ruling, Jan 2026)

EDUCATION:

NEP 2020: July 29, 2020; K. Kasturirangan committee; 5+3+3+4 structure

NIPUN Bharat: Grade 3 foundational literacy by 2026-27; ABC: cross-institution credits

PM SHRI: 14,500+ model schools; PARAKH: national assessment body

International Day of Education: Jan 24; 2026 theme: AI in Education: Preserving Human Agency

LABOUR & FORMAL ECONOMY:

ESIC-EPFO SPREE: 1.03 crore new enrolments; waived Section 14B (EPF) + Section 85 (ESI) penalties

EPFO threshold: 20+ workers; ESIC threshold: 10+ workers (manufacturing); both under MoL&E

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

S4 Solar Radiation Storm: X1.9 flare Jan 18; strongest since Halloween storms 2003; HF radio blackout; GPS degradation; space weather affects NAVIC, GAGAN, satellites

Responsible Nations Index (RNI): India 16th of 154 nations

Open-sea marine fish farming: Andaman Sea; NIOT; first commercial-scale trial in India

Samudrayaan: India's deep-sea mission; Matsya 6000 submersible; 6,000m depth target; 3 crew; NIOT

NGLV Soorya: ISRO's next-generation reusable launch vehicle; under development

Sources: PIB, The Hindu, Indian Express, DD News

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