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Current Affairs Today – January 28, 2026

28 January 2026

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WHY IN NEWS

January 28, 2026 saw an extraordinary convergence of major developments: Republic Day 2026 after-news dominated headlines with Padma Awards (131 recipients), gallantry awards, and DRDO's hypersonic missile unveiling; the India-EU Free Trade Agreement was concluded; and Maharashtra was in shock following the death of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar in a Learjet crash at Baramati Airport.

77TH REPUBLIC DAY 2026 — HIGHLIGHTS

India celebrated its **77th Republic Day** on **January 26, 2026** at **Kartavya Path, New Delhi**.

Theme: “150 Years of Vande Mataram” — commemorating 150 years since Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay composed the national song in 1876 (published in his novel *Anandmath*, 1882).

Chief Guests: In a historic first, **both** top EU leaders attended together:

António Costa — President of the European Council

Ursula von der Leyen — President of the European Commission

First time an EU military contingent participated in a Republic Day parade

Parade facts: President Droupadi Murmu unfurled the National Flag; 21-gun salute by 105mm Light Field Guns; 30 tableaux from States/UTs/Ministries; debut of the newly raised **Bhairav Battalion**; Oscar-winning composer M.M. Keeravani composed a special musical piece.

DRDO display: Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-AShM) made its first public appearance at the parade (see separate article).

Related events: Bharat Parv held January 26–31 at Red Fort; Beating Retreat on January 29 at Vijay Chowk.

DRDO UNVEILS LR-ASHM HYPERSONIC MISSILE

The **Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-AShM)** was publicly displayed for the first time at Republic Day 2026.

Key specs:

Speed: Mach 5+ cruise (average); initial acceleration to Mach 10

Range: ~1,500 km (future variants up to 3,500 km)

Propulsion: Two-stage solid rocket motor

Flight profile: Quasi-ballistic with atmospheric “skips” + low-altitude terminal phase

Purpose: Sea-denial weapon for Indian Navy; effective against all warship classes

India joins the elite club of hypersonic missile nations (currently USA, Russia, China, North Korea).

PADMA AWARDS 2026 — 131 RECIPIENTS

Announced on **January 25, 2026** (Republic Day eve — standard practice). Awarded by the President of India; governed by Padma Awards Committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary. Not “titles” under Article 18 of the Constitution (clarified by Supreme Court).

Breakdown: 5 Padma Vibhushan | 13 Padma Bhushan | 113 Padma Shri **Women:** 19 | **International (foreigners/NRI/PIO/OCI):** 6 | **Posthumous:** 16

Padma Vibhushan (5):

Dharmendra Singh Deol — Actor (posthumous)

V.S. Achuthanandan — Former Chief Minister, Kerala (posthumous)

Justice K.T. Thomas — Former Supreme Court Judge

P. Narayanan — Educationist

N. Rajam — Violinist

Notable Padma Bhushan (13 total): Shibhu Soren (JMM founder, posthumous), Bhagat Singh Koshyari (Former Maharashtra Governor), Mammooty (Actor), Alka Yagnik (Singer), Uday Kotak (Businessperson, Kotak Mahindra Bank).

Notable Padma Shri: Rohit Sharma (cricket), Harmanpreet Kaur Bhullar (women’s cricket captain), Praveen Kumar (Para-high jump, Paris 2024 gold medallist), Savita Punia (women’s hockey goalkeeper), Baldev Singh (women’s hockey coach).

State representation: Maharashtra 15 (highest) | Tamil Nadu 13 | UP 11 | West Bengal 11 | Kerala 8.

GALLANTRY AWARDS 2026 — SHUBHANSHU SHUKLA RECEIVES ASHOKA CHAKRA

Total: 70 Armed Forces personnel received gallantry awards (6 posthumous); 301 defence decorations overall.

Ashoka Chakra (India’s highest peacetime gallantry award) awarded to:

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla (IAF) — For being the first Indian to set foot on the International Space Station (ISS) as part of **Axiom Mission 4 (Axiom-4)**; only the second Indian to go to space after Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma (1984, Soyuz T-11)

Other notable awards:

Kirti Chakra: Group Captain Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair (Gaganyaan astronaut)

Shaurya Chakra: Lt Cdr Dilna K. and Lt Cdr Roopa A. — first women naval officers to receive Shaurya Chakra

INDIA AND EU CONCLUDE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

India and the **European Union** formally concluded **FTA negotiations** (announced around January 28, 2026) — a landmark after nearly two decades of on-and-off negotiations (started 2007, suspended 2013, relaunched 2022).

Key terms:

EU opens **97% of tariff lines** covering **99.5% of India's exports** by value; zero-duty for textiles, apparel, leather, gems, jewellery (worth ~\$33 billion)

India opens **92.1% of tariff lines** covering 97.5% of EU exports; dairy, cereals, poultry protected; automobiles: gradual liberalisation

EU commits across **144 services sub-sectors**; India opens **102 services sub-sectors**

TRIPS-compliant with safeguards for India's generic pharmaceutical sector

Pending: Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) remain as non-tariff challenges

Requires ratification by all 27 EU member states + European Parliament

India is the EU's 22nd FTA partner; combined India-EU GDP = ~25% of global GDP.

UNEP FINANCE FOR NATURE 2026 REPORT

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** released its "**State of Finance for Nature 2026**" report (January 2026).

Key findings:

For every **USD 1** invested in nature protection, **USD 30** is spent on nature-destructive activities

Nature-negative spending (2023): **USD 7.3 trillion** globally (~7% of global GDP)

Government environmentally harmful subsidies: **USD 2.4 trillion** annually (primarily fossil fuel subsidies)

Private sector harmful flows: USD 5.5 trillion (2024) — up 12% from 2023

Nature-based Solutions (Nbs) funding: USD 220 billion (2023); needed by 2030: **USD 571 billion** — 2.5x current level

CBD 30x30 target: Conserve 30% of land/waters and restore 30% degraded ecosystems by 2030 (Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, 2022).

BNHS–JHARKHAND VULTURE CONSERVATION MOU

The **Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)** signed an MoU with the **Jharkhand Forest Department** for vulture conservation.

Duration: 5 years

Breeding centre: Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centre at Muta, near Ranchi

Target species: Oriental White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) and Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) – both Critically Endangered (IUCN Red List)

Background: South Asian vulture populations collapsed by 95–99% due to **diclofenac** (NSAID drug used in veterinary medicine; banned in India in 2006)

BNHS founded: **1883**, Mumbai – India’s premier ornithological and wildlife conservation NGO

RAJASTHAN LAUNCHES RAJ-UNNATI — FIRST STATE PRAGATI REPLICATION

The **Government of Rajasthan** launched **Raj-UNNATI**, a digital governance monitoring system modelled on the Centre’s **PRAGATI** (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) platform.

Rajasthan became the **first Indian state** to replicate the PRAGATI model at the state level. PRAGATI (est. 2015) is a monthly video-conferencing platform chaired by the Prime Minister aggregating data from 50+ central/state applications; reviewed projects worth Rs 14.5 lakh crore as of 2024.

INTERNATIONAL DATA PRIVACY DAY — CONVENTION 108

January 28 is observed as **International Data Privacy Day** annually. It commemorates the signing of **Convention 108** — the first binding international data protection treaty — by the **Council of Europe** on **January 28, 1981**.

India highlighted its **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023** and **DPDP Rules, 2025** on this occasion. The Data Protection Board of India is the enforcement body under the DPDP Act.

NATIONAL VOTERS’ DAY 2026 — ECINET LAUNCHED

National Voters’ Day (NVD) is observed on **January 25** annually — marking the establishment of the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** on January 25, 1950 (Article 324 of the Constitution).

16th NVD (2026): Theme: “*My India, My Vote*” | Chief Guest: President Droupadi Murmu | CEC: Gyanesh Kumar

ECINET: New unified digital platform integrating 40+ ECI applications — launched at NVD 2026. India also hosted **IICDEM 2026** (India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management), which adopted the **Delhi Declaration 2026** (5 pillars: clean electoral rolls, free elections, research, technology sharing, capacity building).

PERSONS IN NEWS

Ajit Pawar (July 22, 1959 — January 28, 2026):

Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister died in a **Learjet 45 (VT-SSK)** aircraft crash at **Baramati Airport**, Pune, age 66

Six-term DyCM; held Finance, Planning, Energy portfolios; represented Baramati constituency for over 3 decades

NCP founder (with Sharad Pawar, 1999); led NCP faction split in 2023; ECI recognised his faction as "NCP" in February 2024

Nephew of Sharad Pawar; associated with Maharashtra's cooperative (sugar) sector since 1982

Mark Tully (October 24, 1935 — January 2026):

BBC's New Delhi Bureau Chief for 22 years; known as "BBC's Voice of India"

Born in Kolkata; lived in India for decades after retirement; age 90

Knighthood: 2002 (KBE); Padma Shri (1992), Padma Bhushan (2005)

Covered: 1971 Bangladesh War, 1975–77 Emergency, Operation Blue Star (1984), Indira Gandhi assassination (1984), Babri Masjid demolition (1992), Bhopal gas tragedy (1984)

Inderjit Singh Bindra:

Former BCCI President (1993–96); Punjab Cricket Association President 1978–2014 (36 years — longest tenure); retired IAS officer (Punjab cadre)

Brought ICC Cricket World Cup 1987 (first outside England; India-Pakistan co-hosted) and 1996 (India-Pakistan-Sri Lanka) to the subcontinent

IS Bindra Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali named in his honour (2015)

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA
77TH REPUBLIC DAY 2026:

Date: **January 26, 2026** (Constitution came into force January 26, 1950)

Theme: “**150 Years of Vande Mataram**” (composed 1876; published in *Anandmath* 1882)

Chief Guests: **António Costa** (European Council President) + **Ursula von der Leyen** (European Commission President)

Venue: **Kartavya Path** (renamed from Rajpath in 2022)

Parade Commander: Lt Gen Bhavnish Kumar

New unit: **Bhairav Battalion** (debut)

Tableaux: **30** from States/UTs/Ministries

Beating Retreat: January 29, Vijay Chowk

DRDO LR-ASHM:

Full form: Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile

Speed: **Mach 5+** average cruise (Mach 10 initial)

Range: **~1,500 km** (variants planned up to 3,500 km)

Propulsion: Two-stage solid rocket motor

First public display: Republic Day 2026 parade

PADMA AWARDS 2026:

Total: **131** (5 Padma Vibhushan + 13 Padma Bhushan + 113 Padma Shri)

Posthumous: **16** | Women: **19** | International: **6**

Padma Awards instituted: **1954**; awarded by the President

Not “titles” under Article 18 (Supreme Court clarification)

Padma Vibhushan: Dharmendra Singh Deol (posthumous), V.S. Achuthanandan (posthumous), Justice K.T. Thomas, P. Narayanan, N. Rajam

GALLANTRY AWARDS 2026:

Ashoka Chakra: **Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla** (IAF; first Indian on ISS — Axiom Mission 4)

Ashoka Chakra = highest **peacetime** gallantry (Param Vir Chakra = highest wartime)

Kirti Chakra: Group Captain Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair (Gaganyaan)

First Indian in space: Wing Commander **Rakesh Sharma** (1984, Soyuz T-11)

INDIA-EU FTA:

EU opens: **97% tariff lines** (99.5% of India’s exports by value); zero-duty for textiles, apparel, leather, gems, jewellery

India opens: **92.1% tariff lines** (97.5% EU exports); dairy, cereals, poultry protected

Services: EU — 144 sub-sectors; India — 102 sub-sectors

Negotiations: Started **2007**; suspended **2013**; relaunched **2022**; concluded **2026**

Pending: CBAM, EUDR, CSDDD (non-tariff measures)

India is EU’s **22nd FTA partner**

UNEP FINANCE FOR NATURE 2026:

Harmful : protective ratio = **30 : 1** (USD 30 spent destructively for every USD 1 in nature)

Nature-negative spending: **USD 7.3 trillion** (~7% global GDP)

Govt harmful subsidies: **USD 2.4 trillion** (fossil fuel)

NbS funding needed by 2030: **USD 571 billion** (current: USD 220 billion)

CBD 30x30: Conserve + restore 30% land/waters by 2030 (Kunming-Montreal, 2022)

BNHS VULTURE CONSERVATION:

BNHS founded: **1883**, Mumbai

Species: Oriental White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) + Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) — both Critically Endangered

Diclofenac ban in India: **2006** (caused 95–99% vulture population collapse)

Breeding centre: Muta, near Ranchi, Jharkhand

RAJ-UNNATI:

State: **Rajasthan** — first state to replicate PRAGATI at state level

PRAGATI: Est. **2015**; chaired by PM; 50+ apps aggregated; Rs 14.5 lakh crore projects reviewed

INTERNATIONAL DATA PRIVACY DAY:

Observed: **January 28** (Convention 108 signed January 28, **1981**, Council of Europe)

India: DPDP Act **2023**; enforcement body: **Data Protection Board of India**

NVD + ECINET:

NVD: **January 25** (ECI established January 25, 1950); Constitutional basis: **Article 324**

16th NVD 2026; CEC: **Gyanesh Kumar**

ECINET: Unified platform integrating **40+** ECI applications

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Padma Vibhushan: Established 1954; Padma Bhushan: 1954; Padma Shri: 1954 — all three instituted together

Vande Mataram: National Song (not National Anthem — Jana Gana Mana is the anthem); Article 51A(a) — respect national song = Fundamental Duty

EU total GDP (27 members + India combined) = ~25% of global GDP

Axiom Space: US private space company; Axiom Mission 4 = 4th private ISS mission

NCP founded: **1999** by Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma, Tariq Anwar (after expulsion from Congress for challenging Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin)

BCCI founded: **1928**; ICC founded: **1909** (as Imperial Cricket Conference); 1987 World Cup = first outside England (India-Pakistan co-hosted)

Sources: President of India, PIB, ECI, DRDO, UNEP, The Hindu, Indian Express

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