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Current Affairs Today – January 31, 2026

31 January 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED**POLITY****ECONOMY****ENVIRONMENT****SCIENCE & TECH****SOCIAL ISSUES****IR****HISTORY & CULTURE****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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Current Affairs Today — January 31, 2026

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WHY IN NEWS

January 31, 2026 was marked by Maharashtra gaining its first woman Deputy Chief Minister, Indian Railways setting a single-day Kavach commissioning record, the inauguration of the 39th Surajkund International Crafts Mela, and a Supreme Court ruling on menstrual health as a fundamental right.

SUNETRA PAWAR — MAHARASHTRA'S FIRST WOMAN DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Sunetra Ajit Pawar (62) was sworn in as **Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra** on January 31, 2026, at **Lok Bhavan, Mumbai**, making history as the state's **first-ever woman Deputy Chief Minister**. Governor **Acharya Devvrat** administered the oath of office.

Background — Ajit Pawar's death: Maharashtra Deputy CM **Ajit Pawar** (66) died on **January 28, 2026** when his chartered **Learjet 45XR** crashed at Baramati Airport (Pune district) in heavy fog while attempting a second approach to the runway at approximately 08:46 IST. All five on board perished — pilot Sumit Kapur, co-pilot Shambhavi Pathak, flight attendant Pinky Mali, Ajit Pawar, and his PSO Vidip Jadhav. Chief Minister **Devendra Fadnavis** declared three days of state mourning.

Sunetra Pawar — profile:

A **Rajya Sabha MP** from the NCP (Ajit Pawar faction)

Wife of the late Ajit Pawar

Elected unanimously as leader of the NCP legislature party (name proposed by Dilip Walse Patil, seconded by Chhagan Bhujbal)

Portfolios assigned: Excise Department; Sports and Youth Welfare; Welfare and Minorities Development

Constitutional context:

Article 163 and Article 164 govern the Council of Ministers in states — CM advises Governor on appointments; Deputy CM is a convention (not a separate constitutional post)

The oath of office for a state minister is administered by the Governor under the Third Schedule of the Constitution

UPSC angle: First woman Deputy CM in Maharashtra’s history — a landmark in women’s political representation. The succession context (replacing a deceased minister mid-term) and the Governor’s role in administering oath are also relevant for Mains GS-2.

KAVACH 4.0 — RECORD 472.3 KM COMMISSIONED IN SINGLE DAY

Indian Railways commissioned **472.3 route kilometres (RKm)** of **Kavach Version 4.0** on January 30, 2026 — the **highest single-day commissioning** of the Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system in history.

Three sections commissioned simultaneously:

Vadodara–Virar: 344 km (Western Railway)

Tughlakabad Junction Cabin–Palwal: 35 km (Northern Railway)

Manpur–Sarmatanr: 93.3 km (East Central Railway)

What is Kavach? Kavach (meaning “armour” in Hindi) is India’s **indigenously developed ATP system** that prevents train collisions by automatically applying brakes when:

A train passes a signal at danger (SPAD — Signal Passed At Danger)

Trains are on a collision course on the same track

Speed exceeds prescribed limits

Technology: Uses microprocessors, **GPS**, and radio communication between locomotives, tracks, and stations.

Safety certification: Certified to **SIL-4** (Safety Integrity Level 4) — the highest globally recognised rail safety standard, with probability of failure less than 1 in 100 million operations per hour.

Current cumulative coverage: Over **1,300 RKm** nationwide (as of Jan 31, 2026)

Previous single-day record: 324 RKm (Kota–Mathura section, West Central Railway)

UPSC relevance: Kavach is frequently tested in Prelims (technology, SIL rating, which zones covered) and Mains GS-3 (indigenous technology, rail safety, infrastructure development). The Balasore train collision (June 2023, 294 killed) renewed focus on Kavach rollout urgency.

SURAJKUND INTERNATIONAL CRAFTS MELA 2026 — 39TH EDITION

The **39th Surajkund International Crafts Mela** was inaugurated on January 31, 2026, at **Surajkund, Faridabad, Haryana**, by **Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan**. Haryana Chief Minister **Nayab Saini** was also present.

Key facts:

Theme: “Local to Global” — celebrating traditional artisans’ journey to international recognition

Theme States: Uttar Pradesh and Meghalaya

Partner Nation: Egypt

Duration: January 31 – February 15, 2026

Venue: Surajkund, Sector 20, Faridabad, Haryana (near Delhi-Haryana border)

Special feature: The **Mela Sathi App** was launched at the inauguration to help visitors navigate the mela and connect with artisans digitally.

About Surajkund Mela:

One of Asia’s largest crafts fairs — started in 1987 (1st edition)

Organised jointly by **Haryana Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, and Ministry of Textiles,** Government of India

Features traditional handicrafts, handlooms, folk performances, tribal arts from across India and partner countries

Named after the 10th-century reservoir (surajkund = “sun tank”) built by Tomar ruler Surajpal near Delhi

UPSC relevance: Theme, partner nation, theme state, venue — all are standard Prelims data points. GS-1 Mains: cultural heritage, folk arts, artisan economy.

SUPREME COURT STAYS UGC (PROMOTION OF EQUITY) REGULATIONS 2026

The **Supreme Court of India** stayed the implementation of the **UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026**, which had been notified on **January 13, 2026**.

Bench: Chief Justice **Sanjiv Khanna** and Justice **Joymalya Bagchi**

Grounds for stay:

“Complete vagueness” in the definition of caste-based discrimination

Clause 3© defined caste-based discrimination only with respect to SC/ST/OBC students — petitioners argued this excluded the general category and lacked equal protection

No mechanism to penalise false complaints, creating risk of misuse

No safeguards against weaponisation

Effect: The **2012 UGC Guidelines** on non-discrimination in higher education will continue to operate until the Court reviews the 2026 Regulations. **Next hearing: March 19, 2026.**

About UGC: The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** was established under the **UGC Act, 1956**. It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Education that coordinates, determines, and maintains standards of university education in India.

UPSC angle: GS-2 Mains — judicial oversight of executive/regulatory orders; higher education governance; equality vs equity distinction under Article 14; role of UGC in India's higher education ecosystem.

MENSTRUAL HEALTH — SUPREME COURT DECLARES FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

In the case **Dr. Jaya Thakur vs Government of India**, the Supreme Court declared the **right to menstrual health** an integral component of the **Right to Life and Dignity under Article 21** of the Constitution — a significant expansion of the fundamental rights jurisprudence.

Directions issued by the Court:

All states and UTs to ensure **free sanitary pads** in every government and aided private school

Gender-segregated toilets with water supply, privacy partitions, and safe disposal facilities to be installed within three months

Pads must be **oxo-biodegradable** (avoiding single-use plastic)

MHM (Menstrual Hygiene Management) corners mandatory in schools for emergency access

Integration of **menstrual and reproductive health education** into school curricula

Strict accountability and compliance reporting mechanism to be established

Significance: This ruling follows the pattern of expansive interpretation of Article 21 by the Supreme Court — the Right to Life has been judicially interpreted to include right to health (Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity case, 1996), right to education (pre-86th Amendment), right to privacy (K.S. Puttaswamy, 2017), and now menstrual health.

UPSC angle: Prelims — Article 21, recent SC rulings. Mains GS-2: women's rights in India, social justice, fundamental rights expansion through judicial interpretation; GS-1: social issues, gender equity in education.

WORLD BANK — NEW COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK FY2026–FY2031

The World Bank Group and the Government of India unveiled a new **Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for FY2026–FY2031**, committing **USD 8–10 billion annually** in financing — a significant increase from **USD 6–7 billion** under the previous CPF (FY2018–FY2025).

Total commitment over five years: ~USD 50 billion

Focus areas:

Job creation — aligned with India’s need to absorb ~12 million young people entering the labour market annually

Private sector development — unlocking private investment in job-rich manufacturing, infrastructure, and green energy sectors

Alignment with India’s **Viksit Bharat** vision (developed economy by 2047)

About the World Bank Group: The World Bank Group consists of five institutions: IBRD, IDA, IFC, MIGA, and ICSID. India is one of the World Bank’s largest borrowers. The Country Partnership Framework is the primary instrument for World Bank engagement at the country level.

UPSC angle: Prelims — CPF quantum (USD 8-10 bn/year), period, World Bank structure. Mains GS-2: India-multilateral relations, development financing; GS-3: investment, employment, development.

NSHIP — INDIA’S FIRST MEGA SHIPBUILDING CLUSTER, THOOTHUKUDI

The Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu established the **National Shipbuilding and Heavy Industries Park (NSHIP)** as a **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** through a **50:50 joint venture** between:

V.O. Chidambaranar (VOC) Port Authority — representing the Union Government

SIPCOT (State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu) — representing Tamil Nadu

Location: Thoothukudi (Tuticorin), Tamil Nadu — India’s first mega shipbuilding and heavy industries cluster

Scale:

2 km waterfront access

2,000 acres total land (1,000 acres for shipyards + 1,000 acres for ancillary industries)

Approved investment: **₹19,989 crore** (under Union Cabinet-approved **Shipbuilding Development Scheme**)

Expected employment: **55,000+ direct and indirect jobs**

Strategic importance: India currently builds only ~1% of global ship tonnage despite having 7,500 km of coastline and 1,382 islands. NSHIP is central to **Maritime India Vision 2030** which targets India becoming a top-5 global shipbuilding nation. China, South Korea, and Japan control ~90% of global ship orders.

VOC Port: Named after **Vanchi Okonnar Chidambaram Pillai**, the early nationalist and first Indian to run a swadeshi shipping line (1906). It is Tamil Nadu’s only deep-water international seaport.

UPSC angle: Prelims — NSHIP, Thoothukudi, VOC Port, SIPCOT. Mains GS-3: Blue economy, maritime policy, Make in India, shipbuilding, port-led industrial development.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2026 — WOMEN'S SINGLES FINAL

Elena Rybakina (Kazakhstan, 5th seed) won the **Australian Open 2026 Women's Singles** title by defeating **Aryna Sabalenka** (Belarus, World No. 1) in a three-set final:

Score: 6–4, 4–6, 6–4

Significance:

Rybakina's **second Grand Slam title** (first: Wimbledon 2022)

Sabalenka was the defending champion (won Australian Open 2024, 2025)

First Grand Slam final since 2008 Wimbledon where both finalists reached the final without dropping a set

Context: The Australian Open is held annually in Melbourne, Australia — the first Grand Slam of the tennis season (January). The other three Grand Slams are: Roland Garros (Paris, May-June), Wimbledon (London, June-July), US Open (New York, August-September).

UPSC Relevance: Prelims (Australian Open 2026 Women's winner, nationality, score).

TWO NEW RAMSAR SITES — INDIA'S TOTAL REACHES 98

India added two new **Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance**, announced ahead of **World Wetlands Day** (February 2):

Patna Bird Sanctuary — Etah district, Uttar Pradesh

A freshwater wetland; critical wintering ground for migratory birds from Central Asia via the **Central Asian Flyway**

Hosts over **60,000 birds** during peak winter season

Threatened by agricultural encroachment and groundwater exploitation

Chhari-Dhand — Kutch district, Gujarat

A **saline and seasonal desert wetland** in the Rann of Kutch region

Expands to **~80 sq km** during good monsoon years; shrinks in dry season

Home to migratory flamingos, cranes, and rare raptors; ecologically unique in India

India's updated Ramsar count: 98 sites — the **most in Asia** and among the highest in the world

About Ramsar Convention: The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was signed in **Ramsar, Iran, in 1971** (hence the name). India acceded in **1982**. Official name: *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat*.

UPSC relevance: Prelims — India’s total Ramsar sites (98), locations of new sites. Mains GS-3: wetland conservation, biodiversity conventions, climate resilience, migratory bird protection.

PAIMANA PORTAL — MOSPI INFRASTRUCTURE MONITORING

The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** operationalised **PAIMANA — Project Assessment, Infrastructure Monitoring and Analytics for Nation-building** — a web-based portal to monitor Central Sector Infrastructure Projects worth **₹150 crore and above**.

Key features:

Replaces the earlier **OCMS (Online Computerised Monitoring System)** launched in 2006

“**One data, one entry**” principle — eliminates duplication across reporting systems

Integrated via APIs with **DPIIT’s Integrated Project Monitoring Portal**

~60% of project data auto-updated (reduced manual data entry burden)

Covers **1,702 ongoing projects** with a revised cost of **₹39.25 lakh crore**

Cumulative expenditure: ₹20.02 lakh crore (**51% of revised cost**)

645 projects (38%) have achieved over 80% physical progress

About MoSPI: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation — nodal ministry for national statistics; publishes National Accounts (GDP), CPI, IIP, and NSS surveys; also monitors infrastructure through its projects wing.

UPSC angle: Prelims — PAIMANA, MoSPI, project monitoring. Mains GS-3: infrastructure, e-governance, project management in India.

PERSONS IN NEWS

Ajit Pawar (1959–2026):

Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra and president of the Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction)

Died **January 28, 2026** in a Learjet 45XR crash at **Baramati Airport**, Pune district, Maharashtra

Five-time Finance Minister of Maharashtra; veteran of Maharashtra politics for over three decades

Son of a prominent Maratha farming family; nephew of Sharad Pawar (NCP founder)

Succeeded by wife Sunetra Pawar (sworn in January 31, 2026 as Maharashtra’s first woman Deputy CM)

Abhijit Majumdar (1972–2026):

Odia composer and music director known for films *Sasura Ghara Zindabad* and *Balunga Toka*

Died January 2026, aged 54, due to liver disease

UPSC RELEVANCE

Sunetra Pawar (Maharashtra first woman Deputy CM; Jan 31, 2026; NCP Ajit faction; Rajya Sabha MP); *Ajit Pawar death* (Jan 28, 2026; Learjet 45 crash; Baramati Airport); *Kavach 4.0* (472.3 Rkm single day record; SIL-4; Indian ATP system; Jan 30, 2026); *Surajkund Mela 39th edition* (Jan 31–Feb 15, 2026; Faridabad, Haryana; theme “Local to Global”; partner Egypt; theme states UP + Meghalaya); *UGC Equity Regulations 2026 stayed* (CJI Sanjiv Khanna; 2012 Guidelines continue); *Menstrual health = Article 21* (Dr. *Jaya Thakur vs GoI*); *World Bank India CPF FY26-31* (USD 8-10 bn/year; ~USD 50 bn total); *NSHIP Thoothukudi* (VOC Port + SIPCOT; 50:50; ₹19,989 crore; India’s first mega shipbuilding cluster); *Patna Bird Sanctuary* (Etah, UP) + *Chhari-Dhand* (Kutch, Gujarat) = India 98 Ramsar sites; *PAIMANA* (MoSPI; replaces OCMS-2006; 1,702 projects; ₹39.25 lakh crore); *Australian Open Women’s 2026* — *Elena Rybakina* (Kazakhstan) def. *Sabalenka* 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

Sunetra Pawar oath — Article 163/164 constitutional provisions; *Surajkund Mela* and cultural soft power; *UGC Equity Regulations* — equity vs equality, judicial oversight; *Menstrual health ruling* — Article 21 expansion; *India-World Bank CPF* — multilateral development financing. **GS-3:** *Kavach 4.0* — indigenous rail safety technology; *NSHIP* — blue economy, *Maritime India Vision 2030*; *Ramsar sites* — wetland conservation; *PAIMANA* — infrastructure monitoring and e-governance.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA
SUNETRA PAWAR / MAHARASHTRA:

First woman Deputy CM of Maharashtra: **Sunetra Pawar** (sworn in January 31, 2026)

Ajit Pawar died: **January 28, 2026**, Learjet 45XR crash, Baramati Airport, Pune

Governor of Maharashtra (who administered oath): **Acharya Devvrat**

CM Maharashtra: **Devendra Fadnavis** (NDA, sworn Dec 2024)

Sunetra Pawar party: **NCP (Ajit Pawar faction)**; designation: **Rajya Sabha MP**

Portfolios: Excise; Sports and Youth Welfare; Welfare and Minorities Development

KAVACH ATP SYSTEM:

Full form: Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system; Hindi: “armour”

Developer: Indian Railways (indigenously); Ministry of Railways

Certification: **SIL-4** (Safety Integrity Level 4) — highest global safety standard

Jan 30, 2026 record: **472.3 Rkm** in single day (previous: 324 Rkm Kota-Mathura)

Sections commissioned: Vadodara-Virar (344 km, WR) + Tughlakabad-Palwal (35 km, NR) + Manpur-Sarmatanr (93.3 km, ECR)

Total coverage as of Jan 31, 2026: **>1,300 Rkm**

Version: **Kavach 4.0**; Prevents SPAD, head-on, rear-end collisions; uses GPS + radio

SURAJKUND MELA 2026:

Edition: **39th** (started 1987); Venue: **Surajkund, Faridabad, Haryana**

Inaugurated by: **VP C.P. Radhakrishnan**

Theme: “**Local to Global**”; Partner Nation: **Egypt**; Theme States: **Uttar Pradesh + Meghalaya**

Duration: **January 31 – February 15, 2026**

Organised by: Haryana Tourism + Ministry of Tourism + Ministry of Textiles

App launched: **Mela Sathi App**

UGC EQUITY REGULATIONS 2026:

Notified: January 13, 2026; Stayed by SC: January 29-31, 2026

Bench: **CJI Sanjiv Khanna + Justice Joymalya Bagchi**

Interim order: 2012 UGC Guidelines to continue; next hearing **March 19, 2026**

UGC established: **UGC Act, 1956**; Ministry: Education

MENSTRUAL HEALTH (ARTICLE 21):

Case: **Dr. Jaya Thakur vs Government of India**

Ruling: Right to menstrual health = integral to **Article 21** (Right to Life and Dignity)

Key directions: Free sanitary pads in schools; gender-segregated toilets within 3 months; MHM corners; reproductive health in curricula; oxo-biodegradable pads

WORLD BANK INDIA CPF:

Period: **FY2026–FY2031** (5 years)

Annual lending: **USD 8–10 billion** (up from USD 6–7 bn under FY18–FY25 CPF)

Total: **~USD 50 billion** over 5 years

Focus: Job creation, private sector, Viksit Bharat 2047

NSHIP THOOTHUKUDI:

Full name: **National Shipbuilding and Heavy Industries Park**

Location: **Thoothukudi (Tuticorin), Tamil Nadu**

SPV structure: **50:50 JV – VOC Port Authority (Centre) + SIPCOT (Tamil Nadu)**

Scale: 2 km waterfront; **2,000 acres** (1,000 shipyards + 1,000 ancillary); **₹19,989 crore; 55,000+** jobs

VOC Port: Named after **Vanchi Okonnar Chidambaram Pillai** (swadeshi shipping pioneer, 1906)

RAMSAR SITES – INDIA:

India total: **98 Ramsar sites** (highest in Asia)

New sites (Jan 2026): Patna Bird Sanctuary (Etah, UP) + Chhari-Dhand (Kutch, Gujarat)

World Wetlands Day: **February 2** (annually)

Ramsar Convention: Signed **1971, Ramsar, Iran**; India acceded **1982**

PAIMANA PORTAL:

Full form: **Project Assessment, Infrastructure Monitoring and Analytics for Nation-building**

Ministry: **MoSPI** (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation)

Replaces: **OCMS** (Online Computerised Monitoring System, 2006)

Coverage: **1,702 projects** worth **₹39.25 lakh crore** (projects \geq ₹150 crore)

Cumulative expenditure: ₹20.02 lakh crore (51% of revised cost)

AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2026 – WOMEN'S SINGLES:

Winner: **Elena Rybakina** (Kazakhstan, 5th seed)

Runner-up: **Aryna Sabalenka** (Belarus, World No. 1)

Score: **6–4, 4–6, 6–4**

Rybakina's 2nd Grand Slam (1st: Wimbledon 2022)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Balasore train collision: **June 2, 2023**; 294 killed; renewed urgency for Kavach rollout

India's Ramsar site additions since 2014: **276% increase** (from 26 to 98)

Central Asian Flyway: Migration route for birds from Central Asia to India, Bangladesh, Myanmar through the Indus-Gangetic plains

SIPCOT: State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu – state-level industrial area developer

Karnataka HC/SC – Article 21 expansions historically: right to health (1996), privacy (2017), menstrual health (2026)

SIL-4 (Safety Integrity Level 4): Probability of failure on demand $< 10^{-8}$ – used in nuclear, aviation, and now Indian railways

Sources: AffairsCloud, InsightsIAS, PIB, LiveLaw, The Hindu

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