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GUJARAT PASSES UNIFORM CIVIL CODE BILL, 2026

The Gujarat Legislative Assembly passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, 2026 on March 26 after a 7.5-hour debate, making Gujarat the second Indian state after Uttarakhand to enact a UCC.

Key Provisions

FEATURE	DETAIL
Marriage registration	Mandatory within 60 days of solemnisation
Penalty for non-registration	Up to Rs 10,000 fine
Live-in relationships	Must be registered with designated authority
Divorce	Uniform grounds applicable to all communities
Inheritance	Equal rights for daughters and sons across communities
Applicability	All residents of Gujarat regardless of religion

Background

Article 44 of the Indian Constitution (Directive Principles of State Policy) directs the State to secure a Uniform Civil Code for citizens throughout India. Uttarakhand became the first state to pass a UCC in February 2024, which came into effect on January 27, 2025. The Goa Civil Code — inherited from Portuguese rule — has been in force since 1961 and is often cited as India's closest existing model of a UCC.

UPSC Angle

The passage raises questions on federalism, fundamental rights (Articles 25-26 on religious freedom vs. Article 44), and the balance between uniformity and diversity in personal laws.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

GUJARAT UCC BILL, 2026:

Passed: March 26, 2026 after 7.5-hour debate

Gujarat: 2nd state to pass UCC (Uttarakhand was 1st, February 2024)

Article 44: DPSP directing State to secure UCC

Goa: Only state with existing uniform civil code (from Portuguese era, since 1961)

Uttarakhand UCC effective: January 27, 2025

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Article 25: Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion

Article 26: Freedom to manage religious affairs

Shah Bano Case (1985): SC ruled in favour of maintenance for Muslim divorced women, sparking UCC debate

Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India (1995): SC urged Parliament to frame a UCC

Jose Paulo Coutinho v. Maria Luiza Valentina Pereira (2019): SC praised Goa's common civil code

IRAN REJECTS TRUMP'S 15-POINT PEACE PLAN

Iran rejected a 15-point peace plan sent by the United States through Pakistan, putting forward its own five counter-conditions as the US-Iran military conflict entered its 26th day.

Key Proposals in Trump's Plan

- One-month immediate ceasefire
- Iran to hand over all enriched uranium stockpiles
- Permanent ban on further uranium enrichment
- Guarantee safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz for all vessels
- In return: US to lift all sanctions on Iran

Iran's Counter-Conditions

- ❶ War reparations from the US and Israel for damage caused
- ❷ Sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz recognised internationally
- ❸ Immediate halt to attacks on Hezbollah and pro-Iran militias in Lebanon and Syria

- ④ Lifting of all sanctions as a precondition, not an outcome
- ⑤ International guarantee of Iran's territorial integrity

Impact on India

India imports over 85% of its crude oil, with a significant share transiting through the Strait of Hormuz (~20% of globally traded oil). The ongoing conflict has disrupted global oil supply chains and added an estimated \$1 billion in extra costs for India in March alone.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

US-IRAN CONFLICT (2026):

- Conflict started: ~March 1, 2026
- Peace plan: 15-point proposal sent via Pakistan
- Key demand: Iran to surrender enriched uranium + ban enrichment
- Iran's response: Rejected; issued 5 counter-conditions
- Strait of Hormuz: ~33 km wide, ~20 million barrels/day transit

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

- JCPOA (Iran Nuclear Deal): Signed 2015, US withdrew May 2018
- P5+1: US, UK, France, Russia, China + Germany — original JCPOA negotiators
- Iran's uranium enrichment: Up to 60% purity (weapons-grade is 90%)
- Pakistan's role: Acting as diplomatic intermediary between US and Iran

INDIA'S OIL IMPORT CRISIS — \$1 BILLION EXTRA COST IN MARCH

West Asian crude price distortions caused by the Iran war have added approximately \$1 billion in extra costs for India's ~21 million barrels of crude oil imported in the first three weeks of March 2026.

Key Data

METRIC	VALUE
Extra cost in March 2026	~\$1 billion
Barrels imported (first 3 weeks)	~21 million
Global oil shipments from West Asia (decline)	Down 43% to 11 million barrels/day
Saudi share of India's March crude	~70% (via Yanbu terminal, Red Sea)
Brent crude range	~\$96–\$110/barrel

Impact Chain

The war has cut global oil shipments from West Asia by 43%. Indian refiners are approaching Saudi Aramco to shift the pricing peg from a West Asian benchmark to a European crude benchmark to reduce pricing volatility. Saudi Arabia has compensated by routing supply through the Yanbu terminal on the Red Sea, bypassing the Strait of Hormuz.

UPSC Angle

This is relevant for GS3 (Indian Economy — External Sector, Energy Security) and tests understanding of India's oil import dependence (85–88%), Strategic Petroleum Reserve, and diversification strategies.

FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

INDIA'S OIL IMPORT PROFILE:

Crude import dependence: 85–88%

Top suppliers: Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Russia, UAE, Kuwait

Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) capacity: ~5.33 million metric tonnes (~9.5 days)

SPR locations: Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, Padur (all underground rock caverns)

India is world's 3rd largest oil consumer after US and China

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Yanbu Terminal: Saudi Aramco's Red Sea export hub, bypasses Hormuz

Brent crude: Global benchmark; traded on ICE Futures Europe

India's oil import bill (FY25): ~\$150 billion

ONGC Videsh: India's largest overseas oil exploration company

FRANCE HOSTS EMERGENCY G7 FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING

France, holding the G7 presidency for 2026, convened an emergency meeting of G7 foreign ministers near Paris on March 26 to discuss the Iran war, reopening of Strait of Hormuz maritime routes, and surging global oil prices.

Key Details

- **Invitees beyond G7:** Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Brazil, India, and EU Foreign Affairs Chief Kaja Kallas
- **Agenda:** Iran conflict resolution, Hormuz maritime safety, oil price stabilisation, Ukraine situation
- **G7 Summit 2026:** Scheduled for Evian, France, June 15–17, 2026

G7 Members

The Group of Seven comprises the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Japan. The European Union participates as a non-enumerated member. India is not a G7 member but has been invited as a guest at multiple summits.

FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

G7 — KEY FACTS:

Members: US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan (+ EU)

Founded: 1975 as G6 (Canada joined 1976, became G7)

Russia joined 1997 (G8) — suspended 2014 after Crimea annexation

2026 Presidency: France; Summit at Evian, June 15–17

G7 represents ~30% of global GDP and ~10% of world population

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Kaja Kallas: EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs (former PM of Estonia)

India has attended G7 outreach sessions (e.g., Hiroshima 2023, Apulia 2024)

G20 (broader forum): India hosted 2023 presidency (New Delhi Declaration)

PHILIPPINES DECLARES NATIONAL ENERGY EMERGENCY

Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed Executive Order No. 110 on March 24, declaring a national energy emergency for one year amid the Iran war's devastating impact on global oil supply.

Key Facts

- Philippines imports 90–98% of its oil from the Gulf region
- Fuel prices have more than doubled — diesel and petrol crossing 120 pesos (~\$2) per litre
- Emergency powers activated for 1 year to manage supply, impose price controls, and fast-track alternative energy projects
- The Philippines is the most oil-import-dependent major ASEAN economy

UPSC Angle

Demonstrates how the Strait of Hormuz disruption creates cascading energy crises in import-dependent nations. Relevant for GS2 (IR) and GS3 (Energy Security).

FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

PHILIPPINES ENERGY EMERGENCY:

Executive Order: No. 110, signed March 24, 2026

Duration: 1 year

Oil import dependence: 90–98% from Gulf region

Fuel price surge: Diesel/petrol above 120 pesos/litre (~\$2)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

ASEAN: 10 member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam)

Philippines capital: Manila; President: Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (since June 2022)

Strait of Hormuz: Connects Persian Gulf to Gulf of Oman; bordered by Iran and Oman

SEBI APPOINTS KV RAMANA MURTY AS WHOLE-TIME MEMBER

The Government of India appointed Kompella Venkata Ramana Murty as a whole-time member of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) for a three-year term.

About the Appointment

- **Previous role:** Additional Controller General of Defence Accounts, Ministry of Defence
- **Earlier:** Served as part-time SEBI board member representing Ministry of Corporate Affairs
- SEBI now has its full complement of four whole-time members

About SEBI

FEATURE	DETAIL
Established	April 12, 1992 (statutory body under SEBI Act, 1992)
Headquartered	Mumbai
Current Chairperson	Tuhin Kanta Pandey (since February 2025)
Composition	1 Chairman + 4 whole-time members + 1 nominee each from RBI, MoF, MCA + elected members
Functions	Protect investor interests, regulate securities market, promote market development

FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

SEBI — KEY FACTS:

Established: April 12, 1992 under SEBI Act, 1992

Initially set up: 1988 as a non-statutory body

HQ: Mumbai (Bandra Kurla Complex)

Chairman: Tuhin Kanta Pandey (since February 2025)

Previous Chairs include: Madhabi Puri Buch (2022–2025), Ajay Tyagi (2017–2022)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

SEBI regulates: Stock exchanges (BSE, NSE), mutual funds, credit rating agencies, FPIs

Appeals against SEBI orders go to: Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT)

SEBI can impose penalties, pass cease-and-desist orders, and conduct investigations

TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS) AMENDMENT BILL, 2026

Parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, which changes the definition and identification process for transgender persons, sparking significant controversy.

Key Amendments

PROVISION	ORIGINAL ACT (2019)	AMENDMENT (2026)
Identification	Self-perceived gender identity	Medical board recommendation required
Identity certificate	District Magistrate issues based on self-declaration	DM issues based on medical board report
New offence	—	Kidnapping/forcing someone to assume transgender identity: 10 years to life + Rs 2 lakh fine

Controversy

- **Opposition view:** Violates the *NALSA v. Union of India (2014)* judgment where the Supreme Court upheld the right to self-identification of gender
- **Kalki Subramaniam:** Prominent transgender activist resigned from the National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP) in protest
- **Government view:** Amendment needed to prevent misuse of self-declaration provisions

FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

TRANSGENDER RIGHTS IN INDIA:

NALSA v. Union of India (2014): SC recognised transgender as “third gender,” upheld right to self-identification

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act: Passed 2019

National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP): Advisory body under MoSJE

Section 377 (IPC): Decriminalised by SC in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018)*

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Census 2011: ~4.88 lakh transgender persons in India (widely considered undercount)

Madras HC (2019): Banned sex reassignment surgery on intersex infants

SMILE Scheme: Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise — covers transgender welfare

DRDO TESTS ADC-150 AIR-DROPPABLE CONTAINER FROM P-8I AIRCRAFT

DRDO and the Indian Navy successfully conducted four in-flight release trials of the ADC-150 air-droppable container from a Boeing P-8I maritime patrol aircraft off the Goa coast between February 21 and March 1, 2026.

Key Details

FEATURE	DETAIL
System	ADC-150 (Air-Droppable Container)
Payload capacity	Up to 150 kg
Purpose	Deliver equipment, medical supplies, rations to ships at sea
Aircraft	Boeing P-8I Neptune (Indian Navy designation)
Developer	Naval Science and Technological Laboratory (NSTL), Visakhapatnam
Parachute system	Aerial Delivery Research and Development Establishment (ADRDE), Agra
Certification	Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC), Bengaluru

Significance

The ADC-150 enhances the Indian Navy's logistics capability for resupplying warships operating far from shore without requiring them to return to port. This is critical for sustained operations in the Indian Ocean Region amid the ongoing West Asia tensions.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

ADC-150 & P-8I:

ADC-150: Delivers up to 150 kg payload via parachute from aircraft to ships

P-8I Neptune: Long-range maritime patrol aircraft; based on Boeing 737-800

India ordered: 12 P-8I aircraft (8 in 2009 + 4 in 2016); all delivered

P-8I capabilities: Anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, ISR

NSTL: DRDO lab in Visakhapatnam, specialises in naval systems

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

ADRDE (Agra): Develops parachutes, aerial delivery systems, aerostats

CEMILAC (Bengaluru): Certifies military aircraft and airborne stores

DRDO HQ: New Delhi; Chairman: Dr. Samir V. Kamat (as of 2022)

HELIUM SUPPLY CRISIS THREATENS INDIA'S SEMICONDUCTOR AMBITIONS

Iran's attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG hub on March 2 disrupted approximately 33% of global helium supply, threatening India's semiconductor manufacturing plans and causing rising costs in hospitals for MRI services.

Why Helium Matters for Semiconductors

- **Cooling:** Helium cools MRI magnets and semiconductor fabrication chambers
- **Carrier gas:** Used in chemical vapour deposition (CVD) processes
- **Leak detection:** Helium's small atomic size makes it ideal for detecting microscopic leaks in chips
- **Lithography:** Used in extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography environments

Impact on India

- Hospital MRI costs rising due to helium shortage
- India's semiconductor fab plans (Dholera, Gujarat — Tata Electronics; Greater Noida — HCL) face potential delays
- India has no domestic helium production; entirely import-dependent

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

GLOBAL HELIUM SUPPLY:

Qatar's Ras Laffan: Supplied ~33% of global helium (byproduct of LNG extraction)

Attack date: March 2, 2026 (by Iran)

Top helium producers: US, Qatar, Algeria, Russia, Australia

Helium is non-renewable — extracted from natural gas reserves

INDIA'S SEMICONDUCTOR MISSION:

India Semiconductor Mission (ISM): Launched 2021 under MeitY

Budget: Rs 76,000 crore (\$10 billion) for semiconductor ecosystem

Tata Electronics fab: Dholera, Gujarat (partnership with PSMC, Taiwan)

Micron Technology: ATMP facility in Sanand, Gujarat (operational by 2025)

INDIA TO HOST 2028 WORLD INDOOR ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS IN BHUBANESWAR

The World Athletics Council confirmed at its meeting in Torun, Poland on March 19 that India will host the 2028 World Indoor Athletics Championships — the first time India hosts this event.

Key Details

- **Edition:** 22nd World Indoor Athletics Championships
- **Dates:** March 3–5, 2028
- **Venue:** Kalinga Stadium Complex, Bhubaneswar, Odisha
- **Events:** 26 events (13 men's + 13 women's)
- **Bid by:** Athletics Federation of India (AFI)

Bhubaneswar's Sports Legacy

Bhubaneswar has hosted multiple international sporting events including the 2018 Hockey World Cup, FIH Pro League matches, and Asian Athletics Championships. The Kalinga Stadium Complex is one of India's premier multi-sport venues.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

2028 WORLD INDOOR ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS:

Host: Bhubaneswar, India (1st time for India)

Dates: March 3–5, 2028; 22nd edition

Venue: Kalinga Stadium Complex

Events: 26 (13 men’s + 13 women’s)

Governing body: World Athletics (President: Sebastian Coe)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

2024 World Indoor Championships: Held in Glasgow, Scotland

India’s first National Indoor Athletics Championship: Inaugurated at Kalinga Stadium (March 2026)

AFI President: Adille Sumariwalla

Odisha CM: Mohan Charan Majhi (BJP)

GARBH-INI INITIATIVE — INDIA’S LARGEST PREGNANCY COHORT STUDY

The GARBH-INI (Group for Advanced Research on Birth outcomes — an interdisciplinary INitiative) programme is enrolling approximately 12,000 women to tackle India’s preterm birth crisis using AI-driven diagnostic solutions.

Key Data

FEATURE	DETAIL
Full form	Group for Advanced Research on Birth outcomes — an interdisciplinary INitiative
Cohort size	~12,000 women enrolled
Repository	1.6 million biospecimens + 1 million ultrasound images
Significance	South Asia’s largest pregnancy cohort
Leading institution	THSTI (Translational Health Science and Technology Institute), Faridabad
India’s preterm births	3.6 million of 27 million annual births

Outcomes So Far

- AI-based pregnancy dating models (more accurate than last menstrual period method)
- Microbiome-based predictors for preterm birth risk
- Rapid point-of-care diagnostics for rural health workers

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

GARBH-INI:

Full form: Group for Advanced Research on Birth outcomes — an interdisciplinary INitiative

Led by: THSTI, Faridabad (under DBT, Ministry of Science & Technology)

Repository: 1.6 million biospecimens + 1 million ultrasound images

India's preterm births: 3.6 million/year (out of 27 million total)

India ranks: 1st globally in absolute number of preterm births

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

WHO defines preterm birth: Before 37 completed weeks of gestation

Global preterm births: ~15 million/year; leading cause of under-5 mortality

DBT: Department of Biotechnology (Ministry of Science & Technology)

THSTI: Located in NCR Biotech Science Cluster, Faridabad

EXERCISE SEA DRAGON 2026 — MULTINATIONAL ANTI-SUBMARINE WARFARE DRILL

The US-led multinational anti-submarine warfare (ASW) exercise Sea Dragon 2026 commenced near Guam on March 16, with India deploying its P-8I Neptune maritime patrol aircraft.

Key Details

FEATURE	DETAIL
Exercise	Sea Dragon 2026
Location	Near Guam, Western Pacific
Duration	2 weeks (started March 16)
Participants	US, India, Australia, Japan, New Zealand
India's asset	P-8I Neptune maritime patrol aircraft
Focus	Detecting and tracking hostile submarines
Total flight hours	200+ cumulative

Strategic Context

The exercise comes amid China's rapidly expanding submarine fleet in the Indo-Pacific. China operates approximately 60 submarines including nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and attack submarines (SSNs). Sea Dragon strengthens interoperability among Quad-adjacent nations for undersea domain awareness.

FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

EXERCISE SEA DRAGON:

Type: Multinational anti-submarine warfare exercise

Led by: US Navy (hosted by Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing)

Location: Near Guam (US territory in Western Pacific)

2026 participants: US, India, Australia, Japan, New Zealand

India's contribution: P-8I Neptune aircraft

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Quad: US, India, Australia, Japan — strategic forum (not a military alliance)

RIMPAC: World's largest multinational naval exercise (biennial, off Hawaii)

Malabar Exercise: India-US-Japan-Australia annual naval exercise

INS Taragiri (F41): New Nilgiri-class stealth frigate to be commissioned April 3, 2026

ARGENTINA WITHDRAWS FROM WHO

Argentina formally completed its withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 17, 2026, becoming the second country after the United States to leave the global health body.

Key Details

- **Notification date:** March 17, 2025 (one-year notice period under WHO Constitution)
- **Effective withdrawal:** March 17, 2026
- **Reason cited:** “Health sovereignty” and dissatisfaction with WHO’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic
- **President:** Javier Milei (libertarian, took office December 2023)

UPSC Angle

Raises concerns about the erosion of multilateral health governance. WHO’s Constitution requires a one-year notice period for withdrawal. The US under Trump initiated withdrawal in 2025.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

WHO — KEY FACTS:

Founded: April 7, 1948 (World Health Day)

HQ: Geneva, Switzerland

Director-General: Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (since 2017)

Members: 194 member states (now 192 with US and Argentina out)

Governing body: World Health Assembly (annual, May)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

WHO Constitution: Article 7 allows suspension of voting rights; requires 1-year notice for withdrawal

US withdrawal: Initiated January 2025 under Trump (effective January 2026)

Argentina President: Javier Milei (La Libertad Avanza party)

India’s WHO contribution: Among top 10 assessed contributors

NBA LAUNCHES INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) introduced a short-term internship programme of up to three months targeting undergraduate and postgraduate students for practical biodiversity conservation exposure.

About NBA

FEATURE	DETAIL
Established	2003 under Biological Diversity Act, 2002
HQ	Chennai
Parent Ministry	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)
Function	Regulate access to biological resources, ensure benefit-sharing
Structure	National (NBA) → State (SBB) → Local (BMC) three-tier system

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY AUTHORITY:

Established: 2003 under Biological Diversity Act, 2002

HQ: Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Three-tier structure: NBA (national) → SBB (state) → BMC (local/panchayat)

India is 1 of 17 megadiverse countries (along with Brazil, Colombia, China, etc.)

Nagoya Protocol: International framework on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS), effective 2014

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity (signed at Rio Earth Summit, 1992)

COP 16 (Biodiversity): Held in Cali, Colombia (October 2024)

India's biodiversity hotspots: 4 — Western Ghats, Eastern Himalayas, Indo-Burma, Sundaland

INS TARAGIRI (F41) — COMMISSIONING ANNOUNCEMENT

The Indian Navy announced that the stealth frigate INS Taragiri (F41), the fourth ship of the Nilgiri-class (Project 17A), will be commissioned on April 3, 2026 by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Key Specifications

FEATURE	DETAIL
Ship	INS Taragiri (pennant F41)
Class	Nilgiri-class (Project 17A)
Ship number	4th of 7 planned
Builder	Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL), Mumbai
Displacement	6,670 tonnes
Indigenous content	Exceeds 75%
Armament	BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles
Supply chain	200+ Indian MSMEs

Nilgiri-Class Ships

- ❶ INS Nilgiri (F39) — commissioned August 2024
- ❷ INS Udaygiri (F40) — commissioned 2025
- ❸ INS Dunagiri — under trials
- ❹ **INS Taragiri (F41) — April 3, 2026** 5–7. Three more under construction at GRSE, Kolkata

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

PROJECT 17A (NILGIRI-CLASS):

Total ships: 7 (4 at MDL Mumbai + 3 at GRSE Kolkata)

Design: Directorate of Naval Design (DND), Indian Navy

Displacement: 6,670 tonnes; length: ~149 m

Stealth features: Reduced radar cross-section, IR signature suppression

BrahMos: Indo-Russian supersonic cruise missile; range 290 km (extended to 450 km)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

MDL: India's premier warship builder (also building Scorpène submarines)

GRSE: Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers, Kolkata

Indian Navy motto: "Sha No Varunah" (May the Lord of Water be auspicious unto us)

Fleet strength: ~130 warships; target 175 by 2035

KAVEH MADANI WINS 2026 STOCKHOLM WATER PRIZE

Kaveh Madani, Director of the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), was announced as the 2026 Stockholm Water Prize laureate on March 18 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

Key Details

- **Age at award:** 44 years (youngest laureate ever)
- **Firsts:** First UN official and first former politician to receive the prize
- **Presentation:** By King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden during World Water Week, August 2026
- **Prize significance:** Often called the “Nobel Prize of Water”

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

STOCKHOLM WATER PRIZE:

Established: 1991 by Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)

Presented by: King of Sweden during World Water Week

2026 laureate: Kaveh Madani (Director, UNU-INWEH)

2025 laureate: Andrea Rinaldo (hydrologist)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

UNU-INWEH: Based in Hamilton, Canada

World Water Week: Annual event in Stockholm, August

World Water Day: March 22 (Theme 2026: “Water for Peace”)

India’s water crisis: 600 million face high-to-extreme water stress (NITI Aayog)

KALPANA SOREN RECEIVES BRICS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT TRAILBLAZER AWARD

Kalpna Soren, MLA from Gandey (Jharkhand) and wife of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, received the BRICS Women Empowerment Trailblazer Award at the BRICS CCI WE Annual Women Summit held at Hyatt Regency New Delhi on March 23.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

BRICS — KEY FACTS:

Members: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa + Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia (expanded 2024)

Founded: 2006 as BRIC; South Africa joined 2010; 5 new members added January 2024

2024 Summit: Kazan, Russia; 2025 Chair: Brazil

BRICS CCI: Chamber of Commerce and Industry

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Jharkhand CM: Hemant Soren (JMM); took office December 2024

Gandey: Assembly constituency in Giridih district, Jharkhand

JMM: Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, founded by Shibu Soren (1972)

RAM NAVAMI 2026 — MARCH 26

Ram Navami, celebrating the birth of Lord Rama, is being observed on March 26, 2026 with the Navami Tithi starting at 11:48 AM and the Madhyahna (birth time) at 12:27 PM.

Key Details

- **Tithi:** Chaitra Shukla Navami (9th day of bright half of Chaitra month)
- **Puja Muhurat:** 11:13 AM to 1:41 PM
- **Madhyahna moment:** 12:27 PM (believed birth time of Lord Rama)
- **Ayodhya celebrations:** Grand events on March 27
- **Bank holidays:** In several states

UPSC Angle

Ram Navami marks the culmination of the 9-day Chaitra Navratri festival. Lord Rama is revered as the seventh avatar of Vishnu. The epic Ramayana, attributed to sage Valmiki, is one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

RAM NAVAMI:

Celebrates: Birth of Lord Rama (7th avatar of Vishnu)

Month: Chaitra (Hindu calendar); Shukla Paksha Navami

Significance: Culmination of Chaitra Navratri

Ramayana: Composed by Valmiki; ~24,000 shlokas in 7 Kandas

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Ram Mandir (Ayodhya): Pran Pratishtha on January 22, 2024

Tulsidas: Author of Ramcharitmanas (Awadhi, 16th century)

Chaitra Navratri 2026: March 18–26

7 Kandas of Ramayana: Bala, Ayodhya, Aranya, Kishkindha, Sundara, Yuddha, Uttara

PERSONS IN NEWS

Kompella Venkata Ramana Murty — Appointed SEBI whole-time member for 3 years. Previously Additional Controller General of Defence Accounts, Ministry of Defence.

Kalki Subramaniam — Prominent transgender activist; resigned from National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP) in protest against the Transgender Persons Amendment Bill, 2026.

Kaveh Madani — Director, UNU-INWEH; youngest-ever Stockholm Water Prize laureate (age 44).

Kalpana Soren — Gandey MLA, Jharkhand; received BRICS Women Empowerment Trailblazer Award.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Gujarat UCC, SEBI appointment, G7 members & presidency, NALSA judgment, NBA under Biological Diversity Act, P-8I aircraft, Project 17A, Stockholm Water Prize, BRICS members, WHO withdrawal process, GARBH-INi initiative, ADC-150

UCC debate (Article 44 vs. Articles 25-26), transgender rights (NALSA judgment implications), G7 foreign ministers meeting, Argentina's WHO withdrawal, India-US defence exercises

India's oil import crisis and energy security, helium supply disruption and semiconductor impact, DRDO indigenous defence development, India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve

Ethical dimensions of mandatory gender identification by medical boards vs. self-identification rights

Sources: [GKToday](#) , [The Hindu](#) , [Indian Express](#) , [Business Standard](#) , [PIB](#) , [DD News](#)

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