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Current Affairs Today — May 24, 2026

24 May 2026 · 12 min read · 7 tags

A quick-read compilation of the most exam-relevant developments of **May 24, 2026** — the International Day of the Markhor, the Quad foreign ministers’ curtain-raiser in New Delhi, China’s Shenzhou-23 launch, CBI’s ABHAY AI helpbot, EPFO’s E-PRAAPTI portal, Maharashtra’s AI Policy 2026, India’s 144-crore Aadhaar milestone, IMD’s heatwave + monsoon-onset bulletin, US Secretary Rubio’s four-day India visit, and a new Indian pole-vault national record.

1. INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE MARKHOR 2026

May 24 was observed as the **International Day of the Markhor**, instituted by **UNGA Resolution A/RES/78/278** (adopted **May 2, 2024**). The 2026 theme drew renewed attention to the **Pir Panjal Markhor** of Jammu & Kashmir, whose numbers have crashed from ~55 (2004) to a handful.

Background

The Markhor (*Capra falconeri*) is a long-horned wild goat distributed across the Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Pir Panjal ranges. It is the **national animal of Pakistan since 1975**. In India, the **Kashmiri / Pir Panjal subspecies** (*C. f. cashmiriensis*) survives in pockets of J&K — its conservation is anchored at **Hirpora Wildlife Sanctuary, Tatakutti WLS and Kazinag National Park**.

Key Facts

- **IUCN Red List:** Near Threatened (global population ~5,800).
- **CITES:** Appendix I.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I (highest protection).
- **Range states:** 6 — Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.
- **Pakistan’s Torghar Conservancy:** Community-based trophy-hunting model recovered numbers from <50 to **1,500+**.

UPSC Angle

- **GS3 Environment:** Species recovery models, community-conservation, CITES vs IUCN frameworks.
- **GS2 IR:** Transboundary conservation cooperation.

MINI FACTS CORNER — MARKHOR

Scientific name: *Capra falconeri*

National animal: Pakistan

Indian habitat: Hirpora WLS, Kazinag NP (J&K)

Resolution: UNGA A/RES/78/278 (May 2, 2024)

IUCN: Near Threatened · CITES: App-I · WPA: Sch-I

2. QUAD FMS TO MEET IN NEW DELHI — CURTAIN-RAISER

EAM S. Jaishankar will host **Penny Wong** (Australia), **Toshimitsu Motegi** (Japan) and **Marco Rubio** (USA) in New Delhi on **May 26, 2026** — the **first Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting** since Washington (**July 1, 2025**). Rubio's four-day India visit (May 22-25) serves as the curtain-raiser; he called on **PM Modi** on **May 23** and extended a White House invitation.

Background

The Quad — India, USA, Japan, Australia — was revived as **Quad 2.0** in **November 2017** on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit, Manila. The **first Quad Leaders' Summit (virtual)** was held on **March 12, 2021**.

Key Facts

- **IPMDA** — Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness, launched at the **Tokyo Summit (May 24, 2022)**.
- **Quad Cancer Moonshot** — launched at **Wilmington Summit (September 2024)**.
- **Quad Fellowship, STEM Fellowship, Critical & Emerging Technology Working Group, Quad Ports of the Future Partnership**.
- Agenda 2026: maritime security, critical minerals & supply chains, counter-terrorism, AI/quantum standards.

UPSC Angle

- **GS2 IR:** Quad architecture, Indo-Pacific strategy, minilateralism.
- **GS3 Security:** Critical-minerals supply chain, maritime domain awareness.

MINI FACTS CORNER — QUAD

Members: India, USA, Japan, Australia

Revival: November 2017 (Manila)

First Leaders' Summit: March 12, 2021 (virtual)

IPMDA: Tokyo, May 24, 2022

Cancer Moonshot: Wilmington, Sept 2024

3. SHENZHOU-23 LIFTS OFF — CHINA'S FIRST YEAR-LONG CREWED MISSION

China launched **Shenzhou-23** atop a **Long March 2-F** rocket from the **Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre** on **May 24, 2026**, carrying three taikonauts — including **Lai Ka-ying**, the first astronaut from **Hong Kong**. One crew member will remain on the **Tiangong Space Station** for about a year, China's first year-long crewed flight.

Background

Tiangong ("Heavenly Palace") is China's three-module orbital station — **Tianhe core (April 2021)**, **Wentian (July 2022)**, **Mengtian (October 2022)**. It will be the only permanently-crewed station once the **ISS de-orbits in 2030**.

Key Facts

- **Crew:** Cdr **Zhu Yangzhu** (second flight, after Shenzhou-16 in 2023), pilot **Zhang Zhiyuan**, payload specialist **Lai Ka-ying**.
- **First Chinese in space:** Yang Liwei — Shenzhou-5, October 15, 2003.
- **Chang'e-6:** First lunar far-side sample return — May 2024.
- **India context:** **Gaganyaan** target 2027; **Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS)** by 2035; **Rakesh Sharma** — first Indian in space (Soyuz T-11, 1984); **Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla** — second Indian in space (Axiom-4, 2025).

UPSC Angle

- **GS3 S&T:** Human spaceflight programmes, space stations.
- **GS2 IR:** Space diplomacy and the China-led ILRS bloc.

MINI FACTS CORNER — SHENZHOU-23

Rocket: Long March 2-F · Site: Jiuquan SLC

Station: Tiangong (Tianhe-Wentian-Mengtian)

Mission length: ~1 year (a Chinese first)

First HK astronaut: Lai Ka-ying

4. CBI LAUNCHES 'ABHAY' AI HELPBOT AGAINST DIGITAL-ARREST SCAMS

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) unveiled ABHAY — AI-based Helpbot for Authentication of CBI Notices on May 15, 2026 at the 22nd D.P. Kohli Memorial Lecture, with sustained citizen-outreach coverage through May 22-24. All CBI notices issued from May 1, 2026 carry a QR code for instant verification.

Background

The I4C (Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre) under MHA reports that ₹2,140 crore was lost to “digital arrest” scams in 2024 — fraudsters impersonating CBI/ED/Customs to coerce victims via video calls.

Key Facts

- **CBI established:** April 1, 1963 — under Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946.
- **Parent ministry:** DoPT (Department of Personnel & Training).
- **First Director:** D.P. Kohli (1963-1968).
- **Current Director:** Praveen Sood.
- **DSPE Section 6:** State consent required for CBI to operate in a state.
- **Cyber helpline: 1930** (I4C, established 2018).
- **BNS 2023:** Sections 318 (cheating), 336 (forgery) — invoked in digital-arrest cases.

UPSC Angle

- **GS2 Governance:** CBI mandate, federal consent issue.
- **GS3 Internal Security:** Cybercrime architecture, citizen-facing AI tools.

MINI FACTS CORNER — CBI ABHAY

Tool: ABHAY (AI Helpbot)

CBI: 1963; DSPE Act 1946; under DoPT

First Director: D.P. Kohli (1963-68)

Helpline: 1930 · I4C: 2018

5. EPFO LAUNCHES 'E-PRAAPTI' FOR INOPERATIVE PF ACCOUNTS

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) under the Ministry of Labour & Employment launched E-PRAAPTI — EPF Aadhaar-Based Access Portal for Tracking Inoperative Accounts in May 2026, targeting ~31.83 lakh inoperative PF accounts, some idle for over 20 years.

Background

EPFO is a statutory body under the **Employees' Provident Funds & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952**. It serves ~7 crore active subscribers and manages a corpus of over ₹25 lakh crore.

Key Facts

- **UAN (Universal Account Number):** launched **October 2014**; 12-digit; portable across employers.
- **EPF rate FY2025-26: 8.25%.**
- **Linked initiatives:** EPFO 3.0 reforms (ATM-card pilot, June 2025), JAM Trinity.
- **eKYC** via Aadhaar enables automatic UAN linkage and claim settlement.

UPSC Angle

- **GS2 Social Justice:** Social-security architecture (EPF + ESIC + APY + PMSYM).
- **GS3 Economy:** Formalisation, JAM-led delivery.

MINI FACTS CORNER — EPFO

Statute: EPF & MP Act, 1952

UAN: October 2014 (12-digit)

FY26 EPF rate: 8.25%

Subscribers: ~7 crore · Corpus: ₹25+ lakh crore

6. MAHARASHTRA CABINET CLEARS AI POLICY 2026

The Maharashtra Cabinet under CM Devendra Fadnavis approved the Maharashtra AI Policy 2026 – projecting ₹10,000 crore investment and 1.5 lakh AI jobs by 2031. Maharashtra becomes the first Indian state with a separate Ethical AI framework.

Background

The policy complements the **IndiaAI Mission**, approved by the Union Cabinet on March 7, 2024, with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore over five years under MeitY.

Key Facts

- **6 AI Centres of Excellence + 5 AI Innovation Cities.**
- **₹500 crore AI Startup Venture Fund** (50:50 with private partners).
- **MCAT – Maharashtra Centre for Advanced AI Training:** target 2 lakh trainees.
- **20% AI-implementation subsidy** for 5,000 MSMEs.
- **Reference frameworks:** DPDP Act 2023 (assented August 11, 2023); EU AI Act 2024.

UPSC Angle

- **GS2 Polity/Governance:** Cooperative federalism in tech policy.
- **GS3 Economy/S&T:** State-level industrial AI policy.

MINI FACTS CORNER — MAHARASHTRA AI POLICY

Investment: ₹10,000 crore · Jobs: 1.5 lakh by 2031

First state Ethical AI framework

IndiaAI Mission: March 7, 2024 — ₹10,371.92 crore / 5 yrs

DPDP Act: 11 August 2023

7. INDIA'S DPI CROSSES 144 CRORE AADHAAR ENROLMENTS

As of March 2026, Aadhaar enrolments crossed 144 crore, PMJDY accounts touched 57.71 crore (up from 14.72 crore at 2014 launch), and India has signed DPI cooperation MoUs with 24 countries. An IMF working paper (April 2026) called India the “leading example of digital public infrastructure”.

Background

The **JAM Trinity** (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) underpins **Direct Benefit Transfer**, which has cumulatively disbursed **over ₹40 lakh crore** since 2014.

Key Facts

- **Aadhaar Act:** 2016 · **UIDAI** established: 2009 (statutory in 2016).
- **PMJDY:** Launched August 28, 2014.
- **UPI:** Launched April 11, 2016 by **NPCI**; **18+ billion monthly transactions** (early 2026).
- **DigiLocker:** July 1, 2015 · **ABDM:** September 27, 2021 · **ONDC:** April 2022.
- **MOSIP** (Modular Open Source Identity Platform) — built by **IIIT Bangalore** — exported as global DPI public good.
- **G20 New Delhi Declaration (September 9, 2023)** endorsed DPI globally.
- **K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India (2017):** Recognised right to privacy as a fundamental right.

UPSC Angle

- **GS2 Governance:** DPI as a public good, India Stack.
- **GS3 Economy:** Financial inclusion, fintech, exportable digital infrastructure.

MINI FACTS CORNER — INDIA DPI

Aadhaar: 144 crore · PMJDY: 57.71 crore

UPI: 11 April 2016 (NPCI) · 18 bn+ txn/month

MOSIP: IIIT Bangalore

DPI MoUs: 24 countries

8. IMD BULLETIN — SEVERE HEATWAVE + EARLY MONSOON ONSET

The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** on **May 24, 2026** declared **severe heatwave conditions** over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi (May 25-27) and West Rajasthan (May 24-30). It also forecast the **southwest monsoon onset over Kerala on May 26 (±4 days) — five days ahead of the normal date of June 1.**

Background

IMD functions under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**. The **Long Period Average (LPA)** rainfall (1971-2020 baseline) is **~87 cm**. The 2026 seasonal forecast: **92% of LPA ± 5% — below normal.**

Key Facts

- **Heatwave criteria (Plains):** $T_{max} \geq 40^{\circ}\text{C}$ AND departure $\geq 4.5^{\circ}\text{C}$.
- **Severe heatwave:** departure $\geq 6.5^{\circ}\text{C}$.
- Delhi maxima expected to touch **45°C** .
- **Andaman & Nicobar** already covered by southwest monsoon.
- India has only **23 functional Heat Action Plans (HAPs)** as of 2025.

UPSC Angle

- **GS1 Geography:** Monsoon system, climatology.
- **GS3 Disaster Management:** Heatwave as a notified disaster, HAP framework.

MINI FACTS CORNER — IMD BULLETIN

Normal Kerala onset: June 1 · 2026 onset: May 26 (± 4)

LPA: ~ 87 cm (1971-2020) · 2026 forecast: 92% of LPA

Severe HW: departure $\geq 6.5^{\circ}\text{C}$

IMD under: MoES

9. US SECRETARY RUBIO'S FOUR-DAY INDIA VISIT (MAY 22-25)

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio undertook his **first India visit from May 22-25, 2026**. He called on **PM Modi on May 23**, inaugurated a new wing of the US Embassy in **Chanakyapuri**, and extended a **White House invitation**. His visit ends just before the **Quad FM Meet on May 26**.

Background

India-US bilateral trade stood at **$\sim \$190$ billion in FY25**. The relationship is anchored by several frameworks: **iCET (May 2022)**, the **TRUST initiative (February 13, 2025, Modi-Trump)** and the **10-year US-India Defence Framework (renewed 2025)**.

Key Facts

- **Major Defence Partner status:** 2016.
- **Strategic Trade Authorisation Tier-1 (STA-1):** 2018.
- **Foundational agreements:** LEMOA (2016), COMCASA (2018), BECA (2020).
- **Defence trade since 2008:** $\sim \$25$ billion.

- **Agenda 2026:** trade reset post-2025 tariff impasse, **GE F-414 engine co-production**, critical minerals, civil nuclear.

UPSC Angle

- **GS2 IR:** India-US strategic partnership, multi-alignment.
- **GS3 Security:** Defence co-production, technology transfer.

MINI FACTS CORNER — INDIA-US

Bilateral trade FY25: ~\$190 bn

Major Defence Partner: 2016 · STA-1: 2018

Foundational pacts: LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA

iCET: May 2022 · TRUST: 13 Feb 2025

10. DEV MEENA & KULDEEP KUMAR EQUAL POLE VAULT NATIONAL RECORD (5.45 M)

At the **29th National Senior Athletics Federation Competition** on **May 24, 2026**, **Dev Meena** and **Kuldeep Kumar** both cleared **5.45 m** in the men's pole vault, jointly setting a **new Indian national record**. The previous mark — **5.40 m** — was held by **Dev Meena** himself, set earlier in 2026.

Background

The **Athletics Federation of India (AFI)** — headquartered at **Hauz Khas, New Delhi** — is affiliated to **World Athletics** and the **Indian Olympic Association (IOA)**. The result is timed for selection trials for the **2026 Asian Games in Nagoya**.

Key Facts

- **Asian pole-vault record:** Huang Bokai (China) — 5.81 m.
- **Sports governance bodies in India:** AFI, IOA, NADA, SAI; **WADA** at the global level.
- **Khelo India** and **TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme)** support elite athletes.

UPSC Angle

- **GS2/GS3:** Sports governance, India's Olympic preparation pipeline.

MINI FACTS CORNER — POLE VAULT NR

New NR: 5.45 m (joint — Dev Meena + Kuldeep Kumar)

AFI HQ: Hauz Khas, New Delhi

2026 Asian Games: Nagoya

Asian record: 5.81 m (Huang Bokai)

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA (MAY 24, 2026)

CONSERVATION & ENVIRONMENT

Markhor (*Capra falconeri*) — IUCN Near Threatened; CITES Appendix I; WPA Schedule I; national animal of Pakistan since 1975; 6 range states.

Indian subspecies: Pir Panjal / Kashmiri Markhor — Hirpora WLS, Tatakutti WLS, Kazinag NP (J&K).

International Day of the Markhor — UNGA A/RES/78/278, 2 May 2024.

GEOPOLITICS & DIPLOMACY

Quad: India · USA · Japan · Australia — Quad 2.0 revived Nov 2017 (Manila); first virtual summit 12 March 2021.

IPMDA — Tokyo, 24 May 2022 · IPOI — Bangkok EAS, 4 Nov 2019 · Quad Cancer Moonshot — Wilmington, Sept 2024.

India-US: Major Defence Partner 2016 · STA-1 2018 · LEMOA-COMCASA-BECA · iCET (May 2022) · TRUST (13 Feb 2025) · 10-yr Defence Framework (renewed 2025).

SPACE

Tiangong modules: Tianhe (Apr 2021), Wentian (Jul 2022), Mengtian (Oct 2022).

Shenzhou-23: Long March 2-F · Jiuquan SLC · first Hong Kong astronaut (Lai Ka-ying).

First Chinese in space: Yang Liwei (Shenzhou-5, 15 Oct 2003).

First Indian in space: Rakesh Sharma (Soyuz T-11, 1984); second: Gp Capt Shubhanshu Shukla (Axiom-4, 2025).

Gaganyaan target 2027 · BAS by 2035 · Chang'e-6 — first far-side sample return (May 2024).

GOVERNANCE & INSTITUTIONS

CBI: Established 1 April 1963 · DSPE Act 1946 · Parent ministry DoPT · First Director D.P. Kohli (1963-68) · DSPE Section 6 (state consent).

I4C established 2018 (MHA); cyber helpline 1930; BNS 2023 §§318, 336.

EPFO: EPF & MP Act 1952 · UAN launched Oct 2014 · FY26 EPF rate 8.25% · ~7 crore subscribers · corpus ₹25+ lakh crore.

AI & DPI

IndiaAI Mission: Cabinet 7 March 2024 · ₹10,371.92 crore / 5 yrs (MeitY).

DPDP Act: assented 11 August 2023 · EU AI Act: 2024.

UIDAI: 2009 · Aadhaar Act: 2016 · 144+ crore enrolments.

PMJDY: 28 August 2014 · 57.71 crore accounts (vs 14.72 crore at launch).

UPI: 11 April 2016 (NPCI) · 18 bn+ monthly transactions.

DigiLocker: 1 July 2015 · ABDM: 27 September 2021 · ONDC: April 2022.

MOSIP: IIIT Bangalore — exportable digital identity platform.

G20 New Delhi Declaration: 9 September 2023 (endorsed DPI).

K.S. Puttaswamy v UoI (2017): Right to privacy is a fundamental right.

CLIMATE & GEOGRAPHY

IMD under Ministry of Earth Sciences · LPA: ~87 cm (1971-2020).

Normal Kerala monsoon onset: 1 June · 2026 forecast onset: 26 May (± 4).

Severe heatwave criterion: Tmax departure $\geq 6.5^\circ\text{C}$.

Heat Action Plans: only 23 functional (2025).

SPORTS

AFI — HQ Hauz Khas, New Delhi · affiliated to World Athletics, IOA.

Pole Vault NR: 5.45 m — Dev Meena + Kuldeep Kumar (24 May 2026).

2026 Asian Games: Nagoya.

Sources: [The Hindu](#), [Indian Express](#), [PIB](#), [MEA](#), [IMD](#), [EPFO](#), [CBI](#), [UIDAI](#).

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International Day of the Markhor 2026: Pir Panjal Population...

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