

Current Affairs - 17 January 2026

STARTUP INDIA @10 - FROM POLICY INITIATIVE TO NATIONAL INNOVATION REVOLUTION

- On January 16, 2025 (**National Startup Day**), the Prime Minister of India addressed the startup ecosystem on the 10th anniversary of the Startup India scheme, launched on January 16, 2016.
- It is a flagship Government of India initiative, launched in 2016, to foster a robust ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship, transforming India into a nation of job creators through support **pillars**:
 - Simplification & Handholding,
 - Funding Support, and
 - Incubation & Industry-Academia Partnership.
- It offers benefits like tax exemptions, easier compliance, seed funding, and **mentorship** to eligible startups, promoting economic growth and large-scale job creation.

Key Highlights of Startup India's Decade-long Journey:

- **Record growth in startup ecosystem:**
 - **Growth trajectory:** Less than 500 startups, and 4 unicorns in 2014. Over 2 lakh DPIIT-recognised startups, and about 125 active unicorns in 2025.
 - **Impact:** Startups → Unicorns → IPOs → creates a virtuous cycle of job creation, and innovation-led growth.
- **Cultural shift - Mainstreaming risk-taking:**
 - Risk-taking is now socially accepted and respected, unlike earlier stigma. Shift from job-seeking **mindset** to job-creating mindset.
- **Government support and funding ecosystem:**
 - Fund of Funds 2.0 (₹10,000 crore) approved in April 2025 to focus on deep tech sectors (Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Quantum technologies, Defence & Aerospace).

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- **Strategic focus on indigenous AI and manufacturing:**
 - **IndiaAI Mission:** 38,000+ GPUs onboarded to democratise access to computing power.
 - **Emphasis on:** Manufacturing, global-standard products, and leadership in new technologies (not mere partnerships) - boosting strategic autonomy, economic security, and data sovereignty.
- **Regulatory reforms and ease of doing business:**
 - **Jan Vishwas Act:** Decriminalised over 180 provisions - promoting Ease of Doing Business, and trust-based governance.
 - **Key enablers:** Self-certification under multiple laws, simplified mergers and exits, and reduction in Inspector Raj.
 - Innovation ecosystem strengthened through **Atal Tinkering Labs**, hackathons, and incubation support.

Challenges and Way Ahead:

- **Sustaining funding:** During global economic uncertainties. Expand access to risk capital and advanced infrastructure (GPUs, labs).
- **Bridging deep tech talent and R&D gaps:** Strengthen deep tech ecosystems through academia–industry collaboration. Integrate startups with national missions (AI, defence, space, climate tech).
- **Ensuring quality scale-up:** Enhance domestic manufacturing under startup-led innovation.
- **Managing cybersecurity:** Ensuring data governance in AI-driven growth.
- **Avoiding regional and sectoral concentration:** Focus on export-oriented and globally competitive startups.

Conclusion:

- As India marks a decade of the Startup India Initiative, the country's startup ecosystem stands at an **inflection point** - moving decisively from rapid expansion to sustainable scale and deeper integration with the real economy.
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BUDGET 2026-27 MUST KEEP THE GROWTH MOMENTUM

- A central policy challenge ahead is balancing **growth-enhancing expenditure** with prudent fiscal consolidation.
- Strengthening the domestic engines of consumption, investment, and productivity requires targeted public spending, especially in infrastructure and social sectors, without undermining fiscal credibility.
- Maintaining India's current glide path of **fiscal consolidation** is critical to containing debt risks and sustaining macroeconomic stability, particularly during a time of volatile global capital flows.

Defence Sector as an Industrial and Strategic Lever

- One of the most significant reform thrusts has been in national defence, not only for security reasons but also as a catalyst for industrialisation.
- Continued prioritisation of capital expenditure is necessary to modernise defence capabilities, with proposals to increase the share of capital outlays to 30% in the coming budget.
- **Enhanced funding** for the Defence Research and Development Organisation would fortify indigenous innovation, while new defence industrial corridors, building on progress in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, could geographically diversify industrial capacity.

Strategic Sectors and Critical Mineral Supply Chains

- India's industrial transition toward clean energy, advanced manufacturing, electric mobility, semiconductors and other strategic technologies is reshaping **resource requirements**.
- Complementing this mission with a tailings recovery programme and dedicated financing could further enhance resource security, reduce import dependence, and foster a circular economy for critical minerals, elements increasingly central to technological competitiveness.



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Export Competitiveness and Trade Facilitation

- In a period of global trade fragmentation, export competitiveness will require more than market access and exchange rate stability.
- Schemes such as the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products remain vital in offsetting embedded costs that erode price competitiveness.
- **Reducing tariff complexity** and rationalising customs slabs would address inverted duty structures that currently penalize domestic manufacturers and discourage value addition within India.

Deepening Capital Markets and Financial Infrastructure

- **Sustained growth** also depends on expanding long-term financing beyond the banking sector.
- Deepening corporate bond markets is critical for large-scale infrastructure, manufacturing, and urban development.

Institutional Efficiency and Dispute Resolution

- A modern economy requires efficient dispute resolution systems.
- India's direct tax appellate system faces significant pendency, especially at the Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals) level, where vacancies approach 40%.
- A dual-track disposal system that differentiates cases by complexity and value could accelerate resolution, reduce uncertainty for businesses, and improve tax administration credibility, an underrated component of competitiveness.

Emerging Technologies and Industrial Scale

- Sectors such as drones highlight India's evolving innovation ecosystem.
 - Global competitiveness in the drone sector will require both R&D and scale.
 - Policy proposals for enhancing production-linked incentives and establishing a dedicated R&D fund would accelerate the commercialisation cycle and bolster export readiness, mirroring approaches adopted successfully by major manufacturing economies.
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KEY FACTS ABOUT VITAMIN A



- It is a **fat-soluble** vitamin **primarily stored in the liver**.
- There are **two types** of vitamin A that are found in the diet.
 - **Preformed vitamin A** is found in **animal products** such as **meat, fish, poultry, and dairy foods**.
 - **Precursors to vitamin A**, also known as **provitamin A**, are found in **plant-based foods** such as **fruits and vegetables**.
 - These compounds are **converted to the active form in your body**.
 - The **most common type** of provitamin A is **beta-carotene**.
 - **Foods with the highest levels** of vitamin A include:
 - **Beef liver and other organ meats**
 - Some **types of fish** such as herring and salmon and cod fish oil
 - **Eggs**
 - **Dairy products** such as cheese and fortified milk
 - **Fortified breakfast cereals**
 - **Orange and yellow vegetables and fruits**, such as carrots, sweet potatoes, mangos, and cantaloupe
 - **Broccoli, spinach, and most dark green, leafy vegetables**
- **Function:**
 - Vitamin A **helps form and maintain healthy teeth, skeletal and soft tissue, mucus membranes, and skin**.
 - It is also **known as retinol** because it **produces the pigments in the retina** of the eye.
 - Vitamin A **promotes good eyesight**, especially in low light.
 - It also has a role in **healthy pregnancy and breastfeeding**.



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- If you do not get enough vitamin A, you have more risk of eye problems such as:
 - Reversible night blindness
 - Non-reversible corneal damage known as xerophthalmia
 - It can also lead to hyperkeratosis or dry, scaly skin.
 - Vitamin A deficiency can be treated with vitamin A supplements.
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KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK



- **Location:** It is situated between the Brahmaputra River and the Karbi (Mikir) Hills, in Assam.
- It is the single largest undisturbed and representative area in the Brahmaputra Valley floodplain.
- In 1985, the park was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.
- **Terrain:** It is of sheer forest, tall elephant grass, rugged reeds, marshes, and shallow pools.

Rivers: The River Difalu, a tributary of the Brahmaputra, flows through the National Park while another tributary, Moradifalu, flows along its southern boundary.

Flora: It is primarily famous for its dense and tall elephant grasses intermixed with small swamplands. It also includes an abundant cover of water lilies, water hyacinths and lotus.

Fauna: It is home to species like Rhino, Tiger, Eastern swamp deer, Elephant, Buffalo, Hoolock gibbon, Capped langur,

- The Gangetic River dolphin is commonly found in the habitat.
 - It is inhabited by the world's largest population of one-horned rhinoceroses, as well as many mammals.
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CSIR INTEGRATED SKILL INITIATIVE



• It is a flagship national programme implemented by the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)**.

• It is aimed at **bridging the gap** between **scientific research** and industry requirements, and employable skills.

• **Objective:** To seamlessly **integrate skill development with science and technology** by leveraging CSIR's vast research infrastructure, widespread network domains.

• It provides **inclusive accessibility**, catering to a diverse spectrum of beneficiaries ranging from

○ Students, young researchers, technical staff, and working professionals to school dropouts, ITI diploma holders, farmers, and rural communities

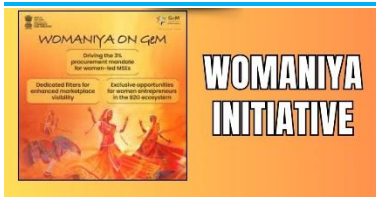
• It emphasizes to **align skill training with real-world industrial, societal, and entrepreneurial demands**.

• **Features of CSIR Integrated Skill Initiative:**

○ It provides structured **short-term and long-term skill development** modules comprising training, **internships, certification courses**, and hands-on laboratory exposure.

○ It equips participants with **comprehensive skill development** in advanced and rapidly evolving technologies interconnected with industry requirements.

WOMANIYA INITIATIVE



• It was launched in **2019**.

• It is a flagship programme aimed at strengthening the **participation of women-led Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in public procurement**.



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- Womaniya was conceived to address the limited access of women entrepreneurs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to government markets.
- It **spurs Women entrepreneurship** by aligning them with opportunities to **sell their products** to various **Government ministries, departments and institutions**.
- By providing a direct, transparent and fully digital interface with government buyers, the initiative eliminated intermediaries and reduced entry barriers that had historically constrained participation.
- **Impact:** The initiative seeks to **develop women entrepreneurship** to achieve gender-inclusive economic growth.

What is GeM Portal?

- **Government e-Marketplace**, shortly known as GeM, is a digital platform that enables buying and **selling of goods and services**.
- It is the **Public Procurement Portal** for procurement of **goods and services** for all Central Government and State Government Ministries, Departments, Public Sector Units (PSUs) and affiliated.
- It was launched in **August 2016**, by the **Ministry of Commerce & Industry**.
- The sole purpose of GeM is to **enhance efficiency; transparency and speed** in public procurement.
- GeM Marks Seven Years of Womaniya Initiative to Strengthen Women-Led MSE Participation in Public Procurement.

ROOT WILT DISEASE



- It is **caused by phytoplasma (bacteria)** is one of the most devastating diseases of coconut palms.
- **Origin:** It is classified as a non-fatal disease of coconut palm and was first identified more than a century and a half **ago in Erattupetta in Kerala**.
- It is not lethal; but it debilitates the **production potential of the palms**.



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- **Transmission:** The disease spreads **through insect vectors**, aided by the movement of wind and uninterrupted stretches of coconut plantations.
- The root (wilt) disease occurs in all major soil types but the **spread is faster in sandy, sandy loam and alluvial soil.**

Factors accelerating spread: Erratic temperatures, especially extremes, and the rise of new sucking pests, particularly whiteflies, have significantly accelerated its spread.

Symptoms of Root Wilt Disease:

- Tapering of terminal portion of the trunk
- Reduction of leaf size
- **Abnormal bending or Ribbing** of leaf lets termed as flaccidity.
- **Flowering is delayed** and also yield is considerably reduced.
- The characteristic symptom is the **flaccidity of leaflets.**

Impact: The tree quickly becomes unproductive, sheds all its nuts, and assumes a distorted appearance.

Management: Breeding resistant and tolerant varieties remains one of the most successful tools for managing phytoplasma.
