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Current Affairs - 06 January 2026

INDIAN AVIATION SAFETY, ITS DANGEROUS CREDIBILITY DEFICIT

- Aviation safety is founded on the principle that even a single loss of life is unacceptable.
- This conviction underpins the global framework established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which stresses collective responsibility and openness.
- The crash of **Air India Flight 171** in June 2025 highlights a disturbing gap between these principles and their implementation in India, raising serious concerns about transparency, regulatory independence, and international credibility.

ICAO Principles and the Centrality of Transparency

- ICAO recognises aviation as an **interconnected global system** in which a failure in one state affects all others.
- Transparency and the free exchange of safety information are essential to collective action, effective regulation, and public confidence.
- Annex 13 mandates independent, non-punitive accident investigations focused solely on preventing future occurrences.
- India, as an ICAO signatory, is obligated to uphold these standards. However, the handling of the AI 171 investigation reflects a retreat from openness, replacing clarity with delay and ambiguity, thereby weakening trust in the investigative process.

The AI 171 Crash and Troubling Indicators

- AI 171 crashed within a minute of take-off from Ahmedabad, killing 241 passengers and 19 people on the ground.
- The rapid recovery of the Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) and Digital Flight Data Recorder (DFDR), with assistance from the U.S.
- National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), underscored the gravity of the event.
- The need for commando protection for the chief investigator further suggested the sensitivity of the findings.
- The preliminary report, released a month later, raised more questions than it answered.



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- It confirmed that both engine fuel control switches moved to cut-off seconds after lift-off and recorded a brief cockpit exchange denying intentional action.
- Since these switches require deliberate mechanical movement, the absence of detailed analysis is deeply concerning.
- The CVR and DFDR should conclusively reveal cockpit actions, crew roles, and ambient cues during the critical seconds, particularly with NTSB expertise available.
- The lack of clarity points to reluctance in addressing uncomfortable conclusions.

A Pattern of Regulatory Weakness

- The AI 171 case reflects long-standing systemic issues. After the **2010 Mangalore crash**, official claims of ICAO compliance were contradicted by later findings of concealed safety violations.
- Following the 2020 Kozhikode crash, promised corrective actions remain largely unimplemented years later.
- The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has repeatedly yielded to political and commercial pressure, **delaying enforcement** of safety requirements and granting repeated extensions.
- The mishandling of the AI 171 crash site, where evidence was compromised and flights resumed without **adequate rescue** and **fire-fighting services**, further illustrates institutional failure and disregard for established safety protocols.

Lessons from International Best Practices

- International practice demonstrates a stark contrast. Following a UPS **MD-11** cargo crash in November 2025, the NTSB conducted daily briefings, rapidly analysed recorder data, and coordinated with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).
 - The absence of similar action after AI 171 strongly indicates that international regulators do not believe a systemic defect exists in the Boeing 787.
 - This suggests that the probable cause lies elsewhere, knowledge that, if withheld, only deepens suspicion about the **investigation's integrity**.
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THE PARALLEL TRACK THAT KEEPS U.S.-INDIA TIES GOING

- Bilateral tensions have been driven largely by **trade and tariff disputes**, particularly U.S. sanctions related to India's purchase of Russian crude oil.
- These measures have coincided with a sharp decline in Indian exports to the U.S. in 2025, underscoring the economic cost of political friction.
- The delayed Quad Leaders' Summit and limited official communication further reflect this uneasy phase.
- India's concerns are compounded by Washington's growing **engagement with Pakistan** and comparatively lower tariff barriers for both Pakistan and China.
- U.S. cooperation with Islamabad, centred on port access and critical mineral supply chains, signals a pragmatic approach rooted in immediate geopolitical and economic interests.
- From New Delhi's perspective, this reinforces apprehensions about shifting U.S. priorities and the possibility of a U.S.-China accommodation.
- Nevertheless, American officials continue to emphasise **India's strategic importance**, indicating recalibration rather than disengagement.

Sustained Institutional and Multilateral Engagement

- Despite strained political signals, institutional cooperation has continued to expand.
- The July 2025 Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Washington launched initiatives covering maritime security, counterterrorism, economic cooperation, critical technologies, and humanitarian assistance.
- The Quad Counterterrorism Working Group's third meeting in December 2025 further reinforced the grouping's functionality and **Quad's operational relevance** beyond leadership-level summits.
- High-level visits by India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and the Indian Navy Chief to the United States fit within this broader pattern of sustained engagement.

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Defence Cooperation as the Cornerstone

- Defence cooperation remains the most stable pillar of the relationship and the defence cooperation cornerstone of bilateral ties.
- Since the 2008 civil nuclear agreement, defence and security frameworks have steadily deepened.
- Foundational agreements such as LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA have enabled logistical support, secure communications, and intelligence sharing, significantly enhancing military interoperability.
- This momentum continued with the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies and the India-U.S. Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (**INDUS-X**).
- A major milestone was the signing of a 10-year Defence Framework Agreement in October 2025, institutionalising long-term coordination, information sharing, and technological collaboration aimed at strengthening **Indo-Pacific stability**.
- Regular military exercises, including Yudh Abhyas, Tiger Claw, and Malabar, continue to deepen trust and operational synergy between the armed forces.

Conclusion

- India-U.S. relations in 2025 demonstrate significant **institutional resilience** despite political headwinds.
 - While leadership-level engagement faces constraints from economic disputes and geopolitical recalibrations, cooperation continues through strong bureaucratic frameworks, reflecting **bureaucratic continuity** and shared strategic interests.
 - Looking ahead, sustaining this momentum will require deeper institutional understanding beyond defence, including regulatory alignment, technological integration, and expanded sectoral cooperation.
 - Ultimately, the durability of the partnership will rest on its capacity to preserve a **long-term strategic partnership** that can withstand short-term political volatility while remaining responsive to an evolving global order.
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POLICE SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING IN INDIA

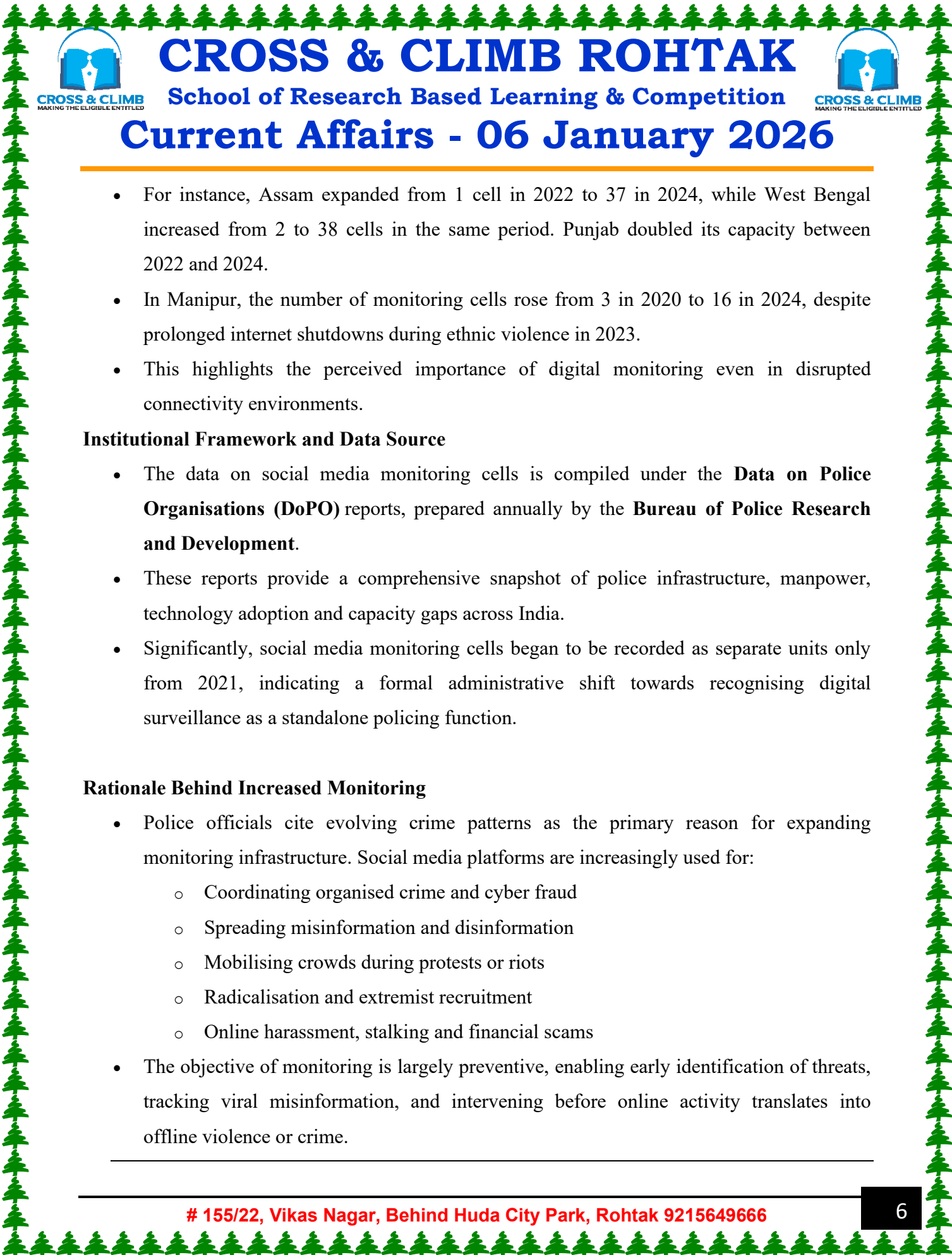
- The rapid expansion of social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat has transformed the nature of crime, public mobilisation and information dissemination in India.
- While these platforms have strengthened democratic participation and communication, they have also become channels for cybercrime, misinformation, hate speech, radicalisation and coordination of unlawful activities.
- In response, policing in India has increasingly incorporated digital surveillance and online intelligence gathering as part of internal security management.
- Social media monitoring has thus emerged as a critical component of modern policing, aimed at both crime prevention and public order maintenance.

Growth of Social Media Monitoring Cells

- According to an analysis of police infrastructure data, the number of dedicated social media monitoring cells across States and Union Territories rose from **262 in January 2020 to 365 in January 2024**.
- These cells are distinct units tasked with tracking online activity, unlike earlier arrangements where such functions were embedded within cybercrime police stations.
- The expansion reflects an institutional recognition that digital platforms require specialised monitoring capabilities, trained personnel, and real-time response mechanisms.

State-wise Trends and Expansion

- The growth of monitoring cells has been uneven across States, reflecting differences in population size, internal security challenges and digital penetration.
- States with the highest number of such cells include **Bihar (52), Maharashtra (50), Punjab (48), West Bengal (38) and Assam (37)**.
- Several States have witnessed rapid scaling up since 2021.



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- For instance, Assam expanded from 1 cell in 2022 to 37 in 2024, while West Bengal increased from 2 to 38 cells in the same period. Punjab doubled its capacity between 2022 and 2024.
- In Manipur, the number of monitoring cells rose from 3 in 2020 to 16 in 2024, despite prolonged internet shutdowns during ethnic violence in 2023.
- This highlights the perceived importance of digital monitoring even in disrupted connectivity environments.

Institutional Framework and Data Source

- The data on social media monitoring cells is compiled under the **Data on Police Organisations (DoPO)** reports, prepared annually by the **Bureau of Police Research and Development**.
- These reports provide a comprehensive snapshot of police infrastructure, manpower, technology adoption and capacity gaps across India.
- Significantly, social media monitoring cells began to be recorded as separate units only from 2021, indicating a formal administrative shift towards recognising digital surveillance as a standalone policing function.

Rationale Behind Increased Monitoring

- Police officials cite evolving crime patterns as the primary reason for expanding monitoring infrastructure. Social media platforms are increasingly used for:
 - Coordinating organised crime and cyber fraud
 - Spreading misinformation and disinformation
 - Mobilising crowds during protests or riots
 - Radicalisation and extremist recruitment
 - Online harassment, stalking and financial scams
 - The objective of monitoring is largely preventive, enabling early identification of threats, tracking viral misinformation, and intervening before online activity translates into offline violence or crime.
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SUPREME COURT BROADENED THE MEANING OF 'TERRORIST ACT'

- The Supreme Court of India centred its bail decision on an **individualised assessment of culpability**, holding that the accused did not occupy the same position within the alleged conspiracy.
- The Court noted a clear hierarchy of roles, rather than treating all accused as equally culpable.
- **Principal Accused: Alleged Masterminds**
 - For Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, the Court found that prosecution material placed them at the level of conceptualisation, direction, orchestration, and mobilisation.
 - They were described as “**ideological drivers**” and “**masterminds**”, allegedly responsible for strategising the transformation of protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act into disruptive chakka jams aimed at paralysing Delhi.
 - The allegations suggested a central and directive role.
- **Co-Accused Granted Bail: Peripheral Roles**
 - In contrast, the five accused granted bail were characterised as “local-level facilitators” or “site-level executors”.
 - Their roles were termed derivative, indicating that they acted on instructions from higher levels of the alleged conspiracy rather than shaping it.
 - The Court held that continued incarceration of these minor participants would be disproportionate, especially since the investigation was complete and the trial had seen significant delays.

How the Law Defines a ‘Terrorist Act’?

- **Section 15** of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) defines a terrorist act as one carried out with intent to threaten India’s unity, integrity, security, economic security, or sovereignty, or to strike terror among people.



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- The provision lists methods such as bombs, explosives, firearms, or inflammable substances, and also adds a broader clause—“or any other means”.
- The prosecution argued that an alleged “chakka jam” (road blockade) planned by the accused could fall under “any other means”, even if it did not involve conventional weapons, because of its intended impact and consequences.

Defence’s Stand: Protest Is Not Terror

- Defence Counsel contended that road blockades are a legitimate democratic protest.
 - Since Section 15 primarily refers to violent methods, he argued that “any other means” should be read narrowly to include only other violent means.
 - **Supreme Court’s View**
 - Rejecting the defence claim that the acts were mere political dissent, the Court accepted the prosecution’s view that sustained choking of arterial roads and systemic disruption of civic life can amount to calibrated acts threatening India’s unity and integrity.
 - When such blockades are planned, synchronised, and timed with international events—such as the Donald Trump visit in 2020—they may prima facie fall within the definition of a terrorist act.
 - The Court emphasised that the focus is not just on the weapon used, but on the **design, intent, and effect of the act**.
 - **Impact on Bail Under Section 43D(5)**
 - Under Section 43D(5) of the UAPA, bail is barred if accusations appear prima facie true.
 - Applying this, the Court found that witness statements, chats, and meeting records established a prima facie conspiracy against Khalid and Sharjeel Imam.
 - As a result, the statutory bar on bail operated fully against them.
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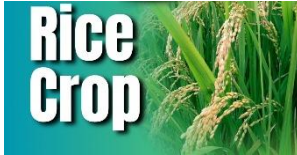
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RICE CROP



- Rice is a **tropical crop** and the staple food for the majority of the Indian population.
- **Growing Season:** It is **primarily a Kharif crop**, grown during the **southwest monsoon season** (June to October) but it can also be cultivated **in Rabi and summer seasons** under assured irrigation.

Required Climatic Conditions for Rice Crop:

- Rice is grown under varying conditions in India **from 8°N to 30°N latitude**.
- The **average annual rainfall** required for rice is **150 cm**.
- **Temperature:** Between **25°C and 35°C**.
- **Soil:** It can be grown on a variety of soils **including silts, loams and gravels** and can tolerate acidic as well as alkaline soils.
- The crop **requires standing water** during most of its growing season.

Major Rice Producing states: It is most commonly cultivated in states such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Odisha, and Assam.

Nutrition: It has a higher nutritional value and rich in Vitamins A, B, and calcium.
