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Current Affairs - 05 November 2025

INTERSTELLAR COMET 3I/ATLAS



- It is the **third known interstellar object** from outside our solar system after **1I/'Oumuamua(2017)** and **2I/Borisov (2019)**.
- It has **hyperbolic orbit and travels at 57–68 km/s speed relative to the Sun**.
- It will exit the solar system permanently after a brief interaction with the Sun.
- This interstellar comet was first seen by a **NASA-supported telescope in Rio Hurtado, Chile**, which is part of the ATLAS (Asteroid Terrestrial-impact Last Alert System) survey.

Physical Characteristics of Comet 3I/ATLAS

- 3I/ATLAS is confirmed to be an **active comet**, with a **visible coma**, a **cloud of ice particles** and dust surrounding the nucleus.
- As it nears the Sun, it is expected to develop a tail, a characteristic cometary feature formed by solar heating.
- Photometric analysis **shows a reddish hue** suggests the surface may be rich in **complex organic compounds or water ice**.
- The nucleus is estimated to be **10–30 km wide**.

What are interstellar Objects?

- These are **celestial bodies that originate outside the solar system**, and travel through it. These objects are **not gravitationally bound to a star**.
 - They can come from other solar systems and be thrown into interstellar space (the area between the stars) due to collisions.
 - The trajectory of these objects is **basically open-ended hyperbolic orbit**, where there is a perihelion point (closest to the Sun) but no aphelion.
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BRICS PAY - REDEFINING GLOBAL FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE

- The BRICS grouping, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has embarked on an ambitious mission to challenge the global financial dominance of the U.S.-led SWIFT system.
- The recent unveiling of the BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative, or “BRICS Pay,” marks a decisive step in their long-standing quest to establish a more inclusive, multipolar financial order.
- This effort aims to promote local currency settlements, protect member nations from Western sanctions, and strengthen the group’s financial sovereignty.
- The motivation behind this move has intensified since Russia faced sweeping Western sanctions in 2014 and 2022, leading the bloc to pursue alternative transaction mechanisms insulated from U.S. influence.

The BRICS Pay Initiative

- BRICS Pay represents the grouping’s most concrete step to reduce reliance on the **SWIFT network**, a Belgium-based system used by over 11,000 banks for global money transfers.
- SWIFT’s control by G-10 central banks, especially under U.S. influence, has long been criticised for allowing the weaponisation of the global financial system through sanctions.
- Each BRICS nation already possesses a robust digital payment infrastructure:
 - **India** - Unified Payments Interface (UPI)
 - **China** - Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS)
 - **Russia** - System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS)
 - **Brazil** - Pix Instant Payment System
 - **South Africa** - South African Multiple Option Settlement (SAMOS)
- Together, these systems form the technological backbone of BRICS Pay, offering a credible alternative to SWIFT within the bloc and potentially to other developing economies.



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Strategic Motivation and Political Context

- The desire to establish BRICS Pay stems from three key motivations:
 - **Financial Sovereignty:** Reducing dependency on the U.S. dollar and mitigating exposure to Western sanctions.
 - **Economic Efficiency:** Lowering transaction costs and settlement times for trade among member nations.
 - **Geopolitical Assertion:** Establishing the BRICS bloc as a counterweight to Western economic dominance.
- The inclusion of **Iran**, a nation long targeted by Western sanctions, in BRICS in 2024 further emphasised the grouping's goal of building a sanctions-proof global payments system.
- However, this initiative has drawn strong reactions.
- Former U.S. President Donald Trump threatened **100% tariffs** on BRICS members if they attempted to “create a new currency or back any other currency to replace the mighty U.S. dollar,” underscoring the geopolitical sensitivity of the move.

Challenges in Implementing BRICS Pay

- Despite its promise, BRICS Pay faces multiple hurdles:
 - **Divergent National Interests:** Each member is promoting its own payment system globally. For instance, India's UPI is expanding into Asia and Africa, while China's CIPS operates in over 120 countries. Aligning these platforms under one interoperable framework remains a major challenge.
 - **Technical Interoperability:** Integrating five distinct digital payment ecosystems requires harmonised regulatory and security standards.
 - **Currency Coordination:** The absence of a unified BRICS currency limits the system's potential to function seamlessly.
 - **Trust Deficit:** Smaller BRICS members may fear Chinese dominance, given the internationalisation of the yuan and its inclusion in the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket.
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QS ASIA UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2026 - INDIAN INSTITUTIONS SLIP AMID RISING EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN COMPETITION

- The **QS World University Rankings: Asia 2026**, released by global higher education analyst QS Quacquarelli Symonds, revealed a **decline in the rankings of most top Indian institutions**.
- Despite improvement in absolute scores, **9 out of 10 leading Indian universities**—including seven IITs—**fell in rank due to stronger performance by universities from China, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Malaysia**.

Key Highlights of QS Asia Rankings 2026:

- **Top performers in Asia:**
 - **The University of Hong Kong** topped the rankings, overtaking Peking University (China), which slipped to second place.
 - National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) shared the third position.
 - **East and Southeast Asian universities**—especially from China, South Korea, and Malaysia—showed consistent upward mobility, driven by investment in research collaboration and internationalisation.

Top 10 Indian institutions in 2026 and their rank in previous years

Top 10 Indian Institutions in 2026 and Their Rank in Previous Years						
Institute/Year	2026	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
IIT Delhi	59	44	46	46	45	47
IISc	64	62	58	52	56	56
IIT Madras	70	56	53	53	54	50
IIT Bombay	71	48	40	40	42	37
IIT Kanpur	77	67	63	66	64	72
IIT Kharagpur	77	60	59	61	60	58
Delhi University	95	81	94	85	77	71
Chandigarh University	109	120	149	185	271-280	-
IIT Roorkee	114	108	116	114	109	103
IIT Guwahati	115	104	111	124	119	117

• Performance of Indian institutions:

- Among the top Indian universities, **IIT Delhi** retained its position as India's best institution but fell 15 places to 59th (from 44th in 2025).
- **IIT Bombay** witnessed the sharpest decline, dropping 23 places to 71st.
- Other IITs—**Madras, Kanpur, and Kharagpur**—also recorded their lowest ranks in recent years.
- The **only** Indian institution showing **improvement** was **Chandigarh University**, rising from 120 to 109.



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Reasons Behind India's Relative Decline:

- **Intensifying regional competition:**
 - Universities in **China, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Malaysia** have significantly improved in research productivity, faculty resources, and global engagement.
 - QS noted a “**clear eastward concentration**” of top performance in higher education.
- **Expanded ranking scope and competition:**
 - **The 2026 rankings included 1,529 institutions**, adding 552 new entrants.
 - **China added 261 new institutions**—more than any other country—while **India added 137**, bringing its total to 294.
 - The expansion **increased competition and volatility** in the results.

Positive Aspects:

- Indian institutions maintained strong scores (80–90 range) in:
 - **Academic reputation**
 - **Employer reputation**
 - **Staff with PhD**
 - **Papers per faculty**
- India continues to expand its footprint with 294 universities represented in the 2026 rankings, the **second highest** in Asia after China.

Conclusion:

- The QS Asia Rankings 2026 **underscore a concerning trend for Indian higher education**—while absolute performance has improved, relative standing has fallen due to stronger regional competitors.
- To climb the global ladder, **India must bridge gaps in research impact, faculty resources, and internationalisation**, aligning with the NEP 2020 vision of making Indian universities globally competitive and innovation-driven.



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INDIA'S FORESTS HOLD THE FUTURE

- As India charts its path toward **sustainable development** while pursuing rapid economic growth, forests are gaining renewed prominence in the country's **climate and ecological agenda**.
- The revised **Green India Mission (GIM)** aims to restore **25 million hectares of degraded forest and non-forest land by 2030**, aligning with India's pledge to create an **additional carbon sink of up to 3.39 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent**.
- However, the success of this mission will depend not only on the number of trees planted, but also on **how restoration is conceptualised, implemented, and sustained**.
- With climate change reducing forest productivity and communities increasingly demanding participation, India stands at a defining moment in shaping its **forest-restoration paradigm**.

Pillars of Forest Restoration Efforts in India

- **Community Participation: The Social Foundation**
 - Forest restoration in India is inseparable from the lives of nearly **200 million people** who depend on forests for subsistence.
 - Laws such as the **Forest Rights Act (2006)** empower communities to protect and manage their landscapes.
 - However, many plantation initiatives continue to bypass local consent, creating **social conflict, legal challenges, and mistrust**.
- **Ecological Design and Native Species**
 - India's earlier afforestation programmes relied heavily on **monocultures of eucalyptus and acacia**, fast-growing but **ecologically harmful, water-depleting, and biodiversity-suppressing**.
 - The revised GIM advocates a shift toward **native, site-specific species**, a crucial step in building **ecosystem resilience**.



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- **Financing and Institutional Alignment**

- India's restoration ambitions are backed by substantial resources; the **CAMPA Fund alone holds ₹95,000 crore**.
- However, utilisation remains **uneven and inefficient**, with Delhi using only **23%** of its approved funds between 2019 and 2024. The challenge is not funding alone, but **smart, accountable deployment**.
- Innovative financing initiatives—such as **Himachal Pradesh's biochar-carbon credits programme** and **Uttar Pradesh's carbon-market-linked village plantation efforts**, signal emerging models for **climate financing and local economic integration**.
- To strengthen implementation, India needs:
 - **Transparent public monitoring dashboards**
 - **Training for frontline forest staff**
 - **Community-led planning and monitoring**
 - **Flexible use of CAMPA funds for people-centric restoration**

Conclusion

- India possesses **strong laws, institutional frameworks, financial resources, and promising state-level models**. What it needs now is **alignment, capacity, and inclusive governance**.
 - As India moves toward **Viksit Bharat 2047**, forests must be understood not as environmental luxuries, but as **economic and ecological capital essential for the country's future**.
 - The restoration of **25 million hectares** will not be easy; Yet, pursued with **scientific rigour, social inclusion, and ecological wisdom**, it has the potential to **redefine global restoration practices**, empower communities, and build forests that are **resilient, biodiverse, and climate-adaptive**.
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BANDIPUR TIGER RESERVE (BTR)



- It is situated in the Mysore and Chamarajanagar revenue districts of southern Karnataka.

- It is located at the **tri-junction area** of the States of **Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala**.
- Geographically, it is an “**ecological confluence**” of the **Western and Eastern Ghats**.
- It was **once a hunting ground** for the rulers of the neighbouring **kingdom of Mysore**.
- It is **part of the larger Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve**, which is recognized as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

BTR is surrounded by:

- **Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (Tamil Nadu)** in the North West (Kabini Reservoir separates the two).
 - **Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (Tamil Nadu)** in the South.
 - **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (Kerala)** in the South West.
 - **Rivers:** It is surrounded by **River Kabini** in its north and **River Moyar** in its south.
 - **Climate:** Bandipur has a typical **tropical climate** with **distinct wet and dry seasons**.
 - **Flora:**
 - It comprises diverse vegetation of **dry deciduous to tropical mixed deciduous**.
 - It includes **rosewood, Indian kino tree, sandalwood, Indian laurel, clumping bamboo, and giant clumping bamboo, etc.**
 - **Fauna:**
 - It is a shelter for the **largest population of wild Asian elephants** in South Asia.
 - It comprises other mammals such as the **Bengal tiger, gaur, sloth bear, golden jackal, dhole, and four-horned antelope, etc.**
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INDIAN MOUSE DEER



- The Indian Mouse Deer, or **Indian Spotted Chevrotain**, is a species of **even-toed ungulate** belonging to the family Tragulidae.

- Scientific Name: *Moschiola indica*

- It is the **smallest deer species found in India** and is known for its **elusive and shy nature**.

- **Distribution:**

- It is **endemic to the Indian Subcontinent**.
- It is mainly found in **peninsular India**, with some old records from **Nepal**.
- **Sri Lanka** has a separate species called the **spotted chevrotain** (*Moschiola meminna*).
- **Within India**, it is commonly encountered in a number of forest areas along the **Western Ghats**, in the **Eastern Ghats up to Orissa**, and in the **forests of central India**.

- **Features:**

- It is **small**, 25-30 cm at shoulder height, and weighs from two to four kg.
- The **fur color is dark brown with white underparts**.
- There are four or five **light rows of white spots on the back**.
- **Males** of this species have **tusk-like upper canines**.
- A unique feature of this group is that instead of a four-chambered stomach like in other ruminants, they have a **three-chambered stomach**.
- **Diet:** It forages on the forest floor for **fruits, roots, leaves**, and herbs. It has occasionally been observed eating **insects, crustaceans**, and even small mammals.
- **Life Span: 8 to 12 years**.

- **Conservation Status:**

- IUCN: **Least Concern**
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