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AI MEETS DIPLOMACY: INDIAN MISSIONS TURN TO AI AVATARS TO SERVE THE DIASPORA

Indian missions abroad are increasingly deploying AI-enabled videos and digital tools to educate and assist the Indian diaspora, marking a shift from traditional text-based advisories to more accessible, engaging formats.

The Sarathi Initiative

- The Consulate General of India in Munich launched an **AI-enabled video awareness series** featuring a virtual avatar named 'Sarathi', a month ago.
- Sarathi addresses common issues faced by Indians abroad — passports, visas, OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) services, birth registration, police clearance, and consular matters — through short videos.
- Officials describe the goal as leveraging artificial intelligence and modern digital communication tools to educate and assist the regional diaspora.
- The shift to audio-visual content over text-based advisories aims to make information more accessible and easier to comprehend for a wider, more diverse audience.

Origins: The Heads of Mission Conference

- The initiative emerged from brainstorming at the **11th Heads of Mission Conference**, held in April 2026, themed '**Reforming Indian Diplomacy for 2047**'.
 - PM Narendra Modi addressed over 180 Indian envoys at the conference, stressing the 3Ts — Tourism, Technology, and Trade.
- Discussions flagged that Indian missions were lagging in using technology for diaspora outreach, and stressed the need for messaging that is "engaging, interactive and contemporary."
- Officials linked the initiative to govt.'s broader emphasis on citizen-centric governance.

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Broader AI and Digital Push Across Missions

- Indian missions are integrating the government's **Bhashini AI platform** — a voice-first tool enabling seamless translation of text, documents, and voice across dozens of Indian and international languages — to bridge multilingual communication gaps.
- Several missions have deployed chatbots and digital assistants over recent years:
 - New York Consulate** (serving 10 US states, ~2.5 million diaspora members) was among the first, deploying chatbot '**Bharati**' for subject-specific queries.
 - Dubai Consulate General** has integrated AI/chatbot technology into its Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (PBSK) digital services, developed with Zoho Corp, to assist Indian workers.
 - The Indian Embassy in Hungary (also serving Bosnia and Herzegovina) has a '**Bharati**' chatbot on its website.
- The current emphasis is on channelising these platforms to multiply outreach and shift messaging from standard text replies to more visual and interactive formats.

India as a Testbed for the Global South

- India's real AI opportunity lies in **applying it at scale**, leveraging its vast population and digital infrastructure.
- The "**India Stack**" — comprising Aadhaar, UPI, and financial inclusion programmes — has already proven that technology can be deployed at population scale.
- The next step: building an AI layer atop this digital public infrastructure, creating a model that could extend to other emerging economies.
- This positions India as a potential gateway to the Global South, offering cost-effective AI solutions to underserved markets across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Conclusion

India's AI strategy is increasingly intertwined with its global diaspora — not merely as a source of capital or talent, but as connectors linking ecosystems, ideas, and markets across borders.

As AI reshapes the global technology landscape, this diaspora network, may prove to be one of India's most valuable strategic assets in defining its role in the world's AI future.

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PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS (PREVENTION OF UNFAIR MEANS) AMENDMENT BILL

2026

- The Parliament has passed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 in the aftermath of the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak, widespread student protests, and growing concerns over the **credibility** of competitive examinations.
- The Bill **amends** the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, introducing stricter penalties, time-bound investigations, and special fast-track courts to curb examination malpractices.

The Amendment Bill:

- **Key objectives:**
 - Strengthen deterrence against organised examination fraud.
 - Ensure time-bound investigation and adjudication of offences.
 - Improve institutional accountability.
 - Protect the integrity, transparency and merit-based nature of public examinations.
- **Major provisions:**
 - **Time-bound investigation and trial:**
 - Investigation by police, central agencies or Special Task Forces must be completed within 60 days.
 - Trials in designated special fast-track courts must conclude within three months of filing the chargesheet.
 - Appeals before the High Courts are to be heard by a two-judge Division Bench and disposed of within three months.
- **Enhanced punishments:** The Bill substantially increases penalties under the 2024 Act.
 - **For general offences (Section 10(1)):** Imprisonment increased from 3–5 years to 5–10 years. Maximum fine increased from ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh.
 - **For service providers:** Maximum fine raised from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore. The debarment period extended from 4 years to 8 years.

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- **For directors and senior management:** Minimum fine increased from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore. Imprisonment increased from 3–10 years to 5–10 years.
- **For organised crime networks (Section 11):** Minimum imprisonment enhanced from 5 years to 7 years. Maximum fine increased from ₹1 crore to ₹10 crore.
- **Measures to reduce procedural delays:** The Bill introduces procedural reforms to accelerate justice -
 - Courts can't grant adjournments beyond the following day except for recorded exceptional reasons.
 - All pending cases under the 2024 Act will be transferred to special fast-track courts.
 - States and Union Territories must appoint special public prosecutors exclusively for these cases.

Expert Views:

- **Systemic challenges identified by the Law Commission:** Persistent bottlenecks delaying criminal trials include -
 - Non-production or absence of accused persons.
 - Failure to apprehend absconding offenders.
 - Frequent and unnecessary adjournments.
 - Non-attendance of official witnesses.
 - Weak judicial case management.
 - Inadequate judicial manpower and court infrastructure.
- **Performance of the 2024 Act:**
 - Despite introducing a legal framework against examination malpractices, the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 **failed** to secure a single conviction during its two years of operation.
 - This underscores deficiencies in enforcement and prosecution.
- **Significance of Amendment Bill for Governance:**
 - Seeks to restore public confidence in merit-based selection.
 - Success will depend not only on stricter penalties but also on institutional capacity, investigative accountability, judicial infrastructure, and effective implementation.

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SUPREME COURT COLLEGIUM SYSTEM - TRANSPARENCY IN JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

- The **Collegium System** is the mechanism through which judges of the **Supreme Court** and **High Courts** are appointed and transferred.
- It is a judicially evolved system and does not find explicit mention in the Constitution.

Composition

- The Supreme Court Collegium comprises:
 - Chief Justice of India (CJI)
 - Four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court

It recommends:

- Appointment of Supreme Court judges
- Appointment of High Court Chief Justices
- Appointment and transfer of High Court judges
- A High Court Collegium consists of:
 - Chief Justice of the High Court
 - Two senior-most judges of the High Court
 - It recommends names for appointment as High Court judges.

The Collegium recommends names after considering:

- Merit and judicial competence
- Seniority
- Integrity
- Representation of different regions and communities
- The recommendations are forwarded to the Union Government. While the government may seek reconsideration, if the Collegium reiterates its recommendation, convention requires the government to accept it.

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Need for Transparency in Judicial Appointments

- Judicial appointments directly affect the independence, credibility, and efficiency of the judiciary. Transparency in the appointment process helps:
 - Strengthen public confidence in the judiciary
 - Ensure accountability in decision-making
 - Recognise deserving candidates based on merit
 - Reduce perceptions of arbitrariness
 - Promote institutional legitimacy
- At the same time, the process must maintain confidentiality where necessary to protect the independence of judicial deliberations.

Supreme Court Judge Ujjal Bhuyan made these observations while delivering the keynote address at an event.

- **Concern Over Absence of Reasons**
 - Justice Bhuyan observed that the last three resolutions of the Supreme Court Collegium contained no reasons for recommending judges for elevation.
 - **Transparency Enhances Public Confidence**
 - Justice Bhuyan stated that recording reasons for judicial appointments strengthens public trust in the institution.
 - **Recognition of Deserving Candidates**
 - Justice Bhuyan pointed out that the absence of reasons also disadvantages deserving judges.
 - **Risk of Unsuitable Appointments**
 - Justice Bhuyan cautioned that withholding reasons could create space for unsuitable individuals to enter the higher judiciary.
 - He argued that judicial appointments should involve meaningful discussion and recorded reasons.
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KEY FACTS ABOUT LOHAGAD FORT



- Lohagad, also known as **Iron Fort**, is a **hill fort** located near Lonavala in the **Pune district, Maharashtra**.
- The mountain **divides basins of the Pavana and the Indrayani rivers**, and the Lohagad fort **overlooks the Pavana reservoir** situated south of the mountain range.
- The **Visapur fort** is located on its **eastern side**.
- It is a **UNESCO world heritage site**.
- **Architecture:**
 - The **fort boasts four grand gates**—Ganesh Darwaja, Narayan Darwaja, Hanuman Darwaja, and Maha Darwaja—each narrating tales of war, resilience, and bygone eras.
 - These gates, **still largely intact**, exhibit **intricate carvings** and remarkable **masonry** that highlight the exceptional engineering skills of the past.
 - One of Lohagad's most breathtaking features is the '**Vinchukada**', or '**Scorpion's Tail**'—a **long, narrow, fortified spur** extending from the fort's **main structure**.
 - This **naturally sculpted rock formation** resembles a scorpion's sting and offers panoramic views of the surrounding Sahyadri landscapes.

History:

- Initially **established** during the **Lohtamia dynasty** in the **10th century CE**, the fort soon became a coveted prize for rulers across the ages.
- Over time, it bore witness to the **Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Yadavas, Bahamanis, Nizams, Mughals, and Marathas**, each leaving an indelible mark on its strategic and cultural significance.

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- In **1648 AD**, **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** seized **Lohagad**, recognizing its defensive and strategic importance.
- However, due to the **Treaty of Purandar in 1665**, he was **forced to relinquish it to the Mughals**.
- Undeterred, he **recaptured the fort in 1670 AD** and used it as a **treasury vault** to store the riches from his successful **Surat campaign**.
- Later, during the **Peshwa era**, statesman **Nana Phadnavis** sought refuge **here**, constructing essential structures like a large tank and step-well, which still stand as silent witnesses to history.

NATHU LA PASS



Border trade via Nathu La Pass, which had remained suspended for six years due to Covid-19 pandemic and India-China border tensions, resumed recently.

- It is a **mountain pass** in the **Himalayas in Sikkim**.
- It **connects** the Indian state of **Sikkim** with **China's Tibet Autonomous Region**.
- ‘Nathu’ means “listening ears”, and ‘La’ means “pass” in Tibetan.
- The pass forms a part of an **offshoot of the ancient Silk Road**.
- It is **one of the highest motorable roads** in the world.
- It is **guarded** on both sides by **Chinese and Indian soldiers**.
- It is **one of the three open trading border posts** between **India and China**; the other two are in **Himachal Pradesh (Shipkila)** and **Uttarakhand (Lipulekh)**.
- **Sealed by India** after the **1962 Sino-Indian War**, Nathu La was **reopened in 2006** following numerous bilateral trade agreements.
- **Traded items** are **limited** and include **silk, clothes, and yak hair and tail**.
- **Only citizens of India** can **visit the pass**, and then only after obtaining a permit in **Gangtok**.

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ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE INDEX



- It is a **biennial index** that is a scorecard that ranks **countries** on **their environmental performance**.

- It is a data-driven global benchmark developed by the **Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy**, **Columbia University's Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN)** and **Yale Center for Geospatial Solutions**.

Framework: It includes **47 indicators** across **12 issue categories** spanning three policy objectives: **Environmental Health, Ecosystem Vitality, and Climate Change**.

- It serves as a **vital analytical tool** for measuring how close nations are to achieving global sustainability targets, such as the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** and **Paris Climate Agreement objectives**.

Highlights of Environmental Performance Index 2026:

- **Top 5 countries:** **Estonia, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Finland and Netherlands** secured
- **Laos** ranked the lowest in the Index.
- **India ranked** the 176th position out of 177 evaluated countries.
- India's overall EPI score came out to 22.46, compared to a regional average of 31.81.