

March - 17

TNPSC BITS

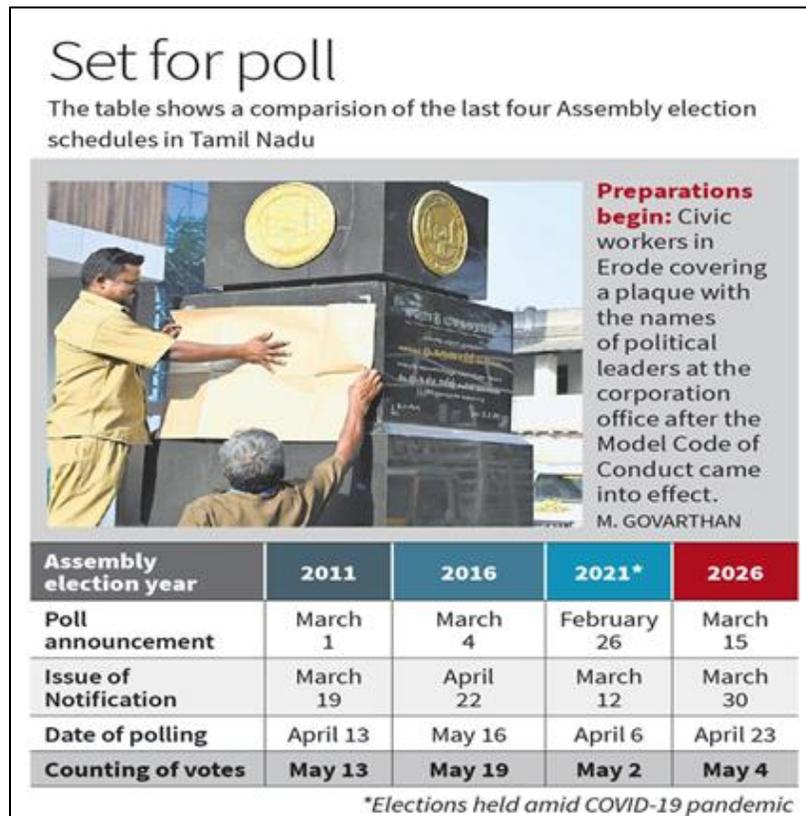
- ❖ The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has begun the Cold Response 2026 Arctic military exercise, a biennial drill held mainly in Norway focusing on Arctic warfare and interoperability of allied forces.
- ❖ The Indian Army launched a major bridge project in Sri Lanka under Operation Sagar Bandhu to connect Colombo, the capital city, with the economic centre Puttalam, restoring connectivity for people, goods, and essential services.
- ❖ The International Rail Coach Expo (IRCE) 2026 was inaugurated at the Integral Coach Factory (ICF), Chennai.
- ❖ India is testing Sheshnaag-150, a long-range swarming attack drone by Newspace Research Technologies, Bengaluru.
- ❖ Joha rice, an aromatic indigenous variety mainly grown in Assam, was exported for the first time in large quantities as a 25-metric-tonne consignment from Guwahati to the United Kingdom and Italy.
- ❖ Kavach 4.0 has been commissioned on 1,452 route km of the Indian Railways high-density Delhi–Mumbai and Delhi–Howrah corridors.
 - It is an indigenous Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system that prevents train collisions by automatically controlling speed and braking.
- ❖ The International Malaria Conference (IMC) 2026 concluded in New Delhi from 7–9 March 2026.
 - The theme of the conference was “Discovery, Development and Delivery: Driving Malaria Elimination and Beyond.”
- ❖ World Rotaract Day was observed on March 13 every year, marking the 58th anniversary of the Rotaract movement.
 - It is celebrated every year to recognize the success and impact of Rotaract clubs worldwide.

TAMIL NADU NEWS

T.N. Assembly election 2026

- ❖ With the announcement of the Tamil Nadu Assembly election schedule on March 15, political parties will get a 38-day window to undertake campaigning.
- ❖ It will end at 5 p.m. on April 21, before polling is held on April 23.

- ❖ The window for campaigning in this election is the same as that of the 2021 Assembly election, which was held amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ In 2016, candidates had over 70 days to campaign, while in 2011 the campaign period was over 40 days.
- ❖ Further, the 2026 election cycle represents Tamil Nadu's most compressed poll schedule since 2011.
- ❖ This means the administrative freeze on announcing new policies and schemes or floating tenders during the Model Code of Conduct will be relatively brief.



- ❖ From the date of announcement to the counting of votes on May 4, the entire process spans 51 days in this election.
- ❖ In comparison, the time frame stretched to 66 days in 2021, 77 days in 2016, and 74 days in 2011.
- ❖ The gap between polling of votes and counting has been reduced from 25 days in 2021 to 10 days this time.
- ❖ The term of the 16th Tamil Nadu Assembly will end on May 10.
- ❖ The total number of electors in Tamil Nadu, according to the electoral rolls, is 5.67 crore.

- ❖ There are 75,032 polling booths, including 44,065 in rural areas and 30,967 in urban areas.
- ❖ The average number of electors per booth is 756.
- ❖ A polling booth will be established at Vellimalai in Varusanadu in Theni district to help just five voters exercise their franchise.
- ❖ Of the 234 Assembly constituencies, 44 are reserved for candidates of the Scheduled Castes and two are reserved for candidates of the Scheduled Tribes.

Model Code of Conduct 2026

- ❖ The announcement of the Tamil Nadu Assembly election schedule was made on March 15.
- ❖ Consequent to the announcement of the election schedule, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into force in Tamil Nadu in the evening.
- ❖ The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a set of rules issued by the Election Commission to guide political parties and candidates during elections.
- ❖ This is in keeping with Article 324 of the Constitution, which gives the Election Commission the power to supervise elections to the Parliament and state legislatures.
- ❖ The model code of conduct consists of seven sections which deal with general conduct, meetings, processions, party in power, polling booth, polling day and election manifestos.

Impact of Model Code of Conduct

- ❖ It would be applicable to all candidates, political parties, and the State and Union governments.
- ❖ District Election Officers (DEOs) have been directed to obtain information on unusual and suspicious withdrawal or deposit of cash exceeding ₹1 lakh at banks for due verification.
- ❖ The ruling government cannot sanction new projects, announce financial grants, or utilize government vehicles/staff for political campaigns.
- ❖ No campaigning is allowed within 100 meters of polling stations.
- ❖ Public meetings and rallies are prohibited 48 hours before the poll closes.
- ❖ Vehicles used for campaigning must be registered with district administration, and illegal use or voter transportation is punished.
- ❖ Organizers must inform the local police well in advance, detailing routes, timing, and using designated spaces impartially.



- ❖ Candidates and parties must avoid activities that cause conflict, such as criticizing other parties' private lives or conducting protests at opponents' houses.
- ❖ No appeals to religion, caste, or communal sentiments.
- ❖ Criticism must focus on policies, performance, and programmes, not private lives.
- ❖ Official mass media cannot be used for biased coverage favoring the ruling party.
- ❖ Illegal activities like bribing, intimidation, impersonation, or campaigning near polling stations are prohibited.
- ❖ Demonstrations outside private homes or use of someone else's property for campaigning are banned.
- ❖ Parties must inform authorities about meetings and processions; permissions for loudspeakers or gatherings must be obtained.
- ❖ Police instructions must be followed to maintain peace and manage traffic.
- ❖ Processions must follow pre-decided routes, timings, and start/end points.
- ❖ Carrying harmful objects or burning effigies is prohibited.
- ❖ Parties must avoid clashes with other processions.
- ❖ Parties and candidates must cooperate with election officials during polling.
- ❖ No propaganda, liquor, or crowding near polling booths; camps must remain simple and free of political symbols.
- ❖ Governments cannot use official machinery, funds, or positions for campaigning.
- ❖ No announcements of financial grants, new projects, infrastructure promises, or ad-hoc appointments that could influence voters.
- ❖ Government facilities, including transport, rest houses, dak bungalows, and public spaces, must be equally available to all parties.
- ❖ Election manifestos must follow constitutional principles, be realistic, and cannot be released during the prohibited period before polling.

Background

- ❖ The birth of the Model Code of Conduct dates back to the Assembly elections of Kerala in 1960, during which the State administration drafted a 'Code of Conduct' for political actors.
- ❖ In the 1962 general elections to the Lok Sabha, the MCC was circulated by the Election Commission of India to recognised parties, and state governments.
- ❖ The MCC was largely followed by all parties in the 1962 elections and continued to be followed in subsequent general elections.
- ❖ In 1979, the Election Commission added a section to regulate the 'party in power' and prevent it from gaining an unfair advantage at the time of elections.



- ❖ It was the year 1991 when the Election Commission decided to make more stringent use of the Model Code of Conduct following repeated election norms violations and continued corruption.
- ❖ In 2013, the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to include guidelines regarding election manifestos, which it had included in the MCC for the 2014 general elections.
- ❖ The MCC is not enforceable by law.
- ❖ However, certain provisions of the MCC may be enforced through invoking corresponding provisions in other statutes such as the Indian Penal Code, 1860, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- ❖ The Election Commission has argued against making the MCC legally binding; stating that elections must be completed within a relatively short time (close to 45 days), and judicial proceedings typically take longer, therefore it is not feasible to make it enforceable by law.
- ❖ The MCC contains eight provisions dealing with general conduct, meetings, processions, polling day, polling booths, observers, party in power, and election manifestos.
- ❖ Major provisions of the MCC are outlined below.
- ❖ **General Conduct:** Criticism of political parties must be limited to their policies and programmes, past record and work.
- ❖ **Activities such as:** (a) using caste and communal feelings to secure votes, (b) criticising candidates on the basis of unverified reports, (c) bribing or intimidation of voters, and (d) organising demonstrations or picketing outside houses of persons to protest against their opinions, are prohibited.
- ❖ **Meetings:** Parties must inform the local police authorities of the venue and time of any meeting in time to enable the police to make adequate security arrangements.
- ❖ **Processions:** If two or more candidates plan processions along the same route, organisers must establish contact in advance to ensure that the processions do not clash. Carrying and burning effigies representing members of other political parties is not allowed.
- ❖ **Polling day:** All authorized party workers at polling booths should be given identity badges. These should not contain the party name, symbol or name of the candidate.
- ❖ **Polling booths:** Only voters, and those with a valid pass from the Election Commission, will be allowed to enter polling booths.
- ❖ **Observers:** The Election Commission will appoint observers to whom any candidates may report problems regarding the conduct of the election.

- ❖ Party in power: The MCC incorporated certain restrictions in 1979, regulating the conduct of the party in power. Ministers must not combine official visits with election work or use official machinery for the same. The party must avoid advertising at the cost of the public exchequer or using official mass media for publicity on achievements to improve chances of victory in the elections. Ministers and other authorities must not announce any financial grants, or promise any construction of roads, provision of drinking water, etc. Other parties must be allowed to use public spaces and rest houses and these must not be monopolized by the party in power.
- ❖ Election manifestos: Added in 2013, these guidelines prohibit parties from making promises that exert an undue influence on voters, and suggest that manifestos also indicate the means to achieve promises.

Model Code of Conduct (MCC) அமலில் இருக்கும்போது

தேர்தல் ஆணையத்தின் அதிகாரங்கள்

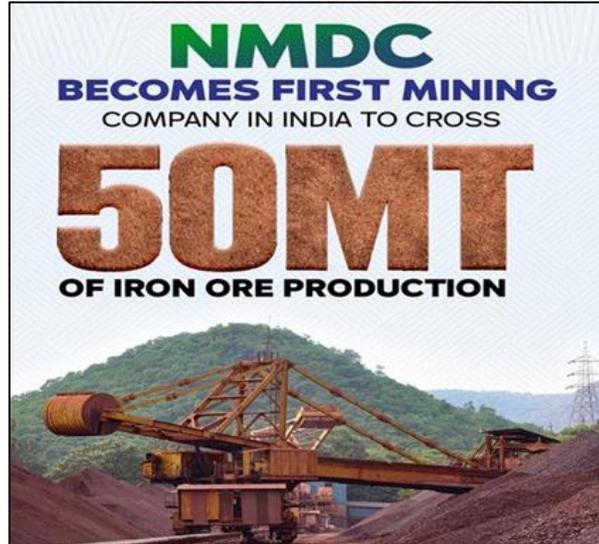
- அதிகாரிகளை மாற்ற உத்தரவிட முடியும்
- தேர்தல் விதிமீறல்களுக்கு எதிராக நடவடிக்கை எடுக்க முடியும்
- தேர்தல் பரப்புரையை தடை செய்ய முடியும்
- முறைகேடுகளை கண்டறிந்தால் தேர்தலை ரத்து செய்யவும் முடியும்
- தேர்தல் சமநிலையை பாதுகாப்பதே Model Code of Conduct-ன் நோக்கம்

NATIONAL NEWS

National Mineral Development Corporation

- ❖ The National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) became the first mining company in India to produce 50 million tonnes of iron ore in a single FY 2025–26.
- ❖ It is a Navratna Central Public Sector Enterprise under the Ministry of Steel.
- ❖ National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) was established in 1958 and is headquartered in Hyderabad.
- ❖ It is the largest producer of iron ore in India, operating major mines in Chhattisgarh and Karnataka.

- ❖ It also operates India's only mechanised diamond mine at Panna in Madhya Pradesh.



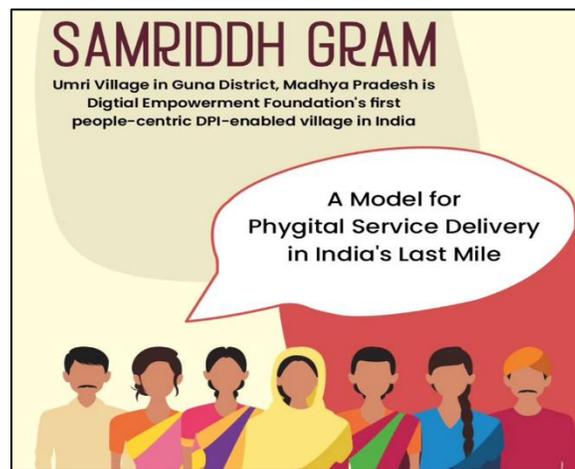
Elections 2026

Election schedule for four States and one Union Territory	
STATE/UT	POLLING
West Bengal	April 23, 29 (Two Phases)
Assam	April 9 (Single Phase)
Tamil Nadu	April 23 (Single Phase)
Kerala	April 9 (Single Phase)
Puducherry (UT)	April 9 (Single Phase)
Counting	May 4

- ❖ The Election Commission of India announced that Assembly elections in Assam, Keralam, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu will be held in a single phase, while polling in West Bengal will take place in two phases.

- ❖ CEC Gyanesh Kumar said the total number of voters of the four States and Union Territories is equivalent to the population of Australia, France, South Africa, Germany and Canada.
- ❖ A total of 17.4 crore voters is eligible to take part in the forthcoming Assembly elections in four States and one Union Territory to elect 824 MLAs.
- ❖ Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said the EC will also ensure 100% webcasting across all polling stations to maintain transparency during the voting process.

Samridh Gram Phygital Services Initiative

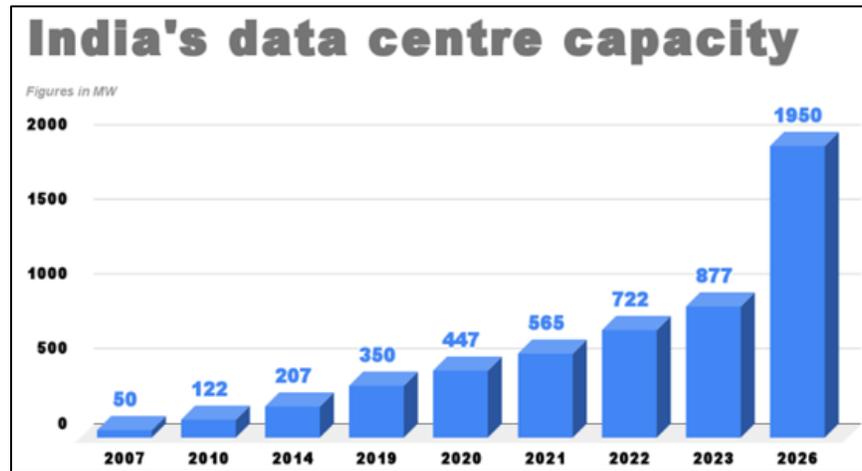


- ❖ The Samridh Gram Phygital Services Pilot Initiative was inaugurated at Umri village in Madhya Pradesh to deliver integrated rural services.
- ❖ It is a pilot project for “Phygital” (Physical + Digital) service delivery in rural areas.
- ❖ The project is implemented by the Department of Telecommunications using the BharatNet rural broadband network.
- ❖ The project establishes Samridh Kendras, village service hubs providing services like education, telemedicine, agriculture advisory, e-governance, and financial services.
- ❖ It aims to improve digital access and public service delivery in villages through an integrated digital infrastructure.

Data Centres in India

- ❖ India’s data centre capacity increased from about 375 MW in 2020 to around 1500 MW in 2025.
- ❖ A data centre is a secure facility used to store, process, and manage large amounts of digital data.

- ❖ Major data centres in India are located in Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Noida, and Jamnagar.
- ❖ They support services such as digital payments, cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), and 5G technology.
- ❖ India's first hyperscale data centre, Yotta D1, is located in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh.



Lifetime Validity for FSSAI Licences

Type	New Turnover Limit
Registration	Turnover upto ₹1.5 Crore
State License	Turnover above ₹1.5 Crore and upto ₹50 Crore
Central License	Turnover above ₹50 Crore

fssai

Regulatory News

Food licence will get lifetime validity from 1 April 2026.

Food licence will get lifetime validity from 1 April 2026.

- ❖ India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare approved lifetime validity for licences issued by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

- ❖ Food business operators will no longer need to renew their licences repeatedly, which reduces paperwork and compliance costs.
- ❖ The turnover limit for basic registration has been increased from ₹12 lakh to ₹1.5 crore.
- ❖ Street food vendors registered with Municipal Corporations or Town Vending Committees will now be automatically considered registered under FSSAI.
- ❖ The government will also introduce a risk-based, technology-enabled food inspection system to improve food safety monitoring.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Strikes on Kharg Island



- ❖ The United States carried out air strikes on military targets on Kharg Island, the main oil export hub of Iran.
- ❖ It is located in the northern Persian Gulf, about 50–55 km from the Iranian mainland and northwest of Bushehr port.
- ❖ Kharg Island is a five-mile-long coral island formed from coral limestone deposits.
- ❖ Unlike many islands in the Gulf, it has natural freshwater resources, which supported settlements in the past.

- ❖ It lies close to the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important oil shipping chokepoints.

India–New Zealand Sports Cooperation 2026



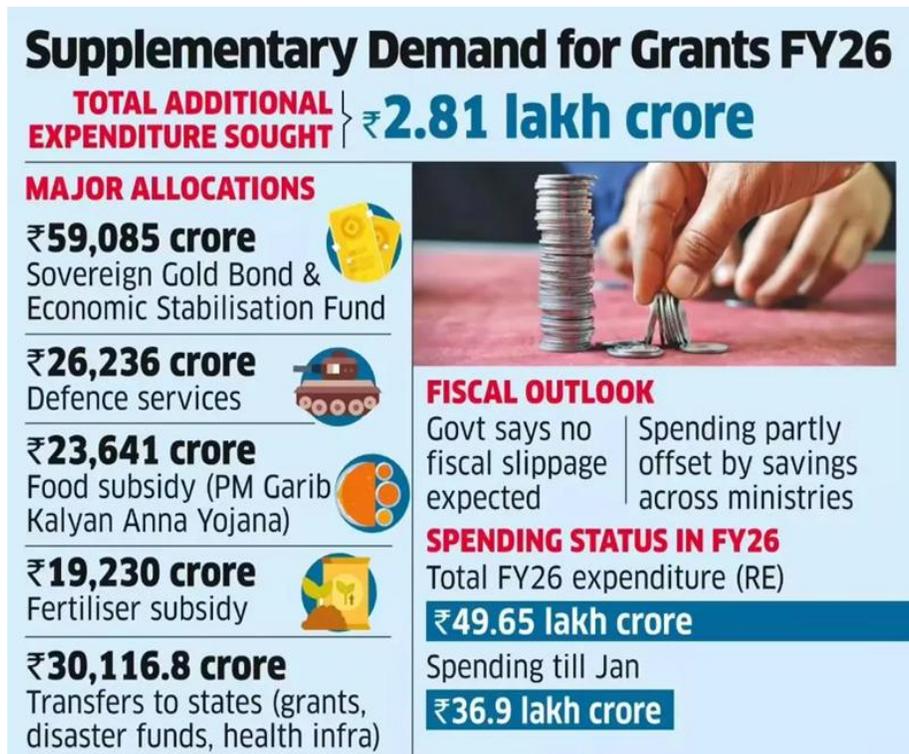
- ❖ India and New Zealand plan to expand sports cooperation as 2026 marks 100 years of sporting relations between the two countries.
- ❖ A high-level meeting was held in New Delhi, chaired by the Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports.
- ❖ The sporting ties began in 1926 with the Indian Army hockey tour to New Zealand.
- ❖ Both countries identified sports such as rugby, rowing, canoeing, sailing, athletics, and cycling for cooperation.
- ❖ The Sports Authority of India and the Indian Olympic Association are involved in the collaboration.
- ❖ A proposed India–New Zealand Centenary Sports Cooperation Programme 2026 will promote training camps, coaching exchanges, and sports science collaboration.

ECONOMY NEWS

Economic Stabilization Fund

- ❖ The Lok Sabha approved the second batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants for 2025–26.
- ❖ The finance minister proposed the Economic Stabilisation Fund (ESF) with a total outlay of ₹1 lakh crore.

- ❖ The ESF is intended to help India respond to global crises, sudden economic shocks, and supply chain disruptions.
- ❖ Supplementary Demands for Grants are required when the budget approved by Parliament for a financial year is insufficient for a particular service.
- ❖ The President lays these demands before both Houses of Parliament, and they must be passed before the end of the financial year.
- ❖ Supplementary Demands for Grants are mentioned under Article 115 of the Indian Constitution.

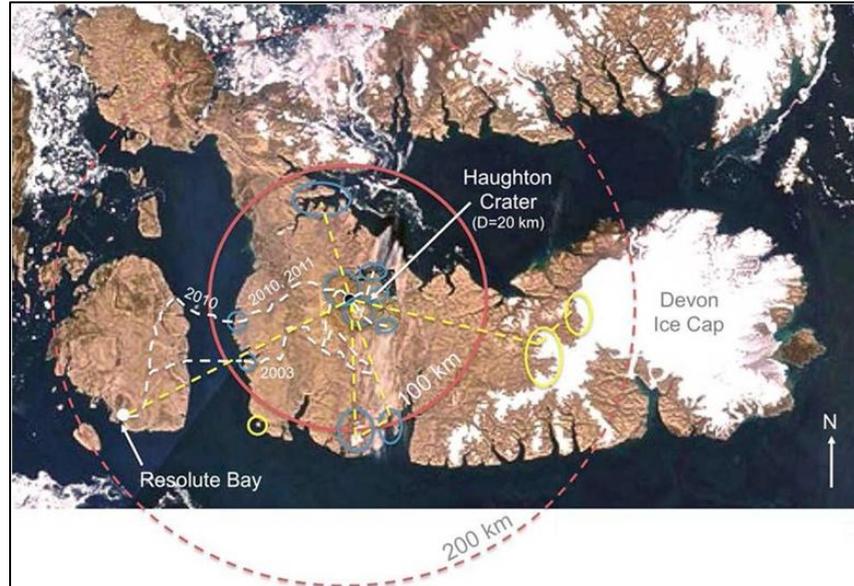


SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY NEWS

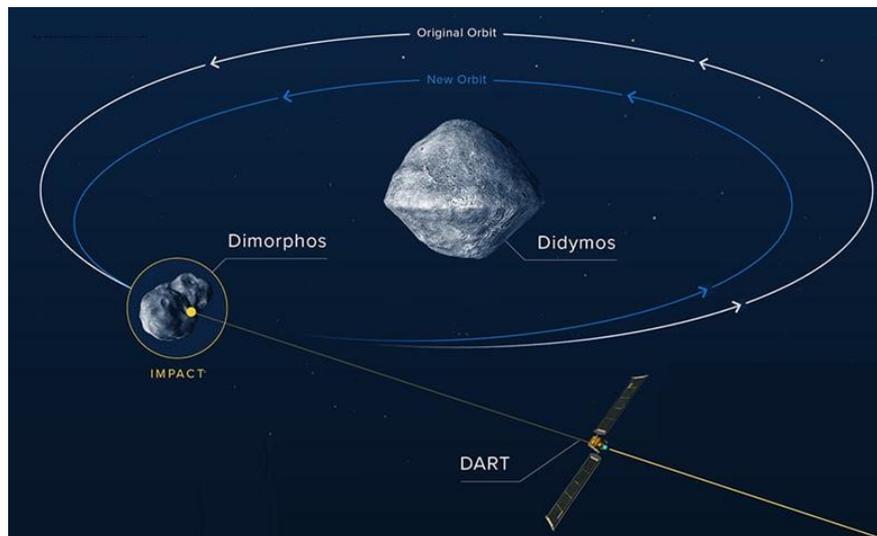
Earth's Closest Natural Laboratory for Mars Exploration

- ❖ The Scientists are studying Devon Island in Nunavut, Canada, as a natural site to test technologies and survival methods for future Mars missions.
- ❖ It is the world's largest uninhabited island and has a polar desert environment with very low temperatures and almost no vegetation.
- ❖ The island contains the Houghton Impact Crater, a 20-km-wide meteorite crater that resembles the rocky surface of Mars.
- ❖ Scientists also conduct experiments, such as the Arthur Clarke Mars Greenhouse, to study how plants could grow in Mars-like soil.

- ❖ Researchers study microorganisms living inside rocks (endolithic colonisation) to understand how life may survive in extreme environments similar to Mars.



Double Asteroid Redirection Test Mission



- ❖ A study showed that NASA's Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) mission changed the orbit of an entire asteroid system.
- ❖ The mission targeted Dimorphos, a small asteroid orbiting Didymos in a binary asteroid system.
- ❖ In September 2022, a spacecraft was deliberately crashed into Dimorphos using the kinetic impactor technique.

- ❖ After the impact, Dimorphos' orbital period around Didymos reduced by about 33 minutes.
- ❖ The collision also slightly changed the orbit of the Didymos–Dimorphos system around the Sun, demonstrating a method of planetary defence.

ENVIRONMENT NEWS

National Climate Stack Innovation Challenge

- ❖ The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) launched the National Climate Stack Innovation Challenge.
- ❖ The initiative aims to create a National Climate Stack, which will integrate different climate datasets into one digital system.
- ❖ It will help improve forecasting of climate hazards such as droughts, floods, heatwaves, and cyclones.
- ❖ The system will support agriculture planning, rural finance, disaster preparedness, and public policy decisions.



PERSONALITIES, AWARDS, AND EVENTS

Jürgen Habermas demise (1929–2026)

- ❖ Influential German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas passed away at the age of 96.

- ❖ He was a key 20th-century German philosopher and social theorist, known for advocating deliberative democracy and the public sphere as essential for legitimate governance.
- ❖ He belonged to the Frankfurt School of critical theory.
- ❖ His work focused on communicative rationality, democracy, and the rule of law.
- ❖ His ideas influenced debates on democracy and European integration, including the European Union.



MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

Flying reptile species - Bakiribu waridza



- ❖ Scientists discovered a new flying reptile species, Bakiribu waridza, from a 100-million-year-old fossilised regurgitate (dinosaur vomit).



- ❖ The fossil was found in the Araripe Basin of Brazil, a major Cretaceous fossil site.
- ❖ It is the first extinct species described entirely from fossilised regurgitated material (regurgitalite).
- ❖ The remains likely came from a predator such as a Spinosaurid dinosaur.
- ❖ The pterosaur had hundreds of thin teeth used for filter-feeding, similar to modern flamingos.

