CENTER OF POLICY RESEARCH & GOVERNANCE

THIS WEEK IN POLICY

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THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

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UNION GOVERNMENT & NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

At the Centre

01

MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS

Lok Sabha passes Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026

The Act passed by Parliament raises imprisonment for using unfair means from three to five years to five to ten years, and the maximum fine from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 50 lakh. Service providers now face fines of up to Rs 5 crore and an eight-year debarment, and organised crime up to Rs 10 crore. It also creates fast-track courts, a three-month trial window and a special task force. Fifty-two FIRs have already been filed under the 2024 Act.

CPRG INSIGHT

In the wake of the recent student protest, this Act shifts India's approach from merely penalising examination fraud to building stronger institutional safeguards. Time-bound investigations, specialised courts and enhanced penalties target organised cheating networks rather than isolated offenders. If implemented effectively, the reforms could improve the credibility of public examinations, although success will ultimately depend on robust enforcement and coordination between investigative agencies and examination authorities

02

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING

India's first Telecom Manufacturing Zone to come up at Gwalior

The DoT and Madhya Pradesh signed an MoU on 30 July for India's first integrated Telecom Manufacturing Zone, a 350-acre cluster at Gwalior run through an SPV owned 51 per cent by the state and 49 per cent by DoT. The Centre is funding Phase-I infrastructure fully at Rs 493 crore, and the state is providing about 170 acres free, alongside capital subsidies, power rebates and export freight support. Anchored by firms like Dixon, HFCL and Tejas Networks, it has drawn initial commitments of around Rs 5,000 crore, with total investment projected at Rs 12,000–15,000 crore and roughly 14,000 direct jobs.

CPRG INSIGHT

The zone marks a deliberate push to move India from a telecom services economy to a products one, an area still reliant on imported equipment. By concentrating manufacturing, testing and R&D in a single cluster tied to the Semiconductor Mission and allied schemes, it aims to build domestic supply chains and ease security concerns. Its success will depend on anchor firms moving beyond assembly into higher-value components like chips and optical fibre.

03

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Defence Ministry allows women equal induction in the Coast Guard and eases ex gratia rules for personnel missing at sea

Two directives issued on 28 July put women on par with men for both Short Service and Permanent Appointments, open Short Service entry to male candidates, and let serving women officers convert to permanent terms. The second allows personnel missing at sea on duty to be declared presumed dead for ex gratia purposes, removing the administrative wait families faced before receiving compensation and terminal benefits.

> ***CPRG INSIGHT***
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> The reforms advance gender inclusion in the armed forces and speed up welfare delivery for service families. The induction policy aligns the Coast Guard with broader military reforms promoting equal career opportunities, while the streamlined ex gratia framework spares the next of kin the prolonged administrative delays they faced before compensation and terminal benefits could be released. Under the general rule, a missing person can be legally presumed dead only after around seven years, so allowing the Coast Guard to make that declaration for ex gratia purposes removes a wait that could otherwise stretch for years.

04

MINISTRY OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILISERS

Cabinet approves India Industrial Development Scheme Chemicals (Brich Chemicals)

The Union Cabinet approved the India Industrial Development Scheme Chemicals, or Grand Chemical Scheme, for establishing three dedicated chemical parks across the country. Announced in the Union Budget 2026–27, the scheme has a financial outlay of ₹3,030 crore and will be implemented over five years from 2026-2031.

> ***CPRG INSIGHT***
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> The industrial park model in this scheme addresses one of the chemical sector's longstanding constraints: the high cost of shared infrastructure and environmental compliance. By financing common utilities and waste management facilities, it aims to reduce production costs while improving regulatory compliance. The competitive selection of states could encourage better project execution, although the success of the scheme will depend on timely land acquisition, private investment and integration with downstream manufacturing and export supply chains

05

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING

Television Rating Policy, 2026 issued to strengthen audience measurement framework

The 2014 guidelines have been replaced. Net worth required to run a rating agency is reduced from Rs 20 crore to Rs 5 crore, the metered home panel grows from 50,000 to 80,000, and measurement now covers connected televisions and OTT-carried channels. Landing pages are excluded from viewership counts, while agencies face annual independent audits, cross-holding limits, a third of the board as independent directors and graded penalties.

CPRG INSIGHT

The policy updates a regulatory framework that pre-dates the rapid growth of connected television and digital content distribution. Lowering the net worth requirement to run a rating agency from Rs 20 crore to Rs 5 crore reduces the entry barrier for new players and opens up a space long dominated by a single incumbent, which should benefit smaller and new rating agencies and, in turn, broadcasters and advertisers seeking more competitive measurement. Since audience measurement directly influences advertising allocation, broadcaster revenues and programming decisions, the reforms could have significant implications for competition and transparency across India's broadcasting ecosystem.

06

MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ

Atmanirbhar Panchayat Karyakram and Samarth portal launched to strengthen panchayat finances

Launched on 27 July along with Model Own Source Revenue Rules for states, both follow the Sixteenth Finance Commission's push on panchayat revenue. The programme will develop 350 bankable revenue projects over four years with NABARD and HUDCO as partners, while the Samarth portal digitises collection and is already live in Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh.

CPRG INSIGHT

These initiatives reflect a shift from grant-dependent local governance to strengthening own-source revenues, a long-standing recommendation of successive Finance Commissions. Their success, however, will depend on whether states adopt the model rules and whether Panchayats build the administrative capacity needed to effectively assess, collect and manage local revenues.

DIPLOMACY & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

India & the World

07

India and Israel close the second round of Free Trade Agreement talks

The four-day round ran from 20 to 23 July at Vanijya Bhawan in New Delhi, covering goods, services, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, intellectual property, customs procedures and economic cooperation. The Terms of Reference signed in November 2025 continue to frame the negotiations. Merchandise trade between the two countries stood at USD 3.93 billion in FY 2025-26.

CPRG INSIGHT

Trade between the two is under four billion dollars, and a substantial portion of that is diamonds for processing. India's principal interests in Israel, defence equipment and technology, are procured through direct government channels and fall outside the scope of a trade agreement. The deal is therefore more significant for what it delivers on investment and easier movement of professionals than for tariff reduction.

08

First direct container freight train runs from Kolkata Port to Nepal

A 40-wagon train carrying canola completed the first direct commercial run to Biratnagar Customs Yard under the revised India-Nepal Rail Transit Protocol, ending the need to transship cargo at the border and cutting transit time and handling cost. The service builds on the Jogbani to Biratnagar broad gauge link opened in June 2023.

CPRG INSIGHT

This milestone builds upon years of gradual diplomatic adjustments, including the 2004 Rail Services Agreement and the Jogbani-Biratnagar rail link opening. By eliminating traditional transhipment bottlenecks, it addresses historic logistical friction points for landlocked Nepal and aligns with India's broader strategic vision of enhancing regional economic integration under its "Neighbourhood First" policy

09

GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA

India and Romania sign three agreements on science and technology, education and sports during the President's state visit

President Droupadi Murmu addressed the India-Romania Business Forum where she flagged energy security, chemicals and fertilisers, cyber security, ports and logistics and pharmaceuticals as areas to build on, and pressed for early implementation of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement.

> ***CPRG INSIGHT***
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> Romania is a small market and will never be a big trade partner. Its use to India is as a base inside the European Union, which matters once the India-EU trade deal comes into force. Romania is also short of workers and has been hiring Indians, and that is increasingly a significant part of the relationship.

STATE POLICY & GOVERNANCE

Across the States

10

GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra becomes the first state to clear the bar for a second RKVY instalment

The state spent roughly Rs 260 crore of the Rs 335 crore released as its first instalment under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, crossing the 75 per cent utilisation benchmark and qualifying for a second tranche of equal size.

> ***CPRG INSIGHT***
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> Maharashtra crossed the 75 per cent utilisation benchmark by moving quickly on the ground. It built unique Farmer IDs to streamline direct benefit delivery and digital agriculture profiling, and demonstrated strong transfer capacity, routing Rs 14,000 crore in flood compensation directly into farmers' accounts within about five days. The pace of fund deployment, rather than coordination alone, is what unlocked the second tranche.

STATE POLICY & GOVERNANCE

11

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHR PRADESH

Andhra Pradesh takes AI Sanjeevani health care programme statewide

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu confirmed that the programme goes live across the state in August after a pilot in Kuppam that began in July 2025. Every resident receives a digital health profile and an ABHA ID, with records from primary health centres up to state institutions on a single platform. The build covers more than five crore citizens and includes 42 home-based diagnostic tests, teleconsultation and predictive screening

CPRG INSIGHT

Andhra Pradesh's Sanjeevani programme illustrates how digital public infrastructure and artificial intelligence can be integrated to strengthen primary healthcare and shift health systems towards preventive and personalised care. Other states are pursuing comparable models, with Telangana rolling out digital health profiles for all adult residents and Tamil Nadu launching Nalam TN, an AI-powered statewide digital health platform, indicating a wider shift toward AI-enabled, records-based public healthcare.

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GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

Assam scraps stamp duty on self-help group loan papers up to Rs 10 lakh

The Cabinet waived stamp duty on individual loan documents executed by members of self-help groups under the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission, for loans up to Rs 10 lakh taken from banks and other RBI-regulated institutions for livelihood and enterprise use. The same meeting made registration compulsory for agreements for sale, development agreements, property-related powers of attorney and equitable mortgages

CPRG INSIGHT

The waiver of stamp duty follows previous financial interventions by the state, such as the Assam Micro Finance Incentive and Relief Scheme, lowering the transaction cost of borrowing and giving self-help group members cheaper and easier access to formal finance.

13

GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya clears an EV policy with Rs 25,000 cash back and zero registration fee

The Cabinet approved the Electric Vehicle Policy 2026 on 27 July, giving every buyer a flat Rs 25,000 incentive along with a full waiver of registration fees. Separate structures apply to two, three and four-wheelers, with additional benefits planned for buyers producing a valid scrapping certificate. The state currently has a little over 5,000 electric vehicles on its roads

CPRG INSIGHT

A flat Rs 25,000 incentive is meaningful for a two-wheeler buyer but marginal for a car buyer. In a hill state, the bigger concerns are charging availability and range rather than sticker price, so the subsidy will do little unless charging comes up along the main routes out of Shillong. If Meghalaya can ensure a reliable electricity supply, EVs can displace expensive imported fossil fuel. Nepal is a useful example, where abundant domestic hydropower, lower EV import duties and charging investment pushed EVs to over 70 per cent of newly imported cars in 2024 and, by the Nepal Electricity Authority's estimate, cut oil import costs by around USD 22 million a year.

14

GOVERNMENT OF NCT OF DELHI

Delhi approves Lakshmi Yojana with Rs 2,500 a month for eligible women

The Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta cleared the scheme for women aged 21 to 60 with an annual family income of up to Rs 2.5 lakh. The registration portal opens on 1 August and the 2026-27 budget carries a provision of Rs 5,110 crore. The government has framed the transfer as support for education, health, skilling and savings rather than income support alone.

CPRG INSIGHT

Delhi joins a long list of states running cash transfers for women, and the pattern everywhere is the same: such schemes typically launch at scale and then come under fiscal strain. At Rs 5,110 crore, this is a large recurring commitment that will have to be paid for every year, usually by squeezing spending elsewhere

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GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA

Haryana replaces its 2013 property tax rules with a formula-based system

The Cabinet gave in-principle approval on 28 July to assess capital value from plot or carpet area, the applicable collector rate and a floor factor, with cities grouped into four categories and increases in liability capped and phased. Rebates run to 75 per cent for residential property in Lal Dora areas and 25 per cent for property owned by women. EWS buyers under PMAY-Urban 2.0 will pay Rs 500 each as stamp duty and registration fee.

CPRG INSIGHT

Tying the tax to collector rates is a real improvement, since owners can now compute their liability directly rather than depending on an assessor's discretion, and the tax will rise on its own as land values go up, but Haryana's problem has also been collection, not just calculation, and a cleaner formula does not necessarily fix that alone.

REFERENCES

Sources

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