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CENTER OF POLICY RESEARCH & GOVERNANCE

THIS WEEK IN POLICY

Weekly Policy Digest

VOLUME 09

7 AUGUST TO 13 AUGUST, 2026

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At the Centre

01

MINISTRY OF MINES

Parliament passes the MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026 barring state levies on mineral rights

A new Section 9D prohibits any state from imposing a tax, cess or levy on mineral rights or mineral-bearing lands, whether calculated on quantity, value, royalty or any other basis, except under conditions the Centre prescribes. Any such levy not paid or collected before commencement is treated as invalid, though amounts already recovered will not be refunded. Union regulatory control now extends from mines and minerals to mineral-bearing lands.

CPRG INSIGHT

What a mine costs to run has long depended on which state it is in, because each government set its own cess and could add another after the mine was already operating. The 2024 Supreme Court ruling that states may tax mineral rights opened the way to fresh demands including for past years, and several mineral-rich states began raising them. This Bill puts all of that under one central framework and cancels the still-unpaid demands. A miner now knows what a state can charge on top of the royalty already fixed by the Centre, which matters most for the long-gestation critical mineral projects the Centre is trying to get moving.

02

MINISTRY OF MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

Parliament passes the MSMED Amendment Bill, 2026

Twenty years after the parent Act, the amendment writes the twin classification criteria of investment and turnover into the law and gives the Udyam portal permanent statutory backing as a free, voluntary registration platform. On delayed payments, it introduces online dispute resolution, caps mediation at 90 days and the arbitral award at 90 days after pleadings close, and requires courts to order payment of at least half the awarded amount where a set-aside application has been pending beyond six months.

CPRG INSIGHT

The commonest complaint from a small supplier is not that credit is hard to get but that the buyer has not paid and the existing laws made redressal a cumbersome process. A facilitation council could take years and a buyer who lost could appeal at higher courts to set the award aside and stall for years more. The amendment puts a proper timeline, releases half the awarded money to the supplier if a set-aside plea drags past six months, and lets the District Collector recover a settled amount as land revenue.

03

MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

CBDC-based Direct Benefit Transfer to launch under PMGKAY in Chandigarh and Dadra & Nagar Haveli

The two Union Territories become the first to move all eligible PMGKAY beneficiaries to food subsidy paid as programmable Central Bank Digital Currency tokens credited to CBDC wallets. Beneficiaries spend the tokens with empanelled merchants through a traceable digital payment mechanism instead of receiving a bank transfer. The rollout builds on earlier pilots in Puducherry and Gujarat and covers every eligible beneficiary rather than a sample. The government is positioning it as a template for other states and Union Territories.

CPRG INSIGHT

Food subsidy under PMGKAY has always reached the beneficiary as money in a bank account, which is simple to send and impossible to follow once it lands. The digital rupee tokens being used here are programmable, so the subsidy can only be spent on foodgrain at an empanelled shop and each step stays visible to the department. Puducherry and Gujarat ran this on a sample of beneficiaries; Chandigarh and Dadra & Nagar Haveli are the first to move everyone on the rolls. That gives the Centre a fully working example to point to when it asks larger states to follow.

04

MINISTRY OF PORTS, SHIPPING AND WATERWAYS

E-Samudra launched as a single window for maritime services

The platform brings seafarer, shipping company and port services onto one digital window with end to end workflows, online payment, real time tracking and digitally issued certificates. It sits alongside the e-NAVIK 24x7 grievance system, a planned Seafarer Tracking Dashboard and a digital Seafarers Employment Agreement. India's active seafarer workforce has grown from about 1.03 lakh in 2013 to more than 3.23 lakh in 2025, making India the second largest supplier globally.

CPRG INSIGHT

India supplies more seafarers to the world's merchant fleet than any country except the Philippines and until now the paperwork behind that ran through physical offices in a handful of port cities, which is difficult when the applicant is at sea. E-Samudra puts certificates, payments and applications on one window reachable from a ship. The tracking dashboard which tells the government which Indian is on which vessel is significant here as it comes directly out of the past year, when the DGMA had to trace and bring home more than 4,000 seafarers caught in disrupted shipping lanes.

05

MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

NABL launches India's first accreditation scheme for mobile food testing laboratories

The National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories, a constituent board of the Quality Council of India, launched the scheme under its Integrated Assessment Programme at the Gunvatta Samanvaya ceremony. It sets out how mobile laboratories can be accredited to deliver quality-assured, internationally benchmarked food testing outside conventional laboratory settings. The event also saw a multilateral MoU exchange among regulators and commodity boards under the Integrated Assessment Framework, aimed at coordinated assessments and mutual recognition in place of separate ones.

CPRG INSIGHT

Food safety enforcement has stepped up this year, with FSSAI running drives on street food and dairy and state regulators like Maharashtra's FDA raiding and sealing units. All of it rests on a test result that will hold up later. Until now a sample picked up at a mandi or a roadside stall had to be sent to a proper laboratory before anyone could act on it. Accrediting mobile labs means that first test counts on its own, saving days in every case. The MoU exchange fixes the other half, so a laboratory is not assessed separately by four different regulators for much the same thing.

06

MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE

Parliament passes the Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026 and creates a National Tribunals Commission

The Bill repeals the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021 and sets up a National Tribunals Commission with a judicial majority, chaired by a former Supreme Court judge or High Court Chief Justice, with two judicial and two technical members. It covers 16 bodies including CESTAT, the Central and State Administrative Tribunals, SAT, TDSAT, the Armed Forces Tribunal, NGT, NCLAT and ITAT. Search-cum-Selection Committees are judicially chaired with the chair holding a casting vote, recommend a single name per vacancy, and the government must appoint within three months.

CPRG INSIGHT

Tribunals decide tax disputes, service matters, electricity tariffs and company appeals, and until now the government appointed the people who heard those cases, often after leaving the posts vacant for a year or more. The Supreme Court struck down parts of the 2021 Act and asked for a standing commission to do the job instead, which is what this Bill sets up. The committee now sends one name rather than a panel, and the government has three months to act on it. Fixed five-year terms also replace the shorter tenures that had members looking for reappointment while still hearing cases.

07

MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

Eleven more international ports notified for entry of e-Visa holders

Nine land ports and two airports have been added, taking the total to 88, made up of 37 airports, 38 seaports and 13 land ports. The new land ports are Agartala, Darranga, Gede, Ghojadanga, Haridaspur, Jaigaon, Dawki, Moreh and Attari (Road), with Bhopal and Tirupati as the new airports. The e-Visa facility is open to nationals of 172 countries across 17 sub-categories, roughly 78 per cent of Indian visas are now electronic, and about 95 per cent of applications are cleared within 72 hours.

CPRG INSIGHT

The e-Visa has effectively been a flying document. A traveller could land at Delhi or Chennai on one but could not use it to walk across a land border, which suited long-haul tourists and made little sense for the neighbourhood, where most crossings happen by road. Nine of the eleven additions are land ports, opening the routes into Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar that Northeast tourism depends on, along with Attari on the Punjab side. Land ports go from four to thirteen in a single notification, the largest expansion since the e-Visa began in 2014.

STATE POLICY & GOVERNANCE

Across the States

08

Delhi Cabinet clears a Bill to allow private universities

The Cabinet approved the Delhi Private Universities Bill, creating a statutory framework for private universities in the capital for the first time, with a 25 % quota for Delhi students. Private institutions in Delhi currently operate either as deemed universities or as colleges affiliated to Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University. Officials said the Bill is expected to attract investment in higher education and improve industry collaboration, with self-financing colleges that already hold autonomous status likely to benefit most.

CPRG INSIGHT

Almost every state has a private universities law and Delhi has not, so a private institution in the capital could either affiliate to GGSIPU or apply to the UGC for deemed status, both routes decided outside the state government and both slow. The colleges most likely to use it are the self-financing ones already holding autonomous status, which means new degree capacity without new campuses.

09

Andhra Pradesh notifies India's first Pedestrian Safety and Universal Accessibility Policy

The policy brings road safety audits, universal design and statutory accountability into a single enforceable framework covering urban areas, rural stretches and town fringes. It prescribes a minimum two-metre clear walking zone, a maximum footpath height of 150mm, flush utility covers, kerb ramps, tactile indicators and audible signals, requires 20 percent of roads to be surveyed within a year, and mandates processed construction waste in non-structural pedestrian works

CPRG INSIGHT

Footpath standards in India usually sit inside municipal engineering manuals that nobody is accountable for following, which is why footpaths end without warning, stand too high to step onto, or vanish under a utility box. Andhra Pradesh has lifted those specifications into a policy with numbers attached, from two metres of clear walking width to a kerb no higher than 150mm and tactile paving at crossings. Requiring a fifth of the state's roads to be audited within a year gives it something measurable to report against. It is also the first state instrument to treat pedestrian safety and accessibility for disabled users as one subject rather than two.

10

Rajasthan Cabinet approves one-state-one-election plan

The Cabinet approved holding the forthcoming Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Body elections simultaneously under a One State-One Election framework. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel said staggered polls disrupt the pace of development work and impose repeated administrative and financial costs on the state. The Chief Minister had first announced the proposal in the 2024-25 State Budget, and this decision operationalises it.

CPRG INSIGHT

Rajasthan's panchayats and municipal bodies have drifted out of step over the years, so the state has been running local elections in batches almost every year. Each round brings the model code of conduct with it, which halts fresh sanctions and transfers in those districts, and each round needs its own staff and security deployment. Folding them into one cycle reduces that to a single interruption every five years. It is the same logic as One Nation One Election, applied at the level a state can act on by itself.

11

Punjab charters three private digital universities

The House passed the Cloud University, Hoshiarpur Bill, 2026, the MS Digital University, Patiala Bill, 2026 and the Physicswallah Digital University, Patiala Bill, 2026 in the same sitting. All three are self-financed private institutions chartered to deliver online and technology-enabled education, with programmes planned across engineering, medicine, life sciences, humanities, liberal arts and management.

CPRG INSIGHT

These are universities without a campus in the usual sense. Online degrees in India have until now mostly run as distance programmes of existing institutions, needing UGC clearance for each course, whereas a state charter gives these three the power to award degrees in their own name. For a state that sends a very large number of students abroad each year, adding a degree capacity that needs no hostel and no lecture hall could be a different way of holding some of them back. One of the three is an edtech company crossing over into becoming a university, a route very few Indian firms have taken.

12

Odisha Govt Launches Project BLESS to Curb Distress Migration

Odisha's Mission Shakti Department signed a tripartite MoU with CRISP and the NSE Foundation to launch Project BLESS: a three-year initiative to curb distress migration through rural livelihoods. Implemented with the Odisha Livelihoods Mission, it covers 69 blocks across eight migration-prone districts, targeting 8.81 lakh families and 86,000+ SHGs. A mobile app will flag at-risk households before they migrate, linking them to skilling, credit and welfare schemes; while those who do migrate get support for fair wages, legal aid and continuity of health/education services at destination

CPRG INSIGHT

These are the same western-Odisha districts long studied for climate-driven distress migration to brick kilns in Telangana/Andhra Pradesh - research that found even MGNREGS wasn't blunting the pressure locally. BLESS's pivot is notable as instead of another wage-guarantee scheme, it uses tech-enabled pre-emptive targeting built on Mission Shakti's existing SHG network, and rather than trying to stop migration outright, builds in a safe migration track (wage protection, portable services), echoing broader national moves like e-Shram toward managing migration rather than merely discouraging it.

13

Jharkhand tables a Rs 8,399 crore first supplementary budget

Finance Minister Radhakrishna Kishore presented the supplementary demands for 2026-27 on 7 August, the second day of the Monsoon Session. Revenue expenditure accounts for Rs 7,256.25 crore against capital expenditure of Rs 1,143.06 crore. The Rural Development Department received Rs 4,258.67 crore, more than half the total, with the rest spread across education, healthcare, drinking water, infrastructure and disaster management. The annual budget presented in February was Rs 1.58 lakh crore.

CPRG INSIGHT

States ask for a supplementary when the year's budget starts running out. Jharkhand has done it five months in, and half the money is going to a single department, Rural Development, which carries Abua Awas Yojana, the state's own housing scheme for families left out of the central one. Building 20 lakh houses is expensive and the instalments fall due faster than a February estimate can predict. The money is mostly for wages and running costs, so it keeps existing work moving rather than starting anything new.

14

Tripura brings out its first Operation and Maintenance Policy for rural water

Announced on 8 August, the policy places day-to-day upkeep of Jal Jeevan Mission water supply systems with Village Water and Sanitation Committees in Gram Panchayats and ADC villages. The committees will handle minor pipeline leaks, repair of taps and valves, pump operation and cleaning around water points, with the department stepping in for major faults. The policy covers rural areas only and excludes Nagar Panchayats.

CPRG INSIGHT

Jal Jeevan Mission paid for laying the pipes, not for keeping them working. Once a scheme is handed over, running it becomes the state's problem, and most states have never written down who is actually responsible. Tripura now has: small repairs and pump operation go to the village committee, bigger faults stay with the department. It also covers the ADC villages, where the schemes are newest and a broken pump is hardest to get fixed

DIPLOMACY & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

India & the World

15

India and the Southern African Customs Union sign Terms of Reference for a Preferential Trade Agreement

The ToR was signed at Vanijya Bhawan, India's first such signing with the African region. SACU, the world's oldest customs union, comprises South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Eswatini. The PTA is to cover eight chapters: trade in goods and market access, rules of origin, customs procedures and trade facilitation, trade remedies including a bilateral safeguard, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, dispute settlement, and legal and horizontal provisions. Negotiations are to begin within a month of signature and conclude within a year.

CPRG INSIGHT

India and SACU have talked on and off since 2007 without ever agreeing what the talks would cover, which is what these Terms of Reference could settle. A preferential agreement is a lighter instrument than a full free trade agreement, leaving services and investment outside, which is what makes it workable for a bloc that includes economies as small as Lesotho and Eswatini. As the Commerce Minister put it, the signing lowers no tariff by itself; the timetable is what moves things, with talks to start within a month and close within a year.

16

Bhopal Declaration adopted at the eleventh BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting

14 countries took part including ten BRICS members and four partner countries. The Declaration covers cultural and creative industries and market access through digital tools, UNESCO multinational nominations, provenance research and restitution of cultural property including exploration of AI-enabled tracing, safeguarding of traditional knowledge systems and cultural expressions, museum and archive cooperation on digitisation, and protection of creators' rights with fair remuneration where copyrighted work is used in Artificial Intelligence systems.

CPRG INSIGHT

The part worth noting is on artificial intelligence. Ten countries agreed that creators should be told and paid when their work is used to train AI systems. Indian music and publishing companies are fighting the same battle in court here, so an international text backing them is useful. The declaration also puts India, Egypt, Ethiopia and China on one line about getting artefacts returned, which works better than four countries asking separately

17

Culture Ministry sets out the Global Engagement Scheme as India's cultural diplomacy framework

Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat described the Global Engagement Scheme as the umbrella under which India's international cultural engagement runs. It has four components: the International Cultural Exchange Programme, Project Mausam, Brihattar Bharat, and the scheme for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and diverse cultural traditions. Cultural Exchange Programmes are currently valid with 98 countries, and the Scheme funds Festivals of India, artist deputations and India's participation in the BRICS, G20, SCO and BIMSTEC cultural tracks.

CPRG INSIGHT

Cultural agreements with 98 countries give India one of the widest such networks in the world, and the Global Engagement Scheme brings them under a single framework. Project Mausam is the most distinctive piece, mapping India's old maritime links across the Indian Ocean and giving countries in the region a shared history to build ties on. Brihattar Bharat does similar work with people of Indian origin settled abroad.

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