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THIS WEEK IN POLICY

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UNION GOVERNMENT & NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

At the Centre

01

Centre approves ₹1,195 crore for upgrading 25 ITIs under PM-SETU

The National Steering Committee approved five Strategic Investment Plans worth ₹1,194.92 crore under PM-SETU, covering ITI clusters in Maharashtra, Odisha and Jammu & Kashmir. Each cluster comprises one hub and four associated institutes, with industry partners including Tata Steel Foundation, BVG India and Belrise Industries. The investments will support infrastructure modernisation, industry-aligned courses, trainer development and stronger employer linkages. Cumulative investment approvals under the ₹60,000-crore scheme have now reached ₹3,687 crore.

CPRG INSIGHT

India has expanded its ITI network considerably, but PM-SETU represents a change in how these institutions are developed. Industry partners will contribute at least 17% of project costs and participate directly in shaping training. Each cluster also brings five government ITIs together under a common development plan. This allows institutions to share facilities and expertise while offering courses suited to industries operating in their region. The scheme therefore links public investment in vocational education more closely with employer requirements.

02

Centre launches Khet Bachao Abhiyan for sustainable farming during Rabi 2026

The Agriculture Ministry launched Khet Bachao Abhiyan–Rabi 2026 on 22 October, with implementation continuing until 30 November. The nationwide campaign will promote soil-test-based fertiliser use, crop diversification, residue management, water conservation and natural farming. Around 4,150 teams comprising over 12,000 scientists and agricultural functionaries will conduct training, field demonstrations and farmer meetings. The campaign targets approximately one crore participants and will also facilitate Farmer IDs, crop insurance awareness and wider Kisan Credit Card coverage.

CPRG INSIGHT

The first Khet Bachao Abhiyan, conducted in June 2026, organised over 96,000 field demonstrations and nearly 25,200 awareness camps on balanced fertiliser use. The Rabi campaign extends this effort to another cropping season, with emphasis on soil testing, crop diversification and agricultural inputs. Rather than creating another subsidy, it builds on existing schemes such as Soil Health Cards and agricultural extension programmes. The seasonal approach allows farmers to receive practical advice when they are deciding what and how to cultivate.

03

Centre revises sports federation funding with ₹7,387-crore outlay

The Sports Ministry issued operational guidelines for the revised Scheme of Assistance to National Sports Federations for 2026–27 to 2030–31, with an approved outlay of ₹7,386.74 crore. The framework raises assistance for hosting international tournaments to ₹50 crore per event and provides equivalent support for National Games. New components cover specialised Olympic Training Centres, international sports cooperation and global promotion of indigenous games. Existing support for coaching, international exposure, sports science and national championships will continue.

CPRG INSIGHT

India currently trains its elite athletes through National Centres of Excellence, academies and overseas facilities. The proposed Olympic Training Centres will instead provide dedicated infrastructure for individual sports, bringing specialised coaching, equipment and sports science together. The revised framework also expands support for hosting international competitions, alongside India's preparations for the 2030 Commonwealth Games and proposed 2036 Olympics. This combines athlete development with the creation of domestic facilities capable of supporting major international sporting events.

04

Centre launches upgraded digital portal for agricultural schemes and services

The Agriculture Ministry launched an upgraded Agri Welfare Portal to provide farmers with access to government schemes, subsidies, agricultural information and digital services through a common platform. It supports online eligibility checks, applications and information on Direct Benefit Transfers, alongside weather forecasts, market prices and scientific farming advice. Designed for basic smartphones and low-connectivity areas, the portal also incorporates accessibility features for persons with disabilities. It seeks to simplify access to ministry services and reduce dependence on intermediaries.

CPRG INSIGHT

Farmers already use platforms such as PM-KISAN, AgriStack and PM Fasal Bima Yojana, but these services have developed through separate digital systems. The upgraded portal brings access to them through a common interface, alongside information on eligibility, financial assistance and agricultural markets. It also connects farmers with FPOs, cooperatives and agricultural experts. This is particularly relevant for small farmers who depend on local offices or intermediaries for information, and the ministry has also planned training through Krishi Vigyan Kendras to support its use.

DIPLOMACY & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

India & the World

05

India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement enters into force

The India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement entered into force on 20 October, providing zero-duty access to all New Zealand tariff lines for Indian goods, eliminating tariffs previously reaching 10%. India has retained protections for sensitive agricultural products, including dairy and sugar. The agreement also provides market access across approximately 118 services sectors, annual quotas of 5,000 temporary employment visas and 1,000 working-holiday visas, and cooperation in agricultural productivity. New Zealand has committed to facilitating US$20 billion in investment into India.

CPRG INSIGHT

New Zealand already applied relatively low tariffs to many imports, so the agreement's gains are particularly relevant to products such as textiles, leather and footwear, where duties previously reached 10%. It also opens opportunities beyond merchandise trade through services, professional mobility and investment cooperation. The two countries have set a target of doubling bilateral trade in goods and services to NZ$7 billion by 2030. The agreement therefore combines improved market access with measures to expand a relatively small bilateral trading relationship.

06

India and New Zealand sign electronic origin-data exchange arrangement

India's Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs and the New Zealand Customs Service signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on 19 October for electronic exchange of origin information under their Free Trade Agreement. The arrangement will enable customs authorities to exchange origin-related data in advance, supporting verification of goods claiming preferential tariff treatment. It seeks to reduce information gaps, improve customs efficiency and provide greater certainty to businesses using the agreement's concessions.

CPRG INSIGHT

An FTA's lower tariffs are available only when goods meet its rules of origin. Importers must therefore provide evidence that a product was manufactured or sufficiently processed in the partner country. Under the India–New Zealand arrangement, customs authorities can cooperate directly to verify this information, with an interim mechanism already supporting traders while electronic exchange is developed. This is particularly useful for smaller exporters because reliable verification can reduce uncertainty around claiming tariff concessions and make the agreement easier to use.

07

India and Poland target doubling bilateral trade by 2030

During Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk's official visit, India and Poland agreed to target a doubling of bilateral trade by 2030 and establish a Defence Industry Dialogue. The countries also agreed to strengthen cooperation in critical minerals, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, space technology and industrial supply chains. Poland announced its participation in the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. The discussions reviewed implementation of the 2024–28 Strategic Partnership Action Plan and supported early signing and ratification of the concluded India–EU Free Trade Agreement.

CPRG INSIGHT

Bilateral trade has grown from US$1.95 billion to US$6.36 billion in 2025, with Indian exports accounting for US$4.83 billion. Poland is already India's largest trading partner in Central and Eastern Europe and provides access to wider European manufacturing and distribution networks. The proposed Defence Industry Dialogue and cooperation in critical minerals, machinery and emerging technologies could broaden this relationship beyond existing trade flows. The concluded India–EU FTA also provides a wider framework for strengthening commercial ties once implemented.

08

SCO Heads of Government adopt 2026–30 economic cooperation action plan

India participated in the 25th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Council of Heads of Government meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 20 October, represented by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Member states adopted a Joint Communiqué, the organisation's 2027 budget and the Action Plan for implementing its Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation during 2026–30. Discussions covered trade, investment, transport, finance and the digital economy. India emphasised cooperation against terrorism and respect for sovereignty in regional connectivity projects.

CPRG INSIGHT

India joined the SCO in 2017 to strengthen its engagement with Eurasia, particularly Central Asia. The organisation brings together major energy producers, manufacturing economies and important regional transport routes. India has separately pursued connectivity through projects such as Chabahar Port and the International North–South Transport Corridor. The new economic cooperation action plan provides another multilateral platform for working on trade facilitation, transport and investment. Its significance lies in coordinating these areas among countries that are central to India's wider Eurasian economic engagement.

09

India begins trade outreach to Germany and the Netherlands

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal began a visit to Germany on 22 October, as part of a trade and investment engagement extending to the Netherlands until 27 October. Accompanied by approximately 100 businesses and startups, the delegation is pursuing industrial partnerships in advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, pharmaceuticals, clean technology and logistics. The programme includes meetings with German and Dutch officials, sector-specific business roundtables and planned engagement with the Port of Rotterdam, alongside discussions on opportunities arising from the India–EU trade agreement.

CPRG INSIGHT

Germany and the Netherlands serve different purposes in India's European trade relationship. Germany is a major manufacturing and technology partner, while the Netherlands is a significant entry point for Indian goods into European supply chains. Indian merchandise exports to the Netherlands stood at approximately US$17.5 billion in 2025–26. With the India–EU FTA concluded but not yet operational, the immediate task for businesses is identifying buyers, meeting European product standards and preparing supply arrangements. The delegation's industry-level engagements address this preparatory stage.

STATE POLICY & GOVERNANCE

Across the States

10

Delhi approves ₹50-crore Go-Delhi Foundation to support startups

The Delhi government announced Cabinet approval for the Go-Delhi Foundation, with an initial corpus of ₹50 crore, to support startups, MSMEs and research-led entrepreneurship. Established as a Section 8 not-for-profit company under the Industries Department, the foundation will provide access to prototyping, testing, intellectual property assistance, incubation and investor networks. It will also facilitate pilot projects allowing startups to test technologies addressing public-service challenges, with successful solutions considered for government adoption.

CPRG INSIGHT

Delhi had already approved a ₹400-crore Startup and Incubation Policy in July 2026, providing for incubation centres across universities, colleges and technical institutions. The new foundation addresses a different stage of business development. Incubators primarily support early-stage ideas, while startups developing physical products or advanced technologies also need laboratories, testing, certification and customers. The foundation brings these services together and creates a route for government departments to test startup solutions. With nearly 21,000 DPIIT-recognised startups in Delhi, the distinction between supporting registrations and helping firms commercialise products is significant.

11

Delhi drafts E-Rickshaw Scheme to regulate rapid growth

The government released the draft Delhi E-Rickshaw (Registration and Operation) Scheme, 2026, proposing a fleet ceiling of 2.5 lakh vehicles. Every e-rickshaw would require a digital compliance certificate valid for two years, linking registration, driver authorisation, fitness, insurance and battery compliance. Individual owners would be limited to five vehicles and organisations to 100, with aggregator licensing required for fleets of 25 or more. Existing operators would receive 90 days to comply after notification. Public consultation remains open.

CPRG INSIGHT

E-rickshaws have become an important part of Delhi's last-mile transport network, particularly around Metro stations and residential areas. Unlike buses and autorickshaws, their rapid expansion has taken place without a comparable system for managing fleet numbers and operating locations. The proposed ceiling and digital compliance certificates introduce a more structured approach to registration and monitoring. Linking vehicle, driver and fitness information in one system would also make it easier for enforcement agencies to identify authorised operators.

12

Mizoram launches SUMAN Roadmap 2030 for maternal and newborn health

Mizoram launched its SUMAN Roadmap 2030 to reduce preventable maternal and newborn deaths and strengthen access to timely, quality healthcare. The roadmap, aligned with the national Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan initiative, targets a maternal mortality ratio below 70 per lakh live births by 2030. It prioritises coordination among district administrations, health facilities and communities, alongside improvements in antenatal care, institutional deliveries and services for underserved districts.

CPRG INSIGHT

SUMAN was introduced nationally in 2019, so Mizoram's roadmap is an implementation effort rather than a new maternal-health entitlement. The state's institutional delivery rate reached approximately 93% in 2025–26, while first-trimester antenatal registration stood at around 81%. These figures suggest that the remaining challenge extends beyond bringing women into health facilities. Southern districts such as Lawngtlai and Lunglei continue to report relatively low institutional deliveries, alongside cases of home births without skilled assistance. The roadmap's contribution will depend on improving continuity of care in these underserved areas.

13

Goa launches Artificial Intelligence Policy 2026

Goa launched its Artificial Intelligence Policy 2026, establishing a three-year framework for AI adoption across education, industry and public services. It targets 50,000 AI-certified professionals by 2030, including at least 25% women, and proposes introducing AI fundamentals in Classes VI–XII from 2027–28. The policy provides for AI laboratories in up to 50 government schools, training for 500 teachers, startup support and development of Konkani-language AI tools. It also proposes risk-based safeguards for AI applications.

CPRG INSIGHT

States are increasingly developing their own AI policies, but their priorities differ. Uttar Pradesh's recently approved AI Mission targets five lakh trained youth and AI centres across all 75 districts, focusing on large-scale adoption in governance. Goa has set a smaller target of 50,000 certified professionals, while placing greater emphasis on education, tourism and local-language technology. Its proposed Konkani language model is particularly relevant to a state with a relatively small linguistic population, making regional-language access an important part of its AI strategy.

14

Himachal Pradesh announces Nutrition Policy 2026 to address malnutrition

Himachal Pradesh announced approval of its Nutrition Policy 2026, adopting a life-cycle approach to malnutrition, anaemia and dietary deficiencies. It prioritises maternal and child nutrition, the first 1,000 days of life and underserved communities. The policy proposes State and District Nutrition Coordination Cells, a digital nutrition portal and stronger integration of existing food and welfare programmes. It also envisages upgrading the Kandaghat food-testing laboratory, establishing four additional laboratories and expanding food-quality surveillance.

CPRG INSIGHT

Himachal Pradesh performs relatively well on several health indicators, but nutritional deficiencies remain widespread. NFHS-5 recorded anaemia among 55.4% of children aged 6–59 months and 53% of women aged 15–49. These figures show that nutrition concerns extend beyond access to food and include dietary quality and micronutrient deficiencies. The policy's emphasis on traditional foods, diverse diets and coordination across departments builds on existing programmes such as Anganwadi services and PM POSHAN, bringing a broader nutritional focus to food-related welfare measures.

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