

DAILY PT POINTERS

28 January, 2025



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India, China to resume direct flights, issue visas

Steps to rebuild ties announced as Misri meets Chinese Foreign Minister in Beijing; Mansarovar pilgrimage to restart this summer; Wang calls for end to 'mutual suspicion and estrangement'

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Three months after negotiating an end to the military stand-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), India and China agreed to concrete measures to resume direct flights, visas, people-to-people exchanges, and the Mansarovar Yatra for pilgrims this summer. They agreed to resume the dialogue on trans-border rivers and sharing of hydrological data that China has withheld for years.

Both sides committed to marking the 75th year of establishment of ties with a number of celebratory events this year, as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called for an end to the



Rebooting ties: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on Monday. AP

two countries.

The decisions on reviving various measures were taken during a meeting between Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong in Beijing.

"As agreed between Prime Minister Narendra

zan in October, the two sides reviewed the state of India-China bilateral relations comprehensively and agreed to take certain people-centric steps to stabilise and rebuild ties," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, announcing that the technical officials

take forward plans to resume direct flights between India and China, the Mansarovar Pilgrimage in the "summer of 2025".

It said the India-China Expert Level Mechanism would discuss resumption of provision of hydrological data and "other cooperation pertaining to trans-border rivers", while the two sides would facilitate "people-to-people exchanges, including media and think tank interactions". Reports about the construction of a hydro-power project on the Brahmaputra in South Tibet (Yarlung Zangpo) have raised concern in Delhi.

The officials also held a discussion on economic and trade areas.

- India and China have agreed to resume key bilateral activities, including direct flights, visas, the Mansarovar pilgrimage, and dialogue on trans-border rivers and hydrological data sharing.
- These measures follow a meeting between Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong, aimed at stabilizing ties after the 2020 military tensions at the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- Both sides also addressed economic and trade issues, including restrictions on investments and exports.

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Uttarakhand adopts Uniform Civil Code, launches portal

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama on Monday officially rolled out the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for all residents of the State, except the Scheduled Tribes and natives who have migrated out of the State. With this, Uttarakhand has become the first Indian State to implement the UCC post-Independence.

The UCC Bill, passed by the State Assembly last February, bans practices such as *halala*, *iddat*, and *talaq* (customs related to marriage and divorce in Muslim Personal Law). It also ensures that women are given equal rights in matters related to property and inheritance.

The UCC mandates online registration of marriages, divorce and live-in relationships. A government portal – ucc.uk.gov.in



Pushkar Singh Dhama

cess records, register complaints and also upload their will on the portal. Mr. Dhama also registered his marriage on the portal.

“Under the able leadership of the respected Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, our government has today implemented the UCC in Uttarakhand. Today is a special day for the people of this State as well as for all the countrymen,” Mr. Dhama said during the launch of the UCC portal.

“I am confident that this

irrigate the entire country in the near future,” he added.

Terming the UCC the “beginning of a new era of equality and harmony”, Mr. Dhama added that his government had promised the “god-like” people that every citizen of the State would have equal rights, and the implementation of UCC was a reflection of the BJP’s commitment to achieve the resolution taken before the public.

According to a communique from the State government, the online portal created for the UCC registration has Aadhaar-based verification. An AI-based translation service will translate the content into 22 languages, including English.

The portal has integrated data from across more than 13 government departments, including civic bodies, police and courts.

- Uttarakhand became the first Indian state to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), which bans practices like *halala* and *talaq*, and ensures equal property and inheritance rights for women. The UCC mandates online registration for marriages, divorces, and live-in relationships through a government portal. It also allows will registration and integrates data from multiple departments. The portal offers Aadhaar-based verification, AI translation, and emergency services. Violations can lead to fines after warnings.
- The Uniform Civil Code aims to establish a uniform legal framework for all citizens, regardless of their religion. Article 44 in the DPSP, found in Part IV of the Constitution, states that “the State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India”.

Govt's lateral entry scheme: Politics stalled it, now case awaits legal process

JAY MAZOOMDAAR
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 27

THE GOVERNMENT'S lateral entry scheme to invite talent into the bureaucracy from outside the system — by contractual hiring of joint secretaries — was put on hold last year after the Opposition and allies objected to the absence of quotas.

While that put a question mark on the future of the scheme — 63 appointments have been made under it since 2019 — a court case that could have a bearing on it is also waiting for almost five years for hearings to begin.

The legal standoff began back in February 2020 when Indian Forest Service officer Sanjiv Chaturvedi challenged the Lateral Entry scheme before the Nainital Bench of the Central Administrative Tribunal on the ground that it lacked legal sanctity and procedural rigour.

When CAT resumed its regular functioning after the Covid pandemic, the Centre cited the

to come up for a hearing.

The Indian Express reviewed the various submissions made before the CAT by applicant Chaturvedi, and the replies filed by the government. These are the key contentions:

Constitutional questions: Multiple SC judgments have held that contractual appointments to permanent posts disregard the constitutional scheme of permanent civil services, argued the applicant.

Also, Article 309 of the Constitution says that recruitment to Central government jobs can only be through an Act of Parliament or a statutory Rule framed under the authority of the President. None of these, the applicant submitted, was done for the "Lateral Entry" scheme.

In its reply, the DoPT said the "doctrine of pleasure" could be invoked under Article 310 where it is up to the President to appoint any person having special qualifications to any post.

In a counter, the applicant argued that the powers to appoint

- The government's lateral entry scheme, which hires external talent for bureaucratic roles, has faced opposition due to the lack of quotas.
- A legal challenge filed by Sanjiv Chaturvedi in 2020 argues the scheme violates constitutional principles, as it bypasses recruitment processes outlined in Article 309.
- The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) defends it under Article 310's "doctrine of pleasure." The case, now delayed for years, remains pending with the Supreme Court. Key concerns include conflicts of interest and inadequate vetting of private sector candidates.

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India's ties with Indonesia

After starting on a high in the late 1940s, ties deteriorated in the 1960s. The relationship has been growing steadily since the 1990s, when India launched the 'Look East' policy. Here's a short history

ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 27

INDIA AND Indonesia signed agreements on maritime security, health, traditional medicine, culture, and digital cooperation on Saturday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto had their summit meeting in New Delhi's Hyderabad House.

In the 75 years between Indonesia's first President Sukarno and President Prabowo being the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebration, the relationship between the two countries has gone through its highs and lows.

After starting on a high in the late 1940s on the back of a common commitment against imperialism and shared democratic principles, ties were strained in the 1960s as Indonesia cosied up to China and Pakistan.

Relations improved under President Suharto (1967-98), but they took off only in the 1990s as the government of P V Narasimha Rao initiated India's 'Look East' policy. In 2014, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India took a step forward and



Pakistan to face India's aggression."

Jakarta supplied Islamabad with weapons, and its leaders fuelled anti-India sentiments among Indonesians, culminating in a mob attack on the Indian embassy in Jakarta.

Drift during Cold War

Domestically, Sukarno maintained a precarious balance of power between the Army, the communists, and himself. An attempted left-wing coup in 1965 swiftly changed things. The Army retaliated brutally, and nearly wiped out the communists. This left Sukarno weakened. By 1966 he had effectively handed over power to General Suharto, a staunch anti-communist who had the backing of the United States.

This effectively broke the Beijing-Jakarta axis — in no small part due to China's alleged support to the 1965 coup. Suharto started working towards repairing his country's damaged ties abroad, including the relationship with India. New Delhi reciprocated with a number of trade agreements in 1967.

But by the 1970s, India under Indira Gandhi had drifted ever closer to the USSR, and the growth of New Delhi's ties with the

- India and Indonesia signed agreements on maritime security, health, culture, and digital cooperation during a meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Prabowo in New Delhi.
- Their relationship, which began strong in the 1940s, faced setbacks in the 1960s due to differing views on China and Indonesia's alignment with Pakistan.
- Ties improved in the 1990s with India's 'Look East' policy and grew further with the 'Act East' policy. Bilateral trade has surged, with Indonesia becoming India's second-largest ASEAN trading partner.
- Despite progress, experts believe there is still untapped potential, and the recent agreements aim to strengthen trade, security, and defense cooperation.

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LEZIM

Maharashtrian folk dance at the centre of controversy involving Vicky Kaushal's new Bollywood film

ALOK DESHPANDE

MUMBAI, JANUARY 27

A SCENE from the trailer of the upcoming Bollywood film *Chhava*, based on the life of Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, has led to controversy in Maharashtra. Actor Vicky Kaushal, who portrays the king, is seen performing the *Lezim* dance alongside actress Rashmika Mandanna, who plays Sambhaji's wife Maharani Yesubai in the film. Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj (1657-1689) was the son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (1630-1680), the founder of the Maratha empire.



A Lezim performance during a cultural program in Pune, Maharashtra. Anil Horizon

What is the controversy about?

Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, a descendant of the king and a former Rajya Sabha MP, objected to the depiction and questioned the cinematic liberty taken by the filmmakers. On Saturday, Maharashtra's Minister for Industries & Marathi Language, Uday Samant, said in a post on X, "It is a matter of joy that a Hindi film is being made based on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the protector of religion and freedom... Our position is that this film should not be re-

panied by an *akhada*, which is "a party of persons skilled in performing many feats of physical skill". Today, *Lezim* has "become part and parcel of physical education drill in all schools and colleges" in the state, she wrote.

"*Lezim*, a small mallet, is made of a thin wood with pieces of metal strung together which clash and produce a sonorous sound when swinging. *Lezim* is as much a rigorous physical exercise, a drill, as a dance: the formations are in twos and fours and sometimes even a circle. The dance is accompanied by a *dhol* or *dholgi*

- The trailer for *Chhava*, a film about Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, sparked controversy due to a scene featuring Vicky Kaushal (as Sambhaji) performing the *Lezim* dance with Rashmika Mandanna (as Yesubai). Critics, including Sambhaji's descendant and Maharashtra Minister Uday Samant, raised concerns over the portrayal. Director Laxman Utekar announced the scene would be removed, explaining that *Lezim* is a part of Maratha culture.
- Sambhaji Maharaj, son of Shivaji Maharaj, was a prominent Maratha ruler who fought against the Mughal Empire until his capture and execution.

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PM Modi a co-chair of Paris AI summit: What's on the agenda?

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 27

HOW TO leverage the power of AI while mitigating its risks: that seems to be the biggest challenge confronting policymakers across countries on the issue of AI regulation. Amid growing concerns over how to develop regulatory oversight of artificial intelligence, without stifling the AI ecosystem, global leaders are set to gather in Paris on February 10 for a two-day AI Action Summit. This builds on a AI Safety Summit held in Britain in Bletchley Park in 2023 and a smaller meeting in Seoul in 2024.

While the Bletchley summit was focused on the debate surrounding the 'doomsday' concerns posed by AI, and eventually resulted in all 25 states, including the US and China, signing the Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety, the Seoul summit last May saw 16 top AI companies making voluntary commitments to develop AI in a transparent manner.

TWO-DAY AI ACTION SUMMIT FROM FEB 10



THE PARIS summit is an initiative of French President Emmanuel Macron and focuses on the broader agenda of global AI governance, innovation

THE SUMMIT aims to address the increasing concentration of power in the AI market, especially with respect to the foundational models being owned by a few companies

where Macron has taken a personal initiative, is important for Europe because the development of powerful AI is now increasingly perceived as a race between the tech majors of America and the state power of China. In his widely cited report on the challenges to Europe's economy, Mario Draghi, the former president of the European Central Bank, highlighted red tape and laws that pre-

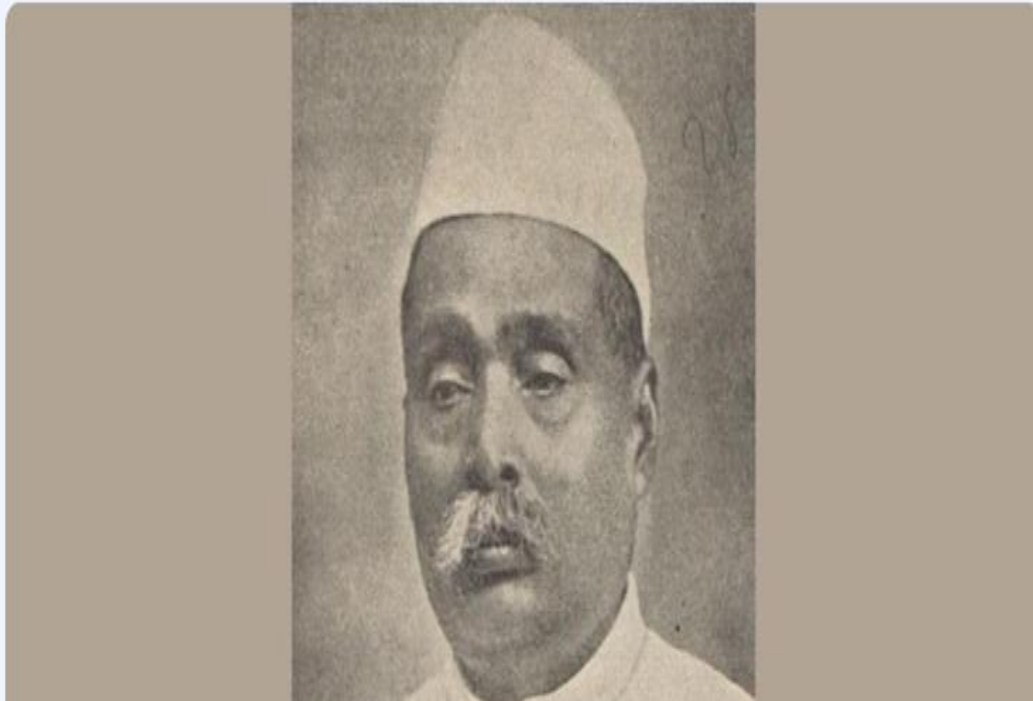
deavour as previously thought with foundational models possible at a fraction of the cost of what it took companies like OpenAI and Google to build theirs. Chinese tech major Alibaba too released new AI model in November which is said to rival OpenAI GPT-o1 series models in reasoning capability. The emergence of China's AI tech is a relatively new phenomenon that could be a fa-

- The Paris AI Summit, scheduled for February 10-11, will focus on global AI governance, innovation, and public interest, as leaders aim to balance AI development with regulation.
- The summit builds on prior events, including the 2023 Bletchley Park AI Safety Summit and the 2024 Seoul meeting. Discussions will address the concentration of AI power in a few companies, with a focus on regulatory approaches across regions.
- The EU is proposing strict regulations, while the UK favors a lighter approach, and the US is leaning toward deregulation. China has also advanced its AI capabilities, despite efforts by the US to curb progress. India stresses ensuring AI's safety and trust while recognizing its potential.

HEADLINES OF THE DAY

Air-GS1(History)

Nation Remembers Lala Lajpat Rai On His Birth Anniversary



- The Nation is remembering Lala Lajpat Rai on his 160th Birth Anniversary today.
- The legendary freedom fighter and flag bearer of the Swadeshi Movement was born on this day in 1865, at Dhudike in the then Faridkot district of the Punjab Province of British India. His father Munshi Radha Krishna was a government school teacher and his mother was Gulab Devi. He played a pivotal role in India's Freedom Struggle.
- Known as Punjab Kesari, Lala Lajpat Rai died of severe trauma injuries he sustained on his head during a baton charge by police in October 1928. The Police did the Lathi charge when Lalaji was leading a peaceful protest march against the all-British Simon Commission in Lahore.