

16/04/2026 Daily Current News

1. Scarborough shoal:

Context: China is employing ships and a barrier to tighten control of the entrance to the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea amid roiling tension with the Philippines over the disputed feature.

About Scarborough shoal:



- ❖ Location: A disputed atoll in the South China Sea, about 220 km west of the Philippines' Luzon Island.
- ❖ Geography: Largest atoll in the South China Sea, mostly submerged at high tide with few rocks visible.
- ❖ China's Claim: China asserts historical ownership dating back to the Yuan Dynasty (1200s), calling it Huangyan Island.
- ❖ Philippines' Claim: Philippines bases its claim on proximity and UNCLOS, as the shoal lies within its 200-nautical-mile EEZ.
- ❖ Legal Basis: The Philippines relies on the 1982 UNCLOS provisions supporting its maritime rights.
- ❖ Economic Importance: Waters around the shoal are rich in fish, shellfish, and sea cucumbers, making it a key fishing zone.

2. Andaman Sea:

Context: At least 250 people, including Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals, were missing after a boat capsized in the Andaman Sea recently on the way to Malaysia, according to the United Nations' refugee and migration agencies.

About Andaman Sea:



- ❖ **Location & Type:** Andaman Sea is a marginal sea of the northeastern Indian Ocean
- ❖ **Boundaries:** Bordered by Myanmar and Thailand (north & east), Malay Peninsula and Sumatra (south), and separated from Bay of Bengal by Andaman and Nicobar Islands (west)
- ❖ **Strategic Link:** Southern end connects to Strait of Malacca, a key corridor between Indian and Pacific Oceans
- ❖ **Geographical Features:** Includes Gulf of Martaban and receives rivers like Irrawaddy River, Salween River, and Sittang River
- ❖ **Tectonic Activity:** Seafloor is tectonically active along the Burma–Sunda plate boundary
- ❖ **Strategic Importance:** Enhances India's maritime leverage through Andaman and Nicobar Command
- ❖ **Economic Role:** Crucial for global shipping, fisheries, and marine resources
- ❖ **Environmental Concern:** Rich biodiversity under threat from increasing environmental pressures.

3. *Asia Zero-Emission Community (AZEC) Plus:*

Context: EAM S. Jaishankar reaffirms India's commitment to safe & unimpeded maritime transit in the meeting of Asia Zero-Emission Community (AZEC) Plus.

About Asia Zero-Emission Community (AZEC) Plus:

- ❖ **Overview:** Asia Zero-Emission Community (AZEC) Plus is an expanded framework led by Japan to promote clean energy transition, energy security, and regional resilience in Asia
- ❖ **What is AZEC?:** Regional platform (launched in 2023) for cooperation on carbon neutrality (net-zero emissions) and sustainable energy transition in Asia
- ❖ **Member Countries:** Includes ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, etc.), along with Japan, Australia, and partners South Korea
- ❖ **What is AZEC Plus?:** Expanded and more strategic version of AZEC focusing on energy security + decarbonization, combining climate goals with stable energy supply
- ❖ **Wider Participation:** Includes additional countries such as India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka

- ❖ **Crisis Response Mechanism:** Addresses oil supply disruptions and ensures maritime route security during global crises
- ❖ **Supply Chain Resilience:** Focus on strengthening energy supply chains across the region
- ❖ **New Initiative – POWERR Asia:** Partnership on Energy & Resources Resilience for emergency fuel financing, creation of strategic reserves, and supply chain strengthening
- ❖ **Financial Support:** Japan announced ~\$10 billion support for energy procurement and stabilizing Asian economies during crises
- ❖ **Key Objectives:** Ensure energy security in Asia; promote clean energy (hydrogen, ammonia, renewables); strengthen supply chains; support economic growth with decarbonization; enhance Indo-Pacific cooperation

4. *India's exports in 2025-26 financial year:*

Context: The cumulative exports (merchandise & services) during FY 2025-26 (April-March) is estimated at US\$ 860.09 Billion, as compared to US\$ 825.26 Billion in FY 2024-25 (April-March), an estimated growth of 4.22%.

More details:

		FY 2025-26 (US\$ Billion)	FY 2024-25 (US\$ Billion)
Merchandise	Exports	441.78	437.70
	Imports	774.98	721.20
Services*	Exports	418.31	387.55
	Imports	204.42	198.72
Total Trade (Merchandise + Services) *	Exports	860.09	825.26
	Imports	979.40	919.92
	Trade Balance	-119.30	-94.66

	FY 2025-26 (US\$ Billion)	FY 2024-25 (US\$ Billion)
Non- petroleum exports	387.88	374.32
Non- petroleum imports	601.03	535.42
Non-petroleum & Non Gems & Jewellery exports	359.67	344.50
Non-petroleum & Non Gems & Jewellery imports	498.56	454.59

- ❖ Services exports is estimated to grow by 7.94 percent during FY 2025-26 (April-March)* over FY 2024-25 (April-March).
- ❖ Top 5 export destinations, in terms of change in value, exhibiting positive growth in FY 2025-26 (April-March) vis a vis FY 2024-25 (April-March) are China P Rp (36.66%), Spain (46.33%), Hong Kong (33.22%), Vietnam Soc Rep (22.78%) & Sri Lanka Dsr (21.14%).
- ❖ Top 5 import sources, in terms of change in value, exhibiting growth in FY 2025-26 (April-March) vis a vis FY 2024-25 (April-March) are China P Rp (16.03%), U S A (15.95%), Hong Kong (23.32%), Peru (78.08%) & U K (36.09%).

5. Urban Challenge Fund:

Context: Union Minister Shri Manohar Lal Launches Operational Guidelines for Urban Challenge Fund.

Operational Guidelines for Urban Challenge Fund:

- ❖ Urban Challenge Fund, with a total Central Assistance of ₹1 lakh crore, is designed as a catalytic instrument to mobilise nearly four times the investment through market-based financing.
- ❖ Central Assistance will be limited to 25% of project cost, while at least 50% of funding will be mobilised through municipal bonds, bank loans and public-private partnerships, thereby ensuring financial discipline and encouraging private participation.
- ❖ Final 25% contributed by States/UTs/ULBs or additional market funding
- ❖ Out of the total outlay, ₹90,000 crore has been earmarked for projects, ₹5,000 crore for project preparation and capacity building, and ₹5,000 crore for the Credit Repayment Guarantee Sub-Scheme.
- ❖ Fund will support transformative projects across key sectors such as redevelopment of old city areas and markets, urban mobility and last-mile connectivity, non-motorised transport, water and sanitation infrastructure, and climate-resilient urban development.

About Urban Challenge Fund:

- ❖ About: Urban Challenge Fund is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs with ₹1 lakh crore support (FY 2025–26 to 2030–31, extendable to 2033–34)
- ❖ Objective: Aims to fund bankable urban infrastructure projects using a challenge-based approach to mobilise ~₹4 lakh crore investment
- ❖ Paradigm Shift: Moves from grant-based funding to market-linked, reform-driven, and outcome-oriented urban development
- ❖ Private Participation: Encourages private sector involvement in financing and management of projects
- ❖ Growth Hubs Vertical: Focus on transit-oriented development, greenfield townships, and economic corridors
- ❖ Eligibility (Small Cities): ULBs in NE/hilly states and towns with population <1 lakh
- ❖ Guarantee Coverage: Up to ₹7 crore or 70% (first loan) and 50% (subsequent loans)
- ❖ Project Capacity: Enables small ULBs to take projects worth ₹20 crore initially and ₹28 crore later
- ❖ Coverage: Includes cities with population ≥10 lakh, all capitals, and industrial towns ≥1 lakh population

- ❖ Project Criteria: Must be bankable, transformative, aligned with three verticals, and backed by credible financing
- ❖ Exclusion: Projects already funded under AMRUT 2.0 and Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0 are not eligible
- ❖ Selection Mode: Uses competitive challenge-based selection instead of population-based allocation
- ❖ Reform Linkage: Funding tied to reforms in governance, digital systems, and financial transparency
- ❖ Evaluation Metrics: Based on KPIs like job creation, revenue generation, and climate resilience

6. *Cocoa Production:*

Context: India has set an ambitious goal to achieve self-sufficiency in cocoa production by 2040 under a comprehensive roadmap aimed at strengthening domestic output and reducing import dependence with cocoa imports exceeding \$866 million annually.

About Cocoa production:

- ❖ About Cocoa: Cocoa is a major plantation crop used for chocolate production
- ❖ Origin: Native to the Amazon Basin and suited to humid tropical climates
- ❖ Latitudinal Range: Grown near the equator within 20° North and South
- ❖ Altitude: Cultivated up to 300 m above mean sea level
- ❖ Rainfall: Requires 1500–2000 mm annual rainfall
- ❖ Temperature: Thrives in 15°–39°C, with optimum around 25°C
- ❖ Soil: Prefers deep, well-drained soils, mainly clay loam and sandy loam
- ❖ Soil pH: Ideal pH range is 6.5 to 7.0
- ❖ Shade Requirement: Grows as an under-storey crop requiring about 50% shade
- ❖ Global Production: Around 70% of cocoa comes from West African countries—Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon
- ❖ India Production: Mainly cultivated in Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu as an intercrop with arecanut and coconut.

Quick Bites:

- ☐ R. Vaishali won the Women's Candidates chess tournament in Cyprus on Wednesday and thus qualified for the World championship match to be played later this year. The Grandmaster from Chennai scored a crushing victory over Russia's Kateryna Lagno in the final round to emerge as the clear winner.
- ☐ Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, inaugurated Sri Guru Bhairavaikya Mandira at Sri Kshetra Adichunchanagiri in Mandya, Karnataka.
- ☐ Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Hosts First BRICS Health Working Group Meeting 2026 in New Delhi.
- ☐ ILO report titled "Universal social protection in changing labour markets: Protecting workers in all types of employment" calls for strong social protection systems for all types of workers.

- ☐ Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL), a joint venture of National Aluminium Company Limited, Hindustan Copper Limited, and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Limited under the Ministry of Mines, has secured environmental clearance for deep exploration of five lithium blocks in Argentina. Lithium, a soft, silvery-white alkali metal with the lowest density among metals, is a critical mineral for batteries and energy storage, and the “Lithium Triangle” comprising Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile holds over 75% of global lithium reserves.
- ☐ New burrowing reed snake species discovered in Meghalaya’s Garo Hills. The discovered species is named as Calamaria garoensis (Garo Hills reed snake).
- ☐ India’s trade pattern shifted in FY 2025–26 as China overtook the United States to become India’s largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching USD 151.1 billion. This marks China’s return to the top position, reflecting India’s continued dependence on Chinese imports despite rising exports, while the US slipped to second place after leading for four consecutive years.

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