



P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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1. For the first time in India's space history, the Vikram-1 rocket, developed by a private company, is scheduled to be launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh, into Low Earth Orbit (LEO).
 - i. The rocket has been designed and developed indigenously by Skyroot Aerospace, a Hyderabad-based private space company in Telangana.
 - ii. Until now, rockets built by private companies in India had been launched only for sub-orbital test missions. For the first time, Vikram-1 will place satellites into Low Earth Orbit. This historic mission has been named "Aagaman."
 - iii. Following the Central Government's decision to permit private participation in the space sector, IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre), operating under ISRO, granted approval to Skyroot Aerospace to develop orbital launch vehicles.
 - iv. Under its "Prarambh" programme, Skyroot began developing a new family of launch vehicles. Three different variants capable of carrying different payload capacities were designed and named "Vikram" in memory of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme.
 - v. The Vikram-S rocket, capable of carrying payloads of up to 480 kg, was successfully launched as a demonstration mission in 2022. Following that success, the company developed Vikram-1.
 - vi. Vikram-1 is a four-stage rocket standing 24 metres tall. It is capable of carrying payloads of up to 350 kg to orbit. Its engines have been manufactured using 3D printing technology.
 - vii. The rocket will deploy payloads from Indian private space companies, including Grahac Space, CosmoServe, D-Cubed, as well as Skyroot's own Scope payload, into a 450-km Low Earth Orbit. These payloads will collect data on the space environment, which private companies intend to use for planning future satellite missions.
 - viii. ISRO officials stated that all preparations for the launch have been completed and the countdown has begun.

2. Andy Burnham Chosen as New UK Prime Minister

Andy Burnham (56) has been officially elected as the new leader of the Labour Party, the ruling party in the United Kingdom.

- i. As a result, he is expected to assume office as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom next week. He will become the seventh Prime Minister of the country in the last 10 years.

3. Sir Garfield Sobers (89), the legendary West Indies cricketer, passed away in Bridgetown, the capital of Barbados, due to age-related illness.

- i. He was the first batter in cricket history to hit six sixes in a single over. He achieved the feat in 1968, while playing for Nottinghamshire against Glamorgan in a first-class match.
- ii. In his honour, the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy is awarded annually by the International Cricket Council (ICC) to the best men's cricketer across all international formats.

4. Stringent new visa regulations implemented by the U.S. Government for international students and professionals

(i) New Visa Restrictions and Duration

- The U.S. has tightened regulations for international students arriving on non-immigrant 'F' type visas, limiting their maximum stay for higher education to 4 years.
- The new rules also apply to 'J' type visas (exchange program participants) and 'I' type visas (journalists).
- Students who require more than four years to complete their degree programs must now formally apply to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for specific permission to extend their stay.

(ii) Changes to Post-Study and Training Periods

- After completing their studies, the time allowed for international students to remain in the U.S. to prepare for departure or change their visa status has been cut from 60 days to 30 days.
- Elimination of OPT Extensions: Previously, students could stay for up to an additional three years under Optional Practical Training (OPT). This provision has been removed, and such long-term stays after graduation are no longer permitted.

(iii) Impact on Journalists and Specific Nationalities

- Journalists on 'I' visas are now restricted to a maximum stay of 240 days.
- The regulations are even stricter for Chinese journalists, whose stay is now capped at just 90 days.

(iv) Rationale and Implementation for Current Students

- U.S. Department official Mark Weinman stated that these rules aim to end the practice of international students staying indefinitely and to re-establish the Government's ability to properly inspect and monitor foreign nationals.
- Students currently studying in the U.S. on non-immigrant visas will be automatically brought under these new rules, meaning their total permitted stay will be capped at the four-year mark.

(v) Statistical Impact on Indian Students

- Indian students are likely to be the most significantly impacted by these changes.
- According to the 2025 "Open Doors" report, there were 3,63,019 Indian students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities during the 2024–25 academic year.
- This figure represented a 9.5% increase in Indian student enrollment compared to the previous year, highlighting the massive scale of the population now facing these new restrictions.

5. The Monsoon Session of Parliament is scheduled to commence on July 20, 2026, and will continue until August 13, 2026.

(i) Key Legislative Agenda

The Government plans to introduce and pass several significant bills and ordinances during this session:

- **Income Tax Act Amendment Bill:** This bill aims to attract foreign investment and stabilize the rupee by providing income tax exemptions for foreign investors on interest income and capital gains derived from Government securities.
- **National Song Protection:** A constitutional amendment bill is expected to be introduced to make insulting the national song "Vande Mataram" a punishable offense.
- **Women's Reservation and Delimitation:** The Government intends to re-introduce the bill for Women's Reservation in legislatures, linked with the process of constituency

delimitation.

- Other Amendments: Other planned legislation includes the Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Bill and the Foreign Contribution Regulation Amendment Bill (FCRA)

6. Historic launch of India's first hydrogen-powered train, marking a significant step toward clean energy in the transportation sector.

(i) Launch and Route Details

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the country's first hydrogen train service on Friday, July 17, 2026.
- The train runs between Jind and Sonipat in the state of Haryana.
- The service covers a distance of 89 km, stopping at 12 railway stations, and completes the journey in 2 hours.
- The Prime Minister highlighted this project as a successful example of the "Make in India" initiative.

(ii) Technical Specifications

- The train consists of 10 coaches and has the capacity to carry approximately 2,600 passengers at a maximum speed of 75 km per hour.
- It is powered by a 3,200 horsepower propulsion system.
- While hydrogen trains in other countries typically feature only 3 to 4 coaches, India's 10-coach version is recognized as the world's longest and most powerful hydrogen train.

(iii) Operational Mechanism

- Fuel Cell Technology: Unlike traditional electric trains that receive power from overhead lines, this train generates its own electricity internally through a chemical reaction between hydrogen and oxygen using a fuel cell system.
- Because the train generates its own power, it eliminates the need for expensive overhead electrification infrastructure.

(iv) Environmental and Safety Features

- The train is completely eco-friendly; instead of harmful pollutants like carbon dioxide or nitrogen oxide, its only byproduct is water vapor.
- The hydrogen engine operates much more silently than traditional diesel engines.
- The train is equipped with multi-layered safety systems designed to detect hydrogen

leaks, heat, flames, and smoke in advance.

(v) Global Context and Future Outlook

- With this launch, India joins a very small group of nations—including Germany, France, China, Japan, and Sweden—that operate hydrogen trains.
- Germany was the global pioneer, launching the first such service in 2018.
- Countries like the USA, Britain, and South Korea are still in the pilot or preparatory stages of this technology.
- Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw stated that trial runs are currently being conducted with the goal of extending this service to Delhi.