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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 19 July 2026

NITI AAYOG'S DEREGULATION PUSH: RETHINKING INDIA'S CONTENT BLOCKING REGIME

NITI Aayog has sought feedback from major tech companies and start-ups on whether India's current online content blocking requirements and transparency timelines are "feasible."

This is part of a broader deregulation push targeting India's tech laws framework, which falls under the IT Ministry's domain.

- The Aayog has sought industry views on how existing legislation can be simplified. The consultation covers a wide sweep of regulatory issues:
 - Laws affecting social media companies and other online intermediaries
 - Cybersecurity
 - Data protection
 - Online gaming
- In a meeting, where executives of technology industry participated, specific questions were shared with stakeholders, including:
 - Are current takedown, grievance, and transparency timelines operationally feasible across different categories and sizes of intermediaries?
 - Which intermediary due diligence obligations impose the highest recurring compliance burden, and what specific operational simplifications would be most impactful?
- NITI Aayog will review industry responses and send a detailed note to the IT Ministry with its recommendations. However, the IT Ministry retains discretion and may or may not accept the Aayog's suggestions.
- **The 'Jan Vishwas Siddhant' Initiative**
 - This consultation is part of NITI Aayog's **Jan Vishwas Siddhant initiative**, an effort to build a trust-based regulatory environment by gathering inputs across sectors on deregulation and rationalisation of existing laws.

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India's Expanding Digital Footprint

- India's rapid digitalisation has transformed how citizens interact with the State, access services, and participate in governance.
- Digital platforms now operate at population scale, making data a critical public resource.
- This has made embedding privacy and security into digital systems a central governance priority.
- **Scale of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**
 - Aadhaar: A trusted digital identity framework.
 - UPI: Revolutionised real-time digital payments.
 - MyGov: A citizen-participation platform with over 6 crore users.
 - eSanjeevani: Facilitated more than 44 crore digital health consultations, expanding healthcare access.
 - These platforms demonstrate the scale and inclusiveness of India's DPI while underscoring the need for strong data protection to sustain public trust.
- **Connectivity and Digital Inclusion at Scale**
 - India is the **world's third-largest digitalised economy**.
 - Over **101.7 crore broadband subscribers** (as of September 2025), each spending an average of **1,000 minutes online**.
 - Mobile data is highly affordable, at **\$0.10 per GB (2025)**.
 - This affordable, widespread connectivity has made digital platforms central to identity verification, payments, healthcare, education, grievance redressal, and citizen participation.

Conclusion

NITI Aayog's outreach signals a recalibration of India's tech regulation, weighing tighter content control against ease of compliance for platforms. Whether this results in eased timelines or reaffirms the current strict regime will depend on how the IT Ministry balances industry concerns with its broader push for a stronger digital enforcement architecture.

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SKYROOT'S VIKRAM-1 - A NEW ERA FOR INDIA'S PRIVATE SPACE SECTOR

- The **Mission Aagaman** marks India's emergence as the **third** country (after US and China) where a private company has independently demonstrated **orbital launch**
- So far, all orbital rockets India has launched have been state funded and led by the ISRO, but Skyroot Aerospace changed this, reflecting the growing maturity of India's commercial space ecosystem following space-sector reforms.
 - Vikram-1, a 22-metre, **three-stage** orbital launch vehicle, was successfully launched from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.
 - The mission, titled 'Aagaman' (**Arrival**), validated the rocket's ability to achieve full orbital flight.
 - India joins a select group of nations where private enterprises possess orbital launch capability.
- **Technical features:**
 - **Payload capacity:** Up to 350 kg to Low Earth Orbit (450 km).
 - **Rocket built using:** All-carbon composite structure, 3D-printed engines, high-thrust solid-fuel boosters, and indigenous propulsion systems.
 - **Successfully validated:** Propulsion; stage separation; Guidance, Navigation and Control (GNC); avionics; telemetry; and overall vehicle performance.

Evolution of Skyroot Aerospace:

- Founded in **2018**, Skyroot emerged after the liberalisation of India's space sector.
- It became India's **first** unicorn in the space sector (valuation exceeding \$1 billion).
- Earlier launched **Vikram-S** (2022), a suborbital mission that demonstrated launch capability but did not achieve orbit.
- Vikram-1 represents the **transition** from demonstration to operational orbital launch capability.
- **The company's future plans:** Additional test launches; commercial launch services; and manufacturing capacity of one Vikram-1 rocket per month (12 annually).

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Challenges Before Skyroot:

- While the technological achievement is significant, commercial success remains uncertain. **Challenges are -**
 - **Challenging global market:** The small-satellite launch market has become highly competitive. Several startups in the US, Europe, China, Japan and Australia have struggled or exited due to limited launch demand.
 - **Competition from rideshare launches:**
 - Small satellites increasingly use rideshare missions aboard larger rockets such as SpaceX's Falcon 9, significantly reducing launch costs.
 - Dedicated launch vehicles like Vikram-1 offer orbital flexibility but often at a higher price.
 - **Competition from ISRO:** Vikram-1 will also compete with ISRO's Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) and the well-established Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
 - **Limited domestic demand:**
 - India's current demand for dedicated small-satellite launches remains modest.
 - To fully utilise its proposed production capacity, Skyroot must secure international commercial customers.
 - **Low-margin industry:** Launch services are capital-intensive; comparatively low-margin; and subject to increasing compliance costs, including space debris mitigation and regulatory obligations.
- The successful launch of Vikram-1 marks a watershed moment for India's private space industry and validates years of **policy reforms** encouraging private participation.
- For India, the mission represents another major step towards becoming a leading player in the global space economy and advancing the vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** in strategic technologies.

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KUDANKULAM NUCLEAR POWER PLANT DATA BREACH

- The **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP)**, located in the **Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu**, is India's largest nuclear power generation facility and a flagship Indo-Russian civil nuclear project.
- Recently, a ransomware group known as **World Leaks** allegedly published several internal documents relating to the plant on the dark web.
- The leaked material reportedly included:
 - Engineering drawings
 - Inspection records
 - Minutes of meetings
 - Technical reports
 - Official correspondence
- Responding to the reports, the **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)** clarified that the leaked documents pertained only to non-critical facilities located outside the "reactor island" and did not compromise nuclear safety or reactor operations.
- The breach has also revived memories of the 2019 cyberattack on the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, which remains one of the most significant cybersecurity incidents involving India's nuclear establishment.

Measures Taken to Strengthen Cybersecurity

- India has undertaken several initiatives to strengthen the cybersecurity of critical infrastructure, including:
 - **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)**: The national agency responsible for responding to cybersecurity incidents.
 - **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)**: Established under the Information Technology Act, 2000, to protect

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critical information infrastructure across sectors such as power, banking, telecommunications, transport, and strategic facilities.

- **National Cyber Security Policy, 2013:** Provides the framework for securing cyberspace and strengthening cyber resilience.
- Regular cybersecurity audits, penetration testing, and network monitoring by strategic organisations.
- Adoption of **air-gapped operational networks** and enhanced access control mechanisms in sensitive installations.

SEMICON 2.0: INDIA'S NEXT LEAP IN CHIPMAKING

Recently, the Union Cabinet cleared the second phase of the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM), along with the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS), with outlays of ₹1.27 lakh crore and ₹62,500 crore respectively.

Together, the schemes aim to expand semiconductor fabrication, assembly, and packaging facilities in India, while boosting phone assembly and component manufacturing.

Targets Under the New Scheme

- Over its five-year tenure, the government expects the scheme to draw:
 - ₹4 lakh crore in investment
 - ₹2 lakh crore in production
 - ₹1 lakh crore in exports

Key changes in Phase 2 (Semicon 2.0)

- **Broader scope:** Covers a larger part of the electronics ecosystem, including chip design talent, capital machinery (equipment used in chip-making), semiconductor-grade chemicals and gases, and R&D efforts.
- **Lower subsidies:** Capital subsidies have been trimmed to 30-40%, as officials believe India's semiconductor industry is becoming attractive even with reduced incentives.

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- **Reduced land support:** The Union government is less likely to offer land assistance, as State governments have increasingly stepped in with land at token prices and their own additional incentives.

Why Is India Focusing on Semiconductor Manufacturing?

- The push stems from lessons learned through recent global disruptions:
 - COVID-19-era supply chain breakdowns exposed India's vulnerabilities.
 - U.S. export controls during its trade tensions with China highlighted the risks of weak integration into global electronics value chains.
- The government maintains that building domestic capacities is essential, even if it takes decades to match countries like the **Netherlands and Taiwan**, whose companies remain critical to global chipmaking.

Why the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS)?

- Although a growing share of global iPhone sales come from India-assembled handsets, most components remain imported, and Indian-designed handsets are virtually absent from the market.
- The MPMS seeks to:
 - Expand domestic phone assembly to grow the ancillary component market.
 - Incentivise domestic design and R&D.
- The scheme offers incentives ranging from 2.25% to 5%, depending on the extent of local design involved in the handsets.

Conclusion

Semicon 2.0 marks India's shift from simply attracting chip packaging units to building a deeper, more self-reliant electronics ecosystem, spanning design, machinery, and R&D.

Its success will hinge on whether India can move beyond legacy-node manufacturing toward owning the intellectual property and expertise that define frontier chipmaking.

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INVESTMENT FRIENDLINESS INDEX (IFI) 2026



- It is the **country's first IFI** released by the **NITI Aayog**.
- It assesses how well Indian states and Union Territories are positioned to attract investments.
- It covers **all 28 states and 8 Union Territories** and evaluates investment attractiveness across the following **eight pillars**:
 - **Infrastructure,** **Business climate**
 - **Resources,** **Government policy**
 - **Regulatory Ease,** **Institutional Environment**
 - **Financial Health; and** **Environmental Resilience**
- The framework comprises 84 indicators, incorporating both secondary data and perception-based measures derived from a primary survey of investors.
- The index uses a **100-point scale** and serves as a benchmark for states to improve their investment environment.
- Based on overall scores, States and Union Territories have been classified into **four performance categories**:
 - **Top Performers** (scores above 50) **Frontrunners** (45–50)
 - **Emerging Performers** ($\geq 40 - < 45$) **Aspiring States** (below 40)
- States and Union Territories have also been assessed within **three peer groups** - Large States, Hilly and Northeastern States, and Union Territories and City States.
- **Highlights of IFI 2026:**
 - **5 states** were identified as **top performers**: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Goa, and Odisha.
 - **15 States** have been classified as **Frontrunners**, while **8 States/UTs** have been placed in each of the **Emerging Performers** and **Aspiring States** categories.
 - **Among the large states**, Gujarat secured the **first rank**, followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

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- In the **Hilly and Northeastern States** category, **Uttarakhand** emerged as the highest-ranked State, followed by Assam and Himachal Pradesh.
- Among the **City States and Union Territories**, **Goa** secured the top position, followed by Delhi and Chandigarh.

SATHYAMANGALAM TIGER RESERVE



- **Location:** It is located in the state of **Tamil Nadu**.
- It is nestled at the junction of the **Eastern and the Western Ghats** in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve
- It is **contiguous with the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, Bandipur Tiger Reserve** (Karnataka), and **BR Tiger Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary** (Karnataka).
- **Terrain:** The terrain is hilly and undulating with altitude ranging between 750 m and 1649 m.
- **Climate:** It is **subtropical and dry**.
- **Rivers:** Some of the prominent rivers in the region include the Bhavani, Moyar, and Noyyal rivers.
- **Tribal Communities:** It is home to several indigenous tribal communities, including the **Irula and Kurumba tribes**.
- **Vegetation:** It consists of southern **tropical dry thorn forests**, mixed deciduous forests, **semi-evergreen forests**, and **riparian forests**.
- **Flora:** It includes teak, sandalwood, bamboo, Terminalia, and Albizia, alongside medicinal plants and shrubs that support both wildlife and local communities.
- **Fauna:** The major species are Elephant, Tiger, Panther, Sloth bear, Gaur, Black Buck, Spotted deer, Wild boar, Black napped hare, Common langur Nilgiri langur, Striped neck mongoose, and Bonnet macaque.