VIDHIGYA
CLAT
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India's Best Current Affairs & Mentorship Magazine

UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

FEB. 2024

SPECIAL FEATURES

TOPPER'S TALK WITH KEERTHNA NAIR

CHECK YOUR QUIZDOM

HIGHLIGHTS

Uniform Civil Code •
NDPS Act 1985 •
Supreme Court Strikes Down Electoral Bond Scheme •
Farmers protest and demand of MSP •
Chandigarh Mayor Election Quashed •

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LAW ⚖ PUN

A man who had been caught embezzling millions from his employer went to a lawyer seeking defense. He didn't want to go to jail. But his lawyer told him, "Don't worry. You'll never have to go to jail with all that money." And the lawyer was right. When the man was sent to prison, he didn't even have a penny..

Be
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TOPPER'S TALK

WITH

CLAT TOPPER

Keerthna Nair a consistent & hardworking child has achieved this feat and made it large. She has secured admission to National Law School of India University - (NLSIU) Bengaluru, also known as 'Harvard of East'.
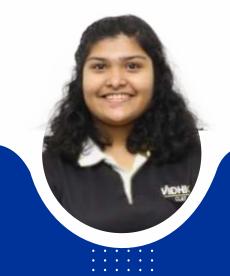
Know the success secrets, habits and the prep strategy she adopted that fetched her this success in CLAT 2023.

Vidhigya Correspondent: Hi Keerthna, Many Congratulations on achieving this feat. Tell us something about yourself.

Keerthna: Hi, I am Keerthna Nair, I did my schooling from St. Raphael's School, Indore with humanities stream. I started my preparation for CLAT in 11th standard with Vidhigya Classroom Programme.

Vidhigya Correspondent: There are different fields after 12th, what motivated you to make a career in law?

Keerthna: I think law seemed to me, a field that would allow me to make a difference, Afterall,

KEERTHNA NAIR
NLSIU, Bengaluru

CLAT 2023

Lawyers are called social engineers and given my interest in social sciences and reading, law would help me hone my interests.

As regards my future aspirations, I want to give myself a few more years to explore the different carrier options within Law and choose the one that resonates the most with me. I think the internship opportunities in my near future will help me carve out my particular interests,

Vidhigya Correspondent: During your CLAT preparation, did you ever think that you would end up being at NLSIU Bengaluru

Keerthna: During the prep, just like every other CLAT aspirant , I wanted to come to NLS and I also had wallpapers of NLSIU with the phrase I am coming written there. So, I did manifest NLSIU and see myself there but I must add, It was also in part due to the unwavering trust Bahul sir had in me and my ability to do it that made me want to reach for the best out there.

Vidhigya Correspondent: Tell us about your CLAT preparation?

Keerthna: This was my first attempt at CLAT and I prepared for 2 years (XI and XII). Though I started preparing seriously only in 12th. When concepts were being covered, I was very particular about attending the classes and making my base understanding strong. I rarely missed mocks. I believe solving the mocks and Vidhigya T20 series questions was something that made me gain confidence in my preparation. Personal mentoring session by Bahul Sir helped me structure my preparation well.

Vidhigya Correspondent: How did you prepare for the FIVE sections of the paper? Can you elaborate on your preparation strategy for each section?

Keerthna: GK: I followed the Vidhigya Panchamrit, I read newspaper editorial compilations that helped me with not only the GK section but English and C.R as well. I would try my best to do the daily GK quiz. The weekly roundups by Samip Sir, and Analysis of GK Vidhigya

Mocks. I also completed the 2 compendiums of Static and C.A .

English : In the beginning I used to solve the module, without focusing on a single topic, I would choose 6 questions from 6 different topics and solve them in a row without timer, Focusing on strengthening my understanding of the passage, I also did all the Eng class worksheets in the class. Analysis of Eng section in the mock also gave me many insights that helped me increase my score substantially.

Maths: I started with the concepts of the most important topics and would do Data interpretation questions from the topics I covered .. I did the Q.T worksheets in the class and while analysing the Q.T section, I would try to solve the question by myself and take help from analysis videos only if I couldn't do it myself.

Logical Reasoning: I did C.R class worksheets and also sectional tests for C.R that allowed me to deal with a variety of questions. Sometimes when the C.R section were very tough in the

mocks I would also go back and do a basic google search on the topic mentioned .. Its history etc.. I did this to make myself familiar with the context in which a particular passage was written. This can also help with some passages in English (in case of Extracts from Novels read a summary of the book to give yourself a context)

Legal Reasoning : Bahul Sir's class notes allowed me clear my concepts well, For practice questions I referred to T20 series, VMTCs and their analysis videos and the class worksheets by BahulSir

Vidhigya Correspondent: What did you do to overcome your challenges?

Keerthna: During the preparation, there is a phase your marks become constant and overcoming that stagnant phase was a challenge for me. But if we keeping going forward without loosing faith in our ability I think we will be able to tackle it . I always had my family's support. My mentors at Vidhigya and some teachers at school helped me a lot. It is always easy to get through challenges when you have people

around you who believe in you and hold your hands throughout the journey

Vidhigya Correspondent: What was your study routine and best practices for CLAT?

Keerthna: I did not follow a strict study routine or time table as such but before sitting down to study I would tell myself some goals I had set for that day.

I would prioritise according to the class timetable . For eg. if next day we had C.R then I would do C.R on priority. G.K, I would cover daily and one more subject at night .

On Sundays, After the mock I would take a nap for 2 hrs after which I would sit down to do the mock analysis. I took up to 3 hours to do my mock analysis properly.

Vidhigya Correspondent: Did you take mock tests; how many did you take? Are they useful?

Keerthna: Mock tests were very important in adding structure to my CLAT preparation, Analysing the mocks

gave me insights into the mistakes that I could avoid and giving mocks in a time limit allowed me divide my time up for each section and to understand the risk reward ratio that worked out for me. I took around 80 mocks &in 12th I started analysing them properly which has certainly helped me. To all the aspirants, an advice I used to follow and I would like to give to them is to avoid post – mock discussions as far as possible as it weigh heavy on you .. Always remember that your competition is with your yesterday's self not with anybody else.

Vidhigya Correspondent: There are certain times when you don't score good in your Mock Tests and you feel low about it. How did you stay motivated during your CLAT preparation?

Keerthna: Like every other CLAT aspirant during my prep I had my lows as well, But the most important thing is to tell yourself to not give up, no matter how hard it gets and keep talking to people who are supporting you through this journey, your parents, grand parents, mentors. I used to tell myself

that every night when I go to bed I must feel that today I did my best possible work. I used to try not to get myself affected by low scores and start preparing for the next week , But if at all I felt like giving up I would stop studying and go out on a drive with my mother É or I would talk to myself until I felt motivated again. When your motivation is low, stop, recharge and start again.

Vidhigya Correspondent: How is life at NLSIU Bengaluru? What are the things you are cherishing the most?

Keerthna: As they say, 'Harvard is Hard', 'Harvard of East' is no less hard. It takes consistency and hard-work to keep your head above the water here, but I think, the idea of being consistent is a lesson they wish to impart in you through your CLAT prep itself .Even though academics is rigorous, simultaneously you get to make friends from different states, live a 'hostel life' which is a lot of fun and meet dignitaries like CJI and Mrs. Sudha Murthy on campus . I think NLS gives you a wholesome exposure and sets the bar high in terms of academic and non-academic standards.

Vidhigya Correspondent: Your message for the other CLAT Aspirants preparing for upcoming CLAT exams?

Keerthna: I would say first 'Know your Why'. When you know your 'why' start working hard and give your best every day. Pull yourself up every time you fall, NEVER GIVE UP because believe me in the end its all worth the effort.

Vidhigya Correspondent: Wish you success in all your academic and professional pursuits. Stay Blessed and Stay LAWgical !!!

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BIG NEWS

Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in Uttarakhand

The bill seeks to govern and regulate the laws related to marriage and divorce, succession, live-in relationships etc. in the state.

- It has been prepared by a five-member committee led by former Supreme Court Judge Ranjana Prakash Desai.
- The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution provides that both the Centre and state legislatures can legislate on matters pertaining to family laws. In pursuance of this power, the government of Uttarakhand passed Uniform Civil Code in the state Assembly.

Applicability

- ✓ It will be applicable to the residents of Uttarakhand (but only to those who identify within the binary genders of male and female who are in heterosexual relationships, thus leaving most LGBT persons outside its ambit).
- ✓ It excludes members of the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and their unique customary practices.
- ✓ UCC does not disturb those customary practices pertaining to family law that are protected under Part XXI the Constitution.

Key Features of the Bill

1. Regulates 'Live-in' Relationships:

- ✓ **Mandatory Registration Requirement:** All the heterosexual couples (irrespective of their domicile) in a live-in relationship will have to mandatorily register their relation by submitting a "statement of live-in relationship" to the concerned registrar within one month of entering such relationship.
- ✓ **Penalties for Non-Registration:** Failure to register will attract imprisonment for up to three months or a fine up to Rs. 10 thousand or both. If no registration is made upon being issued a notice, there is a provision for six months of imprisonment or a fine of Rs. 25,000 or both.
- ✓ **Consequences of False Statements:** Any false statement will also attract imprisonment for up to three months or a fine of Rs. 25 thousand or both.
- ✓ **Notification to Parents/Guardians for Minors:** Declarations will also be sent to the parents/guardians if either of the partners is less than 21 years of age.

✓ **Registrar's Summary Inquiry:** The registrar upon receiving the information, may conduct a "summary inquiry" to ensure that the relation does not fall under prohibited categories i.e., if a partner is married or in another relationship, if either of the partner is minor and his/her consent was obtained forcefully, by fraud or misrepresentation.

✓ **Timely Decision by Registrar:** The registrar must take a decision within 30 days and reasons must be conveyed in writing in case of refusal of permission.

✓ **Termination of Relationship:** The relationship can be terminated by either of the parties by submitting a "statement of termination".

✓ **Maintenance Claim for Desertion:** A woman can claim maintenance from her live-in partner in case of desertation.

2. Illegitimate Children: The bill abolishes this concept and extends legal recognition to children born in void and voidable marriages, as well as the ones born in live-in relationships.

3. Bigamy/Polygamy is prohibited under the bill as per section 4 which states that neither party should have a spouse living at the time of the marriage. Thus, prohibition on bigamy/polygamy has been extended to all communities/Religions.

4. Marriages:

✓ Compulsory Marriage Registration: Registration of marriage has been made compulsory while the marriageable age is left the same i.e., 21 and 18 for men and women respectively.

✓ Flexibility in Marriage Ceremonies: Marriages may be solemnized through any ceremonies or rituals as per legislations such as The Anand Marriage Act, 1909, Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937, and The Special Marriage Act, 1954, among others.

✓ Public Inspection of Marriage Register: Upon registration, the Register of Marriages is open to public inspection.

✓ Validity of Unregistered Marriages: An unregistered marriage remains valid but failure to register a marriage after issue of notice by the sub-registrar will attract a fine of Rs 25,000.

✓ Exception for Customary Marriages: It retains the "custom" exception for married parties within the "degrees of prohibited relationships" from the Hindu Marriage Act.

  • Degrees of prohibited relationship applies to two people who share a common ancestry or are the wife/husband of a common ancestor. It applies to those communities, which have an established custom allowing marriage within the degrees of prohibited relationships.

5. Divorce: (Men and women have been accorded similar rights with respect to divorce.)

✓ Restrictions on Divorce Initiation: It prohibits the initiation of divorce proceedings (Section 28) before one year of marriage but if the petitioner has suffered "exceptional hardship" or if the respondent has exhibited "exceptional depravity", then divorce can be filed.

✓ Mandatory Court Order for Divorce: No marriage can be dissolved without a court order or else it can attract imprisonment of up to 3 years.

✓ Grounds for Divorce and Exclusions: Divorce can also be obtained on the grounds of religious conversion, but it excludes the case of "irretrievable breakdown of marriage".

✓ Women's Right to Divorce: Women can specifically seek a divorce if the husband has been found guilty of rape or any kind of unnatural sexual offence or if he has more than one wife.

✓ Child Custody Following Divorce: The custody of a child up to 5 years remains with the mother after the divorce.

6. Inheritance Rights: (The Bill extends equal property rights for sons and daughters across all classes.)

- ✓ It abolishes the coparcenary system governing ancestral property under the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and all properties will pass as individual property as per the scheme of intestate succession which
- ✓ guarantees equal property rights for the spouse, children, and parents.
- ✓ In case there is no immediate family, the property will be equally divided among second-line relatives (first cousins from the paternal side). Others can also stake a claim if no eligible claimants are found.
  - As per the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, property can be held as coparcenary property or self-acquired property. Four generations of Hindus hold ancestral property as coparceners. The share of the deceased in the coparcenary property forms part of the property pool again. Consequently, for a person to get their individual share in coparcenary property, the property has to be partitioned.
  - Self-acquired property on the other hand, is individual property, and is passed on as per rules for intestate succession on death.

7. Guardianship: It remains silent on the question of guardianship. Thus, the Guardians and Wards Act (GWA), 1890 will continue to govern court-appointed guardians while natural guardianship will be governed by personal laws.

- ✓ All personal laws on guardianship follow the archaic common law principle wherein the father is deemed the guardian of the child and has the right to take decisions in relation to the child and the child's property whereas the mother is relegated to the role of caretaker.
- ✓ The Supreme Court (SC) in the past has attempted to end this discrimination by stating that the mother can be appointed the guardian of the child if the father fails at discharging his functions as a guardian.

8. Adoption: It fails to provide for mandatory registration of adoption unlike marriages and live-in relationships. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (HAMA), 1956 and the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015 will continue to prevail.

- ✓ Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs can adopt under HAMA. It involves the giving and taking of the child between the surrendering parent or guardian and the adoptive parents.
- ✓ Adoption can also be done under the secular JJ Act, 2015 by anyone irrespective of their religion. It provides sufficient safeguards to protect the safety and best interests of the child being adopted.

Concerns Raised

1. **Exclusion of LGBT Community:**
   - The bill misses an opportunity to uphold the Supreme Court's decision on marriage equality, neglecting the rights of the LGBT community.
2. **Ignored Grounds for Divorce:**
   - Despite recognition in several Supreme Court judgments, the bill ignores the concept of irretrievable breakdown of marriage as a ground for divorce.
3. **Reliance on Criminalization:**
   - Enforcement of the bill through criminalization could disproportionately impact minority communities, potentially outlawing religious and customary practices and harming religious sentiments.

4. **Surveillance Regime:**
   - The registration process and open access to registration books may facilitate a surveillance regime, raising concerns of harassment, particularly for inter-faith and inter-caste couples.

5. **Breach of Right to Privacy (Article 21):**
   - Mandating the registration of live-in relationships infringes upon the right to privacy, as recognized under Article 21 of the Constitution. Compulsory registration also undermines individuals' freedom to choose not to marry.

6. **Opposition to Uniformity (Article 44):**
   - The bill's introduction of a state-specific UCC opposes the framers' intent of having a common UCC for the entire country, as outlined in Article 44 of the Constitution.

7. **Exclusion of STs and Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs):**
   - The bill's exclusion of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs) overlooks significant segments of the population, potentially denying them the benefits and protections offered by the UCC.

Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

The Uniform Civil Code seeks to replace the existing diverse personal laws, which vary based on religious affiliations, with a common law governing personal matters such as marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance, and succession for all citizens, irrespective of their religion.

Objectives:

- ✓ Establish consistency in laws across diverse communities.
- ✓ Promote equality between the rights of men and women, both within and across communities.

Related Constitutional Provisions:

Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, under the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP-Part 4), directs the state to secure a uniform civil code for citizens throughout the country.

Origin:

- ✓ The British Government in 1835 submitted its report recommending a uniform code for Indian laws relating to crimes, evidence, contracts, etc., but excluded personal laws of Hindus and Muslims from its perspective.
- ✓ The B N Rau committee, formed in 1941, recommended a codified Hindu Law giving equal rights to women, adopted in 1956 as the Hindu Succession Act.
- ✓ Despite these efforts, separate personal laws persisted for Muslims, Christians, and Parsis.
- ✓ Dr. B R Ambedkar, while formulating the Constitution, made the UCC voluntary and recommended its implementation when the nation was ready to accept it.
- ✓ **UCC in DPSP:** The fundamental rights sub-committee, led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, decided against categorizing UCC under fundamental rights with a 5:4 majority vote.

NDPS Act 1985

The Supreme Court recently overturned an order by the Madras High Court granting anticipatory bail to a respondent accused under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act). Anticipatory bail is granted under Section 438 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) for non-bailable offenses, allowing a person to seek bail if they fear arrest on false charges, due to enmity, or if a false case is likely to be built against them.

About the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act)

The NDPS Act was introduced to control and regulate drug abuse by prohibiting activities related to the production, cultivation, sale, purchase, transport, storage, and consumption of any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance. It also provides for the identification, treatment, rehabilitation, and social reintegration of addicts.

✓ **Narcotic Drugs:** This includes substances like coca leaf, cannabis or hemp (charas, ganja), opium, poppy straw, and all manufactured drugs.
✓ **Psychotropic Substances:** These are substances that modify the mind, including substances specified in the Schedule of the Act such as amphetamine, methaqualone, diazepam, alprazolam, and ketamine.

Objectives of the NDPS Act

✓ Prevent, combat, and regulate operations relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
✓ Provide for the forfeiture of property derived from or used in illicit trafficking.
✓ Implement international conventions on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to which India is a party.
✓ India is a signatory to several international conventions aimed at limiting the use of narcotics and psychotropic substances for medicinal, personal, and scientific purposes, as well as preventing their abuse. These include –
  1. UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs, 1961,
  2. UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971, and
  3. UN Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988

Need: Prior to 1985, the statutory control over drugs was being exercised through the Opium Act of 1852, Opium Act of 1878 and The Dangerous Act of 1930. All of these regulations became outdated and inadequate with increasing drug abuse across the world. Thus, NDPS was introduced.

Applicability: It covers the whole territory of India as well as all Indian citizens living outside India and all persons travelling aboard ships and aircraft registered in India.

Key Amendments to the NDPS Act

1988 Amendment:

✓ Introduced stricter provisions targeting the financing of illicit drug trafficking.

✓ Expanded the scope of offenses to include production, possession, sale, purchase, transportation, and warehousing of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

✓ This amendment aimed to strengthen enforcement measures and deter individuals or entities involved in financing drug trafficking activities.

2001 Amendment:

✓ Focused on improving access to justice for drug addicts by streamlining the bail process.

✓ Eased the requirements for obtaining bail, particularly for individuals accused of drug-related offenses.

✓ This amendment aimed to ensure that individuals with substance abuse issues could navigate the legal system more effectively and access bail when necessary.

2014 Amendment:

✓ Achieved uniform regulation of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances across the country, eliminating conflicts between state-level regulations.

✓ Facilitated access to essential narcotics such as morphine and fentanyl for medicinal purposes, particularly in pharmaceutical preparations.

✓ Revised penalties for drug trafficking offenses, reducing the death penalty for repeat criminal convictions to a discrete 30-year sentence.

✓ Increased the maximum penalty for "small quantity" offenses from 6 months to 1 year of imprisonment.

✓ This amendment aimed to balance the need for stringent measures against drug trafficking with ensuring access to essential medications for medical purposes.

✓ 2014 amendment addressed the difficulty in procuring morphine, a critical pain management medication, by amending the NDPS Act to make it more accessible.

Punishments under the NDPS Act

For Possession/Sale/Manufacture:

✓ The severity of punishment depends on the quantity of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances involved and the gravity of the offense.

✓ Small Quantity: If a person is found in possession, engaged in sale, or involved in manufacturing of a small quantity (less than 1 kg) of drugs such as cannabis, the punishment may include imprisonment for up to one year along with a fine of up to Rs 10,000.

✓ Commercial Quantity: For offenses involving a commercial quantity (20 kg or more) of drugs, the fine can extend up to Rs. 2 lakhs or more at the discretion of the court, and the imprisonment term can be up to 20 years.

For Consumption:

✓ Individuals found consuming narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances may face a sentence of up to six months in prison, along with a fine of up to Rs 10,000.

For Repeated Offenders:

✓ Repeat offenders may face enhanced penalties, including a jail term of up to one and one-half times the maximum term of imprisonment for the offense.

✓ Additionally, repeat offenders may be subject to a fine of up to one and one-half times the maximum fine imposed for the offense.

✓ Depending on the circumstances and the quantity of drugs seized, repeat offenders may also face the possibility of being sentenced to death.

Important Note:

✓ An amendment to the NDPS Act in 1989 made the sentence awarded under the Act non-commutable, meaning it cannot be substituted by a lesser sentence, except for the sentence awarded for the consumption of drugs. This amendment underscores the serious nature of drug-related offenses and aims to deter individuals from engaging in drug trafficking or consumption.

Other steps, initiatives, and institutions aimed at curbing the drug menace in India

1. **National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances:**
   ✓ Aligned with Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, this policy mandates the state to strive towards prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating drugs, except for medicinal purposes, due to their detrimental effects on health.
2. **Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJE):**
   ✓ Designated as the nodal Ministry for drug demand reduction in the country.
3. **Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA):**
   ✓ Launched by MoSJE on August 15, 2020, in 272 identified most vulnerable districts, and later extended to all districts across the country.
   ✓ Aims to spread awareness about substance use, with a focus on higher educational institutions, university campuses, and schools.
4. **National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) 2018-2025:**
   ✓ Includes initiatives such as:
   - Toll-free Helpline Number 14446 for de-addiction and providing primary counseling and immediate referral services.
   - Development of Navchetna Modules and teacher-training modules for sensitizing students, teachers, and parents on drug dependence, coping strategies, and life skills.
   - Launch of a mobile app and web portal called 'Map Drugs' for identifying and destroying illegal drug farming.
   - Establishment of an e-portal named 'SIMS' (Seizure Information Management System) for cases involving large seizures.
5. **UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime):**
   ✓ Collaborates with the Indian Government and law enforcement agencies to develop a comprehensive strategic framework to address the drug problem.
6. **Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF):**
   ✓ Directed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to be created by state governments under their respective Directors General of Police (DGPs) to fight the drug menace for a "drug-free India" by 2047.
   ✓ ANTF investigates criminal cases related to drugs as classified or assigned by the Supreme Court, High Court, government, or DGP.

Supreme Court strikes down Electoral Bond Scheme

A five-judge Constitution Bench (Led by CJI DY Chandrachud) unanimously struck down the Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) terming it unconstitutional, manifestly arbitrary and a violation of the Right to Information (RTI) under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution and disproportionate restrictions.

Directions of Supreme Court

1. **Stop Issuing EBs and Furnish Details:**
   - The State Bank of India (SBI) was ordered to immediately halt the issuance of any further electoral bonds.
   - SBI was directed to provide detailed information about each bond purchased since April 12, 2019, including the date of purchase, name of the purchaser, and denomination, to the Election Commission of India (ECI) by March 6.
2. **Publication of Information by ECI:**
   - The Election Commission of India (ECI) was instructed to publish all the information shared by the SBI regarding electoral bonds on its official website by March 13, 2024.
3. **Return of Unencashed EBs:**
   - Electoral bonds that are within the validity period of fifteen days but have not yet been encashed by the political party were ordered to be returned to the issuing bank.
   - This directive ensures that the amount can be refunded back to the purchaser's account.
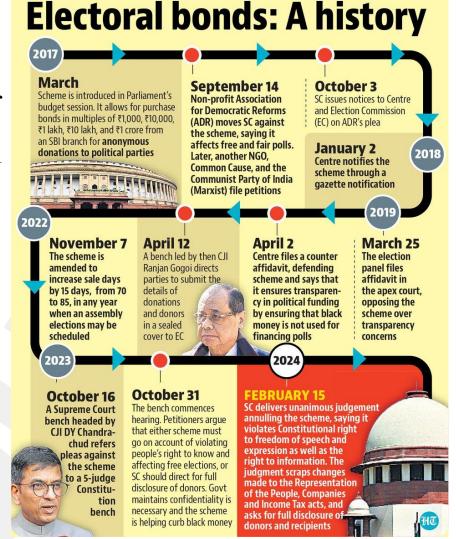
Electoral bonds: A history

2017

March
Scheme is introduced in Parliament's budget session. It allows for purchase bonds in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh, and ₹1 crore from an SBI branch for **anonymous donations to political parties**

September 14
Non-profit Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) moves SC against the scheme, saying it affects free and fair polls. Later, another NGO, Common Cause, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) file petitions

October 3
SC issues notices to Centre and Election Commission (EC) on ADR's plea

January 2
Centre notifies the scheme through a gazette notification
2018

2019

2022

November 7
The scheme is amended to increase sale days by 15 days, from 70 to 85, in any year when an assembly elections may be scheduled

April 12
A bench led by then CJI Ranjan Gogoi directs parties to submit the details of donations and donors in a sealed cover to EC

April 2
Centre files a counter affidavit, defending scheme and says that it ensures transparency in political funding by ensuring that black money is not used for financing polls

March 25
The election panel files affidavit in the apex court, opposing the scheme over transparency concerns

2023

October 16
A Supreme Court bench headed by CJI DY Chandrachud refers pleas against the scheme to a 5-judge Constitution bench

October 31
The bench commences hearing. Petitioners argue that either scheme must go on account of violating people's right to know and affecting free elections, or SC should direct for full disclosure of donors. Govt maintains confidentiality is necessary and the scheme is helping curb black money

2024
FEBRUARY 15
SC delivers unanimous judgement annulling the scheme, saying it violates Constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression as well as the right to information. The judgment scraps changes made to the Representation of the People, Companies and Income Tax acts, and asks for full disclosure of donors and recipients

Far Reaching Implications of the Supreme Court's Landmark Judgement

1. **Ensuring Equal Opportunities for All Political Parties:**

8

- The verdict aims to level the playing field by eliminating discrimination based on the popularity or vote share of political parties.
- Smaller and regional parties are expected to benefit from this decision as they can now compete on an equal footing with larger parties, providing voters with a broader range of choices.

2. **Strengthening Democratic Framework:**
- Protecting the voters' right to information is essential in a democratic system. The judgment ensures transparency by providing crucial information about political funding to the public.
- Withholding essential information, especially under the guise of privacy, contradicts the principles of transparency and undermines the democratic process.

3. **Diminishing the Impact of Money and Corporate Influence:**
- The judgment addresses concerns

Electoral Bond Scheme

Electoral bonds (EBs) are financial instruments used for making donations to eligible political parties in India. Here are the key points about electoral bonds:

✓ **Nature and Usage:**
- Electoral bonds are interest-free bearer bonds or money instruments.
- They can be used for making donations to eligible political parties.
- There is no limit on the number of electoral bonds that one can purchase.

✓ **Eligible Political Parties:**
- Only political parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and securing at least one percent of the votes polled in the last General Election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly are eligible to receive electoral bonds.

✓ **Face Value and Sale:**
- Electoral bonds are sold in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore.
- They are sold through designated branches of the **State Bank of India (SBI).**

✓ **Purchase and Validity:**
- They can be purchased from designated SBI branches during the first 10 days of the beginning month of every quarter.
- Electoral bonds are valid for 15 calendar days from the date of issue.

✓ **Encashment:**
- Proceeds from the bonds, if not encashed within 15 days of issuance, are deposited in the Prime Minister Relief Fund (PMRF).

✓ **Purchasers:**
- Any person, including individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), companies, firms, or associations, can purchase electoral bonds through a KYC-compliant account.

✓ **The EBS Timeline:**
- **2017:** The scheme is introduced as a Finance Bill.
- **September 14, 2017:** The scheme is challenged by NGO 'Association for Democratic Reforms'.
- **October 3, 2017:** Notice issued by SC to Centre and EC on PIL filed.
- **January 2, 2018:** The scheme is notified by the Central government.
- **November 7, 2022:** The sale days of EBs increased from 70 to 85 in a year where any assembly election may be scheduled.
- **October 16, 2023:** Pleas against the scheme referred to a five-judge Constitution bench.
- **November 2, 2023:** The verdict on the scheme is reserved by SC.
- **February 15, 2024:** Unanimous judgment by SC bench annuls the scheme.

about the potential misuse of electoral bonds by eliminating the anonymity of donors.

- By removing the cloak of anonymity, the decision aims to reduce the influence of money and corporate interests in politics, encouraging political parties to prioritize the public interest over the interests of donors.

4. **Boosting Transparency and Accountability in Political Funding:**
   - Guaranteeing public access to information about the source and amount of funding received by political parties through electoral bonds enhances transparency.
   - This provision empowers citizens to scrutinize political parties' actions and hold them accountable for their performance and decisions.

Farmers protest and demand of MSP

✓ A major demand of the farmers protesting in Delhi is for the enactment of a law to guarantee MSP for all crops, as per the formula recommended by the Dr. M S Swaminathan Commission.

✓ This comes at a time when a committee appointed by the central government in July 2022 continues to deliberate on ways to make MSP more effective and transparent.

Minimum Support Price (MSP) Regime in India

Background

✓ The Food-Grain Enquiry Committee, established by the Nehru administration in 1957, was the first attempt to address the agricultural earning issue.

✓ Then, in 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri formed the Food Grain Price Committee (under LK Jha), to push for a MSP regime.

✓ Despite the fact that the report was quickly accepted by the Shastri government, the first MSP announcement was made in 1967.

✓ Thus, the MSP regime came into existence as a policy decision and the government set up the Agricultural Prices Commission for fixing MSP for crops.

• The commission was renamed as the CACP in 1985.

About MSP

✓ MSP is a form of market intervention (a policy decision not enforceable by law) by the Government to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices during bumper production years.

✓ These are announced by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (Chaired by the Prime Minister of India).

✓ The recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) at the beginning of the sowing season for certain crops forms the basis of these announcements.

Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) takes into account several factors when recommending Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for various crops:

1. **Commodity's Demand and Supply:** This factor helps assess the balance between the production and consumption of a particular crop, influencing its market dynamics and pricing.

2. **Cost of Production:** The CACP evaluates the expenses incurred by farmers during the cultivation of crops, including inputs like seeds, fertilizers, labor, and machinery.

3. **Market Price Trends:** Both domestic and international market trends are considered to gauge the prevailing prices of the crop and anticipate potential fluctuations.

4. **Inter-crop Price Parity:** The CACP analyzes the relative prices of different crops to ensure equitable pricing and prevent distortions in farmers' cropping patterns.

5. **Terms of Trade:** This refers to the ratio of farm input prices to farm output prices, which helps assess the profitability of agricultural production compared to other sectors.

6. **Minimum Margin over Cost of Production:** The CACP recommends MSPs that provide farmers with a minimum profit margin over their cost of production, typically set at 50% or more.

7. **Implications on Consumers:** The potential impact of MSPs on consumers, particularly in terms of food prices and inflation, is also taken into consideration to strike a balance between farmers' welfare and consumers' interests.

Objectives of MSP

✓ **Preventing Distress Sales:** MSPs serve as a guaranteed floor price for farmers' produce, protecting them from selling their crops at distressingly low prices during times of market glut or adverse conditions.

✓ **Procurement for Public Distribution:** When market prices fall below the MSP, government agencies step in to purchase the entire quantity of the crop at the announced minimum price. This procurement ensures an adequate supply of food grains for public distribution and maintains stability in the market.

Crops covered

✓ Government announces MSPs for 22 mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane (total 23).

✓ Crops covered by MSPs include:
- 7 types of cereals (paddy, wheat, maize, bajra, jowar, ragi and barley),
- 5 types of pulses (chana, arhar/tur, urad, moong and masur),
- 7 oilseeds (rapeseed-mustard, groundnut, soyabean, sunflower, sesamum, safflower, nigerseed),
- 4 commercial crops (cotton, sugarcane, copra, raw jute).

Sanjay Agrawal Committee

The committee constituted in 2022 by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare focuses on several key areas related to agriculture, natural farming, and crop diversification.

Background:

✓ The committee was formed following the conclusion of the year-long farmers' protest at Delhi's borders after the government announced the repeal of the controversial farm laws.

✓ Its primary areas of focus are Minimum Support Price (MSP), natural farming, and crop diversification.

✓ However, the terms of reference do not include a legal guarantee for MSP.

About the Committee:

✓ Headed by Sanjay Agrawal, a former agriculture secretary, the committee comprises **26 members.**

Terms of Reference of the Committee

1. **Promotion of Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF):** To advocate and promote sustainable farming practices under ZBNF, aiming to enhance soil fertility, reduce production costs, and increase farmers' income.
2. **Suggestions on Natural Farming:** Providing recommendations on various aspects of natural farming, including value chain development, protocol validation, research needs, and expanding the area under Indian Natural Farming System.
3. **Crop Pattern Changes:** Recommending changes in crop patterns to align with evolving national needs.
4. **Strengthening Agricultural Marketing System:** Proposing measures to enhance the agricultural marketing system to ensure better prices for farmers' produce, both domestically and through exports.
5. **Crop Diversification:** Mapping existing cropping patterns, formulating strategies for crop diversification, ensuring remunerative prices for new crops, and reviewing micro-irrigation schemes.
6. **Enhancing MSP Effectiveness and Transparency:** Making suggestions to improve the effectiveness and transparency of MSP, including granting more autonomy to the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) and implementing scientific measures in MSP determination.

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Consequences of According Legal Stature to MSP

1. **Sustainability Concerns:** According to a policy paper by NITI Aayog's agricultural economist Ramesh Chand, sustaining a price level solely through legal means, without considering demand and supply dynamics, may not be feasible in the long run. This approach could lead to market distortions and inefficiencies.
2. **Impact on Agricultural Growth:** The paper highlights that sectors such as horticulture, milk, and fisheries, which have minimal market intervention, have shown higher annual growth rates compared to cereals, where MSP and other interventions are prevalent. This suggests that excessive intervention in the form of MSP may hinder agricultural growth.
3. **Inflationary Pressures:** Increasing procurement costs associated with MSP could lead to higher prices of food grains, subsequently contributing to inflation. Such inflationary pressures could disproportionately affect the poor, who spend a significant portion of their income on food.
4. **Challenges in Private Sector Participation:** Implementing legally guaranteed MSPs may pose practical difficulties in engaging the private sector. Private buyers may be reluctant to comply with mandated prices, leading to potential market disruptions and shortages.
5. **Case of Sugarcane:** The paper cites the example of sugarcane, where the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) acts as the statutory minimum price. The accumulation of arrears owed to sugarcane farmers by private sugar mills illustrates the challenges associated with enforcing MSP. The mismatch between FRP and sugar prices has resulted in significant financial burdens on sugar mills.

Suggestions

✓ **Direct Income Support:** Implement direct income support programs for farmers to provide financial assistance regardless of market fluctuations, enhancing economic stability.
✓ **Investment in Infrastructure:** Improve agricultural infrastructure by investing in irrigation, rural roads, storage facilities, and post-harvest management, along with easier access to credit and power.
✓ **Addressing Disguised Unemployment:** Create employment opportunities in non-agricultural sectors through policies promoting industrial growth, skill development, and entrepreneurship to reduce disguised unemployment in agriculture.
✓ **Diversification of Livelihoods:** Encourage non-farm activities like agro-processing, rural tourism, and small-scale industries to diversify rural livelihoods and reduce dependency on agriculture.
✓ **Supporting Sustainable Farming Practices:** Promote sustainable farming practices such as organic farming and conservation agriculture through incentives, training, and technical assistance to enhance resilience and mitigate climate change effects.

Chandigarh Mayor election quashed

The Supreme Court (SC) recently invalidated the result of the Chandigarh Mayor Election due to controversy surrounding the deliberate invalidation of eight ballots cast in favor of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-Congress candidate, resulting in the declaration of the BJP candidate as the winner.

Background

✓ The election for Chandigarh's Mayor post occurred on January 30, 2024, where the **BJP secured 16 votes out of 36,** while the joint AAP-Congress combine received 12 votes.

✓ The Returning Officer (RO) invalidated eight votes cast for the AAP candidate, leading to the BJP candidate's victory.

✓ Videos surfaced showing the RO marking ballot papers to invalidate them, prompting an AAP councilor to approach the High Court (HC), which listed the petition without an immediate stay on the results. The matter was then taken to the SC.

✓ During the hearing, the RO explained that he marked the votes to segregate them due to defacement by councilors.

✓ The SC deemed the remarks of the Presiding Officer inconsequential under regulation 6 of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation (Procedure and Conduct of Business) Regulations 1996 and ruled the eight votes as valid.

✓ **Regulation 6** stipulates that a ballot can only be invalidated –
   - if more than one vote is cast,
   - if there is any identifying mark of the voter, or
   - if the marks are placed ambiguously

Final SC Verdict

✓ The court, while using its power under **Article 142** of the Constitution, held that allowing such a practice would be destructive of the most valued principles on which the entire edifice of democracy depends.

Role of the Returning Officer (RO)

Definition

- The individual responsible for overseeing elections within a constituency, or sometimes two, and announcing the elected candidate.

Appointment

- Appointed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in consultation with the relevant State Government or Union Territory (UT).

Duties and Responsibilities

1. **Pre-election Preparation:**
   ✓ Publish notices regarding the election and enforce the Model Code of Conduct.
   ✓ Accept and scrutinize nomination forms.
   ✓ Publish candidates' affidavits and allocate symbols to contesting candidates.
2. **Logistical Arrangements:**
   ✓ Print and dispatch postal ballot papers.
   ✓ Prepare Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) systems.
   ✓ Conduct training sessions for polling personnel, sector officers, and area/zonal magistrates, covering all aspects including the use of EVMs with VVPATs.
3. **Ensuring Fairness:**
   ✓ Ensure a free and fair election process.
   ✓ Designate and obtain approval for counting centers from the ECI.
4. **Communication:**
   ✓ Notify candidates about the location, date, and time of vote counting.
   ✓ Communicate voting results promptly and accurately.
5. **Grievance Redressal:**
   ✓ Address grievances promptly and efficiently to maintain the integrity of the electoral process.

✓ It ruled in the favour of the AAP councilor and immediately quashed the result of the election declared by the presiding officer.
✓ It also expressed its disappointment over the actions of the RO as he had unlawfully altered the course of the Mayoral election and made a false statement before the court. The court therefore ordered a show-cause notice to be served to the RO under Section 340 (conduct affecting the administration of justice) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Article 142 of the Constitution

Article 142 grants the Supreme Court special powers to issue decrees or orders necessary for complete justice in any pending cause or matter before it when laws or statutes fall short.

Enforceability:

Orders issued under Article 142 are enforceable across India as per laws enacted by Parliament or orders of the President.

Purpose of Inclusion:

Access to Justice: It addresses potential barriers to accessing justice or realizing rights due to judicial compromise.

Importance:

✓ **Ensuring Justice:** Allows the SC to transcend legal constraints to dispense justice effectively.
✓ **Exercising Executive and Legislative Functions:** Empowers the SC to issue guidelines, directions, or orders to governments or authorities.
✓ **Intervention:** Permits intervention in matters of public interest, human rights, constitutional values, or fundamental rights protection.
✓ **Source of Judicial Activism:** Enhances the SC's role as a guardian of the constitution and final arbiter of law.

Judicial Activism:

Refers to the collective framework of Article 142, Article 32 (right to constitutional remedies), Article 141 (mandating adherence to SC decisions), and Article 136 (allowing Special Leave Petitions).

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VIDHIGYA CONFACTUALS

ECONOMY

Inland Waterways Development Council

Recently, the inaugural meeting of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) was convened in Kolkata.

Organized by IWAI

The IWDC was orchestrated by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the central agency overseeing inland waterways, operating under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways.

Empowering Inland Waterways

The primary objective of the meeting was to empower inland waterways as pivotal channels for fostering economic growth and facilitating commerce within the country.

Investment Commitment for River Cruise Tourism

✓ A substantial investment of Rs. 45,000 crore was pledged for the development of river cruise tourism nationwide.
✓ Of this total, approximately Rs. 35,000 crore has been allocated for the procurement and enhancement of cruise vessels.
✓ Another Rs. 10,000 crore has been earmarked for the development of cruise terminal infrastructure by 2047.

Boosting Cargo Trade Through Inland Waterways

An investment commitment of Rs. 15,200 crore was made at the Global Maritime India Summit (GMIS) held in October 2023 to bolster inland waterways for cargo trade.

Projected Growth and Volume Increase

This strategic investment is anticipated to register a growth rate exceeding 400%, potentially increasing the cargo volume to over 500 Million Tonnes Per Annum (MTPA) by 2047.

SAFETY Technology

The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has facilitated the transfer of the Smart Food Grain Storage System (SAFEETY) technology to Paras Defense and Space Technology Ltd.

Developed by SAMEER

SAFEETY stands for Smart Food Grain Storage System and has been developed by the Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering and Research (SAMEER) under the guidance of MeitY.

Features

SAFEETY boasts cutting-edge features including conveyorized loading and unloading of grain bags with RFID for traceability, online weight and moisture measurement, and radio frequency-based removal of moisture from grain.

Capacity and Efficiency

This state-of-the-art system demonstrates remarkable efficiency, capable of handling nearly one truckload (approximately 28 tons) of grains in just 40 minutes.

Realizing Viksit Bharat at 2047

The transfer of SAFEETY technology signifies a significant step towards realizing the Innovation, Science, and Technology theme of Viksit Bharat at 2047, reflecting India's aspirations for advancement in various sectors.

Government-Private Collaboration for National Development

The collaboration between government entities and the private industry in the transfer of SAFEETY technology underscores the commitment to leverage technological innovations for the progress and development of the nation.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY) is a pivotal initiative aimed at formalizing the fisheries sector and supporting fisheries micro and small enterprises.

Approval and Scope

✓ The Union Cabinet has approved PM-MKSSY as a Central Sector Sub-scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada.
✓ It spans four years from FY 2023-24 to FY 2026-27, covering all States and UTs with an investment of Rs 6,000 crores.

Implementation Strategy

✓ **Component 1-A: Formalization of Fisheries Sector**
  • Creation of a National Fisheries Digital Platform (NFDP) for registration of fish producers, workers, vendors, and processors.
  • Financial incentives provided to encourage stakeholder registration.
✓ **Component 1-B: Facilitate Adoption Of Aquaculture Insurance**
  • Introduction of appropriate insurance products covering aquaculture farms, with one-time incentives.

Cabinet Decisions: 08 February 2024

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)

- **Cabinet approves** Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana for formalization of fisheries sector and supporting fisheries micro and small enterprises
- Investment of over **Rs. 6,000 crores** over next 4 years from FY 2023-24 to FY 2026-27 in all States/Union Territories

Benefits

- Creation of National Fisheries Digital Platform to provide **40 lakh small and micro-enterprises** work based identities
- Support to **6.4 lakh micro-enterprises** and **5,500 fisheries cooperatives**, providing access to institutional credit

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- Additional incentives for SC, ST, and women beneficiaries.
✓ **Component 2: Support Microenterprises To Improve Fisheries Sector Value Chain Efficiencies**
  - Provision of performance grants to enhance value chain efficiencies in the fishery sector.
  - Grants differentiated based on enterprise size and ownership category.
✓ **Component 3: Expansion of Fish And Fishery Product Safety And Quality Assurance Systems**
  - Incentivizing fisheries micro and small enterprises to adopt safety and quality assurance systems.
  - Expected expansion of the domestic market for fish through increased supply of safe products.
✓ **Component 4: Project Management, Monitoring and Reporting**
  - Establishment of Project Management Units (PMUs) for efficient project oversight.

Significance

✓ Gradual formalization of the fisheries sector and enhanced access to institutional credit to support 6.4 lakh micro-enterprises and 5,500 fisheries cooperatives.
✓ Transition from conventional subsidies to performance-based incentives.
✓ Addressing aquaculture crop losses through insurance coverage to bolster production.
✓ Enhancing export competitiveness through value addition and creation.
✓ Projected creation of 1.7 lakh new jobs, with a focus on employing 75,000 women.
✓ Promotion of environmental sustainability and transparency, facilitating ease of doing business.

PM-MKSSY is poised to catalyze growth and sustainability in the fisheries sector, contributing to economic development and inclusivity.

Business Payment Solution Provider (BPSP)

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has instructed card networks Visa and Mastercard to discontinue their Business Payment Solution Provider (BPSP) business in commercial and business payments through corporate credit cards. Here are the key points regarding BPSP and the RBI's directives:

Business Payment Solution Provider (BPSP)

✓ BPSPs offer business-to-business payment services to corporates using credit cards.
✓ It was introduced around 2017 to enable small businesses to accept card payments without having a card terminal in their account.
✓ BPSP allowed corporates to make credit payments to their suppliers, even if the suppliers didn't have the infrastructure for accepting credit payments.
✓ Under this arrangement, the intermediary accepts card payments from corporates and transfers the funds via IMPS/RTGS/NEFT to non-card accepting recipients.

Regulatory Concerns Raised by RBI

✓ RBI classified this arrangement as a payment system under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems (PSS) Act, 2007.
✓ Such payment systems require authorization under Section 4 of the PSS Act, which BPSP did not obtain, rendering the activity without legal sanction.
✓ RBI expressed concerns over non-compliance with Know Your Customer (KYC) norms in these transactions, highlighting potential risks associated with them.

Directive to Visa and Mastercard

✓ RBI has directed Visa and Mastercard to cease their BPSP business in commercial and business payments through corporate credit cards.
✓ This directive is in line with the regulatory framework under the PSS Act and aims to ensure compliance with KYC norms and safeguard against risks associated with unauthorized payment systems.

MoU between IEPFA and DBS

An Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been established between the Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA) and DBS Bank, facilitated under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA). This MoU signifies a collaborative effort aimed at supporting investor awareness and protection activities.

MoU Purpose and Scope

The MoU between IEPFA and DBS Bank aims to bolster investor education and protection initiatives.

DBS Bank has pledged to extend its support to IEPFA in conducting various awareness programs and safeguarding investor interests.

Previous Collaborations

Prior to this MoU, IEPFA has entered into similar agreements with other financial institutions like Bank of Baroda and ICICI Bank for analogous investor protection and education endeavors.

IEPFA

✓ Established in 2016 under the MCA, IEPFA administers the Investor Education and Protection Fund.
✓ Its primary mandate involves managing funds for refunding shares, unclaimed dividends, and matured deposits/debentures to investors, thereby ensuring investor protection and empowerment.

DBS Bank

✓ DBS Bank is a prominent financial services group in Asia, operating across 19 markets.
✓ With a presence in India for 29 years since its inception in 1994, DBS Bank India Limited stands out as the first among major foreign banks to operate as a wholly-owned, locally incorporated subsidiary of a leading global bank.
✓ Through this collaboration, IEPFA can leverage DBS Bank's extensive reach and expertise to further its investor education and protection goals, thereby enhancing transparency and trust in the financial ecosystem.

Skill India Centre

The Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship has inaugurated the first Skill India Centre (SIC) in Sambalpur, Odisha, marking a significant milestone in India's skill development landscape. Here's a detailed overview of the initiative:

Objective of Skill India Centre (SIC)

✓ Each SIC aims to address specific skill needs in high economic growth sectors, driving regional development and creating sustainable employment opportunities.

✓ The initiative aims to democratize access to quality education, providing a level playing field for aspiring youth, and equipping them with employable skills.

Focus Areas and Industry Alignment

✓ SICs target trades with high demand in industries such as Media & Entertainment, Leather, Tourism & Hospitality, and IT-ITeS.
✓ Curriculum design in collaboration with industry experts ensures alignment with evolving industry needs, promoting standardization, and creating employment opportunities.

Infrastructure and Facilities

✓ SICs are equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure, cutting-edge technologies, and modern facilities to catalyze demand for formal skills.
✓ These centers offer enhanced accessibility, personalized learning experiences, and improved career guidance to learners.

Role in Workforce Development

✓ SICs play a pivotal role in creating an industry-ready workforce, encouraging entrepreneurship, and strengthening the skilling ecosystem.
✓ By providing relevant skills and staying updated with industry trends, learners contribute effectively to India's workforce development.

Overall, the establishment of Skill India Centres underscores the government's commitment to nurturing a skilled and competent workforce, essential for India's development in the 21st century. Through targeted skill development initiatives, SICs aim to bridge the gap between industry requirements and available talent, thereby fueling economic growth and prosperity.

Increase in FCI's Authorised Capital

The government has announced a substantial increase in the authorized capital of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), a state-run entity, from Rs. 10,000 crore to Rs. 21,000 crore. This augmentation aims to bolster FCI's operational capabilities and enable it to fulfill its mandate effectively.

Need for the Increase

✓ FCI plays a pivotal role in India's food security architecture, including procurement of food grains at Minimum Support Price (MSP), maintenance of strategic food grain stocks, and distribution to state governments and Union Territories.
✓ The operations undertaken by FCI, including procurement and distribution, are crucial for stabilizing food grain prices in the market.
✓ Despite the government providing subsidies for these operations, FCI often incurs losses, funded by borrowing from the market or the National Small Saving Fund (NSSF).

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✓ Interest on these loans contributes to the food subsidy expenditure, necessitating an increase in FCI's authorized capital to alleviate the financial burden.

Significance of Increased Authorized Capital

✓ The government's infusion of equity into FCI will aid in meeting its working capital requirements and capital asset creation.

✓ The increase in authorized capital will alleviate the interest burden on loans, thereby reducing the economic cost and positively impacting the government's subsidy expenditure.

✓ FCI will utilize the additional capital to modernize storage facilities, improve transportation networks, and adopt advanced technologies, essential for reducing post-harvest losses and ensuring efficient distribution of food grains.

✓ The augmentation of FCI's capital will facilitate the implementation of comprehensive IT systems, integrating internal and external systems for enhanced operational efficiency.

Overall, the increase in FCI's authorized capital signifies the government's commitment to strengthening the food security ecosystem and ensuring efficient management of food grain procurement and distribution. By providing the necessary financial resources, FCI will be better equipped to modernize its infrastructure and adopt technological advancements, thereby enhancing its operational efficiency and effectiveness.

Restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has imposed severe restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank, effectively halting its core services, including accounts and wallets, from March onwards. Here are the key details regarding this development:

Restrictions Imposed

✓ RBI's actions have significantly curtailed Paytm Payments Bank's operations, barring it from offering essential banking services such as fund transfers, Aadhaar Enabled Payment System, Immediate Payment Service, and Bharat Bill Payment Operating Unit.

✓ Additionally, further deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups in customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, National Common Mobility Card cards, etc., are not permitted.

Customer Impact

✓ While the restrictions limit Paytm Payments Bank's operations, customers are allowed to withdraw or utilize their available balances without any restrictions.

Reasons behind Restrictions

✓ RBI's crackdown on Paytm Payments Bank stems from its failure to comply with regulations despite repeated warnings.

✓ Instances of excessive transactions, surpassing regulatory limits in minimum KYC pre-paid instruments, have raised concerns about money laundering.

✓ Additionally, the bank has been found to have numerous non-KYC compliant accounts, with many cases involving single PANs used for opening multiple accounts.

✓ Concerns have also been raised about the lack of information barriers within the Paytm Payments Bank's parent company, One97 Communications Ltd (OCL), and access to data by China-based entities, which indirectly hold stakes in the bank through their shares in OCL.

✓ RBI is committed to safeguarding depositors' funds and aims to mitigate risks associated with exposing depositors' money to such vulnerabilities.

Overall, RBI's stringent actions against Paytm Payments Bank underscore the importance of regulatory compliance and the imperative to protect the interests of depositors and the integrity of the banking system.

Pigeon Pea Breeding Protocol

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), based in Hyderabad, has introduced a groundbreaking innovation in pigeon pea breeding, unveiling the world's first Pigeon pea speed breeding protocol. Here are the key details about this development:

Introduction of Pigeon Pea Speed Breeding Protocol:

✓ ICRISAT has devised a novel method for pigeon pea breeding, promising to significantly reduce the time required to develop new pigeon pea lines with desirable traits.
✓ This innovation is expected to expedite the delivery of food to dryland communities by accelerating the breeding process.

Challenges Addressed

✓ Pigeon pea's lengthy growth cycle and sensitivity to day length have posed challenges to traditional breeding efforts.
✓ Over six decades, only around 250 pigeon pea varieties have been released globally due to these constraints.
✓ Developing a new pigeon pea variety typically involves a lengthy process spanning approximately 13 years of breeding, testing, and release.

Impact of the New Protocol

✓ ICRISAT's newly developed protocol has demonstrated a significant reduction in the breeding cycle, with completion times of around seven years, potentially further reduced to 2 to 4 years.
✓ This accelerated pace enables the development of climate-resilient, nutritionally superior, and higher-yielding pigeon pea varieties at an unprecedented rate.

Implications and Future Prospects

✓ The implementation of the pigeon pea speed breeding protocol is expected to contribute to self-reliance in pulse production.
✓ Additionally, it aims to address the dietary needs of countries such as India, Myanmar, Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique, where pigeon pea cultivation is significant.

iMPEAL-AI Program for AI Startups

iCreate, in collaboration with Microsoft and facilitated by the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY), has launched the iMPEL-AI (iCreate-Microsoft Program for Emerging Leaders in Artificial Intelligence) initiative to foster AI startups in India. Here's a comprehensive overview of the program:

Partnership and MoU Signing

iCreate and Microsoft have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance support for AI startups in India.

Introduction of iMPEL-AI Program

✓ The iMPEL-AI program aims to promote AI innovation and product development by providing mentorship and access to technology infrastructure.
✓ It offers a platform for Indian innovators to build globally successful AI ventures.

Key Features

✓ The program will screen 1100 AI innovators across India, selecting them as AI Most Valuable Players (MVPs).
✓ It focuses on sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, smart cities, sustainability, and financial inclusion to identify and scale approximately 100 startups nationwide.
✓ The top 25 startups will receive go-to-market support from Microsoft's Global Network to develop advanced, globally competitive products.

AI Skilling Opportunities

✓ Microsoft and iCreate will provide AI skilling opportunities to 11,000 innovators, startups, and young Indians across the country.
✓ Participants will undergo training through Microsoft's Learning Management System and receive globally recognized certifications upon completion.

Overall, the iMPEL-AI program is poised to catalyze AI innovation and entrepreneurship in India by nurturing startups and providing them with the necessary support, mentorship, and skilling opportunities. Through this initiative, India aims to strengthen its position as a global hub for AI-driven innovation and development.
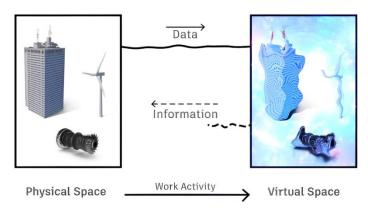
Sangam: Digital Twin

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has initiated the 'Sangam: Digital Twin' project, aimed at harnessing the potential of Digital Twin technology for various sectors.

Introduction of Sangam: Digital Twin

✓ The Sangam: Digital Twin project, introduced by the DoT, invites Expressions of Interest (EoI) from a diverse range of stakeholders including industry pioneers, startups, MSMEs, academia, innovators, and forward-thinkers.

THE DIGITAL TWIN MODEL

Data

Information

Physical Space → Work Activity → Virtual Space

Understanding Digital Twin Technology

✓ Digital Twin technology involves creating virtual replicas of physical assets, enabling real-time monitoring, simulation, and analysis to optimize outcomes effectively.

Proof of Concept (PoC) Distribution

✓ The Sangam: Digital Twin initiative is distributed across two stages of Proof of Concept (PoC).
✓ The first stage focuses on creative exploration, while the second stage involves practical demonstrations of specific use cases, laying the groundwork for scaling up successful strategies in future infrastructure projects through collaboration.

Significance of the Initiative

✓ The Sangam: Digital Twin initiative aims to create an ecosystem that maximizes the value of technological advancements for development.
✓ It aligns with advancements in communication, computation, and sensing, integrating technologies such as 5G, IoT, AI, AR/VR, AI-native 6G, Digital Twin, and next-gen computational technologies.
✓ By bringing all stakeholders together on a unified platform, the initiative seeks to bridge the gap between conceptualization and realization, facilitating advancements in infrastructure.
✓ It encourages a holistic approach to innovation by fostering collaboration, unified data sharing, and collective intelligence among stakeholders.

Overall, the Sangam: Digital Twin initiative represents a significant step towards leveraging cutting-edge technologies to address contemporary challenges and drive sustainable development across various sectors. By promoting collaboration and innovation, the initiative aims to unlock new possibilities and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure development efforts.

Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)

The Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), conducted by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), has released the results for the reference periods of 2020-21 and 2021-22. Here are the key highlights from the ASI reports:

Objective of ASI

✓ ASI aims to provide insights into the dynamics of change in the composition, growth, and structure of various manufacturing industries in terms of output, value added, employment, capital formation, and other parameters.
✓ It serves as a valuable input to the National Accounts Statistics at both the national and state levels.

Resilience of Indian Manufacturing Sector

✓ Despite the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian manufacturing sector showcased resilience, demonstrating a turnaround story.

Gross Value Added (GVA)

✓ GVA grew by 8.8% in 2020-21 over the previous year, primarily due to a sharp fall in input costs that offset the output contraction during the pandemic.
✓ In 2021-22, GVA witnessed a significant increase of 26.6% over the previous year, driven by high growth in industrial output, surpassing pre-pandemic levels.

Major Drivers of Growth in 2021-22

✓ Industries such as Basic metals, Coke & Refined Petroleum Products, Pharmaceutical Products, Motor vehicles, Food Products, and Chemical and Chemical products were the main drivers of growth.

✓ These industries contributed approximately 56% of the total GVA and exhibited significant growth in output.

State-wise GVA Trends

✓ Gujarat remained at the top in terms of GVA in 2020-21 and ranked second in 2021-22, while Maharashtra ranked first in 2021-22 and second in 2020-21.

✓ Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh were among the top five states in both years, collectively contributing around 53% of the total manufacturing GVA.

Employment Trends

✓ Despite a marginal fall in employment in 2020-21 due to COVID-19, the sector experienced robust growth of 7.0% year-on-year in 2021-22.

✓ Employment levels surpassed the pre-pandemic levels of 2018-19 by more than 9.35 lakh individuals.

✓ Average emoluments increased, with average salaries per employee rising by 1.7% in 2020-21 and 8.3% in 2021-22.

✓ Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana were the top five states in terms of employment in both years, collectively contributing about 54% of total manufacturing employment.

Overall, the ASI reports highlight the resilience and growth potential of the Indian manufacturing sector despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

GOVERNANCE AND SCHEMES

C-CARES Portal

The launch of the C-CARES portal marks a significant step towards digitizing the records and work processes of the Coal Mines Provident Fund Organization (CMPFO). Here's an overview of the portal and its benefits:

C-CARES Portal

✓ The C-CARES portal is designed to digitize the records and manual processes of CMPFO.
✓ It allows Coal Mines Provident Fund (CMPF) subscribers to access and view their individual details and subscription status.
✓ Coal companies can submit contribution details, subscribers' particulars, and claims for online settlement and payment through the portal.

CMPFO

✓ CMPFO is an autonomous organization established in 1948 under the Ministry of Coal.
✓ It provides social security to coal sector workers through various schemes, including the Coal Mines Provident Fund Scheme, Coal Mines Family Pension Scheme, Coal Mines Pension Scheme, and Coal Mines Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme.

Developed by

The C-CARES portal has been developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC).

Benefits of C-CARES Portal:

1. **Transparency:** The portal promotes transparency in operations by digitizing records and processes.
2. **Better Record Management:** It enables better record management and monitoring of CMPFO activities.
3. **Paperless Working:** The portal facilitates paperless working, reducing the reliance on physical documentation.
4. **Timely and Accurate Settlement:** It ensures timely and accurate settlement of PF claims, leading to improved efficiency.
5. **Reduction in Processing Time:** By streamlining processes, the portal reduces processing time for various tasks.
6. **Grievance Redressal:** It provides a platform for addressing grievances related to CMPFO services.

Overall, the C-CARES portal enhances the efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness of CMPFO operations, benefiting both subscribers and coal companies.

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF)

The continuation of the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) for another three years up to 2025-26 has been approved by the Union Cabinet.

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About AHIDF

✓ **Objective:** AHIDF aims to incentivize investments in various infrastructure aspects of animal husbandry to boost productivity, value addition, and market access.

✓ **Implemented by:** Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

✓ **Eligible Entities:** Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), private companies, individual entrepreneurs, Section 8 companies, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and Dairy Cooperatives are eligible for support under the scheme.

✓ **Application Process:** Beneficiaries can apply for loans in scheduled banks through the "Udyami Mitra" portal of SIDBI.

Objectives

✓ Increase milk and meat processing capacity and product diversification.

✓ Provide increased price realization for producers.

✓ Make available quality protein-enriched food to the population and prevent malnutrition.

✓ Develop entrepreneurship, generate employment, and promote exports in the livestock sector.

Features

✓ 3% interest subvention for 8 years (including two years of moratorium) will be provided by the Central Government.

✓ Credit guarantee of up to 25% of the credit borrowed will be provided to MSMEs and Dairy Cooperatives.

✓ No upper or lower limit on the loan amount.

✓ Lending rate of interest to be fixed by scheduled banks.

✓ Technologically assisted breed multiplication farms, strengthening of veterinary drugs and vaccine units, and animal waste to wealth management are eligible activities.

Benefits

✓ Upgradation of livestock sector infrastructure.

✓ Employment generation and wealth creation through entrepreneurship development.

✓ Doubled farmer income through private sector investment, latest processing technologies, and livestock product export.

Achievements

✓ AHIDF has contributed to increasing milk processing capacity, feed processing capacity, and meat processing capacity, thereby enhancing the supply chain and processing capacity in the dairy, meat, and animal feed sectors.

Overall, the AHIDF plays a crucial role in modernizing and enhancing the efficiency of the animal husbandry sector, ultimately benefiting both producers and consumers.

Nazool Land

Nazool Land refers to land that was seized by the British government from local kings and rulers during the British era, particularly after defeating them in battles. After Independence, these lands were left vacant by the British, and due to poor documentation, the original owners failed to prove their ownership.

Consequently, these lands were marked as Nazool land and became the property of the respective state governments.

Key points about Nazool Land

1. **Ownership:** Nazool Land is owned by the government but is not directly administered as state property. Instead, it is generally allotted to entities on lease for a fixed period, which can range from 15 to 99 years.
2. **Usage:** Nazool Land is typically used for public purposes such as building schools, hospitals, Gram Panchayat buildings, etc. It may also be utilized for housing societies, usually on lease, at various locations.
3. **Governing Rules:** The Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956, is the primary law governing Nazool land adjudication. This legislation outlines the procedures and regulations regarding the transfer and management of Nazool land.
4. **Lease Renewal:** The government has the authority to renew or cancel leases for Nazool land. If the lease term is expiring, individuals or entities can approach the Revenue Department of the local development authority in the concerned district to request lease renewal.

Regarding Waqf Land, it refers to lands permanently dedicated for religious, charitable, or pious purposes, according to Muslim law. Governed by the Waqf Act of 1995, these lands play a crucial role in supporting mosques, educational institutions, and welfare initiatives within the Muslim community. The Waqf Act establishes bodies such as the Central Waqf Council and State Waqf Boards, defines the powers and duties of trustees (mutawallis), and provides mechanisms for dispute resolution through Waqf Tribunals constituted by the state government.

Section 41A of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)

Section 41A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) deals with the issuance of notices of appearance before a police officer.

Key points regarding Section 41A and its implications

1. **Notice of Appearance:** Under Section 41A, a police officer conducting a probe in a case can issue notices to individuals connected to that case, directing them to appear before him. This notice serves as a means for individuals to cooperate with the investigation.
2. **Limitation on Arrest:** If individuals comply with the notice issued under Section 41A and appear before the police officer, they cannot be arrested unless specific reasons exist. These reasons include preventing the person from tampering with evidence, committing further offenses, or facilitating a proper probe. Importantly, these reasons must be recorded in writing by the police officer.
3. **Protection against Routine Arrests:** The provision aims to prevent routine arrests by the police when custody is avoidable. It ensures that individuals are given an opportunity to cooperate with the investigation before resorting to arrest.

In the case involving former ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar and her husband, the Bombay High Court deemed their arrest by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as an "abuse of power" and a violation of Section 41A of the CrPC. The court noted that the arrest was carried out without proper application of mind and solely because the couple allegedly did not cooperate with the investigation. However, the court found that the Kochhars had complied with the notices served to them, which should have precluded their arrest under Section 41A.

Injunction

Injunction is a legal remedy granted by a court to prevent a party from engaging in certain actions or behaviors. Here's an overview:

Purpose: Injunctions serve as preventive measures to stop legal wrongs or enforce rights. They are discretionary remedies granted by the court after considering various factors.

Types:

1. **Temporary Injunction:** Granted for a specified period or until further order of the court, aimed at securing the interests of an individual or property until a final judgment is made.
2. **Perpetual Injunction:** Also known as permanent injunction, granted by a decree made at the hearing upon the merits of the suit, preventing the defendant from asserting rights or committing certain acts.
3. **Mandatory Injunction:** Requires the defendant to carry out a particular action, compelling performance at the court's discretion.

Legislation: In India, injunctions are governed by the Specific Relief Act, 1963, which provides for different types of injunctions and procedures.

Dynamic Injunction: In some cases, courts grant injunctions even before a copyrighted work is publicly released, distributed, or created. This concept, known as dynamic injunction, is aimed at preventing irreparable loss due to online piracy.

Enforcement: If a party violates the terms of an injunction, they may be held in contempt of court, leading to penalties such as fines or imprisonment.

In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court emphasized that an injunction suit may not be maintainable if the plaintiff fails to prove title to the property while seeking injunction relief against the defendants. This underscores the importance of establishing legal standing and merit before seeking injunctive relief from the court.

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024

The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024, which aims to amend the existing Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, has received approval from the President. Here's an overview of the key points:

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974

✓ Enacted under Article 252 of the Constitution, this act is designed to prevent and control water pollution.
✓ It established the Central and State Pollution Control Boards (CPCB and SPCBs) to monitor and prevent contamination of public water resources by sewage and industrial effluents.
✓ The CPCB provides technical guidance and standards, while the SPCBs enforce compliance and file cases against violators.
✓ Industrial units must obtain permission from their respective state boards before setting up factories and comply with prescribed norms.

Violations of this act can result in shutdowns, fines, and imprisonment for up to six years.

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024

✓ Proposed by the Environment Ministry, the bill aims to decriminalize certain violations and instead impose penalties for them.

✓ **Objective:** To rationalize criminal provisions and alleviate concerns of citizens, businesses, and companies regarding imprisonment for minor, technical, or procedural defaults.

✓ The bill seeks to establish a balance between the severity of the offense and the gravity of the punishment provided.

✓ **Applicability:** Initially applicable in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Union territories, and in any other state that adopts the Act.

Comparative study of Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024

Amendments	Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024	Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974
1. Prior Consent for Establishing Industries	Exemption for certain industrial plants from SPCB consent.	Prior consent of SPCB required for industries likely to discharge sewage.
2. Power to Issue Guidelines	Central Government empowered to issue guidelines.	SPCB had authority to issue guidelines.
3. Establishing Industry without SPCB Consent	Introduction of penalties and imprisonment for tampering with monitoring devices.	Imprisonment and fines for violation.
4. SPCB Chairman	Nomination and terms of SPCB chairman by Central Government.	SPCB chairman appointed by state government.
5. Penalties	Decriminalization and imposition of fines.	Imprisonment or fines for offenses.
6. Adjudicating Officer	Central Government may appoint an officer as adjudicator.	No provision for an adjudicating officer.
7. Appeals	Appeals to National Green Tribunal with deposit requirement.	Appeals to appellate authority constituted by State Government.
8. Cognizance of Offense	Courts may take cognizance based on the complaint of the adjudicator.	Courts could take cognizance based on complaints by CPCB, SPCB, or complainants.
9. Penalty for Violation by Govt. Department	Department heads liable for penalties.	Heads deemed guilty for departmental offenses subject to due diligence.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Mission Utkarsh

Mission Utkarsh is a collaborative initiative between the Ministry of Ayush and the Ministry of Women and Child Development aimed at improving the nutrition of adolescent girls (14-18 years) through Ayurvedic interventions, particularly focusing on addressing anaemia.
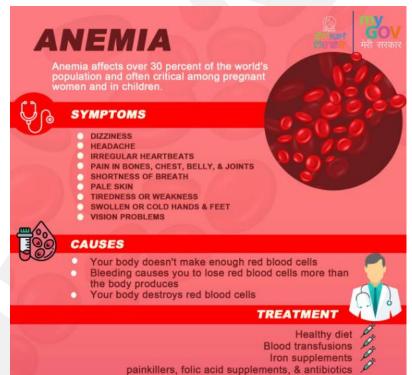
Key highlights of Mission Utkarsh

1. **MoU Signing:** The Ministry of Ayush and the Ministry of Women and Child Development have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate on this initiative.
2. **Objective:** The primary objective of Mission Utkarsh is to control anaemia among adolescent girls by implementing Ayurvedic interventions for nutritional improvement.
3. **Collaborative Effort:** Mission Utkarsh involves the participation of 15 central ministries or departments, indicating a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to address the issue.
4. **Aspirational Districts:** Initially, the mission will be launched as a pilot project in five aspirational districts, chosen from different states. Aspirational Districts are those identified by the Government of India as being among the most underdeveloped in terms of socio-economic indicators.
5. **Pilot Districts:** The five aspirational districts selected for the pilot phase of Mission Utkarsh are Dhubri in Assam, Bastar in Chhattisgarh, Paschimi Singhbhum in Jharkhand, Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, and Dhaulpur in Rajasthan.
6. **Target Group:** The mission aims to improve the nutrition of approximately 95,000 adolescent girls in these anaemia-prone districts.

By focusing on Ayurvedic interventions and leveraging the collaborative efforts of multiple ministries, Mission Utkarsh seeks to make significant strides in addressing anaemia among adolescent girls, particularly in underdeveloped districts with high rates of malnutrition.

BharatGPT Group Unveils 'Hanooman'

The BharatGPT consortium, led by IIT Bombay and other prestigious Indian engineering institutions, has introduced 'Hanooman', a groundbreaking suite of Indic language models. Created in collaboration with Seetha Mahalaxmi Healthcare (SML) and supported by Reliance Industries Ltd and the Department of Science and Technology, Hanooman marks a significant advancement in AI technology.

Key Features of Hanooman

1. **Multilingual Capability:** Hanooman is proficient in 11 Indian languages initially, with plans for expansion to over 20 languages.
2. **Application Diversity:** Designed for deployment across various sectors including healthcare, governance, financial services, and education.
3. **Multimodal Functionality:** Unlike traditional chatbots, Hanooman is a multimodal AI tool capable of generating text, speech, videos, and more in multiple Indian languages.
4. **Customization:** Hanooman offers tailored solutions like VizzhyGPT, a healthcare-focused AI model fine-tuned using extensive medical data.
5. **Impressive Scale:** The size of Hanooman's AI models ranges from 1.5 billion to an impressive 40 billion parameters, ensuring robust performance across diverse applications.

Operation AMRITH (Antimicrobial Resistance Intervention for Total Health)

Operation AMRITH is an initiative launched by the Kerala government to enforce the original H1 rule, which mandates a doctor's prescription for acquiring any class of antibiotics. Here's an overview of the initiative and the context surrounding it:

H1 Rules and Implementation

✓ In 2011, the Indian government introduced the H1 rule to prohibit over-the-counter sales of antibiotics without a prescription, in response to the growing concern over Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).
✓ Implementation of this rule faced challenges due to the heterogeneous healthcare system across the country.
✓ In 2013, the rule was modified to restrict over-the-counter sales only for second- and third-line antibiotics, ensuring accessibility to life-saving antibiotics in remote areas.

AMRITH and Its Implementation in Kerala

✓ Kerala's high doctor-patient ratio and literacy rate make it conducive for enforcing this rule effectively.
✓ An informed populace is more likely to understand and adhere to regulations, facilitating smoother execution and compliance.
✓ Kerala aims to demand hospitals to disclose the incidence of hospital-acquired infections and support the development of new antibiotics, diagnostics, and vaccines by entrepreneurs.

Impact and Future Outlook

✓ While Kerala's implementation of the H1 rule is commendable, its immediate impact on drug-resistant infections may be limited.
✓ The effects of this initiative may take several years to manifest fully, but it will contribute to fostering a culture of respecting antibiotics and encourage further actions to combat AMR.

Operation AMRITH represents Kerala's proactive approach to addressing the challenge of AMR through stringent regulations and public awareness initiatives, setting an example for other states to follow in combating this global health threat.

IRDAI Issues Exposure Draft on Bima Sugam E–Marketplace for Insurance

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has introduced an exposure draft for an innovative insurance electronic marketplace named Bima Sugam.

Bima Sugam

✓ Bima Sugam serves as an online platform offering various insurance schemes from multiple companies, covering life, health, and general insurance needs.
✓ The platform facilitates paperless settlement of claims, ensuring a seamless experience for policyholders.

Steps Taken by IRDAI

✓ A committee has been appointed by IRDAI to develop the platform.
✓ Plans are underway to issue requests for proposals to appoint a service provider for the platform.
✓ Service providers will act as technological partners for the creation and management of the platform.

Benefits of Bima Sugam

✓ **Single window solution:** Offers end-to-end solutions for insurance needs, including purchase, service, and claims settlement.
✓ **Consumer empowerment:** Enables customers to compare and choose suitable schemes from various options.
✓ **Benefits for insurers and intermediaries:** Facilitates access to real-time data and reduces paperwork for insurance companies and intermediaries.
✓ **Universalization of insurance:** Bima Sugam aims to democratize insurance by leveraging India Stack, a digital infrastructure, for seamless service delivery.

Proposed Guidelines Highlights

✓ **Not-for-profit structure:** Bima Sugam will operate as a not-for-profit company under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013.
✓ **Multi-stakeholder ownership:** Shareholding will be widely distributed among life, general, and health insurers, preventing any single entity from holding a controlling stake.
✓ **Regulatory oversight:** IRDAI will oversee Bima Sugam's governance and operations, nominating two members to the board and approving the appointment of the Chairperson & CEO.
✓ **Risk management:** A dedicated risk management committee will be established to identify and mitigate operational risks.
✓ **Consent-based architecture:** The platform will operate on a consent-based model, ensuring user control over data and interactions to enhance trust and privacy.
✓ **Free services for consumers:** Aimed at making insurance products and services accessible to individuals across diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Bima Sugam represents a significant advancement in the Indian insurance sector, aiming to streamline processes, enhance consumer choice, and promote financial inclusion through technology-driven solutions.
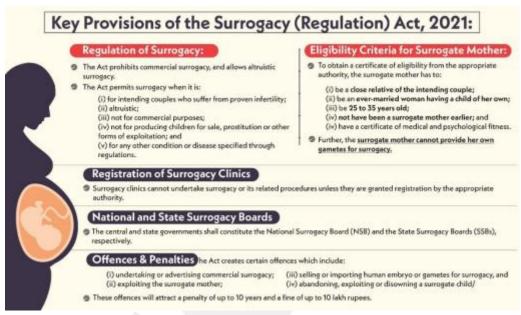
Government Allows Donor Egg & Sperm in Surrogacy

The recent amendment to the Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022 by the Central government brings a ray of hope for couples desiring parenthood through surrogacy.

Key changes and implications

1. **Donor Gametes Allowed:** The amendment permits the use of donor gametes, including ova (egg cells) and sperm, for married couples undergoing surrogacy. This is particularly beneficial for couples facing medical complications hindering conception.

Key Provisions of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021:

Regulation of Surrogacy:
- The Act prohibits commercial surrogacy, and allows altruistic surrogacy.
- The Act permits surrogacy when it is:
  (i) for intending couples who suffer from proven infertility;
  (ii) altruistic;
  (iii) not for commercial purposes;
  (iv) not for producing children for sale, prostitution or other forms of exploitation; and
  (v) for any other condition or disease specified through regulations.

Eligibility Criteria for Surrogate Mother:
- To obtain a certificate of eligibility from the appropriate authority, the surrogate mother has to:
  (i) be a close relative of the intending couple;
  (ii) be an ever-married woman having a child of her own;
  (iii) be 25 to 35 years old;
  (iv) not have been a surrogate mother earlier; and
  (iv) have a certificate of medical and psychological fitness.
- Further, the surrogate mother cannot provide her own gametes for surrogacy.

Registration of Surrogacy Clinics
- Surrogacy clinics cannot undertake surrogacy or its related procedures unless they are granted registration by the appropriate authority.

National and State Surrogacy Boards
- The central and state governments shall constitute the National Surrogacy Board (NSB) and the State Surrogacy Boards (SSBs), respectively.

Offences & Penalties The Act creates certain offences which include:
(i) undertaking or advertising commercial surrogacy;
(ii) exploiting the surrogate mother;
(iii) selling or importing human embryo or gametes for surrogacy, and
(iv) abandoning, exploiting or disowning a surrogate child/
- These offences will attract a penalty of up to 10 years and a fine of up to 10 lakh rupees.

2. **District Magistrate Board Certification:** In cases where either the husband or wife suffers from a medical condition preventing the use of their own gametes, the couple can resort to donor gametes. However, this necessitates certification by a District Magistrate Board.

3. **Limitation on Donor Gametes:** The notification specifies that only one of the partners, either the wife or husband, can utilize a donor gamete. Additionally, at least one gamete from the intending parents must be used in the conception process.

4. **Exclusion of Couples with Dual Medical Issues:** The amendment presents a challenge for couples where both partners have medical issues or are unable to provide their own gametes. Such couples are effectively precluded from opting for surrogacy under the current regulations.

5. **Response to Supreme Court Concerns:** The modifications in the Surrogacy Rules follow doubts raised by the Supreme Court regarding the validity of existing regulations. The court was prompted by applications from married women unable to conceive due to medical complications.

In essence, while the amendment expands options for couples seeking surrogacy by allowing the use of donor gametes, it also introduces limitations and challenges, particularly for couples with dual medical issues. The changes reflect efforts to address concerns raised by the Supreme Court and provide clarity in the realm of surrogacy regulations.

Divorced Muslim Women's Right to Maintenance

The Supreme Court's decision to examine the entitlement of a divorced Muslim woman to claim maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) against her former husband marks a significant legal development.

Key points regarding the ongoing debate surrounding maintenance rights for divorced Muslim women

✓ **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986:**
  - This Act, introduced as a religion-specific legislation, outlines the procedure for Muslim women to claim maintenance during divorce.
  - It was enacted to counter the Supreme Court's 1985 ruling in Mohd. Ahmad Khan v. Shah Bano Begum, which recognized a Muslim woman's right to seek maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC. However, this decision sparked controversy over perceived conflicts with religious personal laws.

✓ **Provisions of the 1986 Act:**
  - Section 3 of the Act guarantees maintenance payments to a divorced Muslim woman by her former husband during the iddat period, which typically lasts three months.
  - The maintenance amount is typically equivalent to the mahr or dowry given to the woman at the time of marriage or afterward.
  - After the iddat period, if the woman has not remarried and is financially unable to support herself, she can seek maintenance from a first-class magistrate.

✓ **Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC):**
  - This provision establishes a secular law for the maintenance of wives, children, or parents.
  - It allows individuals, including divorced Muslim women, to claim financial support from their spouses or children if they are unable to sustain themselves.

✓ **Prior Judicial Precedents**
  - **Allahabad High Court's Rulings:**
    - The Allahabad High Court has consistently upheld a divorced Muslim woman's entitlement to claim maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC even after the conclusion of the iddat period, provided she remains unmarried.

  - **Mujeeb Rahiman v. Thasleena (2022):**
    - In this case, a single judge of the Kerala High Court opined that a divorced Muslim woman has the right to seek maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC until she receives relief under Section 3 of the 1986 Act.
    - The court's decision implied that the maintenance order remains valid until the amount stipulated under Section 3 of the 1986 Act is paid.

  - **Noushad Flourish v. Akhila Noushad (2023):**
    - This case established a precedent where a Muslim wife who initiates divorce through khula, with her consent, is deemed ineligible to claim maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the CrPC.
    - The ruling highlights a distinction in the application of maintenance rights based on the method of divorce initiation within Muslim personal law.

Newly Amended Electricity Rules and Rooftop Solar Power

The Ministry of Power has recently announced amendments to the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020, aimed at facilitating the installation of rooftop solar projects and empowering consumers.

Key highlights of the amendment

1. Simplification of Rooftop Solar Installation Process:

✓ Previously, DISCOMs had to conduct a feasibility study for rooftop solar projects within 20 days of receiving an application. The amendment reduces this period to 15 days. If the study is not completed within this time frame, it is presumed that the proposal is technically feasible.

✓ Solar PV systems with a capacity of up to 10 kilowatts will be deemed accepted without requiring a study.

✓ DISCOMs can include the expenditure on strengthening distribution infrastructure for rooftop solar projects in their revenue requirement, with the maximum capacity to be prescribed by each state electricity regulatory commission.

2. Empowerment of Consumers in Residential Societies:

✓ Residents of residential societies now have the option to choose between individual connections for each household or a single connection for the entire society. This choice will be determined through a fair voting process organized by the distribution company.

✓ If a single-point connection is chosen for the entire premises, the residential society association will handle metering, billing, and collection on a non-profit-no-loss basis. Otherwise, the DISCOM will manage these tasks for individual connections.

3. Expedited Process for New Electricity Connections:

✓ The period for obtaining a new electricity connection or modifying an existing one has been reduced to 3 days in metropolitan areas, 7 days in other municipal areas, and 15 days in rural areas. However, in rural areas with hilly terrain, the period remains at 30 days.

4. Inclusion of Electric Vehicles (EVs):

✓ The rules now mandate DISCOMs to provide a separate connection for electricity supply to EV charging points upon consumer request, within the revised timeframes mentioned above.

✓ This provision enables EV owners in metropolitan cities to obtain a new electricity connection for charging their vehicles within three days.

These amendments aim to streamline processes, promote renewable energy adoption, and enhance consumer rights and convenience in the electricity sector.

Annual Death Penalty Report 2023

The Annual Death Penalty Report 2023, compiled by Project 39A, affiliated with the National Law University, Delhi, presents significant insights into the status of capital punishment in India.

PRISONERS ON DEATH SENTENCE
400 (2016), 366 (2017), 426 (2018), 378 (2019), 404 (2020), 490 (2021), 541 (2022), 561 (2023)

Key highlights and takeaways from the report

- ✓ **Confirmation of Death Sentences:**
  - Appellate courts in India, including the Supreme Court and all High Courts, confirmed only one death sentence in 2023. This marks a substantial decrease compared to previous years.
- ✓ **Low Confirmation Rate:**
  - The confirmation rate of death sentences by High Courts reached its lowest point in 2023 since 2000. Only one death sentence was confirmed by a High Court during the year.
- ✓ **Supreme Court's Role:**
  - The Supreme Court did not confirm any death sentences in 2023, similar to the situation in 2021.
- ✓ **Decline in Disposal Rate:**
  - There was a 15% decrease in the disposal rate of death penalty confirmation proceedings by High Courts in 2023 compared to the previous year.
- ✓ **Rise in Death Row Population:**
  - The number of prisoners under death sentence increased by 45.71% by the end of December 2023 compared to 2016. 2023 witnessed the highest number of prisoners on death row in nearly two decades.
- ✓ **Nature of Offenses:**
  - The majority of death penalty cases in trial courts involved crimes related to sexual offenses, with more than 50% of sentences imposed for homicidal rapes.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ **Concerns with Investigations and Trials:**
  - Acquittals and remands by the Supreme Court and High Courts in 2023 indicate significant concerns with the quality of police investigations and evidence appreciation by lower courts.
- ✓ **SC's Criticisms:**
  - The Supreme Court criticized negligence in investigation and trials in several cases, highlighting the need for improved legal procedures.
- ✓ **Lack of Information in Trial Court Sentences:**
  - Trial courts imposed death sentences in the absence of crucial information about the accused in the majority of cases, despite the Supreme Court's mandate in Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2022) to collect psychiatric and psychological evaluation reports before sentencing.
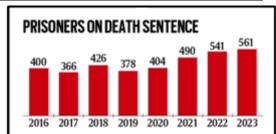
Recent Developments

- ✓ **International Changes:**
  - Ghana passed a bill to abolish the death penalty for ordinary crimes, and Malaysia eliminated the mandatory death penalty for 11 criminal offenses.
- ✓ **Proposed Legislation in India:**
  - The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023, if passed, would increase the number of offenses punishable by death in India from 12 under the Indian Penal Code (1860) to 18 under the Act.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

EU Launches Non-Military Mission To Protect Cargo Ships in Red Sea

- ✓ EU has launched a naval mission to help protect cargo ships in the Red Sea as attacks by Houthi rebels continue to threaten maritime traffic, hamper trade.
- ✓ Dubbed 'Aspides' (Greek for shield), the mission will be run out of Larissa in central Greece — home to the Hellenic Air Force and a NATO headquarters.
- ✓ The Iranian-backed Houthis have waged a persistent campaign of drone and missile attacks on commercial ships over Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas.
- ✓ In response, U.S. and British forces have bombed multiple targets used by the Houthis.
- ✓ However, the EU mission will not take part in any military strikes and will only operate at sea.

PM Modi's Visit to UAE

PM Modi's ongoing official visit to the United Arab Emirates marks his seventh visit to the country since 2015 and the third within the past eight months. The visit has yielded several significant agreements and pacts, emphasizing the growing bilateral relations between India and the UAE.

Key pacts signed during the visit

1. **Bilateral Investment Treaty:** A crucial agreement aimed at fostering investments in both countries.
2. **Energy Cooperation:** Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on cooperation in electrical interconnection and trade, enhancing collaboration in energy security and trade.
3. **Regional Connectivity:** Formation of an Intergovernmental Framework Agreement for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), facilitating regional connectivity and cooperation.
4. **Digital Infrastructure Cooperation:** MoU signed for cooperation in digital infrastructure projects, enabling investment cooperation and sharing technical knowledge and expertise.
5. **Instant Payment Platforms Interlinking:** Agreement signed for interlinking the UPI (India) and AANI (UAE) payment platforms, facilitating seamless cross-border transactions.
6. **Domestic Debit/Credit Cards Interlinking:** Agreement signed for interlinking RuPay (India) with JAYWAN (UAE), enhancing the universal acceptance of RuPay in the UAE.
7. **Heritage and Museum Cooperation:** Cooperation protocol signed between the National Archives of both countries for restoration and preservation of archival material, and MoU signed for cooperation in heritage and museums, supporting the Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal, Gujarat.

Additionally, the visit included significant events such as:

- ✓ **Interaction with Indian Community:** PM Modi addressed the Indian community in the UAE at the 'AHLAN MODI' event, organized in his honor.

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✓ **Temple Inauguration:** PM Modi inaugurated the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) Mandir on February 14. This temple, the first Hindu stone temple in Abu Dhabi, features traditional architecture and cultural depictions from various civilizations.

PM Modi's visit underscores the strengthening of bilateral ties between India and the UAE across various sectors, including economy, energy, digital infrastructure, and cultural exchange.

State Visit of PM of Greece to India
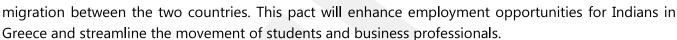
- The Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, is currently on a state visit to India, highlighting the close bilateral relations between the two countries.
- PM Mitsotakis was the Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker at the 9th Raisina Dialogue, 2024 in New Delhi.
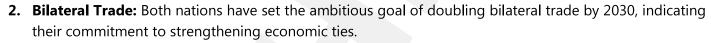
Key Highlights of the Visit

1. **Mobility and Migration Partnership Agreement:** India and Greece are set to sign an agreement aimed at facilitating skilled migration between the two countries. This pact will enhance employment opportunities for Indians in Greece and streamline the movement of students and business professionals.
2. **Bilateral Trade:** Both nations have set the ambitious goal of doubling bilateral trade by 2030, indicating their commitment to strengthening economic ties.
3. **Defence Cooperation:** There is a mutual agreement to collaborate on co-production and co-development of military hardware, reflecting a deepening partnership in the defense sector.
4. **Regional Cooperation:** India and Greece have pledged to cooperate in the Eastern Mediterranean region, emphasizing shared strategic interests. The discussion also touched upon the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), launched in 2023, as a means to enhance strategic influence and promote connectivity in the region.
5. **Shipping and Connectivity:** Both leaders have identified shipping and connectivity as priority areas for cooperation, underscoring the importance of infrastructure development and maritime security.
6. **Combating Terrorism:** There is a reaffirmed commitment to jointly combat terrorism, highlighting the shared resolve to address common security challenges.

Additionally, plans have been outlined to commemorate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between India and Greece in 2025. This milestone provides an opportunity to celebrate shared heritage and achievements on the global stage, further solidifying the strong bond between the two nations.

Expansion of UPI and RuPay Services

Launch in Sri Lanka and Mauritius

✓ India has introduced its Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system in Sri Lanka and Mauritius.
✓ This initiative aims to facilitate seamless digital payments for both Indian nationals visiting these countries and nationals from Sri Lanka and Mauritius traveling to India.
✓ Additionally, RuPay card services have been initiated in Mauritius as part of this expansion effort.

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Benefits of UPI in Sri Lanka and Mauritius

✓ Indian travelers can now access UPI settlement services during their visits to Sri Lanka and Mauritius, enhancing convenience for digital transactions abroad.
✓ Similarly, nationals from Sri Lanka and Mauritius traveling to India can also utilize UPI for payment transactions.

Introduction of RuPay Cards in Mauritius

✓ The extension of RuPay card services in Mauritius enables local banks to issue RuPay cards, facilitating transactions based on the RuPay network.
✓ This initiative promotes the use of RuPay cards for payments within both India and Mauritius, promoting financial inclusivity and interoperability.

Strategic Expansion

✓ The Indian government, through the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is actively promoting the adoption of UPI and RuPay networks internationally.
✓ Previous efforts include launching UPI acceptance in countries like France, with partnerships established to expand UPI's global footprint.
✓ Countries such as Singapore, Bhutan, and the UAE have also embraced UPI, highlighting its growing acceptance and relevance on the global stage.

Indians Can Travel To Iran without a Visa

- Indian passport holders can now travel to Iran without requiring a visa, specifically for tourism purposes and via air travel.
- The relaxation, announced in December 2023, took effect from February 4, 2024, with specific conditions outlined.
- This waiver is limited to tourism and doesn't extend to other purposes like work or study.

Reasons for Iran's Visa Requirement Lift

- Iran's decision to lift visa requirements for Indian tourists aligns with its commitment to global engagement and fostering positive international relations.
- The move aims to combat negative perceptions and dispel rumors, countering the phenomenon of Iranophobia.
- By easing visa restrictions, Iran seeks to encourage greater interaction and tourism, showcasing its openness to the world.

Expanding Visa Waivers for Indian Citizens

- Besides Iran, other countries like Kenya, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam have also recently waived visa requirements for Indian citizens.
- Thailand, for instance, implemented a visa exemption for Indian citizens from November 10, 2023, to May 10, 2024.
- Currently, 27 countries offer visa-free entry to Indian citizens, reflecting a broader trend of expanding travel privileges for Indian passport holders.

Indian Aid for Cholera-Stricken Zambia

Background

✓ Zambia is grappling with a severe cholera outbreak, particularly in its capital region.
✓ The outbreak, according to the Red Cross, started in the capital and claimed around 333 lives by early January 2024.

Indian Assistance

✓ In response to the crisis, India has provided medical and material aid to Zambia.
✓ The aid package includes 3.5 tonnes of crucial supplies for water purification, chlorine tablets, and ORS (Oral Rehydration Solution) sachets.
✓ These supplies are essential for combating cholera and treating those affected by the disease.

Humanitarian Gesture

✓ India's support to Zambia demonstrates its commitment to international solidarity and humanitarian assistance.
✓ By extending aid to Zambia during a health emergency, India underscores its role as a responsible global actor.
✓ The assistance not only addresses immediate needs but also strengthens bilateral relations between India and Zambia.

WHO Launches Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)

Initiative Background: The World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) through a virtual platform, fulfilling one of the three priority areas established during India's G20 presidency in 2023.

Overview of GIDH

✓ **Key Deliverable:** GIDH is a significant outcome of India's G-20 Presidency.
✓ **Objective:** It aims to consolidate evidence and amplify global digital health gains while enhancing future investments' impact through mutual accountability.
✓ **Equitable Access:** GIDH, managed by WHO as a Network of Networks, will promote equitable access to digital health by sharing digital goods and knowledge.
✓ **Inclusivity and Alignment:** The initiative pledges to ensure inclusivity, integration, and alignment of healthcare goals, leaving no one behind.

Pillars of GIDH

1. **Country Needs Tracker:**
   • Facilitates digital health investments by informing them based on country priorities.
2. **Country Resource Portal:**
   • Identifies traditional and innovative resource opportunities, promoting transparency and reducing duplication risk.
   • Enables prospective and retrospective analysis of resourcing gaps in digital health.

3. **Transformation Toolbox:**
    *   Advocates for quality-assured tools and resources to enhance country capacity and autonomy in managing national digital health transformation.
4. **Convening and Knowledge Exchange:**
    *   Promotes collaboration and knowledge exchange across global, regional, and national networks in digital health.

These pillars form the foundation of GIDH, enabling coordinated efforts to address global health challenges and advance digital health initiatives worldwide.

China Moves its Nationals into its Vacant 'Defence Villages' Along LAC

China's recent movement of its nationals into the "Xiaokang" border defence villages along India's north-eastern borders has raised concerns and underscores the ongoing territorial tensions between the two countries.

China's Settlement Strategy along India's Borders

1. **Xiaokang Villages Construction:**
    *   China has been constructing 628 "Xiaokang" or "well-off villages" along India's borders with the Tibet Autonomous Region since 2019.
    *   These villages are believed to serve dual purposes, serving both civilian and military functions.
2. **Line of Actual Control (LAC) Disputes:**
    *   The LAC serves as the demarcation line between Indian-controlled territory and Chinese-controlled territory.
    *   However, differing perceptions of its length and alignment between India and China have led to disputes and tensions.

3. **Infrastructure Development Competition:**
    *   Both China and India have been investing in infrastructure development along the LAC.
    *   China has been enhancing its connectivity through passes, constructing roads, bridges, and model villages.
    *   India has been improving its border infrastructure, including connectivity to forward areas and developing border villages under initiatives like the Vibrant Villages program.

4. **Territorial Claims Divergence:**
    *   India's claim line encompasses the entire boundary marked on official maps by the Survey of India, including Aksai Chin and Gilgit-Baltistan.
    *   However, China's claim line diverges, especially in the eastern sector where it asserts control over the entirety of Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet.

5. **Implications and Ongoing Tensions:**
    *   The settlement of Chinese nationals in these villages adds to existing tensions along the LAC.
    *   It highlights China's strategic investments in border regions and underscores the need for continued vigilance and diplomatic efforts to address territorial disputes and prevent escalation.

7th Indian Ocean Conference

✓ **Date and Location:** The 7th edition of the Indian Ocean Conference took place in Perth, Australia on 9-10 February 2024.

✓ **Organizers:** The conference was organized in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia, along with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, and the Perth-US Asia Centre in Australia.

✓ **Theme:** The theme of the conference was "Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean."

Key Points from EAM Jaishankar's Speech

✓ **Challenges in the Indian Ocean:**
    *   EAM Jaishankar highlighted various challenges in the Indian Ocean, including threats to maritime traffic such as piracy and terrorism, concerns about international law and freedom of navigation, and a range of transnational and non-traditional threats.

✓ **Concerns Regarding Grey Areas:**
    *   He expressed concern about grey areas arising from climate change, natural disasters, disruptive events, and consequences of distant happenings like fuel and food crises.
    *   Unsustainable debt, opaque lending practices, and unviable projects were also highlighted as affecting countries in the region.

✓ **Challenges of Globalization:**
    *   The current form of globalization, characterized by over-concentrations of manufacturing and technology, was discussed.
    *   The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of dispersing production across more geographies and building reliable and resilient supply chains.
    *   The digital era and emergence of AI emphasized the need for trust and transparency.

✓ **Drivers of the Future:**
    *   EAM Jaishankar emphasized focusing on future drivers such as digital technology, electric mobility, green hydrogen, and green shipping for a sustainable future.

Africa Club: Promoting African Interests

The Africa Club was launched at the 37th African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, held in February 2024.

Purpose and Goals

✓ **Alliance of African Multilateral Financial Institutions:** The Africa Club comprises African-owned and controlled multilateral financial institutions.

✓ **Objectives:**
    *   **Promotion of Democratic Principles and Institutions:** Advocating for democratic governance across the continent.
    *   **Encouragement of Popular Participation:** Fostering active involvement of African citizens in governance and decision-making processes.

- **Promotion of Peace, Security, and Stability:** Working towards ensuring peace and stability in Africa.
- **Acceleration of Socio-economic Integration:** Enhancing cooperation and integration among African nations for socio-economic development.

✓ **Member Institutions**

The Africa Club includes esteemed institutions such as:

- African Export-Import Bank
- Trade and Development Bank
- Africa Finance Corporation
- African Reinsurance Corporation
- African Trade and Investment Development Insurance, among others.

World Governments Summit 2024

Event: Prime Minister Modi participated in the World Governments Summit in Dubai as the Guest of Honour.

Keynote Address: PM Modi delivered a special keynote address on the theme of the Summit - "Shaping the Future Governments".

About the World Governments Summit

Purpose: It is a global platform dedicated to shaping the future of government worldwide.

Annual Event: Held annually in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, since its inception in 2013.

Agenda Setting: The Summit sets the agenda for the next generation of governments, focusing on leveraging innovation and technology to address universal challenges.

World Governments Summit Organization

✓ **Headquarters:** Located in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
✓ **Nature:** A global, neutral, non-profit organization.
✓ **Mission:** Dedicated to shaping the future of governments.

Commonwealth Attorneys and Solicitors General Conference (CASGC) 2024

Venue: Prime Minister Modi inaugurated the Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA) - Commonwealth Attorneys and Solicitors General Conference (CASGC) 2024 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.

Theme: The conference is themed "Cross-Border Challenges in Justice Delivery."

Key Points from PM Modi's Speech

✓ **Rethinking Legal Systems:**
- PM Modi highlighted the need to rethink, reimagine, and reform legal systems, emphasizing the modernization of legal frameworks.

- He addressed the challenges posed by transnational criminal networks leveraging advanced technology, economic crimes funding illicit activities across borders, and the rise of cryptocurrency and cyber threats.

✓ **Positive Impact of Technology:**
- PM Modi cited examples of technology positively impacting justice systems, such as the use of drones for land mapping and issuing property cards to rural populations, thereby reducing disputes and enhancing efficiency.
- Digitalization initiatives, including online court proceedings, have facilitated improved access to justice, particularly for remote areas.

✓ **Reforms in Indian Legal System:**
- India has witnessed significant legal reforms, including the abolition of obsolete colonial-era laws and the replacement of century-old criminal legislation with modern laws focused on justice rather than punishment.
- PM Modi highlighted the shift towards ensuring justice and enhancing ease of living and doing business through legal reforms.

About Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA)

Establishment: Founded in 1971, CLEA is a Commonwealth-wide organization with regional chapters and committees across Asia, Southern Africa, West Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe.

Goal
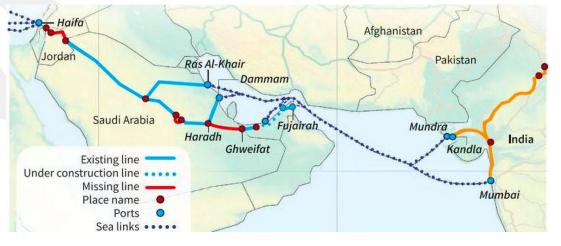
✓ To make legal education socially relevant and professionally useful, particularly through:
✓ The development of law curricula and teaching methodologies;
✓ Assisting law schools to prepare themselves for the demands of the profession in the context of the information revolution and other global challenges; and
✓ Supporting continuing legal education and distance learning programmes.

New Trade Route to Israel via Mundra Port

The Israeli transport minister announced a new trade route involving the Mundra port in Gujarat due to ongoing attacks by Houthis on Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea.

New Route

✓ **From Mundra to UAE Ports:** Goods will be shipped from Mundra to ports in the UAE, such as Dubai's Jebel Ali Port, by sea.

✓ **Land Transport:** From the UAE ports, goods will be transported via land

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through Saudi Arabia and Jordan to Israel.

✓ This land corridor became feasible due to the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020.
✓ **Mode of Transportation:** A major part of the land transport will be carried out on trucks.
✓ **Potential Use in IMEC:** A similar route might be utilized in the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project, aiming to link India to Europe via the Middle East.

Benefits and Costs

✓ **Time and Cost Savings:** The land route will significantly reduce travel time and costs for Israel.
✓ **Revenue Generation:** It will generate revenue for Saudi Arabia and Jordan in terms of transport fees and duties.
✓ **Limitations of Land Transport:** Trucks can carry fewer goods compared to ships, limiting the volume of trade.
✓ **Dependency on Diplomatic Relations:** The success of the route depends on Israel maintaining friendly ties with Saudi Arabia and Jordan amidst the rapidly fluctuating situation in the Middle East.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

PM Modi Announces 4 Astronauts for Gaganyaan

✓ Prime Minister Modi reveals the names of the four astronauts selected for India's maiden crewed space mission, Gaganyaan: Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair, Angad Prathap, Ajit Krishnan, and Shubanshu Shukla.

✓ All are distinguished members of the Indian Air Force (IAF), holding ranks of either wing commanders or group captains, with extensive experience as test pilots.

Overview of Gaganyaan Project

✓ Gaganyaan aims to demonstrate India's human spaceflight capability by launching a crew of three members into a low-Earth orbit of 400 km for a duration of three days, followed by a safe return to Earth.

✓ Initiated in 2007 under the Indian Human Spaceflight Programme (IHSP), Gaganyaan is a crucial step towards developing the necessary technology for crewed orbital spacecraft missions.

Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3)

✓ The Gaganyaan mission utilizes the Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3/GSLV Mk3), India's heaviest rocket, which comprises solid, liquid, and cryogenic stages.

✓ All systems of the LVM3 launch vehicle are reconfigured to meet human rating requirements, designated as Human Rated LVM3/HLVM3.

Current Status of Gaganyaan Missions

✓ Gaganyaan missions include both manned and unmanned flights, with the first unmanned test flight, Gaganyaan-1, scheduled to take off by the end of 2024.

✓ The manned mission, carrying a three-membered crew to a low Earth orbit at an altitude of 400 km for three days, is scheduled subsequently.

✓ ISRO is actively developing technology for the proposed human-space flight mission, including life support systems, crew emergency escape provision, and crew management aspects.

✓ Successful tests of a basic crew module and crew escape system were conducted in October 2023.

Training of Astronauts

✓ The four selected astronauts have completed generic training at Russia's Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre, facilitated by an MOU signed between ISRO-Glavkosmos in June 2019.

✓ Currently, they are undergoing specialized training at ISRO's astronaut training facility in Bengaluru. One astronaut is expected to receive training from NASA.

Organoid Neural Network (ONN)

Scientists have achieved a significant breakthrough by combining brain-like tissue with electronics to create an 'organoid neural network' capable of recognizing voices and solving complex mathematical problems.

Neural Networks Overview

✓ Neural networks are a class of machine learning models inspired by the structure and functioning of the human brain. They consist of interconnected nodes (neurons) organized into layers, capable of learning from data, generalizing patterns, and making predictions or decisions.

✓ Deep learning involves training deep neural networks with multiple hidden layers to learn complex representations and features from data, finding applications in various fields such as image recognition, language processing, and robotics.

What are Organoids?

Organoids are miniature 3D structures grown from stem cells under controlled laboratory conditions, resembling specific organs, including the brain. They mimic the structure and function of certain brain regions to some extent.

About Organoid Neural Network (ONNs)

✓ ONNs integrate brain organoids with neural network technology by interfacing them with microelectrode arrays (MEAs). This setup enables the recording and stimulation of the organoid's electrical activity.

✓ The recorded electrical signals are used to construct a computational model of the organoid's neural network, facilitating further experimentation and artificial intelligence (AI) development.

✓ This innovation extends neuromorphic computing, the emulation of the human brain in computers, by directly incorporating brain tissue into computational systems.

Applications

1. **Understanding Brain Function:** ONNs provide a more realistic and dynamic model of brain activity compared to traditional cell cultures, aiding in the study of brain function.
2. **Drug Discovery:** Testing drugs on ONNs could offer a predictive model for their effects on the human brain, potentially accelerating drug discovery and development.
3. **Neuromorphic AI:** Developing AI systems based on the principles of the brain could lead to more efficient and flexible technologies with applications in various domains.

Challenges

1. **Complexity:** Organoids represent simplified models of the brain and may not fully capture its complexity.
2. **Scalability:** Scaling up ONNs to mimic larger brain regions and functionalities remains a challenge, limiting their broader applicability.

Observation of Interplanetary Dust Originating Zodiacal Light

The Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) in Ahmedabad has conducted observations on the origin of interplanetary dust responsible for the phenomenon known as zodiacal light, with a specific focus on Mars' moons, Deimos and Phobos.

Zodiacal Light

✓ Zodiacal light refers to a faint, diffuse glow of sunlight scattered by interplanetary dust particles within the solar system.

✓ It is most prominently visible just after sunset or before sunrise, when the Sun is below the horizon and the sky is dark enough to observe this subtle illumination.

✓ The term "zodiacal light" derives from its position along the zodiac, the band of the sky through which the Sun, Moon, and planets traverse, though it is not tied to any specific zodiacal constellation.

✓ **Origin:** The phenomenon is attributed to sunlight being scattered by minuscule dust particles distributed within the plane of the solar system, believed to be remnants of comets and asteroids.

✓ **Visibility:** Optimal viewing conditions for zodiacal light occur on clear, moonless nights in areas with minimal light pollution. Though challenging to photograph due to its faintness, it can be discerned with the naked eye under suitable circumstances.

✓ **Study and Exploration:** Previous space missions, such as the European Space Agency's IRAS (Infrared Astronomical Satellite) and NASA's COBE (Cosmic Background Explorer), have contributed crucial data concerning the infrared emission associated with zodiacal dust.

Lunar Nuclear Reactor Project (LNRP) by NASA

NASA has unveiled plans for its Lunar Nuclear Reactor Project (LNRP), marking the completion of the initial phase of this ambitious endeavor aimed at constructing a small electricity-generating nuclear reactor on the Moon.

Implications of the Project

1. **Sustainable Lunar Exploration:** The deployment of a nuclear reactor on the Moon promises to revolutionize lunar exploration by providing a reliable and independent power source. This enables longer-duration missions, sustains permanent lunar bases, and facilitates the operation of scientific instruments for extended periods.

2. **Resource Utilization:** The LNRP could pave the way for in-situ resource utilization (ISRU) on the Moon, unlocking the potential to extract and utilize resources such as ice water for fuel or construction purposes. Placing a nuclear reactor in permanently shadowed areas, potentially containing water ice, or providing continuous power during lunar nights (lasting 14-and-a-half Earth days) are among the envisioned applications.

3. **Gateway to Mars:** The technological advancements achieved through the development of the lunar reactor hold significant implications for future missions to Mars. The capability to generate crucial power can play a pivotal role in establishing a sustainable human presence on the red planet.

4. **International Collaboration:** The LNRP has the potential to foster collaboration in space exploration on a global scale. Other countries may join the effort or benefit from the technological advancements and insights gained through this project, thereby promoting international cooperation in the exploration and utilization of space resources.

The Lunar Nuclear Reactor Project represents a crucial step forward in humanity's quest for sustainable exploration and utilization of celestial bodies, offering immense potential for scientific discovery and international collaboration in space exploration endeavors.

World Health Organization's Guidance on Large Multi-Modal Models (LMM) in Healthcare

The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued comprehensive guidelines regarding the ethical implementation and governance of large multi-modal models (LMM) in healthcare settings.

Overview of Large Multi-Modal Models (LMMs)

✓ LMMs are a form of artificial intelligence (AI) capable of processing and comprehending information from various sources, including text, images, audio, and video.

✓ In healthcare, where data often exists in diverse formats such as medical images, electronic health records (EHRs), and patient narratives, LMMs hold particular promise.

Examples of LLM-Guided Multimodal Models

Notable examples include OpenFlamingo, MiniGPT-4, Otter, InstructBILP, and BLIVA.

Advantages of LMMs in Healthcare

1. **Analyzing Complex Medical Data:** LMMs excel at analyzing intricate medical data, including radiology images, genetic information, and patient histories, to identify patterns.
2. **Personalized & Precision Medicine:** By leveraging patient medical histories and genetic makeup, LMMs facilitate personalized and precision medicine.
3. **Accessibility and Affordability:** LMM-powered healthcare technologies aim to ensure equitable access for all individuals.

Challenges Associated with LMMs

1. **Ensuring Data Privacy and Security:** Safeguarding sensitive medical data is imperative when utilizing LMMs to prevent breaches and maintain patient confidentiality.
2. **Bias and Fairness:** LMMs may perpetuate biases inherent in the data they are trained on, raising concerns about fairness and equity in healthcare delivery.

The WHO's guidance seeks to address these challenges while harnessing the potential benefits of LMMs in revolutionizing healthcare delivery.

INSAT-3DS Mission

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched the INSAT-3DS satellite atop the GSLV-F14 launch vehicle. This mission, fully funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), aims to bolster the country's meteorological services and enhance environmental monitoring capabilities.

Objective

✓ The primary objective of the INSAT-3DS mission is to augment India's meteorological services, particularly in weather, climate, and ocean-related monitoring. It seeks to complement the functions of the existing INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR satellites, which have reached the end of their operational lives.

✓ Additionally, the mission aims to elevate capabilities in data collection and dissemination, enabling more effective monitoring of Earth's surface, atmosphere, oceans, and environment.

Features of the Mission

1. INSAT-3DS is equipped with four payloads, including an Imager, a sounder, a data relay transponder, and a satellite-aided search and rescue transponder.
2. Meteorological data from the satellite will be utilized by institutes under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, such as the India Meteorology Department (IMD), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), and Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS).
3. The mission's capabilities include providing short-range forecasts for extreme weather events like thunderstorms, estimating visibility for aviation purposes, and studying phenomena such as forest fires, smoke, and snow cover, in addition to supporting climate studies.

Launch Details

✓ GSLV-F14, a three-stage launch vehicle with a length of 51.7 meters and a liftoff mass of 420 tonnes, was utilized to launch the INSAT-3DS satellite into orbit.

Green Propulsion System Development

Under the DRDO's Technology Development Fund (TDF) program, a Green Propulsion System was successfully developed and demonstrated its in-orbit capability on a payload launched by the PSLV C-58 mission.

DRDO's Technology Development Fund (TDF) Program

TDF is a flagship program of the Ministry of Defence executed by DRDO under the 'Make in India' initiative. It aims to fund innovation in defense and aerospace sectors, particularly supporting startups and MSMEs.

About Green Propulsion System

✓ A type of rocket engine that utilizes non-toxic and environmentally friendly propellants, offering a safer and more sustainable alternative to traditional propulsion systems.

✓ Green propellants are less hazardous to handle and produce fewer harmful emissions compared to conventional propellants like hydrazine.

PSLV C-58 Mission

✓ The PSLV-C58 mission marked the 60th flight of ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle.
✓ Launched on January 1, 2024, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, India.
✓ The primary payload of the mission was the XPoSat satellite, designed to study X-ray emissions from celestial sources.

Types of Green Propellants

1. **Ionic Liquids:** These are salts that remain liquid at room temperature and can serve as both fuel and oxidizer in rocket engines.
2. **High-Test Peroxide (HTP):** Concentrated hydrogen peroxide used as an oxidizer in rocket engines.
3. **Methanol and Ethanol:** Simple alcohols that can act as fuels in rocket engines.
4. **Biopropellants:** Derived from biomass sources such as vegetable oils or algae, offering a renewable and sustainable option for rocket propulsion.

Open AI Sora

OpenAI, the creator of the innovative ChatGPT chatbot, has introduced a new generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) model named Sora. This model possesses the capability to transform text prompts into video content.

About Sora

✓ Sora represents an AI model designed to generate realistic and imaginative videos or scenes based on textual instructions.

✓ Trained on an extensive dataset comprising both text and video inputs, Sora can produce videos up to 60 seconds in length while ensuring high visual quality and adherence to the user's prompt.

Sora Model Mechanism

✓ The model utilizes a transformer architecture, akin to the ChatGPT models, to achieve superior scaling performance.

✓ It represents videos and images as collections of smaller data units known as patches, similar to tokens in GPT models.

✓ Sora's development builds upon previous research, particularly leveraging techniques from OpenAI's DALL-E model.

• DALL-E, introduced in January 2021, is a text-to-image model capable of generating digital images from natural language descriptions.

✓ Sora incorporates the recapturing technique from DALL-E 3, involving the generation of descriptive captions for visual training data.

Applications of Sora

1. Sora exhibits the ability to generate intricate scenes featuring multiple characters with specific movements and precise details of both the subject and background.

2. The model not only comprehends the user's prompt but also understands how these elements translate into the real world.

3. Leveraging its deep understanding of language, Sora accurately interprets prompts and creates characters with vibrant emotions, enhancing the richness and realism of the generated content.

GRAPES-3 Experiment

The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research's GRAPES-3 experiment, located in Ooty, India, has made significant strides in cosmic ray research, identifying a novel characteristic in the cosmic-ray proton spectrum.

About GRAPES-3 (Gamma Ray Astronomy PeV EnergieS phase-3 experiment)

✓ GRAPES-3 is a Muon telescope facility designed to study cosmic rays and investigate phenomena such as solar modulations and geomagnetic effects on cosmic ray intensity.

✓ **Objective:** The experiment aims to explore cosmic rays in the PeV (Petaelectron Volt) energy range, corresponding to extremely high-energy particles, to understand their origin, acceleration, and propagation.

Understanding Cosmic Rays

✓ Cosmic rays are high-energy charged particles, predominantly protons and atomic nuclei, originating from various sources in the universe.

✓ Contrary to their name, cosmic rays are not rays but fast-moving particles that constantly bombard Earth's atmosphere from outer space, generating particle showers comprising electrons, photons, muons, protons, and neutrons.

Components of GRAPES-*3*

1. **Scintillator Array:** Consisting of 400 plastic scintillator detectors covering an area of approximately 50,000 square meters. These detectors record charged particles produced when cosmic rays interact with the atmosphere.

2. **Muon Detector:** A large-area (560 m^2) tracking muon detector used to identify muons, secondary particles produced in cosmic ray interactions, and study their properties.

Key Findings

1. **Novel Feature in Cosmic-Ray Proton Spectrum:** GRAPES-3 has discovered a new feature in the cosmic-ray proton spectrum around 166 TeV energy. This finding suggests a deviation from a single power-law spectrum, providing valuable insights into acceleration mechanisms.

2. **Acceleration of Muons during Thunderstorm Conditions:** In 2014, the experiment observed the acceleration of muons during thunderstorm conditions, indicating potential new avenues for studying cosmic ray acceleration in Earth's atmosphere.

The GRAPES-3 experiment continues to deepen our understanding of cosmic rays and their behavior, offering significant contributions to the field of astroparticle physics.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY

High Altitude Pseudo Satellite (HAPS): Revolutionizing Aerial Technology

CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) has conducted successful tests of an unmanned aerial vehicle known as High Altitude Pseudo Satellite (HAPS).

About HAPS

✓ **Definition:** HAPS are aircraft positioned above 20 km altitude, in the stratosphere, for very-long-duration flights, sometimes lasting months or even years.
✓ **Features:**
  • **Altitude:** Capable of reaching heights up to 23 km.
  • **Duration:** Can remain airborne for at least 90 days.
  • **Design:** May include airplanes, airships, or balloons.
✓ **Recent Test:** A 5-meter-long system, with an 11-meter wingspan and weighing 23 kg, rose to about 3 km and stayed aloft for about eight hours during the recent test.

Benefits/Advantages of HAPS

✓ **Bridge the Gap:** Serve as a link between lower altitude UAVs and conventional satellites in space.
✓ **Applications:** Telecommunications, emergency/public safety communications, intelligent transportation systems, maritime surveillance, environmental monitoring, land border control, etc.
✓ **Coverage and Interference:** Can cover larger areas with less interference compared to ground-based communication networks.
✓ **Data Transfer:** Facilitate data transfer between satellites and ground-based telecom networks.
✓ **Cost and Launch:** Significantly cheaper and easier to launch compared to traditional satellites.

Significance for India

✓ **Border Security:** Crucial for safeguarding India's long and complex land border of about 15,000 km and coastline of about 7,500 km.
✓ **Applications:** Round-the-clock missions, border patrolling, target tracking, maritime surveillance, navigation, and missile detection.
✓ **Comparison with China:** China's AVIC has been developing similar HAPS platforms for surveillance, including the solar-powered Morning Star drone, capable of long-duration flights.

Ensuring Child Safety Online

In light of recent concerns about online child safety, particularly regarding exposure to inappropriate content and risks posed by online predators, there is a growing recognition of the need for concerted efforts to protect children in the digital realm.

Challenges

1. **Exposure to Inappropriate Content:** Children may inadvertently encounter harmful content like violence, pornography, and hate speech while browsing online.
2. **Online Predators and Grooming:** The proliferation of social media and gaming platforms has facilitated the grooming of children by online predators, who exploit these platforms to establish relationships for malicious purposes.
3. **Cyberbullying:** Digital technology is used to harass, intimidate, or humiliate children, leading to serious psychological and emotional consequences.
4. **Privacy Concerns:** Children may unknowingly share personal information online due to a lack of understanding about privacy settings.
5. **Addictive Behavior:** Excessive screen time and device usage can lead to addictive behavior among children, affecting their mental, physical health, academic performance, and social interactions.

Responsibility of Tech Companies

✓ **Data Collection and Privacy:** Tech companies collect vast amounts of data, raising concerns about privacy, security, and surveillance, particularly among children.
✓ **Safety by Design:** There is a growing demand for tech companies to prioritize safety by design, ensuring that platforms are safe for children and young users.

Concerns about Generative AI

✓ **Misinformation and Disinformation:** Generative AI can produce convincing content that may spread misinformation, posing risks to children who are still developing critical thinking skills.
✓ **Impact on Mental Well-being:** There are concerns about the impact of interacting with AI-generated content on the mental well-being of young minds.

Strategies for Child Safety Online

1. **Tech Company Responsibility:** Incorporating safety features and mechanisms into platforms to protect children from harmful content and interactions.
2. **UNICEF's Guidance for Child-Friendly AI:** Guidelines emphasizing children's development, data protection, and privacy in AI technologies.
3. **Government Oversight:** Implementing regulatory frameworks and addressing harmful online content and behaviors through legislative measures.
4. **Parental Involvement:** Educating parents about internet safety measures, utilizing parental controls, and monitoring children's online activities to mitigate risks.

DAC Approves Projects to Enhance Armed Forces' Capabilities

✓ The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has given the green light to capital acquisition proposals totaling Rs 84,560 crore.

✓ These projects aim to bolster the capabilities of the Armed Forces and the Indian Coast Guard, covering various sectors.

Key Projects Cleared by DAC

1. **Maritime Reconnaissance and Multi-Mission Aircraft:**
   - Acquisition of 15 aircraft for the Navy and the Coast Guard to enhance maritime surveillance and security.

2. **Flight Refueller Aircraft:**
   - Procurement of six aircraft for the Indian Air Force (IAF) to strengthen aerial refuelling capabilities.
3. **New Generation Anti-Tank Mines:**
   - Deployment of advanced anti-tank mines for the Army to enhance ground-based defense capabilities.
4. **Heavy Weight Torpedoes (HWT):**
   - Acquisition of torpedoes for the Navy's Scorpene-class submarines to bolster underwater warfare capabilities.

Amendments to DAP 2020

✓ The DAC has approved modifications to the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, focusing on various aspects such as benchmarking, cost computation, payment schedules, and procurement quantities.

✓ These changes are aimed at facilitating the procurement of advanced technologies from startups and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

✓ Special emphasis has been placed on sourcing equipment from Indian vendors to promote indigenous manufacturing and reduce dependence on foreign suppliers.

Military Exercises

Sada Tanseeq: Joint Military Exercise

✓ The first joint military exercise between the Indian Army and the Royal Saudi Land Force, called Sada Tanseeq, was held at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in Rajasthan.

MILAN 2024: Indian Navy's Largest Naval Exercise

✓ MILAN 2024, the 12th edition of the Indian Navy's largest naval exercise, took place in Visakhapatnam in February 2024.

✓ **Participation:** Over 50 countries participated.

✓ **Theme:** "Camaraderie Cohesion Collaboration".

✓ **Inauguration:** The Defence Minister inaugurated NISHAR, a platform created by the Indian Navy for networking and information-sharing.

✓ **NISHAR:** Allows ships of friendly navies to share information through the MITRA terminal, working on plug-and-play architecture.

Vayu Shakti 2024: Demonstrating Air Force Capabilities

✓ The Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted Exercise Vayu Shakti-2024 in February 2024 at the Pokhran firing range in Rajasthan.

✓ **Aim:** Demonstrating the IAF's full spectrum of operations, including combat and fire capabilities, in a realistic scenario.

✓ **Frequency:** Triennial exercise, conducted once every three years. Previous edition held in February 2019.

Establishment of 18 Corps for LAC Operations

✓ The Indian Army plans to establish a new corps, named **18 Corps**, to oversee operations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the central sector.

✓ The proposed area of responsibility for the 18 Corps spans 545 kilometers across Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

✓ The **Headquarters Uttar Bharat (HQ UB)** area, currently based in Bareilly, will be transformed into the operational headquarters of the 18 Corps.

✓ This transformation will involve shifting the focus of HQ UB from its current role of managing peacetime duties to fully engaging in operational activities along the LAC in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

✓ The HQ UB area presently oversees peacetime locations and training establishments in Uttarakhand and western Uttar Pradesh, in addition to its responsibilities along the LAC in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

✓ The region covered by the proposed 18 Corps is often referred to as the central theatre.

Introduction of Kendriya Grihmantri Dakshata Padak

✓ The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has introduced a new medal, Kendriya Grihmantri Dakshata Padak, after **merging four existing medals.**

✓ The four existing medals merged to form the Kendriya Grihmantri Dakshata Padak are:

Kendriya Grihmantri Dakshata Padak (Gold)

Obverse · Reverse · Ribbon

- Union Home Minister's Special Operation Medal,
- Union Home Minister's Medal for Excellence in Investigation,
- Asadharan Aasuchana Kushalata Padak, and
- Union Home Minister's Awards for Meritorious Service in Forensic Science.

✓ The award will be presented in the form of a medal, styled and designated as the Kendriya Grihmantri Dakshata Padak.
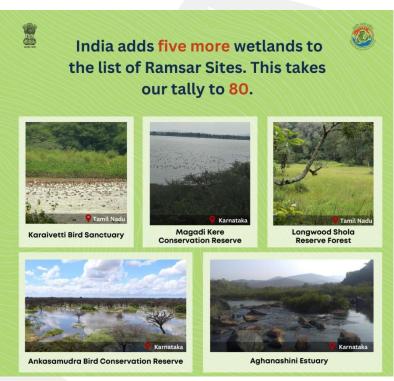
ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

Five More Wetlands to Ramsar List

✓ Five new wetlands (3 in Karnataka and 2 in Tamil Nadu) in India have been added to the Ramsar list reaching total count to 80.

✓ The Ramsar Convention recognizes wetlands of international importance.

1. Aghanashini Estuary (Karnataka):

✓ **Location:** Formed at the confluence of Aghanashini River with the Arabian Sea.

✓ **Importance:** Provides diverse ecosystem services including flood and erosion risk mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and livelihood support for local communities.

✓ **Economic Contribution:** Supports fishing, agriculture, collection of edible bivalves and crabs, shrimp aquaculture, and traditional fish farming.

✓ **Environmental Protection:** Mangroves bordering the estuary help protect shores against storms and cyclones.

India adds **five more** wetlands to the list of Ramsar Sites. This takes our tally to **80**.

Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary — Tamil Nadu
Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve — Karnataka
Longwood Shola Reserve Forest — Tamil Nadu
Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve — Karnataka
Aghanashini Estuary — Karnataka

2. Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve (Karnataka):

✓ **Significance:** Man-made reservoir serving as a haven for diverse wildlife and a popular birding destination.

✓ **Biodiversity:** Home to over 166 species of birds, including 130 migratory species.

✓ **Conservation Status:** Declared a conservation reserve in 2018.

3. Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve (Karnataka):

✓ **Location:** Human-made Village Irrigation Tank in Northern Karnataka.

✓ **Biodiversity:** Supports over 200 species of birds, including pelicans, cormorants, storks, ducks, herons, and raptors.

✓ **Population Support:** Over 30,000 waterbirds nest and roost at this wetland, including significant populations of Painted Stork and Black-headed Ibis.

4. Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu):

✓ **Location:** One of the largest inland wetlands in Tamil Nadu.

✓ **Economic Contribution:** Significant source of groundwater recharge, supporting agricultural crops and providing water for domestic use.

✓ **Biodiversity:** Home to over 200 species of birds, contributing to the Central Asian Flyway.

5. Longwood Shola Reserve Forest (Tamil Nadu):

✓ **Significance:** Important habitat for globally endangered and vulnerable bird species, including the Black-chinned Nilgiri Laughing thrush and Nilgiri Blue Robin.

✓ **Environmental Role:** Provides vital water source for surrounding villages, serves as a natural habitat for diverse wildlife, and contributes to maintaining the microclimate of the region.

Ramsar Convention and Wetlands in India

Ramsar Convention: Established in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, it is the only international treaty dedicated solely to the preservation of wetlands. India became a signatory to this convention in February 1982.

Ramsar Sites in India:

✓ Tamil Nadu has the highest number of Ramsar Sites (16 sites), followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).

✓ The largest Ramsar Site in India is Sundarbans in West Bengal, while the smallest is Renuka Wetland in Himachal Pradesh.

✓ Chilika Lake in Odisha and Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan were the first sites in India to be designated as Ramsar Sites.

The Montreux Record:

✓ It is a list of wetland sites within the Ramsar List facing ecological changes due to human interference, pollution, or technological developments.

✓ Two wetlands in India are on the Montreux Record:
  1. Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan)
  2. Loktak Lake (Manipur)

✓ Chilika Lake in Odisha was previously on the Montreux Record but was removed in 2002. It was added to the record in 1993 due to concerns about siltation and sedimentation clogging the lake's mouth.

Atmospheric Rivers

Atmospheric Rivers are long, narrow regions in the atmosphere that transport massive amounts of moisture, akin to rivers in the sky. They are characterized by concentrated water vapor moving across the atmosphere, often stretching thousands of miles in length and hundreds of miles wide, particularly over the Pacific Ocean.

Formation

✓ **Moisture Evaporation:** They form over warm tropical oceans where the sun's heat evaporates large amounts of water vapor into the atmosphere.

✓ **Cloud Formation:** The moist air rises, cools, and forms clouds.

✓ **Coriolis Effect:** The Earth's rotation causes the Coriolis force, which deflects this air mass, creating long, narrow bands of concentrated moisture known as atmospheric rivers.

Examples:

1. **Pineapple Express:** A strong and well-known atmospheric river that transports moisture from the tropical Pacific around Hawaii to the US and Canadian West Coasts.

2. **Gulf of Mexico Influence:** The eastern half of the US also experiences atmospheric rivers, with moisture pulled from the Gulf of Mexico.
3. **Global Impact:** Western Europe, North Africa, New Zealand, and Australia also experience frequent atmospheric rivers.

Impacts

Positive Impacts:

1. Essential for cloud formation and influence air temperatures, sea ice, and other components of the climate.
2. Responsible for 90% of moisture movement from the tropics towards the poles.

Adverse Impacts:

1. **Heavy Rain:** Can cause intense rainfall leading to flooding and landslides.
2. **Snowfall:** In colder regions, they can bring heavy snowfall, disrupting transportation and infrastructure.
3. **Strong Winds:** Accompanied by strong winds that can cause damage to trees, power lines, and buildings.

Climate Change Impact:

As the world warms, the atmosphere can hold more moisture, leading to potentially rainier atmospheric river events.

Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW)

NITI Aayog has introduced the GROW initiative, aimed at revitalizing degraded land through agroforestry practices. The initiative seeks to restore barren land, promote agroforestry, improve rural livelihoods, and create a carbon sink to mitigate climate change impacts.

Objectives

✓ **Restore Degraded Land:** Targeting the revitalization of 26 million hectares of barren land by 2030 to contribute to India's Land Degradation Neutrality commitment.
✓ **Promote Agroforestry & Improve Livelihoods:** Encourage the integration of trees and shrubs alongside crops and livestock on farms, enhancing environmental and economic benefits for rural communities.
✓ **Create Carbon Sink:** Foster the development of a new carbon sink capable of sequestering 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, thereby mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Key Features

1. **Agroforestry Suitability Index (ASI):** Developed a robust index using remote sensing and GIS technologies to map the suitability of different agroforestry practices across all Indian districts. This index aids in identifying areas suitable for various agroforestry activities.
2. **Generating Live Maps:** Utilizes data to create area prioritization regimes, indicating highly suitable, moderate, and less suitable areas for agroforestry practices. These live maps provide stakeholders with valuable information for decision-making.

3. **GROW-Suitability Mapping Portal:** An accessible online platform showcasing state and district-level agroforestry suitability data. This portal empowers stakeholders with the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding agroforestry initiatives.
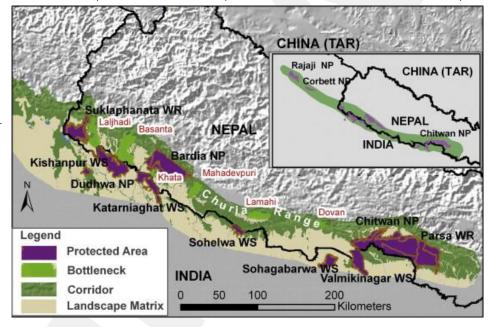
Terai Arc Landscape (TAL)

Nepal's Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) initiative has gained global recognition from the United Nations as one of seven World Restoration Flagships. This initiative, launched in 2001, aims to conserve critical habitats, connect fragmented landscapes, and engage local communities while promoting transboundary cooperation.

Key Features

1. **Geographical Coverage:** TAL spans an 810 km stretch between the Yamuna River in the west and the Bhagmati River in the east. It encompasses the Shivalik hills, adjoining bhabhar areas, and the Terai flood plains. The landscape extends across the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, as well as the low-lying hills of Nepal.

2. **Protected Areas:** TAL comprises 13 Protected Areas, including nine in India and four in Nepal. These protected areas play a crucial role in conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecological balance.
3. **Objectives:** The primary objectives of TAL include conserving critical habitats, connecting fragmented landscapes, and fostering community engagement. Transboundary cooperation between India and Nepal is also emphasized to ensure effective conservation efforts.
4. **Flagship Species:** TAL is home to several flagship species, including the Bengal tiger (Panthera tigris), the greater one-horned rhinoceros (Rhinoceros unicornis), and the Asian elephant. These iconic species highlight the biodiversity richness of the landscape and underscore the importance of conservation efforts.
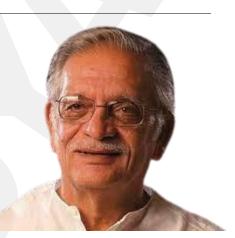
ART AND CULTURE

58th Jnanpith Award Recipients

Celebrated Urdu poet and lyricist Gulzar and Sanskrit scholar Jagadguru Rambhadracharya have been honored with the prestigious Jnanpith Award.

Gulzar

- ✓ Gulzar, also known as Sampooran Singh Kalra, is renowned as one of the finest Urdu poets of his generation and a distinguished director and writer in Hindi cinema.
- ✓ Born in 1934, Gulzar has been recognized with numerous accolades, including the Sahitya Akademi Award for Urdu, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the Padma Bhushan, and multiple National Film Awards.
- ✓ His song "Jai Ho" from the film Slumdog Millionaire earned him an Oscar in 2009 and a Grammy in 2010.
- ✓ In poetry, Gulzar introduced a new genre called 'Triveni,' characterized by non-mukaffa poems consisting of three lines.

Jagadguru Rambhadracharya

- ✓ Jagadguru Rambhadracharya is a Hindu spiritual leader, educator, and prolific writer with over 240 books and texts to his credit, including four epics.
- ✓ Born in 1950, Rambhadracharya is a polyglot fluent in 22 languages. He holds the position of one of the four present Jagadguru Ramanandacharyas of the Ramananda sect since 1982.
- ✓ He is a poet and writer in several Indian languages, including Sanskrit, Hindi, Awadhi, and Maithili, and was honored with the Padma Vibhushan in 2015.

Jnanpith Award

- ✓ **Inception:** Instituted in 1961, the Jnanpith Award stands as India's highest literary honor, conferred annually by the Bharatiya Jnanpith.
- ✓ **Recognition Criteria:** The award acknowledges exceptional contributions to literature by Indian citizens since 1965. It's exclusively reserved for authors writing in Indian languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and English. Notably, posthumous awards are not granted.
- ✓ **Components:** Recipients are bestowed with a cash prize of ₹ 11 lakh, a statue of Vagdevi, and a citation, commemorating their literary achievements.
- ✓ **Inaugural Awardee:** The inaugural recipient of the award was Malayalam writer G. Sankara Kurup in 1965, recognized for his anthology of poems titled "Odakkuzhal" (The Bamboo Flute).

Discovery of Deepasthambham in Mudimanikyam Village

✓ **Location:** Mudimanikyam village in Nalgonda, Telangana, is the site where a 390-year-old Deepasthambham (lamp post) has been unearthed.

✓ **Uniqueness:** While Dhwajasthambam (flag poles) are commonly found in temple architecture, lamp posts are rare in the Deccan region, contrasting with their prevalence in temples along the west coast, particularly in Goa.

✓ **Historical Significance:** The pillar, discovered near a ruined Śiva temple, bears an inscription indicating its construction in 1635. The inscription, written in a blend of Telugu and Tamil, is dedicated to Kasi Viswanatha.

✓ **Geographical Context:** Mudimanikyam village, situated approximately 180 kilometers from Hyderabad, was under the rule of the Qutb Shahi rulers during the lamp post's construction. It is speculated that the lamp post served as a geographical marker for traders and ships navigating through the area, given the village's historical importance dating back to the early medieval period.

Sammakka Saralamma Jathara

✓ **Significance:** The Sammakka Saralamma Jathara is one of the largest tribal festivals globally, held biennially in Medaram village, Telangana.

✓ **Absence of Vedic Influence:** This festival stands out for its lack of Vedic or Brahmanic influence and is celebrated purely in tribal traditions. It holds special cultural significance as the state festival of Telangana.

✓ **Commemoration:** The festival commemorates the legendary fight of a mother and daughter, Sammakka and Saralamma, against unjust rulers and laws.

✓ **Religious Practices:** During the festival, devotees offer bangaram (gold) in the form of jaggery, equivalent to their weight, to the goddesses Sammakka and Saralamma. They also partake in a holy bath in the Jampanna Vagu stream.

✓ **Jampanna Vagu:** This stream, a tributary to the River Godavari, holds historical and mythological significance as it is associated with Jampanna, a tribal warrior and the son of the tribal goddess Sammakka.

✓ **Community Gathering:** The Sammakka Saralamma Jathara brings together people from various tribal communities to participate in rituals, prayers, and cultural festivities, fostering a sense of unity and community spirit.

Attukal Pongala Festival

✓ **Location:** Attukal Pongala is an annual 10-day religious festival celebrated at the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple located in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

✓ **Key Event:** The highlight of the festival occurs on the ninth day, during which there is a massive gathering of thousands of women at the temple premises.

✓ **Pongala Preparation:** The preparation for the Pongala ritual begins with a sacred ceremony known as 'Aduppuvettu'. This ritual involves the lighting of the Pongala hearth, also known as Pandarayaduppu.

✓ **Significance:** Often referred to as the "Sabarimala for women," Attukal Pongala holds immense cultural and religious significance. It is renowned as the largest annual gathering of women, a recognition certified by the Guinness World Records.

Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur

✓ **Recipient:** Shashi Tharoor, a prominent Indian politician, was recently honored with France's highest civilian award, the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur.

✓ **Recognition:** Tharoor was recognized by France for his significant efforts in strengthening the relationship between India and France, his dedication to global peace initiatives, and his longstanding friendship with France.

✓ **Establishment:** The Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur, translated as Knight of the Legion of Honour, was established by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802.

✓ **Purpose:** This prestigious award acknowledges extraordinary achievements and services rendered to France across various fields, including arts, literature, science, and public service.

✓ **Durga Charan Rakshit:** Notably, Durga Charan Rakshit became the first Indian to receive this honor in 1896, recognized for his humanitarian contributions and service to society.

SPORTS

India wins gold at 2024 Badminton Asia Team Championships

On February 18, 2024, India made history by winning its first-ever gold medal at the Badminton Asia Team Championships held in Shah Alam, Malaysia. The Indian women's team secured the title by defeating Thailand 3-2 in an exhilarating final match.

PV Sindhu's Stellar Performance:

✓ World No. 11 PV Sindhu gave India a flying start by defeating Supanida Katethong, ranked 17th, with a score of 21-12, 21-12 in just 39 minutes.

Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand Extend Lead:

✓ India's young doubles pair, Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, upset the higher-ranked Thai pair, Jongkolphan Kititharakul/Rawinda Prajongjai, securing a crucial victory with a score of 21-16, 18-21, 21-16.

Thai Fightback and India's Response:

✓ Despite Thailand's strong comeback, winning the next two rubbers, India's hopes were kept alive by Anmol Kharb, who clinched victory against Pornpicha Choeikeewong, securing the gold medal for India with a score of 21-14, 21-9.

Significance of the Victory:

✓ India's triumph marked its first-ever title at the Badminton Asia Team Championships, earning valuable ranking points for the Paris 2024 Olympics race.
✓ As semi-finalists, India also qualified for the 2024 Thomas & Uber Cup Finals.
✓ The victory provides invaluable experience and confidence to India's young players for future competitions.

6th edition of the Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG)

The 6th edition of the Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) is currently ongoing from January 19 to January 31, 2024, across four cities in Tamil Nadu: Chennai, Trichy, Madurai, and Coimbatore.

6th edition of KIYG

✓ Involves 933 medals (278 gold, 278 silver, and 377 bronze) across 26 sports in Tamil Nadu.
✓ Squash makes its debut, and Silambam, an indigenous martial art, is featured as a demonstration sport.
✓ The mascot is **Veera Mangai**, inspired by Indian queen Rani Velu Nachiyar who fought against British colonial rule.

Khelo India Youth Games

✓ KIYG is a national-level, multi-disciplinary sports competition for school and college students in India.
✓ Held annually in January or February as part of the government's Khelo India initiative.
✓ Aims to promote sports culture and identify talent at the grassroots level.
✓ Previous editions have been held in Delhi, Pune, Guwahati, Panchkula, and Bhopal.

Format:

✓ Divided into under-17-year-old school students and under-21 college students categories.
✓ Operates in a team championship format where individual medals contribute to the overall state or Union Territory (UT) tally.
✓ The state or UT with the most gold medals is declared the winner.
✓ Maharashtra and Haryana are the only states to have won the title so far.

Medal Tally

Rank	State	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total medals
1	Maharashtra	57	48	53	158
2	Tamil Nadu	38	21	39	98
3	Haryana	35	22	46	103
4	Delhi	13	18	25	56
5	Rajasthan	13	17	17	47

- PLACES IN NEWS
- APPOINTMENTS
- DAYS & THEMES

PLACES IN NEWS

S. No.	Place	Why in News?
		International Places in News
1.	Kampala	• The 19th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit took place in Kampala, Uganda. • Kampala is recognized as one of Africa's fastest-growing cities. • The city boasts an annual population growth rate of 4.03 percent. • Kampala's topography is characterized by hills and valleys. • Some of these valleys contain slow-moving rivers and swamps. • The geographical features of Kampala present both opportunities and challenges for urban development and infrastructure planning.
2.	Torkham Border	• Recently, trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan resumed following the reopening of the Torkham border crossing. • The Torkham border crossing, situated in the northwest, had been closed for over 10 days prior to its reopening. • This border crossing holds significant economic and strategic importance for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. • Its reopening signifies the restoration of a vital economic lifeline between the two nations. • The Torkham border crossing serves as a crucial route for trade and commerce, facilitating the movement of goods and people between Pakistan and Afghanistan. • The resumption of trade activities at Torkham border crossing is expected to positively impact the economies of both countries.
3.	Soda Lake	• Scientists have made a remarkable discovery of a shallow "soda lake" in western Canada. • This soda lake exhibits a pH value typically ranging between 9 and 11, indicating strong alkalinity. • Soda lakes, also known as alkaline lakes, are characterized by their pH values falling on the strongly alkaline side of neutrality, usually between 9 and 12. • The alkalinity of these lakes is primarily attributed to high concentrations of carbonate compounds, notably sodium carbonate, in the water. • Such lakes are relatively rare and are distinguished by their unique chemical composition and ecological characteristics. • The discovery of this soda lake in Canada adds to our understanding of diverse natural environments and their potential ecological significance.

4.	Rio De Janeiro	• Rio de Janeiro recently declared a health emergency due to a dengue outbreak. • The city is renowned as one of the most visited destinations in the Southern Hemisphere. • Known for its vibrant culture, Rio de Janeiro is famous for its natural beauty, including stunning beaches and scenic landscapes. • The city is celebrated for its lively carnival festivities, captivating samba music, and iconic bossa nova rhythms. • Balneario beaches such as Barra da Tijuca, Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon are popular attractions among tourists and locals alike. • The dengue health emergency underscores the importance of public health measures and efforts to combat mosquito-borne diseases in this vibrant metropolis.
5.	Aral Sea	• Climate change is exacerbating the ongoing decline of the Aral Sea, which has now shrunk to less than a quarter of its original size. • The Aral Sea drainage basin spans across multiple countries, including Uzbekistan and parts of Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. • The diminishing size of the Aral Sea has significant ecological, economic, and social consequences for the region. • Factors contributing to the decline of the Aral Sea include overuse of water resources for agriculture, diversion of rivers for irrigation projects, and changing weather patterns influenced by climate change. • The shrinking of the Aral Sea has led to the emergence of environmental crises, including the drying up of once fertile lands, loss of biodiversity, and adverse impacts on local communities dependent on fishing and agriculture.
6.	Trinidad and Tobago	• Recently, oil spills have affected an island nation located in the southeastern West Indies. • This island country comprises two main islands, Trinidad and Tobago, along with several smaller islands. • Trinidad is the larger and more populous of the two main islands, while Tobago is smaller, making up approximately 6% of the total land area and 4% of the population. • The impacts of oil spills on this island nation have significant environmental, economic, and social consequences. • The spills pose threats to marine life, ecosystems, coastal communities, and the tourism industry, which is vital to the economy of the region.
7.	Korean Peninsula	• Ongoing tensions in the Korean peninsula have sparked concerns regarding the deterioration of the international security environment. • The division of the Korean peninsula into two separate entities stems from the end of World War II, following the defeat of imperial Japan, which had occupied the territory. • After World War II, the Korean peninsula was divided into North Korea and South Korea along the 38th parallel, with each part governed by different political systems.

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- The division has led to decades of conflict and strained relations between North Korea and South Korea, as well as between other countries in the region and globally.
- The Korean War in the early 1950s further solidified the division and resulted in an armistice agreement rather than a peace treaty, leaving the peninsula in a state of ongoing tension and occasional flare-ups of violence.

National Place in News

1.	**Sultanpur National Park**	• Sultanpur National Park, located in Farrukhnagar, Gurugram, has experienced a notable decline in the number of migratory birds this season, according to forest department officials. • The decrease in migratory bird populations at Sultanpur National Park is estimated to be between 20-30 percent. • Sultanpur National Park primarily consists of wetlands, making it an essential habitat for various bird species, particularly migratory birds. • In recognition of its ecological significance, Sultanpur National Park was designated as a Ramsar site in 2021. Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention, aimed at promoting the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands worldwide.
2.	**Swarved Mahamandir**	• Swarved Mahamandir inaugurated as the world's largest meditation center in Varanasi. • Capacity for 20,000 people to meditate together. • Represents a significant space for spiritual practice and communal reflection. • Varanasi chosen as the location, a city deeply rooted in spirituality and culture. • Prime Minister's involvement highlights government support for wellness and spiritual development initiatives.
3.	**Zuari Bridge**	• Goa's Zuari Bridge recently became fully operational. • Located on the Zuari river at Cortalim village on Margao-Panaji National Highway. • Spanning 13.20 kilometers, it features eight lanes. • Notably, it is India's second longest cable-stayed bridge. • Enhances connectivity for transportation between North and South Goa. • Expected to bolster connectivity for Mormugao Port Trust. • Provides a crucial link for trade and transportation in the region. • A significant infrastructure development contributing to Goa's connectivity and economic growth.
4.	**Sirpur Lake**	• National event held at Sirpur Lake, Indore to celebrate World Wetlands Day (WWD). • WWD commemorates the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in 1971. • India became a party to the Ramsar Convention in 1982. • Sirpur Lake chosen as the venue for the event. • The event aimed to raise awareness about wetlands' significance and conservation efforts.

5.	Vaitarna River	• Rare sighting of a bull shark observed in Maharashtra's Vaitarna River. • Vaitarna River flows westward between Mumbai and the Tapi River. • Originates in the Trimbakeshwar Hills of Nasik district, Maharashtra. • Receives significant rainfall primarily from the South West monsoon. • Bull sharks are known for their ability to adapt to freshwater environments. • Sightings of bull sharks in rivers are uncommon, making this event noteworthy. • Indicates the ecological diversity and potential habitat of the Vaitarna River.
6.	T 50 Tunnel J&K	• Inauguration of India's longest rail tunnel, T-50, part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL), in Jammu and Kashmir. • Tunnel T-50 spans an impressive 12.77 kilometers. • Integral part of the ambitious rail link project connecting Udhampur, Srinagar, and Baramulla. • Recognized as one of the most challenging segments of the project due to its length and terrain.
7.	Morodharo	• Site named Morodharo discovered, yielding a significant quantity of Harappan pottery akin to Dholavira findings. • Dating back 4,500 years, the settlement exhibits architectural resemblances to Dholavira. • Dependency on the sea indicated, implying that the desert region might have been navigable water in ancient times. • Discovery sheds light on the maritime activities and trade networks of Harappan civilization.

APPOINTMENTS

S. No.	Person		Designation
1.	Anil Kumar Lahoti		Chairman of TRAI
2.	Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi		Vice Chief of Army
3.	Olzhas Bektenov		Prime Minister of Kazakhstan
4.	Sanjay Kumar Jain		Chairman & Managing Director of IRCTC
5.	Nikhil Joshi		Managing Director of Boeing Defence India
6.	Nawaf Salam		President of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)
7.	Justice A M Khanwilkar		Appointed as Lokpal
8.	Champai Soren		Chief Minister of Jharkhand

DAYS AND THEMES

S. No.	Date	Event
1.	1st February	**Indian Coast Guard Day** On 1st February, the Indian Coast Guard celebrates its foundation day. This year, the Indian Coast Guard is celebrating its 46th Raising Day. Indian Coast Guard has played a significant role in securing the Indian Coasts and enforcing regulations within the Maritime Zones of India
2.	2nd February	**World Wetland Day** Every year on 2nd February, World Wetlands Day is celebrated internationally. This day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in Ramsar, Iran. It was first celebrated in 1997. **Theme: Wetlands and Human Wellbeing**
3.	4th February	**World Cancer Day** Every year on 4 February World Cancer Day is observed globally and is celebrated by WHO to aware people of the disease Cancer and how to cure it. **Theme: Close the Care Gap**
4.	8th February	**Safer Internet Day** This year, it is celebrated on 8 February. The day calls for all stakeholders to join together to make the internet a safer and better place for all, mainly for children and young people.
5.	10th February	**World Pulses Day** It is observed on 10 February to spread awareness about the nutritional and environmental benefits of pulses as part of sustainable food production. **Theme: Pulses: nourishing soils and people**
6.	13th February	**National Women Day** On the occasion of Sarojini Naidu's birthday on 13 February 1879 National women Day is celebrated. She was a gifted national leader, a freedom fighter, and a celebrated poet. She was known as the 'Nightingale of India' and 'Bharat Kokila'. Her birth anniversary was chosen to commemorate Indian women and their contribution to the nation in every sphere of life.

		World Radio Day On Nov 3, 2011, UNESCO declared February 13 as World Radio Day because on this day United Nations Radio was first established in 1946. It is observed to preserve the importance of radio as well as to encourage decision makers to provide access to information through radio. UNESCO coordinates World Radio Day activities on a global scale with UN member countries through their radio stations. *Theme: Radio: A century informing, entertaining and educating*
7.	20th February	**World Social Justice Day** World Day of Social Justice is observed every year on 20 February to encourage people to see how social justice affects poverty eradication. The main aim of this day is to achieve full employment and support for social integration. This day tackle issues like poverty, exclusion, and unemployment. *Theme: Bridging Gaps, Building Alliances*
8.	21st February	**International Mother Language Day** International Mother Language Day is celebrated annually on 21 February worldwide to aware of the diversity of the language and its variety. This day promotes the awareness of language and cultural diversity across the world. On 17 November 1999, it was first announced by UNESCO. *Theme: Multilingual education is a pillar of intergenerational learning*
9.	27th February	**World NGO Day** The day is dedicated to recognizing, celebrating, and honoring all non-governmental and non-profit organizations, and also the people behind them that contribute to society. *Theme: Building a Sustainable Future: The Role of NGOs in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*
10.	28th February	**National Science Day** National Science Day is celebrated every year in India on 28 February to mark the discovery of the Raman Effect by the Indian Physicist Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman. He discovered the Raman Effect on 28 February 1928 and for this discovery, he was honored with the Nobel Prize in Physics subject in 1930. *Theme: Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat*

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SNIPPETS

- ✓ Cervical cancer remains a pressing issue for women in India, with over **120,000 new cases and 75,000** fatalities reported annually, making it the second most common cancer among Indian women.
- ✓ India's position on the **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)** in 2023 experienced a slight decline, ranking **93 out of 180 countries** with a **score of 39**, down from 40 in 2022, reflecting ongoing challenges in combating corruption.
- ✓ The Karnataka government, in collaboration with the **All India Game Developers Forum (AIGDF),** has introduced a 'Digital Detox' initiative aimed at raising awareness about the adverse effects of excessive technology use and promoting mindful digital habits among citizens.
- ✓ **Champai Soren** of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) assumed office as the **Chief Minister of Jharkhand** on February 2, 2024, marking a significant political development in the state.
- ✓ The **Kamakhya Divyalok Pariyojana,** a temple corridor project in Guwahati, Assam, funded by the central government at Rs. 498 crore, seeks to transform the pilgrimage experience at the Kamakhya temple, fostering tourism growth in the Northeast region.
- ✓ **NASA's Mars helicopter Ingenuity,** after completing numerous successful flights over three years, has concluded its groundbreaking mission, marking a historic achievement in space exploration.
- ✓ The Indian Air Force (IAF) is set to conduct **Vayu Shakti-24,** a major exercise in Rajasthan, showcasing its operational capabilities during day and night operations.
- ✓ The **Unified Payment Interface (UPI)** of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) was formally launched at the Eiffel Tower in Paris on February 2, 2024, marking a significant milestone in expanding UPI's global reach.
- ✓ **Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko** has set a new **world record** for the most time spent in space, surpassing 878 days in orbit, underscoring Russia's contributions to space exploration.
- ✓ The Indian Navy commissioned its latest survey vessel, **INS Sandhayak**, at Naval Dockyard in Visakhapatnam on February 3, 2024, highlighting India's naval modernization efforts.
- ✓ The **Law Commission** has proposed amendments to address property damage during protests, aiming to impose stricter penalties on individuals or groups causing disruptions.
- ✓ **Uttarakhand government** has proposed legislation to implement a **Uniform Civil Code (UCC),** following in the footsteps of Goa, to ensure uniformity in personal laws.
- ✓ The central government introduced the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024**, to curb cheating in public examinations and entrance tests.
- ✓ India is preparing for its manned space mission, Gaganyaan, with a humanoid robot named **Vyommitra** set to test critical systems before human astronauts are sent into space.
- ✓ **NASA's discovery of TOI-715 b**, a potentially habitable **"super-Earth"** planet, offers exciting prospects for exoplanet research and exploration.
- ✓ Scientists at India's Raman Research Institute have developed an advanced image-correction algorithm to enhance studies of **ultracold atoms**, providing insights into quantum mechanics.
- ✓ The US government approved a significant military sale to India, including **MQ-9B SkyGuardian drones**, reinforcing defense cooperation between the two nations.
- ✓ Proposed construction of a 6-lane elevated highway through **Bannerghatta National Park** has sparked environmental concerns, highlighting the delicate balance between development and conservation.

✓ Rajya Sabha passed bills aimed at amending constitutional provisions related to **Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes**, signaling legislative efforts to address social justice issues.

✓ The Election Commission of India resolved disputes within the **Nationalist Congress Party (NCP),** affirming the Ajit Pawar faction's legitimacy.

✓ The **7th Indian Ocean Conference in Perth, Australia**, focused on achieving stability and sustainability in the region, facilitating dialogue among key stakeholders.

✓ The Union Cabinet approved the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana to support fisheries micro and small enterprises**, enhancing the fisheries sector's formalization.

✓ The US Federal Communications Commission banned **AI-generated robocalls** to combat voice cloning scams, protecting citizens from fraudulent activities.

✓ Kenya announced the **discovery of coltan deposits** within its borders, signaling potential economic opportunities in electronics production.

✓ According to the **International Energy Agency**, India's electricity demand is projected to surpass China's, with the **world's fastest growth rate by 2026**, highlighting the country's energy needs and growth trajectory.

✓ The mascot and logo for the **2024 Khelo India Winter Games**, featuring a snow leopard named **'Sheen-e She,'** were unveiled, promoting biodiversity and cultural heritage.

CHECK YOUR QUIZDOM

QUIZ ZONE FOR CLAT ASPIRANTS

QUIZDOM

Passage 1

[1] has recently made headlines as the first state in independent India to enact a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), a significant move closely aligned with the ideological agenda of the Sangh Parivar. This decision, occurring just two months prior to the Lok Sabha election, follows in the wake of other contentious actions such as the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. However, the introduction of the UCC Bill was met with opposition from various quarters, including women's rights activists and opposition MLAs. Women's groups within the state have vehemently opposed the UCC, demanding that the Bill undergo scrutiny by a Standing Committee or Select Committee before being passed. Despite this resistance, the Bill was eventually approved, with the Chief Minister asserting that it would eliminate discrimination against women. He proudly declared the State Assembly as the first legislative body in independent India to pass such a Bill, emphasizing that the UCC aimed to ensure equality for all individuals in crucial matters such as marriage, maintenance, inheritance, and divorce. Nevertheless, dissenting voices have emerged both within and outside political circles. Some political parties have criticized the UCC, with one MLA arguing that it contradicts the BJP's portrayal of it as a women's rights issue, contending instead that it encroaches upon women's rights and freedom. This divergence of opinions underscores the contentious nature of the UCC and the complex dynamics surrounding its implementation in the above said State.

1. What has been redacted by [1] in the passage?
(a) Uttarakhand   (b) Manipur   (c) Uttar Pradesh   (d) Gujrat

2. Who is the current Chief Minister of state redacted by [1] in the passage?
(a) Gurmit Singh   (b) Harish Rawat   (c) Tirath Singh Rawat   (d) Pushkar Singh Dhami

3. Who led the five-member committee that prepared the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in the state, as redacted by "[1]" in the passage?
(a) Sanjiv Khanna   (b) Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai
(c) Ranjana Prakash Desai   (d) Surya Kant

4. According to Section 4 of the UCC Bill, what is prohibited in marriage?
(a) Heterosexual marriage   (b) Homosexual marriage
(c) Bigamy/Polygamy   (d) Child marriage

5. Consider the following statements:
1. The Guardians and Wards Act (GWA), 1890 will continue to govern court-appointed guardians.
2. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (HAMA), 1956, and the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015 will continue to prevail for adoption.
3. Concerns have been raised regarding UCC infringing upon the right to privacy, as recognized under Article 21 of the Constitution.
4. The bill's state-specific UCC aligns with Article 44's aim of a nationwide uniform UCC.
Which of the following statements is true?
(a) 1 Only   (b) 4 Only   (c) 1 ,2 and 3   (d) 1, 2 and 4

Passage 2

The Supreme Court, in its recent decision, has annulled the bail granted by the Madras High Court to a convicted drug peddler. This ruling stems from a case involving the seizure of a substantial quantity of narcotics, prompting the apex court to underscore the prudence required in extending bail, especially anticipatory bail, in such circumstances. Furthermore, the Court emphasized the imperative of detaining

individuals with purported criminal backgrounds, highlighting the heightened necessity for judicial restraint in these scenarios. In a meticulous evaluation, a bench comprised of esteemed Justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta invalidated the anticipatory bail previously conferred upon B Ramu, a defendant implicated in a case concerning the recovery of 232.5 kg of ganja. The Court's verdict denounced the Madras High Court's decision, deeming it cryptic and unsustainable due to its glaring oversight in acknowledging the substantial narcotics haul, far exceeding commercial quantities.

6. Anticipatory bail is granted under which section of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)?
(a) Section 420   (b) Section 438   (c) Section 302   (d) Section 376
7. When was the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act passed?
(a) 14th November 1985   (b) 29th December 2021
(c) 10th October 1990   (d) 5th June 1978
8. What constitutes a "small quantity" of drugs under the NDPS Act?
(a) Less than 5 kilograms   (b) Less than12 kilogram
(c) Less than 1 kilogram   (d) Less than 10 kilograms
9. What constitutional Article does the National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances align with?
(a) Article 42   (b) Article 47   (c) Article 51   (d) Article 19
10. By what year does the Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) aim to achieve a "drug-free India" according to its mandate?
(a) 2035   (b) 2047   (c) 2050   (d) 2060

Passage 3

In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court of India has adjudicated in favor of [1], the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate, affirming his rightful ascension to the esteemed position of Mayor of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation. The apex court meticulously scrutinized the electoral process, notably nullifying the election outcome initially decreed by the presiding officer, Anil Masih. The pivotal decision stemmed from irrefutable evidence captured by closed-circuit television (CCTV), which unequivocally exposed the Returning Officer's deliberate act of invalidating and discarding eight votes cast in favor of the AAP leader. In its judicial pronouncement, the Supreme Court unequivocally underscored the imperative to rectify the egregious disenfranchisement, affirming that accounting for the aforementioned eight votes would confer a tally of 20 votes upon the petitioner, thereby elevating him to the status of the definitive victor in the Chandigarh mayoral polls. This legal pronouncement reverberates against a backdrop where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) purportedly clinched victory in the mayoral contest, purportedly thwarting the comfortably poised AAP-Congress alliance candidate. The contentious aftermath of the electoral fray was embroiled in allegations of ballot tampering, precipitated by the Returning Officer's contentious decision to nullify the votes in question. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged victorious in the Chandigarh mayoral polls on January 30, securing a win over the Aam Aadmi Party-Congress alliance candidate. However, the veneer of victory was swiftly eroded as the winner candidate tendered his resignation in short order. Moreover, the political landscape witnessed a seismic shift as three AAP councillors defected to the BJP, engendering a paradigm shift in the political calculus of the region. The Supreme Court's adjudication not only redresses the miscarriage of electoral justice but also serves as a potent reaffirmation of the sacrosanct principles underpinning democratic governance.

11. What has been redacted by [1] in the passage?
(a) Kuldeep Dhalor   (b) Manoj Sonkar   (c) Sunil Kumar   (d) None of the Above
12. Who appoints the Returning Officer (RO) in consultation with the relevant State Government or Union Territory (UT)?
(a) Chief Election Commissioner   (b) Prime Minister
(c) President of India   (d) Election Commission of India (ECI)

13. Consider the following statements regarding the duties and responsibilities of the Returning Officer (RO):

Statement 1: The Returning Officer (RO) prints and dispatches postal ballot papers.

Statement 2: The Returning Officer (RO) prepares Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) systems.

Statement 3: The Returning Officer (RO) notifies candidates about the location, date, and time of vote counting.

Which of the following statements is true?

(a) Statement 1 only   (b) Statement 2 only

(c) Statements 1 and 3 only   (d) All of the above

14. The mayor is usually elected by the members of the Municipal Corporation or Council. Which city saw the formation of the first municipal corporation in India?

(a) Madras (Chennai)   (b) Bombay (Mumbai)   (c) Calcutta (Kolkata)   (d) Delhi

15. According to the Supreme Court's ruling in the Supreme Court Bar Association case, what nature do the powers under Article 142 possess?

(a) They are punitive in nature   (b) They are proactive in nature

(c) They are curative in nature   (d) They are restrictive in nature

Passage 4

The Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC), operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW), has unveiled an ambitious plan necessitating a substantial investment of Rs 45,000 crore to revitalize river cruise tourism within the country. This announcement unfolded during the inaugural meeting of the IWDC convened in [1] under the auspices of the Inland Waterways Authority of India, a key constituent of the MoPSW. Spearheaded by [2], the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, this landmark event served as a pivotal forum, congregating delegates from waterway states, high-ranking central government officials, and esteemed domain specialists. The gathering, characterized by its historic significance, witnessed the convergence of ministers and officials from various state governments alongside federal authorities, emblematic of a concerted endeavour towards charting the course for the revitalization of inland waterways and associated sectors. Marking the occasion with a spirit of collaboration, several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were inked, reflecting the collective commitment of stakeholders towards the advancement and enhancement of inland waterways infrastructure and operations. This monumental initiative underscores a paradigm shift in India's approach towards leveraging its vast inland water resources, envisioning a future where river cruise tourism serves as a catalyst for economic growth and sustainable development. With a keen focus on fostering partnerships and fostering synergy between stakeholders, the IWDC's strategic roadmap epitomizes a holistic approach towards unlocking the full potential of India's inland waterways, heralding a new era of prosperity and progress in this vital sector.

16. What has been redacted by [1] in the passage?

(a) Kolkata   (b) Puducherry   (c) Kollam   (d) None of the above

17. What has been redacted by [2] in the passage?

(a) Milind Deora   (b) Mansukh Mandaviya   (c) Sripad Naik   (d) Sarbananda Sorwal

18. When was the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) established?

(a) 1980   (b) 1986   (c) 1990   (d) 1995

19. Which act declared the 111 inland waterways as 'national waterways' in India?

(a) Inland Waterways Act,2010   (b) National Waterways Act, 2016

(c) Maritime Transport Act, 2005   (d) Water Resources Management Act, 2018

20. Which is the smallest waterway in India?

(a) National Waterway-1 (NW-1)   (b) National Waterway-69 (NW-69)

(c) National Waterway-10 (NW-10)   (d) National Waterway-25 (NW-25)

Passage 5

In response to yet another public interest litigation petition concerning a contentious proposal by authorities to construct a building on designated park land in Aruppukottai, Virudhunagar district, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court has issued an interim injunction against the move. The Division Bench, comprising Justices D. Krishnakumar and R. Vijayakumar, presiding over the case filed by Anbu Nagar Mudhal Theru Kudiyirupor Nala Sangam, represented by its secretary D.R. Selvaganesan, mandated the halt of construction activities for an additional school building on the park premises. The petitioner underscored their plea to preserve the park, emphasizing its significance as the sole green lung space within the vicinity. Despite making representations to the authorities to uphold the park's integrity, the petitioner expressed concern that disregarding their plea and proceeding with the conversion would impose considerable hardship on the residents.

21. What is an injunction mentioned in the passage in the legal context?
(a) A court order permitting the commission of a wrongful act
(b) A remedy granted by the court to prohibit a wrongful action
(c) A legal document used to commence a lawsuit
(d) A penalty imposed by the court for contemptuous behavior

22. What are the two categories of injunction recognized under the Specific Relief Act, 1963?
(a) Permanent and Interim injunction
(b) Criminal and Civil injunction
(c) Permanent and Temporary injunction
(d) Prohibitory and Mandatory injunction

23. What remedies are provided under The Specific Relief Act 1963?
(a) Recovery of Possession of Property
(b) Specific Performance of Contracts
(c) Rectification of Instruments
(d) All of the above

24. What is a dynamic injunction aimed at preventing?
(a) Copyright infringement
(b) Breach of contract
(c) Tortious conduct
(d) Public disclosure of confidential information

25. According to the ruling, what must the plaintiff prove to maintain an injunction suit against the defendants?
(a) The plaintiff's financial resources
(b) The plaintiff's social status
(c) The plaintiff's title to the property
(d) None of the Above

Passage 6

The recent amendments to the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 have drawn sharp criticism from environmental experts, who argue that the changes fail to address the fundamental shortcomings of the legislation. Despite calls for a comprehensive revamp to strengthen the Act, the amendments introduced by the central government have been perceived as exacerbating its weaknesses. The swift passage of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 through both houses of Parliament within a mere 72 hours has raised concerns about the thoroughness of the legislative process. Experts lament that instead of bolstering the Act, the amendments have significantly weakened its efficacy, undermining its original purpose established five decades ago. Renowned water expert Himanshu Thakkar has voiced dismay over the amendments, asserting that the alterations run counter to the imperative need for decentralization and more stringent regulations. Thakkar highlights the divergence between the actual requirements, calling for stricter laws, and the amendments' tendency towards centralization and diluted provisions. Similarly, environmental lawyer Ritwick Dutta underscores the historical ineffectiveness of environment laws in India, including the Water Act. Dutta points to the alarmingly low number of criminal cases recorded under the Act, as reported by the National Crime Records Bureau in 2022, highlighting a glaring deficiency in enforcement and the imperative for stronger penal measures. In essence, the latest bill has been criticized for further weakening an already ineffective Water Act, exacerbating existing challenges rather than addressing them comprehensively.

26. Under which Article of the Constitution was the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 enacted?
(a) Article 245   (b) Article 252   (c) Article 256   (d) Article 260

27. What is the role of State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs)?
(a) Provide technical guidance and standards   (b) Enforce compliance and file cases against violators
(c) Issue permits for industrial units   (d) Conduct public awareness campaigns

28. In which regions is the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 initially applicable?
(a) All states of India   (b) Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Union territories
(c) Gujrat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh   (d) Coastal regions of India

29. Which authority decides the nomination and terms of the SPCB chairman under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024?
(a) Central Government   (b) State Government   (c) Local Municipality   (d) Environmental NGOs

30. What penalties do heads of departments face for violations of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act under the amendment bill?
(a) Termination from their positions.   (b) Demotion in rank.
(c) Penalties equal to one month's basic salary.   (d) Written warning issued by the government.

V – 70s

31. What is the name of the satellite recently launched by NASA to survey oceans and atmosphere?
(a) ROSAT   (b) STARS-1   (c) PACE   (d) ASTRO A

32. What specific functions will Vyommitra perform to ensure a smooth journey for future astronauts?
(a) Piloting the spacecraft   (b) Conducting scientific experiments
(c) Testing life support and communication systems (d) Operating panels and responding to simple questions

33. Which company has won the order for setting up Haryana's first ultra-supercritical power plant?
(a) Adani Power   (b) Reliance Power   (c) BHEL   (d) Tata Power

34. Where was Bharat Tex 2024 inaugurated by the Prime Minister?
(a) Gujarat   (b) New Delhi   (c) Mumbai   (d) Bhopal

35. Who is the first Indian to receive an honorary Knighthood under King Charles III?
(a) Sachin Tendulkar   (b) Sunil Bharti Mittal   (c) Ratan Tata   (d) Naredndra Modi

36. How many astronauts have been nominated for the Gaganyaan mission?
(a) 71   (b) 6   (c) 4   (d) 5

37. What is the term used for the budget presented during the Budget Session before the general elections?
(a) Full budget   (b) Interim budget   (c) Vote-on-account budget (d) Supplementary budget

38. C- CARES web portal, recently seen in the news, is associated with which sector?
(a) Agriculture sector   (b) Renewable energy sector
(c) Petroleum sector   (d) Coal sector

39. Where will the 'Exercise Vayu Shakti 24' be held?
(a) Pokhran   (b) Balasore   (c) Ajmer   (d) Jodhpur

40. India's first 'Gati Shakti Research Chair' has been established at which institute?
(a) IIT Kanpur   (b) IIT Bombay   (c) IIM Shillong   (d) IIM Ahmedabad

41. Where was the recently discovered ancient stone wall located?
(a) Pacific Ocean   (b) North Sea   (c) Baltic Sea   (d) Mediterranean Sea

42. Where was the multinational military exercise 'Shanti Prayas IV' organised?
(a) Kathmandu   (b) Visakhapatnam   (c) Myanmar   (d) Dhaka

43. GROW report and portal is launched by which one of the following?
(a) Council of Scientific and Industrial Research   (b) NITI Aayog
(c) Ministry of Textiles   (d) Ministry of Agriculture
44. Dr. MS Swaminathan will be awarded Bharat Ratna, he was a famous person in which field?
(a) Journalism   (b) Agriculture   (c) Medical   (d) Acting
45. Recently, which country's parliament has passed the Quad Bill to enhance cooperation?
(a) Australia   (b) India   (c) United States   (d) Japan
46. What is the objective of the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana?
(a) Enhance public transportation   (b) Provide free water supply
(c) Promote rooftop gardening   (d) Light up one crore households with free electricity
47. Melghat Tiger Reserve, recently seen in the news, is located in which state?
(a) Karnataka   (b) Maharashtra   (c) Gujarat   (d) Kerala
48. Which is the longest cable-stayed bridge in India?
(a) Sudarshan Setu`   (b) Pamban Setu   (c) Howrah Setu   (d) Atal Setu
49. Which private company built the Odysseus spacecraft?
(a) Intuitive Machines   (b) Blue Origin   (c) SpaceX   (d) Boeing
50. Who was elected as the new president of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)?
(a) Nawaf Salam   (b) Abdulqawi Yusuf   (c) Joan Donoghue   (d) Christopher Greenwood
51. Krishna Raja Sagara reservoir, recently seen in the news, is located in which state?
(a) Odisha   (b) Maharashtra   (c) Tamil Nadu   (d) Karnataka
52. Which is the largest multinational naval exercise of the Indian Navy?
(a) Operation Trident   (b) MILAN   (c) Exercise Varuna   (d) Operation TROPEX
53. 'DHARMA GUARDIAN' exercise is conducted between which two countries?
(a) India & Australia   (b) India & Sri Lanka   (c) India & Japan   (d) India & Egypt
54. Which constitutional article did the Supreme Court of India invoke to overturn the Chandigarh mayoral election results?
(a) Article 142   (b) Article 51A   (c) Article 356   (d) Article 226
55. What is the name of the woman robot astronaut that will fly into space ahead of ISRO's "Gaganyaan" mission?
(a) Vyommitra   (b) Astronautila   (c) Gaganyaatri   (d) Vyomnaut
56. Who broke the world record for the most time spent in space?
(a) Oleg Kononenko   (b) Vladimir Shatalov   (c) Nikolai Rukavishnikov   (d) Gennady Padalka
57. What is the name of the first private spacecraft to land on the Moon?
(a) Odyssey   (b) Apollo 11   (c) Artemis   (d) Odysseus
58. Recently, which player won the Women's singles title at the Australian Open, 2024?
(a) Aryna Sabalenka   (b) Ankita Raina   (c) Zheng Qinwen   (d) Barbora Krejcikova
59. Recently, which organization has launched the 'Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)'?
(a) European Union   (b) World Health Organization (WHO)
(c) United Nations   (d) UNICEF
60. Ancient Badami Chalukya temples were recently discovered in Mudimanikyam village along the banks of which river?
(a) Tapi River   (b) Kaveri River   (c) Godavari River   (d) Krishna River
61. Recently, NASA and which country's space agency have joined to launch the world's first wooden satellite?
(a) UK   (b) Russia   (c) Japan   (d) India
62. 'Mera Gaon, Meri Dharohar' program is an initiative of which ministry?
(a) Ministry of Agriculture   (b) Ministry of Panchayati Raj
(c) Ministry of Culture   (d) Ministry of Rural Development
63. Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary, recently seen in the news, is located in which state?
(a) Odisha   (b) Kerala   (c) Tamil Nadu   (d) Bihar

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64. What is the fiscal deficit target set in the interim budget for FY 2024-25?
(a) 6.0% of GDP   (b) 4.5% of GDP   (c) 5.1% of GDP   (d) 3.5% of GDP

65. Where will the 8th Asia Economic Dialogue take place?
(a) Mumbai   (b) New Delhi   (c) Kolkata   (d) Pune

66. The Nilgiri marten is endemic to which one of the following regions in India?
(a) Grasslands   (b) Western Ghats   (c) Eastern Ghats   (d) Wetlands

67. With which country does Sri Lanka aim to establish a Free Trade Agreement by the end of 2024?
(a) India   (b) Malaysia   (c) Australia   (d) Indonesia

68. Lake Rotorua is located in which country?
(a) New Zealand   (b) Russia   (c) Australia   (d) France

69. Who becomes the new Chief Minister of Jharkhand?
(a) Champai Soren   (b) Hemant Soren   (c) CP Radhakrishnan   (d) None of the above

70. What was the theme of the Ministry of Culture's tableau that secured the 1st prize at the Republic Day Celebration Parade 2024?
(a) Cultural Harmony   (b) Vibrant India
(c) India: Mother of Democracy   (d) India: Unity in Diversity

71. Who has been appointed as the Chairman of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)?
(a) Anil Kumar Lahoti`   (b) Anil Sharma   (c) Bhaskar Ramamurthi   (d) PD Vaghela

72. Recently, UPI payment system has been launched in which two countries?
(a) Australia and Egypt   (b) Chile and Peru
(c) Iran and Israel   (d) Sri Lanka and Mauritius

73. With which country did India sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Digital Cooperation?
(a) Colombia   (b) Argentina   (c) Brazil   (d) Peru

74. Recently, the government has released guidelines for starting pilot programmes to use green hydrogen in which of the following sectors?
(a) Steel sector   (b) Shipping sector   (c) Industrial sector   (d) Transportation sector

75. Martand sun temple, recently seen in the news, is located in which state/UT?
(a) Madhya Pradesh   (b) Jammu & Kashmir   (c) Ladakh   (d) Rajasthan

76. What is the name of India's first septic tank cleaning robot?
(a) Swachhata Atom   (b) RoboCleaner 1.0   (c) Homosep Atom   (d) Sanitech Pro

77. In which Indian state did the Indian Army launch the Women's Skill Development initiative?
(a) Manipur   (b) Rajasthan   (c) Assam   (d) Uttar Pradesh

78. Zircon Missile, a supersonic ballistic missile, recently launched by which country?
(a) Ukraine   (b) Russia   (c) Israel   (d) China

79. With which country did the National Institute of Ayurveda sign a MoU for academic collaboration in traditional medicine?
(a) Nepal   (b) Bhutan   (c) Thailand   (d) Sri Lanka

80. In which state did the Prime Minister inaugurate ISRO's second spaceport?
(a) Karnataka   (b) Andhra Pradesh   (c) Kerala   (d) Tamil Nadu

81. Where was the Maritime Technical Exposition MTEX-24 inaugurated?
(a) Goa   (b) Kochi   (c) Chennai   (d) Visakhapatnam

82. Who has been appointed as the new Vigilance Commissioner in the Central Vigilance Commission?
(a) Amitabh Kant   (b) A S Rajeev   (c) Alok Kumar Sinha   (d) Abhishek Banerjee

83. Which ministry has released the report titled "The Indian Economy: A Review"?
(a) Ministry of Finance   (b) Ministry of Home Affairs
(c) Ministry of Agriculture   (d) Ministry of Commerce & Industry

84. Which educational institution has launched the Human DNA Bank as part of the Make In India initiative?
(a) Jawaharlal Nehru University   (b) Delhi University
(c) Mumbai University   (d) Banaras Hindu University

85. FAST Telescope, recently seen in the news, is developed by which country?
(a) Russia   (b) USA   (c) India   (d) China

86. Where will the World Government Summit 2024 be organized?
(a) London   (b) Paris   (c) Dubai   (d) New Delhi

87. In which state assembly was the Uniform Civil Code Bill introduced recently?
(a) Bihar   (b) Assam   (c) Uttarakhand   (d) Uttar Pradesh

88. What was the primary objective of the Cassini-Huygens Mission, recently seen in the news?
(a) Exploring about black holes
(b) Analyzing the composition of Asteroids
(c) Investigating the atmosphere and moons of Saturn
(d) Searching for exoplanets

89. What city is launching the world's first air taxi service?
(a) Tokyo   (b) New York   (c) Singapore   (d) Dubai

90. In which Indian state has the world's first Vedic clock been installed?
(a) Madhya Pradesh   (b) Arunachal Pradesh   (c) Rajasthan   (d) Uttar Pradesh

91. What is the rank of India in the Global Intellectual Property Index 2024?
(a) 42nd (b) 46th (c) 44th (d) 45th

92. Which airport has recently been given the status of International Airport by the Government of India?
(a) Dibrugarh Airport   (b) Birsa Munda Airport   (c) Jorhat Airport   (d) Surat Airport

93. Which prominent Indian musicians, who are part of the fusion band Shakti, won the Grammy Award in the Best Global Music Album category for their latest album "This Moment"?
(a) A.R. Rahman and Lata Mangeshkar   (b) Sonu Nigam and Shreya Ghoshal
(c) Shankar Mahadevan and Zakir Hussain   (d) Hariharan and Kavita Krishnamurthy

94. Which country is set to launch its first luxury train, the Dream of the Desert?
(a) Saudi Arabia   (b) Egypt   (c) United Arab Emirates   (d) Turkey

95. Which Indian state is set to launch the country's first Helicopter Emergency Service (HEMS)?
(a) Himachal Pradesh   (b) Jammu and Kashmir   (c) Arunachal Pradesh   (d) Uttarakhand

96. Who is the chairman of 'One Nation One Election' committee?
(a) Ram Nath Kovind   (b) Amitabh Kant   (c) Dr. Manmohan Singh   (d) Mohammad Hamid Ansari

97. Who emerged as the most popular global leader with a 78% approval rating by Morning Consult 2024?
(a) President of Mexico   (b) Prime Minister Narendra Modi
(c) US President Joe Biden   (d) President of Argentina

98. What is 'Alaskapox', recently seen in the news?
(a) Fungus   (b) DNA virus   (c) Helminths   (d) Bacterial Infection

99. Who has been appointed as the new Lokpal of India?
(a) Sushil Chandra   (b) Justice AM Khanwilkar
(c) President Droupadi Murmu   (d) Justice Lingappa Narayana Swamy

100. Who has become the first Indian bowler to take 100 wickets against England in Test cricket?
(a) Ravichandran Ashwin   (b) Ravindra Jadeja
(c) Jasprit Bumrah   (d) Kuldeep Yadav

ANSWERS & EXPLANATIONS

1. Ans. a
Exp. The legislature of Uttarakhand recently passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill following the submission of the final report by a state-appointed panel. This makes Uttarakhand the first state in India to implement such legislation since Independence.

2. Ans. d
Exp. Pushkar Singh Dhami is an Indian politician and a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party, serving as the 10th and the current Chief Minister of Uttarakhand since 2021.

3. Ans. c
Exp. The UCC bill aims to govern and regulate laws related to marriage and divorce, succession, live-in relationships, etc., within the state. It has been prepared by a five-member committee led by former Supreme Court Judge Ranjana Prakash Desai.

4. Ans. c
Exp. Bigamy/Polygamy is prohibited under the bill as per section 4 which states that neither party should have a spouse living at the time of the marriage. Thus, prohibition on bigamy/polygamy has been extended to all communities/Religions.

5. Ans. c
Exp. UCC remains silent on the question of guardianship. Thus, the Guardians and Wards Act (GWA), 1890 will continue to govern court-appointed guardians while natural guardianship will be governed by personal laws. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (HAMA), 1956 and the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015 will continue to prevail. Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs can adopt under HAMA. Mandating the registration of live-in relationships infringes upon the right to privacy, as recognized under Article 21 of the Constitution. The bill's introduction of a state-specific UCC opposes the framers' intent of having a common UCC for the entire country, as outlined in Article 44 of the Constitution.

6. Ans. b
Exp. Anticipatory Bail or Pre-arrest Bail is a legal provision that allows an accused person to apply for bail before being arrested. In India, pre-arrest bail is granted under section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973. It is issued only by the Sessions Court and High Court.

7. Ans. a
Exp. NDPS Act or the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act is Legislation passed on 14th November 1985. It regulates the Storage, Consumption, Transport, Cultivation, Possession, Sale, Purchase, and Manufacturing of Narcotics and Psychotropic substances. The act defines these substances and imposes severe penalties for violation.

8. Ans. c
Exp. Small Quantity: If a person is found in possession, engaged in sale, or involved in manufacturing of a small quantity (less than 1 kg) of drugs such as cannabis, the punishment may include imprisonment for up to one year along with a fine of up to Rs 10,000.

9. Ans. b
Exp. The National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances is in accordance with Article 47 of the Indian Constitution. This policy mandates the state to endeavour to prohibit the consumption of

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intoxicating drugs, except for medicinal purposes. This is due to the adverse effects these substances have on health.

10. Ans. b
Exp. Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF): Directed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to be created by state governments under their respective Directors General of Police (DGPs) to fight the drug menace for a "drug-free India" by 2047.

11. Ans. a
Exp. The Supreme Court of India ruled that Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate Kuldeep Kumar is the validly elected candidate for the post of Mayor of Chandigarh Municipal Corporation.

12. Ans. d
Exp. Returning Officer is an individual responsible for overseeing elections within a constituency, or sometimes two, and announcing the elected candidate. Appointment- Appointed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in consultation with the relevant State Government or Union Territory (UT).

13. Ans. d
Exp. The duties of the Returning Officer (RO) include preparing EVMs and VVPAT systems, notifying candidates about vote counting details, printing and dispatching postal ballots, publishing election notices, and scrutinizing nomination forms.

14. Ans. a
Exp. History of Mayor's elections in India Municipal corporation mechanisms in India was introduced during British Rule with formation of municipal corporation in Madras (Chennai) in 1688, later followed by municipal corporations in Bombay (Mumbai) and Calcutta (Kolkata) by 1762. However, the process of introduction for an elected President in the municipalities was made in Lord Mayo's Resolution of 1870.

15. Ans. c
Exp. In the case of Supreme Court Bar Association vs Union of India (1998), the Supreme Court highlighted that the powers granted under Article 142 of the Constitution are meant to complement existing laws, not to override them. These powers are intended to address certain issues that may not be fully covered by existing laws. However, the Court cautioned that these powers should not be used to ignore the rights of people involved in legal cases or to bypass the rules set by statutory laws. Instead, they should be applied in a way that helps to correct certain legal shortcomings or to achieve fairness and justice in specific situations.

16. Ans. a
Exp. The inaugural meeting of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) was held in Kolkata by the Inland Waterways Authority of India, which is part of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW).

17. Ans. d
Exp. Sarbananda Sonowal is an Indian politician of Bharatiya Janata Party from Assam who is serving as the current Cabinet Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and Cabinet Minister of AYUSH, Government of India and the member of the Rajya Sabha representing Assam since 2021. The inaugural meeting of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) was coordinated by Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

18. Ans. b
Exp. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is a statutory body under Ministry of Shipping established in 1986 for development and regulation of inland waterways for shipping and navigation. It is

headquartered in Noida, Uttar Pradesh and its main function is to build necessary infrastructure in inland waterways, surveying economic feasibility of new projects and also carrying out administration and regulation.

19. Ans. b
Exp. Under the National Waterways Act, 2016, 111 inland waterways (including five national waterways in India declared earlier) have been declared as 'national waterways. Out of the 111, National Waterways declared under the National Waterways Act, 2016, 13 are operational for shipping and navigation and cargo/passenger vessels are moving on them.

20. Ans. b
Exp. The National Waterway-69 (NW-69) is the smallest waterway in India. The NW-69 has only 5 km in length. It is the part of the Manimutharu River which is located in Tamil Nadu state.

21. Ans. b
Exp. An injunction is a remedy granted by the court that prohibits the commission of a wrong threatened or the continuance of a wrongful course of action already begun. If a party fails to comply with an injunction granted by a court, then the party could face criminal or civil penalties or contempt of court.

22. Ans. c
Exp. In India, the legal framework concerning injunctions is established by the Specific Relief Act of 1963. Under this legislation, injunctions are categorized into two main types: permanent (or perpetual) injunction and temporary injunction. Section 36 of the Specific Relief Act states that Preventive relief is granted at the discretion of the court by way of injunctions, temporary or perpetual.

23. Ans. d
Exp. Recovery of Possession of Property: The Specific Relief Act 1963 facilitates a remedy for those wrongfully dispossessed of immovable property, like land or buildings, enabling them to regain possession through a court order. Specific Performance of Contracts: In cases of contractual breaches, the Act empowers aggrieved parties to seek specific performance, compelling the breaching party to fulfill their contractual duties and ensuring adherence to the agreement terms. Rectification of Instruments: The Act permits the rectification of instruments, correcting errors in legal documents such as contracts or deeds, providing a remedy for mistakes.

24. Ans. a
Exp. Dynamic Injunction: In some cases, courts grant injunctions even before a copyrighted work is publicly released, distributed, or created. This concept, known as dynamic injunction, is aimed at preventing irreparable loss due to online piracy.

25. Ans. c
Exp. In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court emphasized that an injunction suit may not be maintainable if the plaintiff fails to prove title to the property while seeking injunction relief against the defendants. This underscores the importance of establishing legal standing and merit before seeking injunctive relief from the court.

26. Ans. b
Exp. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, enacted under Article 252 of the Constitution, aims to prevent and control water pollution. It established both the Central and State Pollution Control Boards (CPCB and SPCBs), tasked with monitoring and preventing the contamination of public water resources by sewage and industrial effluents.

27. Ans. b
Exp. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, established both the Central and State Pollution Control Boards (CPCB and SPCBs) with the mandate to monitor and prevent contamination of public water resources by sewage and industrial effluents. While the CPCB provides technical guidance and standards, the SPCBs enforce compliance and are responsible for filing cases against violators.

28. Ans. b
Exp. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024, proposed by the Environment Ministry, aims to decriminalize certain violations and instead impose penalties for them. Initially applicable in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Union territories, and any other state that adopts the Act.

29. Ans. a
Exp. Under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024, the nomination and terms of the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCB) chairman are determined by the Central Government, whereas in the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, the chairman was appointed by the state government.

30. Ans. c
Exp. The Bill extends the entities empowered to file complaints to include adjudication officers, alongside CPCB and SPCB. Penalization: Heads of departments are subject to penalties equal to one month's basic salary if their departments violate the Act, reinforcing accountability within government bodies.

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31. Ans. c
Exp. NASA and SpaceX rescheduled the Plankton, Aerosol, Cloud, and ocean Ecosystem (PACE) mission launch due to weather delays. The mission, exploring ocean-atmosphere connections amid climate change, aims to understand the impact of microscopic life in water and air. PACE will monitor carbon dioxide exchange, atmospheric variables, and ocean health through phytoplankton study. The mission's aerosol products will aid health advisories for phenomena like wildfires and monitor harmful algae blooms. Scientists express excitement for groundbreaking insights, emphasizing PACE's significance in advancing Earth system understanding.

32. Ans. c
Exp. Vyommitra is expected to be onboard uncrewed Gaganyaan missions to perform microgravity experiments, monitor module parameters, and support astronauts in crewed missions by simulating functions exact like human. It is programmed to speak Hindi and English and perform multiple tasks.

33. Ans. c
Exp. Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) has secured the order for establishing Haryana's inaugural ultra-supercritical thermal power plant, marking a significant advancement in the state's power infrastructure. BHEL's longstanding contribution to Haryana's power sector dates back to 1974.

34. Ans. b
Exp. Bharat Tex 2024, the largest textile event in India, was inaugurated by the Prime Minister in New Delhi, emphasizing the city's significance as the host location. This event serves as a platform to showcase India's textile heritage, innovations, and trade opportunities.

35. Ans. b
Exp. Sunil Bharti Mittal, the founder and chairman of Bharti Enterprises, has been conferred an honorary Knighthood by Britain's King Charles III for his services to UK and India business relations. This prestigious recognition makes him the first Indian citizen to receive the Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (KBE) under King Charles III.

36. Ans. c
Exp. The names of 4 astronauts have been announced for India's ambitious space mission Gaganyaan Mission. This includes Group Captain Prashant Balakrishnan Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, Group Captain Angad Pratap and Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla. The Prime Minister also presented astronaut wings to the astronauts.

37. Ans. b
Exp. The Interim Budget outlines expenditures and revenues until the formation of a new government as it helps the government to manage its financial obligations. Major announcements of 2024 Interim Budget: Two crore more homes under PM Awas Yojana.

38. Ans. d
Exp. Union Minister Shri Pralhad Joshi launched the C-CARES web portal for the Coal Mines Provident Fund Organization (CMPFO). Developed by C-DAC, it aims to digitize records and streamline processes for 3.3 lakh Provident Fund subscribers and 6.1 lakh pensioners in the coal sector.

39. Ans. a
Exp. Exercise Vayu Shakti-24 will be held on February 17, 2024 at the Pokhran Air to Ground Range, near Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. The exercise will demonstrate the Indian Air Force's offensive and defensive capabilities.

40. Ans. c
Exp. The Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW) and IIM Shillong have joined forces to establish India's inaugural 'Gati Shakti Research Chair.'

41. Ans. c
Exp. Stone Age Wall Discovered Beneath the Baltic Sea Helped Early Hunters Trap Reindeer. In 2021, scientists aboard a research vessel noticed a submerged stretch of stones off Germany's Baltic coast.

42. Ans. a
Exp. Kathmandu recently hosted the multinational military exercise 'Shanti Prayas IV,' becoming a hub for global peacekeeping efforts.

43. Ans. b
Exp. NITI Aayog launched the "Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW)" initiative, unveiling a portal for universal access to state and district-level data.

44. Ans. b
Exp. The Central Government has honored former Prime Ministers PV Narasimha Rao, Chaudhary Charan Singh and the father of the Green Revolution, Dr. It has been announced that India's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna will be given to MS Swaminathan. Bharat Ratna MS Swaminathan was born on August 7, 1925 in Tamil Nadu. Dr. Swaminathan served as Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and Secretary of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education in the Government of India.

45. Ans. c
Exp. The US House of Representatives has bolstered the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) by passing legislation to strengthen ties among the member nations – USA, Australia, India, and Japan.

46. Ans. d
Exp. Objective of the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana is to Light up one crore households with free electricity.

47. Ans. b
Exp. The Kula Mama Volleyball Tournament-2024 at Melghat Tiger Reserve's Semadoh promotes tiger and forest conservation with local youth engagement. Melghat Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra, established in 1967, declared a tiger reserve in 1974, and the first in the state, is located in the Amravati district.

48. Ans. a
Exp. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated 'Sudarshan Setu', India's longest cable-stayed bridge over the Arabian Sea in Gujarat. This bridge is 2.32 km long which connects Okha and Bet Dwarka. It is the longest cable-stayed bridge in India. Rs 980 crore has been spent in its construction. There are solar panels on the upper part of the footpath of this bridge which will help in generating one megawatt of electricity. The bridge has also been constructed with four lanes and a 2.50 meter wide footpath on each side.

49. Ans. a
Exp. The spacecraft, named Odysseus built by Intuitive Machines in Houston, Texas, also became the first US lunar lander since 1972, when the last crew of Apollo astronauts visited the Moon.

50. Ans. a
Exp. Lebanese Judge Nawaf Salam was elected as the new president of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a three-year term, succeeding US Judge Joan Donoghue. This appointment highlights Salam's distinguished career path and his significant role within the field of international law.

51. Ans. d
Exp. Bengaluru, known as the 'garden city,' faces its worst domestic water crisis. Over 30 localities receive water on a rotational basis every alternate day, with supply lasting only 30-45 minutes. The city, once abundant with 262 lakes, now has only 81 due to real estate development.

52. Ans. b
Exp. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated the 12th edition of MILAN 2024, the flagship naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy in Visakhapatnam on 21 Feb 2024.

53. Ans. c
Exp. The 5th edition of Joint Military Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' began at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges, Rajasthan, India, lasting from February 25 to March 9, 2024. It involves the Indian Army and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, emphasizing joint tactical maneuvers in a simulated semi-urban setting. The exercise aims to enhance interoperability and strengthen military cooperation, aligning with Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

54. Ans. a
Exp. The Supreme Court invoked Article 142 to overturn the Chandigarh mayoral election results, aiming to ensure justice and maintain the integrity of the electoral process. Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to pass necessary decrees or orders for complete justice in pending cases.

55. Ans. a
Exp. Woman Robot Astronaut 'Vyommitra' will fly into space ahead of ISRO's ambitious 'Gaganyaan' mission, which will be India's first human-manned space flight carrying Indian astronauts into space.

56. Ans. a
Exp. The world record for the most time spent in space was broken by Cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko, surpassing the previous record held by Gennady Padalka. The Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko spent more than 878 days and 12 hours in space, surpassing fellow Russian Gennady Padalka, who set the previous record of 878 days, 11 hours, 29 minutes, and 48 seconds in 2015.

57. Ans. d
Exp. Odysseus, built by Intuitive Machines, achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first U.S.-built spacecraft to land on the Moon since Apollo 17 in 1972, marking the first moon landing by a private company.

58. Ans. a
Exp. Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus won the 2024 Australian Open women's singles title. Sabalenka defeated China's Zheng Qinwen 6–3, 6–2 to win her second consecutive Grand Slam title. Sabalenka is the first woman to win back-to-back Australian Open titles since Victoria Azarenka in 2012 and 2013.

59. Ans. b
Exp. The World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) as part of India's G20 presidency. The initiative aims to democratize digital health technologies, featuring components such as a country needs tracker and a transformation toolbox.

60. Ans. d
Exp. Two Badami Chalukya temples, aged 1,300-1,500 years, and a 1,200-year-old label inscription were discovered in Mudimanikyam village, Telangana near the Krishna River.

61. Ans. c
Exp. NASA and Japan's space agency, JAXA, are planning to launch the world's first wooden satellite, LignoSat, in 2024. The satellite is designed to reduce space debris and is made of biodegradable magnolia wood, known as Hoonoki in Japanese.

62. Ans. c
Exp. The Ministry of Culture is preparing mapping and documentation of all the villages under the 'Mera Gaon, Meri Dharohar' (MGMD) programme. The National Mission on Cultural Mapping is being run in coordination with Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts (IGNCA) under the Ministry of Culture. A web portal on MGMD was also launched on July 27, 2023.

63. Ans. a
Exp. Recent Maoist-securities clash occurred in Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary, located in Odisha's Nuapada district. Established in 1983, the sanctuary spans 600 sq kms, adjacent to Chhattisgarh's Sitanadi and Udanti sanctuaries. Featuring diverse habitats like plateaus, canyons, and waterfalls, it serves as Jonk River's catchment area. Dry deciduous tropical forests house various flora such as Bija, Teak, and fauna including Barasingha, tigers, leopards, and serves as a migration link for rare wild buffaloes between Orissa and Chhattisgarh.

64. Ans. c
Exp. Finance Minister Smt Nirmala Sitharaman presented the interim budget for FY 2024-25 on February 1, 2024 in Parliament. Since it's an interim budget, it focuses on essential expenditures until the regular budget is presented after general elections.

65. Ans. d
Exp. The 8th Asia Economic Dialogue will be held in Pune from February 29 to March 2. Organized jointly by the Ministry of External Affairs and Pune International Centre, this annual conference focuses on addressing geo-economic challenges under the theme 'Geo-economic Challenges in an Era of Flux'.

66. Ans. b
Exp. The Tamil Nadu Government has launched the "TN Endangered Species Conservation Fund" to protect lesser-known species like the Nilgiri Marten. This rare carnivore, scientifically named Martes gwatkinsii, is exclusive to the Western Ghats in India, spanning Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

67. Ans. a
Exp. Sri Lanka's objective to finalize Free Trade Agreements with various nations, including India, by 2024, reflects its strategy to address economic challenges and stimulate growth. These agreements are intended to open new markets for Sri Lankan businesses

68. Ans. a
Exp. New maps reveal a hidden hydrothermal system under Lake Rotorua, at a dormant volcano's heart in New Zealand. Hydrothermal systems, common near convergent plate boundaries and mid-ocean ridges, need fluids, heat, and permeability. Seawater percolates through oceanic crust, heating to 350-400°C, producing chemically modified hydrothermal fluid.

69. Ans. a
Exp. Champai Soren Becomes the New Chief Minister of Jharkhand.

70. Ans. c
Exp. The theme of IGNCA's Ministry of Culture tableau that secured the 1st prize at the Republic Day Celebration Parade 2024 was 'India: Mother of Democracy.' The tableau highlighted the blend of tradition and innovation, incorporating the anamorphic technique to showcase India's rich heritage.

71. Ans. a
Exp. Anil Kumar Lahoti, former Railway Board Chief, has been appointed as the Chairman of TRAI, succeeding PD Vaghela. With a background in Civil Engineering and significant leadership experience, Lahoti brings valuable expertise to this role in India's telecommunications sector.

72. Ans. d
Exp. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, inaugurated Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, and RuPay card services in Mauritius via video conferencing.

73. Ans. a
Exp. India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Digital Cooperation with Colombia. This MoU aims to facilitate the sharing of India's open-sourced Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs) with a focus on India Stack Solutions, contributing to digital transformation efforts in Colombia.

74. Ans. d
Exp. The Indian government, through the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, has issued guidelines for pilot projects under the National Green Hydrogen Mission, focusing on using Green Hydrogen in the transportation sector.

75. Ans. b
Exp. The Martand Sun Temple is a Hindu temple located near the city of Anantnag in the Kashmir Valley of Jammu and Kashmir (union territory), India.

76. Ans. c
Exp. India's first septic tank cleaning robot, named Homosep Atom, aims to eradicate manual scavenging and bolster the Swachhata Abhiyan across the nation.

77. Ans. a
Exp. The Indian Army, in collaboration with the State Handicraft Department, initiated a Women's Empowerment Program in Manipur, specifically in Phougakchao village of the Bishnupur district. The program aims to provide comprehensive training in handloom weaving to women in the region, with the participation of 35 local women.

78. Ans. b
Exp. Russian forces recently launched a 3M22 Zircon missile targeting Kyiv. The 3M22 Zircon is a scramjet-powered hypersonic cruise missile developed in Russia, boasting speeds up to Mach 9 and a 1000 km range. It features a two-stage design with solid fuel in the first stage and a scramjet motor in the second. The missile employs cooled supersonic combustion ramjet engines, creating a plasma cloud during flight for radar invisibility. It differs from other hypersonic weapons like China's DF-17 or Russia's Avangard, using an active and passive radar seeker guidance system.

79. Ans. c
Exp. The National Institute of Ayurveda signed a MoU with the Government of Thailand to establish Academic Collaboration in Ayurveda and Thai Traditional Medicine. This agreement highlights the efforts towards enhancing cooperation between India and Thailand in the field of traditional medicine.

80. Ans. d
Exp. The Prime Minister inaugurated ISRO's second spaceport in Tamil Nadu by laying the foundation stone. This development is significant for India's space exploration, and promising advancements in satellite launch capabilities. The new facility, situated in Kulasekarapattinam, aims to meet the rising demand for satellite launches efficiently.

81. Ans. d
Exp. The Maritime Technical Exposition MTEX-24 is a key feature of MILAN 2024 in Visakhapatnam, showcasing India's strides in naval technology. Inaugurated by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, MTEX-24 spans three days and emphasizes self-reliance in defence.

82. Ans. b
Exp. President Draupadi Murmu has appointed AS Rajeev as Vigilance Commissioner in the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC). Rajiv is currently the MD and CEO of Bank of Maharashtra. Central Vigilance Commission is an apex Indian government body which was established in 1964.

83. Ans. a
Exp. The Ministry of Finance released a report titled The Indian Economy: A Review in January 2024. The report was released a few days before the Union Budget for 2024-25 was presented in Parliament on February 1. The Ministry of Finance is made up of five divisions: Economic Affairs, Revenue, Expenditures, Investment and Public Asset Management, and Financial Services.

84. Ans. d
Exp. Banaras Hindu University (BHU) has taken a significant step in scientific progress by launching the Human DNA Bank as part of the Make In India initiative. This initiative, along with the nearing completion of the Wildlife DNA Bank, showcases BHU's commitment to innovation and indigenous manufacturing using advanced technologies like the Automated DNA Extractor Machine.

85. Ans. d
Exp. Astronomers at Nanjing University, China, using the world's largest single-dish radio telescope, FAST, detected a radio pulsar in CTB 87 supernova remnant. FAST, located in Guizhou, has a receiving area equivalent to 30 football fields and aims to maintain its world-class status for 20-30 years. Its goals include detecting neutral hydrogen at the universe's edge, reconstructing early universe images, discovering pulsars, participating in gravitational wave detection, and contributing to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

86. Ans. c
Exp. The World Government Summit 2024 will be organized in Dubai between 12-14 February. Heads or representatives of more than 25 countries around the world will participate in this conference. This year India, Turkey and Qatar have been invited as guest countries. PM Modi will participate in this conference from India's side. This year's theme is 'Shaping Future Governments'.

87. Ans. c
Exp. Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami has presented the Uniform Civil Code in the Assembly. This bill will now be sent further to the Governor. After this bill is passed it will become a law. With this, Uttarakhand will become the first state in the country to implement UCC. The draft of the Uniform Civil Code has been prepared on the basis of the report of Justice Ranjana Desai Committee.

88. Ans. c
Exp. NASA's Cassini spacecraft, part of a joint mission with ESA and ASI, recently unveiled a vast ocean beneath the icy surface of Saturn's moon Mimas. Launched in 1997, Cassini orbited Saturn from 2004 to 2017, contributing vital insights about the planet and its moons.

89. Ans. d
Exp. Dubai to have world's first air taxi, agreements inked at World Government Summit 2024. In a pathbreaking move set to revolutionize urban transportation, Dubai has inked agreements at the World Government Summit 2024 to launch the world's first air taxi service.

90. Ans. a
Exp. The world's first Vedic clock has been installed in Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh, which will be unveiled on March 1. This watch will display time as per Indian traditional calendar. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually inaugurate this clock installed on the 85 feet high tower at Jantar Mantar in the city on March 1.

91. Ans. a
Exp. The US Chamber of Commerce released the 12th edition of the International Intellectual Property (IP) Index, ranking 55 economies on their IP frameworks. India secured the 42nd position with a 38.64% overall score.

92. Ans. d
Exp. Recently, the Government of India has officially given the status of 'International Airport' to Surat Airport in Gujarat. Last December, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated a new terminal at Surat airport built at a cost of □ 353 crore.

93. Ans. c
Exp. Shankar Mahadevan and Zakir Hussain's fusion band Shakti won the Grammy award for Best Global Music Album for their latest release, "This Moment."

94. Ans. a
Exp. Saudi Arabia is preparing to debut its first luxury train, the Dream of the Desert, marking the first luxury train in the Middle East. This initiative aims to offer travellers a unique journey through the kingdom, highlighting its cultural and historical landmarks.

95. Ans. d
Exp. Uttarakhand is poised to introduce India's inaugural Helicopter Emergency Service (HEMS), aimed at swiftly transporting accident victims and patients from remote and hilly regions to AIIMS in Rishikesh. This initiative, operating under project 'Sanjeevani', marks a significant advancement in emergency medical services infrastructure.

96. Ans. a
Exp. 'One Nation One Election' Committee Chairman Ram Nath Kovind held a consultation meeting with members of Republican Party of India-Athawale (RPI) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in New Delhi. In September 2023, the central government formed this committee under the leadership of former President Ramnath Kovind.

97. Ans. b
Exp. Prime Minister Narendra Modi emerged as the most popular leader in the world with 78% of approval, according to a recent Morning Consult survey.

98. Ans. b
Exp. An Alaskan man recently became the first to die from Alaskapox, an orthopox virus discovered in 2015. It is DNA virus belonging to the same genus as smallpox, monkeypox, and cowpox, it primarily affects small mammals.
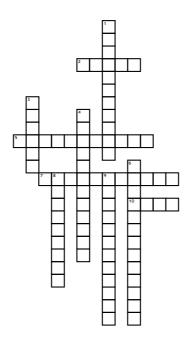
99. Ans. b
Exp. The President of India Droupadi Murmu has appointed former Supreme Court judge Justice AM Khanwilkar has been appointed as the Chairperson of the Lok Pal.

100. Ans. a
Exp. Ravichandran Ashwin has become the first Indian bowler to take 100 wickets against England in Test cricket. Before this, no Indian bowler had reached 100 wickets against England. Let us tell you that recently Ashwin has completed his 500 test wickets. Ashwin is only the second bowler to take 100 wickets in the Test matches between England and India. Only James Anderson (145 wickets) is ahead of him in this list.
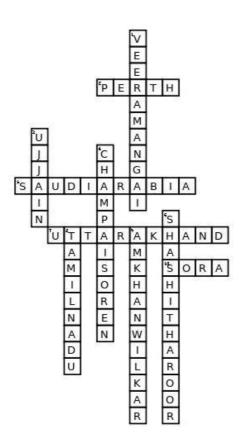
Vx Word

Down:

1. What is the name of Mascot of 6th edition of the Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG)?
3. In which Indian City has the world's first Vedic clock been installed?
4. Who recently became Chief Minister of Jahrkhand?
6. Recently who is honored with France's highest civilian award, the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur?
8. Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary is located in which State?
9. Who has been appointed as the new Lokpal of India?

Across:

2. 7th edition of the Indian Ocean Conference took place in which city?
5. Sada Tanseeq Military exercise took place between India and which Country?
7. Which State has proposed legislation to implement a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), following in the footsteps of Goa, to ensure uniformity in personal laws.
10. What is the name of new generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) model by Open AI?

Vx Word

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