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WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

- NATIONAL
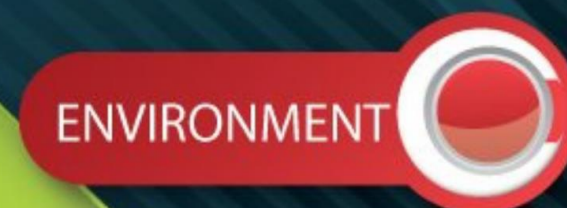- INTERNATIONAL
- ART & CULTURE
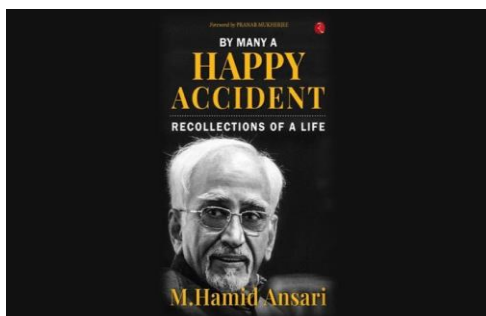- ECONOMICS
- SPORTS
- ENVIRONMENT
- SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

INDIA'S NO. 1 PORTAL FOR UPSC STUDENTS

Arts and Culture

Books & Authors:

By Many a Happy Accident: Recollections of a Life':

A book titled 'By Many a Happy Accident:

Recollections of a Life' has been authored by M Hamid Ansari.

About the Book:

By Many a Happy Accident is an account of a life of unplanned happenings that took M. Hamid Ansari away from his preferred fancy for academia to professional diplomacy and then be co-opted in public life and catapulted to the second highest office in the land for two consecutive terms.

None of his predecessors, except Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, had experienced this honour.

Besides chairing the Rajya Sabha and shedding interesting light on some of its functional aspects, Ansari used the vice presidency as a formidable pulpit to express himself candidly on a range of issues at different times in India's changing political landscape.

Their overarching theme was the need for modern India to re-commit itself to the constitutional principles of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, to the values of a composite culture, and for correctives in polity relating to identity, security and empowerment of the weaker segments of our society.

About M H Ansari: Mohammad Hamid Ansari was the vice president of India and chairman of the Rajya Sabha for two consecutive terms from 2007 to 2017.

A former diplomat, he served as ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, as high commissioner to Australia and as permanent representative to the United Nations in New York.

In 2008, he published a set of his own writing, Travelling through Conflict: Essays on the Politics of West Asia.

Selections from his speeches have been published as Teasing Questions (2014), Citizen and Society (2016) and Dare I Question? (2018).

Mushaira:

Mushaira is a poetic symposium. It is an event (called mehfil, mushairi) where poets gather to recite their work so that they may enjoy, criticize, and ultimately appreciate what was recited. It is a part of the culture of Pakistan, North India and the Deccan esp. among the Hyderabadi Muslims.

Urdu Mushaira reached its final, decisive form in 18th century and was popularized by Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor of India.

Different Types of Mushaira

❖ Tarahi Mushaira: The Tarahi Mushaira is a competitive form of mushaira where a misra is given, and poets compose their ghazals using that misra and the behar (rhythmic metre) of the misra.

❖ Mazahiya Mushaira: If the poetry is humorous in nature, it is referred to as Mazahiya Mushaira. Some of the poets now developed it in the form of criticising with a deeper meaning.

❖ In News: Union Ministry of Minority Affairs will organise "Mushaira" on the theme of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" in New Delhi on 20th February 2021 where renowned poets of the country will present their couplet.

Samarpan Diwas:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently paid floral tribute to former Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) leader Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya on his 53rd death anniversary as part of 'Samarpan Diwas', in New Delhi on 11 February 2021.

About Swami Dayananda Saraswati:

🔸 Dayananda Saraswati (25 September 1916 – 11 February 1968) was an Indian politician and thinker of right-wing Hindutva ideology espoused by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), leader of the political party Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the forerunner of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and founder of the Arya Samaj, a reform movement of the Vedic dharma.

🔸 He was the first to give the call for Swaraj as "India for Indians" in 1876, a call later taken up by Lokmanya Tilak.

🔸 Denouncing the idolatry and ritualistic worship, he worked towards reviving Vedic ideologies.

🔸 Subsequently, the philosopher and President of India, S. Radhakrishnan called him one of the "makers of Modern India", as did Sri Aurobindo.

🔸 Those who were influenced by and followed Dayananda included Madam Cama, Swami Shraddhanand, Shyamji Krishna Varma, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, etc.

- He was a sanyasi (ascetic) from boyhood and a scholar. He believed in the infallible authority of the Vedas.

- Dayananda advocated the doctrine of Karma and Reincarnation. According to him "Humankind had four hierarchically organized attributes of body, mind, intellect, and soul which corresponded to four universal objectives, Kama (desire), Artha (wealth), Dharma (moral duties) and Moksha (total liberation or 'salvation'). Dharma is the 'basic', and Moksha the 'ultimate' objective of humankind and society. Dharma is the thread bear that abides 'Kama' and 'Artha' for the supreme goal of human life 'Moksha'.

- Among Dayananda's contributions were his promoting of the equal rights for women, such as the right to education and reading of Indian scriptures, and his commentary on the Vedas from Vedic Sanskrit in Sanskrit as well as in Hindi.

Additional Info: Deendayal Upadhyay and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee together laid the foundation of the Jana Sangh.

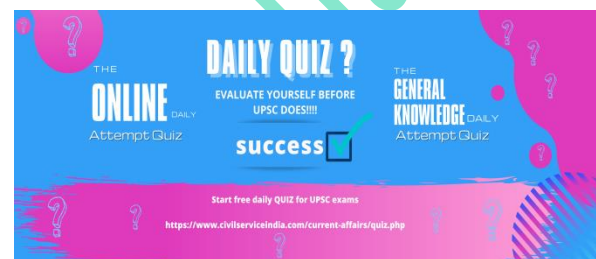It can be said that the foundation of the Bharatiya Janata Party is standing on the Jana Sangh.

While in the Jana Sangh, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee laid the foundation of an ideology on which the Bharatiya Janata Party was built.

The Bharatiya Janata Party has emerged from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1980.

Note: In 2017, Mughalsarai Junction was renamed as Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Junction.

During the rail journey on the night of 11 February 1949, he was found dead in suspicious condition near Mughalsarai (Deen Dayal Upadhyay) railway station.

Defence

Indian Army:

The Indian Army recently laid the foundation stone of the tallest 'Iconic National Flag' at the famous ski-resort of Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir.

The flag will be on a 100 feet-high pole, the highest Tricolour in the Valley.

The Indian Army will install the 'Iconic National Flag' at Gulmarg in collaboration with the Solar Industry.

The foundation stone for the iconic national flag was laid by Dagger Division General Officer Commanding (GoC) Major General Virendra Vats along with Bollywood actor-producer Arbaaz Khan and actress Vidya Balan.

This iconic Indian national flag will be a first in many ways.

The site is expected to become another tourist attraction, among the snow-clad mountains of Kashmir.

Indian Army: The Indian Army is the land-based branch and the largest component of the Indian Armed Forces. It was founded on 1 April 1895. It is headquartered in New Delhi, India. It is the world's second-largest military force. It has the world's largest volunteer army. The President of India is the Supreme Commander of the Indian Army, and its professional head is the Chief of Army Staff, who is a four-star general. The current Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army is President Ram Nath Kovind and the 28th Chief of Army Staff is General Manoj Mukund Naravane. The motto of Indian Army is "Service Before Self".

JTAP-Centre for Excellence (JATP – CoE):

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bengaluru for creation of JATP–Center of Excellence (JATP – CoE) in the premises of IISc to expand the scope and objective of existing Joint Advanced Technology Program (JATP) between the two institutions.

The MoU was signed by Dr. G Satheesh Reddy, Secretary of Directorate of Defence Research and Development (DDR&D) & Chairman and Prof. Govindam Rangarajan, Director IISc at a virtual event which was held in DRDO Bhawan, New Delhi.

Highlights:

- The JATP-CoE located in the campus of IISc, Bengaluru will enable Directed Basic & Applied Research and engage with premier research institutes through multi-disciplinary & multi-institutional collaboration.
- The focused research efforts at the centre will lead to realisation of indigenous technologies in the critical areas to develop state of art technologies.
- Under the MoU, DRDO will support JATP in equipping it with advanced and unique research facilities that will enable the faculty and scholars to conduct advanced research.
- DRDO will facilitate for advanced research to utilize technology outcome in the futuristic applications.
- The DRDO scientists and engineers will work with the academic research faculty and scholars in advanced areas namely aerospace systems and materials, high temperature materials, quantum technologies, artificial intelligence and robotics etc.

Note: JATP was created by President of India Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam in 1983 (while leading IGMDP program), where the DRDO scientists actively collaborated with the faculty of IISc to work on various missile technologies.

DRDO: It is an acronym for the Defence Research and Development Organization. DRDO is India's largest research organization. It was founded in 1958. It is headquartered in New Delhi, India. It is an agency under the Ministry of Defence, Government of India. It is charged with the military's research and development. It has a network of laboratories engaged in developing defence technologies covering various fields, like aeronautics, armaments, electronics, land combat engineering, life sciences, materials, missiles, and naval systems. The Minister currently responsible for DRDO is Rajnath Singh, Minister of Defence. The present Chairman of DRDO is Dr. G. Satheesh Reddy.

Exercise TROPEX-21:

The largest war game of Indian Navy -the Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (Tropex 21) to test its combat readiness in the context of the current geostrategic environment will culminate in the third week of February.

TROPEX 21 is a biennial exercise that started in early January has the participation of all operational units of Indian Navy including ships, submarines, aircraft as well as units of the Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Coast Guard.

This exercise is being conducted in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its adjunct water. The conduct of the Indian Navy's largest exercise is being overseen by the Naval Headquarters with the participation from all three commands of the Navy and the tri-services command at Port Blair.

The main objective of this exercise is to validate Navy's offensive-defence capabilities, protect national interests in the maritime domain and encourage stability and peace in the IOR.

Tropex-21 is being conducted in distinct phases that will also test the Navy's transition from peacetime to hostilities.

First Phase of the Exercise -Sea Vigil

In the first Phase of the exercise the Navy had conducted coastal defence exercise 'Sea Vigil' along the entire coastline and island territories of India on January 12-13, 2021. The exercise was conducted with the aim of validating the coastal defence setup of India. The exercise was participated by the Indian Navy, Marine Police of 13 coastal States and Union Territories and the Coast Guard, besides the stakeholders in the maritime domain.
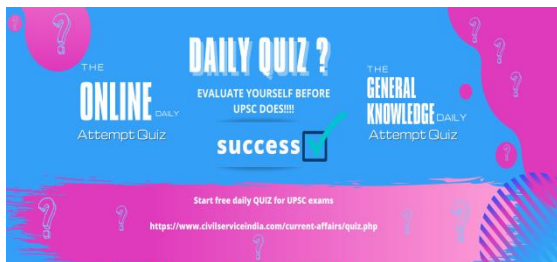
Second Phase of the Exercise - AMPHEX-21

In the second phase, 'Sea Vigil' was followed by a large-scale Tri-Service joint amphibious exercise AMPHEX-21.was held in the Andaman and Nicobar group of Islands from 21-25 January 2021. It was held with the aim of validating India's capabilities so as to safeguard the territorial integrity of its Islands. Defence

Exercise 'KAVACH' for defence of Andaman & Nicobar Islands was also a part of AMPHEX-21 exercise.

Third Phase of Weapon Workup Phase of TROPEX

The third phase of Weapon Workup Phase of TROPEX concluded recently. This phase observed the multiple on-target ordnance deliveries such as torpedoes, missiles and rockets from frontline aircrafts, warships and submarines. It demonstrated the lethal firepower of the Indian Navy.

This exercise bolsters its role towards maritime security in the wider Indian Ocean Region and is in keeping with the theme of being a 'Combat Ready, Credible and Cohesive force'.

Economics

CCEA:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) recently accorded approval to the proposal of the Department of Fertilizers for Grant-in-aid of Rs.100 crore to Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizers Corporation Limited (BVFCL), Namrup (Assam).

The proposal was approved to sustain operations of its urea manufacturing units.

The grant in aid of Rs. 100 crore to BVFCL will restore the urea production capacity of 3.90 Lac MT per annum and ensure timely availability of Urea to Tea Industry & Farming Sector in the entire North Eastern region specially Assam.

About BVFCL:

BVFCL, Namrup is a Public Sector Undertaking formed as per Companies Act, under the administrative control of the Department of Fertilizers (DoF), Government of India (GoI).

Currently, the Company is operating its two vintage plants viz. Namrup-ll and Namrup-lll in the premises of BVFCL in Namrup, Assam.

SISFS:

It refers to the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme. The SISFS has recently been approved for the period of next four years starting from 2021-22. It will be implemented with effect from 1st April 2021.

The objective of the Scheme is to provide financial assistance to startups for proof of

concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry and commercialization.

The scheme is expected to support about 3600 startups as 945 Crore corpus will be divided over the next 4 years for providing seed funding to eligible startups through eligible incubators across India.

Financial Literacy Week:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently launched the Financial Literacy Week (FLW) from February 8-12, 2021, to propagate financial education.

The theme for 2021 FLW is "Credit Discipline and Credit from Formal Institutions".

RBI conducts Financial Literacy Week (FLW) every year since 2016 to propagate financial education messages on a particular theme every year across the country, through a focused campaign.

RBI: It refers to the Reserve Bank of India. The RBI is India's central bank, which controls the issue and supply of the Indian rupee. It carries out India's monetary policy and exercises supervision and control over banks and non-banking finance companies in India. RBI was set up in 1935 under the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934. It is headquartered in Mumbai. RBI plays an important part in the Development Strategy of the Government of India. The current Governor of RBI is Shaktikanta Das.

World Pulses Day:

The World Pulses Day falls on February 10 every year and recognised Pulses as a global food. On this day, people make efforts in creating awareness about the importance of Pulses in sustainable food production.

World Pulses Day for 2021 theme is #LovePulses.

The UN General Assembly after recognizing the value of pulses in 2013 adopted 2016 as the International Year of Pulses (IYP).

In 2018, the UN General Assembly decided to mark 10 February as World Pulses Day. The first WPD was held on February 10, 2019.

On 20 December 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/RES/68/231) proclaiming 2016 as the International Year of Pulses (IYP).

The celebration of the year, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), increased the public awareness of the nutritional and environmental benefits of pulses as part of sustainable food production.

Pulses: Pulses, also known as legumes, are the edible seeds of leguminous plants cultivated for food. Dried beans, lentils and peas are the most commonly known and consumed types of pulses..

Digital Insurance Policies via DigiLocker:

IRDAI (Insurance Regulatory Authority of India) recently has advised all Insurance companies for issuance of Digital Insurance Policies via DigiLocker.

As per the circular, the Digilocker team in NeGD (National e-Governance Division) under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology will provide necessary technical guidance and logistic support to facilitate adoption of Digilocker.
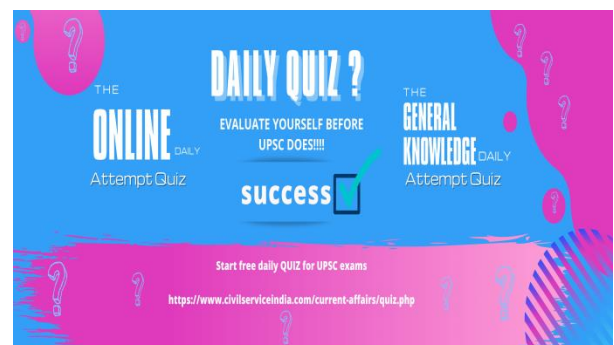
Benefits of Digilocker app:

❖ Issuance of the policies through the Digilocker app will result in to better customer experience.
❖ Using this app, claims processing and settlement of the policies will be faster.
❖ This app will also reduce the disputes and reduction in fraud.
❖ It will also enable the policyholders to preserve all their policy documents.
❖ Necessary technical guidance and logistic support to facilitate the adoption of Digi locker will be pro-

vided by the Digilocker team in National e-Governance Division (NeGD) under MeITY.

Digilocker: Digilocker is an initiative under the Digital India programme by the government where citizens can get authentic documents and certificate in digital format from original issuers of these certificates.

It aims at eliminating or minimizing the use of physical documents and will enhance effectiveness of service delivery, making this hassle free and friendly for the citizens.

IRDAI: The acronym stands for Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India. IRDAI is an autonomous, statutory body tasked with regulating and promoting the insurance and re-insurance industries in India. It was established by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999, an Act of Parliament passed by the Government of India. The agency's headquarters are in Hyderabad, Telangana, where it moved from Delhi in 2001. IRDAI is a 10-member body including the chairman, five full-time and four part-time members appointed by the government of India. The current Chairman of IRDAI is Subash Chandra Khuntia.

Environment

World Sustainable Development Summit 2021:

The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi recently inaugurated the World Sustainable Development Summit 2021 through video conferencing. It was held in between 10th to 12th February 2021.

The summit was organized under the theme– 'Redefining Our Common Future: Safe and Secure Environment for All'.

This summit was the 20th edition of The Energy and Resources Institute's (TERI) flagship event.

The main aim of the summit was to bring together a wide number of governments, academicians, business leaders, climate scientists, civil society and youth to fight against climate change.

India's Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) are key partners of the Summit.

Uttarakhand Glacier Burst:

A large piece of Nanda Devi glacier broke off on a chilly winter morning of February and fell into a river, triggering an avalanche and glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF).

The break off caused an avalanche and glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in Dhauli Ganga, Rishi Ganga and Alaknanda rivers due to which over 150 people are feared missing after the flash flood.

Two hydroelectric power projects, namely, NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project and Rishi Ganga Hydel Project got completely washed away along with five bridges and scores of houses after the waters came rushing in.

This is a second massive blow for the Himalayan state after the 2013 Kedarnath Tragedy. The 2013 Kedarnath tragedy was caused by the cloudbursts that led to severe floods and landslides. However, in case of Uttarakhand Glacier Burst, it is yet to know what actually triggered the glacier burst at Chamoli district of Uttarakhand.

GLOF: GLOF stands for glacial lake outburst flood. It is a type of outburst flood that is caused by the failure of a dam containing a glacial lake. An event similar to a GLOF, where a body of water contained by a glacier melts or overflows the glacier, is called a jökulhlaup.

When glaciers break off, the space underneath them develops into a glacial lake filled with water. The glacial outburst occurs when the water level of lake rises or when the glacier retreats.

Causes for GLOF are as follows:

- Erosion, a buildup of water pressure
- Avalanche of rock or heavy snow

- Earthquake or volcanic eruptions under the ice
- Displacement of water in a glacial lake when a large portion of an adjacent glacier collapses into it

What are Glaciers?

Glaciers are the largest source of freshwater outside of the Polar Regions. Glaciers and snow melt in the Himalayan ecosystem are the source of water for several rivers across the subcontinent.

These are responsible for maintaining the perennial supply of water in the river systems like the Ganges, Indus and Brahmaputra to over a billion people.

But these glaciers have reduced considerably in mass and surface area since the little ice age period. As per the predictions, an increase in global temperatures by 2°C from 1850 by 2070 would result in 45% of the medium and large glaciers (10 sq km or more) disappearing completely. Nearly 70% smaller glaciers are likely to melt away.

Shrinking glaciers have led to the formation of a large number of glacial lakes all across the Himalayas. Many of these high-altitude lakes are potentially dangerous, because of their potential to cause flash floods in the event of a breach.

A 2005 study by Kathmandu-based ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) had listed 127 such lakes in Uttarakhand. A more recent study by ICIMOD held that 36% of the volume of glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region will be gone by the end of 2100 even if the world manages to keep the temperature rise within 1.5 degree Celsius target of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Similarly, the data from the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has also revealed that the melting of the glaciers has increased in the first 20 years of this century.

Mandarin Duck:

The mandarin duck is a perching duck species native to the East Palearctic. The scientific name of mandarin duck is Aix galericulata. It is a perching duck species which is native to the East Palearctic. The duck is medium-sized with 41–49 cm in length and 65–75 cm of wingspan. The duck is closely related to North American wood duck.

Considered the most beautiful duck in the world, the Mandarin duck, or the (Aix galericulata) was first identified by Swedish botanist, physician and zoologist Carl Linnaeus in 1758.

Recently, a rare Mandarin duck which is a colourful duck from eastern Asia was spotted in Assam recently after 118 years. It was first spotted on February 8 by Madhab Gogoi floating in the Maguri-Motapung beel (or wetland) in Assam's Tinsukia district.
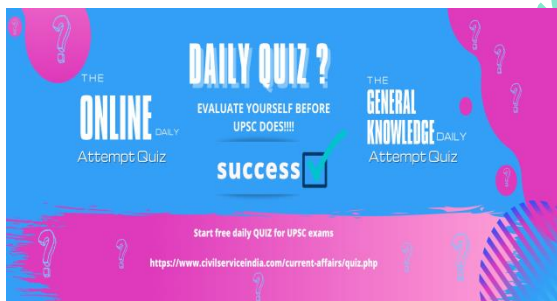
The migratory duck breeds in Russia, Japan Korea and north-eastern parts of China. It now has established populations in

Western Europe and America too. The duck, however, rarely visits India as it does not fall in its usual migratory route.

Though this duck is in the Least Concern list of ICUN, spotting one is always considered significant because they only make "rare appearances."
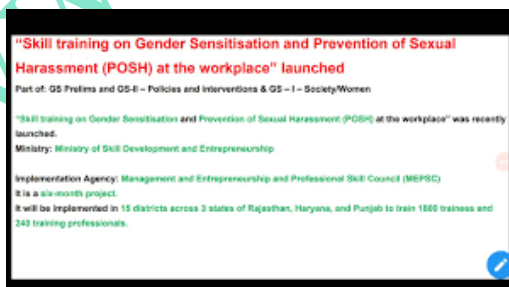
Maguri Motapung Beel: Maguri Motapung Beel is a wetland and lake located near to Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Motapung Village of Tinsukia district in Assam. It is an Important Bird Area as declared by the Bombay Natural History Society.

In May 2020, the beel was adversely affected by a blowout and fire at an Oil India Limited-owned gas well. So spotting of the Mandarin has raised hopes for the wetland which was affected by a blowout and inferno.

National

POSH:

The Union Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Mahendra Nath Pandey recently launched the "Skill training on Gender Sensitization and Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) at the workplace". It was launched at the event on 'Transforming skilling through strategic partnerships under SANKALP.

This project was launched in partnership with Management and Entrepreneurship and Professional Skill Council (MEPSC) as the Implementation Agency for the project.

It is a six-month project. It will be implemented in 15 districts across 3 states of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan to train 1800 trainees and 240 training professionals.

- **TIFAC:**

It refers to the Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council. TIFAC, on the occassion of its 34th foundation day launched two new initiatives. These two initiatives are SAKSHAM (Shramik Shakti Manch) Job Portal and a Seaweed Mission.

SAKSHAM Portal:

- It is a dynamic job portal for mapping the skills of Shramiks (workers).

- The job portal will help eliminate middlemen or labour contractor and directly connect Shramiks and MSMEs and other industries all across the country. .

- It will also help in the identification of skill proficiency level and development of Skill Cards for Shramiks.

- The pilot portal originally initiated with two districts is now being launched as an all India portal.

- It will facilitate creation of 10 lakh blue collar jobs.

- The portal with the demand and supply data uses algorithm and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, for geo spatial information on demand and availability of Shramiks, and also provides analysis on skill training programmes of Shramiks.

- The portal is significant because it would help labourers to find jobs who had to return to their native place amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Seaweed Cultivation Mission:

Seaweed Mission has been launched for commercial farming of seaweeds and its processing for value addition towards boosting the national economy.

As per the estimates of Department of Science & Technology (DST), if seaweed cultivation is done in 10 million hectares or five per cent of the Exclusive Economic Zone area of India, it can provide employment to 50 million people, set up new seaweed industry, contribute to national GDP, ocean productivity, abates algal blooms, sequesters millions of tons CO_2 and could produce bioethanol of 6.6 billion litres.

Thus, with this objective, it envisages activities given below:

- Establishing model demonstration farms over one hectare for cultivation of economically important seaweeds in nearshore and onshore along the Indian coast.

- Establishment of seaweed nurseries for supplying seed material for large scale farming of economically important seaweeds in the country.

- Onshore cultivation for Seedling supply facility and Seaweed cultivation for processing.

- Establishment and demonstration of processing technologies as well as recipes for edible seaweeds in line with consumer acceptability or cultural food habit.

- Setting up of processing plant for integrated production of plant growth stimulants (sap) along with industrially important cell wall polysaccharides (phycocolloids) such as carrageenan, agar, agarose and alginates from fresh seaweeds.

TIFAC: TIFAC is an autonomous organization set up in 1988 under the Department of Science & Technology (DST). The organization works in technology domain, assess the technology trajectories, and support innovation by

networked actions in select areas of national importance.

Seaweed Cultivation: Seaweed Cultivation also known as the kelp farming is the practice of cultivating and harvesting the seaweed.

The process comprises of management of naturally found batches in the simplest form. While in the advanced form, the process comprises of fully controlling the life cycle of the algae.

India and EU:

The First High-Level Dialogue on trade and investment was recently held between India and European Union (EU).

The meeting was co-chaired by the Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal from India side and the European Union Executive Vice-President & Trade Commissioner Mr Valdis Dombrovskis, from the EU side.

This Dialogue was organized in line with the commitment made at the 15th India-EU Leader's Summit held in July 2020.

At the meet, the Ministers of both the countries agreed for further deepening of bilateral trade and investment relationship through a series of regular engagements, aiming at quick deliverable for the businesses in these tough times.

They also agreed to meet within the next three months, to reach consensus on a host of bilateral trade & investment cooperation issues like bilateral Regulatory Dialogue; an India-EU Multilateral Dialogue to explore further possibilities of cooperation.

Note: The relations between India and EU are currently defined by the 1994 EU-India Cooperation Agreement.

EU: It is an acronym for European Union. EU is a political and economic union of 27 member states that are located primarily in Europe. It was founded on 1 November 1993.

It is headquartered in Brussels, Belgium. The current President of EU is David-Maria Sassoli.

India and Afganistan:

India and Afghanistan have virtually signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for construction of Lalandar (Shatoot) Dam. A signing ceremony of the MoU took place over VTC on 9 February 2021.

The MoU was signed between External Affairs Minister Dr Jaishankar and Afghanistan Foreign Minister Mr Hanif Atmar, in the presence of Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Afghanistan President Dr Mohammad Ashraf Ghani.

The project is a part of the New Development Partnership between India and Afghanistan.

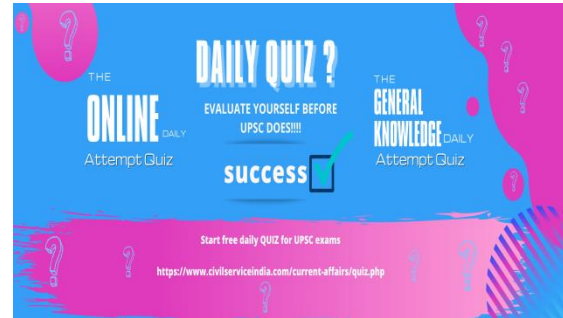The dam will be constructed on the Kabul River basin.

Benefits of Lalander Dam:

- It would meet the safe drinking water needs of Kabul City
- It would provide irrigation water to nearby areas
- It would rehabilitate the existing irrigation and drainage network
- It would aid in flood protection and management efforts in the area,
- It would also provide electricity to the region.

This is the second major dam being built by India in Afghanistan, after the India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam (Salma Dam), which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and the President in June 2016.

This is the second major dam being built by India in Afghanistan, after the India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam, which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and the President in June 2016.

Afghanistan: Afghanistan, officially the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is a landlocked country in Asia. It is bordered by Pakistan to the east and south; Iran to the west; Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north; and China to the northeast. Its Capital is Kabul and the currency used here is Afghan afghani. The President of Afganistan is Ashraf GhanI.

International

World Radio Day (WRD):

The day is celebrated on 13 February every year globally. The main objective behind celebrating WRD is to raise awareness among the public and the media of the importance of radio, to encourage decision-makers to establish and provide access to information through radio; as well as to enhance networking and international cooperation among broadcasters.

In 2011, UNESCO's General Conference, at its 36th session, proclaimed February 13 as World Radio Day. The day February 13 was proposed by the Director-General of UNESCO because it coincides with the anniversary of the United Nations Radio, the UN's international broadcasting service was established on February 13, 1946.

Theme for WRD 2021: The theme of WRD 2021 is "New World, New Radio", will highlight the services rendered by the radio medium throughout the crisis.

On the occasion of WRD 2021, UNESCO calls on radio stations to celebrate this event's 10th anniversary and the more than 110 years of radio through three sub-themes.

Evolution: The world changes, radio evolves radio is resilient and sustainable;

Innovation: The world changes, radio adapts and innovates- radio adapts to new technologies and remains the go-to medium of mobility, accessible everywhere and to everyone;

Connection: The world changes, radio connects - radio services our society during natural disasters, socio-economic crises, epidemics, etc.

United Nations Radio: United Nations Radio was created on 13 February 1946. In 2017, United Nations Radio and the UN News Centre merged to form UN News, producing daily news and multimedia content in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Swahili, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Hindi.

Radio in India: Radio is the primary medium and source of information. In India Radio broadcasting started in the early 1920s and in 1923, the first program was aired by the Radio Club of Bombay. Lord Irwin, then Viceroy of India, inaugurated the Indian Broadcast Company (IBC) in Bombay.

All India Radio (AIR) is one of the largest radio networks in the world. It was founded in 1956. Until 1993, AIR was the only radio broadcaster in India.

FM broadcasting began in July 23, 1977, in Chennai. Radio City Bangalore was the first private FM radio station that started on July 3, 2001. In India, private FM is not allowed to broadcast news.

World Unani Day:

The World Unani Day is celebrated on 11th February every year. The Day is celebrated globally to spread awareness about health care delivery with the help of Unani system of medicine through its preventive and curative philosophy. This day is also celebrated to the birth Anniversary of Hakim Ajmal Khan.

World Unani Day was celebrated on February 11, 2021 to spread awareness about health care delivery through Unani system of medicine through its preventive and curative philosophy.

Hakim Ajmal Khan: He was an Indian Unani Physician and a social reformer. He was a versatile genius who was also a noted freedom fighter, a Unani medical educationist and founder of scientific research in Unani System of Medicine.

He was one of the founders of the Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. He was a descendant of one of the line of physicians called the Rais of Delhi who came to India during reign of Mughal Emperor Babar. His grandfather Hakim Sharif Khan was a physician to Mughal Emperor Shah Alam.

Unani Medicinal system: Unani medicine is a system of alternative medicine. It originated in ancient Greece but is now

practiced primarily in India. It involves the use of herbal remedies, dietary practices, and alternative therapies, Unani medicine addresses the prevention and treatment of disease.

The theoretical framework of Unani medicine is based on the work of Hippocrates (460-377 BC).

Revival of Unani Medicinal System:

The system owes its present form to the Arabs who saved much of the Greek literature by rendering it into Arabic and also enriching it with their own contributions.

In India, it was introduced by Arabs and Persians sometime around the eleventh century. It saw the beginning of its revival during the freedom struggle due to the efforts of Hakim Ajmal Khan. He established Ayurvedic and Unani Tibbia College and Hindustani Dawakhana a pharmaceutical company for manufacturing of Ayurvedic and Unani medicine in Delhi in 1916.

Italy:

Italy, officially the Italian Republic, is a country of south-central Europe, occupying a peninsula that juts deep into the Mediterranean Sea. The Capital of Italy is Rome. The currency used here is Euro.

Recently, the former European Central Bank Chief Mario Draghi has been sworn in as the new Prime Minister of Italy on 12 February 2021.

The 73-year-old had served as President of the European Central Bank from 2011 until 2019.

He replaces Giuseppe Conte, who resigned recently after losing majority support from his coalition government over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

US to re-join UNHRC:

The Joe Biden administration in United States is all set to re-join the UN Human Rights Council that former President Donald Trump withdrew from almost three years ago.

Trump pulled out of the Geneva-based body over what he saw as its bias against the Israeli government as Israel had received by far the largest number of critical council resolutions against any country.

Members also include China, Cuba, Eritrea, Russia and Venezuela, all of which have been accused of human rights abuses.

UNHCR: It refers to the United Nations Human Rights Council. UNHRC is the Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system. It is located at the UN Office at Geneva. It was founded in 2006 by the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251. It replaced the former United

Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) that had been strongly criticised for allowing countries with poor human rights records to be members.

The UNHRC works closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The agency is involved in strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights across the world.

It is involved in discussing all the thematic human rights issues.

The council comprises of the 47 UN Member States.

The member states are elected by the UNGA by a direct and secret ballot.

The members of the Council serve for a period of three years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.

The UNHRC holds three regular sessions in a year.

The session lasts for a total of 10 weeks. The session takes place for 4 weeks in the month of March, 3 weeks in the month of June and 3 weeks in the month of September.

The sessions are held at the UN Office Geneva in Switzerland.

India Polity

The National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021:

The Upper House of the Parliament recently passed The National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021 by a voice vote.

Highlights:

- It was introduced by Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs of India, Hardeep Singh Puri, for extending the time period available with the Government for regularization of unauthorized colonies.
- The bill seeks to replace the ordinance brought to the same effect by the President on 30th of December last year.
- The legislation aims to amend the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second Act, 2011.
- The 2011 Act was valid till December 31, 2020. The ordinance extended the deadline to December 31, 2023.
- The 2011 Act provided for the regularization of the unauthorized colonies that existed in the national capital as on March 31, 2002 and

where construction took place till June 1, 2014.

Hardeep Singh Puri said that the bill was brought in the form of an ordinance because the Winter Session of the Parliament was suspended in view of the Corona pandemic and the validity of this Act was set to expire on December 31, 2020.

Benefits:

- Around 1.35 crore people of Delhi who are living in unauthorised colonies will get their ownership right for which the tenders have been floated for "Jahan Jhuggi Wahan Makaan".
- Delhi will not only benefit from the improvement in living condition of those people but the Central Vista project will also make Delhi one of the finest cities in the world.

Note: The government has also introduced an affordable housing rental scheme for the migrant workers living in the city.

Two Child-Policy:

Three candidates from the Municipal Corporations of Vadodara and Rajkot in the state of Gujarat were disqualified recently under the two-child policy in place in the state for candidates.

The nominations were challenged because each candidate had three children.

Background:

In 2005, the Government of Gujarat amended the Gujarat Local Authorities Act to "prevent a person having more than two children to be a member of panchayat, or the councillor of a municipality or municipal corporation".

The amendment also added the clause to the other Acts governing elections to local administrative bodies such as the Gujarat Provincial Municipal Corporations Act, 1949, and the Gujarat Panchayats Act.

The rationale behind the two-child policy was said to be the need to "order and stabilise" the growing population of the count.

About the Bill:

- The Bill seeks to amend the Constitution with a view to make a provision by the State to discourage the people from increasing their family and encourage them to keep their family limited to two children only.

- The said Act will be called the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2020.

- Insertion of New Article 47 A: After article 47 of the Constitution, the following article shall be inserted, namely - 47A.

Under 47A, the State shall promote small family norms by offering incentives in taxes, employment, education, etc. to its people who keep their family limited to two children and shall withdraw every concession from and deprive such incentives to those not adhering to small family norm, to keep the growing population under control.

Major Port Authorities Bill, 2020:

The "Major Ports Authorities Bill, 2020" was passed recently in the Rajya Sabha.

The bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha on February 10, 2020 through ballot votes with 84 in favour and 44 against it. Lok Sabha had cleared it in September 2020.

The Union minister of state for ports, shipping and waterways, Mansukh Mandaviya, highlighted that the bill will not only encourage the good competition with in the major private ports but will also boost port land usage as well as amplify competition in port tariffs.

Provisions of the bill are as follows:

1. The bill will replace the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.

2. The bill aims to provide more autonomy in decision-making.

3. It will provide autonomy to the 12 major ports of India.

These ports are as follows:

- Deendayal (erstwhile Kandla) port
- Mumbai port
- JNPT port
- Mormugao port,
- New Mangalore port,
- Cochin port,
- Chennai port,
- Kamarajar (erstwhile Ennore) port,
- V O Chidambaranar port,

- Visakhapatnam port,
- Paradip port, and
- Kolkata (including Haldia) port.

4. The Bill allows the Board to use its property, assets and funds as deemed fit for the development of the major port.
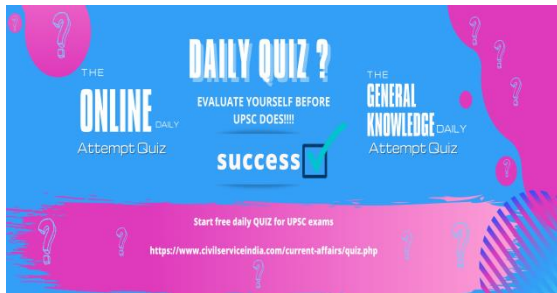
5. The bill will professionalise the governance of the port with the formation of boards.

6. It comprises of the provisions of creating a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port that in turn will replace the existing Port Trusts.

7. Under the new Bill, any person contravening any provision of the Bill or any rules or regulations will be punished with a fine of up to Rs one lakh.

Composition of the board: The Board will consist of a Chairperson and a deputy Chairperson. Both will be appointed by the central government following the recommendation of a selection committee. The board will also include one member from each of the respective state governments, Railways Ministry, Defence Ministry, and Customs Department. It will also have 2 to 4 independent members. In addition, it will include 2 members who will represent the interests of the employees from the Major Port Authority.

Note: However, the bill is being criticized and opposed alleging that it is aimed at privatising the ports. The bill will deplete the powers of states with respect to the land use.

Persons in News

Bikram Singh Bedi:

Bikram Singh Bedi has recently been appointed as the new Managing Director for its India Business by Google Cloud.

He will succeed Karan Bajwa, who has been elevated as Vice president for the Asia Pacific (APAC) region cloud operations at Google Cloud.

Bedi is a senior leader with more than 26 years of leadership experience.

At Google, Bikram Bedi will be responsible for leading Google Cloud's sales and operations teams in this dynamic market.

Google Cloud: Google LLC is an American multinational technology company that specializes in Internet-related services and products, which include online advertising technologies, a search engine, cloud computing, software, and hardware. It was founded on 4 September 1998. It is headquartered in California, United States.

The current CEO of Google is Sundar Pichai.

Ghulam Nabi Azad:

Senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad recently retired from Rajya Sabha. He was bid an emotional farewell by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad.

Azad was a Congress' Rajya Sabha MP from Jammu and Kashmir.

He retired from the Upper House on February 15 after serving as the leader of the opposition for over six years since June 8, 2014.

Senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge will replace Ghulam Nabi Azad as Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha.

Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu accorded his approval to Congress president Sonia Gandhi's request for appointing Kharge in place of Azad.

"The Chairman, Rajya Sabha, has accorded recognition to Shri Mallikarjun Kharge, leader of the Indian National Congress Party in the Rajya Sabha, as the leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha w.e.f February 16, 2021, in terms of Section 2 of the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977 and rules made thereunder," a Parliament bulletin said.
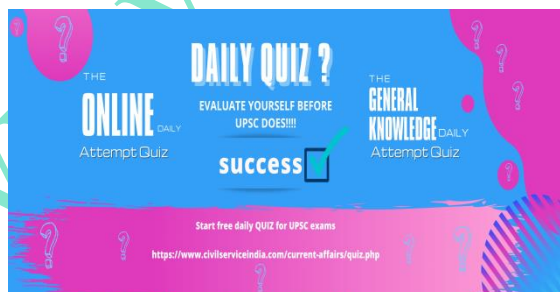
Robert Irwin:

He is an Australian wildlife photographer who has achieved the 1st prize in the Wildlife Photographer of the Year People's Choice Award Contest.

His image 'bushfire', which highlights the devastating Australian Bushfire in 2020 was selected from a shortlist of 25 finalists and it got 55,486 votes to win the title.

He captured this image with the help of a drone, near the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve in Cape York, Queensland.

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year is the largest wildlife photography competition in the world. It is organized by the Natural History Museum.

About: Robert Irwin is a 17-year-old Australian who is a children's television personality and wildlife photographer and at present, he is hosting Robert's Real Life Adventures program.

SAANS Campaign:

The Madhya Pradesh health department has launched a new Social awareness campaign named SAANS to curb infant mortality or death rate due to pneumonia.

SAANS stands for 'Social Awareness and Action to Neutralize Pneumonia Successfully'.

Under the SAANS campaign training will be imparted at the community and primary health centres.

The state has set up around 4,000 Health and Wellness Centres for this purpose.
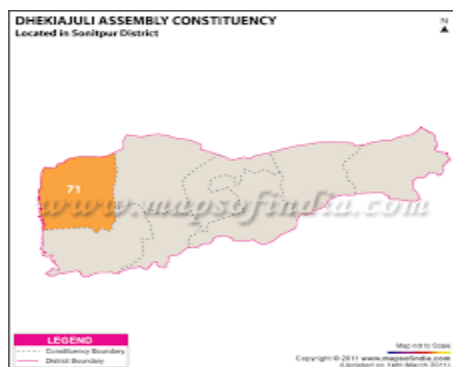
The MP State government has also developed training modules in partnership with PGIMER, Chandigarh, and UNICEF, which will be used to enhance the skills of health workers, including doctors and paramedical staff.

Madhya Pradesh: Madhya Pradesh (MP) is the second largest Indian state by area.

It borders the states of Uttar Pradesh to the northeast, Chhattisgarh to the southeast, Maharashtra to the south, Gujarat to the west, and Rajasthan to the northwest.

Its capital is Bhopal. The current Chief Minister and Governor of Madhya Pradesh are Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Anandiben Patel respectively.

Dhekiajuli:

It is a historic "martyr" town in Assam where Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his recent visit laid the foundation stone for two medical colleges and launched a road and a highway project.

Background:

Dhekiajuli is associated with the Quit India Movement of 1942. It was home to possibly the youngest martyr of the Indian freedom struggle.

On September 20, 1942, as part of the Quit India movement, processions of freedom fighters marched to various police stations across several towns in Assam.

These squads were known as 'Mrityu Bahini', or death squads. These squads had wide participation — including women and children who set out to unfurl the tricolour atop police stations, seen as symbols of colonial power.

The British administration came down heavily on them. At least 15 people were shot dead, three of them women, including the 12-year-old Tileswari Barua in Dhekiajuli.

Note: September 20 has for long been observed as Martyrs' Day in Dhekiajuli town.

The Assam government recently restored and accorded the Dhekiajuli police station the heritage status.

Mukhyamantri Vigyan Pratibha Pariksha Scheme:

The Delhi cabinet recently approved "Mukhyamantri Vigyan Pratibha Pariksha" scheme.

Under this scheme, an amount of Rs 5,000 will be provided to 1,000 meritorious students of Class 9 in schools of Delhi as a science scholarship. The scholarship will provide a boost to science education in secondary classes at the school level.

According to the release, the students studying in Delhi schools who have secured more than 60% in Class 8 are eligible for the examination. Students belonging to SC, ST, PH, or OBC category will be given a relaxation of up to 5% of marks.

Delhi government seeks to promote the pursuit of excellence and scientific temper among the children.

Delhi: It is an urban district located in the city of Delhi. New Delhi officially the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT), is a city and a union territory of India. It serves as the capital of India is the seat of the State Government of Delhi and the Government of India, as well as the city or local governments as per the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. Union

Territories are governed by the Union Government. The current Chief Minister and Governor of Delhi are Arvind Kejriwal and Anil Baijal respectively.

Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM):

The Government of Karnataka recently inaugurated the office of the Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM) in Bengaluru. At the same occasion, the "Beyond Bengaluru" report which facilitates to achieve the target of increasing the contribution was also launched.

The mission was founded on a public-private partnership (PPP) model. In the mission, the industries like, India Electronics and Semiconductor Association, National Association of Software and Service Companies, The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) and Vision Group Start-ups have 51 per cent stake.

Highlights about KDEM:

❖ This office has been opened with the objective of increasing digital economy's contribution by 30% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP).
❖ To propagate the KDEM smoothly the state government has allowed for 51 per cent stakes to industry as-

sociations while retaining a minority holding of 49 per cent for itself.

❖ The state government seeks to act as a facilitator in the KDEM office rather than an authority.
❖ In order to strengthen the digital economy, the government will focus on providing connectivity even to remote parts, providing 24/7 electricity. The government will also reduce the rural-urban divide by establishing the needed infrastructure.
❖ KDEM aims to attract investments for the IT/ITeS sector in the state and to create 10 lakh jobs by 2025.
❖ The office will work to achieve the target with the focus on 5 verticals of Information Technology.

The 5 verticals are as follows:

1. IT products and services.
2. Innovation and Startups.
3. Electronic System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM).
4. Beyond Bengaluru
5. Talent Accelerator.

KDEM has been established with an aim to reach the goal of 150 billion dollars in IT exports and also to become a 300 billion dollars economy by 2025.

Karnataka: It is a state in the south western region of India. It was formed on 1 November 1956, with the passage of the States Reorganization Act. Originally known as the State of Mysore, it was renamed Karnataka in 1973. Its capital city is Bangalore. The current Chief Minister and Governor of Karnataka are B. S. Yediyurappa and Vajubhai Rudabhai Vala respectively.

Vijayanagara District:

The Karnataka government recently issued a notification demarcating boundaries of the newly-formed Vijayanagara district. Now, with Vijayanagara, Karnataka has 31 districts.

About Vijayanagara: Named after the capital of the Vijayanagar Empire, the new district was carved out from Ballari under the Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964.

It located in Hyderabad-Karnataka region and is famous for its UNESCO World Heritage sites – Hampi and Virupaksha Temple.

With Hosapete as its headquarters, Vijayanagara has 6 taluks namely - Hosapete, Kudligi, Kotturu, Hoovina Hadagali, Hagaribommanahalli and Harapanahalli.

Vijaynagar Empire: Vijayanagara or "city of victory" was the name of both a city and an empire. The empire was founded in the fourteenth century (1336 AD) by Harihara and Bukka of Sangama dynasty. Hampi was its capital city.

Vijayanagar Empire was ruled by four important dynasties They are Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu.

The most famous ruler of Vijayanagara was Krishnadevaraya (ruled 1509-29) of the Tuluva dynasty. His rule was characterized by expansion and consolidation. He is credited with building some fine temples and adding impressive gopurams to many important south Indian temples. He also founded a suburban township near Vijayanagar called Nagalapuram after his mother. He composed a work on statecraft in Telugu known as the Amuktamalyada.

India Policy

Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) Scheme 2020-21:

SMAM Scheme is a central government scheme for the Agricultural Department targeted to boost the union budget 2021. In the recent Union Budget 2021, an amount of Rs. 1050 crore budget has been allocated for Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) for the financial year 2021-2022. The amount will be issued for the financial year 2021-2022.

Background:

+ The SMAM scheme was launched in the year 2014-15.

It was launched by the government of India (GoI) with the aim of 'reaching the unreached'.

The scheme seeks to reach the unreached by making the farm machines accessible and affordable for the small and marginal farmers (SMFs).

It makes the machines accessible to the SMFs by, establishing the Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs), creating Hubs for hi-tech & high value farm equipment and establishing the Farm Machinery Banks.

The distribution of various subsidized agricultural equipment and machines are done to individual farmer.

Why was SMAM scheme launched?

The Agricultural mechanization is crucial for the agriculture sector as this not only helps in improving the efficiency and affectivity of the inputs that are used in the crop production but also helps in increasing the productivity of crops. Therefore, this scheme was launched with the objective of increasing the efficiency, affectivity and productivity of the crops.

Fundamentals of the scheme:

The scheme comprises of following fundamentals:

The scheme makes it possible for the SMFs to connect with the hiring institutes that enables the SMFs to hire the machines because, purchasing the farm machines for SMFs is not financially feasible.

The performance testing and certification of machines at the designated testing centres ensures the

farm machinery effectively and efficiently.

It also raises awareness among the stakeholders by demonstrating the machine operations and skill development of farmers and youth.

Achievements under the scheme:

Ever since the scheme was launched in 2014, an amount of Rs.4556.93 crores of funds has been released under this scheme for the States during the financial year 2014-2015 to 2020-2021.

Under the scheme, as of now, around 13 lakh agricultural machines have been distributed so far and 27.5 thousand Custom Hiring Institutions have been established.

The programs and schemes on farm mechanization have also increased the availability of the farm power per unit area. This power is used to perform various agricultural operations.

Nai Roshni:

It is the name given to a scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women by Ministry of Minority affairs. Nai Roshni is being implemented across India.

Aim: The scheme aims is to empower and instill confidence in women by providing knowledge, techniques and tools for interacting with Government systems, banks and other institutions at all levels.

This includes empowerment of the trainee women so that they become independent and confident members of the society.

Training: The scheme provides for 6 days training programme followed by handholding for a period of one year. The training covers issues relating to women viz. Leadership of Women through participation in decision making, Educational Programmes for women, Health and Hygiene, Legal rights of women, Financial Literacy, Digital Literacy, Swachh Bharat, Life Skills, and Advocacy for Social and Behavioural change.

Implementation: The Scheme is being implemented through Non-Governmental Organisations enrolled under the Nai Roshni Scheme as per scheme guidelines in force.

Note: The other schemes that help in the economic empowerment of the Minority women are:

- Seekho Aur Kamao (Learn & Earn) Scheme where 33% of the total beneficiaries are women.
- Nai Manzil scheme, where 30% of the total beneficiaries are women.

Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF):

The Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) Mahendra Nath Pandey recently chaired the event on 'Transforming skilling through strategic partnerships under SANKALP.

At the event MSDE Ministry launched the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) programme in partnership with 9 Indian Institutes' of Management (IIM) across India to strengthen skills training at district level.

About MGNF:

- MGNF is a two-year government-funded programme.

- It is a Certificate Program in Public Policy and Management offered by IIMs.

- It has been launched under the World Bank loan assisted programme SANKALP (Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion).

- It has been designed at the initiative of the MSDE, Government of India (GoI) and implemented in collaboration with State Skill Development Missions (SSDMs).

- The MGNF 2021-23 has been rolled out nationally in more than 660 districts across India.

- Fellows under the MGNF will acquire the academic expertise and technical competency which will help in understanding the overall skill ecosystem along with being attached to DSCs (District Skill Committees).

About SANKALP: SANKALP stands for the "Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion". SANKALP scheme was launched in January 2018 and has tenure till March 2023.

This scheme is assisted by the World Bank loan.

The main aim of launching the scheme is to strengthen the district skill administration and the District Skill Committees (DSCs).

NeGPA:

It refers to the National e-Governance Plan in Agriculture. NeGPA scheme has recently been extended up to March 31, 2021.

About NeGPA:

- It is a centrally sponsored scheme launched with the objective of achieving the rapid development in India by using Information & Communication Technology (ICT).
- This scheme helps in timely access of the agriculture related information to the farmers.
- It was initially launched in the year 2010-11 in 7 States. These states are Assam, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- From 2014-2015, it expanded to other states and 2 UTs.

Phase-II of the scheme:

Under Phase-II of the scheme, funds were released to States for carrying out the activities mentioned below:

1. Site preparation of offices for installation of hardware
2. Establishment of computer training labs
3. Procurement, installation and accounting of system software
4. To back-up power arrangements
5. To set-up the State Project Management Unit (SPMUs)
6. To hire manpower on contractual basis
7. Data Digitization Customization of applications as per the requirement in the State and UTs
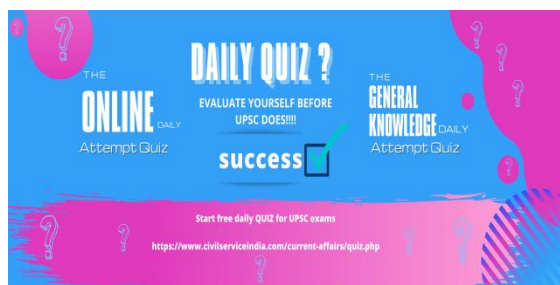
Recent Developments under the scheme:

The NeGPA guidelines were amended in 2020-2021 in order to infuse the modern information technologies in the farm sector.

Furthermore, the initiatives such as Unified Farmers Service Platform (UFSP) were launched in order to bring a paradigm change in accessing the data related to farmers.
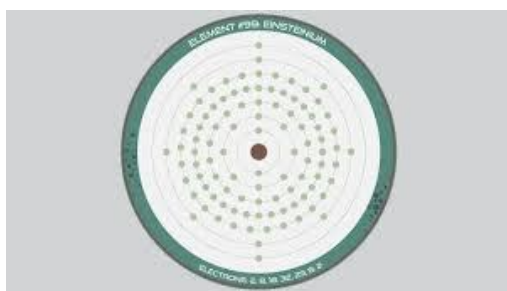
UFSP: It refers to the Unified Farmer Service Platform. UFSP is a combination of Core Infrastructure, Applications & tools and Data.

- The platform helps in seamless interoperability of various public and private IT systems in the agriculture domain across India.
- It acts as a central agency in the agri ecosystem such as UPI in the e Payments does.
- It also enables the Registration of Service Providers.

Science and Technology

Einsteinium:

A team of scientists at the Berkeley Lab recently reported some of the properties of element 99 in the periodic table called "Einsteinium", named after Albert Einstein. This new study published in the journal Nature.

It is for the first time that the researchers have been able to characterise some of the properties of the element.

About Einsteinium:

❖ It was discovered in 1952 in the debris of the first hydrogen bomb (the detonation of a thermonuclear device called "Ivy Mike" in the Pacific Ocean).

❖ Since its discovery, scientists have not been able to perform a lot of experiments with it because it is difficult to create and is highly radioactive. Therefore, very little is known about this element.

❖ The most common isotope of the element, einsteinium 253 has a half-life of 20 days.

❖ It has been noted that due to high radioactivity of the element, most of it has decayed since the beginning of the Earth.

❖ The element is invisible to the naked eye.

This is the reason that it cannot be found in nature and needs to be manufactured using very precise and intense processes.

The discovery of the Einsteinium:

When Ivy Mike was detonated on November 1, 1952, as part of a test at a remote island location called Elugelab on the Eniwetok Atoll in the South Pacific, it produced an explosion that was about 500 times more destructive than the explosion that occurred at Nagasaki.

This isotope was identified by Albert Ghiorso and coworkers at Berkeley, California, in debris taken from the first thermonuclear (hydrogen bomb) explosion, "Ivy Mike," in the South Pacific (November 1952).

The element was named after the German-born physicist Albert Einstein.

BL Lacertae:

Indian Astronomers recently detected one of the strongest optical flares in one of the oldest astronomical objects that is a super massive black hole or blazar called BL Lacertae.

The analysis of the flare from this blazar which is one of the oldest astronomical objects can help trace the mass of the black hole and the source of this emission. It can also provide a lead to probe into mysteries and trace events at different stages of evolution of the Universe.

What are Blazers?

Blazars are feeding super-massive black (SMBH) holes in the heart of distant galaxies. Like other forms of active galactic nuclei (AGN), blazars are the most luminous and energetic objects in the known universe.

They emit jets of charged particles traveling nearly at the speed of light and are one of the most luminous and energetic objects in the Universe.

BL Lacertae blazar:

BL Lacertae blazar is situated 10 million light-years away and is among the 50 most prominent blazars that can be observed with the help of a relatively small telescope.

This blazar was predicted to be experiencing flares with the help of the Whole Earth Blazar Telescope (WEBT), an international consortium of astronomers.

The Blazers receive a lot of attention from the astronomical community because of their complicated emission mechanism.

ASIIM:

It is an abbreviation for Ambedkar Social Innovation and Incubation Mission.

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India (GoI) recently launched ASIIM under Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes (VCF-SC) on 30th September 2020.

The main objective is to boost entrepreneurship and innovation among the SC students/SC Divyang youth.

Under this initiative, the companies/entrepreneurs owned by Scheduled Castes enrolled /registered with Technology Business Incubators (TBIs) are eligible to get maximum capital of Rs.30 lakhs over a period of 3 years i.e. Rs.10 lakhs every year.

Financial support of up to Rs.10 lakhs per year for a period of 3 years aggregating to Rs.30 Lakhs shall be provided to eligible applicants as equity funding.

Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes:

Venture Capital Fund is a Social Sector Initiative to be implemented nationally in order to promote entrepreneurship among the Scheduled Castes population in India.

"Entrepreneurship" relates to entrepreneurs managing businesses which are oriented towards innovation and growth technologies.

The spirit of the above mentioned fund is to support those entrepreneurs who will create wealth and value for society and at the same time promoting profitable business.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science:

The day is observed globally on the 11th of February annually. The United Nations (UN) in December 2015 adopted a resolution to celebrate February 11 as the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

The day is celebrated with an aim to recognize the critical role of women and girls play in science and technology. The day's purpose is to promote full and equal access to participation in science for women and girls

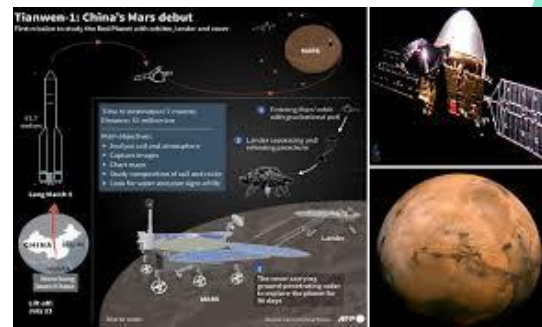The day was celebrated for the first time in 2016.

The idea behind this day is to ensure equal participation and involvement of women and girls in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Recently, on the occasion of the International Day of Women & Young Girls in Science, the Ministry of Women & Child Development in association with Ministry of Education and MyGov, Ministry of Electronics and Information technology launched an online campaign to celebrate women in Science.

This campaign not only celebrates women who have carved a niche for themselves in the field of STEM but also encourages young girls who aspire to excel in STEM and contribute towards nation building. It honours young girls from across the country who have performed well in Maths and Science.

Mars Mission:

The Chinese Tianwen-1 mission to Mars successfully entered Mars orbit on February 10, 2021, just one day after the United Arab Emirates mission Hope arrived at the red planet on February 9.

They'll soon be followed by NASA's Perseverance mission which is set to arrive and land on February 18.

Hope and Tianwen-1 thereby made their respective countries the 5th and 6th earthly cultures respectively to successfully reach the red neighboring planet, after the United States, India, the former Soviet Union and Europe (via the European Space Agency).

Both the Chinese and the American missions are robotic which consists of an orbiter, a lander and a rover. Both the missions aim to land on the surface of Mars whereas the Hope mission, carrying 3 instruments, including a high-resolution camera and a spectrometer, the spacecraft is on an orbital mission to collect data on Martian climate dynamics and help scientists understand why Mars's atmosphere is decaying into space.
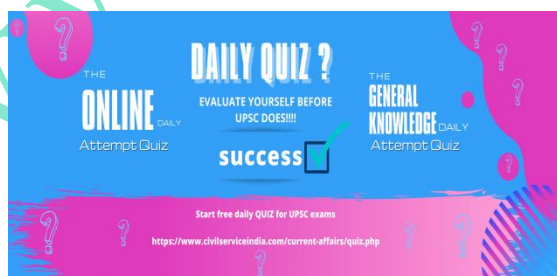
UAE Hope Mission: The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) first mission to Mars entered the orbit of the red planet, seven months after the Emirati-built 'Hope Probe' was launched from the Tanegashima Space Centre in Japan aboard a Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' H-II A rocket.

The unmanned spacecraft is called 'Al-Amal' — the Arabic word for hope. The historic event was timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the unification of the UAE's seven emirates.

First announced in July 2014, the Mars Mission was developed and operated by the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in collaboration with the University California, Berkeley, Arizona State University and the University of Colorado-Boulder in the United States.

Hope is the UAE's fourth space mission and first interplanetary one. The previous three were all Earth-observation satellites. Its overall mission life is one Martian year, which is about 687 days on Earth.

Chinese Tianwen-1 mission: Tianwen-1 is China's first Mars exploration mission. It is named after an ancient Chinese poem meaning Heavenly Questions. After traveling 292 million miles (470 million km) from Earth, the mission has entered a polar orbit around Mars on February 10, 2020.

Sports

Ishant Sharma:

Indian fast bowler Ishant Sharma recently became the sixth Indian and third pacer from the country to take 300 wickets in Test cricket.

The 32-year-old Ishant reached the milestone in 98 matches, more than the other Indian bowlers in the club. He reached the landmark when he trapped Dan Lawrence with a delivery that swung back sharply before hitting his pads in England's second innings on the fourth day of the opening Test.

Besides Anil Kumble (619) and Kapil Dev (434) the other bowlers from the country who have reached the landmark are Ravichandran Ashwin (377 before this game), Harbhajan Singh (417), and Zaheer Khan (311).

Australian Cricket Awards:

Former captain Steve Smith recently claimed his third Allan Border Medal while Beth Mooney bagged her maiden Belinda Clarke Award, the top two honours of the Australian Cricket Awards.

Smith was honoured for his performances in all three formats of the game, while Mooney bagged the recognition in the Australian women's game for the first time.

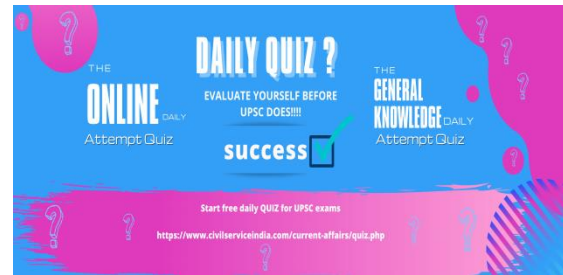The awards were decided by a voting process for the period 2020-21.

Rishabh Pant:

The Indian wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant recently won the inaugural ICC Player of the Month award 2021.

Pant has been honoured for his superlative performances in the two Tests against Australia in January 2021, wherein he scored a 97 at Sydney and an unbeaten 89 at Brisbane, leading India to an incredible series win.

Apart from him, Shabnim Ismail of South Africa has been named the ICC Women's Player of the Month following her performances across three ODIs and two T20Is in January 2021.

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