

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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SWAMINATHAN PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

- The first of the 12 demands made by protesting Punjab farmers was for a **legal guarantee to MSP**, and for the **determination of crop prices as per the recommendations of the Dr Swaminathan Commission**.

About

- On November 18, 2004, the Ministry of Agriculture constituted a **National Commission on Farmers (NCF) under Prof Swaminathan**.
- The NCF submitted five reports in favor of farmers, and made several recommendations, including on MSP but **it did not recommend either a legal guarantee for MSP or the formula for its calculation** that the farmers' unions are now demanding.
- The **10-point terms of reference of the commission**, included suggesting a "comprehensive medium-term strategy for food and nutrition security", and ways of "enhancing productivity, profitability, and sustainability of the major farming systems" in the country.

Major Findings/Recommendations

- **Public investment:**
 - ♦ The acute agricultural distress in the country, is the symptom of a deep seated malady arising from **inadequate public investment and insufficient public action**.
- **Marketing:**
 - ♦ **Trading** :The Commission recommended **futures and options trading** in agricultural commodities, with supervision and regulation by a "**SEBI like autonomous body**".
 - ♦ **Risk factors:** The risk factor and the marketing and post harvest expenses which are not taken into account while deciding MSP by CACP, which could look into.
 - ♦ **Amend acts:** There is an urgent need to undertake a review of the **Essential Commodities Act and other legal instruments covering marketing, storing and processing** of agricultural produce.
- **Women farmers:**
 - ♦ It called for the setting up of a **National Board for New Deal for Women in Agriculture** under the Union Food and Agriculture Minister.
- **MSP:**
 - ♦ MSP should be **at least 50% more than the weighted average cost of production**.
 - ♦ As such, "**The 'net take home income' of farmers should be comparable to those of civil servants,**" the report said.
- ♦ **Consider cost escalation:** Purchase by Government should be **MSP plus cost escalation since the announcement of MSP**. This will be reflected in the prevailing market price.
- ♦ **Avoid delay:** Delay in issue of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) particularly in respect of Kharif crops needs to be avoided.
- ♦ **Regional balance:** Implementation of MSP across regions needs improvement as it is highly concentrated in Punjab, Haryana, UP, and Andhra Pradesh.
- ♦ **Continuation:** Despite weaknesses, MSP may have to be continued in the foreseeable future and its implementation improved.
- **Formula to determine prices:** The swaminathan panel referred to earlier Committee on **Long Term Grain Policy, 2002 led by economist Abhijit Sen**.
 - ♦ It recommended **C2 cost of production** (i.e., all costs including imputed costs of family labour, owned capital and rental on land) in **more efficient regions** and **A2 + FL costs** (i.e., costs actually paid plus imputed value of family value labour) for relatively **high cost regions**.
 - ♦ But this recommendation **did not find mention in the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission**.
- **Innovation:**
 - ♦ **Farm Schools** should be established in the fields of innovative farmers, in order to spread their message and methods.
 - ♦ Promoting **50,000 Farm Schools** across the country will require an investment of **Rs 150 crore**, the report said.
 - ♦ **Establishing a grain bank and community food and fodder banks**, promoting insurance, and setting up a national network of advanced soil testing labs.
- **Contract farming:**
 - ♦ Report of the NCF titled From **Crisis to Confidence** recommended a **farmer centric 'Code of Conduct' for contract farming** arrangements, which should form the basis of all contract farming agreements.
 - ♦ Also encourage **development of farmer's groups/ organisations** to negotiate with the purchasers and take care of the interests of the small farmers.

- **APMC:**
 - ♦ The State APMC Acts need to be amended to provide for...encouraging the **private sector** or cooperatives to establish markets, develop marketing infrastructure and supporting service.
 - ♦ **Market fee and other charges** need to be rationalized.
- **PDS:**
 - ♦ Government should procure the staple grains needed for PDS at the **same price private traders are willing to pay to farmers.**
- **CACP:**
 - ♦ The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), should be an **autonomous statutory organization** with its primary mandate being the recommendation of remunerative prices for the principal agricultural commodities of **both dry farming and irrigated areas.**
- ♦ It set off an **electromagnetic pulse (EMP)** and the charged particles and radiation emitted was accelerated by the earth's magnetic field, distorting the ionosphere and resulting in bright aurorae.
- **The Soviet Union** also conducted high-altitude nuclear tests during the same period, which is **Test 184.**
 - ♦ The resulting EMP induced a very high current in 500 km of electric cables and eventually triggered a fire that burned down a power plant.

Why has space emerged as the new battlefield?

Source: IE

RUSSIA TESTS ANTI-SATELLITE WEAPON

- The US has confirmed that Russia is developing a space-based weapon that is a 'serious threat to national security'.

What are anti-satellite weapons?

- Anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons are designed to debilitate and/or destroy satellites that are already in orbit and operational.
- Most of these **weapons are kinetic**, i.e. they destroy satellites in orbit by rocketing into them or detonating an explosive near them, and blowing them to pieces.
- Because of the low gravity and lack of an atmosphere, the resulting debris can stay in orbit for a long time depending on their size.
- ASAT weapons violate the **Outer Space Treaty (OST)** through
 - ♦ **Article VII**, which holds parties to the treaty liable for damaging satellites belonging to other parties
 - ♦ **Article IX**, which asks parties to refrain from the "harmful contamination" of space.

Space weapons in the past

- **The U.S.** in 1962 in a high-altitude test called Starfish Prime detonated a thermonuclear bomb 400 km above ground. It remains the largest nuclear test conducted in space.

- **Military Significance of Space:** Space has immense strategic importance due to its role in enabling communication, navigation, reconnaissance, and surveillance capabilities for military operations.
- **Competing Interests:** As space becomes more accessible and economically valuable, there is a growing competition among countries for space resources, such as valuable minerals and water on celestial bodies.
- **National Security Concerns:** Countries perceive safeguarding their space assets as critical to their national security interests. As a result, they invest in deploying capabilities to protect their assets and degrade those of potential adversaries, leading to militarization of the space.
- **Technological Advances:** Advances in technology have led to the proliferation of capabilities that could be used for offensive purposes in space, such as anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons, cyber warfare tools targeting space systems, and directed energy weapons.

Outer Space Treaty (OST)

- The Treaty was opened for signature by the three depository Governments (the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) in January 1967, and it **entered into force in October 1967.**
- It provides the basic framework on international space law, including the following principles:
 - ♦ The exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all mankind;
 - ♦ Outer space shall be free for exploration and use by all States;
 - ♦ Outer space is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means;

- ♦ States shall not place nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies or station them in outer space in any other manner;
- ♦ The Moon and other celestial bodies shall be used exclusively for peaceful purposes;
- ♦ Astronauts shall be regarded as the envoys of mankind;
- ♦ States shall be responsible for national space activities whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental entities;
- ♦ States shall be liable for damage caused by their space objects; and
- ♦ States shall avoid harmful contamination of space and celestial bodies.

Mission Shakti

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in **2019** successfully neutralized a satellite in space with its anti-satellite (ASAT) missile in Mission Shakti.
- The satellite downed by the ASAT missile was **Microsat-R**, an imaging satellite in the **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** at 300 km in space.
- **Significance:** Anti-satellite weapons provide the capability to shoot down enemy satellites in orbit thereby disrupting critical communications and surveillance capabilities.
 - ♦ ASAT missiles also act as a space deterrent in dissuading adversaries from targeting the country's satellite network.

Source: TH

LAKSHADWEEP'S MARITIME POTENTIAL

- The diplomatic crisis between India and Maldives has opened the world's eyes to the maritime potential of the Lakshadweep archipelago in the Arabian Sea.

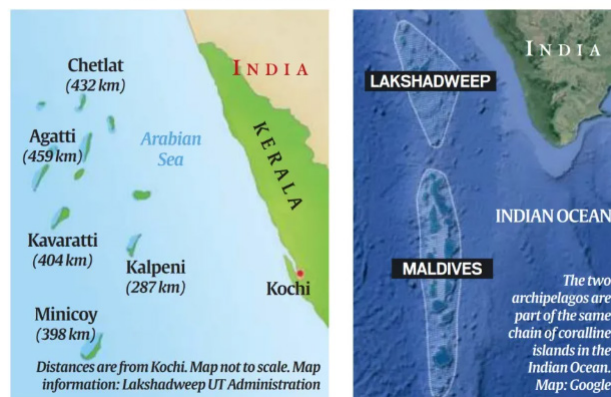
Lakshadweep Archipelago

- Lakshadweep is an archipelago of **36 islands** that are located some **400 km** to the west of Kerala.
- It is a uni-district Union Territory and comprises **12 atolls**, three reefs, five submerged banks and **10 inhabited islands**.
- It is divided into three island subgroups:
 - ♦ The **Laccadive Islands** in the middle with the **Amindivi Islands** in the north separated by the **11th parallel north** and
 - ♦ The **atoll of Minicoy** to the south separated to **Laccadive Islands** by the **Nine Degree**

Channel.

- The islands have a total land area of just 32 sq km but confer a 400,000-sq kms Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- The capital is **Kavaratti**.

THE ISLANDS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN



Strategic Importance

- Lakshadweep has assumed strategic importance in recent years with the rise of China and its efforts to increase its presence in the **Indian Ocean Region**.
- The islands can serve as an **Indian naval base** in the Arabian Sea to safeguard EEZ, check smuggling & sea piracy, monitor Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC), counter China's influence and help in joint training with friendly foreign countries like QUAD.

Lakshadweep: A logistics hub

- Lakshadweep's proximity to international shipping routes confers on it the potential to become a logistics hub.
 - ♦ **Amini, Kadamat, Bitra, Chetlat, Kiltan and Agatti** islands are closer to Mangalore.
 - ♦ **Andorth, Kavaratti and Kalpeni** islands are closer to Kozhikode, and
 - ♦ **Minicoy** is closer to Kochi in Kerala.
- Coastal Karnataka is keen to tap the proximity and historical links between Lakshadweep and Mangaluru.

Tourism Potential

- **Scenic Beauty:** The islands boast pristine white sandy beaches, crystal-clear turquoise waters, and lush greenery, making them a paradise for nature lovers and photographers.
- **Marine Biodiversity:** Lakshadweep is home to diverse marine life, including colorful coral reefs, making it an excellent destination for snorkeling, scuba diving, and underwater photography.

- **Cultural Heritage:** The islands have a rich cultural heritage influenced by Arab, Portuguese, and Indian traditions.
- **Relaxation and Wellness:** The serene environment of Lakshadweep offers an ideal setting for relaxation and wellness retreats.

Challenges

- According to the **UNDP**, Lakshadweep, just 1-2 meters above sea level on average, is losing its coral reefs and facing varieties of climate change at multiple levels.
- The Lakshadweep occupies a far smaller area — only 10 islands are inhabited — and the scope for tourism is limited.
- The islands are Eco-sensitive zones and infrastructure development with increased tourist activities can damage the pristine environment of the region.

Way Ahead

- As the islands are of ecological importance, rather than building large infrastructure on the islands, arrangements can be made to anchor cruise vessels at sea, allowing visitors to tour the island and return to the vessels.
- Hence promoting sustainable tourism, and strengthening security measures can transform this undiscovered asset into a shining beacon of prosperity and security in the Indian Ocean region.

Kochi-Lakshadweep islands submarine optical fiber connection (KLI-SOFC)

- The project is funded by **Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF)**, Department of Telecommunication.
- The dedicated submarine OFC will ensure a paradigm shift in communication infrastructure in the Lakshadweep islands, enabling faster and more reliable internet services, telemedicine, e-governance, educational initiatives, digital banking, digital currency usage, digital literacy etc.

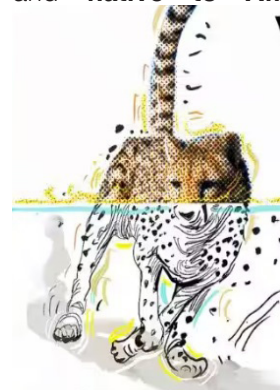
Source: TH

SURVIVAL CHANCES OF CHEETAH IN INDIA

- Recently, the Wildlife officials of Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh informed about the birth of seven cheetah cubs.

About Cheetah (*Acinonyx Jubatus*):

- It is the fastest terrestrial animal on earth, and **native to Africa and central Iran.**



Where Are Cheetahs Currently Found?

7,100

Estimated number of cheetahs left in the wild, according to wildlifeday.org

Of these,

only 12 are Asiatic cheetahs, all of them in Iran

Found primarily in:

Eastern and southern ranges of Africa, south of the Sahara Desert

Small populations in North Africa and Iran

- **The Gestation Period:** 93 days;
- **Cub Mortality:** Higher in Protected Areas (like National Parks and Wildlife Reserves); It can be as high as 90%;
- **Average Life Span (in the wild):** 10 – 12 years.
- Adult male about 8 years (*Adult mortality is one of the most significant limiting factors for the growth and survival of the wild cheetah population*).

Cheetah in India (Asiatic):

- **1st plan to reintroduce the cheetah:** First solid steps were taken in the **1970s**, during negotiations with Iran.

• African Cheetah:

- **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
- **Characteristics:** They are bigger in size as compared to Asiatic Cheetah.

• Asiatic Cheetah:

- **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered
- **Status in India:** Declared extinct in India in 1952.
- **Distribution:** They are only 40-50 and found **only in Iran.**
- **Characteristics:** Smaller and paler than the African cheetah.

- ♦ **Iran's cheetahs were Asiatic**, like India's extinct animals.
- ♦ The plan was **to exchange Asiatic lions for Asiatic cheetahs.**
- **In 2009:** Another attempt to source Iranian Cheetahs in India was made without success.
 - ♦ Iran did not permit cloning of its Cheetahs.
- **In 2020:** **South African** experts visited four potential sites: **Kuno-Palpur, Nauradehi Wildlife**

Sanctuary, Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary and Madhav National Park.

- **In 2022:** The Government of India has decided to reintroduce cheetahs, under the '**Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India**'.
- ♦ It aims to bring back the cheetah.
- ♦ As part of the project, **50 cheetahs** will be introduced in **various National Parks over five years**, and it is being done under **Project Cheetah**, the **world's first inter-continental large wild carnivore translocation project**.
- ♦ It aims to re-establish the functional role of the cheetah in representative ecosystems **within its historical range**.

Kuno Palpur National Park

- It was established in 1981 as a Wildlife Sanctuary.
- ♦ In 2018, it was given the **status of a National Park**.
- Kuno Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary is underway to become India's second home for the Asiatic lion.

Why was it selected for Cheetah?

- Amongst the 10 surveyed sites of the central Indian states, Kuno Palpur National Park has been rated the highest.
- ♦ It is because of its suitable habitat and adequate prey base.
- Kuno is probably the **only wildlife site** in the country where there has been a complete relocation of villages from inside the park.
- It offers the prospect of **housing four big cats of India** - tiger, lion, leopard and cheetah – and allowing them to coexist as in the past.

Role Played by Cheetah

- **Ecological:** Cheetahs fulfil a unique ecological role within the **carnivore hierarchy** and their restoration is expected **to enhance ecosystem health** in India.
- ♦ It helps restore India's open forests and grassland ecosystems, which have been suffering.
- **Conservation:** The Cheetah can benefit **India's broader conservation goals** by improving general protection and ecotourism in areas that have been previously neglected.
- ♦ Resources invested in these highly exploited and neglected systems ensure better management and restore their ecosystem services for the country.

- **A Flagship Species:** The cheetah serves as a flagship to save its prey-base and other endangered species of the grassland and semi-arid ecosystems.

- ♦ **India** is home to the **world's largest free-roaming populations** of livestock.

Threats to Cheetah:

- **Coexistence with Tigers and Leopards:** Threats like conflict with leopards, poaching and deaths caused while capturing cheetahs to retrieve them from outside park boundaries loom over the reintroduced species in the new habitat.
- ♦ More aggressive predators such as tigers and leopards will compete with the cheetahs.
- ♦ They may be driven to the outskirts of the park, where they could come into conflict with humans.

Impacts of Close Enclosure on Cheetah:

- According to Kuno officials, the cubs are **safe in enclosures, away from predators**.
 - But they are going to be artificially protected from **danger without protecting the genetics**.
- Housing cheetahs in small enclosures has been linked to *'stress related behaviours, medical conditions and reduced reproductive performance'*.

- **Anthropogenic Threats:** These include snaring for bush meat and retaliatory killings due to livestock depredation.
- **Captive Breeding:** There is a concern among experts that weak genetics accumulated may persist among the captive cheetahs and **eventually weaken the gene pool**, resulting in animals that need constant human intervention for survival.
- ♦ Cheetahs are known for **open forests and grassland ecosystems**.
- **Locational Challenges of Kuno-Palpur National Park:**
 - ♦ The protected area of Kuno-Palpur National Park is largely **dry, deciduous forest**.
 - ♦ The **African cheetahs** who are more **used to the savannahs** of that continent adapt well to Kuno.
 - ♦ There is a hypothesis that via the wound the African cheetah may have been **exposed to parasites** that Indian big-cats are usually resistant to.
- **Specific Prey Base:**
 - ♦ Indian cheetahs were largely dependent on blackbucks and chinkaras, sometimes on chital and rarely on nilgai.

- ◆ Few of these species are believed to have disappeared from Kuno.

Government's Efforts:

- **Increasing Prey Base:** To increase prey base inside the 500-hectare enclosure, the Kuno National Park has brought in 238 chitals or spotted deer (*Axis axis*) from Pench and Narsingharh Wildlife Sanctuaries of the state and are planning to bring in around 300 more deer.
- **Gradual Co-existence:** Over time, says the action plan by the Centre, cheetah and leopard populations will be able to coexist.
- **Tracking:** The initial batch of cheetahs and their potential offspring will be radio-collared and tracked for at least 10 years.

Source: IE

INDIA'S ECONOMIC POLICY AGENDA

- The Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission recently stressed on the reform agenda to 10% growth for the Indian Economy.

Status of India's Economy at Present

- **GDP Growth:** India's GDP growth rate declined annually from 2016-17, and fell below 3.5% in the fourth quarter of 2019-20.
 - ◆ The GDP growth rate has been declining since 2016.
 - ◆ However, the Indian economy is expected to recover with a GDP growth forecast for FY24 to be in the range of 6-6.8%.
 - ◆ The IMF has projected India's real GDP growth as 6.7% for 2023-24 and 6.5% for 2024-25.
- **Fiscal Deficit:** The interim Budget signals significant cutbacks in public expenditures, slashing effective capital expenditure by 1 lakh crore and reducing welfare and subsidy allocations.
 - ◆ The fiscal deficit, which was expanded to 9.2% of GDP in 2020-21 to deal with the pandemic-induced recession, would be brought down to 5.8% by the end of the current financial year and 5.1% by next year to reach the targeted 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26.
- **Economic Ranking:** Recent IMF data show that India is ranked 4th in world's GDP rankings in 2024, just after the USA, China and Germany.
 - ◆ India's economy boasts diversity and swift growth, fuelled by key sectors such as **information technology, services, agriculture, and manufacturing.**
- **Economic Performance:** India aims to become a **\$5 trillion economy by 2024** has been

questioned due to the lack of a coherent policy structure.

Current Policies to Boost India's Economy

- **India's Evolving and Dynamic Policy Framework:** It is designed to ease the entry of foreign direct investment, streamline the financial system, dismantle redundant procedures and add transparency to the process of **doing business.**
 - ◆ As per the **World Bank's Ease of Doing Business**, India is ranked **63 among 190 economies.**
- **Diversification:** India has implemented a range of policy initiatives in the areas of sustainable development, infrastructural improvements, banking and financial services, job creation, digital transformation, manufacturing and services industries in an effort **to build a strong base for the Indian economy.**
- **Priority:** It is keeping India on track as **one of the world's fastest growing economies** so it can become the **second largest economy in the world by 2050.**
- **Formalisation:** India aims to expand the reach of the formal economy, thereby **improving the informal sector's efficiencies** and **increasing the country's tax base.**
 - ◆ It has taken measures to **improve capacity to spend in the rural sector**, infrastructure creation, and inviting foreign investments.
- **Inclusive Growth:** India has the **twin objectives** of inclusive growth and financial empowerment as the centrepiece of its policy agenda for the country's growth.
- **Climate related Policy:** Achieving **net-zero emissions by 2070** could boost India's economy by as much as **4.7%** above the projected baseline growth in GDP terms by **2036.**

Emerging Challenges

- **Disruption caused by the pandemic:** India's potential growth may have slowed to **6% (from 7.1% YoY estimated in 2017)** due to longer-than-expected disruption caused by the pandemic, balance-sheet concerns and a modest policy response by the government.
- **Regulatory Issues:** These are related to trade policy, labour law implementation, and the long standing, very long-term issue of the land markets.
 - ◆ India's economic growth is facing potential risks **due to reform and policy barriers**, according to research by **Moody's Investors Service.**
- **Geopolitical conflicts:** There are **many ongoing crises** in the world that are impacting the global

supply chain that affects the emerging economy and market like India.

- ♦ End of **hyper globalisation** in global manufacturing, **energy transition** challenge, and advent of **Artificial Intelligence**.

Future Outlook:

- Challenges before the economy are complex and multifaceted, and it requires a **combination of policy interventions, institutional reforms, and private sector initiatives**.
- Political stability and policy consistency can pave the way for India's ascent to becoming the third-largest economy at a time of geopolitical uncertainties and risks to economic growth.

Source: IE

NEWS IN SHORT

AADHAAR AS DATE OF BIRTH PROOF

- The UIDAI, asked all agencies that use Aadhaar to authenticate identities to delete it from the list of acceptable documents for verifying a person's date of birth.

Background

- The UIDAI in a circular in December 2023, had said an Aadhaar number can be used for establishing identity of an individual, subject to authentication, and thereby, per se, **it is not a proof of date of birth**.
- Also Aadhaar cards and PDF versions of the identity document have started including a more explicit and prominent disclaimer that they are "**a proof of identity, not of citizenship or date of birth**."

What is Aadhaar?

- Aadhaar is a **12 digit** individual identification number which serves as proof of identity and proof of address for residents of India.
- Any individual, irrespective of age and gender, who is a resident in India and satisfies the verification process laid down by the UIDAI can enroll for Aadhaar.

Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)

- The UIDAI is a statutory authority established under the provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 under the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**.

Source: TH

NEARLY 50% OF PREGNANCIES IN INDIA ARE HIGH-RISK

- A study that analysed the data of nearly 24,000 pregnant women in India has found the prevalence of high-risk pregnancies to be high at 49.4%.

Key Highlights of Data

- **Methodology** : The study used the nationally representative cross-sectional household survey data of the **National Family Health Survey-5** (2019-2021).
 - ♦ The researchers used the unit-level data from the **Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) programme**.
- The proportion of multiple high risks was higher among women with no educational category (22.5%) compared with educated women.
- About **33% of pregnant women** had a single high-risk factor, while 16% had multiple high-risk factors.
 - ♦ **High-risk factors:** The study found that pregnant women from vulnerable populations such as poor women and those who had no education had the possibility of having one or more risk factors for pregnancy.
 - The **leading high-risk factors** were: short-birth spacing (the time interval between the last birth to the time of current conception being less than 18 months), adverse birth outcomes such as miscarriage, abortion, or stillbirth, and finally women whose most recent delivery was a caesarean section.
 - The risk factors that were considered for the study were maternal risks, lifestyle risks, medical risks, current health risks, and previous birth outcome risks.
- **Statewise Data:** Northeastern States of Meghalaya (67.8%), Manipur (66.7%) and Mizoram (62.5%) and the southern State of Telangana (60.3%) had the highest prevalence of high-risk factors in India, while Sikkim (33.3%), Odisha (37.3%) and Chhattisgarh (38.1%) had the lowest prevalence of high-risk pregnancies.
 - ♦ **Risk factor** arising from adolescent pregnancies was highest in Tripura (10.3%), while advanced maternal age of over 35 years risk factor was most seen in Ladakh (14.3%), short stature (height below 140 cm) was highest in Puducherry (4.8%), and BMI over 30 was seen in Goa (17.4%).
- **Suggestions**

- ◆ **Policies and programmes** and creating **public awareness** and education of women are needed to address the short interval between two successive pregnancies.

Source:TH

BUBONIC PLAGUE

- Recently, a new case of bubonic plague was detected in the USA.

About the Bubonic Plague:

- It is often referred to as the **'Black Death'**.
- It is an infectious disease caused by the **bacterium Yersinia pestis** which is usually found in small mammals and their fleas.
 - ◆ It occurs when the **bacteria get into the lymph nodes**.
- Earlier, it **occurred from 1346 to 1353**, resulting in the deaths of as many as 50 million people in Europe.

Transmission:

- Humans can contract the plague in one of three ways:
 - ◆ The bite of infected fleas.
 - ◆ Unprotected contact with infectious bodily fluids or contaminated materials.
 - ◆ The inhalation of respiratory droplets/small particles from a patient with pneumonic plague.

Symptoms:

- It can cause fever, headache, weakness, and painful, swollen lymph nodes. It usually happens from the bite of an infected flea.
- **Septicemic Plague:** It happens if the bacteria enters the bloodstream, causing abdominal pain, shock, bleeding into the skin, and blackening of appendages, most often fingers, toes, or the nose.
- **Pneumonic Plague:** This is the most dangerous form of the plague, and it happens when the bacteria enter the lungs.
 - ◆ It adds rapidly developing pneumonia to the list of symptoms.

Treatment:

- All forms of the **plague are treatable with common antibiotics**, and people who seek treatment early have a better chance of a full recovery.
 - ◆ **Sunlight** and drying can kill plague bacteria on surfaces.

Source: IE

SOMINSAI FESTIVAL

- Japan's 1,000-Year-Old 'Naked Men' Festival recently marked its historic end due to the country's ageing population crisis.

About the Sominsai Festival:

- It is a thousand-year-old tradition held in the **Iwate region of northern Japan**.
- It is held at the **secluded Kokuseki Temple**, which opened in 729.
- Participants, mostly men and boys clad only in loincloths, cleanse their bodies in a river and march around the temple's ground.
- They then engage in a symbolic skirmish over a bag of wooden talismans, passionately chanting **"jasso, joyasa" (meaning "evil, be gone")**.
- The one who secures the talismans is believed to secure good fortune for the coming year.

Source: TH

JNANPITH AWARD

Legendary lyricist and poet Gulzar and Sanskrit scholar and spiritual leader Jagadguru Swami Rambhadracharya will be honoured with the Jnanpith Award.

- This is the **second time the award** is being given for the **Sanskrit language** and for the fifth time for the Urdu language.

About Jnanpith Award

- Established in 1961, the **Jnanpith Award** is given annually for outstanding contributions to Indian literature in any of the 22 "scheduled languages" recognized in the Indian Constitution and, from 2013, in the English language .
- It is considered the highest literary honour in the country.
- The prize carries a cash award, a citation, and a bronze replica of Vagdevi (Saraswati), the goddess of learning.
- It is sponsored by the cultural organization Bharatiya Jnanpith.

Do you know ?

- **Sampoorn Singh Kalra**, popularly known as Gulzar, has penned several memorable and iconic songs in Hindi cinema.
 - ◆ He started his career as a lyricist with the film 'Kabuliwala', starring Balraj Sahni.
 - ◆ He has penned songs and scripts in numerous films, and also directed several acclaimed feature films including 'Maachis', 'Aandhi', 'Mausam', 'Khushboo', 'Parichay' and 'Koshish'.

- ♦ He has earlier received the Sahitya Akademi Award for Urdu in 2002, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 2013, the Padma Bhushan in 2004, and at least five National Film awards for his works.
- **Rambhadracharya**, is a renowned Hindu spiritual leader, educator and writer of more than 240 books and texts, including four epics.
- He is also the founder and head of Tulsi Peeth in Chitrakoot in Madhya Pradesh.

Source: TH

SPUR-WINGED LAPWING OBSERVED AT WARANGAL LAKE

- A birdwatching team from Telangana recently spotted a **spur-winged lapwing** at **Ammavaripet Lake** near **Warangal**.

Spur-winged lapwing



- **Scientific name:** *Vanellus spinosus*
- **Native:** North Africa, the Middle East and Mediterranean regions.
- **Habitat:** It is found around wetlands, but also away from water in cultivated areas and even suburbia and urban settings.
- **Features:**
 - ♦ **A wader bird:** A bird with long legs and a long neck, that lives near water and feeds on fish.
 - ♦ **Vocal:** It is very vocal, producing a piercing and repeated "sik-sik-sik..." call.
 - ♦ **Feeding habits:** It forages mainly for arthropods, but also small reptiles and amphibians.
- **IUCN Status:** Least Concern

Source: TH