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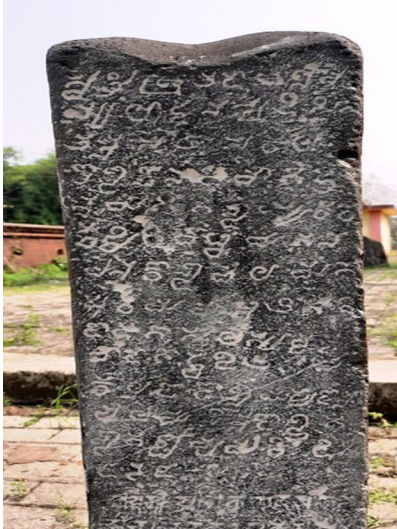
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KADAMBA INSCRIPTION

Context

- 10th century Kadamba inscription written in Kannada, Sanskrit recently discovered in the Mahadeva temple at Cacoda in southern Goa.



About the Inscription (Discovery and Study)

- It throws light on the **Kadamba period in Goa** and **opens** with an auspicious word 'Be it well' (Swasthi Shri).
- It was found lying in between the temples of Mahadev and Sateri-Betal at Cacoda in Goa.

Epigraphic Details:

- It records that when **Talara Nevayya** was administering the mandala, his son Gundayya having taken a vow to fulfil his father's desire of capturing a gopura of the port of Goa, fought and died after fulfilling his father's wish.
 - ♦ Its epigraph is **engraved in Kannada and Nagari** characters.

- It is in the literary style of the **Talangre inscription of Jayasimha I** of the same period.
- Deciphering of the Kadamba stone inscription has **highlighted the historical and socio-cultural importance**.

Historical Narrative:

- The Kadambas of Goa were the subordinates of Chalukyas of Kalyana.
 - ♦ **Chalukyan emperor Tailapa II** appointed **Kadamba Shasthadeva as Mahamandaleshwara of Goa** for his help in overthrowing the Rashtrakutas.
 - ♦ Kadamba Shasthadeva **conquered the Chandavara city in 960 A.D.**, and conquered the port of **Gopakapattana (present Goa)**.
- It is believed that the Gundayya, son of Talara Nevayya, have participated in the battle, and won the port of Gopakapattana at the cost of his life.
 - ♦ His father, **Talara Nevayya, erected a memorial stone with the inscription** in the temple of Mahadev of Cacoda to commemorate the heroic fight of his son.

Socio-cultural Importance:

- Cacora village lies in the vicinity of **navigable waterways** which connect to the Upper Ghat region through the ancient route of Diggi ghat leading to Karnataka.
- **Cacoda, now a census town** under the **Municipality of Curchorem Cacora** in Goa and it has the temple of the presiding deity Mahadev, with the affiliated deities of Betal, Dana Gaddi, Sidha, Bhumipurush, Paik, Vithal, Vagro and a shrine dedicated to Pir.

Kadambas Dynasty

- The Kadambas were an ancient Karnataka royal dynasty that controlled northern Karnataka and the Konkan region, established by Mayurasharma in about 345 AD.
- They lived alongside the Western Ganga Dynasty and created one of the first local kingdoms to rule the region autonomously.

Major sources of Kadamba history:

- Inscriptions like **Talagunda, Gundanur, Chandravalli, Halasi, and Halmidi** in Sanskrit and Kannada.
 - ♦ **The Talagunda inscription:** It is one of their earliest inscriptions that establishes **Mayurasharma as the kingdom's founder** and provides the explanation for the creation of the **Kadamba monarchy**.

Architecture:

- It includes unique features, including some **similarities to the Chalukyan and Pallava** styles and was **inspired by the Satavahana** architectural tradition.
- The most noticeable aspect of their architecture is the **Kadamba Shikara**.

- ◆ Several decades later, that type of Shikara was adopted in the Doddagaddavalli Hoysala temple and the Mahakuta temples in Hampi.
- Kadambas **contributed to the development of the later Chalukya-Hoysala style** in architecture and sculpture.
- They erected the **Madhukeshwara (Lord Shiva) temple at Banavasi**.

Religion:

- The Kadambas **adhered to Vedic Hinduism**.
- Mayurasharma, the founder of the dynasty, was a Brahmin by birth, but his heirs changed their surname to Varma to signify their Kshatriya rank.
- The **horse sacrifice (Ashwamedha)** was carried out by several Kadamba monarchs, such as Krishna Varman.
- **Talagunda** (inscriptions) begins with a prayer to **Lord Shiva**, and **Halmidi and Banavasi** (inscriptions) begin with a prayer to **Lord Vishnu**.

Language:

- The **development of Kannada as a language** of inscriptions goes to the Kadambas, the Gangas and the Badami Chalukyas.
- Inscriptions in **Sanskrit and Kannada** are the main sources of Kadamba history.
 - ◆ The **main content was in Sanskrit**, and the boundary specifications were in Kannada in Halmidi stone inscription and the Tagare copper plates.

Administrations:

- The Kadamba rulers, like the Satavahana kings, referred to themselves as **Dharma Maharajas**.
- The Prime Minister (Pradhana), the Council Secretary (Tantrapala or Sabhakarya Sachiva), the Scholarly Elders (Vidyavridhdhas), the Physician (Deshamatya), the Private secretary (Rahasyadhikritha), the Chief Secretary (Sarva Karyakarta), the Chief Justice (Dharmadhyaksha), and other officials (Bhojaka and Ayukta).
- Officers in the **army** included Jagadala, Dandanayaka, and Senapathi.
- Mandalas (Provinces) or Desha were used to partition the kingdom.
- Vishayas had been living in a Mandala (districts).

Economy:

- There have been nine Vishaya in the kingdom like Mahagramas (Taluk) and Dashagramas (Hobli) under a Vishaya .
 - ◆ Mahagrama had a greater number of villages than Dashagramas.
- Tax on one-sixth of land output was required.
- Perjunta (load tax), Vaddaravula (royal family social security tax), Bilkoda (sales tax), Kirukula (land tax), Pannaya (betel tax), and other professional charges on traders were among the levies imposed.

Society:

- The **caste system was widespread**, with the Brahmins and Kshatriyas at the top in organised Hindu society.
- The **erection of memorial stones** to honour the deceased hero was a unique feature of mediaeval Indian society (**hero stone**).

Source: **TH**

7TH NEPAL-INDIA JOINT COMMISSION MEETING

Context

- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Nepal counterpart NP Saud co-chaired the seventh meeting of the **Nepal-India Joint Commission**.

About

- Established in 1987, the **India-Nepal Joint Commission** provides a platform to review all aspects of the bilateral partnership.
- India and Nepal have signed five key agreements. They are:
 - An agreement to export 10,000 megawatts of electricity to India in the next decade.
 - Fifth tranche of Indian assistance for people affected by an earthquake in Jajarkot area of Nepal in November 2023.
 - Launch of Nepali space satellite,
 - Cooperation in renewable energy development,
 - Implementation of high-impact community development projects,
- They Inaugurated three **132-kV** cross-border transmission lines, including the second circuits of the **Raxaul-Parwanipur** line and the **Kataiya-Kusaha** line, and the **New Nautanwa-Mainhiya** line.

India-Nepal Relations

- Nepal is important for India in the context of its overall strategic interests in the region, and the leaders of the two countries have often noted the **age-old 'roti beti' relationship**, which refers to **cross-border marriages** between people of the two countries.
- Shared Border:** The country shares a border of over **1,850 km with five Indian states - Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand**. Land-locked Nepal relies heavily on India for the transportation of goods and services and access to the sea is through India.
- The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship:** Signed in 1950, it forms the **bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal**.
 - Nepalese citizens **avail facilities and opportunities on par with Indian citizens** in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty. Nearly 8 million Nepalese citizens live and work in India.

- Defense Cooperation:** India has been assisting the Nepal Army (NA) in its **modernisation by supplying equipment and providing training**.
 - Assistance during disasters, joint military exercises, adventure activities and bilateral visits are other aspects.
 - The **'Indo-Nepal Battalion-level Joint Military Exercise SURYA KIRAN'** is conducted alternately in India and in Nepal.
 - Since 1950, India and Nepal have been awarding each other's Army Chief with the **honorary rank of General** in recognition of the mutual harmonious relationship between the two armies.
 - The Gorkha regiments** of the Indian Army are raised partly by recruitment from **hill districts of Nepal**.
- Connectivity and Development Partnership:** India has been assisting Nepal in development of border infrastructure through **upgradation of 10 roads in the Terai area**; development of cross-border rail links at Jogbani-Biratnagar, Jaynagar-Bardibas; and establishment of **Integrated Check Posts** at Birgunj, Biratnagar, Bhairahawa, and Nepalgunj.
- Water Resources Cooperation:** Cooperation in water resources primarily concerning the **common rivers** is one of the most important areas of bilateral relations.
 - A three-tier bilateral mechanism established in 2008**, to discuss issues relating to cooperation in water resources, flood management, inundation and hydropower between the two countries, has been working well.
- Energy Cooperation:** India and Nepal have had a **Power Exchange Agreement since 1971** for meeting the power requirements in the border areas of the two countries, taking advantage of each other's transmission infrastructure.
 - India is currently supplying a total of about **600 MW of power to Nepal**. An Agreement on **'Electric Power Trade, Cross-border Transmission Interconnection and Grid Connectivity'** between India and Nepal was signed in 2014.
- Trade and Economic:** India remains **Nepal's largest trade partner**, with bilateral trade crossing **US\$ 7 billion in FY 2019-20**. India provides transit for almost the entire third-country trade of Nepal.

- ♦ India's export to Nepal has grown **over 8 times in the past 10 years** while exports from Nepal have almost doubled. Despite the difficulties due to the pandemic, India ensured uninterrupted flow of trade and supplies to Nepal.
- ♦ **Nepal is India's 11th largest export destination**, up from 28th position in 2014.
- ♦ In FY 2021-22, it constituted **2.34% of India's exports**. Infact exports from India constitute almost 22% of Nepal's GDP.
- **The 'New Partnership in Agriculture'**: It was announced in April 2018, which focuses on **collaborative projects in Agriculture, Education and R&D**.
- **Mahakali River bridge**: Recently, a MoU was signed between India and Nepal for the **construction of a motorable bridge** across the Mahakali River connecting Dharchula (India) with Darchula (Nepal), under Indian grant assistance.
- **Operation Maitri & post-earthquake reconstruction assistance**: In the wake of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, India was the first responder and carried out its **largest disaster relief operation abroad (Operation Maitri)**.
 - ♦ India extended US\$ 1 billion to Nepal as part of its long-term assistance for post-earthquake reconstruction in housing, education, health and culture heritage sectors.

Issues between India & Nepal

- **Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950**: On 31 July 1950, India and Nepal signed a treaty of peace and friendship in an effort to **"strengthen and develop these ties and to perpetuate peace between the two countries"**.
 - ♦ As time passed, Nepal believed the treaty was **"incompatible with national self-respect"**.
- **Madhesi Issue**: India's entrenched interests in Nepal suffered a setback in 2015, when a blockade at the borders ensued following protests by Madhesis and some other ethnic groups against marginalization of their interests in the newly-passed Nepalese Constitution.
- **Kalapani dispute**: The area is in India's control but Nepal claims the region because of **historical and cartographic reasons**. The area is the largest territorial dispute between Nepal and India consisting of at least 37,000 hectares of land in the High Himalayas.

- **Susta Border dispute**: Susta is a disputed territory between Nepal and India. It is administered by India as part of West Champaran district of Bihar.
 - ♦ Nepal claims the area a part of West Nawalparasi District under Susta rural municipality, alleging that over 14,860 hectares of Nepali land in Susta has been encroached upon by India.

Way ahead

- There are several irritants that have developed, straining this relationship, and for now there seems to be a concerted attempt by both governments to return to bonhomie, with the Indian government seeking to utilize **"religious diplomacy"** as a means to emphasize the special relationship.
- India-Nepal relations need to graduate to a **more meaningful partnership on economic and geopolitical issues**, with the Indian government continuing to retain a substantial role in partnering the Nepali regime in development projects.

Source: *IE*

SLUMS IN INDIA

In Context

- The subject of slums has found a prominent place in the debates and discussions of the Indian Parliament throughout history.

Slums in India

- **Nationwide Data**: Slums are found in **65 percent** of the Indian towns. One in every six urban Indians lives in slums.
 - ♦ Andhra Pradesh tops the list, with **36.1%** of its urban population living in slums. Other states are: Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal, Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir and Haryana.
 - ♦ Maharashtra is home to Dharavi that has close to 1 million people living in just over 2 square kilometres.
- **Lack of Facilities**: Of the **63%** of Indian slum households without any proper drainage system, out of them **44%** have open drains and close to **19%** of the households are without any drainage connection.
- **Future Projection**: In the next 10 years, 50 percent of India will reside in urban areas, up from the current 28%.

- ◆ With this increase in urban population, slums will grow exponentially.

Evolution of Government Policies of Slums

- Between the **1950s and 1960s**, the slums were a result of **partition** and the inflow of a huge population.
 - ◆ This resulted in people living in deteriorating buildings without basic civic amenities.
 - ◆ Slums were considered an epidemic that needed to be eradicated.
 - ◆ This changed with the introduction of the **Slum Areas Act of 1956**.
- Between the early **1970s and mid-1980s**, the narrative around slums shifted- from being considered a space that needed eradication, it was looked at as a necessary evil that had to be developed.
 - ◆ **Town planning** emerged as a governance tool, pushing slums to the peripheries. The narrative evolved to prioritise providing basic amenities to slums instead of destroying them.
- Between the mid-**1980s and late 1990s**.
 - ◆ From being considered liabilities, funding to cities and urban spaces including the slums, were now looked at as **assets and investments for the economic growth of the State**.
 - ◆ The **first two National Housing Policies** were introduced during this period.
 - ◆ Further, in **1996 the National Slum Development Programme** was launched bringing back targeted funding from the union government towards slum redevelopment.

Reasons for the Growth of Slums in India

- **Rural-to-Urban Migration:** One of the primary drivers of slum growth in India is the significant influx of people from rural areas to urban centers in search of better economic opportunities.
- **Lack of Affordable Housing:** Many urban areas in India face a shortage of affordable housing. This leads people to settle in informal settlements due to the absence of alternatives.
- **Inadequate Urban Planning:** Cities may fail to accommodate the needs of their expanding populations, leading to the development of informal settlements.

- **Poverty and Unemployment:** Poverty and unemployment in both urban and rural areas push people toward informal settlements.
- **Inadequate Government Policies:** Inconsistent or ineffective government policies and programs to address urban poverty and slum development can exacerbate the problem.

The Importance of Slum Development in India

- **Poverty Alleviation:** Slums are often home to some of the most economically disadvantaged populations. By providing better living conditions, access to basic services, and economic opportunities, slum development can contribute to poverty reduction and improved living standards.
 - **Social Equity and Inclusion:** It ensures that marginalized and vulnerable populations have access to decent housing, clean water, sanitation, education, and healthcare, reducing social disparities.
 - **Health and Well-being:** Access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and healthcare services can reduce the spread of diseases and enhance the overall well-being of slum residents.
 - **Education Opportunities:** This allows children in slum areas to receive quality education, breaking the cycle of poverty and providing a brighter future.
 - **Economic Empowerment:** Slum development can empower residents economically by providing access to stable housing, infrastructure, and job opportunities. This, in turn, leads to increased income and better living standards.
 - **Urban Development:** Addressing slum development is integral to the broader urban development of Indian cities.
 - **Crime Reduction:** Improved living conditions and economic opportunities can lead to reduced crime and violence in slum areas, enhancing the safety and security of residents.
 - **Sustainability:** It involves not only providing housing and infrastructure but also creating economic opportunities and social services that support lasting development.
- ## Major Challenges to Slum Development in India?
- **Overpopulation:** Slums are often densely populated, leading to overcrowding and inadequate living space. This overpopulation can strain already limited resources and infrastructure.

- **Resettlement Challenges:** Relocating slum dwellers to improve living conditions can be challenging, as it requires finding suitable land, addressing resistance from the affected communities, and ensuring that resettlement sites have adequate infrastructure.
- **Political and Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Slum development often involves navigating complex bureaucratic processes and overcoming political challenges, which can slow down progress and result in corruption.
- **Lack of Community Participation:** Successful slum development often requires the community's active participation in governance and planning.

Conclusion

- Slum development in India is crucial for poverty reduction, equity promotion, improved health, education, and sustainable urban growth.
- Grassroot development groups play a key role in these initiatives, but success demands a comprehensive approach supported by the government.
- This endeavor is vital for enhancing human well-being, particularly for impoverished slum dwellers.
- This requires collaborative efforts in creating affordable housing, providing basic services, improving infrastructure, and promoting livelihood opportunities for slum dwellers, while preserving the social and economic fabric of these communities.

Source: **TH**

FREE LEGAL AID IN INDIA

In Context

- **Supreme Court judge** Justice BR Gavai has been nominated as the **Chairman of the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (SCLSC)**.

Supreme Court Legal Services Committee

- The Supreme Court Legal Services Committee was constituted under **Section 3A** of the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, to provide free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of society, in cases falling under the top court's jurisdiction.
- Section 3A of the Act states that the **Central Authority (the National Legal Services Authority or NALSA)** shall constitute the committee.

- ♦ It consists of a **sitting SC judge**, who is the chairman, along with other members possessing the experience and qualifications prescribed by the Centre.
- ♦ Both the chairman and other members will be nominated by the CJI.

Constitutional Backing

- **Article 39A** states, "The State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities."
- **Articles 14 (right to equality)** and **22(1)** (rights to be informed of grounds for arrest) also make it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before the law and a legal system that promotes justice based on equal opportunity.

Legal Services Authorities Act

- **Establishment:** In **1987**, the Legal Services Authorities Act was enacted to give a **statutory base to legal aid programmes**.
- **Eligible Groups:** It aims to provide free and competent legal services to eligible groups, including **women, children, SC/ST and EWS categories, industrial workers, disabled persons, and others**.
- **Monitoring Body:** Under the Act, **NALSA was constituted in 1995** to monitor and evaluate the implementation of legal aid programmes and to lay down policies for making legal services available.
- **Implementation:** A nationwide network has been envisaged under the Act for providing legal aid and assistance.
 - ♦ It also disburses funds and grants to State Legal Services Authorities and NGOs for implementing legal aid schemes and programmes.
- **State Legal Services:** In every state, State Legal Services Authorities (SLSA) were established to implement NALSA's policies and directions, give free legal services to people, and conduct Lok Adalats.
 - ♦ An SLSA is headed by the **Chief Justice of the respective High Court** and includes the senior HC judge as its Executive Chairman.

- ♦ While the HC Chief Justice is the patron-in-chief of the SLSA, the **CJI is the patron-in-chief of NALSA.**
- **District Legal Services:** Similarly, District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) and Taluk Legal Services Committees were established in districts and most taluks.
 - ♦ Each DLSA is chaired by the **District Judge** of the respective district.
 - ♦ The **Taluka or Sub-Divisional Legal Services Committees** are headed by a senior civil judge.

Source: *IE*

ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Context

- The Union Health Ministry has sought data from States and UTs regarding the number of single women who have used **Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART).**

What is Assisted Reproductive Technology?

- **Assisted reproductive technologies (ART)** refer to a range of fertility treatments aimed at aiding reproduction for couples suffering from infertility or to persons who may wish to have a child through artificial methods.
- These arrangements include **in-vitro fertilization** (fertilizing an egg in the lab), **gamete donation** (sperm or egg), and **gestational surrogacy** (where the child is not biologically related to the surrogate mother).

Concerns of ART

- **Ethical Issues:** The process of selecting embryos for implantation raises ethical questions, especially when it involves the potential for genetic screening and manipulation.
- **Parental Rights:** Legal issues can arise regarding the determination of parental rights, especially in cases involving surrogacy, egg donation, or sperm donation.
- **Long-term Health Effects:** The long-term health effects of some fertility treatments and medications used in ART are not yet fully understood.
- **Access and Affordability:** Access to ART may be limited due to financial constraints, leading to concerns about socioeconomic disparities in the ability to access these technologies.

Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2021

- Provision of ART services: The Bill defines ART and the services will be provided through:
 - ♦ **ART clinics**, which offer ART related treatments and procedures, and
 - ♦ **ART banks**, which collect, screen and store gametes.
- **Registration of ART clinics and banks:** Every ART clinic and bank must be registered under the National Assisted Reproductive Technology and Surrogacy Registry.
 - ♦ A National Registry will be established under the Bill, which will act as a central database with details of all ART clinics and banks in the country.
- **Boards:** The Bill provides that the National and State Boards constituted under the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019 will also act as the National and State Boards for the regulation of ART services.
- **Rights of a child born through ART:** A child born through ART will be deemed to be a biological child of the commissioning couple and will be entitled to the rights and privileges available to a natural child of the commissioning couple.
 - ♦ A donor will not have any parental rights over the child.

What is Surrogacy?

- It is a practice where a woman gives birth to a child for an intending couple with the intention to hand it over to them after the birth.
- Currently, the Indian Government only allows altruistic surrogacy for which no monetary compensation can be provided.
- **Eligibility of the Couple:** It is only restricted to a legally wedded infertile couple who have no biological children of their own- not including a child who is mentally or physically challenged or suffers from a fatal illness- or a single or divorced woman above the age of 35.
- Surrogacy is **prohibited for commercial purposes.**

Who can be a surrogate?

- A surrogate mother has to be a **close relative of the couple**, a married woman with a child of her own, aged between 25-35 years, who has been a surrogate only once in her life.
- She must also possess a certificate of medical and psychological fitness for surrogacy.

Commercial Surrogacy

- Commercial Surrogacy is a branch of gestational surrogacy in which a **gestational carrier is paid to carry a child to maturity** in her womb and is usually hired to by higher income infertile couples.
- Commercial surrogacy is also known as 'wombs for rent', outsourced pregnancies' or 'baby farms'.
- India was a popular surrogacy destination but commercial surrogacy was **banned in 2015 due to,**
 - ♦ Commodification of the body and the child (it was available in markets at low prices for sale) where both the surrogate as well as the child were treated as commodities and were sold at very low prices.
 - ♦ Gender exploitation; Human trafficking and Degradation of the morality of women, etc.

Source: TH

KOCHI-LAKSHADWEEP ISLANDS SUBMARINE OPTICAL FIBRE CONNECTION

Context

- The Prime Minister of India inaugurated **Kochi – Lakshadweep Submarine Optical Fibre Cable** to provide 100 Gbps internet connectivity to the **Lakshadweep**.

About

Other Projects inaugurated in Lakshadweep:

- **Low Temperature Thermal Desalination Plant at Kadmat Island** with the capacity to produce 1.5 lakh litres of drinking water per day;
- **Functional Tap Connections** in all the households of Agatti and Minicoy Islands under the **Jan Jeevan Mission**;
- **Solar Power Plant (1.4 MW)** in Kavaratti with battery energy storage system.
- Headquarters of **Indian Reserve Battalion at Kavaratti**.
- A **Primary health care facility on Kalpeni Island**;
- **Five Nand Ghar model Anganwadi** on the islands of Agatti, Minicoy, Androth, Chetlat and Kalpeni.
- Distributing laptops to college students, bicycles to girl school students, Kisan Credit Cards and PMJAY Cards.

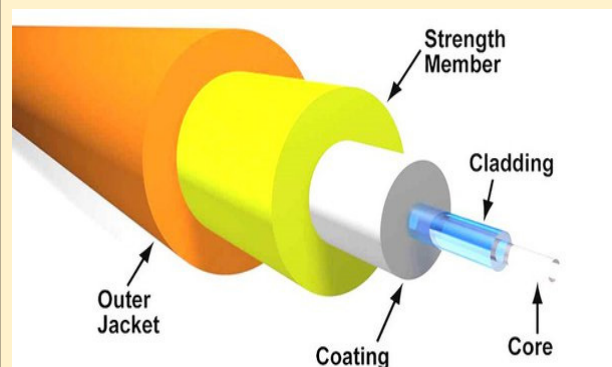
- For the first time since independence, Lakshadweep will be connected through Submarine Optical Fibre Cable.
 - ♦ **Earlier, the only means of communication with the Islands was through Satellite medium**, which had limited bandwidth capacity and was not able to meet the growing bandwidth demand.
- The project was funded through the **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)**, which is set to be **renamed as Digital Bharat Nidhi** after the **Telecommunications Act, 2023** is notified.
- Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) is the Project Executing Agency.
- **Kavaratti**, Lakshadweep's capital, will be **connected along with the islands** of Agatti, Amini, Kadmat, Chetlat, Kalpeni, Minicoy, Androth, Kiltan, Bangaram and Bitra.

Significance of KLI - SOFC

- It helps in achieving the **objective of 'Digital India' and 'National Broadband Mission'** and for rolling out various e-governance projects of Government of India in Lakshadweep Islands.
- Social infrastructure like Tourism, Education, Health etc will get a boost that further helps in improvement in standards of living of the people in Island and **accelerate overall social and economic development** in these areas.
- The potential of developing **Lakshadweep as a logistics hub** will get strength from this project,
- High speed broadband will be provided through FTTH and 5G/4G Mobile network.

Optical Fibre Cable

- It is a network cable that contains strands of glass fibres inside an insulated casing.
- They're designed for long-distance, high-performance data networking, and telecommunications.
- The optical fibre works on the **principle of Total Internal Reflection (TIR)**.



Importance

- It provides full utilisation of network capacity, and carries large amounts of data.
- It aids in providing additional bandwidth and **stronger backhaul support** (backhaul is a component of the larger transport that is responsible for carrying data across the network).

Source: TH

OPEN ACREAGE LICENSING POLICY BID ROUND-IX LAUNCHED

News

- The **Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG)** recently signed contracts for 10 blocks awarded under **Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)**.

Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)

- Launched in June 2017, it **empowers companies to carve out exploration blocks of their choice**, offering greater flexibility and potential for faster discoveries.

Core Principles of OALP

- **Bidder-driven exploration:** Companies can propose exploration blocks based on their own assessment of available data and geological potential.
- **Continuous bidding:** Bid rounds are held biannually, enabling companies to continuously submit proposals for new blocks.
- **Revenue-sharing model:** Successful bidders pay a royalty to the government based on the extracted hydrocarbon resources, replacing the earlier profit-sharing model.
- **Simplified procedures:** Streamlined approval processes and reduced paperwork aim to expedite exploration activities.

Benefits of OALP

- **Faster exploration and development:** OALP provides greater freedom and flexibility for companies, potentially leading to quicker discovery and production of oil and gas resources.
- **Increased investment:** By reducing bureaucratic hurdles and offering favorable terms, OALP aims to attract more domestic and international companies to invest in Indian hydrocarbon exploration.

- **Enhanced transparency and competition:** The open bidding process promotes competitiveness and encourages companies to focus on efficient exploration and development.
- **Improved resource utilization:** OALP allows companies to explore areas previously overlooked by state-owned enterprises, potentially leading to better utilization of India's hydrocarbon resources.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Data availability:** The quality and comprehensiveness of available geological data play a crucial role in attracting bidders and informing their choices.
- **Environmental considerations:** Balancing exploration activities with environmental protection remains a crucial challenge, requiring rigorous regulations and monitoring.
- **Community engagement:** Ensuring transparent communication and addressing concerns of local communities affected by exploration activities is vital for social sustainability.
- **Competition and resource allocation:** Managing competition amongst companies and ensuring fair allocation of promising blocks while preventing speculation requires careful regulatory oversight.

Government Initiatives in the Exploration and Production (E&P) sector:

- **The Hydrocarbon Exploration & Licensing Policy (HELP):** It was approved in March 2016 to reduce import dependency of oil and gas and accelerate E&P activities, with a **focus to shift from 'revenue' to 'production' maximization**.
- **Making available good quality data of Indian Sedimentary Basins:** Through National Seismic Programme (NSP) in Onshore areas, EEZ Survey in Offshore areas, opening of Andaman Basin, etc.
- **A Data Centre** has been opened within the campus of **University of Houston** for ease of data viewing by foreign companies.
- **Improving the 'Ease of Doing Business' in the Indian Exploration and Production (E&P) sector:** All approvals and clearances are through online systems for faster approval.
 - ♦ **A dispute resolution mechanism** to resolve various contractual matters has been put in place through a Committee of Eminent External Experts.

Way Ahead:

- Overall, OALP presents a **promising approach to accelerate India's hydrocarbon exploration and production.**
- However, its success hinges on **addressing the challenges, ensuring responsible practices, and promoting transparency and sustainable development.**

Source: **PIB**

GSAT-20**Context:**

- **NewSpace India Limited (NSIL)**, ISRO's commercial arm, will launch **GSAT-20** satellite on-board **SpaceX's Falcon-9** during the second quarter of 2024.

About the GSAT-20

- It is, weighing 4700 kg, a **High Throughput Satellite (HTS)** with **Ka-Ka-band** which is fully owned, operated and funded by **NewSpace India Limited (NSIL)**.
- It was recently renamed as **GSAT-N2**.
- It will be the **second 'demand driven' satellite launch** enabled by NSIL.

Significance:

- It is a **high-capacity communication satellite** that is meant to offer **broadband services**, including **In-flight and Maritime Connectivity (IFMC)** services.
- It offers **Pan-India coverage** including Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands, along with an **HTS capacity of nearly 48 Gbps** and has been specifically designed to meet the demanding service needs of remote and unconnected regions.

Why Falcon 9 of SpaceX?

- GSAT-20 weighs about 4,700 kg, much heavier than launch capacity of ISRO's most powerful rocket, LVM-3.
- For its heavier satellites, weighing more than 4,000 kg, India had been depending on **Arianespace's heavy launch vehicle Ariane-5**.
 - ♦ However, it was retired and its successor **Ariane-6 is yet to make its debut.**

- Typically, **communication satellites** are launched into space at an orbit that is 170 km x 36,000 km (also known as **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit or GTO**).
- India's GSLV and LVM3 rockets are designed and reliably proven to deliver payloads into such a highly elliptical (egg-shaped) orbit.
 - ♦ GSLV can deliver around 2250 kg to GTO
 - ♦ LVM3 can deliver 4000 kg to GTO.
- However, **GSAT-20 is beyond the payload capacity of India's operational rockets.**

SpaceX Falcon 9:

- It is a **reusable, two-stage rocket** for reliable and safe transport of people and payloads into Earth orbit and beyond.
 - ♦ It can carry over **8,300 kg into GTO**.
- Falcon 9 is the **world's first orbital class reusable rocket**.
 - ♦ The reusable nature of the rocket ensures that a significant portion of launch cost is reduced, compared to expendable rockets.

Source: **TH**

NEWS IN SHORT**PRERANA PROGRAM****In News**

- The Ministry of Education has launched the **'Prerana' program**.

About PRERANA Program

- It is a **week-long residential** program for selected students of class **IX to XII**.
- It is an **experiential and inspirational learning program** for students with the best-in-class technology where heritage meets innovation.
- **Features** : A batch of 20 selected students (10 boys and 10 girls) will attend the program every week from various parts of the country.
 - ♦ It will run from a **Vernacular School**, established in **1888**, in one of the oldest living cities of India, Vadnagar, district Mehsana, Gujarat.
 - ♦ It will feature yoga, mindfulness, and meditation sessions, followed by experiential learning, thematic sessions, and hands-on interesting learning activities.

- The **themes**:
 - ♦ Swabhiman and Vinay, Shaurya and Sahas, Parishram and Samarpan, Karuna and Sewa, Vividhta and Ekta, Satyanishtha and Shuchita, Navachar and Jigyasa, Shraddha and Vishwas, Swatantrata and Kartavya
- **Purpose and objectives**: It is aiming to offer a meaningful, unique, and inspiring experience to all participants, thereby empowering them with leadership qualities.
 - ♦ It will inspire the **youth and foster respect for Bharat's** unity in diversity, embodying the spirit of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"
 - ♦ It will contribute by making the youth of today, a flame holder for Viksit Bharat.

Source: **PIB**

NRITYA KALANIDHI AWARD

In Context

- Classical dancer and choreographer **Vasanthalakshmi Narasimhachari** was presented with the 'Nritya Kalanidhi' award at the **17th Dance Festival of The Music Academy**.

About

- Vasanthalakshmi Narasimhachari excels both in **Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi**.
- **Nritya Kalanidhi Award** is presented in the field of **dance every year by the Madras Music Academy**.

About Madras Music Academy

- The Music Academy, Madras is a landmark institution in the history of the fine arts.
- It emerged as an offshoot of the All India Congress Session held in Madras in **December 1927**.
- It was conceived to be the institution that would set the **standard for Carnatic music**.
- One of the most notable events organized by the Music Academy is its **annual music and dance festival**.
- It also confers the various awards such as the Sangita Kalanidhi, Nritya Kalanidhi, Sangita Kala Acharya, TTK, and Musicologist awards for the year.

Source: **TH**

UN STATISTICAL COMMISSION

News

- India started its four-year term as a member of the **United Nations Statistical Commission**.

About

- During this tenure, **India, along with 24 other members**, will play an essential role in deciding the "**role in setting of statistical standards and the development of concepts and methods**."

About the UN Statistical Commission:

- **Established in**: 1946.
 - ♦ It is the **highest body of the global statistical system** bringing together the **Chief Statisticians** from member states from around the world.
- **Mandate**: It is the highest decision making body for international statistical activities, **responsible for setting of statistical standards and the development of concepts and methods**, including their implementation at the national and international level.
- **Role**: The Statistical Commission oversees the work of the **United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)**, and is a **Functional Commission of the UN Economic and Social Council**.
- **Membership**: The Commission consists of **24 member countries** of the United Nations elected by the **United Nations Economic and Social Council** on the basis of an **equitable geographical distribution**.
 - ♦ **The term of office** of members is **four years**.
- **Past Indian Leadership at UNSC**: Indian representative **Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis** chaired the commission during its eighth and ninth sessions in 1954 and 1956, while **V.R. Rao** took up the chairmanship in 1976.

Significance

- India's membership is seen as **important as a global youth leader**.
- It comes at a time when international bodies are trying to create a **regular database of parameters under the Sustainable Development Goals**.
- According to experts, the most crucial business India will participate in is the **finalization and implementation of the 2025 System of National Accounts (SNA)**.
- The current estimates of national income are based on the **2008 SNA, with 2011-12 as the base year**.

Source: **ET**