

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE OF DENOTIFIED, NOMADIC, AND SEMI-NOMADIC TRIBES

Context

- The **Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DWBDNC)** is making renewed efforts to implement the recommendations of the **Idate Commission** to address the **challenges** faced by these communities and improve their **socio-economic conditions**.

Nomadic, Semi Nomadic, and Denotified Tribes (NTs, SNTs, and DNTs)

- Nomadic communities:** Communities that move frequently instead of settling in one place. They are often engaged in traditional occupations like herding, trading, or crafts.
- Semi-nomadic Tribes:** Partially nomadic and partially settled, migrating seasonally but also establishing temporary settlements.
- Denotified tribes (DNTs):** Formerly classified as “**criminal tribes**” under the **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871** during British rule. The Act was repealed in 1952, and these communities were “**de-notified**.”
 - While most DNTs are spread across the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories, **some DNTs are not covered in any of the SC, ST or OBC categories**.
- Status: The Idate Commission** had concluded there were a total of 1,526 DNT, NT, and SNT communities across the country, of which **269 were not yet categorised as either SC, ST, or OBC**.
 - There are a total of **425 Denotified Tribes, 810 Nomadic Tribes and 27 Semi Nomadic Tribes in India**.
- Of DNT communities, **Lambadas (STs)** are the most vocal and visible, followed by Vadderas (BCs) in government sector and political spheres.

Challenges faced by NTs, SNTs, and DNTs

- Lack of Recognition and Documentation:** Denotified communities are lacking citizenship documents, which makes their identity invisible and causes hindrances in obtaining government benefits, constitutional, and citizenship rights.
- Limited Political Representation:** Inadequate representation of these communities makes it challenging to voice their concerns and advocate for their rights.

- Social Stigma and Discrimination:** NTs, SNTs, and DNTs often face discrimination and social stigma, both due to their historical denotified status and their distinct way of life.
- Economic Marginalization:** Lack of access to resources, markets, and employment opportunities results in economic marginalization of these communities.
- Educational Deprivation:** Educational opportunities for these tribes are limited, leading to high illiteracy rates.

Recommendations of the Idate Commission

- In **2014**, a National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Tribes was constituted under the Chairmanship of **Bhiku Ramji Idate** for a period of three years.
- The commission has given the following recommendations;
 - There is a need to identify challenges faced by the NTs, SNTs, and DNTs owing to the stigma imposed by the enactment of the **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871**.
 - It also suggested the non-inclusion of DNTs/NTs/SNTs under the SC/ST/OBC and formulation of specific policies for the former, among many others.
 - Setting up a permanent commission** for Nomadic, Semi Nomadic, and Denotified Tribes (NTs, SNTs, and DNTs) in India.
 - It stressed on taking measures to discern hurdles endured by the communities in availing basic facilities such as education, employment, health care, and legal documents, among others.

Steps taken by Government

- Development and Welfare Board for DNTs, SNTs, and NTs (DWBDNC):** Constituted in 2019 to address welfare concerns.
- NITI Aayog Identification Efforts:** A committee was established to finalize the identification of these communities.
- Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED):** Launched in 2022 with a budget of 200 crore over five years (2021-26).
 - The four components of the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs are:
 - Coaching for competitive exams.
 - Health insurance.
 - Community-level livelihood initiatives.
 - Financial assistance for housing construction.

Way Ahead

- **The colonial mindset** about the Denotified Tribes having “criminal tendencies” needs to change to ensure their human rights are not violated.
- **Proper documentation** of their identities needs to be speeded up so that they get the benefits of welfare schemes and the basic needs are provided to them.
- **The NHRC** has suggested that there is a need to ensure representation of Denotified tribes in parliament, government institutions and higher education to mitigate the challenges faced by them.

Source: TH

SHOULD VOTER IDS BE LINKED WITH AADHAAR?

Context

- The debate over **linking Voter IDs with Aadhaar** has been a contentious issue in India, with arguments both for and against the move.

Background

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** launched the **National Electoral Rolls Purification and Authentication Program (NERPAP)** in 2015 to address issues like duplicate entries in electoral rolls.
 - ♦ This initiative aimed to link **Voter IDs (EPIC) with Aadhaar numbers** for authentication. However, the Supreme Court’s interim order in 2015 restricted the **mandatory use of Aadhaar to welfare schemes and PAN linking, halting NERPAP.**
- In 2021, the **Representation of the People Act, 1950**, was amended to allow voluntary linking of Voter IDs with Aadhaar to enhance electoral roll accuracy and eliminate duplicate entries.

Rationale Behind Linking Voter IDs with Aadhaar

- **Elimination of Duplicate and Fraudulent Entries:** By linking with Aadhaar, which is based on biometric authentication, the duplication of entries across constituencies can be minimized.
 - ♦ The **Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021**, allows electoral officers to request Aadhaar numbers for identity verification.
- **Improved Electoral Rolls:** Regular Aadhaar-based verification ensures accurate, updated electoral rolls.
- **Administrative Efficiency:** With over **99% of adults possessing Aadhaar cards**, utilizing this database can streamline voter verification

processes, making them quicker and more cost-effective.

- **Facilitating Voter Mobility:** Aadhaar linkage can help voters who move to different states or regions by simplifying the process of updating their voter registration details.
- **Inclusion and Accessibility:** Linking Aadhaar with Voter ID can pave the way for **future innovations like remote voting, enabling migrant workers** and those living away from their constituencies to exercise their voting rights.

Arguments Against Linking Voter IDs with Aadhaar

- **Privacy and Data Security Concerns:** Linking Aadhaar with Voter IDs could lead to the misuse of personal data, especially in the absence of a robust data protection law, making it vulnerable to breaches, profiling, or surveillance.
- **Data Accuracy Issues:** Errors in the Aadhaar database could lead to incorrect voter exclusions or inclusions, undermining electoral integrity.
- **Risk of Disenfranchisement:** Past experiences, such as the 2015 linkage exercise in **Andhra Pradesh and Telangana**, resulted in the disenfranchisement (**loss of voting rights**) of **around 30 lakh voters.**
 - ♦ Errors in biometric authentication, with reported failure rates up to 12%, further exacerbate this risk.
 - ♦ Such exclusions in the electoral context would violate the Right to vote.
- **Legal and Constitutional Questions:** The **Supreme Court’s 2018 judgment on Aadhaar** limited its mandatory usage to welfare schemes, emphasizing that it cannot be imposed universally.
 - ♦ Linking it with Voter ID could face legal challenges under this precedent.
- **Electoral Manipulation:** Critics worry about the centralization of sensitive data, which could theoretically be exploited for political gains or voter profiling.
- **Citizenship Verification Issues:** Aadhaar serves as proof of residence, not citizenship. Relying on it for voter verification may not effectively prevent non-citizens from being listed on electoral rolls.

Current Status in India

- As of now, the linking of Voter IDs with **Aadhaar remains voluntary.**
- The ECI has clarified that **no voter will be denied registration** or have their name deleted from the electoral roll due to the inability to furnish an Aadhaar number.

- Alternative identification documents can be used if Aadhaar is unavailable.

Global Perspectives

- Countries like the **United States and the United Kingdom** use unique identifiers, but none employ a system as extensive and biometric-based as Aadhaar for voter authentication.
- Instead, most focus on ensuring inclusivity and avoiding disenfranchisement.

Way Forward

- **Robust Legal Safeguards:** Enactment of a comprehensive data protection law that ensures privacy and safeguards against misuse is essential before implementing this linkage.
- **Voluntary Opt-in Mechanism:** The process should remain voluntary and not impede voters' rights, ensuring that those without Aadhaar are not disenfranchised.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Educating voters about the process and benefits while addressing privacy concerns is critical to garnering trust.
- **Independent Auditing Mechanisms:** Regular audits and oversight by independent bodies can ensure the system's accountability and minimize risks of manipulation or data breaches.

Conclusion

- The linking of Voter IDs with Aadhaar offers potential benefits like enhanced electoral roll accuracy, reduced fraud, and administrative efficiency. However, significant concerns related to privacy, data security, and voter disenfranchisement must be addressed.
- A balanced approach—focusing on voluntary participation, robust safeguards, and public awareness—can help ensure that this initiative strengthens democracy without compromising citizens' rights.

Source: TH

DATA LOCALIZATION IN INDIA

Context

- The government released the **Draft of Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025** for public consultations, which has regulations pertaining to **Data Localisation**.

What is Data Localisation?

- It refers to the practice of **storing and processing data within the borders of a specific country** or geographic region, in compliance with that **region's laws and regulations**.

- It involves **restrictions on transferring data across international borders**.

Background

- In 2017, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) established the **Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee** to develop a data protection framework for India.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill was passed in 2023.
 - ◆ Once notified, the Rules will enable the effective implementation of the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act)**.

Highlights of the Rules under the Act in line with the Data Localisation

- **Data Fiduciaries:** All major tech companies including Meta, Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon are expected to be classified as significant **data fiduciaries**.
- **Transparency:** Data Fiduciaries must provide clear and accessible information about how personal data is processed, enabling informed consent.
- **Restriction on flow of Data:** The Union Government will specify the kind of personal data which can be processed by "significant data fiduciaries"
 - ◆ It is subject to the restriction that such personal data is not transferred outside the territory of India.
- **Data Breach:** In the event of a data breach, data fiduciaries will have to intimate impacted individuals without delay, including the measures implemented to mitigate risk.
 - ◆ The penalty for not being able to take enough safeguards for preventing a data breach could go as high as Rs 250 crore.

Need for Data Localisation

- **India's Growing Digital Economy:** India's digital economy is projected to reach \$1 trillion by 2025, making it one of the world's largest data generators.
 - ◆ With over 800 million internet users and growing, the volume of personal data being generated, processed, and stored is astronomical.
 - ◆ This has attracted global technology giants, but it has also raised questions about data sovereignty and national security.

- **National Security:** When critical personal data of Indian citizens is stored in foreign jurisdictions, it becomes subject to foreign laws and potentially foreign surveillance, creating vulnerabilities in India's national security framework.
- **Increasing Cyber Threats:** In an age where **data breaches and cyber warfare are real threats**, having critical data within national borders ensures better incident response and more control over security measures.
- **Economic Interests:** It effectively creates a robust domestic data centre industry. This not only generates employment and technological expertise but also reduces dependency on foreign infrastructure.
- **Improved Data Management:** By keeping data within the country, it can be more easily monitored and audited to prevent misuse or breaches.
- **Access to Law Enforcement Agencies:** It also enables **faster access to data for law enforcement** agencies when investigating cyber crimes or national security threats.

Challenges with Data Localisation

- **Infrastructural Hurdles:** India may face a shortage of adequate infrastructure to support the vast amounts of data generated across industries.
 - ♦ Building and maintaining local data centers can be expensive for businesses, especially smaller ones.
- **Global Business Impact:** There are concerns that strict localisation requirements could increase operational costs for businesses, potentially hampering innovation and foreign investment.
- **Compliance Burden:** Businesses may face legal and regulatory complexity in adhering to multiple localization laws, especially when dealing with cross-border data transfers.

Conclusion

- India's approach to data protection and localisation reflects both its **sovereign aspirations** and the practical challenges of managing its vast digital footprint.
- In an interconnected world where data flows know no borders, India's approach to data protection and localisation could **serve as a model for other developing nations** seeking to protect their digital sovereignty while fostering innovation and growth.

Source: TH

STRESS IN MICROFINANCE SECTOR DUE TO RISE IN DELINQUENCIES

Context

- India's microfinance sector is witnessing a **rise in delinquencies**, even as the overall banking sector records a **12-year low in non-performing assets (NPAs)**.

What is Microfinance?

- Microfinance refers to the **provision of small loans and financial services** to low-income groups who lack access to traditional banking channels.
- **Microfinance institutions (MFIs)** play a pivotal role in **financial inclusion** by offering credit to underserved populations, primarily for entrepreneurial activities and income generation. Types of MFIs are;
 - ♦ **Non-Banking Financial Companies – Microfinance Institutions (NBFC-MFIs).**
 - ♦ **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** It operates as non-profit organizations.
 - ♦ **Cooperatives:** They are Member-owned institutions providing microfinance services.
 - ♦ **Commercial Banks and Small Finance Banks (SFBs):** Provide microfinance as part of their priority sector lending.

Current Scenerio

- **Rising Delinquencies:**
 - ♦ Microfinance loans to low-income groups have shown a sharp increase in Portfolio at Risk (PAR) (overdue loans of 31-180 days).
 - ♦ **Geographic Impact:** Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha account for 62% of new late payments.
 - ♦ Delinquencies are increasing across all loan categories, with Small Finance Banks (SFBs) being most affected.
- **Market Share and Growth:**
 - ♦ NBFCs and banks together hold 71.3% of the total microloan portfolio.
 - ♦ Despite a 7.6% year-on-year growth in the loan book and an 8.9% rise in the live customer base, there was a quarterly decline of 4.3% in the loan book and 1.1% in the customer base.



Reasons for Rising Delinquencies

- **Borrower Overleveraging:** Increased borrowing from both MFI and non-MFI sources has resulted in excessive debt burdens among borrowers.
- **Instances of Frauds:** Cases of misrepresentation and fraudulent practices have led to heightened operational risks.
- **Economic Distress:** External economic shocks and income uncertainties have impacted repayment capacities.
- **Operational Challenges:** High staff attrition and lack of proper borrower assessment mechanisms.

Impact of Rising Delinquencies

- **Financial Strain on MFIs:** Increased credit costs reduce profitability for MFIs, affecting their financial stability.
- **Reduced Lending Capacity:** Higher NPAs limit the ability to extend fresh credit to borrowers, hampering financial inclusion.
- **Borrower Distress:** Overleveraged borrowers face economic hardships and risk exclusion from financial systems.
- **Sector-Wide Confidence Issues:** Rising defaults can diminish investor and lender confidence in the microfinance ecosystem.

Way Ahead

- **Strengthening Credit Assessment:** Implementing better risk profiling and borrower assessment mechanisms.
- **Financial Literacy Initiatives:** Enhancing borrower awareness regarding credit management.
- **Stricter Regulatory Oversight:** Strengthening supervision to prevent fraud and malpractices.
- **Operational Strengthening:** Reducing staff attrition through better training and incentives.
- **Debt Consolidation Measures:** Offering structured repayment plans for overleveraged borrowers.

Concluding remarks

- To ensure the long-term health of the microfinance sector, a balanced approach involving stronger credit discipline, financial education, and regulatory vigilance is essential.
- Addressing structural vulnerabilities and promoting responsible lending practices will be crucial for sustaining financial inclusion in India.

Sources: IE

INDIA'S NEED FOR AUTHENTIC AND IMPACTFUL RESEARCH

In Context

- Recently, the Vice President emphasized the **need for authentic and practical research** that can effect tangible changes in society.
 - ♦ For India to emerge as a global leader and achieve self-reliance, research and development (R&D) must be prioritized across all sectors.

Why India Needs More Authentic and Impactful Research?

- **Low Patent Contribution:** India spends only 0.65% of GDP on R&D, far below developed nations like the US (2.8%) or South Korea (4.5%).
- **Boosting Economic Growth:** Research-driven industries can add billions to the economy.
- **Reducing Import Dependency:** India spends \$1 billion annually on semiconductor imports. Authentic research can develop indigenous technologies, reducing dependency on foreign suppliers.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliance):** Research in core technologies like AI, defense, and renewable energy is critical for achieving self-reliance and strengthening national security.
- **Global Competitiveness:** India ranks 40th in the Global Innovation Index (2023). Focused research can improve this ranking and establish India as a global innovation leader.
- **Addressing Domestic Challenges:** India faces 2.4% of the global land area but 16% of the world's population, leading to challenges in resource management.
 - ♦ Research can provide solutions for agriculture, clean water, and urban planning.

Challenges Hindering Research in India

- **Inadequate Funding:** India's R&D investment is far below the global average, limiting the scope of ambitious research projects.
- **Brain Drain:** Talented researchers often move abroad due to better funding, infrastructure, and opportunities.
- **Weak Industry-Academia Collaboration:** A lack of coordination between academia and industries prevents the commercialization of research outputs.
- **Overemphasis on Theoretical Research:** Much of the research in India remains academic, with limited practical application or societal impact.

- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Lengthy approval processes and lack of autonomy in research institutions hinder innovation.

Initiatives Taken to Boost Research in India

- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** It encourages innovation through startups, incubators, and mentorship programs.
- **National Research Foundation (NRF):** This was established to strengthen research infrastructure and promote collaborative research.
- **PLI Schemes (Production Linked Incentive):** Promotes research and manufacturing in key sectors like electronics, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals.
- **Institutes of Eminence (IoE):** Designates select universities as centers for high-impact research.
- **IMPRINT and SPARC Programs:** IMPRINT focuses on addressing national challenges through research, while SPARC promotes joint research between Indian and global institutions.
- **DRDO Young Scientists Labs:** Focused on cutting-edge research in defense technologies, involving young researchers.

Way Forward

- **Increase R&D Funding:** Allocate at least 2% of GDP to R&D to match global standards.
- **Strengthen Industry-Academia Collaboration:** Establish innovation hubs that connect universities with industries for applied research.
- **Retain Talent:** Offer competitive salaries, grants, and infrastructure to prevent brain drain and attract global talent.
- **Focus on Key Areas:** Prioritize research in AI, renewable energy, biotechnology, and defense technologies.
- **Simplify Bureaucracy:** Streamline funding and approval processes to encourage high-impact research.

Source: ET

ISRO ATTEMPTED 'DOCKING' SATELLITES IN SPACE

In News

- ISRO is demonstrating its first space docking (SpaDeX) mission, aiming to bring two small satellites together and dock them in space.

SpaDeX Mission

- It is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission focused on in-space docking.
 - ♦ It uses two small spacecraft launched by the PSLV rocket.

- The primary goal is to develop the technology needed for the docking of two small spacecraft — SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target) — in a low-Earth orbit.
- It aims to demonstrate rendezvous, docking, and undocking technologies in space.
 - ♦ The mission will employ advanced sensors like Laser Range Finder, Rendezvous Sensor, and Proximity and Docking Sensor for precise measurements, and a new satellite navigation-based processor for determining relative position and velocity.

About Docking

- Docking is the process of bringing two spacecraft together in orbit and joining them, necessary for missions involving large spacecraft or space stations.
- It is crucial for setting up space stations, sending crew and supplies, and for future space station and lunar missions.

Docking in History

- **In 1966,** USA's Gemini VIII, with astronaut Neil Armstrong, was the first to dock with an Agena target vehicle.
- **In 1967,** Soviet Union's uncrewed Kosmos 186 and 188 demonstrated automated docking.
- **In 2011,** China's Shenzhou 8 docked with Tiangong 1 space laboratory, followed by the first crewed docking in 2012.

Importance for India

- India is working on technologies for a space station by 2035 and lunar missions by 2040, requiring docking capabilities.
- The SpaDeX mission supports India's space ambitions, including the **Moon mission**, sample return from the **Moon**, and the building and operation of the **Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS)**.
 - ♦ The Chandrayaan-4 mission will use docking for transporting samples from the moon, involving multiple modules being launched separately and docked in orbit.
- The mission aims to position India as the fourth country after **the US, Russia, and China** in the world with the capability of in-space docking technology.

Emerging Challenges

- The docking process involves precise maneuvers and stringent sensor calibrations.

- Small deviations in speed, alignment, or timing can lead to failure.
- ISRO has postponed the docking attempt twice to refine these calibrations and algorithms.

Future Vision:

- Docking is essential for ferrying supplies to manned space stations and it allows refueling of space vehicles.
 - ♦ It is also essential for missions that require multiple rocket launches to achieve common objectives.
- The docking capability is a step towards fully autonomous space missions, where future spacecraft may dock without satellite-based navigation data.

Source: IE

SMALL LANGUAGE MODELS

In News

- A former OpenAI chief scientist recently suggested that progress in Large Language Models (LLMs) may be slowing down as scaling approaches its limits.

Small Language Models (SLMs)

- SLMs are AI models designed for natural language processing (NLP) tasks but with significantly fewer parameters compared to LLMs. While LLMs like GPT-3 (175 billion parameters) and GPT-4 (1.7 trillion parameters) are built for general intelligence, SLMs focus on more specific applications.
- Examples of Smaller Models:
 - ♦ Google: Gemini Ultra
 - ♦ OpenAI: GPT-4o Mini
 - ♦ Meta: Llama 3
 - ♦ Anthropic: Claude 3

Reasons for the Rise of SLMs

- **Diminishing Returns in LLMs:** As LLMs scale, the performance gains decrease, leading to diminishing returns despite higher resource requirements.
- **Specialized Needs:** SLMs cater to specific tasks and are more cost-efficient, addressing resource and scalability issues.

Advantages of SLMs

- **Compact and Efficient:** Require less memory and computational power, making them suitable for edge devices, mobile applications, and offline AI.

- **Cost-Effective:** Cheaper to train and deploy compared to LLMs, enabling accessibility in resource-constrained environments.
- **Targeted Solutions:** Provide specialized outputs, making them ideal for applications in healthcare, education, and agriculture.

Limitations of SLMs

- **Reduced Cognitive Capacity:** Fewer parameters mean limited capabilities in complex tasks like coding or logical problem-solving, where LLMs excel.
- **Specific Applications:** SLMs are designed for narrow tasks, lacking the general intelligence and versatility of LLMs.
- **Performance Ceiling:** SLMs may struggle to match the depth and breadth of knowledge that LLMs offer.

SLMs in India

- India's unique needs and resource constraints make SLMs particularly relevant for localized applications:
 - ♦ **Addressing Resource Constraints:** SLMs are cost-efficient and ideal for sectors like healthcare, agriculture, and education where resources are limited.
 - ♦ **Preserving Language Diversity:** SLMs can help preserve regional languages and cultural diversity through tailored language models.
 - ♦ **Localized Models:** Initiatives like Visvam AI (IIIT Hyderabad) and Sarvam AI aim to develop specialized, localized models to address India's specific challenges.

Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

HARVEST FESTIVALS ACROSS INDIA

In Context

- Recently, various regions of India have witnessed harvest festivals which reflect the deep and harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

About Harvest Festivals of India

- **Lohri:** Marks the end of the winter solstice and celebrates the rabi crop harvest. Celebrated in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir by Hindus and Sikhs.

- **Makar Sankranti:** Marks the sun's northward journey (Uttarayan) and the end of winter. Celebrated as a harvest festival across India.
 - ♦ Known as **Poush Sankranti (Bengal)**, **Sukarat (Central India)**, **Makara Sankranti (South and West India)**.
- **Magh Bihu (Assam):** Marks the end of the harvest season and the transition to spring.
- **Pongal (Tamil Nadu):** A four-day festival dedicated to the Sun God, marking Uttarayan and the harvest season.
 - ♦ Includes cleaning (Bhogi), worship of the Sun (Surya Pongal), honoring cows (Maattu Pongal), and social visits (Kanum Pongal).

Source: PIB

GANGASAGAR MELA

Syllabus: GS1/ Culture

Context

- The organisers of the Gangasagar Mela have announced several new initiatives, including a certificate for pilgrims participating in the annual pilgrimage.

About

- The **Gangasagar Mela**, also known as the **Gangasagar Yatra**, is an annual Hindu religious festival held on **Sagar Island, West Bengal**, at the confluence of the Ganges River with the Bay of Bengal.
 - ♦ **Rituals** include the **Sacred bath** and **Deepdan** (offering of lamps).
- It is celebrated during **Makar Sankranti**, it is the **second-largest** religious gathering in India after the **Kumbh Mela**.
 - ♦ **Makar Sankranti** marks the Sun's transition into Capricorn (Makara Rashi) and is considered highly auspicious in Hinduism.
- The pilgrimage site has ancient roots, being mentioned in the **Mahabharata's Vana Parva (1500–2000 BC)**.
- The mela is closely associated with the **Kapilmuni Ashram**, where devotees pay homage to **Sage Kapila**.

Source: TH

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Context

- On the occasion of **National Youth Day**, commemorating the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the Prime Minister participated in

the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025.

About Swami Vivekananda

- Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) was an Indian **Hindu monk, spiritual leader, and philosopher**.
- He was deeply influenced by his spiritual teacher, **Ramakrishna Paramahansa**.
- **Major Literary Work:**
 - ♦ **Raja Yoga (1896):** It focuses on meditation, concentration, and mental discipline as paths to self-realization.
 - ♦ **Jnana Yoga (1899):** Emphasizing self-inquiry and the realization of one's true nature to attain liberation.
 - ♦ **Karma Yoga (1896):** It discusses the philosophy of selfless action, stressing the importance of performing duties without attachment to the results.
- **Role in Spirituality and Philosophy:**
 - ♦ He was a proponent of **Vedanta**, a school of philosophy derived from the **Vedas**, and emphasized the idea of universal brotherhood and self-realization.
 - ♦ His famous speech at the **Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893**, where he began with the greeting "Sisters and Brothers of America," is still widely remembered for its message of **religious tolerance, unity, and peace**.
 - ♦ He founded the **Ramakrishna Mission in 1897**, an organization dedicated to social service, education, and the spread of Vedantic philosophy.
- **Legacy:**
 - ♦ He played a key role in the introduction of Indian **philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world**.
 - ♦ **January 12**, his birth anniversary, is celebrated as **National Youth Day** in India to honor his vision for youth empowerment and national progress.

Source: PIB

DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI

Context

- January 11 marks the **death anniversary of Lal Bahadur Shastri**.

About Lal Bahadur Shastri

- **National Movement:** He joined the **Indian National Congress** and participated in various **civil disobedience movements led by Mahatma Gandhi**.
 - ♦ His childhood name was **Lal Bahadur Shrivastava**. However, being against the prevailing caste system, he decided to drop his surname.
- **The title 'Shastri'** was given after he completed his graduation at Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi in 1925.
 - ♦ The title **'Shastri'** refers to a 'scholar' or a person, adept in the holy scriptures.
- He became the **second Prime Minister of India in 1964**.
- **Agricultural Reforms:** To boost India's food production, he promoted the Green Revolution in India in 1965, which led to an increase in food grain production, especially in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.
 - ♦ His slogan **'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan'** during the **1965 war** boosted the morale of the soldiers as well as farmers amid food scarcity.
- **Tashkent Declaration** for fostering long-term peace between the neighbours was signed on January 10, 1966, between Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistan's General Ayub Khan, brokered by the Soviet Union.
- **Legacy:**
 - ♦ He was posthumously awarded the **Bharat Ratna in 1966**.
 - ♦ Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) for Civil Servants is named after him.

Source: IE

STATE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION (SPSC)

In News

- Recently, the Vice President addressed the 25th National Conference of Chairpersons of State Public Service Commissions (SPSC).

About State Public Service Commission

- **Role and Function:** Conducts examinations for appointments to state services.
 - ♦ Advises on recruitment, promotions, transfers, and disciplinary actions in state public services.

- **Constitutional Provisions:** SPSCs are governed by **Articles 315-323 under Part XIV** of the Indian Constitution.
 - ♦ These provisions outline the structure, powers, and functions of Public Service Commissions for the Union and States.
- **Appointment of Chairperson and Members:** Appointing Authority is the Governor of the State (**Article 316**)
 - ♦ The Chairperson serves a term of **6 years or until they reach the age of 62 years**, whichever is earlier.
- **Removal from Office:** The Chairperson can be removed by the President of India on the following grounds:
 - ♦ Adjudged Insolvent, engages in employment outside their official duties, Mentally unsound and in case of proved misbehaviour.

Source: PIB

INDIA JOINS UN PANEL ON BIG DATA

In News

- India has been included in the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD).

UN-CEBD

- It was created in 2014 with Australia as the first Chair.
- It consists of 31 member states and 16 international organizations.
- A plenary meeting is held annually, usually alongside the Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics, to review and discuss activities and initiatives.

Mandate

- It provides direction for a global big data program, supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- It addresses challenges related to data quality, access, privacy, security, and analytics.
- It fosters training, experience-sharing, and collaboration.
- It promotes the use of big data for policy applications and monitoring sustainable development goals.

Importance for India

- India's involvement strengthens its influence in global statistical practices, reinforcing its commitment to data-driven progress.

- Membership allows India to align domestic advancements in big data with international goals, showcasing leadership in data science.
 - ♦ Big data and advanced techniques like IoT, satellite imagery, and private sector data will modernize statistical processes and improve data accuracy.
- This marks a key achievement, as India recently regained membership in the **UN Statistical Council**.

Source :PIB

PINK FIRE RETARDANT

In News

- Authorities in Southern California are deploying planes and helicopters to combat wildfires, using **pink fire retardant** as a key tool in firefighting.

About Pink fire retardant

- It is a chemical mix designed to extinguish or slow the **spread of fires by depriving flames of oxygen**. **Pink Color enhances** visibility, aiding firefighters in targeting areas effectively.
- **Phos-Chek** is the most commonly used fire retardant in the U.S. for wildfires.
- It is an **ammonium phosphate-based slurry** that coats vegetation, creating a barrier to prevent fire from spreading.
- **Research indicates** that Phos-Chek contains toxic metals like chromium and cadmium, which can harm both humans and aquatic life when they enter waterways.

Source :IE

RARE CARNIVOROUS PLANT UTRICULARIA

In News

- Recently, rare carnivorous plant Utricularia (Bladderworts) were found in large numbers in Rajasthan's Keoladeo National Park, showcasing the park's rich wetland biodiversity.

About Utricularia (Bladderworts)

- **About:** Known for its tiny bladder-like structures called **utricles that trap prey**.
- **Mechanism:** Hair-like projections near the bladder opening are sensitive to movement, triggering a vacuum-like action to suck in prey.
- **Prey:** Feeds on small organisms like protozoa, insects, larvae, mosquitoes, and even tadpoles.

- **Habitat:** Found in lakes, streams, and waterlogged soils, requiring aquatic or semi-aquatic conditions.

Significance

- Contributes to ecological diversity by controlling insect populations.
- Helps maintain balance by naturally regulating small organism populations.

Source: TH

HOLLONGAPAR GIBBON WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

In News

- The Standing Committee of the **National Board for Wildlife** has approved oil and gas exploration in the eco-sensitive zone of the **Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary**.

About Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Location:** Situated in the Jorhat district, Assam.
 - ♦ It officially includes Dissoi Valley Reserve Forest, Dissoi Reserve Forest, and Tiru Hill Reserve Forest.
- **Establishment:** Declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1997.
- **Significance:** Home to India's only gibbons, the Hoolock Gibbons.
 - ♦ Hosts Northeast India's only nocturnal primate, the Bengal Slow Loris.

Source: TH

HUSH MONEY

Context

- US President-elect Donald Trump has been spared from punishment over his criminal conviction stemming from the hush money case.

About

- Hush money refers to a **payment made to someone** in exchange for their silence regarding;
 - ♦ **Illegal, unethical, or immoral actions:** Such as criminal offenses or misconduct.
 - ♦ **Stigmatized behavior:** Actions that could damage personal or professional reputation.
 - ♦ **Defamation Prevention:** Money paid to placate a disgruntled adversary who may disclose embarrassing information, even if untrue, to avoid the harm and trouble of dealing with defamation claims.

Sources: TH