

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY**First Swadesh Darshan project in Sikkim**

Union Minister for Tourism inaugurated the first Swadesh Darshan project in Sikkim. The project “Development of North East Circuit: Rangpo– Rorathang- Aritar- Phadamchen- Nathang-Sherathang- Tsongmo- Gangtok-Phodong- Mangan- Lachung-Yumthang- Lachen- Thangu-Gurudongmer- Mangan- Gangtok-Tuminlingee- Singtam” implemented under Swadesh Darshan Scheme of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Swadesh Darshan Scheme

- Launched by the Ministry of Tourism in n 2014-15 for the integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits in the country.
- It also has a provision for voluntary funding under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
- The scheme has identified 13 thematic circuits for development: Buddhist Circuit, North-East India Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Desert Circuit, Eco Circuit, Wildlife Circuit, Tribal Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Ramayana Circuit and Heritage Circuit

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Curative petition on Bhopal Tragedy**

The Supreme Court will hear in April a curative petition filed by the Centre seeking Rs 7,844 crore additional money from US-based Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), now owned by Dow Chemicals, to provide compensation to victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy.

The tragedy: More than 3,500 people were killed instantly when poisonous gas, Methyl Isocyanate leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal on the night of December 2-3, 1984. Thousands more have died over the years. Many more thousands have been maimed or suffer from serious health issues due to their exposure to the gas.

Curative petition:

- It is the last judicial resort available for redressal of grievances in court which is normally decided by judges in-chamber. It is only in rare cases that such petitions are given an open-court hearing.
- The concept of curative petition was first evolved by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra and Anr. (2002) where the question was whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, after dismissal of a review petition.
- The Supreme Court in the said case held that in order to prevent abuse of its process and to cure gross miscarriage of justice, it may reconsider its judgements in exercise of its inherent powers. For this purpose, the Court has devised what has been termed as a “curative” petition.
- To entertain the curative petitions, the Supreme Court has laid down certain specific conditions:
 - The petitioner will have to establish that there was a genuine violation of principles of natural justice and fear of the bias of the judge and judgement that adversely affected him.
 - The petition shall state specifically that the grounds mentioned had been taken in the review petition and that it was dismissed by circulation.
 - The petition is to be sent to the three senior most judges and judges of the bench who passed the judgement affecting the petition, if available.
 - If the majority of the judges on the above bench agree that the matter needs hearing, then it would be sent to the same bench (as far as possible) and the court could impose “exemplary costs” to the petitioner if his plea lacks merit.
- Article- 137 of the Constitution subjects to the provisions of the guidelines made under Article 145, by which it is clear that the Supreme Court has the ability to review any judgment declared by it.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES**Odisha govt launched "DAMaN" initiative to control malaria**

Odisha Government had launched a malaria control programme – "Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN)" initiative. This programme involves mass screening for malaria with the treatment of positive cases along with intensified surveillance, mosquito control measures and regular health education activities throughout the year.

District Health Information System 2 (DHIS2), open-source web-based surveillance for malaria is used for mass screening and treatment of patients in inaccessible areas.

Status of Odisha in Malaria: Odisha, which accounts for over 40% per cent malaria burden of the entire country, has reported about a 85% decline in average monthly malaria cases in the State.

Malaria

- It is caused by the protozoan parasite Plasmodium.
- Malaria is typically found in tropical and subtropical climates where the parasites can live.
- According to The World Health Organization's World Malaria Report of 2018
- India is the only country among the 11 highest-burden countries that saw substantial progress in reducing disease burden.
- India had pledged to eliminate the disease by 2030 at the East Asia Summit, 2015.
- India has launched the five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (NSPME) (2017-2022) which focused on malaria "control" to "elimination".
- NSPME includes the target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.

ICAR launches National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP)

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has launched an ambitious National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP). This project will be funded by the World Bank and the Indian Government on a 50:50 basis. The aim of the project to attract talent and strengthen higher agricultural education in the country.

Student READY Scheme:

- Student READY (Rural Entrepreneurship Awareness Development Yojana) scheme is being run in order to promote the participation of students in agricultural business.
- Under the scheme, practical experience of agriculture and entrepreneurship is provided to undergraduate students.
- Recently, the second Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) of the country was - also established in Barahi, Jharkhand.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**India to participate in PISA 2021**

The Union Human Resources Development Ministry has signed an agreement with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for India's Participation in Programme for International Student Assessment- PISA 2021. The students will be selected by PISA through random sampling. The schools run by Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and schools in the UT of Chandigarh would be participating.

Significance: India's participation in PISA- 2021 would lead to recognition and acceptability of Indian students and prepare them for the global economy in the 21st century.

Program for International Student Assessment (PISA):

- It is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years.
- First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle. PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as collaborative problem solving.
- By design, PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling.

- PISA is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries, and is conducted in the United States by NCES. Data collection for the most recent assessment was completed in Fall 2015.
- In 2012 PISA test, schools of Shanghai in China topped reading, mathematics and science test, followed closely by Singapore. In 2015, Singapore, Japan and Estonia were ranked as top three countries, in that order.

INDIAN ECONOMY

India replaced Japan as second top steel producer

India has replaced Japan as the world's second-largest steel producing country, while China is the largest producer of crude steel accounting for more than 51 Percent of production. It was stated by the World Steel Association (worldsteel) in its latest report.

Key Figures:

- The global steel body in its latest report noted that China's crude steel output jumped 6.6 Percent to 928.3 million tonnes (MT) in 2018 from 870.9 MT in 2017.
- India's crude steel production in 2018 was at 106.5 MT, up by 4.9 Percent from 101.5 MT in 2017.
- Japan produced 104.3 MT in 2018, down 0.3 per cent compared to 2017.
- The United States is at the 4th position as the country produced 86.7 MT of crude steel in 2018.

World Steel Association

- It is one of the industry associations in the world.
- Its members represent around 85 Percent of the world's steel production, including over 160 steel producers with 9 of the 10 largest steel companies, national and regional steel industry associations, and steel research institutes.
- It is a non-profit organisation with its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

'India can't handle more big cats'

With shrinking habitats, experts opine that India has almost neared its capacity to manage tigers. Therefore, India must also prepare for a new challenge — of reaching the limits of its management capacity. India has the maximum number of wild tigers in the world (70% of tigers in the world are in India). Therefore, it needs a fool-proof plan to manage the growing number of big cats.

Given the low availability of prey in some reserves, the country should now concentrate on developing vast tracts of potential tiger habitat that can be used to improve prey density, develop tiger corridors and therefore support a much larger population.

Key Facts:

- India's current capacity to host tigers ranges from 2,500-3,000 tigers. Officially, India had 2,226 tigers as of 2014. An ongoing census is expected to reveal an update to these numbers.
- 25-35% of India's tigers now lived outside protected reserves.
- Recent attempts at translocating tigers to unpopulated reserves, such as Satkosia in Orissa, have ended badly, with one of the tigers dying.

Challenges:

- Dwindling core forest as well as the shrinking of tiger corridors.
- Poaching and man-animal conflict.

International Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation:

- The 3rd Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation was recently inaugurated in New Delhi. Third in a series of Stock Taking Conferences, this is the second to be held in India after 2012 and is expected to have wide-ranging discussions on the status of the

Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) by the 13 tiger range countries besides deliberations on combating wildlife trafficking.

- 13 Tiger range States—Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- The conference is being hosted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in close collaboration with the Global Tiger Forum which is an International, Intergovernmental Organization for conserving tigers in the world.

Success for golden langur breeding project in Assam

Assam Govt announced the success of the Golden Langur Conservation Breeding Programme in the State which was undertaken at the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati during the 2011-12 fiscal which is funded by the Central Zoo Authority.

Golden langur

- It is an Old World monkey found in a small region of western Assam, India and in the neighbouring foothills of the Black Mountains of Bhutan.
- It is one of the most endangered primate species in India.
- Its IUCN status is endangered.

Conservation efforts of River Yamuna

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked for a performance guarantee of Rs 10 crore each from the governments of Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh expressing dissatisfaction over the cleaning of river Yamuna. The order comes after the interim report led by the monitoring Committee comprising of expert member B S Sajwan and former Delhi chief secretary Shailaja Chandra.

Recommendations of the Monitoring Committee

The committee tasked with developing an action plan and a detailed report had made the following recommendations in its interim report:

- A study to assess the environmental flow of the river Yamuna for the stretch between Hathanikund and Okhla and notes that it would not be possible to rejuvenate it unless minimum environmental flow was provided.
- Creating ponds and pits in various localities to facilitate idol immersion.
- Building awareness about why the flood plains are sacrosanct and why they need conservation.
- Involvement of citizens by dissipating knowledge about why the river is important and why it is worth preserving and restoring. River Yamuna is a unique birding destination and there is a need for the Delhi Development Authority to preserve the birding hot spots.

Other observations:

- The performance guarantee would be forfeited if the work was not carried out as per the recommendations of the monitoring committee.
- The monitoring committee was asked to expeditiously submit its final report.
- Steps to be taken by the three states at the earliest for disposal of municipal solid waste, cleaning of drains and ensuring cleaning of garbage.
- Haryana pollution control board to conduct a study of water quality and the flow of Yamuna at the point it enters Haryana, and submit the list of industries located in the catchment area.

NGT also noted that almost 67 per cent of the pollutants that enter the Yamuna would be treated by two sewage treatment plants at Delhi Gate and Najafgarh under the first phase of the Maili se Nirmal Yamuna Revitalisation project.