

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY**T J Alone Panel**

The Ministry of Culture recently set up a seven-member panel of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) headed by T J Alone, to locate the grave of the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh (1615-59).

Dara Shikoh:

- The eldest son of Shah Jahan, Dara Shikoh was killed after losing the war of succession against his brother Aurangzeb.
- Dara Shikoh is described as a “liberal Muslim” who tried to find commonalities between Hindu and Islamic traditions. He translated into Persian the Bhagavad Gita as well as 52 Upanishads.
- He is believed to be buried somewhere in the Humayun’s Tomb complex in Delhi, one of around 140 graves of the Mughal clan.
- According to the Shahjahannama, after Aurangzeb defeated Dara Shikoh, he brought the latter to Delhi in chains. His head was cut off and sent to Agra Fort, while his torso was buried in the Humayun’s Tomb complex.

GEOGRAPHY- PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC**Betelgeuse**

Using the European Space Organisation’s (ESO) Very Large Telescope (VLT), astronomers have noticed the unprecedented dimming of Betelgeuse, a red supergiant star (over 20 times bigger than the Sun) in the constellation Orion.

About:

- Betelgeuse was born as a supermassive star millions of years ago and has been “dramatically” and “mysteriously” dimming for the last six months.
- What has intrigued some astronomers is the fact that along with the dimming, the star’s shape has been changing as well. Instead of appearing round, the star now appears to be “squashed into an ova.”
- While Betelgeuse’s behaviour is out of the ordinary, it doesn’t mean that an eruption is imminent since astronomers predict the star to blast sometime (supernova explosion, which is the largest explosion to take place in space) in the next 100,000 years or so.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**SUTRA PIC**

The Government of India has unveiled a programme to research on ‘indigenous’ cows.

About:

- Name: The initiative is called SUTRA PIC or Scientific Utilisation Through Research Augmentation-Prime Products from Indigenous Cows.
- Objective: Scientific research will be carried out milk products derived from Indian indigenous cows.
- It has five themes:
 - Uniqueness of Indigenous Cows,
 - Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Medicine & Health,
 - Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Agricultural Applications,
 - Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Food & Nutrition and
 - Prime-products from indigenous cows-based utility items.
- Bodies involved: To be funded by multiple scientific ministries, the initiative is led by the Department of Science and Technology (DST). Researchers from academic organisations as well as NGOs active in India were invited to apply for funding.

Punjab Kinnow

The Punjab Agri Export Corporation recently launched the ‘Punjab Kinnow’ brand at the kinnow festival in Abohar.

About:

- This brand of kinnow, which is considered the ‘king fruit’ of Punjab, is also said to be “pesticide-free”.
- This has been done along the lines of the region-specific branding of several other fruits like the ‘Nagpur orange’ (which even has a GI tag) and ‘Australian kiwi’.
- Punjab being the largest producer of kinnow in the country, such branding will attract more consumers.
- The plant starts flowering in February-end, grows till July-August, turning from green to yellowish in September-October till the pre-harvesting stage in November. Kinnow crop harvesting starts in the first week of December in Punjab and continues till mid-March.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**State of India's Birds 2020 (SoIB)**

The State of India's Birds 2020 (SoIB), a new scientific report was jointly released by 10 organisations. It was produced using a base of 867 species, and analysed with the help of data uploaded by birdwatchers to the online platform, eBird.

Key Findings:

- Over a fifth of India's bird diversity, ranging from the Short-toed Snake Eagle to the Sirkeer Malkoha, has suffered strong long-term declines over a 25-year period.
- More recent annual trends point to a drastic 80% loss among several common birds.
- For every bird species that was found to be increasing in numbers over the long term, 11 have suffered losses, some catastrophically.
- Of 101 species categorised as being of High Conservation Concern endemics such as the Rufous-fronted Prinia, Nilgiri Thrush, Nilgiri Pipit and Indian vulture were confirmed as suffering current decline.
- Among widely known species, the common sparrow, long seen as declining in urban spaces, has a stable population overall, although they have become rare in cities and urban areas.
- Raptors overall are in decline, with 'open country' species such as the Pallid and Montagu Harriers, White-bellied Sea Eagle and Red-necked Falcon suffering the most.
- Migratory shorebirds, along with gulls and terns, seem to have declined the most among waterbirds.

Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

The attempts of the Kerala Forest Department to notify the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary as the third Tiger Reserve in the State was rejected at the recently held State Wildlife Advisory Board due to public resistance.

Geography:

- Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is an animal sanctuary in Wayanad, Kerala.
- The sanctuary is an integral part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.
- It is bounded by protected area network of Nagarhole and Bandipur of Karnataka in the northeast, and on the southeast by Mudumalai of Tamil Nadu.

Tiger population:

- Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is home to more than half the number of tigers present in Kerala.
- The Status of Tigers in India report released last year had estimated the tiger population of Wayanad as between 75 and 80 individuals. Periyar Tiger Reserve, the first one in Kerala, has an estimated population of 30 to 35 big cats whereas Parambikulam, the second reserve, has a population of 20 to 25 tigers.
- There are five Tiger Reserves in the neighbouring States that share boundaries with Wayanad.
- Its notification as a tiger reserve would ensure financial aid from the Centre and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and better conservation and management of the tiger population.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC**'Station' Programme**

Google has decided to gradually wind down the 'Station' programme globally as better data plans and improving mobile connectivity have made it "simpler and cheaper" for users to get online.

About:

- The 'Station' programme was kick-started in India in 2015 as a partnership between Google, Indian Railways and RailTel to bring fast and free public Wi-Fi to 400 busiest railway stations in India.
- However, users in India will be able to continue using the existing facilities at the over 400 stations via RailTel, Google's partner in India for the programme.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY**Women In Armed Forces**

The Supreme Court declared that Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers are eligible for permanent commission and command posts in the Army irrespective of their years of service.

About:

- The Supreme Court dismissed the Union government's submissions that women are physiologically weaker than men as a "sex stereotype."
- According to government, isolation and hardships would eat into their resolve and they would have to heed to the call of pregnancy, childbirth and family. Women ran the risk of capture by enemy and being taken prisoner of war.
- The Supreme Court ordered the government to implement its judgment in three months.

Background:

- The verdict came on a nearly 10-year-old appeal filed by the government against a 2010 decision of the Delhi High Court to grant SSC women officers permanent commission.
- The induction of women officers in the Army started in 1992. Recruits under the Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) had a shorter pre-commission training period than their male counterparts who were commissioned under the Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme.
- In 2006, the WSES scheme was replaced with the SSC scheme, which was extended to women officers. They were commissioned for a period of 10 years, extendable up to 14 years.

PRELIMS SPECIFIC FACTS- INDICES, DAYS, EVENTS, AWARDS ETC

2020 Laureus World Sports Awards

The Laureus Award is shared for the first time in its 20-year history; Sporting Moment Award goes to Tendulkar for the 2011 World Cup triumph.

About:

- Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton and footballer Lionel Messi were declared joint winners of the prestigious Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award.
- The Laureus Sporting Moment Award (2000-2020) public fan vote was won by Sachin Tendulkar, who was part of the victorious 2011 ICC World Cup-winning team, was carried on the shoulders by his teammates.
- The 2019 Rugby World Cup winner South Africa won its second Laureus World Team of the Year Award.
- American gymnast Simone Biles won her third Laureus Sportswoman of the Year Award.

Related Info:

- The Laureus World Sports Awards is an annual award ceremony honouring individuals and teams from the world of sports along with sporting achievements throughout the year. It was established in 1999 by Laureus Sport for Good Foundation.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Progress from Millennium Development to Sustainable Development entails a shift in the focus from universalizing access to education towards the delivery of quality education. Explain.

Ans: Quest to fulfill MDG target of universal access to education, India has improved its gross enrolment ratio at all levels: primary schooling (over 100%), secondary (74%) and nearly 24% in higher education. SDG 4 expands the goals and target towards ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Issues in present education system and need for quality education

- Gender Gap in enrolment, especially at higher education levels.
- According to NSSO 71st round (2014), drop-out rates are very high for boys at the secondary school level. Reasons for the same are economic activities, lack of interest in education and financial constraints.
- The transition rate from secondary school to senior secondary and further to higher education is very low.
- Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) reflects this deteriorating quality. The report opines that deficits in foundational reading and arithmetic skills are cumulative, which leaves students grossly handicapped for further education.
 - From 1952-2012, education expenditure as a percentage of total government expenditure increased from 7.92 to 11.7 and as a percentage of GDP increased from 0.64 to 3.31. But it is still not reached 6% of GDP, as was recommended by the Kothari Commission way back in 1964.
 - Expenditure by the government on elementary education is more than tertiary level, but expenditure per student is more in tertiary. So, there is a need to increase expenditure in all segments.
- Inequitable education system: rich-poor divide, especially in private institutions, low representation of depressed communities.
- Lack of new age employable skills, issues related to Teachers like lack of training, skewed teacher-student ratio, corruption in appointment.

Steps towards fulfilling SDG 4 goal

- Padhe Bharat Bade Bharat – targeting early reading and writing. Twin track approach of comprehension and math is the main focus.

- Need to expand RTE Act to 14-18 age groups.
- The National Research Foundation, to fund, coordinate, and promote research at the college-level, is proposed by Kasturirangan report.
- Government has launched Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, (BBBP), a campaign to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls in India.
- National Teacher Platform or Diksha in 2017 as a one-stop solution to address teacher competency gaps.
 - Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme (EQUIP) of MHRD.

Way Forward: Thus, shifting focus from just accessibility to quality of education will require initiatives at multiple levels as highlighted in Kasturirangan Committee and in new education policy along with need to expand expenditure on public education.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs

1. With reference to the women in armed forces, consider the following statements:
 1. The Supreme Court declared that Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers are eligible for permanent commission and command posts in the Army irrespective of their years of service.
 2. In 2006, the Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) was replaced with the Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme, which was extended to women officers.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2**
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
2. With reference to the State of India's Birds 2020 (SoIB), consider the following statements:
 1. It was released by NITI Aayog.
 2. Over a fifth of India's bird diversity, ranging from the Short-toed Snake Eagle to the Sirkeer Malkoha, has suffered strong long-term declines over a 25-year period.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) **2 only**
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
3. 'Station' programme is an initiative of:

(a) **Google**
(b) Facebook
(c) Microsoft
(d) Twitter
4. The initiative, SUTRA PIC is a programme to research on:

(a) Coronavirus
(b) Defence
(c) Nano technology
(d) **Indigenous Cows**
5. With reference to the 2020 Laureus world sports awards, consider the following statements:
 1. Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton and footballer Lionel Messi were declared joint winners of the prestigious Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award.
 2. The Laureus World Sports Awards is an annual award ceremony honouring individuals and teams from the world of sports along with sporting achievements throughout the year.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2**
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
6. What is Betelgeuse, recently seen in news?

(a) Comet
(b) **A red supergiant star**
(c) Satellite of Jupiter
(d) None of the above
7. T J Alone panel, recently seen in news, is related to:

(a) **To locate the grave of a Mughal Prince**
(b) Improvement in the Customer Service at Primary (Urban) Cooperative Banks
(c) To analyse the financial condition of the Regional Rural Banks in India
(d) None of the above
8. Which of the following is the largest producer of kinnow in the country?

(a) **Punjab**
(b) Gujarat
(c) Uttar Pradesh
(d) Bihar