

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY**Ther Mound, Sirsa**

A mound in Sirsa could hold clues to the ancient city of 'Sarishika'. However, before the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) can confirm the historicity of the site, it has to convince the nearly 50,000 people living on the identified 82 acres to move away from the land.

About:

- Sirsa is a city and a municipal council in Sirsa district of Haryana.
- Sirsa is believed to be one of the oldest towns located in Haryana, the ancient route leading to Taxila.
- Its present name is derived from the ancient name Sarishika, which finds mention in the Mahabharata, Panini's Ashtadhyayi and Buddhist text Divyavadana.

Ancient site of Ther Mound:

- The ruins of the ancient Sarishika are presumably buried in this mound.
- This extensive site is spread over an area of about five kms in circumference with a maximum height of about 15 meters.
- No archaeological excavations have so far been conducted at this site. According to government, Stone sculptures, coins, an inscription, pottery pieces and other antiquities collected from surface exploration are sufficient to prove its archaeological relevance.
- The 1904 Ancient Monuments Preservation Act first declared Sirsa's 'Ther Mound' a protected monument back in 1932.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Analysis Of MPs' Performance**

The first edition of the report analysing the Rajya Sabha MPs' performance on party lines during the recently concluded Parliament session was released by Rajya Sabha Chairman.

Key findings:

- The report shows that each political party got a proportional share of time, with the Opposition getting a little more. The BJP, accounting for 34% of the strength of the House, got 480 opportunities amounting to 33% of the total.
- The Congress, constituting 19% of the strength, got 345 opportunities, which comes to 24% share of the total.
- The 10 recognised parties in the House with five members and above each with a total of 190 members — accounting for 80% of the strength of the Council — got about 81% of the total opportunities.
- Others, including regional parties and Independents coming to 20% of the membership of the House, got a 19% share of participation indicating broad correspondence between the strength and share of opportunities.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**AJRAK**

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi addressed the 9th Episode of 'Mann Ki Baat 2.0.'

Key Highlights:

- He narrated the story of Ismail Khatri (of Ajrak village in Kutch area of Gujarat) who nurtured his traditional art form of 'Ajrak print'.
- He shared the achievement of Kamya Karthikeyan, who conquered Mount Aconcagua – the highest peak of the Andes Mountains in South America – at the age of twelve. She is now on a new mission, called 'Mission Saahas', under which she is trying to conquer the highest peaks of all the continents.
- Quoting Tamil poetess Avvaiyar "Katrathu Kaiman Alavu Kallathathu Ulagalavu" which means, what we know is but just a handful of sand; what we do not know is like a universe in itself, PM pointed out the recent discovery of new species of fish in the caves of Meghalaya.

- Modi hailed the take-off of Indian Air Force's AN 32 aircraft from Leh's Kushok Bakula Rimpoche Airport. The aircraft for the first time ever used a mixture of 10% Indian bio-jet fuel.
- He also mentioned his surprise trip to Hunar Haat in Delhi and urged others to visit the exhibition organised by the Minority Affairs Ministry.

Related Info: Ajrak is a unique form of blockprinted shawls with deep crimson red and indigo blue background found in Sindh region of India and Pakistan.

Centralized Public Grievance Redress And Monitoring System (CPGRAMS)

Union Minister for Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions launched the CPGRAMS 7.0 version.

About:

- The Centralized Public Grievance Redress And Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), is an online web-enabled system over NICNET developed by NIC in association with the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG).
- It has been developed with an objective of speedy redress and effective monitoring of grievances by Ministries/Departments/Organizations of Government of India.
- CPGRAMS aims at submission of grievances by the aggrieved citizens from anywhere and anytime (24x7) basis for instant and easy communication between the nodal PG officers of Government Organizations and citizens resulting in the speedy redress of their grievances.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Katherine Johnson

Katherine Johnson (1918 – 2020), an American mathematician whose calculations of orbital mechanics as a NASA employee were critical to the success of the first and subsequent U.S. crewed spaceflights, passed away.

About:

- Her work was fundamental in enabling Apollo 11 to land on the moon in 1969. Before Apollo 11, Johnson calculated the trajectory of Alan Shepherd's 1961 trip to space. Her calculations were also essential to the beginning of the Space Shuttle program.
- NASA noted her "historical role as one of the first African-American women to work as a NASA scientist".
- In 2015, President Barack Obama awarded Johnson the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2019, Johnson was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.
- The 2016 Oscar-nominated film Hidden Figures tells the stories of Johnson, Vaughan and Mary Jackson.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Steel Industry

As per World Steel Association data, India became the second largest steel producer of crude steel after China in 2018 and 2019, by replacing Japan.

About:

- India's crude steel production in 2018 was at 109.3 MT, an increase of 7.7 per cent from 101.5 MT in 2017. This moved up to 111.2 million tonnes in 2019.
- In contrast, China remains number one with 920 million tonnes of production in 2018 and 996.3 million tonnes in 2019. The United States and South Korea rank fourth and fifth respectively.

Related Info:

- World Steel Association is the international trade body for the iron and steel industry. It is a non-profit organisation with its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.
- Steel being a deregulated sector, the Government does not set any annual targets for steel production. Decision on quantity of steel production is taken by individual companies based on commercial considerations and market requirements.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**World Air Quality Report 2019**

The 2019 World Air Quality Report was released by the pollution tracker IQAir and Greenpeace.

Key findings:

- India accounts for two-thirds of the world's most polluted cities — 21 of the most polluted 30 cities; 14 of the highest 20; and 6 of the highest 10.
- The ranking is based on a comparison of PM2.5 levels.
- Among countries, when population is taken into account, average PM2.5 pollution is highest in Bangladesh, followed by Pakistan, while India is at number 5.
- While cities in India, on average, exceed the WHO target for annual PM2.5 exposure by 500%, national air pollution decreased by 20% from 2018 to 2019, with 98% of cities experiencing improvements. These improvements are believed to be largely a result of economic slowdown.
- According to it, around 90% of the global population is breathing unsafe air.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE
ETC****Science And Applied Research Alliance And Support (Saras)**

NCL (Northern Coalfields Limited) has set up a centre named "Science and Applied Research Alliance and Support"(SARAS) to promote Innovation and improve NCL's operational efficiency.

About:

- NCL (Northern Coalfields Limited) is a flagship subsidiary of Coal India.
- NCL accounts for 15 per cent of India's coal production and 10 per cent of thermal power generation of the country is met by the coal produced by this Miniratna Company of Govt. of India.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Q. What is Budget Transparency? Scratching its genesis, discuss the benefits associated with budget transparency as well as the ways through which it can be promoted in functioning of a government?

Answer

Budgets are key documents since they lay out a government's priorities in terms of policies and programs. Opening up budgets and democratizing the budget process gives citizens a say in policy formulation and resource allocation. Budget transparency refers to the extent and ease with which citizens can access information about and provide feedback on government revenues, allocations, and expenditures.

Increased transparency in budgeting made significant advances in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was a period associated with unfavourable budget conditions in most countries - high annual deficits and increasing levels of debt. Governments needed to institute large fiscal consolidation programmes. These were often painful and getting the public's understanding of the problems was necessary. The most effective manner for achieving that was simply to throw open the books to the public and explaining the problem to them in order for an understanding to emerge as to the best course of action to take. This time period also coincided with increased attention being paid to good governance in general which demanded openness about policy intentions, formulation and implementation – answer to all these was Budget Transparency.

Importance Of Budget Transparency

- **Less Corruption:** First, budget transparency and oversight over how resources are allocated and spent are powerful disincentives for officials to misuse or misappropriate funds since their actions are more likely to be scrutinized. This leads to less corruption.

- **Efficient Use Of Resource:** Budget transparency allows citizens to provide feedback on the quality and adequacy of services and infrastructure provided. This feedback, combined with reduced corruption, results in more efficient use of resources.
- **Enhanced Trust:** In many cases, perceptions of high levels of corruption, poor services and infrastructure, and opaqueness of operations lie at the heart of citizens' distrust of their governments. The gesture of opening up government books of account is likely to lead to more trust in government.
- **Higher Revenues:** Budget transparency is also instrumental in generating higher revenues for governments since citizens are more likely to pay taxes and contribute donations to local schools and health centres if they trust that their money will be well spent. In developing countries, where revenues are often inadequate to pay for needed investments in sustainable poverty reduction and development programs, this is of utmost importance.

Ways Through Which Budget Transparency Can Be Promoted

- **Release Of Budget Data:** The systematic and timely release of all relevant fiscal information is what we typically associate with budget transparency. It is an absolute pre-requisite. Disclose budget documents and simplified budget information through electronic and print media as well as online portals and cell phones.
- **Effective Role For The Legislature:** It must be able to scrutinise the budget reports and independently review them. It must be able to debate and influence budget policy and be in a position to effectively hold the government to account. This is both in terms of the constitutional role of the legislature and the level of resources that the legislature has at its disposal.
- **Effective Role For Civil Society Through Media And NGOs:** Citizens, directly or through these vehicles, must be in a position to influence budget policy and must be in a position to hold the government to account. In many ways, it is a similar role to that of the legislature albeit only indirectly.
- **Improving Budget Literacy of parliamentarians, government officials, elected representatives, journalists, and select civil society representatives and Increasing their capacity to analyze budgets.**
- **Create budget literacy manuals for capacity-building programs.**

Thus, budget transparency, while not a goal in itself, is a prerequisite for public participation and accountability. Such information must be disseminated in a timely manner so that citizens can effectively provide feedback that can influence policy formulation and resource reallocation.