

National News

Reconstitution of EPFO governing body

The Union government reconstituted the **Central Board of Trustees (CBT)** of the **Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)** by excluding representatives of the **Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)**, **All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)** and **All India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC)** from the panel.

About EPFO

- Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) was **established by an act of Parliament of India.**
- It aims to provide social security to workers working in India.
- It came into force by the **Employee Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952.**
- EPFO comes under the control of the **Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India.**

South India leads in pension enrolment

- South India currently has the highest number of **National Pension System (NPS)** private sector enrolments
- Some **31% of private sector enrolments comprising NPS corporate and NPS All Citizen** so far this financial year were from the Southern region.
- Southern region's share in enrolment in **NPS Corporate in FY24 is 39% and for All Citizen it is 29%**
- Also, some 36% of women participation in NPS Corporate subscriber base came from the Southern region, again highest in the country.

ICMR starts revising current National Essential Diagnostics List

- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has begun the process of revising the current **National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL)**
- The NEDL lists the essential and most basic tests that should be available at various levels of healthcare facilities in the country, including

at the village level, in sub-health centres, health and wellness centres, and primary health centres

- The **ICMR defined essential diagnostic tests** as those that satisfy the priority health care needs of the population and are selected with due regard to disease prevalence and public health relevance, evidence of efficacy and accuracy, and comparative cost-effectiveness.

About ICMR

- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is the **apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.**
- Its mandate is to conduct, coordinate and implement medical research for the benefit of the Society; translating medical innovations into products/processes and introducing them into the public health system.
- It is funded by the Government of India through the **Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.**

'Minorities' right to open institutions

The Supreme Court observed that the right given to religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer their own educational institutions under **Article 30(1) of the Constitution** was not intended to "ghettoize" them.

Key points

- The minority character of an educational institution is not lost if its founders, who belong to a particular minority community, chose administrators from other communities, including the majority group, to run the institution
- **Article 30 does not mandate** that the administration of a minority educational institution should be only by members of that community
- The provision confers on the minority the discretion to choose the administrators of the institution.

Textbooks in regional languages

- The Union Education Ministry directed all school and higher education regulators such as the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Indira Gandhi National Open University, the heads of Indian Institutes of Technology, Central Universities, and the National Institutes of Technologies, and the University Grants Commission to make study material available in regional languages for all courses in the next three years.
- Study material for all courses under school and higher education would be made available digitally in languages included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution.

Maharashtra State News

Indian Army Day

- Every year on **January 15th**, India celebrates **Army Day**, a day to honor the dedication and sacrifice of the brave men and women who safeguard our nation.
- This day marks the historic event of **Lieutenant General Kodandera M. Cariappa taking over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army on January 15, 1949.**
- This day serves as a **source of inspiration for young people**, showcasing the values of patriotism, courage, and resilience.
- **"In Service of the Nation"** will be the theme for Indian Army Day in 2024

Navi Mumbai international airport will be operational by March 2025

- **Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said the Navi Mumbai International Airport is set to be commercially operational by March 2025.**
- This mega-project promises to **decongest Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA)** and transform travel in the region.
- It is also aiming to be **India's first green airport with extensive rainwater harvesting, solar power, and sustainable practices.**

Hyundai to invest Rs 7,000 crore in Pune's Talegaon area

- **South Korean automobile giant Hyundai Motor India is set to invest a whopping Rs 7,000 crore in Pune's Talegaon area**
- It marks a **significant expansion beyond its home base of Tamil Nadu** for over 25 years.
- This strategic move **promises to boost Maharashtra's auto industry and generate considerable economic benefits for the region.**
- The investment will be **utilized to revive the inoperative General Motors plant in Talegaon**, giving it a new lease on life.

PMC organizes health awareness drive as part of the Mera Yuva Bharat campaign

- The **health department of Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has organized a series of week-long awareness programmes and activities for the city youths as part of the 'Mera Yuva Bharat campaign'.**
- The campaign was **launched on National Youth Day on Friday, January 12, and will go on till January 19, 2024.**
- The civic body **targets to reach out to over 11 lakh youths** during the campaign.

Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)

- **Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)** is an initiative by the **Indian government launched in October 2023**
- It is aimed at **empowering and engaging the nation's youth (aged 15-29 years).**
- It envisions a **"phygital platform", a blend of physical and digital activities to:**
 1. Provide equitable opportunities
 2. Facilitate skill development
 3. Promote social responsibility
 4. Nurture a sense of national pride

National StartUp Day

- **National Startup Day is celebrated annually on January 16th**
- It ignites the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship across the nation.

About:

- It commemorates the launch of the **"Startup India" initiative in 2016**, a landmark program

aimed at fostering a vibrant ecosystem for young minds to thrive.

- PM Modi announced January 16, the foundation day of Startup India, as **National Startup Day in 2022**.

Adani Group to provide Dharavi residents 350 sq ft homes

- Mumbai has introduced the **StartUp Mumbai Challenge** during the **Mumbai Festival 2024**.
- The **StartUp Mumbai Challenge** named **'Forever Planet'** signifies a forward-looking commitment to nurturing early-stage startups.
- It is in **collaboration with Turbostart and the United Nations India** and aims to position Mumbai as a global hub for innovative and sustainable development.
- The initiative is in line with **PM Modi's Mission LiFE**.

Indian Army conducts firepower demonstration 'Exercise Topchi' at Devlali

- The Indian Army conducted an impressive display of firepower and precision during **'Exercise Topchi'**, an annual training exercise held at **Devlali, Maharashtra**.
- The exercise showcased the **integrated use of a variety of weapons and surveillance platforms**, demonstrating the army's capabilities and readiness.

MTHL will open trade opportunities, attract investments for JNPT

- The **Mumbai Trans Harbour Link** will slash the time taken to transport cargo, thereby elevating the overall operational efficiency of **JNPT (Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority)**.
- In turn, this will create a more streamlined supply chain, leading to reduced operational costs, and enhance the port's competitiveness on a global scale.

Navi Mumbai Airport

- Over **10,000 jobs** are expected to be created with the launch of the first two phases at **Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA)** next year.
- About **60%** of the airport's construction is complete, with the remaining work on track for completion by the end of **2024**.

Eurasian otters spotted in Pench

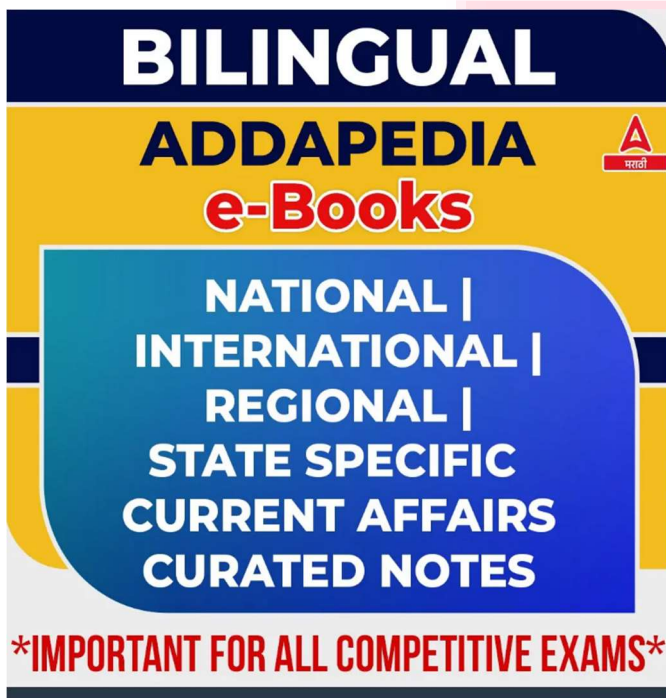
- The first record of **Eurasian otters** in Maharashtra has been found in the waters of **Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR)**.
- The discovery was jointly led by **Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR)**, and experts from **Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), Mumbai, MH**.
- The discovery also indicates the presence of a **healthy ecosystem**.

Coca-Cola India joins forces with Reliance Retail for PET collection, recycling initiative

- **Coca-Cola India** and **Reliance Retail** have collaborated on a groundbreaking sustainability initiative, **'Bhool Na Jana, Plastic Bottle Lautana'**.
- It focuses on used **PET bottle collection and recycling** through **Reverse Vending Machines (RVMs)** and collection bins.

Interstate fire safety training centre to be built soon

- An **interstate fire safety training centre** will be established in **Haryana** on the lines of the one in **Maharashtra's Nagpur**.
- Moreover, the **Fire and Emergency Services Training Centre** in **Manesar Sector 8** will soon have its own **90m-high hydraulic platform and gym**.



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IMPORTANT FOR ALL COMPETITIVE EXAMS

Centre imposes 50% export duty on molasses to boost ethanol production

- Central government has imposed a 50% export duty on molasses, a byproduct of sugar cane.
- The decision will come in force from January 18.
- The decision has been taken given the possibility of a decline in domestic sugar production in the current season.

Mumbai Festival 2024

- The first edition of Mumbai Festival will be held from January 20 to 28, 2024, with a mission to showcase the city's cultural kaleidoscope.
- The theme, **Everyone's United**, emphasises the inclusivity of Mumbai as the melting pot that welcomes and embraces everyone in the city of dreams, **Sapno Ka Gateway**.
- The festival will feature cultural and musical events, food festivals, and more.

Ghrishneshwar temple

- Centre has included the **Ghrishneshwar temple in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district in the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) scheme**, leading to excitement among the stakeholders.
- The temple is one of the 12 Jyotirlinga temples.
- Inclusion in the scheme would enrich religious tourism at different fronts.

PRASAD Scheme:

- The Government of India launched the PRASAD scheme in the year **2014-2015 under the Ministry of Tourism**. The full form of the PRASAD scheme is the '**Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive**'.
- This scheme focuses on developing and identifying pilgrimage sites across India for enriching the religious tourism experience.
- It aims to **integrate pilgrimage destinations** in a prioritized, planned and sustainable manner to provide a complete religious tourism experience.
- The growth of domestic tourism hugely depends on **pilgrimage tourism**.

Pune startups witness 70% dip in funding in 2023

Pune had accounted for 3.19 per cent of the funding reported in India for 2023, while it had cornered 4.15 per cent of the funding in 2022.

Key Points:

- Pune, as per government data, has over 5,900 registered startups that accounted for five per cent of the total startups in the country.
- Advait Kurlekar, TiE Pune Governing Council Member and Chair Nurture 12.0, said the squeeze is mainly because of the issues related to ethics and corporate governance.
- Funding refers to investment by Venture Capital Fund (VC) or Angel Investor into the startup. It can either be in terms of debt or equity (where the investor buys shares of the company).

State signs MoUs worth ₹3.10 lakh crore in Davos

- The state government of Maharashtra has signed MoUs worth over ₹3.10 lakh crore (\$42.3 billion) with Indian and foreign companies at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Key points:

- Adani Group has declared to invest ₹50,000 crore in the next 10 years in Maharashtra by setting up a data centre with a capacity of one gigawatt.
- Among the overseas investors is AB InBev, a **Belgium-based** brewing company, who will set up a unit in Maharashtra.
- The state inked a pact worth ₹600 crore. AB InBev is known for popular beer brands such as Budweiser.
- The development came days after the Shinde-led government decided to revive the Wine Industrial Promotion Scheme for five years.

INS Shivaji

Indian Navy chief inaugurates **CO2-based AC plant** at INS Shivaji in Pune.

Key Points:

- This is a major step towards meeting the **government's commitment to reduce global warming and emission of gases harmful to the environment**.

- Navy chief emphasised the anti-piracy operations of the the force while outlining the central government's Anti-Piracy Act.
- "We have two operations ongoing in the Indian Ocean region. One is an anti-piracy operation that has been going on since 2008, which has constant deployment of one ship there. Since 2008 about 108 ships were deployed to counter piracy.

India gets its first International Dark Sky Park in Pench

- The Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra has been announced as India's first Dark Sky Park
- It offers pristine night skies without light pollution
- Thus, it is an ideal haven for astronomy enthusiasts and tourists.

PM Modi lays foundation stone of 8 AMRUT projects in Maharashtra's Solapur

- PM Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of several development projects at Solapur in Maharashtra.
- AMRUT 2.0 is designed to provide universal coverage of water supply through functional taps to all households in all the statutory towns in the country and coverage of sewage/septage management

Rare sight of Indian vulture spotted in Thane

- First in many years, a vulture was spotted in the skyline of Thane's Malang Gad by naturalist Sanal Santosh.
- Indian vulture or long-billed vulture (Scientific name Gyps indicus) has not been spotted over two decades in the city.

Mumbai-Vashi lane on Thane Creek Bridge-3 set to open in April

- The ongoing construction of Thane Creek Bridge-3 is designed to accommodate the increasing vehicular traffic expected once the Navi Mumbai International Airport becomes operational.
- This project involves expanding the current Thane Creek Bridge-2 to add six more lanes.

- With significant progress achieved on the South Mumbai to Vashi carriage – comprising over 85 per cent of the project – the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) is hoping to open one side of the road, potentially by April 2024.

Maharashtra govt approves separate barrack for transgenders in Nagpur Central jail

- The Maharashtra government has sanctioned Rs 3 crore to construct separate barracks for transgender inmates in Nagpur Central prison.
- It will be the first central prison in the state to have an independent barrack for transgender inmates.
- Presently, they are accommodated in separate cells in prisons for men and women.

'National Aarogya Fair' to be held from Jan 19-22

- A 'National Aarogya Fair' will be held under the aegis of the Ministry of AYUSH in Maharashtra's Thane from January 19-22
- The theme of the event is 'Ayurveda for All - New Approaches in the Management of Lifestyle Disorders'
- Free patient check-ups and Ayurvedic consultations will be available for several diseases
- Also, citizens can also avail of Ayurvedic medicines at a discount at the venue.

Advertising Standards Council warns against greenwashing

- The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has issued its guidelines to prevent false pro-environment claims, also known as greenwashing,
- These guidelines aim to ensure that environmental claims made by advertisers are reliable, verifiable, and transparent.

K'ghar couple invited for Ram temple ceremony

- Kharghar-based couple Vithal (53) and Ujjwala Kamble (46) will be one among the select band of 11 couples picked across the country to

participate in the main rituals at Ayodhya Temple

- The grand consecration ceremony of the idols at Ram Temple in Ayodhya is to be held on Jan 22.

Declaration of public holiday on 22 January in Maharashtra

- Maharashtra government declares a public holiday on **January 22, 2024**
- It is in view that Lord Ram will be seated in the grand temple built at Shri Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya on this particular day
- The event will be held in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

NGT seeks Talawade fire tragedy report in four weeks

- The **National Green Tribunal's principal bench in New Delhi, in a suo motu exercise, directed the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board, Pune district magistrate (collector) and the Pimpri Chinchwad municipal commissioner to file their responses related to the fire tragedy at a sparkling candle manufacturing unit in Talawade last year.**
- The **responses must indicate if the unit was operating with necessary environmental clearance, the action taken against it for violating environmental norms and details of payment to the family members of the deceased victims as also to the injured victims.**

State News

Chhattisgarh govt. launches scheme for Ayodhya visit

- Chhattisgarh has approved its **Ram Lala Darshan (Ayodhya Dham) Yojana.**
- Under the scheme, 20,000 eligible residents of the State would be taken to the holy city for pilgrimage every year.

PM unveils three projects worth ₹4,000 crore in Kochi

- Three infrastructure projects were unveiled by the PM in Kochi.
- It included a new dry dock and an **international ship repair facility (ISRF) of Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL) and an LPG**

import terminal of Indian Oil Corporation Limited at Puthuvypeen

Key points

- The new projects, including the **country's largest dry dock**, would catalyse the development of Kerala and southern parts of the country.
- The new dry dock would enable big vessels to dock here for repairs, reducing dependence on foreign countries and thus saving foreign exchange.
- The ISRF would transform Kochi into **South Asia's largest ship-repair centre.**

Andhra becomes 2nd State to take up 'caste census'

- The Andhra Pradesh government kicked off its comprehensive caste census **to enumerate all communities in the State**
- With this initiative, Andhra Pradesh has become the **second State in the country after Bihar** to take up a caste census.

International News

Genocide Convention

Recently, South Africa had moved the ICJ, invoking the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948**, against Israel, accusing it of committing genocide during its ongoing military campaign in Gaza.

About

- The Genocide Convention, 1948, was the **first human rights treaty to be adopted by the UN General Assembly.**
- It primarily arose from a commitment to 'never again' allow mass killing of people such as the Holocaust.
- South Africa's case is based upon **Article II which says genocide means acts such as killing members of a national, racial, ethnic or religious group; causing serious bodily and mental harm to the members of the group; and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.**
- It has **also accused Israel of causing hunger, dehydration, and starvation in**

Gaza by impeding sufficient humanitarian assistance, cutting off water, food, fuel, and electricity, and failing to provide shelter or sanitation to Palestinians in Gaza, including its 1.9 million internally displaced people.

India's KABIL acquires five lithium blocks in Argentina

- India announced the acquisition of five lithium blocks in Argentina.
- **Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL)**, operating under the Ministry of Mines, signed an agreement with Argentina's state-owned **Catamarca Minera Y Energética Sociedad Del Estado (CAMYEN)** based in Catamarca province.

Key points

- KABIL, which has obtained exploration and exclusivity rights for the blocks, will start exploration and development of the five lithium brine blocks — **Cortadera-I, Cortadera-VII, Cortadera-VIII, Cateo-2022-01810132, and Cortadera-VI** — covering an area of about 15,703 hectares.
- KABIL was preparing to set up a branch office at Catamarca, officials told businessline, adding that the project cost (for development and exploration) was about ₹200 crore and would be spread over a five-year period.

Key fact

India's lithium requirements, amounting to about ₹24,000 crore, are met through imports, with the bulk of supplies coming from China. Often called '**white gold**', lithium is key to the 'green transition' and is used in energy storage solutions, batteries for mobile phones, and in EVs.

Agreement news

India, Saudi Arabia discuss defence ties

- India and Saudi Arabia discussed ways to enhance **navy-to-navy cooperation**, joint training, and opportunities for joint ventures in defence production
- Discussions were held on **issues of mutual strategic interests**, bilateral defence cooperation, opportunities for joint ventures in defence production and technology

collaboration and joint military training, duly affirming stronger ties between both nations.

India, U.K. sign two deals

- **India and the United Kingdom** signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** for a bilateral international cadet exchange programme and a **Letter of Arrangement (LoA)** on defence collaboration in research and development.
- The LoA on R&D was signed between the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the U.K.'s Defence Science and Technology Laboratory.

Schemes and Committees News

PM-JANMAN

Prime Minister will release ₹540 crore — the first instalment of funding — for pucca homes under the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G)** to one lakh **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)** beneficiary families as part of the recently launched PM-JANMAN package for the overall development of PVTG habitations.

About

- PM JANMAN is a government scheme that aims to **bring tribal communities into the mainstream**.
- The scheme (**comprising Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes**) will be implemented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, in collaboration with the State governments and the PVTG communities.
- The scheme will concentrate on 11 critical interventions overseen by 9 line Ministries, ensuring the implementation of existing schemes in villages inhabited by PVTGs.
- It **encompasses various sectors, including safe housing under the PM-AWAS Scheme**, access to clean drinking water, improved healthcare, education, nutrition, road and telecommunications connectivity, as well as opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.
- The plan also includes the establishment of **Van Dhan Vikas Kendras** for trading in forest produce, off-grid solar power systems for 1 lakh households, and solar street lights.

Defense News

Akash missile

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted a successful flight test of the new generation **Akash surface-to-air missile (SAM)** from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, off the coast of Odisha.

About

- Akash is **India's first indigenously produced medium range SAM** that can engage multiple targets from multiple directions and it can be launched from mobile platforms like battle tanks or wheeled trucks.
- It has nearly 90% kill probability.
- The development of the Akash SAM was started by the DRDO in the late 1980s as part of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.
- It is unique in the way that It can simultaneously engage multiple targets in group mode or autonomous mode.
- It has built-in **Electronic Counter-Counter Measures (ECCM)** features, which means that it has mechanisms on-board that can counter the electronic systems that deceive the detection systems.
- The missile is supported by the **indigenously developed radar called 'Rajendra'**.

Defence Minister inaugurates 35 projects in border areas

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh **inaugurates 29 bridges six roads** constructed by the Border Roads Organisation
- The event was organised on the **Dhak Bridge, a 93-metre-long bridge over Dhak Nallah**
- Eleven of the projects are in Jammu and Kashmir, nine in Ladakh, eight in Arunachal Pradesh, three in Uttarakhand, two in Sikkim and one each in Mizoram and Himachal Pradesh.

Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

- It is a **statutory body under the ownership of the Ministry of Defence** of the Government of India.
- BRO **develops and maintains road networks** in India's border areas and friendly neighboring countries.

- This includes infrastructure operations in 19 states and three union territories (including Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, Tajikistan and Sri Lanka.

Ranks & Reports News

NCDC survey on Antibiotics

- According to the NCDC survey, **In 13 out of 20 hospitals, more than 70% of patients** were given at least one dose of antibiotic
- The findings of the report are worrying as India is among the few countries where **antimicrobial resistance** is notably high.
- Such resistance develops when antimicrobials, which include antibiotics, are misused or overprescribed.

Key fact

According to the WHO, antimicrobial resistance was directly responsible for **1.27 million global deaths in 2019 and contributed to 4.95 million deaths**

About NCDC

- The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), formerly **National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD)**, had its origin as the Central Malaria Bureau, established at **Kasauli (Himachal Pradesh) in 1909**.
- NICD was transformed into the **National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)** with a larger mandate of controlling emerging and re-emerging diseases in 2009.
- It functions as the nodal agency in the country **for disease surveillance facilitating prevention and control** of communicable diseases.
- It is also a national level institute for training specialized manpower for public health, laboratory sciences and entomological services and is involved in various applied research activities.

ILO on unemployment

- As per International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s **'World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024'** report
- Global unemployment rate is set to increase in 2024 while growing social inequalities remain a concern.

- Joblessness and the jobs gap have both fallen below pre-pandemic levels but global unemployment will rise in 2024.

CEEW study on rise of rainfall

- The study — authored by **Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)**, a research and policy think tank — **analysed high-resolution meteorological data** spanning four decades, from 1982 to 2022, which has been recorded by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- According to it, Rainfall is increasing in more than half of **India's 4,400-odd tehsils or sub-districts**
- While 55% of tehsils have seen a rise in rainfall, about 11% have experienced a fall.

ASER study on basics maths ability

- The **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)** released a report titled **"Beyond Basics"**
- It involved a survey by the civil society organisation **Pratham** among **rural students aged 14 to 18**.
- The household survey, conducted in 28 districts across 26 States, assessed the foundational reading and arithmetic abilities of 34,745 students.
- It **discussed the activities students are engaged in**, their basic and applied reading and maths abilities and digital awareness and skills.

Key findings

- Overall, 86.8% of 14- to 18-year-olds are enrolled in an educational institution. There are small gender gaps in enrolment, but notable differences are visible by age.
- The percentage of youth not enrolled is 3.9% for 14-year-old youth and is 32.6% for 18-year-olds
- Most of the people in this age group were enrolled in the **Arts/Humanities stream**.
- In **Class 11 or higher, more than half are enrolled in the Arts/Humanities stream (55.7%)** and girls are less likely to be enrolled in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics stream (28.1%) than boys (36.3%)

- More than half struggle with division (3-digit by 1-digit) problems. Only 43.3% of 14-18-year-olds are able to do such problems correctly.

India's domestic air passenger traffic

- India's domestic air passenger traffic is expected to **touch 300 million by 2030, an almost two-fold rise from the 153 million in 2023**
- The country would still remain one of the most under-penetrated markets among the top 20 globally, **moving up from existing 3-4% to 10-15% by the end of decade**.

Sports News

Khelo India Youth Games

The Prime Minister will be the Chief Guest for the opening ceremony of the **6th Khelo India Youth Games 2023** which will be held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai.

Key Points:

- Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) are the **annual national level multidisciplinary grassroot games** in India held in January or February for two categories, namely under-17 years school students and under-21 college students.
- Every year **best 1,000 kids will be given an annual scholarship of ₹5 lakh** for 8 years to prepare them for the international sporting events.

About:

- This is the first time that **Khelo India Youth Games are being held in South India**.
- The Games will be played across four cities of Tamil Nadu, namely Chennai, Madurai, Trichy and Coimbatore from 19th to 31st January, 2024.
- The mascot for the games is **Veera Mangai**.
- **Rani Velu Nachiyar**, fondly called as Veera Mangai, was an Indian queen who waged a war against British colonial rule.
- The mascot **symbolises the valour and spirit of Indian women**, embodying the strength of women power.
- The logo for the games incorporates the figure of poet **Thiruvalluvar**.

- Over 5600 athletes will be participating in this edition of Khelo India Youth Games, spread across 13 days in 15 venues with **26 sporting disciplines, over 275 competitive events and 1 demo sport.**
- The 26 sporting disciplines is a diverse mix of conventional sports such as Football, Volleyball, Badminton etc. and traditional sports such as Kalaripayattu, Gatka, Thang ta, Kabaddi and Yogasana.
- **Silambam, a traditional sport of Tamil Nadu,** is being introduced as a demo sport for the first time in the history of Khelo India Youth Games.

Science and Technology News

ISRO upgrades its distress alert device for fishermen

- The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** has developed an improvised distress alert transmitter (DAT) with advanced capabilities for fishermen at sea to send emergency messages from boats.
- The **DAT-SG has the facility to send back acknowledgement to the fishermen** who activate the distress alert from sea.
- The **information about potential fishing zones** are also transmitted to fishermen using DAT-SG on regular intervals.

Miscellaneous News

India's oldest living city

- A joint study by five prominent institutions (**Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Physical Research Laboratory, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Deccan College**) was done.
- It has found evidence of a cultural continuity in Vadnagar in present-day Gujarat even after the collapse of the Harappan civilisation, thus making it likely that the **"Dark Age"** was a myth.

Key points

- They found evidence of a human settlement that is as old as **800 BCE contemporary to late-Vedic/pre-Buddhist Mahajanapadas or oligarchic republics**

- The study also indicates that the rise and fall of different kingdoms during the 3,000-year period and recurrent invasions of India by central Asian warriors were driven by severe changes in climate like rainfall or droughts.
- The period between the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilisation and the emergence of the **Iron Age and cities such as Gandhar, Koshal, and Avanti is often depicted as a Dark Age by archaeologists.**
- If true, then it suggests a cultural continuity in India for the last 5500 years and the Dark Age may be a myth

Prabha Atre

Legendary classical singer and Padma Vibhushan recipient Prabha Atre passes away.

Key points

- She was born in September 1932 in Pune, Maharashtra
- She has won the **Padma Shri in 1990, the Padma Bhushan in 2002 and the Padma Vibhushan in 2022.**
- She received her training in classical music from Sureshbabu Mane, a prominent exponent of the **Kirana gharana.**
- She was equally proficient in different classical genres, be it khyal, tarana, thumri, dadra, ghazal and bhajan, citing the influence of Ustad Amir Khan (founder of the Indore gharana) for khyal and Bade Ghulam Ali Khan (Kasur gharana) for thumri.

Panama Canal

There is a shortage of water in the Panama Canal due to which the shipping sector is facing a lot of problems.

About

- The Panama Canal is an **82 km artificial waterway** in Panama, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and dividing North and South America.
- It allows ships to avoid the lengthy and dangerous voyage around Cape Horn.
- **Panama itself forms an isthmus** (a narrow land strip connecting two larger landmasses) between North and South America.
- This differs from straits, which are narrow waterways joining larger bodies of water, like the Strait of Gibraltar.

Kuno National Park (KNP)

One more cheetah, part of the set of 20 imported from Africa, died recently.

About Kuno National Park (KNP):

- It is located in the **Sheopur district in Madhya Pradesh**.
- It is nestled near the Vindhyan Hills.
- It is named after the **Kuno River (One of the main tributaries of the Chambal River)** that cuts across it.
- Initially established as a wildlife sanctuary, it was only in 2018 that the government changed its status into a national park.
- Kuno National Park was selected under **'Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India'**.
- Vegetation: Kuno is primarily a grassland region, though a few rocky outcrops are found here too.

Flora:

- Kardhai, Salai, and Khair trees dominate the forested area of Kuno National Park, which is mostly mixed forest.
- The park has a total of 123 tree species, 71 shrub species, 32 exotic and climbing species, and 34 bamboo and grass species.
- **Fauna:** The protected area of the forest is home to the jungle cat, Indian leopard, sloth bear, Indian wolf, striped hyena, golden jackal, Bengal fox and dhole, along with more than 120 bird species.

Sisal leaves

Scientists at Stanford University are researching the use of **sisal leaves to create a highly absorbent material** that could replace cotton, wood pulp, and chemical absorbents in sanitary napkins.

Key points

- The absorption capacity of the sisal-based material is reported to be higher than that in commercial menstrual pads.
- The method developed by the researchers involves using a **decorticator to mechanically separate the fibres** from sisal leaves and employing a process inspired by termite guts to delignify the fibres.
- The study claims that the process uses no polluting or toxic chemicals and can be conducted on a small scale, making it environmentally sustainable.

13% of land mass in Kerala vulnerable to landslips

- An artificial intelligence-based map of Kerala has revealed that **13% of the land mass is extremely vulnerable to landslips**, forming part of a multifaceted crisis gripping the region.
- The map shows **Idukki, Palakkad, Malappuram, Pathanamthitta, and Wayanad** as highly vulnerable regions
- Critical factors contributing to landslip vulnerability include first-order stream disturbances, slope toe cutting for road construction, and unscientific land use.
- The vulnerability map, prepared under the aegis of **Kufos, is the first AI-based landslip susceptibility map**.

Warmer winter impacts coldest region of Ladakh

- An unusually warm winter has impacted extreme **winter sports like ice hockey and the 105-km Chadar** trek in the cold desert mountains of Ladakh
- It is **considered the country's coldest place**, where the minimum temperature can drop up to -40 degrees Celsius.
- **Ladakh is the only region where ice formation**, not snow accumulation, is a common phenomenon.
- This helps locals to prepare for national and international events.

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