NEXT IAS

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

Time: 45 Min

Date: 25-03-2025

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SC SETS UP TASK FORCE TO ADDRESS STUDENT SUICIDES

Context

- The Supreme Court has set up a **national task force to address students' mental health concerns** and prevent suicides in higher educational institutions.

About

- The Supreme Court noted that student suicides in higher educational institutions, including IITs, have increased, **surpassing the number of farmer suicides due to agrarian distress.**
- The recurring incidents highlight the **institutional frameworks** in addressing student mental health, emphasizing the **need for better mechanisms to prevent suicides.**

Task Force Established

- **10-Member Task Force:** Formed to investigate causes of student suicides, including ragging, caste-based discrimination, academic pressure, financial stress, and mental health stigma.
- **Assessment of Current Frameworks:** The task force will evaluate the effectiveness of existing laws, policies, and frameworks in higher education and suggest improvements.
- **Authority for Surprise Inspections:** The task force has the authority to conduct surprise inspections at higher education institutions.
- **Flexible Mandate:** The task force can make recommendations beyond its specified mandate if necessary.
- **Reporting Timeline:** The court has ordered the task force to present an interim report within four months and a final report within eight months.

Student's Suicide in India

- As per the Report of the National Crime Records Bureau 2022, over 13,000 students having lost their lives by committing suicide in the country.
- **Surge in Student Suicides:** Student suicides in India have risen at an alarming annual rate of 4%, double the national average.
- **Gender Trends:** Between 2021-2022, male suicides decreased by 6%, while female suicides increased by 7%.
- **States:** Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Madhya Pradesh account for one-third of student suicides.

Reasons for the Rise in Student's Suicide

- **Academic Pressure:** Intense competition and high expectations in educational institutions, particularly in coaching hubs like Kota.
- **Mental Health Issues:** Increasing rates of depression, anxiety, and stress among students, with inadequate mental health support systems.
- **Social Stigma:** Stigma surrounding mental health, discouraging students from seeking help.
- **Caste and Gender Discrimination:** Discrimination based on caste, gender, and other social factors within academic institutions.
- **Family and Financial Strain:** Pressure from families to perform well academically, often combined with financial difficulties.
- **Failure and Academic Setbacks:** Struggles with failing exams, academic underachievement, and fear of failure leading to despair.
- **Lack of Support Systems:** Insufficient counseling services and mental health infrastructure in educational institutions.
- **Social Media and Peer Pressure:** The impact of social media on self-esteem, comparison with peers, and bullying.

Government Initiatives

- **Manodarpan Initiative:** The Union Education Ministry launched 'Manodarpan,' a program providing psychological support to students through a national toll-free helpline and website.
- **Rajasthan Government Actions:** Issued mental health guidelines in 2022 and 2023, enforced by district administrations.
  - Appointed 90 psychological counselors to support students.
  - Introduced a toll-free helpline for student assistance.
  - 10,000 hostel gatekeepers have been trained to identify signs of mental distress among students.
- **Dinner with DM Initiative in Kota:** A program where students in distress can meet district administration officials for support and counselling.
- **Helpline for Support:** Students facing distress or suicidal tendencies can call the helpline at 104 for assistance.
- **National Mental Health Policy:** Focused on improving mental health infrastructure and awareness in educational institutions.

Way Ahead

- **Need for Mental Health Focus:** The IC3 (Career Counseling Program) Institute emphasizes the need for a shift in educational focus to prioritize student well-being over competitive pressures.
- **NCRB Report:** The report advocates for a robust, integrated career and college counseling system

within institutions to address mental health challenges and student aspirations.

◆ The report stresses the importance of shifting the focus from academic competition to nurturing students' core competencies and well-being to prevent further suicides.

Source: IE

JUDICIARY'S IN-HOUSE INQUIRY AGAINST DELHI HIGH COURT JUDGE

Context

• Recently, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) initiated an unprecedented three-member in-house inquiry into the conduct of Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma.

About the In-House Inquiry

• **Origins and Evolution:**

◆ The need for an in-house inquiry mechanism arose **in 1995** following **allegations of financial impropriety** against Bombay High Court Chief Justice A.M. Bhattacharjee.

◆ In-House Procedure was formulated by the Supreme Court in 1997 following a case involving allegations against Justice V. Ramaswami, a former SC judge.

◆ The process was **refined in 2014** after a **sexual harassment** complaint led to the establishment of a seven-step inquiry framework

Key Features of the In-House Inquiry

• **Distinct from Impeachment:** Unlike impeachment, which requires Parliamentary approval under Article 124(4) of the Constitution**,** the in-house inquiry is an **internal mechanism** aimed at addressing conduct inconsistent with judicial values.

• **Formation of Inquiry Committees:** Committees typically consist of senior judges from different High Courts to ensure impartiality.

◆ For the current case, a three-member committee includes the Chief Justice of Punjab & Haryana High Court, Chief Justice of Himachal Pradesh High Court, and a Justice of Karnataka High Court.

• **Transparency:** Recent inquiries have demonstrated a commitment to transparency, with reports and evidence made publicly accessible.

Process of In-House Inquiry

• **Preliminary Scrutiny:** Complaints against judges are **first examined by the Chief Justice of India (CJI)** in the case of SC judges, or by the

Chief Justice of the respective High Court for HC judges.

• **Formation of a Committee:** If a prima facie case is established, a three-judge committee is formed to investigate the allegations.

• **Inquiry Proceedings:** The committee examines the evidence, questions the accused judge, and determines whether the allegations hold merit.

• **Report Submission:** The committee submits its findings to the CJI, who then decides on further action.

Possible Outcomes

• If the judge is found guilty of misconduct, the report is sent to the President of India for consideration of removal via Parliamentary impeachment.

• If the misconduct is minor, the judge may be advised to resign voluntarily.

• If the allegations are baseless, the matter is dropped.

Challenges in the In-House Inquiry Process

• **Lack of Transparency:** The inquiry is conducted behind closed doors, and reports are not made public. It raises concerns about accountability.

• **No Binding Authority:** Even if misconduct is established, the judiciary cannot directly remove a judge; impeachment by Parliament is required.

• **Rare Impeachment:** The complex impeachment process makes it nearly impossible to remove judges, as seen in the cases of Justice Ramaswami (1991) and Justice S. N. Shukla (2022).

• **Political Influence:** The impeachment process can be influenced by political considerations, reducing its effectiveness.

• **Delayed Justice:** Investigations often take years, diminishing public faith in judicial accountability.

Notable Cases of Judicial Inquiry in India

• **Justice V. Ramaswami Case (1991):** The first judge to face impeachment proceedings, but Parliament failed to remove him due to political maneuvering.

• **Justice Soumitra Sen Case (2011):** Found guilty of financial misconduct by an in-house inquiry; the Rajya Sabha passed an impeachment motion, but he resigned before the Lok Sabha could vote.

• **Justice S. N. Shukla Case (2022):** Accused of favoring private medical colleges; he was found guilty by an in-house inquiry, but impeachment did not follow.

Recommendations for Reform

• **Make Inquiry Reports Public:** Increasing transparency will enhance public trust.

- **Strengthen Judicial Oversight Bodies:** The establishment of Judicial Standards and Accountability Commission will be a significant step towards ensuring transparency and accountability in the judiciary.
- **Introduce Alternative Disciplinary Mechanisms:** Instead of only relying on impeachment, other disciplinary actions like suspensions or fines should be considered.
- **Ensure Time-Bound Proceedings:** Delays in inquiries should be minimized to prevent judicial misconduct from going unpunished.
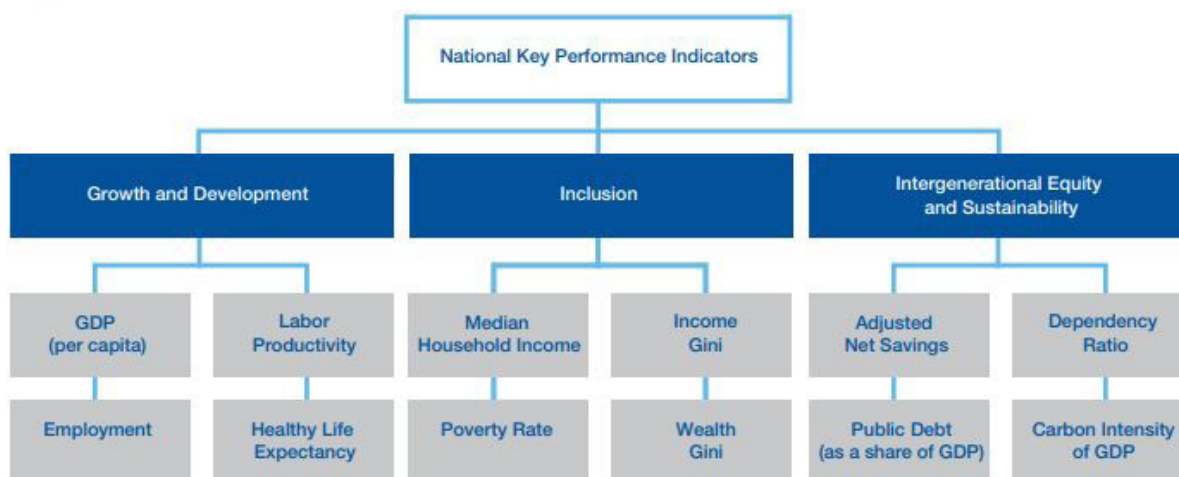
Source: IE

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

Context

- President Droupadi Murmu emphasized the **importance of inclusive development for all regions,** including those affected by Maoist extremism in Chhattisgarh.

About

- She stressed the **need to balance modern development with environmental protection and the inclusion of all sections of society** in the development process.

- **Naxalism or Left Wing Extremism (LWE)** is one of the major challenges to India's internal security.
  - Naxalites seek to overthrow the State through violent means.
  - Naxal affected areas in India are known as the **'Red Corridor'.**
- The States of **Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Bihar** are considered **severely affected.**
- She emphasized the "saturation approach" to ensure that no citizen is left behind in India's development journey.

What is Inclusive Development?

- Inclusive Development refers to a development approach that ensures **all segments of society** have **equal access** to opportunities, resources, and benefits of economic, social, and political progress.
  - It focuses on **reducing inequality** and addressing the needs of diverse populations.
- The Indian model of inclusive growth, viewed from a development economics perspective, has three pillars: **Market economics, Empowerment, and Pragmatism.**
- **India ranked 62nd out of 74 emerging economies** in the World Economic Forums' **Inclusive Development Index (IDI),** last released in **2018**.

Figure 1: Inclusive Growth and Development Key Performance Indicators

- **The three key approaches for inclusive development include:**
  - **Good governance** (progressive politics, effective management and successful engagement in the global economy;
  - **Structural transformation**, (economic, social and demographic), and;
  - **Multi-pronged policy and programme mix** (macroeconomic policies, sound institutions,

public-private sector development, effective economic policy management).

Identified Segments for Inclusive Development

- **Tribal and Rural Communities:** Assimilation of communities in society; educating at grassroot level; electricity, network connectivity; connectivity through roads; pucca houses; introduction to new basic technologies etc.

- **Physically Disabled:** Providing facilities such as wheelchairs and audio-visual aids; installation of ramps and tactical paths for easy accessibility; training of individuals on interacting with differently abled; skilling specially-abled, etc.

- **Streamlining Unbanked Section:** Awareness should be provided related to the importance of bank accounts in rural and tribal areas, financial literacy, mobile banking etc.

- **Women:** Pre- and post-pregnancy care, healthcare, education, childcare, skill-development, opportunities for financial improvement etc.

Difference Between Inclusive Growth and Development:

Aspect	Inclusive Growth	Inclusive Development
Focus	Primarily focuses on economic aspects such as income and employment.	Broader scope, including social justice, healthcare, education, and infrastructure.
Measurement	Often measured by GDP growth, income levels, and employment rates.	Measured by indicators such as HDI (Human Development Index), quality of life, and social equity.
Policy Approach	Promotes policies to create equal economic opportunities.	Advocates for policies that provide both economic and social empowerment, including welfare schemes.

Need for Inclusive Development in India

- **Addressing Inequality:** India has significant disparities in income, education, healthcare, and living standards, particularly between urban and rural areas, and among different social groups.

- **Empowering Marginalized Communities:** Large sections of society, including tribal communities, women, and the differently-abled, remain excluded from mainstream development and opportunities.

- **Promoting Social Justice:** Inclusive development ensures that every citizen, regardless of their background, has access to the benefits of growth, promoting fairness and reducing social tensions.

- **Economic Growth:** India can unlock the full potential of its population, leading to more sustainable and equitable economic growth.

- **Global Competitiveness:** A more inclusive society leads to a more productive, skilled, and innovative workforce, enhancing India's global competitiveness.

- **Sustainable Development:** It aligns with the goal of long-term, sustainable growth, considering the needs of all sections of society, including future generations.

Constitutional Framework for Inclusive Development

- **Fundamental Rights (Part III):**
  - **Equality Before Law (Article 14):** Guarantees equality for all citizens.
  - **Prohibition of Discrimination (Article 15):** Ensures no discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
  - **Equality of Opportunity (Article 16):** Ensures equal opportunities in public employment.
  - **Right to Education (Article 21A):** Guarantees free education for children aged 6 to 14.
  - **Protection of Minorities (Articles 29 & 30):** Safeguards the cultural and educational rights of minorities.

- **Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV):**
  - **Social Justice (Article 38):** Promotes the welfare of the people, focusing on justice and reducing inequalities.
  - **Promotion of Weaker Sections (Article 46):** Aims to protect and promote the interests of SCs, STs, and OBCs.

- **Reservation and Affirmative Action: Articles 15(4) and 16(4)** allow for affirmative action, such as reservations in education and employment for SCs, STs, and OBCs.

- **Panchayats and Local Governance (Part IX):** Article 243N strengthens local self-governance, ensuring the participation of marginalized communities.

- **Legal Protection for Vulnerable Groups:** Laws like the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 protect disadvantaged communities from discrimination and violence.

- **Judicial Oversight:** The Supreme Court and High Courts ensure that policies align with the constitutional values of equality and justice.
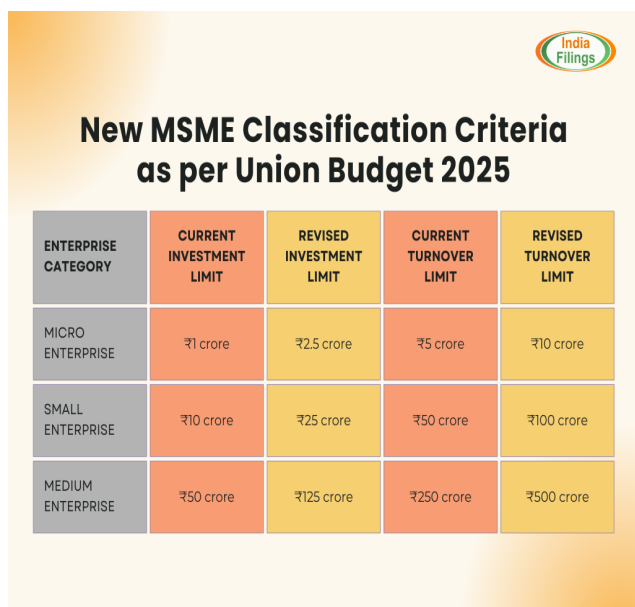
Conclusion

- There are many Government initiatives focused on providing opportunities, resources, and social security for marginalized communities, ensuring broad-based growth and well-being.

Source: TH

GOVT NOTIFIES REVISED CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFYING MSMES

In News

- The government has notified significant revisions to the turnover and investment criteria for classifying Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which will come into effect from April 1.

New MSME Classification Criteria as per Union Budget 2025

ENTERPRISE CATEGORY	CURRENT INVESTMENT LIMIT	REVISED INVESTMENT LIMIT	CURRENT TURNOVER LIMIT	REVISED TURNOVER LIMIT
MICRO ENTERPRISE	₹1 crore	₹2.5 crore	₹5 crore	₹10 crore
SMALL ENTERPRISE	₹10 crore	₹25 crore	₹50 crore	₹100 crore
MEDIUM ENTERPRISE	₹50 crore	₹125 crore	₹250 crore	₹500 crore

Significance of MSMEs

- **Dynamic & Vibrant:** Evolving over five decades, MSMEs play a vital role in India's economic and social development.
- **Employment:** Employs 24.14 crore people, making it second only to agriculture in job creation.
  - Nearly 40% of the 6.13 crore registered MSMEs are women-owned.
- **Ancillary Role:** Complements large industries, serving as ancillary units and boosting inclusive industrial development.
- **Rural Reach:** Helps industrialise rural and backward areas, reducing regional disparities.
- **Global Footprint:** Produces a diverse range of products and services for both domestic and international markets.
- **Self-Reliance Mission:** With over 6 crore units, MSMEs are key to building a strong, self-reliant India.

Challenges of MSMEs

- **Limited Access to Finance:** Many MSMEs lack formal credit history, collateral, or proper documentation to secure loans from banks.
  - **Example:** According to SIDBI, only 16% of MSMEs get formal credit; the rest rely on informal sources or NBFCs at higher interest rates.
- **Low Technology Adoption:** Most units still operate with outdated machinery, affecting productivity, quality, and scalability.
  - **Example:** Textile MSMEs in Surat still rely on traditional looms, limiting their ability to compete with Chinese manufacturers.
- **Limited Market Access & Exports:** MSMEs contribute 48% to India's exports, but only a small percentage are directly exporting.
  - **Example:** Handicraft MSMEs in Rajasthan often lack online platforms or export licenses to scale internationally.
- **Skill Shortage & Labour Issues:** Over 70% of MSMEs face difficulty in hiring skilled manpower, as per a FICCI survey.
- **Delayed Payments from Buyers:** Larger companies delay payments, choking the cash flow of MSMEs.
  - **Example:** MSMEs supplying to government PSUs often face delays of 3–6 months, disrupting working capital cycles.

Initiatives to Boost MSMEs

- **Udyam Registration Portal:** A simplified online portal for MSME registration, providing them with a unique identification number and facilitating access to various government schemes.
- **Public Procurement Policy for MSEs**: Mandates that a certain percentage of procurement by government ministries and PSUs must be sourced from MSEs.
- **Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Programme (ESDP)**: Conducts various training programs to promote entrepreneurship and develop skills relevant to MSMEs.
- **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE):** Provides collateral-free loans up to ₹5 crore to MSMEs. The guarantee coverage varies based on the loan amount and category of the borrower.
- **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY):** Offers loans up to ₹10 lakh to non-corporate, non-farm small and micro-enterprises. These loans are categorized as 'Shishu' (up to ₹50,000), 'Kishore' (above ₹50,000 and up to ₹5 lakh), 'Tarun' (above ₹5 lakh and up to ₹10 lakh) and 'Tarun Plus' (between 10 lakh to 20 lakh).
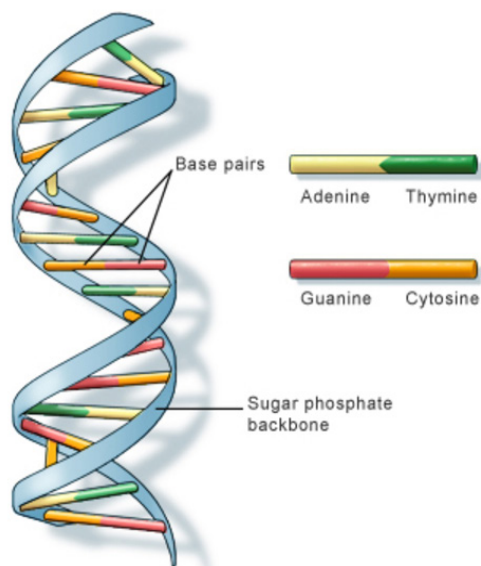
- **Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI):** Organizes traditional artisans into clusters to make them more competitive and provide sustainable employment.
- **PM Vishwakarma:** Provides comprehensive support to artisans and craftspeople, focusing on skill development, toolkits, credit access, and market linkage.

Source: TH

DNA'S ROLE IN IDENTIFICATION

In Context

- DNA has been instrumental in solving cold cases by analyzing profiles from archived crime scene materials.

Base pairs

Adenine Thymine

Guanine Cytosine

Sugar phosphate backbone

U.S. National Library of Medicine

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA)

- It is the hereditary material in humans and most organisms, with nearly every cell containing the same DNA.
- It is primarily found in the cell nucleus as nuclear DNA, though a small amount exists in mitochondria as mitochondrial DNA.
- **DNA is made up of four chemical bases**: adenine (A), guanine (G), cytosine (C), and thymine (T), which pair up to form base pairs (A with T, C with G).
- These bases are attached to sugar and phosphate molecules, forming nucleotides that create a double helix structure.
- The sequence of these bases encodes information for building and maintaining organisms, similar to how letters form words.

- DNA can replicate, making exact copies of itself, which is crucial for cell division, ensuring that new cells contain the same DNA as the original.
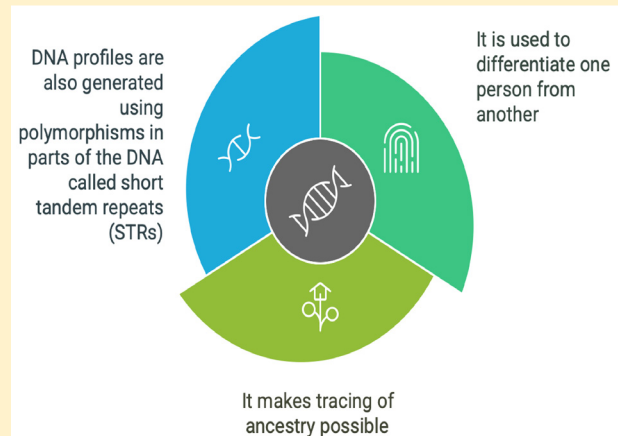
DNA's and Identification

- DNA acts like a **biological fingerprint**, used to uniquely identify individuals, much like an Aadhaar number does for social security.
  - DNA is present in every cell of the body, and each cell contains 46 DNA molecules—23 inherited from the mother and 23 from the father.
  - DNA is packed in chromosomes. For example, chromosome 3 contains 6.5% of the total DNA.

Polymorphisms

- Polymorphism in genomics refers to the existence of different forms of a DNA sequence among individuals or populations.
- They are small differences in DNA between individuals, and they help in tracing **ancestry by identifying variations inherited from parents**.

Use of Polymorphism

DNA profiles are also generated using polymorphisms in parts of the DNA called short tandem repeats (STRs)

It is used to differentiate one person from another

It makes tracing of ancestry possible

Short Tandem Repeats (STRs)

- STRs are short DNA sequences repeated multiple times (e.g., GATCGATCGATC).
- STRs are polymorphic, meaning unrelated individuals often have different numbers of repeats in specific STRs.

Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)

- PCR is used to amplify (copy) specific DNA sequences, even from small amounts of DNA.
- The process involves separating DNA strands, binding primers to target sequences, and using DNA polymerase to replicate the sequence. It can create millions of copies in about 50 minutes.

Applications of DNA Fingerprints

- DNA fingerprints are used in forensic science, paternity testing, disaster victim identification, and organ donation matching.
- They can also help solve cold cases by identifying suspects or exonerating wrongly accused individuals.

Importance

- DNA is highly stable, and scientists have successfully extracted DNA from ancient human remains (e.g., 65,000 years old).
- This stability makes DNA useful in solving crimes from archived materials.

Source :TH

═══ NEWS IN SHORT ═══

PAY HIKE FOR MPS

In News

- The Centre notified a **24% increase in the salaries of MPs** with effect from April 1, 2023.
  - The salaries and allowances were last revised in April 2018.

About Pay hike

- The increase in the salary has been notified in exercise of the powers granted under the **Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act** on the basis of the **Cost Inflation Index specified in the Income Tax Act of 1961.**
- A **Lok Sabha or a Rajya Sabha** member will get 1.24 lakh a month, up from the 1 lakh they receive at present.
- The daily allowance has been increased from 2,000 to 2,500.
- The pension for former MPs has been increased from 25,000 a month to 31,000.
- During their term, MPs are provided with rent-free housing in New Delhi.

> **Do you know?**
> - The **Rajya Sabha** consists of not more than 250 members - 238 members representing the States and Union Territories, and 12 members nominated by the President.
>   - It is a permanent body and is not subject to dissolution. However, one third of the members retire every second year, and are replaced by newly elected members. Each member is elected for a term of six years.

> - **The Lok Sabha** is composed of representatives of people chosen by direct election on the basis of **Universal Adult Suffrage**.
>   - The Constitution of India allows for a maximum of **550 members** in the House, with **530 members representing the States** and **20 representing the Union Territories**.

Source :TH

PM VIKAS SCHEME

Context

- The Union Minister of Minority Affairs & Parliamentary Affairs, reaffirmed that the **PM VIKAS Scheme focuses on upliftment of minority communities.**

About

- The **Pradhan Mantri Virasat Ka Samvardhan (PM VIKAS)** is a **Central Sector Scheme** by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, focusing on the **upliftment of six notified minority communities** (Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jain and Zorastrians (Parsis).
- **Merges five schemes:** 'Seekho Aur Kamao', 'Nai Manzil', 'Nai Roshni', 'USTTAD', and 'Hamari Dharohar'.
- **Key Focus Areas:**
  - **Skilling and Training:** Both non-traditional and traditional skills.
  - **Women Leadership and Entrepreneurship:** Empowering women through leadership and business opportunities.
  - **Education:** Provided through the National Institute of Open Schooling.
  - **Infrastructure Development:** Through Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram.
  - **Credit Linkages:** Connecting beneficiaries with loan programs from the National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation (NMDFC).
- **Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)** is a **knowledge partner** of the Ministry under the scheme.
- **EPCH's Role:**
  - Providing marketing linkages and branding.
  - Developing training content and course modules.
  - Organizing awareness programs and mobilizing artisans for producer groups.

- Under the PM VIKAS Scheme, the **implementing partners** are to ensure placement of 75 per cent of total candidates trained under NSQF aligned skill programs.

Source: PIB

GOVT PROPOSES TO ABOLISH 6% EQUALISATION LEVY

Context

- The government proposed to **abolish** the **6% Equalisation Levy (digital tax) on online advertisements, effective April 1, 2025.**

About

- **Platforms:** This move benefits **advertisers on digital platforms like Google, X, and Meta.**
- **Equalisation Levy:** The Equalisation Levy on online ads **was introduced in 2016,** and the **Finance Act 2020 extended it to e-commerce services.**
  - It was designed to **tax online advertising services, digital ad space, and related facilities.**
  - The levy is charged at 6% in respect of the **sum received or receivable by a non-resident for online advertisement services.**
  - In 2020, Equalisation Levy was **also imposed on non-resident** e-commerce operators. The rate was 2%, but **it was removed in 2024.**
- **Aim:** The proposal aims to show a **more accommodative stance toward the US,** which has threatened reciprocal tariffs starting April 2.

Source: TH

DALLE CHILLY

Context

- **The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)** has successfully **exported the first consignment of Dalle Chilly from Sikkim to the Solomon Islands.**

About

- **Dalle Chilly** is known for its **pungency**, **bright red color, and high nutritional value,** with **Scoville Heat Units (SHU) ranging from 100,000 to 350,000.**
  - **The Scoville scale** is a **measurement of the pungency** (spiciness) of peppers and other hot foods.
  - The scale is based on the **concentration of capsaicin,** an active component of chili peppers that produces a burning sensation when it touches the tongue or skin.
- Dalle Chilly received the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2020,** enhancing its marketability and identity.
- **Government Support:** The Indian government promotes organic farming in North East India through the MOVCD-NER scheme, boosting organic Dalle Chilly production.
- **Significance:** This export boosts Sikkim's global spice profile and highlights India's growing prominence in the organic agricultural market.

What is a GI Tag?

- It is a **sign used on products** that have a **specific geographical origin** and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
- Geographical Indications are part of the **intellectual property rights** that come under the **Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.**
- In India, Geographical Indications registration is administered by the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999.**
  - They are typically used for **agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts, and industrial products.**
- The registration of a geographical indication is **valid for a period of 10 years,** it can be renewed from time to time for a further period of 10 years each.

Benefits of GI Tag

- It confers **legal protection** to Geographical Indications in India which in turn **boost exports.**
- Prevents **unauthorised use** of a Registered Geographical Indication by others.
- It promotes **economic prosperity of producers** of goods produced in a geographical territory.

Source: PIB

AIKEYME AND IOS SAGAR

Context

- The Indian Navy is set to launch two **maiden initiatives—AIKEYME and IOS Sagar**—aimed at strengthening India's position as the **'Preferred Security Partner' and 'First Responder'** in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

AIKEYME (Africa India Key Maritime Engagement)

- 'AIKEYME', which means 'Unity' in **Sanskrit**, is a large-scale multilateral maritime exercise with African nations.

- The first edition will be **co-hosted** by the **Indian Navy** and the Tanzania Peoples' Defence Force **(TPDF)**.
  - It will take place **off the coast of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania**, over six days in mid-April 2025.
- Participating nations include **Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, and South Africa**, alongside the co-hosts.

Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) Sagar

- As part of this initiative, the **Indian Naval Ship (INS Sunayna)** will be deployed to the **Southwest IOR** with a combined crew from **India** and **nine Friendly Foreign Countries (FFCs)**.
  - Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka , and South Africa.

Source: TH

BLACK CARBON

In News

- A new report warns **black carbon** is a major driver of glacier melt, monsoon disruption and extreme weather.
  - India is the second-largest black carbon emitter globally, after China.

About Black Carbon

- Also **known as soot.** A major component of fine particulate air pollution (PM2.5).
- Classified as a **Short-Lived Climate Pollutant (SLCP)**, meaning it stays in the atmosphere for only days to weeks.

Impacts

- **Global Warming:** It's a significant contributor to global warming, alongside methane, responsible for about half of the total warming.
- **Regional Climate Impact:** Darkens snow and ice, reducing their reflectivity (albedo).
  - This leads to increased absorption of solar radiation and accelerates ice melting, particularly in the Arctic and glaciers.
  - Black carbon is estimated to be responsible for 39% of the Yala glacier's mass loss in the Tibetan Plateau.
- **Disruption of Hydrological Cycle:** Can disrupt Asian and West African monsoon precipitation patterns. This disruption increases the risk of flooding and drought.

Source: TH

BLUE FLAG TAG

In News

- **Rushikonda Beach** in Visakhapatnam wins back the **Blue Flag tag.**
  - India currently has 13 beaches with **Blue Flag certification.**

About Blue Flag Tag

- The Blue Flag is an **international eco-label awarded to beaches, marinas, and sustainable** boating tourism operators.
- It is administered by the **Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE)**, headquartered in **Copenhagen, Denmark.**
- Recognized globally as a symbol of cleanliness, safety, and environmental sustainability.
- To earn the Blue Flag, a beach/marina must meet 33 strict criteria across four main categories:
  - Environmental Education and Information
  - Water Quality
  - Environmental Management
  - Safety and Services

Source: TH

PERMAFROST THAWING IN KASHMIR HIMALAYA

In News

- A recent study highlighted the growing environmental threat posed by melting **permafrost in the Kashmir Himalaya**.

Permafrost

- Permafrost is any ground that remains completely frozen—32°F (0°C) or colder—for at least two years straight.
- These permanently frozen grounds are most common in regions with high mountains and in Earth's higher latitudes—near the North and South Poles.

Concerns

- Thawing permafrost can degrade infrastructure like roads and hydropower projects and destabilize glacial lakes, increasing the risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).
- In J&K, 332 proglacial lakes were identified, with 65 posing significant GLOF risks. The thawing of permafrost could exacerbate these risks.

Impacts

- Human activities like deforestation, land-use changes, and infrastructure development (roads, dams, tourism) can destabilize permafrost, worsening its degradation.

- Permafrost degradation could affect groundwater and river flow, as it plays a role in maintaining the base flow of rivers. However, comprehensive studies on this are still lacking.

Recommendations

- Future infrastructure projects should consider the presence of permafrost.
- Environmental impact assessments should better account for GLOF and cryospheric hazards.
- Monitoring of permafrost through both satellite data and in-situ data loggers is needed for more accurate risk assessment.
- More studies are required to understand the full extent of permafrost degradation and its impacts, particularly in relation to water resources and infrastructure.

Source :TH

INDIA'S HEAT ACTION PLANS

In News

- According to a recent study, most **Indian cities' Heat Action Plans (HAPs)** lack long-term strategies to address the growing threat of extreme heat, and those with such strategies have not implemented them effectively.
  - **Heat Action Plans (HAPs)** is an early warning system and preparedness strategy aimed at reducing health impacts of extreme heat on vulnerable populations.

About

- The study, titled "Is India Ready for a Warming World?", was conducted by the Sustainable Futures Collaborative (SFC) and several international universities (King's College London, Harvard, Princeton, and UC Berkeley).

- The study focused on cities with populations over 1 million that are expected to experience significant increases in dangerous heat index values.

Key Findings

- Short-term measures like access to water and adjusted work schedules are in place in most cities.
- Long-term measures (e.g., cooling options, insurance for lost work, fire management, and electricity grid retrofits) are mostly absent or poorly implemented.
- Many actions, such as expanding green cover and urban shade, are not effectively targeting the most heat-exposed populations.
- Gaps in planning could lead to higher heat-related deaths in the future, as heat waves become more frequent, intense, and prolonged.

> **Do you know?**
>
> - Heatstroke deaths increased from 530 in 2020 to 730 in 2022, but decreased to 269 suspected and 161 confirmed deaths in 2024, according to NDMA.
> - The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has been implementing HAPs in 23 heatwave-prone states in collaboration with state authorities.

Suggestions

- The study emphasizes the urgent need to strengthen both immediate responses and long-term strategies to reduce the health impacts of extreme heat.
- Adequate funding is required to implement long-term measures.

Source :IE

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