



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

General Studies-1

Taj Mahal turning green:

The Supreme Court on Tuesday expressed concern over the change of colour of the iconic Taj Mahal at Agra and said the monument had become yellowish earlier and was now turning brownish and greenish. The apex court suggested that the Centre take the assistance of experts from India and abroad to first assess the damage and then take steps to restore the historic monument.

Dangers to Taj Mahal:

1. Use of coal fired chulhas by petha makers.
2. Unregulated number of tourists, as constant trading wears down the floor.
3. Due to high temperature, mineral impurities present in the marble gets oxidized and creates brown stains.
4. Rain also has weathering effect on the marble and can cause chipping and cracking.
5. Iron dowels used to fix the marble slabs get rusted and rust flows down with rain getting deposited on marble.
6. Hot dusty wind had abrasive effect on marble too.
7. In recent weeks, activists in Agra have complained that the structure was developing greenish-black patches on several parts as a result of the release of faeces and dirt by an insect identified as the Geoldichironomus (Chironomus calligraphus).
8. Activists attributed it to the rising pollution levels of the Yamuna, saying it led to an explosive breeding of the insect in the river, on whose banks stands the 17th century monument.
9. Dumping of waste in the Yamuna led to the stagnation of the river and the consequent "explosive breeding" of the insect, which is a "biological indicator of water quality and localised water pollution."

Solutions:--

Increasing green cover and water bodies.

Regulating number of tourists per day.

Mandating user of gas powered chulhas by hotel.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

Controlling vehicular pollution

150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi

The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, chaired the first meeting of the National Committee for the Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, at Rashtrapati Bhavan today (May 2, 2018).

The Committee has a total of 125 members, including 116 from India and encompasses the President (as chair), the Vice-President, Prime Minister, Union Ministers, former Prime Ministers, Chief Ministers, senior MPs and political leaders from across party lines, and eminent Gandhians, social thinkers and activists representing a cross-section of Indian society and regional diversity.

The Committee also has nine international members, including two former Secretaries General of the United Nations – Mr Kofi Annan and Mr Ban Ki-moon – and Nobel laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and former US Vice-President Al Gore. Today's meeting was attended by 82 members of the Committee, including two from abroad. [Lists of Committee members and of those who attended are attached.

The Prime Minister stressed that all programmes associated with this celebration should be designed around the theme of "Karyanjali" - or "Gandhi in action".

Aranmula snakeboat Festival

The famous Aranmula snakeboat regatta in **Kerala** will not be a competitive race in the Pampa river waters at this year's Onam festival, and will instead return to its roots as a spectacle of colour and song.

Ruling in favour of regalia, the Palliyoda Seva Sanghom (PSS), which conducts the show, has decided to do away with the race format during the Uthrottadhi Vallamkali in August.

What caused concern was the influence of competitive sport on the legacy of style and colour.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

“The Aranmula Vallamkali has strong moorings in the traditions of the centuries-old Sree Parthasarathy temple at Aranmula, regarded as one of the 101 Vaishnava Tirupatis.

The Vallamkali marks the anniversary of the idol installation at the Aranmula temple, with the participation of about 50 units called Palliyoda Karayogams in and around Aranmula, which have their own snakeboats (Palliyodams) .

The oarsmen consider it a holy mission to take part, and the boats are treated as those of the deity.

The race was not part of Aranmula Vallamkali earlier, and the high-crested boats that take part are distinct from those used in races elsewhere in Kerala.

They are meant to be paddled, in tune with the rhythmic Vanchippattu, which are verses in praise of Lord Krishna, Mr. Krishnakumar said. The dhoti-and-shawl dress code of the oarsmen is also a special feature.

The Mannam Trophy will thus go to the snakeboat that is adjudged the best in terms of paddling style, discipline, costume of the oarsmen, and Vanchippattu singing.

Passionate practitioners persevere into the night to save 'Tholu Bommalata' for posterity

The show goes on till late in the night as passion for puppetry is still strong among select families in Prakasam district, which are determined to practice the ancient art form even while doing odd jobs for a living during day time.

Tholu Bommalata is the [shadow puppet](#) theatre tradition of the state of [Andhra Pradesh](#) in [India](#).

Its performers the part of a group of wandering entertainers and peddlers who pass through villages during the course of a year and offer to sing ballads, tell fortunes, sell amulets, perform acrobatics, charm snakes, weave fishnets, tattoo local people and mend pots.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

This ancient custom, which for centuries before radio, movies, and television provided knowledge of [Hindu epics](#) and local folk tales, not to mention news, spread to the most remote corners of the subcontinent.

Tholu Bommalata literally means "the dance of leather puppets" (*tholu* – leather and *bommalata* – puppet dance),

The skin of wild animals including the antelope and the spotted deer was used to make puppets. We have settled for goat skin in view of the ban on hunting wild animals.

General Studies-2

POCSO Act:

Why in News?

Shocked by the high rate of pendency of child sexual assault cases, the Supreme Court directed High Courts to set up panels of its judges to regulate and monitor [trials](#) under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The Bench, also comprising Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and D.Y. Chandrachud, issued a series of directions which supplement the ordinance.

These include:

the State police chiefs should constitute special task forces to investigate cases, High Courts should ensure that they are tried and disposed of by the designated Special Courts under the Act;

POCSO judges will give no adjournments and make every effort to fast-track trial, witnesses should be produced in court on the day of the hearing and high courts should make every effort to provide a child-friendly atmosphere in tune with the spirit of the Act.

About POCSO:



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

POCSO or The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012 was established to protect the children against offences like sexual abuse, sexual harassment and pornography.

It was formed to provide a child-friendly system for trial underneath which the perpetrators could be punished.

The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age. It also makes provisions for avoiding the re-victimisation of the child at the hands of the judicial system.

The Act defines different forms of sexual abuse which includes penetrative and non-penetrative assault. It also involves sexual harassment, pornography, etc.

Under certain specific circumstances POCSO states a sexual assault is to be considered "aggravated if the abused child is mentally ill or when the abuse is committed by a member of the armed forces or security forces or a public servant or a person in a position of trust or authority of the child, like a family member, police officer, teacher, or doctor or a person-management or staff of a hospital — whether Government or private."

The Act also makes it mandatory to report such cases. It makes it the legal duty of a person aware of the offence to report the sexual abuse. In case he fails to do so, the person can be punished with six months' imprisonment or fine.

The Act further states that the evidence of the child should be recorded within a period of thirty days.

The Special Court taking cognizance of the matter should be able to complete the trial within the period of one year from the date of taking cognizance of the abuse.

It provides that the Special Court proceedings should be recorded in camera and the trial should take place in the presence of parents or any other person in whom the child has trust or confidence.

WHO recognises air pollution is a critical risk factor for non-communicable diseases



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

Delhi and Varanasi are among the 14 Indian cities that figure in a list of 20 most polluted cities in the world in terms of PM2.5 levels in 2016, data released by the WHO showed.

Other Observations:

The WHO data also said that nine out of 10 people in the world breathe air containing high levels of pollutants.

The World Health Organisation has called upon member-countries in its Southeast Asia region to aggressively address the double burden of household and ambient (outdoor) [air pollution](#), saying the region, which comprises India, accounts for 34% or 2.4 million of the seven million premature deaths caused by household and ambient air pollution together globally every year.

Of the 3.8 million deaths caused by household air pollution globally, the region accounts for 1.5 million or 40% deaths, and of the 4.2 million global deaths due to ambient air pollution, 1.3 million or 30% are reported from the region, it said.

The PM2.5 includes pollutants like sulfate, nitrate and black carbon, which pose the greatest risk to human health.

“WHO estimates that around 7 million people die every year from exposure to fine particles in polluted air that penetrate deep into the lungs and cardiovascular system, causing diseases including stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases and respiratory infections, including pneumonia,” the report said.

According to the report, more than 90% of air pollution-related deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries (including India), mainly in Asia and Africa, followed by low- and middle-income countries of the Eastern Mediterranean region, Europe and the Americas.

“Around 3 billion people — more than 40% of the world’s population — still do not have access to clean cooking fuels and technologies in their homes, the main source of household air pollution,” it said.

It said the WHO recognises air pollution is a critical risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), causing an estimated 24% of all adult deaths from heart disease, 25% from stroke, 43% from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and 29% from lung cancer.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

Major sources of air pollution from particulate matter include inefficient use of energy by households, industry, agriculture and transport sectors, and coal-fired power plants. In some regions, sand and desert dust, waste burning and deforestation are additional sources of air pollution.

InSight Explorer:

Six years after last landing on Mars, NASA is sending a robotic geologist to dig deeper than ever before to take the planet's temperature.

The Mars InSight spacecraft, set to launch this weekend, will also take the planet's pulse by making the first measurements of "marsquakes." And to check its reflexes, scientists will track the wobbly rotation of Mars on its axis to better understand the size and makeup of its core.

About the Mission:

The lander's instruments will allow scientists "to stare down deep into the planet.

The \$1 billion U.S.-European mission is the first dedicated to studying the innards of Mars.

By probing Mars' insides, scientists hope to better understand how the red planet — any rocky planet, including our own — formed 4.5 billion years ago.

Mars is smaller and geologically less active than its neighbour Earth, where plate tectonics and other processes have obscured our planet's original makeup. As a result, Mars has retained the "fingerprints" of early evolution.

In another first for the mission, a pair of briefcase-size satellites will launch aboard InSight, break free after liftoff, then follow the spacecraft for six months all the way to Mars. They won't stop at Mars, just fly past.

The point is to test the two CubeSats as a potential communication link with InSight as it descends to the red planet on November 26.

WALL-E and Eve



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

These Mars-bound cubes are nicknamed WALL-E and EVE after the animated movie characters.

It will be NASA's first interplanetary mission launched from somewhere other than Florida's Cape Canaveral

Once on the surface, InSight will take interplanetary excavation to a "whole new level," according to NASA's science mission director Thomas Zurbuchen.

A slender cylindrical probe dubbed the mole is designed to tunnel nearly 16 feet into the Martian soil.

A quake-measuring seismometer, meanwhile, will be removed from the lander by a mechanical arm and placed directly on the surface for better vibration monitoring.

About InSight:

The 1,530-pound (694-kilogram) InSight builds on the design of the Phoenix lander and, before that, the Viking landers.

They're all stationary three-legged landers; no roaming around. InSight stands for "Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport." InSight's science objectives, however, are reminiscent of NASA's Apollo program.

Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Apollo moonwalkers drilled up to 8 feet (2.5 metres) into the lunar surface so scientists back home could measure the underground flow of lunar heat. The moon still holds seismometers left behind by the 12 moonmen.

Previous Mars missions have focused on surface or close-to-the-surface rocks and mineral. Phoenix, for instance, dug just several inches down for samples. The Martian atmosphere and magnetic field also have been examined in detail over the decades.

Exercise VIJAY PRAHAR



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

Formations of South Western Command are carrying out Exercise VIJAY PRAHAR employing more than 20000 troops, cutting edge equipment and state of the art force multipliers in the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges close to Suratgarh in Rajasthan.

The exercise is aimed to orchestrate wide spectrum of threats which are planned to be tackled through high tempo joint air and land operation involving hundreds of aircrafts, thousands of tanks and artillery pieces supported by real time intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and just in time logistic support.

The month-long exercise is essentially to practice the troops in penetrative manoeuvres across the obstacle ridden terrain under a nuclear umbrella.

During the exercise, the formations of South Western Command are practising and operationalising certain innovative concepts of operating in the network centric environment, integrated employment of modern day sensors with the weapon platforms, employment of attack helicopters in the air cavalry role and bold offensive of application of the Special Forces.

The formations will refine their drills and procedures for fighting in the nuclear environment during the course of the exercise.

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme

Why in News?

The Ministry of Women and Child Development will hold National Conference of 244 Districts under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) in New Delhi tomorrow.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development will share experiences from their sectoral interventions on improving the Sex Ratio at Birth and initiatives to encourage girl child education.

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi announced the All India expansion of BBBP scheme in 640 districts across the country (as per Census 2011) on 8th March, 2018 at Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.

About the scheme:

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (*translation: Save girl child, educate a girl child*) is a personal campaign of the [Government of India](#) that aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

The scheme was launched with an initial funding of ₹100 crore (US\$15 million). It mainly targets the clusters in [Uttar Pradesh](#), [Haryana](#), [Uttarakhand](#), [Punjab](#), [Bihar](#) and [Delhi](#).

The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme was launched on 22 January 2015 by Modi.

It aims to address the issue of the declining child sex ratio image (CSR) and is a national initiative jointly run by the [Ministry of Women and Child Development](#), the [Ministry of Health and Family Welfare](#) and the [Ministry of Human Resource Development](#).

It initially focused multi-sector action in 100 districts throughout the country where there was a low CSR.

Reason for launch of Scheme:

According to census data, the [child gender ratio](#) (0–6 years) in India was 927 girls per 1,000 boys in 2001, which dropped to 918 girls for every 1,000 boys in 2011.

A 2012 [UNICEF](#) report ranked India 41st among 195 countries.

In the Population Census of 2011 it was revealed that the population ratio of India 2011 is **943 females** per 1000 of males. The Sex Ratio 2011 shows an upward trend from the census 2001 data.

Speaking on the occasion of [International Day of the Girl Child] in 2015, the [Prime Minister](#), [Narendra Modi](#) had called for the eradication of [female foeticide](#) and invited suggestions from the citizens of India via the [MyGov.in](#) portal.

PradhanMantriSwasthyaSurakshaYojana

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister ShriNarendraModi has given its approval for continuation of PradhanMantriSwasthyaSurakshaYojana (PMSSY) beyond 12th Five Year Plan for a period 2017-18 to 2019-20 with a financial outlay of Rs. 14,832 crores.

About the Yojana:



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

PMSSY aims at correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/reliable tertiary healthcare services and also at augmenting facilities for quality medical education in different regions of the country.

The various initiatives under PMSSY will lead to development of apex level medical education and nursing education and connected research facilities.

It will also lead to creation of tertiary level health care infrastructure through establishment of new AIIMS and will improve the referral system and enhance cross linkages between primary, secondary and tertiary level health care facilities.

Schemes under PMSSY will result in reduction of disparities to access quality health services between the States and regions.

He further stated that the scheme will also address imbalances in human resources development and in the availability of quality trained medical, nursing manpower for public health care delivery system through establishment of medical and nursing colleges.

The schemes will lead to improvement in health outcomes through adequate and timely intervention of medical/health services.

Ayushman Bharat Yojana

Why in News?

A two day national consultation conference on operationalizing the Health and Wellness Centres (HWC) for provision of Comprehensive primary health care under Ayushman Bharat was organized by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with technical support from the National Health Systems Resource Centre, recently.

Highlights of the scheme:

Coverage: The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme. The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.

Target: The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database. Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.

Role of state governments: State Governments will be allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.

Council: For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC) at apex level Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.

Who is eligible?

It will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.

- The different categories in rural area include families having only one room with kucha walls and kucharroof; families having no adult member between age 16 to 59; female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59; disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; and landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour.
- Also, automatically included families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme.

Implementation Strategy:

At the national level to manage, an Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Agency (AB-NHPMA) would be put in place. States/ UTs would be advised to implement the scheme by a dedicated entity called State Health Agency (SHA). They can either use an existing Trust/ Society/ Not for Profit Company/ State Nodal Agency (SNA) or set up a new entity to implement the scheme. States/ UTs can



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

decide to implement the scheme through an insurance company or directly through the Trust/ Society or use an integrated model.

Benefits of the scheme:

This will lead to increased access to quality health and medication. In addition, the unmet needs of the population which remained hidden due to lack of financial resources will be catered to. This will lead to timely treatments, improvements in health outcomes, patient satisfaction, improvement in productivity and efficiency, job creation thus leading to improvement in quality of life.

WHO Framework Convention on tobacco control

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet has given approval to accede to the Protocol under World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on tobacco control to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products.

- It will be applicable to both smoking and chewing or smokeless tobacco (SLT) forms as negotiated and adopted under Article 15 of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

About WHO FCTC:

- The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first international public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO.
- The objective of FCTC is to provide a framework for supply and demand reduction measures for tobacco control at the national, regional and global levels.
- Article 15 of WHO FCTC envisages elimination of all forms of illicit trade and tobacco products, including smuggling, illicit manufacturing and counterfeiting.
- India is a party to WHO FCTC.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi today has approved the proposal for renaming and restructuring of Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) as Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK). CCEA has also approved its continuation during the remaining period of the 14th Finance Commission.

Background:

> MsDP has been identified as one of the Core of the Core Schemes under National Development Agenda in the Report of the Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Rationalization of Centrally Sponsored Schemes, which was constituted by NITI Aayog.

The programme was launched in the year 2008-09 in 90 identified Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs) having at least 25% minority population and below national average with respect to one or both of the backwardness parameters with the objective of developing assets for socio-economic and basic amenities.

The MCDs were identified on the basis of census 2001 data. The programme continued during 11th Five Year Plan.

MsDP has been designed primarily to address the developmental gaps/deficits in identified backward minority concentration areas by topping up of existing Centrally Sponsored Schemes of various Central ministries/departments without any change in the norms, guidelines and the funding pattern.

The projects considered are additional class rooms, laboratories, school buildings, hostels, toilets, buildings for Polytechnics, ITIs, Community Health Centres, Primary Health Centres / Sub-centres, Anganwadi Centres, Rural Housing etc.

In addition to gap filling projects, MsDP also provides for taking up innovative projects which are not covered by any of the existing CSS of various ministries and these are funded in the ratio of 60:40 and for NE and Hilly States at 90:10



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

between the Centre and States. This includes Sadbhav Mandap, Market shed etc.

About PMJVK:

- The Programme aims to address development deficits in the identified minority concentration areas. The identification of minority concentration areas has been done on the basis of presence of substantial population of notified Minority Communities based on Census, 2011.
- The restructured programme would provide better socio economic infrastructure facilities to the minority communities particularly in the field of education, health & skill development as compared to the present situation, which would further lead to lessening of the gap between the national average and the minority communities with regard to backwardness parameters.
- **National Water Informatics Centre**
- **Why in News?**
- Consequent upon approval of the Cabinet, National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC) has recently been created by Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation at New Delhi.
- **About NWIC:**
- NWIC would be a repository of nation-wide water resources data and would work as a Subordinate Office under the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
- The centre would be headed by a Joint Secretary level officer.
- **How will it Help in Water Management?**
- The management of water resources is a highly complex and tedious task that involves expertise of multidisciplinary domains and depend on historical and real time reliable data and information.
- For this, the first requirement is to develop, maintain and update regularly a comprehensive "Water Resources Information System" (WRIS) in public domain for awareness and involvement of all concerned for effective integrated water resources management.
- This is also prerequisite for scientific assessment, monitoring, modelling and Decision Support System (DSS) and Integrated water resource Management.
- In this back drop NWIC is expected to provide a 'Single Window' source of updated data on water resources & allied themes; and provides value added products and services to all stake holders for its management and sustainable development.
- Besides the centre will also collaborate with leading research institutes nationally as well as internationally to provide technical support to other



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

central and state organizations dealing with water, emergency response for hydrological extremes.

- **SWAYAM Portal:**

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched a major and unique initiative of online professional development of 1.5 million higher education faculty using the MOOCs platform SWAYAM.
- In the first phase, 75 discipline-specific National Resource Centres have been identified which are tasked to prepare online training material with focus on latest developments in the discipline, new & emerging trends, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for transacting revised curriculum.
- Under this initiative, all in-service teachers, irrespective of their subject and seniority will have an enabling opportunity to keep abreast of the latest developments in their disciplines through the technology based online refresher course.
- Faculty can benefit from this initiative as it is highly flexible and can be done at one's own pace and time.
- The NRCs will revolutionize professional development of faculty by catering to massive numbers by leveraging ICT and online technology platform of SWAYAM.
- **About SWAYAM:**
- SWAYAM is a programme initiated by Government of India and designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz., access, equity and quality.
- The objective of this effort is to take the best teaching learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged.
- SWAYAM seeks to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution and have not been able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy.
- This is done through an indigenous developed IT platform that facilitates hosting of all the courses, taught in classrooms from 9th class till post-graduation to be accessed by anyone, anywhere at any time.
- All the courses are interactive, prepared by the best teachers in the country and are available, free of cost to the residents in India.
-
- **IBM to Help in improving Crop Productivity:**
- NITI Aayog and IBM signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) today to develop a crop yield prediction model using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to provide real time advisory to farmers in Aspirational Districts.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

- The partnership aims to work together towards use of technology to provide insights to farmers to improve crop productivity, soil yield, control agricultural inputs with the overarching goal of improving farmers' incomes.
- Bringing in future technologies like Artificial Intelligence into practical use will have tremendous benefits for the practice of agriculture in the country, improving efficiency in resource-use, crop yields and scientific farming.
- The ten Aspirational Districts chosen will be invigorated with cutting-edge technological support to leap-frog development of agri-based economies".
-
- First phase of the project will focus on developing the model for 10 Aspirational Districts across the States of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- The scope of this project is to introduce and make available climate-aware cognitive farming techniques and identifying systems of crop monitoring, early warning on pest/disease outbreak based on advanced AI innovations.
- IBM will be using Artificial Intelligence to provide all the relevant data and platform for developing technological models for improving agricultural output and productivity for various crops and soil types, for the identified districts.
- NITI Aayog, on its part, will facilitate the inclusion of more stakeholders on the ground for effective last mile utilisation and extension, using the insights generated through these models.
- **Gram swaraj Abhiyaan:**
- At the end of a three-week drive to bring seven flagship schemes to 16,850 villages with a high number of poor, SC (Scheduled Caste) and ST (Scheduled Tribe) households, less than 30% of the target households received an electricity connection, while less than 40% got a gas connection, according to government data.
- **About the Abhiyan:**
- The Prime Minister has announced that on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti a "Gram Swaraj Abhiyan" would be organised starting from 14th April to 5th May, 2018.
- This Abhiyan is being undertaken for reaching out to poor households, spreading awareness about government welfare schemes and other people centric initiatives.
- As a special initiative during the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, universal coverage under seven welfare programmes including Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in 21058 identified villages with large number of underprivileged households across the country has been contemplated.
- Highest importance is given to saturate these villages with the benefits of seven welfare programmes.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

- **Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction**
- **Why in News?**
- A committee set up by the Centre to prepare a report on the issue of inter-country parental child abduction has questioned one of the basic principles of the Hague Convention by arguing that the return of the child to his or her habitual residence may not necessarily be in the best interest of the child.
- There is immense pressure on India from the U.S. to accede to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, which is a multi-national treaty that seeks to protect children wrongfully removed by one of the parents from the custody of the other parent.
- At the heart of this treaty is the criterion of “habitual residence” of the child, which is used to determine whether the child was wrongfully removed by a parent as well as to seek the return of the child.
- **Observation of Committee:**
- The Committee feels that the concept of habitual residence is not synchronous with the best interest of the child.
- It adds that returning a child to the place of habitual residence may result in sending the child to an inharmonious set-up as well as overlook the fact that a mother is the primary caregiver of the child.
- The panel has also prepared a draft law to safeguard the interest of the children, as well as those of the parents, particularly mothers.
- The proposed legislation lays down nine exceptions under which a child will not be returned to the country of habitual residence.
- **Conditions for refusal**
- The important conditions under which a child’s return can be refused are — best interest of the child, domestic violence or mental or physical cruelty or harassment against the parent who fled with the child, the parent claiming the return of the child was not exercising the custody rights at the time of removal, and if there is a grave risk that the child would be exposed to physical or psychological harm.
- **Indian family system**
- The panel has also emphasised the importance of the “Indian family system” in ensuring the best interest of the child, seemingly to question the logic behind returning the child to a place of habitual residence outside India.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

- The report also requires the setting up of an Inter-Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority, which will be the nodal body to decide on the custody of the child, mediate between the warring parties, as well as order the return of the child to the country of habitual residence.
- The Committee submitted its report to Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi last month.
- The Ministry will be circulating the report to the Ministries of External affairs and Home Affairs for their inputs.
- The Justice Rajesh Bindal Committee was set up last year to suggest a model legislation to safeguard the interest of the child as well those of the parents when an NRI (Non Resident Indian) marriage goes sour and one of the parents flees from one country to another with the child.
- Once the Central government decides to set-up the Authority and frames a law on the issue, it is expected to take a decision on whether it should accede to the Hague Convention.
- In 2016, the government had decided not to be a signatory to the treaty on the ground that it can be detrimental to the interest of the women fleeing an abusive marriage.
- **About the Convention:**
- The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction or Hague Abduction Convention is a [multilateral treaty](#) developed by the [Hague Conference on Private International Law](#) (HCCH) that provides an expeditious method to return a child [internationally abducted](#) by a parent from one member country to another.
- The Convention was concluded 25 October 1980 and entered into force between the signatories on 1 December 1983. The Convention was drafted to ensure the prompt return of children who have been abducted from their country of [habitual residence](#) or wrongfully retained in a contracting state not their country of habitual residence.
- The primary intention of the Convention is to preserve whatever [status quo child custody](#) arrangement existed immediately before an alleged wrongful removal or retention thereby deterring a [parent](#) from crossing international boundaries in search of a more sympathetic court.
- The Convention applies only to children under the age of 16.
- As of September 2017, 98 states are party to the convention.
-
- **African Continental Free Trade Area**
- The African Continental Free Trade Area is the result of the [African Continental Free Trade Agreement](#) among all 55 members of the [African Union](#)



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

- If ratified, the agreement would result in the largest [free-trade area](#) in terms of participating countries since the formation of the [World Trade Organization](#).
- African heads of state gathered in [Kigali, Rwanda](#) in March 2018 to sign the proposed agreement.
- Forty-four of the 55 members of the African Union signed it on 21 March 2018.
- The Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) is a continent-wide [free-trade agreement](#) brokered by the [African Union](#) (AU) and initially signed on by 44 of its 55 member states in [Kigali, Rwanda](#) on March 21, 2018.
- The agreement initially requires members to remove [tariffs](#) from 90% of goods, allowing free access to commodities, goods, and services across the continent.
- The [United Nations Economic Commission for Africa](#) estimates that the agreement will boost intra-African trade by 52 percent by 2022.
- The proposal will come into force after [ratification](#) by 22 of the signatory states.

Ayushman Bharat

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, on Monday reviewed the progress of preparations towards the launch of the ambitious Health Assurance programme under Ayushman Bharat.

The Prime Minister was apprised of the preparation done so far, including consultations with States, for the smooth and expeditious rollout of the Health Assurance programme.

About Ayushman Bharat:

The scheme will provide a cover of upto Rs. 5 lakh per family.

Target: The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database. Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.

Role of state governments: State Governments will be allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.

Council: For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC) at apex level Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.

Who is eligible?

It will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.

- The different categories in rural area include families having only one room with kucha walls and kucharroof; families having no adult member between age 16 to 59; female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59; disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; and landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour.
- Also, automatically included families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme.

The Prime Minister stressed on providing maximum benefit to the poor and marginalized sections of society, under this scheme.

Guatemala supports India for UNSC bid:

Agreeing to push the 'complementary' and 'not competitive' nature of bilateral relations to a new level for mutual benefit from the emerging opportunities in both the countries, India and Guatemala today agreed to support each other's candidature for Non-Permanent Membership in the United Nations Security Council.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

Guatemala will support India's candidature for UNSC membership for 2021-22 while New Delhi will do so for 2031-32 for Guatemala.

This decision was one of the several outcomes of extensive talks Vice President of India Shri M.Venkaiah Naidu held with the President, Vice President and Parliament Speaker of Guatemala in the capital Guatemala City on May 7, 2018.

National Nutrition Mission

Why in News?

The Government of India signed a loan deal worth \$ 200 million with the World Bank today for the National Nutrition Mission (*POSHAN Abhiyaan*).

The loan would help the Government of India in achieving its goal of reducing stunting in children 0-6 years of age from 38.4% to 25% by the year 2022.

About Poshan:

The POSHAN (PM's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment) Abhiyaan was launched by the Prime Minister on 8th March 2018 at Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.

The Abhiyaan targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.

The target of the mission is to bring down stunting among children in the age group 0-6 years from 38.4% to 25% by 2022.

A large component of POSHAN Abhiyaan involves gradual scaling-up of the interventions supported by the ongoing World Bank assisted Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Systems Strengthening and Nutrition Improvement Project (ISSNIP) to all districts in the country over a 3-year period.

The loan approved today will support the first phase scale up to 315 districts across all states and union territories (UTs).

With a focus on improving the coverage and quality of ICDS nutrition services to pregnant and lactating women and children under 3 years of age, the project will include investments in improving the skills and capacities of ICDS staff and community nutrition workers, instituting mechanisms of community mobilization and



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

behavior change communication, strengthening systems of citizen engagement and grievance redress and establishing mobile technology based tools for improved monitoring and management of services for better outreach to beneficiaries during the critical 1,000 day window for nutrition impact.

The project will additionally ensure convergence of all nutrition related schemes and provide performance based incentives to states and community nutrition and health workers, facilitating a focus on results.

One Stop Centres

In the Programme Approval Board (PAB) meeting of the Ministry of Women and Child Development today, 100 additional One Stop Centres have been approved in the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

The Ministry of Women & Child Development has set up 182 Centres till date under the scheme of One Stop Centres (OSCs) for women affected by violence since April, 2015.

Over 1.3 lakhs such women affected by violence have been assisted at these centres till date in 33 States/UTs.

Objectives of OSC:

The purpose of these OSCs is to facilitate integrated services for women affected with violence such as police assistance, medical aid, psycho-social counselling, legal aid/counselling, temporary stay for 5 days etc. such that aggrieved women can avail services under one roof.

As per the Cabinet Decision in the meeting dated 21st April, 2018 it was decided that in the coming years every district will be covered by one OSC and each OSC will be strengthened with an additional annual grant of Rs. 50,000 for immediate assistance for first aid.

Also, the scheme of Universalization of Women's Helpline (181) of the Ministry that was also started in April, 2015 has now become operational in 30 States/UTs.



इहोइहो
IAS ACADEMY
Your Dreams, Our Mission!

Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

Every OSC is integrated to this Women Helpline. The Helplines have assisted over 16.5 lakh women so far.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

General studies-3

"Green Revolution – Krishonnati Yojana"

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for the Umbrella Scheme, "Green Revolution – Krishonnati Yojana" in agriculture sector beyond 12th Five Year Plan for the period from 2017-18 to 2019-20 with the Central Share of Rs. 33,269.976 crore.

About the Yojana:

The Umbrella scheme comprises of 11 Schemes/Missions.

These schemes look to develop the agriculture and allied sector in a holistic and scientific manner to increase the income of farmers by enhancing production, productivity and better returns on produce.

The Schemes that are part of the Umbrella Schemes are :-

(i) **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH):** aims to promote holistic growth of horticulture sector; to enhance horticulture production, improve nutritional security and income support to farm Households.

(ii) **National Food Security Mission (NFSM)**, including National Mission on Oil Seeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP), with a total central share of Rs.6893.38 crore.

It aims to increase production of rice, wheat, pulses, coarse cereals and commercial crops, through area expansion and productivity enhancement in a suitable manner in the identified districts of the country, restoring soil fertility and productivity at the individual farm level and enhancing farm level economy.

It further aims to augment the availability of vegetable oils and to reduce the import of edible oils.

(iii) **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)** aims at promoting sustainable agriculture practices best suitable to the specific agro-ecology focusing on integrated farming, appropriate soil health management and synergizing resource conservation technology.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

(iv) **Submission on Agriculture Extension (SMAE)** aims to strengthen the ongoing extension mechanism of State Governments, local bodies etc., achieving food and nutritional security and socio-economic empowerment of farmers, to institutionalize programme planning and implementation mechanism, to forge effective linkages and synergy amongst various stake-holders, to support HRD interventions, to promote pervasive and innovative use of electronic / print media, inter-personal communication and ICT tools, etc.

(v) **Sub-Mission on Seeds and Planting Material (SMSP)** aims to increase production of certified / quality seed, to increase SRR, to upgrade the quality of farm saved seeds, to strengthen the seed multiplication chain, to promote new technologies and methodologies in seed production, processing, testing etc., to strengthen and modernizing infrastructure for seed production, storage, certification and quality etc.

(vi) **Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation (SMAM)** aims to increase the reach of farm mechanization to small and marginal farmers and to the regions where availability of farm power is low.

Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandan Yojana (PMVVY)

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for extending the investment limit from Rs 7.5 lakhs to Rs 15 lakhs as well as extension of time limits for subscription from 4th May 2018 to 31st March, 2020 under the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandan Yojana (PMVVY) as part of Government's commitment for financial inclusion and social security.

About PMVVY

The PMVVY is being implemented through Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) to provide social security during old age and protect elderly persons aged 60 years and above against a future fall in their interest income due to uncertain market conditions.

The scheme provides an assured pension based on a guaranteed rate of return of 8% per annum for ten years, with an option to opt for pension on a monthly / quarterly / half yearly and annual basis.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

The differential return, i.e. the difference between the return generated by LIC and the assured return of 8% per annum would be borne by Government of India as subsidy on an annual basis.

Algal bloom due to global warming:

The phenomenon of Mumbai's beaches glowing in the dark maybe a consequence of global warming and not industrial pollution, according to a year-long investigation by Indian and American scientists.

The *Noctiluca* algae, commonly known as sea tinkle, is a parasite and occurs in patches or 'blooms' in the northern Arabian Sea.

Their bioluminescence has earned them the name 'sea sparkle'.

However, these patches ring an alarm bell for ecologists because the algae compete with fish for food and choke their supply.

Noctiluca devours one of the most important planktonic organisms at the base of the fish-food chain, namely diatoms, and also excretes large amounts of ammonia, which is linked with massive fish mortality.

A warming ocean means greater temperature differences among layers of the sea water.

This slows the upward transport of nutrients like silicate from the ocean bottom, lowering its concentration at the surface. Diatoms growing in surface water need both sunlight and silicate to build their glass skeletons and thus, will fail to thrive when silicate is in short supply.

On the other hand, *Noctiluca* remains unaffected by these changes and prey on the remaining diatoms.

"Remarkably, the waters in the study area were observed to have sufficient oxygen clearly opposing any linkage between low oxygen and *Noctiluca* growth.

Intensifying global-warming conditions may be expected to disrupt the fish-food chain and cause a decline of fisheries in the region," the researchers stated.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

Why in News?

The **Ministry of Finance, Government of India in collaboration with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) organized the 4th Regional Conference on Futuristic, Resilient and Digital Infrastructure** in Bengaluru today.

About AIIB:

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a [multilateral development bank](#) that aims to support the building of infrastructure in the [Asia-Pacific](#) region.

The bank currently has 64 member states while another 20 are prospective members for a total of 84 approved members and was proposed as an initiative by the government of China.

The initiative gained support from 37 regional and 20 non-regional Prospective Founding Members (PFM), all of which have signed the Articles of Agreement that form the legal basis for the bank.

India is an influential member (and a founding member) of the AIIB as it has the second-largest voting share and percentage of shares.

AIIB Membership is not restricted to only Asian countries.

New snake species discovered in Western Ghats:

Bhupathy's shieldtail has been observed only in the Anaikatty Hills of Tamil Nadu.

Just 40 cm long and iridescent brown, Bhupathy's shieldtail is the latest addition to the snake fauna of the Western Ghats.

The snake, currently observed only in the forests of the Anaikatty hills in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore district, has been named *Uropeltis bhupathyi*, after the late herpetologist S. Bhupathy, for his contributions to the field.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

The reptile belongs to a family of snakes found only in peninsular India and Sri Lanka.

They are non-venomous, burrowing and mostly earthworm-eating, and are called shieldtails after the large, flat tips of their tails, which make them appear almost sliced off.

A study announcing the discovery was published in *Zootaxa*. The discovery takes the number of known species of shieldtails in India to 41.

The country is home to more than 300 snake species.

Goods and Services Tax Network

The Goods and Services Tax Network - Special Purpose Vehicle (GSTN-SPV) was created as a private limited, not-for-profit company under Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956 (Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013) by Govt. of India on 28th March, 2013 with an objective to provide shared IT infrastructure and services to Centre and States Governments, tax payers and other stakeholders for implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in the country.

Presently, the Central Government and State Government are holding 24.5% equity shares respectively and the remaining 51% are held by non-Governmental institutions and through various mechanisms.

GSTN is under strategic control of government.

Considering the nature of 'state' function performed by GSTN, Council felt that GSTN be converted into be a fully owned government Company.

Thus Cabinet has decided for:

Acquisition of entire 51% of equity held by the Non-Governmental Institutions in GSTN amounting to Rs. 5.1 crore, equally by the Centre and the States governments and allow GSTN Board to initiate process for acquisition of equity held by the private Companies; and

GSTN Board shall be allowed to continue the existing staff at existing terms and conditions for the a period upto five years, and shall have the flexibility of hiring



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

people through contract on the terms and conditions similar to those used by GSTN till now while hiring regular employees.

National Mission for Clean Ganga

National Mission for Clean Ganga has brought on board Survey of India, the oldest scientific department in the country set up in 1767, to facilitate the Ganga rejuvenation task by using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology.

The project includes use of Digital Elevation Model (DEM) technology which ensures accurate data collection, an important aspect for river basin management planning.

DEM technology enables identification of entire topography of an area making it easy for policy makers to analyse the available data thereby supporting the decision-making process.

Critical hotspots are also easily identified through this technology. The use of GIS technology for Namami Gange programme will also ensure decentralisation.

The data collected and subsequent actions taken by the government can easily be shared with the local public through geo portals and mobile apps.

The technology will also enable people to send their feedback up to the national level thereby providing an interactive and transparent platform.

In addition, the high resolution GIS enabled data will help in regulating the proposed protected and regulatory zones along the banks of river.

About NMCG:

National Mission for Clean Ganga(NMCG) was registered as a society on 12th August 2011 under the Societies Registration Act 1860.

It acted as implementation arm of National Ganga River Basin Authority(NGRBA) which was constituted under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA),1986.

NGRBA has since been dissolved with effect from the 7th October 2016, consequent to constitution of National Council for Rejuvenation, Protection and Management of River Ganga (referred as National Ganga Council).



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

The Act envisages five tier structure at national, state and district level to take measures for prevention, control and abatement of environmental pollution in river Ganga and to ensure continuous adequate flow of water so as to rejuvenate the river Ganga as below:

1. National Ganga Council under chairmanship of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.
2. Empowered Task Force (ETF) on river Ganga under chairmanship of Hon'ble Union Minister of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
3. National Mission for Clean Ganga(NMCG).
4. State Ganga Committees and
5. District Ganga Committees in every specified district abutting river Ganga and its tributaries in the states

NITI Aayog and Google sign SoI to help grow AI ecosystem in India

Aim: To focus on training, hackathons, mentoring startups, and providing research grants

Aiming to foster growth for India's nascent artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) ecosystem, NITI Aayog and Google have come together to work on a range of initiatives to help build the AI ecosystem across the country.

A Statement of Intent (SoI) was signed to this effect by Ms. Anna Roy, Advisor, NITI Aayog and Shri Rajan Anandan, Vice President, India and South East Asia, Google in the presence of the Shri Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog.

About the Initiative:

The NITI Aayog has been entrusted to setup a national programme to conduct research and development in frontier technologies such as AI.

In furtherance of this mandate, NITI Aayog has been developing India's national strategy on AI along with the National Data and Analytics Portal to enable the wide deployment and use of AI.

Importance of initiative:

Artificial Intelligence is going to disrupt the way business is done and India, in particular, is uniquely poised in utilising AI to innovate for social and inclusive good.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

India is embracing future technologies such as machine learning and AI to augment its capacity in healthcare, improve outcomes in education, develop innovative governance systems for our citizens and improve overall economic productivity of the nation.

NITI's partnership with Google will unlock massive training initiatives, support startups and encourage AI research through PhD scholarships, all of which contributes to the larger idea of a technologically-empowered New India."

Role of Google:

Under the aegis of this program, Google will train and incubate Indian AI startups in an accelerator program.

These startups will be mentored and coached by Google and its affiliates to enable them to better leverage AI in their respective business models.

To help bolster the research ecosystem, one of the initiatives includes funding Indian researchers, scholars and university faculty for conducting AI-based research.

Further, Google will also bring its online training courses on AI to students, graduates and engineers to numerous cities across India, in the form of study groups and developer-run courses.

NITI Aayog and Google will organize a AI/ML hackathon that will be focused on solving key challenges within agriculture, education, healthcare, financial inclusion, transportation/mobility and more.

This hackathon may use Kaggle, a global platform, to help facilitate international participation into these planned hackathon challenges.

Google through the NITI Aayog, will conduct hands-on training programs that aim to sensitise policymakers and technical experts in governments about relevant AI tools, and how they can be used to streamline governance.

Indus dolphins Census

Why in News?

For the conservation of Indus dolphins – one of the world's rarest mammals – the Punjab government along with WWF-India are conducting the first organised census on their population.



Current Affairs From 2nd May to 8th May

About Indus Dolphins:

- A blind species that communicates through echo like bats do, Indus dolphins are one of the seven freshwater dolphins found across the world.
- They are found only in India and Pakistan. In Punjab, they are confined to only a 185 km stretch between Talwara and Harike Barrage in India's Beas river in Punjab.
- The most flourishing population of the Indus dolphin, *Platanista gangetica minor*, is found across Pakistan where their numbers are estimated to be around 1,800 over a stretch of 1,500 km of the Indus river.

It is listed by the IUCN as endangered on its red list of threatened species. IUCN suspects the population size of the Indus river dolphins has reduced by more than 50% since 1944.