

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

By



SOURCES



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Important News Articles

1. PM-SVANidhi boosted annual income of street vendors by ₹23,000: Study - Indian Express
2. India to leverage US-led partnership to get critical mineral assets from abroad - Indian Express
3. Ensure fair, equitable evaluation process in NExT: House panel - The Hindu
4. Transitioning to hyperlocal extreme weather forecasting - The Hindu
5. India developing a new Earth system model to improve forecasts, track climate crisis impacts - Hindustan Times

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Important News Articles

GS II

1. PM-SVANidhi boosted annual income of street vendors by ₹23,000: Study - Indian Express

Relevance: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

News:

- Recently, a study was conducted by the Centre for Analytical Finance of the Indian School of Business (ISB) to **assess the impact of the PM SVANidhi scheme**.
- It was commissioned by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- The study covered **5,141 vendors** across 100 urban local bodies in 22 states.

Key Findings

- **60.65 lakh first-term loans**, 16.95 lakh second-term loans, and 2.43 lakh third-term loans have been disbursed under the scheme so far.
- **For 95% of the vendors** surveyed, the **PM-SVANidhi loan was their first-ever bank loan**, and for 72%, it was their first business loan.
- The first tranche of Rs. 10,000 led to an **additional annual income of 23,460** for each beneficiary.
- **94% of beneficiaries** who availed the first loan of 10,000 **used it for business investments**.
 - The figure was 98% for those who availed the second loan.
- **13.9%** of all disbursed loans were classified as **non-performing assets (NPAs)**.
 - The highest NPAs were recorded during the Covid-19 pandemic, declining over time.
- The **debt-to-income (DTI) ratio of the beneficiaries (9%)** was lower than expected for small businesses, indicating their high creditworthiness.
- However, there was **no significant improvement** in street vendors accessing **formal credit** from other sources.
 - Only 9% of beneficiaries had loans from other financial institutions.

PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** i.e. fully funded by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**.
- **Objectives**
 - To facilitate collateral free working capital loan to street vendors
 - To incentivize regular repayment and reward digital transactions
- The Scheme is available to **all street vendors** engaged in **vending** in **urban areas**.
- **Eligibility:** Beneficiaries belonging to only those States/UTs which have notified Rules and Scheme under Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014.
- **Lending Agencies:** Microfinance Institutions, Non-Banking Financial Company, Self Help Groups
 - Due to their ground level presence and proximity to the urban poor including the street vendors.

Early Repayment

- On timely/early repayment of the loan, an **interest subsidy of 7% per annum** will be credited through direct benefit transfer on a six monthly basis.
- **Rise of the credit limit** on timely/ early repayment of loans
- There will be **no penalty on early repayment** of loan.

Prelims Takeaway

- PM-SVANidhi
- Non-Banking Financial Company
- Non - Performing Assets (NPAs)

2. India to leverage US-led partnership to get critical mineral assets from abroad - Indian Express

Relevance: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

News:

- The Union Mines Ministry has proposed to **circulate critical mineral block proposals**

Prelims Takeaway

- Critical mineral
- KABIL

Key Highlights

- It was received by partner countries in the **US-led Minerals Security Partnership (MSP)** with **central public sector** undertakings or PSUs
 - To allow them to acquire critical mineral assets abroad.
- The ministry has also recommended that **PSUs give a clear financial mandate to relevant subsidiaries** to expedite the acquisition process
- The MSP is a **US-led collaborative effort involving thirteen countries** including the UK, Australia, France, and Germany, and the European Union
 - Which aims to catalyse public and private investment in critical mineral supply chains globally.
- The **collaboration is currently engaged in fostering a critical minerals and metals** cooperation forum for :
 - The sharing of expertise
 - Building a robust battery materials supply chain
 - Jointly developing a minerals processing facility in South America.
- KABIL** is a central public sector enterprise (CPSE) under **the mines ministry**
 - Which on January 15 signed an agreement with a state-owned company in Argentina to explore and develop five lithium blocks in the South American country.
- NTPC is looking at acquiring lithium, cobalt, graphite, and high-purity limestone assets abroad through its subsidiary NTPC Mining Limited.

3. Ensure fair, equitable evaluation process in NExT: House panel - The Hindu

Relevance: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

News:

- The National Exit Test (NExT)** should be brought in only after meticulous due diligence

Prelims Takeaway

- NEXT Regulations, 2023
- National Board of Examinations

Key Highlights

- Keeping in mind the diverse background of medical colleges from which the first batch of NExT aspirants will come
 - The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare said in its report on the quality of medical education in India
- The Committee, under the chairmanship of **Bhubaneswar Kalita**, explained that
 - Presently, it is medical colleges which conduct final-year MBBS examinations.
- At the same time, **the responsibility for NEET PG and FMGE** — which are licensing and qualifying examinations for those who have completed their undergraduate medical degrees —
 - Falls under the purview of the National Board of Examinations (NBE), overseen by the Director-General of Health Services within the Health Ministry.
- The **National Medical Commission Act** now provides for the **NExT to enhance the competence of graduating MBBS students who obtain licenses to practice annually**.
- This initiative addresses the current emphasis on clearing the NEET-PG, which is predominantly theoretical and necessitates rote memorisation.
- In June 2023, the National Medical Commission developed the **NMC Exit Test Regulations 2023 (NEXT Regulations, 2023)**.

- The test was to replace the final MBBS examination
- act as a licentiate exam for grant of registration to practice medicine, and provide a basis for entry to postgraduate courses instead of NEET PG.

Mentor institutes

- The Committee recommended that **the government divide India into zones, with reputed institutes**
 - Such as AIIMS to function as mentor institutes for all the other medical colleges in that zone.
- Mentor institutes shall play a significant role in **monitoring the standard of education** and the classes in the newer medical colleges as well as private institutions.

GS III

4. Transitioning to hyperlocal extreme weather forecasting - The Hindu

Relevance: Disaster and disaster management.

News:

- The **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare** have initiated **the weather information network and data system (WINDS)** to generate long-term, hyper-local weather data

Key Points

- Accurately predicting rain, cyclones, heatwaves and drought are **critical to inform decision making on disaster management.**
- In India the **Indian Meteorology Department (IMD)** is the **principal government agency** in all matters relating to meteorology
 - It specialises in the incredibly complex science of predicting weather patterns by observing, modelling and interpreting a multitude of variables.
- However, in **tropical countries** like India, **weather variability** is inherently higher.
- IMD's forecasts have improved vastly in the last few years as it has upgraded to technologies
 - Similar to the ones used by the U.S., the U.K. and Japan, which are known to produce accurate forecasts.
- Yet, there are still many days and geographies for which **Indian forecasts go wrong**, especially during winter and summer monsoon.
- One of the major hurdles is the **lack of weather monitoring ground stations.**
- Currently, IMD operates around 800 automatic weather stations (AWS), 1,500 automatic rain gauges (ARG) and 37 doppler weather radars (DWR).
- This is against the total requirements of more than 3,00,000 ground stations (AWS/ARG) and around 70 DWRs.
- Currently, most of the **prediction software used in forecasting are based on the global forecasting system** and weather research and forecasting models,
- the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare have initiated the
 - To generate long-term, hyper-local weather data.
- The system will also promote the data for wider applications in agriculture and other sectors, it will help in creating a national-level data base

Prelims Takeaway

- Indian Meteorology Department
- Weather information network and data system (WINDS)

5. India developing a new Earth system model to improve forecasts, track climate crisis impacts - Hindustan Times

Relevance: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

News:

- The **Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM)** is collaborating with the Centre for Climate Change Research (CCCR) to develop **India's first Earth System Model (ESM)**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Earth System Model
- Monsoon Convection, Clouds and Climate Change (MC4) sub-scheme

Development of Earth System Model

- The Earth System Model **integrates various components of the Earth system**, including the atmosphere, ocean, land, ice, and biosphere.
- Objective:** To provide reliable future projections of global and regional climate, with a specific focus on Indian monsoon rainfall.
- An allocation of ₹192.28 crores has been sanctioned under the **Monsoon Convection, Clouds and Climate Change (MC4) sub-scheme** for developing the climate forecasting system.

Functionality of Earth System Model

- The ESM is designed as an **open-source software** to simulate interactions among different Earth system components.
- It utilizes **numerical weather prediction** and **data assimilation techniques** for accurate climate change predictions.
- The IITM-ESM incorporates elements from the Climate Forecast System (CFS) of the National Center for Environmental Prediction (NCEP, USA) to enhance its capabilities.
- The development of the model is ongoing and is anticipated to be **completed by 2025**.

Significance of Earth System Model

- It will aid in **understanding the complexities of climate change**, particularly focusing on the Indian subcontinent, with its diverse geographical features.
- By addressing regional climate change aspects, the model aims to provide **policy-relevant information** based on robust scientific analysis and assessments.

Editorials, Gists and Explainers

6. What are the changes in the new Water Act? - The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Context:

- The Lok Sabha recently approved the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Act, 2024**, which was earlier passed in the Rajya Sabha.
- This amendment revises the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974**, marking significant changes in India's approach to water pollution management.
- The amended Act will currently apply to **Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Union territories**.

<p>Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Act, enacted in 1974, aimed to establish institutional mechanisms for addressing contamination of water bodies in India. It led to the formation of the Central Pollution Control Boards (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCB) in September 1974. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To monitor and prevent contamination of water bodies by industrial effluents and sewage. Industrial units were required to obtain permission from State boards before factory establishment, ensuring compliance with prescribed norms. <p>Amendments to the Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It replaces imprisonment penalties for certain violations, deemed "minor", with fines ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹15 lakh. The Centre gains increased authority to override SPCB in some instances and exempt industrial plants from certain permissions, consulting with the CPCB. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per the original Act, the SPCB's permission is needed for establishing any industry or treatment plant, which could discharge sewage into a water body, sewer, or land. Violations such as operating without SPCB consent still carry a penalty of up to six years of imprisonment along with fines. It also penalises tampering with monitoring devices used in determining whether any industry or treatment plant can be set up. The Centre is empowered to issue guidelines for the grant, refusal, or cancellation of consent granted by the SPCB. The Centre can also establish rules for selecting SPCB chairpersons and provide guidelines for State boards on industry establishment procedures. 	<p>Response to Amendments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Environment Minister defended the amendments stating that outdated regulations caused a "trust deficit" and harassment to businesses. The Opposition members expressed concerns that the amendments weaken protections against industrial pollution of rivers and water bodies. They argued that the fear of imprisonment acted as an effective deterrent to industrial units that were lax with complying with strict regulations.
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7. How can child safety be ensured online? - The Hindu

Relevance: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Context:

- Recently, the Meta CEO apologised publicly for **online child safety issues on social media platforms**, prompting scrutiny of major tech companies.

<p>Issues with Children's Safety Online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and activists globally are demanding the tech companies to take responsibility for children's safety online or provide platforms 'safe by design' for children and young users. UNICEF's 'The Metaverse, Extended Reality and Children' Report highlights that children face significant risks online. These include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> safety concerns such as exposure to graphic sexual content, bullying, sexual harassment and abuse Collection of vast amounts of data, including non-verbal behaviour, leading to hyper-personalised profiling, advertising and increased surveillance impacting children's privacy, security, other rights and freedom. Additionally, recent reports have highlighted that children are using AI to create inappropriate content, such as indecent child abuse images. Children may also encounter trauma, solicitation, and abuse online, leading to long-lasting psychological effects that extend into their real lives. 	<p>Reach of Generative AI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Davos World Economic Forum in a paper explained that generative AI brings potential opportunities. These include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> homework assistance, easy-to-understand explanations of difficult concepts, and personalised learning experiences. children can use AI to create art, compose music and write stories and software (with no or low coding skills), fostering creativity. children with disabilities can interface and co-create with digital systems in new ways through text, speech or images. However, generative AI could also inadvertently cause harm or society-wide disruptions at the cost of children's prospects and well-being. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are vulnerable to the risks of mis/disinformation created by Generative AI as their cognitive capacities are still developing. There is also a debate regarding the potential effects on young minds due to interaction with chatbots that exhibit a human-like tone. <p>Measures to Keep Children Safe Online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tech companies must prioritise safety by design, following UNICEF's guidance on child-centred AI. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This includes support for children's development and well-being, and protecting children's data and privacy. UNICEF recommends that tech companies apply the highest existing data protection standards to children's data in the metaverse and virtual environments. Governments also play a crucial role in regulating online environments to protect children's rights and well-being.
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Conclusion

- Protecting children online requires **collaboration among tech companies, governments and society**.
- All the rules that exist in the real world to protect children, should also apply to the digital realm.

8. A privileged strategic partnership, without a gulf - The Hindu

Relevance: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Context:

- The Indian Prime Minister will soon embark on an **official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** from February 13-14, 2024.
- A highlight of this trip includes the inauguration of a Hindu temple constructed by the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha in Abu Dhabi.

Evolution of India-UAE Relationship

- Over the years, the relationship between India and the UAE has flourished significantly, evolving into one of India's most prominent bilateral partnerships.
- The UAE has emerged not only as a strategic ally but also a crucial anchor for India's engagement in the Gulf region.
- The close rapport between the President of the UAE and the Indian Prime Minister underscores the depth of this relationship.

Pillars of the India-UAE Relationship

1. Economic Partnership

- The economic collaboration between India and the UAE has witnessed significant growth, with bilateral trade reaching \$85 billion in 2022-23.
- The UAE stands as India's third-largest trading partner and the second-largest destination for Indian exports.
- The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement signed in record time (88 days) aims to further boost trade to \$115 billion in five years.
- Additionally, the recent approval of a bilateral investment treaty with the UAE is expected to enhance economic engagement, particularly in manufacturing and foreign direct investment.

2. Fintech Collaboration

- Both nations have made strides in fintech cooperation, exemplified by the acceptance of the RuPay card in the UAE since August 2019.
- The operationalization of a rupee-dirham settlement system further underscores the financial ties between the two countries.

3. Energy Security

- The UAE plays a pivotal role in India's energy security, notably being the only nation from the region to have strategic oil reserves in India.
- Agreements such as the investment in the strategic crude oil storage facility in Mangaluru underscore the depth of this partnership.

4. Strategic Ties

- India and the UAE share strategic cooperation in various domains, including defence, security, and people-to-people ties.
- Both countries are in close coordination and a part of a number of important groupings such as the I2U2 or the West Asian Quad.
- The UAE is also part of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) infrastructure project that was signed during the G-20 summit in Delhi.
- Both nations have displayed exceptional gestures, such as inviting each other to key events despite external pressures.
 - During the UAE visit in August 2019, the Indian PM was conferred with the UAE's top civilian honour, the Order of Zayed.
- Amid regional challenges like the conflict in Gaza, the visit provides an opportunity for the leaders to confer on critical issues.

Global Climate Collaboration

- The India-UAE relationship extends beyond religious landmarks and strategic agreements.
- It encompasses shared concerns and collaborations on global climate issues.
- This was evident during India's PM presence at the COP28 climate summit in Dubai.
- Both nations demonstrated their commitment to environmental sustainability by co-launching the Global Green Credit Initiative.

Conclusion

- The strategic partnership between India and the UAE reflects a **convergence of interests and mutual respect** at all levels.
- Despite minor divergences, both countries recognize the **potential for further strengthening their relationship** in the years ahead.

9. What Charan Singh did for farmers' welfare - Indian Express

Relevance: Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country.

Context:

- The Prime Minister of India recently announced that the Former Prime Minister **Chaudhary Charan Singh** (1902-87) will be conferred the **Bharat Ratna**, India's highest civilian award.

Chaudhary Charan Singh

- He was Union home minister in the Morarji Desai-headed Janata Party government that appointed the Backward Classes Commission under B.P. Mandal in January 1979.
- Its report submitted in December 1980 led to the announcement of 27% reservations for OBC (other backward classes) communities
 - In addition to the existing 22.5% for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), in August 1990.

Town versus Village

- Singh was struck by a 1961 survey that showed only 11.5% of Indian Administrative Service officers with agricultural family backgrounds
 - 45.8% having fathers who were government servants.
- He, therefore, not only proposed 60% reservations for farmers' children
 - but also ineligibility for government jobs to those whose parents had already benefitted from public employment.

Criticism and present-day relevance

- The 60% quota – Singh had proposed it first at 50% before the executive committee of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Legislature Party in April 1939
- Landless labourers, constituting 28.1% of the total agricultural workforce in the 1951 Census, were excluded.

Game-changing laws

- He pushed through three major legislations that transformed the agricultural economy of UP.
- The first was the UP Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950 (ZALR).
- It did away with zamindars who paid taxes to the government, from lands that they themselves owned and also from those cultivated by others, including as tenant farmers.
- ZALR granted all verified tenant-cultivators permanent and heritable interest in their holdings.
- ZALR basically replaced the old zamindari agrarian system with a new rural social order based on peasant-proprietors owning and cultivating family-sized farms.
- Its beneficiaries were the erstwhile hereditary tenant-cultivators, mainly from the Muslim, Yadav, Gujjar, Kurmi and other OBC castes.
- The second was the UP Consolidation of Holdings Act, 1953.
- The new law enabled every landowner to have his scattered plots consolidated by swapping parcels of equivalent quality with other farmers in the same village.
- The idea was to provide every owner-cultivator with a single tract of land making it a more productive holding.
- The last law was the UP Imposition of Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1960.
- It established a cap of 40 acres of “fair quality land” per family of five members.
- Consolidated holdings of a certain minimum size were necessary to also allow use of tractors and other productivity-enhancing farm machinery.

10. Haldwani violence: what is Nazool land - Indian Express

Relevance: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present – significant events, personalities, issues.

Context:

- Recently, violence erupted in **Uttarakhand's Haldwani district** following a demolition drive conducted by the administration at the site of a mosque and madrasa allegedly on **Nazool land**, resulting in five deaths and numerous injuries.

Nazool Land

- Nazool land is owned by the government but, generally, it is not directly administered as state property.
- The state generally allots such land to any entity on lease for a fixed period, typically between 15 and 99 years.
- The lease can be renewed or cancelled by the government, which then repossesses the land.
- Various states have established rules for Nazool land management, with the Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956 being widely used.

Emergence of Nazool Land

- During the British colonial era, rulers and kingdoms that resisted British rule often engaged in rebellions, resulting in numerous conflicts.
- Following victories in these battles, the British frequently confiscated land from these rulers.
- After India gained independence, these lands became vacant and were marked as Nazool land - to be owned by the respective state governments.
 - due to the lack of adequate documentation proving ownership by the former kings and royals

Utilization of Nazool Land

- The government generally uses Nazool land for public purposes like building schools, hospitals, Gram Panchayat buildings, etc.
- In some cases, large tracts of land denoted as Nazool land are leased to housing societies.

Status of Haldwani Land

- The Haldwani district administration claims that the land where the structures were demolished was registered as Nazool land owned by the Municipal Council.
- A notice was issued on January 30 for removal of encroachments or submission of ownership documents within three days.
- This was followed by a demolition drive on February 3 after locals' application and discussions, supposedly with consent from the court.
- However, a councillor, disputes this, stating that locals had requested a delay until the High Court hearing.

Quick Look

1. Pak Army chief backs Nawaz call to form unity govt

- Pakistan's powerful army chief urged the country's polarised political leadership to form a "unified government of all democratic forces"
 - as he backed ex-premier Nawaz Sharif's plea to his rivals to help form a coalition government after the general elections appear to have produced a hung Parliament.
- Efforts to form a unity government gained momentum after the three-time former prime minister Sharif, who seems to enjoy the backing of the Pakistan Army,
- Appealed to other political parties to join hands to pull cash-strapped Pakistan out of its current difficulties.
- Springing a surprise, independents backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party won the lion's share of 100 seats in the National Assembly in Thursday's election.
- Khan's party has already claimed victory in the elections.

2. New Defence Systems

- Recently, the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) inaugurated a Precision Approach Radar (PAR) at INS Utkrosh in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
 - The PAR facilitates highly accurate horizontal and vertical guidance for safe aircraft landings in low visibility conditions, such as heavy rain and fog.
- He also inaugurated the Integrated Underwater Harbour Defence and Surveillance System (IUHDSS) at Naval Jetty, Port Blair.
 - IUHDSS is designed to detect, identify, and track surface and underwater targets in the vicinity of the naval jetty, enhancing the security of Port Blair harbour.
- He also inaugurated the Naval Communication Network (NCN) Centres at INS Kohassa, INS Baaz, and INS Kardip.
 - The newly inaugurated NCN Centres are designed to augment communication and operational capability, enhancing real-time situational awareness and jointness in communication across ANC.

3. Brumation

- Brumation is a state of dormancy or reduced activity observed in reptiles, akin to hibernation in mammals.
- It occurs typically during colder months when temperatures drop and food becomes scarce.
- Reptiles enter this state to conserve energy and survive adverse environmental conditions.
- Reptiles may seek refuge in underground burrows, rock crevices, or other sheltered areas where temperatures are relatively stable.
- Their metabolism slows significantly, allowing them to go without food for weeks or months.
- Researchers have documented instances of brumation in various reptiles, including box turtles, painted turtles, snakes, and lizards.

4. Kalasa-Banduri Project

- The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) recently deferred the decision on diverting forest land from the Kali and Sahyadri tiger reserves for the construction of a part of the Karnataka government's Kalasa-Bhanduri Project.
- The Kalasa-Bhanduri Project involves the construction of dams and a canal system to divert water from the Mahadayi River, located in Goa, to the Malaprabha River (a tributary of the Krishna River) basin in Karnataka.
- Purpose: To meet the drinking water needs of the districts of Belagavi, Dharwad, Bagalkot, and Gadag in Karnataka.
- Though the project was first proposed in the early 1980s, it has remained on paper owing to a dispute between Karnataka, Goa, and Maharashtra.
- As per plans, barrages are to be built against Kalasa and Bhanduri streams - tributaries of Mahadayi - and water diverted towards Karnataka's parched districts.

5. Dhokra Shilpkala

- Chhattisgarh's Ocher Studio is helping to preserve India's 4,000-year-old craft- Dhokra Shilpkala.
- The word "Dhokra" is believed to be derived from the Dhokra Damar tribes, who are the traditional metal smiths of Central India.
- The origins of Dhokra Shilpkala can be traced back to the tribal communities residing in the regions of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha.
- It is distinguished by its exceptional metal casting technique, which employs the lost wax casting method, also recognized as cire perdue.
- Artisans draw inspiration from nature, mythology, and everyday life, incorporating motifs such as animals, birds, deities, and tribal symbols into their creations.
- From miniature figurines and jewellery to larger-than-life sculptures and functional objects, Dhokra Shilpkala encompasses a wide range of artistic expressions.
- The rapid pace of urbanisation, coupled with the rise of mechanised production techniques, has threatened the livelihoods of traditional artisans and endangered this ancient craft.

Prelims Track Question

Q1. Consider the following statements about PM SVANidhi Scheme

1. Its purpose is to facilitate affordable working capital loans of up to ₹10,000.
2. On timely/early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy of 7% per annum is credited to the beneficiaries.
3. It has been launched by the Ministry of Social Justice.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding critical mineral assets

1. Lithium is classified as a critical mineral due to its essential role in the manufacturing of batteries for electric vehicles.
2. Rare Earth Elements (REEs) are critical minerals primarily used in the aerospace and defense industries.
3. Cobalt is considered a critical mineral as it is a key component in the production of solar panels.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding The National Exit Test (NExT)

1. NExT is a proposed common final-year undergraduate medical examination in India.
2. The purpose of NExT is to assess the competency of medical graduates and provide a single licensing examination for entry into postgraduate medical courses.
3. The implementation of NExT aims to streamline the medical education system and improve the quality of healthcare services in the country.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the Indian Meteorology Department (IMD)

1. IMD is the national meteorological service of India, responsible for providing weather forecasts and warnings.
2. It operates under the Ministry of Earth Sciences and plays a crucial role in monitoring and predicting monsoons in the Indian subcontinent.
3. The IMD was established during British colonial rule in the 19th century to primarily serve the interests of the British East India Company.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the Earth System Model

1. It is open-source software designed to integrate the interactions of atmosphere, ocean, land, ice and biosphere.
2. It is being developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

Q6. Consider the following statements about the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974

1. It aimed to establish institutional mechanisms for addressing contamination of water bodies in India.
2. It led to the formation of the Central Pollution Control Boards (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCB).

3. The Act requires industrial units to obtain permission from state boards before setting up factories and to comply with specific environmental norms.

How many of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- A. Only one
B. Only two
C. All three
D. None

Q7. Consider the following statements about Child Online Safety Toolkit

1. It is a hands-on, comprehensive guide to making the online world free from harm for children.
2. It has accessible worksheets and resources both online and in print to help make child online safety a reality.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- A. Only 1
B. Only 2
C. Both 1 and 2
D. Neither 1 nor 2

Q8. Consider the following statements with reference to India and UAE

1. India is the first country with which the UAE has signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.
2. Both India and UAE are signatories to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) Project.
3. SADA TANSEEQ is a joint military exercise between India and UAE.

How many of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- A. Only one
B. Only two
C. All three
D. None

Q9. Consider the following statements regarding Charan Singh

1. Charan Singh served as the Prime Minister of India for a brief period in 1979-1980.
2. He was a prominent leader associated with the Indian National Congress throughout his political career.
3. Charan Singh was a strong advocate for farmers' rights and is often remembered for his role in championing agricultural reforms.
4. Charan Singh's political party, Lok Dal, merged with the Janata Party to form Janata Dal in the 1980s.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
B. Only two
C. Only three
D. All four

Q10. Consider the following statements with reference to Nazool land

1. It refers to the land owned by the government and often leased to individuals or entities for specific purposes.
2. The lease tenure of Nazool land is fixed and cannot be renewed or cancelled.
3. It is governed by specific rules such as the Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
B. Only two
C. All three
D. None

Prelims Track Answer

Answer 1 Option B is correct

Explanation

- PM SVANidhi Scheme is a Central Sector Scheme i.e. fully funded by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**
- Objectives: To facilitate collateral free working capital loan to street vendors, incentivize regular repayment and reward digital transactions. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The Scheme is available to all street vendors engaged in vending in urban areas.
- Lending Agencies: Microfinance Institutions, Non-Banking Financial Company, Self Help Groups due to their ground level presence and proximity to the urban poor including the street vendors.
- On timely/early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy of 7% per annum will be credited through direct benefit transfer on a six monthly basis. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The scheme provides for the rise of the credit limit on timely/ early repayment of loans.
- There will be no penalty on early repayment of loan.
- ULBs play a pivotal role in the implementation of the scheme by ensuring to target the beneficiary and reaching to them in an efficient manner.

Answer 2 Option B is correct

Explanation

- Lithium is indeed classified as a critical mineral because of its crucial role in the production of batteries for electric vehicles (EVs) and energy storage systems. As the demand for EVs and renewable energy storage increases, the importance of lithium has grown significantly. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- While Rare Earth Elements (REEs) are indeed critical minerals, they are not primarily used in the aerospace industry. Instead, REEs find extensive application in the manufacturing of various high-tech products such as smartphones, electric vehicle motors, and renewable energy technologies. However, they are also important for certain defense applications. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**

- Cobalt is not a key component in the production of solar panels. Cobalt is primarily used in the manufacturing of lithium-ion batteries, similar to lithium. The use of cobalt in batteries contributes to the energy storage sector rather than solar panels. Solar panels typically use materials such as silicon, cadmium, and tellurium. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**

Answer 3 Option C is correct

Explanation

- The National Exit Test (NExT) is indeed a proposed common final-year undergraduate medical examination in India. It is intended to serve as a standardized examination for medical students completing their undergraduate studies. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- The purpose of NExT is to assess the competency of medical graduates.
- It is designed to be a single licensing examination that would replace the existing separate exams required for medical graduates to pursue postgraduate courses.
- The idea is to have a uniform and comprehensive examination that determines eligibility for postgraduate medical education. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- The implementation of NExT does aim to streamline the medical education system in India.
- By providing a common exit examination, it is expected to bring about a more standardized and rigorous evaluation of medical graduates. This, in turn, is anticipated to enhance the overall quality of healthcare services in the country by ensuring that medical professionals meet a certain standard of competence. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**

Answer 4 Option B is correct

Explanation

- The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) is indeed the national meteorological service of India. It is responsible for providing weather forecasts, issuing warnings, and monitoring various meteorological phenomena across the country. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- The IMD operates under the Ministry of Earth Sciences and plays a crucial role in

monitoring and predicting monsoons in the Indian subcontinent.

- The accurate prediction of monsoons is of paramount importance for agriculture and various sectors of the Indian economy. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- The IMD was not established during British colonial rule to primarily serve the interests of the British East India Company.
- It was actually founded in 1875 and its primary purpose was to provide meteorological services to support various sectors such as agriculture, aviation, and defense. While its origins date back to the colonial period, its mission was broader than serving the interests of a specific company. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**

Answer 5 Option A is correct

Explanation

- The Earth System Model is an open-source software designed to integrate the interactions of atmosphere, ocean, land, ice, and biosphere. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Purpose: To improve its forecasts, facilitate long-term climate studies, and predict climate impacts in the coming years.
- Since it is based on numerical weather prediction and data assimilation, it can be used for accurate climate change predictions.
- The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology along with the Centre for Climate Change Research (CCCR), is developing this first-for-India Earth System Model. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- An amount of ₹192.28 crores has been sanctioned under the Monsoon Convection, Clouds and Climate Change (MC4) sub-scheme to develop the climate forecasting system
- The work on the model is currently underway and is expected to be completed by 2025.

Answer 6 Option D is correct

Explanation

- The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1974 was India's first legislation aimed at addressing water contamination. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It led to the establishment of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and State

Pollution Control Boards (SPCB) in September 1974. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

- These boards are tasked with monitoring and preventing the contamination of public water resources by sewage and industrial effluents.
- The Act requires industrial units to obtain permission from state boards before setting up factories and to comply with specific environmental norms. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- The CPCB's role includes collecting and disseminating data on water pollution and setting technical standards, while the SPCB enforces compliance, with penalties for violations including factory shutdowns, monetary fines, and imprisonment of up to six years.

Answer 7 Option D is correct

Explanation

- The child online safety toolkit is a hands-on, comprehensive guide to making the online world free from harm for children. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It builds on existing international agreements and best practices, developed in consultation with international experts from a range of backgrounds.
- It has accessible worksheets and resources both online and in print to help make child online safety a reality. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

Answer 8 Option A is correct

Explanation

- India and the UAE established diplomatic relations in 1972.
- In 2022, India became the first country with which the UAE signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Both countries are a part of a number of important groupings such as the I2U2 or the West Asian Quad.
- The UAE is also part of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) infrastructure project that was signed during the G-20 summit in Delhi. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- Both nations demonstrated their commitment to environmental sustainability by co-launching the Global Green Credit Initiative.

- SADA TANSEEQ is a Joint Military Exercise between India and Saudi Arabia. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**

Answer 9 Option B is correct

Explanation

- Charan Singh served as the Prime Minister of India for a brief period from July 28, 1979, to January 14, 1980. His tenure as Prime Minister was relatively short but marked by efforts to address agricultural issues and rural development. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- Charan Singh was not associated with the Indian National Congress throughout his political career. He initially started his political journey with the Congress but later parted ways due to differences. He went on to form and lead his own political party, the Lok Dal. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect**
- Charan Singh was indeed a strong advocate for farmers' rights. He is often remembered for his emphasis on agricultural reforms and policies aimed at addressing the concerns of farmers. His government took steps to improve the conditions of farmers and rural communities. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**
- Charan Singh's party, Lok Dal, did not merge with the Janata Dal. Instead, it merged with other parties to form the Janata Dal in 1988. The Janata Dal was a political merger of several parties, including Lok Dal, Jan

Morcha, and others. **Hence, statement 4 is incorrect**

Answer 10 Option B is correct

Explanation

- Nazool land is owned by the government but, generally, it is not directly administered as state property.
- The state generally allots such land to any entity on lease for a fixed period, typically between 15 and 99 years. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The lease can be renewed or cancelled by the government, which then repossesses the land. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- Various states have established rules for Nazool land management, with the Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956 being widely used. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- After India gained independence, the lands confiscated by the Britishers following victories in the battles with the rulers became vacant and were marked as Nazool land - to be owned by the respective state governments.
 - due to the lack of adequate documentation proving ownership by the former kings and royals.
- The government generally uses Nazool land for public purposes like building schools, hospitals, Gram Panchayat buildings, etc.
- In some cases, large tracts of land denoted as Nazool land are leased to housing societies.

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