

TARGET4IAS: TOGETHER WE CAN



Target4IAS
Together We Can

Weekly Current Affairs

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World Press Freedom Day:

- **3rd May**, the anniversary of the **Declaration of Windhoek** is celebrated worldwide as World Press Freedom Day.
- World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993, following the recommendation of UNESCO's General Conference.
- **Theme:** "Information as a Public Good".

Xylophis deepaki:

- It is a **new snake species** discovered recently in **Tamil Nadu**.
- It is a tiny snake of just 20 cm length with iridescent scales.
- It is now reported to be an endemic species of Tamil Nadu and has been sighted in a few locations in the southern part of the Western Ghats.
- The species is named in honour of Indian herpetologist Deepak Veerappan for his contribution in erecting a new subfamily Xylophiinae to accommodate wood snakes.

About Wood Snake

- Wood snakes are **harmless**, sub-fossorial and often found while digging soil in farms and under the logs in the Western Ghat forests.
- They **feed on earthworms** and possibly other invertebrates.
- Interestingly, their close relatives are found in northeast India and Southeast Asia and are known to be arboreal.



G7 Summit

In news

The Group of Seven wealthy democracies recently discussed how to form a common front towards an increasingly assertive China in the Foreign Ministers' first in-person talks in two years. The recent meet also focused on the nuclear programmes of Iran and North Korea.

About G7

- It was originally formed in 1975 to discuss the political and economic concerns prompted during oil crisis of 1973.
- G7 countries are— Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.
- It does not have a formal constitution or a fixed headquarters.

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- The decisions taken during summit are non-binding.
- Every year, the summit is hosted by one of the members. The hosting members shall invite three more guest countries on its will. This year, UK has invited India, Australia and South Korea.
- In 2019, the 45th G7 summit was hosted by France.

Putala Nach

In news

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided an Assam-based trust the opportunity to focus on a near-forgotten form of string puppetry called Putala Nach.

About Putala Nach

- **The string puppetry of Assam** is called Putala Nach.
- There were three different styles of string puppetry in Assam. They were Barpeta-Nalbari in western Assam, Kalaigaon in northern Assam and Majuli “island” in eastern Assam.
- It is used to perform scenes from the epics such as Ramayana or Mahabharatha.
- These dolls are 1.5 metres tall and are made of hollow wood or bamboo. Their heads are made of terracotta.
- Musical Instruments used in performing the art are dhol, harmonium, kansi, double reed wind instrument and a bell metal plate beaten with a stick.



SUTRA Model

In news

Scientists working on the SUTRA model have rejected media reports claiming that they had cautioned the Government regarding the second wave of the corona pandemic in March this year.

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About SUTRA Model

- SUTRA model is used for charting the trajectory of COVID-19 in the country.
- Group of scientists working on the model stated that a mathematical model can only predict future with some certainty so long as virus dynamics and its transmissibility don't change substantially over time.
- They added that in the case of COVID-19, the nature of the virus has been changing very rapidly. In such a context, they said any prediction for COVID-19 must be continually readjusted.
- The Scientists working on the SUTRA model said that they continue their efforts to better estimate the future trajectory of the pandemic.
- The model uses three main parameters to predict the course of the pandemic.
 - The first is called beta, or contact rate, which measures how many people an infected person infects per day.
 - The second parameter is 'reach', measures the level of exposure.
 - The third is 'epsilon' -> ratio of detected and undetected cases.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

In news

The High Court of Manipur has allowed seven Myanmar nationals, who entered India secretly following the February military coup, to travel to New Delhi to seek protection from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Key takeaways

- Though India is not a party to the UN Refugee Conventions, the country is a party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966.
- The far-reaching and myriad protection afforded by Article 21 of our Constitution, as interpreted and adumbrated by our Supreme Court time and again, would indubitably encompass **the right of non-refoulement**.

What is Non-refoulement

It is the principle under international law that a person fleeing from persecution from his own country should not be forced to return.

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About UNHCR

- It is a UN Refugee Agency and a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting the rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.
- It was **created in 1950** to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes.
- It is **headquartered at Geneva, Switzerland**.

Moorhen Yoga Mat

In news

A biodegradable and compostable yoga mat developed from water hyacinth by six young girls from the fishing community in Assam.

Key takeaways:

- The 'Moorhen Yoga mat' **named after Kam Sorai (Purple moorhen, a resident bird of Deepor Beel Wildlife sanctuary)**.
- It will soon be introduced to the world market as a unique product.
- The intervention was triggered through an initiative by **North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), an autonomous body under Department of Science & Technology (DST)** to involve the entire women community associated with a collective called 'Simang' meaning dream, led by the 6 girls to create wealth from water hyacinth plants.
- Water hyacinth is considered as a nuisance since it does not benefit the fishing community and harms their occupation.



Deepor Beel

- Deepor Beel is a permanent **freshwater lake in Assam**.
- It is recognised as a Ramsar Site and a bird wildlife sanctuary.

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

In news

Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs and Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Governor for India Nirmala Sitharaman participated in the Governor's Seminar on "Cooperation for a Resilient Future", held as part of ADB's annual meeting 2021.

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About ADB

- It is a regional development bank **established on 19 December 1966**.
- Headquartered in **Manila, Philippines**.
- **Members:** It has 67 members—of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside. **India is one of the founding members**.
- It **aims** to promote social and economic development in Asia and provides loans, technical assistance and grants.
- The ADB was modelled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar **weighted voting system** where votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.
- **Japan and US holds the largest proportion of shares in ADB followed by China, India and Australia. ADB is also an official United Nations Observer.**
- Most of the ADB's lending (~80%) is concentrated public sector lending in five operational areas viz. Education; Environment, Climate Change & Disaster Management; Finance Sector Development; Regional Cooperation & Integration and Private sector lending.
- **Creative Productivity Index** is released by the **Economic Intelligence Unit of ADB** and is used to study Asian knowledge economies on different parameters.

Food price index

In news

The United Nations recently announced that the world food prices increased for the eleventh consecutive month in April 2021. It reached the highest level since May 2014.

Key takeaways

- The Food Price Index **measures monthly changes of a basket of food grains** such as oil seeds, cereals, dairy products, sugar and meat.
- **Released by: Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).**
- The wheat prices were steady.
- The vegetable oil prices increased by 1.8%.
- Dairy Prices increased by 1.2%. The demand for milk products such as milk powder, butter, cheese was mainly from Asia.
- The meat index increased by 1.7%.
- Sugar prices increased by 60% as compared to the previous year. This price increase was mainly due to slow harvest in Brazil and also due to large frost damage in France.

Intellectual property Rights

In news

India and South Africa proposed for IP waiver at the World Trade Organisation in 2020. This has now been backed by the United States.

What are patents and IP Rights

- IP right is a monopoly granted by a government to an inventor. It means that the others cannot copy their invention.
- It can be a process patent or a product patent.
 - **A product patent:** it is an **exclusive right given to the original inventor** of a product. This means that no other manufacturer can provide the same product through the same or any other process.
 - **A process patent:** the patent is granted for a particular manufacturing process. Any other person can produce the same product through some other process, modifying the various parameters.
- India moved from product patenting to process patenting in the 1970s. But due to obligations arising out of the TRIPS Agreement, India had to amend the Patents Act in 2005, and switch to a product patents regime.

Strategic Disinvestment

In news

The Union Cabinet recently approved the Strategic Disinvestment and transfer of management control in IDBI bank.

What is Strategic Disinvestment?

- Strategic disinvestment is transferring the ownership and control of a public sector entity to some other entity (mostly to a private sector entity). Unlike the simple disinvestment, strategic sale implies some sort of privatisation.
- **DIPAM** is Department of Investment and Public Asset Management. It is the nodal department for strategic sale in the Public Sector Undertakings. Earlier, the Public Sector Undertakings were identified by NITI Aayog.
- The Department of Disinvestment was renamed as DIPAM in 2016.

Used Cooking Oil (UCO) Based Bio-Diesel

In news

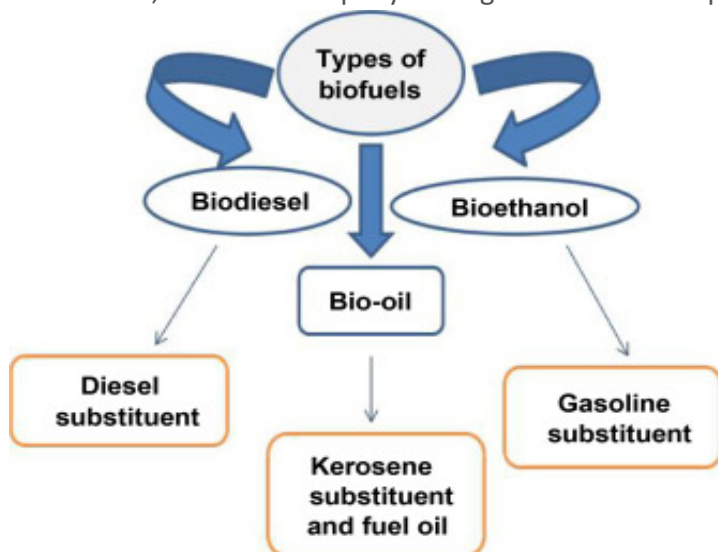
Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas flagged off the first supply of UCO (Used Cooking Oil) based Biodiesel blended Diesel under the **Expression of Interests Scheme** from Indian Oil's Tikrikalan Terminal, Delhi.

Expression of Interest Scheme

- It was **launched in 2019**.
- It was launched for the procurement of bio diesel produced from used cooking oil.
- It mainly aims to create a system for collection and conversion of Used Cooking Oil into biodiesel.
- Between August 2019 and November 2020, that is, during the first phase of the scheme, eleven Expression of Interests were received.

About Biodiesel

- It is an alternative fuel, similar to conventional or 'fossil' diesel.
- It can be produced from vegetable oils, animal fats, tallow and waste cooking oil.
- A significant advantage of Biodiesel is its carbon-neutrality, i.e. the oilseed absorbs the same amount of CO₂ as is released when the fuel is combusted in a vehicle.
- Also, Biodiesel is rapidly biodegradable and completely non-toxic.



Supreme Court Upheld Validity of 102nd Constitution Amendment Act

Key takeaways

- The court held that the 102nd Constitution Amendment has abrogated the power of states to identify Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs).

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- The Central List will now be the “only list” for the SEBC. This means that the Centre alone is empowered to identify SEBC and include them in the Central List under Article 342A(1) for claiming reservation benefits.
- The States could only make suggestions to the President or the statutory commissions for inclusion, exclusion, or modification of castes and communities to be included in the SEBC List.
- Once published under Article 342A (1), the list can only be amended through a law enacted by Parliament.

About 102nd Amendment Act, 2018:

- The 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2018 gave constitutional status to the **National Backward Classes Commission**.
- The Amendment also gives the President powers to notify backward classes.
- However, several states have raised questions on the interpretation of this Amendment and argued that it curtails their powers.

SC strikes down Maratha reservation

In news

The Supreme Court of India recently struck down Maratha reservation in the state as it breaches 50% ceiling of reservation.

How SC order impacts other states

RAJASTHAN
The state provides 16% reservation to SC, 12% to ST, 21% to OBC; 10% is given to EWS and 5% to Most Backward Classes, including Gujjars.
"Why did the Modi government not include MBC in the IX schedule..? If the impact of the court's decision comes on MBC's 5% reservation then we have to come on railway tracks and roads."
— Himmat Singh, Gujjar leader

Retired Judge NN Mathur said the reservation in Rajasthan exceeds 50% cap, which could be challenged on the basis of the Supreme Court order

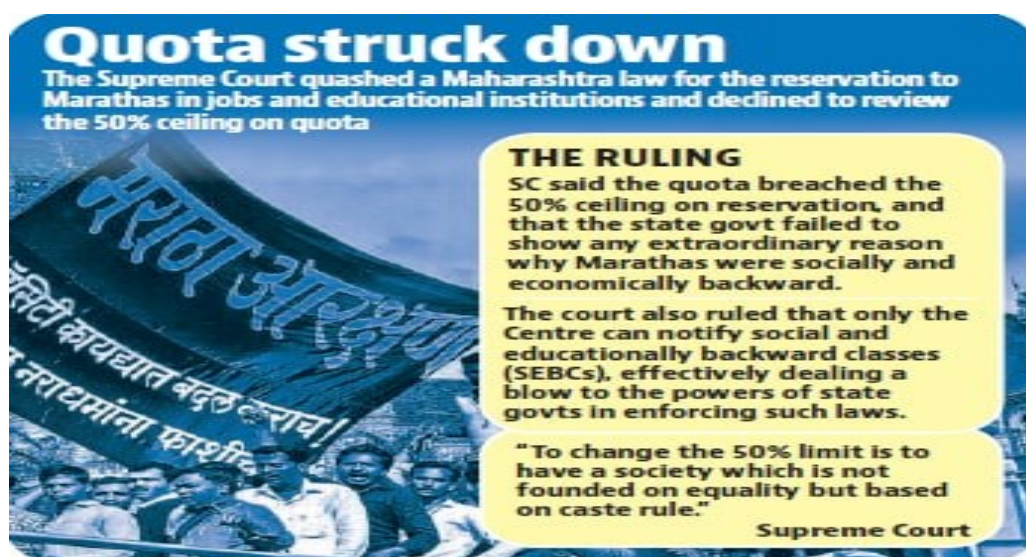
UTTAR PRADESH
The state provides 50% reservation to SC, ST and OBC
"The main criteria should be the ratio of caste/communities groups in the population. The share of the reservation to a particular caste or community must be on the basis of the population..."
—Rajendra Chaudhary, SP state spokesperson

"We have always believed in the courts."
—Naveen Srivastava, BJP spokesperson

MADHYA PRADESH
In July 2019, the then Congress-led state government increased the reservation for Other Backward Classes from 14% to 27%, taking the total percentage of quota offered in the state to 73%. The move was stayed by the high court in 2020.
"The reservation was increased by the previous government according to the population of OBC in MP but after the apex court judgment, we have to think of something else to give a fair chance to OBC population..."
— PC Sharma, Congress MLA

"We respect the Supreme Court judgment..."
—Rajneesh Agrawal, BJP spokesperson

WEST BENGAL
The state currently offers 55% reservation. It crossed the 50% reservation cap in July 2019 by passing a bill to provide 10% quota to the economically weaker sections (EWS).
"We would not like to comment on the SC verdict"
—Tapas Roy, TMC leader



Crocidura Norcondamica

In news

A team from the Zoological Survey of India has discovered a new insect eating mammal species from the remote uninhabited dormant volcanic island of Narcondam in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Key takeaways:

- It is almost the size of the house mouse.
- It lives in the forest floor and feed on insects. They help to control the insect population in the dense Narcondam forest.
- It belongs to Shrews family. Shrews are not rodents.
- This insect eating mammal species has been discovered in India after four years. The last insect eating mammal to be discovered in India was Jenkin's Andaman shrew(1978).

Dahla Dam

In news

The Taliban has captured Afghanistan's second-biggest dam after months of fierce fighting in its former bastion of Kandahar.

Key takeaways

- It provides irrigation to farmers via a network of canals as well as drinking water for the provincial capital
- It is now under Taliban control.
- The dam's capture comes after clashes erupted in neighbouring Helmand province just days after the U.S. military formally began withdrawing its remaining troops from Afghanistan.

About Dahla Dam

- The Dahla Dam is also known as Arghandab Dam.
- It is located in the Shah WaliKot District of Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.
- Dahla was built by the United States nearly 70 years ago to provide water for irrigating land in about seven districts of Kandahar.
- It is built on the **Arghandab River**.