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Sub-Classification of Scheduled Castes (SC) Reservations

Context: A seven-judge constitution bench, led by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, will commence hearings on the sub-categorization among Scheduled Castes (SCs) next week.

- **Punjab's 1975 Notification: Initial Sub-Classification**
 - Punjab government divided its 25% SC reservation into two categories.
 - Balmiki and Mazhbi Sikh communities received first preference due to economic and educational backwardness.
 - Rest of SC communities did not benefit from this preferential treatment.
- **Legal Challenge: Andhra Pradesh's 2000 Law Struck Down**
 - 2004 constitution bench (E V Chinniah v State of Andhra Pradesh) deemed Andhra Pradesh's law violative of the right to equality.
 - Emphasized the homogeneity of the SC list, preventing states from disturbing the list through sub-classification.
- **High Court's Decision: Punjab & Haryana High Court Strikes Down 1975 Notification**
 - 'Dr. Kishan Pal v. State of Punjab' (2006): Punjab & Haryana High Court invalidated Punjab's 1975 notification, aligning with the Supreme Court decision.
- **Punjab's Attempt to Reinstate: 2006 Act**
 - Punjab government enacted the Punjab Scheduled Caste and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, 2006, reintroducing preferences for Balmiki and Mazhbi Sikh communities.
 - High Court struck down this provision in 2010, maintaining the stance against sub-classification.
- **Supreme Court Referral: 'Davinder Singh v State of Punjab' (2014)**
 - 2014: Supreme Court referred the appeal to a five-judge constitution bench to reconsider the 2004 E V Chinniah decision.
 - Required examination of multiple constitutional provisions and the validity of sub-classification.

A Brief History of Backward Classes Reservations in India:

- The constitutional term for Other Backward Classes or OBC is **Socially and Economically Backward Classes or SEBC**.
- The benchmark for OBC affirmative action is 'class' and not 'caste'.

1955: First Backward Classes Commission Report (Kaka Kalekar Commission)- recommended caste enumeration in the 1961 census.

1980: Janata Party government-appointed Second Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission) submitted its report.

Commission extrapolated the OBC population to 52% from the last caste census from 1931.

1989: V P Singh government implements Mandal Commission Report.

1992: In the Indira Sawhney Case, the SC Introduces the concept of creamy layer to exclude well-off among OBCs in the ambit of quota.

What is sub-categorisation of OBC?

- Creating sub-groups of backward castes within the OBC category.
- The objective is to ensure equitable distribution of the quota pie between haves and have-nots or the backward and most backward classes.

Sub-categorisation of OBCs in states:

1972: Karnataka CM Devraj Urs appoints Havanur Commission, its report formed the basis for the sub-categorisation of OBCs.

1977: Bihar CM Karpoori Thakur implements Mungeri Lal Commission report to divide OBCs into two categories: extremely backward classes (EBCs), and backward classes

2002: Former UP CM Rajnath Singh appoints Hukum Singh committee to earmark 5% OBC quota for Yadavs and 14% for Most Backward Classes

Sub-categorisation in the central OBCs list:

2017: The Modi government appoints a commission headed by Justice G Rohini to examine the sub-categorisation of OBCs



Terms of reference of the Rohini Commission:

- i. To examine the inequitable distribution of reservation benefits among OBCs in the Central List.
- ii. To work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach
- iii. To identify the respective castes and classify them into their respective sub-categories

2023: Rohini Commission submits its report to the President of India.

- **Reconsideration: 2020 Constitution Bench**
 - 2020 constitution bench, led by Justice Arun Mishra, held that the 2004 E V Chinniah decision needed reconsideration.
 - Rejected the notion of a homogeneous SC group, acknowledging inequalities within SCs, STs, and backward classes.
- **Introduction of "Creamy Layer" Concept**
 - Post-2018: "Creamy layer" concept applied to SC reservations, imposing an income ceiling.
 - States argue that sub-classification mirrors the creamy layer formula, providing preferential treatment to the most disadvantaged castes.
- **Current Status: Seven-Judge Bench**
 - A larger seven-judge bench is currently hearing the issue, emphasizing the authority of a larger bench overruling a smaller bench.
 - Sub-classification's potential impact on various castes, including Balmikis, Mazhabi Sikhs, Madiga, Paswans, Jatavs, and Arundhatiyars.

Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT)

Context: MNRE has initiated Rs 17,490 crore SIGHT program to boost domestic electrolyser manufacturing and green hydrogen production.

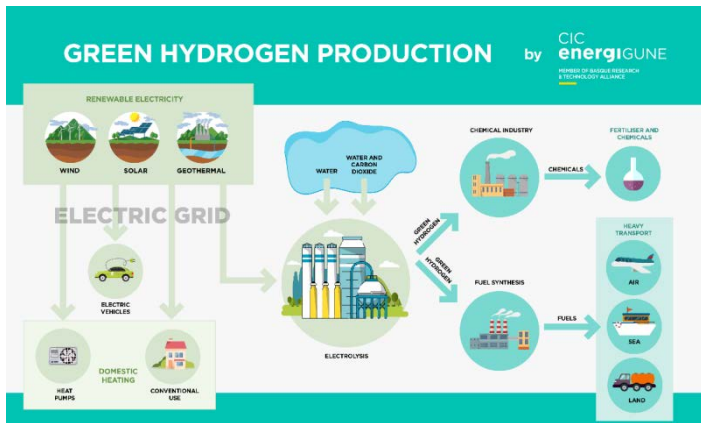
- **SIGHT Programme Allocation:** The Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) allocates Rs 17,490 crore under the National Green Hydrogen Mission for the Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) programme.
- **Mode-2B Implementation:** MNRE adopts the Mode-2B approach for the SIGHT scheme, involving the aggregation of demand and solicitation of bids for green hydrogen production through a competitive selection process.
- **Tranche I Details:** Tranche I of Mode 2B presents a substantial bidding capacity of 200,000 million tonnes per annum.
- **Execution Oversight**
 - Implementation of the scheme entrusted to agencies nominated by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG), primarily oil and gas companies.
 - The Centre for High Technology (CHT) is designated to provide secretarial, managerial, and implementation support.
- **Oil and Gas Companies' Plans**
 - Indian Oil Corporation commits to converting 50% of its grey hydrogen to green hydrogen by 2030.
 - Hindustan Petroleum Corporation is actively involved in constructing a 370 million tonnes per annum green hydrogen plant at its Visakhapatnam refinery.
- **Incentive Criteria**
 - Bidders must adhere to the 'National Green Hydrogen Standard' criteria notified by MNRE to qualify for incentives.
 - The scheme offers direct incentives over three years based on production and supply rates: Rs 50/kg in the first year, Rs 40/kg in the second year, and Rs 30/kg in the third year.

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- **Bid Allocation Process:** The allocation process prioritizes the bidder quoting the lowest price, with subsequent bidders allocated their admissible capacity in ascending order of price until the total available capacity is exhausted.
- **Financial Requirement:** Bidders need a net worth equal to or greater than Rs 15 crore per thousand MT per annum of quoted production and supply capacity.
- **Monitoring Committee**
 - A scheme monitoring committee, co-chaired by the secretaries of MoPNG and MNRE, along with industry experts, will periodically review the implementation status and performance.
 - The committee is tasked with recommending measures to address challenges and facilitating the smooth progression of the scheme.
- **World Economic Forum Report**
 - A recent report by the World Economic Forum sheds light on the limited on-the-ground traction for green hydrogen adoption in India.
 - Caution is expressed regarding potential land-use and water conflicts arising from the substantial land and water resources required for green hydrogen production.

WHO guidelines for use of LLMs in Healthcare

Context: The World Health Organization (WHO) has released comprehensive guidance on the ethical use and governance of large multi-modal models (LMM) in healthcare.

- **Introduction of Generative AI in Healthcare**
 - The fast-growing generative AI technology is revolutionizing healthcare and medical research by processing diverse data inputs like text, videos, and images.
 - Platforms such as ChatGPT, Bard, and Bert have become household names since their introduction only last year.
- **LMMs Adoption**
 - Large Language Models (LLMs), known for mimicking human communication and performing tasks without explicit programming, have been adopted more rapidly than any other consumer technology in history.
 - The United Nations health agency notes their unprecedented adoption.
- **Benefits and Risks:** Rapid adoption underscores the need to carefully weigh out the benefits and risks associated with LMMs.

- **Applications of LMMs in Healthcare:** WHO identifies five broad applications of LMMs in healthcare: Diagnosis and clinical care, patient-guided use, clerical and administrative tasks, medical and nursing education, and scientific research and drug development.
- **Risks Associated with LMMs**
 - Despite promising uses, LMMs pose risks such as the generation of false, inaccurate, or biased statements that could misguide health decisions.
 - The data used to train these models can suffer from quality or bias issues, potentially perpetuating disparities based on race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, or age.
- **Collaborative Approach Advocated:** WHO calls for a collaborative approach involving governments, technology companies, healthcare providers, patients, and civil society in all stages of LMM development and deployment.
- **Key Recommendations for Governments**
 - Governments are recommended to invest in public infrastructure, such as computing power and public datasets, adhering to ethical principles.
 - Laws and regulations should be used to ensure LMMs meet ethical obligations and human rights standards.
 - Regulatory agencies should be assigned to assess and approve LMMs for healthcare use.
 - Introduce mandatory post-release audits and impact assessments to ensure ethical use.
- **Guidance for Developers**
 - Developers are advised to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including potential users and healthcare professionals, from the early stages of AI development.
 - LMMs should be designed for well-defined tasks with necessary accuracy, understanding potential secondary outcomes.
- **Roadmap for Ethical Use of AI in Healthcare**
 - WHO's new guidance offers a roadmap for harnessing the power of LMMs in healthcare while navigating their complexities and ethical considerations.
 - This initiative marks a significant step towards ensuring that AI technologies serve the public interest, particularly in the health sector.
- **WHO's Previous Ethical Principles**
 - WHO emphasizes the importance of applying ethical principles and appropriate governance in AI for health.
 - The six core principles identified by WHO include protecting autonomy, promoting human well-being, ensuring transparency, fostering responsibility and accountability, ensuring inclusiveness and equity, and promoting AI that is responsive and sustainable.
- **World Economic Situation and Prospects Report**
 - The 2024 World Economic Situation and Prospects report highlights that although AI, including generative AI, will transform the labor market and enhance productivity, its impact may not be evenly distributed, potentially widening disparities.
 - Following the launch of technologies like ChatGPT, there's been a marked shift from early adopters to mass market adoption, with around a third of surveyed firms globally using generative AI regularly within six months of its introduction.

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➤ **AI's Impact on Labor Market**

- The report notes concerns that AI, especially generative AI, could exacerbate inequalities within and between countries.
- It might reduce demand for low-skilled workers and negatively impact disadvantaged groups and lower-income countries reliant on low-skill-intensive economic activities.

➤ **Concerns Over Job Displacement**

- The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report for 2024 identifies AI-generated disinformation and misinformation as one of the most significant global risks.
- The widespread use of such tools may undermine the legitimacy of newly elected governments, especially in the context of major upcoming elections.

➤ **EU's Response with AI Act**

- The European Union passed the AI act in December, aiming to ensure that AI systems used in the EU are safe and respect fundamental rights and EU values.
- This is particularly relevant to the EU elections, which are considered uniquely vulnerable to attacks due to the collective voting of the 27 EU-nations.

➤ **Quantum Computing as a Disruptor**

- Alongside AI, the report categorizes quantum computing as a potential disruptor.
- It highlights security concerns such as "harvest attacks," where criminals collect encrypted data for future decryption with advanced quantum computers.

NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar



The President of India, will confer the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar, 2024 to exceptional children in an award ceremony which will take place at Vigyan Bhawan on 22nd January, 2024.

About Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar:

- Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar is an **annual award presented by the Government of India.**
- The award has two categories: **Bal Shakti Puraskar and Bal Kalyan Puraskar.**
- It is awarded for exceptional achievements of **children aged 5-18** in fields such as innovation, scholastic achievements, social service, arts & culture, sports and bravery.
- The Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar, **2024** will be conferred upon **19 children** selected from all regions of the country for their exceptional achievements.
- There are **9 boys** and **10 girls** among the awardees belonging to **18 States and UTs** including **2 Aspirational Districts.**
- Each awardee of Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar is given a **Medal, Rs. 1,00,000 cash prize, book vouchers worth Rs. 10,000, certificate and citation.**

Nanjarayan Tank Bird Sanctuary



Recently, a flock of the rare migrant birds including the European Wigeon, Glossy Ibis, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Kingfisher, Red-Wattled Lapwing and Wood Sandpiper have spotted to Tiruppur's Nanjarayan Tank bird sanctuary

About Nanjarayan Tank Bird Sanctuary:

- Nanjarayan Tank **bird sanctuary** is located on the outskirts of Tiruppur, in western **Tamil Nadu.**
- It was declared the **17th bird sanctuary in Tamil Nadu in September 2022.**
- The sanctuary is **locally known as Sarkar Periyapalayam tank.**
- **European Wigeon (Mareca Penelope) and Ruddy Shelduck (Tadorna ferruginea)** also recently spotted.
- Ducks like **Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Garganey, Common Teal and Bar-headed Geese visit during winter.**
- Native bird species include Spot-billed Pelican, **Painted Stork, Grey Heron, Purple Heron** and various types of cormorants, egrets, ducks, and grebes.
- **Terrestrial birds like Barn Swallow, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Common Cuckoo, and Rosy Starling** also flock to and around the tank during winter.

Wings India Awards



Recently the Bangalore & Delhi Airports jointly bagged best airport award for the year 2024 at 4th edition of "Wings India Awards" in the Civil Aviation Sector held in Hyderabad.

About Wings India Awards:

- Wings India Awards are the **benchmark for excellence** for those demonstrating best practice and innovation in the **aviation sector.**
- The 2024 Wings India Awards were presented by the Ministry of Union Civil Aviation.
- The event was jointly **organized by the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MOCA) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).**
- The theme of the event was "**Connecting India to the World in Amrit Kaal: Setting the stage for Indian Civil Aviation @2047**".

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The Great Indian Bustard



Recently the Supreme Court has directed the Central government to come clean by February on its plans to save the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard.

About the Great Indian Bustard:

- The Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigripes*) is a large, **terrestrial bird native** to the Indian subcontinent.
- It is **one of the heaviest flying birds in the world** and is known by many names, including **Maldhok, Yerbhoot, Ghorad and Godawan**.
- It lives in **dry grasslands and scrublands**, with the largest populations **found in Rajasthan and Gujarat**.
- It is **about one meter tall**, with a **black cap, pale head and neck** and a **brownish body with a white-spotted black patch**.
- **Males are deep sandy buff colored** and have a black breast band during breeding season.
- The bird has a **horizontal body and long bare legs**, giving it an ostrich-like appearance.
- According to the World Wildlife Fund, there are **about 200 Great Indian Bustards left** in the world.

Gangetic Dolphin



Recently, a rare Gangetic dolphin, captured by a fisherman in Odisha's Balasore district in the **Jalaka river** is now planning by the Forest department to release it into the **Budhabalang river** for preservation.

About the Gangetic Dolphin:

- The Ganges river dolphin (*Platanista Gangetica*) is a **freshwater species of dolphin** that is legally protected in all countries where it is found.
- It is **found in Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu** river systems across Nepal, India and Bangladesh.
- It is known as **Blind dolphin, Ganges dolphin, Ganges susu and South Asian River Dolphin**.
- It is also known as the "**Tiger of the Ganges**" and is **India's National Aquatic Animal**.
- It has **long thin snout, rounded belly, stocky body** and large flippers.
- In **2021**, the **Indian government launched Project Dolphin** to conserve both riverine and oceanic dolphin species.
- It holds an **IUCN status of Endangered**, is granted **Schedule-I** protection under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, and is listed under Appendix I of **CITES**.

Panama Canal

The Panama Canal has been hit by a severe drought that began last year has recently forced authorities to slash ship crossings by 36 per cent in the Panama Canal.



About Panama Canal:

- The Panama Canal is **one of the world's two most strategic artificial waterways**, with the other being the **Suez Canal**.
- It **serves as a crucial link between the Atlantic (Caribbean Sea) and Pacific Oceans, connecting North America with South America**.
- Recognized as **one of the most important trade routes** globally, the canal facilitates the transit of a significant portion of international maritime trade.
- Initially **opened in 1914**, the canal was under the exclusive control of the USA, which was responsible for its construction.
- In **1999**, control of the Panama Canal was officially transferred to Panama, marking a significant shift in governance.

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Place in News

Uganda

Recently, the two-day 19th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit has begun in Uganda's Kampala in which the External Affairs Minister of India will lead the Indian delegation.



Uganda (Capital: Kampala)

Location: Uganda is a **landlocked country**, located in **East Africa**.

Boundaries: Uganda shares its border with **Kenya** (East), the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (West), **South Sudan** (North), **Tanzania** (South) and **Rwanda** (Southwest).

Physical Features:

- The **Ruwenzori mountain range** contains the **highest peak** in Uganda, which is named **Alexandra**.
- Much of the south of the country is heavily influenced by one of the world's biggest lakes, **Lake Victoria, which contains many islands**.
- **Bwindi Impenetrable National Park** and **Rwenzori Mountains National Park** (both UNESCO World Heritage Sites).

POINTS TO PONDER

- Which state in India has become 2nd State recently to take up 'caste census' after Bihar? - **Andhra Pradesh**
- In which architectural style is the Ram Temple in Ayodhya being built? - **Nagara style**
- Which ministry has recently published guidelines and incentives to promote the procurement of green hydrogen as part of the National Green Hydrogen Mission? - **The Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)**
- When was Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) set up by an Act of Parliament through an amendment to the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885? - **December 2003**
- Which larger group of animals do recently discovered isopods belong to? - **Crustaceans (crabs and shrimp)**

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