



17 February, 2024

Sagar Aankalan guidelines

Context: Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush, introduced the 'Sagar Aankalan' guidelines.

➤ Launch of 'Sagar Aankalan' Guidelines:

- Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush, introduced the 'Sagar Aankalan' guidelines during a stakeholders meet.
- These guidelines aim to transform the performance assessment of Indian ports.
- They focus on mapping and benchmarking of Indian port logistics performance and efficiency, harmonization of standards, and improving competitiveness, efficiency, and overall performance of the port sector.

➤ Implementation of MoUs from GMIS 2023:

- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW) concluded the Stakeholders Meet to implement the MoUs signed at the Global Maritime India Summit 2023 (GMIS 2023).
- Action plans were drawn up for the swift implementation of the MoUs, aiming to make them actionable at the earliest.
- Participants engaged in productive discussions to overcome challenges and facilitate the implementation of the MoUs.



➤ Significance of GMIS 2023:

- GMIS 2023 emerged as one of the largest maritime summits globally, attracting significant investment commitments.
- 360 MoUs were signed with an investment commitment of ₹8.35 lakh crore, with additional investible projects worth ₹1.68 lakh crore announced.
- The MoUs covered various aspects of the maritime sector, including port development, modernization, green hydrogen and ammonia, port-led development, cruise sector, shipbuilding, and knowledge sharing.

➤ Progress Update on MoUs:

- Port representatives provided updates on the progress of the MoUs signed at GMIS 2023, detailing milestones achieved and challenges encountered.
- Stakeholders shared perspectives on the implementation of the agreements, fostering transparency and accountability.

➤ Commitment to Action:

- The Ministry remains committed to translating the objectives outlined in the MoUs into tangible outcomes.
- By fostering collaboration, leveraging technologies, and embracing sustainable practices, India aims to unlock the full potential of its maritime sector, driving inclusive growth and prosperity.

National Commission for Scheduled Castes

Context: Arun Halder, Vice-Chairman (Acting Chairman), presented the Annual Report 2022-23 of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes to the President of India.

➤ About NCSC:

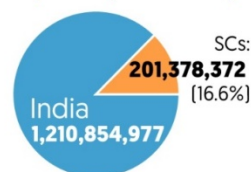
- The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) is a statutory body established under Article 338 of the Constitution of India.
- It serves as a watchdog to safeguard the interests of the scheduled castes (SCs) and ensure their socio-economic development.
- NCSC works towards eliminating discrimination and promoting equality for SCs in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social participation.
- The commission plays a crucial role in advocating for the rights and welfare of SCs and addressing their grievances.

➤ History and Origin:

- Initially, Article 338 of the Constitution provided for the appointment of a Special Officer for SCs and Scheduled Tribes.
- The 65th Amendment Act of 1990 transformed the Special Officer system into a multi-member National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- Subsequently, the 89th Amendment Act of 2003 led to the bifurcation of the commission into two separate bodies: the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).

Scheduled Castes in India

Population (Census 2011):



States with highest SC Literacy Rate



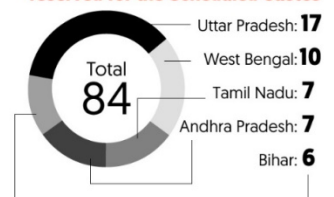
Literacy Rate:



Sex Ratio



State-wise Lok Sabha seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes



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➤ **Structure:**

- The NCSC is composed of a Chairperson, Vice-chairperson, and three other members, all appointed by the President of India.
- The members of the commission are chosen based on their expertise and commitment to the upliftment of SC communities.

➤ **Functions:**

- Monitoring and investigating all matters relating to the safeguards provided for SCs under the Constitution.
- Inquiring into specific complaints of deprivation of rights and safeguards of SCs and recommending remedial action.
- Advising the central and state governments on policies and programs for the socio-economic development of SCs.
- Providing regular reports to the President on the implementation of safeguards and suggesting measures for their effective implementation.
- Recommending steps to promote the socio-economic development and welfare of SC communities.
- Discharging similar functions for the Anglo-Indian Community as it does for SCs.

➤ **Other Constitutional Provisions for SC Upliftment:**

- Article 15(4) enables the state to make special provisions for the advancement of SCs.
- Article 16(4A) provides for reservation in promotions to ensure adequate representation of SCs in public services.
- Article 17 abolishes untouchability and prohibits its practice in any form.
- Article 46 directs the state to promote the educational and economic interests of SCs and protect them from social injustice.
- Articles 330 and 332 reserve seats for SCs in the House of the People and legislative assemblies of states.
- Part IX and Part IXA of the Constitution provide reservation for SCs in local government bodies, namely Panchayats and Municipalities, respectively.

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024

Context: Environment experts deem the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 counterproductive, opposing the changes proposed by the central government.

➤ **Establishment of Pollution Control Boards:**

- The Act initiates the establishment of both Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) to proactively prevent and manage water pollution.
- The Bill introduces a significant shift by decriminalizing several violations, opting instead for the imposition of penalties as a means of enforcement.
- Initially, the jurisdiction of this legislation extends to Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and select union territories, with provisions for other states to adopt it through appropriate resolutions.

➤ **Consent Exemptions for Industries:**

- Industrial ventures intending to discharge sewage into water bodies, sewers, or land are mandated to obtain prior consent from the respective SPCB.
- The Bill empowers the central government, in consultation with the CPCB, to exempt certain categories of industrial plants from the requirement of obtaining consent.
- Furthermore, it grants authority to the central government to issue guidelines concerning the grant, refusal, or cancellation of such consent by the SPCB.
- Operating without the required consent or tampering with monitoring devices is met with penalties, maintaining the severity of consequences outlined in the Act.

➤ **Appointment of State Board Chairman:**

- The Act currently mandates that the chairman of an SPCB be nominated by the respective state government.
- The Bill proposes an enhancement by specifying that the central government will prescribe the nomination process and delineate the terms and conditions of service for the chairman.

➤ **Discharge of Polluting Matter:**

- SPCBs are vested with the authority to issue immediate directives to curtail activities contributing to the discharge of noxious or polluting matter into water bodies.
- Violations of prescribed standards concerning polluting matter in water bodies or on land, except for specific exemptions such as depositing non-polluting materials for land reclamation, are now subject to penalties rather than imprisonment as per the Bill.

➤ **Penalties for Other Offenses:**

- In cases where offenses are not explicitly specified in the Act, the Bill replaces imprisonment with penalties ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15 lakh.
- Failure to pay imposed penalties may result in imprisonment or significantly higher fines, serving as a deterrent against non-compliance.

➤ **Adjudication of Penalties:**

- To streamline the process of determining penalties, the Bill empowers the central government to appoint adjudication officers, ensuring a standardized approach.
- Appeals against decisions made by these officers can be lodged with the National Green Tribunal, contingent upon depositing a percentage of the penalty levied.

➤ **Cognizance of Offenses:** In addition to complaints from CPCB, SPCB, or concerned individuals, the Bill extends the grounds for the court to take cognizance of offenses to include complaints from adjudicating officers.

➤ **Offenses by Government Departments:**

- The Act stipulates that heads of departments are liable for offenses committed by their respective government departments, subject to demonstrating due diligence.
- The Bill proposes penalties, in the form of a deduction from the head's basic salary, for violations by government departments, emphasizing accountability and compliance.

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NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Broom Grass



Recently, the tribal people at Umswai village in Assam, were seen harvesting broom grass, which is expected to continue until the end of February.

About Broom Grass:

- Broom grass, **scientifically known as *Thysanolaena maxima***, belongs to the **Poaceae family**.
- It is extensively cultivated in the **Karbi Anglong hills of Assam**.
- **Tiwa, Karbi and Khasi** tribal communities practice mixed cropping of broom grass under jhum cultivation.
- This grass serves multiple purposes, including **broom making, fuel and fodder** during crises and considered an eco-friendly product due to its sustainable cultivation practices.
- It thrives in various soil types ranging from **sandy loam to clay loam**.
- It can be propagated through both seeds and **rhizomes** (modified stems).
- **Assam is the largest producer of this cash crop in India.**

The Essential Services Maintenance Act



Recently, the Uttar Pradesh government invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), banning strikes by government employees in all state departments, corporations, and authorities for six months.

About the Essential Services Maintenance Act:

- The Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) is a **central law** that allows the government to prohibit strikes and demand arbitration or conciliation in certain industries.
- The act was enacted by the **Indian Parliament in 1968** to ensure the supply of certain services that, if impeded, would harm people's daily lives.
- The act **empowers the government to designate any economic activity or service as "essential"**, where disruption would impact the normal life of people.
- Each **state has also its own ESMA** with provisions slightly varying from the federal statute, allowing states to choose essential services and initiate ESMA enforcement.
- Employees involved in strikes can face dismissal, legal action, including arrest without a warrant, and up to one year of imprisonment or fines under ESMA.

European Bison



Recently, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has launched a campaign to relocate bull bison and save the female-only herd from extinction after all male bison disappeared in Zalissia National Nature Reserve during the Russian invasion.

About European Bison:

- The European bison (***Bison bonasus***), also known as wisent, is one of the **world's most endangered** large mammals and the **herbivore** is protected on the European level.
- It is similar in **appearance to the American bison**, but it is taller and has longer legs.
- It has a **dense coat that is dark to golden brown in color** and is less bushy than the American bison.
- It helps to maintain ecological corridors, enabling migration of species such as brown bear, wolf, lynx, among others.

World Wildlife Fund:

- The World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is an **international non-profit organization** that works to **preserve and conserve nature and its species**.
- It was **established in 1961** and is headquartered in Gland, **Switzerland**.

Parhyale Odian



Recently, the researchers at Berhampur University, Odisha, discovered a new species of marine amphipod, *Parhyale odian* in Chilika Lake.

About Parhyale Odian:

- Parhyale Odian is a **newly discovered species of marine amphipod**, a shrimp-like crustacean, found in Chilika Lake, Odisha.
- It **belongs to the genus Parhyale**, which now comprises a total of **16 species globally**.
- Named after Odisha's native language, Odia, the species is **brown in color, around eight millimeters long and has 13 pairs of legs**.
- It lives in **shallow, intertidal and circumtropical** marine environments.
- The genus Parhyale was first reported by **Stebbing in 1899** from the Virgin Islands.

Chilika Lake:



- Chilika Lake is the **largest brackish water lake in India** and serves as a prominent wintering ground for migratory birds in the Indian subcontinent.
- It is **Asia's largest lagoon and the world's second-largest**.
- In **1981**, Chilika Lake was designated as the first Indian wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, highlighting its ecological significance.

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<p>Chabahar Port</p>	<p>Recently, India urges Central Asian countries to utilize the Chabahar port in Iran for enhancing connectivity and trade with India and other global partners.</p> <p>About Chabahar Port: Chabahar Port is located in Iran's Sistan-Balochistan province on the Makran coast along the Gulf of Oman.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is Iran's only oceanic port and consists of two separate ports named Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari. This Port is considered a gateway to trade opportunities for India, Iran and Afghanistan with central Asian countries. India and Iran signed an initial agreement in 2016 for India to develop and operate Shahid Beheshti terminal for 10 years. It was proposed in 1973 by the last Shah of Iran, but development was delayed by the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The first phase opened during the Iran-Iraq War (1983) to shift seaborne trade eastward, reducing dependency on Persian Gulf ports vulnerable to attacks. It diversifies India's trade routes by circumventing Pakistan, which has historically imposed restrictions on India's trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. 
<p>Place in News</p> <p>Kazakhstan</p>	<p>In Kazakhstan, one of the largest methane leaks ever recorded released an estimated 127,000 tonnes of methane over six months, raising concerns about methane emissions confirmed by satellite data.</p> <p>Kazakhstan (Capital: Astana) Location: Kazakhstan, officially the Republic of Kazakhstan is a landlocked country mostly in Central Asia. Boundaries: Kazakhstan shares its border with China (East), the Caspian Sea (West), Russia (North and West), Uzbekistan (South), Kyrgyzstan (Southeast) and Turkmenistan (Southwest). Physical Features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The highest point in Kazakhstan is Khan Tengri. The major rivers in Kazakhstan include the Irtys, Syr Darya, Ili, Ural and Chu, contributing to the country's irrigation, transportation, and ecosystem. Kazakhstan is rich in minerals, including coal, iron ore, copper, gold, uranium and various rare earth elements, making it a significant player in the global mining industry. 

POINTS TO PONDER

- Which iconic Indian actress, known for her role as Lalitaji in the 1980s Surf detergent advertisement and as the star of the Doordarshan serial Udaan, passed away recently due to a cardiac arrest? - **Kavita Chaudhary**
- Which company is collaborating with Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL) to set up the world's first green hydrogen plant? - **Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL)**
- Which country recently slipped to become the world's 4th-largest economy? - **Japan (USA, China, Germany are the top 3 largest economies in the world, while India is ranked as 5th Largest)**
- Which initiative is conducted recently by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) specifically for school children? - **Young Scientist Programme (YUVIKA)**
- What is the nickname given to the rocket that the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will use to launch a meteorological satellite into space today (at 5.35 pm) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota? - **Naughty Boy**

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