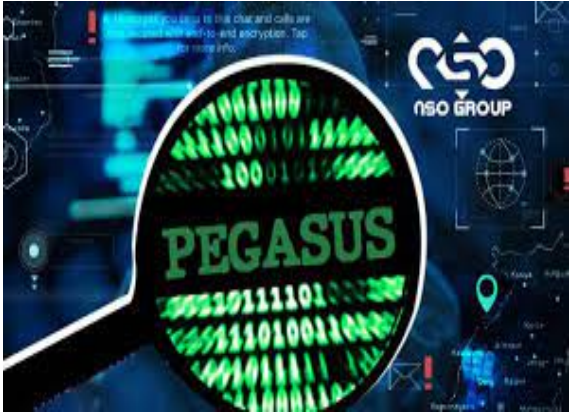




29 December 2023

National and International News

<p>Qatar court drops death penalty for eight Indians</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of External Affairs confirmed that the Court of Appeals in Doha has commuted the death sentence of Eight Indian nationals to life imprisonment. All eight arrested last year were employees of the Dahra Global defense services company. The eight men were previously convicted of charges related to the death of a Qatari citizen during a robbery attempt.
<p>Pegasus spyware found on journalists' phones after Apple alert</p> 	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recent discovery of Pegasus spyware on the phones of several journalists in India has sparked major concerns about privacy, press freedom, and national security. <p>Key Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Security Lab of Amnesty International announced that the founder editor of The Wire news website Siddharth Varadarajan and another journalist in India were targeted with Pegasus spyware this year The journalists had received an alert from Apple that they were being targeted by "state-sponsored hacking", following which they provided their phones to the non-profit for testing. <p>About:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pegasus is a sophisticated Israeli-made software that allows attackers to remotely access a phone's data, including messages, calls, emails, and even location information. Pegasus attack is also called as a "Zero Click attack"
<p>Person in News: Vijayakanth</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vijayakant, the charismatic actor and influential politician who transcended the screen to win over the hearts of millions in Tamil Nadu, passed away at the age of 71. He was born in Madurai as Muthuraman



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- Vijayakanth made his **acting debut in 1976** and quickly rose to stardom with powerful performances in action-oriented roles.
- Vijayakanth, who was **known for his action films and philanthropic work**, launched the **Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK)** in 2005 as an alternative to the ruling **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)** and **All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)**.

Disabled staff to get quota in promotion with effect from 2016

Context:

- The **Indian government has implemented a policy granting disabled staff reservation in promotions within government departments, retroactive to June 30, 2016.**
- This decision signifies a **significant step towards ensuring equal opportunities for disabled individuals in career progression.**

Key Points:

- The policy provides a **4% reservation in vacancies within Groups C, B, and A** for promotion of **Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)**.
- Employees with **benchmark disabilities exceeding 40%** in specified categories, as defined by the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, are **eligible for the quota.**
- It aims to **address the underrepresentation of PwDs in higher positions** within government departments, offering them a fair chance to climb the career ladder.
- The **Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT)** has **issued guidelines for various aspects of the policy**, including identification of vacancies, application procedures, and selection criteria.

Houthi attacks - a threat to global shipping

Context:

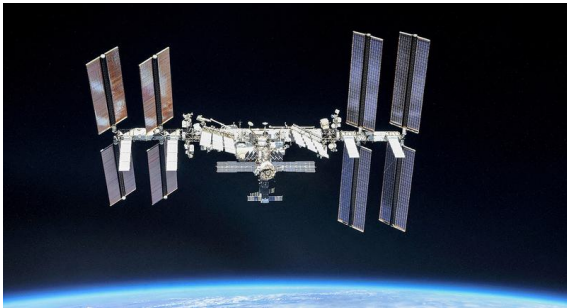
- The **recent drone attacks on merchant vessels in the Red Sea by Houthi rebels** have raised concerns about maritime security, disrupting global trade routes and potentially impacting economies.

Key Points:

- These **attacks have prompted some shipping companies to reroute vessels, avoid the Red Sea, and increase operational costs**




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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India heightened its presence, deploying various resources to counter potential threats in the region and monitor maritime activity. • On December 23, the crisis in the Red Sea reached Indian waters as Liberian-flagged merchant vessel Chem Pluto heading to Mangalore port was hit by a projectile about 271 miles from Porbandar in Gujarat, just outside the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). • This comes in the backdrop of a sharp rise in missile and drone attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea by Houthi rebels in Yemen in the last couple of weeks following Israel's offensive against Hamas in Gaza.
<p>Russia, NASA agree to continue joint ISS flights until 2025</p> 	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite ongoing geopolitical tensions, Russia and NASA have agreed to continue joint flights to the International Space Station (ISS) until at least 2025. • This decision ensures uninterrupted operation of the orbiting laboratory, a landmark example of international cooperation in science and technology. • The agreement covers delivery of crews by both countries' spacecraft, guaranteeing continued presence of American and Russian astronauts on the ISS.
<p>Farming crisis forcing youths to take to illegal migration</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From volatile weather patterns and climate change to plummeting crop prices and rising input costs, the agricultural sector is facing immense challenges. • This crisis is hitting young people particularly hard, pushing many towards the perilous path of illegal migration. <p>Reasons for the Exodus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwindling Profits: Declining agricultural incomes due to factors like unfair market practices and volatile prices leave many young farmers with bleak financial prospects. • Limited Opportunities: The lack of alternative employment opportunities in rural areas, often characterized by limited infrastructure and



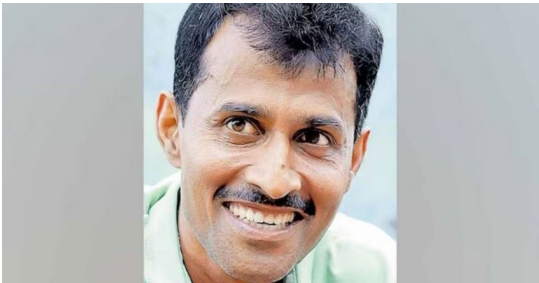

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	<p>education, further amplifies the pressure to seek greener pastures abroad.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt Burden: Many young farmers inherit crippling debts from their families, adding to the financial strain and making migration seem like the only escape route. • Desire for a Better Life: The allure of higher wages, better living conditions, and access to education and healthcare in developed countries acts as a powerful magnet for young people desperate for a brighter future.
<p>Women account for 49% of Ayushman cards</p> 	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian Ministry of Health recently revealed that nearly 49% of Ayushman cards, also known as Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) cards, are held by women. • This signifies a significant step towards inclusivity and equitable access to healthcare in India. <p>Key takeaways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased participation: The figure reflects the growing awareness and utilization of the Ayushman Bharat scheme among women. • Empowering women: Access to quality healthcare empowers women to take charge of their health and well-being, leading to improved overall health outcomes. • Focus on women's health: The scheme also includes 141 health benefit packages specifically designed for women, addressing various health concerns and needs.
<p>COVID-19-hit MSMEs can tap new relief window from Jan. 1</p> <p>Vivad Se Vishwas I scheme</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic can tap new relief window from Jan. 1 • This new window will open for them to submit fresh claims under the Vivad Se Vishwas I scheme, offering relief from pending litigation related to taxes, interest, and penalties. <p>About:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Vivad Se Vishwas I scheme was launched in 2020



- The aim is to resolve tax disputes between businesses and the government through mutual agreement.

Kerala Regional News

<p>Kannur farmer PB Aneesh wins Karshakasree 2024 Award</p> 	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PB Aneesh was selected for the Karshakasree 2024 Award for the best farmer in Kerala. • The award will be presented at the Karshakasree Agricultural Festival, which is scheduled to be held in Malappuram in February 2024 • He is thus the 17th recipient of this prestigious honor bestowed upon the best farmer in Kerala. • It was in view of Aneesh's exemplary dedication and innovative practices in agriculture.
<p>Millet-fish fest begins at CMFRI</p> 	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) in Kochi, Kerala, kicked off a three-day "Millet & Fish" festival on December 28th • It celebrates the nutritional benefits of combining millets, ancient grains known for their health properties, with the delicious variety of fish found in the coastal region. • Aim is to encourage the consumption of nutritious millets and fresh fish for a balanced diet rich in protein, fiber, and essential minerals. • It also showcases innovative dishes that blend the unique flavors and textures of millets and seafood, inspiring food enthusiasts and chefs. •
<p>Kerala to welcome New Year with heli-tourism</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kerala is gearing up to launch a unique initiative - heli-tourism • It offers scenic helicopter rides to celebrate the arrival of 2024. • Kochi will be the main hub, with helicopters taking off from the Cochin International Airport.



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- Initial phase covers 10 major destinations: Munnar, Kumarakom, Bekal, Alappuzha, Jatayu Earth Centre, Thiruvananthapuram, Kovalam, Wayanad, Thekkady, and Kollam.

Paramekkavu Devaswom plans mini pooram for PM Modi

Context:

- Paramekkavu Devaswom is planning to organize a mini Pooram for Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Mahila Sangam in Thrissur on January 3

About:

- Mini Pooram, also sometimes referred to as "Mini Thrissur Pooram," is a scaled-down version of the majestic Thrissur Pooram festival celebrated in Kerala
- While the grand Pooram happens once a year in April-May, mini Poorams are smaller events organized by various temples or cultural organizations throughout the year.
- These mini versions offer a chance to experience the vibrant energy and cultural treasures of Pooram on a smaller scale.

Person in News: Prasanth Narayanan



Context:

- Playwright and director Prasanth Narayanan, passed away at age of 51.
- He was known for helming some of the landmark plays in Malayalam, including Chayamukhi
- Over a career spanning three-and-a-half decades, he directed more than 60 plays and scripted quite a few of them too.



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