

National News

Supreme Court Upholds Broad Definition of Forest

- The Supreme Court has instructed the Central government to adhere to the **broad definition of 'forest' for now, as per a 1996 order.**
- This decision will lead to **1.97 lakh square km of undeclared forest land** being included in the definition of 'forest'.

Key points:

- A three-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, issued this directive while hearing petitions challenging the 2023 amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
- The Act was originally **enacted to prevent further deforestation and ecological imbalance.**

Recommendations:

- The 2023 amendments had narrowed the definition of forest to include **only declared forests and lands recorded as forests in government records after 1980.**
- However, the court emphasized the need to follow the **dictionary meaning of 'forest', as established in the T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad case.**
- The court clarified that 'forest' should not be limited to lands recorded as forests in government records.
- It directed States and Union Territories to compile a **consolidated record of all lands recorded as 'forest' in government records, and instructed the Environment Ministry to publish these records on its website by April 15, 2024.**
- Additionally, the court mandated that the **establishment of zoos or safaris by any government or authority must receive final approval from the Supreme Court.**
- The case is set to be heard again in **July 2024.**

Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of Sugarcane

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved an FRP of ₹340 per quintal for sugarcane for the 2024-25 sugar season,

marking an **8% increase from the current season's FRP.**

- This new price will come into effect on **October 1, 2024.**

Key points:

- The Union Information and Broadcasting Minister emphasized the government's commitment to addressing farmers' issues, noting that **Indian sugarcane farmers receive the highest prices for their produce compared to those in other countries.**
- The increase in FRP is intended to enhance the **prosperity of sugarcane farmers and is expected to benefit approximately five crore farmers** and others in the sugar sector.
- The FRP for sugarcane with a recovery rate of **9.5% has been set at ₹315.10 per quintal,** and further price adjustments will be made based on recovery rates.

FRP:

- **FRP, short for Fair and Remunerative Price,** is the price set by the **government that mills must legally pay to farmers for the cane they procure.**
- Payment of FRP nationwide is regulated by the **Sugarcane Control Order of 1966,** issued under the **Essential Commodities Act of 1955,** which mandates payment within 14 days of cane delivery.
- The FRP is determined **based on recommendations from the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) and announced by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).**
- For the 2021-22 sugar season, the FRP has been set at Rs 2,900 per tonne with a base recovery of 10%. Sugar recovery is calculated as the ratio of sugar produced to cane crushed, expressed as a percentage. A higher recovery rate corresponds to a higher FRP and increased sugar production.

India's First Gati Shakti Research Chair

- The **Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW) and Ayush, Shri Sarbananda Sonowal,** participated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony between MoPSW and the **Indian**

Institute of Management (IIM) Shillong to establish India's first 'Gati Shakti Research Chair' on February 23, 2024.

Key points:

- The Chair will lead high-quality academic research on **multimodal logistics with a focus on the North-East**.
- **Aim:** to strengthen links between multimodal logistics research and capacity-building activities with key stakeholders such as the logistics industry, government bodies, and local authorities, supporting the **PM Gati Shakti Masterplan for East and North-East Region's logistical capacity**.

Other Initiatives:

- **Arth Ganga and Mahabahu Brahmaputra** are ambitious projects initiated by the Indian government to foster **holistic socio-economic development along the River Ganga and River Brahmaputra**.
- The Arth Ganga project aims to revamp the **inland waterways**, contributing to the all-round development of Northeast India.
- **Mahabahu Brahmaputra** is another significant initiative with similar objectives, focusing on the Brahmaputra River.
- These projects are part of a broader strategy to optimize regional logistical capabilities, aligning with the **National Logistic Mission**.
- They are instrumental in fostering socio-economic development along these key river networks.

Maharashtra State News

Maharashtra government likely to table bill for 10-12% Maratha quota on Feb 20

- The MH government is set to introduce a bill proposing a **10-12% reservation for the Maratha community in government jobs and educational institutions** during a special assembly session on February 20.
- This move comes **after the State Backward Class Commission (SBCN) submitted a report recognizing the Marathas as a Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC)**.

Maharashtra reports lower than expected farm finance

- **State Level Banking Conference (SLBC)**, the apex body of bankers in the state, reported **lower than expected farm credit reaching farmers**.
- **Banks were given a target of Rs 1,68,481 crores to be disbursed as loan for agriculture for the 2023-24 fiscal**.
- **But till September 2023, only Rs 88,881 crores was disbursed, which roughly estimates to 53 per cent of the target**.
- Thus, only **53% of its targeted farm credit for 2023-24 as of September 2023**
- This represents a **decrease from 57% achieved in the previous year**.
- In contrast, loan disbursement to **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) reached 68% of the target, exceeding the previous year's 62%**.

'Without by Ashaya' Startup

- Founded by **Anish Malpani**, **'Without by Ashaya'** tackles **two critical challenges - plastic waste and poverty** - through innovative recycling and social impact.

About:

- They create premium products like **sunglasses, using a unique technology to recycle "impossible-to-recycle" multi-layered plastic (MLP) waste, primarily from chip packets**.
- It **diverts MLP waste from landfills and oceans, giving it a new life**.
- It **provides dignified work and income opportunities** to waste pickers, uplifting them from poverty.

Did you Know?

- They are **World's first recycled sunglasses that are made from chip packets**.

Country's First Swachh Bharat Academy to Come Up in Thane

- In a significant move towards **addressing the crucial need for skilled professionals in the sanitation sector**, India's first **Swachh Bharat Academy** is set to be established in **Thane, Maharashtra**.

About:

- This initiative is spearheaded by the **Maharashtra State Skill University and BVG - India Development Group**
- It aims to **bridge the gap in skilled manpower and empower youth** with the necessary training and employment opportunities in the sanitation field.

1946 Naval uprising

- The **Royal Indian Navy mutiny** or revolt, is also called the **February 18, 1946 Naval Uprising**.
- It was a failed insurrection of Indian naval ratings, soldiers, police personnel and civilians against the British government in India

About:

- The **Royal Indian Navy (RIN)** was part of the **British Raj** and comprised primarily Indian enlisted men with British officers.
- During **World War II**, the RIN expanded rapidly, leading to poor living conditions, discrimination, and broken promises of demobilization.
- The strike quickly escalated into a **full-fledged mutiny**, spreading to other ports and involving over **78 ships and 20,000 sailors**.

World Day of Social Justice

- **World Day of Social Justice** is an international day recognizing the need to promote social justice and is celebrated annually on **20th February**
- The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** marks the occasion this year with a series of **six events held in major cities around the globe**.
- It includes efforts to tackle issues such as **poverty, exclusion, gender inequality, unemployment, human rights, and social protections**
- The theme of **World Day of Social Justice 2024** is **"Bridging Gaps, Building Alliances"**.

Did you Know?

- In **2008**, **ILO** declared 20 Feb as the World Day of Social Justice.

MH cabinet approves draft bill to extend 10% reservation to Marathas

- The **Maharashtra Cabinet** approved the draft of a bill proposing a **10% reservation for the Maratha community in education and government jobs**, reigniting the long-standing debate on caste-based quotas in the state

About:

- The quota will **increase reservations to 62%**, facing legal challenges.
- The **OBC community** fears dilution of its quota.
- **Muslim leaders** demand 5% reservation.

Supriya Sule Receives Sansad Maharatna Award From President

- **Supriya Sule**, the Member of Parliament (MP) representing **Baramati in Maharashtra**, has been conferred with the prestigious **Sansad Ratna Award** by President **Droupadi Murmu**.
- This distinguished honor recognizes her **outstanding contributions to the Indian Parliament**, particularly during the first year of the **17th Lok Sabha (2019-2020)**.
- Previously, Sule was honored with the **Parliament Excellence Maharatna Award for Best Journalism** by Prime Point Foundation and E Magazine in Chennai.

Lokmat Maharashtra of the Year Awards 2024

- **Lokmat Maharashtra of the Year** aims to celebrate the outstanding achievements of individuals who have left an indelible mark on Maharashtra and beyond.
- Over the years, **Piyush Goyal, Nitin Gadkari, Sushil Kumar Shinde, and Nita Ambani** have been a part of the jury panel.
- The selection process for the **LMOTY awards** involves editorial meetings, public voting, and evaluation by a jury.
- In addition to the main awards, **LMOTY** also gives special honors on individuals who have made exceptional contributions to society.

List of Awardees 2024:

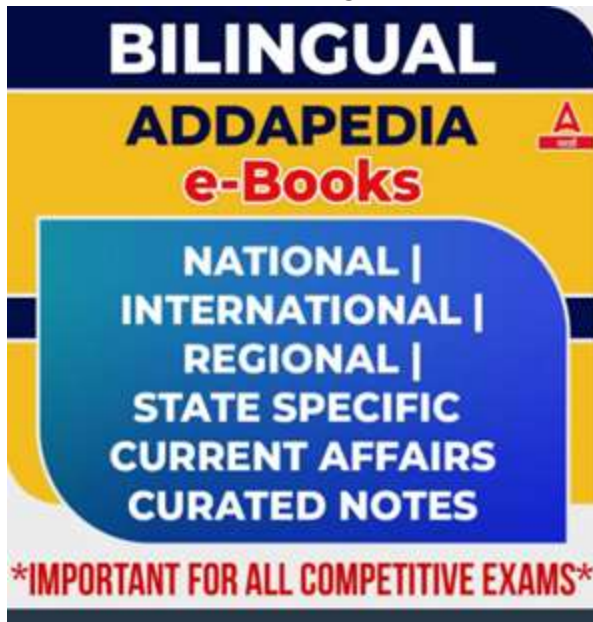
SPECIAL AWARDS:

1. Isha Ambani.
2. Abhay Bhutada.

- Jaisingh Chavan -Special Award for Overcoming Disability and Empowering Others

MAIN AWARDS:

- Actor (Male)- Ranbir Kapoor.
- IPS (Promising) - Somay Munde.
- IAS (Promising) - Bhushan Gagrani.
- Influential Politician - Deepak Kesarkar.
- Influential Politician - Atul Salve.
- Lok Seva - Harishchandra Sude
- Politics - (Promising) - Kunal Patil
- Sports - (Promising) - Ojas Deotale.
- Medical - Dr. Abhishek Mangeshkar.
- Medical - Dr. Meraj Kadri.
- BKT - Innovator in Agriculture - Savita Nana Pawra.
- Tech-Savvy Teacher - Anand Anemwad.
- Industry and Business Category - Sudhir Mehta and Vishal Chordia.



11 state varsities to get Rs 540 crore grant under PM-USHA; Rs 100 crore for SNDT

- The GOI has allocated Rs. 540 crore to 11 state universities in Maharashtra under the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) scheme.
- This initiative aims to improve the infrastructure and academic development of higher education institutions.
- Four universities, including SNDT Women's University, received a substantial grant of Rs. 100 crore each, while the

remaining seven universities will receive Rs. 20 crore each.

About:

- PM-USHA, or Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan, is a centrally sponsored scheme by the Indian government aimed at transforming and uplifting the higher education system in the country.
- It was launched in 2021, building upon the previous Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) scheme, and aligns with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

International Mother language Day

- International Mother Language Day (IMLD), annually celebrated on February 21st, serves as a crucial reminder of the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity.
- It was initiated by Bangladesh and formally recognized by UNESCO in 1999, aiming to:
 - Promote awareness:** Highlight the value of linguistic and cultural diversity for sustainable societies.
 - Preserve languages:** Encourage the protection and revitalization of endangered languages.
 - Promote multilingualism:** Advocate for using and learning multiple languages for individual and societal benefits.

Theme for 2024:

- "Multilingual education is a pillar of intergenerational learning."
- This theme emphasizes the role of mother tongue-based education in fostering learning, literacy, and the transmission of traditional knowledge across generations.

Did you Know?

- On 21st February 2000, the first International Mother language Day was observed.

Maharashtra Water Crisis

- Maharashtra is facing a severe water crisis, with many reservoirs shrinking to critical levels in February 2024.
- This has raised concerns about water shortages for drinking, irrigation, and industrial use.

About:

- Most of the dams in the state have reached the bottom, with an average of 21.61 percent less water stock left than last year.
- The state's 12 projects are currently in minus storage, with 15 dams having barely 10 percent storage.
- The situation in Marathwada is alarming. Marathwada has only 26 percent water stock left. Last year, it was 72 percent.
- The storage in 138 major dams in the state has come down to 50.37 percent from 74.34 percent last year.

Nashik stands 3rd in Maha dist good governance index

- The Nashik district stood third in the recent District Good Governance Index (DGGI) of Maharashtra that encompasses 10 governance sectors with 161 indicators and over 300 data points.
- It is the first time that the department of administrative reforms and organization and methods carried out such an exercise.
- Maharashtra has become the fifth state in the country to implement such an exercise.

MH has attracted highest FDI at 38.78 per cent of total investment in country

- Maharashtra has emerged as the top recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the country
- The state has attracted highest FDI at Rs 65,500 crore, which accounts for 38.78 percent of total investment in country
- This achievement underscores the state's robust infrastructure, favorable business environment, and strategic initiatives to attract global investors.
- Maharashtra will achieve its target of one-trillion-dollar economy by 2027-28

Nutrition scheme for leprosy patients in the state

- The number of new leprosy patients is increasing inspite of the efforts made by the health department to eradicate leprosy at various levels.
- In the past three years, the number of leprosy patients has been continuously increasing in this research campaign and Health Minister Tanaji Sawant has decided to

provide nutritional food to these leprosy patients during treatment.

- Rs 500 nutritional food will be given to leprosy patients.

About:

- According to the information available from the Department of Health (Leprosy and Tuberculosis), 14,520 leprosy patients were detected in 2021-22. In 2022-23, this increased to 19,860 leprosy patients and in the search campaign till December 2023-24, 20 thousand leprosy patients were found.
- The proportion of newly diagnosed patients is 9.55 percent, 11.14 percent and 15.58 percent respectively.

World Thinking Day

- World Thinking Day, celebrated annually on February 22nd
- It is a day for Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (including associated Scout and Guide organizations) across the globe to connect, reflect, and take action.
- It's a day of International friendship, Global awareness, Advocacy, Raising awareness and taking action on critical issues affecting girls and communities.

About:

- Established in 1926, the day coincides with the birthdays of Lord Baden-Powell, founder of Scouting, and his wife, Lady Olave Baden-Powell, World Chief Guide. S

Theme:

- The 2024 theme is "Our World, Our Equal Future", focusing on gender equality and climate change.

MH witnesses decline in child and infant mortality rates

- Maharashtra achieves significant reduction in child mortality rates.
- Infant mortality rate drops from 19 to 16 per 1000 live births.
- Neonatal mortality rate stands at 11, fulfilling SDG 2030 target.
- Special initiatives like SNCUs and NBSUs in district and sub-district hospitals have contributed to the progress, but improvement needed in rural and tribal areas.

Mumbai centre of India economic ties, says Aus envoy

- Australian High Commissioner to India Philip Green said Mumbai sits at the centre of Australia's economic engagement with India.
- He said that Mumbai is often the first stop for Australian firms looking to explore opportunities in India's rapidly growing market
- He also said the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) between Australia and India, signed in 2022, is already helping Maharashtra's exports of industrial goods (steel and other products) to Australia and is also benefiting state's wine and cotton industries.

Finolex Cables signs MoU with MH government

- Finolex Cables, a leading Indian cable manufacturer, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maharashtra government.
- The company will invest Rs 580 crore to expand its optic fiber cables (OFC) production capacity in the state.
- This expansion aims to meet the growing demand for OFC driven by 5G rollout and increasing fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) adoption.

About:

- The project includes setting up new fiber draw towers and implementing backward integration for glass preform production.
- This move aligns with the government's vision of providing last-mile fiber connectivity and the Make in India initiative.
- The expansion will create over 400 direct and indirect employment opportunities.

Grape harvest fest in Nashik on weekend

- The tourism department of the state govt has organized a two-day grape harvest festival beginning from Feb 24.

About:

- The grape harvest festival is a part of government efforts to promote the grape and wine industry of Nashik and attract tourists

- The event will have around 50 grape farmers showcasing different varieties of the fruit, along with 12 wineries
- As many as 4,000 tourists are expected to attend the festival.

Shiv Sena MP bags Sansad Ratna award

- Dr Shrikant Eknath Shinde, Shiv Sena MP from Kalyan, received the Sansad Ratna award at Maharashtra Sadan in New Delhi for his active participation in 17th Lok Sabha proceedings.
- He raised 556 questions, participated in 67 discussions, and works tirelessly for the betterment of his constituency.

About:

- The Sansad Ratna Awards are presented annually to the top performing Parliamentarians based on their performance including raising questions on crucial issues including those related to their respective constituencies, participating in discussions, presence in the House, among others.

23/9 floods: State clears ₹204cr special package

- The state government has announced a special package of ₹204.72 crore to provide relief to the people affected by the recent floods that occurred on September 23.
- The floods caused widespread damage to property and infrastructure.
- The relief package will be used to provide financial assistance to the affected families, as well as to rebuild damaged homes and infrastructure.

Maha to be first state to start digital health course

- Maharashtra University of Health Sciences (MUHS), which oversees 450 medical colleges and 40,000 medical students, will launch the country's first foundation course for digital health.

About:

- The course, developed along with not-for-profit Koita Foundation, will not only cover hospital management information systems, electronic medical records, but also the use

of sensors and wearables in gathering health data. \

- Modules on the use of **artificial intelligence and machine learning in healthcare** will also be covered.
- The **digital health foundation course** will be launched by **governor Mahesh Bais** medical education minister **Hasan Mushrif**.

World Peace and Understanding Day

- **World Peace and Understanding Day** is observed on **February 23** every year, promoting **harmony and goodwill among individuals from different religions, cultures and geography**
- The day commemorates the first meeting of **Rotary International**, an **NGO** dedicated to **humanitarian service, peace, and goodwill across the world** that took place in **Chicago, US**.
- Every year, this **Special Day** is observed to remind people of the ways that they can bring **peace, harmony and goodwill** to the world and contribute positively.

Veteran actor Ashok Saraf presented Maharashtra Bhushan Award

- **Veteran actor Ashok Saraf** was presented with the **prestigious Maharashtra Bhushan Award**, the highest civilian honor bestowed by the Maharashtra state government.
- This recognition celebrates his remarkable contributions to the field of entertainment over a career spanning nearly five decades.
- He was joined by other distinguished honorees including **Suresh Wadkar, Aruna Irani, Mithun Chakraborty**, and many more, who were recognized for their contributions to the film industry.

MH MSMEs to showcase niche products at Defence expo

- The inaugural **MH MSME Defence Expo**, currently underway in **Pune**, marks a significant moment for **India's aspirations towards self-reliance in the defense sector**.
- Over **200** micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) from the state are showcasing their **niche products and capabilities**, aiming to contribute to the nation's defense preparedness.

About:

- MSMEs are exhibiting innovative solutions across diverse areas like aerospace, armaments, electronics, communication, and logistics.
- These include components for combat vehicles, communication equipment, drones, and specialized textiles.
- The expo fosters collaboration between MSMEs and established defense players like L&T, Mahindra, and Tata, opening doors for joint ventures and technology transfer.
- The expo aligns with the government's "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" initiative, promoting indigenous defense manufacturing and reducing reliance on foreign imports.

Subsidy announced on solar panel installations

- The **Indian government** has announced a new **subsidy scheme** to make **rooftop solar panel installations** more affordable.

Subsidy:

- **₹30,000** per kilowatt for systems up to **2 kW**
- **₹18,000** per additional kilowatt up to **3 kW**
- **Capped at ₹78,000** for larger systems exceeding **3 kW**

Benefits:

- Lower upfront cost of installation
- Reduced electricity bills
- Increased energy independence
- Environmentally friendly power generation

Sonu Nigam receives Raj Kapoor Vishesh Yogdaan Puraskar

- **Sonu Nigam** was awarded the **Raj Kapoor Vishesh Yogdaan Puraskar** at a ceremony in **Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir**
- The award is given to individuals who have made **significant contributions** to the Indian film industry.

About:

- **Nigam** has been a playback singer for over **25 years** and has sung songs for over **1,000 films** in **Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Bhojpuri languages**.

- He has won numerous awards for his singing, including four National Film Awards and two Filmfare Awards.

JP Dutta, Vidhu Vinod Chopra feted with prestigious Raj Kapoor Awards

- Two iconic figures of Indian cinema, JP Dutta and Vidhu Vinod Chopra, were recognized for their exceptional contributions with prestigious Raj Kapoor Awards.
- This marks a significant moment for their careers and highlights their lasting impact on the industry.

About:

- JP Dutta, known for crafting patriotic and historical epics like "Border", "LOC Kargil", and "Refugee", received the Maharashtra Bhushan Raj Kapoor Award.
- This award celebrates his dedication to showcasing themes of valor, sacrifice, and national pride through his powerful narratives.
- Dutta expressed immense gratitude, stating that the recognition from his home state held immense significance.
- Vidhu Vinod Chopra, acclaimed for films like "Lage Raho Munna Bhai", "Parinda", and "Munnabhai MBBS", was presented with the Raj Kapoor Special Contribution Award.
- This award acknowledges his diverse filmography, spanning genres and addressing social issues while entertaining audiences.
- Chopra's commitment to storytelling and exploration of complex themes has been widely appreciated.

The Central Excise Day

- The Central Excise Day commemorates the establishment of the Central Excise and Salt Act of 1944, which laid the foundation for India's indirect tax system.
- It celebrates the contributions of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) in mobilizing revenue for the nation's development.
- This act was a combination of 11 acts regarding excise duties, and it was passed to make changes in the law related to salt and central duties.

About:

- On 24 February 1944, the Central Excise and Salt Act was passed, and Central Excise Day is celebrated to commemorate this legislation.
- In 1966, the act was renamed The Central Excise Act 1944, and Schedules 1 and 2 of the act were related to the values and rates of the duties

Do you Know?

- The Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBIC) is responsible for administering indirect taxes in India.

State News

Maharashtra clears 10% quota for all Marathas

- Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his Cabinet approved a Bill to provide a 10% quota for the Maratha community in education and government jobs.

Key points:

- The Bill, passed by the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council, is similar to the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act, 2018 introduced by the then-government led by Devendra Fadnavis, which was struck down by the top court in May 2021.
- This is the third time in the last decade that the State has introduced legislation for a Maratha quota.
- While seeking to fulfill demands of poorer Marathas, this Bill does not disturb the existing OBC quota. It will push total reservations in Maharashtra to 62%, above the Supreme Court-mandated limit of 50%.
- As things stand, reservation in the state is 52%. The break down: 13% for Scheduled Castes, 7% for Scheduled Tribes, 19% for OBCs, 2% for Special Backward Classes, 3% for Vimukta Jati, 2.5% for Nomadic Tribe (B), 3.5% for Nomadic Tribe (C) Dhargar, and 2% for Nomadic Tribe (D) Vanjari.
- With the proposed Maratha reservation, the state's overall quota percentage goes up to 62%, just below Tamil Nadu, which stands at 69%. "Maharashtra is not the only state to have above 60% reservation. Haryana and Rajasthan have 64%. Twenty-two states have more than 50%."

First Solar Project of NTPC

- NTPC Renewable Energy Limited's inaugural solar project in **Chhattargarh, Rajasthan**, has commenced commercial operations, boasting a capacity of 70 MW as of February 21, 2024.
- This development brings the total installed capacity of the **NTPC Group to 73,958 MW**.

Key points:

- Currently, **NTPC-REL is actively pursuing 17 projects**, collectively exceeding **6,000 MW** in capacity.
- Consequently, the NTPC Group's total **operational renewable energy capacity has reached 3,448 MW**.
- The Chhattargarh Solar project is slated to reach its full capacity of **150 MW by March 2024**, a project secured under SECI-Tranche:III, benefiting the state of **Rajasthan**.
- The solar plant is projected to produce **370 million units of energy annually**, catering to 60,000 households.
- It is expected to **reduce CO2 emissions by 3 lakhs tons per year** and conserve 1,000 MMTPA of water, equivalent to the needs of over 5,000 households annually.

International News

Shehbaz to be Pakistan PM, Zardari to be President

- The **Pakistan People's Party (PPP)** and **Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)** reached an agreement to establish a new coalition government in Pakistan after days of negotiations.
- PPP chairman **Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari** announced that **PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif is set to assume the role of Prime Minister** again while **PPP co-chairman Asif Zardari is slated to become the country's next President**.

Schengen zone

- **Kosovo** recently secured visa-free access to the Schengen Zone in Europe.

About:

- The Schengen zone refers to an area in Europe where internal border controls have been abolished among **27 countries**.
- This allows for passport-free travel within these countries. Recent developments include

Kosovo gaining visa-free access, **Croatia joining in 2023**, and **Romania and Bulgaria** set to gain partial entry in March.

- The Schengen Area operates under a **common visa policy and includes 23 EU member states and four non-EU members**.
- The area aims to promote tourism and trade, enhance security, and provide convenience, but it also faces challenges such as managing migration and standardizing procedures.
- **Four non-EU members: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Norway**.

India-Middle East Economic Corridor

- The Greek Prime Minister, **Kyrios Mitsotakis**, encouraged India and Greece to continue with the **India-Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC)** despite the disruption caused by the **Israeli war in Gaza**.

About:

- The corridor will feature a shipping route connecting **Mumbai and Mundra in Gujarat with the UAE**, as well as a rail network linking the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan with the Israeli port of Haifa, ultimately reaching the **Mediterranean Sea**.
- Haifa will be connected by sea to the port of Piraeus in Greece, extending the corridor to Europe.

The IMEC is significant for several reasons:

- It will increase trade accessibility, efficiency, and economic cooperation.
- It will reduce costs, secure regional supply chains, and generate jobs.
- It will lower greenhouse gas emissions and boost economic growth.

Economy News

'India to seek \$26 bn private investment in nuclear power sector'

- India will invite private companies to invest about **\$26 billion in its nuclear energy sector** to increase the amount of electricity from sources that do not produce carbon dioxide emissions.

Key points:

- This is the first time that New Delhi is pursuing private investment in nuclear power, a non-carbon-emitting energy source that contributes

less than **2% of India's total electricity generation.**

- The funding would help India achieve its target of having 50% of its installed electric generation capacity use non-fossil fuels by 2030, up from 42% now.
- The government is in talks with at least five private firms, including **Reliance Industries, Tata Power, Adani Power, and Vedanta Ltd.**, to invest around ₹440 billion (\$5.3 billion) each.
- With the investment, the government hopes to build **11,000 megawatts (MW) of new nuclear power generation capacity by 2040**, said the officials, adding that the plan is still being finalized.
- The state-run **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL)** owns and operates the country's fleet of nuclear power plants, with a capacity of 7,500 MW, and has committed investments for another 1,300 MW.

Nvidia dethrones Tesla as Wall Street's most traded stock

Context:

- Chipmaker **Nvidia is replacing Tesla as Wall Street's most traded stock**, adding to its prominence after becoming the **third-most valuable U.S. company** and showing more evidence of how central AI-related bets have become to investors.

Key points:

- **About \$30 billion Nvidia shares changed hands daily on average over the past 30 sessions**, pulling ahead of Elon Musk's electric car maker, which averaged **\$22 billion per day over the same period.**
- Tesla since 2020 has dominated daily U.S. stock trading, as per LSEG data, with turnover — a stock's share price multiplied by the number of shares exchanged — peaking above \$35 billion several times in recent years.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Space sector

- Satellite-related activities within the space sector can receive Foreign Direct Investment ranging from **49-100 per cent**, following the **Union Cabinet's approval of an amendment to the FDI policy for the space sector.**

- This move will enable companies to establish their manufacturing facilities within the country, thereby promoting the 'Make In India' and '**Atmanirbhar Bharat**' initiatives of the **Government.**

Current Scenario:

- At present, **satellite manufacturing & operation, satellite data products, and ground segment & user segment can attract FDI up to 74 per cent through the automatic route.**
- Beyond this limit, the government route will be applicable.
- Sub-sectors such as launch vehicles and associated systems or sub-systems, as well as the creation of spaceports for launching and receiving spacecraft, **can receive FDI through automatic routes up to 49 per cent.**

What Is Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)?

- **Foreign direct investments (FDIs) are significant, long-term investments** made by a company or government into a foreign entity.
- FDI investors **typically acquire controlling positions in domestic firms or joint ventures** and actively participate in their management.

Such investments may involve **acquiring sources of materials, expanding a company's presence, or establishing a multinational presence.**

Summits & Conferences News

Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)

- Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, addressed the public launch event of the World Health Organization's Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) virtually.
- It was collectively launched as a key deliverable of India's **G20 Presidency during the Health Ministers' Meeting in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, on August 19, 2023.**

About:

GIDH: a network of networks

As a WHO Managed Network ("Network of Networks"), GIDH will address challenges such as duplication of efforts and "products-focused" digital health transformation through a focus on four foundational pillars:

- **Country Needs Tracker** - facilitating digital health investments to be informed by country priorities;
- **Country Resource Portal** – identifying traditional as well as innovative resource opportunities, and promoting transparency, while reducing the risk of duplication for enabling a standards-based prospective and retrospective analysis of resourcing gaps in digital health.
- **Transformation Toolbox** – advocating for quality-assured tools and resources that strengthen country capacity and autonomy to manage the national digital health transformation.
- **Convening and Knowledge Exchange** - promoting strengthened collaboration and knowledge exchange across global, regional, and national networks in digital health.

Schemes and Committees News

Rashtriya Udyamita Vikas Pariyojana

Union Minister of Education and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, **Shri Dharmendra Pradhan**, launched the **Rashtriya Udyamita Vikas Pariyojana** in Sambalpur, Odisha.

Objectives and Focus:

- This initiative targets individuals benefiting from the **PM SVANidhi scheme**, with the aim of fostering job creators.
- Its goal is to provide comprehensive entrepreneurship training, aligning with PM Modi's vision of cultivating job creators.
- The focus lies on enhancing the competitiveness and adaptability of workers through reskilling and upskilling in the face of technological disruptions.

Implementation and Impact

- The program offers extensive entrepreneurship training spanning 22 weeks through offline, online, and hybrid methods.
- Upon completion, participants receive certificates, boosting the credibility and value of the course.
- In collaboration with Flipkart, street vendors from ten major cities will undergo training and receive stipends to expand their businesses.

The aim is to realize the vision of a "Kushal Bharat Viksit Bharat" through the promotion of entrepreneurship and skill development initiatives.

Awards News

Jnanpith Awards

- The Jnanpith Awards, considered India's highest literary honor, were recently conferred upon **Gulzar and Sanskrit scholar Jagadguru Rambhadracharya**.
- The Jnanpith Award is presented annually since **1965 by Bharatiya Jnanpith, established in 1944**, to recognize outstanding contributions to Indian literature.

Gulzar

- Gulzar, also known as **Sampoorn Singh Kalra**, is a renowned Urdu poet, Bollywood director, and writer, recognized for his contributions to Urdu literature and Hindi cinema.
- He has received numerous awards, including the **Sahitya Akademi Award, Dadasaheb Phalke Award, Padma Bhushan, and National Film Awards**.
- He won an **Oscar and Grammy for the song "Jai Ho"** from Slumdog Millionaire and has introduced a new genre in poetry called 'Triveni'.

Jagadguru Rambhadracharya

- He is a Sanskrit scholar, Hindu spiritual leader, educator, and writer, known for founding and leading **Tulsi Peeth in Madhya Pradesh**.
- He has written over 240 books, including four epics, and is a polyglot speaking 22 languages.
- He received the **Padma Vibhushan in 2015**.
- **He was born in 1950 in Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh**.

Award Details:

- The award carries a cash prize of ₹11 lakh, a statue of Vagdevi, and a citation.
- This is the second time it has been awarded for Sanskrit and the fifth time for Urdu.

Ranks & Reports News

Amount of tiny plastic particles in bottled water underestimated

- A study has confirmed the fragmentation of the plastic content of real-world water samples beyond the micrometer scale.

Key points:

- A liter of bottled water can contain **more than one lakh particles of micro- and nano-plastics**, with 90% of those being the latter.
- Nanoplastics are difficult to analyze, mainly **due to their size and also due to the inability of different diagnostic techniques** to identify them.
- The study, conducted by **scientists at Columbia University in New York and published on January 8, 2024 in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences**, The investigation revealed the presence of around **2.4 lakh micro- and nano-plastic particles per liter of bottled water (give or take 1.3 lakh)**.
- The algorithm the research team used to track the presence of plastics in bottled water could spot following the types: **polyamide 66, polypropylene (PP), polyethylene, polymethyl methacrylate, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), polystyrene, and polyethylene terephthalate (PET)**.

A recent report on local fintech players

- The recent report on local fintech players, presented to **Parliament by the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology**, highlights concerns about the dominance of foreign-owned fintech apps in India. It recommends promoting local players.

Key findings:

- Unified Payments Interface (UPI) data reveals its substantial contribution to digital payments in the fiscal year 2022-23.
- While UPI accounted for 73.5% of total digital payments by volume, its share by value stood at only 6.67% during the same period.
- The dominance of foreign-owned fintech entities, exemplified by **PhonePe and Google Pay, is notable in the Indian fintech landscape**.
- PhonePe holds the highest market share in terms of transaction volume, closely followed by Google Pay.
- **In contrast, NPCI's BHIM UPI trails behind significantly in transaction volume.**
- Local fintech players have an inherent understanding of the local market, while foreign entities excel in technology and global connectivity.

- A balanced presence of both local and foreign players is deemed crucial for the holistic development of India's fintech ecosystem.

Science and Technology News

Anti satellite weapons

Russia is developing a new anti-satellite weapon, which the US finds concerning.

About:

- Anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons are **designed to disable or destroy satellites already in orbit**.
- This goes **against the Outer Space Treaty**, which prohibits damaging other parties' satellites and the harmful contamination of space.
- Most ASAT weapons are **kinetic, meaning they destroy satellites by colliding with them or detonating explosives** nearby, creating debris that can remain in orbit for a long time.

Effects:

- The principal threats from a space-based nuclear weapon are **EMP(Electromagnetic pulse)** and the release of charged particles, which can affect satellites around the point of detonation, including **those of strategic allies and countries not involved in a conflict**.
- This can lead to the destruction of satellites and the creation of debris, potentially causing a **"collisional cascade"** that increases the amount of debris in orbit.

GSLV-F14/INSAT-3DS

- The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) fully funded the **satellite INSAT-3DS**, which was successfully launched by the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh**, using the GSLV-F14 launch vehicle.

Aim and objectives:

- INSAT-3DS aims to enhance **India's meteorological services**, complementing the existing **INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR satellites**.
- It will improve **monitoring of the Earth's surface, atmosphere, oceans, and environment**, enhancing data collection,

dissemination, and satellite-aided search and rescue services.

- This initiative will **advance weather, climate, and ocean-related observations** and services in India, contributing to disaster mitigation and preparedness.

Specification:

- Based on ISRO's I-2k bus platform, **INSAT-3DS has a lift-off mass of 2,275 kilograms.**
- It is equipped with state-of-the-art payloads, including an imager payload with a **six-channel optical radiometer for Earth imaging**, a 19-channel sounder payload for atmospheric information, and communication payloads such as a data relay transponder and a **satellite-aided search and rescue transponder.**
- Indian industries have played a significant role in the development of INSAT-3DS.

Rhodamine-B

- The Tamil Nadu government banned the sale and production of cotton candy in the state due to the presence of the **harmful chemical Rhodamine-B.**

About:

- Rhodamine B is a chemical compound and a dye.
- **Chemical formula:** C₂₈H₃₁CIN₂O₃1.
- **Appearance:** It is a red to violet powder¹.

Uses:

- It is often used as a tracer dye within water to determine the rate and direction of flow and transport.
- Rhodamine B is used in biology as a **staining fluorescent dye.**
- It is also used in the **textile industry, leather, paper printing, paint, colored glass, and plastic industries.**

Health Impact:

- Rhodamine B is considered a carcinogen. If consumed regularly, it can cause severe damage to the **cerebellum tissue in the brain and to the brainstem that connects the brain to the spinal cord.**

Coronal mass ejections

Context:

ISRO announced that the **Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya (PAPA)** payload aboard Aditya-L1 has

successfully identified the impact of **coronal mass ejections (CMEs).**

PAPA:

- PAPA, equipped with advanced sensors, is specifically designed for in-situ measurements of solar wind electrons and ions in the low energy range.
- **It comprises two sensors: the Solar Wind Electron Energy Probe (SWEEP) and the Solar Wind Ion Composition Analyser (SWICAR),** capable of measuring electrons and ions in specified energy ranges and mass spectrums.
- These sensors are also adept at determining the direction of solar wind particle arrival.
- Operational since **December 12, 2023, PAPA** continues to make continuous observations, demonstrating its effectiveness in monitoring space weather conditions and analyzing solar phenomena.

Coronal mass ejections

- Coronal mass ejections (CMEs) are **large expulsions of plasma and magnetic fields from the sun's atmosphere — the corona.**
- Solar flares are bursts of **electromagnetic radiation that travel at the speed of light, reaching Earth in just over 8 minutes .**
- CMEs travel at a more leisurely pace, relatively speaking.
- CMEs can reach Earth and collide with **Earth's magnetosphere, where they can cause geomagnetic storms, aurorae, and in rare cases damage to electrical power grids.**
- The largest recorded geomagnetic perturbation, presumably from a CME, was the solar storm of 1859, also known as the Carrington Event.

Miscellaneous News

YUVIKA

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has initiated a special program named **"Young Scientist Programme"** or **"YUva Vigyani Karyakram"** (YUVIKA) tailored for school children.
- The primary aim of this endeavor is to **provide fundamental knowledge in Space Science, Technology, and Applications** to young learners, exposing them to the latest advancements in these fields.

- ISRO has designed this program with the motto of "**Catch them young**," acknowledging that the youth are pivotal for the future of space exploration and technology in our nation.
- YUVIKA also endeavors to inspire more students to pursue careers in **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)**.
- **Since its inception in 2019, YUVIKA has been successfully conducted in 2019, 2022, and 2023, attracting increasing participation each year.**

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid his tributes to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on his **394th birth anniversary who was born on 19th Feb in 1630.**

About:

- Shivaji Bhonsale I, also known as Chhatrapati Shivaji, was an Indian ruler and a member of the **Bhonsle Maratha clan**.
- He established the Maratha Empire by carving out a region from the declining **Adilshahi sultanate of Bijapur**.
- In 1674, he was formally crowned as the Chhatrapati of his realm at **Raigad Fort**.
- He established the **Council of Eight Ministers, or Ashta Pradhan Mandal**, which included positions like the Peshwa (Prime Minister) for general administration, the Amatya for finance, and the Sumant or Dabir for foreign affairs.

Recent contributions by Gol:

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi unveiled the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at Rajkot Fort, Sindhudurg, Maharashtra.
- The Maharashtra government has designated February 19 as a holiday to commemorate Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's birth, known as **Shivaji Jayanti**.

Morodharo

- Archaeologists recently uncovered a **fortified Harappan settlement called Morodharo in the Kutch District, Gujarat**.
- Dating back to **2600-1900 BCE**, it features a **102m by 58m** fortification wall averaging **3.3m in thickness**.

- The settlement includes a **10x10m platform and a well**.
- Burial cairns and Harappan pottery were found, resembling items from **Dholavira**.

Key features of IVC:

- The Harappan civilization was the **first urban civilization in South Asia**, covering approximately **800,000 sq km**.
- Major Harappan cities included **Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Dholavira, Lothal, Surkotada, Kalibangan, Banawali, and Rakhigarhi**.
- The civilization's town planning featured a rectangular grid pattern, planned streets and alleyways, fortifications, and division into an upraised citadel and lower town.
- Harappans extensively used **burnt bricks** and had well-developed residential areas with multiple-story houses, courtyards, and sophisticated drainage systems.

RIP Currents

- The **Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad** and the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** are collaborating on a project to continually monitor and issue operational forecast alerts regarding **rip currents**.

About:

- Rip currents are powerful water flows **moving from a beach towards the open ocean, sea, or lake**.
- They can exceed 45 meters (150 feet) in width but are usually less than 9 meters (30 feet) wide, with speeds up to 8 kilometers (5 miles) per hour.
- Rip currents are considered one of the most **dangerous natural hazards globally**.

How are they formed?

- Rip currents form when **waves break near the shoreline, piling up water** between the breaking waves and the beach.
- One of the ways this **water returns to sea is to form a rip current, a narrow stream** of water moving swiftly away from shore, often perpendicular to the shoreline.

World Day of Social Justice

Context:

- The **United Nations General Assembly** designated February 20th as the annual World Day of Social Justice, starting from the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, in a declaration made on November 26, 2007.
- The theme of World Day of Social Justice 2024 is "Bridging Gaps, Building Alliances".

Social Justice in Indian Scenario

- In India, **social justice is a multifaceted concept** that encompasses a wide range of issues, including **casteism, discrimination against women, and economic inequality**.
- The Indian Constitution adopts this concept in various provisions, including the **preamble in the form of 'Socialist', 'Social and Economic Justice', 'Equality', etc.**, which clearly states that the state is extensively involved in the social welfare of people and endeavors to establish an equal society.

Govt Schemes that aid Social justice:

- **MGNREGA**
- **Skill India Mission**
- **ICDS**
- **PM Awas Yojana**
- **Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY)**
- **PM-JANMAN**

Lab-grown diamonds put natural gems industry under huge pressure

- Man Made gems are reshaping the **\$89 bn** global diamond jewelry market, especially in **Surat where 90%** of the world's diamonds are cut and polished; lab-grown diamond exports from India tripled in value between 2019-2022 while exports rose **25% between April and October 2023**.

Key points:

- The glittering diamonds sparkle the same but there are key differences: **mined natural gems are more than a billion years old, while laboratory-made rocks are new and cost less than half the price.**
- "It's the same product, it's the **same chemical, the same optical properties.**"
- The lab-grown industry has had its problems, too. Supply has skyrocketed and prices have dropped drastically, with wholesale prices down by 58% in 2023 alone.

Nigeria

- Nigeria is currently grappling with one of its severest economic crises in recent years, largely due to **skyrocketing inflation caused by monetary policies** that have drastically devalued the currency against the dollar.
- This dire situation has sparked widespread anger and protests throughout the country.

About:

- Officially known as the **Federal Republic of Nigeria**, it is located in **West Africa**, bordered by **Niger to the north, Chad to the northeast, Cameroon to the east, and Benin to the west.**
- Nigeria is bordered by the **Sahel to the north and the Gulf of Guinea to the south** in the **Atlantic Ocean.**
- It stands as the **sixth-most populous country globally**, comprising **36 states and the Federal Capital Territory**, with **Abuja serving as the capital.**
- **Lagos**, one of the world's largest metropolitan areas, is Nigeria's largest city.

Economy:

- The country's economy has been severely affected, experiencing its deepest recession in four decades in **2020.**
- In 2023, Nigeria witnessed a **17-year high inflation rate of 25.8%**, contributing to sluggish growth and pushing millions into poverty.

Challenges:

- Several economic challenges plague Nigeria, including the **devaluation of its currency** due to monetary policies, an **ongoing supply crisis in the power sector** despite abundant coal, oil, and gas reserves, and a **soaring cost of living** exacerbated by rising prices and heightened insecurity on the roads.

Relics of Kapilavastu

- The **National Museum in Delhi** is home to 20 relics of Lord Buddha, categorized as **'AA' (rare) artifacts**, and are considered significant cultural treasures.
- **Four of these relics are currently being transported to Thailand** for a month-long exhibition, following a special request from the Thai Government.

Significance of the Relics

- These relics hold immense religious and cultural importance for Buddhists worldwide.
- They are **revered as sacred objects** and are often enshrined in **pagodas and stupas for veneration**.

About:

- The Kapilvastu Relics were excavated from **Piprahwa, located in the Siddharthnagar District of Uttar Pradesh**, once part of the ancient city of Kapilavastu.
- Kapilvastu, also known as Taulihawa, is a municipality and administrative center located in Kapilvastu District, Lumbini Province, southern Nepal.
- It lies approximately 25 kilometers southwest of Lumbini, the UNESCO World Heritage Site and birthplace of Gautama Buddha.

Sant Guru Ravidas

Prime Minister Modi spoke at the **647th Birth Anniversary of Sant Guru Ravidas in Varanasi**, where he unveiled a new statue of Sant Ravidas and inaugurated various development projects.

About:

Guru Ravidasji, also known as Ravidas, Rohidas, and Ruhidas, was a North Indian mystic poet-saint of the Bhakti movement during the 15th to 16th century CE.

He is venerated in the regions of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana.

Here are some key points about Guru Ravidas Ji:

- He was born in **1377 CE, in a small village called Seer Govardhanpur in Uttar Pradesh.**
- Despite being born in a poor family, Guru Ravidas dedicated his life to preaching about human rights and equality.
- He was a **saint, poet, philosopher, and his teachings are celebrated.**
- His devotional songs and verses made a lasting impact upon the Bhakti movement.
- **Some of his poems are a part of Guru Granth Sahib Ji.**
- Mystic poet and an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna, **Meera Bai also acknowledged Guru Ravidas as her spiritual mentor.**
- His birthday is celebrated as **Ravidas Jayanti.**

Sammakka-Saralamma Jatara

- Union Tribal Affairs Minister Shri Arjun Munda recently visited the **Sammakka-Saralamma Jatara at Medaram in Telangana, the country's largest tribal festival.**
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has allocated Rs. 2.30 Crores for the Medaram Jatara 2024 to promote tribal culture and heritage.

About:

- Considering the footfall of the festival and its auspicious significance, the Jatara was declared a **State Festival in 1996.**
- Tribal festival is the second-largest fair of India, after the **Kumbh Mela, celebrated by the Koya tribe for four days.**
- **Sammakka Saralamma Jatara, also known as Medaram Jatara, is a festival celebrated in the state of Telangana, India, to honor the Hindu Tribal goddesses.**
- The festival commemorates the **fight of a mother and daughter, Sammakka and Saralamma, with the reigning rulers against an unjust law.**
- The rituals related to the Goddesses are **entirely conducted by the Koya Tribe priests, in accordance with Koya customs and traditions.**
- The Jatara begins at Medaram in Tadvai Mandal in Mulugu district.
- It is held every two years and lasts for four days.
- People offer **Bellam (jaggery), locally called as Bangaram.**
- Now, a large number of non-Koya people visit Medaram, and the **Koya people comprise only 2% of the total worshippers.**

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Maharashtra ka mahapack

**Live classes, Test series
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