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2 March 2024

National & International News

International Big Cat Alliance



Context:

- The Union Environment Ministry of India plans to establish and **coordinate an International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)**.
- This initiative, approved by the Cabinet, is similar to the International Solar Alliance.

Key points:

- India's global leadership in tiger conservation has been acknowledged.
- The IBCA, which will be headquartered in India, will spearhead initiatives to share best practices in big cat conservation. **India has committed ₹150 crore for this cause over the next five years.**

Addressing Conservation Challenges:

- Currently, there is no international body that addresses the **conservation challenges faced by big cats across their various habitats.**
- The IBCA aims to fill this gap by replicating India's pioneering and long-standing good practices in **tiger and other big cat conservation in other countries.**

Participation in the IBCA:

- So far, **16 countries have given their written consent to join the IBCA.**
- The alliance is open to the **96 countries** that are home to 'big cats', as well as other countries, conservation organizations, scientific organizations, businesses, and corporations interested in supporting 'big cats'.

India is home to **five out of seven big cat species: Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, and Cheetah.** The long-standing conservation practices in India, especially for tigers, are considered pioneering and could serve as a model for other countries.

Vikramaditya Vedic Clock

Context:

The Vikramaditya Vedic Clock, situated on an 85-foot tower within Jantar Mantar in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, was virtually inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Timepiece Based on Indian 'Panchang':

- This unique timekeeping system is based on the **Indian 'panchang'** (almanack).



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Understanding Greenwich Mean Time (GMT): Greenwich Mean Time, the mean solar time at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London, serves as the benchmark for timekeeping. Established in the 19th century, the Royal Observatory was designated as the prime meridian (0° longitude), dividing the Earth into Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

- It provides a wealth of information, including **planetary positions, Muhurat, and astrological calculations.**
- It also displays Indian Standard Time (IST) and Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).
- Ujjain has a rich history in time calculation. The standard time of the world was determined from Ujjain 300 years ago.
- The city, through which the **Tropic of Cancer passes, is considered a hub for time calculation.**

Unique Features of the Vedic Clock:

- The clock serves multiple purposes beyond just indicating time.
- It provides details such as the **moon's position, Parva, Shubhshubh Muhurat, Ghati, Nakshatra, and more.**
- Its design aims to revive the tradition of Indian time calculation based on astronomical theories.

Clock's Operational Mechanism:

- The Vedic clock calculates time from one sunrise to the next, dividing the period into 30 parts.
- Each hour consists of 48 minutes according to ISD. The clock starts at 0:00 with the sunrise and operates for 30 hours.

Defence Ministry Signs Five Major Contracts

Context:

- The Union Ministry of Defence signed five major capital acquisition contracts worth **₹39,125.39 crore for the three services.**
- These deals aim to strengthen **indigenous capabilities, save foreign exchange, and reduce dependency on foreign-origin equipment manufacturers.**

Key points:

Contract with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL):

- A contract worth **₹5,249.72 crore** was signed with HAL for the procurement of RD-33 aero engines for MiG-29 aircraft.



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- These engines will be manufactured by the Koraput Division of HAL **under a Transfer of Technology (TOT) license from the Russian OEM.**
- This programme will focus on the indigenization of high-value critical components, which would help **increase the indigenous content of future Repair and Overhaul (ROH) tasks of RD-33 aero-engines.**

Impact on Indian Air Force (IAF):

- The IAF operates three squadrons of upgraded **MiG-29UPG.**
- These aero engines are expected to fulfill the need of the IAF to sustain the operational capability of the MiG-29 fleet for the residual service life.

Contracts with Larsen & Toubro (L&T):

- Two contracts were signed with L&T.
- The contract for **Close-in Weapon System (CIWS)** is worth ₹7,668.82 crore, and the deal for **High-Power Radar (HPR)** is at a cost of ₹5,700.13 crore.
- The CIWS will provide terminal air defence to select locations of the country.
- The HPRs contracted will replace existing long-range radars of the IAF with modern active aperture phased array-based HPR with advanced surveillance features.
- **This will significantly enhance the terrestrial air defence capabilities of IAF.**

Employment Generation: The projects with L&T are expected to generate direct and indirect employment of approximately an average of 2,400 persons per year for five years (CIWS) and 1,000 people/year over five years (HPR).

Contracts with BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited (BAPL):

Two contracts were signed with BAPL for the procurement of **missiles worth ₹19,518.65 crore and ship-borne BrahMos system worth ₹988.07 crore.** These missiles will be utilized to meet the combat outfit and training requirements of the Navy. This project is likely to generate employment of nine lakh man-days in Joint Venture entities and around 135 lakh man-days in ancillary industries, including MSMEs.



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Exercise SAMUDRA LAKSAMANA



Context:

- Exercise Samudra Laksamana is currently underway from 28 Feb - 02 Mar 24 at/ off Visakhapatnam.
- The Indian Naval Ship Kiltan and the Royal Malaysian Ship KD Lekir are participating in the 3rd edition of this exercise.

Key points:

- During the harbour phase, the crew of both ships engages in various professional interactions, Subject Matter Expert Exchanges on topics of mutual interest, sports fixtures, and other interactions. **These interactions aim to enhance the knowledge base, share best practices, and further cooperation on maritime aspects.**
- In the sea phase, units jointly hone their skills while conducting various operations at sea.
- **The exercise aims to strengthen bonds and enhance interoperability between the Indian and Royal Malaysian Navy.**

Exercise Harimau Shakti: It is a bilateral exercise between the Indian Army and the Malaysian Army. It focuses on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in rural and urban environments.

Civil Accounts Day 2024

Context:

The Civil Accounts Day 2024 on 1st March was celebrated in New Delhi to mark the **48th foundation day of the Indian Civil Accounts Service (ICAS).**

Key points:

- The **Indian Civil Accounts Service was constituted in 1976**, following the separation of the maintenance of Accounts of the Union government from Audit.
- This led to the **Comptroller and Auditor General of India being divested of this responsibility.**
- ICAS is one of the Civil Services of India ("Group A") and falls under the **Department of Expenditure in the Union Ministry of Finance.**
- The service was created with the purpose of separating the **Auditing and Accounting functions of the Union Government**, with deputation and transfer from the Indian Audit and Accounts Department.
- ICAS is **responsible for the development of processes, systems, and forms related to government accounts of the Union of India and the states.**
- It frames and optimizes manuals, rules, and procedures for accounting of receipts and payments according to Government Accounting Rules, 1990.



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- ICAS also prepares monthly and annual account statements conducts periodic audits of revenue, deficits, and borrowings, and monitors and reconciles cash balances of the Government of India with the Reserve Bank of India.

DoomsDay Glacier



Context:

- The Thwaites Glacier, often referred to as the “doomsday glacier,” began its rapid retreat earlier than previously known, likely starting in the 1940s, according to a study that utilized new satellite technology.

Location: Located in West Antarctica, the Thwaites Glacier spans approximately 192,000 square kilometers (74,000 square miles) and is situated adjacent to the Amundsen Sea.

Significance: Thwaites Glacier, one of the widest and fastest-flowing glaciers in Antarctica, acts as a major conduit for the flow of ice from the West Antarctic Ice Sheet into the ocean, significantly contributing to global sea-level rise.

Concerns:

- Recent years have seen accelerated melting and thinning of the Thwaites Glacier.
- The retreat of the grounding line, the transition point where the glacier’s ice shifts from resting on bedrock to floating on the ocean, destabilizes the glacier and contributes to sea-level rise.
- The glacier’s complete collapse could raise sea levels by several feet and undermine the stability of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, causing catastrophic global flooding.

The Thwaites Glacier is a critical component of the Antarctic ice sheet. Its rapid melting poses significant risks for global sea-level rise, highlighting the urgent need for strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The glacier’s retreat was likely triggered by an extreme El Niño event at a time when the glacier was already in a phase of melting.

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