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13 May 2024

West Bengal News

Darjeeling Orchards Under Threat:
"Mission Suntala"

Context:

- **The Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants in Darjeeling aims to tackle the menace of truck borers and insects that harm orange trees, by offering cash rewards.**
- Cash rewards are set at Rs 30 for male truck borers and Rs 50 for female specimens.
- Dr. Samuel Rai, the director of the directorate, underscores the importance of this initiative in saving Darjeeling's renowned oranges.

Key points:

- **Truck borers** contribute significantly to the decline of orange orchards in the region.
- **Despite being smaller in size compared to Nagpur oranges, Darjeeling oranges are prized for their superior taste.**
- Orange production in the hills has dwindled from 52 metric tonnes to 29 metric tonnes annually over the past decade, spanning an estimated area of 4,150 hectares.
- **The state government and the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) have launched "Mission Suntala" to revive orange cultivation.**
- The initiative, managed by the cinchona directorate, incorporates the insect award program.
- Other threats to orange trees include **citrus tristeza virus, greening (fungal infections), and fruit fly attacks.**
- To combat these threats, the directorate provides farmers with guidance through manuals and practical training sessions on insecticide preparation and plant grafting.
- **A team of 18 members underwent an exposure tour to Maharashtra to learn the best cultivation practices.**
- Distribution of approximately 5 lakh seedlings and orange grafts is in the pipeline.
- **A survey is underway to assess ground-level issues, aided by a mobile app for farmer feedback and QR codes for accessing crop details.**
- Officials are engaging with experts globally to exchange ideas on effective agricultural practices.



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<p>Lake beautification project</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Alipurduar Municipality is planning a lake beautification project for the lakes in Alipurduar town, known as the 'City of Lakes'.Despite their importance, many lakes in the town have been neglected, with overgrowth of weeds and in need of renovation. <p>Key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Municipal Engineering Directorate (MED) surveyed the seven lakes in the town and proposed activities such as boating, construction of pathways, and installation of public seating areas.Prasenjit Kar, Chairman of Alipurduar Municipality, stated that a proposal has been submitted to the Urban Development & Municipal Affairs department and MED has conducted a physical survey of the lakes.A Detailed Project Report (DPR) will be prepared, followed by the allocation of funds by the state government for the renovation work.Seven lakes will be renovated sequentially, along with Kaljani Ghat and several children's parks.Measures will be taken to clear encroachments around the lakes and introduce boating activities pending financial approval.
<p>Rasikbil mini zoo</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">In the Rasikbil mini zoo located in Cooch Behar, two female leopards have recently given birth to a total of seven cubs, marking a significant event in captive breeding.Bijan Kumar Nath, the additional divisional forest officer of Cooch Behar forest division, disclosed that Garima, one of the female leopards, delivered three cubs on April 2, while Rimjhim, another female leopard, gave birth to four cubs on April 14. <p>Key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">This development increases the leopard population in Rasikbil to 12 individuals.Rasikbil's mini zoo, spanning 25 hectares in the Tufanganj subdivision of the Cooch Behar district, is a favored destination for tourists and locals alike.



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- Aside from leopards, the zoo is home to **approximately 200 spotted deer, a fishing cat, an Indian rock python, an Indian peafowl, and 11 gharials, emphasizing its diverse wildlife offerings.**
- Previously, the mini zoo gained acclaim for **its successful captive breeding program of gharials, releasing 37 hatchlings into the Ganga River to bolster the critically endangered species.**

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