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Monthly Current Affairs Magazine

PM-SETU SCHEME

The Ministry of Skill Development has invited industry leaders to participate in the PM-SETU scheme, marking a shift towards an industry-led model of vocational training.

About PM-SETU Scheme:

- **Full Form:** PM-SETU stands for Pradhan Mantri Skilling and Employability Transformation through Upgraded ITIs.
- **Nature:** It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched to strengthen India's vocational training ecosystem.
- **Objective:** It aims to modernise the ITI ecosystem by upgrading 1000 government ITIs across India into modern, industry-aligned training institutions
- **Nodal Ministry:** It comes under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- **Implementation:** It is implemented as a hub-and-spoke model, with 200 hub ITIs linked to 800 spoke ITIs. Each hub will be equipped with advanced infrastructure, innovation and incubation centres, production units, training of trainer facilities, and placement services, while the spokes will extend access and outreach.
- **Funding:** The financial outlay for the schemes is Rs. 60,000 crores, over a five- year period.
- **Financing partners:** The initiative is backed by global co-financing from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.



- **Components:**

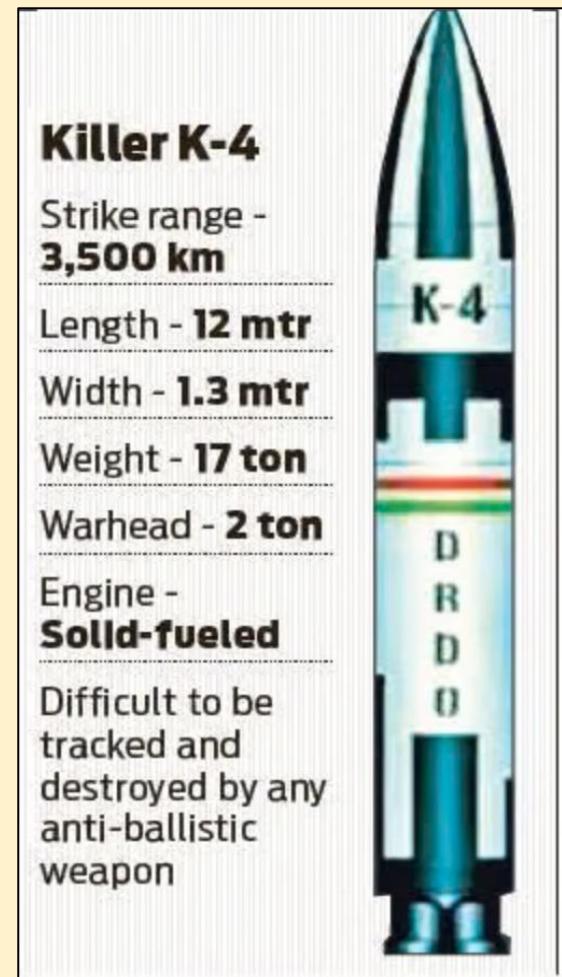
- Introduce new, demand-driven courses and revamp existing ones in collaboration with industry;
- Set up Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) with credible Anchor Industry Partners to manage clusters and ensure outcome-based training;
- Create pathways for long-term diplomas, short-term courses, and executive programs;
- Strengthen 5 National Skill Training Institutes in - Bhubaneswar (Odisha), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Hyderabad (Telangana), Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh), Ludhiana (Punjab), as Centres of Excellence with global partnerships.

K-4 MISSILE

Recently, India tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile called K-4, from the nuclear-powered submarine INS Arighat in the Bay of Bengal.

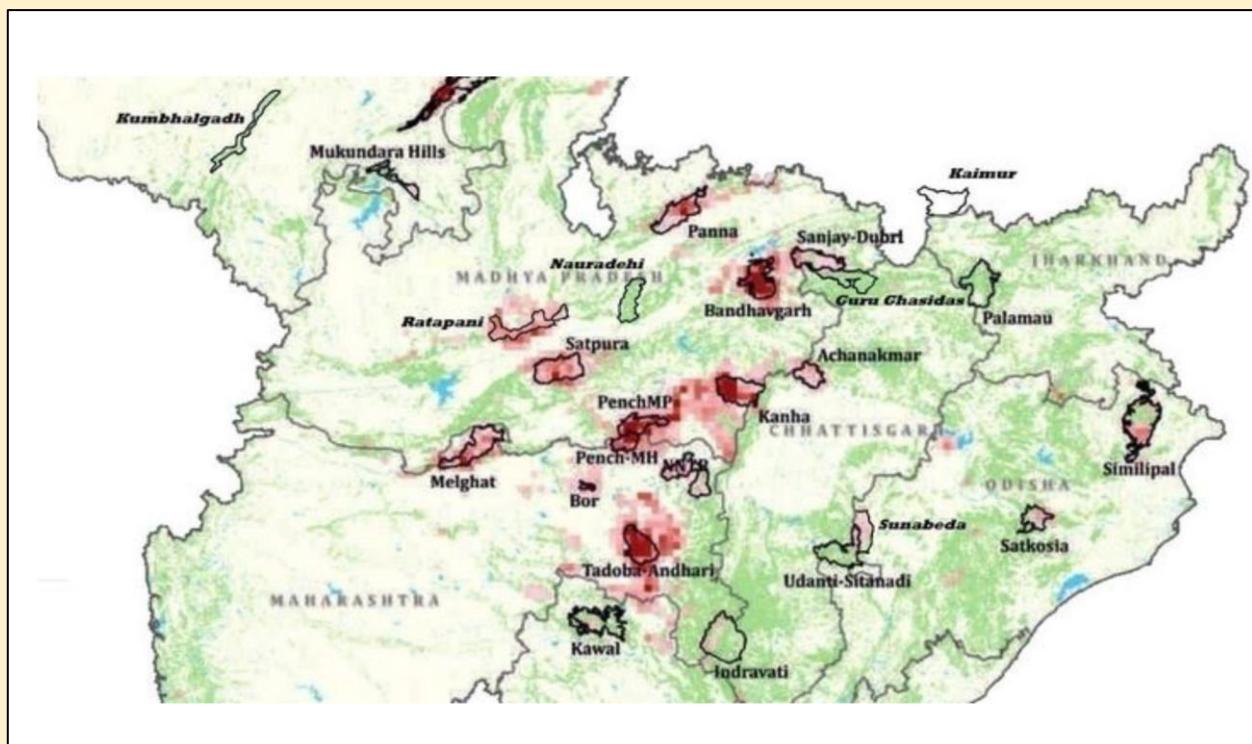
About K-4 Missile:

- **Nature:** Kalam-4 or K-4 Missile, is a nuclear-capable intermediate-range submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) designed mainly for deployment on Arihant-class submarines. Each Arihant-class submarine can carry four K-4 missiles.
- **Development:** K-4 was indigenously developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- **Structure:** The 12-metre-long missile weighing 17 tonnes has a two-stage solid-fuel system.
- **Range:** It has a range of around 3,500 km. It is a major improvement over the older K-15 missile, which had a much shorter range of only 750 kilometers.
- **Payloads:** It can carry payloads, up to 2 tons, including a nuclear warhead.
- **Uniqueness:** One of its key features is its ability to be cold-launched from underwater, which allows the missile to be ejected from the submarine before the engine ignites.
- **Accuracy:** It is guided by an advanced inertial navigation system supported by GPS and India's NavIC system. This combination ensures high accuracy, with a reported circular error probable of less than 10 metres.
- **Launch Mechanism:** It is a "cold-launched" missile, meaning it is ejected from the submarine using gas pressure before its engine ignites once it clears the water. The missile is also equipped with manoeuvring features that help it evade missile defence systems.



MELGHAT TIGER RESERVE

Recently, BNHS along with the Maharashtra Forest Department, successfully carried out the tagging of 15 long-billed vultures at Melghat Tiger Reserve.



About Melghat Tiger Reserve:

- Location:** It is located in the Amravati district of Maharashtra. It is located on the southern offshoot of the Satpura Hill Range in Central India, called Gavilgarh Hill.
- Establishment:** It was established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1967 and was declared a tiger reserve in 1974.
- Nomenclature:** The name 'Melghat' means the confluence of various 'ghats' or valleys, as is typical from the landscape of this tiger Reserve.
- Uniqueness:** It was the first tiger reserve in Maharashtra. It was among the first nine tiger reserves notified in 1973-74 under Project Tiger.
- Vegetation:** The forest is tropical dry deciduous in nature, dominated by teak.
- Rivers:** The reserve is a catchment area for five major rivers: the Khandu, Khapra, Sipna, Gadga, and Dolar, all are tributaries of the river Tapti.
- Boundaries:** The Tapti River and the Gawilgadh ridge of the Satpura Range form the boundaries of the reserve.
- Tribes:** The Korkus are the largest tribal community in Melghat. Other communities include the Gawli community, the Gond tribe, and several other smaller tribal communities.
- Flora:** Some of the common species are teak, Lagerstroemia Parviflora, Terminalia Tomentosa, Ougeinia Oojeinensis, Emblica Officinalis, Bamboo, etc.
- Fauna:** Apart from Tigers the other prominent animals are Sloth Bear, Indian Gaur, Sambar deer, Leopard, Nilgais, dhole, hyena, jungle cat, langur, etc. It is also considered a stronghold of the critically endangered forest owl.

About Long-Billed Vulture

It is an old World vulture native to the Asian region.

They are also known as Indian long-billed vultures due to their comparatively longer beak.

Appearance: It is a medium-sized and bulky scavenger feeding mostly on the carcasses of dead animals.

Females of this species are smaller than males.

Habitat: They are usually found in savannas and other open habitats around villages, cities, and near cultivated areas.

Distribution: These are native to India, Pakistan, and Nepal.

Conservation status: IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered

THANJAVUR PAINTING

Recently, Department of Posts undertook the transmission of a priceless Thanjavur painting of Shri Ram from Bengaluru to Ayodhya using its Logistics Post service.



About Thanjavur Painting:

- **Origin:** This classical South Indian art form developed under the Nayakas of Thanjavur, who were feudatories of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- **Zenith:** It reached its peak under the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur (17th-19th centuries), particularly under the patronage of King Serfoji II (Sarfoji Maharaj).
- **Influences:** It reflects a blend of Vijayanagara, Maratha, Deccani, and later European (Company) styles.
- **Base materials:** Tanjore or Thanjavur paintings are created on wooden panels, commonly known as palagai padam. These are traditionally created on canvas affixed to wooden planks, typically made from jackfruit or teak, and bound with Arabic gum.

- **Significance:** It has received the Geographical Indication tag.
- **Rich Colours:** These paintings are known for their vibrant colours. They often use bright shades of red, blue, green, and gold leaf-work to create an opulent effect.
- **Visual Style:** These are characterized by vibrant colours (red, blue, green), compact compositions, and figures with rounded, cherubic faces and almond-shaped eyes.
- **Theme:** Tanjore paintings typically depict Hindu gods and goddesses, especially figures like Lord Krishna, Lord Ganesha, and Goddess Lakshmi.

Technique:

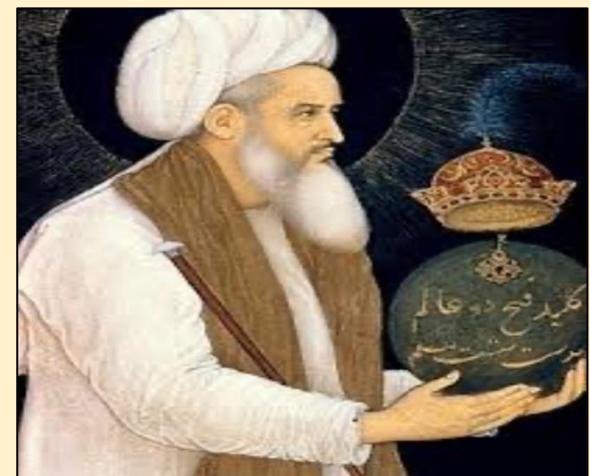
- **Gesso Work:** A paste made of limestone powder and a binding agent (sukkan or makku) is used to create raised, embossed areas, giving a three-dimensional effect.
- **Gold Leaf:** Genuine 22-carat gold foil is layered over the gesso work.
- **Embellishments:** Inlays of glass beads, pearls, and precious or semi-precious stones (diamonds, rubies) are used for ornamentation.

KHWAJA MOINUDDIN CHISHTI

Recently, the Supreme Court declined urgent hearing of a plea against the practice of offering a 'Chadar' by the Prime Minister at the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.

About Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti:

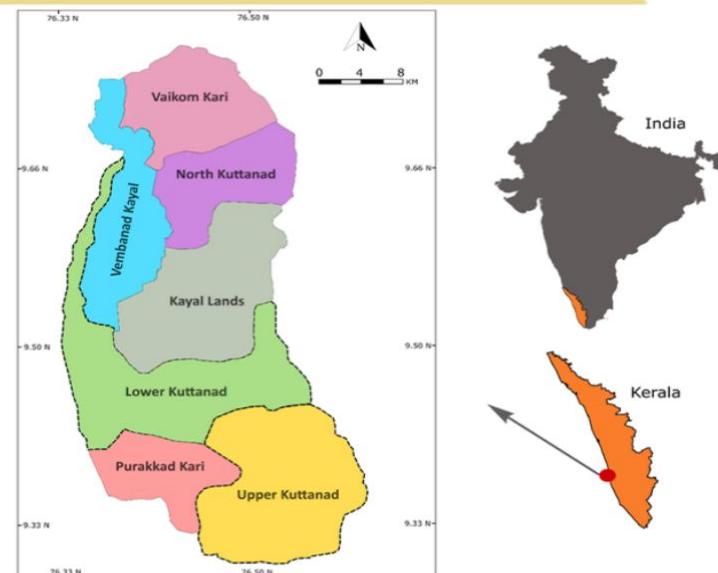
- **Early Life:** He was born in 1141 CE in Sijistan (modern-day Sistan, Iran). He was later orphaned at age 14 and turned to spirituality after a meeting with the mystic Ibrahim Qandozi. He was a very important Sufi saint.
- **Other names:** People often call him Gharīb Nawāz, which means 'Benefactor of the Poor' (for his service to the needy).
- **Education:** He studied Islamic theology in the famous learning centres of Samarkand and Bukhara.
- **Spiritual Lineage:** A follower of Sunni Hanafi theology, he became the disciple of Hazrat Khwaja Usman Harooni, who later initiated him into the Chishti order.
- **Arrival in India:** He arrived in India around 1192 CE, coinciding with the Second Battle of Tarain. He finally settled in the city of Ajmer during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish in Delhi and Prithviraj Chauhan in Ajmer.
- **Significance:** He is famous for bringing the Chishti Order of Sufism to India. He preached love, tolerance, charity, and detachment from materialism, and established a Khanqah in Ajmer to serve the poor.
- **Prominent disciples:** His legacy was carried forward by notable saints like Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (Delhi), Baba Farid (Punjab), and Nizamuddin Auliya (Delhi).
- **Dargah:** After his death in 1236 CE, Moinuddin Chishti was buried in Ajmer. His tomb is visited by people of all faiths and it is now known as the Dargah Sharif, or the Ajmer Sharif Dargah.
- **Architectural style of tomb:** The architectural style of Dargah Sharif purely reflects the Mughal style of architecture. All Mughal rulers from Humayun to Shah Jahan have made modifications in the structure.



KUTTANAD WETLAND AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM

Recently, soil tests in Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala revealed dangerously high aluminium concentrations in paddy fields, posing a serious threat to crop health.

KUTTANAD WETLAND AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM



Soil tests in Kuttanad paddy fields (part of Kuttanad Wetland Agricultural System) show increased aluminium levels above safe limits.

About Kuttanad Wetland Agricultural System:

- **Geography:** It is located in the Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta districts of Kerala.
- **Part of Ramsar site:** It is part of the Vembanad-Kol wetland system, a designated Ramsar Site since 2002.
- **Uniqueness:** It is unique and the only system in India that favours rice cultivation below sea level. The cultivation takes place 1 to 2 meters below mean sea level.
- **Complex system:** Farmers reclaim land by draining delta swamps and building a complex network of polders (Padasekharams) and bunds to manage water and salinity.
- **Concerns:** The system faces severe threats from rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and chemical pollution from both agriculture and tourism. Further, frequent flood-drought cycles are threatening the Puncia (summer) rice season, the primary cultivation period.

- **Structure:** It is a mosaic of three distinct agricultural landscapes:
 - Paddy Wetlands: Used for rice cultivation (locally called Puncha Vayals) and seasonal fish catching.
 - Garden Lands: Used for planting coconut, tubers, and food crops.
 - Water Bodies: Used for inland fishing and shell harvesting.

Global and National Recognition:

- **GIAHS Status:** It is recognized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2013 as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS).
- **Rice Bowl of Kerala:** It contributes significantly to Kerala's rice production, often referred to by this sobriquet.
- **Kuttanad Package:** It is a major revival program recommended by the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) to address ecological and agrarian distress in the region.

IUCN SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION

Recently, Vivek Menon became the first Asian chairman of the IUCN Species Survival Commission.



About IUCN Species Survival Commission:

- **Nature:** It is a science-based global network of over 10,000 volunteer experts (biologists, conservationists, etc.) providing technical advice on species conservation.
- **Objective:** Its primary role is to provide scientific data for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the global gold standard for extinction risk assessment.
- **Headquarters:** Its headquarters is located in Gland, Switzerland.
- **Structure:** It functions as one of the six expert Commissions of IUCN. It works closely with the IUCN Secretariat and national governments, NGOs, and research institutions.
- **Mechanism:** It operates through more than 160 Specialist Groups (e.g., Cat Specialist Group, Asian Elephant Specialist Group), Task Forces, and Red List Authorities.

- **Focus areas:**

- To prevent species extinctions and support recovery of threatened species.
- To ensure that use of biodiversity is equitable and sustainable.
- To integrate science, policy, and on-ground action for global conservation.

- **Significance:**

- It forms the scientific backbone of global biodiversity governance.
- It guides national laws, protected area policies, and international conventions such as CBD and CITES.
- It serves as the global gold standard for extinction risk assessment.

WORLD ANTI-DOPING AGENCY'S (WADA)

For the third consecutive year, India has topped the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) global list of offenders, with 260 positive cases in 2024.



About World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA):

- **Nature:** It is an international non-governmental organization initiated by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).
- **Establishment:** It was established in 1999, following the "Lausanne Declaration" to lead a collaborative worldwide movement for doping-free sport.
- **Objective:** It aims to develop, harmonize and coordinate anti-doping rules and policies across all sports and countries.
- **Headquarters:** Its headquarters is located in Montreal, Canada.
- **Funding:** It is composed and funded equally by the Olympic Movement (IOC) and governments worldwide.
- **Focus areas:** Its activities include scientific and social science research; education; intelligence & investigations; development of anti-doping capacity; and monitoring of compliance with the World Anti-Doping Program.

- **Governance Structure:**

- Foundation Board: It consists of 42-members and is the agency's highest policy-making body. It is composed of representatives of the Olympic Movement (IOC, National Olympic Committees, International Sports Federations, and athletes) and representatives of governments from all 5 continents.
- Executive Committee: It consists of 16-members to which the Board delegates the management and running of the agency, including the performance of all its activities and the administration of its assets.

- **Key Instruments:**

- World Anti-Doping Code: The core document that harmonizes anti-doping policies, rules, and regulations across all sports and countries.
- Prohibited List: An international standard identifying substances and methods banned in sport, updated annually.
- ADAMS: The Anti-Doping Administration and Management System, a central clearinghouse for coordinating global anti-doping activities.
- Athlete Biological Passport (ABP): A tool used to monitor an athlete's biological markers over time to detect doping indirectly.

- **India and WADA:**

- Compliance: India is a signatory to the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport (2005), which provides the legal framework for the WADA Code.
- Institutional Framework: National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) was established in 2005 (as a society) and it was given statutory status under the National Anti-Doping Act, 2022.
- National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL): The WADA-accredited facility in New Delhi responsible for sample analysis.

RAPID FINANCING INSTRUMENT

Recently, IMF approved funding of USD 206 million under its Rapid Financing Instrument to help Sri Lanka address urgent needs arising from the Cyclone Ditwah.



About Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI):

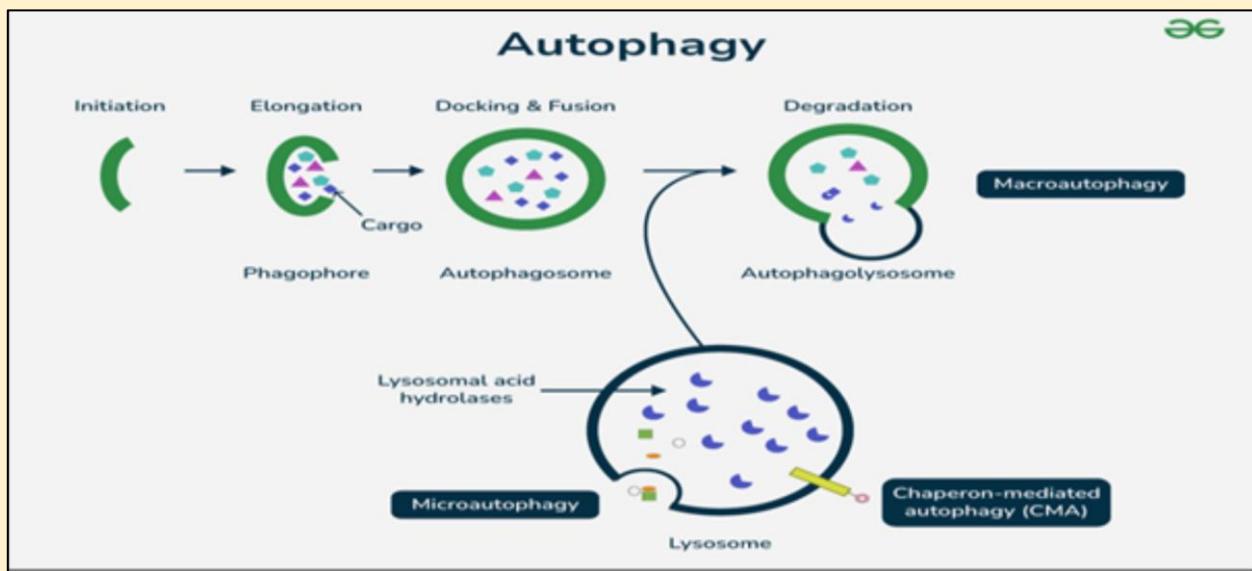
- **Nature:** It is an IMF emergency lending facility that provides quick, low-access financial assistance to member countries facing urgent balance-of-payments needs, especially during crises such as natural disasters, external shocks, or domestic instability.
- **Organisation:** It is given by International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- **Eligibility:** It is available to all IMF member countries. For low-income countries (LICs), a similar concessional facility called the Rapid Credit Facility (RCF) is available under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT).

- **Conditionality:** Support is provided with limited or no ex-post conditionality (policy commitments or reviews after the loan is approved), though prior actions might be required. The borrowing country is still expected to pursue policies to address the underlying BoP problem.
- **Disbursement of funds:** It involves a single, rapid disbursement of funds. Repayment is expected within $3\frac{1}{4}$ to 5 years, with interest rates similar to the IMF's standard non-concessional facilities.
- **Windows:** The RFI has two main windows: a regular window and a large natural disaster window (for disasters where damage is 20% of GDP or more).

- **Focus areas:**
 - To provide immediate liquidity to countries facing sudden balance-of-payments (BoP) pressures.
 - To prevent severe economic disruption when full-fledged IMF programmes are unnecessary or not feasible.
 - To support macroeconomic stability during short-term crises.

AUTOPHAGY

Recently, researchers uncovered a surprising player in autophagy that can pave the way for developing therapies for diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and cancer.



About Autophagy:

- **Nature:** Autophagy is the body's cellular recycling system. It is a key biological process where cells clear out damaged and unwanted materials.
- **Trigger factors:** It is triggered by stress (fasting, starvation, hypoxia, or infection), a cup-shaped double membrane called a phagophore begins to form.
- **Major functions:** It recycles damaged cell parts into fully functioning cell parts. It gets rid of nonfunctional cell parts that take up space and destroys pathogens in a cell that can damage it, like viruses and bacteria.

- **Types:**

- Macroautophagy: The most common form, involving the formation of autophagosomes to transport large cargo to lysosomes.
- Microautophagy: The lysosome directly “swallows” cytoplasmic material by folding its own membrane inward.
- Chaperone-Mediated Autophagy (CMA): Specific proteins are identified by “chaperone” molecules and transported directly across the lysosomal membrane without forming a separate vesicle.

- **Significance:**

- Anti-Aging: By clearing out damaged proteins that cause cellular “clutter,” autophagy slows aging and promotes longevity.
- Neuroprotection: It removes toxic protein aggregates associated with neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and Huntington’s.
- Immunity: In a process called xenophagy, cells use autophagy to identify and destroy invading viruses and bacteria.

The Cancer Paradox: It initially prevents cancer but later supports tumour growth and acts as a tumour suppressor by maintaining genome integrity and cellular homeostasis. In certain types of cancer, cells hijack autophagy for their own survival and propagation.

Nobel connection: Yoshinori Ohsumi won the 2016 Nobel Prize for discovering the genes (ATG genes) that regulate this process.

Relationship with Apoptosis: While autophagy is “self-eating” for survival, apoptosis is “programmed cell death” for the benefit of the organism. They are distinct but highly interconnected processes.

RIGHT TO DISCONNECT BILL

The introduction of the Right to Disconnect Bill as a Private Member’s Bill reflects growing concern over digital overreach at workplaces, where technology has blurred boundaries between work and personal life despite India’s consolidated labour law framework.

Current Context and Rationale

- **Digitalisation of Work:** With smartphones, emails, and messaging platforms, work increasingly extends beyond physical offices and prescribed hours, intensifying stress, burnout, and work-life imbalance.
- **Existing Labour Law Framework:** India recently consolidated 29 labour laws into four labour codes, including the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, which regulates working hours and overtime but is largely premised on physical workplaces.
- **Purpose of the Bill:** The Right to Disconnect Bill seeks to protect employees from after-hours work-related communication by granting them the right to not respond to calls, messages, or emails beyond prescribed working hours.

Key Issues and Limitations of the Bill

- **Undefined Concept of 'Work':** The Bill regulates after-hours communication but does not clarify whether such digital engagement constitutes "work" under existing labour codes. This creates a conceptual gap where communication is regulated without being legally recognised as labour.
- **Disconnect from Working Time Regulations:** While the OSH Code governs working hours and overtime, the Bill does not integrate digital availability into this framework, weakening enforceability and reducing the right to a behavioural guideline rather than a labour standard.
- **Ambiguity in Legal Nature:** The Bill does not specify whether the right to disconnect is a **mandatory labour standard** or a **contractual right** that can be modified through employer policies or employment contracts.
- **Absence of Constitutional Anchoring:** Although the right has a clear linkage with **Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty)** – particularly dignity, privacy, and autonomy – the Bill does not acknowledge or articulate this constitutional basis.

Comparative Perspective: Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

- **European Union Approach:** EU jurisprudence treats **employer control** as a key determinant of working time. Periods of on-call duty or availability, even without active work, are often recognised as working time.
- **France:** Labour law distinguishes clearly between working time and rest time. Digital communication is regulated through collective bargaining, ensuring enforceability without redefining "work".
- **Germany:** Strict working-time and rest-period regulations limit employer intrusion into personal time, supported by strong enforcement mechanisms.
- **Key Insight:** In effective models, the right to disconnect works because digital availability is legally integrated into working-time regulation.

Governance and Social Implications

- **Work-Life Balance:** Unregulated digital work erodes rest time, affecting mental health, productivity, and family life.
- **Labour Rights in the Gig and Platform Economy:** Ambiguity over what constitutes work disproportionately affects white-collar employees, gig workers, and remote workers.
- **Legal Uncertainty:** Without clarity, courts may deliver divergent interpretations, leading to inconsistent labour jurisprudence.

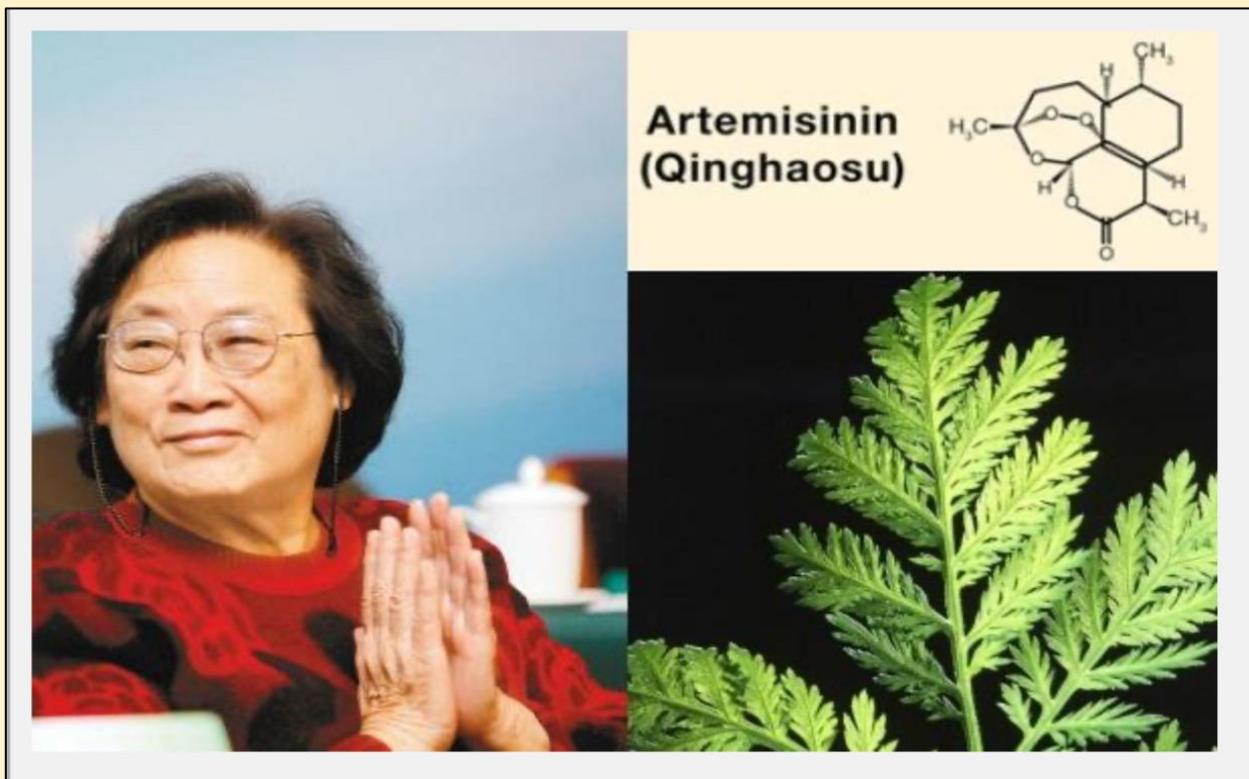
Way Forward

- **Define 'Digital Work':** Explicitly recognise after-hours digital communication under labour law when it involves employer control.
- **Integrate with Labour Codes:** Align the Right to Disconnect with working-hour and overtime provisions under the OSH Code to ensure enforceability.
- **Clarify Mandatory Nature:** Specify whether the right is non-derogable or subject to collective bargaining and contractual modification.
- **Constitutional Anchoring:** Explicitly link the right to dignity, privacy, and autonomy under Article 21 to strengthen judicial interpretation.
- **Encourage Collective Bargaining:** Allow sector-specific solutions through negotiated agreements, especially in IT and services sectors.

The Right to Disconnect Bill acknowledges that digital technologies have transformed work, but it remains conceptually incomplete. By failing to define digital labour and integrate it with existing labour laws, it risks becoming symbolic. The Bill should be seen as a starting point for a broader rethinking of labour jurisprudence in the digital economy.

ARTEMISININ

A new study warns that heavy artemisinin use may trigger resistance hotspots, with resistance markers gradually increasing in parts of Africa.



About Artemisinin:

- **Source:** It is an antimalarial drug derived from the sweet wormwood plant, *Artemisia annua*. The process involves drying the leaves and using a solvent to extract the active ingredient.
- **Discovery:** It was discovered in the 1970s by Tu Youyou (China) as part of “Project 523.” She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine (2015) for this discovery.
- **Significance:** It offered a new option when the malaria parasite was becoming resistant to older drugs like chloroquine and sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine. It is effective against all the malaria-causing protozoal organisms in the genus *Plasmodium*.
- **Mechanism:** It mainly targets the malaria parasite during the blood stage, disrupting the parasite's ability to replicate within red blood cells. It helps significantly reduce the parasites but doesn't stay in the body for a long time, being eliminated within hours.
- **Derivatives:** Its common derivatives include Artesunate (injectable for severe malaria), Artemether, and Dihydroartemisinin.
- **Used as a combination drug:** It is usually partnered with another drug that eliminates the remaining parasites over a longer period of time.
- **Recommended by WHO:** The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs) as the go-to treatment for *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria.

BURA CHAPORI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Recently, a team of government officials visited the encroached areas of land earmarked for compensatory afforestation at Bura Chapor Wildlife Sanctuary.



About Bura Chapor Wildlife Sanctuary:

- Location:** It is located on the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra in the Sonitpur district, Assam.
- Area:** It covers an area of approximately 44 sq. km.
- Establishment:** It was declared a Reserved Forest in 1974, upgraded to a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1995.
- Boundaries:** It is located on the north side of Laokhwa Wildlife Sanctuary and shares an integral transboundary landscape of the Laokhwa-Burachapor Wildlife Sanctuary ecosystem.
- Connectivity:** It acts as a wildlife corridor connecting Kaziranga and Orang National Parks.
- Buffer Zone:** It was notified as a buffer zone of the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve in 2007, which helps in reducing human-wildlife conflict and supporting landscape-level conservation efforts.
- Flooding:** Most of the low-lying areas of the sanctuary are vulnerable to flooding during summer.
- Significance:** The sanctuary's unique grassland habitat is vital for grassland-dependent species, especially the Bengal florican, whose global population is critically endangered.
- Flora:** It is enveloped and adorned by wet alluvial grasslands, riparian, and semi-evergreen forests. Most of the plant species found here are of great commercial and medical value.
- Fauna:** It is a habitat of a wide range of wild animals, including tigers, elephants, wild buffalos, one-horned rhinoceros, hog deer, and wild boar. The avian inhabitants feature species like the Bengal florican, black-necked stork, open-billed stork, white-eyed pochard, mallard, spotbill, large whistling teal, and numerous others.

CHILD TRAFFICKING IN INDIA

A recent **Supreme Court of India** judgment describing child trafficking as a “deeply disturbing reality” brings renewed focus on India’s persistent trafficking networks, despite constitutional safeguards, special laws, and multiple government schemes aimed at child protection.

Scale and Nature of Child Trafficking in India

- **Magnitude of the Problem:** As per NCRB *Crime in India* data, over **2,200 children were trafficked in 2022**, with girls constituting a majority. States such as West Bengal, Telangana, Bihar, Maharashtra and Assam consistently report high numbers due to poverty, migration corridors and porous borders.
- **Organised Crime Networks:** Trafficking operates through decentralised yet interconnected verticals—recruitment, transportation, harbouring and exploitation—often spread across States, complicating detection and prosecution, as noted by the Supreme Court.
- **Forms of Exploitation:** Children are trafficked for **commercial sexual exploitation**, forced labour, domestic work, begging, and increasingly for online sexual abuse material, reflecting adaptation to digital platforms.

Reasons for Persistence of Child Trafficking

- **Socio-Economic Drivers:** Poverty, seasonal migration, debt bondage, lack of schooling, family disintegration and disasters push children into vulnerability. UNICEF notes that children from migrant and informal labour households face disproportionately higher trafficking risks.
- **Demand-Side Factors:** Urban informal economies, tourism hubs, construction sites and domestic work markets sustain demand. NCRB data shows trafficking hotspots align with major urban and industrial centres.
- **Weak Preventive Governance:** Limited surveillance in source areas, understaffed Child Welfare Committees, and poor inter-State coordination weaken early detection. Parliamentary Standing Committee reports have flagged capacity gaps in child protection institutions.
- **Low Conviction Rates:** Conviction rates under trafficking-related provisions remain low (often below 30%), reflecting poor investigation quality, victim intimidation, and insensitive evidentiary standards—issues directly addressed by the recent Supreme Court judgment.

Legal and Policy Framework

- **Constitutional Mandate:** Articles **23 and 24** prohibit trafficking and child labour; Articles **15(3), 21 and 39(f)** mandate special protection for children’s dignity and development.
- **Statutory Architecture:** The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, Juvenile Justice Act, POCSO Act and IPC Sections 370/370A collectively criminalise trafficking, exploitation and abuse.
- **Judicial Reinforcement:** The Supreme Court has clarified that trafficked children are **injured witnesses**, whose testimony cannot be discarded due to minor inconsistencies, aligning with trauma-informed justice principles.

Government Schemes and Institutional Response

- **Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs):** Established in many districts to focus on detection, rescue and investigation, supported by the Ministry of Home Affairs, though uneven operational capacity persists.
- **Ujjawala Scheme:** Targets prevention, rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and child victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation; however, CAG audits have pointed to gaps in coverage and monitoring.
- **Mission Vatsalya (Child Protection Services):** Supports Child Welfare Committees, shelter homes, counselling and education, forming the backbone of post-rescue care.
- **Operation Smile / Muskaan:** Police-led initiatives that have traced **thousands of missing children annually**, reducing trafficking risks through coordinated rescue operations.
- **TrackChild Portal:** A national digital platform integrating police and child welfare data to track missing and found children, improving inter-State coordination.

Gaps and Criticisms

- **Implementation Deficit:** Reports by NCPCR and CAG highlight overcrowded shelters, staff shortages, and inadequate psychosocial care, increasing risks of re-trafficking.
- **Reactive Policy Bias:** Most interventions focus on rescue after exploitation, while preventive measures such as livelihood security, schooling and social protection in source areas remain weak.
- **Fragmented Governance:** Multiple ministries—Home, Women & Child Development, Labour—operate in silos, diluting accountability and follow-up.
- **Reintegration Challenges:** Without sustained education, skill training and income support, rescued children often return to vulnerable environments.

Way Forward

- **Shift to Prevention-Centric Strategy:** Strengthen social protection, universal schooling, nutrition, and livelihood programmes in trafficking-prone districts, in line with SDG 8.7 (ending child trafficking).
- **Trauma-Informed Justice System:** Mandatory training for police, prosecutors and judges on child psychology and victim-sensitive evidence handling, institutionalising Supreme Court guidelines.
- **Unified Anti-Trafficking Framework:** Operationalise a national anti-trafficking authority to coordinate intelligence, rescue, rehabilitation and prosecution across States.
- **Strengthen Rehabilitation and Aftercare:** Improve quality of shelters, long-term education, skill development and family reintegration to prevent re-trafficking.

- **Data-Driven Monitoring:** Enhance NCRB data granularity, map trafficking corridors, and track repeat offenders to improve deterrence and accountability.

Child trafficking in India reflects deep socio-economic inequalities and governance gaps. While judicial interventions have strengthened victim-centric justice, eliminating trafficking requires a preventive, welfare-oriented and institutionally coordinated approach that protects children before exploitation occurs.

REPUBLIC OF SOMALILAND

Israel has formally recognised the Republic of Somaliland as an independent state, becoming the first country to do so more than three decades after the region declared separation from Somalia. The move marks a significant geopolitical development in the Horn of Africa and represents a historic shift in Israel's diplomatic engagement with unrecognised or partially recognised states.



Formal Recognition Agreement

According to official sources, the recognition declaration was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar on behalf of Israel. Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi signed the declaration for Somaliland. Netanyahu described the development as "seminal and historic", signalling the beginning of formal bilateral relations between the two sides.

Somaliland's Long Quest for Recognition

Somaliland briefly attained independence in 1960 and was recognised at the time by Israel and 34 other countries before voluntarily uniting with Somalia. Following the collapse of Somalia's central government, Somaliland declared independence again in 1991.

Despite maintaining political stability, democratic institutions, and effective governance, it remained unrecognised internationally until Israel's announcement. Several countries, including the UK, Ethiopia, Turkey, the UAE, Denmark, Kenya, and Taiwan, have maintained liaison offices without extending formal recognition.

Strategic and Diplomatic Implications

During a phone conversation with President Abdullahi, Netanyahu expressed Israel's intent to cooperate with Somaliland in economic development, agriculture, and social sectors.

He also invited Abdullahi for an official visit to Israel and said he would convey Somaliland's interest in joining the Abraham Accords to US President Donald Trump. Somaliland's leadership welcomed the invitation, indicating readiness to deepen diplomatic ties.

- Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991.
- Israel is the first country to officially recognise Somaliland.
- Somaliland has functioned with its own government, currency, and elections.
- The Abraham Accords focus on normalisation between Israel and Arab states.

Embassies and Regional Impact

Foreign Minister Sa'ar confirmed that embassies will be opened in both countries and ambassadors appointed. Netanyahu's office acknowledged the role of Israel's security and diplomatic establishment, including Mossad Director David Barnea, in facilitating the recognition process.

The decision is expected to have broader regional implications, particularly amid ongoing diplomatic shifts in the Middle East and East Africa, and may prompt renewed debate over international recognition norms.

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