

EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS—JANUARY 16, 2023

NATIONAL

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi – recently announced the setting up “Global South Centre of Excellence” on January 13, 2023**
- ✓ The announcement was made during his opening address at the concluding session of the Voice of Global South virtual summit, which was hosted by India
- ✓ The Centre will undertake research on developing solutions or best practices that would help the members of the developing countries
- ✓ During the event, PM Modi also announced the launch of 'Global South Science and Technology initiative' to share the country's expertise with other developing nations in areas like space technology and nuclear energy
- ✓ Further, the PM announced a new Aarogya Maitri project under which India will provide essential medical supplies to any developing country affected by natural disasters or humanitarian crisis
- ✓ During his address, the PM proposed a Global-South Young Diplomats Forum to connect youthful officers of Indian foreign ministries
- ✓ He also announced the launch of Global-South Scholarships for students from developing countries to pursue higher education in India
- ✓ The Prime Minister further added that the summit has seen the participation of more than 120 developing countries.
- ✓ PM Modi presided over the Inaugural Leaders' session on January 12 and the Summit wrapped up on January 13 with a Concluding Leaders' Session also hosted by Prime Minister.

- **Indian Railways - is launching Bharat Gaurav tourist train from Ayodhya to Janakpur in February.**
- ✓ The seven-day special pilgrimage initiative will be called "Shri Ram-Janaki Yatra: Ayodhya to Janakpur"
- ✓ It would cover two most significant pilgrimage sites - Ayodhya and Janakpur - from two neighbouring countries - India and Nepal - respectively

- ✓ The Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC Tourist Train will start on 17 February 2023 from New Delhi.



- ✓ The initiative will strengthen the bilateral relations and promote the cultural relations between the two countries.
- ✓ The tourist train will visit pilgrimage and heritage sites at Nandigram, Sitamarhi, Kashi and Prayagraj as added attraction during the tour.
- ✓ The launch of 'Bharat Gaurav Tourist Train' is in line with the Government initiative "Dekho Apna Desh" to promote domestic tourism.
- **The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change - has listed Neelakurinji under Schedule III of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.**



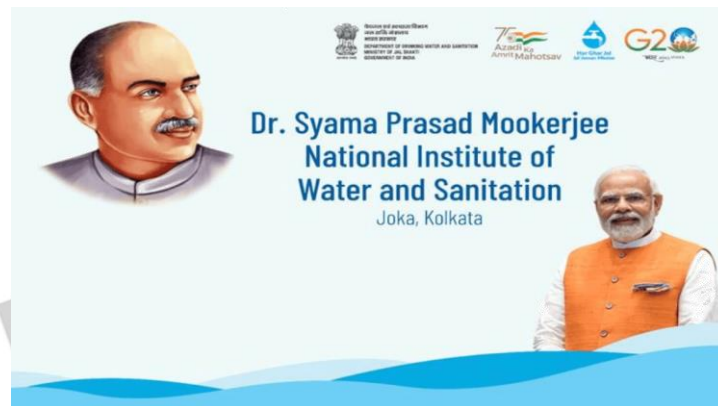
- ✓ Accordingly, Neelakurinji is included as a plant under protected species.
- ✓ It has joined the list of 19 plants that are already listed under Schedule III
- ✓ As per the new order, cultivation and possession of Neelakurinji is not permitted.
- ✓ Further, those uprooting or destroying the plant will be fined Rs 25,000 and imprisoned for three years
- ✓ The plant is present in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Goa
- ✓ In the Western Ghats region, about 70 varieties of Neelakurinji plants have been identified in the small stretch between the Mangaladevi hills to the Nilgiris hills
- ✓ The most popular is Neelakurinji Strobilanthes kunthiana, which blooms once in 12 years

- ✓ The most recent bloom of Neelakurinji was over a vast area on the Kallippara hills at Santhanpara in Idukki.
- ✓ The Eravikulam National Park near Munnar is known for its extensive flowering of Kurinji, with the next flowering season expected in 2030
- **The Union government - has decided to scrap the discretionary Haj quota that was available with people in top constitutional posts and the minority affairs ministry.**



- ✓ Till now, around 500 people could go to Haj through seats allocated to the President, Vice President, prime minister, minority affairs minister and Haj committee under the VIP Haj quota
- ✓ Henceforth, all Haj pilgrims will go through the Haj committee and private tour operators only.
- ✓ There were 100 seats in the President's quota, 75 in the Vice President's quota, 75 in the PM quota and 50 in the minority affairs minister quota, while the Haj Committee of India has 200 seats
- ✓ According to Union Minister for Minority Affairs, Smriti Irani, a new Haj policy is going to be announced soon.
- ✓ On January 9, the Indian consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia informed that India signed the Haj 2023 bilateral agreement with Saudi Arabia.
- ✓ According to the agreement, a total of 1,75,025 Indian Haj pilgrims will be able to perform Haj, reportedly the highest in history.
- ✓ According to the 2018-22 policy document, 70% of India's total quota goes to the Haj Committee of India and 30% goes to private operators
- **The Centre - has named the new Integrated Food Security Scheme as Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana, PMGKAY.**
- ✓ Earlier, the Union Cabinet had approved new integrated food security scheme for providing free foodgrains to Antodaya Ann Yojna (AAY) and Primary Household (PHH) beneficiaries, as per entitlement under National Food Security Act
- ✓ The implementation of the new scheme has started from 1st of January this year, benefiting more than 80 crore poor population.

- ✓ The Central Government will spend more than Rs. two lakh crore in 2023 as food subsidies under NFSA and other welfare schemes
 - ✓ Under the NFSA, the entitlement of foodgrains per person per month is 5 kg for priority households category, while 35 kg per family per month for Antodaya Anna Yojna (AAY) families.
 - ✓ The government has recently discontinued free monthly distribution of 5 kilograms of foodgrains to poor people under a scheme that was also known as PMGKAY.
 - ✓ This scheme, which was launched following the coronavirus pandemic in April 2020, ended in December last year.
- **The National Centre for Drinking Water, Sanitation and Quality in Kolkata - has been renamed as Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee National Institute of Water and Sanitation**



- ✓ The Union Cabinet, at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, gave ex-post facto approval to the proposal to rename the institute set up on 8.72 acres of land in Joka, Diamond Harbour Road, Kolkata.
 - ✓ The Institute was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December, 2022.
 - ✓ It is modelled as a premier institute to assist states and Union territories in the field of public health engineering, drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene through training programmes.
 - ✓ Further, working and miniature models of Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) technologies are also installed to facilitate the training at the institute.
 - ✓ Mookerjee, the Jana Sangh founder, was a front-runner in national integration, inspiration for industrialisation, an eminent scholar and the youngest vice chancellor of the University of Calcutta.
- **Union Minister of Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal along with Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha - recently inaugurated the School of Logistics, Communication, and Waterways in Agartala on January 11**
- ✓ The new institute will provide support for studies, research, training, and workshops to the traders and entrepreneurs of the northeastern region



- ✓ According to the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the Centre for Logistics, Communication and Waterways would facilitate conducting studies, research, training, workshops and seminars for various stakeholders
- ✓ It has been set up under the State Institute of Public Administration and Rural Development (SIPARD)
- ✓ SIPARD is an autonomous body funded by the Government of Tripura and partially by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
- ✓ The Government of India is providing financial assistance under the Central Sector Scheme for the development of Inland Waterway in the Northeast including Tripura

INTERNATIONAL

- **Swedish state-owned mining company, LKAB - announced that it has discovered more than one million tonnes of rare earth oxides in the northern Kiruna area of the country.**
- ✓ This is the largest known deposit of rare earth elements discovered anywhere in Europe
- ✓ Currently, no rare earths are mined in Europe and it mostly imports them from other regions.
- ✓ According to a report, 98% of rare earths used by the European Union were sent by China
- ✓ Rare earth elements or rare earth metals are a set of 17 chemical elements in the periodic table — the 15 lanthanides, plus scandium and yttrium.
- ✓ The 17 rare earths are cerium (Ce), dysprosium (Dy), erbium (Er), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), holmium (Ho), lanthanum (La), lutetium (Lu), neodymium (Nd), praseodymium (Pr), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), scandium (Sc), terbium (Tb), thulium (Tm), ytterbium (Yb), and yttrium (Y).
- ✓ These elements are important in technologies of consumer electronics, computers and networks, communications, clean energy, advanced transportation, healthcare, environmental mitigation, and national defence, among others.

- ✓ Scandium is used in televisions and fluorescent lamps, and yttrium is used in drugs to treat rheumatoid arthritis and cancer.
 - ✓ Rare earth elements are used in space shuttle components, jet engine turbines, and drones.
 - ✓ Cerium, the most abundant rare earth element, is essential to NASA's Space Shuttle Programme.
 - ✓ Elements like neodymium and dysprosium, which are used in wind turbine motors, are sought-after more than ever in recent times
- **The United Arab Emirates - announced a ban on single-use plastic shopping bags to take effect next year**



- ✓ The law would prohibit the import, production and circulation of such bags from January 1, 2024
- ✓ A similar ban would apply to plastic cups, plates and cutlery from January 1, 2026.
- ✓ This is the latest initiative aimed at reducing pollution in the oil-rich nation.
- ✓ The UAE, a major oil producer and the host of this year's United Nations climate summit, has declared to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050
- ✓ Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, imposed a ban on single-use plastics in June, and the city of Dubai began charging around 6 cents for such bags in July.
- ✓ Plastic takes decades to degrade and microscopic particles have been found inside the bodies of fish, birds and other animals.
- ✓ Plastic bags are the main reason to cause maximum damage to the environment, polluting streets and waterways and harming birds and marine life.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **Astronomers - have discovered a new planet outside our solar system which resides in the habitable zone around its star.**
- ✓ The new exoplanet, named TOI 700 e, was discovered using NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS)
 - ✓ It orbits a star located around 100 light-years away in the southern constellation 'Dorado' and a year there lasts just 37 days.

- ✓ The new discovery has emerged as the perfect candidate for a habitable planet because it is 95% Earth's size and likely rocky and chances are that water might exist in liquid form there.
- ✓ This planet is part of the TOI 700 planetary system where planets TOI 700 b, c, and d have previously been discovered
 - ✓ Out of these, the planet TOI 700 b is the innermost, which is about 90% Earth's size and orbits the star every 10 days.
 - ✓ TOI 700 c is over 2.5 times bigger than Earth and completes one orbit every 16 days
- **India - successfully carried out a test launch of the tactical ballistic missile Prithvi-II from the Integrated test range, Chandipur, off the Odisha coast recently on January 10.**



- ✓ The user training launch successfully validated all operational and technical parameters of the missile, which had struck its target with “high accuracy”
- ✓ The missile, which is powered by light propulsion twin engines, has a range of around 350 km and can carry 500-1,000 kg of warheads.
- ✓ It uses an advanced inertial navigation system to strike the set target.
- ✓ The Prithvi-II was earlier successfully test-fired during night hours in 2018 and in 2019.
- ✓ Prithvi missile was developed by the DRDO under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.

BUSINESS/ECONOMY

- **India's trade deficit with China - breached \$100 billion for the first time in 2022, according to the latest data released by the China customs**
- ✓ The trade deficit for India stood at \$101.02 billion, crossing the 2021 figure of \$69.38 billion
- ✓ Overall, the trade between India and China touched an all-time high of \$135.98 billion in 2022, overtaking the \$125 billion mark a year earlier by registering a rise of 8.4%
- ✓ China's exports to India rose to \$118.5 billion, a year-on-year increase of 21.7%

- ✓ During 2022, China's imports from India dropped to \$17.48 billion, a year-on-year decline of 37.9%
- ✓ From 2015 to 2021, India-China bilateral trade grew by 75.30%, an average yearly growth of 12.55%
- **Fintech unicorn BharatPe - has received an in-principle authorisation from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as an online payment aggregator (PA).**
- ✓ A wholly-owned subsidiary of the company, named Resilient Payments Private Limited, has received the approval.



- ✓ The Gurugram-based company, founded in March 2020, is one of the leaders in the UPI offline transactions, processing more than 18 crore UPI transactions per month
- ✓ According to BharatPe, its point of sale (POS) business now processes payments of over \$4 billion annually on its machines.
- ✓ The company is backed by global investors such as Tiger Global, Dragoneer Investment Group, Steadfast Capital, Coatue Management, Ribbit Capital, Insight Partners, Steadview Capital, Beenext, Amplo, and Sequoia Capital
- ✓ In December, digital payment processing firm Worldline ePayments India and fintech startup Paysharp had also received in-principle authorisation from the RBI to act as a PA.
- ✓ In the last few months, several other fintech players, including Open, Infibeam, and Cashfree, got the nod for the PA licence.
- ✓ Razorpay, Pine Labs, and 1Pay among others have already received RBI approval.
- ✓ A payment aggregator provides payment services to merchants and e-commerce sites by accepting payment instruments from customers.
 - ✓ They store the funds received from customers and transfer them to merchants after a certain time.
- ✓ Their services include facilitating integrated payment options such as transactions of cash and cheque and online and offline touchpoints, besides allowing bank transfers for merchants without the need to set up accounts directly with a bank.

- ✓ In a new set of guidelines in March 2020, the RBI said all PAs have to be authorised by it.

AWARDS

- **President Droupadi Murmu - recently conferred the Digital India Award 2022 – Gold to CBSE in the Data Sharing and Use for Socio Economic Development category.**



- ✓ This year, the awards were given out in three categories, with Platinum, Gold, and Silver awards being given to the winning teams.
- ✓ CBSE's pioneering IT initiative "Digital Academic Repository – Parinam Manjusha" was selected for Gold category award.
- ✓ Under this category, Smart Cities Mission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs won the Platinum award, while Center for e-governance (Karnataka) won the silver award.
- ✓ Parinam Manjusha is first of its kind online repository as a single source of result data developed and implemented by IT Department, CBSE and integrated with National eGovernance Division's (NeGD) Digi Locker
- ✓ Under the category of Digital Empowerment of Citizens, e-NAM, the flagship initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare bagged the Platinum award, while the Gold and Silver awards were bagged by Transport Mission Mode Project (eTransport) and Judgment Search Portal respectively
- ✓ Among the states, DUARE SARKAR (West Bengal) won the Platinum and e-Services Manipur won the gold award
- ✓ Among the central ministries/departments category, ICEGATE Portal won the Platinum and e-Shram won the Gold award
- ✓ In the category of Digital Initiatives at Grassroots Level, e-Vivechna App (MP) won the Platinum, DeGS Computer Basic Training (Jharkhand) won the Gold and Ksheerasree Portal (Kerala) won the silver award.
- ✓ Under the category of Digital Initiatives for Ease of Doing Business, Mine Mitra (UP) bagged Platinum, while the Gold and Silver award went to eAbkari (Odisha) and Invest Punjab respectively

- ✓ Digital India Awards have been instituted under the ambit of National Portal of India, a mission mode project of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- ✓ The award acknowledges exemplary and innovative digital solutions by government entities across India.

SPORTS

- **Swastika Ghosh - becomes the fourth Indian to qualify for the World Table Tennis Championship.**



- ✓ Swastika was among the 28 women singles qualifiers from the Asian Continental Stage of 2023 WTTTC finals held in Doha
- ✓ Swastika joins Sreeja Akula, Manika Batra and Sharath Kamal, who made it by finishing among the top-16 from the continent.
- ✓ In men's doubles, Sharath and Sathiyam made it among the 14 qualified pairs, while in women's doubles, Sreeja and Reeth were among the 12 qualifiers

RANKINGS

- **For the fifth consecutive year, Japan's passport - continues to be the most powerful in the world, with visa-free entry in 193 countries out of 227 around the world**



- ✓ South Korea and Singapore ranked in the second spot enjoy a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 192, while Germany and Spain jointly hold third place in the ranking with visa-free access to 190 destinations worldwide.
- ✓ The UK and the US remain in 6th and 7th places, with scores of 187 and 186 countries, respectively
- ✓ India's passport is ranked at 85th place, as the country offers visa-free access to 59 countries
 - ✓ Earlier in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, the country ranked at 82nd spot, 84th, 85th and 83rd respectively.
- ✓ Afghanistan's passport was the worst passport according to the ranking with a visa- free score of 27.
- ✓ Iraq is the second worst passport ranked at 108 with a visa- free score of 29.
- ✓ The Henley Passport Index is considered as the original and authoritative ranking of the world's passports.
- ✓ The index includes 199 different passports and 227 different travel destinations.
- ✓ London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm, Henley & Partners, released the official Henley Passport Index for 2023 recently on January 10
- ✓ Henley & Partners get exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which is enhanced by their in-house research team.

