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13 July, 2024

Non-subsidised Fertilizers

Context: *The upcoming Union Budget is expected to lack major reform announcements for the fertiliser sector, particularly concerning non-subsidised fertilisers.*

➢ **Control of Non-Subsidised Fertilisers:**
- Non-subsidised fertilisers like NBS (Nutrient-Based Subsidy) products receive a per-tonne subsidy linked to their nutrient content (N, P, K, S).
- Recently, informal price controls have been imposed, where maximum profit margins over costs dictate "reasonable" Maximum Retail Prices (MRPs).
- Effective from April 2023, fertiliser companies charging above the prescribed MRPs risk losing subsidies under NBS.

➢ **Prescribed MRPs:**
- "Reasonable" MRPs set as of now are Rs 27,000 per tonne for DAP, Rs 30,000-31,000 for MOP, and Rs 11,000 for SSP.
- Complex fertilisers like 20:20:0:13 are priced at Rs 24,000, and those like 10:26:26:0 and 12:32:16:0 NPKS at Rs 29,400.

➢ **Sales and Market Dynamics:**
- Approximately 94% of fertiliser sales in recent years (2022-23 and 2023-24) involved just seven products, including Urea, DAP, SSP, and selected NPKS fertilisers.
- Despite new political dynamics, there is little fiscal pressure on the government to increase MRPs directly.

➢ **About Fertiliser Subsidy:**
- The government provides subsidies to fertiliser producers to enable farmers to purchase fertilisers at prices below market rates.
- This subsidy covers the difference between the cost of production or import of fertilisers and the amount paid by farmers.

➢ **Subsidy on Urea:**
- Urea is India's most produced, imported, consumed, and regulated fertiliser, exclusively subsidised for agricultural purposes.
- The subsidy on urea is based on the production cost at each manufacturing plant, and it must be sold to farmers at a government-set Maximum Retail Price (MRP).
- The current MRP for urea is fixed at Rs 5,628 per tonne.

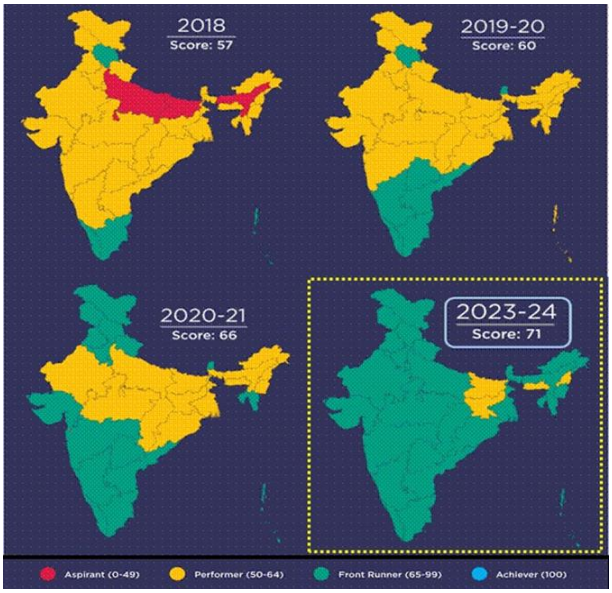
➢ **Subsidy on Non-Urea Fertilisers:**
- Non-urea fertilisers have their MRPs decontrolled or determined by the manufacturers.
- However, due to recent global price increases following the Russia-Ukraine conflict, these fertilisers have been subjected to government price control measures.
- All non-urea fertilisers fall under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme.

➢ **Fiscal Considerations:**
- Budgeted fertiliser subsidy for 2024-25 is Rs 163,999.80 crore, down from Rs 189,487.44 crore in 2023-24 and Rs 251,339.36 crore in 2022-23.
- Landed prices of imported urea, DAP, and MOP have significantly decreased recently due to global market shifts.

SDG India Index

Context: *The SDG India Index 2023-24, the fourth edition of India's key tool for measuring national and subnational progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), was released today by NITI Aayog.*

➢ **Composite Score Improvement:**
- Increased from 57 in 2018 to 66 in 2020-21 and further to 71 in 2023-24.
- This signifies significant national progress towards achieving the SDGs, reflecting concerted efforts and effective policy interventions.



➢ **Goals in 'Front Runner' Category:**
- Goals 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 13 (Climate Action) have achieved scores between 65–99 in the latest assessment.
- Goal 13 (Climate Action) saw a significant score increase from 54 to 67, indicating focused efforts towards environmental sustainability.
- Goal 1 (No Poverty) improved from 60 to 72, showcasing advancements in poverty alleviation measures.

➢ **Sectoral Progress:**
- Goals 1 (No Poverty), 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable

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and Clean Energy), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) have shown significant progress.
- Government initiatives such as PM Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, PM Ujjwala Yojana, and Ayushman Bharat have played pivotal roles in achieving these milestones.
- Improvement in digital infrastructure and financial inclusion has also positively impacted development outcomes.

➢ **Government Interventions:**
- Over 4 crore houses constructed under PM Awas Yojana.
- Construction of 11 crore toilets and 2.23 lakh Community Sanitary Complexes in rural areas.
- Distribution of 10 crore LPG connections under PM Ujjwala Yojana.
- Provision of tap water connections to over 14.9 crore households through Jal Jeevan Mission.
- Healthcare coverage for over 30 crore beneficiaries under Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- Coverage of over 80 crore people under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
- Establishment of 150,000 Ayushman Arogya Mandir providing primary medical care and affordable generic medicines.
- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) totaling ₹34 lakh crore through PM-Jan Dhan accounts.
- Skill development initiatives like Skill India Mission, benefiting over 1.4 crore youth.
- PM Mudra Yojana sanctioning 43 crore loans amounting to ₹22.5 lakh crore to support entrepreneurial aspirations.
- Support for startups through Start Up India and Start Up Guarantee schemes.
- Expansion of electricity access through the Saubhagya scheme.
- Emphasis on renewable energy, increasing solar power capacity from 2.82 GW to 73.32 GW over the decade.
- Addition of around 100 GW of installed electric capacity between 2017 and 2023, with 80% attributed to non-fossil fuel-based resources.
- Significant improvement in digital infrastructure, reducing internet data costs by 97% and fostering financial inclusion.

➢ **State and UT Performance:**
- State scores range from 57 to 79, while UT scores range from 65 to 77, showcasing improved overall performance compared to previous assessments.
- 32 States/UTs achieved 'Front Runner' status (scores between 65 and 99), an increase from 22 previously.
- Ten new States and UTs entered the 'Front Runner' category, including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.
- Notable score improvements of up to 8 points were recorded by States such as Assam, Manipur, Punjab, West Bengal, and Jammu and Kashmir since the last assessment.

➢ **Overall Progress:**
- Scores have shown increments ranging from 1 to 8 points, indicating sustained efforts towards achieving sustainable development goals.
- Collaboration between the central government, states, and UTs has been instrumental in driving these advancements.
- Continued focus on key sectors such as poverty alleviation, healthcare, sanitation, renewable energy, and infrastructure development is crucial for further progress.

Crew Health and Performance Exploration Analog

Context: *On July 6, four volunteer crew members concluded a year-long mission simulating life on Mars, emerging from a habitat designed to replicate conditions on the Red Planet.*

➢ **Mission Setup**
- The Crew Health and Performance Exploration Analog (CHAPEA) simulates Mars missions at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.
- It involves a series of three missions, the first of which began on June 25, 2023.
- The mission's habitat, Mars Dune Alpha, spans 1700 square feet and replicates Martian surface conditions.

➢ **Habitat Features**
- Mars Dune Alpha includes living quarters, an exercise area, workspaces, a recreation area, and a crop cultivation section.
- The exterior mimics Mars' landscape with red soil and cliffs, potentially serving for 3D-printed habitat experiments.
- Crew access between the habitat and the hangar is through an airlock.

Mission Details

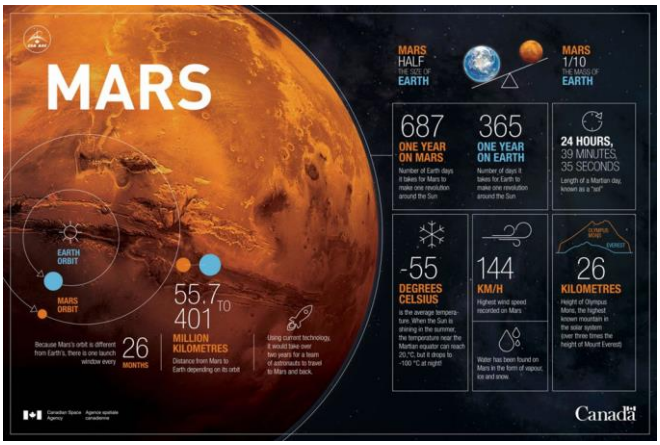
➢ **CHAPEA 1**
- CHAPEA 1 started on June 25, 2023, and concluded on July 6, 2024, lasting 378 days.
- Crew members for CHAPEA 1 included Kelly Haston (mission commander), Ross Brockwell (structural

engineer), Nathan Jones (emergency medicine physician), and Anca Selariu (microbiologist).

- Applicants for CHAPEA 1 needed to be US permanent residents or citizens aged 30-55, with specific qualifications in aviation, STEM fields, or medical credentials.

➢ **Future Missions**

- CHAPEA 2 is scheduled for Spring 2025, with applications accepted from February 16 to April 2, 2024.
- CHAPEA 3, the final mission in the series, is planned for 2026.



NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

NABARD

Recently, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has announced an agri fund for Start-Ups & Rural Enterprises (Agri-SURE), with an initial corpus of ₹750 crore to be managed by its wholly owned subsidiary Nabventures.

About NABARD:

- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is **India's apex development bank** that was **established in 1982** under an Act of Parliament.
- Its primary objective is to **promote sustainable** and **equitable agriculture** and **rural development in India.**
- **It was recommended by the Committee led by Shri B. Sivaraman and approved through Act 61 of 1981.**
- It performs various functions including **refinancing agricultural activities**, **providing credit to rural areas**, **promoting agricultural** and **rural development institutions** and **offering technical assistance**.
- Notable initiatives include the **SHG Bank Linkage Project**, **Kisan Credit Card scheme**, and watershed development projects.
- It operates through various departments including **Financial, Developmental** and **Supervision**, **focusing on refinance support**, **district-level credit plans, skill development training** and **supervision of Cooperative Banks** and **Regional Rural Banks (RRBs).**
- Its headquarter is in **Mumbai**, India's financial capital.

Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary

Recently, panic erupted at Junagadh Agricultural University (JAU) when a leopard from Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary entered a laboratory at the College of Agricultural Engineering and Technology (CAET).

About Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary:

- Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in the Junagadh district of **Gujarat**.
- It was **declared a wildlife sanctuary in 2008** and later in **2021 safari rides** were introduced for the visitors.
- The sanctuary is **part of the larger Girnar mountain range**, which is considered sacred and is a popular pilgrimage site for both Hindus and Jains.
- This Wildlife Sanctuary, **an exceptional blend of Savanna grasslands** and distinct wildlife is **home to Asiatic Lions** who live in the hilly and forested area of the park.
- **Flora:** The sanctuary features diverse vegetation, including dry deciduous forests, thorny scrub, and grasslands.
- **Fauna:** The Sanctuary is home to a variety of wildlife, including the **Asiatic lion**, **spotted deer**, **leopard**, **Indian golden jackals**, sloth bear, sambar and chital.

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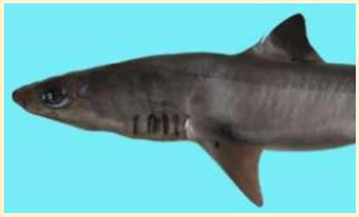
Trishuli River

Recently, Nepali Army troops conducted a rescue operation after a landslip swept two buses into the Trishuli River in Chitwan, leaving at least 63 people, including seven Indian nationals, missing.

About the Trishuli River:

- The Trishuli River, **located in central Nepal** is a **major tributary of the Narayani River**, which eventually joins the Ganges.
- The name "**Trishuli" is derived from the trident** ("Trishul") of Lord Shiva, reflecting its mythological significance.
- It **originates from the Langtang Himal region** (part of the Himalayan Mountain range) near Rasuwa Fort at the Nepal-Tibet border from the **union of Kyirong Tsangpo and Lende Khola.**
- It **merges with the Bhote Koshi River at Betrawati** (meeting place of three major rivers, the **Betran Ganga**, **Rudra Ganga** and **Trishul Ganga**) and further downstream, it joins the Narayani River.
- The **Upper Trishuli-1 Hydropower project** (UT-1 or the Project) is a 216 mega-watt greenfield run-of-river hydropower plant on the Upper Trishuli River in Nepal.
- This river is **popular for white-water rafting** and **kayaking**, attracting tourists and adventure enthusiasts.

Squalus Hima



Recently, the scientists from the Zoological Survey of India have discovered a new species of deep-water dogfish shark, Squalus hima, from the Sakthikulangara fishing harbour in Kerala along the Arabian Sea.

About the Squalus Hima:

- Squalus hima **belongs to the genus Squalus** within the family Squalidae, commonly known as spurdogs, characterized by smooth dorsal fin spines.
- It **inhabits the depths of the Indian Ocean**, particularly around the **Seychelles** and **Mauritius**.
- It is characterized by its **small size**, typically around **50 cm in length** and distinctive features like **large eyes** and a **light-colored body**.
- Species from the genera Squalus and Centrophorus, including Squalus hima, are **exploited for their liver oil,** which is highly valued in the pharmaceutical industry.

Place in News

Lithuania

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda was sworn in for a second five-year term yesterday on July 12, 2024.

Lithuanina (Capital: Vilnius)

Location: Lithuania, officially known as the Republic of Lithuania is a country in the **Baltic region of Europe**.

Boundaries: Lithuania shares its borders with **Belarus** (East & South), the **Baltic Sea** (West), **Latvia** (North), **Poland** (South) and Russia (Southwest).

Physical Features:

- The highest point in Lithuania is **Aukštojas Hill,** also known as Juozapinė Hill.
- The major rivers of Lithuania include the **Nemunas** (Neman), **Neris**, **Šventoji** and **Venta** rivers.
- Lake **Drūkšiai** is the country's largest lake.
- Lithuania has small reserves of various minerals including clay, limestone, gypsum and **dolomite**.

Independence: Lithuania declared independence from the **Soviet Union in 1990** and joined the **European Union in 2004.**

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POINTS TO PONDER

- Which organization has recently sanctioned seven new projects for the private sector under the Technology Development Fund scheme? **– Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**
- Recently, which military contingent has traveled to Australia to participate in Exercise Pitch Black 2024? **– Indian Air Force (IAF) contingent**
- Vizhinjam Seaport, located in Thiruvananthapuram, is India's first Deepwater Container Transshipment Port. Which model is the port being developed under, with a Public Private Partnership component? **– Landlord model**
- Indian scientists recently developed an open-source tool to generate an infrared star catalogue for which system of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT)? **– Adaptive Optics System**
- The IUCN Red List categorizes species at risk of extinction into nine categories. Approximately how many species are currently included in the list, and how many of them are threatened with extinction? **– 163,000 species; 45,000 threatened**