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World Press Freedom Index

India's ranking in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index has slipped to 161 out of 180 countries, according to the Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

Highlights of the index

- In comparison, Pakistan has fared better when it comes to media freedom as it was placed at 150, an improvement from last year's 157th rank.
- In 2022, India was ranked at 150.
- Sri Lanka also made significant improvement on the index, ranking 135th this year as against 146th in 2022
- Norway, Ireland and Denmark occupied the top three positions in press freedom, while Vietnam, China and North Korea constituted the bottom three.

About Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

- It comes out with a global ranking of press freedom every year.
- RSF is an international NGO whose self-proclaimed aim is to defend and promote media freedom.
- Headquartered in Paris, it has consultative status with the United Nations.
- The objective is to compare the level of press freedom enjoyed by journalists and media in 180 countries and territories.

Reference

1. The Hindu | World Press Freedom Index

Sanctions on Indian agencies

India should be designated as a "country of particular concern" on the status of religious freedom, the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom

Issue

- A federal U.S. commission has urged to impose targeted sanctions on Indian Government agencies responsible for "severe violations" of religious freedom in the country by freezing their assets.
- The U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) also recommended to Congress to raise the issue of religious freedom during U.S.-India bilateral meetings.

India's stand

- India has previously slammed the USCIRF for "misrepresenting" facts. India has also described it as an "organisation of particular concern."
- USCIRF is not a branch of the State Department, or the Executive Branch and its report reflects the importance of religious freedom to the American people.
- The report fails to acknowledge the cultural and economic significance of cows to Indian villagers, not to mention the constitutional ban on cow slaughter.
- USCIRF fails to mention the beheadings of Hindus and their targeted killings by jihadi Muslims in Kashmir.

Reference

1. The Hindu | Sanctions on Indian agencies

Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)

The department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) seeks an increase in corpus of Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) as it accelerates pace of funding to incubators for supporting early stage companies across India.

Key features

- Easy availability of capital is essential for entrepreneurs at the early stages of growth of an enterprise.
- It is essential to provide seed funding to startups with an innovative idea to conduct proof of concept trials.
- DPIIT has created Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) with an outlay of INR 945 Crore.
- It helps to provide financial assistance to startups for Proof of Concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry, and commercialization.
- Seed Fund offered to such promising cases can have a multiplier effect in validation of business ideas of many startups, leading to employment generation.
- It will support an estimated 3,600 entrepreneurs through 300 incubators in the next 4 years.
- The Seed Fund will be disbursed to eligible startups through eligible incubators across India.

References

1. The Financial Express | Startup India Seed Fund Scheme
2. About | Startup India Seed Fund Scheme

Maximum Residue Limit in tea

Food Safety Standards Authority of India notifies residue cap for five pesticides in tea plantation

Issue

- The five pesticides are emamectin, benzoate, fenpyroximate, hexaconazole, propiconazole, and quinalphos.

- In 2018, the FSSAI came out with a notification which lowered the MRL for certain compounds which affected the industry.
- Quinalphos is considered to be important for pest control under the integrated pest management programme.
- However, the Assam government recently prohibited the sale, distribution, and use of four insecticides, including quinalphos with relevance to tea cultivation for a period of 60 days.
- MRLs of the important plant protection formulations being revised to realistic levels from the erstwhile LOD (limits of detection) level would help the tea sector.
- Indian tea exports got a boost in 2022 on the back of supply disruptions in Sri Lanka and inroads into newer markets.
- Accepted residual levels in most of the countries for many of the pesticides that have been allowed is very low.

Reference

1. Business Standard | Maximum Residue Limit in Tea

Greater Nicobar Project

The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has now flagged alleged discrepancies with respect to the forest clearance granted for the Great Nicobar Island (GNI) Project.

Issue

- The Andaman and Nicobar administration had reported nil implementation of FRA.
- The justification of the administration has been that the islands have the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Act, 1956 (PAT56).
- This act already provides for the full protection of the interests of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes.
- So, there is no claim as such for settlement under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.
- NCST claimed that, under the PAT56, a significant portion of the forest land in Great Nicobar has been marked as a Tribal Reserve.
- Over these reserves, local tribes people have been given rights to use and collect resources as and when needed for their daily sustenance.
- However, the power of notification and de-notification of the land as a Tribal Reserve is solely with the administrator of the islands under PAT56.

Reference

1. The Hindu | Greater Nicobar Island project

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