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Social Issues/ society

National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET)

• Recently, NCVET part of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), has granted official recognition to the National Institute of Social Defence (NISD).
• **Status** – Autonomous Body under the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
• **Established On** – December 5, 2018
• **Objective** – To oversee, elevate, and standardize vocational education, training, and skill development throughout India.
• **Responsibilities** – Recognize, oversee, and revoke certifications for awarding bodies and assessment organizations.
- Create regulations for approving and monitoring qualifications.
- Guarantee quality assurance in the vocational training framework.
- Resolve complaints via a systematic grievance mechanism.
- Consolidate and optimize disjointed regulatory systems to boost employability.

Economy

India's Tea Export Triumph

India has surged to become the world's second-largest tea exporter in 2024, surpassing Sri Lanka, according to the Tea Board of India.

• **India's Export Growth** – India exported 254 million kilograms (Mkg) of tea in 2024, a notable increase from 231 Mkg in 2023, propelling it past Sri Lanka.
• **Kenya's Continued Dominance** – Kenya remains the global leader, exporting over 500 Mkg of tea in 2024, maintaining its top position.
• **Historical Highs and Current Performance** – India's 2024 exports are the second highest in its history, only slightly behind the 256 Mkg exported in 2018.
• **Ambitious Future Targets** – The Indian tea industry aims to achieve 300 Mkg in exports by 2030, building on its recent export success.

SEBI's Revised FPI Disclosure Norms

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has increased the disclosure threshold for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) from Rs.25,000 crore to Rs.50,000 crore.

• **Original Mandate for FPI Disclosures (2023)** – SEBI initially mandated comprehensive disclosures for FPIs holding over Rs.25,000 crore in Indian equity assets.
• This measure was implemented to prevent stock manipulation and reduce market disruption risks from large FPIs.
• **Rationale for Threshold Increase** – The decision to raise the threshold is attributed to the substantial growth in cash equity market trading volumes, which have more than doubled between FY 2022–23 and FY 2024–25.
• This adjustment reflects the expanding scale of the Indian equity markets.
• **New Disclosure Requirements** – FPIs with equity Assets under Management (AUM) exceeding Rs.50,000 crore are now required to *disclose full ownership and control details*, tracing back to the ultimate natural person.
• This aims to *provide greater transparency* regarding the entities behind significant FPI investments.
• **Objectives of the Revised Norms** – SEBI's primary objective is to *maintain market integrity while adapting to the evolving dynamics* and increased volumes of the Indian equity market.
• This adjustment balances the need for regulatory oversight with the market's growth.

Gold Monetisation Scheme: Changes Announced

The Ministry of Finance will discontinue Medium– and Long–Term Gold Deposits under the Gold Monetization Scheme (GMS) from March 26, 2025.

• **Launched in** – November 2015,
• **Aim** – To mobilize idle household and institutional gold, making it productive and reducing gold imports.
• **GMS Components and Structure** – The scheme comprised gold deposits of :
  - Short–Term (1–3 years)
  - Medium–Term (5–7 years)
  - Long–Term (12–15 years)
• **Deposit Parameters** – A minimum deposit of 10 grams of raw gold was required, with no maximum limit imposed.
• **Current Revision and Continuation** – Banks can continue offering Short–Term Gold Deposits at their discretion, while Medium– and Long–Term options will be discontinued.

Environment

Global Lake Deoxygenation Crisis

Recent, studies show that 83% of over 15,000 lakes are losing dissolved oxygen (DO), threatening aquatic ecosystems.

• **The Necessity of Dissolved Oxygen** – Dissolved oxygen (DO) is vital for aerobic aquatic life, low levels cause hypoxia, endangering fish and biodiversity.
• **Climate Change** – A Major Oxygen Depletion Factor accounting for 55% of global surface DO decline.
• **Eutrophication's Contribution to DO Loss** – Nutrient runoff causes eutrophication, contributing 10% to DO loss via algal bloom decomposition.
• **Combined Impact and Ecological Consequences** – Climate change and eutrophication synergistically reduce DO, impacting aquatic health and ecosystem stability.

Kasungu National Park

Kasungu National Park, located in Malawi's Central Region, is facing legal action due to increased human–elephant conflicts following a large–scale elephant relocation.

• **Location** – West of Kasungu town in Malawi (African country) and bordering Zambia.
• **Managed by** – The Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW).
• **Features** – The Park features the Dwangwa, Lingadzi, and Lifupa rivers, supporting diverse wildlife and is predominantly inhabited by the Chewa people.
• **Flora and Fauna Diversity –** Kasungu primarily consists of Miombo woodland and grassy wetlands, home to elephants, various antelope species, zebras, and buffaloes.
• It is also a designated Lion Conservation Unit.
• **Elephant Relocation and Resulting Conflicts –** In 2022, 263 elephants were relocated from Liwonde National Park to Kasungu by the DNPW, African Parks, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).
• **Legal Action and Community Impact –** The relocation has led to increased elephant incursions into villages, resulting in at least 12 deaths and extensive crop damage affecting over 11,000 villagers, prompting legal action against IFAW.

Security

Successful VLSRSAM Flight Test

Recently DRDO and the Indian Navy successfully tested the Vertically–Launched Short–Range Surface–to–Air Missile (VLSRSAM) at ITR Chandipur, Odisha.

• **Indigenous Development and Purpose** – VLSRSAM is an indigenously developed missile designed for short–range air defence, capable of engaging low–altitude aerial threats.
• **Advanced Technology** – The missile features an indigenous Radio Frequency seeker, enhancing target acquisition and engagement precision.
• **Test Execution and Results** – Launched from a land–based vertical launcher, it successfully engaged a high–speed aerial target, demonstrating Near–Boundary–Low Altitude capability and high agility.
• **Significance for Indian Defence** – This successful test marks a significant advancement in India's defence capabilities, strengthening its shortrange air defence systems.

Science

MeitY's Deepfake Report to Delhi High Court

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has submitted a status report to the Delhi High Court, addressing the escalating issue of deepfake technology and its associated risks.

• **Understanding Deepfake Technology** – Utilizes artificial intelligence, specifically generative adversarial networks (GANs), to create synthetic media that manipulates or replaces real content with fabricated, highly realistic versions.
• **Deepfake Creation Process** – Involves data collection, feature learning, synthesis and manipulation, and refinement using GANs, where AI models compete to enhance realism, ultimately producing convincing fake content.
• **Key Concerns Highlighted by MeitY** – Report emphasizes the lack of a uniform definition for "deepfake," hindering regulatory and detection efforts.
• It also raises serious concerns about the targeted use of deepfakes against women during elections, leading to privacy violations and harmful content dissemination.
• **Proposed Mitigation Strategies** – To focus on developing detection technologies, enhancing legal frameworks.
• To promote public awareness to combat the spread of misinformation and protect individuals from malicious deepfake usage.

Gaia's Retirement: A Milestone in Galactic Mapping

The European Space Agency (ESA) has retired its Gaia space observatory, which significantly advanced our understanding of the Milky Way.

• **About the Gaia Mission** – Gaia, launched in December 2013, was an ESA operated astrometry mission designed to create a precise 3D map of the Milky Way.

• **Mission Objectives and Scope** – Its primary goal was to chart the galaxy, tracking positions, distances, movements, and characteristics of over 2 billion stars, and to study the Milky Way's formation and future.

• **Key Scientific Discoveries** – Gaia provided a detailed 3D map of the Milky Way, revealed a new class of "dark" black holes, confirmed stellar collisions impacting galactic evolution, and catalogued over 1.5 lakh asteroids.

• **Lasting Legacy and Data Utilization** – Despite mapping only 2% of the Milky Way, Gaia's data will continue to drive astronomical discoveries for decades through future data releases.

BioSaarthi: Nurturing India's Biotech Startups

Union Minister unveiled the Bio-Saarthi Mentorship Initiative at the 13th Foundation Day of BIRAC, highlighting India's rapid rise in the global bio-economy.

• Bio-Saarthi is a structured global mentorship program designed to support India's emerging biotech startups through expert guidance and capacity building.

• **Initiated by** – Ministry of Science and Technology.

• **Implemented by** – Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

• **Program Objectives** – Aims to strengthen India's biotechnology ecosystem by fostering innovation, supporting startups, and enhancing global competitiveness through mentorship.

• **Key Program Features** – Bio-Saarthi employs a sixmonth cohort model, providing structured mentormentee engagements, access to a global mentor pool, and a startupcentric approach addressing R&D, scaling, regulation, and funding challenges.

• **Ecosystem Linkage and Outreach** – It promotes collaboration between industry, academia, and government, complementing initiatives like BioE3 for inclusive sectoral growth and nationwide impact.

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