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History, Art and Culture

Asia's First UNESCO Chair

Symbiosis University in Pune has launched Asia's first UNESCO Chair focused on gender inclusion and skill development for women.

• **Historic Milestone -** This is the first initiative in Asia to link UNESCO's global goals with practical job training for underprivileged girls.
• **Future-Ready Training -** The program has already trained 10,000 girls in high-tech fields like robotics, semiconductors, automation, and defense technology.
• **Proven Success -** Every student trained under this model received a job offer, proving the effectiveness of linking education directly to industry needs.
• **The project aims** - To close the gender gap in technical sectors where women are often underrepresented.
• **Global Partnership -** As a UNESCO partner, the university serves as an international hub for research and innovation in inclusive education.
• **Vision for Growth -** The initiative supports "women-led development," preparing a skilled workforce for fast-growing "sunrise industries" that drive the modern economy.

The Spirit of Thrissur Pooram

Despite recent safety concerns, thousands gathered at the Vadakkunnathan Temple to celebrate Thrissur Pooram, Kerala's most iconic temple festival.

• **Mother of All Poorams -** Created in 1796 by Maharaja Sakthan Thampuran, this grand event is over 200 years old and unites ten different temples.
• **Grand Processions -** The festival features more than 50 elephants decorated with gold ornaments, carrying idols through the city to the beat of traditional drums.
• **Kudamattam Display -** A visual highlight is the "Kudamattam," where rival temple teams compete to quickly exchange beautiful, colorful silk umbrellas atop the elephants.
• **Mesmerizing Music -** The air is filled with "Ilanjithara Melam," a powerful performance by hundreds of musicians playing traditional percussion and wind instruments.
• **Sacred Rituals -** Deities perform the "Panchapradakshinam," circling the ancient Shiva temple in a holy ritual that draws massive crowds of devotees.
• **2026 Celebration -** This year, festivities were scaled back following a tragic fireworks unit explosion. While rituals continued, the famous midnight fireworks show was cancelled out of respect.

Geography

The Bering Strait Dam

Scientists are exploring a massive dam project in the Bering Strait to help stabilize the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), a crucial global current.

• **The Goal -** By blocking water flow between the Arctic and Pacific, the dam aims to regulate ocean heat and fight climate change.

• **Where It Is -** The Bering Strait connects Asia and North America, linking the Arctic Ocean to the Pacific's Bering Sea.

• **Project Structure -** The proposed 80 km dam would connect Russia to Alaska using the Big and Little Diomede Islands as anchors.

• **Historic Land Bridge -** Thousands of years ago, this area was a land bridge called Beringia, allowing humans and animals to migrate between continents.

• **Major Risks -** Building here would be difficult due to the remote location and lack of roads. It could also devastate marine migrations.

• **Environmental Impact -** Altering water salinity and currents might harm ecosystems, making this geoengineering project highly controversial despite its potential climate benefits.

Polity & Governance

Sikkim's 50th Statehood Anniversary

India's PM recently joined the closing ceremony in Gangtok to celebrate 50 years of Sikkim as an Indian state.

• **Celebration -** Starting in May 2025, these events honor Sikkim's 1975 integration into India, marking its journey from a kingdom to a sustainable development leader.

• **Founded in** - 1642 under the Namgyal dynasty, Sikkim later became a British protectorate in 1861 to serve as a buffer zone.

• **Indian Protectorate -** After 1947, a 1950 treaty gave India control over Sikkim's defense and foreign affairs while the state kept internal soul autonomy.

• **The Path to Democracy -** Public protests in the 1970s led to a 1975 referendum. Nearly 97.5% of voters chose to join India and end the monarchy.

• **Becoming a State -** On May 16, 1975, the 36th Amendment officially made Sikkim India's 22nd state.

• **Why It Matters -** The milestone celebrates Sikkim's successful shift to democracy and its vital role in India's cultural and green initiatives.

Economy

RBI Launches Mission SAKSHAM

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has started a massive training program to modernize and strengthen Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs).

• **What is SAKSHAM -** The name means "capable." This mission aims to make community banks more professional, efficient, and ready for future financial challenges.

• **The Scale -** This nationwide project will train nearly 140,000 people using both in-person classes and digital learning modules.

• **Who is Participating -** Training targets everyone from board members and senior managers to IT staff and compliance officers within the cooperative sector.

• **Key Goals -** The RBI wants to improve bank governance, risk management, and digital standards while keeping their local, member-owned focus.

• **Local Accessibility -** To ensure everyone learns effectively, training materials will be provided in various regional languages across different Indian states.

• **A Stronger Future -** By partnering with national federations, the RBI is building a more resilient banking system that supports long-term financial stability.

Environment

Cyborg Botany

Cyborg botany is a new field that blends living plants with electronic parts, turning nature into a biological circuit board.

• **The Hybrid System -** By merging biology with engineering, scientists create "cybernetic organisms" that use natural plant processes to power artificial functions.

• **Living Wires -** Researchers use conductive polymers like PEDOT to act as wires inside plant tissue. These carry electrical signals from cells to external devices.

• **Advanced Sensors -** Tiny electronic transistors are embedded into cell walls. These act as biosensors, detecting internal chemical changes in real-time.

• **Fighting Plant Stress -** The system monitors "abiotic stress" like droughts and "biotic stress" like pests, which are often invisible to the naked eye.

• **Early Warnings -** These sensors can alert farmers to diseases or water shortages weeks before physical symptoms appear, allowing for much faster intervention.

• **Agricultural Impact -** This technology helps farmers save resources by applying water or nutrients only when needed, boosting food security and crop health.

The Hidden History of Issyk-Kul

Underwater archaeologists recently discovered a 700-year-old lost city beneath the waves of Lake Issyk-Kul, revealing an ancient civilization hidden for centuries.

• **Where It Is -** Located in Kyrgyzstan’s Tian Shan mountains, this massive lake sits at a high altitude of 1,600 meters, making it the world’s second-largest mountain lake.

• **A Unique Basin -** Formed 25 million years ago, Issyk-Kul is an endorheic lake. This means no rivers flow out of it, trapping its blue, salty water within.

• **The "Hot Lake" -** The name means "hot lake" because it never freezes. Its extreme depth, salt content, and underground warm springs keep the water liquid even in freezing winters.

• **Deep and Massive -** It is the seventh deepest lake on Earth, reaching 668 meters. It is also the second-largest saline lake globally, trailing only the Caspian Sea.

• **Diverse Nature -** The surrounding area is unique, featuring everything from warm subtropical plants to icy tundra landscapes in a very small geographical space.

• **Global Protection -** Recognized as a site of international importance, it has been on the Ramsar list since 1976 to protect its vital wetlands and wildlife.

• Nilgiri Tahr Survey

• Tamil Nadu has started its third synchronized survey to count and protect the Nilgiri Tahr, a rare mountain goat.

• **Where They Live -** Found only in the Western Ghats of India, these animals live in high-altitude grasslands and stunted "shola" forests.

• **Unique Features -** Known locally as 'Varayaadu', they are stocky goats with curved horns. Adult males are larger and darker than females.

• **Locations -** They live across a 400 km stretch in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Eravikulam National Park holds the largest population.

• **Conservation Status -** The species is listed as "Endangered." It receives the highest legal protection under India’s Wildlife Protection Act.

• **Major Threats -** The Tahr faces dangers from habitat loss, competition with livestock, and the expansion of commercial plantations.

• **Survival Importance -** As the only mountain ungulate in Southern India, protecting them is vital for maintaining the region's unique mountain ecosystem.

Security

Exercise 'Pragati' Begins

The Indian Army is launching a new multilateral military exercise called 'Pragati' in Umroi, Meghalaya.

• **The Meaning -** 'Pragati' stands for Partnership of Regional Armies for Growth and Transformation in the Indian Ocean.
• **Who is Involved -** The Indian Army is hosting military delegations from 11 friendly nations to train together.
• **Primary Goals -** The exercise aims to improve teamwork, build mutual trust, and strengthen defense ties between regional forces.
• **Special Location -** Drills are held at a specialized training hub designed for joint tactical planning and maneuvers.
• **Regional Focus -** This inaugural event highlights India's "neighborhood-first" policy, focusing on security within the Indian Ocean Region.
• **Global Impact -** By leading this 12-nation group, India promotes collective security and stability in a vital maritime corridor.

Science

Dopamine

Researchers found that dopamine issues in the brain's memory center directly cause trouble with forming new memories.

• **The Body's Messenger -** Dopamine is a chemical messenger that sends signals between nerve cells and throughout your body to control behavior and movement.
• **The Reward System -** Often called the "pleasure chemical," it is released when you expect a reward, helping you stay focused and work toward goals.
• **Brain Functions -** Beyond pleasure, it regulates learning, mood, sleep, and attention. It even helps humans plan for the future.
• **Vital Health Roles -** Balanced levels are critical. Abnormal dopamine is linked to conditions like Parkinson's disease, ADHD, and restless legs syndrome.
• **Dopamine as a Hormone -** Outside the brain, it acts as a hormone to manage heart rate, kidney function, and insulin levels.
• **Universal Presence -** This essential chemical isn't just for humans; it is found in almost all animals, from insects to mammals.

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering