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Current Affairs - 25 November 2024

CBSE MERIT SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME FOR SINGLE GIRL CHILD



- It aims to provide scholarships to meritorious female students who are the only children of their parents and have passed the CBSE Class X examination with 60% or more marks and are continuing their further school education in Class XI and Class XII.
- The scheme is aimed at recognizing the efforts of parents in promoting education among girls and to providing encouragement to meritorious students.
- It provides financial aid every month to the selected students, so they can continue their higher education.

Eligibility Criteria:

- The applicant should be the single girl child of her parents and be an Indian national.
- To be eligible for the scholarship scheme, all single girl students must have 60 percent or more marks in the CBSE Class 10 Examination.
- They should be studying Class 11 and 12 in CBSE-affiliated schools with tuition fees not exceeding Rs 1,500 per month.
- NRI applicants of the Board are also eligible for the award. The tuition fee for the NRIs should be a maximum of Rs. 6,000/- per month.
- Students with gross parental/family income up to Rs. 8 lakh per annum are eligible for scholarships under the scheme.

Scholarship amount:

- Students who are selected for the scholarship will receive an amount of ₹500/- per month.
- The amount is payable for a maximum period of two years. Payment will be made through ECS/NEFT.
- Renewal options: Existing scholarship holders can renew their scholarship for Class XII if they secured 50% or more marks in their Class XI exams.



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KANHIRAPOIL MEGALITHIC SITE



- It is located in the state of Kerala.

Major findings

- 24 pairs of prehistoric footprints and a human figure have been found carved into rock on private property.
- The carvings, made with iron tools, include footprints varying in size from six to ten inches, suggesting representations of both children and adults.
- At the end of the footprints, a human figure has been intricately etched, accompanied by four circular pits around it.
- These carvings bear similarities to prehistoric rock art found in Avalakki Pera in Udupi district in Karnataka.

Key facts about Megaliths

- These were constructed either as burial sites or commemorative (non-sepulchral) memorials.
 - The former are sites with actual burial remains, such as dolmenoid cists (box-shaped stone burial chambers), cairn circles (stone circles with defined peripheries) and capstones (distinctive mushroom-shaped burial chambers found mainly in Kerala).
 - Non-sepulchral megaliths include memorial sites such as menhirs.
 - In India, archaeologists trace the majority of the megaliths to the Iron Age (1500 BC to 500 BC).
 - In India, these are concentrated in the states of Maharashtra (mainly in Vidarbha), Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
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WHAT IS METHANOL POISONING?



• It is a serious and potentially life-threatening condition that arises when methanol, a type of alcohol widely used in industrial applications, is ingested, inhaled, or absorbed through the skin.

- Methanol's toxic effects emerge after the body metabolises it into harmful compounds like formaldehyde and formic acid.
- These byproducts can wreak havoc on the nervous system, optic nerves and other vital organs.

How does alcohol cause methanol poisoning?

- It typically occurs when counterfeit or illicit alcohol, often containing methanol, is consumed instead of ethanol, the type of alcohol found in beverages.
- In the body, methanol is metabolised by the liver enzyme alcohol dehydrogenase into formaldehyde and then into formic acid, both of which are toxic.
- Methanol poisoning can indeed be fatal if left untreated. The toxic byproducts lead to complications.
- Metabolic Acidosis: A dangerous drop in blood pH levels.
- Optic Nerve Damage: Potentially resulting in partial or complete blindness.
- Central Nervous System Depression: Causing confusion, coma or death.

Prevention

- Avoid Non-Drinkable Alcohol: Never consume industrial alcohol or alcoholic beverages from unverified sources, as they may contain methanol.
- Regulated Alcohol Sales: Governments should ensure the production and sale of alcohol adhere to safety standards to eliminate harmful levels of methanol.
- Public Awareness: Educate communities about the dangers of consuming illicit or counterfeit alcohol.



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- Methanol Screening: Regular testing of alcoholic products in unregulated markets can help identify and prevent contaminated beverages from reaching consumers.
- Seek Prompt Medical Care: If methanol poisoning is suspected, immediate medical attention can be life-saving.

NON-BANKING FINANCIAL COMPANIES IN INDIA

- Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) are financial institutions that provide banking-like services but do not hold a banking license. They are governed by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** under the provisions of the RBI Act, 1934.
- NBFCs play a crucial role in the Indian financial system by offering credit to sectors underserved by traditional banks.

Features of NBFCs:

- **Non-Deposit Holding:** Unlike banks, most NBFCs do not accept demand deposits (e.g., savings or current accounts).
- **Credit Focus:** They provide loans, hire-purchase financing, leasing, and other financial products.
- **Specialized Services:** NBFCs cater to niche markets such as microfinance, vehicle loans, housing finance, and infrastructure development.
- **Diverse Clients:** NBFCs often serve rural and semi-urban areas, SMEs, and individuals who lack formal credit access.

Types of NBFCs:

- **Asset Finance Companies (AFCs):** Provide financing for physical assets like vehicles and machinery.
- **Loan Companies:** Focus on loans and advances to individuals or businesses.
- **Investment Companies:** Deal with securities investments.
- **Infrastructure Finance Companies (IFCs):** Offer credit for infrastructure projects.
- **Microfinance Institutions (MFIs):** Provide small loans to low-income groups.
- **Housing Finance Companies (HFCs):** Specialize in housing loans.

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Role of NBFCs:

- **Financial Inclusion:** NBFCs bridge the credit gap in rural and unbanked areas.
 - **Economic Growth:** They finance key sectors like MSMEs, transport, and infrastructure.
 - **Risk Diversification:** By targeting niche markets, NBFCs diversify risks in the financial system.
 - **Job Creation:** NBFC activities stimulate economic growth, leading to employment generation.
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US JUSTICE DEPARTMENT WANTS GOOGLE TO SELL CHROME

The U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) and multiple states proposed measures to address Google's alleged monopolistic practices, including the possible sale of its Chrome web browser. This comes after a landmark ruling in August, where Judge Amit Mehta of the US District Court of Columbia said, "Google is a monopolist, and it has acted as one to maintain its monopoly."

Antitrust Case Against Google in US Courts

- **Background**
 - The antitrust case against Google is a significant legal battle centered around the company's alleged monopolistic practices, primarily in the search and advertising markets.
 - The case involves multiple lawsuits filed by the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) and several state attorneys general.
 - These lawsuits have accused Google of using anti-competitive tactics to maintain and expand its dominance in online search, advertising, and related markets.
- **Multiple antitrust lawsuits**
 - **Search market**
 - The US DOJ filed a lawsuit against Google in 2020, alleging that the company violated antitrust laws by creating barriers to entry and maintaining a monopoly in the search market.



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- In August 2024, a federal judge ruled that Google violated the Sherman Act by maintaining a monopoly in the search and advertising markets.
- The DOJ is considering breaking up Google's businesses, including Chrome, Play, or Android.
- **Digital advertising**
 - The DOJ is also suing Google for anti-competitive practices in the digital advertising industry.
 - The DOJ is seeking to determine if Google is using its power to edge out competitors.
- **App store**
 - In December 2023, Epic Games won an antitrust case against Google in the app store, alleging that Google maintained monopoly power in the Android app distribution market.

US Antitrust Actions Against Big Tech

- **Background**
 - In recent years, U.S. agencies have accused major tech companies like Amazon, Meta, and Google of monopolistic practices that stifle market competition.
- **Google's Search Monopoly Case**
 - The DoJ and several states sued Google in 2020 for maintaining dominance by paying companies like Apple and Samsung billions to prioritize Google for search queries on devices.
- **Landmark Verdict**
 - In August 2023, Judge Amit Mehta ruled Google as a monopolist and directed the DoJ and states to propose corrective measures, potentially including breaking up Google's business units, to address its search monopoly.
- **Potential Impact of Proposed Measures on Google**



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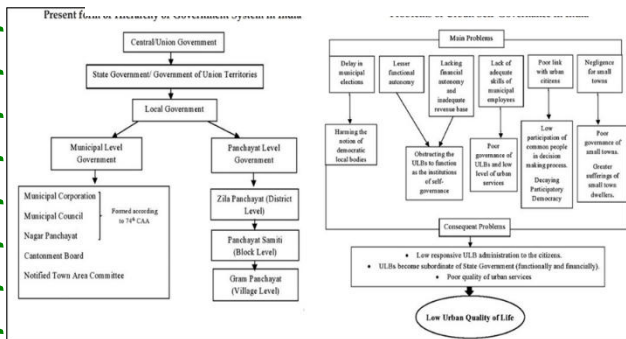
- If implemented, the proposed measures could significantly disrupt Google's business, which is projected to generate over \$300 billion in revenue this year.
- Google, which holds around 90% of the online search market and 95% of the smartphone search market, could face 10 years of regulation and oversight by the federal court that ruled the company monopolistic.

REVITALISING MUNICIPAL FINANCES IN URBAN INDIA

Why in News?

Urban India, contributing nearly 60% to the nation's economic output, relies heavily on municipal corporations (MCs) for essential services like road maintenance and sanitation.

However, the **financial constraints** faced by the MCs **impede their capacity to deliver efficiently.**



Problems of Urban Self-Governance in India:

Key Challenges in Municipal Financing:

- **Limited revenue generation:**

- With revenue receipts constituting a mere 0.6% of GDP in 2023-24, MCs **rely significantly on state and central**

government transfers, curtailing their financial autonomy and developmental capabilities.

- The low revenue receipts of MCs are mainly because of **poor property tax revenues**, a critical revenue source, which remains low at 0.12% of GDP.
- **Revenue concentration:** Over 58% of municipal revenue is generated by the top 10 municipal corporations, highlighting fiscal disparity among urban areas.
- **Inefficiency in tax and fee collection:**
 - Ineffective property tax systems fail to reflect actual property valuations.
 - User fees for essential services like water supply and sanitation are inadequately adjusted, **affecting cost recovery.**

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Strategies for Strengthening Urban Local Bodies (ULBs):

- **Enhancing participatory governance:** Encourage direct citizen involvement in policy-making through forums like resident welfare associations, NGOs, and citizen forums.
- **Building capacity of municipal personnel:** Implement comprehensive training programs that include administrative and management skills. Continuously calibrate training outcomes using measurable indicators.
- **Legislative and institutional reforms:** Strong institutional arrangements are essential to empower ULBs as self-governing entities. Therefore, states must enact legislative reforms for fiscal and functional devolution.

Strategic Recommendations for Financial Improvement in MCs:

- **Enhancing own-source revenues:**
 - Implement **GIS-based property tax mapping** for better compliance. Use **valuation-linked property tax formulae** to improve revenue elasticity.
 - **Periodic adjustments for cost recovery.** Better service delivery to increase public willingness to pay.
 - **Boosting non-tax revenues:**
 - Increase income from services like waste management and urban transport through public-private partnerships (**PPPs**).
 - Enhance revenue from investments and user charges via **technology integration and monitoring systems**.
 - **Reducing dependence on transfers:** Clearly defined, **rule-based frameworks** for state and central transfers to ensure predictable compensation. **Adjust transfer amounts for inflation and economic growth potential.**
 - **Strengthening fiscal management:** Digitalisation and automation to streamline expenditures and free resources for capital projects. Pooling resources across MCs to fund large-scale infrastructure projects.
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NARSAPUR LACE CRAFT



The famous Narasapuram lace craft has bagged the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

- Narsapur is situated on the bank of Godavari River in the state of Andhra Pradesh.
- It is believed that the women of the farming community of this region started creating highly attractive artefacts from colourful lace, about 150 years ago.
- The craft has survived the Indian famine (1899) and the Great Depression (1929). By the early 1900s, above 2,000 women were involved in the craft in the Godavari region.
- The lace work is done using thin threads and these are again woven with thin crochet needles of varying sizes.
- Narsapur's famed hand-made crochet industry produces doilies, pillow covers, cushion covers, bed spreads, table-runners and tablecloths etc.
- Many of these products are exported to markets in the USA, UK and France.

What is a GI Tag?

- Geographical Indications (GI tags) are signs used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess distinctive qualities, reputation or characteristics attributable to that place of origin.
 - GI tags serve as intellectual property rights that identify a product's unique geographical source, providing legal protection and preventing unauthorised use.
 - In India, the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, of 1999 governs the registration and protection of GIs.
 - These tags play a crucial role in promoting and safeguarding the unique products and traditional knowledge of various regions.
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