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MAHASAGAR INITIATIVE



Recently, the third edition of the high-level virtual interaction MAHASAGAR was conducted by the Indian Navy.

- Maritime Heads for Active Security and Growth for All in the Region (MAHASAGAR) -- which means vast ocean in Hindi, is the Indian Navy's flagship outreach for high-level virtual interaction among the leaders.
 - The initiative, started by the Indian Navy, is conducted bi-annually and has garnered wide acceptance among the participating nations ever since its inception in 2023.
 - Participating countries: Indian Ocean Region littorals viz., Bangladesh, Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and Tanzania.
 - The interaction's theme of this edition was 'Training Cooperation to Mitigate Common Maritime Security Challenges in IOR', which highlights the present and necessary imperatives for Training Corporation towards mitigation of common maritime challenges in the Indian Ocean Region.
 - During the current edition, the principals candidly dwelled on the imperatives of quality training and opportunities for training collaboration between IOR littorals towards developing requisite capacities and skilled manpower to tackle Common Maritime Security Challenges in the IOR.
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TITANIUM



Recently, the Indian Rare Earths Limited and Ust-Kamenogorsk Titanium and Magnesium Plant JSC, (UKTMP JSC) Kazakhstan have signed an agreement to establish Indo-Kazakh joint venture company (JVC): IREUK Titanium

Limited for the production of Ti Slag in India.



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- It is the fourth most abundant element in the Earth's crust.
- It often occurs in ore deposits in the form of chemical compounds with iron or oxygen.
- It is present in meteorites and the sun.

Ores of Titanium: The two prime commercial minerals are Ilmenite (FeTiO_3) and Rutile (TiO_2).

Properties

- It is very corrosion-resistant and generally not affected by air, water, acids or bases.
- It has a low density, good strength, is easily fabricated, and has excellent corrosion resistance.
- The metal burns in the air and is the only element that burns in nitrogen.

Applications:

- It is useful in aircraft, spacecraft, ships, and other high-stress applications.
 - It also is used in prosthetic devices, because it does not react with fleshy tissue and bone.
 - Titanium oxide spectra are used by astronomers to identify cool red dwarf stars.
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MAHA KUMBH MELA



The Mahakumbh Mela is scheduled to take place in the holy city of Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26.

- It is a sacred pilgrimage that is celebrated four times over the course of 12 years.
- Kumbh Mela, the world's largest peaceful gathering, draws millions of pilgrims who bathe in sacred rivers seeking to purify themselves from sins and attain spiritual liberation.
- This sacred event rotates between four locations in India-Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik, and Prayagraj- each situated by a holy river, from the Ganges to the Shipra, the Godavari, and the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Prayagraj.



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Historical background

- The roots of the Kumbh Mela stretch back thousands of years, finding early references during the Maurya and Gupta periods (4th century BCE to 6th century CE).
- During the medieval period, the Kumbh Mela received patronage from various royal dynasties, including the Chola and Vijayanagar empires in the south, and the Delhi Sultanate and Mughals in the north.
- Even Mughal emperors such as Akbar are noted to have participated in the celebrations, illustrating a spirit of religious tolerance.
- British administrators observed and documented the festival, intrigued by its massive scale and the diverse congregations it drew. Figures such as British colonial administrator James Prinsep chronicled the Kumbh Mela in the 19th century, detailing its ritualistic practices, the vast congregations, and the socio-religious dynamics at play.
- Post-independence, the Maha Kumbh Mela gained even greater significance, symbolizing national unity and India's rich cultural heritage. Recognized by UNESCO in 2017 as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, the Kumbh Mela stands as a testament to the survival and evolution of ancient traditions in an era of modernization.

PM-VIDYALAXMI SCHEME



- It is a Central Sector Scheme.
 - Under this scheme any student who gets admission to a quality Higher Education Institution (QHEI) will be eligible to get collateral-free, guarantor-free loans from banks and financial institutions to cover the full amount of tuition fees and other expenses related to the course.

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- The scheme will be administered through a simple, transparent and student-friendly system that will be inter-operable and entirely digital.
- It will apply to the top quality higher educational institutions of the nation, as determined by the NIRF rankings - including all HEIs, government and private, that are ranked within the top 100 in NIRF in overall, category-specific and domain-specific rankings; state government HEIs ranked in 101-200 in NIRF and all central government governed institutions.

Loan provision

- For loan amounts up to ₹ 7.5 lakhs, the student will also be eligible for a credit guarantee of 75% of outstanding default. This will give support to banks in making education loans available to students under the scheme.
 - In addition to the above, for students having an annual family income of up to ₹ 8 lakhs, and not eligible for benefits under any other government scholarship or interest subvention schemes, 3 percent interest subvention for loans up to ₹ 10 lakhs will also be provided during the moratorium period.
 - An outlay of ₹ 3,600 Crore has been made during 2024-25 to 2030-31.
 - The Department of Higher Education will have a unified portal “PM-Vidyalaxmi” on which students will be able to apply for the education loan as well as interest subvention, through a simplified application process to be used by all banks.
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INDIA-US TIES UNDER TRUMP AS US PRESIDENT

As Donald Trump has gained the votes required to become the U.S.'s 47th President, we will try to analyse India-US ties during Trump 1.0 and what Trump 2.0 means for India.

Trump's Return and its Impact on India-US Relations:

- With Donald Trump set to re-enter the White House, **India anticipates both benefits and challenges** in the upcoming phase of bilateral relations.

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- Building on Trump's earlier tenure, New Delhi expects **continuity in defence, energy cooperation, and strategic ties**, alongside possible **friction in trade and sensitive diplomatic interactions**.
- **Opportunities for stronger India-US ties under Trump:**
 - **Reviving trade and defence deals:**
 - Trump has expressed interest in resuming the Free Trade Agreement talks.
 - Expanded U.S. military hardware sales could further bolster India's defence capabilities.
 - **Focus on energy independence:** As seen with the earlier MoU for the Driftwood LNG plant, potentially reviving investments and boosting India's energy security.
 - **Less pressure on domestic issues:** Compared to the Biden administration, issues like press freedoms, treatment of NGOs, and human rights may see less scrutiny under Trump, easing diplomatic tensions.
 - **Stance on regional issues:**
 - Trump's stance of cancelling the majority of U.S. funding to **Pakistan** during his last term is likely to continue.

Also, crackdown on **Khalistani** organisations is anticipated during Trump 2.0.
- **Potential areas of friction:**
 - **Trump's tariff policy:** Trump's focus on reducing trade tariffs might reignite disputes over India's tariffs, straining the economic partnership.
 - **Diplomatic mis-steps:** For instance, Trump's previous remarks on Kashmir mediation and India's conflict with China were met with strong denials from New Delhi.
 - **Unpredictable sanctions on oil imports:**
 - Under Trump, India faced pressure to cut off oil imports from **Iran and Venezuela**, risking its energy stability.
 - Similar policies could emerge, impacting India's energy policy and regional diplomacy.

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Conclusion:

- Trump's first term reshaped Indo-US relations and India anticipates both opportunities and obstacles with Trump's return to the presidency.
 - **Shifting regional dynamics will require careful navigation to maintain a balanced and productive partnership.**
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ANTI-TERROR CONFERENCE 2024

The two-day anti-terror conference, organized by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), will address several critical issues, including:

- **Terrorist Group Formation and Criminal Linkages**
 - A focus on preventing the formation of new terrorist groups through a "ruthless" approach, as directed by Union Home Minister.
 - Discussion of organized crime's role in terror funding, especially in northeast India.
 - The rise of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT) in southern states and transnational crime syndicates' links to terrorism.
- **Case Studies and Emerging Threats**
 - Detailed discussion of the **Rameshwaram cafe blast**, including the arrest of the accused through coordination between West Bengal police and the NIA.
 - Examination of new methods for arms and drug trafficking across borders using drones.
- **Counter-Terrorism Coordination and Strategy**
 - Importance of a uniform anti-terror structure, with better coordination between counter-terrorism squads and local police at the district level.
 - Strategy to tackle terror financing and dismantle the terror ecosystem in areas affected by Left Wing Extremism.

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- **Technological Challenges in Terrorism**
 - The role of social media and encrypted applications in terrorism, including the use of VPNs, virtual numbers, and encrypted apps by terror groups.
 - The impact of narcotics trafficking on national security.
- **National Databases for Counter-Terrorism**
 - Use of the NIA's national-level terror database, which includes data on fingerprint records, terrorist cases, narco-offenders, and human trafficking offenders, to aid in investigations.

Organised Crime and Terror Funding

- Organized crime refers to criminal enterprises that are systematically structured to engage in illegal activities for profit.
- These criminal groups often operate with a high level of coordination, secrecy, and persistence, using violence and corruption to exert control over their operations.
- In India, organized crime includes activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, extortion, and illegal mining.

Symbiosis between Organized Crime and Terrorism

- Organized crime has developed a symbiotic relationship with terrorist groups. This collaboration allows both entities to thrive.
 - Terrorist organizations, such as those active in the region, often rely on the financial support provided by organized criminal gangs.
 - These groups, in turn, benefit from the protection and resources offered by the terrorist organizations.
 - This partnership helps sustain their operations, often in remote areas where the government has limited reach.
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SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY



- Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) is a genetic disease affecting the central nervous system, peripheral nervous system and voluntary muscle movement (skeletal muscle).

- It involves the loss of nerve cells called motor neurons in the spinal cord and is classified as a motor neuron disease.

Symptoms:

- Spinal muscle atrophy symptoms vary and may be mild or disabling, but involve a weakness of the muscles that control movement. Involuntary muscles are not affected, such as those in the heart, blood vessels and digestive tract.

Treatment: There isn't a cure for SMA. Treatment for SMA mainly seeks to manage symptoms and prevent complications. Symptom management therapies may include:

- Physical therapy, which can help improve posture, prevent joint immobility and slow muscle weakness.
 - Occupational therapy, which can improve your ability to perform daily tasks.
 - Assistive devices, like orthopaedic braces, crutches, walkers and wheelchairs.
 - Therapy for speech and swallowing difficulties.
 - A feeding tube if swallowing is too difficult and/or dangerous.
 - Assisted ventilation for breathing issues.
 - Medications for SMA: Between 2016 and 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved treatments that can significantly improve the course of SMA. They include:
 - Disease-modifying therapy
 - Gene replacement therapy
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RANTHAMBORE TIGER RESERVE



Recently, Rajasthan's Chief Wildlife Warden has constituted a three-member committee after an internal report said that as many as 25 tigers were missing at the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve.

- It lies on the junction of the Aravalis and Vindhyan ranges in Eastern Rajasthan.
- It is one of the largest tiger reserves in northern India.
- It was once a royal hunting ground for the Maharajas of Jaipur.
- The scenery changes significantly from the gentle and steep slopes of the Vindhyas to the sharp and conical hills of the Aravali Valley.
- The Rivers Chambal in the south and the Banas River in the north bound tiger reserve.
- The reserve is dotted with steep rocky hills, and the dominant architecture of Ranthambore Fort (built in the 10th era and a UNESCO World Heritage Site) adds to its landscape.
- A major environmental feature is the 'Great Boundary Fault' where the Vindhyas plateau meets the Aravali range.

Vegetation: Tropical dry deciduous and tropical thorn type.

Flora: Pure sands of Dhok tree (*Anogeissus pendula*) interspersed with grasslands at the plateaus; meadows in valleys and luxuriant foliage around the canals make the jungle.

Fauna: Tiger, Leopard, wild boar, sloth bear, striped hyena, rhesus macaque etc are found here.
