

SELA TUNNEL

On the eve of the fourth anniversary of the border conflict with China in eastern Ladakh, Prime Minister is all set to inaugurate the long-awaited Sela Tunnel



About Sela Tunnel:

- It is the **longest bi-lane road tunnel in the world**, at an altitude above 13,000 feet. It is located in the **West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh**.
- It will connect Tezpur, in Assam, with Tawang, in Arunachal Pradesh. It is **built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO)** under **Project Vartak**, and the tunnel's construction commenced on April 1, 2019.

Need:

- Located near the Sela Pass, this **all-weather tunnel** was needed because the **Balipara-Charidwar-Tawang Road** remains closed for a long time every year, courtesy of snowfall and landslides caused by heavy rainfall.
- The tunnel is significant as it will **provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang**, bordering China. It will cut down the travel time between Tezpur and Tawang by over an hour.
- It will also provide for faster deployment of weapons, soldiers, and equipment to forward areas near the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**.

Key Facts about Sela Pass:

- It is a high-altitude mountain pass located in the **Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh**.
- **Elevation:** 4,170 meters above sea level.
- **Open throughout the year**, Sela Pass is managed by the BRO.

PRIMARY AGRICULTURAL CREDIT SOCIETIES

Why in the News?

- Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah recently said that the Centre has decided to ensure formation of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) in every village by 2027.
- Addressing an event, he said the **Centre has introduced 20 new activities to be associated with PACS**, enabling them to generate profits.
- The computerization of PACS has opened up many possibilities for their development, he said.

What is a Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS)?

- PACS are village level **cooperative credit societies** that serve as the last link in a three-tier cooperative credit structure headed by the **State Cooperative Banks (SCB)** at the state level.
 - Credit from the SCBs is transferred to the **District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs)**, that operate at the district level.
 - The DCCBs work with PACS, which deal directly with farmers.
- Since these are cooperative bodies, individual farmers are members of the PACS, and office-bearers are elected from within them. A village can have multiple PACS.
- PACSs **provide short-term, and medium-term agricultural loans to the farmers for the various agricultural and farming activities.**

Number of PACS in India:

- The first PACS was formed in **1904**.
- Currently, there are more than 1,00,000 PACS in the country with a huge member base of more than 13 crore farmers.
- However, **only 63,000 of them are functional.**

Why Are PACS Attractive?

- The attraction of the PACS lies in the **last mile connectivity they offer.**
- For farmers, timely access to capital is necessary at the start of their agricultural activities.
- PACS have the capacity to **extend credit with minimal paperwork within a short time.**
 - With other scheduled commercial banks, farmers have often complained of tedious paperwork and red tape.

Challenges Faced by PACS:

- Since PACS are cooperative bodies, **political compulsions often trump financial discipline**, and the recovery of loans is hit.
 - Many committees have pointed out various issues plaguing the cooperative system such as;
 - Lack of active participation by the members,
 - Lack of professionalism,
 - Absence of corporate governance,
 - Bureaucratisation,
 - Ageing and unenthusiastic employees.
-

WHAT ARE FIREFLIES?

Researchers recently identified the key transcription factors that regulate the development of light organs and bioluminescence in the firefly.



- Fireflies, also known as **lightning bugs, are beetles.** They get the names “firefly” and “lightning bug” because of the flashes of light they naturally produce. This phenomenon is called **bioluminescence.**
- There are about **2,000 firefly species.** They are found in **temperate and tropical regions** on every continent **except Antarctica.**

Features:

- They are **soft-bodied beetles** that range from 5 to 25 mm (up to 1 inch) in length.
- Fireflies **use their light**, called bioluminescence, to light up the ends of their abdomen **to communicate** with their fellow fireflies. (Animals that produce light are called luminescent).
- They have **special organs** under their abdomens that take in oxygen. Inside special cells, they combine the oxygen with a substance called luciferin to make light with almost no heat.
- Each firefly species has its own pattern of light flashing and **males use this pattern to attract females** of the same species.
- **Bioluminescence in fireflies is nearly 100 percent efficient**, meaning little energy is wasted to produce their light.
- From egg to adulthood, fireflies can **live up to a year**. Most fireflies are **nocturnal**, although some species are diurnal. They mostly **feast on plant pollen and nectar**.

WHAT IS UNICEF?

Over 230 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), according to a newly released UNICEF report.



- The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**, originally known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, was created by the United Nations General Assembly on December 11, **1946**, to provide **emergency food and healthcare to children and mothers** in countries that had been devastated by World War II.
- In **1950**, UNICEF's mandate was **extended to address the long-term needs of children and women in developing countries everywhere**.

- In 1953, it became a permanent part of the UN System, and the words "international" and "emergency" were dropped from the organization's name, though it retained the original acronym, "UNICEF".
 - UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories and in the world's toughest places to reach the children and young people in greatest need.
 - UNICEF supports immunization programs for **childhood diseases** and programs to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS; it also provides **funding for health services, educational facilities**, and other welfare services.
 - Since 1996, UNICEF programs have been **guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**, which affirms the right of all children to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health.
 - **Funding:** UNICEF's activities are financed by **both government and private contributions**.
 - **Headquarters:** New York, United States.
 - It was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Peace in 1965**.
-

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day was recently celebrated globally.



About International Women's Day:

- It is an annual event celebrated on **March 8** to raise awareness about a number of issues, including violence and abuse against women, women's reproductive rights, gender equality and **women's achievements in various fields**.
- **March also marks the start of Women's History Month** around the world. It begins on March 1 and ends on March 31.
- The campaign theme for International Women's Day 2024 is "**Invest in women: Accelerating Progress**".

History:

- **First celebrated in the United States** on February 28, 1909, in New York City, the event was organised on the suggestion of activist Theresa Malkiel.
- In August 1910, German delegates of International Socialist Women's Conference, held in Copenhagen, Denmark, drew inspiration from American activists, and proposed to establish an annual 'Women's Day'.
- On March 19 of the **following year**, more than a **million people in Austria-Hungary, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland celebrated** Women's Day.
- Since then, International Women's Day has evolved into a worldwide day of acknowledgment and festivity.
- As the women's liberation movement swept around the world in the 1970s, the **United Nations designated 1975 International Women's Year** and celebrated the holiday for the first time. Two years later, **in 1977, it designated March 8 International Women's Day.**

IRIS AI ROBOT

A groundbreaking development in education has emerged from Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram, where a school has introduced India's first AI teacher robot, Iris.



IRIS AI Robot is powered by **Robotics and Generative AI technologies**. It has a dedicated Intel processor and coprocessor for seamless performance.

- Its **Android App interface** allows users to control and interact with the robot, ensuring a personalized learning experience.
- It is not just a passive presence in the classroom but a **dynamic voice assistant and interactive learning tool**. It acts as an **AI voice-controlled assistant**, responding to user queries, providing explanations, and delivering educational content.
- It engages users in interactive learning experiences through personalized content generation, quizzes and interactive activities.

- Equipped with a 4-wheel chassis, Iris can move freely within its environment, facilitating interaction with users and navigating through learning spaces.
 - Its hands, featuring 5 DoF each, enable Iris to manipulate objects, perform demonstrations and engage in hands-on learning activities.
 - The robot can teach subjects from **nursery to Class 12**. The robot currently speaks **three languages - English, Hindi and Malayalam**.
 - It is created by **the Maker Labs**.
-

PRITZKER ARCHITECTURE PRIZE

Japanese architect **Riken Yamamoto** was declared winner of the **2024 Pritzker Architecture Prize**.



About Pritzker Architecture Prize:

- It is the highest international award in the field, which is sometimes referred to as the “Architecture Nobel” and “the profession’s highest honor.” The prize has been awarded every year since its **founding in 1979**.
- It is awarded to a living **architect/s for significant achievement**. It was established by the Pritzker family of Chicago through their Hyatt Foundation.
- **Objective:** To honour a living architect whose built work demonstrates talent, vision and commitment, who has produced consistent and significant contributions to humanity and the built environment through the art of architecture”.
- The laureate **receives \$100,000** and also a **bronze medallion**.

Works of Riken Yamamoto

- Yamamoto is the ninth laureate from Japan. His famous works are the Hiroshima Nishi Fire Station (2000) has a transparent façade and glass walls and floors that allow passersby to look inside.
- The Koyasu Elementary School (2018), spacious, open terraces not only make learning the arts — dance, music, painting but also encourage students to interact.

LINKING AADHAAR WITH VOTER ID

Why in news?

- The Election Commission of India has asked the Union government to change the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and voter registration forms.
- It wants to remove the requirement for voters to **give reasons** if they choose not to link their Aadhaar number with their voter ID card.

Representation of People Act

- The Parliament passed two laws to provide a legal framework for the conduct of elections:
 - The Representation of the People Act, 1950,
 - The Representation of the People Act, 1951
- The 1950 Act provides for
 - allocation of seats and delimitation of constituencies for elections,
 - qualifications of voters,
 - preparation of electoral rolls.
- The 1951 Act regulates the actual conduct of elections and by-elections. It provides for the conduct of elections and offences and disputes related to elections.
 - It also deals with the registration of political parties, the qualifications and disqualifications for membership of the Houses.

Previous attempt to link voter card and Aadhaar number

- The EC had in 2015 taken up linking of voter card and Aadhaar number as part of its National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme.
 - The aim of the drive was to remove bogus or duplicate entries from the electoral roll.
 - Around 32 crore Aadhaar numbers were seeded at that time.
 - However, this initiative was halted by the Supreme Court in August 2015 via its famous protection of privacy judgement in the Puttaswamy case.

- In 2019, the EC again proposed linking Aadhaar with the electoral roll, asking the government to amend the election laws to enable collecting of Aadhaar details
 - The government then brought the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which was passed by Parliament in December 2021, to enable the linking of Aadhaar and Voter IDs.
 - Under the Act, the EC re-started the collection of Aadhaar numbers from July 2022 on a **voluntary basis**.
 - A **new Form, Form 6B, was introduced** for existing electors to give their Aadhaar number and the form for new registrations was amended as well.
- It was again challenged in Supreme Court.
 - The Form 6B gave only two options — either provide the Aadhaar number or say one does not possess an Aadhaar.
 - This would force those who did not want to give their Aadhaar number into making a false declaration.
 - The petition sought directions to the Election Commission and the government to make amendments so those who don't want to link their Aadhaar and Voter ID have that option.
 - As a result, EC told the court in September that it would make the clarificatory changes required.

Broad reasons in support of the linkage

- Improving the accuracy of the electoral rolls, by weeding out duplication and misrepresentation in electoral rolls;
- Assistance in the ECI's plans to implement advanced mechanisms such as electronic and internet-based voting;
- Giving 'remote' voting rights to domestic migrants; and
- To facilitate proxy voting which may require Aadhaar backing for voter verification.