ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

CABINET NOD FOR 10,000 ELECTRIC BUSES IN 169 CITIES

GIST: PM e-bus Sewa scheme has an estimated budget of ₹57,613 crore, of which the Centre will provide ₹20,000 crore; 181 cities without organised bus services will get green mobility infrastructure

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a scheme to add 10,000 e-buses to city bus services across the country, and to shore up urban infrastructure under green mobility initiatives with a focus on cities having no organised bus services.

In 169 cities, 10,000 e-buses will be deployed using the public-private partnership (PPP) model; in 181 other cities, infrastructure will be upgraded under the green urban mobility initiatives.

Two segments

First segment, depot infrastructure will also be developed or upgraded to support the new e-buses, including the creation of behind-the-meter power infrastructure such as substations.

Second segment, the initiatives will focus on bus priority, infrastructure, multimodal interchange facilities, automated fare collection systems, and charging infrastructure.

Reaching the Unreached:

The scheme will cover cities of Three lakh and above population as per census 2011 including all the Capital cities of Union Territories, North Eastern Region and Hill States. Under this scheme priority will be given to cities having no organized bus service.

Direct Employment Generation:

The scheme will generate 45,000 to 55,000 direct jobs through deployment of around 10,000 buses in city bus operation.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

SC UNVEILS HANDBOOK TO ELIMINATE GENDER STEREOTYPES FROM LAW

Context : The Honourable Supreme Court has given a 30-page handbook suggesting alternatives to gender-unjust terms.

Aims to free the judiciary and the legal community from the mechanical application of gender stereotypical language in judgments, orders, and court pleadings.

Career woman, fallen woman, faithful or obedient wife, eve-teasing, hermaphrodite: the Supreme Court has identified these words and many others as gender-unjust terms that are often heard in Indian courts. In a new handbook released on Wednesday, the top court offered the correct terms that should be used instead: woman, woman, wife, street sexual harassment, intersex.

Stereotype promoting language (INCORRECT)	Alternative language (PREFERRED)
Adulteress	Woman who has engaged in sexual relations outside of marriage
Affair	Relationship outside of marriage
Bastard	Non-marital child or, a child whose parents were not married
Biological sex / biological male / biological female	Sex assigned at birth
Born a girl / boy	Assigned female / male at birth
Career woman	Woman
Carnal intercourse	Sexual intercourse
Chaste woman	Woman
Child prostitute	Child who has been trafficked
Concubine / keep	Woman with whom a man has had romantic or sexual relations outside of marriage
Dutiful wife / Faithful wife / Good wife / Obedient wife	Wife
Easy virtue (e.g., a woman of easy virtue)	Woman
Effeminate (when used pejoratively)	Accurately describe the characteristic using a gender neutral term (e.g., confident or responsible)
Eve teasing	Street sexual harassment
Faggot	Accurately describe the individual's sexual orientation (e.g., homosexual or bisexual)

Equitable society

Announcing its publication in open court, Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said he hoped the handbook would mark a significant milestone in the journey towards a more just and equitable society. In his foreword, the Chief Justice underscored the oft-forgotten fact that "predetermined stereotypes in judicial decision-making contravenes the duty of judges to decide each case on its merits, independently and impartially".

"Intelligence plus character-that is the goal of true education. — Martin Luther King Jr.

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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

TEXTILE EXPORTS CONTINUE TO DECLINE

Exports of textiles and apparel declined 1.9 % and 17.4 %, respectively, in July compared with the same period the year earlier. The cumulative export of textiles and apparel for the April-July 2023 period slid 13.7 % year-on-year.

The cotton yarn, fabrics, and made-ups registered 6.62 % growth last month ($1,009 million) from July 2022 ($946.48 million). The shipment of man-made yarn, fabrics, made-ups, jute products, carpets, and apparel items declined. Textile products worth a total of $1,663 million were shipped last month compared with $1,695 million in July 2022. Apparel exports were $1,141 million last month versus $1,381 million in July 2022.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

MERGING OF VARIOUS ENVI-RONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

CONTEXT: MoEFCC retreats from merging key agencies like FSI, NTCA, WCCB, and CZA under its Ministry after initial plans.

BACKGROUND: Proposed merger of key environmental agencies in COVID-19 lockdown criticized as it could weaken their autonomy and effectiveness. NTCA concerned about loss of independence and interference. MoEFCC cited "ease of doing business" as justification.

HIGHLIGHTS: MoEFCC drops merger plan for key environmental bodies after wildlife conservationist's petition, citing technical difficulties. NTCA, FSI, WCCB, CZA serve different roles: Tiger Reserves, forest data, enforcement, zoos.

The notification suggests reorganizing regional offices without clear criteria, drawing criticism. Government's merger plan for Project Tiger and Project Elephant raises concerns about NTCA autonomy and lack of legal backing for Project Elephant. Decision-making process in MoEFCC's wildlife division questioned.

Experts emphasize need for dedicated and decentralized efforts to bolster environmental monitoring. Regional offices' roles expanded for approvals and safeguards. Adequate funding and infrastructure essential. Maintaining balance between regulatory outcomes and environmental protection while upholding social justice recommended.

GEOGRAPHY

A NECESSARY BRAKE

GIST: Even though it was Elnino year , the rain in north so heavy that it creates massive damages to humans

Disaster struck

- July saw record rainfall in many parts of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Uttarakhand and the rare sight of the Yamuna nearly spilling into the Red Fort in Delhi.
- At least 150 were killed and losses worth ₹10,000 crore were reported by Himachal Pradesh alone.
- Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand that have claimed at least 60 lives since Sunday. A series of landslides has crumbled buildings and blocked highways.

Western Disturbances

- The immediate explanation for the landslides is the unexpectedly copious rainfall that these States have received due to Western Disturbances (WD).
- These are temperate storms that originate in the Mediterranean region and normally bring winter rainfall to north India.
- The combination of WD and monsoon can be dismissed as 'freak' weather, climate scientists have been warning of the increasing probability of such high-risk events.

Adverse impact of Infra Development

- The ongoing Char Dham road building project has led to large-scale altering of the mountains with significant chunks carved away, rendering them vulnerable to upheaval. As recent fears of land subsidence in Joshimath, Uttarakhand demonstrated, ill-thought construction and haphazard building practices have magnified the risk to residents who live in these regions.

Impact of Climate Change

- Scientists say the rainfall is hard to forecast and varies considerably, but climate change is making the monsoon stronger and more erratic, increasing the frequency and ferocity of the floods.
- Human-induced climate change is already intensifying hydrological extremes in India, and the recent floods in parts of northern India are yet another example of how extreme events can be more disastrous in hilly regions than in plains.

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SOCIAL JUSTICE

HOUSING FOR ALL

CONTEXT: PM Modi's new urban housing scheme acknowledges housing shortage, reflects slow progress of PMAY-U, aims to reduce beneficiary burden.

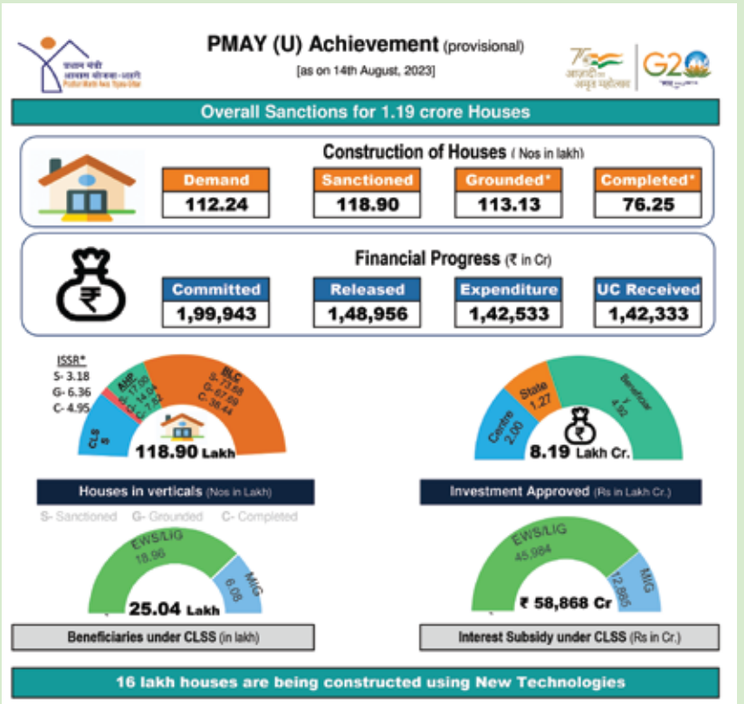
DEVELOPMENT SO FAR: In 8 years of PMAY-U, only 2/3 of sanctioned houses completed. Central assistance ₹1.49 lakh crore, beneficiaries bear 60% costs. Proposed scheme aims to reduce beneficiary share to 40% due to low incomes. State attempts to aid loans face lender reluctance due to income proof.

HIGHLIGHTS: The parliamentary committee's recommendations for PMAY-U implementation include flexible assistance based on local factors, addressing housing quality, and involving various stakeholders like states, local bodies, and financial institutions. High land costs, regulations, and certification affect housing success. Central government should facilitate discussions for an improved scheme. The goal is to transform 'housing for all' from a slogan to a tangible reality in the foreseeable future.

PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA-URBAN (PMAY-U)

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) is an Indian government initiative under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, aiming to provide affordable housing to urban residents, fostering sustainable urban development.

- Housing for All: PMAY-U aims to provide affordable housing to urban poor, ensuring a roof over every family's head.
- Subsidized Interest Rates: Offers reduced home loan interest rates, making homeownership more accessible and affordable.
- Economically Weaker Sections: Focuses on uplifting EWS and LIG groups by providing financial assistance for housing construction or enhancement.



- Slum Rehabilitation: Aims to improve living conditions of slum dwellers through slum redevelopment projects, creating modern urban spaces.
- Women Empowerment: Priority to female homeowners and co-owners, empowering women's rights and fostering gender equality in property ownership.

Excerpts from: "The Hindu - Addressing housing shortage in urban areas requires urgent, concerted efforts"

SECIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DIGITAL PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION ACT, 2023

CONTEXT: The rejected argument for state dominance over citizens' privacy resurfaces as India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (Data Act), criticized for undermining transparency, accountability, and prioritizing data collection over protection, contrary to Supreme Court's privacy affirmation.

BACKGROUND: The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023, passed in Rajya Sabha via voice vote, retains controversial provisions including exemptions and grants censorship authority to the Centre. India's second attempt at privacy legislation after previous versions were considered and abandoned.

MAKING INDIANS STAND IN LINE

- Data Act's Motive: The Data Act reflects a drive for total state control, suppressing constitutional objectives, evident in digital public goods and data exploitation.
- Misplaced Techno-Solutionism: PM Modi's faith in technology as a panacea led to digital deployments, like Aarogya Setu and Co-Win, sacrificing privacy and efficiency.
- Erosion of Privacy: State's disregard for data protection is inherent in digital programs like "Smart Cities Mission" and mass surveillance projects, compromising citizens' safety.
- Mass Surveillance: Projects like "social media communications hub" and "Facial Recognition System" exhibit direct mass surveillance measures with legal exceptions under Data Act.
- Impact on Citizens: Data Act imposes duties, fines, and risks on marginalized groups, prioritizing state control over individual rights and safety.

THINKING BY THE GOVERNMENT: The Data Act is seen as a flawed social contract, creating trust issues due to vagueness and partisan appeal. Recent legislation, including Criminal Procedure Act and Births and Deaths Act, contributes to authoritarian control and extensive data collection. The Act's connection to the private sector and financial objectives raises concerns about economic concentration and centralized state power, akin to China's model, impacting economic freedom.

Salient Features of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 – For More details

https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1947264

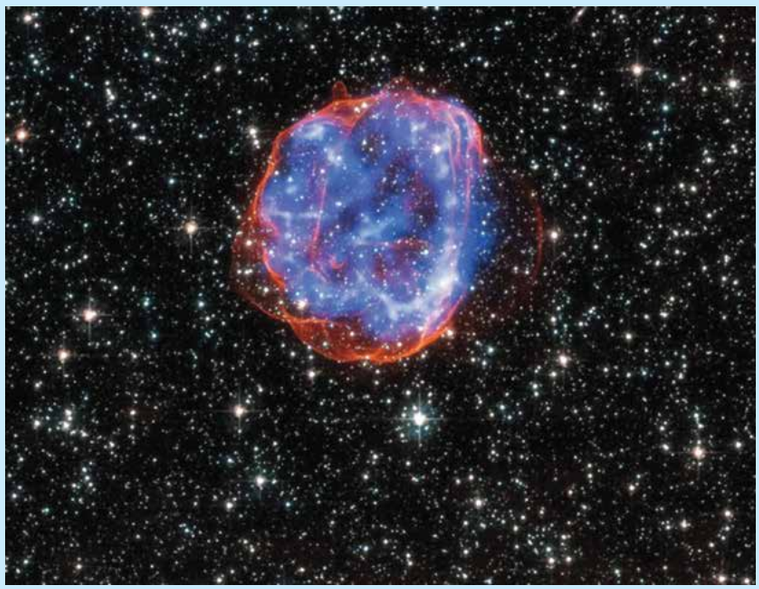
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ZARTH – APP TO CATCH A SUPERNOVA

CONTEXT: ZARTH app, inspired by Pokemon Go, combines augmented reality and serious science, developed by IIT Mandi and Gandhinagar students.

BACKGROUND: ZARTH app, enables users to contribute to science while gaming, utilizing open-source Sky Map. Named 'ZTF Augmented Reality Transient Hunter,' it merges play and serious research. ZARTH app, inspired by ZTF's real-time data, lets users catch transient celestial events like supernovae, flaring stars. Users score by catching and ranking transients based on rarity and importance, enhancing astronomy data and aiding machine learning algorithms. App promotes citizen science and astronomy outreach.

ZARTH IN CLASSROOMS: ZARTH app's potential for STEM education and citizen science acknowledged by Dr. Mahabal. Encourages global implementation of ZTF-like surveys for transients. Android app with plans for iPhone release. ZARTH app sets higher standards for rare astronomical event detection through human-AI collaboration, aiding exciting discoveries.



SUPERNOVA

A "supernova" is a colossal stellar explosion, releasing an extraordinary burst of energy and light. It marks the dramatic end of a massive star's life cycle, scattering elements into space.

- Element Formation: These explosions create and disperse heavy elements, enriching the universe with elements essential for life.
- Brightness Surpasses Stars: Temporarily outshines entire galaxies, allowing scientists to study distant cosmic phenomena and measure cosmic distances.
- Types Differ: Divided into two main types, Type I (no hydrogen) and Type II (hydrogen-rich), each providing unique insights into stellar evolution.
- Neutron Star or Black Hole: Depending on the remnant left after the explosion, a supernova can result in the formation of a neutron star or a black hole.

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