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ITLF – AMIT SHAH TO MEET

CONTEXT: Union Home Minister Amit Shah will hold talks with representatives of the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) in New Delhi facilitated by Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga.

The Kuki People's Alliance (KPA) withdrew support to the BJP-led government in the State. The withdrawal of outside support of Kuki People's Alliance (KPA) with 2 MLAs is unlikely to impact the BJP, which has 32 seats.

More than 20,000 tribal people have taken refuge in neighbouring Mizoram since the ethnic violence erupted in Manipur on May 3. The Chin-Kuki-Zo-Hmar tribes in Mizoram and Manipur share ethnic ties.

The Manipur Police have recovered approximately 1,057 arms and 14,201 ammunitions have been recovered in the valley districts and 138 arms and 121 ammunitions have been recovered in the hill districts looted from police armouries since May 3. More than 4,000 weapons and lakhs of rounds of ammunition are said to have been looted from police armouries.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

REVAMP OF 508 AMRIT BHARAT STATIONS

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the redevelopment of 508 railway stations across the country at a cost of over ₹ 24,470 Cr.

The redevelopment of 508 railway stations across the country is part of the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, under which 1,300 prime railway stations in the country would be redeveloped. The 508 stations are spread across 27 States and Union Territories — 55 each in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (at a cost of ₹4,000 crore), 49 in Bihar, 44 in Maharashtra (₹1,500 crore), 37 in West Bengal, 34 in Madhya Pradesh (₹1,000 crore), 32 in Assam, 25 in Odisha, 22 in Punjab, 21 each in Gujarat and Telangana, 20 in Jharkhand, 18 each in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, 15 in Haryana, 13 in Karnataka and others.

Amrit Bharat station: Develop Railway stations with better seating on platforms, upgraded waiting rooms, free Wi-Fi and other conveniences as "city centres", with proper integration of both sides of a city driven by the vision of the overall urban development of a city, centred on a railway station. The redevelopment inspired by local culture, heritage, and architecture will provide modern passenger amenities along with ensuring well-designed traffic circulation, inter-modal integration, and signage for passengers. The Jaipur railway stations would have glimpses of the Hawa Mahal and Amer Fort in Rajasthan, Jammu Tawi railway station's design would be inspired by the Raghunath Mandir.

INTERNAL SECURITY

DETAILS OF UNACCOUNTED-FOR WEALTH HIGHLY CLASSIFIED

CONTEXT: The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), a research institute under the Ministry of Finance refused to reveal any information on unaccounted-for income and wealth inside and outside India citing adverse impact of the economic interest of the country.

Tallapaneni Krishna, an RTI activist filed a request before Chief Public Information Officer in 2019 seeking information on unaccounted-for income and wealth inside and outside India. The Chief Public Information Officer of National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) denied a copy of the "Estimation of unaccounted income and wealth inside and outside the country" cited information as exempted under Section 8(1)(a) of the RTI Act.

The First Appellate Authority upheld the decision of the Chief Public Information Officer. On a further appeal to the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC), the representatives argued that the contents in the Memorandum of Understanding entered into between the NIPFP and the CBDT were reflected in the report (sought by the petitioner) and were highly confidential in nature. They also informed that the disclosure of information sought might have affected the economic interest of the country at large and accordingly, exemption under the provisions of Section 8 (1) (a) of the Right to Information (RTI) Act was invoked by them.

INTERNAL SECURITY

FATF TO REVISE RECOMMENDATIONS TO SAFEGUARD NPOS

CONTEXT: During its October plenary session, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) will take up proposals to revise the FATF Standards' Recommendation 8 on non-profits, and its interpretive note, and also adopt an updated best practices paper on this issue.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is looking to revise its current recommendations aimed at safeguarding non-profit organisations (NPO) from being abused for terrorist financing, to ensure that they do not hurt these organisations' legitimate activities instead. In June 2022, the plenary had agreed to consider amending the recommendation and established a project team for this purpose. Subsequently, a draft amendment was prepared. The revisions seek to address the problem of over-application of preventive measures to the NPO sector in some countries, recognising the negative impact this can have on legitimate NPO activities.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

MALDIVES SC BARS YAMEEN FROM CONTESTING

CONTEXT: The Maldives Supreme Court barred the jailed former President Abdulla Yameen from contesting the island nation's presidential election in September, citing his conviction by a criminal court.

Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) nominated Abdulla Yameen as its candidate for the island nation's presidential race scheduled on September 9, in which incumbent President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih is seeking a second term. In December 2022, Mr. Yameen was sentenced to a 11-year jail sentence after he was pronounced guilty of corruption and money-laundering charges.

Mr. Yameen, 64, had relaunched his political campaign on an anti-India platform, spearheading the 'India Out' campaign across the Indian Ocean archipelago. A majority from the joint senate of his PPM and its coalition partner People's National Congress (PNC) voted against election boycott call made by Yameen.

Earlier this year, President Solih's ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) split after members loyal to Parliamentary Speaker and former President Mohamed Nasheed broke away, to form a new party named 'The Democrats'. Mr. Nasheed announced his decision to quit the MDP in June, fuelling speculation that he might run against his former colleague. But, young parliamentarian Ilyas Labeed submitted his nomination as the candidate of The Democrats.



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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

INDIA'S SUGAR CRISIS

India is the world's largest consumer of sugar surpassed Brazil as the world's top sugar producer in 2021-2022 with a record production of 35.9 MTPA. India exported a record of 11 MT exported in 2021-2022. Brazil, Australia, and Guatemala filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) against India for violating international trade rules by offering excessive export subsidies and domestic support to farmers to outcompete other countries in the global sugar market. The WTO ruled against India and India also lost its appeal.

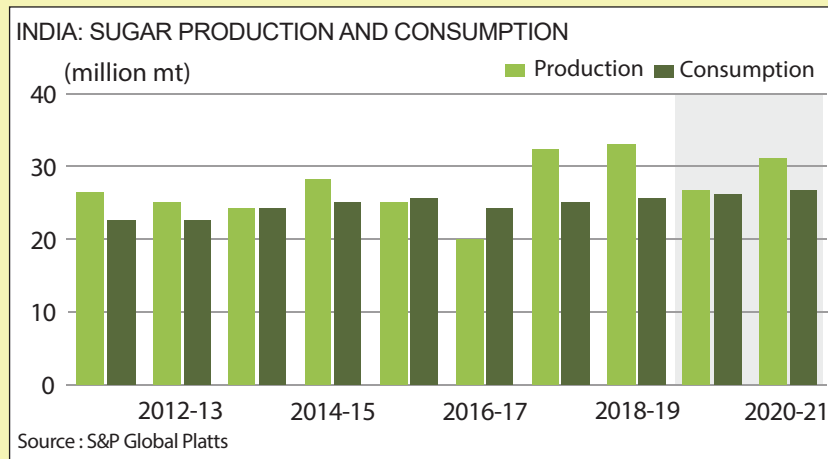


FIGURE: Column chart representation of the domestic production and consumption of sugarcane in India in MMTA.

The Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) Scheme mandate sugar mills to pay a minimum price to sugarcane farmers and heavy subsidies offered by the State Governments incentivise sugarcane farmers resulting in significant rise in production of sugar.

Over-cultivation of sugarcane has caused a sugar surplus and high exports, impacting groundwater negatively. Sugarcane requires 3,000 mm of rainfall, but top-growing States get 1,000-1,200 mm, relying heavily on groundwater from confined aquifers, a limited resource. 100 kg of sugar needs two lakh litres of groundwater for irrigation. Environmentally responsible sugarcane cultivation practices that prioritise groundwater, such as drip irrigation, to tackle the issue in the long run.

The Government launched the Ethanol Blending Programme in 2003 with a modest goal of achieving a blending rate of 5 %, but the target set for 2025 is 20 %. The use of ethanol-blended petrol (EBP) significantly reduces harmful emissions, such as carbon monoxide and various hydrocarbons, from vehicles. India's EBP program reduced crude-oil imports, sugar exports, and greenhouse-gas emissions. The government reduced the Goods and Services Tax on ethanol from 18% to 5% in 2021. In the same year, of the 39.4 MT of total sugar produced, about 35 MT were diverted to produce ethanol, while India achieved a blending rate of 10% months ahead of the target.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

G-20 NEGOTIATORS FACE CLIMATE CHANGE HURDLE

GIST: Differences over a common language on climate change hold up talks on Leaders' Declaration; reference to Ukraine conflict is the main reason no G-20 ministerial meeting has issued a joint communique so far; negotiators are burning the midnight oil to resolve issues ahead of summit in Sept.

- After months of wrangling over language on Ukraine, G-20 negotiators are now worried about reaching a consensus over climate change issues ahead of the leaders' summit in September.
- The concerns have grown after two G-20 ministerial meetings on energy transitions, environment and climate in July ended without joint language on a number of key issues, including emissions targets, cutting down on fossil fuels, and climate finance. The differences carried into virtual Sherpa negotiations for a "zero-draft" or first draft of the Leaders' Declaration last week, said a number of sources.
- According to the statement issued by the Indian Chair at the end of the ECSWG, differences between members were recorded on global emissions targets of peaking by 2025, and a 60% reduction in emissions by 2035 (compared to 2019), which, developing countries, including India, did not commit to.
- Another contentious issue was the lack of funding promised by developed countries, including the U.S. and Australia, which had committed to providing \$100 billion per year, beginning 2020. As the Chairman's Summary recorded, G-20 members didn't even agree on what could be discussed.
- "There exist divergent views among G-20 members on the

mandate of the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group to discuss energy issues in the light of the existence of a separate Energy Transition Working Group. There also exist divergent views on the issues of energy transitions and how to reflect them in this document," said paragraph 64 of the Chairman's Summary and Outcome document released in Chennai.

- In addition, climate experts and activist groups are particularly disappointed that the meetings had "diluted ambition" that could derail negotiations ahead of the UN COP28 Climate Change conference to be held in Dubai in November as well.
- "We expected a strong, coherent signal, but we did not get that," Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, said after the meeting in Chennai.
- The 4th Sherpa meeting is now due in Manesar on the outskirts of Delhi on September 3-6, followed by a meeting of the Finance and Central Bank Deputies on September 5-6. The two groups that represent the "twin tracks" of the G-20 process will then hold joint meetings from September 6 onwards to try and forge a joint statement.
- While differences over the reference to the Ukraine conflict have been the main reason no G-20 ministerial meeting thus far has issued a joint communique, the problems over common language on climate change will compound the challenge before negotiators, as India tries to avoid hosting the first G-20 Presidency that fails to issue a "Leaders' Declaration".

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

5% OF BIRDS IN INDIA ARE ENDEMIC, SAYS ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA PUBLICATION

GIST : The highest number of endemic species have been recorded in the Western Ghats, with 28 bird species.

CONTEXT : The publication, 75 Endemic Birds of India, was recently released on the 108th foundation day of the ZSI by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) points out that about 5% of the birds found in the country are endemic and not reported in other parts of the world.

- India is home to 1,353 bird species, which represents approximately 12.4% of the global bird diversity. Of these, 78 (5%) are endemic to the country.
- Amitava Majumder, one of the authors of the publication, said three of the 78 species have not been recorded in the past few decades.
- They are the Manipur bush quail (*Perdica manipurensis*), listed as "endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species with its last recorded sighting in 1907; the Himalayan quail (*Ophrysia superciliosa*), listed as "critically endangered" with its last recorded sighting in 1876; and the Jerdon's courser (*Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*), listed as

"critically endangered" with its last confirmed sighting in 2009.

- ZSI Director Dhriti Banerjee pointed out that the publication highlighted the importance of endemic bird species in the country.
- "Since endemic species are restrictive in nature, it is important that their habitats are conserved so that they don't dwindle out. Ornithologists are aware of the facts related to endemic birds, but our effort has been so that common people, particularly students, are aware of these endemic species found in restricted spaces.
- The ZSI Director, who is also one of the authors of the publication, pointed out that 75 Endemic Birds of India came at a time when the country was celebrating 75 years of Independence with the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations.
- Some of the species recorded in the country's bio-geographic hotspot are the Malabar grey hornbill (*Ocyrocus griseus*); Malabar parakeet (*Psittacula columboides*); Ashambu laughingthrush (*Montecincla meridionalis*); and the white-bellied sholakili (*Sholicola albiventris*).

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

M.P. STRATEGY FOR TIGERS CAN HELP CHEETAHS TOO

- The Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh is currently host to African cheetahs, with six of the 20 already dead since the first animals were translocated in September 2022.
- Many of the practices being applied to the cheetah project, of keeping them in enclosures till they adapt, draw from experiences with the tiger and other ungulates.
- To form a viable cheetah population, we need to follow similar principles of active prey management



- Balancing the population of predators and prey was a key factor enabling a 50% surge in Madhya Pradesh's tiger population, helping the State snag the top spot in the 2022 census of the big cat, according to tiger experts.
- A similar strategy could help form a viable cheetah population, even as the project translocating African cheetahs to the Kuno National Park in the State has taken a beating, with six of the animals dying.
- An update to the 2022 tiger census publicised last week reported a count of 3,682 nationally, with Madhya Pradesh, for the second time in the past three censuses, reporting the highest number at 785. The State has reported a 50% rise in the number of tigers since the previous census, a jump

exceeded only by Bihar, which has a much fewer 54 tigers. While many factors contribute to a State's tiger population, experts told The Hindu that the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department's strategy of actively moving tigers and their prey within the State, to balance predator and prey population, was a key indicator of success.

- Moving tigers and prey
- "The Forest Department of Madhya Pradesh has demonstrated remarkable commitment and success in active management practices. They have effectively restored low-density areas through incentivised voluntary village relocations, prey supplementation, reintroduction of species such as Barasingha (swamp deer) to new habitats like Satpuda and Bandhavgarh, and the reintroduction of Gaur to Bandhavgarh and Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserves.
- Prey species such as chital (spotted deer) have been successfully supplemented in Satpuda, Sanjay Tiger Reserves, Nauradehi, Kuno, and Gandhisagar Wildlife Sanctuaries through translocation from high-density areas such as Pench and Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserves," notes the 2022 tiger census report, prepared by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun and the National Tiger Conservation Authority.
- India has 53 tiger reserves, with Madhya Pradesh accounting for six of them. While the State has the most tigers, the most populous reserves are the Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand, followed by the Bandipur and Nagarhole reserves in Karnataka.
- While nature usually corrects imbalances between predator and prey populations, the process can take a long time. Given the myriad pressures on the wild habitat — such as diminishing protected areas in forests and human-wildlife conflict — active prey management was necessary, said Y.V. Jhala, a former dean of WII who is closely involved with lion, tiger and cheetah conservation projects.

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