

In an attempt towards environmental sustainability and reducing overmining of sand, Coal India Limited (CIL) has started a facility in West Bengal to produce manufactured sand, the first such initiative in the State. The manufactured sand is being produced, an estimated 3 lakh cubic metre per year, in the Kajora area of Eastern Coalfields Ltd (ECL), a subsidiary of CIL, from overburden material of open cast mines. Set up through private participation, the M sand facility has started operations since September 2022.

The Speaker, whose leadership of the House is mandated under Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, is elected at the beginning of a new Congress by most of the lawmakers in the chamber. A record making 15 voting rounds were conducted before Kevin McCarthy succeeded in acquiring the Speaker's gavel. The odds are high that Mr. McCarthy will subtly seek to promote the core values of 'Trumpism'.

He may also seek to investigate the of repeated false claim of the "stolen" 2020 election and ballot voting and the decision making behind COVID-19 related school closures and vaccine mandates. Mr. McCarthy's influence as Speaker will be constrained by the tenuousness of his grip on House conservative caucuses. While the Republicans managed to flip the House from Democratic control in the midterm election, they only hold 222 seats in the 435-member chamber which is a very narrow margin.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) announced the draft regulations for 'Setting up and Operation of Campuses of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions in India.' The proposal allows a foreign university among the top 500 global rankings or a foreign educational institution of repute in its home jurisdiction to apply to the UGC to set up a campus in India. The objective in promoting India as a global education destination is to primarily save loss of foreign exchange.

Residents of Joshimath, the Himalayan pilgrim town that appears to be sinking, are blaming major power and road infrastructure projects for their plight and are demanding that the government resettle and give new homes for all those who have lost their properties in the town. Members of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) are set to visit the town on Monday to assess the situation and advise the Uttarakhand government.

Chinese health experts are warning that fake versions of Indian generic medicines are flooding the black market in China as a record surge of COVID-19 cases fuels demand for antivirals, particularly Pfizer's Paxlovid and Indian generic versions. With Paxlovid in short supply and highly regulated in government clinics, sales of Indian generic versions have ballooned through Chinese e-commerce platforms in the wake of the ending of the "zero COVID" policy on December 7.

60 number of families evacuated from Joshimath which has been declared a landslide subsidence zone. There are a total of 4,500 buildings in Joshimath and 610 of these have developed huge cracks, according to Garhwal Commissioner Sushil Kumar. "Land subsidence has been going on slowly in Joshimath but it has increased over the past week," he added.

SC DIRECTS THE COMMITTEE TO BUILD A FRAMEWORK TO ENSURE ROAD SAFETY

- Context:** A Bench led by the Chief Justice of India (D.Y. Chandrachud) agreed that urgent steps need to be taken to enforce Section 136A of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.
- Background:** Section 136A was introduced into the Motor Vehicles Act in 2019 to keep an electronic eye on errant drivers. In this respect, the SC directed its committee (led by Justice A.M. Sapre) to meet with the Road Transport Secretary and frame State-specific guidelines. In its reply, the Centre stated that it has already framed Rules under sub-section (2) of Section 136A, which provides for rules for the electronic monitoring of road safety including speed cameras, CCTV cameras, speed guns, etc.
- Data on Road accidents in India:** According to NCRB data, over 1.5 lakh people died from road accidents in 2021 and nearly 90% of deaths on the road were due to speeding, overtaking and dangerous driving. According to the World Bank's data from 2019, India ranked first among the top 20 countries for road accidents.
- The WB's report on women's mobility in India:** For women, the fear of sexual assault is another cause for concern when they traverse public spaces after dark. 84% of women's trips were estimated to be by public transport, and more women tend to walk to work compared to men.
- Steps taken by the Indian government:** The 2021 National Road Safety Board Rules require the formation of technical working groups to address issues such as crash investigation and forensics.

REMOTE WORK HELPED IN SAVING JOBS DURING COVID: ILO REPORT

- A report titled 'Working Time and Work-Life Balance Around the World' has been recently released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This first-ever ILO global report on working time focuses on the actual number of hours of work, working-time arrangements, and their implications for work-life balance.
- Highlights of the report:** Nature of work during the COVID-19 crisis: Flexible working hours. Short-time work and work-sharing measures. Increased working hours in the healthcare or pharmaceutical industries. Teleworking contributed to the pandemic response by reducing social contact. Great resignation phenomenon: It is an ongoing economic trend (beginning in early 2021) in which employees (most likely in hospitality, healthcare, and education sectors) have voluntarily resigned from their jobs in mass, in the wake of the pandemic. The most cited reasons are work-life imbalances, wage stagnation amid the rising cost of living, limited opportunities for career advancement, hostile work environments, etc.
- Impact:** Inclusive short-time work schemes with the highest possible allowances – Enabled individuals as well as companies, enterprises, and industries to collectively reduce the hours or volume of work. Sustained purchasing power and created the possibility of cushioning the effects of economic crises. Laid the ground for a better and more healthy work-life balance. Teleworking helped in maintaining organisational operations and preserving jobs.
- Suggestions by the ILO:** ILO member countries need to prescribe policies necessary to remedy the weaknesses of working-time instruments that became apparent during the pandemic. Large-scale implementation of telework nearly everywhere in the world to change the nature of employment soon.

SAGOL KANGJEI

- Modern polo is said to have originated from Sagol Kangjei, a sport indigenous to Manipur, in which players ride horses, specifically the Manipur Ponies, which are referenced in records dating back to the 14th century.
- Marjing is considered the God of polo and features a pony as his carrier. The Lai-Haraoba festival of the state depicts the life and times of Khoriphaba, the polo-playing god of sports.
- The Manipur Pony is one of five recognised equine breeds of India and has a powerful cultural significance for Manipuri society. The Marjing Polo Complex has been developed to conserve the Manipur Pony.

RESERVE BANK OF INDIA PUTS ON HOLD NUE LICENSING

- RBI is said to have put on hold licensing of the New Umbrella Entity (NUE) network, a fintech institution planned as a rival to the National Payments

Rs. 62,682 crores, the total outstanding dues owed by electricity distribution companies (discoms) to power producers. The amount has almost halved when compared to the ₹1,21,030 crore in the year ago period. This reduction is due to steps like the implementation of late payment surcharge rules.

34 number of tigers lost by 'tiger state' Madhya Pradesh compared to just 15 in Karnataka, its nearest competitor in housing tigers in the country. Karnataka, home to 524 tigers is competing with MP (526) for the tag of India's 'tiger state'. A senior forest department official said it is a "mystery" as to why Madhya Pradesh has recorded higher tiger deaths.

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15 % by which the country's coal fired power generation increased year on year in December. Coal based power generation accounts for 76.59% of the total power generation in the country. The NTPC had earlier said that coal-based electricity generation is the backbone of power supply in the country.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA), in the chargesheet filed in connection with the Ludhiana court complex blast in December 2021, has identified a Pakistan based smuggler through whose network the improvised explosive device (IED) had allegedly been brought into the country.

Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will visit the U.S. to participate in the 13th India-U.S. Trade Policy Forum (TPF) from January 9 to 11. Mr. Goyal will meet Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo in Washington on January 11. He will also interact with USTR (U.S. Trade Representative) Ambassador Catherine Tai, said a press release.

Turkey, which has for months blocked NATO membership bids by Sweden and Finland, has made some demands that Sweden cannot accept, Sweden's Prime Minister said on Sunday. "Turkey has confirmed that we have done what we said we would do, but it also says that it wants things that we can't, that we don't want to, give it," Ulf Kristersson said during a security conference.

People taking the train on the Kalka-Shimla heritage line may soon get to travel in advanced vistadome narrow gauge coaches which will have glass roofs and large windows and offer a panoramic view of the scenic route.

Corporation of India (NPCI). Six groupings, which included Facebook, Google, Amazon, Flipkart and others, had applied for NUE licences, but none of them could meet the RBI's expectations in bringing a technology breakthrough.

- What is Retail Digital Payment System?** The retail payment system facilitates the transfer of funds from consumers to merchants in exchange for goods and services.
- What is NUE?** NUE is an entity (under the Companies Act 2013) that will manage and operate the new payment system in the retail sector such as ATMs, POS, UPI etc. It will also manage clearing and settlement systems that could be an alternative to the bank-promoted NPCI. It will be allowed to charge fees for transactions (unlike the existing NPCI). The RBI had in 2020 issued guidelines for corporates to create for-profit NUEs with an aim to foster competition and "de-risk" India's burgeoning digital payments ecosystem, where much of the settlement burden has fallen on the non-profit NPCI over recent years.
- What is NPCI?** NPCI was established by the RBI and the Indian Banks' Association in 2008 modelled on the non-profit payments and settlement entity run by the Swedish central bank that's owned and operated by banks. It has developed the country's key payment railroads, including UPI, the Immediate Payments System (IMPS), RuPay and the National Financial Switch (NFS). It's also credited with powering the Direct Benefit Transfer architecture that supports the government's Jan Dhan Yojana.

PROTEIN FOUND IN ZEBRAFISH CAN REGENERATE AGED DISCS IN HUMAN VERTEBRAE

- A protein found in the backbone of zebrafish that plays a positive role in disc maintenance and promotes regeneration in aged discs between vertebrae can have potential therapeutic implications to promote regeneration in degenerated human discs.
- Currently, only symptomatic treatments for disc degeneration are available, including pain relievers or anti-inflammatories. In severe cases, disc replacement or disc fusion surgery is performed.
- A study by Agharkar Research Institute (ARI), Pune, discovered that a protein called Cellular communication network factor 2a (Ccn2a) secreted from intervertebral disc cells induces disc regeneration in aged degenerated discs by promoting cell proliferation and cell survival by modulating the pathway called the FGFR1-SHH (Fibroblast growth factor receptor-Sonic Hedgehog) pathway.

SNAPDRAGON SATELLITE

- Qualcomm at CES 2023 has announced Snapdragon Satellite- a satellite-based two-way capable messaging solution for premium smartphones. The company has collaborated with Iridium and Garmin to introduce satellite connectivity for two-way texting in remote or no internet connectivity areas.
- Features:** According to a report, you can send only 160-character messages using Qualcomm's satellite connectivity feature. You can type your own messages and choose the recipient from your phone's contact book which is not possible with iPhone 14. Apple allows you to send limited responses to emergency services.

NEW DWARF BOA FOUND IN ECUADORAN AMAZON

- Scientists have discovered a new species of dwarf boa in the Ecuadoran Amazon and named it after an Indigenous activist.
- About dwarf boa:** Up to 20 centimetres (7.8 inches) long and with skin colouring like those of the boa constrictor — the previously unknown snake was named Tropicodphis cacuangoae.
- The name honours early 20th-century Indigenous rights activist Dolores Cacuango. The species is unusual for having a "vestigial pelvis" characteristic of primitive snakes.



*"Choice is binary;
Hard Work or Hard Luck"*

DR. KHAN
(KSG)