

KSG:NEWSPAPER CRUX

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NEWSPAPER HIGHLIGHT

Riding on a plantation wave that is sweeping Northeast India, the rubber nurseries in Kerala are getting the best out of their grow bags after a decadelong lull. A plan by the Rubber Board to develop rubber plantations in an area of two lakh hectares across the seven north eastern States in a span of five years starting from 2021-22 has unleashed pent up demand among the rubber nurseries in the State. Besides bringing in a dramatic turnaround in sales, this expanding programme of plantation has also ensured a longer business season in the coming years as nurseries play catchup. According to officials with the Rubber Board, a whopping 51 lakh rubber saplings, sourced from the nurseries across Kerala, will soon be making their way to plantations across the Northeast and West Bengal in special trains.

The free trade agreement between India and the UAE is likely to come into effect from May 1 this year, under which domestic exporters of as many as 6,090 goods from sectors such as textiles, agriculture, dry fruits, gem and jewellery would get duty free access to the UAE market, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed by India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in February which aims to boost bilateral trade to \$100 billion in the next five years from current \$60 billion. The two countries have agreed to set up a technical council on Investment, Trade Promotion and Facilitation, as part of the agreement signed.

The Supreme Court wants to fix fool proof parameters to determine if a person belongs to a Scheduled Tribe and is entitled to the benefits due to the community. The judiciary is no longer sure about an "affinity test" used to sift through anthropological and ethnological traits to link a person to a tribe. There is the likelihood that contact with other cultures, migration and modernisation would have erased the traditional characteristics of a tribe. A Bench of Justices Hemant Gupta and V. Ramasubramanian has considered it best to refer the question of fixing the parameters to a larger Bench. The Bench emphasised that the issue was a "matter of importance" when it came to issuance of caste certificates.

PM-CARES

- 1.The Supreme Court has refused to entertain an appeal challenging an Allahabad High Court order which rejected a challenge to the constitutional validity of the PM-CARES Fund.
- 2.Issue-The High Court had dismissed the PIL which challenged the validity of the PM-CARES Fund and the Prime Minister National Relief Fund in the backdrop of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. The petitioner had contended that the fund was established without statutory backing and was kept beyond the scrutiny of the RTI Act.
- 3.Issues surrounding the fund and its functioning-PM CARES has been under a cloud of suspicion ever since it was announced, with opposition parties demanding transparency over the handling of the funds.
- 4.About PM-CARES-The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund was set up to accept donations and provide relief during the Covid-19 pandemic, and other similar emergencies.
- 5.PM-CARES Fund-PM-CARES was set up as a public charitable trust with the trust deed registered on March 27, 2020. It can avail donations from the foreign contribution and donations to fund can also avail 100% tax exemption. PM-CARES is different from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF).
- 6.Who administers the fund-**Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund and Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Finance, Government of India are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund.** In 2021, the Delhi High Court was informed that the PM CARES Fund is not a Government of India fund and that the amount collected by it does not go to the Consolidated Fund of India.

MEKEDATU WATER PROJECT

- 1.Karnataka Assembly has adopted a unanimous resolution seeking clearance for the Mekedatu project. This was in response to the resolution adopted by Tamil Nadu opposing the Mekedatu drinking water and balancing reservoir project proposed by the State.
- 2.Demand by Karnataka: Karnataka Legislative Assembly urges the Central Water Commission and MoEF to approve the Mekedatu project at the earliest. The House urges the Central authorities not to finalise the DPR of the Godavari, Krishna, Pennar, Cauvery, Vaigai, and Gundar river-linking project till the share of riparian States is decided and till Karnataka gives its approval. It also urges them not to approve the illegal projects of Tamil Nadu and to instruct Tamil Nadu to desist from continuing them.
- 3.Reasons given by Karnataka for taking up the Mekedatu project: Mekedatu project, the resolution said: "The Supreme Court has modified the judgement of Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal and prescribed confirmation of release of 177.25 tmcft of water at Biligundlu (water gauge) in a normal water year. To ensure allocation of 24 tmcft for Bengaluru Metropolitan city and consumptive use of 4.75 tmcft as per the Supreme Court's verdict and also in turn provide for hydel generation, the Mekedatu drinking water and balancing reservoir project has been planned.
- 4.**About the Project: Mekedatu is a multipurpose (drinking and power) project. It involves building a balancing reservoir, near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district in Karnataka. The project once completed is aimed at ensuring drinking water to Bengaluru and neighboring areas (4.75 TMC) and also can generate 400 MW power. The estimated cost of the project is Rs 9,000 crore.**

DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

- 1.The bill will be tabled in the Parliament. It aims to merge the Capital's three municipal corporations — South, North and East — ten years after the trifurcation of the civic body. In 2011, the state government had proposed the trifurcation for better efficiency.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will visit Delhi this week for official meetings, as the war in Ukraine completes one month, sources confirmed. The visit, the first by a senior Russian official since President Vladimir Putin declared war on the neighbouring country, comes amid a flurry of trips by several leaders from the Western-backed sanctions regime, seeking a shift in India's position, which has not criticised Moscow for the invasion.

Trade unions, including in the coal, steel, oil, telecom, banking and insurance sectors, will go on a two-day strike or 'Bharat Bandh' from Monday, according to a joint platform of 10 Central trade unions. The joint platform, at a meeting here on March 22, reviewed preparations for the strike against the "antiworker, antifarmer, antipeople and antinational" policies of the Modi government.

Women's rights activists pledged on Sunday to launch a wave of protests across Afghanistan if the Taliban fail to reopen girls' secondary schools within a week. Thousands of secondary school girls flocked to classes on Wednesday for the first time since last August. But officials ordered the schools shut again just hours into the day, triggering international outrage.

The Saudi led coalition launched air strikes on Sunday on Yemen hours after Houthi rebels announced a three day truce, with the UN chief condemning a surge in violence as the war enters its eighth year.

Myanmar's leader vowed Sunday to intensify action against homegrown militia groups fighting the military run government, saying the armed forces would "annihilate" them.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Sunday Vladimir Putin's position as President is "up to the Russians" to decide, playing down President Joe Biden's comments that suggested a desire for regime change in Moscow.

The leader of Ukrainian rebel region of Luhansk said on Sunday it may hold a referendum on joining Russia, drawing a warning from Kyiv that any such vote would have no legal basis and trigger a stronger international response. Three days before ordering the February 24 invasion of Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin recognised the Ukrainian rebel regions of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent States, though the rest of the world considers them part of Ukraine.

2.Need for: Problems of trifurcation: Uneven distribution of property tax between three civic bodies, inefficient management and growing losses, etc. Gap in the resources available: Trifurcation was uneven in terms of the territorial divisions and revenue-generating potential of each corporation.

3.Constitutional Provisions related to Municipal Corporations: In the Constitution of India, no provision was made for the establishment of local self-government, except the incorporation of Article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy. The 74th Amendment Act, 1992 has inserted a new Part IX-A into the Constitution which deals with the administration of Municipalities and Nagar Palikas. It consists of Article 243P to 243ZG. It also added a new twelfth schedule to the Constitution. The 12th schedule consists of 18 items.

EXPORT PREPAREDNESS INDEX 2021

1.NITI Aayog, in collaboration with the Institute of Competitiveness, has released the second edition of the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2021. The first Index was launched in August 2020.

2.About the Index: The Export Preparedness Index is a comprehensive analysis of India's export achievements. It aims to identify the fundamental areas critical for subnational export promotion. The coastal states have been adjudged as the best performers in the index.

3.How were states ranked-The index ranked states on four key parameters – policy; business ecosystem; export ecosystem; export performance. **The index also took into consideration 11 sub-pillars — export promotion policy; institutional framework; business environment; infrastructure; transport connectivity; access to finance; export infrastructure; trade support; R&D infrastructure; export diversification; and growth orientation.**

4.Performance of various states: Gujarat has topped NITI Aayog's Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2021 for the second consecutive time. Maharashtra has been ranked second and Karnataka has been ranked third.

LEAD POISONING

1.Recently, high levels of lead were found in the blood of thousands of children living around the Kabwe mine in Zambia.

2.Lead affects children-Lead is a potent neurotoxin that causes irreparable harm to children's brains. It is particularly destructive to babies and children under the age of 5 as it damages their brain before they have had the opportunity to fully develop, causing them lifelong neurological, cognitive and physical impairment. Childhood lead exposure has also been linked to mental health and behavioral problems and an increase in crime and violence. Older children suffer severe consequences, including increased risk of kidney damage and cardiovascular diseases in later life.

3.Childhood lead exposure is estimated to cost lower- and middle-income countries almost USD \$1 trillion due to lost economic potential of these children over their lifetime.

Factors contributing to lead poisoning: Informal and substandard recycling of lead-acid batteries. Increase in vehicle ownership, combined with the lack of vehicle battery recycling regulation and infrastructure. Workers in dangerous and often illegal recycling operations break open battery cases, spill acid and lead dust in the soil. They also smelt the recovered lead in crude, open-air furnaces that emit toxic fumes poisoning the surrounding community.

4.Need of the hour: A coordinated and concerted approach across the following areas: Proper Monitoring and reporting. Prevention and control measures. Management, treatment and remediation. Public awareness and behavior change. Legislation and policy. Global and regional action.

RAJASTHAN GOVERNMENT'S LAW TO CURB CHEATING IN EXAMS

1.Rajasthan govt's law to curb cheating in exams: The state government has tabled The Rajasthan Public Examination (Measures for Prevention of Unfair Means in Recruitment) Bill, 2022 to deter use of unfair means in public examinations with strict provisions of punishment up to 10-year imprisonment and penalties in the form of fine up to Rs 10 crore and attachment/confiscation of property.

2.Need for: A fair and reasonable process of selection to posts, subject to the norm of equality of opportunity under Article 16 (1)

The EU's coordinator for talks to restore the 2015 nuclear deal met Iran's Foreign Minister and its chief negotiator in Tehran, state media reported, hoping to bridge gaps in the talks.

India on Sunday successfully test-fired two Army version Medium Range Surface to Air Missiles (MRSAMs) from the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur in Odisha. The flight tests were carried out as part of live firing trials against highspeed aerial targets, sources in the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) said, adding that the missiles intercepted the targets and destroyed them completely, registering direct hits at both the ranges.

of the Constitution, is a constitutional requirement. A fair and reasonable recruitment process is a fundamental requirement of Article 14 as well.