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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

1. Students of classes 5, 8 can now be detained: Centre

Context: The Centre has scrapped the 'no-detention policy' for classes 5 and 8 in schools governed by it allowing them to fail students who do not clear the year-end exams. Following the amendment to the Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2019, at least 18 states and Union Territories have already done away with the 'no-detention policy' for the two classes. According to a issued notification, after the conduct of regular examination, if a child fails to fulfil the promotion criteria, as notified from time to time, he shall be given additional instruction and opportunity for re-examination within a period of two months from the date of declaration of results.

Key points

- **Overview:** The Central Government has recently amended the Right to Education Act, 2009, scrapping the no-detention policy in schools governed by it. It includes Kendriya Vidyalayas,

Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, and other institutions under the Ministry of Defence and Tribal Affairs.

- **No Detention Policy (NDP):** Introduced under Section 16 of the Right to Education Act, 2009 to prohibit the detention of students until Class 8. Aimed to ensure minimum education levels for all children by promoting automatic promotion.

- **Key Clause in RTE Act, 2009:** *Section 16* - No child shall be detained in any class until the completion of elementary education (Classes 1-8).
  Amended in 2019 - Allowed States to hold back students in Classes 5 and 8 based on academic performance.

- **Reasons for Removal:** *Declining Learning Outcomes* - Students reportedly lacked seriousness about studies due to assured promotions.
  Accountability - Schools failed to focus on learning, as emphasized by the HRD Ministry.
  States' Feedback - Many states demanded policy removal to improve quality and accountability in elementary education.
  National Alignment - Linked with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for holistic education.

- **Challenges with No Detention Policy:** In 2016, Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) had advised Human Resource Development Ministry for the scrapping of 'No Detention policy' on the ground that it was leading to lower learning outcomes. The policy focused more on increasing the enrolment in elementary education and compromised on the quality of basic education. It led to lackadaisical attitude among students towards their studies, as they did not fear detention.

- **Way Forward:** Bringing back year-end examinations for Classes V and VIII and detaining students who fail will not improve learning outcomes on their own unless supported by other necessary changes in the educational ecosystem. The real solution to poor learning outcomes is socio-economic deprivation lies in improving quality of and access to education.

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2. DBT: Solution or economic burden?

Context: India's economic inequalities and pervasive poverty have long underscored the systemic inefficiencies in the conventional welfare system. Traditional subsidy mechanisms, though intended to bridge socioeconomic divides, have instead been bogged down under the weight of bureaucratic hurdles, rent-seeking behaviour and fragmented distribution channels. In response to these flaws, the Government of India launched the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme in 2013 as an ambitious remedy. It aims to eliminate intermediaries and inaugurate a new era of precision and transparency. Since 2014, this initiative has expanded nationwide, revolutionizing the subsidy framework and signalling a decisive shift from outdated systems.

Direct Benefit Transfer scheme

- **About:** Government of India launched the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Program on 1st Jan 2013. With DBT program, GoI aims to make payments directly into the Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of the end beneficiaries, removing any malpractices from the existing system such as diversions and duplicate payments. The primary objective of the DBT program is to bring transparency and terminate pilferage from distribution of funds sponsored by Central Government.

- **DBT Process:** The following are the steps or sub-sections, which are the major checkpoints in the Direct Benefit Transfer process, Public Financial Management System (PFMS) registration. Examination of eligibility of the beneficiary. Verification of the beneficiaries' bank account/ Aadhar Enabled bank account. Initiation of the payment. PFMS (Public Financial Management System) is a Central Plan Monitoring System of the Ministry of Finance, Government of India. It is used as a common platform to carry out both Aadhar and non-Aadhar e-payments for the DBT program.

- **Achievements of the DBT Program:** The first payment was made to a mother in the Puducherry for the Janani Suraksha Yojana in January 2013. The benefits include accurate targeting of the beneficiaries, de-duplication and reduction of fraud.

- **Components of Direct Benefit Transfer:** Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) comprises several crucial components that ensure its effective implementation.
  Beneficiary Account Validation System - One key element is the Beneficiary Account Validation System, which validates beneficiary accounts to ensure accurate and timely transfer of benefits.
  Payment and Reconciliation Platform - Additionally, Direct Benefit Transfer relies on a robust Payment and Reconciliation Platform, which is integrated with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), and various public and private sector banks.

- **Impact of Direct Benefit Transfer:** *Reduction in Administrative Costs* - Implementing DBT has caused a reduction in administrative charges related to subsidy distribution.
  Targeting of Beneficiaries - DBT allows for more specific targeting of beneficiaries primarily based on criteria together with earnings stage, demographic profile, and social fame.

- **Challenges of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT):** *Aadhaar Authentication Issues* - Issues such as wrong Aadhaar statistics, duplicates, or authentication issues can cause delays or errors in subsidy disbursal.
  Lack of Awareness - This can bring about low enrolment rates, resistance to digital transactions, and problems in gaining access to schemes, especially among marginalised communities.

- **Way Forward:** *Enhanced Outreach and Awareness Campaigns* - Governments should conduct big awareness campaigns to educate beneficiaries about the blessings of DBT, the enrolment system, and the usage of virtual charge methods.
  Investment in Digital Infrastructure - Governments want to invest in enhancing digital infrastructure, which include banking centres, internet connectivity, and power delivery, specifically in rural and far-flung areas.

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3. Why has the MHA reimposed restrictions in three NE States?

Context: On December 17, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reimposed the Protected Area Regime (PAR) in the States of Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram to restrict and monitor the movement of foreigners. From now on, foreigners visiting the three States would have to seek prior permission and Protected Area Permits (PAP) from the government. The circular stated that the relaxation provided to the three States under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958 was being withdrawn with immediate effect. The PAP regime was lifted from Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland in January 2011 to promote tourism. However, the current security situation necessitated its reimposition. The permit typically allows foreign nationals to stay for 10 days, with an option for extension, and can be issued by the Union Home Ministry or concerned state authorities.

Key points

- **Overview:** The move ensures that foreigners visiting these states must secure the necessary PAP under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958.
- **Protected Area Permit (PAP):** PAP is a special permit required by foreign nationals to visit certain areas in India deemed sensitive due to their proximity to international borders. These areas fall between the "Inner Line" and the international borders as defined under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958.
- **Covered Area:** The PAP regime covers entire or parts of states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand.
- **Purpose of the Protected Area Permit:** The primary objectives of the PAP are-
  - ➢ *National Security -* To regulate the entry of foreigners in sensitive areas near international borders.
  - ➢ *Preservation of Local Communities -* To protect indigenous populations and their unique cultural heritage.
  - ➢ *Environmental Conservation -* To minimize ecological disturbances in fragile regions.
- **Relevant Acts and Regulations:** *Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958* – Defines areas as protected and prescribes the requirement for obtaining PAP.
  Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963 – Specifies Restricted Areas (such as Andaman & Nicobar Islands and parts of Sikkim) requiring a Restricted Area Permit (RAP).
- **Key Features of the PAP Regime:** *Eligibility -* Foreigners, except Bhutanese citizens, need a PAP to enter and stay in these regions.
  Permissible Visits - Group tourists (minimum of two persons). Restricted tourist circuits/routes specified in the permit.
  Validity and Compliance - PAP is valid only for the specified area, route, and time. Permit holders cannot stay beyond the permit's validity. Photocopies of the permit must be deposited at entry and exit points.
  Restrictions - Citizens of Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan (and those of Pakistani origin) require prior approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Diplomats and officials require special instructions from the Ministry of External Affairs.
  Registration - Foreigners must register with the Foreigners Registration Officer (FRO) of the district within 24 hours of arrival.

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4. Canary in the canopy

Context: Through history, forests for humans have been sites of shelter, food, livelihoods, protection, and strength of spirit. According to the new India State of Forest Report 2023, 25% of India's land is covered by forests or trees, on its face a healthy figure and a step closer to the National Forest Policy's prescriptions. But big numbers always hide problems. Post-Independence, India's forest governance has been typified by attempts to break free from European colonialists' insular view of forests as sources of timber, codified in laws the country inherited. Two significant achievements in this regard were the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 and the Forest (Rights) Act 2006.

ISFR 2023

- **Forest and Tree Cover:** The total forest and tree cover of the country is 8,27,356.95 km2 which is 25.17% of the geographical area (GA) of the country.

- **Increase in Forest and Tree Cover:** The country's forest and tree cover has increased by 1,445.81 km², with a 156.41 km² rise in forest cover compared to 2021.
  - ➤ Maximum increase (Forest and Tree Cover) - Chhattisgarh (684 sq km) followed by Uttar Pradesh (559 sq km), Odisha (559 sq km) and Rajasthan (394 sq km).
  - ➤ Maximum Increase (Forest Cover) - Mizoram (242 sq km) followed by Gujarat (180 sq km) and Odisha (152 sq km).
  - ➤ Largest Decrease - Madhya Pradesh (612.41 km²) followed by Karnataka (459.36 km²), Ladakh (159.26 km²), and Nagaland (125.22 km²).
- **Top Three States:** Area wise top three states having largest forest cover are Madhya Pradesh (77,073 sq km) followed by Arunachal Pradesh (65,882 sq km) and Chhattisgarh (55,812 sq km).
- **High Forest Cover:** 19 states/UTs have above 33% of the geographical area under forest cover.
- **Carbon Stock:** The country's forest carbon stock is estimated at 7,285.5 million tonnes, with an increase of 81.5 million tonnes compared to 2021.
- **Regional Performance:** The Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Areas (WGESA) covers 60,285.61 km², with 44,043.99 km² (73%) under forest cover.
- **Mangrove Cover:** India's mangrove cover is 4,991.68 km², representing 0.15% of the total geographical area, with a net decrease of 7.43 km² since 2021.
- **Forest Fire:** The top three states with the most fire incidents in the 2023-24 season are Uttarakhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.

Key points

- **Overview:** Recently, the Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change released the 18th India State of Forest Report 2023 (ISFR 2023). ISFR is brought out by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) on a biennial basis since 1987.
- **Trend in Forestry Parameters Between 2013-2023:** *Increase in Greenery -* The forest cover of the country has shown an increase of 16,630.25 km2. The tree cover has shown an increase of 20,747.34 km2. Mangrove cover of the country has increased by 296.33 km2.
  Soil Health - There is a general improvement in soil health (87.16% of shallow to deep soil as against 83.53% in 2013) reflected by improvement in humus.
  Biotic influences - Biotic influences on forests have also come down to 26.66% from 31.28% in 2013 which indicates improved floral biodiversity, and improved surroundings for faunal biodiversity.
- **Conclusion:** The 18th India State of Forest Report 2023 highlights positive trends in forest and tree cover, carbon stock, and soil health, while addressing challenges like forest fires and mangrove loss. India's commitment to global climate goals, such as the Paris Agreement and Bonn Challenge, reinforces its ongoing conservation efforts.

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5. ISRO to launch its key Spadex mission on December 30

Context: The Indian Space Research Organisation will end the year with its SPADEX mission. The launch of two small satellites to demonstrate docking in space, is about to take place on December 30 at 9:58 pm from the country's spaceport at Shriharikota. Docking is the process where two satellites are aligned and then joined in space, a necessity for missions that the space agency hoped to achieve in the future such as Chandrayaan-4 or setting up the Bharatiya Antariksh Station. The last stage of the rocket will also be

utilised to demonstrate 24 payloads, including a robotic arm to capture space debris and an experiment to demonstrate seed germination and plant growth up to two leaves in space.

- **Overview:** ISRO is preparing to launch a record 24 scientific experiments on board the POEM satellite under the Spadex Mission.
- **SpaDeX Mission:** The Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) is a groundbreaking mission by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) aimed at developing autonomous space docking technology. The mission involves PSLV-C60 as the launch vehicle to demonstrate in-space docking technology using two small spacecraft: Chaser (SDX01) and Target (SDX02). This technology is a critical milestone for future lunar missions, the development of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), and other advanced space endeavours.
- **Mission Overview:** *Docking and demonstration* - After docking, the mission will demonstrate electrical power transfer before undocking for payload operations.
  Separation dynamics - Target and Chaser spacecraft will separate with an initial velocity difference to achieve 10-20 km inter-satellite separation. Propulsion systems will be used to align spacecraft into the same orbit, achieving Far Rendezvous.
  Orbit - 470 km circular orbit at a 55-degree inclination.
  Launch vehicle - PSLV-C60.
- **PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM):** Developed by Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC). Repurposes the fourth stage of PSLV into an orbital station for scientific experiments. First used in the PSLV-C53 mission (2022) to minimize space debris. Equipped with a Navigation Guidance and Control (NGC) system for attitude stabilization.
- **Historical Context:** The concept of space docking was first achieved by the Soviet Union in 1967 with the docking of Kosmos 186 and Kosmos 188. SpaDeX positions India as a potential fourth country globally to master space docking technology.