14th October 2025

1. **Maitri II**: Recently, the Finance Ministry approved the establishment of **Maitri II**, India's newest Antarctic research station, to be built in eastern Antarctica.
   - **About Maitri II Station**: Maitri II will serve as **India's latest and largest research base** on the icy continent, designed with a strong focus on **sustainability and green technology**.
     - **Key Features: Size & Design:** Larger than the existing Maitri I, it will be developed as a **green research station**.
       - **Renewable Energy Integration:** The station will rely on **solar energy** during summer and **wind power** to harness strong Antarctic winds for continuous operations.
       - **Automated Systems:** Equipped with **automated instruments** to record and transmit scientific data to India, even during unmanned periods.
       - **Completion Timeline:** The construction is expected to be **completed by January 2029**.
       - **Nodal Agency:** The project is led by the **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)** under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**, which manages India's polar missions.
2. **Van Rakshak Project (VRP):** Recently, a report by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) highlighted the crucial role of India's forest protectors, or **Van Rakshaks**, in safeguarding the nation's wildlife and ecosystems.
   - **About VRP**: Also known as the **"Guardians of the Wild"**, the **Van Rakshak Project** is a flagship initiative of **WTI**, launched in **2000**, to strengthen and support **India's frontline forest staff**.
     - **Aim:** To build a **strong, well-equipped, and motivated** force of forest personnel dedicated to **protecting wildlife and their habitats** within India's **Protected Areas (PAs)**.
     - **Van Rakshaks**: They are **forest rangers and frontline staff** responsible for the protection of over **1,100 protected areas** and numerous other natural habitats across India.
     - **Key Features of the Project: Four Core Areas of Focus:**
       - **Training** – on wildlife crime prevention, human-wildlife conflict mitigation, and rescue operations.
       - **Equipping** – provision of essential field gear for safety and patrolling.
       - **Awareness** – promoting conservation ethics among forest personnel and local communities.
       - **Morale Boosting** – through financial aid and public recognition.
     - **Community Engagement:** The initiative also focuses on **empowering local and indigenous communities**, recognizing their critical role on the **frontlines of conservation**.
3. **Civil Registration System (CRS) Report 2023**: Recently, the Vital Statistics of India based on the **Civil Registration System (CRS) Report 2023** revealed that India recorded 2.52 crore births in 2023 — a decline of about 2.32 lakh compared to 2022.
   - **Key Findings**: The report, prepared by the **Registrar General of India (RGI)**, also noted that **86.6 lakh deaths** were registered in 2023, a slight increase from **86.5 lakh deaths** in 2022.
     - **Sex Ratio at Birth (2023): Lowest:** Jharkhand (899), Bihar (900), Telangana (906), Maharashtra (909), Gujarat (910), Haryana (911), Mizoram (911)
       - **Highest:** Arunachal Pradesh (1,085), Nagaland (1,007), Goa (973), Ladakh & Tripura (972), Kerala (967)
     - **Institutional Births: Share of institutional births:** 74% in 2023 (data excludes Sikkim).
       - **Overall birth registration:** 98.4%.
     - **Timely Registration (within 21 days): Above 90%:** Gujarat, Puducherry, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Tamil Nadu, Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Punjab.
       - **80–90%:** Odisha, Mizoram, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh.
       - **50–80%:** Assam, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Telangana, Kerala, Karnataka, Bihar, Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh.

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4. **Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects**: Recently, UNESCO unveiled the **Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects** during its MONDIACULT conference.
   - **About Virtual Museum**: This groundbreaking **digital platform** seeks to reconnect communities with their **stolen cultural treasures**.
     - **Objective:** The initiative aims to create the **first global virtual immersive museum** dedicated to stolen cultural artifacts. It strives to raise public awareness about the **impact of illicit trafficking** of cultural property and assist in the **recovery of stolen objects**.
     - The museum was launched during the **World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT 2025)**. The project receives **financial backing from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia** and was developed in partnership with **INTERPOL**.
     - Currently, the digital museum showcases **around 240 missing cultural objects** from **46 countries**.
     - **Indian Artifacts Featured:** Among the exhibits are **two 9th-century sandstone sculptures** from the **Mahadev Temple in Pali, Chhattisgarh**:
       - A **Nataraja sculpture**, depicting **Lord Shiva** in his cosmic dance.
       - A **Brahma sculpture**, showing **the creator god** seated in *lalitasana*, with **three visible faces and four arms** holding sacred symbols such as a **rosary** and the **Vedas**.
5. **National Critical Mineral Stockpile (NCMS)**: Recently, India began preparations to launch the **National Critical Mineral Stockpile (NCMS)** to secure the availability of rare earth elements (REEs) vital for clean energy, defense, and high-tech industries.
   - **About NCMS:** A **strategic reserve** of **critical minerals** vital for **economic resilience** and **national security**.
     - **Aim:** To **reduce dependence on imports**, **safeguard India's mineral security**, and **secure rare earth supplies** against global disruptions.
     - **Under:** The initiative will operate under the **National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM)**.
     - **Purpose:** To **mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities**, particularly in light of **China's export restrictions** on **rare earth magnets** and **processing technologies**, which have disrupted **global supply chains**.
     - **Funding:** The government has allocated **₹500 crore** under the NCMM to **shield against supply shocks** and ensure **steady mineral availability**.
     - **Initial Focus:** The NCMS will begin by establishing a **two-month reserve** of **rare earth elements** to buffer against global market fluctuations.
     - **Private Sector Participation:** The design of NCMS includes **collaboration with private entities** to ensure **efficient stockpile management and reserve adequacy**.
6. **Indian wolf:** Recently, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) conducted, for the first time, a separate evaluation of the **Indian wolf (Canis lupus pallipes).**



   - **About Indian Wolf:** A **subspecies of the Grey Wolf**, native to the **Indian subcontinent** and parts of **Southwest Asia**.
     - **Habitat:** It primarily inhabits **scrublands**, **semi-arid grasslands**, and **pastoral agro-ecosystems**.
     - **Behavior:** Indian wolves typically live in **small packs** of about **6–8 members**. They are **less vocal**, seldom **howl**, and are known to be **territorial** and **nocturnal hunters**.
     - **Appearance:** They are **intermediate in size** between the **Tibetan** and **Arabian wolves**, but **lack a thick winter coat**, an adaptation suited to **warmer climates**.
     - **Distribution:** Their range extends across **India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Israel, Turkey, Iran, and Syria**.
     - **Threats:** The species faces a **steady population decline** due to **habitat loss**, **reduced prey availability**, and **human persecution**.

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7. **Blue Flag Certification**: Recently, the prestigious international **Blue Flag certification** was awarded to five beaches in Maharashtra.
   - **About Blue Flag Certification**: The **Blue Flag** is a **globally recognized eco-label** granted by the **Foundation for Environment Education (FEE), Denmark**.
     - It is awarded to **beaches, marinas, and sustainable tourism boats** that meet **33 stringent criteria** related to **cleanliness, natural beauty, and environmental sustainability**.
     - **Background:** The **Blue Flag programme** began in **France in 1985** and expanded **beyond Europe in 2001**. It has since become one of the **most respected voluntary awards** in the field of **environmental management and sustainable coastal tourism**.
     - **Core Focus Areas:** The programme encourages sustainable development across **freshwater and marine ecosystems** through four main parameters: **Water Quality**, **Environmental Management**, **Environmental Education** and **Safety.**
     - **Mission:** To **promote sustainability in tourism** through **environmental protection**, **education**, and **responsible coastal development practices**.
8. **Operation Golden Sweep**: Recently, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) launched **Operation Golden Sweep**, dismantling a transnational gold smuggling syndicate at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport.
   - **About Operation Golden Sweep**: A **strategic intelligence-driven operation** by the **DRI**, targeting an **international gold smuggling network** that used **transit passengers** and **airport insiders** to illegally transport gold into India.
     - **Aim:** To **disrupt organized smuggling cartels**, **protect India's economic security**, and **reduce illicit gold inflows** that harm **legitimate trade** and **drain foreign exchange reserves**.
     - **Key Features: Gold Seized:** 10.488 kg of 24-carat gold worth **₹12.58 crore**.
       - **Modus Operandi:** Smugglers arriving from **Dubai, Singapore, Bangkok, and Dhaka** concealed gold in **egg-shaped wax capsules** inside their bodies.
       - **Insider Nexus:** Investigations exposed the involvement of **airport personnel** who facilitated the movement of contraband from secure zones — highlighting a **serious insider threat** within aviation infrastructure.
9. **IUCN Kenton Miller Award**: Recently, Sonali Ghosh, Director of **Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve**, achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first Indian to be honoured with the prestigious **IUCN Kenton Miller Award** at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi.
   - **About the Kenton Miller Award:** The **Kenton Miller Award for Innovation in Protected Area Management** is a **biennial award** (given every two years) that celebrates **innovative leadership and excellence** in managing and sustaining **national parks and protected areas**.
     - **Named After:** Dr. **Kenton R. Miller**, a global pioneer in **conservation** and a former **Director General of IUCN**.
     - **Established in: 2006**
     - **Presented by:** The **IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)**.
     - **Purpose:** To **honor innovators** who have made a **significant, measurable impact** on conservation and **protected area management** at **local, national, or international levels**.
     - **Award Components: USD 5,000 grant**
       - **International recognition** by conservation peers
       - **Formal citation** acknowledging their contribution
     - **Award Categories:** Recognizes innovations in:
       - Planning and Management
       - Finance and Economics
       - Governance
       - Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation
       - Communication

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