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Syria holds first elections since Assad's ouster

Syria has held its first parliamentary elections since the ouster of longtime leader Bashar al-Assad, marking a significant step in Syria's political transition after years of civil war. The new elections law and constitution aim to move the country forward. Security forces were deployed widely to maintain order across polling stations amid the ongoing tensions. The new parliament has a 30-month term to prepare for broader reforms.



Inside the polling booths, electoral college members filled out ballots with lists of candidates rather than a direct public vote. These ballots were sealed and later counted publicly. Around 7,000 electoral college members from 60 districts voted for 140 seats in the legislature.

The election system is indirect: Two-thirds of the 210-member assembly will be chosen by the provincial electoral colleges, while one-third will be appointed directly by Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa. This setup means there was no direct popular vote, as the voting electorate consisted of electoral college members rather than the general population. Some regions, such as the Sweida province and areas controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, did not participate due to security concerns and tensions with Damascus, leading to indefinite postponements there.

“Whispers of winter stir”



Several parts of Himachal Pradesh witnessed rainfall, while higher reaches received first snowfall of the season, including Kullu and Lahaul-Spiti districts. The temperature has also dropped noticeably in the upper regions. Atal Tunnel, formerly known as Rohtang Tunnel, connects Manali to Lahaul and Spiti Valley throughout the year.



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STATE



Vallarpadam rail link underutilised due to high freight cost

Despite being commissioned 14 years ago, the 4.62 km Vallarpadam rail link remains underused primarily due to high freight costs, which discourage its use in favor of road trucking for short distances and last-mile deliveries.

Several key reasons explain the underperformance:

- The rail line was designed for faster container movement, but the necessity for trucking for last-mile connectivity diminishes its advantages.
- The balance capacity is prioritized for metro services, limiting freight train availability.
- Freight rates by rail are higher compared to road transport, making trucking economically preferable for shippers.
- Additional costs imposed on exporters, such as charges for subcontracting container handling, also deter rail usage.
- Road transport is preferred because it offers greater frequency, speed, and flexibility across typical cargo distances of 250-300 km.
- Attempts by Concor, the main operator, to boost rail traffic (including combined coastal and Exim cargo) have not fully succeeded.

Despite a surge in container traffic during pandemic-related road transport disruptions, the rail link has not gained sustained traction.

Exploring rail solutions for enhanced regional connectivity and customer opportunities could help revive the rail link's role in cargo movement, reducing over-reliance on trucking and supporting broader freight infrastructure development in South India.

This highlights the interplay between infrastructure planning and operational cost factors that influence logistics decisions, emphasizing the need for more competitively priced, efficient rail freight services to realize the full potential of the Vallarpadam rail link.

Torrential rain batters Bengal

- Torrential rain in Bengal, resulted in at least 23 deaths due to landslides and flooding, particularly affecting Darjeeling, Mirik, and other northern parts of West Bengal.
- Road connectivity to these areas was badly disrupted when landslides and the collapse of key bridges cut off major routes, stranding thousands of tourists and isolating local populations.
- The Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) confirmed that most fatalities occurred in Mirik and Darjeeling, and efforts were made to rescue and evacuate stranded tourists and residents.
- Wildlife in inundated national parks and disrupted railway connectivity added to the challenges faced by the region.
- Bhutan's hydrology authorities issued alerts due to the risk of dam overflow, affecting rivers downstream in Bengal and Sikkim.
- The disaster exposed vulnerabilities in the region's infrastructure and disaster preparedness, particularly regarding landslide-prone areas and essential connectivity.
- The coordinated response from local, national, and neighboring country agencies highlights both the regional impact and the necessity for cross-border cooperation in managing hydrological and meteorological risks.
- The incident reinforces the urgency of strengthening early warning systems, better road and bridge maintenance, and preemptive relocation strategies for at-risk populations and tourists during periods of extreme weather.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for heavy rainfall, warning of more landslides and road blockages until October 7.
- Incessant rainfall triggered by a low-pressure system over the Bay of Bengal has triggered floods in the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan.
- As first responder, India remains committed to assisting Nepal and Bhutan, says Modi.



British and Indian warships begin four-day maritime exercise Konkan in Indian Ocean

Four-day joint maritime exercise named "Konkan" between British and Indian warships in the Western Indian Ocean has begun. This edition of Exercise Konkan is significant because it is the first to feature both countries' carrier strike groups—HMS Prince of Wales for the UK and INS Vikrant for India—thus representing an advanced level of maritime cooperation and interoperability.

Strategic and Operational Importance

- The drill, involving air and maritime operations like anti-submarine warfare and cross-deck flying, aims to deepen combined operational capabilities and strengthen joint maritime security.
- The exercise is linked to Operation Highmast, the UK's multinational global deployment involving complex scenarios and showcasing the UK's ability to project power and maintain alliances in the Indo-Pacific.
- Post-exercise, British warships plan port calls in Mumbai and Goa, emphasizing deepening political, defence, and trade ties.

Diplomatic and Security Context

- Statements by British and Indian officials underline shared ambitions for a secure, open Indo-Pacific region and maintaining a rules-based international order.
- The partnership aligns with the strategic vision outlined by the UK-India Vision 2035 and highlights both countries' commitment to future cooperation, regional stability, and shared democratic values.
- An aerial defence exercise with the Indian Air Force will follow, further enhancing interoperability and tactical capabilities.

Broader Implications

- The collaboration is both a demonstration of advanced military integration and a symbol of strong people-to-people and institutional ties between the UK and India.
- Operation Highmast's involvement of other allied nations signals a broader commitment to coalition-based security in the region.



Centre plans National Camel Mission to save India's dwindling desert icon



- The Indian government plans to launch a National Camel Sustainability Initiative (NCSI) to reverse the sharp decline in the country's camel population, particularly in traditional camel-rearing regions of Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- The move arises from alarming census data: India's camel numbers dropped from 11 lakh in 1977 to just 2.52 lakh in 2019, a nearly 77% decline.

Strategic Importance

- Camels are economically and ecologically significant, especially for arid and semi-arid rural communities, symbolizing resilience and rural sustainability.
- Their rapid decline poses both socio-economic and ecological threats to these regions, endangering the sustainability of India's pastoral cultures.

Policy Proposals

- The draft policy calls for a coordinated multisectoral strategy involving various ministries and state governments, integrating camel issues into education and rural development.
- It suggests a review of the Rajasthan Camel Act to better balance conservation with the livelihood needs of camel owners and proposes traceable inter-state trade mechanisms and improved infrastructure for camel-related commerce.

Critical Perspective

- Historically, camels have been marginalized in livestock policy and not received adequate support compared to other animals.
- Successful reversal of the decline will require more consistent, integrated public policies, sustainable funding, and practical implementation beyond pilot breeding and entrepreneurship projects.
- The plan represents an overdue but vital step to conserve camels as a key component of India's cultural heritage and rural livelihood systems, demanding a shift in livestock development priorities and wider public awareness.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1. Recently, the government reintroduced Indian grey hornbills into which one of the following sites in the second attempt after 1980 ?

- (a) Pakke Tiger Reserve
- (b) Sathyamangalam Wildlife Sanctuary
- (c) Gir National Park
- (d) Keoladeo National Park

2. 'Sela macaque', a new species of old world monkey recorded recently from which one of the following states of India ?

- (a) Maharashtra
- (b) Sikkim
- (c) Karnataka
- (d) Arunachal Pradesh

3. Money spiders, commonly found in European meadows, have been reported recently for the first time from which of the following protected areas:

- (a) Rajamala Eravikulam National Park
- (b) Sundarbans Tiger Reserve
- (c) Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary
- (d) Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

4. Which one of the following straits connects the Java Sea with the Indian Ocean ?

- (a) Dover strait
- (b) Bosphorus Strait
- (c) Strait of Malacca
- (d) Sunda strait

DETAILED ANSWER KEY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE CHRONICLE PAGE

Why is ADR crucial for India's courts?

- The legal foundation for ADR in India is found in Article 39A of the Constitution and Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure, which encourage non-litigation routes to justice.
- Lok Adalats, based on principles of collective consensus, quickly resolve civil and compoundable criminal cases; their decisions are generally final and not subject to appeal.
- Legislative reforms like the Arbitration and Conciliation Act (1996, amended in 2021) and the Arbitration Act (2021) have institutionalized ADR processes, including the creation of the Indian Arbitration Council.
- The judicial system faces severe delays, especially in populous states like Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar, which have high vacancies and workloads in High Courts and district courts.

Why Strengthen ADR?

- ADR is deemed essential for social harmony, allowing solutions through dialogue and mediation in a language and manner parties understand.
- It reduces pendency by resolving disputes pre-litigation, preventing cases from entering already overburdened courts, and supporting constitutional values of justice and accountability.
- The India Justice Report highlights that disparities in state-level pendency and vacancy rates intensify the need for effective ADR. Lok Adalats and mediation can address these disparities and ensure a more equitable distribution of justice.

Critique and Future Directions

- The need for systemic awareness, education, and integration of ADR in court and rural systems to maximize its impact.
- Continuous monitoring and improved infrastructure are crucial to overcoming regional disparities and ensuring nationwide access to justice.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in addressing the overwhelming backlog and delays facing India's judiciary is crucial. ADR methods—including mediation, arbitration, conciliation, and Lok Adalats offer cost-effective, speedy, and accessible justice alternatives to traditional court litigation, which is often slow, expensive, and burdened by over 45.7 million pending cases nationally.

SCIENCE

Philippines pioneers coral larvae cryobank to protect threatened reefs

Referred to as the “Amazon of the seas,” the Coral Triangle spans several Southeast Asian nations and harbors more than three-quarters of the world’s coral species, making its conservation globally significant. However, the region faces severe threats from climate change, overfishing, pollution, and destructive marine practices, with scientists estimating that up to 70% of global coral might be lost by 2050 without urgent intervention.



Scientific and Policy Significance

- The coral cryobank will freeze and preserve tiny, free-swimming coral larvae at ultra-low temperatures, offering a genetic “insurance policy” for future reef restoration. Frozen larvae could later be used to reseed degraded reefs or support scientific research.
- The initiative, led by the Marine Environment and Resources Foundation, is part of a broader regional effort to create cryobanks across the Coral Triangle.
- Cryopreservation is crucial for storing genetic material from both “model” and rare coral species, helping ensure no species are lost forever, even as extinction pressures mount.

Technological and Conservation Advances

- Freezing coral larvae is a delicate process, requiring specialized expertise and technology, but it promises to halt biodiversity loss and protect food security for over 120 million people reliant on coral reef ecosystems.
- By banking larvae from different locations and species, the project protects crucial symbiotic relationships between corals and their microorganisms, which are essential for survival and climate resilience.
- ‘Living seed banks’ help maintain a reservoir of genetic diversity, which may be critical for future breeding and adaptation to environmental change.

Broader Implications

- The initiative serves as a model for urgent, science-led conservation in the face of climate and habitat crises. It builds hope for coral restoration but also highlights the scale of challenges, as large portions of coral reefs are already declining rapidly.
- The long-term vision is to create a network of cryobanks, providing restoration tools and knowledge-sharing for countries throughout the Coral Triangle.
- Communities that depend on reefs stand to benefit, but the success of such initiatives will depend on parallel efforts to reduce pollution, curb overfishing, and manage climate change.

The Philippines’ coral cryobank is a remarkable step in ensuring the survival of coral reefs for future generations—providing both a technological breakthrough and a symbol of regional collaboration between scientists, governments, universities, and local communities, the project aims to strengthen marine conservation.

India's SMR ambitions get a private sector boost

Strategic Significance and Private Sector Role

- SMRs, typically generating up to 300 MW each, promise flexible, scalable, and lower-cost nuclear energy options, important for achieving climate and decarbonization goals while maintaining energy security.
- Private sector companies are eager to contribute capital, technology, and operational expertise.
- The tender model proposed by NPCIL allows private firms to build and finance projects, while the state will retain operational control—striking a critical balance for risk management and public trust.

Policy, Technology, and Market Context

- SMRs are seen as a way to complement renewable energy sources, offering stable, clean power to balance grid intermittency from solar and wind.
- Global SMR development is advancing rapidly. The success stories from Russia, China, and others that position India to benefit from international experience and technology transfer.
- The government is pushing for faster regulatory clearances and more robust legal frameworks to support SMR implementation. This includes a push for amendments to atomic energy laws and incentive structures to support early-stage commercialization.

Challenges and Opportunities

- SMRs are still “unproven” at commercial scale, with public safety and long-term waste management concerns needing careful regulation.
- The move is expected to create new avenues for private sector participation in nuclear manufacturing, partnerships (including with global tech leaders like Microsoft and Alphabet), and knowledge transfer.
- There is competition and a race to gain first-mover advantage, as countries such as the US, Russia, and China move ahead with commercial SMRs.



India's computer services exports up 30% since ChatGPT's release says World Bank

Export Boom and Sectoral Impact

- Latest Reserve Bank of India data confirms that the export of software services jumped notably, with the sector seeing broader and sharper demand post-ChatGPT.
- The increase is tied to companies worldwide seeking Indian IT expertise for AI implementation, leading to a boom in both BPO and IT services, and positioning India as a key beneficiary of the global AI wave.

Private Investment and Growth Potential

- While private investment remains slow by international benchmarks, it is not as weak as often portrayed, with solid activity noted in computer services relative to other sectors.
- The sector's growth is also fueled by a trade surplus in services, with record surpluses for computer and software services offsetting sluggish merchandise exports.

FDI and Structural Challenges

- Despite strong computer services exports, India's FDI inflows, especially in the technology sector, have been disappointing relative to global peers.
- Regulatory and structural frictions—such as taxation, market access, and policy ambiguity—continue to constrain the inflow of new FDI, and the article urges for reforms that can turn a greater share of trade gains into sustained private investment.

Macro-Economic Implications

- The sharply rising exports in computer services are vital in narrowing India's trade deficit and supporting the broader economy during periods of global uncertainty.
- However, this underscores the need for strategic reforms to convert export-led momentum into more balanced, broad-based growth, warning that FDI inflows lagging behind could limit long-term benefits.

Sir Creek: site of decades long India-Pak border dispute



Geopolitical and Strategic Dimensions

- Sir Creek's boundary disagreement involves both national security interests and economic stakes, including the control of vital sea lanes near Karachi and Kutch.
- India and Pakistan have militarized the area, building bunkers and increasing troop presence in response to perceived threats and illicit activities like drug trafficking.

Boundary and Legal Dispute

- The dispute centers on differing interpretations of the boundary: Pakistan claims the creek in its entirety, while India maintains that the 'mid-channel' of the navigable waterway is the correct boundary under the 'Thalweg principle'.
- This disagreement impacts the delimitation of EEZs, affecting rights over marine resources and triggering frequent disputes over fishing and access.

Negotiation and Diplomatic Stalemate

- Multiple rounds of talks since the late 20th century have failed to resolve the issue, with both sides holding fast to their claims. Talks have stalled after the 2012 rounds, and the matter is often inflamed by wider geopolitical and military tensions, including terror attacks and cross-border shelling.
- The dispute remains a significant irritant in bilateral relations, with little progress expected without renewed diplomatic engagement and confidence-building measures.

The estuary, located between Gujarat (India) and Sindh (Pakistan), is of high strategic and economic significance, serving as a buffer for critical infrastructure, a potential site for untapped oil and gas reserves, and a demarcator for Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) that impact fishing rights and resource exploitation.

Pakistan offers Arabian Seaport to US

Pakistan offered the United States to develop a port in the Arabian Sea at Pasni, Baluchistan, as a terminal for shipping minerals. This offer is part of Pakistan's ongoing efforts to expand its maritime infrastructure beyond Gwadar, a major port developed with Chinese assistance. Pasni is strategically located about 70 miles from Gwadar and near the Pakistan-Iran border.

Strategic and Geopolitical Implications

- The proposal to link Pasni port to a new railway aimed at improving mineral transportation highlights Pakistan's efforts to diversify and strengthen logistics and trade routes.
- The port could potentially facilitate shipments of minerals, including copper and other natural resources, boosting Pakistan's export capabilities.
- The plan includes significant financing, with a blueprint estimating a \$1.2 billion project cost supported partly by Pakistan's federal government.

US-Pakistan Relations and Diplomatic Context

- The reported offer was floated in meetings with the Trump administration, but senior US officials have not confirmed any decision or expressed formal interest.
- The report was based on anonymous sources, and Pakistan's government and military have not officially commented on the matter.
- This potential cooperation comes amid uncertain and evolving US-Pakistan relations, especially regarding security, trade, and regional stability in South Asia.

Broader Regional Dynamics

- Pakistan's efforts to woo US investment reflect a balancing act in its foreign policy, seeking partners besides China.
- Developing the port and rail link at Pasni could enhance economic connectivity and strategic leverage in the Arabian Sea region, but it also faces challenges related to financing, geopolitical sensitivities, and local governance.
- It is an attempt to diversify its maritime trade capabilities and possibly recalibrate its diplomatic ties.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

Q1. Ans c

Indian Grey Hornbills (IGH) was reintroduced to Gir Forest by Gujarat Forest Department after nearly 90 years since they disappeared from this largest contiguous forest tract in western India. Indian grey hornbills are gregarious birds that can find throughout Gujarat, including the north, center, and south. The effort at reintroduction occurred around a year after an IGH was spotted close to Pipavav port in Amreli. In 2013, reports of sightings also came from Bhavnagar and Mendarda in the Junagadh district of the Gir (west) wildlife division.



Q2. Ans d

A new species of old world monkey, 'Sela macaque' recorded from Arunachal Pradesh, has been named after a strategic mountain pass at 13,700 ft above sea level, located on the border between the Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh.



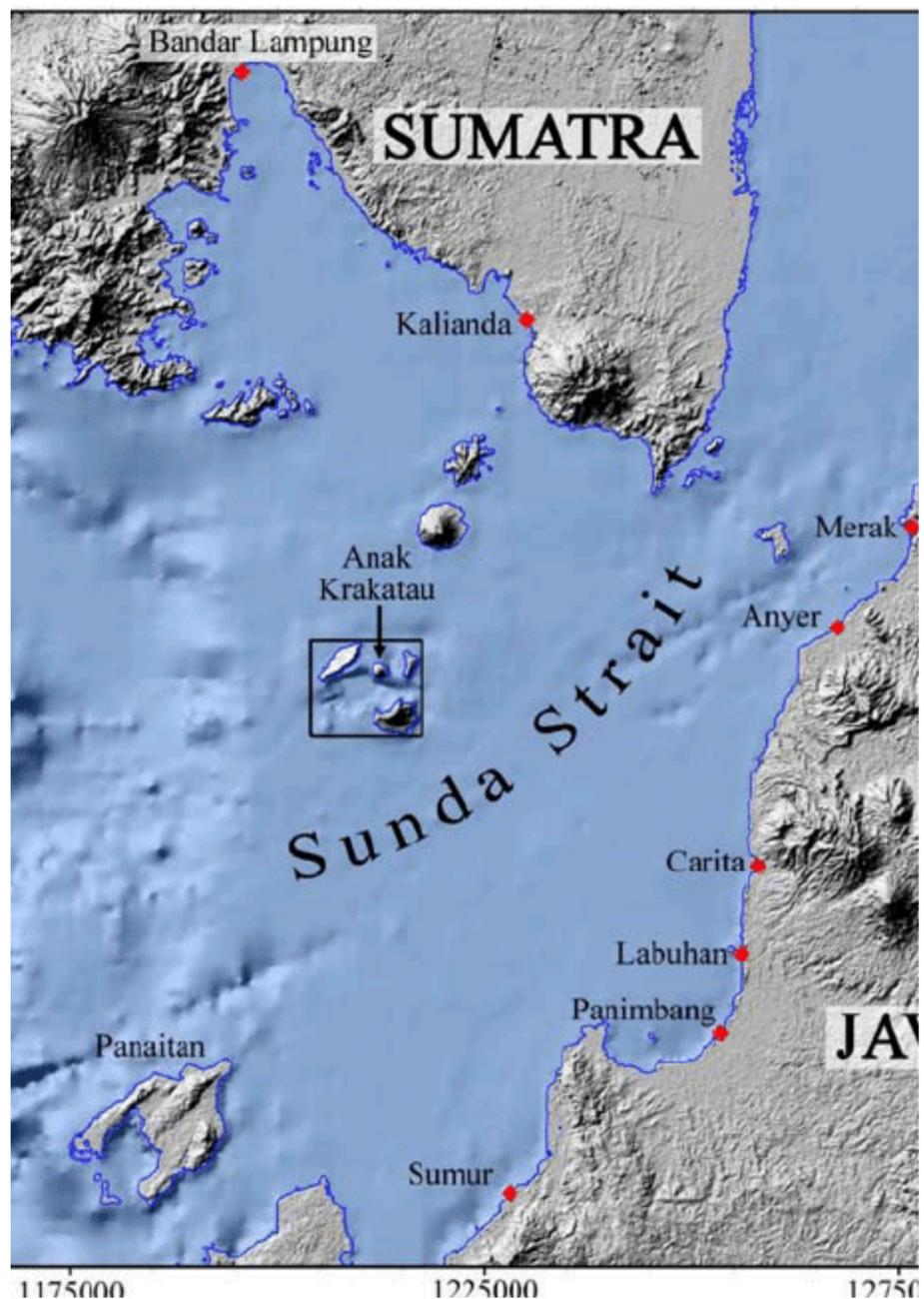
Q3. Ans d

Money spiders, commonly found in European meadows, have been reported for the first time in the country from the Muthanga range of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary. The species is called so as it is "believed to bring luck" to the person who comes in contact with it.



Q4. Ans d

Sunda strait lies between the Java and Sumatra islands, connecting the Java Sea to the Indian Ocean.

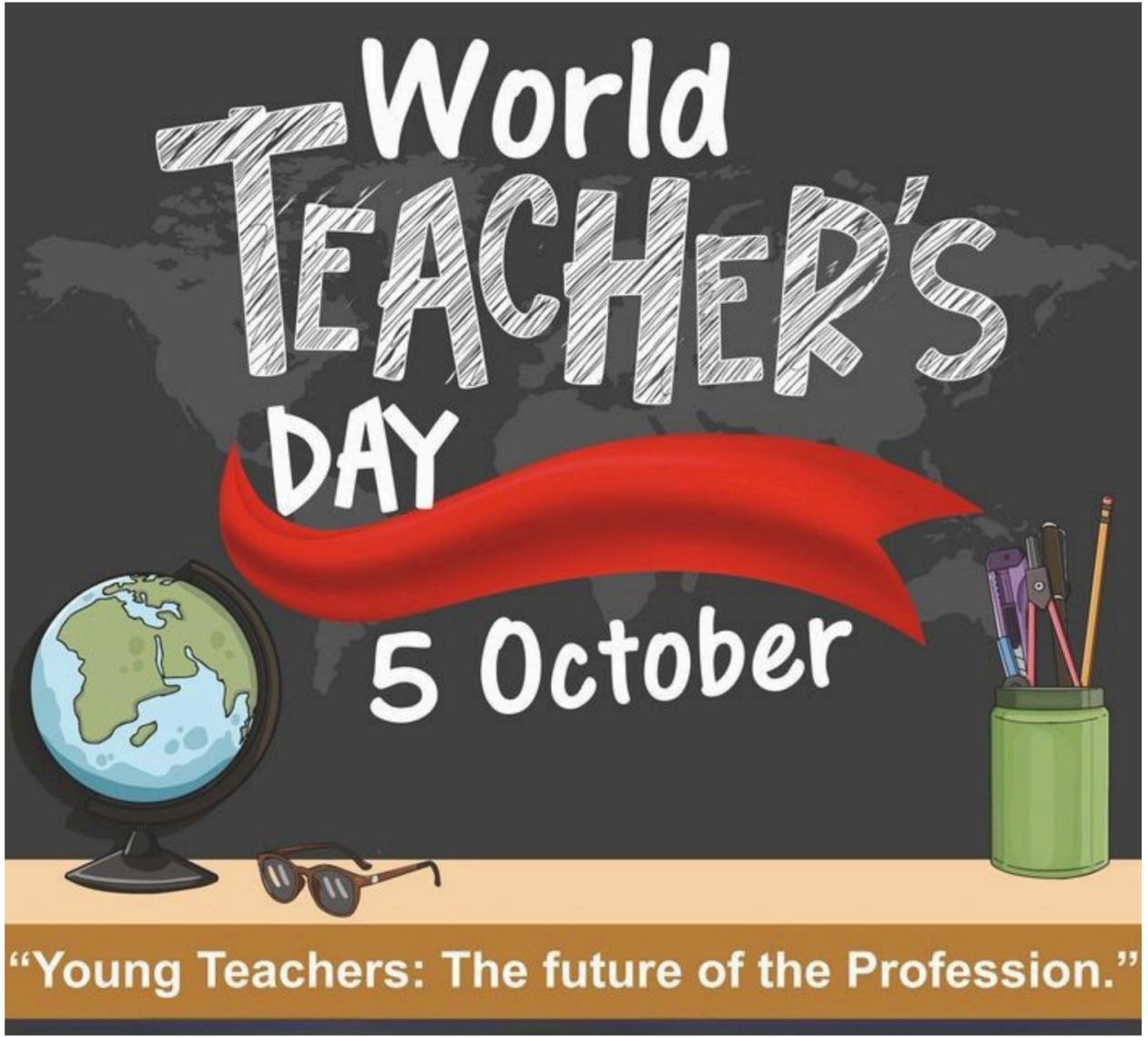


Case Study:



Asian Games Village in New Delhi, is a vibrant and diverse community that mirrors the broader Indian society. The enclave, known for its leafy trees, open spaces, and clusters of low-rise yellow buildings, was originally built to house athletes for the 1982 Asian Games. The village layout was designed to embody the Indian housing philosophy of mixing built spaces with greenery, making it reminiscent of a typical Indian ‘mohalla’ or neighborhood. Several prominent artists, musicians, and public figures have lived in the village. Currently, parts of the complex are slated for redevelopment by HUDCO, sparking worry among residents who fear the loss of the close-knit community atmosphere and architectural heritage. While acknowledging the need for repairs and updates, many residents and planners stress that redevelopment should preserve the social and architectural fabric of the village, avoiding high-rise construction or excessive commercialization. The consensus is for sensitive, community-focused renovation rather than drastic transformation.

World Teachers’ Day is held annually on 5 October to celebrate all teachers around the globe. It commemorates the anniversary of the adoption of the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers.



World Para Athletics Championships 2025 medals tally

Rank	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Brazil	15	20	9	44
2	People's Republic of China	13	22	17	52
3	Islamic Republic of Iran	9	2	5	16
4	Netherlands	8	3	1	12
5	Poland	8	2	6	16
6	Colombia	7	10	4	21
7	Great Britain	7	5	13	25
8	Italy	7	1	3	11
9	United States	6	9	12	27
10	India	6	9	7	22
11	Germany	6	2	3	11
12	Thailand	6	2	2	10

India achieved its best-ever performance at the World Para Athletics Championships 2025, held in New Delhi, by securing a total of 22 medals — comprising 6 gold, 9 silver, and 7 bronze. This remarkable feat surpasses the country’s previous record of 17 medals at the Kobe 2024 Championships, reaffirming India’s growing dominance in global para-sports. The championship, featuring over 2,000 athletes from 104 countries, marked a historic moment for Indian para-athletics and showcased the nation’s commitment to inclusivity, excellence, and sports empowerment.