

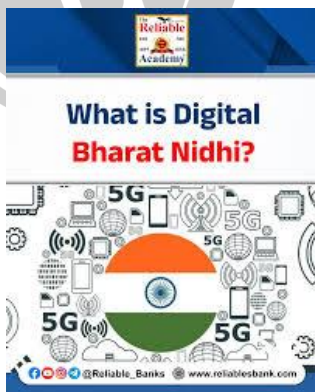
17th July, 2024

Governance

Draft Rules for Digital Bharat Nidhi Released

Context: On July 4, India's Department of Telecommunications (DoT) unveiled draft rules for the Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN). The initiative aims to enhance internet connectivity, particularly in rural, remote, and economically disadvantaged urban areas.

- ❖ This plan revises the current Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) by reallocating funds to improve and broaden telecommunication services.



Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) Overview

- ❖ The USOF was established in 2003 to enhance telecom services in less profitable regions of India. Funded by a 5% levy on telecom operators' adjusted gross revenue (AGR), the

USOF has faced criticism for underutilization despite substantial revenue generation.

- ❖ For instance, government reports indicate that only around 72% of the Rs 41,740 crore collected between 2017 and 2022 was spent. This inefficiency led to budget revisions and reductions in FY23, especially affecting projects like BharatNet.

Environment

West Antarctica's Vulnerability

Context: For a long time, the distinct ice sheets covering various parts of Antarctica have puzzled scientists. A recent study is shedding light on this mystery, revealing why West Antarctica remains highly susceptible to modern-day warming.

- ❖ Published in the renowned journal "Science," the research indicates that the ice sheets of East and West Antarctica formed at vastly different times.



Initial Ice Sheet Formation

- ❖ Approximately 34 million years ago, Earth's climate transitioned from a warm greenhouse state to a cooler icehouse state, initiating the formation of ice sheets in Eastern Antarctica.
- ❖ However, it took an additional 7 million years for ice to begin covering the western part of the region.
- ❖ This time difference is crucial for understanding the natural challenges currently facing Antarctica.

Geological and Climate Insights

- ❖ The latest study analyzed sediment samples from the seafloor near the Pine Island and Thwaites glaciers. These samples suggest that during the early stages of major glaciation,

- ❖ West Antarctica remained ice-free. Johann Klages and his team from the Alfred Wegener Institute propose that dense forests and a cool to temperate climate likely hindered the initial ice formation in the region.

Personalities in News

Tamil Writer Sivashankari Wins National Literary Award

Context: Famed Tamil author Sivashankari has been awarded the Dr. C. Narayana Reddy National Literary Award. The Sushila Narayana Reddy Trust announced this recognition to honor her significant contributions to Tamil literature.

Award Details

- ❖ Sivashankari will receive a cash prize of ₹5 lakh, a memento, and a shawl. The award will be presented on July 29 during the 93rd birth anniversary celebrations of Dr. C. Narayana Reddy at Ravindra Bharati in Hyderabad.



- ❖ The Chief Minister, A. Revanth Reddy, will be the chief guest, joined by Minister for Culture Jupalli Krishna Rao and Government Whip Adi Srinivas. Additionally, Dr. C. Narayana Reddy's new book of poems, "Samanvitham," will be released at the event.

Sivashankari's Literary Contributions

- ❖ Sivashankari's prolific career includes 36 novels, 48 mini-novels (navalikas), 150 short stories, 15 travelogues, seven essay collections, four study papers, and two biographies.
- ❖ Her works predominantly focus on social issues and human values. Alongside the upcoming award, she has previously received the prestigious Saraswati Samman, highlighting her enduring impact on Indian literature.

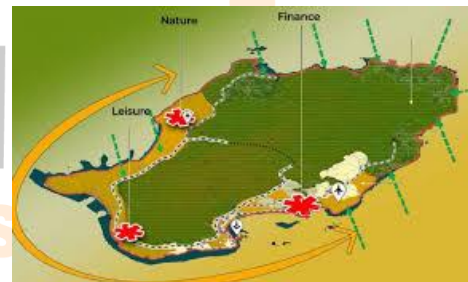
Infrastructure

Great Nicobar Project

Context: The Great Nicobar Project, valued at ₹72,000 crore, is under intense scrutiny due to concerns

regarding its potential environmental, legal, and ethical impacts. The project involves the construction of facilities such as an international airport and a trans-shipment port.

- ❖ The handling of public consultations, particularly the exclusion of the Shompen and Nicobarese Indigenous groups from the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) conducted in June 2020, has sparked significant controversy.



Consultation and Community Impact

- ❖ The draft SIA report's public hearing did not invite local tribal groups, significantly impacting the Shompen, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), and the Nicobarese, a Scheduled Tribe (ST). Instead, the hearing primarily included residents from the recently settled communities of Gandhi Nagar and Shastri Nagar.

- ❖ The draft SIA, crucial for compliance with the Land Acquisition Act, overlooked the indigenous population, focusing instead on the landowners of the areas slated for acquisition.

Environmental and Social Concerns

- ❖ The project's progression requires the acquisition of 404.8 hectares of private land and the diversion of approximately 130 square kilometers of forest land, affecting around a million trees.

- ❖ Environmentalists and social scientists warn of severe adverse impacts on local ecosystems, including the potential destruction of coral reefs, marine life, and habitats of rare species such as the Nicobar Megapode bird and leatherback turtles.
- ❖ The displacement of indigenous tribes, who depend on these lands for their livelihood, raises serious social and ethical issues.



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