

NEWS TODAY

GUJARAT HARAPPAN SITE REVEALS DEATH RITUALS OF 5000 YEARS AGO

- **Excavations at Juna Khathiya village** (Kutch district) found **rows of graves** with skeletal remains, **ceramic pots, beaded jewellery, animal bones etc.**

➤ These are **from 3,200 BCE to 2,600 BCE**, (pre-urban Harappan) **predating several other Harappan sites** in the state.

- **Key findings**

➤ Other sites like Dholavira have a cemetery in and around the town, but **no major habitation has been discovered here.**

➤ Site demonstrates **transition from earth-mound burials to stone graves.**

➤ **Pottery have features and style similar** to those excavated from early Harappan sites in Sindh and Balochistan.

➤ **Pebbles of local rock, basalt, etc were used for construction**, and clay was used to bind them together.

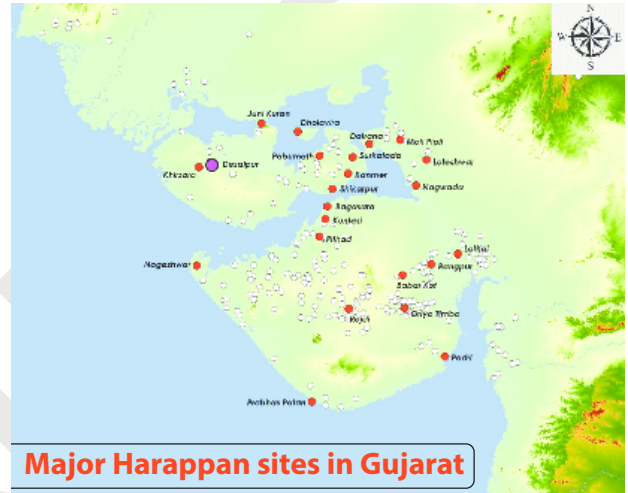
- **Major burial practises of Indus Valley Civilization** (also known as Harappan Civilisation)

➤ Although **varied across sites**, there were **three known types** of burial customs: **complete burial, fractional burial and urn burial** (Burial of the ashes after cremation).

➤ **Most common burial method** was placing body with **head towards north** in a simple pit or brick chamber.

➤ **Grave goods** including food, pottery, tools and ornaments **can be found along with the body.**

➤ **Lothal** provides evidence of **burial of pairs of male and female** together.



AS SHARE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY (RE) INCREASES IN GRID, GOVERNMENT EXPLORES STORAGE OPTIONS

- India needs to work on **developing viable energy storage system (ESS)** options to **operationally sustain a huge monthly addition** (average 1,000 megawatt) **from renewables** to electricity grid.

➤ **Nearly 40%** (out of India's total installed capacity of 404 GW) **comes from non-fossil fuel sources** such as wind, solar etc.

➤ According to a recent report, India **requires 160 GW of ESS by 2030.**

- ESS **enables energy from renewables to be stored** and then released when needed the most. **Some ESS are:**

➤ **Lithium-ion battery, Pumped Storage Hydropower, Thermal Storage, Compressed Air Energy Storage, Mechanical Energy Storage** (e.g. Flywheels) etc.

- Since some RE generation sources aren't available all the time, storage becomes an enabling technology to:

➤ **Improve reliability and resilience** of RE by balancing out variability in RE generation.

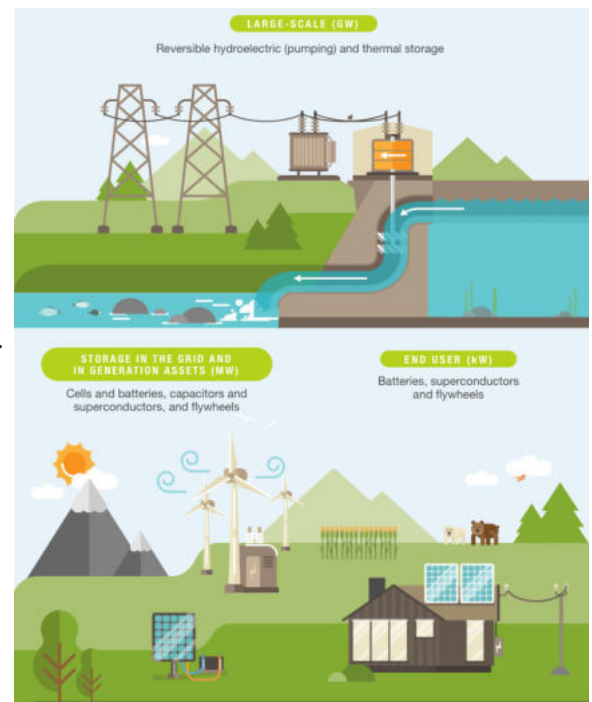
➤ **Maximise amount and value** of solar and wind power in its electricity system.

➤ **Reduce environment impacts** by improving efficiencies and capabilities for electric grid.

- **ESS initiatives taken in India**

➤ **Granting Legal status** for ESS and **notification of Energy Storage obligation trajectory** till 2029-30.

➤ **Waiver of Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) Charges** on **Hydro Pumped Storage Projects and Battery Energy Storage System Projects** etc.





MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (MORTH) STREAMLINED NATIONAL HIGHWAY (NH) PROJECT PROPOSALS UNDER GATISHAKTI

- **With an aim** to offer comprehensive operational estimates so that **road assets under GatiShakti can be better monetised**, revised format for consultations proposal submitted should include features like:

➤ **Advantages** project will accrue **to industries and economic activities** in the region.

➤ How project will **contribute to multi-modal connectivity, connect manufacturing and economic zones** to infrastructural connectivity.

- **MoRTH informed about the revised format in network planning group (NPG)**, a group of officials from ministries and departments related to infrastructure that is **tasked with unified planning and integration of proposals**.

➤ **NPG also assists empowered group of secretaries (EGoS)** on GatiShakti National Master Plan (NMP).

- **GatiShakti NMP is an integrated plan** which will address the missing gaps to **ensure seamless movement of people, goods & services**.

➤ It aims **to enhance ease of living, ease of doing business, minimize disruptions** and expedite completion of works with cost efficiencies.

➤ It **provides comprehensive database of the ongoing & future projects** of various Ministries thereby **facilitating planning, designing and execution of infrastructure projects** with a common vision.

➤ **Six pillars of GatiShakti NMP:** Comprehensiveness, Prioritization, Optimization, Synchronization, Analytical and Dynamic.

RBI TO ISSUE SOVEREIGN GREEN BONDS (SGrBs) IN TWO TRANCHES OF RS 8000 CRORE EACH

- **RBI will issue 5-year and 10-year green bonds** of Rs 4,000 crore each in current financial year.

- Green bonds are **bonds issued by any sovereign entity, inter-governmental groups or alliances** and corporates with the aim that **proceeds of bonds are utilised for environmentally sustainable projects**.

➤ **SGrBs were announced in Union Budget 2022-23 and framework for SGrBs was issued** (by Ministry of Finance) **in November 2022**.

- **Eligible projects under SGrBs framework include** projects of renewable energy, energy efficiency, clean transportation, climate change adaptation, sustainable water and waste management, pollution prevention and control, green buildings, and biodiversity conservation.

- **Significance of Green Bonds**

➤ An important **financial instrument to deal with threats of climate change** and related challenges.

➤ Influence business strategy by **offering investors a platform to engage in good practices**.

➤ Will help India in **tapping requisite finance for deployment in public sector projects** aimed at **reducing carbon intensity of economy**.

- **Challenges in realising potential of Green Bonds**

➤ **Greenwashing** due to eligibility of wide range of projects.

➤ **Lack of robust impact assessment framework** to quantify environmental outcomes.

➤ **Liquidity issues for investors** as it is still a small market.

SGrBs BY RBI WILL BE

- **Issued through Uniform Price Auction** and **5% will be reserved for retail investors**.

- **Eligible for Repo and Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) purpose**.

- **Eligible for trading in the secondary market**.

- **Designated as specified securities for investment in Government Securities by non-residents**.

RELATED NEWS

- In a recent meeting of GatiShakti NMP, **MoRTH has been directed to:**

➤ **Open newly-constructed National Highway stretches only after conducting road safety audits**.

➤ **Frame a policy for implementation of smooth transition in lane configuration** with adequate signage and warnings to reduce accidents.

➤ **Identify measures and policy required** by central and state governments **to expedite electrification of all public transport vehicles**.

KEVIN McCARTHY ELECTED U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SPEAKER

- **US House of Representatives (lower chamber)**, along with the **Senate (upper chamber)**, is **part of US Congress, i.e., the Legislative Branch**.

➤ **US Vice President serves as presiding officer and President of the Senate** by virtue of his/her office.

- Speaker is the **political and parliamentary leader of the House of Representatives**. He is simultaneously the **House's presiding officer, party leader, and institution's administrative head**, among other duties.

➤ **Speaker has always been** (but is not required to be) **a House Member** and is second in line to succeed the President, after Vice President.

➤ He is **elected by the house every two years**.

- In India, **Lok Sabha Speaker is the comparative office to US Speaker** as both heads the elected house of the **Legislative Branch**.

- But **some differences exist between the two**. E.g. in India, the speaker:

➤ **Need to be a Lok Sabha member** to be elected.

➤ **Can be outside the ruling party or coalition**, based on instances.

➤ **Holds office from his/her election till immediately before the first meeting of the Lok Sabha after the dissolution of the one to which he/she was elected**.

INDIA LOST 2 OUT OF 5 WETLANDS IN LAST 3 DECADES: WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL (WI)

- A study by WI, a non-government global organisation headquartered in Netherlands, also found that:
 - 40% of water bodies have lost quality for survival of aquatic animals.
 - Reasons for decline include massive infrastructure development, expansion of housing plans, exploitation of water without alternative strategy etc.
- Wetlands are **lands transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems** where water table is usually at or near surface, or land is covered by shallow water.
- India is a Contracting Parties to Ramsar Convention (adopted in 1971) that provides framework for conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
 - India has around 2.2 lakh big wetlands and 75 wetlands are part of **Ramsar Wetland Sites**.
 - **Tamil Nadu has maximum no. of Ramsar sites (14)**, followed by UP (10).
- Recently, Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (**COP14**) adopted the **Wuhan Declaration, calling for:**
 - **Practical actions** to promote conservation, restoration, management as well as wise and sustainable use of wetlands worldwide.
 - **Committing additional resources** to better implement convention's strategic plan and take **more impact-oriented action** up to 2030.

ALSO IN NEWS



Aspirational Block Programme (ABP)

- **PM launched ABP** aimed at **improving performance of blocks** lagging on various development parameters.
 - It was initially **announced in Union Budget 2022-23**.
 - It is **said to cover 500 districts** across country.
- ABP is **on the lines of Aspirational District Programme (ADP)** that was launched in 2018 and initially covered 112 districts across the country.
 - **Key pillars of ADP: Convergence** of central and state schemes; **Collaboration** among central, state nodal officers and district collectors; and **Competition** among districts.



Village Defence Committees(VDCs)

- Recently, Lt Governor of **Jammu and Kashmir** agreed to **set up VDCs**.
- First formed in the **mid 1990s in Doda district**, VDCs are a **force multiplier** against militant attacks.
 - It involves **residents of remote hilly villages** who are **trained** and **given weapons** to defend themselves.
 - They function **under the direction of the SP/SSP of the district** concerned with **ex-servicemen, ex-policemen and able-bodied youth** as members on a **voluntary basis**.
- VDCs are **renamed as Village Defence Guards (VDGs)** with increased payment.



Wildlife Conservation Bond (WCB)

- **Also Known as Rhino Bond**, WCB is a five-year \$150m sustainable development bond, **to protect and increase black rhino populations** in two protected areas in **South Africa**.
- WCB is an **outcome-based World Bank structured bond** that channels **private capital to finance conservation activities**.
- Together **with financing from Global Environment Facility (GEF)**, WCB transfers project risk from donors to investors.
 - It is **part of GEF's Blended Finance initiative** that shows how innovative finance can work to combat global environmental degradation.
 - GEF was **established at Rio Earth Summit, 1992 to help developing countries** and countries with economies in transition to meet **objectives of environmental conventions and agreements**.



Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

- **Kerala government has launched a welfare fund board** to provide pension to MGNREGS workers.
- Funded by government grant, premium collected from registered workers, contributions of the local bodies and the loans availed by fund board, **it will provide monthly pension to:**
 - **MGNREGS and state's Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme workers above 60.**
- MGNREGS, under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005), **guarantees at least 100 days** (extendable upto **150 days**) of **wage employment** in a **Financial Year to a rural household** whose adult members volunteer to do **unskilled manual work**.

 <p>Army's Rightsizing plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is being reported that as part of Army's planned manpower optimisation exercise veterans will be roped in specific areas including training institutions, cross-skilling technical trades etc. Exercise is aimed at sharpening its tooth-to-tail ratio (number of military personnel it takes to supply and support a combat soldier). Army's rightsizing plan was first recommended by Shekatkar committee with a focus on creation of a leaner force and sharpening of its combat edge amid changing dynamics of modern warfare.
 <p>Digital India Awards (DIA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> President conferred the Digital India Awards, 2022. DIA aims to encourage and honour innovative digital solutions/ exemplary initiatives by various government entities (startups also for 2022) at all levels. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DIA has been instituted by Minister for Electronics & Information Technology, under aegis of National Portal of India. Winners for 2022 includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e-NAM: Pan-India electronic trading portal to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities. e-Vivechna App (MP): To help in crime investigation. Mine Mitra (UP): For online approval of Mining plan. DUARE SARKAR (WB): For service delivery and welfare schemes at peoples' doorsteps.
 <p>Earth Radiation Budget Satellite (ERBS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NASA's retired ERBS is expected to re-enter Earth's atmosphere. Launched in 1984 (intended for two years), ERBS was part of NASA's three-satellite Earth Radiation Budget Experiment (ERBE) mission. It carried instruments to measure Earth's radiative energy budget and stratospheric constituents, including ozone. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy budget, balance between amount of energy from Sun that Earth absorbs or radiates, is an important indicator of climate health. Stratospheric Aerosol and Gas Experiment II (SAGE II) on ERBS collected important data that confirmed ozone layer was declining on a global scale.
 <p>Standards and Labeling Program of Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ceiling fans have come under the ambit of mandatory star labelling of BEE. Standards and Labeling Program was launched in 2006, under Energy Conservation Act, 2001. Under it, a Star Rating was introduced on appliances for visual representation of appliance's efficiency, i.e: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lowest energy consumption appliances having highest star and highest energy consumption having the least star. It is mandatory for several appliances including Frost Free and Direct Cool Refrigerator, LED Lamps, Room AC (Variable and Fixed speed), Color TV, Refrigerators, TFL, Stationary Storage Type Electric Water Heater etc. 
 <p>Thullal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ottanthullal (or Thullal) is a recite-and-dance art-form of Kerala that is famous for its humour and social satire. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was introduced in 18th century by legendary poet Kunchan Nambiar. It is marked by its simplicity as opposed to more complex dance-forms like Kathakali and Koodiyattam. Thullal performer is supported by a singer who repeats the verses and is accompanied by an orchestra of mridangam or thoppimaddalam (percussions) and cymbals. It has spawned into three separate versions which include Ottanthullal, Seethankan thullal and Parayan thullal.