

❖ Government Increases The Number Of Disability Categories From 3 To 5

➤ Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh informed that the government has increased the number of disability categories for reservation for PwD (persons with disabilities) from 3 to 5. Earlier, there were only three categories in which reservation was given to persons with disabilities (PWD).

➤ These categories include –

- 1) Blindness and low vision
- 2) Deaf and hard of hearing
- 3) Locomotor disability including cerebral palsy, cured leprosy patients, dwarfism, acid attack victims and muscular dystrophy.

The Government of India has added two more categories –

1. Autism, intellectual disability, specific learning disability and mental illness
 2. Persons with multiple disabilities, including deaf-blindness, under clauses (1) to (4).
- Reservation quota for the disabled in Central government services has been increased from 3% to 4% and 5% in education for them.

❖ New Guinness World Record Set in 'City of Music' Gwalior

➤ 1500 people performed tabla in the 'Taal Darbar' in Gwalior, city of Music, setting a Guinness World Record for the most persons performing tabla at the same time. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadhav, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, and Assembly Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar witnessed the historic performance.

➤ Chief Minister Mohan Yadav stated that 25th December will be designated as 'Tabla Divas'.

➤ The 'Tabla Darbar' festival program was organized at Karna Mahal of Gwalior Fort on 25th December, This program was part of the annual '99th Tansen Samaroh' music festival in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh.

➤ **About Tansen Samaroh** Tansen Sangeet Samaroh, one of India's largest yearly music festivals, is held in Gwalior. It is a 5-day music festival, the festival honors great 16th century musician Mian Tansen. Gwalior Music Gharana flourished under the patronage of Gwalior's former royal houses, such as Raja Mansingh and Scindias.

➤ **Gwalior-City of Music:** The city of Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh has been accepted by UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (UCCN) for its outstanding commitment to culture and creativity.

➤ The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has designated Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, as the 'Creative City of Music' for the year 2023.

❖ **Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary's One Km Area Declared Eco-Sensitive Zone**

➤ The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has recently issued a draft notification declaring an area of one kilometre from the boundaries of Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary in Kangra district as an eco-sensitive zone.

➤ According to the draft notification, no commercial activity like construction of hotels, resorts or any type of polluting industry will be allowed in the eco-sensitive area around the Pong Dam Sanctuary. The notification also prohibits installation of overhead electric or communication towers in environmentally sensitivity.

➤ **Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary:** Pong Dam Lake (also known as Maharana Pratap Sagar) is a manmade reservoir formed due to the construction of Pong Dam on the Beas River in the wetland zone of Shivalik Hills. This Pong Dam Lake is located in Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh.

➤ In 1983, the entire reservoir was declared as a wildlife sanctuary by the government of Himachal Pradesh. In 1994, the Government of India declared it a “Wetland of National Importance”. Pong Dam Lake was declared as a Ramsar Site in November 2002.

❖ **Telangana Announced Rs 5 Lakh Accident Insurance for GIG Workers**

➤ **Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy** has announced to provide accident insurance of **Rs 5 lakh to gig workers** from the government on 23 December 2023. This state government has made an important announcement for gig workers like food delivery, cab, and auto-rickshaw drivers.

➤ Chief Minister Revanth Reddy assured the gig workers that the government will also provide a health cover of Rs 10 lakh under the Rajiv Aarogyasri Scheme.

➤ **About Gig Workers:** There are some tasks in every business that can be done by a temporary employee instead of a permanent employee. Companies compensate workers based on the tasks performed. Individuals engaged under this payment-for-task arrangement are referred to as gig workers.

➤ Gig workers are those who work temporary jobs, typically in the service sector as an independent contractor or freelancer. Delivery partners for food aggregators such as Swiggy or Zomato are gig workers.

➤ Recently, in July 2024 Rajasthan became the first state in the country to pass a law to provide social security to gig workers. This law gives rights to platform-based gig workers to register themselves with the state government, have access to social security schemes and be heard in case of any grievances among other things.

➤ **INDIA Skill Report 2024**

➤ The India skills report has been launched by Wheebox in association with various agencies including All India Council for Technical Education, Confederation of Indian Industry and Association of Indian Universities.

➤ This 11th edition of the India skills report is based on the extensive Wheebox National Employability Test (WNET) with 3.88 lakh participants and insights from 152 corporations. It unfolds key highlights that underscore India's leadership in the AI domain.

➤ **State of Employability in India:** It has improved with 51.25% of the assessed youths found to be employable with the required skills

➤ **State with Maximum Employability in India Skills Report 2024:** Telangana has the highest concentration of employable talent in the age group of 18-21 where 85.45% were found employable.

➤ Gujarat has the highest availability of employable resources in the age group of 26-29 with 78.24% in this age group found employable.

➤ Kerala and Telangana demonstrate a high concentration of highly employable youth. As of August 2023, there were 4.16 Lakh AI professionals, poised to meet the increasing demand expected to reach 1million by 2026.

➤ **Cities with Employable Talent:** Among top cities with employable talent in the age group of 18-21, Pune came first with 80.82% of candidates found highly employable, followed by Bengaluru, and then Trivandrum. For employability in the age group of 22-25 among top cities, Lucknow comes first at 88.89%, followed by Mumbai and then Bengaluru.

➤ **Most Preferred State to Work:** Kerala is the most preferred state to work for both male and female employable talent, with Cochin being the most preferred area to work for female test takers.

➤ **India to acquire five lithium blocks in Argentina**

➤ In a significant development, India is poised to secure exploration and development rights for **five lithium blocks in Argentina**, marking its second international foray into critical minerals after a partnership with Australia in 2022.

➤ The deal is on the verge of finalization between **Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL)** and **Catamarca Minera Y Energética Sociedad Del Estado (CAMYEN)**, an Argentine state-owned mining and energy company.

➤ The Indian government plans to invest around Rs 200 crore over the next five years for exploration, signalling a strategic commitment to securing a domestic supply of critical minerals. The proposal is awaiting approval from the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.

➤ India is also set to establish an offshore office for **KABIL in Catamarca, Argentina**, enhancing coordination with provincial regulatory authorities.

➤ **KABIL** (Khanij Bidesh India Limited) is a joint Venture between the national Aluminium Company (NALCO), Mineral Exploration Corporation Ltd. (MECL), and Hindustan Copper Ltd. (HCL), it was formed for the identification, acquisition, development, and processing of strategic minerals overseas for use in India.

➤ Argentina, holding **21% of the world's lithium reserves** concentrated in the Lithium Triangle, is a key partner for India. Lithium triangle comprised of 3 countries namely Argentina, Bolivia and Chile.

➤ **Africa's second largest oil producer Angola leaves OPEC**

➤ **Angola**, a significant oil-producing nation, has declared its decision to exit the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** with effect from January 1, 2024. This move follows the footsteps of exit of Ecuador in 2020 and Qatar in 2019.

➤ Angola became a member of OPEC in 2007, contributing approximately 1.1 million barrels per day to the global oil market. In comparison, the entire OPEC group, founded in 1960 by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Venezuela, Iran and Iraq produces around 28 million barrels per day.

About Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

➤ Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Venezuela, Iran and Iraq created OPEC. It is a permanent intergovernmental organisation of countries that export oil, this was founded in September 1960 at the Baghdad Conference.

➤ In the first 5 years of existence, OPEC's Headquarters was in Geneva, Switzerland, but later it moved to Vienna on September 1st, 1965.

➤ In recent apart from Angola, Ecuador, Indonesia and Qatar are left from OPEC. With this at present total member countries of OPEC are 12 members which include 5 founding members and other 7 member countries are UAE, Algeria, Gabon, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Libya.

❖ Actress Aastha Rawal Crowned with Miss Continental International 2023

➤ Indian Actress Aastha Rawal has won the 5th edition of 'Miss Continental International Award 2023' pageant held in New Delhi, India for the very first time. Aastha Rawal was also honoured with the titles of "Best in Interview" and "Best in Swimwear".

➤ The journey to this illustrious was no walk in the park, as contestants faced a series of challenging trails. Aashtha Rawal, alongside another exceptional representative from India, emerged victorious from a fierce competition that included participants from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bhutan and various other Asian countries.

❖ **Visva-Bharati Researchers Discover Bacteria Named After Rabindranath Tagore**

➤ A team of researchers from Visva-Bharati University's botany department has made a groundbreaking discovery that has the potential to revolutionize agricultural practices. They have identified a new bacteria strain capable of boosting plant growth and named it 'Pantoea Tagorei' in honor of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

➤ The discovery was made by a team led by Professor Bomba Dam in the Microbiology Laboratory in the Department of Botany. The research team detected Pantoea Tagorei bacteria in the soil of Jharia coal mines. The bacteria Pantoea Tagorei exhibits remarkable properties.

➤ This Pantoea Tagorei is a good Bacteria variant and useful to promote plant growth. It has the functions of potassium solubilisation, nitrogen replenishment, phosphorus solubilisation and promoting plant growth.

➤ Excessive use of chemical fertilisers has led to the degradation of arable land, which has increased the trend towards organic farming. Pantoea Tagorei has emerged as a promising solution. It not only makes potassium soluble but also supplies nitrogen. Initial experiments involving farmers receiving these bacteria have yielded positive results.

❖ **India-Russia Signed Kudankulam Plant Agreement for Future Power Supply**

➤ **India and Russia** signed agreements related to the construction of future power generation units of the **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant** in **Tamil Nadu** on 26 December 2023.

➤ External Affairs Minister Jaishankar has announced the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant agreement after meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov on bilateral economic cooperation.

➤ In the presence of both leaders, agreements regarding nuclear energy, medicine and medical equipment were signed. External Affairs Minister Jaishankar accompanied Manturov during the visit to the Russian Industry and Trade Exhibition.

➤ **About Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant:** Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) built in Tamil Nadu with technical assistance from Russia. Its construction started in March 2002. The initial power Unit of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant has been consistently operated since February 2016, generating 1,000 MW of capacity.

➤ KNPP will be India's largest nuclear power station. It is located 650 Km south of Chennai in the Tirunavelli district of Tamil Nadu. KNPP is being developed by Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL).