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Current Affairs of the Day

Army trains officers on LAC in Tibetology

1. With a view to orienting its officers and men posted along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Tibetan culture and also preparing them to better understand the information warfare, the Army has begun a course in Tibetology in a tie-up with the Central Institute of Himalayan Cultural Studies in Arunachal Pradesh.

2. Understanding Tibetan traditions, cultural peculiarities, democracy and political influence and so on empower our men and officers to understand where we are going and where we are operating.
3. During the 42 days of the preliminary course, Tibetan history, geopolitics and current political dynamics were covered in the form of lectures and case studies, the officer added.
4. Lamas who were proficient in Tibetan issues were hired from the Bomdila Monastery to teach the course.

THE HINDU

Army trains officers on LAC in Tibetology

Lamas from Bomdila Monastery engaged for teaching; first batch completes course

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

With a view to orienting its officers and men posted along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Tibetan culture and also preparing them to better understand the information warfare, the Army has begun a course in Tibetology in a tie-up with the Central Institute of Himalayan Cultural Studies in Arunachal Pradesh.

The first batch of 15 participants was trained from March to May this year.

Better idea
"Understanding Tibetan traditions, cultural peculiarities, democracy and political influence and so on empowers our men and officers to understand where we are going and where we are operating," said a senior Army officer at the 5 Mountain Division at Tenga in Arunachal Pradesh.

Officers posted in the area would be considered for the course.

The Army's Training Command, ARTRAC, has identified seven institutes for Tibetology across the country, two of which are in the northeast.

The other one is the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Sikkim.

Such training was happening earlier too but now it has been formalised.

On a trial basis, the first batch with 15 officers was held from March to May, and the Army has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the institute.

The second course is scheduled to begin next month. Currently, two courses a year are planned with about 15-20 participants in each course. Around 150 officers have


been trained so far across the country at various centres, the officer stated.

A longer course was being planned and a proposal for a three-month course had been sent to ARTRAC, another officer noted.

Broad range of topics
"The officers who are trained will function as trainers in their battalions and in a few years, we will have a sizable number of personnel with understanding of Tibetan issues," the officer explained.

During the 42 days of the preliminary course, Tibetan history, geopolitics and current political dynamics were covered in the form of lectures and case studies, the officer added.

Lamas who were proficient in Tibetan issues were hired from the Bomdila Monastery to teach the course.



Ground work: Army personnel near the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh. #FILEPHOTO



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Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh

Kushinagar connect to Sri Lanka

Prime Minister will declare to open the Kushinagar International Airport in Uttar Pradesh soon.

Kushinagar connect to Sri Lanka

Premier Mahinda's son to lead 125-member team at airport opening by PM Modi

BY ANURAG BHARDWAJ

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi declares open the Kushinagar International Airport in Uttar Pradesh on October 20, a sizeable Sri Lankan contingent, led by a member of the Sri Lanka royal family, will be present.

Sri Lanka's former Rajapaksas, nephew of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and son of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, will travel to Uttar Pradesh, along with ministerial colleagues and a group of 300 Buddhist monks to attend the event, according to officials in Colombo.

Insalivita visit

The airport is expected to provide seamless connectivity to tourists from Sri Lanka, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and so on. Kushinagar is the centre of the Buddhist world, which carries the idea of pilgrimage sites at Lumbini, Sarathi and Topi. Buddhist pilgrims consider Kushinagar a sacred site where, they believe, Gautama Buddha delivered his last sermon and attained 'Nirvana' or salvation.

The inaugural flight on Wednesday will land at the airport from Colombo, Sri Lanka, carrying the 125-member delegation of dignitaries and Buddhist monks. To mark the occasion, Sri Lanka will present to India photographs of two monks passed by members of Sri Lanka's royal family.



One of the monks, by Sri Lanka's royal family, that will be gifted to India on the occasion.

Lanka's royal family, the daughter of the Emperor, is Sri Lanka, bearing a copy of the sacred Buddhist sutra. The royal family's visit to India is followed by the visit of the monks to Kushinagar.

The gesture comes at a time when Sri Lanka and India have agreed to strengthen ties through the Buddhist Heritage.

Despite India's known support to the Mahinda Rajapaksa administration in deposing the 1975, sections among Sri Lanka's southern population resent such gestures, wary of the big neighbour who "interferes" in Sri Lanka's internal conflict, "laced with Hinduism".

Cultural diplomacy

In the decade after the civil war, which coincides with China's growing influence, New Delhi seems keen on re-emerging its image as a friend, using religion and cultural diplomacy.

When India sent the first contingent of 500 monks of Theravada Buddhism to Sri Lanka in January 1960, the Indian High Commission in Colombo in a letter to the Sri Lanka government, it referred to a "Buddhist Free Day" at the knowledge could be shared by Buddhists.

Sri Lanka, too, continues promoting shared Buddhist for a matter of "cultural cooperation", as was outlined in the Integrated Country Strategy prepared by Sri Lanka's High Commission in India.





Buddhist circuit

1. The airport is expected to provide seamless connectivity to tourists from Sri Lanka, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and so on. Kushinagar is the centre of the Buddhist circuit, which consists of pilgrimage sites at Lumbini, Sarnath and Gaya.
2. Buddhist pilgrims consider Kushinagar a sacred site where, they believe, Gautama Buddha delivered his last sermon and attained 'Mahaparinirvana' or salvation.
3. To mark the occasion, Sri Lanka will present to India photographs of two murals painted by renowned Sri Lankan artist Solias Mendis.
4. One of the murals depicts 'Arahat Bhikkhu' Mahinda, son of Emperor Ashoka delivering the message of the Buddha to King Devanampiyatissa of Sri Lanka.
5. The other shows the arrival of 'Theri Bhikkhuni' Sanghamitta, the daughter of the Emperor, in Sri Lanka, bearing a sapling of the 'sacred Bodhi tree' under which Siddhārtha Gautama is believed to have obtained enlightenment.

Cultural diplomacy

1. In the decade after the civil war, which coincides with China's growing influence, New Delhi seems keen on recasting its image as a friend, using religious and cultural diplomacy.
2. Sri Lanka, too, considers promoting shared Buddhist ties a matter of "paramount importance", as was outlined in the Integrated Country Strategy prepared by Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to India.

India's pulses problem: We need real reform

India is the largest producer and consumer of pulses in the world. The strange irony is that pulses have to be imported to meet demand, and the general public suffers due to the unusually high prices. The main reason for this imbalance is the half-hearted and ad-hoc price policy of the government.



Challenges to Pulse Productivity & Production

- Mostly grown under rainfed marginal conditions: considered as secondary crops;
- Instability in yield: prone to a range of biotic and abiotic stresses;
- Changing climate: emerging new stresses;
- Low yield potential: limited use of wide range of genetic diversity and desirable genes;
- Use of less inputs by farmers;
- Inappropriate supportive policies favouring cereals production at the expense of pulses;
- Limited access to quality seed of improved varieties
- ¹⁹Low investment in pulses R & D



Constraints to pulse production (Continued..)

- ❖ High vulnerability of pulse crops to both biotic (pests and diseases) and abiotic stresses (temperature extremes and aberrant rainfall driven by climate change).
- ❖ Pulses are largely grown in marginal lands under rainfed conditions without much inputs.
- ❖ Inadequate availability of labour-saving technologies (varieties suitable for machine harvesting, herbicide resistance) for pulses.
- ❖ Pulses are prone to damage by storage pests.

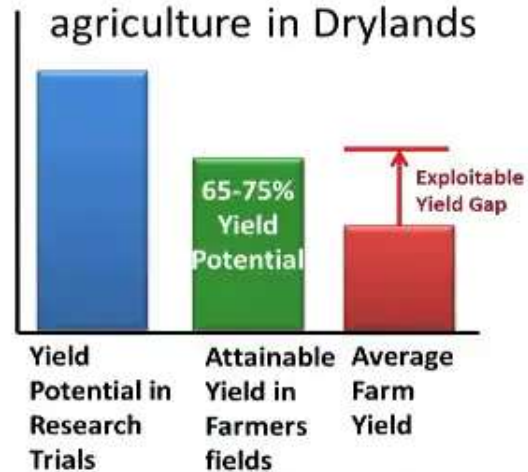




Strategy for Enhancing Pulses Production

- Crop genetic improvement & new genetic gains for improved varieties;
- Vertical increase in productivity through sustainable intensification of production systems;
- Closing the yield gaps
- Horizontal expansion
- Reduced post-harvest losses

Yield potential for rainfed agriculture in Drylands



- 25-60% yield gaps in pulses
- Reasons are many.....
- Closing the yield gaps can alone supply 60% of pulses deficit
- Farmers participatory research



MSP Regime:

1. The Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission, established under the Union Ministry of Agriculture, fixes the minimum support price (MSP) of all agricultural products, including pulses.
2. The MSP is set on the basis of the cost of production, the position of supply, demand and prices in markets, the position of prices relative to other commodities, proper use of natural resources like land and water, the economy of the country, and 50 per cent profit on the cost of production.

Problems in the MSP regime

1. There are several inconsistencies in this arrangement. First, the commission is by status a department whose recommendations are only advisory. Representation of farmers is minimal.
2. The so-called 50 per cent profit to the farmer is not per the government's intended formula, and so it is relatively low. The farmers do not even get the declared MSP.



3. What's most bizarre is that consumers have to buy pulses at 150 to 200 per cent of MSP. This increases inflation and puts an unbearable burden on the weaker section.
4. Even more astonishing is that pulses are imported at prices lower than the domestic ones. In order to check consumer prices, the government takes ineffective measures like reducing the storage limit of pulses under the Essential Commodities Act.
5. For genuine reform, first of all, the MSP formula should be revised and the purchase of each crop in the entire country should be ensured at that declared price.
6. Next, the commission should be given constitutional status, so that its recommendations are binding. A maximum retail price for consumers should be fixed by adding a reasonable profit of 50-60 per cent over MSP to the farmer.

All restrictions on transport, storage, trade, processing and export of all agricultural products should be abolished. In case of low domestic production, imports and taxes should be decided after the harvest. All these points are also in the commission's reports.

Development projects threaten Bengal florican habitat in Assam

The Bustard Specialist Group (BSG) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature wrote to the Assam government recently on the urgent need to prevent land-use changes at Kokilabari Seed Farm in the state to protect Bengal floricans and other species.

1. Land-use changes at the site, which houses 25 Bengal floricans, is posing a threat to the critically endangered bird. The species is found in very small numbers only in India and Cambodia. About a hundred of them are present in Nepal and the species is extinct in Bangladesh.
2. It has 200 other species too. The biodiversity of the site, as an economically viable food-producing enterprise, is as great as any we know of anywhere in the world, the experts wrote in the letter. Kokilabari is an excellent example of human-animal coexistence.



Bengal florican *(Houbaropsis bengalensis)*

Ambassadors of the floodplain grasslands

Habitat
Dense riverine grasslands in subtropical floodplains

Geographic range
India — Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh; Nepal, Bhutan, Cambodia, Vietnam

Grasslands
• Vegetation height is an important factor in Bengal florican habitats
• Need a mix of short grass and tall grass to be able to forage, nest and to use as cover

THREATS
• Hunting, pesticides and fertilisers
• Grazing by livestock
• Uncontrolled burning of grasslands
• Invasive shrubs
• Conversion of native grasslands to agriculture
• Collision with powerlines

Mating Behaviour
• Solitary, except during the breeding season
• In the breeding season, males put up a spectacular aerial display to court females
• During aerial display, males croak and produce a deep hum
• Show site fidelity — always return to same breeding sites

POPULATION, NUMBERS DECLINING
250 - 999

WEIGHT
1.25 - 2.25 kg

Males have a striking black head, neck, and underparts that contrast with the white wings (visible in flight), and a long crest

Females are buff brown and usually larger than males

Eat: Insects (grasshoppers and beetles), grass, seeds, fruits and flowers, reptiles and frogs

PROTECTION STATUS CRITICALLY ENDANGERED ON THE IUCN RED LIST

Lucy in the sky: Things to know about NASA mission to Jupiter's Trojans

Lucy is in outer space and will go where no one else has before — to the Jupiter Trojan asteroids. Astronomers hope it will look back into the origins and evolution of the solar system formed over 4 billion years ago through these celestial bodies.

What are Jupiter Trojan asteroids?

- Simply known as Trojans, they are a large group of asteroids that share Jupiter's orbit around the Sun. Thousands of such asteroids exist in a gravitationally stable space. The swarms lead and follow the planet Jupiter along its orbit around the Sun.



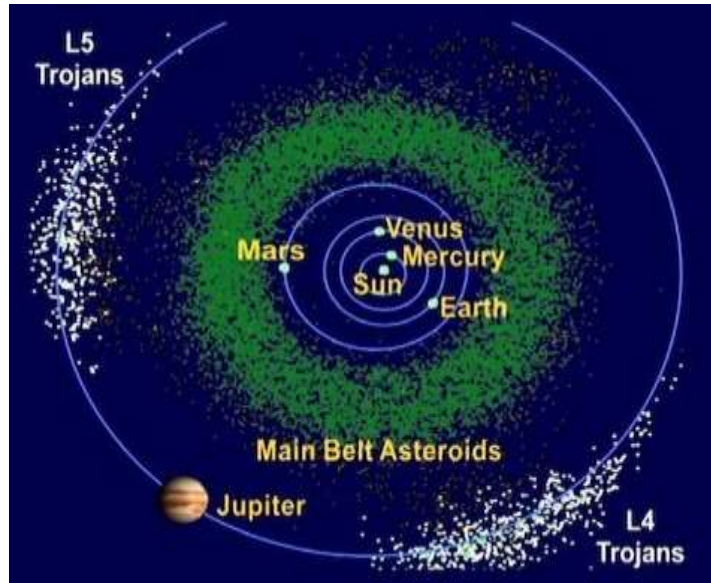
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2. Lucy will fly by eight asteroids—seven Trojans and one main-belt asteroid — over the next 12 years. It is the agency's first single spacecraft mission in history to explore so many different asteroids.



What exactly are Trojans?

Lucy's Trojan destinations are trapped near Jupiter's Lagrange (L) points, which are gravitationally stable locations — it is where the gravity from the Sun and from Jupiter cancel each other out. This means their orbits are stable and the Trojans are trapped in the space between.

Who is Lucy?

1. It is the fossil of a hominin that lived 3.2 million years ago. She is known to be one of the most famous pre-human fossils in history.
2. Lucy will run on solar power out to 850 million kilometres away from the Sun. This makes it the farthest-flung solar-powered spacecraft ever, according to NASA.

MCQ	<p>Q. NASA Mission Lucy will probe</p> <p>a. Jupiter Trojans</p> <p>b. Saturn Rings</p> <p>c. Mars</p> <p>d. Kuiper belt objects</p>
MAINS DAWP	<p>Q. Discuss cultural diplomacy potential hidden in the <i>Buddhist circuit of India</i> and its economic and geo-political implications.</p>