

7. Short news

1. UNESCO's Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects

Recently, UNESCO launched the Virtual Museum of Stolen Cultural Objects at MONDIACULT conference held in Barcelona, Spain.

About UNESCO's Virtual Museum for Stolen Cultural Objects

Introduction – The museum is an innovative digital platform designed to confront illicit trafficking of cultural objects, particularly those taken during colonial periods, and promote awareness of heritage restitution.

Objective – Its main goal is to reconnect communities with stolen cultural treasures, raise awareness about heritage loss, and facilitate eventual restitution of objects to their countries of origin.

Key Features –

- i. The museum displays almost 240 missing objects from 46 countries, with the collection expected to change as items are returned.
- ii. Artificial intelligence is used to digitally recreate objects for which images are scarce.
- iii. The website's design, like a baobab tree which symbolizes strength, and includes the Stolen Cultural Objects Gallery, Auditorium, and Return and Restitution Room.
- iv. Visitors can explore objects by name, material, function, and colour, view community testimonies, and locate the origins of stolen items on a map.
- v. The platform promotes dialogue among governments, museums, law enforcement, and civil society to support cultural restitution and best practices.

India's Participation – The museum features at least two ninth-century sandstone sculptures from the Mahadev Temple in Pali, Chhattisgarh,

- i. The Nataraja figure represents Shiva's cosmic dance.
- ii. A Brahma sculpture illustrating Hindu philosophical concepts.

Significance – The project serves as a virtual tool for repatriation, easing logistical challenges, preserving cultural identity, and promoting global collaboration in combating illicit cultural trafficking.

2. Kenton R. Miller Award

Dr. Sonali Ghosh, Field Director of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, became the first Indian to receive the IUCN WCPA Kenton R. Miller Award 2025 for innovation in protected area management. She was awarded along with Ecuador's politician–environmentalist, Roque Simón Sevilla.

About Kenton R. Miller Award

Introduction – The Kenton R. Miller Award, instituted in 1999 by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), honours innovation and excellence in sustainable management of protected areas.

Named After – Dr. Kenton R. Miller, a pioneer conservationist and former IUCN Director-General, known for promoting global park governance and sustainability.

Purpose – The award promotes innovative approaches in planning, governance, monitoring, capacity-building, and financing of national parks and protected areas.

Eligibility Criteria – Open to protected area managers, researchers, educators, and community leaders engaged in conservation across all governance systems. (Public / Private). Priority is given to nominees without prior international recognition to encourage new leadership in conservation practice.

Award Components – Includes a USD 5,000 grant, global recognition, and sponsored participation at the IUCN World Conservation Congress.

2025 Awardee Dr. Sonali Ghosh (India) – Recognised for pioneering community-integrated conservation models in Kaziranga and Manas National Park, blending traditional ecological knowledge with scientific research.

3. Kaziranga National Park

Location – Assam, along the floodplains of the Brahmaputra River.

Major Animals – One-horned rhinoceros, tigers, elephants, swamp deer, and wild water buffalo.

Manas National Park

Location – Assam, bordering Bhutan, part of the Manas River valley.

Major Animals – Tigers, Indian elephants, pygmy hogs, golden langurs, and wild water buffalo.

Both parks are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, renowned for their rich biodiversity, conservation of endangered species, and critical habitats for large mammals in Northeast India.

4. Schemes to Promote Agriculture Production

On October 11, 2025, Prime Minister launched two major agriculture schemes worth Rs 35,440 crore and inaugurated projects valued at Rs 5,450 crore.

About the National Pulse Mission

The Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses aims to enhance domestic pulse production and reduce import dependency, supporting India's goal of agricultural self-reliance. Target – The mission seeks to increase pulses production from 252.38 lakh tonnes (current) to 350 lakh tonnes by the 2030-31 crop year, thereby decreasing import requirements. Budget and Implementation – The scheme has a total outlay of Rs 11,440 crore and will be implemented from the upcoming rabi season until 2030-31.

About Pradhan Mantri DHAN DHANYA Krishi Yojana

The Pradhan Mantri DHAN DHANYA Krishi Yojana targets 100 low-performing agri-districts for transformation through enhanced agricultural productivity and sustainable development practices. Target and Focus Areas – The scheme aims to improve productivity, crop diversification, irrigation, storage facilities, and credit access in the selected districts to boost overall agricultural output. Budget – The programme has a total outlay of Rs 24,000 crore and will be implemented from the 2025-26 rabi season until 2030-31, complementing other government initiatives in agriculture.

Key Projects Inaugurated by PM

1. Artificial insemination training centres in Bengaluru and Jammu & Kashmir
2. Centres of excellence at Amreli and Banas
3. IVF lab in Assam under Rashtriya Gokul Mission
4. Milk powder plants at Mehsana, Indore, and Bhilwara
5. Fish feed plant at Tezpur under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana

About Rabi Season

The Rabi season refers to the winter cropping season in India, during which crops are sown around October–December and harvested in March–June of the following year. Major Rabi Crops are Cereals (Wheat, Barley, Oats, Gram), Pulses (Lentils, Peas) and Oilseeds (Mustard, Rapeseed). The initiatives strengthen value chains in pulses, agriculture, animal husbandry, and fisheries, promote farmer empowerment, and enhance rural livelihoods through FPOs, PMKSKs, and certified MAITRI technicians.

5. Indian Wolf (Canis Lupus Pallipes)

In a first-ever global assessment, the Indian wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*) has been listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List, with only about 3,000 mature individuals remaining.

About Indian Wolf

The Indian wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*) is one of the most ancient and elusive wolf lineages globally, historically distributed across India and Pakistan.

Distribution – Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan are major population strongholds, supporting nearly half of India's wolves, primarily in grasslands, scrublands, and semi-arid landscapes. Most wolves live outside protected areas, often near farms and villages.

Decline – The IUCN assessment, conducted using habitat modelling over 10,000 locations, estimates 2,877–3,310 mature individuals remaining. Populations have declined due to habitat loss, human persecution, disease, and hybridisation with feral dogs. For example, Maharashtra's Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary landscape saw a 41% decline between 2007–2023.

Ecological Role – As an apex predator, the Indian wolf maintains ecological balance by controlling herbivore populations and preventing overgrazing in grasslands.

Conservation status –

1. Vulnerable on IUCN Red List.
2. Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act (WPA), 1972.

Conservation Recommendations – The IUCN calls for urgent measures, including grassland restoration, community-based coexistence programmes, long-term population monitoring, conflict mitigation, compensation schemes, and strengthened legal protection.

6. Fare Se Fursat Scheme

Recently, Civil Aviation Minister Shri Rammohan Naidu launched "Fare Se Fursat", a fixed-fare initiative by government-owned regional carrier Alliance Air.

About Fare Se Fursat Scheme

"Fare Se Fursat" is a pilot initiative by Alliance Air that offers passengers a single, fixed airfare, unaffected by booking date, season, or last-minute demand fluctuations.

Objectives

1. To eliminate airfare unpredictability, providing cost certainty even for bookings on the day of travel.
2. Promote affordable and accessible air travel for passengers from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
3. Aligns with the UDAN Regional Connectivity Scheme and vision of democratizing aviation.
4. Encourage first-time flyers from smaller towns to choose air travel, enhancing connectivity and passenger convenience.
5. Foster a passenger-centric approach in Indian aviation, complementing initiatives like Udan Yatri Cafes.

About Alliance Air

Introduction – Alliance Air is a government-owned regional airline providing domestic flights under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS-UDAN) to connect smaller towns and cities.

Ownership – Fully owned by the Government of India through AI Asset Holding Ltd. (AIAHL). Formerly a subsidiary of Air India, now a separate, government-controlled entity post-Air India privatization.

Role in Indian Aviation – Serves as the backbone of RCS-UDAN, ensuring last-mile connectivity for regional and remote areas. Implements initiatives focused on public service rather than profitability, supporting the vision of 'Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik'.

Significance – The scheme and Alliance Air's efforts reinforce India's goal of making air travel predictable, affordable, and accessible while strengthening regional connectivity and economic inclusion.

7. Exercise Austrahind 2025

Recently, the fourth edition of India-Australia joint military Exercise AUSTRAHIND 2025 was held in Perth, Australia.

About Exercise AUSTRAHIND 2025

It is an annual joint military exercise conducted between the Indian Army and the Australian Army to strengthen operational collaboration and interoperability.

Origin – It was started in 2022 with first AUSTRAHIND exercise

2025 Venue – Open and semi-desert terrain near Perth, Australia.

Participants – Indian contingent led by a Battalion of Gorkha Rifles and Australian Army units, participating in joint tactical and operational drills.

Objectives – Enhance military cooperation and exchange of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs).