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Significance of Lohri, Pongal, Bihu and Makar Sankranti



- Festival season is here with Lohri and Pongal falling on the same day- January 13 and Makar Sankranti falling on the very next day- January 14. Lohri, Pongal and Makar Sankranti, all the three festivals are harvest festivals of the country and are celebrated in different parts of the country with equal pomp and show.

- While Lohri is celebrated in North Indian states of Punjab and Haryana, Pongal is a festival of the South and is especially celebrated with grandeur in Tamil Nadu.
- Makar Sankranti is celebrated in a number of states like Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Bengal, Assam and Karnataka

Lohri:

- Lohri is celebrated just a day before Makar Sankranti and marks the onset of the harvest festival. People celebrate the festival by singing folk songs, lighting bonfires, eating foods like rewari and peanuts. Lohri is also said to mark the end of winter months and the start of longer summer days.

Pongal

- Harvest festival of the South Indian states, Pongal is celebrated to mark the harvest time of rice, turmeric and sugarcane. The festival stretches for four days and each day has a special name- Bhogi Pongal, Surya Pongal, Mattu Pongal and Kanum Pongal. People celebrate by decorating the cows, painting their horns, holding bathing rituals and carrying out processions.

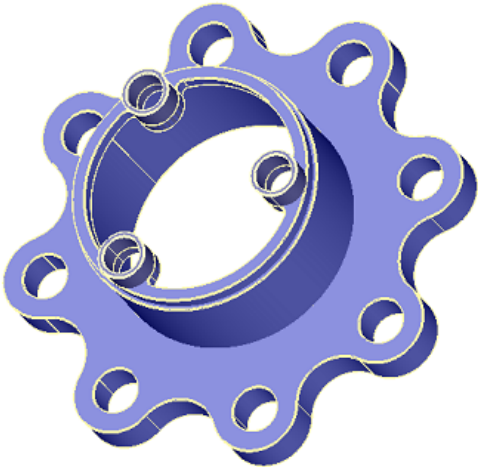
Makar Sankranti

- Makar Sankranti is another harvest festival celebrated a day after Lohri. It marks the first day of the sun's transit to the Makar Rashi or Capricorn. This also marks the end of the winter solstice. Many devotees take a dip at the sacred rivers Like Ganga in Varanasi, Haridwar, Allahabad or Yamuna and offer their prayers to the Sun God. People fry kites, light bonfires and enjoy yellow coloured Khichdi on this festival.
- History- According to a famous legend, Sankranti was a goddess who killed a devil called Shankarasur. Bhisma Pitamah, a character in Mahabharat also breathed his last on the day of Makar Sankranti.

Magh Bihu:

- Magh Bihu is when the annual harvest takes place in Assam. People celebrate Rongali Bihu to mark the beginning of the Assamese new year and the end of the harvest season
- It is believed that the festival started from the time when people of the valley started tilling the land. Bihu is believed to be as old as river Brahmaputra.

CollabCAD Software



- National Informatics Centre (NIC), MeitY along with Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Ministry of Education is jointly launching CollabCAD Software, a collaborative network, computer-enabled software system, providing a total engineering solution from 2D drafting & detailing to 3D product design for students and faculty of Engineering Graphics Curriculum.
- This initiative aims to provide a great platform to students across the country to create and modify 3D digital designs with a free flow of creativity and imagination.
- This software would also enable students to collaborate over designs across the network and concurrently access the same design data for storage and visualization.
- NIC and CBSE will be signing an MOU for 'CollabCAD Software Support and Training for Students and Faculty of Engineering Graphics in CBSE affiliated Schools' for a period of 10 (ten) years in the august presence of Sh Ajay Sawhney, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology.
- This MOU aims to develop human resources and skills around CollabCAD software and popularize CollabCAD among the students and faculty.

Preparations for world's largest Corona vaccination drive gain momentum; vaccines being transported across the country



- Preparations for the world's largest Corona vaccination drive have gained momentum with planes carrying vaccines flying into airports across the country.
- From various airports, the vaccines are being dispatched to small cities and towns in readiness for the inoculation exercise beginning Saturday.
- From Assam to Goa and from Jammu and Kashmir to Kerala, the vaccines were carefully and swiftly transported to far corners of the country.
- According to sources, 95 per cent of the 1.1 crore doses of Covishield vaccine purchased by the government have been delivered and shipped to nearly 60 consignee points across India in the past two days.
- Of the 55 lakh doses of indigenously developed Covaxin of Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech ordered by the Centre, the first tranche of 2.4 lakh doses have been dispatched to 12 states.

- Health Ministry said, vaccines have been allocated to all states and UTs in proportion to their healthcare workers database.
- In accordance with the national priority list, the vaccine will be first given to healthcare and frontline workers.
- Each vaccination session will cater to a maximum of 100 beneficiaries per day.

India and Turkmenistan hold 4th round of Foreign Office Consultations virtually



- The 4th round of Foreign Office Consultations between India and Turkmenistan was held through virtual mode
- The External Affairs Ministry said in a statement that the Consultations provided an opportunity to comprehensively review the various aspects of bilateral relations, including political, economic, commercial, defence, scientific, cultural, education and consular cooperation
- Both sides exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest and agreed to enhance cooperation in the UN and multilateral arena.

Donald Trump becomes first US President to be impeached twice



- Donald Trump has become the first US president to be impeached twice.
- The House of Representatives voted last night to charge him with inciting last week's mob attack on US Congress.
- Trump was impeached by 232 - 197 vote by the US House on a single charge of incitement of insurrection that left five dead and the Capitol ransacked
- It was supported by all Democrats and 10 Republicans, including Liz Cheney.
- The Senate will not hold a trial before January 20, when Democrat Joe Biden assumes the presidency, meaning Mr Trump will escape the risk of being forced to leave early.

US bans cotton & tomato products from China's Xinjiang region over use of forced labour



- United States has banned entry of cotton and tomato products from China's Xinjiang region amid allegations that detainee or prison labour from Uyghurs went into making them.
- According to US Customs and Border Protection (CPB), it will detain cotton and tomato products produced in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region at all US ports of entry.
- The ban, also known as a Withhold Release Order (WRO), was imposed following the emergence of reports indicating that the products were manufactured using forced labour from detained Uyghurs.
- The products banned include apparel, textiles, tomato seeds, canned tomatoes, tomato sauce, and other goods made with cotton and tomatoes.

The Doha Intra-Afghan Dialogue



- The U.S. signed a deal (at Qatar's capital-Doha) with the Taliban that could pave the way towards a full withdrawal of foreign soldiers from Afghanistan over the next 14 months and represent a step towards ending the 18-year-war in Afghanistan known as Doha Intra-Afghan Dialogue.

Doha Negotiations

- 1st Segment: The Doha track was first initiated with the Taliban.
- 2nd Segment : A second track was with Islamabad/Rawalpindi to cajole the Pakistan Army to lean on the Taliban to get them to the negotiating table.
- 3rd Segment : It was with Kabul to ensure that the Afghan government would accept the Doha outcome.

Khadi Prakritik Paint: India's first cow dung paint



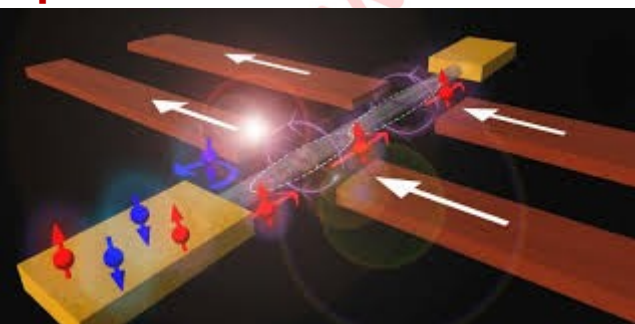
- The Union Minister for Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises launched the Khadi Prakritik Paint recently
- The eco-friendly, non-toxic paint, called "Khadi Prakritik Paint" is a first-of-its-kind product, with anti-fungal, anti-bacterial properties.

- Based on cow dung as its main ingredient, the paint is cost-effective and odorless, and has been certified by Bureau of Indian Standards.
- Khadi Prakritik Paint is available in two forms – distemper paint and plastic emulsion paint. The project was conceptualized by Chairman KVIC in March 2020, and later developed by Kumarappa National Handmade Paper Institute, Jaipur (a KVIC unit).
- The paint is free from heavy metals like lead, mercury, chromium, arsenic, cadmium and others. It will be a boost to local manufacturing and will create sustainable local employment through technology transfer.
- This technology will increase consumption of cow dung as a raw material for eco-friendly products and will generate additional revenue to farmers and gaushalas.
- Utilization of cow dung will also clean the environment and prevent clogging of drains.

Khadi Prakritik Distemper & Emulsion Paints have been tested at 3 reputed National Laboratories

- I. National Test House, Mumbai
 - II. Shri Ram Institute for Industrial Research, New Delhi
 - III. National Test House, Ghaziabad
- Khadi Prakritik Emulsion paint meets BIS 15489:2013 standards; whereas Khadi Prakritik Distemper paint meets BIS 428:2013 standards.
 - The paint has successfully passed various test parameters such as application of paint, thinning properties, drying time and finish, among others. It dries in less than 4 hours, and has a smooth and uniform finish.
 - The paint can be applied on interior as well as exterior walls. Both distemper and emulsion paints are available in white base colour, and it can be developed in any colour by suitably mixing colorants.

Spintronics and 2D Electron gas



- Scientists at INST, Mohali, Punjab have produced an ultra-high mobility 2d-electron gas (2DEG). This research may open up a new field of device physics, especially in the field of quantum technology applicable for next-generation data storage media and quantum computers
- The need for attaining new functionalities in modern electronic devices has led to the manipulation of property of an electron called spin degree of freedom along with its charge.
- This has given rise to an altogether new field of spin-electronics or 'spintronics'. It has been realized that a phenomenon called the 'Rashba effect', which consists of splitting of spin-bands in an electronic system, might play a key role in spintronic devices.

- Scientists at Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST), Mohali (Punjab), an autonomous institution of Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, have produced an ultra-high mobility 2d-electron gas(2DEG) at the interface of two insulating oxide layers.
- Due to the high mobility of the electron gas, electrons do not collide inside the medium for a long distance and hence do not lose the memory and information.
- Hence, such a system can easily remember and transfer its memory for a long time and distance. In addition, since they collide less during their flow, their resistance is very low, and hence they don't dissipate energy as heat. So, such devices do not heat up easily and need less input energy to operate

Havana Syndrome



- In late 2016, US diplomats in Havana reported feeling ill after hearing strange sounds and experiencing odd physical sensations in their hotel rooms or homes.
- The symptoms included nausea, severe headaches, fatigue, dizziness, sleep problems, and hearing loss, which have since come to be known as "Havana Syndrome".
- Cuba had denied any knowledge of the illnesses even though the US had accused it of carrying out "sonic attacks", leading to an increase in tensions.

Veterans Day 14 Jan 2021



- Indian Armed Forces will be celebrating Veteran's Day on 14 Jan 2021.
- The day was chosen as recognition of the services rendered by the first Commander-in-Chief of Indian Armed Forces, Field Marshal KM Cariappa, OBE who retired on this day in 1953.
- Wreath Laying Ceremonies and Veteran's Meets' are being organised in various Military Stations to mark our solidarity towards the Next of Kin (NoK) of our brave hearts and towards our veterans as a mark of respect to their selfless duty and sacrifices towards the Nation.

Green Aviation Policy



The Green Aviation Policy is aligned with the relevant National and International frameworks such as:

- ICAO's Vision, Mission and ambitious goals towards environment protection
- United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030
- India's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) under UNFCCC- Paris Agreement
- Ministry of Civil Aviation's objective to achieve Sustainable Aviation as outlined in National Civil Aviation Policy 2016.

Aims of Green Aviation Policy

- Systematic environmental management through a robust Environment Management System
- Airport Master Planning by including environment impact assessment
- Setting up Green Infrastructures to help environmentally responsible and resource-efficient Operations
- Minimize or mitigate the adverse effects of aircraft noise on communities by implementing effective noise management programs
- Minimize and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions
- Adoption of measures to reduce emissions in all areas—aircraft, ground support, airport infrastructure and landside access traffic.
- Adoption of resource efficiency measures including technology and operational improvements to reduce fuel consumption and improve electrical consumption efficiency

Ordre national du Merite



- Pune-born physicist Professor Rohini Godbole was honoured with the Ordre National du Merite, one of the highest recognitions by France, for her research contributions and collaborations between India and France.
- The 68-year-old is also the first woman physicist to be awarded the PadmaSri.
- She is the honorary professor at the Centre for High Energy Physics at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- A top ranker in both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in physics from the University of Pune and IIT, Bombay, respectively, Prof Godbole has over 280 research paper storer credit.
- Prof Godbole has also co-edited two books — Lilavati's Daughters : Women Scientists of India and A Girl's Guide to a Life in Science.

- The Ordre national du Mérite (English: National Order of Merit) is a French order of merit with membership awarded by the President of the French Republic, founded on 3 December 1963 by President Charles de Gaulle.
- The reason for the order's establishment was twofold: to replace the large number of ministerial orders previously awarded by the ministries; and to create an award that can be awarded at a lower level than the Legion of Honour, which is generally reserved for French citizens

Farm laws, their constitutional validity, and hope

(Written by P.D.T. Achary)

- With the Supreme Court of India staying the operation of the farm laws and setting up a committee of experts to negotiate with the government and the farmers, the agitation being carried on by the farmers is entering a new phase.
- So whatever the experts' committee recommends, the question of the constitutional validity of the farm laws can be decided only after a proper hearing of the matter before the Court.
- It involves the violation of the Constitution itself. Article 100 says that all questions at any sitting of either House shall be determined by a majority of votes of the members present and voting.
- Majority can be determined only in terms of number, and therefore what this Article requires is that all questions in the House should be determined by recording the votes of the members present and voting.
- Majority cannot be determined through voice vote. In fact the Constitution does not recognise voice vote to determine majority in a legislature.
- It is true that Article 122 of the Constitution protects the proceedings of the House from judicial review.
- But this protection is available only when the proceedings are challenged on irregularity of procedure.
- The Supreme Court in Raja Ram Pal's case had clarified that the proceedings can be challenged on substantive grounds like violation of the Constitutional provisions.
- The Farm Bills were passed in the Rajya Sabha in violation of Article 100 of the Constitution and can be challenged in the Supreme Court on that ground.
- The Court can strike down the whole laws as the requirement of Article 107 has not been fulfilled.
- This Article says that a Bill shall not be deemed to have been passed unless it has been agreed to by both Houses.
- The Court may also invalidate the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha and send the three 'Acts' back to that House for further proceedings in accordance with the constitutional provisions.

Terror trail

- In his speech to the UN Security Council (UNSC) marking 20 years since the resolutions that announced a global commitment to the war against terror after the U.S. 9/11 attacks, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar made a pitch for greater coordination between counter terrorism agencies worldwide.
- First, the world must acknowledge that terrorist organisations use not only extortion and money laundering, drugs and wildlife trafficking to raise funds, but, in the present and future, will use loopholes in digital security and the “anonymity” provided by block chain technology to access finances.
- Second, in a clear reference to Pakistan, he spoke of the need to link actions between the UN and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and for countries that “wilfully provide financial assistance and safe havens” as well as “5 star” treatment to criminals and terrorists, to be held to account by them.
- Finally, he pointed to countries that allow their “political and religious” affinities to decide on issues of designation of terrorists, blocking and unblocking requests at the UNSC for such reasons rather than technically evaluate the evidence against these individuals.

Final blow

- The Trump administration’s decision to redesignate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism, taken in its last days, appears to be a blatantly politicised move, bereft of any strategic or moral reasoning.
- In the announcement, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cited Cuba’s hosting of 10 Colombian rebels, a few American fugitives and its backing for Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro as evidence for its “support for acts of international terrorism”.
- The designation now puts the Caribbean country with Iran, North Korea and Syria, and would trigger fresh sanctions, making it more difficult for Cuba to do business.
- Havana has stated that returning the Colombian rebels would complicate the peace process in which it is a mediator.
- With regard to Venezuela, Cuba is following a foreign policy which it thinks serves its best interests, dealing with the country’s government, irrespective of Washington’s opinion.
- The U.S. has punished Cuba for decades with harsh sanctions, hoping that the Castro regime would eventually collapse.
- But the Cuban communists survived even the fall of the Soviet Union.
- With the Cold War memories fading and a new generation of Americans demanding a reset in foreign policy, Mr. Obama re-established ties, opened the American embassy and travelled to Havana, marking a new beginning.