RS passes pregnancy termination bill that makes abortion possible till 24 weeks

- The Rajya Sabha on Tuesday passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

- The Bill extends the limit of medical termination of pregnancy to 24 weeks with opinion of two registered medical practitioners and also aims to ensure confidentiality of process and respect privacy of women, the government stated.

- The Bill was previously passed in the Lok Sabha.

India is known for respecting political & religious convictions of citizens: IPU President Duarte Pacheco

- Addressing Indian Parliamentarians in the Central Hall of Parliament today,

- Mr. Pacheco said both India and Portugal share deep relationship based on common grounds of parliamentary democracy.

- He said India is and in all levels, from local to national, is looking to be more inclusive with active participation from women and youth.

- The IPU President said that India, the largest democracy of the world known to respect convictions both political & religious of every person.

- Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU):

- The Inter-Parliamentary Union is an international organization of national parliaments.

- Its primary purpose is to promote democratic governance, accountability, and cooperation among its members; other initiatives include advancing gender parity among legislatures, empowering youth participation in politics, and sustainable development.

- The organization was established in 1889 as the Inter-Parliamentary Congress.

- Its founders were statesmen Frédéric Passy of France and William Randal Cremer of the United Kingdom, who sought to create the first permanent forum for political multilateral negotiations.

- Initially, IPU membership was reserved for individual parliamentarians, but has since transformed to include the legislatures of sovereign states.

- As of 2020, the national parliaments of 179 countries are members of the IPU, while 13 regional parliamentary assemblies are associate members.

- The IPU has played a leading role in the development of international law and institutions, including the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the League of Nations, and the United Nations.

- It also sponsors and takes part in international conferences and forums, and has permanent observer status at the United Nations General Assembly.

- Consequently, eight individuals associated with the organization are Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

Kathakali

- Kathakali maestro Chemancheri Kunhiraman Nair passes away at 105

- It is one of the six classical dances of India

- It is a story, a dancing tale woven in a classical format, based on stories of Hindu mythology.

- The story is enacted purely by the movements of the hands (mudras), facial expressions (rasas) and body movements – there are 24 basic mudras.

- Some characters adorn their left fingers with long steel or silver nails to enhance the clarity of the hand gestures

- The term Kathakalī is derived from Katha which means "story or a conversation, or a traditional tale", and Kalī which means "performance and art".

- The dance symbolises the eternal fight between good and evil

- It is a dance that brings out deft movements, highly evolved gestures, strenuous exercise and practice, colourful elaborate skirt-like costumes, and make-up that involves extensive face-painting
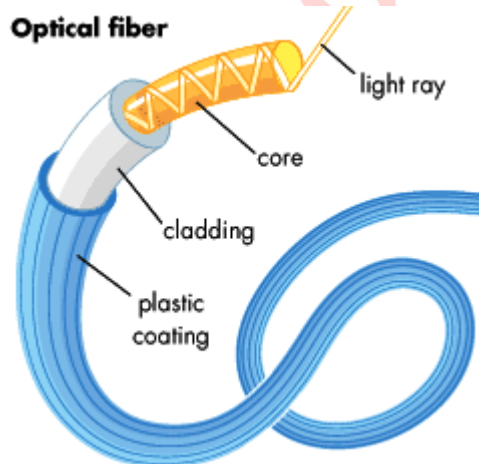
The 5 major roles or veshams are given below.

1. Pacha (Green) – To portray noble characters like kings and divine beings

2. Kathi (Knife) – To portray arrogant and evil characters.

3. Kari (Black) – Used to portray evil characters.

4. Thaadi (Beard) – There are 3 different types in this category.

5. Minukku (Radiant) – To portray spiritual characters like sages

Swaminarayan Sampradaya

- The Swaminarayan Sampradaya is a Hindu sampradaya which was founded in 1801 by Sahajanand Swami, who is worshipped as Swaminarayan, the supreme manifestation of God, by his followers

- Under Swaminarayan's leadership the sampradaya grew to more than 100,000 followers and 3,000 swamis (monks) by the time of his death in 1830.

- Swaminarayan instituted the sampradaya's mandir tradition to facilitate followers' devotional worship of God. During his lifetime, Swaminarayan constructed six mandirs: Ahmedabad (1822), Bhuj (1823), Vadtal (1824), Dholera (1826), Junagadh (1828), and Gadhada (1828)

- Socially, Swaminarayan's doctrine that everyone's true self is the atman within which God resides, led him to reject caste-based discrimination within the religious community.

- Swaminarayan also inspired followers to engage in humanitarian service activities, leading various denominations of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya to currently provide humanitarian service globally.

Raman thermometry for Monitoring of Power Transmission Cables
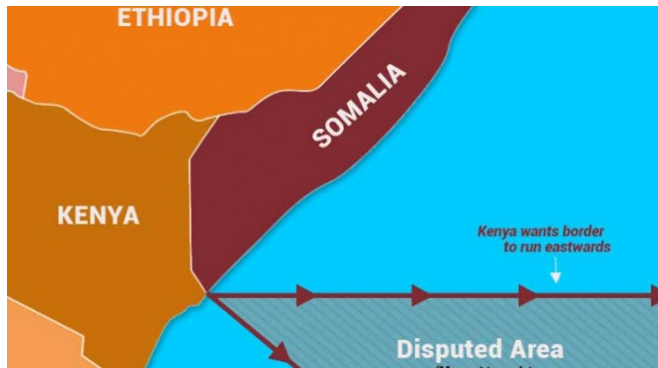
- IIT Madras have demonstrated that by using Raman thermometry on fibre optic cables, they can achieve the monitoring of power transmission cables.

- Raman spectroscopy analytical method for identifying chemical compounds and characterizing the chemical bonding and solid-state structure of materials.

- One can use Raman spectroscopy to determine the temperature of the material being analyzed.

- Raman thermometry is a thermal characterization technique which makes use of Raman scattering phenomena to determine the local temperature in microelectronics systems.

- When light is scattered off an object, say a molecule, two bands are observed, with higher and lower frequency than the original light, called the Stokes and anti-Stokes bands, respectively.

Raman Effect:

- The Raman Effect is a phenomenon in spectroscopy discovered by the eminent physicist Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman in 1928.

- In 1930, he got a Nobel Prize for this remark.
- The Raman Effect is a change in the wavelength of light that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules.

Maritime dispute between Kenya and Somalia

- The dispute between the two East African countries stems from a disagreement over which direction their border extends into the Indian Ocean.
- Somalia argues its maritime boundary should run in the same direction as the southeasterly path of the country's land border.
- In contrast, Kenya claims the border should take a roughly 45-degree turn at the shoreline and run in a latitudinal line.
- This gives Kenya access to a larger share of the maritime area.
- Apart from fishing, the disputed area – about 100,000 square kilometres – is thought to be rich in oil and gas, with both countries accusing each other of auctioning off blocks before a ruling by the court.

What bearing would this have on bilateral relations?

- In recent years, relations between Somalia and Kenya have sharply deteriorated.
- In 2019, Somalia criticised Kenya after the latter blocked the entry of two Somalian legislators and a minister after they landed at Nairobi airport, and proceeded to deport them.
- Last year, Kenya accused Somalia of an "unwarranted attack" on its territory during a conflict between Somalia and regional forces. Somalia refuted the accusation.
- In December, Kenya hosted the leader of Somaliland, an entity that has declared independence from Somalia since 1991.
- Somalia responded by breaking off diplomatic relations with Kenya, accusing it of interfering in its domestic affairs– claims that Kenya denied.
- Despite the many points of disagreement, the two countries remain allies in their fight against Al Shabaab, an Islamist terror organisation that has launched several attacks in both countries over the past decade.

UK's Turing Scheme

The UK's global programme to study and work abroad

- Named after the celebrated English mathematician and codebreaker Alan Turing, the scheme will enable schools, colleges and universities in the UK to apply for government funding to allow students to study and work across the globe, including in India.

- The scheme, for which the British government has allocated 110 million pounds for the first year, starts in 2021/22, and would enable up to 35,000 students from across the country to study or work across the world from September this year.

- Under the programme, after schools and universities successfully apply for funding for exchanges, university study and work placements, they can invite their students to apply for individual fundings, as per the BBC.

- The British government has said that the scheme is aimed towards ensuring social mobility, and targets students from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas from where not many could benefit under the previous Erasmus+ scheme.

Vellore Sepoy uprising of 1806

- The President of India highlighted the significance of the Vellore Sepoy uprising of 1806 at the 16th annual convocation of the Thiruvalluvar University.

- Vellore Mutiny, outbreak against the British on July 10, 1806, by sepoys (Indian troops employed by the British) at Vellore (now in Tamil Nadu state, southern India)

- The incident began when the sepoys broke into the fort where the many sons and daughters of Tippu Sultan of Mysore and their families had been lodged since their surrender at Seringapatam (now Shrirangapattana) in 1799 during the fourth Mysore War.

- The outbreak, though encouraged by the Mysore princes, was basically caused by resentment at new British regulations that ordered changes in headgear and shaving style and the prohibition of ornaments and caste marks for the Indian troops.

- Suppression: The fort was recovered within hours by a relief force of British soldiers and sepoys under Colonel Robert Gillespie from nearby Arcot.

Causes of the Mutiny

- The immediate causes of the mutiny revolved mainly around resentment felt towards changes in the sepoy dress code, introduced in November 1805.

- General Sir John Craddock, Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Army, ordered the wearing of a round hat resembling that associated at the time with both Europeans in general and with Indian converts to Christianity.

- The new headdress included a leather cockade and was intended to replace the existing turban.

- These measures offended the sensibilities of both Hindu and Muslim sepoys

- Hindus were prohibited from wearing religious marks on their foreheads while on duty, and Muslims were required to shave their beards and trim their moustaches In addition to the military grievances listed above, the rebellion was also instigated by the sons of the defeated Tipu Sultan, confined at Vellore since 1799

Uighur

- Uighurs are treated as second class citizens by the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), like the Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and suffer from Israeli occupation and apartheid, says Olsi Jazexhi, a Canadian/Albanian historian and journalist specialised in the history of Islam, nationalism and modernity.

- There are about 12 million Uighurs, mostly Muslim, living in north-western China in the region of Xinjiang, officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

- The Uighurs speak their own language, similar to Turkish, and see themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian nations.

- They make up less than half of the Xinjiang population.

- In recent decades, there's been a mass migration of Han Chinese (China's ethnic majority) to Xinjiang, and the Uighurs feel their culture and livelihoods are under threat.

- What are the allegations against China?

- The US has accused China of committing genocide against the Uighurs. According to international convention, genocide is the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

- It follows reports that, as well as interning Uighurs in camps, China has been forcibly mass sterilising Uighur women to suppress the population and separating Uighur children from their families.

- On his final day in office under the Trump administration, US Secretary of state Mike Pompeo said: "I believe this genocide is ongoing, and that we are witnessing the systematic attempt to destroy Uighurs by the Chinese party-state."

- A UN human rights committee in 2018 said it had credible reports the Chinese were holding up to a million people in "counter-extremism centres" in Xinjiang.

- The Australian Strategic Policy Institute found evidence in 2020 of more than 380 of these "re-education camps" in Xinjiang, an increase of 40% on previous estimates.

Project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees).

- A research project to reduce human-elephant conflict with the help of honey bees was inaugurated at Ponnampet Forestry College in Kodagu

- The project has been launched for the first time in the country on an experimental basis by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) with support from the college management.

- RE-HAB -- Reducing Elephant Human Attack by using Bees -- aims at controlling wild elephant movement into villages by roping in honey bees.

- The success of the initiative will be monitored regularly to launch it across the country.

- A total of three elephant conflict places have been chosen in Kodagu district including two at Nagarahole Sanctuary and one at Thora village in Virajpet where a total of ten beehive boxes have been placed across the forest fringe.

- The boxes have been placed approximately at eight feet distance and tied using a fence rope. This set-up will act as an elephant conflict mitigation measure.

- The RE-HAB project will create a sustainable employment opportunity in beekeeping while also fighting the elephant conflict ecologically.
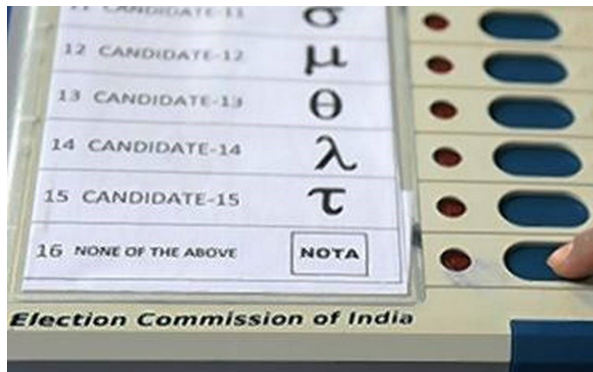
National Population Register

- The Centre will allow residents to fill columns in the National Population Register (NPR) forms on their own through online mode, a month before door-to-door enumeration by Census officials starts.

- After filling the form online, residents will get a reference code that they could mention to the field enumerator at the time of her/his visit

- The details of the respondent would get displayed on a mobile application developed in-house for conducting the Census exercise but no "biometrics or documents" would be collected.

- These details would then be stored in the system for future use.

- The NPR is a register of the usual residents of the country. It contains information collected at the local (village/sub-town), subdistrict, district, state and national level under provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955 and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.

- A usual resident is defined, for the purposes of the NPR, as a person who has resided in a local area for the past six months or more, or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next six months.

- The law compulsorily seeks to register every citizen of India and issue a national identity card.

- The process of updating NPR will be carried out under the aegis of the Registrar General and ex-Officio Census Commissioner, India.

NOTA (None Of The Above)

- Nullify result if NOTA gets majority: SC seeks reply

- The option of NOTA for Lok Sabha and assembly elections was prescribed by the SC in 2013.

- Thus, India became the 14th country to institute negative voting.In India, if a voter does not support any of the candidates contesting in a particular election, but has to vote for something, then they can select the 'None of the above' (NOTA) option.

- This option empowers the voter to reject all the candidates listed on the electronic voting machine (EVM).

- Why have NOTA if there's 'no electoral value'?

- NOTA gives people dissatisfied with contesting candidates an opportunity to express their disapproval.

- This, in turn, increases the chances of more people turning up to cast their votes, even if they do not support any candidate, and decreases the count of bogus votes.

- Also, the Supreme Court has observed that negative voting could bring about "a systemic change in polls and political parties will be forced to project clean candidates"