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1. North Korea has successfully tested cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and artillery rockets equipped with Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, designed for modern warfare conditions.

(i) North Korea, which has been aggressively developing long-range missiles and nuclear weapon capabilities, is now also modernizing its weapons arsenal.

(ii) These advanced weapon tests were conducted in the presence of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Speaking about the tests, Kim Jong Un stated that weapons and automated launch systems suitable for modern warfare have been successfully upgraded, significantly enhancing the military's combat capability.

(iii) This is the first time North Korea has officially acknowledged publicly that it is using AI technology in its missiles. The AI system will help identify targets and strike them accurately using real-time data.

(iv) These advanced missiles, which are expected to be deployed with artillery units near the South Korean border, are capable of accurately striking targets up to 100 km away. Since the South Korean capital Seoul is located about 100 km from the North Korean border, the test has created major tensions in the region.

2. The total number of telecom subscribers in the country increased to 133.75 crore in April, reaching a new record high.

(i) In adding new subscribers in both telephone and landline categories, Bharti Airtel surpassed its competitor Reliance Jio and secured the top position.

(ii) According to the monthly report released by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the total telecom subscriber base rose from 133.05 crore at the end of March to 133.75 crore by the end of April.

(iii) As a result, the country's monthly telecom growth rate stood at 0.52%, with 69.5 lakh new subscribers added in just one month.

(iv) Bharti Airtel alone attracted 34.82 lakh new subscribers, including 31.39 lakh in the telephone segment and 3.43 lakh in the landline segment.

(v) Following Airtel, Reliance Jio added a total of 30.84 lakh new subscribers, including 29.42 lakh in the telephone segment and 1.42 lakh in the landline segment.

(vi) Telephone sector:

- The country's total telephone subscriber base increased from 128.23 crore in March to 128.89 crore in April.
- Vodafone Idea added 53,257 new subscribers, while the state-owned BSNL added 76,175 subscribers.
- Meanwhile, another Government-owned company, MTNL, lost 33,403 subscribers.

(vii) Landline sector:

- The number of landline subscribers increased from 4.82 crore in March to 4.85 crore in April.
- While the top three private telecom companies and BSNL gained new subscribers in this segment, Teleservices and Tata MTNL suffered losses in connections.

(viii) Broadband sector:

- The country's total broadband subscriber base increased to 107.34 crore in April.
- Reliance Jio continued to lead the segment with 52.69 crore subscribers.
- It was followed by Airtel (37.3 crore subscribers), Vodafone Idea (12.8 crore), and BSNL (2.7 crore).

3. Randhir Singh, the first Indian to win a gold medal in shooting at the Asian Games and a senior sports administrator, passed away in Delhi on Wednesday at the age of 79 due to age-related illnesses.

(i) He had also represented India in the Olympic Games and held administrative positions in the Indian Olympic Association, the International Olympic Committee, and the Olympic Council of Asia.

4. The opportunity to host the 2027 Asian Relay Championships has been awarded to Chandigarh, while Bhubaneswar has been given the responsibility of hosting the 2028 Asian Indoor Athletics Championships.

5. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the continuation of the integrated "Sarothak-PDS" scheme and sanctioned an expenditure of ₹25,530 crore by the Central Government for the next five years.

(i) A meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs was held in New Delhi under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

(ii) During the meeting, approval was given to continue the assistance scheme for handling ration transportation and revenue management using machinery and technology in the Public Distribution System (PDS) as an integrated scheme under "Sarothak-PDS."

(iii) The Central Government will spend ₹25,530 crore on the scheme over the next five years.

(iv) Under the National Food Security Act, the following schemes will be integrated and implemented through the Sarothak-PDS program:

- Assistance to state agencies for transporting food grains within states and ensuring fair profit margins for fair price shop dealers.
- Modernization and reforms in the Public Distribution System through technology.

(v) The Cabinet Committee also decided to amend the rules so that States and Union Territories can continue receiving Central Government assistance to compensate expenses arising from:

- Transportation of food grains within States and Union Territories,
- Handling of food grains,
- Profit margins for fair price shop dealers.

The present system of Central Government funding for these activities will also continue.

(vi) The statement added that the Sarothak-PDS scheme aims to ensure that ration supplies reach even the last-mile beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System and to fulfill the country's commitment to food security under the National Food Security Act.

6. Changing demographic landscape of India based on recent reports from the Registrar General of India.

(i) India's Declining Fertility Trends

- According to a 2024 study, India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen to 1.9.
- The birth rate, which stood at 21 per 1,000 people in 2014, has dropped to 18.3 in 2024.
- A fertility rate of 2.1 is considered the minimum required to maintain a stable population level.

(ii) Regional Disparities in Birth Rates

- Only six states maintain a TFR above 2.1: Bihar (2.9), Uttar Pradesh (2.6), Madhya Pradesh (2.4), Rajasthan (2.3), Chhattisgarh (2.2), and Jharkhand (2.2).
- Most other states are below 1.9, with the lowest rates recorded in Delhi (1.2), Tamil Nadu (1.3), and West Bengal (1.3).
- In developed regions like South India, Delhi, and Maharashtra, high urban rents and the rising costs of private healthcare and education discourage parents from having more than one or two children.

(iii) Social and Economic Consequences

- A TFR below 2.1 leads to a shrinking youth population and an aging society, which creates a significant future economic burden.
- In Tamil Nadu, children aged 14 and under now account for only 18% of the population.
- Conversely, the population of those aged 60 and above in Tamil Nadu rose from 10.6% in 2014 to 14.2% in 2024, leading to higher medical care requirements.

(iv) Impact on the Labor Force

- Tamil Nadu is currently experiencing a shortage of physical laborers due to the declining youth population.
- This gap is being filled by migrant workers from states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha who are now found in labor roles across the state, including in remote hill villages.

(v) Policy Shifts: The Case of Andhra Pradesh

- Andhra Pradesh's TFR plummeted from 3.0 in the 1990s to 1.5 today.
- Recognizing the youth shortage, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has reversed his previous support for population control and is now urging citizens to have more children.
- Andhra Pradesh has introduced financial incentives, including:
 - ₹25,000 for a second child, ₹30,000 for a third, and ₹40,000 for a fourth.
 - A monthly allowance of ₹1,000 for five years and free education up to age 18.
 - Provisions for mothers to work from home.

(vi) Lessons from China

- China implemented a strict "one-child policy" in the 1980s but abandoned it in 2016 due to a severe shortage of young workers.
- Despite offering annual subsidies of approximately ₹35,000 for children under three and various educational benefits, a recent survey found that 70% of Chinese citizens still do not wish to have more children.

(vii) Challenges for Future Planning

- Unchecked population growth brings its own set of challenges, including ensuring food security, housing, drinking water, waste management, and infrastructure for millions.

- Incentives alone will not work without ensuring quality healthcare, education, and suitable employment opportunities.
- A growing social divide is noted where wealthy, educated families prefer fewer children, while those struggling for daily survival often have more, creating a complex social issue that requires a national-level debate.

7. Importance of biodiversity for the survival and stability of the planet.

(i) Global Context and Scale of Biodiversity

- International Biodiversity Day was recently observed on May 22 to raise awareness about the necessity of protecting various life forms.
- Scientific research and surveys estimate that there are approximately 87 lakh (8.7 million) species of living organisms on Earth.
- This includes 77 lakh animal species, alongside diverse plants, fungi, and microscopic organisms.

(ii) The Interconnectedness of Life

- Biodiversity is the fundamental link between the Earth's environment, natural resources, and overall health.
- It ensures that all species maintain their traditional characteristics and continue to exist in a balanced state.
- All life forms are tied together through complex food chains and food webs, which sustain the continuity of life on the planet.

(iii) Consequences of Imbalance

- Disrupting biodiversity leads to species losing their traditional traits and potentially facing extinction.
- When the Dodo bird in Mauritius went extinct, the 'Calvari' trees that relied on them for seed dispersal also began to disappear.
- Imbalance in one area affects others: an overpopulation of deer destroys forests, while an overpopulation of predators threatens other species.
- A healthy plant population is essential for maintaining the balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

(iv) The Critical Role of Microorganisms

- Bacteria and other microorganisms are vital for maintaining soil fertility.
- They decompose organic matter and dead organisms, converting them into nutrients for plants.
- Without these microorganisms, soil quality degrades, leading to significant environmental and health hazards.

(v) India's Biodiversity and Protection Efforts

- Globally, Brazil ranks first in biodiversity, while India holds the 8th position.
- Major biodiversity hotspots in India include the Himalayas, Western Ghats, the Indo-Burma region, and Sundaland (Andaman and Nicobar Islands).
- The National Biodiversity Authority was established in 2003 to ensure the protection and sustainable use of India's biological resources.
- By December 2025, the authority had released approximately ₹127 crore for biodiversity conservation efforts across the country.

(vi) Biodiversity Conservation in Tamil Nadu

- The Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Board has declared Arittapatti in Madurai as a biodiversity zone, covering 193.215 hectares.
- This area is home to 250 types of birds, scaly anteaters, and slender lorises, as well as ancient structures like the 'Anai Kondaan' pond.
- Other recognized heritage sites include the Kasampatti Veera Temple in Dindigul, Elathur Lake in Erode, and the Nagamalai Hills, which support 349 species of flora and fauna.

(vii) Conclusion: Biodiversity as a Global Weapon

- Biodiversity is characterized not just as a count of living things, but as a "weapon that can stabilize (save) the world".
- To protect this "weapon" humans must reduce activities like deforestation, plastic usage, and fossil fuel consumption.
- It is our collective duty to ensure that the balance of biodiversity is not disturbed, as it is the only way to ensure the planet's long-term survival.

8. Supreme Court's judgement on online rummy and poker games summarizes a landmark decision affirming the rights of State Governments to regulate and ban online betting.

(i) The Supreme Court's Final Ruling

- The Supreme Court ruled that the bans imposed by the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka Governments on online games involving betting are legally valid.
- The court confirmed that State Governments possess the constitutional authority to either regulate or completely ban online games that involve betting and gambling.
- The bench, comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan, emphasized that even if a game is classified as a "game of skill," betting on its outcome cannot be permitted.
- The judgement noted that if games requiring skill still negatively impact public interest, they are subject to state regulation.

(ii) Overturning Previous High Court Decisions

- The Supreme Court asserted that there is no fundamental right for citizens to engage in betting and gambling.
- Based on this principle, the court overturned previous judgements from the Madras and Karnataka High Courts that had quashed these state-level bans.

(iii) Social Context and Public Safety

- In Tamil Nadu, the addiction to online rummy led many individuals to suffer severe financial losses, resulting in a series of shocking suicides.
- These tragic events created widespread public dissatisfaction and led to intense demands for a total ban on online betting platforms.

(iv) Legislative History and Legal Challenges

- The Tamil Nadu Government initially introduced an ordinance to ban online games in November 2020, which was followed by the Tamil Nadu Gaming and Police Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021.
- Online gaming companies challenged this in the Madras High Court, which struck down the law in 2021 on the grounds that states could not ban "games of skill".

- Tamil Nadu subsequently enacted the Tamil Nadu Online Gambling and Regulation of Online Games Act, 2022, which has now been validated by the Supreme Court's decision.

(v) The "Skill vs. Chance" Debate

- Historically, legal definitions differentiated between "games of chance" (gambling) and "games of skill" (like rummy and poker), with the latter often being protected from gambling bans.
- The Supreme Court's latest ruling clarifies that the presence of skill does not grant an exemption if the game involves betting and monetary stakes, thereby allowing states to intervene for public welfare.