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Daily News Juice

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Centre launches Vishwakarma scheme for those engaged in traditional crafts and skills

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Why in news?

- PM Narendra Modi recently launched the PM Vishwakarma scheme in New Delhi on the occasion of Vishwakarma Jayanti, for giving govt support to workers engaged in traditional crafts and skills.
- This scheme is also being seen as a means for the govt to reach out to the economically marginalised and socially backward communities – particularly the Other Backward Classes (OBC) groups – before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.



Details

- Vishwakarma scheme has an outlay of Rs 13,000 crore and is fully funded by the Central govt.
- It is aimed at helping people who live with traditional skills, work with tools and with their own hands, and are mostly from the OBC community. They include - carpenters, goldsmiths, masons, laundry workers, barbers etc.
- Vishwakarma, in Hindu mythology, is seen as the architect of the gods and was the divine carpenter and master craftsman who fashioned the weapons of the gods and built their cities and chariots.
- Some legends say he was the architect of the mythical city Lanka mentioned in the Hindu epic Ramayana and is also said to have made the great image of Jagannatha at Puri in Odisha. He is considered the patron deity of workers, artisans, and artists.

Who is eligible?

- The professionals engaged in traditional crafts and skills for centuries, often taught by elders in the family, have faced certain problems. These include a lack of professional training for their work, of modern tools, the issue of distance from the markets relevant to them and the availability of little capital for investment.
- Families associated with following 18 such different sectors will be helped in all possible ways:
 - (i) Carpenters
 - (ii) Boat Makers
 - (iii) Armourers
 - (iv) Blacksmiths
 - (v) Hammer and Tool Kit Makers
 - (vi) Locksmiths
 - (vii) Goldsmiths
 - (viii) Potters
 - (ix) Sculptor, Stone breakers
 - (x) Cobblers (Shoemsmiths/ Footwear artisans)
 - (xi) Masons (Rajmistri)
 - (xii) Basket/Mat/Broom Makers/Coir Weavers
 - (xiii) Doll & Toy Makers (Traditional)
 - (xiv) Barbers
 - (xv) Garland makers
 - (xvi) Washermen
 - (xvii) Tailors
 - (xviii) Fishing Net Makers

Benefits to be availed

- The scheme is to help enhance the skills of workers employed in these fields and help them avail loans easily to aid their earnings.
- They will be given skill upgradation involving basic and advanced training, a toolkit incentive of ₹15,000, collateral-free credit support up to ₹3 lakhs at a concessional interest rate of 5%, incentive for digital transactions and marketing support.
- A toolkit booklet has also been released in 12 Indian languages, with accompanying video elements, to aid the knowledge of workers on new technologies in their field.
- A stipend of Rs 500 will be provided for skill training and Rs 1,500 to purchase modern tools. Five lakh families will be covered in the first year and 30 lakh families over five years.

Santiniketan gets included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper I; History & Culture

Why in news?

- Santiniketan, a town established by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, has made it to the UNESCO's World Heritage List. It has become India's 41st World Heritage Site to join this list.
- Located in West Bengal's Birbhum district, Santiniketan, which means "abode of peace", started taking shape in 1901 and is the place where Tagore laid the foundations of Visva-Bharati University.
- Notably, attempts to get Santiniketan inscribed on the World Heritage List have been going on since 2010.
- The dossier by the Culture Ministry proposing Santiniketan's inclusion on this list points out that the "place exhibits an important interchange in human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design".



Cats hunting down India's birds in alarming numbers

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Why in news?

- On the basis of 30 million observations by more than 30,000 birdwatchers, the 'State of Indian Birds 2023' exercise recently concluded that birds in India are faring poorly. Among many factors, the report acknowledged a silent bird-killer lurking in India's urban areas: cats.
- Cats may seem to pale in the shadow of the threats posed by forest degradation, industrialisation, and climate change, but conservationists know better. In the U.S. alone, free-ranging domestic cats have been estimated to kill billions of birds every year.
- One study found that cats may be the "single greatest source of anthropogenic mortality" for birds and mammals in the U.S.
- Worldwide, free-ranging domestic cats have caused or contributed to dozens of extinctions of bird species recorded in the IUCN Red List.



'Landscape of fear'

- As per a survey done by an ecologist in Dehradun, pet cats hunted birds the most, followed by reptiles, insects, rodents, and amphibians. Notably, Dehradun has 590 of the 1,359 species of birds recorded in India.
- As per this ecologist, while free-ranging dogs also harm wildlife, cats have retained the instinct to hunt through many years of domestication, even if they don't need the skill anymore. Since cats can climb, they can reach habitats such as the birds' nests.
- Cat saliva is also more likely to contain bacteria that are lethal to birds. So if the direct impact of an attack doesn't kill them, the bacteria will. As per an urban wildlife rescuer, this could be why most cat-attacked birds reported to her didn't survive treatment.
- Cats also maintain a 'landscape of fear'. "This means that when cats are known to be in a particular area, the bird would avoid foraging or nesting there."

The 'trap, neuter, return' policy



- Domestic cats (*Felis catus*) weren't always this widespread. Palaeogenetic studies have found that wildcats (*Felis sylvestris*) were probably first domesticated in West Asia some 10,000 years ago.
- They spread via sailing ships much later. Today, they are one of the world's 100 worst invasive alien species.
- The proper way to deal with the cat problem has spiralled into a vicious debate in the west.
- Animal welfare groups usually advocate the 'trap-neuter-return' (TNR) policy, whereby stray cats or dogs are trapped, sterilised, and returned in the hope that this will reduce their populations. This is considered a humane approach because it could improve the quality of a cat's life as well.

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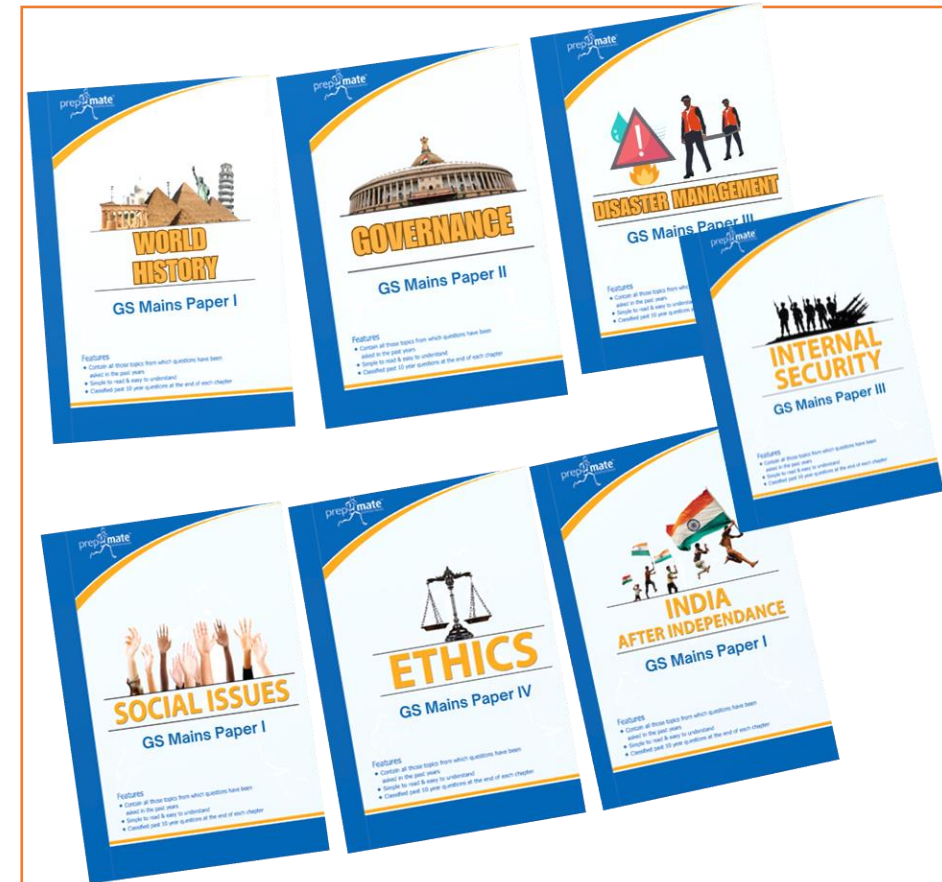
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