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Indian Owl Festival

The Indian Owl Festival, the country's first owl fest, will be held at Pingori village in Purandar taluka of Pune, Maharashtra. The two-day festival is organized by Ela Foundation, an NGO working towards nature education and conservation.

It will give information on owl conservation and feature art forms like pictures, paintings, lanterns, lamp shades, posters, origami, stitched articles, poems and stories on owls. It is a first-of-its-kind festival in the country that is being organized with the intention of creating awareness about owl as a bird and debunking numerous superstitions associated with it.

Of the 262 species of owls that are found in the world, *75 feature in the red data book — meaning they are threatened.* Major causes behind this are superstitions and habitat loss, both are man-made. Owls eat rats, rodents, bandicoots, and mice. *Most of the species that owls consume are harmful to agricultural croplands. So these birds are actually very beneficial to farmers.*

According to a report published by Traffic India, a wildlife trade monitoring body, and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 2010, owls were found to be consumed and traded for a wide variety of purposes, including black magic, street performances, taxidermy, private aviaries/zoos, food and in folk medicines. Despite being protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, the report has found owls to be highly prized and in demand for black magic purposes.

Source: The Hindu.

Saubhagya Scheme

8 States have achieved 100% saturation in household electrification under Saubhagya namely Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Bihar, J&K, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telangana and West Bengal.

The Minister informed that as many as 2.1 crore connections have been released under Saubhagya so far. Many more State like Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh etc. are left with small number of un-electrified households and expected to achieve saturation any time.

Nation is expected to achieve 100% saturation in the country by 31st December, 2018.

For creating healthy competition amongst various DISCOMs, an award scheme has been instituted with awards of more than Rs 300 crore to be won by States/Discoms. The first DISCOM/Power Departments to complete 100% household electrification will be felicitated with cash award of Rs. 50 Lakh for the employees and Rs.100 crore grant to be spent for distribution infrastructure.

For the purpose of award, States have been divided into 3 categories and award would be given in each of these categories. The States completing 100% household electrification by 31st2018

will also receive additional grant of 15% of the project cost (5% for special category States) sanctioned under Saubhagya.

Source: The Hindu.

Exercise Konkan-18

The Bilateral KONKAN exercise marks the naval cooperation between India and the United Kingdom based on the long term strategic relationship.

The KONKAN series of exercises commenced in 2004, and since then has grown in scale. KONKAN-2018 will be conducted from 28 Nov to 06 Dec 18 off Goa with units participating from both navies. The harbour phase is scheduled from 28 Nov to 30 Nov 18, followed by the sea phase from 02 to 06 Dec 18.

The Royal Navy will be represented by HMS Dragon, a Type 45 Class Destroyer equipped with an integral Wildcat helicopter. The Indian Navy will field INS Kolkata, the first ship of latest Kolkata class destroyers, equipped with integral Seaking and an IN submarine.

The thrust of the exercise this year would be on Anti-Air warfare, Anti-Surface Warfare, Anti-Submarine Warfare, Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) and Seamanship Evolutions.

Source: The Hindu.

About Climate Vulnerable Forum

The Climate Vulnerable Forum is an international cooperation group of developing countries tackling global climate change. The CVF was founded by the Maldives government before the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, which sought to increase awareness of countries considered vulnerable.

United Nations agencies collaborate in implementing activities linked to the CVF with the UNDP, the lead organization supporting the forum's work. The CVF was formed to increase the accountability of industrialized nations for the consequences of global climate change.

Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan are its members, whereas India is one of the observer states.

The CVF is being held in Marshall Islands. Through the summit's "*Jumemmej Declaration*", the forum's leaders committed to strengthening their national climate efforts by 2020 in order to pressure world governments to act.

"Jumemmej" is a Marshallese word of seafaring origin calling for vigilance to keep a watch against threats.

The carbon-free summit brought together leaders of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), which represents many of the countries most threatened by climate change. More than 40 heads of state, government and delegation also constituted the first global gathering of leaders of nations most threatened by climate change.

Source: The Hindu.

GST of 18% on tendu leaves: how it will impact tribals

The tendu tree (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) is found widely across central India. Leaves plucked from its shrubs are used to wrap bidi, the poor man's cigarette. Gathering tendu is labour-intensive and employs millions of tribals.

Tendu leaf is the financial lifeline of the tribal people. Many tribals in central India depend on tendu leaf collection for subsistence. They collect the leaves as part of their right defined under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. Madhya Pradesh is the biggest Tendu Leaves producing State of India. Tendu tree is endemic to Indian sub-continent. It is found in dry deciduous forests throughout India.

GST imposed on tendu leaves, a Minor Forest Produce (MFP), is 18%. The 18 per cent GST is made up of 9 per cent central GST (CGST) and 9 per cent state GST (SGST). Central tax on the leaf was earlier zero. Now, as the tax is high, the traders who get the tender from state corporations to collect tendu leaves pay even less to the tribals collecting the leaves. The hike in taxation will surely take a toll on the tribals who depend on the leaves for subsistence.

Source: The Hindu.

Editorial

To Read

China's ageing problem is a serious threat to growth

The impact of the slower growth in the workforce, in turn, is lower total economic growth. The trade war between the US and China is obscuring a key fact: economic growth for both countries will be significantly slower than in the past, for the simple reason that their populations are ageing rapidly.

Let's start with the facts on ageing. The share of the US population aged 65 or above is expected to rise to 21% in 2050 from 13% in 2010. In China, it is expected to rise much more rapidly over that period, to 24% from 8%.

The result of these ageing populations is slower workforce growth. The potential labour force in the US grew by 2.5% per year between 1974 and 1981. It has been declining since, because of ageing, and is expected to be just 0.5% per year over the next decade. In China, the situation is even direr: The workforce has actually fallen recently. So the US is struggling with a lower but still positive growth rate, while China has to cope with almost no growth and perhaps some declines.

The impact of the slower growth in the workforce, in turn, is lower total economic growth. Since economic expansion is arithmetically the sum of workforce growth and labour productivity growth, achieving the same top-line growth as the population ages would require substantially higher productivity growth rates. While higher productivity growth would be welcome, no one really knows how to spur it.

So it is worth turning our attention back to the demographic component, with the focus on China, where population ageing is more acute. The key driver of the rapidly ageing Chinese population is a low number of births per female. To avoid a decline in a population without immigration, the total fertility rate (that is, the average number of children per female throughout her childbearing years) needs to be slightly above two.

In 1960, the fertility rate in China was almost six. It is now about 1.5. One commonly cited reason for the dramatic decline was the infamous one-child policy, limiting couples to one child each, put in place in 1979. Yet the Chinese fertility rate was declining sharply even before the policy was put in place, in part because of an earlier “longer, later, fewer” discouragement of larger families (that people should marry later, wait longer between children, and have fewer of them). Indeed, research suggests that three-quarters of the fertility rate decline since 1970 was not formally related to the one-child policy, even if it was importantly driven by other formal and informal government action.

After a long history of discouraging births, the Chinese have started encouraging larger families. In 2013, the country began raising the limit for some families from one to two, and expanded that pilot programme to all families in the beginning of 2016. The general expectation was that the shift would create larger families, though the impact on economic growth would be delayed because the newly born children would take two decades or so to enter the workforce.

As some predicted at the time, however, the problem is not a delayed demographic benefit—it’s that it will not happen at all. Joan Kaufman, the director for academic programmes at the Schwarzman Scholars Program, wrote in 2016: “Thirty years of constant reminders about China’s population problem and restrictions on births created a new norm. Most urban youth are only children and that feels normal.”

Most do not want more children and the policy change can best be described as too little, too late.

Kaufman has been proven right: after a brief uptick, the fertility rate in China is no higher than before the higher limits were put in place. The reasons are many, including the social norm that she highlighted, along with other factors such as the difficulties of paying for healthcare, education and additional housing for larger families. Meanwhile, some of the consequences of encouraging more children have been unintended and unfortunate: more generous maternity leave policies are discouraging some firms from hiring young women.

The government is now considering eliminating the limit altogether. As the vice-president of the China Society of Economic Reform noted: “It’s late for China to remove birth limits even within this year but it’s better than never.

Scrapping birth limits will have little effect on the tendency of China’s declining births.”

The Chinese government is also considering financial incentives to encourage births, and provinces are considering their own child-related bonuses. Will this work? Some evidence suggests a large effect of such child-related payments on fertility in France. Other research, however, shows smaller effects in other countries. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the effects from these types of payments persist; a study of payments in Quebec suggests a short-term impact but no longer-term one. In addition, even if they work, the incentives can be quite expensive, since the payments are made for all children and not just those that parents choose to have because of the programme: evidence from Australia suggests a cost of more \$90,000 per additional child. So it’s unlikely that financial incentives will be a panacea in China. The conclusion? China’s population will continue to age rapidly for decades and as a result its economic growth will be lower too. And for those who believe the Chinese authorities are always and everywhere able to take the long view and address gradual, predictable problems before they take root, the difficulties the country is facing in belatedly raising birth rates might be a cautionary note.

Mains Question

Q: Highlight the regulations and policy of the government towards protection of tribes of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Also throw light on ineffective implementation of these provisions in the light of recent death of an American National.