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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

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Centralised hiring leads to cultural barriers in Eklavya schools

NEWS: The recent centralization of recruitment for tribal residential schools across the country has introduced Hindi competency as a mandatory requirement, resulting in a flood of requests for transfers. Many staff recruited from Hindi-speaking states are protesting postings to the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) located in southern states, where the language, food, and culture are unfamiliar to them.

BACKGROUND: Though Central government officials point out that the willingness to be posted anywhere in the country was part of the requirement for those applying for jobs, the bigger concern is the impact on tribal students being taught by teachers who are unfamiliar with the local language and culture.

PREVIOUS RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

Until last year, staff recruitment for the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' flagship Eklavya schools was managed by state authorities. In the 2023 Budget Session of Parliament, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the responsibility was being shifted to the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS), which now has the task of staffing 38,000 positions in over 400 Eklavya schools across the country.

STAFF SHORTAGE AND STANDARDIZATION

Officials stated that the centralization of recruitment was meant to address a severe shortage of teachers in the EMRS system and to standardize recruitment rules across states, which had previously used varying criteria and applied reservation quotas as per their state legislation. The examination for this centralized recruitment process — the 2023 EMRS Staff Selection Examination — was entrusted to the National Testing Agency, now beleaguered by several scandals.

EXAMINATION AND SELECTION

The examination was for the first round of 4,000 vacant teaching and non-teaching positions across the Eklavya schools. In June, NESTS announced that 303 principals and 707 junior secretariat assistants had been selected, along with thousands of other teaching and non-teaching positions. However, the new requirement of Hindi competency has resulted in a large number of selected candidates from Hindi-speaking states, many of whom now seek transfers from their postings.

TRANSFER POLICY

NESTS has posted a notification on its website stating that "At present, no request for change of place of posting is being considered." Government sources indicated that NESTS will soon roll out a transfer policy, likely modeled on similar policies for the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNV) and Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV).

LANGUAGE COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

There is "nothing unusual" about the requirement of basic Hindi language competency, as this is mandatory for JNV and KV recruitment as well. However, unlike KVs, where students come from across the country and are often family members of Central government employees, most tribal students in Eklavya schools would benefit from teachers who understand their local cultural contexts.

COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC HIRING

Aparna Choudhary, a social worker who runs the Delhi-based Karta Initiative, which has worked with JNVs and EMRSs, stated, "The issue is that for EMRSs especially, teachers and school staff being hired from within their local communities is the obvious way to go ahead. These communities have very specific contexts under which learning can be made conducive and it would naturally help to have teachers who understand that context."

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Kaziranga's women forest guards help flood-hit animals by patrolling highway adjoining reserve

NEWS: The deployment of women forest guards for patrolling a highway adjoining Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve has resulted in the least number of animals being run over by vehicles in the first year of their service.

BACKGROUND: Record Flooding

Kaziranga National Park, a 1,307.49 sq. km tiger reserve and the world's safest address for the one-horned rhino, recorded the highest flood level in a decade at 87.47 meters on July 1 this year. The flood killed 174 animals, with two of these deaths caused by speeding vehicles on National Highway 715.

HIGHWAY PATROL AND ANIMAL SAFETY

National Highway 715 runs for about 60 km along the southern edge of Kaziranga National Park. During floods, animals flee to the hills of the Karbi Anglong district on the opposite side of the park. Speed guns and cameras are installed at some of the nine animal corridors along this highway, enforcing a speed limit of 40 km per hour to protect the animals.

WOMEN FOREST GUARDS' ROLE

Since September 2023, Kaziranga has had 108 women forest guards and foresters (equivalent to sub-inspector) posted for active flood management and highway patrolling to regulate traffic and ensure animal safety. The park's Director, Sonali Ghosh, highlighted their training and engagement in these efforts. The team of women forest frontline staff, including four from the Special Rhino Protection Force, was named Van Durga by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March.

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SURVIVAL DURING FLOODS

Forest officials note that the annual floods are essential for Kaziranga's landscape and test the survival of the fittest animals. While many animals drown during these floods, deaths due to vehicle hits are deemed unacceptable, prompting significant efforts to prevent such incidents. Flood-related deaths of Kaziranga animals are recorded under four categories: drowning, died under care, vehicle hits, and others. This year, drowning claimed 158 animals, including 10 rhinos; 13 animals died under care; vehicles hit two hog deer; and an otter pup died of "other reasons."

HISTORICAL DATA

Records from the tiger reserve authorities show no animal deaths due to vehicle hits in 2018, a "low-flood" year for Kaziranga. Between 2019 and 2023, 68 animals were killed by vehicles, with 22 deaths occurring in 2022.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Centre amends rules to broaden the administrative role of J&K L-G



NEWS: The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday expanded the administrative role of the Lieutenant Governor (L-G) of Jammu and Kashmir by amending the Transaction of Business Rules. This amendment grants the L-G more authority in matters related to police, public order, All India Service (AIS), which require prior concurrence of the Finance Department, as well as their transfers and postings. Additionally, any proposal concerning the appointment of the Advocate General, Law Officers, and decisions regarding prosecution sanctions or filing of appeals must be presented to the L-G first.

BACKGROUND

On August 5, 2019, the special status granted to J&K under Article 370 of the Constitution was revoked, and the former state was divided into two Union Territories: Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, the latter without an assembly. J&K has been under Central rule since June 2018. The government has stated that statehood will be restored after Assembly elections are held. The Supreme Court's Constitution Bench has ordered the Election Commission to conduct elections to the J&K Assembly before September 30, 2024.

NOTIFICATION OF AMENDED RULES

On Friday, the MHA notified the amended Rules under Section 55 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, which inserted new sections defining the L-G's role. The notification stated

that no proposal requiring the previous concurrence of the Finance Department with regard to 'Police', 'Public Order', 'All India Service', and 'Anti-Corruption Bureau' to exercise the discretion of the Lieutenant Governor under the Act shall be approved or rejected unless it has been placed before the Lieutenant Governor through the Chief Secretary.

ROLE IN LEGAL APPOINTMENTS AND PROSECUTIONS

The amended rules added a provision that the Department of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs must submit proposals for the appointment of the Advocate General and other Law Officers to assist the Advocate-General in court proceedings, for approval by the Lieutenant Governor through the Chief Secretary and the Chief Minister. Any proposal regarding the grant or refusal of prosecution sanction or the filing of an appeal must also be placed before the Lieutenant Governor through the Chief Secretary by the Department of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs.

OVERSIGHT OF PRISONS AND FORENSIC SCIENCE

All matters related to Prisons, the Directorate of Prosecution, and the Forensic Science Laboratory are also to be submitted to the L-G.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

New species of dogfish shark discoveredin Kerala harbour

NEWS: Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India have discovered a new species of deep-water dogfish shark, named Squalus hima, from the Sakthikulangara fishing harbour in Kerala. This significant discovery was led by scientist Bineesh K. K. and published in the journal Records of the Zoological Survey of India.

BACKGROUND

CHARACTERISTICS OF SQUALUS HIMA

Squalus hima belongs to the genus Squalus, commonly known as spurdogs, which are part of the family Squalidae. These sharks are distinguished by their smooth dorsal fin spines.

IMPORTANCE IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Dr. Bineesh highlighted that shark species from the genus Squalus and Centrophorus are often exploited for their liver oil, which is highly sought after in the pharmaceutical industry.



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ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

India shows good progress on SDGs: NITI Aayog report

NITI Aayog released its fourth evaluation report on India's progress regarding the 16 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 by all United Nations member countries. India scored 71 out of 100 in 2023, a significant improvement from 57 in 2018.

LINK TO PEOPLE'S WELFARE

"SDGs are directly linked to people's welfare, well-being, and quality of life," stated B.V.R. Subrahmanyam, NITI Aayog's CEO, during the report's launch.

IMPROVEMENTS IN HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Subrahmanyam highlighted that health conditions have improved due to better public health and insurance coverage. Education benefited from high teacher-student ratios, though teacher quality still needs targeted interventions.

CHALLENGES IN INCOME AND GENDER EQUALITY

The report noted a drop in the scores for income and gender inequality. Specifically, there was a slight decrease in the ratio of women's earnings compared to men, from 0.75 last year to 0.73.

UPCOMING HIGH-LEVEL FORUM

The release of the report precedes the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which will be held under UN auspices in New York on July 18.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India did well to assert its ties with Russia, but the optics were bad



NEWS: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Moscow was billed as his first "stand-alone" visit during his current tenure, with officials emphasizing the purely "bilateral" framework. While the visit had strong bilateral components, its impact was felt globally, drawing unprecedented criticism from Kyiv and Washington due to its timing and optics.

BACKGROUND

Bilateral Outcomes

On the bilateral front, this was Mr. Modi's first visit to Russia since 2019 and the first "annual" summit in three years, resulting in several significant outcomes. The visit reaffirmed India-Russia ties and highlighted Mr. Modi's personal rapport with Russian President Vladimir Putin. During the visit, Mr. Modi received Russia's highest civilian award and praised Mr. Putin's efforts to strengthen bilateral ties, which had appeared to be flagging due to the war in Ukraine and growing Russia-China ties.

ECONOMIC AND TRADE FOCUS

In formal talks, the leaders focused on improving the economic and trade relationship, an often neglected part of the largely government-to-government engagements. They announced a bilateral trade target of \$100 billion by 2030, a target expected to be met given India's massive increase in oil imports from Russia, specially discounted due to Western sanctions. Mr. Modi also secured an assurance from Mr. Putin that Indian recruits enlisted in the Russian Army would be allowed to return to India.

MILITARY PURCHASE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Unlike in the past, the visit lacked any announcements of military purchases, which have been the mainstay of ties. This was partially due to Russian delays in supplying deals already announced after the invasion of Ukraine and to avoid international censure. Mr. Modi's statement that there was "no solution on the battlefield" to the conflict, along with his decision to travel further to Vienna, were seen as attempts to balance the trip, his first since the conflict began.

GLOBAL REACTIONS AND CHALLENGES

In an increasingly polarized world, balancing the visit was easier said than done, especially as Mr. Modi's visit coincided with a devastating missile attack on Ukraine. Meanwhile, NATO, Western alliance leaders, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy converged in Washington for a summit aimed, albeit unsuccessfully, at showing Russia's isolation. The U.S. State Department and Ukraine were openly critical of Mr. Modi's visit, and New Delhi's task will be to limit the damage in ties with the U.S. and Europe.

INDIA'S INDEPENDENT STANCE

In the long term, India will have to assert its interests and convince the West that it is futile to force India to choose sides or to push a country known for its independent stance to become a follower in this conflict. The stance of NATO countries, which have failed to show similar concerns over the killing of innocents in Gaza due to Israel's relentless bombardment, reeks of hypocrisy.



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INDIAN ECONOMY

The PDS impact on household expenditure

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM (PDS)

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a crucial social security program in India aimed at ensuring food security. Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013, up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population are eligible for subsidized food grains.

IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLD RESOURCES

By subsidizing the cost of food grains through the PDS, households can allocate resources to other essential items like vegetables, milk, pulses, eggs, fish, meat, and other nutrient-rich foods. The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23 will shed light on whether households diversify their food consumption when they receive free food items from the PDS.

REPRESENTATIVENESS OF HCES

The HCES: 2022-23 collected information on food and non-food items received by households through various social welfare programs. Detailed information is available in the report published by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) on the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation website. Although the survey does not aim to provide precise estimates of the proportion of households receiving benefits under every scheme, it allows for examining the characteristics of households reporting benefits from the programs.

LIMITATIONS IN IMPUTING VALUES

Detailed information on ailments or diseases, school or college fee waivers, or reimbursement is necessary to impute the value of free medical and educational services. While the NSSO conducts separate surveys for out-of-pocket expenditure and free services in health and education, the HCES focuses on consumption expenditure, including the value of free items received by households.

IMPUTATION OF FREE ITEMS

The NSSO imputed values for selected free food and non-food items to provide guidance to analysts and researchers. This approach enables the calculation of two metrics: the Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) and the value of household consumption considering the imputed value of free items ('MPCE with imputation'). The report shows that a significant portion of households received free food grains from the PDS, with 94% of the imputed value in rural areas and 95% in urban areas attributable to food items.

PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AND POVERTY

The report provides average MPCE values across different fractile classes. For example, the average MPCE of the bottom 5% in rural areas is ₹1,373, while in urban areas, it is ₹2,001. The imputed value of consumption for those at the lower end of the distribution indicates upward movement within the fractile classes, showing that in-kind social transfers enhance the value of consumption for poorer households.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY LINE

The release of the report has prompted discussions on where to draw the poverty line. The debate includes whether to

estimate the number of poor households based on expenditure or the total value of consumption, including free items. In-kind social transfers have significant implications for the well-being of households at the lower end of the consumption or income distribution.

PLACES IN NEWS

Freedom and control in Xinjiang

On June 17, in Yining city, Xinjiang, China, nine musicians of diverse ethnicities, including Uyghur, Kazhak, Mongolian, and Uzbek, performed at an accordion museum to celebrate Eid-Ul-Adha, emphasizing national unity. Xinjiang, home to 56 ethnic groups and followers of various religions, has faced accusations from human rights groups of detaining and abusing Uyghurs in "detention centres," claims the Chinese government refutes, insisting these are "education and vocational training centres." The Chinese authorities justify these measures as efforts to combat terrorism, extremism, and separatism, citing a history of terror attacks in the region.

In Yining's Shaanxi mosque, Imam Ma Jirong denies the accusations of persecution and highlights the mosque's traditional Chinese architecture. This adaptation of religion to Chinese socialism, termed "Sinicisation," is supported by Abud Rakev Tumunyaz, Imam at the Xinjiang Islamic Institute in Kuqa. Tumunyaz emphasizes that religion must align with the nation's socialist principles, and asserts that the "deradicalisation programme" aims to combat extremism, not target any religion or ethnicity.

Xinjiang's strategic importance to China's Belt and Road Initiative has spurred development, improving infrastructure and boosting the region's GDP and tourism. Despite the economic progress, surveillance remains tight, and overt displays of religiosity are frowned upon. The Chinese government promotes standard Chinese in education and public life, claiming ethnic minorities are eager to learn the language. While some Uyghurs have fled China, fearing persecution, the Chinese authorities stress the integration of ethnic cultures into the nation's development strategy.



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INDIAN SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Schooled by dropouts

Madivi Veeramma and Veerayya, a Koya tribal couple, initiated an academic movement called "Koitur Bata" in Ramannapalem, a village with limited formal education, in 2001. This movement, which began with the support of 55 tribal school dropouts under the Neo Literacy Programme funded by Oxfam India, aimed to provide free education to tribal youths in the Godavari Valley. The community-based school, Koitur Bata, initially operated five days a month and prepared students for their Class X exams through a rigorous nine-month program. Despite challenges, Koitur Bata transformed the academic and social landscape, leading to many tribal youths becoming government employees, teachers, writers, and activists. The movement promoted the Koya language and literature, with numerous alumni emerging as writers. By 2012, the initiative faced funding issues, but its legacy continues to inspire and uplift the tribal community.

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Cliffhanger at Varkala

NEWS: Boards with stark "Danger" warnings and restrictions dot the narrow, picturesque pathway leading to Varkala Cliff, situated about 40 kilometers from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala's capital. This cliff, overlooking the Arabian Sea, is flanked by international-style cafes and resorts, showcasing daily catches.

BACKGROUND

Tourist Influx and Geological Significance

During peak tourist seasons and holidays, particularly from October to February, Varkala Cliff attracts throngs of visitors, predominantly youth and foreigners. While many come to unwind in what's dubbed as 'mini-Goa', others are drawn to its geological marvel—a 6-km-long, 30-meter-high formation with a history spanning up to 23 million years.

EROSION CONCERNS AND STRUCTURAL RISKS

Recently, the relaxed ambiance has been overshadowed by concerns over imminent danger. Sections of the cliff have been eroding slowly over decades, prompting authorities to ban vehicular traffic on the pathway. Bamboo barricades now caution visitors against approaching the unstable edges, and tree branches have been pruned to prevent further deterioration.

GEOLOGICAL HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Designated as the 27th National Geological Monument in 2014, Varkala's red cliffs are under scrutiny for their unstable composition. While the top layer boasts robust laterite, softer sandstone and clay layers below are susceptible to erosion, exacerbated by water seepage during rains or from wastewater, which weakens the structure.

CONTROVERSIES AND LEGALITIES

In a controversial move, a district collector ordered the demolition of a section of the cliff to safeguard a nearby ritual site from potential landslides. This action sparked debates about the legality of various cliff-side constructions, including cafes and resorts, some with swimming pools perilously close to the edge.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Historically, Varkala Cliff, depicted in films since the 1960s, once hosted coconut trees and temporary sheds during tourist seasons. However, unauthorized permanent structures now dominate, despite repeated municipal notices and legal challenges.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Environmentalists advocate for a balance between tourism-driven livelihoods and preserving these fragile geological wonders. Proposals include stabilizing measures like soil-binding plants, coir mats, and improved drainage systems, alongside strict bans on vehicular traffic to mitigate further erosion.

CONCLUSION

Varkala Cliff stands as a precarious yet culturally significant site, balancing economic benefits from tourism with the imperative of conservation. Only through careful management and sustainable practices can this natural marvel endure for future generations to enjoy

INDIAN ECONOMY

GST system reforms panel rejigged

NEWS: The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has reconstituted a ministerial group to tackle revenue evasion, enhance coordination between central and State GST authorities, and review IT systems for indirect tax implementation. This restructuring includes new representatives from Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, reflecting recent changes in state governments, as well as a replacement for the Haryana representative.

Background and Recent Developments This reconstitution follows the Council's decision to reformulate the ministerial group responsible for rationalizing the GST rate structure and its tax rates. Initially led by former Karnataka CM Basavaraj Bommai, the panel is now chaired by Bihar Deputy CM Samrat Chaudhary. The GST Council, which last convened in late June after a nine-month break, plans to review the progress of this Group of Ministers (GoM) and outline the roadmap for the GST rate restructuring in its upcoming August meeting.

Formation and Composition of the GoM Established in late 2021, the GoM on GST system reforms was formed by merging two separate groups dealing with IT challenges and revenue mobilisation. This fourth reshuffle includes new appointments:

- Odisha's representation is now by Deputy CM Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, succeeding the Biju Janata Dal's defeat in recent Assembly polls.
- Andhra Pradesh's Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav replaces Buggana Rajendranath following the TDP's electoral victory.



+91 9383 432 123 +91 7777 875 588 0484 452 77 77

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INDIAN ECONOMY

NABARD unveils ₹750-cr. agri fund to promote innovation

NEWS: NABARD has introduced the Agri Fund for Start-Ups & Rural Enterprises (Agri-SURE), allocating an initial corpus of ₹750 crore. This fund will be overseen by Nabventures, NABARD's wholly owned subsidiary. The contributions include ₹250 crore each from NABARD and the Ministry of Agriculture, with the remaining ₹250 crore sourced from other institutions.

OBJECTIVE AND STRUCTURE Agri-SURE aims to support approximately 85 start-ups, providing investments of up to ₹25 crore each by the end of its operational period.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

'Boost financing for green projects'

NEWS: Recent Budget speeches by the Finance Minister have increasingly highlighted India's commitment to green growth. This emphasis follows Prime Minister Modi's announcement at COP26 that India aims to achieve 500GW of fossil fuel-free capacity by 2030 and attain net-zero emissions by 2070.

Financial Strategies for Achieving Net Zero The Finance Minister has affirmed these commitments in Budget speeches to signal India's dedication to environmental sustainability. Accelerating the peak and decline of fossil fuel use will reduce the overall cost of transitioning to net zero for businesses and the economy. Investors are urged to evaluate major investment decisions through this lens to avoid inefficient, large-scale investments in fossil fuel infrastructure.

Promoting Renewable Energy and Storage Private investments are actively creating Renewable Energy (RE) capacities, driven by declining costs in a competitive market. The integration of renewable energy with storage technologies, ensuring round-the-clock supply, has become more cost-effective than new thermal power. To achieve the ambitious goal of 500GW fossil fuel-free capacity by 2030, significant enhancements in capacity are necessary, prompting invitations for RE bids.

Encouraging Large-Scale Storage Solutions Given the intermittent nature of renewable energy generation, substantial investments in storage infrastructure are crucial. The Budget should announce plans to invite bids for large-scale storage projects, including river and off-river hydro pump storage and concentrated solar thermal energy stored in molten salt, which offer long-term viability with minimal operational costs.

Facilitating Affordable Financing To lower bid prices, the Finance Minister could announce provisions for long-term, fixed-rate rupee debt for potential developers. Additionally, existing instruments such as government green bonds can be leveraged. Encouraging global competitive manufacturing of solar panels in India through PLI policies can support the renewable energy sector.

Self-Reliance in Renewable Technologies The Budget could outline strategies for achieving self-reliance in solar panel and battery production for electric vehicles over the next five years. Extending and refining PLI and FAME programmes can facilitate this transition, positioning India as a leader in green manufacturing.

Hydrogen Mission and International Relations The National Hydrogen Mission is poised to leverage green hydrogen for competitive manufacturing, aligning with global trends such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Embracing CBAM could enhance market access for Indian firms, particularly MSMEs exporting to Europe.

Supporting Low-Carbon Exports To support exports of low-carbon goods, the Budget may introduce financing facilities, credit guarantees, or interest subsidies for capital investments. Mandating the use of carbon-free electricity in industrial processes and logistics can further reduce carbon footprints and enhance competitiveness in global markets.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Disaster-hit nations call for immediate climate aid fund

NEWS: Countries grappling with severe climate impacts assert the urgency of receiving long-awaited aid to recover from escalating disasters, including floods and hurricanes wreaking havoc worldwide.

Concerns Over Delayed Aid At the conclusion of the second meeting of the Loss and Damage Fund in South Korea, delegates expressed concerns that crucial climate aid may not be approved until 2025, a timeline deemed unacceptable given current disasters.

Call for Action Representatives, such as Adao Soares Barbosa from East Timor, stressed that waiting until the end of 2025 for initial funds is impractical. They emphasize that Loss and Damage initiatives cannot afford further delays in delivering critical assistance.

Challenges in Fund Implementation Despite the agreement at UN COP-28 to establish the fund for aiding developing nations post-climate disasters, the intricate process of finalizing its structure raises concerns. Many fear that the fund's pace and scale won't align with the rapid frequency of extreme weather events.

Financial Constraints The global community faces significant financial hurdles as damage costs from climate disasters soar into the billions. Current reserves for loss and damage are insufficient, leaving experts skeptical about the fund's ability to adequately respond to even a single catastrophic event.

Year of Unprecedented Disasters The year has witnessed a relentless series of climate catastrophes spanning continents, from floods and landslides to heatwaves and wildfires, underscoring the critical need for swift and effective international aid mechanisms.





Head Office:

Vedhik IAS Academy

Mercy Estate,

MG Road, Ravipuram,

Ernakulam-682 015,

Corporate office:

Vedhik IAS Academy

Samkalp Bhawan, Plot No.15,

Sector 4, Rama Krishna Puram,

New Delhi, Delhi-110022

Regional office Vedhik IAS Academy 202, Raheja Chambers, 12, Museum Road. Bangalore -560001. Karnataka, India. GCC Office:

Bobscoedu,

Bobsco Trading & Contracting Co. W. L. L Office 22, Dream Tower 1, Road: 2701, Adliya, Kingdom of Bahrain www.bobscoedu.com