

Current Affairs - 03 October 2024

WHAT SPECIAL STATUS IS LADAKH SEEKING?

Ladakh's Demand for Sixth Schedule Status:

- Since Ladakh became a Union Territory in 2019, local leaders and activists have consistently raised the demand for special constitutional protections under the Sixth Schedule.
- Their argument is centered around the need to preserve the region's fragile ecosystem and protect the unique cultural identity of Ladakh's people, who are predominantly tribal.
- Wangchuk and other activists believe that without such protections, the region could face exploitation of its natural resources and dilution of its cultural heritage.
- The demand aligns with similar calls from other regions that have significant tribal populations, such as Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Manipur.

Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution:

- **Fifth Schedule:**
 - The **Fifth Schedule** of the Indian Constitution applies to areas designated as "Scheduled Areas."
 - These are typically regions with a significant tribal population, economic backwardness, and unique administrative challenges.
 - The following are key features of the Fifth Schedule:
 - **Governance:** Tribes Advisory Councils (TAC) are established in these areas to guide state governments on matters related to tribal welfare.
 - **Land Rights:** The Governor has the authority to regulate the transfer of tribal land and oversee money-lending businesses in these areas.
 - **Modifications of Laws:** The Governor can direct that laws enacted by Parliament or the state legislature do not apply, or apply with modifications, in these areas to safeguard tribal interests.

Currently, ten Indian states have designated Scheduled Areas under the Fifth Schedule.

Current Affairs - 03 October 2024

Sixth Schedule:

- The **Sixth Schedule** is more expansive in terms of the autonomy granted to tribal areas. It applies to certain regions in **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, & Tripura**.
- Here, **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** are formed to give greater control to local communities over governance. Key features include:
 - **Autonomy in Governance:** ADCs can legislate on matters like land use, inheritance, marriage, and social customs, provided their laws receive approval from the Governor.
 - **Judicial Powers:** ADCs are empowered to establish local courts to handle cases where both parties are members of Scheduled Tribes (STs).
 - **Revenue and Taxation:** These councils can collect land revenue and impose taxes on professions, trades, and other activities.
- In short, the Sixth Schedule grants more **executive, legislative, judicial, and financial powers** to local bodies, offering greater autonomy than the Fifth Schedule areas.

Special Provisions for North Eastern States:

- Apart from the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, various north-eastern states enjoy special provisions under **Article 371** of the Indian Constitution. These articles safeguard local customs and give special powers to local governments. For example:
 - **Article 371A (Nagaland)** and **371G (Mizoram)** protect local laws and practices, including customary law.
 - **Article 371B (Assam)** and **371C (Manipur)** establish separate committees in the legislative assemblies for Tribal and Hill Areas.
 - These provisions are part of India's effort to maintain the delicate balance between integrating tribal communities and preserving their unique identities.
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Current Affairs - 03 October 2024



KEY FACTS ABOUT SAHARA DESERT

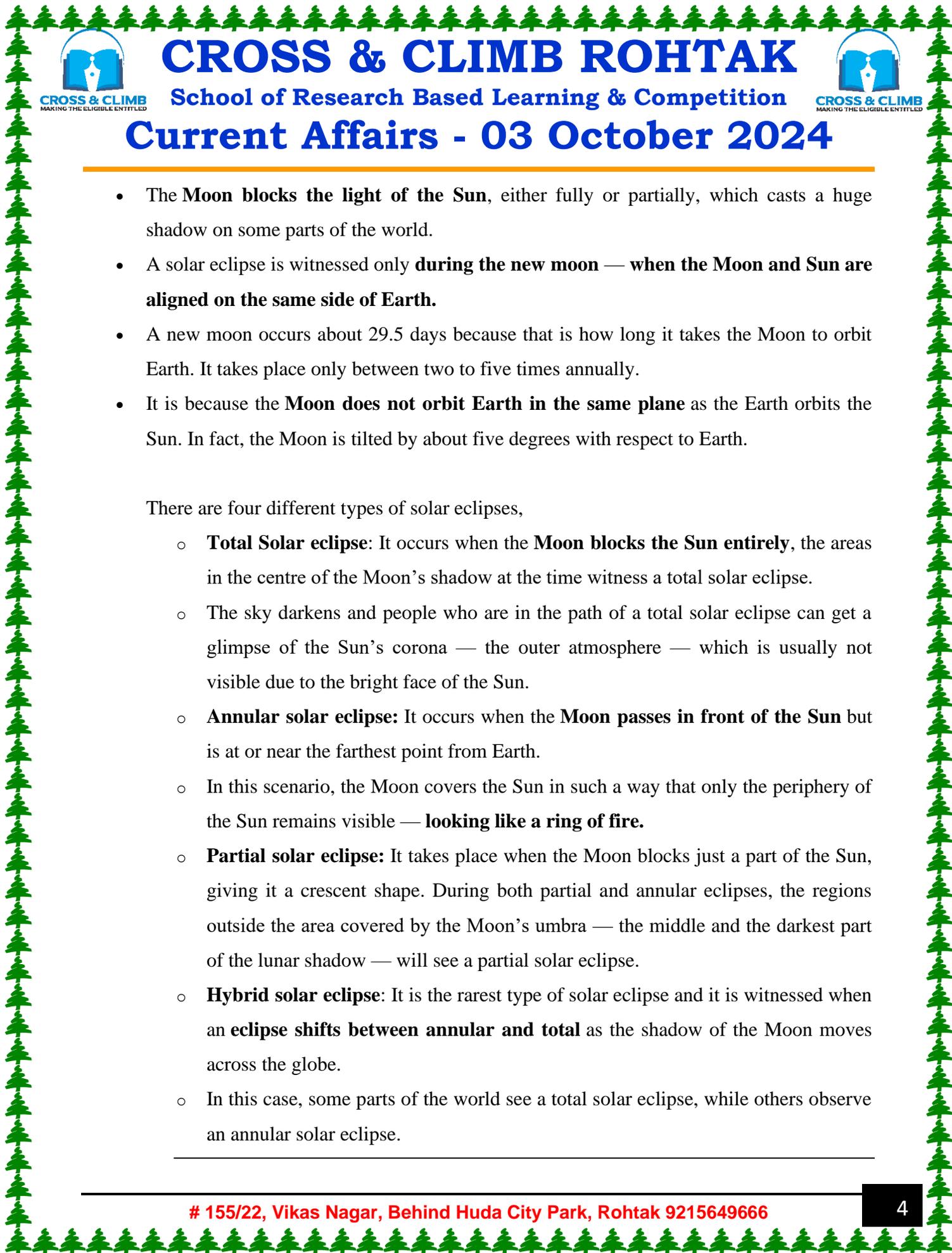
The Sahara Desert is undergoing a rare transformation as heavy rainfall brings unexpected greenery to its arid landscape.

- The Sahara, located in **Northern Africa**, is the **world's largest hot desert** and the **third most extensive desert** after the polar deserts of **Antarctica** and the **northern Arctic**.
- It spans over 9,200,000 sq. km (8% of the earth's land area).
- The Sahara Desert encompasses a major portion of North Africa, occupying about **31% of the entire African continent**.
- The countries within the Sahara Desert are **Morocco, Mali, Mauritania, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Chad, the Niger Republic**, some parts of **Sudan**, a small portion of **Nigeria**, and a small part of **Burkina Faso**.
- The desert is bounded by the **Mediterranean Sea** and the **Atlas Mountains** on the northern side; the **Red Sea** on the eastern side; the **Atlantic Ocean** on the western side and the **semiarid Sahel region** on the southern side.
- The majority of the Sahara is made up of barren, rocky plateaus, as well as salt flats, sand dunes, mountains, and dry valleys.
- The **large Nile and Niger rivers**, along with the seasonal lakes and aquifers, provide the main source of water for the major desert oases.
- The **highest peak** in the Sahara is **Emi Koussi** (3,415m), a volcano **located in the Tibesti Mountains, Chad**.
- The **Sahel region** serves as a **transition zone between the hot desert** in the north and the **humid savannas of Sub-Saharan Africa** in the south.



WHAT IS SOLAR ECLIPSE?

- It takes place when the **Moon moves in the middle of the Earth and the Sun**.



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Current Affairs - 03 October 2024

- The **Moon blocks the light of the Sun**, either fully or partially, which casts a huge shadow on some parts of the world.
- A solar eclipse is witnessed only **during the new moon** — **when the Moon and Sun are aligned on the same side of Earth**.
- A new moon occurs about 29.5 days because that is how long it takes the Moon to orbit Earth. It takes place only between two to five times annually.
- It is because the **Moon does not orbit Earth in the same plane** as the Earth orbits the Sun. In fact, the Moon is tilted by about five degrees with respect to Earth.

There are four different types of solar eclipses,

- **Total Solar eclipse:** It occurs when the **Moon blocks the Sun entirely**, the areas in the centre of the Moon's shadow at the time witness a total solar eclipse.
 - The sky darkens and people who are in the path of a total solar eclipse can get a glimpse of the Sun's corona — the outer atmosphere — which is usually not visible due to the bright face of the Sun.
 - **Annular solar eclipse:** It occurs when the **Moon passes in front of the Sun** but is at or near the farthest point from Earth.
 - In this scenario, the Moon covers the Sun in such a way that only the periphery of the Sun remains visible — **looking like a ring of fire**.
 - **Partial solar eclipse:** It takes place when the Moon blocks just a part of the Sun, giving it a crescent shape. During both partial and annular eclipses, the regions outside the area covered by the Moon's umbra — the middle and the darkest part of the lunar shadow — will see a partial solar eclipse.
 - **Hybrid solar eclipse:** It is the rarest type of solar eclipse and it is witnessed when an **eclipse shifts between annular and total** as the shadow of the Moon moves across the globe.
 - In this case, some parts of the world see a total solar eclipse, while others observe an annular solar eclipse.
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Current Affairs - 03 October 2024

FOOD SAFETY LAWS IN STATES

The Uttar Pradesh government has recently mandated that food establishments prominently display the names of the operator, proprietor, manager, and relevant personnel to customers.

Regulations for selling food in India

- **FSSAI Registration for Food Businesses**
 - Anyone wishing to operate a food business in India must register or obtain a license from the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**.
 - This body, established under the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSSA)**, is responsible for monitoring and regulating food processing, distribution, sale, and import to ensure food safety and quality.
- **Display of Owner's Identity and Location**
 - In both cases—whether for small-scale food manufacturers or larger operators—the owner's identity and the establishment's location are already mandated to be displayed through the photo ID and the license issued by FSSAI.
- **Penalties for Operating Without a License**
 - According to Section 63 of the FSSA, any operator conducting a food business without a valid license may face penalties of up to six months in prison and a fine of up to ₹5 lakh.

Repeat Offenses

- If an FBO is convicted twice for the same offense (including under Section 58), they may face:
 - Double the penalty for the first conviction.
 - A daily fine that can reach up to ₹1 lakh.
 - Potential loss of their licence as outlined in Section 64.

Current Affairs - 03 October 2024

Powers of State Governments Under the FSSA

- **Legal provision**
 - **Section 94(1)** of the **FSSA** grants state governments the authority to make rules, subject to the approval of the **Food Authority** and the **Central Government**.
 - This allows them to carry out functions and duties assigned to them under the Act.
- **Role of the Commissioner of Food Safety**
 - The Commissioner of Food Safety, appointed by the state government under Section 30, is responsible for ensuring the efficient implementation of the FSSA and its accompanying regulations.
- **Legislative Approval Requirement**
 - According to Section 94(3), any rules made by the state government must be presented to the state legislature for approval as soon as possible.

Legal Challenges to UP and Uttarakhand Directives

- **Allegations of Discrimination**
 - Petitioners argued that these orders discriminated against citizens based on religion, violating Article 15(1).
 - **Concerns About Economic Boycott**
 - The petitioners claimed that the directives could lead to the economic boycott of Muslim minorities.
 - **Government's Justification**
 - In response to these challenges, the UP government stated that the recent directives, which include the installation of CCTV cameras at food establishments and a state-wide verification campaign, aim to enhance public health.
 - They cited reports of food adulteration incidents involving human waste and other unsanitary substances, emphasizing the need for measures to ensure food safety and protect public health in the state.
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Current Affairs - 03 October 2024

DIRECT ISRAEL-IRAN CONFLICT AND INDIA'S INTEREST



- The conflict in West Asia has intensified as Iran launched missiles on Israel, with the Israeli military shifting its focus from Hamas in Gaza to the more formidable Hezbollah in Lebanon.
 - Recently, Iran launched a barrage of missiles on Israel overnight. Now, the analysts fear that Israel would retaliate thereby widening of the conflict in the region.

- This follows the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, leading to further instability in the region.
- The widening of the conflict has increased the risk of trade disruptions, as Hezbollah shares close ties with the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who are responsible for the majority of the attacks on ships traversing the Red Sea route.

Impact on India

- **Fears of Protracted Red Sea Disruption**
 - Exporters have long been concerned about a direct conflict between Israel and Iran, fearing it would cause a prolonged disruption of the Red Sea shipping route.
- **Impact on Indian Petroleum Exports**
 - Rising shipping costs and the crisis in the Red Sea have led importers to seek alternative sources, impacting Indian exporters' profitability, particularly standalone refiners.
- **Risk to India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**
 - The ongoing conflict in West Asia could hinder the development of the IMEC, a strategic project announced during the G20 in 2023.

The IMEC plan comprises an Eastern Corridor connecting India to the Gulf region and a Northern Corridor connecting the Gulf region to Europe. It will include a railway and ship-rail transit network, as well as road transport routes.

Current Affairs - 03 October 2024

- The IMEC aims to reduce reliance on the Suez Canal by creating faster trade routes through a rail and ship network connecting India to the Gulf and Europe.
- However, the widening conflict in the region threatens to delay or complicate the corridor's progress, casting uncertainty over its future.
- **Surge in Shipping Costs Due to Longer Trade Routes**
 - The rising costs are hitting Indian exporters hard, especially those dealing in low-margin, labour-intensive goods like textiles, garments, and low-end engineering products.
- **Calls for an Indian Shipping Line**
 - Indian exporters are urging the government to establish an Indian shipping line to reduce reliance on foreign firms.
 - The global shipping lines are seeing their profits soar amid the Red Sea crisis.
 - This push comes as India's outward remittance on transport services exceeded \$109 billion in 2022, with rising exports contributing to higher costs.
 - Many exporters believe an Indian shipping line would benefit MSMEs, reducing foreign shipping lines' ability to dictate terms, especially during crises.

WHAT IS SICKLE CELL DISEASE (SCD)?



The pharmaceutical giant Pfizer recently announced it would voluntarily withdraw its sickle cell disease therapy, Oxbritya, from worldwide markets, owing to the emergence of clinical data that links “fatal events” to the drug.

- It is an **inherited blood disorder**.
- It is marked by **flawed hemoglobin**.
 - Hemoglobin is the molecule in Red Blood Cells (RBCs) that carries oxygen to the tissues of the body.

Current Affairs - 03 October 2024

How does it affect blood flow?

- Normally, RBCs are **disc-shaped** and flexible enough to move easily through the blood vessels.
- People with **SCD** have **atypical hemoglobin** molecules called hemoglobin S, which can **distort RBCs into a sickle, or crescent, shape**.
- These sickled RBCs **do not bend or move easily** and can **block blood flow** to the rest of the body.
- SCD interferes with the delivery of oxygen to the tissues.

What causes it?

- The cause of SCD is a **defective gene**, called a sickle cell gene.
- A person will be born with **SCD only if two genes are inherited—one from the mother and one from the father**.

Symptoms:

- **Early stage:** Extreme tiredness or fussiness from **anemia**, painfully swollen hands and feet, and **jaundice**.
- **Later stage:** Severe pain, anemia, **organ damage**, and infections.

Treatments:

- A **bone marrow transplant** (stem cell transplant) can cure SCD.
 - However, some treatments can help relieve symptoms, lessen complications, and prolong life.
 - **Gene therapy** is also being explored as another potential cure.
 - The UK recently became the first country to approve gene therapy treatment for SCD.
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