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21 May 2024

National & International News

Muria Tribes



Context:

- The Muria tribes in the **Godavari Valley** practice a **traditional and eco-friendly method of seed preservation called the 'deda' method.**

Key points:

- This technique, handed down by their ancestors, **involves wrapping seeds in leaves and weaving them into a casing using Siali leaf (Bauhinia vahlii).**
- The seeds are packed almost airtight, resembling boulders from a distance.
- **The deda has three protective layers:** wood ash spread inside Siali leaves, covered with lemon leaves, and finally sealed with the seeds inside.
- This method ensures **protection from pests and worms**, allowing the seeds to be **stored for up to five years**, although they are typically used within three years.
- Muria families, who have settled along the **Godavari and Sabari rivers in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana** after migrating from Chhattisgarh due to conflicts, continue this practice for their **food security.**
- Despite restrictions on land expansion in reserve forests, they engage in **small-scale farming**, primarily cultivating pulses and maize, with minimal dependence on paddy.
- The Murias rarely sell their produce, focusing instead on **self-sufficiency.**
- Their commitment to preserving traditional methods like the **deda reflects their cultural resilience in the face of displacement.**



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Sri Lankan golden-backed frog



REMARKABLE FIND

These findings highlight utility of DNA barcoding in confirming species identities and suggest that Eastern Ghats' biodiversity may be richer than previously understood

— Deepa Jaiswal | ZSI HYDERABAD

● *Hylarana gracilis* the golden-backed frog belongs to family Ranidae

● ZSI Hyd, spotted the frog at Koundinya wildlife sanctuary in AP

● Also known as Gravenhorst's frog or Sri Lanka wood frog

● Considered endemic to Sri Lanka, found up to 1,250mts above sea level

Context:

- The **Sri Lankan golden-backed frog (*Hylarana gracilis*)** has been rediscovered after **200 years at the Koundinya Wildlife Sanctuary in India.**
- Bharath Bhupathi from the Zoological Survey of India suggests that this rediscovery provides evidence of a **historic land bridge between India and Sri Lanka during the late Pleistocene period or the Ice Age.**

Details of the Rediscovery:

- Researchers from the Zoological Survey of India, in collaboration with the Andhra Pradesh Biodiversity Board, made the rediscovery.
- The frogs were found in the **Palamaner forest range of the Koundinya Wildlife Sanctuary in the Chittoor district.**
- This discovery increases the number of freshwater frog species in India to **20.**

About:

- **Scientific Name:** *Hylarana gracilis*
- **Family:** Ranidae
- **Endemic:** Found in Sri Lanka and recently recorded in the Eastern Ghats
- **Body:** Slender body with a small head
- **Appearance:**
 - Iris: Reddish brown with golden specks and dark patches
 - Flanks: Light yellowish-gray
 - Limbs: Light brown with grayish cross-bands
 - Throat and Limbs: Light grey



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Daily Current Affairs Encyclopedia

New Caledonia

Context:

- French security forces are intensifying efforts to regain control over **New Caledonia, a French Pacific archipelago, amidst ongoing and deadly unrest.**

Key points:

- The immediate trigger for the current wave of unrest was the debate and subsequent approval of voting reforms by the **French legislature, allowing residents who have lived in New Caledonia for ten years to vote in provincial elections.**
- This change has been fiercely opposed by pro-independence supporters, particularly the **indigenous Kanak population**, who fear the new rules will dilute their political influence in favor of pro-France politicians.

About:

- New Caledonia is a **French overseas collectivity with significant autonomy under the 1998 Nouméa Accord.**
- It is situated in the **southwestern Pacific Ocean, about 1,500 km (900 miles) east of Australia.**
- Unlike many Pacific islands that are of relatively recent volcanic origin, New Caledonia is an ancient fragment of the Gondwana supercontinent.
- The territory comprises the **main island of Grande Terre, the four Loyalty Islands (Ouvéa, Lifou, Tiga, and Maré),** the Belep archipelago, the Isle of Pines, and several remote islands, with Nouméa, located on Grande Terre, serving as the capital.



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Daily Current Affairs Encyclopedia

Project Astra

Context:

Google introduces Project Astra, a **real-time, multimodal AI assistant**.

Key points:

- **Project Astra, a novel multimodal AI agent developed by Google, exhibits remarkable capabilities:**
 - It answers real-time questions presented through text, video, images, and speech, retrieving relevant information.
- Astra can **visually perceive the world**, recall object locations, and even assess the correctness of computer code by analyzing it through a phone's camera.
- Its voice **lacks emotional diversity, maintaining a straightforward tone**.
- Not confined to smartphones, **Google demonstrated Astra's compatibility with smart glasses**.
- Astra's learning ability enables it to acquire knowledge about the world, providing a human-assistant-like experience.
- **Multimodal Model AI, such as Google's Gemini, refers to ML models adept at processing diverse modalities** (e.g., images, videos, text).
- For instance, Gemini can analyze a photo of cookies to generate a recipe and vice versa.
- This model enhances generative capabilities by processing information from various modalities, essentially granting AI the capacity to comprehend different sensory modes.



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Daily Current Affairs Encyclopedia

Orcas

Context:

- Two individuals were rescued after their 15-meter-long sailing yacht was sunk by a group of **orcas**, also known as **killer whales**, in the **Strait of Gibraltar**.

Orcas (Killer Whales)

- **Scientific Name:** Orcinus orca
- **Classification:** The largest member of the oceanic dolphin family; a toothed whale.
- **Unique Feature:** Distinct black-and-white patterned body.
- **Distribution:** Inhabit various marine environments, including:
 - Arctic regions
 - Antarctic regions
 - Tropical seas
- **Social Behavior:** Highly social animals.
- Some populations live in stable, matrilineal family groups called pods.
- **Conservation Status:** Data Deficient (International Union for Conservation of Nature).
- **Threats:**
 - Habitat loss
 - Pollution (particularly by PCBs)
 - Capture for marine mammal parks
 - Conflicts with human fisheries

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