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New scheme with 'set-up grant' to get top Indian faculty overseas to return

The Indian government is planning a new "set-up grant" scheme aimed at encouraging top researchers with significant academic achievements to return to or remain in India for advanced research by offering substantial financial and infrastructural autonomy in select premier institutions, including IITs and leading R&D labs. The initiative's goal is to enhance India's research and development ecosystem, boost institutional flexibility, and provide talented scientists the resources to establish labs and teams in STEM fields, with initial focus on 12 strategic areas identified as critical for national capacity building. Current Indian programs like the VAJRA Faculty Programme, while enabling short-term project collaboration with overseas scientists, have not significantly stemmed the outflow of Indian talent or attracted large numbers of top researchers due to procedural delays and lack of institutional support. Persistent structural challenges in India—including noncompetitive academic salaries (notably lower than the US and China), cumbersome approval processes, short-term rather than stable tenure contracts, and limited institutional autonomy—make it difficult for Indian institutions to compete globally for talent. The government is reviewing policy hurdles such as intellectual property norms, research autonomy, and tenure structure to address these shortcomings in the proposed scheme, which will be finalized and placed before the Union Cabinet for approval.

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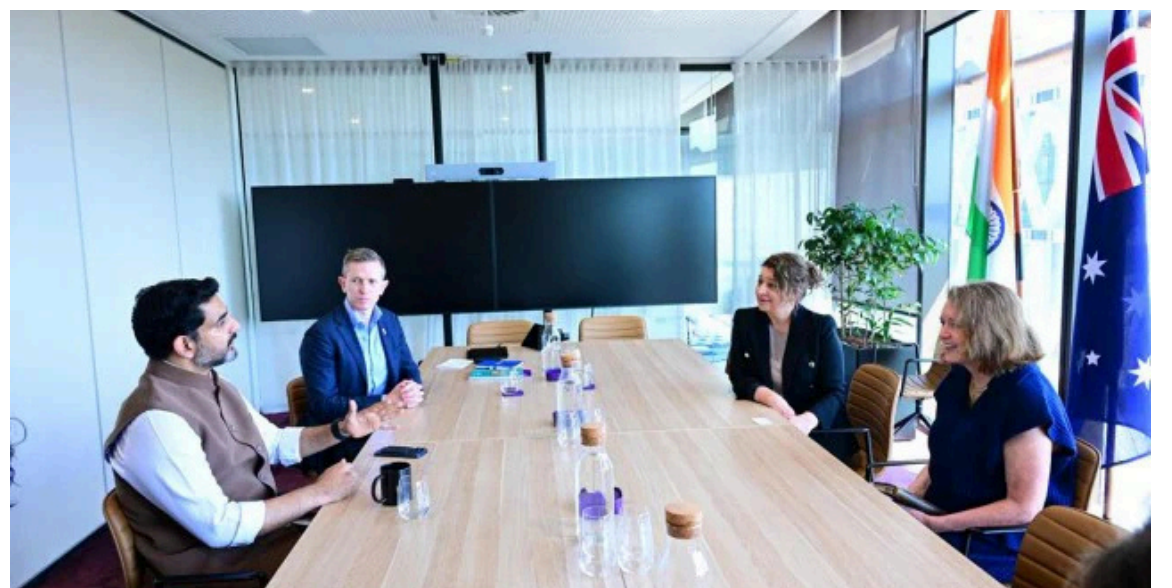


Tamil Nadu govt. seeks to amend rules to allow women in 'dangerous' factory jobs

- The Tamil Nadu government has proposed amending the Tamil Nadu Factories Rules, 1950, to allow women to work in around 20 operations previously classified as 'dangerous,' from which they were earlier prohibited.
- The amendments also propose that women wishing to work night shifts must provide written consent, indicating a push towards giving women more agency and opportunity in factory employment decisions.
- Notification of these draft amendments was issued by the Labour Welfare and Skill Development Department in September, with a public objection period of 45 days for stakeholders to respond.
- Even as rules are being liberalized for women, the government intends to maintain prohibitions for pregnant women, ensuring their protection from hazardous work environments.
- The expansion would allow women access to employment in sectors such as electrolytic processes, glass manufacturing, and the treatment of lead and lead compounds, which are considered hazardous but critical for industrial development.
- These changes reflect a broader move towards gender inclusivity in industrial labor, balancing progressive employment opportunities with health and safety protections for vulnerable workers.

Andhra Pradesh pivots to Australia for Shrimp exports

- Andhra Pradesh's shrimp industry has been significantly affected by recent US tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump, disrupting its primary export market and causing economic concerns within the sector.
- In response to these trade restrictions, Andhra Pradesh is proactively seeking alternative export opportunities in Australia, indicating a strategic shift in its international trade approach to diversify away from over-reliance on the US market.
- State IT and HRD Minister N Lokesh Naidu, representing the government and the seafood industry, has engaged in diplomatic and trade discussions with Australian authorities and industry representatives during an official tour to facilitate potential cooperation and market access.
- This is an example of the importance of governmental intervention and international outreach in mitigating the adverse impacts of protectionist trade policies on local industries.
- This development highlights a classic case of economic adaptation—where sectoral disruptions caused by geopolitical decisions necessitate rapid exploration of alternative markets to safeguard employment and revenue in affected regions.
- By targeting Australia, Andhra Pradesh aims to leverage existing goodwill and bilateral engagement to ease regulatory obstacles and enhance export prospects for its seafood products, especially shrimp.
- The shift is also a reminder of the need for diversified export strategies and resilient sectoral planning to withstand global trade shocks, ensuring the sustainability of agriculture and aquaculture-dependent livelihoods.



PRELIMS CORNER :

1. Which national agency has launched “CyTrain” a portal for online training of different stakeholders in Cybercrime investigations and prosecution?

- (a) C-DAC
- (b) NITI Aayog
- (c) CERTIn
- (d) NCRB

2. Ichamati river is a transboundary river that flows through?

- (a) India and Bangladesh
- (b) India and Bhutan
- (c) India and Nepal
- (d) India and Tibet

3. ‘The Competitiveness roadmap for India@100’ sometimes seen in news recently, is released by

- (a) NITI Aayog
- (b) Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade
- (c) Department of Economic Affairs
- (d) Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister

4. Coco Islands and Preparis Island are part of?

- (a) Bangladesh
- (b) Myanmar
- (c) Indonesia
- (d) Thailand

DETAILED ANSWER KEY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE CHRONICLE PAGE

“Cloud seeding can’t happen without clouds”

- The Delhi government’s cloud seeding project — a major commitment by the BJP-led administration — has been postponed multiple times due to various reasons.
- Initially scheduled for July, it was delayed due to monsoon, changing weather patterns, disturbances and now lack of suitable cloud cover.
- Delhi has been preparing for the artificial rain project in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur to assess whether cloud seeding can help reduce pollution and smog during the peak winter season.
- Last month, the Delhi government signed a MoU with IIT Kanpur for five cloud seeding trials, which are expected to be conducted in northwest Delhi.
- The project, approved by 23 departments, including the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), aims to explore whether artificial rain can be a viable solution to tackle rising pollution levels during the winter months.
- Cloud seeding is a weather modification technique that involves dispersing substances like silver iodide or salt into clouds to increase or induce precipitation, such as rain or snow.
- The goal is to provide a core of ice or condensation nuclei for water vapor to condense onto, making it easier for droplets to form and fall as rain.
- This process is used to combat water scarcity, and to manage other weather-related risks like hail or fog.

Artificial nuclei:

- Cloud seeding introduces special particles, called ice nuclei, that act as a base for water vapor to freeze or condense on.

Agents used:

- Common seeding agents include:
 - Silver iodide: Dispersed from aircraft, it mimics ice crystals and encourages the formation of ice in supercooled clouds.
 - Dry ice: Also used to cool clouds and promote ice crystal formation.
 - Hygroscopic salts: These substances, like potassium iodide, are used in a different method called hygroscopic seeding and attract water molecules to grow into larger droplets.

Delivery methods:

- Substances are released into the air from:
 - Aircraft: Flying into or above clouds to disperse the seeding agents.
 - Ground-based generators: Burning the seeding agents from generators on the ground so that the particles are carried up into the clouds by wind.

India upgrades its Technical Mission in Kabul to embassy

- India has officially upgraded its Technical Mission in Kabul to the status of an embassy with "immediate effect," signaling a significant diplomatic step following talks with Taliban administration officials.
- This move demonstrates India's intent to restore and deepen bilateral engagement with Afghanistan in various sectors after the embassy was shut down in August 2021 following the Taliban's takeover.
- A chargé d'affaires will be appointed to oversee the embassy's functions temporarily, pending the appointment of a full ambassador; this signals cautious engagement without full diplomatic recognition at ambassadorial level.
- The decision aligns with recent regional developments, as other major powers (Iran, China, Russia, Gulf states, Central Asian republics) also engage the Taliban government, although only Russia has granted official recognition so far.
- The timing follows a bilateral meeting between India's External Affairs Minister and the Taliban's acting Foreign Minister, indicating a pragmatic approach to Afghanistan policy amid ongoing tensions and instability in the region, especially along the Durand Line with Pakistan.
- India's diplomatic shift comes against the backdrop of security and strategic concerns, as it seeks to maintain influence and protect its interests in Afghanistan despite unresolved issues relating to Taliban legitimacy and governance.

Preparations for nationwide SIR in final stage: EC to decide rollout dates

- The Election Commission is set to meet the Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of States and Union Territories to discuss preparations for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, after which the Commission could take a call on the rollout of the exercise.
- The meeting, is to be held at the EC's India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) at Dwarka.
- On June 24, the EC had ordered an SIR across the country, starting with Bihar because elections were due in the state. The EC had said it would issue orders for the rest of the states and UTs in due course.
- The SIR involved the creation of the electoral rolls afresh, as opposed to the annual and pre-election Special Summary Revision (SSR) that has been the practice for the past two decades.
- The EC had included an indicative list of 11 documents, including Passport, birth certificate and caste certificate, that electors could submit. The more commonly held Aadhaar, Voter ID and ration cards were not included. In Bihar, 65 lakh names were deleted from the rolls in the draft stage and an additional 3.66 lakh in the final.
- The EC's June 24 order has been challenged in the Supreme Court by a batch of petitions, with critics likening it to the creation of a National Register of Citizens through the backdoor.
- Through its directions, the Supreme Court asked the EC to consider Aadhaar as the 12th document and to publish the names of those deleted from the rolls, along with the reasons.
- At the last meeting with CEOs, the EC had asked officials to map as many electors as possible to the electoral roll of the last intensive revision in their states, so as to reduce the number of electors who will have to submit documents.

EXPLAINED

Chimps imbibe two cocktails' worth of ethanol daily from ripe fruits

- The wild chimpanzees routinely ingest ethanol from ripe fruits, sometimes consuming amounts equivalent to two glasses of wine per day, implying that the natural intake of alcohol in evolutionarily close relatives of humans is significant.
- This phenomenon supports the “drunken monkey hypothesis,” which posits that an attraction to alcohol in fruits provides evolutionary advantages, serving as a signal of ripeness, extra calories, and possibly enhanced taste.
- Chimpanzees share about 98.8% of their DNA with humans, and their fruit-eating behaviors and physiological response to ethanol give researchers valuable insights into human evolution, especially concerning metabolic pathways for processing alcohol.
- Field studies in Uganda calculated the ethanol content of fruits favored by chimps to be 0.6% by volume, with their daily intake sometimes reaching up to 87 ml—roughly two cocktail equivalents for an adult human, based on body mass.
- Analysis found that even relatively high alcohol content did not deter chimpanzees from eating the fruits, but it remains unclear if their attraction is to the ethanol itself or simply the sweetness and caloric value associated with ripeness.
- An evolutionary perspective suggests that human and animal attraction to ethanol is deeply embedded, with research highlighting the selective advantage of being able to metabolize ethanol efficiently, especially in ancient environments dominated by fermenting, sugar-rich fruits.
- Among the fruits identified, those with the highest ethanol content tended to be particularly favored by both chimps and other animals in the wild, reinforcing the link between ethanol, fruit ripeness, and animal preference.

"Rise of the new peacemakers"

- The increasing prominence of non-Western powers—Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and China—in international conflict mediation, signaling a shift from US/European-dominated diplomatic frameworks towards diversified global engagement.
- Historically, major peace efforts in regions like Afghanistan and the Middle East were led by Western actors and the UN, but recent mediation surrounding Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions exemplifies a new phase in which Middle Eastern states and China are central.
- Turkey leverages its intelligence and diplomatic ties to facilitate talks, balancing relationships with Moscow and Kyiv, and using mediation as a tool of strategic bargaining and influence across regions from Ukraine to the Caucasus.
- Qatar, recognized for its 'small-state smart politics,' has acquired global clout by brokering negotiations (often involving groups like Hamas and the Taliban) and supporting humanitarian work, further solidifying its mediation credentials.
- Saudi Arabia and the UAE increasingly use peace diplomacy, with Saudi-led mediation shaping Middle Eastern affairs, as seen in the Riyadh and Ukraine peace summits, and UAE acting as a prominent facilitator of Russia-Ukraine prisoner swaps and regional humanitarian efforts.
- China is advancing its diplomatic stature by taking up leadership roles in mediation, particularly in Africa and the Global South, and presenting itself as a pragmatic alternative to Western-led order, promoting a new language of power based on diplomacy over force.
- These trends show mediation is no longer just about resolving conflict but has become a strategic means for nations to assert diplomatic influence, bargain for regional advantage, and contest traditional Western dominance in conflict zones.
- The mediation now operates as a "display of power" and a pragmatic tool for global repositioning, with the UN and traditional Western actors increasingly sidelined as emerging powers redefine the landscape of international peace processes.

Trump trains guns on Venezuela: Why now, options before Maduro

- The US is building up military presence in the Caribbean Sea, after striking Venezuelan boats it claimed were carrying drugs into the US.
- US President Donald Trump has authorised the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to conduct covert operations into the Latin American country, and his administration has offered \$50 million for information leading to the arrest of the Venezuelan President, Nicolas Maduro.
- The Trump administration would like a regime change in Venezuela, and the 'war on drugs' is pretext that the US has used in this region earlier too.
- Maduro is unpopular and the election that brought him to power was rigged. Venezuela's economy has collapsed and there are frequent allegations of repression of critical voices.
- US sanctions have crippled Venezuela's economy, which depends heavily on oil exports. And the fate of other unseated Latin American leaders have made Maduro determined to stick to power.
- A whole host of top generals, political leaders, cabinet ministers, members of the electoral commission, intelligence agencies, stand to lose from a regime change.
- The victims here are the people of Venezuela, who are denied a free and fair election and the right to choose their leader.
- Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world. If Venezuela starts pumping up oil, it will be in direct competition with the US, which has become one of the biggest exporters of oil. This is the reason the US doesn't want Venezuela, Iran and Russia to export their oil.
- Latin America is rich in natural resources, which the US wants its firms to have full access to. During the Cold War, there was the imperative to stop the spread of Communism.
- While Maduro may not have a lot of friends, he is not exactly a sitting target. He has been trained by Cuba, which has survived many American interventions, assassination attempts, conspiracies, and regime change operations.

U.S.-Australia rare earths deal won't shake China dominance

- The U.S. and Australia recently signed a wide-ranging agreement to finance critical minerals mining and processing, committing \$3 billion and aiming to support investment, supply chain resilience, and Western miner competitiveness.
- Despite expectations, experts believe this deal will take years to affect the global supply chain sufficiently to challenge China's dominant position in rare earths markets, as China accounts for 90% of global rare earth refining and 98% of magnet manufacturing capacity.
- Industry analysts point out that the time frame for projects to be ready and for significant supply growth is likely 5–7 years, making rapid market transformation unlikely and raising skepticism about short-term impacts.
- China's mastery of rare earth extraction, refining, and manufacturing—combined with comparatively cheap costs and environmentally-harmful processes—gives it a strategic advantage that Western projects will struggle to match.
- The U.S. government is promoting investment and price floors for critical minerals, but industry insiders comment that these measures won't necessarily lower global prices or cause a supply glut in the short term, due to persistent technical and market hurdles.
- Western mining companies, particularly in Australia, are expected to benefit from increased investment, with several receiving letters of interest and potential equity funding to advance new projects, including NOLANS and Arafura Rare Earths.
- Analysts caution that even though the deal should support long-term diversification and resilience, China's grip on the supply and processing of rare earths (vital for clean energy, defense, and automotive sectors) will remain firm in the medium term, pending broader structural changes.
- The overall assessment is that while this deal is significant for industry stakeholders and long-term Western competitiveness, it does not immediately challenge China's entrenched market dominance, nor will it trigger major price changes soon.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

Q1. Ans d

'CyTrain' portal: It is a Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) platform, developed for capacity building of police officers/judicial officers through online courses on critical aspects of cybercrime investigation, forensics, prosecution, etc. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) was established in 1986 to act as a repository of information on crime and criminals.

It was set up based on the recommendations of the Tandon Committee, the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the Task Force of the Home Ministry.

Nodal Ministry: It comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India.

Headquarters: New Delhi.

The NCRB has also launched CyTrain, a portal for online training of different stakeholders in cybercrime investigations and prosecution.

Q2. Ans a

It is a trans-boundary river which flows through India and Bangladesh. It also forms part of the boundary between the two countries.

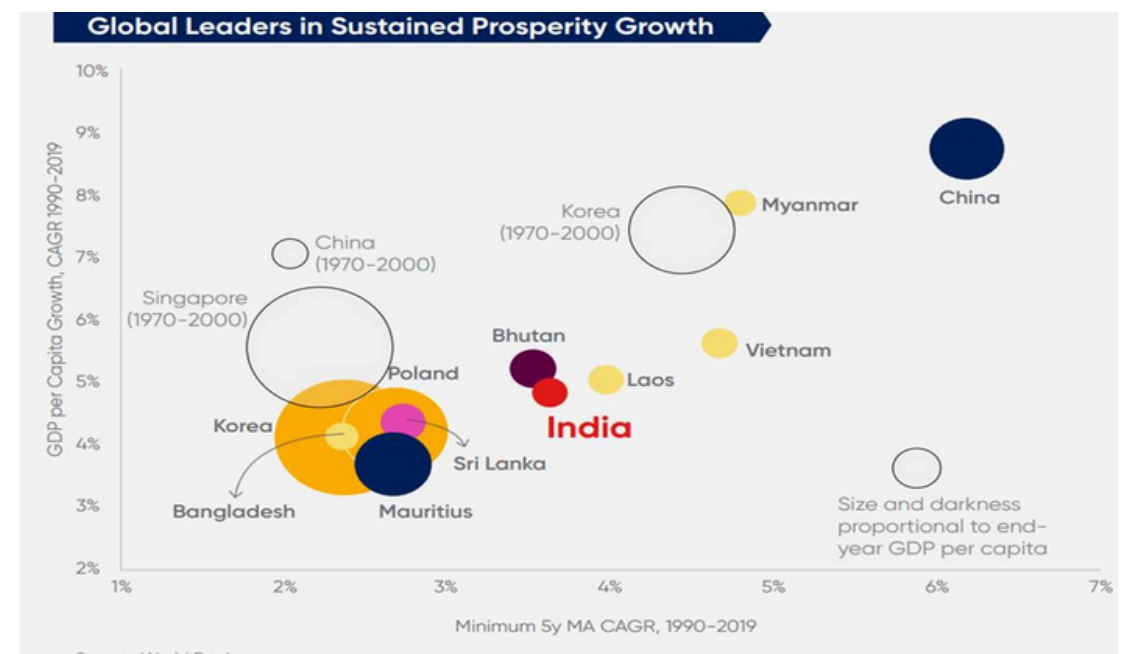
Course:

It is one of the bifurcations of the Mathabhanga River (a distributary of the Padma) and originates at Mahjdia village in the Nadia district of West Bengal. It flows through the Nadia and North 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal. Then it forms part of the India-Bangladesh international border. Later, it enters Bangladesh's Satkhira and Khulna districts. It covers a distance of around 216 km before discharging into the Kalindi River at Hasnabad in North 24 Parganas District and finally outfalls into the Bay of Bengal near Moore Island. Ichhamati River and its tributaries form a large oxbow lake complex in North 24-Paraganas district near Bangaon. The river is facing siltation leading to thin flow of water in the dry season and floods in the rainy season.



Q3. Ans d

The Competitiveness Roadmap for India@100 was released by the Economic Advisory Council (EAC) to the Prime Minister (PM). The roadmap, which is a part of the India Competitiveness Initiative, is a collaborative endeavour between the EAC-PM and The Institute for Competitiveness. It envisions setting new guiding principles for the country's growth journey over the following years and guiding different states, ministries, and partners in India's growth to develop sector-specific roadmaps for achieving targeted goals.



Q4. Ans b

Coco Islands and Preparis Island are a pair of geographically close but politically distinct island groups in the Bay of Bengal that belong to Myanmar. The Coco Islands are a small cluster just south of Preparis Island and about 55 km from India's Landfall Island, while Landfall Island is the northernmost island of the Indian Andaman and Nicobar Islands archipelago. Both islands are strategically located, with recent development on the Coco Islands sparking security concerns for India.



Case Study:



Nigerian monarch takes on oil giant in his search for environmental justice.

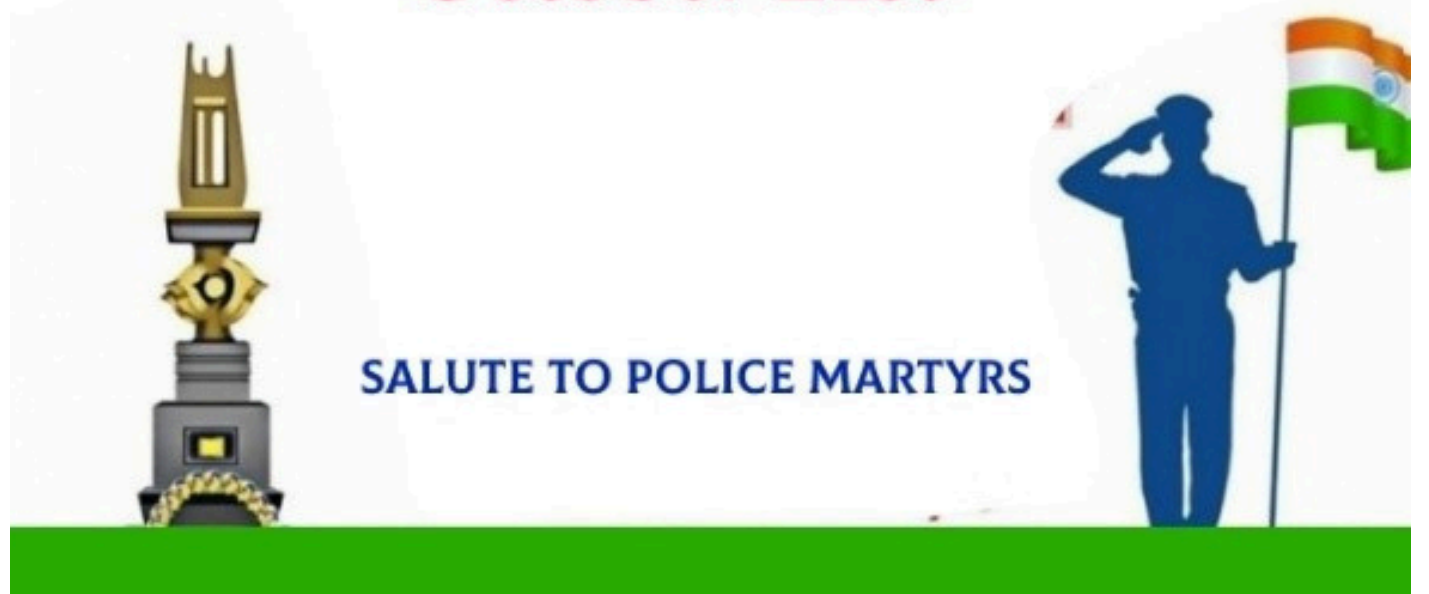
King Bubaraye Dakolo of Ekpetiama, Bayelsa State, has emerged as a leading environmental advocate in Nigeria, leveraging his position and personal experiences to challenge oil pollution and its impact on traditional livelihoods. Dakolo's activism stems from decades of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, notably the destruction of fishing and farming communities due to oil production and spills since the discovery of oil in the region in the 1950s. His judicial campaign targets Shell, a major oil corporation, demanding \$12 billion in compensation for communities affected by corporate environmental misconduct and seeking improvements in decommissioning practices and community restitution. Dakolo's case is built on extensive research and documentation, including published works detailing the environmental and social atrocities committed by oil companies in the Niger Delta, as well as collaboration with international experts. He advocates for leadership that prioritizes environmental restoration and public accountability, criticizing leaders who remain silent or inactive on such issues and referencing the importance of ecological justice for human welfare.

Observed on October 21 every year, the Police Commemoration Day remembers the sacrifices of ten policemen who died in Chinese firing in 1959.



Police Commemoration Day

October 21st



On this day in 1962 – President JFK's Address on the Cuban Missile Crisis

- President John F. Kennedy shocked the nation in a televised speech announcing Soviet missile bases in Cuba.
- He declared a naval "quarantine" to block further Soviet shipments.
- The address marked the start of the tense 13-day Cuban Missile Crisis.
- The U.S. policy was established that any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere would be viewed as a Soviet attack, triggering a full retaliatory response against the Soviet Union.