

29-02-2024

Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered prayers at Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple on 27th February 2024.

More about the Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple

- Meenakshi Amman Temple, also known as Minakshi-Sundareshwara Temple, is one of the oldest and most important temples in India. Located in the city of Madurai, the temple has a great mythological and historical significance.
- It is believed that Lord Shiva assumed the

form of Sundareswarar (the handsome one) and married Parvati (Meenakshi) at the site where the temple is currently located. Renowned for its astonishing architecture, Meenakshi Temple was nominated as one of the wonders of the world, but couldn't make it into the list of 'Seven Wonders of the World'.

- However, the temple is definitely one of the 'Wonders of India'. It is also one of the main attractions of South India with thousands of devotees thronging it every day. During the 'Tirukalyanam Festival,' which takes place over a period of 10 days, the temple attracts more than a million devotees.
- The history of Meenakshi Temple dates back



to the 1st century C.E with scholars claiming it to be as old as the city itself. It is said that Kulashekarar Pandyan, a king who ruled over the Pandyan dynasty, built the temple as per the instructions given in his dream by Lord Shiva.

- During the 14th century C.E, Malik Kafur, a commander of Delhi Sultanate, led his army into most parts of southern India and looted many temples including the famed Meenakshi Temple. Valuables, such as gold, silver and precious gems were taken to Delhi.
- When the Vijayanagar Empire took over Madurai after defeating the Muslim Sultanate, the temple was rebuilt and reopened. The temple was further expanded during the late 16th century and early 17th century by Vishwanatha Nayakar, a king of the Nayaka dynasty.
- The temple has four main towering gateways (gopurams) that look identical to each other. Apart from the four 'gopurams,' the temple also houses many other 'gopurams' that serve as gateways to a number of shrines.
- The temple also has numerous pillared halls called 'Mandapams.' These halls were built by various kings and emperors and they serve as resting places for pilgrims and devotees.

SWAYAM Plus Platform

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Education and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, launched the SWAYAM Plus Platform in New Delhi, on 27th February 2024.

More About the SWAYAM Plus Platform

- SWAYAM, the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform providing educational opportunities for a vast number of learners, was launched by the Ministry of Education in 2017.
- In alignment with NEP 2020, the SWAYAM

Plus platform will now include courses supporting industry needs that enhance learners' employability. Developed in collaboration with industry giants like L&T, Microsoft, CISCO, and more, SWAYAM Plus features innovative elements such as multilingual content, AI-enabled guidance, credit recognition, and pathways to employment.

- SWAYAM Plus primarily focuses on achieving the following:
- Building an ecosystem for all stakeholders in professional and career development, including learners, course providers, industry, academia, and strategic partners; Enabling a mechanism that provides credit recognition for high quality certifications and courses offered by the best industry and academia partners;



- Reaching a large learner base by catering to learning across the country, with a focus on reaching learners from tier 2 and 3 towns and rural areas and
- Offering employment focused courses, based on learner needs – across chosen disciplines with options to learn through resources in vernacular languages.
- SWAYAM Plus also envisions bringing in features such as access to mentorship, scholarships, and job placements as value-added services in due course of time, thus building a digital ecosystem for learners to pursue upskilling/re-skilling at all levels, namely certificate, diploma or degree.

"Jamaat-e-Islami" declared Unlawful Association

Why in News?

- The Government of India has declared 'Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu Kashmir' as an 'Unlawful Association' for a further period of 5 years under Section 3(1) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967.
- The organisation is found continuing its activities against the security, integrity and sovereignty of the nation. The outfit was first declared an 'Unlawful Association' on 28 February 2019



More About Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967

- Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 is a stringent law that makes it almost impossible for an accused under it to get bail.
- The UAPA provides a comprehensive definition of what constitutes "unlawful activities." It includes actions, associations, or organizations that engage in activities intended to threaten the territorial integrity and security of India.
- The UAPA prescribes severe penalties for individuals and organizations involved in unlawful activities. These penalties can include imprisonment, fines, and the forfeiture of property used for unlawful purposes. Offences under this act are cognizable (arrest can be made without a warrant).
- The UAPA allows for the declaration of an

individual as a "terrorist" if they are found to be involved in terrorism-related activities. This designation can lead to stringent legal consequences.

- The act also addresses the issue of funding for unlawful activities. It prohibits the raising, receiving, or managing funds for such purposes.
- The UAPA is seen as a crucial tool in maintaining national security by preventing and countering activities that threaten the sovereignty and integrity of India. It allows law enforcement agencies to take proactive measures against terrorism and other forms of organized crime.

"Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye" Campaign

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has issued a clarion call towards making the electoral process more participative and invited people from all walks of life to spread the message of "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye" campaign in their own style among first time voters on 27th February 2024.
- The campaign is aimed at encouraging young voters to exercise their democratic right to vote.

More About the Campaign

- Union Minister Shri Anurag Thakur launched Campaign Anthem.
- The anthem is an effort to contribute to the campaign launched by Election Commission of India towards voter awareness.



- Speaking about the campaigning in his Mann Ki Baat address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that the campaign focusses on encouraging first time voters to participate in the electoral process in large numbers.
- He had added that Bharat is proud of its youth power that is full of passion and energy and the more youth participate in the electoral process, the better the results will be for the country.
- The Prime Minister had further said that the 18th Lok Sabha will be a symbol of aspirations of youth and this has increased the value of the youth vote manifold.
- The Prime Minister had also appealed to the influencers of the nation on Instagram and YouTube, from film industry, from literature, and other professionals to actively participate in this campaign and motivate the first-time voters.

National Science Day 2024

Why in News?

- National Science Day is celebrated every year on February 28 to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' and raise awareness about the importance of science and its role in improving the lives of people.
- More About National Science Day**
- The National Science Day acknowledges the efforts of the scientific community who work in exploring more and more ways by which science can be implemented to make our lives simpler and easier.
 - The impact of Indian scientific breakthroughs is significantly enhancing the 'Ease of Living' for the common man, which has been proved by developing indigenous COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic.
 - The National Science Day was first observed on the day when Indian Physicist Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman (C V Raman) announced the discovery of the "Raman Effect" in 1928, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1930. He was the first Indian to receive this prestigious award in the field of science.
 - The Raman Effect is the phenomenon when light traverses a transparent material, and some of the light that is deflected changes in wavelength.
 - The history of National Science Day can be traced back to 1986 when the Indian



government accepted the proposal of the National Council for Science and Technology Communication and designated February 28 as National Science Day to commemorate the discovery of the "Raman Effect".

- The theme for National Science Day 2024 is "Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat." The theme for National Science Day 2024 reflects a strategic focus on promoting public appreciation for science, technology and innovation and accomplishments of Indian scientists to address challenges through home-grown technologies for overall well-being.
- National Science Day aims to recognize the pivotal role of science in our daily lives. The Day also showcases the activities, efforts, and achievements of the scientific community for human welfare. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress made in the field of science and technology and to identify the areas where more work needs to be done.

Four IAF Pilots Named as Possible Gaganyaan Crew

Why in News?

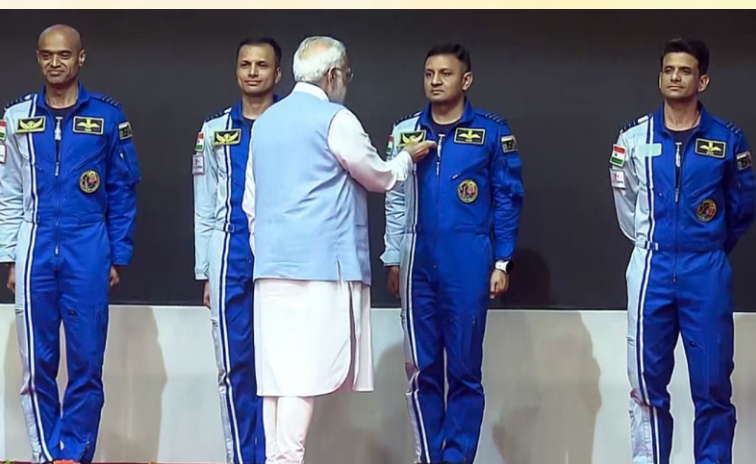
- Four Indian Air Force (IAF) officials designated as astronauts to travel on Gaganyaan Mission, the country's maiden space flight next year, are fighter pilots with each of them having no less than 2000 hours of flying experience. India on 27th February 2024 announced the names of the



four astronaut-designates for the Gaganyaan human spaceflight mission, planned for launch in 2025.

More About the Gaganyaan Mission's Crew

- Names of Group Captain Prashanth Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, Group Captain Angad Pratap and Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla were made public by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who bestowed each of them with astronaut wings during a review of the progress of the Gaganyaan mission on 27th February 2024.
- In the run-up to the crewed mission to LEO, ISRO is in the process of conducting various tests. These include the Integrated Air Drop tests, Test Vehicle Missions, pad Abort Tests. There will be unmanned flights before the actual flight.
- According to ISRO, the Gaganyaan programme is designed to demonstrate



indigenous capability to undertake human space flight mission to Low Earth Orbit (LEO). The mission is expected to pave way for a "sustained Indian human space exploration programme" in the long run.

- Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair is the senior most IAF official among the four shortlisted for the space mission. Born in Thiruvazhiyad, Kerala, on August 26, 1976, Group Captain Nair is a Cat A Flying Instructor and a test pilot with approximately 3,000 hours of flying experience, said sources aware of developments.
- Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, born in Chennai, on April 19, 1982, was decorated early in his career, having got President's Gold Medal and Sword of Honour at Air Force Academy. He was commissioned on June 21, 2003, in the IAF's fighter stream. An alumnus of National Defence Academy (NDA), he is the second most experienced

pilot after Group Captain Nair who has done about 2,900 hours of flying.

- The third Group Captain is Angad Pratap, 42, a Flying Instructor and a Test Pilot, with approximately 2,000 hours of flying experience. He was commissioned on December 18, 2004 in the fighter stream of IAF after passing out from the NDA, said sources. Like his senior colleague, he too has flown both fighter as well as transporter aircraft, including Su-30 MKI, MiG-21, MiG-29, Jaguar, Hawk, Dornier, and An-32.
- Lastly, Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla is a Fighter Combat Leader and a Test Pilot with approximately 2,000 hours of flying experience. Born in Lucknow on October 10, 1985, he went to the NDA and was commissioned on June 17, 2006 in the fighter stream. Among the aircrafts he flew so far include Su-30 MKI, MiG-21, MiG-29, Jaguar, Hawk, Dornier, and An-32.



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