

# CURRENT GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

## AWARDS

### Man Booker Prize

**N**OTED Albanian poet and novelist Ismail Kadare has won the first-ever Man Booker International Prize, thus gaining recognition as one of the world's finest writers. The 69-year old Kadare was chosen for the inaugural award for his body of work which includes novels like *Broken April*, *Spring Frost* and *The General of the Dead Army*.

## COMMISSION

### Knowledge Commission

**S**AM Pitroda, a close associate of the late Rajiv Gandhi, will head the National Knowledge Commission constituted by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Noted molecular biologist P.M. Bhargava will be the vice-chairperson.

The Commission will advise the Prime Minister on issues concerning institutions of knowledge production, and use and dissemination of knowledge.

## DEFENCE

### INS Kadamba—Asia's largest naval base

**D**EFENCE Minister Pranab Mukherjee dedicated INS Kadamba, Asia's largest naval base, to the nation on June 1, 2005.

The project was earlier known as Project Seabird. INS Kadamba has been named after the famous Kadamba dynasty, which originated in Banavasi near Sirsi in Uttar Kannada district. The commissioning of the Indian Navy's biggest base is a landmark in its history.

Operation Seabird was conceptualized by Admiral O.S. Dawson between 1982 and 1984, as an exclusive base for warships of the Indian Navy, which would be beyond the reach of enemy missiles. The initial plan envisaged accommodation for 44 warships, while the cost of the entire project was Rs 34,000 crore.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi laid the foundation stone for Operation Seabird on October 26, 1986. Today, it can repair and refit 11 warships simultaneously. The first phase of the project has now been completed at a cost of Rs 1,825 crore.

## EXPEDITION

### Iranians are first Muslim women to scale Everest

**T**WO Iranian climbers have become the first Muslim women to reach the top of the world's highest peak,

Mount Everest. Farkhondeh Sadegh, a 36-year old graphic designer from Teheran, and Laeh Keshavarz, 25, a dentist from Zabedan, scaled the 8,850-metre mountain from the Nepalese side of the mountain that straddles the border with China.

A total of 102 women are among more than 1600 people from 65 countries who have climbed Mount Everest since it was first scaled by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953.

### Rs 10,000 PC to bridge digital divide

**I**T looks like India is set to bridge the digital divide much earlier than expected. The successful introduction of personal computers, at a price of Rs 10,000 or below, has made it within the reach of virtually everyone and that, in turn, has poised the country for a digital revolution.

Xenitis launched a Rs 10,000 PC in West Bengal, called *Aamar* PC. Its success was resounding. The company has now taken its PC to the Hindi heartland, calling it *Apna* PC, to Maharashtra by the name of *Aamchi* PC, and to the south as well. And Xenitis isn't the only one. Recently, Science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal had launched an "affordable" mobile desktop computer, *Mobilis*.

## Time's 100 great list has 5 Indian entries

**S**ATYAJIT Ray's *Apu Trilogy*, which helped redefine Indian cinema in the 1950s, Guru Dutt's classic *Pyasa*, portraying the disillusionment of a poet with the material world, and Mani Ratnam's *Nayakan*, based on the life of a Mumbai gangster, are among a list of 100 all-time great films compiled by the *Time* magazine.

Put together by *Time* magazine critics Richard Schickel and Richard Corliss, the unranked list of the 100 greatest films has a host of acclaimed movies like *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Casablanca*, *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *Pulp Fiction*.

The list also names the best film from each decade since *Time* began: *Metropolis* (1927), *Dodsworth* (1936), *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Ikiru* (1952) *Persona* (1966), *China Town* (1974), *Decalogue* (1988), *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Talk to Her* (2002).

## 552 species facing extinction in India

**T**IGER, the majestic great cat, a symbol of India, along with a host of other species—552 to be precise—are doing the vanishing act, according to the World Conservation Union (IUCN). This places India squarely amongst the top environmental culprits—at tenth place worldwide. Others that have made it to the 'hall of shame' include Ecuador, USA, Malaysia, Indonesia and China.

According to PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), the species under greatest risk of extinction in India include the tiger, lion, elephant, rhino, snow-leopard, sea-turtle, wild-dog, great Indian bustard and the lion tailed macaque.

According to the IUCN statistics, close to 15,800 plant and animal species worldwide are facing the threat of extinction. Most of the threatened species are located in the tropical regions. One reason that equatorial and tropical countries feature so high on this list is that these places are very rich in wildlife.

## PERSONS

### Dutt, Sunil

**D**IFFERENT people will remember Sunil Dutt in different ways. As the dashing leading man who romanced Waheeda Rehman in *Mujhe Jeene Do*; as the director of such classics as *Reshma Aur Shera*; as the devoted husband who did everything possible for Nargis; as the patient father who went through the travails of his son Sanjay as an equal partner; as the tireless activist for peace who walked everywhere from Dandi to Nagasaki to Punjab; as the dedicated constituency MP who never lost a Lok Sabha election; and as the Sports Minister who promised, at last, to change the way things were done.

Sunil Dutt was born on June 6, 1929 in Khurd, now in Pakistan. His real name was Balraj Dutt. He completed his graduation from Mumbai's Jai Hindu College and began his career as radio show host and celebrity interviewer. His debut film was Nalini Jaywant starrer *Railway Platform* (1955). One of his most memorable films was Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957). It was during the shooting of this film that he fell in love with Nargis and married her. He

turned producer in 1971 with *Reshma Aur Shera* (1971).

## Merchant, Ismail

**M**UMBAI-born Filmmaker Ismail Merchant, who in partnership with James Ivory made some memorable movies, died on May 25, 2005, at the age of 69.

Since their collaboration commenced in 1961, Merchant and Ivory, an American, made some 40 films together, including *A Room With a View*, *Howards End*, both based on E.M. Forster's novel, *Heat and Dust* starring Shashi Kapoor and *The Remains of the Day*. *The Mystic Masseur*, based on the novel by Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul, was Merchant's latest work as Director and was released in 2002.

Born in Bombay on December 25, 1936, Merchant lived and worked for most of his life in the West, completing his education at New York University where he earned his Masters Degree in Business Administration.

## PROJECTS

### Sethusamudram gets Cabinet nod

**T**HE Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has cleared the Rs 2,427.40 crore Sethusamudram project to build "India's own Suez Canal" for fast and safe two-way navigation between the country's east and west coasts.

The Sethusamudram ship channel project envisages creation of a navigable channel from the Gulf of Mannar to the Bay of Bengal through Palk Bay so that ships, depending on draft required, moving between the east and west coasts of India do not have to go around Sri Lanka.

This will save up to 424 nautical miles (one nautical mile = 1.82 km) and up to 30 hours of sailing time for ships sailing between the east and west coast. The project would take about 180 weeks for completion. To create the 300-metre wide channel, 82 million cubic metres of dredging will be required.

Of the total cost approved by the Cabinet, Rs 971 crore would be equity and Rs 1,456.40 crore debt. The Centre's contribution towards the equity will be Rs 495 crore, whereas the port trusts of Tuticorin, Chennai, Ennore, Vishakhapatnam and Paradip, Shipping Corporation of India and Dredging Corporation of India will together contribute Rs 250 crore. The remaining Rs 226 crore of equity will be met through IPO and private placements.

## Horticulture mission

**T**HE Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has cleared the ambitious horticulture mission to bring in a massive 4.9 million hectares under fruits and vegetables, over the next seven years, adding to India's farm power.

The horticulture mission will have an outlay of Rs 2,300 crore, to be fully funded by the Centre, over the first two years.

Small and marginal farmers will be provided subsidy of up to 75% for few types of horticulture activity.

## Nathpa Jhakri project

**N**ATHPA Jhakri Hydel Project (NJHEP)—the country's largest—was dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh on May 28, 2005. *Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Ltd* (SJVN), which has been instrumental in executing the 1,500 MW (6x250 MW) project, has drawn up a comprehensive plan to generate over 6,800 MW power by 2014.

The project involved building of a 62.50 m high concrete Dam on Satluj river, at Nathpa, to divert 486 cusecs of water through four intakes. An underground Desilting Complex, comprising four chambers, each 525 m long, 16.31m wide and 27.5 m deep, is one of the largest desilting chambers in the world. Besides, the complex is the largest underground hydraulic complex for the generation of hydro power in the world. The 10.15 m dia and 27.39 km long Head Race Tunnel is one of the longest power tunnels in the world.

SJVN has also been entrusted the work of development of six more projects—three in Himachal Pradesh, namely, Rampur HEP (412 MW), Rampur-II/Luhri (700 MW) and Khab HEP (636 MW), and three in Uttaranchal, namely Devsari Dam (300 MW), Jakhol Sankari (33 MW) and Devra/Naitwar Mori (33 MW).

## RESEARCH

### Stem cell cure at hand with easier cloning

**S**OUTH Korean researchers have developed a highly efficient recipe for producing human embryos through cloning, and then extracting their stem cells.

Writing in the journal *Science*, the researchers, led by Dr Woo Suk Hwang and Dr Shin Yong Moon of Seoul National University, said they used their method to produce 11 human stem cell lines that were genetic matches of patients who ranged in age from 2 to 56.

The method, called therapeutic cloning, is one of the great hopes of the stem cell field. It produces stem cells, universal cells that are extracted from embryos, killing the embryos in the process, and that, in theory, can be directed to grow into any of the body's cell types.

The development has, however, stirred up the debate about the ethics of cloning and stem cell research. "We believe a cloned embryo is a human being", said Dr Richard Land, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention's ethics and religious liberty commission. "We should not be the kind of society that kills our tiniest human beings in order to seek a treatment for older and bigger human beings", he said.

## SPACE RESEARCH

### The Final Frontier

**A**FTER nearly 28 years in the great beyond, NASA's Voyager 1 is now at the edge of the Solar System, where it is being buffeted by interstellar winds. It is now facing the Termination Shock—a turbulent zone in the Solar System where the speed of solar wind drops as it begins to feel the strong effects of interstellar wind—and is moving along the outer region of Heliosphere, called Heliosheath.

Heliosphere is a bubble that is created by Solar wind, arising from the Sun, as it moves with the Sun through interstellar space.

In 10 years, Voyager 1 may reach the boundary between

material thrown outward by the Sun and interstellar wind called Heliopause. This is the true edge of the Solar System.

### Cassini finds tiny moon snuggled in Saturn ring

**T**HE *Cassini* spacecraft has snapped pictures of a small moon it found tucked away in a gap in the outer ring of Saturn. The small moon is located about 250 km inside the outer edge of Saturn's bright main rings. Another Saturnian moon, *Pan*, also orbits the planet from within its rings and scientists believe there may be many others.

*Cassini*, a \$ 3 billion exploration project, was launched in 1997. In January, it released a probe that plunged to the surface of Saturn's largest moon, *Titan*, and sent back the first images from its fog-shrouded surface.

### Spirit digs Mars' violent past

**T**HE Mars rover *Spirit* has discovered several layers of rocks in a hilly region of the Red Planet that suggest a wet and violent history in the planet's early life.

The debris is most likely ash that settled after volcanic eruptions, although the scientists could not rule out the possibility of an impact explosion.

Meanwhile, *Spirit's* twin rover, *Opportunity*, is trying to free itself from a sand dune. *Opportunity's* wheels started slipping during a planned 295-foot trip.

### NASA offers \$250K to trace oxygen on moon

**T**HE National Aeronautical Space Agency (NASA) has offered a \$ 520,000 prize to any scientist who discovers a way of extracting breathable oxygen from moon-dust. The competition is the latest in NASA's 'Centennial Challenges' series, which aims to stimulate the development of technologies useful to space exploration.

To claim the MoonROx prize, scientists must develop and demonstrate hardware capable of extracting at least five kg of breathable oxygen from a simulated lunar soil made from volcanic ash, in an eight-hour period. MoonROx stands for Moon Regolith Oxygen—regolith being the loose layer of rocks and debris covering the surface of a planet or moon.

### Asteroid named after Mumbai boy

**A**N asteroid flying several thousand miles away from Earth, which is currently located between Mars and Jupiter, has been named after 18-year old Mumbaikar Bhushan Mahadik.

The asteroid was christened after him by the prestigious Lincoln Laboratory of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston which has played a key role in the development of space technology. The asteroid's dimension varies from 3 to 8 km. It completes one rotation around the Sun in 3.78 years.

The laboratory named the asteroid after Bhushan in recognition of his achievement as a finalist in the 2003 Intel International Science Engineering Fair held in Ohio in 2003.