

Factly Weekly

Compilation

2024

**For UPSC CSE Prelims
Exam**

**4th Week
January 2024**

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Subject: Polity and Nation

PM launched multiple technological initiatives for courts in India

Why in the News?

Recently PM Modi inaugurated the Diamond Jubilee celebration of the Supreme Court and unveiled several technology initiatives.

What are the various technology initiatives launched?

Aspect	Details
Digital Supreme Court Reports (Digi SCR)	1. It will provide Supreme Court judgments to the citizens of the country free of cost and in electronic format . 2. The Key features of digital SCR include access to all 519 volumes of Supreme Court reports since 1950 in a user-friendly, open access digital format.
Digital Courts 2.0 application	1. It is a recent initiative under the e-Courts project which aims to provide district court judges with electronic access to court records . 2. It also uses artificial intelligence (AI) to transcribe speech into text instantly.
New website of the Supreme Court	The new website offers bilingual English and Hindi formats , along with a user-friendly interface redesign.

Subject: International Relations

FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI)

Why in the News?

Recently, India has been appointed as the first vice-chair of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Committee on Fisheries (COFI) Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, marking the first time in 59 years.

What is Committee on Fisheries (COFI)?

Aspect	Details
About	1. It stands as the sole global inter-governmental platform dedicated to the examination of significant international fisheries and aquaculture problems and issues. 2. It is a subsidiary body of the FAO Council .
Established in	1965
Membership & Voting	1. COFI membership is open to FAO Members and non-Members are eligible to be an observer of the Organization. 2. Representatives from the UN, its bodies, specialized agencies, regional fishery bodies, and international non-governmental organizations participate in debates without voting rights .

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Functions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. COFI assesses the FAO work program related to fisheries, conducts regular reviews of global fishery issues, and puts forth potential solutions.2. COFI has also been used as a forum in which global agreements and non-binding instruments regarding global fisheries have been negotiated.3. It has two subsidiary bodies: the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.
Significance	COFI played a key role in negotiating the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the Agreement on Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas.

Alliance for Global Good-Gender Equity and Equality

Why in the News?

India has recently launched the 'Alliance for Global Good- Gender Equity and Equality' at the 2024 World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos.

What is the Alliance for Global Good- Gender Equity and Equality?

Aspect	Details
Aim	The alliance strives to promote global development led by women .
Stakeholders	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Supported by- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation2. Housed and anchored by-The CII Centre for Women Leadership3. Network Partner- The World Economic Forum4. Institutional Partner- Invest India
Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The alliance emphasizes adopting global best practices, sharing knowledge, and making investments in women's health, education, and enterprises.2. The concept for this alliance originated from the G20 Leaders' Declaration, emphasizing India's commitment to women-led development.
Significance	It strengthens India's dedication to global cooperation and aligns with the overarching WEF theme, ' Rebuilding Trust '.

Note- The launch was accompanied by the introduction of a **women's leadership lounge (We Lead Lounge)** at **WEF**, which hosted discussions and showcased products from women entrepreneurs.

Subject: Indian Economy

Investment Forum for Advancing Climate Resilient Agrifood Systems in India launched

Why in the News?

Recently, the 'Investment Forum for Advancing Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems in India' was launched in New Delhi.

What is Investment Forum for Advancing Climate Resilient Agrifood Systems in India?

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- 1) **Aim**– This initiative aims to **create a strategy for advancing climate-resilient Agrifood systems** through investment and partnerships among the Indian government, private sectors, farmers’ organizations, and financial institutions.
- 2) It is a **joint initiative** of NITI Aayog, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers’ Welfare and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).
- 3) The Forum will enable discussions and considerations across **six crucial domains**:
 - (i) Climate-resilient agriculture (experiences and pathways)
 - (ii) Digital infrastructure and solutions
 - (iii) Financing climate-resilient agri-food systems (domestic and global)
 - (iv) Climate-resilient value chains
 - (v) Production practices and inputs for climate resilience
 - (vi) Gender main streaming and social inclusion for climate resilience.

RBI guidelines on State guarantees

Why in the News?

A working group formed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) put forth recommendations to tackle issues regarding guarantees provided by State governments.

What defines a ‘state guarantee’?

- 1) A state guarantee is a **commitment by a government entity**, like a state government, to cover the repayment of a debt or fulfil an obligation if the borrower or obligated party cannot do so.
- 2) The recipient of the guarantee is the **‘creditor’**, the defaulting entity on whose behalf the guarantee is given is called the **‘principal debtor** (State owned enterprises, cooperative institutions, urban local bodies in case of state borrowing) and the entity providing the guarantee (State governments in this context) is the **‘surety/guarantor’**

What are the recommendations of the working group?

The RBI working group has pointed out that while guarantees may seem safe during stable times, they can create significant financial risks and stress for the government during economic downturns. This could lead to unexpected cash outflows and higher debt levels. To address this issue, the following recommendations have been made:

- 1) **Expanded Definition of Guarantee**– The Working Group proposes a broader definition of ‘guarantee’ to encompass all instruments which create an obligation on the guarantor to pay. There **must not be any distinction between conditional or unconditional, financial or performance guarantees** while evaluating fiscal risk.
- 2) **Government Guarantee Restrictions**– RBI working group has recommended certain restrictions which are as follows-
 - a. Government guarantees **should not be used to obtain finance through state owned entities** like State owned enterprises, cooperative institutions, urban local bodies.
 - b. Government guarantees **should not create direct liability/de-facto liability** on the State.
 - c. Guarantees must be **given only for the principal amount and normal interest component** of the underlying

loan.

d. Guaranteed **must not be extended for external commercial borrowings, must not be extended for more than 80% of the project loan and must not be provided to private sector companies.**

3) Risk Determination-

a. States should **assign appropriate risk weights like high, medium or low risk** before extending guarantees.

b. The states must also manage the potential stress which will emerge in case of invocation of guarantee. Hence, RBI working Group has proposed that the maximum incremental guarantees (additional guarantees) issued during a year should be capped to either **5% of Revenue Receipts or 0.5% of GSDP- which ever is lesser.**

4) **Disclosure of Guarantees-** The RBI Working Group has proposed that the **RBI may consider advising banks/NBFCs** to disclose the credit extended to State-owned entities, backed by State-government guarantees. The Group has also called for a **comprehensive database** to capture all extended guarantees.

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI) disclosure norms deadline extended

Why in the News?

The **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** has extended the timeframe for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) to reveal details about all entities with ownership, economic interest, or control in the FPI.

What are FPIs and How are they different from FDI?

Aspect	Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs)	Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
Definition	FPIs are investors like mutual funds, hedge funds, pension funds, and other institutions that invest in foreign financial assets such as stocks, bonds, and securities.	FDI involves a foreign entity investing long-term in a business abroad, gaining significant control or ownership in the company.
Investment timeframe	Short to medium-term	Long term
Investment concentration	Financial assets, such as stocks and bonds.	Business or physical assets of a company.
Risk involved	Volatile	Stable

Why has SEBI asked FPIs to provide additional disclosures?

SEBI's initiative intends to deter potential **round-tripping** and misuse of the FPI channel.

1) SEBI requests supplementary details from FPIs with **over 50% of their Indian equity assets under management (AUM)** concentrated within a single corporate group or **exceeding Rs 25,000 crore in Indian equity markets.**

2) Sovereign wealth funds, companies listed on specific global exchanges, public retail funds, and other regulated pooled investment vehicles are **excluded** from the heightened disclosure requirements.

What is round tripping?

- 1) Round tripping refers to **money that leaves the country through various channels and makes its way back into the country** often as foreign investment.
- 2) There are various reasons that promote round tripping. Mainly, Tax concessions allowed in the foreign country encourages individuals to park money there and then reroute it.

Subject: Science & Technology

Mpemba effect

Why in the News?

The Mpemba effect has recently captured the attention of scientists. After many experiments, we still don't have a clear agreement, on what causes this puzzling phenomenon.

What is Mpemba effect?

- 1) It is a phenomenon in which **hot water freezes faster than cold water under certain conditions**.
- 2) It is **named after Tanzanian student Erasto Mpemba**, who observed it in the 1960s.

What are the recently proposed causes for this phenomenon by scientists?

- 1) **Presence of Microbubbles**- One of the proposed causes is the **presence of microbubbles** that remain suspended in water after boiling. These microbubbles **promote convection** and **facilitate faster heat transfer**. Hence, the warm water cools down more quickly.
- 2) **Evaporation**- Another cause is attributed to **evaporation**. As warmer water evaporates more, it takes away the heat more quickly. Thus, warm water cools down more quickly as compared to cold water.
- 3) **Presence of Frost in Cold Water**- The **presence of frost in cold water acts as an insulator** which impedes/slow down the process of heat loss. This raises the freezing point of cold water.
- 4) **Presence of Calcium carbonate and other impurities**- Compounds like **calcium carbonate** precipitate in warm/hot water, and it lowers down the freezing point of warm water. On the other hand, in cold water, **calcium carbonate and other impurities remain dissolved in the cold water**, which increases the freezing point of cold water.

Havisure: India's first indigenously developed Hepatitis A vaccine

Why in the News?

Recently, Indian Immunologicals Ltd (IIL), a wholly owned subsidiary of the **National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)**, has launched India's first domestically developed Hepatitis A vaccine, named 'Havisure.'

What is Havisure?

Specifications	Details
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About	It is India's first indigenously developed vaccine for Hepatitis A .
Dosage	1. It is a two-dose vaccine . 2. The first dose given to those above 12 months of age and the second dose is administered at least six months later.
Who is eligible for the vaccine?	1. The vaccine is advised for routine immunization in children and individuals at risk due to exposure or travel to regions with high hepatitis A prevalence. 2. Additionally, individuals with occupational infection risks and those suffering from chronic liver diseases can also receive Hepatitis A vaccination.
Significance	This vaccine is expected to play a significant role in preventing Hepatitis A. Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver infection transmitted through contaminated food or water.

What is Hepatitis A?

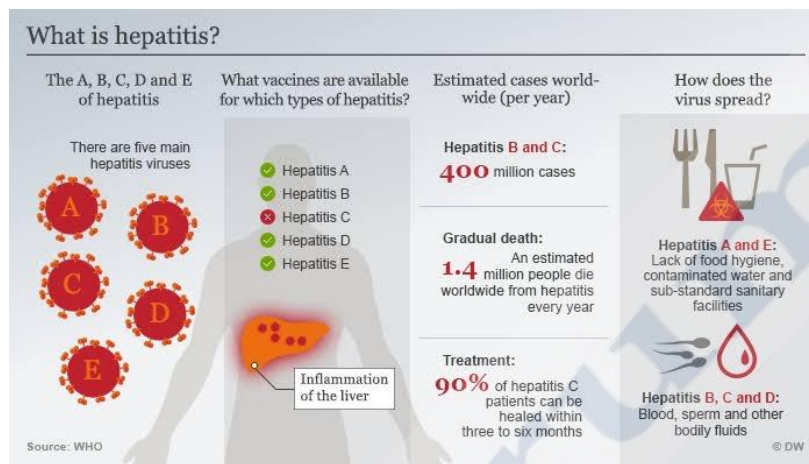


Figure 1. Source- DW

1) It is a **viral infection** that primarily causes **inflammation of the liver**.

2) It can be an acute (short-term) infection or a chronic (long-term) infection.

3) **Transmission**- It is transmitted through the consumption of contaminated food or water or through close contact with an infected person.

4) **Symptoms**- fever, fatigue, nausea, abdominal pain, and

jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

5) **Treatment**- As per WHO there is **no specific treatment for hepatitis A**. Recovery from symptoms following infection may be slow and can take several weeks or months.

Pandemic treaty and disease X

Why in the news?

The World Health Organization (WHO) is urging its member nations to sign a pandemic treaty to strengthen global preparedness for future health crises.

What is Pandemic treaty?

Origin-In March 2021, a group of world leaders announced an initiative for a new treaty on pandemic preparedness and response.

This initiative was taken to the World Health Organization (WHO) and will be negotiated, drafted, and debated by a newly-established Intergovernmental Negotiation Body.

Objective-

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- 1) to foster an all government and all society approach, strengthening national, regional and global capacities and resilience to future pandemics.
- 2) to enhance **international co-operation** in data-sharing, research and local, regional and global production and distribution of medical and public health counter-measures such as **vaccines, medicines, diagnostics and personal protective equipment**.
- 3) The deadline for this agreement is set for the 77th World Health Assembly in May 2024.

About disease X

- 1) It is a hypothetical pathogen or threat that may cause a major pandemic in future.
- 2) It could be a new agent, **a virus, a bacterium, or a fungus** without any known treatment.
- 3) The disease could be any of the 25 families of viruses that have the capability to cause illness in people.
- 4) Disease X was included in the **WHO's updated Blueprint list of diseases back in 2018**.
- 5) Disease X could be 20 times more deadly than SARS-Covid virus that caused pandemic recently.
- 6) It is an illness which is currently unknown but could pose a serious microbial threat to humans in the future.

End-to-end encryption (E2E)

Why in the News?

This article explores End-to-end encryption (E2E), detailing its operational mechanisms and examining implementation challenges and complexities.

What is End-to-end encryption (E2E)?

- 1) Encryption serves as a method to **safeguard data against unauthorized access or manipulation**.
- 2) It functions by **converting the data into a confidential code that only the designated recipient can decode**. This proves beneficial in numerous scenarios, including securing online correspondence, safeguarding sensitive data, and authenticating digital identities.
- 3) Encryption primarily falls into two categories:
 - a. **Symmetric**: This method **employs a single key for both encryption and decryption**. In symmetric encryption, the key utilized to encode data is identical to the one needed for decoding it.
 - b. **Asymmetric**: Asymmetric encryption **relies on a pair of keys: a public key and a private key**. The public key can be distributed openly, whereas the private key must remain confidential.
- 4) The concept of encryption typically pertains to safeguarding stored data, whereas **end-to-end encryption ensures the protection of data during its transmission between locations**, particularly in scenarios involving rapid information exchange.
- 5) In an application equipped with end-to-end encryption (E2EE), only the individuals at each end—namely, the sender and recipient—have the ability to access exchanged messages.

Subject: Environment

Elusive binturong and the small-clawed otter

Why in the news?

Elusive binturong and the small-clawed otter have recently been added to the list of mammals in Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

About the Binturong



Source-Wikipedia

Aspect	Details
About	The binturong, is also known as bearcat. It is native to South and Southeast Asia.
Characteristics	Size -The binturong is long and heavy, with short, stout legs. The binturong is one of only two carnivores that has a prehensile tail. (The other is the kinkajou). A prehensile tail is the tail of an animal that has adapted to grasp or hold objects Family -It belongs to the same family as other small carnivores including Civets, Genets, Mongooses, and Fossa Behaviour - The binturong is active during the day and at night. Diet -The binturong is omnivorous which feeds on small mammals, birds, fish, earthworms, insects and fruits.
Conservation status	IUCN: Vulnerable Wildlife Protection Act of 1972: Schedule I CITES: Appendix III
Population Distribution	China, India, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and on the island of Borneo.
Threats	It is threatened by habitat loss due to logging and agribusiness, especially the oil palm industry. It is also hunted for bushmeat, traditional medicine and the pet trade.

About Small-clawed otter



Source- Wikipedia

Aspect	Detail
About	The Small-Clawed otter is also known as Asian small clawed otter/Oriental Small Clawed Otter. The small-clawed otter is an otter species native to South and Southeast Asia.
Characteristics	Size -Body length-730 to 960 mm and maximum weight can be 5kg. It has short claws that do not extend beyond the pads of its webbed digits. It is the smallest otter species in the world. Behaviour -It is nocturnal in nature as it is mostly active after the dark. Diet -It feeds mainly on crabs, mudskippers and Trichogaster fish.
Conservation status	IUCN: Vulnerable Wildlife Protection Act of 1972: Schedule I CITES: Appendix I
Population Distribution	South East Asian Distribution - The Asian small-clawed otter's native range comprises parts of India to Southeast Asia, including the islands of Sumatra, Java, Borneo and Palawan. India - It is mainly found in West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and in coastal regions of Odisha and Karnataka. It is also found in the Nilgiri and Palni hills in Tamil Nadu.
Threats	Habitat destruction, deforestation, illegal pet trade etc.

Gir and Kankrej cows

Why in the news?

India has imported 40,000 doses of bull semen from Brazil for the first time to boost milk output via artificial insemination.

About Gir cow

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Source-GIRORGANIC

Aspect	Detail
About	The Gir or Gyr is an Indian breed of zebuine cattle . It originated in the Kathiawar peninsula in the state of Gujarat, and the name of the breed derives from that of the Gir Hills. Other names include Bhodah, Desan, Gujarati, Kathiawari, Sorthi and Surti.
Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Size- Average weight of Gir Cow is 385 kg with 130 cm in height; Gir bull weighs 545 kg on average, with a height of 140 cm.Harsh Climate adaptability- It is suited to hot and arid climate.Milk Yield- Indian breed of Gir cows can give 6-10 litres.
Population Distribution	They have originated in west India in the state of Gujarat . It has since spread to neighbouring Maharashtra and Rajasthan .

About Kankrej cow



Source-wikipedia

Aspect	Details
About	It originated from Southeast Rann of Kutch of Gujarat and adjoining Rajasthan (Barmer and Jodhpur district). It is also called as Wadad or Waged and Wadhjar .

Features	Colour- Coat colour of the animal varies from silver grey to iron grey and steel black. Harsh climate adaptability- It is suited to hot and arid climate. Resistance to disease- It is resistant to tick fever, heat stress, very little incidence of contagious abortion and tuberculosis.
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kumki elephant

Why in the news?

Odisha government has deployed Kumki elephant (domesticated, trained elephants) to reduce human-animal conflict.

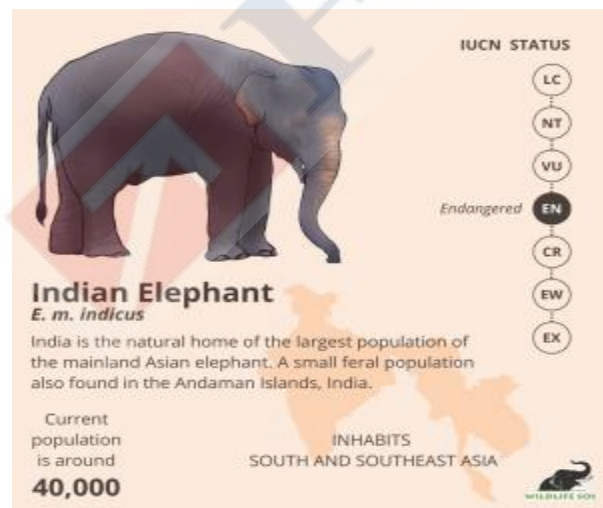
About Kumki elephant

- 1) "Kumki" comes from the Persian word "kumak," which means "aid." This name is used all over India, from Bengal to Tamil Nadu.
- 2) These are trained captive Asian Elephant.
- 3) They help in patrolling and rescue operation. For example-when any wild elephant gets hurt, Kumki elephant provide medical support.
- 4) They would help in minimizing conflicts and safeguard both human and wildlife interest.

Why was there a need to employ kumki elephant in odisha?

- 1) There have been 994 human fatalities and 660 injuries due to elephant attacks in Odisha from 2013-14 to 2022-23, as per government estimates.
- 2) Crops covering 33,822 acres have been damaged by elephants. This has threatened the livelihood of farmers.

About Asian Elephant



Source-Wildlifesos

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Aspect	Detail
About	The Asian elephant is the largest living land animal in Asia.
Population Distribution	1. It is distributed throughout the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, ranging from India in the west, Nepal in the north, Sumatra in the south, and to Borneo in the east. 2. India is home to about 29,964 elephants as per last census conducted in 2017. 3. Karnataka has the highest number of elephants in India.
Conservation Status	Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I IUCN Red List- Endangered . CITES-It is listed in Appendix I of the Convention.
Conservation Efforts	1) Project Elephant: Launched by- the Government of India in 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme . Aim-for the protection of elephants, their habitats and corridors. 2) Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG): AsESG is an integral part of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the IUCN. Aim- to promote the long-term conservation of Asia's elephants and recovery of their populations to viable levels. 3) Gaj Yatra: Launched by- Wildlife Institute of India (WII) Aim-to celebrate elephants and highlight the necessity of securing elephant corridors. 4) Monitoring the Killing of Elephants (MIKE): It is an international collaboration that tracks trends in information related to the illegal killing of elephants from across Africa and Asia to monitor effectiveness of field conservation efforts. 5) Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, COP 13- adopted the Gandhinagar declaration where the Asian elephant was added to the Global Wildlife Agreement .
Threats	Habitat loss, habitat degradation, habitat fragmentation, and poaching.

Odisha to Set Up World's First Melanistic Tiger Safari

Why in the News?

The Odisha government has recently announced the establishment of the world's first melanistic tiger safari.

About the Melanistic tiger safari

- 1) The safari is set to be developed near Baripada, the district headquarter of **Mayurbhanj**.
- 2) A 200-hectare site adjacent to **National Highway-18** has been earmarked for this initiative.
- 3) It is located near the **Similipal Tiger Reserve(STR)** in Mayurbhanj.

What are Melanistic tigers?



Source- Indian Express

Aspect	Details
About	Black tigers (also known as Melanistic Royal Bengal Tiger) are a rare colour variant of the Bengal tiger . These are not a distinct species or geographic subspecies.
Location	They have been recorded only in the Similipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha .
Population	In the 2022 All India Tiger Estimation, in Similipal Tiger Reserve, 10 melanistic tigers were reported out of the total 16 tigers in the reserve.
Conservation Status	IUCN: Endangered

Rare golden tiger snapped in Kaziranga

Why in the News?

A wildlife photographer recently captured an image of a tiger with a golden coat during a safari in Assam's Kaziranga National Park.



Figure 2. Source- The Hindu

What is a Golden Tiger?

- 1) A golden tiger (also known as a golden tabby tiger) is a **Bengal tiger exhibiting a color variation resulting from a recessive gene**.
- 2) The golden tiger's coloring originates from a recessive trait known as **'wideband'**, which influences the production of black pigments during the hair growth cycle.
- 3) Golden tigers are **not a separate subspecies** but rather a result of genetic variation within Bengal tigers.
- 4) They are exceptionally **rare in the wild and even rarer in captivity**.

About Kaziranga National Park

1) **Location:** It is located in the State of **Assam**. It is the single largest undisturbed and representative area in the **Brahmaputra Valley floodplain**.

2) **UNESCO World Heritage Site:** The Park was declared as a **National Park in 1974**. In 1985, the park was designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Further, it was also declared as a **Tiger Reserve in 2006**.

3) **Important Bird Area:** It is also recognized as an **Important Bird Area by Bird Life International** for the conservation of avifaunal species.

Laughing Gull Spotted for the First Time in India

Why in the News?

The laughing gull, a migratory bird originating from North America, has been observed for the first time in the country at the Chittari estuary in Kasaragod district of Kerala.

What is a laughing gull?



Source-The Hindu

Aspect	Details
About	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The laughing gull (<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>) is a species of bird belonging to the family Laridae.2. The name "laughing gull" comes from its distinctive call, which sounds like laughter.
Habitat	These birds are most commonly found along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of North America, as well as the Caribbean and parts of Central America.
Conservation Status	IUCN: Least Concern
Characteristics	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It is a medium-sized gull with a distinctive appearance characterized by its black head, black legs, long drooping bill white body, and long wings.2. They take 2-3 years to reach adult plumage.3. They often nest in colonies on beaches, islands, and marshes4. They are known for their adaptability and opportunistic feeding habits. They feed on a variety of prey, including fish, insects, and scavenged food.

Note– This discovery elevates the total count of bird species discovered in India to **1,367**. The **Kasaragod district alone contributing 400 species** to the state's total count of 554.

About Chittari estuary

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- 1) The Chittari estuary refers to a coastal area where a river meets the sea, forming a brackish water environment.
- 2) It is located in the Kasaragod district of Kerala, India.
- 3) Chittari estuary encompasses a wide variety species of birds including **lesser black-backed gull, slender-billed gull, brown-headed gull, great crested, lesser crested tern, Caspian tern** and others.

Humboldt's Enigma

Why in the News?

The article explores Humboldt's enigma, a concept introduced by Alexander von Humboldt during the 19th century. This concept **suggests a correlation among temperature, altitude, humidity, and biodiversity.**

What is Humboldt's enigma?

- 1) Humboldt's enigma proposes that **biodiversity isn't confined solely to Earth's tropical regions.**
- 2) It suggests that various regions beyond the tropics, such as **mountainous areas, also exhibit significant biodiversity.**
- 3) For example- In case of India, the biodiversity isn't confined only to the tropical regions of MP, Chhattisgarh and Western Ghats but also the regions like **eastern Himalayas also serve as regions of abundant biodiversity,** where variations in climate and a diverse geological makeup contribute to abundant biodiversity.

What are the different drivers of biodiversity?

- 1) **The history of the earth, its geography, and the climate** – These factors are **primary drivers** of biodiversity.
- 2) **Geological process of Mountains**– Mountains act as “**cradles**” for new species, stemming from geological processes such as uplifts that create novel habitats.
- 3) **Climatic Stability**– Climatologically stable mountains have turned these locations into ‘**museums**’ that accumulate diverse species over time.
- 4) **Coastal tropical sky islands**- The **Shola Sky Islands** in the Western Ghats demonstrate features of both a cradle and a museum for biodiversity. This is why some of the oldest bird species in the Western Ghats, like the **Sholicola and Montecincla,** reside on the Shola Sky Islands.

Note– The northern Andes range, which includes Chimborazo, is recognized as the **world's most biodiverse location.**

Snow Leopard

Why in the news?

Union Minister of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav has recently released the report on the Status of Snow leopards in India.

About The Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI)

- 1) This is the **first-ever scientific exercise**, which took around 4 years to complete.
- 2) **The Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** is the National Coordinator for this exercise.
- 2) As per the assessment, India has an estimated **718 snow leopards** in the wild.
- 3) **Ladakh (477) has the highest number** of snow leopard, followed by Uttarakhand (124), Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21), and Jammu and Kashmir (nine).
- 4) India has around 10-15% of global population of snow leopard.

About Snow Leopard



Source-BBC Wildlife

Aspect	Details
About	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) It is a species of large cat in the genus Panthera of the family Felidae. 2) It is native to the mountain ranges of Central and South Asia. 3) It is a top predator in mountain ecosystem.
Characteristics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) It shows several adaptations for living in a cold, mountainous environments. 2) Its small, rounded ears help to minimize heat loss. 3) Its broad paws distribute the body weight for walking on snow, and have fur on their undersides to enhance the grip on steep and unstable surfaces. 4) Its long and flexible tail helps to balance the cat in the rocky terrain.
Habitat	They are distributed across the mountainous landscape of Central Asia that covers different parts of the Himalayas such as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim.
Conservation Status	IUCN List of Threatened Species: Vulnerable . CITES: Appendix I . Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule-I .
Conservation efforts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Government of India has identified the snow leopard as a flagship species for the high-altitude Himalayas.

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	<p>2) India is also party to the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Programme since 2013.</p> <p>3) HimalSanrakshak: It is a community volunteer programme, to protect snow leopards, launched in October 2020.</p> <p>4) Project Snow Leopard (PSL): It was launched in 2009 to promote an inclusive and participatory approach to conserve snow leopards and their habitat.</p> <p>5) Snow Leopard is included in the list of 21 critically endangered species for the recovery programme of the Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change.</p>
Threats	<p>1) Loss of natural prey species</p> <p>2) conflict with humans</p> <p>3) illegal trade of its fur and bones.</p>

Subject: Schemes & Programmes

Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana – Solar rooftop scheme announced for 1 crore households

Why in the news?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced **Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana** to electrify one crore households with solar electricity.

Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana

Aspect	Detail
Aim	To install rooftop solar on 1 crore houses.
Target	To reduce electricity charges of poor and middle class. To make India self-reliant in the field of energy.
Significance	This would help India in meeting the target of generating 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

What is the Rooftop Solar Programme?

Launched in: 2014

Aim: The scheme aims to expand India's rooftop solar installed capacity in the residential sector by providing Central Financial Assistance — the financial assistance to the eligible projects as per MNRE Guidelines — and incentives to DISCOMs (distribution companies).

Target: To increase rooftop solar installed capacity to 40GW by March 2026.

What is India's current solar capacity?

According to the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's website**, solar power installed capacity in India has reached around 73.31 GW as of December 2023.

VAIBHAV Fellowship Scheme

What is the News?

Government of India has launched the Vaishvik Bhartiya Vaigyanik(VAIBHAV) fellowship programme.

What is VAIBHAV Fellowship?

Aspect	Details
Aim	To connect the Indian Science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM) diaspora with academic and R&D institutions in India for collaborative research.
Nodal Ministry	Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology
Eligibility applicants) (for	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The applicant should be a Non-Resident Indian (NRI), Person of Indian Origin (PIO) and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI), currently living abroad.2. The applicant must have obtained a Ph.D/M.D/M.S degree from a recognized University.3. Applicant must be a researcher engaged in an overseas academic / research / industrial organization with proven track record of research & development working in the top500 QS World University Ranking.
Eligibility Institutions) (for	Higher Educational Institutions / Universities ranked in the top 200 in NIRF overall rankings and having NAAC 'A' grade (3.0 and above) and scientific institutes.
Funding	Fellowship would include a fellowship grant (INR 4,00,000 per month) , international and domestic travel, accommodation and contingencies.
Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Under this, 75 VAIBHAV fellowships would be awarded to outstanding scientists/technologists of Indian origin (NRI/OCI/PIO) who are engaged in research activities in their respective countries.2. The selected fellows would be invited to work in 18 identified knowledge verticals including quantum technology, health, pharma, electronics, agriculture, energy, computer sciences, and material sciences amongst others.3. The VAIBHAV Fellow would identify an Indian Institution for collaboration and may spend up to two months in a year for a maximum of 3 years.

PM Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India (YASASVI)

Why in the news

PM Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India, The government has recently released Rs 32.44 Crore for Pre-matric Scholarship and Rs 387.27 Crore for Post-Matric Scholarship to States/UTs under PM YASASVI scheme.

About PM-YASASVI(PM YOUNG ACHIEVERS' SCHOLARSHIP AWARD SCHEME FOR VIBRANT INDIA)

Aspect	Details
About	PM YASASVI is a Scholarship scheme for Other Backward Class (OBCs), Economically Backward Class (EBC) and Denotified Nomadic Tribes (DNT) Students
Concerned Ministry	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India
Objective	To provide financial assistance to the OBC, EBC and DNT students studying at post-matriculation or post-secondary stage to help them complete their education.
Eligibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant students must be a permanent resident of India to get benefits under the PM Yashasvi Scheme. 2. Candidate students should belong to any one of OBC, EBC, DNT SAR, NT or SNT community. 3. Only students studying in class 9 or class 11 will be considered eligible to get this scholarship. 4. The family annual income of the applicant students should be maximum 2.5 lakh rupees to get this scholarship. 5. Students of all genders will be eligible to get the benefits under PM Yashasvi Scheme 2023.
Benefits	<p>Financial assistance of Rs 75,000 per year is provided to the eligible students of class IX in the form of scholarship.</p> <p>An amount of Rs 125,000 per year is provided to the students of class 11th as financial assistance.</p>
Selection	To get the benefits of this scheme, the candidate students have to pass the computer based entrance test.
Testing Agency	National Testing Agency has been entrusted with the responsibility of conducting the YASASVI ENTRANCE TEST
Sub-scheme	<p>There are five sub-Schemes under the Scheme.</p> <p>1. Pre-Matric Scholarship for OBC, EBC and DNT Students Eligibility- for students studying in class IX and X on a full-time basis in Government Schools only. Benefit-The students shall be given a consolidated academic allowance of Rs. 4000/- per annum</p> <p>2. Post-Matric Scholarship for OBC, EBC and DNT Students. Eligibility- for students studying at post-matriculation or post-secondary stage to enable them to complete their education. Benefits-allowance from Rs.5000 to Rs.20000 is awarded to students as per category of course.</p>

<p>3. Top Class School Education for OBC, EBC and DNT Students Eligibility-for meritorious students belonging to OBC, EBC and DNT categories from Class 9 onwards till they complete Class 12. Benefits-Scholarship is awarded for tuition fee, hostel fee and other charges subject to a maximum of Rs. 75,000/- per annum per student of class 9 and 10 and Rs. 1,25,000/- per annum per student of class 11 and 12.</p> <p>4. Top Class College Education for OBC, EBC and DNT Students Eligibility-for students belonging to OBC, EBC and DNT categories. Benefits-by providing full financial support that include tuition fee, living expenses, books and stationaries etc.</p> <p>5. Construction of Hostel for OBC Boys and Girls Aim-To provide hostel facilities to students belonging to socially and educationally backward classes, especially from rural areas, to enable them to pursue secondary and higher education in the Govt. schools, universities, institutions and institutes located at a reasonable distance.</p>
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Subject: Reports & Indices

Corruption index: India ranks 93 among 180 nations

Why in the News?

According to the latest report by Transparency International, India secured the 93rd position out of 180 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2023.

What is Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)?

Aspect	Details
Purpose	To rank 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people.
Released by	Transparency International annually since 1995.
Scoring	The index uses a scale of 0 to 100 to rank Corruption Perception Index(CPI), where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean .

What are the key findings of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2023?

- 1) **India's rank worsened**- In 2023, India **secured the 93rd position among 180** countries, whereas **in 2022, it held the 85th rank**. India attained an overall score of 39 in 2023, slightly down from its score of 40 in 2022.
- 2) **Top performer in Asian region**- **Singapore** topped the Asian region with a score of 83, ranking fifth in the Index.
- 3) **Other South Asian countries**- **Pakistan is ranked 133**, While **Sri Lanka is ranked 115** and **Afghanistan is ranked 162**.
- 4) **Top rankers**- **Denmark at the top**, followed by Finland, New Zealand and Norway.
- 5) **Lowest rank** - At rank 180 was **Somalia** with the lowest score of 11.

Subject: Art & Culture

Madhika Language

Why in the news?

Kerala's Chakaliya community is facing the threat of extinction of its unique language Madhika as just 2 speakers remaining.

About the madhika language

1. The language is spoken by Chakaliya community.
2. It is a **blend of Telugu, Tulu, Kannada, and Malayalam**.
3. It may sound like Kannada but it has its own uniqueness due to diverse influences.
4. It is largely influenced by **Havyaka Kannada**, an old form of Kannada.
5. The language does not have its own script thus it faces the threat of extinction.

Facts about Chakaliya Community

Origin-They have a nomadic origin. They worship gods like Thiruvekattamangalada and Mariamma.

Location- Kannur district (Kerala)

Migration to Kerala- They have migrated to northern Malabar from the hilly regions of Karnataka centuries ago.

Status-Initially they were given the S.T. status, but later they were brought under S.C. category. The mention of the community can be found in the book **Caste and Tribes of Southern India**

Social position- They were considered untouchables.

Srirangam Temple

Why in the news?

The Prime Minister has recently visited Srirangam temple also called the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple.



Figure 3. Source- Wikipedia

About the temple

1. Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to **Ranganatha** (a form of Vishnu), located in **Srirangam, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India**.
2. The temple has the **unique distinction of being the foremost among the 108 Divya Desams** dedicated to the god Vishnu.

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3. The Srirangam temple is the **largest temple compound in India** and one of the largest religious complexes in the world

4. In 2017 the temple won the **UNESCO Asia Pacific Award of Merit 2017** for cultural heritage conservation, making it the first temple in Tamil Nadu to receive the award from the UNESCO.

What is the historical and cultural significance of the temple?

1) The main deity of the temple is mentioned in various Sanskrit literature and epics such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Padma Purana, Brahmanda Purana and Garuda Puranam.

2) Medieval scholars like Nathamuni, Ramanuja, Pillai Lokacharya, Vedanta Desika and Manavala Mamunigal are associated with the temple.

3) Bhakti movement- Ranganathaswamy temple is the **only one** out of the 108 temples that was sung in praise by all the Alvars (follower of Vaishnavism).

Maratha Military Landscapes: India's UNESCO World Heritage Nomination for 2024-25

Why in the News?

The "Maratha Military Landscapes of India" will be India's nomination for recognition in the **UNESCO** World Heritage List for the year 2024-25.

What are the 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India'?

Aspect	Details
About	It refers to the historical regions, fortifications, military architecture , and associated cultural elements related to the Maratha Empire's military history.
Developed in	These were developed between the 17th and 19th centuries .
Selected forts for Nomination	There are more than 390 forts in Maharashtra out of which only 12 are chosen for the Maratha Military Landscapes of India. a. Shivneri Fort, Lohagad, Raigad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala Fort, Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg, and Gingee Fort are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India . b. Salher Fort, Rajgad, Khanderi Fort, and Pratapgad are protected by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra .
Categorization of selected forts	In the Maratha Military Landscapes of India these forts are categorized as: a. Hill forts - Salher fort, Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Raigad, Rajgad and Gingee fort. b. Hill-forest fort - Pratapgad c. Hill-plateau fort - Panhala d. Coastal fort - Vijaydurg e. Island forts - Khanderi fort, Suvarnadurg and Sindhudurg

What are the categories of nomination for UNESCO World Heritage List?

1) There are **two categories of nomination**- cultural and natural criteria.

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2) There are **six criteria (i to vi) for cultural sites** and **four criteria (vii to x) for natural sites** for inclusion in the World Heritage List.

3) The Maratha Military Landscapes of India is **nominated under:**

a. Criterion (iii)- Unique or exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or civilization, either living or extinct.

b. Criterion (iv)- To exemplify a significant stage in human history through outstanding architecture, technology, or landscape.

c. Criterion (vi)- To be closely linked with significant events, traditions, beliefs, and works of universal significance.

What are the World Heritage sites in India, particularly in Maharashtra, and how are they categorized?

1) At present in India there are **42 World Heritage sites**, out of which **34 are cultural sites**, **seven are natural sites** whereas **one is mixed site**.

2) **In Maharashtra there are six World Heritage Sites**, five cultural and one natural:
a. Cultural Sites– Ajanta Caves (1983), Ellora Caves (1983), Elephanta Caves (1987), Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus) (2004), Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai (2018).

b. Natural Site– Western Ghats of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala is serial property in natural category (2012).

3) The Maratha Military Landscapes of India, listed in the 2021 Tentative List of World Heritage sites, is **Maharashtra's sixth cultural property** nominated for the World Heritage List.

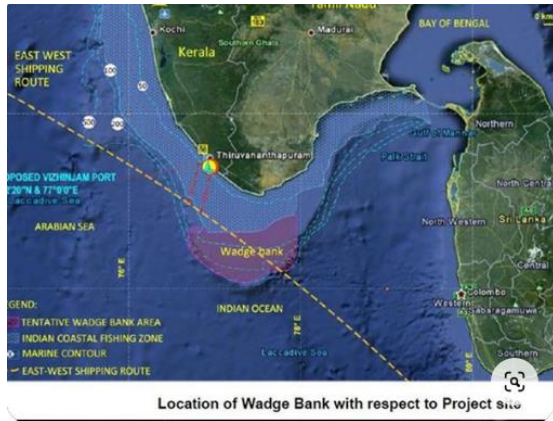
Subject: Geography & Places in News

Wadge Bank Threatened by Hydrocarbon Exploration

Why in the News?

Wadge Bank faces a potential threat as the Indian government considers offering three oil and gas blocks for exploration and development. The blocks designated for exploration coincide with the Wadge Bank.

About Wadge Bank



Source- Pinterest

Aspect	Details
Location	It is a 10,000 square kilometers area, located approximately 50 kilometers south of Kanyakumari .
Features	It features shallow waters, a nearly flat bottom topography, and a continental shelf .
Significance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This area is rich in biodiversity and is considered India's most valuable fishery resource. 2. The low intensity of currents, waves, and tides makes it an ideal location for the accumulation of nutrients and fish food.

Lake Retba

Why in the news?

Lake Retba, located in Senegal, is under threat of extinction due to increase in Nitrate level and pollution.

About the lake Retba

Location– Lake Retba is also known as Lac Rose (meaning “pink lake”). It is located in Senegal.

Nearest ocean– Lake Retba is separated only by some narrow dunes from the **Atlantic Ocean**

Salinity– The lake has high salinity content (comparable to that of the Dead Sea)

World heritage listing– It is under consideration by **UNESCO** for World Heritage Site Status.

Aquatic life– Due to high salinity, many living organisms are **not** able to survive (Exceptions being a few microscopic algae and bacteria).

Why is the colour of lake pink?

- 1) Its distinct pink colour is caused by the **Dunaliella salina bacteria**. This is attracted by the lake's salt content.
- 2) The bacteria produces a red pigment to absorb the sunlight, thus giving the lake its unique colour.
- 3) The Dunaliella salina bacteria is harmless to humans, and swimming in the lake is possible.

Some Other important lakes in West Africa

Lake Bosumtwi in Ghana is the **largest natural lake** in West Africa.

Lake Volta in Ghana is the **largest man-made reservoir** in the world.

Lake Chad is a man-made reservoir located in Chad.

Soda Lakes

Why in the News?

Recently, researchers have found that a shallow 'soda lake' in western Canada bears resemblance to Darwin's concept of "warm little ponds". It is believed to be a potential environment where life originated on early Earth.

What is a Soda lake?

Aspect	Details
About & Characteristics	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It is a lake typically characterized by a pH level ranging between 9 and 11.2. The alkalinity of the water is primarily due to the high concentration of carbonate, particularly sodium carbonate.3. It may also have lots of sodium chloride and other salts, making it a salty or hypersaline lake.4. These ecosystems are notably productive compared to freshwater lakes.5. It represent some of the Earth's most productive aquatic environments due to the abundance of dissolved carbon dioxide.6. They naturally occur in both arid and semi-arid regions.
Biodiversity	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Biodiversity in soda lakes is primarily led by prokaryotes like bacteria and archaea, particularly in lakes with elevated alkalinity levels.2. Multicellular organisms like brine shrimp and fish are abundant in many soda lakes.
Examples	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Africa and Asia host the largest number of soda lakes due to their extensive desert conditions, which favor the formation of such lakes.2. The majority of soda lakes in Africa are situated in Eastern Africa, notably in Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia.3. Lake Natron in Tanzania stands out as one of the most remarkable soda lakes in Africa.4. In Asia, India and China boast the highest count of soda lakes.5. Notable soda lakes in Asia include Lake Van, Tso Kar Salt Lake, Pangong Salt Lake, and Lake Zabuye.

Subject: Defence Exercises

Exercise CYCLONE: India-Egypt Joint Special Forces Exercise

Why in the News?

A 25-member Indian Army contingent has arrived in Egypt for the 2nd edition of India-Egypt Joint Special Forces Exercise, CYCLONE. It will be **conducted at Anshas, Egypt from January 22 to February 1, 2024.**

What is Exercise CYCLONE?

Aspect	Details
About	It is a Joint Special Forces exercise between India and Egypt.
Aim	To enhance mutual understanding of operational protocols for desert/semi-desert Special Operations under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.
First Edition	2023 (India)
Features of 2nd Edition	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Indian contingent is being represented by troops from The Parachute Regiment (Special Forces).2. Egyptian contingent is being represented by Egyptian Commando Squadron and Egyptian Airborne Platoon.3. The Exercise will involve planning and execution of special operations in sub conventional domain and will be conducted in three phases.
Significance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It will provide an opportunity to both the contingents to strengthen their bond and share best practices.2. It will serve as a platform to achieve common security goals and enhance ties between two friendly nations.

SADA TANSEEQ: India-Saudi Arabia Joint Military Exercise

Why in the News?

The first edition of India-Saudi Arabia Joint Military Exercise 'SADA TANSEEQ' has commenced at Mahajan, Rajasthan.

What is Exercise 'SADA TANSEEQ'?

Aspect	Details
About	It is a joint Joint Military Exercise between India-Saudi Arabia.
Aim	To train troops of both sides for Joint Operations in Semi Desert terrain under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

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Edition	First
Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Exercise allows both sides to share their best practices in the tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting operations in sub-conventional domain.2. The Exercise includes setting up Mobile Vehicle Check Posts, conducting Cordon & Search Operations, House Intervention Drills, Reflex Shooting, Slithering, and Sniper Firing.
Significance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It will aid in the development of interoperability, camaraderie, and goodwill among troops from both sides.2. It serves as a platform to achieve shared security objectives, enhance defense cooperation, and foster bilateral relations between friendly nations.

Subject: Miscellaneous

Dragon babies

Why in the news?

Financial Times has recently released a report on population decline of China.

What are "Dragon Babies"?

In Chinese astrology, babies born in the year of the dragon are considered to be especially fortunate and lucky. They are called dragon babies. The eagerly awaited year will officially begin on February 10. There is a higher hope that more births will be recorded during this time rather than in any other year in 12-year Chinese calendrical cycle.

Background

Gloomy economic outlook, ageing society and the coronavirus pandemic pushed China's population to a decline for second consecutive year in 2023.

What is the current status of China's population rate?

1. The national death rate is accelerating, reaching 7.87 per 1,000 people in 2023, the highest level since the early 1970s.
2. The population decline has more than doubled from the previous year.

What is the ramification of this trend?

3. An aging population would demand more expenditure on health.
4. There would be a decline in economic growth

However, experts doubt if such superstitions about dragon year will improve the situation in China. Due to the high cost of living and fierce competition, couples are not willing to have children.

Late former Bihar CM Karpoori Thakur to be awarded Bharat Ratna

Why in the News?

Recently Government of India has announced that Late former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur will be posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna.

Who was Karpoori Thakur?



Source- India Today

Aspect	Details
About	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. He was an Indian politician who served two terms as the Chief Minister of Bihar.2. He was born on January 24, 1924, in the village of Pitaunjhia (now Karpuri Gram) in the Samastipur District of Bihar.3. He passed away in February 1988.4. He was popularly known as Jan Nayak. He was also known as the champion of the poor.5. He drew inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi and Satyanarayan Sinha.
Political career	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. He began his political journey with the Praja Socialist Party and later aligned himself with the Janata Party.2. He was elected as a member of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha in 1952 from the Tajpur constituency as a candidate of the Socialist Party.3. He served as a minister and Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar, before becoming the first non-Congress socialist Chief Minister of Bihar in 1970.4. He also enforced total prohibition of alcohol in Bihar.5. He served as the President of Samyukta Socialist Party.

What is Bharat Ratna?

- 1) Bharat Ratna is the **highest civilian award** of India.
- 2) The award, initially focused on arts, literature, science, and public services. It was broadened to encompass **'any field of human endeavor'** in December 2011.
- 3) The provision of Bharat Ratna was **introduced in 1954**.
- 4) The **first recipients** of the award were scientists Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, C. Rajagopalachari and Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan.
- 5) The award has also been given to **non-Indians** – Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Nelson Mandela.
- 6) The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is restricted to a **maximum of three** in a particular year.