

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY
COMPILATION | 2024





Why in News?

Recently, a study by top environmental scientists warned that air pollution poses a serious threat to the Sundarbans, a crucial mangrove forest in West Bengal.

WHAT IS SUNDARBANS?

About Sundarbans:

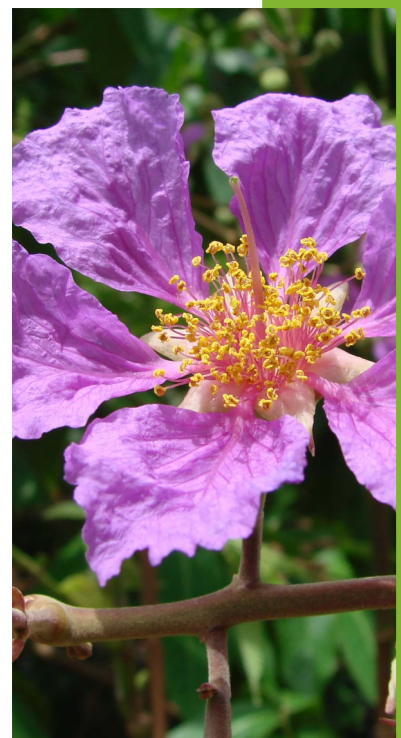
- Largest mangrove forests globally, located at the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna River delta.
- Mangroves are where land meets the sea in tropical areas.

FLORA AND FAUNA

- Various habitats, from swamps to mangroves to saline forests.
- Home to rare and endangered species like crocodiles, dolphins, and turtles.

PROTECTION

- 40% of Sundarbans in India, the rest in Bangladesh.
- UNESCO World Heritage site since 1987 (India) and 1997 (Bangladesh).
- Sundarban Wetland, India, declared 'Wetland of International Importance' in January 2019.
- Project Tiger helps control prey populations, maintaining the ecosystem's balance.
- Protecting tigers ensures a healthy habitat for other species.
- India and Bangladesh signed an MoU in 2011 to conserve the Sundarbans.



What are the Challenges Faced by the Sundarbans?

Rising Sea Levels:

- 01 Consequence of climate change.
- 02 Threaten low-lying mangroves by flooding them with saltwater.
- 03 Makes mangroves more vulnerable to cyclone storm surges.

Increased Cyclone Intensity:

- 01 Climate change leads to more frequent and intense storms.

Conversion for Agriculture:

- 01 Mangrove forests converted to farms for crops like palm oil or rice.
- 02 Destroys habitat and fragments existing ecosystems, affecting biodiversity.

Threat to Wildlife:

- 01 Loss of mangroves leads to endangered species losing habitats.
- 02 Settlement mangroves, once safe for diverse species, are disappearing due to pollution and breeding activities.



Loss of Ecosystem Services:

- 01 Mangroves provide important services like shoreline protection and fish nursery grounds.
- 02 Deforestation disrupts these services, impacting coastal communities and fisheries.

Effect of Pollutants:

- 01 Urban and industrial pollutants worsen air quality in the Sundarbans.
- 02 Pollutants impact the ecosystem's ecology and biogeochemistry.

Way Forward

PROTECTING STREAMBANKS:

- Cultivate native grass species like wild rice, biscuit grass, and salt couch grass to stabilize streambanks and prevent erosion.
- Avoid introducing non-local species like vetiver, which can't handle salt.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE:

- Support soil-tolerant paddy varieties and organic farming practices to boost productivity and farmer income while reducing environmental harm.
- Implement rainwater harvesting and watershed development for better agricultural production.

Wastewater Treatment:

- Use natural processes and microorganisms like lactic acid bacteria and photosynthetic bacteria for wastewater treatment to improve water quality and ecosystem health.

India-Bangladesh Collaboration:

- Transform the India-Bangladesh Joint Working Group (JWG) into a board of interdisciplinary experts to plan and execute climate resilience strategies for the Sundarbans and its communities.

Innovative Solutions:

- Promote solar energy, electric transportation, and subsidized LPG.
- Regulate tourism, close pollutant factories, regulate brick kilns, and manage land use.
- Strengthen coastal regulations for better protection

Multi-Sectoral Approach:

- Engage multiple ministries including tourism, disaster management, agriculture, fisheries, and rural development for a comprehensive plan addressing various aspects of the Sundarbans' sustainability.

GLOBAL REPORT ON NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES 2024



Why in News?

Before the 77th session of the World Health Assembly, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued its 2024 Global report on neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).

This report details the advancements made in 2023 in implementing the Roadmap for neglected tropical diseases 2021-2030.

What are the Key highlights of the WHO Report?

Global Status for 2023:

- By December 2023, 50 countries eliminated at least one NTD, halfway to the 2030 goal of 100 countries.
- 5 countries were recognized for eliminating one NTD, and 1 for eliminating two.
- In July 2023, Iraq became the 50th country to eliminate at least one NTD.
- Noma was added to the NTD list in 2023.
- Bangladesh was validated by WHO in October 2023 for eliminating visceral leishmaniasis.

Global Status for 2022:

- In 2022, 1.62 billion people needed NTD interventions, a 26% drop from 2010.
- About 848 million received treatment for at least one NTD in 2022.
- Reported deaths from vector borne NTDs increased by 22% compared to 2016.

India:

- India was declared free of NTDs like dracunculiasis and yaws.
- Treatment for lymphatic filariasis and soil-transmitted helminthiasis in India decreased by 117 million people in 2022.
- 40.56% of India's population needed NTD interventions in 2022.

Key Challenges:

- Slow post-Covid recovery.
- Uncertainties in funding.
- Geopolitical disruptions.
- Climate change impacts.
- Knowledge and tool gaps.
- Insufficient data for addressing NTDs.

What are the Key Facts About Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)?

About Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs):

- NTDs are a group of diverse conditions caused by various pathogens, including viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi, and toxins. They have severe health, social, and economic impacts.
- These diseases are predominantly found in impoverished communities in tropical regions, although some have a wider geographic spread.

Factors Contributing to NTDs Being "Neglected":

- The epidemiology of NTDs is complex and often linked to environmental factors.
- Epidemiology involves studying the determinants, occurrence, and distribution of health and disease in a specific population.
- Many NTDs are transmitted by vectors (like mosquitoes or flies), have animal hosts, and involve complex life cycles.
- Compared to diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, NTDs receive much less funding for research and development of treatments.

What are the Global and Indian Initiatives to tackle NTDs?

Global Initiatives:

- WHO's 2021-2030 Roadmap: Focuses on impactful actions rather than just treatment, promoting collaboration across healthcare, sanitation, and community sectors. Encourages countries to manage their own NTD programs.
- 2012 London Declaration: An international agreement addressing the global burden of NTDs and advocating for a unified approach to eliminate them.

Indian Initiatives:

- Elimination Programs: India has eradicated guinea worm, trachoma, and yaws. The Accelerated Plan for Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis (APELF) aims to eliminate this disease by 2027.
- WHO Collaborations: India works with WHO in regional partnerships, such as a 2005 initiative with Bangladesh and Nepal for early diagnosis and treatment of Kala-azar.
- Mass Drug Administration (MDA): Regular distribution of free anti-parasitic medications in high-risk areas to prevent NTD transmission.

- **Vector Control:** Programs like Indoor Residual Spraying target insect breeding grounds to curb the spread of NTDs like Kala-azar.
- **Financial Assistance:** Wage compensation schemes support individuals affected by NTDs, particularly those with Post-Kala Azar Dermal Leishmaniasis, to manage their financial burden.



CONCLUSION

The 2024 WHO report shows progress in fighting neglected tropical diseases. Several countries eliminated some of these diseases in 2023, but more work is needed to reach global goals. Challenges like funding shortages and the effects of COVID-19 slow progress. Greater cooperation within countries and worldwide is needed to eliminate these diseases.



LAND ACQUISITION

VALID ONLY IF IT PASSES CONSTITUTIONAL TEST

Why in News?

In an important decision to protect landowners, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the government must follow Article 300A when taking land. The Court cancelled the Kolkata Municipal Corporation's plan to take private land for a public park because it was not legally allowed.

The Right to Property in India:

Before the 44th Constitutional Amendment in 1978:

- The Indian Constitution's Part III (Fundamental Rights) included Article 19(1)(f) and Article 31.
- Article 19(1)(f) gave Indian citizens the right to buy, own, and sell property.
- Article 31 protected people from being deprived of their property, making this right absolute.

These provisions conflicted with the state's ability to acquire property for public use, as the right to property was a fundamental right. The 44th Amendment to the Indian Constitution:

- Abolished Article 19(1)(f) and Article 31.
- Introduced a modified version of Article 31 as Article 300-A.
- Changed the right to property from a fundamental right to a legal/constitutional right.

Article 300-A states:

- No person shall be deprived of his property except by authority of law," allowing the government to take property for the public good.

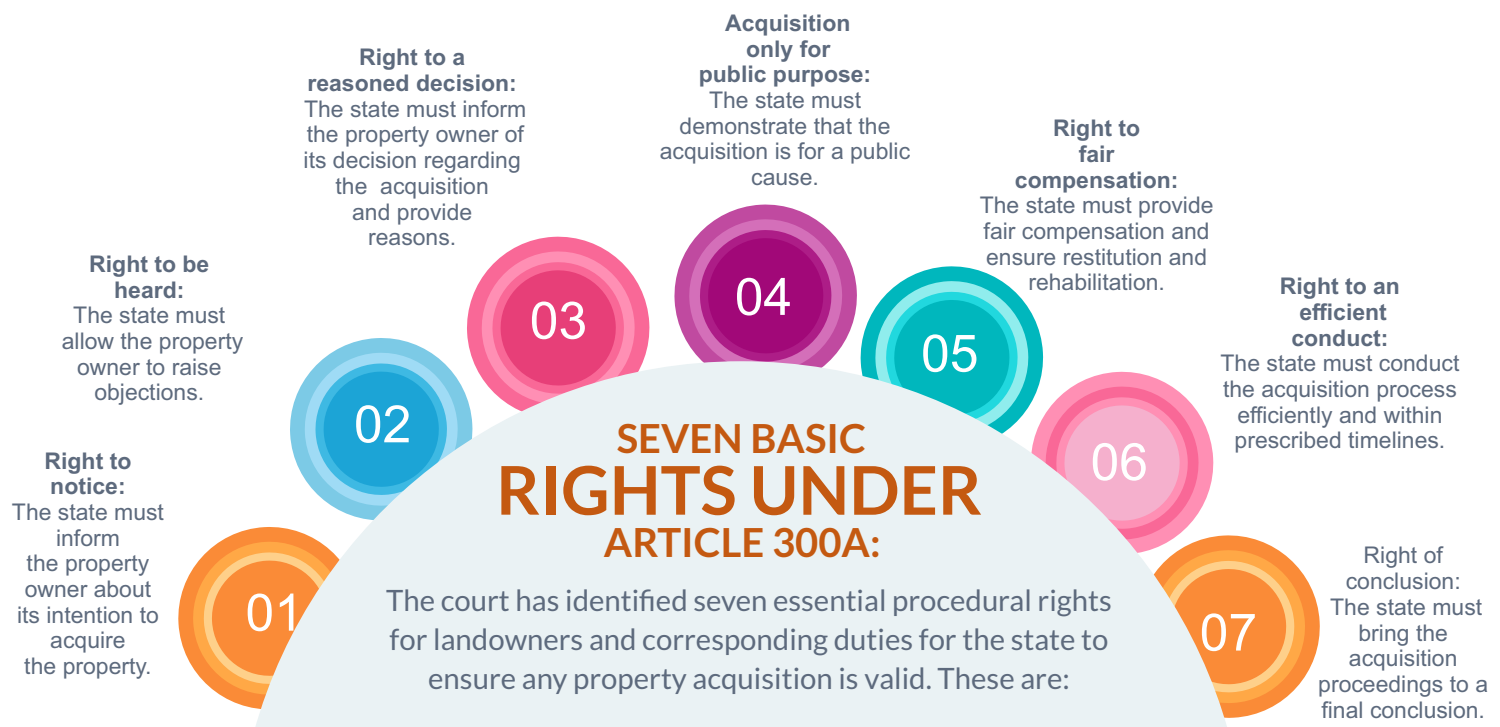
How the courts interpreted Article 300-A:

- The Madhya Pradesh High Court (2022) stated that property acquisition laws must be legitimate and for public benefit.
- In Vidya Devi v. State of Himachal Pradesh (2022), the Supreme Court ruled that even in a welfare state, the government must follow legal procedures to seize property.
- In VimlabenAjitbhai Patel vs. VatslabenAshokbhai Patel, the Supreme Court affirmed that while the right to property is no longer fundamental, it remains a human right.

What were the Observations Made by the SC in the Recent Case?

Nature of the right to property:

Under the current constitutional framework, the right to property in India is protected as a constitutional right and is also recognized as a human right.



Procedural justice - A key mandate of Article 300A:

Adhering to procedural safeguards is crucial for protecting the right to property. These safeguards ensure:

- Fairness,
- Transparency,
- Natural justice, and
- Non-arbitrary exercise of power in the acquisition process.



“Packaged Food and Health Concerns,,

Why in News?

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) stress the need to read food labels carefully to avoid health problems.

Their new report gives advice on healthy eating and cautions against misleading claims on packaged foods.

What are the Key Recommendations for a Healthier Lifestyle?

Moderation in Consumption: The guidelines advise using oil and fats sparingly and cutting down on salt and sugar to lower the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and prevent up to 80% of type 2 diabetes cases through a healthy lifestyle.

Exercise and Physical Activity: They stress the importance of regular exercise along with a balanced diet to prevent obesity. Lack of physical activity and eating too many processed foods can lead to nutrient deficiencies and weight gain.

Dietary Diversity and Nutrient Intake: The guidelines suggest getting nutrients from at least eight different food groups to ensure a balanced diet. This helps meet all nutritional needs and prevent deficiencies in all age groups.

Limiting Ultra-Processed Foods: They recommend limiting ultra-processed foods, which are high in sugar, salt, and fat, as they can harm health, lead to nutrient deficiencies, and contribute to weight gain.

Informed Food Choices: The guidelines encourage reading food labels to make healthier choices, helping to avoid foods high in sugars, fats, and salts, and thus prevent obesity.

Avoid Protein Supplements: They advise against using protein supplements for muscle gain, noting that they offer minimal benefits and can cause problems like bone mineral loss and kidney damage when consumed in large amounts.

How can the Guidelines Benefit Populations?

Pregnant Women and New Mothers: Access to extra nutritious food helps keep both mother and baby healthy, lowering the risk of complications.

Infants and Young Children: Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months promotes the best physical and mental development, followed by the introduction of complementary foods.

Children and Adolescents: A balanced diet supports learning, growth, and physical activity, ensuring optimal development.

Elderly People: Focusing on nutrient-rich foods meets specific needs such as bone health and immune function, enhancing quality of life.

How can Packaged Foods be Misleading?

Attention-Grabbing Labels: Packaged foods often use eye-catching labels suggesting health benefits, which can be misleading.

Natural' Claims:

- Processed foods labeled as 'natural' may still have preservatives and added colors.
- The term is often used loosely, highlighting a few natural ingredients and confusing consumers.
- Terms like "natural," "organic," and "sugar-free" can be ambiguous and misinterpreted, leading to unhealthy choices.
- Truly organic food should be free of preservatives, flavors, colors, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers.
- Only products meeting these criteria should use the 'Jaivik Bharat' logo approved by FSSAI.
- Making deceptive claims or advertisements is punishable under Section 53 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

Packaged Juice Labels:

Juices with as little as 10% natural fruit can be labeled as made with real pulp or juice, which can mislead consumers about the actual content.

Fruit Ripening:

- Calcium carbide use for fruit ripening is misleading and poses health risks.
It releases acetylene gas containing harmful traces of arsenic and phosphorus, known as "Masala."
- These can cause dizziness, frequent thirst, irritation, weakness, difficulty swallowing, vomiting, and skin ulcers.
- Acetylene gas is also hazardous to handlers.
- Using calcium carbide for ripening fruits is banned under the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011.
- FSSAI permits using ethylene gas as a safer alternative, as it is a natural hormone regulating the ripening process.

Chemical Contamination:

- Nepal, Singapore, and Hong Kong have banned certain Indian spice mixes due to potential health risks.
- These products are suspected of being contaminated with ethylene oxide (EtO), a chemical used for fumigation.

Whole Grain Misrepresentation:

Products may advertise whole grains but contain only a small percentage, with the rest being refined grains.

Way Forward

Standardisation of Terminology:

- Implement clear definitions for terms like "natural," "organic," and "sugar-free" to avoid consumer confusion.
- Mandate food labels to clearly disclose all processing methods and potential contaminants.

Nutritional Literacy:

- Include nutritional literacy in school curricula to encourage reading food labels and making informed food choices from a young age.

Taxation and Subsidies:

- Tax ultra-processed foods and provide subsidies for whole foods to make healthier options more affordable.

Mobile Applications:

- Develop apps that scan product barcodes and provide detailed nutritional information and health ratings.

Meal Planning Tools:

- Create and share dietary guidelines tailored to the Indian population. Provide accessible meal planning tools and resources for healthy, balanced diets.

Health Policies:

- Support the National Nutrition Policy and government efforts to promote holistic nutrition and health.
- Encourage local farmers' markets and kitchen gardens to increase access to fresh produce.

“Issue of Solid Waste Management,,



Why in News?

Recently, the Supreme Court criticized the poor management of solid waste in New Delhi. Over 3,800 tonnes of untreated waste are piling up in landfills, threatening public health and the environment.

What are the Issues with India's Solid Waste Management?

ABOUT:

- ➔ **Solid Waste Composition:** Solid waste includes solid or semi-solid household waste, sanitary waste, commercial waste, institutional waste, catering, and market waste, along with other non-residential wastes.
- ➔ **Additional Components:** It also encompasses street sweepings, silt from surface drains, horticulture waste, agricultural and dairy waste, treated biomedical waste (excluding industrial, biomedical, and e-waste), as well as battery and radioactive waste.
- ➔ **Global Contribution:** India, housing approximately 18% of the global population, is responsible for 12% of the world's municipal waste generation.
- ➔ **Annual Waste Generation:** According to The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), India produces 62 million tonnes of waste annually. Of this, about 43 million tonnes (70%) are collected, with approximately 12 million tonnes treated, and 31 million tonnes disposed of in landfill sites.
- ➔ **Future Projections:** Due to changing consumption patterns and rapid economic growth, urban municipal solid waste generation in India is expected to rise to 165 million tonnes by 2030.

Issues:

Poor Implementation of Rules

- ➔ **Garbage Bin Conditions:** Metro cities are plagued with old, damaged, or inadequate garbage bins, insufficient to manage the solid waste effectively.
- ➔ **Waste Segregation:** A significant issue is the lack of segregation at the source, resulting in mixed waste being sent to landfills, violating the Solid Waste Management Rules 2016.
- ➔ **Collection Services:** Some areas suffer from irregular waste collection services, leading to waste accumulation and littering.

Problem of dumping sites

- ➔ **Land Scarcity:** Waste processing plants in metro cities face land scarcity, leading to untreated waste, compounded by illegal dumping and poor stakeholder coordination.
- ➔ **Environmental Hazards:** Despite existing facilities, a large amount of solid waste remains unprocessed, causing environmental hazards such as methane emissions, leachates, and landfill fires, contributing to legacy waste.
- ➔ **Biomining Delays:** Initiated in 2019, biomining efforts are expected to be completed by 2026, extending the environmental impact of mismanaged waste and perpetuating landfill growth.

Lack of Data Collection Mechanism:

- ➔ **Data Deficiency:** The absence of historical data (time series) or regional data (panel data) hampers private companies' ability to assess the costs and benefits of waste management projects.
- ➔ **Market Analysis Challenges:** This data gap makes it difficult for private entities to evaluate the market size and profitability of waste management solutions across various Indian regions.

Formal and Informal Waste Management System:

- ➔ **Service Gaps:** Municipal waste collection services often fail in low-income communities, a gap filled by the informal sector.
- ➔ **Health Risks:** Informal waste pickers face health risks due to unhygienic conditions and lack of safety gear, with child labor being a significant concern in some areas.

Lack of Public Awareness: *There is a general lack of public awareness regarding proper waste management practices, leading to littering and improper disposal habits.*

What are the Solid Waste Management Rules 2016?

These rules replaced the Municipal Solid Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000. They focus on waste segregation at the source, manufacturer responsibility for disposing of sanitary and packaging wastes, and user fees for waste collection, disposal, and processing.

Key Features:

Waste Segregation: Generators must separate waste into three categories:

- ➔ Wet (Biodegradable).
- ➔ Dry (Plastic, Paper, Metal, Wood, etc.).
- ➔ Domestic Hazardous Wastes (diapers, napkins, empty containers of cleaning agents, mosquito repellents, etc.).

Segregated waste should be handed over to authorized rag-pickers, waste collectors, or local bodies.

Fees and Fines:

- ➡ **User Fee:** Paid to waste collectors.
- ➡ **Spot Fine:** For littering and non-segregation.

Bio-Degradable Waste:

- ➡ Should be processed, treated, and disposed of through composting or bio-methanation on the premises whenever possible

Manufacturer Responsibilities:

- ➡ Manufacturers and brand owners of disposable products (like tin, glass, and plastic packaging) must help local authorities financially to set up a waste management system.

Way Forward:- Role of Municipalities:

- ➡ **Enhancing Waste Processing Capacities:** Cities need to increase their waste processing capabilities, considering future population growth. This involves focusing on composting and biogas generation for biodegradable waste and setting up and running facilities in consultation with stakeholders.
- Consulting Various Stakeholders:** Municipalities should identify land, set up plants, and operate them effectively by consulting various stakeholders.

Waste-to-Energy Justification:

- ➡ **Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF):** Non-recyclable dry waste like plastics, paper, and textiles can be converted into RDF, which has a high calorific value and can be used for power generation in waste-to-energy projects.

Decentralised Waste Processing:

- ➡ **Implementation in Metropolitan Areas:** Metropolitan areas like Delhi can collaborate with neighboring states (Haryana, Uttar Pradesh) to establish several composting facilities. These states also have existing organic compost markets.
- ➡ **Micro-Composting Centres (MCC):** Implement MCCs with a capacity of 5 tonnes per day (TPD) in each ward for wet waste, inspired by Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- ➡ **Dry Waste Collection Centres (DWCC):** Establish DWCCs with a capacity of 2 TPD in each ward for dry waste, inspired by Bengaluru.

Integrated Approach:

- ➡ **Combining Options:** Combine decentralised options like MCCs and DWCCs with large-scale processing facilities to ensure all waste is treated effectively.

“Spices Board of India”

Why in News?

The Spices Board of India is addressing the issue of setting limits for Ethylene Oxide (ETO) use in spices with CODEX, the international food standards body. This action follows the recall of certain branded spices exported by Indian companies to Hong Kong and Singapore due to ETO contamination concerns. Additionally, Nepal has banned the sale and import of specific spice-mix products over similar concerns.



What is the Spices Board of India?

About Spices Board:

- The Spices Board was established on February 26, 1987, under the Spices Board Act, 1986, by merging the erstwhile Cardamom Board (1968) and Spices Export Promotion Council (1960).
- It is one of the five statutory Commodity Boards under the Department of Commerce.
- These boards oversee the production, development, and export of tea, coffee, rubber, spices, and tobacco.
- The Spices Board is responsible for promoting the export of 52 scheduled spices and developing Cardamom.
- It serves as the primary organization for promoting Indian spices globally and acts as a bridge between Indian exporters and international importers.



Issue of Ethylene Oxide (ETO):

- ETO is a chemical used as a sterilizing agent in spices but is considered carcinogenic beyond certain limits.
- Although efforts are being made to prevent ETO contamination, the failure rate for Indian spice exports due to ETO is less than 1% in major markets.
- Currently, CODEX has not established a limit for ETO usage, and there is no standardized testing protocol for ETO.
- India has raised the need for setting limits for ETO usage with the CODEX committee due to differing limits in different countries.
- The Spices Board has released guidelines for exporters to prevent ETO contamination and ensure market safety.
- It advises against using ETO as a sterilizing agent for spices and suggests alternatives like steam sterilization and irradiation.
- Other countries such as the US, New Zealand, and Australia have also expressed concerns about the quality of some Indian spices and are considering further action.

“World Wildlife Crime Report 2024,,

Why in News?

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) recently published the 3rd edition of the World Wildlife Crime Report 2024. This report gives a detailed look at the illegal wildlife trade from 2015 to 2021.



WHAT ARE THE KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT?

TRAFFICKING IN ANIMAL AND PLANT PRODUCTS:

- **Animals and Plants Most Affected (2015-2021):** Rhinos and cedar trees were the most affected by illegal wildlife trade.
- **Illegal Animal Trade:** Rhino horns made up 29% of the illegal animal trade, followed by pangolin scales at 28% and elephant ivory at 15%. Other animals involved included eels (5%), crocodiles (5%), parrots and cockatoos (2%), and various carnivores, turtles, tortoises, snakes, and seahorses.
- **Illegal Plant Trade:** Cedars and other trees in the Sapindales order, such as mahogany and holy wood, made up 47% of the illegal plant trade. Rosewoods followed at 35%, and agarwood and other myrtles made up 13%.

COMMODITIES IN TRADE:

- **Seizures:** Coral pieces were the most seized item, making up 16% of all seizures in 2015-2016. Live animals made up 15%, and medicines made from animal products were 10% of all seizures.
- **Bone Processing Shift:** Traditionally, bones were processed in destination countries like those in the Far East. The report highlights a shift towards processing bones closer to the source countries (Africa, Latin America, Asia). This shift is concerning because processing bones into paste makes smuggling easier, and it's unclear if the processed bones are for local use, export, or both. There is also concern about substituting lion and jaguar bones for tiger bones in traditional Chinese medicine.

OFF-TRACK FROM SDG GOAL NO. 15.7:

- **New Indicator:** In 2024, the UNODC introduced a new indicator to track progress on SDG target 15.7, which aims to stop illegal wildlife trafficking.
- **Rising Illegal Trade:** The proportion of illegal wildlife trade has been increasing since 2017. The problem worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021), with wildlife seizures reaching their highest levels at 1.4-1.9% of global trade, compared to 0.5-1.1% in previous years. This increase indicates that the world is not on track to achieve SDG target 15.7 by 2030.

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR WILDLIFE CRIME?

Organised Commercial Illegal Sourcing:

Organised Crime Involvement: Criminal groups engage in elephant and tiger poaching, illegal fishing, and logging. They operate remotely and often overlap with other criminal activities, using power relationships, corruption, illicit firearms, and money laundering.

Specialised Roles in Trade: Organised crime is evident throughout the trade chain in roles such as export, import, brokering, storage, breeding live specimens, and working with processors.

Economic Necessity: Some trafficking is driven by large criminal groups, but many poor people participate to survive.

Desperation Poaching: People may poach to protect their crops or livestock from wild animals.

BLACK MARKETS CREATE NEW DEMANDS:

- ➔ **New Uses for Declining Legal Products:** When legal uses decline, illegal traders invent new uses to keep selling products.
- ➔ **Luxury Items and Scarcity:** Scarcity of rare animals, plants, or endangered species trophies (like ivory and big cat skins) increases demand in illegal markets, attracting more buyers.

CORRUPTION:

- ➔ **Impact on Anti-Trafficking Efforts:** Corruption undermines efforts to stop wildlife trafficking, from bribery at inspection points to higher-level influence on permits and legal decisions.
- ➔ **Challenges in Prosecution:** Despite strong laws against corruption, prosecution of wildlife trafficking organisers under these laws is rare.

CULTURAL ROOTS OF POACHING:

- ➔ **Cultural Practices:** Poaching is not always for money; it can be a cultural practice. For example, in the Chinko reserve in the Central African Republic, some people see elephant hunting as part of their cultural identity, symbolizing bravery and manhood, passed down through generations.

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF WILDLIFE CRIME AND TRAFFICKING?

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

- ➔ **Species Overexploitation:** Wildlife crime harms biodiversity by overexploiting species, leading to population declines and extinction threats. This loss of species diversity disrupts ecosystem functions.
- ➔ **Ecological Impact:** Overexploitation causes long-term ecological issues like imbalanced sex ratios and slowed reproduction rates. Population reductions disrupt species interactions and essential ecological functions such as food chains and food webs.
- ➔ **Invasive Species:** Illegal wildlife trade can introduce non-native species to new environments, leading to invasive species that harm native ecosystems and natural resources.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HARMS:

- ➔ **Well-being and Livelihoods:** Wildlife crime impacts food, medicine, energy, and cultural values by undermining nature's benefits. A World Bank study estimated global economic losses from illegal wildlife trade at USD 1–2 trillion per year, mostly due to the loss of ecosystem services not priced by markets.
- ➔ **Private Sector Costs and Losses:** Wildlife crime increases costs and losses for businesses in the legal wildlife trade and related services. It reduces resource access, causes unfair competition, damages reputations, and incurs additional legality verification costs.
- ➔ **Health Risks:** Wildlife trade poses significant disease transmission risks to humans and animals and threatens natural ecosystems, livestock, and agricultural systems.
- ➔ **Harm to Environmental Defenders:** Wildlife rangers, police, and customs officials face harassment, violence from poachers, and even loss of life.

Governance Harms:

- ➔ **Undermining the Rule of Law:** Illegal wildlife trade weakens the rule of law and hampers natural resource management and criminal justice responses. Corruption facilitates this trade, compromising legislation and political stability. Money laundering is linked to wildlife crime, but financial investigations are limited.
- ➔ **Loss of Government Revenues:** Wildlife crime leads to significant government revenue losses in source countries by evading legal harvest fees, taxes, and tourism income.
- ➔ **Financial Costs of Enforcement:** Governments have increased spending on conservation, law enforcement, and criminal justice globally due to wildlife crimes.

What Measures Can be Taken to Effectively Reduce Wildlife Crime?

Banning Illegal Wildlife Products:

- ➔ This strategy aims to decrease demand by making it illegal to possess or trade goods made from illegally obtained wildlife.
- ➔ For instance, banning ivory products would discourage the killing of elephants for their tusks.

Strengthening Domestic Regulations:

- ➔ India's existing laws, like the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), Environment (Protection) Act (1986), and Biological Diversity Act (2002), require stricter enforcement and better implementation across different government levels.
- ➔ Penalties for breaking wildlife protection laws should be enforced effectively.

Effective Funding for Wildlife Protection:

- ➔ While funding exists, better allocation and management of resources are crucial. Funds should directly support wildlife protection agencies such as park rangers and anti-poaching units.
- ➔ Involving local communities in conservation efforts and offering them financial incentives can increase their involvement in preventing wildlife crime.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EMPOWERMENT:

- Raising public awareness about the consequences of wildlife trafficking is vital. Educating citizens about the value of wildlife and the impact of illegal products can reduce demand.
- This helps foster a sense of responsibility and encourages people to report suspicious activity to authorities.

SC LIMITS ED'S ARREST POWERS IN PMLA CASES

Why in News?

The Supreme Court recently ruled that once a special court takes note of a chargesheet filed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the Enforcement Directorate (ED) cannot make arrests.

This decision restricts the ED's authority to conduct arrests and highlights the importance of protecting personal liberty.



What Measures Can be Taken to Effectively Reduce Wildlife Crime?

PROVISIONS IN QUESTION:

- The Supreme Court's judgment arose from an appeal against the Enforcement Directorate (ED) concerning a Punjab and Haryana High Court decision that denied anticipatory bail.
- The case examined whether an accused could seek bail under the regular provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and whether such bail would also need to meet the conditions under Section 45 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
- The court also considered whether an accused, not arrested during the PMLA investigation, would have to meet the stringent PMLA bail conditions upon appearing before the court after being summoned or issued a warrant for non-appearance.

SC OBSERVATIONS:

Status of Accused Appearing on Summons:

If an accused appears before a designated special court as per a summons, they cannot be treated as in custody. Thus, they are not required to apply for bail under the strict conditions of the PMLA. The ED must separately apply for the custody of the accused after their court appearance, providing specific grounds necessitating custodial interrogation.

Nature of Bonds/Sureties: The special court can direct the accused to provide a surety/guarantee (bonds) under Section 88 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. However, this surety does not equate to granting bail and does not require satisfying the stringent conditions of Section 45 of the PMLA.

Graded Arrest Procedure: If the accused fails to appear despite summons, the special court can issue a bailable warrant initially. If the accused still does not appear, the court can then issue a non-bailable warrant for arrest without bail.

Arresting Non-Accused Parties: The ED can still arrest individuals not named as accused in the initial PMLA complaint. However, to do so, the ED must follow proper arrest procedures outlined in Section 19 of the PMLA.

What is PMLA?

About the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA):

- ➔ The PMLA was enacted to prevent money laundering and allow for the confiscation of property derived from such activities.
- ➔ It aims to combat money laundering linked to illegal activities like drug trafficking, smuggling, and terrorism financing.

Key Provisions of PMLA:

- ➔ **Offences and Penalties:** PMLA defines money laundering offences and imposes penalties, including rigorous imprisonment and fines. Money laundering involves converting illegally earned money into seemingly legal money.
- ➔ **Attachment and Confiscation of Property:** The Act permits the attachment and confiscation of property involved in money laundering, with an Adjudicating Authority overseeing these proceedings.
- ➔ **Reporting Requirements:** Certain entities, such as banks and financial institutions, must maintain transaction records and report suspicious transactions to the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU).
- ➔ **Appellate Tribunal:** Section 25 of PMLA establishes an Appellate Tribunal to hear appeals against orders from the Adjudicating Authority.

Recent Amendments Related to PMLA:

Prevention of Money-laundering (Restoration of Confiscated Property) Amendment Rules, 2019: New Rule 3A:

Allows the Special Court to publish notices in newspapers for claimants with legitimate interest in attached/seized/frozen property to establish their claims for restoration after charges are framed.

Prevention of Money Laundering (Maintenance of Records) Amendment Rules, 2023:

- ➔ **NGO Disclosure Requirements:** Revised regulations to expand disclosure requirements for NGOs by reporting entities like financial institutions, banks, or intermediaries.
- ➔ **Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs):** Clarified definition to align with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations, defining PEPs as individuals entrusted with prominent public functions by a foreign country, such as heads of state, senior politicians, high-ranking government, judicial or military officers, senior executives of state-owned corporations, and important political party officials.

CONCERNS REGARDING PMLA, 2002:

- ➔ **Broad Definition of Proceeds of Crime:** Debates over the broad interpretation of "proceeds of crime" include concerns about encompassing legal financial transactions. The law targets those involved in generating and laundering crime proceeds, even holding accountable those not directly involved in the crime but who participate in the laundering process.
- ➔ **Coverage of Numerous Offences:** The PMLA's schedule includes many offences unrelated to its original purpose of combating drug money laundering. The UN resolution that led to the law's enactment in India only mentioned laundering drug money, considered a serious economic crime threatening global economic stability and national sovereignty.
- ➔ **Arrest Without Written Communication of Grounds:** ED officers have violated Article 22(1) of the Constitution and Section 19(1) of PMLA by relying solely on verbal communication for arrests. The Supreme Court recently ordered the release of News Click founder Prabir Purkayastha, ruling his arrest under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) invalid and emphasizing that arrested individuals must be promptly informed of the grounds for their arrest.

Way Forward:

Incorporating a Clearer Definition of "Proceeds of Crime:

- ➔ **Need for Precision:** To prevent misuse, the term "proceeds of crime" in the PMLA should be clearly defined.
- ➔ **Specificity:** Specify types of crimes and the direct or indirect methods by which proceeds are obtained. This reduces arbitrary interpretation by authorities.

Revising the Burden of Proof:

- ➔ **Current Issue:** The existing framework places a heavy burden on the accused to prove the legitimacy of their assets.
- ➔ **Balanced Approach:** Revising this to ensure a fairer distribution of the burden of proof between the prosecution and defence could result in a more equitable legal process.
- ➔ **Best Practices:** Adopt practices from jurisdictions with a strong presumption of innocence.

Establishing Independent Oversight Mechanisms:

- ➔ **Preventing Overreach:** To avoid the overreach of law enforcement under the PMLA, independent oversight bodies should be established.
- ➔ **Role of Oversight Bodies:** These bodies would review and monitor enforcement actions to ensure they comply with legal standards and respect human rights.

Promoting International Cooperation and Compliance:

- ➔ **Global Challenge:** Given the international scope of money laundering, enhancing cooperation in enforcing PMLA provisions is vital.
- ➔ **Alignment with Standards:** Align India's PMLA with international standards set by bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and ensure compliance with their recommendations.

Incorporating technological advances:

- ➔ **Leveraging Technology:** Using technology can enhance the effectiveness of the PMLA.
- ➔ **Tools for Detection:** Implement artificial intelligence and machine learning tools to analyse financial transactions and identify suspicious patterns indicative of money laundering.

DIGITAL ARREST SCAMS

Why in News?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has warned about a rise in 'digital arrest' scams. In these scams, cybercriminals pretend to be government officials to steal money from people.

The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) is working with Microsoft to fight this online crime.



What are Digital Arrest Scams?

Cybercriminal impersonation

Scammers are pretending to be officials from government agencies like the police, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Narcotics Department, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and Enforcement Directorate.

Intimidation Tactics

Victims get calls accusing them of illegal activities, such as dealing with drugs or fake passports. Scammers might also claim a loved one is involved in criminal activities or accidents, demanding money to "resolve" the case.

Digital Confinement

Some victims are forced to stay on video calls with the scammers until they pay the demanded money.

Demands for Money

Criminals extort money by threatening to expose false legal cases they have fabricated.

Steps Being Taken to Combat These Scams

- 1. Blocking Fraudulent Accounts:** The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) has blocked over 1,000 Skype accounts linked to these scams. They are also helping to block SIM cards, mobile devices, and bank accounts used by the scammers.
- 2. Cross-Border Crime Syndicates:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has identified that these scams are run by international crime syndicates, making it part of a larger organized crime network.
- 3. Alerts and Awareness:** I4C is raising awareness through social media platforms like "cyberdost." If someone receives such a call, they should report it immediately to the cybercrime helpline or the "National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal" for help.

“National Human Rights Commission (NHRC),”

23/05/2024

Why in News?

Recently, the NHRC held a meeting with all seven national commissions to talk about how to protect the rights of vulnerable groups. They wanted to share good ideas and work together on plans.



Incorporating technological advances:

- ➔ **Leveraging Technology:** Using technology can enhance the effectiveness of the PMLA.
- ➔ **Tools for Detection:** Implement artificial intelligence and machine learning tools to analyse financial transactions and identify suspicious patterns indicative of money laundering.

The seven commissions are:

- ➔ National Commission for Women (NCW).
- ➔ National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC).
- ➔ National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).
- ➔ National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).
- ➔ National Commission for Minorities (NCM).
- ➔ National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).
- ➔ Office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities.

What are the Outcomes of the Joint Sitting of Human Rights Bodies?

Joint Strategies for Effective Implementation:

NHRC stressed the importance of all seven national commissions working together to create joint strategies for effectively implementing laws and schemes that protect human rights. They also emphasized learning from each other to ensure equality and dignity for SC-ST communities, women, and marginalized groups.

Mechanical Cleaning of Septic Tanks:

NHRC urged states and local bodies to mechanically clean septic tanks and follow the NHRC's advisory on this issue.

Collaboration for Research:

The commissions should collaborate on research to avoid duplicating efforts. NHRC and the National Commission for Women (NCW) highlighted the need for uniform state laws to ensure women's property rights.

Challenges in Education and Technology:

The Chairperson of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes discussed ensuring that new education policies and technologies benefit everyone equally. He noted that changing mindsets requires both legal measures and compassion. Delays in compensation under the SC and ST Act and the need to review victim compensation schemes were also mentioned.

Rights of children:

The Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) highlighted their proactive efforts in protecting children's rights, including monitoring portals and rehabilitating over one lakh orphaned children.

They issued guidelines and SOPs for child rights protection and emphasized enhanced compensation under the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and state intervention in private school child rights violations.

Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities:

The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities noted that as rights awareness among 'divyangjan' increases, so do related challenges, such as visually impaired individuals facing issues with captcha codes online.

Scope for Cooperation and Structured Approach:

There was an agreement on the need for enhanced cooperation among commissions and a structured approach to safeguarding rights. They emphasized the value of institutional interactions, collaborative advisories, and using the 'HRCNet portal' for better efficiency. HRCNet is an online portal that centralizes complaint handling for aggrieved citizens.

What is the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)?

About:

The commission ensures the protection of rights related to life, liberty, equality, and dignity of individuals, based on the Indian Constitution and international covenants enforceable by Indian courts.

Establishment:

- ➡ Established on 12th October 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Act (PHRA), 1993.
- ➡ Amended by the Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2006, and the Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2019.
- ➡ Created in line with the Paris Principles for promoting and protecting human rights.

Composition:

- ➡ Includes a chairperson, five full-time members, and seven deemed members.
- ➡ The chairperson is a former Chief Justice of India or a Supreme Court judge.

Appointment and Tenure:

- ➡ The chairperson and members are appointed by the President based on recommendations from a six-member committee.
- ➡ The committee includes the Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, leaders of the Opposition in both Houses of Parliament, and the Union Home Minister.
- ➡ They serve for a term of three years or until the age of 70.

Role and Function:

- ➡ The commission has the powers of a civil court for judicial proceedings.
- ➡ It can use central or state government officers or investigation agencies to investigate human rights violations.
- ➡ It can investigate incidents within one year of their occurrence.
- ➡ Its functions are mainly recommendatory.

What are the Shortcomings in Functioning of NHRC?

Non-Binding Nature of Recommendations:

The NHRC investigates human rights violations and makes recommendations, but it cannot force authorities to act. Its influence is mainly moral, not legal.

Inability to Punish Violators:

The NHRC cannot punish those who commit human rights abuses. Even when it identifies violators, it cannot impose penalties or provide direct relief to victims, which limits its effectiveness.

Limited Role in Armed Forces Cases:

The NHRC has limited jurisdiction over human rights violations by the armed forces. Many cases involving military personnel are outside its reach, reducing accountability in such instances.

Time Limitations in Case of Historical Human Rights Violations:

The NHRC cannot address violations reported more than a year after they occur. This rule prevents it from dealing with older or delayed cases effectively.

Resource Constraints:

The NHRC faces resource shortages, making it difficult to handle its high caseload, conduct investigations, and run public awareness campaigns efficiently. Many state human rights commissions also suffer from a lack of staff and leadership.

Lack of Independence:

The NHRC's members are appointed by the government, which challenges its independence and can affect its credibility.

Need for Proactive Interventions:

The NHRC typically responds to complaints rather than taking preventive measures. Adopting a more proactive approach could improve its effectiveness.

What are the Steps Need to be Taken to Strengthen Working of NHRC?

Improve the Scope and Effectiveness:

Broaden the NHRC's mandate to address new human rights challenges like artificial intelligence, deep fakes, and climate change.

Granting Enforcement Powers:

Give the NHRC punitive powers to enforce its recommendations, enhancing accountability and compliance.

Composition Reforms:

Diversify the commission by appointing members from civil society, activists, and experts to provide a holistic perspective.

Developing an Independent Cadre:

Address resource constraints by creating an independent cadre of staff with expertise in human rights issues.

Strengthening State Human Rights Commissions:

Support state human rights commissions through collaboration, capacity building, and knowledge sharing.

Advocacy and Public Awareness:

Shift from reactive to proactive by engaging in advocacy, awareness campaigns, and education to empower citizens about their rights.

International Cooperation:

Collaborate with international human rights bodies to learn from their experiences and adopt effective strategies.

DISENFRANCHISEMENT OF UNDER TRIALS IN INDIA

Why in News?

As the 18th Lok Sabha elections take place, over four lakh undertrials in prisons across the country are unable to vote due to a broad legal ban.

The Representation of the People Act of 1951 prohibits anyone in prison, whether convicted or awaiting trial, from voting.

Why are Undertrials Barred from Voting?

Section 62(5) of the Representation of the People Act:

- ➔ **Voting Ban for Prisoners:** Individuals confined in prison, whether under a sentence or in police custody, cannot vote in any election.
- ➔ **Retention on Electoral Roll:** Despite being prohibited from voting, individuals on the electoral roll remain electors.
- ➔ **Exception for Preventive Detention:** This voting prohibition does not apply to individuals under preventive detention.
- ➔ **Supreme Court Ruling:** The Supreme Court has upheld this provision, citing resource constraints and the need to exclude individuals with criminal backgrounds from the election process.
- ➔ **Right to Vote:** While the Supreme Court acknowledges free and fair elections as part of the 'basic structure' of the Constitution, it considers the right to vote (Article 326) and be elected statutory rather than fundamental rights, subject to regulations like the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- ➔ **Article 326:** This article grants adult suffrage to citizens over 18, unless disqualified due to non-residence, unsound mind, crime, or corrupt practices.

Bar Against Contesting Elections Only After Conviction:

- ➡ **Section 8 of the RPA, 1951:** Disqualifies individuals from contesting elections only after conviction for certain criminal offenses, not just on charges.
- ➡ **Supreme Court Stance:** The Supreme Court has rejected calls to disqualify individuals with criminal charges or false affidavits, stating that only the legislature can amend the RPA, 1951.

Exceptions to Disqualification:

- ➡ **Election Commission Authority:** The Election Commission of India can remove or reduce the disqualification period in certain situations.
- ➡ **Appeals:** A disqualified MP or MLA can still contest elections if their conviction is stayed by a higher court.

Way Forward

As electoral systems evolve and inclusivity becomes a priority, it's crucial to consider alternative methods for facilitating political participation among incarcerated individuals, such as mobile voting units or absentee ballots.

Recognizing the fundamental significance of voting rights for prisoners and upholding the aspiration of rehabilitation and reintegration, the focus should be on not further marginalizing prison populations but providing them with opportunities to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes.

Differentiating Convicts and Undertrials in Electoral Rights:

- ➡ **Undertrials:** These individuals have not been convicted and are presumed innocent until proven guilty. They should retain their voting rights to avoid further marginalization and to uphold the principle of innocence until proven guilty.
- ➡ **Convicts:** Those who have been convicted of crimes may have certain restrictions, but a more nuanced approach could be considered, such as allowing voting rights for non-violent offenders or those serving short-term sentences.

Incorporating Voting as a Fundamental Duty and Right:

- ➡ **Recommendation of the Swaran Singh Committee (1976):** This committee suggested making voting a Fundamental Duty in the Indian Constitution.
- ➡ **Making Voting a Fundamental Right:** Elevating the right to vote to a fundamental right would emphasize its importance and ensure greater protection and accessibility for all citizens, including those who are incarcerated.

Incorporating these changes would ensure a more inclusive and fair electoral process, recognizing the rights and potential for rehabilitation of all individuals, regardless of their incarceration status.

19th session of United nations forum on forest

Why in News?

Recently, India participated in the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) at the UN Headquarters in New York.

India highlighted its significant advancements in forest conservation and sustainable forest management, which have resulted in a consistent increase in forest cover over the past fifteen years.

What were the Key Takeaways from UNFF19?

India presented its revised National Forest Policy at the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) at the UN Headquarters in New York. The policy emphasizes forest fire prevention and management through recommendations and technological solutions.

Key Highlights from India's Presentation:

- ➔ **Forest Fire Management:** India addressed the global issue, noting that around 100 million hectares of forest, or 3% of the world's total forest area, are affected by fires each year according to UNFF.
- ➔ **Global Fire Management Hub:** India proposed operationalizing this hub, a collaborative effort by the UNEP and the FAO, to share knowledge and experiences in mitigating forest fires.
- ➔ **Model Forests Act:** India suggested establishing universally accepted standards for forest certification programs to ensure consistent and responsible forest management practices worldwide.

Forum Activities:

- ➔ **Review of the UN's Strategic Plan for Forests (2017-2030):** The forum reviewed progress in achieving global forest goals, which include enhancing the economic, social, and environmental benefits of forests and securing financial resources.
- ➔ **UN Report on "Climatisation" of Forests:** The report raised concerns about the market-oriented approaches for carbon sequestration, which reduce forests' ecological and social values to mere carbon sinks.

Other Countries' Contributions:

- ➔ **Indonesia's Strategy:** Indonesia presented its Forest and Other Land Use Net Sink 2030 strategy.
- ➔ **Malaysia's Commitment:** Malaysia committed to maintaining at least 50% of its territory under tree cover.

What were India's Highlighted Initiatives in Forest Management at UNFF19?

India highlighted its success in using technology to manage forest fires at the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) in New York. Key technological examples include:

- ➔ **Real-Time Fire Monitoring:** Utilizing remote sensing for immediate detection and monitoring of forest fires.
- ➔ **Online Fire Reporting:** Implementing web portals for quick and efficient reporting of fire incidents.
- ➔ **Ecological Restoration Methods:** Applying ecological techniques for forest restoration after fires.

Forest Fire Exposure in India:

- ➡ Occasional Fires: 54.40% of forests.
- ➡ Moderately Frequent Fires:** 7.49% of forests.
- ➡ High Incidence Levels: 2.40% of forests.

Global Ranking and Conservation Efforts:

- ➡ **Forest Area Gain:** India ranks third globally in the net gain of average annual forest area between 2010 and 2020.
- ➡ **Project Milestones:** India celebrated 50 years of Project Tiger and 30 years of Project Elephant, showcasing its dedication to species conservation and habitat protection.

New Initiatives:

Green Credit Program: This initiative incentivizes tree plantation and the restoration of degraded forest lands, supporting India's climate action efforts.

Hosting International Events:

In 2023, India hosted a country-led initiative under UNFF in Dehradun. The event, attended by representatives from 40 countries and 20 international organizations, focused on forest fire management and forest certification.

What are the Key Facts About the Indian Forest Policy?

The National Forest Policy, 1894 (Colonial Focus):

Timber Production and Custodial Management:The policy prioritized the production of timber and the custodial management of forests.

Forest Classification: Introduced forest classification with a focus on protecting commercially valuable areas.

The National Forest Policy, 1952 (National Needs)

National Priorities:The policy shifted focus to national priorities, including land-use management and environmental protection.

Resource Security: Emphasized securing resources like timber, pasture, and fuelwood for national development.

The National Forest Policy, 1988 (Ecological Security):

Environmental Stability: Prioritized environmental stability, biodiversity conservation, and soil and water security.

Afforestation and Social Forestry: Advocated for large-scale afforestation and social forestry programs.

Draft National Forest Policy, 2018 (Contemporary Challenges):

Modern Issues: Proposed revisions to address contemporary issues such as climate change and human-wildlife conflict.

Climate Change Mitigation: Focused on mitigating climate change effects and promoting public-private partnerships for forest restoration.

“ CONCLUSION:

India's participation at UNFF19 highlighted its achievements in forest conservation and sustainable management. India proposed a comprehensive national forest policy that incorporates technological solutions and advocated for international collaboration through a knowledge-sharing platform.

While the High-Level Declaration is still being discussed, UNFF19 underscored important strides towards meeting global forest goals. ”

“Inter-Services Organisations Act”

24/05/2024

Why in News?

The government recently introduced the Inter-Services Organisations (ISOs) Act, allowing the Commander-in-Chief or Officer-in-Command to manage personnel from all military branches, improving operations and teamwork.

What are the Key Features of the Inter-Services Organisations (ISOs) Act?

Background:

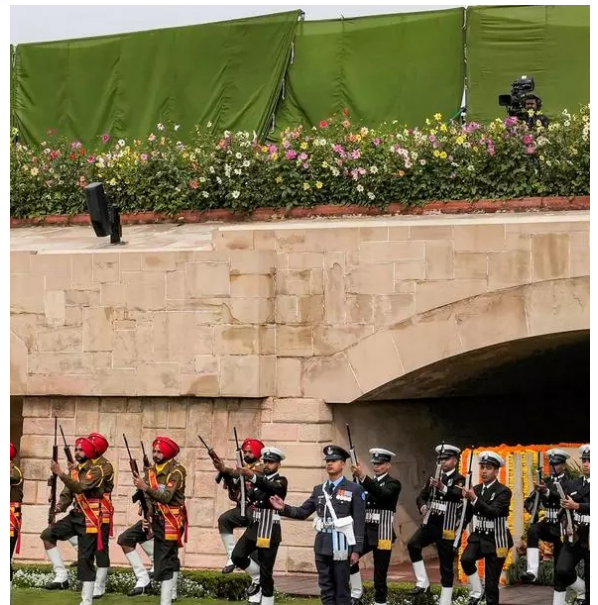
- ➔ The Armed Forces currently operate under separate Service Acts: The Army Act (1950), the Navy Act (1957), and the Air Force Act (1950).
- ➔ These distinct acts can cause challenges in maintaining uniform discipline, coordination, and efficient proceedings across inter-service establishments.
- ➔ The ISO Act does not change existing service acts, rules, or regulations.

Features of the ISO Act: Empowering ISO Leadership:

- ➔ Grants Commanders-in-Chief and Officers-in-Command of ISOs disciplinary and administrative control over service personnel from any branch (Army, Navy, Air Force).
- ➔ Simplifies command structure and ensures efficient decision-making within ISOs.

Constituting and Classifying ISOs:

- ➔ Formally recognizes existing ISOs like the Andaman and Nicobar Command, Defence Space Agency, and National Defence Academy.
- ➔ Allows the central government to establish ISOs with personnel from at least two of the three services (Army, Navy, Air Force).
- ➔ ISOs are commanded by an Officer-in-Command or a Commander-in-Chief for Joint Services Commands (tri-service).



Applicability and Qualifications:

- ➔ Can extend to other centrally controlled forces beyond the Army, Navy, and Air Force.
- ➔ Specifies eligibility criteria for Commanders-in-Chief and Officers-in-Command, requiring high-ranking officers from each service.

Control and Commanding Officer:

- ➔ The central government has ultimate authority over ISOs, issuing directives related to national security, administration, and public interest.
- ➔ Establishes the role of Commanding Officer, responsible for specific units, ships, or establishments within an ISO, with authority to initiate disciplinary or administrative actions.

What is the Significance of Integration of Armed Forces?

Enhanced Operational Effectiveness:

Better Coordination and Understanding: Joint planning and training improve collaboration between services, crucial for modern warfare. The ISOs Act, 2024 empowers ISO leadership to execute a unified command.

Faster Decision-Making:

Streamlined Command Structures: Integrated units allow for quicker decision-making on the battlefield. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), established in 2019, acts as a single-point military advisor to the government, enhancing coordination in defence planning and procurement.

Optimum Resource Utilisation:

Reduced Duplication and Optimised Allocation: Integration reduces redundant efforts and optimizes resource use across all services. Integrated theatre commands streamline planning, logistics, and operations.

“ CONCLUSION

The integration of the Indian armed forces has been a long-term vision, and past steps indicate progress in the right direction. Additionally, incorporating modern warfare systems like China's Information Support Force, Cyberspace Force, or the USA's Space Force can significantly enhance India's defense capabilities to meet modern warfare needs and challenges.”



Sariska Tiger Reserve

Why in News?

Recently, the Supreme Court of India clarified that protected areas include not only national parks and wildlife sanctuaries but also critical tiger habitats, such as tiger reserves.

This clarification relates to its earlier 2023 order stating that mining is not permissible within national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and within 1 km of their boundaries. The case in question concerns the buffer zone created to protect the Sariska Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan.

What are the Key Facts About the Sariska Tiger Reserve?

About Sariska Tiger Reserve:

Location: Situated in the Aravali hills, part of Alwar District, Rajasthan.

History: Declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1955 and a tiger reserve in 1978 under India's Project Tiger.

Feature: Includes ruins of temples, forts, pavilions, and a palace. Notable landmarks include Kankarwadi Fort, where Mughal emperor Aurangzeb imprisoned his brother Dara Shikoh, and a famous temple of Lord Hanuman at Pandupole, linked to the Pandavas.

Flora and Fauna:

Landscape: Characterized by rocky terrains, arid scrub-thorn forests, grasslands, cliffs, and semi-deciduous forests.

Vegetation: Dominated by dhok trees, salar, kadaya, gol, ber, banyan, gugal, bamboo, kair, among others.

Wildlife: Home to Royal Bengal Tigers, leopards, sambhar, chital, nilgai, four-horned antelope, wild boar, hyenas, and jungle cats.

Other Protected Areas in Rajasthan:

- ➡ Desert National Park, Jaisalmer
- ➡ Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur
- ➡ Ranthambore National Park
- ➡ Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary, Udaipur
- ➡ National Chambal Sanctuary (tri-junction of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh)
- ➡ RamgarhVishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary (Rajasthan's 4th Tiger reserve)

What are Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs)?

About:

National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016): This plan required state governments to declare land within 10 km of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries as Eco-Fragile Zones or Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) under the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986.

Activities Around ESZs:

- ➔ **Prohibited Activities:** Commercial mining, sawmills, polluting industries, major hydroelectric projects, and commercial wood use.
- ➔ **Regulated Activities:** Tree cutting, establishment of resorts, commercial use of natural water, erection of electrical cables, drastic changes in agriculture, and road widening.
- ➔ **Permitted Activities:** Existing agricultural or horticultural practices, rainwater harvesting, organic farming, and use of renewable energy sources.

Significance of ESZs:

- ➔ **Buffer Zones:** ESZs act as buffers around protected areas, regulating activities to minimize the negative impacts of development and human intervention.
- ➔ **In-Situ Conservation:** They aid in the conservation of species like the One-horned Rhino in Kaziranga National Park, Assam.
- ➔ **Wildlife Corridors:** ESZs help maintain wildlife corridors and reduce man-animal conflicts by preventing wild animals from entering human settlements.
- ➔ **Fragile Ecosystem:** Many ESZs include wetlands, mangroves, and reefs, crucial for biodiversity. Regulating activities in these areas helps preserve their ecological functions.

Indian Manufacturing Needs Product Sophistication

Why in News?

Recently, the finance minister emphasized that the Indian manufacturing sector should focus on developing more sophisticated products. The government is prepared to provide policy support to help achieve this goal.

What is the Status of India's Manufacturing Sector?

The Importance of the Manufacturing Sector in India:

- ➔ Contributes 17% of India's GDP.
- ➔ Employs over 27.3 million workers.
- ➔ Aims to increase its contribution to 25% of GDP by 2025 (Make in India goal).
- ➔ Key sectors: automotive, engineering, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and consumer durables.

Recent Performance:

- ➔ Manufacturing exports hit a record high of USD 447.46 billion in FY23, a 6.03% increase from Fy22.
- ➔ Key industrial sectors saw a slowdown in January 2024, with growth at 3.6%, down from 4.9% in December 2023 and 9.7% in January 2023.
- ➔ Index of Industrial Production (IIP) for April-October 2023 was 143.5, reflecting 43.5% growth from the base year (2011-12).
- ➔ Capacity utilisation rose to 68.3% in Q2 (2021-22) from 60.0% in the previous quarter.

Sectoral Growth and Investment:

- ➔ Increased FDI inflows in sectors like Drugs and Pharmaceuticals (+46%), Food Processing Industries (+26%), and Medical Appliances (+91%).
- ➔ Employment in the sector grew from 57 million (2017-18) to 62.4 million (2019-20).
- ➔ Despite COVID-19 disruptions, the manufacturing sector showed positive Gross Value Addition (GVA).

Opportunities for the Manufacturing Sector:

1. Broad Domestic Market and Demand:

- ➔ Strong demand for goods domestically and internationally.
- ➔ Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) in May 2024 was 58.8, indicating expansion.

2. Sectoral Advantage:

- ➔ Significant growth in chemicals, pharmaceuticals, automotive, electronics, industrial machinery, and textiles.
- ➔ Pharmaceutical manufacturing costs are 30%-35% lower than in the US and Europe.

3. Global Market Outreach:

- ➔ Shift in Global Value Chains (GVC) from Europe to Asia.
- ➔ Foreign value-added (FVA) in India's domestic demand from Global South partners increased from 27% in 2005 to 45% in 2015.

4. Rise of MSMEs:

- ➔ MSMEs contribute about 30% to GDP and nearly 45% of total exports.

5. Robust Demand:

- ➔ Rising demand for Indian manufacturing products, both domestically and internationally.
- ➔ The sector has the potential to reach USD 1 trillion by 2025.

6. Competitive Advantage:

- ➔ Growth driven by increased production capacity, cost advantages, supportive government policies, and private investment.
- ➔ Sets the stage for sustained economic growth.

What are the Challenges to the Manufacturing Sector in India?

1. Reliance on Outdated Technology and Inadequate Infrastructure:

- ➔ Limits global competitiveness and ability to meet international quality standards.

2. Shortage of Skilled Workforce:

- ➔ Only 24% of India's workforce has the skills needed for complex manufacturing jobs, compared to 52% in the US and 96% in South Korea (World Bank).

3. High Input Costs:

- ➔ Logistics costs in India are 14% higher than the global average, reducing overall competitiveness (RBI, 2022).

4. Complex Regulatory Environment:

- ➔ Deters businesses from setting up manufacturing units in India.
- ➔ Land acquisition is complex; the Land Titling Act proposed by NITI Aayog is yet to be passed.

5. Competition from China and Import Dependence:

- ➔ In 2023-24, China accounted for almost 42% of India's textiles and clothing imports, 40% of machinery, and 38.4% of electronics imports.
- ➔ China leads global manufacturing, with nearly 30% of global output in 2022 (WTO).

Way Forward

Need for Industry 4.0 in Indian Manufacturing:

- ➔ Reports suggest that Industry 4.0 technologies could help the manufacturing sector achieve a 25% share in GDP.
- ➔ Indian manufacturers are increasingly investing in digital transformation, allocating 35% of their operating budgets towards technology, with potential for further increase.

Investment in Infrastructure:

Improving infrastructure standards and accessibility, along with reducing logistics costs, can attract increased investment and business interest in manufacturing.

Promoting Export-Oriented Manufacturing:

- ➔ Encouraging the development of export-oriented manufacturing can open new markets and enhance competitiveness.
- ➔ Support for entering new markets and policies incentivizing export-oriented manufacturing can be beneficial.

Financial Assistance:

- ➔ Many MSMEs struggle to access credit for export-related activities. Enhanced access to finance can support their growth in the manufacturing sector.

Enabling Regulations:

- ➔ Simplifying regulations and making them more efficient can lighten the regulatory burden on businesses and promote increased investment.

Emphasis on Skill Development:

- ➔ Increasing availability of training and skill development programs can address the shortage of skilled labor in manufacturing, enhancing competitiveness.

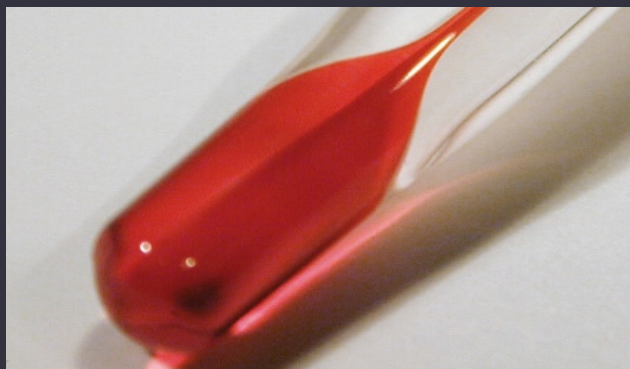
Example from Vietnam:

- ➔ Vietnam has become a global manufacturing hub due to its relatively large, well-educated, and skilled labor force.

Initiative to Eliminate Mercury-Containing Medical Devices

Why in News?

The governments of Albania, Burkina Faso, India, Montenegro, and Uganda have joined forces to address chemical pollution by initiating a USD 134-million project aimed at eliminating the use of mercury in medical devices.



What are the Key Highlights of the Initiative to Eliminate Mercury?

- ➔ The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) leads the initiative.
- ➔ The project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- ➔ The World Health Organization (WHO) executes the project.
- ➔ The goal is to reduce healthcare's impact on the environment and human health.
- ➔ It aims to improve the management of mercury waste and promote alternatives.
- ➔ Specifically, it targets the phase-out of mercury-containing thermometers and blood pressure measuring devices.
- ➔ The project plans to eliminate these devices at a rate of 20% per year.
- ➔ Over 1.8 million people are expected to benefit from this initiative.
- ➔ Mercury-containing medical devices are safe when intact but pose risks if broken or improperly disposed of.
- ➔ Inhalation of mercury vapours from broken devices can harm the lungs, kidneys, and nervous system.



Why in News?

Recently, the Election Commission of India (ECI) emphasized that star campaigners should set a good example and not disturb social harmony while enforcing the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). This has led to a debate about the ECI's power to address MCC violations, including whether it can deregister political parties.

What does the Derecognition of Political Parties Mean?

About Derecognition:

- ➔ **Derecognition:** Withdrawal of recognition by the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- ➔ **Consequences:** Parties become registered-unrecognised parties, can contest elections but lose recognized party privileges.
- ➔ **ECI's Power:** Can derecognize a party if it violates the Indian Constitution or the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Recognised Party:

- ➔ **Registered Party:** Known as a Registered Unrecognised Political Party (RUPP).
- ➔ **Recognition Criteria:** Based on winning a requisite number of seats or obtaining a required percentage of votes in general elections to Lok Sabha (LS) or State Assembly (SA), per the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968.
- ➔ **Current Stats:** Six national parties and sixty-one state parties recognized.

Privileges:

- ➔ Reserved symbol during elections.
- ➔ Forty-star campaigners.
- ➔ Free use of state-owned television and radio during polls since the 1998 Lok Sabha elections.

Grounds for Derecognition of a National Party:

Failure to Secure Votes:

- ➔ Less than 6% of total votes in general elections to LS or state legislative assembly.
- ➔ Fewer than 4 MPs elected in the last LS polls and no seat in LS from the same state.
- ➔ Seats Criteria**: Less than 2% of total LS seats from at least 3 states.

Votes Percentage: Less than 8% of total valid votes in a general election to LS from the state or to the State LA.

Non-Compliance:

- ➔ Failure to submit audited accounts on time.
- ➔ Failure to hold timely organizational elections.

What does the Deregistration of the Political Party Mean?

About Deregistration:

- ➔ **Deregistration:** Cancellation of a political party's registration.
- ➔ **ECI's Limitation:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) cannot deregister parties.
- ➔ **Consequences:** A deregistered party cannot contest elections.

Registered Parties:

Section 29A of the RP Act, 1951:

- ➔ **Requirements:** Political parties must submit their constitution to the ECI.
- ➔ **Declaration:** Must declare allegiance to the Constitution of India, socialism, secularism, democracy, and uphold India's sovereignty, unity, and integrity.

Legal Benefits for Registered Parties:

- ➔ Tax exemption for donations under Section 13A of the Income Tax Act, 1961.
- ➔ Common symbol for contesting general elections.
- ➔ Twenty 'star campaigners' during elections.
- ➔ Current Stats**: 2,790 active registered political parties in India

Grounds for Deregistration:

Conditions:

- ➔ Registration obtained by fraud.
- ➔ Declared illegal by the Central Government.
- ➔ Refusal to comply with the Indian Constitution after revising internal constitution.

ECI's Power:

- ➔ RP Act does not authorize ECI to deregister for non-contesting of elections, non-holding of inner-party elections, or non-submission of required returns.
- ➔ Supreme Court Ruling (2002): ECI lacks power to deregister parties under the RP Act.

Need for Deregistration of Political Parties:

- ➔ **Inactive Participation:** Less than one-third of Registered Unrecognized Political Parties (RUPPs) participate in elections.
- ➔ **Misuse Concerns:** Possible misuse of tax exemptions and donations for money laundering.
- ➔ **MCC Violations:** Recognized parties often breach the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), and ECI can only impose temporary campaign bans.
- ➔ **MCC Prohibitions:** Exploitation of caste and communal sentiments, voter bribery, and intimidation.
- ➔ **Ensuring Integrity:** Deregistration mechanisms can enhance electoral integrity and accountability by removing inactive entities.
- ➔ **Strengthening Democracy:** Prevents dilution of the electoral process by ensuring genuine participation and reducing inactive party proliferation.

Way Forward:

- ➔ **ECI Recommendations (2016):** Suggested amendments to empower ECI to deregister parties.
- ➔ **Law Commission Report (2015):** Recommended deregistration for parties not contesting elections for 10 consecutive years.
- ➔ **Inactive Party Identification (2016):** Effort to identify and discourage paper political parties.
- ➔ **Regular Exercise:** To weed out inactive parties regularly.
- ➔ **National Electoral Fund:** Proposed by former CEC T.S. Krishnamurthy to discourage inactive parties.
- ➔ **Law Commission Report (170th):** Recommended penalties for defaulting political parties and proposed ECI be given audit powers for greater transparency.

Naga Insurgency

Why in News?

- ➔ **NIA Action:** Recently, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) filed a charge sheet in a Guwahati court.
- ➔ **Accusation:** NIA accuses the "China-Myanmar module" of NSCN-IM of supporting cadres of two banned Meitei outfits to infiltrate India.
- ➔ **Allegations:** NSCN-IM's actions were aimed at exploiting ethnic unrest in Manipur, destabilising the state, and waging war against the Indian government.

What is the Status of Conflicts in Nagaland and Manipur?

- ➔ **Geographical Division:** Manipur is divided into valley and hill districts, with the valley dominated by the Meitei community.
- ➔ **Historical Context:** The Kangleipak kingdom of Manipur faced raids from Naga tribes, leading to the British bringing Kuki-Zomi groups from Burma to protect the valley.
- ➔ **Ethnic Tensions:** Tensions between the hill communities (Naga & Kuki) and the Meiteis have existed since the kingdom era, escalating with movements for independence.

Recent Conflict Causes:

- ➔ **Delimitation Issues:** Disputes arose during the 2020 delimitation process over inaccurate census figures and underrepresentation of tribal groups.
- ➔ **Influx of Migrants:** The Myanmar coup triggered a refugee crisis in Manipur's Churachandpur district, raising concerns among Meitei leaders about increased migrant numbers.
- ➔ **Violent Protests:** Violence began with the eviction of a Kuki village, labeled as "illegal settlements" violating Article 371C, triggering protests.
- ➔ **Militant Links:** The recent NIA charge sheet indicates links between NSCN-IM and Imphal valley-based insurgent groups during the ethnic crisis.
- ➔ **PLA Involvement:** The People's Liberation Army (PLA), one of the banned Meitei insurgent groups, remains active and is involved in the recent conflict, advocating for Manipur's secession through armed struggle.

Way Forward

- ➔ **Assessment of ST Status Criteria:** Evaluate the criteria for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for Meiteis based on recommendations from committees like the Lokur Committee (1965) and the Bhuria Commission (2002-2004).
- ➔ **Border Surveillance:** Increase surveillance along border regions to prevent infiltration of migrants from Myanmar, enhancing security measures.
- ➔ **Enhanced Economic and Diplomatic Relations:** Strengthen economic and diplomatic ties with neighbouring nations to promote regional stability and security.
- ➔ **Preservation of Identity and Peace Negotiations:** Preserve the identity of border region communities and engage in peace negotiations with insurgent groups to ensure stability and address grievances.
- ➔ **Review of AFSPA and Confidence-Building Measures:** Regularly review the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and implement confidence-building measures to mitigate tensions and build trust.
- ➔ **Community Involvement in Decision-Making:** Encourage local population involvement in decision-making processes to foster a sense of ownership and connection, promoting inclusivity and addressing community concerns.

World Bank Report on Global Water Crisis

Why in News?

The World Bank just released a new report called "Water for Shared Prosperity" at a big meeting about water in Bali, Indonesia. The report talks about how serious the world's water problem is and how it's affecting people and the economy all over the globe.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

Alarming Water Scarcity Statistics:

- ➡ Globally, many people lack safe drinking water and sanitation. As of 2022, 2.2 billion people don't have safe drinking water, and 3.5 billion lack safe sanitation.
- ➡ Eight out of ten people without these basic services live in rural areas.

Regional Disparities in Access to Water:

- ➡ Freshwater distribution is uneven. China and India, with 36% of the world's population, only have 11% of freshwater, while North America, with 5% of the population, has 52%.
- ➡ In Africa and Asia, some regions have plenty of water, but others, like the Sahel and Southeastern Africa, face water shortages.
- ➡ Low-income countries have seen a decline in access to safe drinking water since 2000, with an additional 197 million people lacking access.
- ➡ Marginalized groups, including women, rural communities, and ethnic minorities, face the greatest disparities.

Impact of Climate Change:

- ➡ Climate change makes water problems worse, causing more severe droughts and floods in developing countries.
- ➡ Over 800 million people are at risk of drought, and twice as many live in flood-prone areas.
- ➡ By 2100, meteorological drought is expected to affect 15% more land globally, rising to nearly 50% when considering temperature effects.

Human Capital and Economic Growth:

- ➡ Access to water and sanitation is vital for education and human development.
- ➡ Many jobs in low-income countries depend on water, but low rainfall can hurt economic growth.

Social Cohesion and Conflict:

- ➡ Proper water management builds trust and cooperation within communities, while mismanagement can lead to conflict.
- ➡ Good water management promotes peace and social unity by being fair and inclusive.

Recommended Interventions for Sustainable Water Management:

- ➔ We need to help the poorest communities cope with water risks.
- ➔ We must develop, manage, and share water resources better.
- ➔ Making sure everyone has fair access to water services is essential for reducing poverty and promoting prosperity for all.

What is the Extent of Water Scarcity in India?

India's Water Crisis:

- ➔ The "Composite Water Management Index" report by NITI Aayog reveals India's severe water crisis, affecting nearly 600 million people with high to extreme water stress.
- ➔ About 8 million urban children under 14 are at risk due to poor water supply.
- ➔ India ranks 120th out of 122 countries in water quality, with nearly 70% of water contaminated.
- ➔ Despite having 18% of the global population, India only possesses 4% of the world's freshwater, creating significant strain on water resources.

Strained Water Availability:

- ➔ Groundwater levels are declining due to excessive extraction, with 20.52 million wells in India. Many areas face critical or over-exploited groundwater levels.
- ➔ Rivers and reservoirs dry up before the monsoon due to seasonal changes and unsustainable water usage, disrupting water access, especially in summer.

Threat to Agriculture and Food Security:

- ➔ Agriculture, a major water user, is threatened by water scarcity. The potential demand-supply gap by 2030 could lead to food shortages and price hikes.
- ➔ Water scarcity may cause a 50% decline in agricultural productivity by 2050, impacting food security and economic growth.

Impact of Climate Change:

- ➔ Erratic monsoon rainfall and rising evaporation rates worsen water scarcity.
- ➔ Glacial melt in the Himalayas disrupts natural water flow patterns, affecting major rivers like the Ganges and Indus.
- ➔ Southern India, including states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, faces severe water crises due to low reservoir levels caused by El Niño events and delayed monsoons.

Way Forward

Micro-Irrigation Techniques:

- ➔ Drip irrigation and sprinklers can help save water in farming by delivering it directly to plants, reducing wastage.

Rainwater Harvesting:

- ➡ Collecting rainwater in tanks and structures offers a sustainable water source for homes and communities, especially during dry seasons.

Desalination:

- ➡ Treating seawater for use can provide a reliable water source in coastal areas, but energy consumption needs to be managed.

Wastewater Treatment:

- ➡ Treating wastewater for irrigation or non-drinking purposes eases the strain on freshwater sources, promoting sustainability.

Nature-Based Solutions:

- ➡ Investing in restoring wetlands and natural water bodies helps purify water and replenish groundwater reserves.

Water ATMs:

- ➡ Water ATMs" provide clean water in underserved areas via prepaid cards, promoting responsible water use with a pay-per-use system.

Climate-Smart Agriculture:

- ➡ Using drought-resistant crops and other climate-resilient farming practices can mitigate water scarcity's impact on agriculture.

Public Awareness Campaigns:

- ➡ Educating people about water conservation and responsible water use habits is vital for long-term solutions.