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Current Affairs - 05 October 2024

ELEPHANT CONSERVATION IN INDIA

- Elephants are not only iconic species in India but also an integral part of the country's ecological and cultural heritage.
- Designated as the **National Heritage Animal of India**, the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) holds immense significance.

Importance of Elephant Conservation:

- **Keystone Species:**
- **Tourism and Economy:**

Current Status of Elephant Populations in India:

- As of the **last reported census in 2017**, India is home to **approximately 27,312 wild elephants**, spread across four major landscapes:
- **North-Eastern India:** Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and other north-eastern states.
- **Eastern-Central India:** Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.
- **Southern India:** Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Northern India:** Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.
- The "**Status of Elephants in India 2022-23**" report, though delayed, is expected to reveal a decline in elephant numbers, especially in states like West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Kerala.
- Initial reports indicate that elephant populations in some of these states have dropped by **50-80%** due to habitat degradation and other anthropogenic pressures.

Challenges Facing Elephant Conservation:

- **Habitat Loss and Fragmentation:**
- **Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC):**
- **Poaching and Illegal Trade:**
- **Climate Change:**

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Government Initiatives for Elephant Conservation:

- **Project Elephant (1992):**
 - Launched in **1992**, **Project Elephant** is a flagship conservation initiative of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **Elephant Corridors:**
 - India has identified **101 elephant corridors** across the country that are critical for ensuring safe movement of elephants between habitats.
- **Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE):**
 - **MIKE** is an international program under the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**.
- **Gaj Yatra Campaign:**
 - The **Gaj Yatra** is a nationwide campaign launched by the **Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)** and MoEFCC to raise awareness about the importance of elephant conservation and protecting elephant corridors.

2022-23 elephant census report:

- **Key Findings:**
 - **Elephant populations** have sharply declined in the **east-central** and **southern regions**.
 - For example, elephant numbers in **West Bengal** have dropped by 84%, in **Jharkhand** by 64%, in **Odisha** by 54%, and in **Kerala** by 51%.
 - The report blames **development projects** like mining and infrastructure construction for threatening elephant habitats.
 - **Counting Methods:**
 - The census used improved counting methods, including **DNA profiling**.
 - However, experts argue that these new methods alone do not fully explain the large decline in elephant numbers.
 - Previous counting methods, like the "**total direct count**" and "**indirect dung count**", had limitations but are important for tracking trends over time.
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WHAT IS MOTOR NEURON DISEASE (MND)?



Motor Neuron Disease (MND) is a rare condition that progressively damages parts of the nervous system.

- This leads to muscle weakness, often with visible wasting.
- MND is also called **Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)** and **Lou Gehrig's disease**.
- **Cause:**
 - MND happens when specialist nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, called **motor neurones**, **stop working properly** and die prematurely. This is known as **neurodegeneration**.
 - Motor neurons instruct the muscles to move by passing on signals from the brain. They play a role in both conscious and automatic movements, such as swallowing and breathing.
 - As MND progresses, it can become more difficult to do some or all of these activities.
- Generally, MND is believed to be caused by a **combination of environmental, lifestyle, and genetic factors**.
- **20%** of cases are linked to **genetic causes**. Half of the genetic cases will be in people who have a family history of MND.
- It mainly affects people in their 60s and 70s, but it can affect adults of all ages.

Symptoms:

- The symptoms of MND start gradually over weeks and months.
- They **tend to appear on one side of the body first** and get progressively worse.
- MND often **begins with weakness of the muscles** in the **hands, feet, or voice**, although it can start in different areas of the body and **progress in different patterns** and at **different rates**.



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- People with MND become increasingly disabled.
 - **Average life expectancy after diagnosis is one to five years**, with 10 percent of people with MND living 10 years or more.
 - **Treatment:** There's **no cure for MND**, but treatment can help reduce the impact the symptoms have on your life.
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AKASHTEER SYSTEMS



Amid heightened global security concerns, the Indian Army has significantly enhanced its air defence capabilities with the acquisition of 100 Akashteer air defence systems.

- These are advanced **Air Defence Control and Reporting Systems (ADCRS)** which will serve as a critical asset in safeguarding the country **from aerial threats**, including missile and rocket attacks.
 - It is a sophisticated, **integrated control and reporting system** designed to neutralize enemy threats swiftly.
 - The system is capable of managing all aspects of air defence for the Army, integrating multiple radar systems, sensors, and communication technologies into a single operational framework.
 - It provides a **real-time battlefield view**, allowing military personnel to detect, track, and engage aerial threats such as incoming missiles or enemy aircraft.
 - It brings together various surveillance assets, **radar systems, and communication nodes**, enabling precise coordination of air defence operations.
 - It is **suitable for a wide range** of operational environments.
 - It is developed by **Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)**.
 - **Significance:** This enhances the Indian Army's ability to monitor airspace and deliver timely responses to any imminent threats.
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NEW GI TAGGED PRODUCTS



Recently, the Geographical Indications Registry in Chennai granted the GI tag to eight products from the Assam region, including traditional food items and several unique varieties of rice beer.

- **Unique varieties of rice beer**

- **‘Bodo Jou Gwran’**: It has the highest percentage of alcohol (about 16.11%) when compared with other varieties of rice beer made by the Bodo community.
- **‘Maibra Jou Bidwi’**: It is known locally as ‘Maibra Jwu Bidwi’ or ‘Maibra Zwu Bidwi’, is revered and served as a welcome drink by most Bodo tribes. It’s prepared by fermenting half-cooked rice (mairong) with less water and adding a little ‘amao’ (a potential source of yeast) to it.
- **‘Bodo Jou Gishi’**: It is also a traditionally fermented rice-based alcoholic beverage.

Traditional Food Products

- **Bodo Napham’**: It is an important and favourite **dish of fermented fish** prepared anaerobically in a tightly sealed container in a process that requires about two-three months.
- **Bodo Ondla’**: A rice powder curry flavoured with garlic, ginger, salt, and alkali.
- **Bodo Gwkha’**: It is locally also known as ‘Gwka Gwkhi’, it’s prepared during the Bwisagu festival.
- **‘Bodo Narzi’**: It is a semi-fermented **food prepared with jute leaves** (*Corchorus capsularis*), a rich source of Omega 3 fatty acids, vitamins and essential minerals, including calcium and magnesium.

Bodo Aronai’: It is a small, **beautiful cloth** (1.5-2.5 meters long and 0.5 meter wide)



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NATIONAL AGRICULTURE CODE



The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has begun the process of formulating a National Agriculture Code (NAC), on the lines of the existing National Building Code and National Electrical Code.

- It will cover the **entire agriculture cycle**, and will also contain a guidance note for future standardisation.
- The code will have **two parts**. The first will contain **general principles for all crops**, and the second will deal **with crop-specific standards** for the likes of paddy, wheat, oilseeds, and pulses.
- The NAC will **serve as a guide for farmers**, agriculture universities, and officials involved in the field.
- It will cover all agriculture processes and post-harvest operations, such as crop selection, land preparation, sowing/transplanting, irrigation/drainage, soil health management, plant health management, harvesting/threshing, primary processing, post-harvest, sustainability, and record maintenance.
- It will also **include standards for input management**, like the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, and weedicides, as well as standards for crop storage and traceability.
- Crucially, the NAC will cover all new and **emerging areas like natural farming and organic farming**, as well as the use of Internet-of-Things in the field of agriculture.

Objectives:

- Create an **implementable national code** covering recommendations for agriculture practices taking agroclimatic zones, crop type, socio-economic diversity of the country and all aspects of agrifood value chain into consideration;



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WHAT IS CERES?



Ceres is a **dwarf planet** and the largest object in the **asteroid belt** between **Mars and Jupiter**.

- It's the **only dwarf planet** located in the **inner solar system**.
- Ceres is named for the Roman goddess of corn and harvests. The word cereal comes from the same name.
- **Called an asteroid for many years**, Ceres is so much bigger and so different from the rocky neighbors that scientists **classified it as a dwarf planet in 2006**.

Features:

- With a radius of 296 miles (476 kilometers), Ceres is **1/13 the radius of Earth**.
- Ceres is **8 Astronomical Units (AU)** away from the Sun. One AU is the distance from the Sun to Earth.
- Ceres **takes 1,682 Earth days** to make one trip around the Sun.
- As Ceres orbits the Sun, it completes one rotation every 9 hours, making its day length one of the shortest in the solar system.

What is a Dwarf Planet?

- A dwarf planet is a **body, other than a natural satellite** (moon), that **orbits the Sun** and that is, for practical purposes, **smaller than the planet Mercury yet large enough for its own gravity to have rounded its shape** substantially.
 - The **International Astronomical Union (IAU)** adopted this category of solar system bodies in **August 2006**, designating **Pluto**, the even more remote object **Eris**, and the asteroid **Ceres** as the **first members of the category**.
 - In June 2008, the IAU created a new category, **plutoids**, within the dwarf planet category.
 - **Plutoids are dwarf planets that are farther from the Sun than Neptune.**
 - **All the dwarf planets except Ceres are plutoids.**
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INDIA'S 5 NEW CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

The Union Cabinet has extended the “classical language” tag to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali. Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia already enjoy this status.

Background – the concept of classical language

- In response to demands from various states, in 2004, the then government established the category of "classical languages" and set criteria for this status.
- Tamil became the first Indian language to receive this designation on October 12, 2004, due to its antiquity and rich literary tradition.

Latest criteria for classical languages

- Recently, in July 2024, the Linguistic Experts Committee (LEC) unanimously revised the criteria for classical status. The criteria now include:
 - **High antiquity of early texts**, and recorded history over a period of 1500- 2000 years;
 - A body of ancient literature/ texts, which is considered a heritage by generations of speakers;
 - Epigraphic and inscriptional evidence;
 - Knowledge texts, especially prose texts in addition to poetry; and

Addition of 5 new classical languages

- **Marathi**
 - The inclusion of Marathi as a classical language comes over a decade after the state government proposed it to the Centre in 2013.
 - Modern Marathi evolved from **Maharashtri Prakrit**, a dialect used in western India and the official language of the Satvahanas.
 - The earliest evidence of Maharashtri Prakrit is a 1st-century BCE stone inscription in Pune, and modern Marathi traces back to a 739 CE copper-plate inscription in Satara.
- **Bengali & Assamese**

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- The governments of West Bengal and Assam have also sought classical language status for Bengali and Assamese.
- Both languages originated from Magadhi Prakrit, the official language of the Magadha court in East India.
- Their emergence is debated, with estimates ranging from the 6th to 12th centuries.
- **Prakrit & Pali**
 - Prakrit refers to a group of closely-related Indo-Aryan languages spoken by the masses, in contrast to the elite language Sanskrit.
 - Historian A.L. Basham noted that by the Buddha's time, simpler Prakrit dialects were in use.
 - Pali, derived from Magadhi Prakrit, became the language of the Theravada Buddhist Canon, Tipitakas, and remains in use in Theravada Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

Significance of classical tag

- The designation of classical languages will have both national and international cultural and academic impacts.
 - The Ministry of Education has taken steps to promote these languages, establishing three Central Universities in 2020 for Sanskrit and setting up the Central Institute of Classical Tamil in 2008 to translate ancient texts and offer courses.
 - Centres of Excellence have also been created for Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Odia.
 - The newly designated classical languages will receive similar support.
 - The National Education Policy encourages the inclusion of classical languages in school curricula.
 - Collaborations between the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, and state governments will focus on research and knowledge-sharing.
 - Additionally, manuscripts in these languages will be digitised to enhance accessibility for scholars.
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