

NATIONAL PANCHAYAT AWARDS

The President of India recently presented the National Panchayat Awards and inaugurated the National Conference on Incentivization of Panchayats in New Delhi.



Why in news?

- The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj celebrating National Panchayat Awards Week from 17th – 21st April 2023 as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) 2.0 in the run-up to the National Panchayati Raj Day (24th April 2023).

About National Panchayat Awards:

- The award was given to the **best-performing Panchayats** by assessing their performance in the attainment of SDGs.
- These annual awards were **first instituted in 2011**.
- The Awardee Panchayats under various categories of National Panchayat Awards–2023 namely,
 - **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar(DDUPSVP)** for the performance under **individual LSDG themes**,
 - **Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar(NDSPSVP)** for the aggregate performance under **all 9 LSDG themes and green initiative-related Special Categories**.
 - Gram Urja Swaraj Vishesh Panchayat Puraskar.
 - Carbon Neutral Vishesh Panchayat Puraskar.
- During the event Union Minister of Rural Development launched the **GS NIRNAY**, National Initiative for Rural India to Navigate, InnovAte and Resolve PanchaYat decisions, a **mobile application**.
- It provides easy access to **critical information discussed during a Gram Sabha**.
- This would bring in more transparency and increase efficiency in the functioning of Panchayats, which play a vital role in decentralized participatory democracy.

CITY NATURE CHALLENGE

Over 30 Indian cities are set to participate in the City Nature Challenge, an app-based competition that records observations of nature.



About City Nature Challenge:

• **What it is?** Under this initiative, participants can use the **iNaturalist app** (available for Android and Apple phones) to **click and upload a photo** of natural flora and fauna.

- The app uses **Artificial Intelligence** to suggest the species name. Community members will collaborate to confirm these suggestions.
- GPS coordinates for the observation are picked up automatically from the image data.
- Once an observation is confirmed, it becomes **available to scientists and researchers** who can use this data to research different plant and animal species or determine the biodiversity in a region.
- The **Bombay Natural History Society, World Wide Fund for Nature-India,** and **The Naturalist School** have partnered to lead this event.
- The event was first organised in the U.S. in 2016 by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and San Francisco's California Academy of Sciences

Key Facts about the Bombay Natural History Society

- It is a **pan-India wildlife research organization**, that has been promoting the cause of nature conservation since 1883.
- Its vision is the conservation of nature, primarily biological diversity through action based on research, education and public awareness.
- It is the partner of **BirdLife International in India**. BirdLife International is a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity.
- It has been designated as a **Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (SIRO)** by the **Department of Science & Technology, Government of India**

What is a Scientific and Industrial Research Organization?

- It is a recognition Scheme which will bring together voluntary organizations operating in a **non-commercial sector** to **promote their activities** in the area of **scientific and industrial research, design and development of indigenous technology** to achieve technological self-reliance and **minimize foreign inputs**.

NAMAMI GANGE PROGRAMME: NATIONAL MISSION FOR CLEAN GANGA (NMCG) CLEARS PROJECTS WORTH ₹638 CRORE

Why in News?

- The Jal Shakti Ministry's National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) cleared eight projects worth ₹638 crore under the Namami Gange Programme.

About Namami Gange Programme:

- It is an **integrated conservation mission**, approved as 'Flagship Programme' by the Union Government in **2014** with budget outlay of Rs.20,000 Crores.
- It is administered by the **Ministry of Jal Shakti's** Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, to **accomplish the twin objectives of -**
 - Effective abatement of pollution,
 - Conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga.
- The program would be implemented by the **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)**, and its state counterpart organisations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
 - **NMCG is the implementation** wing of National Ganga Council (NGC), which replaced the National Ganga River Basin Authority.
 - NGC was created in 2016 under the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016, and is headed by the PM.
- In order to implement the programme, a **three-tier mechanism** has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of:
 - A high-level task force chaired by **Cabinet Secretary** assisted by NMCG at the national level,
 - State level committee chaired by **Chief Secretary** assisted by SPMG at the state level and
 - District level committee chaired by the **District Magistrate**.

- Its implementation has been divided into -
 - Entry-Level Activities (for immediate visible impact),
 - Medium-Term Activities (to be implemented within 5 years of time frame) and
 - Long-Term Activities (to be implemented within 10 years).

What are the Key Achievements under the Programme?

- **Creating Sewage Treatment Capacity:** 98 sewage projects have been completed in the states of UK, UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, etc.
- **Creating River-Front Development:** The projects for the construction, modernisation, and renovation of 267 Ghats/Crematoria and Kunds/Ponds have been initiated.
- **River Surface Cleaning:** River Surface cleaning for collection of floating solid waste from the surface of the Ghats and River and its disposal are afoot and pushed into service at 11 locations.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Cadre of volunteers (**Ganga Praharis**) have been developed and trained to support conservation actions in the field
- **Public Awareness:** Ganga Praharis and Ganga Doots are engaged in spreading awareness through planting trees, cleaning ghats, Ganga Aarti, painting and poems.
- **Industrial Effluent Monitoring:** Regulation and enforcement through regular and surprise inspections of Grossly Polluting Industries (GPIs) is carried out for compliance verification against stipulated environmental norms.
- **Deploying best available knowledge and resources across the world:** Clean Ganga has been a perennial attraction for many international countries that have expertise in river rejuvenation.

ISRO TO LAUNCH SINGAPOREAN EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITE TELEOS-

02

Why in News?

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch Singapore's TeLEOS-2 satellite on April 22, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.
- TeLEOS-2 is an **earth observation satellite**.

- The launch which will be carried out by the **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)**.

About Earth Observation Satellite (EOS):

- Earth observation satellite is also known as the Earth remote sensing satellite.
 - As the name suggests, these satellites observe the planet Earth from space.
- The first EOS or remote sensing satellite was **Sputnik 1**, the first artificial satellite sent to Earth's orbit by the Soviet Union in 1957.
 - It was used to study the topmost layer of Earth's atmosphere, the ionosphere.
- Most EOS **operate at about 500 to 600 kilometres from the surface of the Earth.**

Applications of EOS:

- These satellites can be used for various purposes, including environmental monitoring, cartography, navigation and more.
- Military of different countries also use the Earth observation satellite for spying and communication.
- The most common example of applications of EOS are the images of Earth, or the view available in a popular Earth discovery application called **Google Earth.**

About Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV):

- PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle) is an **indigenously-developed** expendable launch system of the ISRO.
- PSLV has a **four-stage system** comprising a combination of solid and liquid-fuelled rocket stages.
 - The first stage at the very bottom is solid fuelled having six strap-on solid rocket boosters wrapped around it.
 - Second stage is liquid fuelled whereas the third stage has a solid fuelled rocket motor.
 - At the fourth stage, the launcher uses a liquid propellant to boost in the outer space.
 - It is the **first Indian launch vehicle to be equipped with liquid stages.**
- Its first successful launch took place in October **1994**.
- It can take up to **1,750 kg of payload** to Sun-Synchronous Polar Orbits of 600 km altitude.

- During 1994-2017 period, the vehicle had launched 48 Indian satellites and 209 satellites for customers from abroad.
- Besides, the vehicle successfully launched two spacecraft – **Chandrayaan-1** in 2008 and **Mars Orbiter Spacecraft** in 2013 – that later travelled to Moon and Mars respectively.

DEMOCRATISING TIGER CONSERVATION

Context

- Scientists were happy that Project Tiger at fifty years was able to sustain the tiger population in most of the geographical locations where they existed at the beginning of the project.
- However, the 2023 Tiger Census (preliminary report) suggests that **for the first time, the hold seems to be slipping away**. Thus, **India needs to revisit its policies** concerning Tiger Conservation practices.

Background to India's Tiger conservation efforts

- **In 1972**, the **Wild Life Protection Act** was enacted to address **the decline in wildlife across the country**.
- To revive the tiger population in the country **Project Tiger** was launched on **1st April 1973** from the Jim Corbett National Park of Uttarakhand.
- **This project helped bring back the population of tigers which once reached the verge of extinction.**

Tiger Census 2022 (Interim)

- The number released by the PM is the **minimum estimate based on tigers photographed** during the survey.
- There is an indication of a **6% annual growth**. At this rate, the **expected number would be 25-30% above the previous 2018-19 estimate of 2967 tigers in the Tiger Census 2018**.

Issues with current conservation practices

- **Conservation amnesia/Shifting the baseline**
- Fifty years ago, India's alarming revelation that tiger numbers had dropped below 3,000 shocked the world.

- The 1,400+ tigers in 2006 and the claims of doubling the tiger population in 2019 led to celebration among wildlife managers.
- But despite strong political support, funds, and the legal framework provided, **the numbers do not reflect a great success at 50 years of tiger conservation.**
- **Dwindling tiger population in some areas**
 - India is losing tigers from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, the Eastern Ghats, and the North Eastern forests.
 - As a result, **the genetic diversity unique to these geographical locations will be lost** which will create issues **in maintaining long-term population viability and natural recovery.**
- **Misinterpretation of the concept of Umbrella Species**
 - The tiger was considered an Umbrella Species. Saving tigers meant saving the entire ecosystem.
 - But in the **absence of proper scientific oversight**, the **focus stayed on boosting tiger numbers rather than the whole ecosystem.**
- **Manipulation of ecosystem**
 - The most common interventions were to **manipulate ecosystems** to support high densities of the tiger's principal prey species.
 - The manipulation led to further degradation of wildlife ecosystems. **For example**, in most cases, this involved **improving habitat for the cheetal**, which resulted in the **“cheetalification” of tiger reserves.**
- **Exclusive conservation model**
 - Conservation efforts in India depend entirely on a **network of Protected Area**
 - This is an **exclusive conservation model** and suffers from a **“sarkaar” complex.**
 - Ordinary Indians, especially those living closest to wildlife have very little say in conservation.
 - Also, there is **no policy framework and incentive** for ordinary citizens to aid in conservation. As a result, conservation has not **reached beyond these Protected Areas (PAs).**
- **Restrictive Wildlife Protection Act**
 - The WLPA is a **restrictive law**, which describes in great detail what you can't do.
 - However, the law and associated policies have done very little to **enable conservation.**

WHEAT BLAST

Recently, scientists have warned that the fungus *Magnaporthe oryzae*, which is destroying South American wheat crops, could spread worldwide.



About Wheat Blast:

- **What it is?** It is a **fungal disease** in **tropical and subtropical wheat production regions** caused by ***Magnaporthe oryzae***.
- The fungus infects wild and cultivated grasses, most notably rice and wheat.
- It spreads **through infected seeds**, and **crop residues** as well as by spores that can travel long distances in the air.
- The crop fungi are known **to mutate** and adapt to new conditions

History of the outbreak of this disease

- Researchers first detected this pathogen in **Brazilian wheat crops** in the 1980s.
- Asia's first outbreak of this pathogenic wheat blast was reported in **Bangladesh in 2016**.
- Two years later, an outbreak of this fungus was detected in wheat crops in **Zambia**, which was the first time the pathogen was detected in **Africa**.

Key Facts about Wheat

- It is the second most important **cereal crop** in India after rice.
- It is a **Rabi crop** which requires a **cool growing season** and **bright sunshine** at the time of ripening.
- **Temperature:** It requires 10-15°C (at the time of Sowing) and 21-26°C during Ripening & Harvesting.
- **Rainfall:** Around 75-100 cm.
- **Soil required:** Well-drained **fertile loamy and clayey loamy**.

MARKETING AND LOGISTICS DEVELOPMENT FOR PROMOTION OF TRIBAL PRODUCTS FROM NORTH-EASTERN REGION (PTP-NER) SCHEME

Tribal Affairs Minister recently launched Marketing and Logistics Development for Promotion of Tribal Products from North-Eastern Region (PTP-NER) scheme in Manipur.



About PTP-NER Scheme:

- It has been introduced for the benefit of Scheduled Tribes of the North-Eastern Region.
- **Vision:** To strengthen livelihood opportunities for tribal artisans through increased efficiency in procurement, logistics and marketing of tribal products from North Eastern States.
- **Applicability:** It will apply to the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.
- As part of the scheme, it is planned to initiate the empanelment of tribal artisans from the North Eastern Region by organizing 68 Tribal Artisan Melas (TAMs) in various districts of the region.
- The TAMs will be organised in consultation and support of District Administration and other relevant organisations/ departments working in the field etc.
- The programme also includes regular Design & Skill Development training sessions tailored to the needs of the market for tribal recipients.
- **Implementing Partners:** North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEHHDC), India Post under the Department of Posts, and other North Eastern State Government Departments/ Agencies.
- **India Post will provide logistics support** in order to meet the scheme's goals.

CIVIL UNION AND CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE

Why in news?

- A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, began hearing a batch of petitions seeking legal recognition of same sex marriage.
- The Centre argued against the petitions and questioned the judiciary's right to confer legal recognition on the socio-legal institution of marriage.

- However, the apex court clarified that the hearing's scope would be limited to developing a notion of a **civil union** that finds legal recognition under the Special Marriage Act.

What is civil union?

- A **civil union** under the Special Marriage Act is a **legally recognized union** between two individuals, regardless of their caste, religion, or nationality.
 - It also refers to the legal status that allows same-sex couples specific rights and responsibilities normally conferred upon married couples.
- This type of union allows couples to have a formal, legally binding relationship without going through the traditional rituals and customs of a religious or cultural marriage ceremony.
- Although a civil union resembles a marriage and brings with it employment, inheritance, property, and parental rights, there are some differences between the two.

How is a civil union different from marriage?

- A civil union is a **legal agreement** between two individuals that provides them with some of the rights and benefits of a marriage, such as inheritance rights, tax benefits, and access to healthcare.
- However, it is different from a marriage in several ways:
 - Religious or cultural beliefs do not play a role in a civil union, whereas they often do in a marriage.
 - In some countries, civil unions are only available to same-sex couples, whereas marriage is available to both same-sex and opposite-sex couples.
 - A civil union may not be recognized by all states or countries, whereas a marriage is generally recognized worldwide.
 - There may be differences in the legal requirements and procedures for entering into a civil union versus a marriage. It may be different in terms of social and cultural significance and legal recognition.

Which other countries allow civil unions?

- The United States allows same sex unions.



CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK



- Before 2009, the year that Sweden legalised same sex marriages, LGBTQ couples there could apply for civil unions and enjoy different benefits.
 - From 1993, couples in Norway enjoyed the right to enter into civil unions, which gave way to a new law 15 years later.
 - This allowed such couples to marry, adopt and undergo state-sponsored artificial insemination.
 - Similarly, countries like Brazil, Uruguay, Andorra, and Chile had also recognised the right of same sex couples to enter into civil unions, even before they formally recognised their legal right to marriage.
-

