

CENTRE BEGINS SCHEME TO REHABILITATE BEGGARS

In News:

- Government is planning to undertake the task of identifying and rehabilitating persons engaged in begging as a step forward to implement the SMILE Scheme.
- It has prepared a list of 75 areas, including Delhi, Tirupati, Guwahati, Patna, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, where municipal corporations will take on this challenge.

About SMILE Project:

- The Union Government has formulated an umbrella scheme “SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise”.
- **Objective:** To provide welfare measures to the Transgender community and people engaged in the act of begging.
- The scheme strengthens and expands the reach of the rights that provide the targeted group with necessary legal protection and a promise to a secured life.
- It also focuses on the aspect of social security by emphasizing on providing medical care, education, occupational opportunities and shelter.
- This will be done with the support of State Governments/UTs/Local Urban Bodies, Voluntary Organizations, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and institutions and others.
- **Budget:** Rs 365 Crore (2021-22 to 2025-26)
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment

Sub-Schemes:

- SMILE scheme **includes two sub-schemes** -
 - ‘Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons’ and
 - ‘Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of persons engaged in the act of Begging’.

Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Person Scheme:

- The scheme has a provision to provide scholarships to the transgender students studying in IX and till post-graduation to enable them to complete their education.
- There is also a provision of setting up of Transgender Protection Cell to ensure timely registration, investigation and prosecution of offenses.
- Through Composite Medical Health it provides a comprehensive package in convergence with PM-JAY (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana) supporting Gender-Reaffirmation surgeries through selected hospitals.

Comprehensive Rehabilitation of persons engaged in the Act of Begging:

- It will focus on survey and identification, mobilisation, rescue/shelter home and comprehensive resettlement.
- Pilot projects have already been initiated on Comprehensive Rehabilitation in ten cities namely Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Indore, Lucknow, Mumbai, Nagpur, Patna and Ahmedabad.

News Summary:

- To mark 75 years of independence, Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Dr Virendra Kumar launched the “SMILE-75 Initiative”.
- Under the Smile-75 initiative, the identified municipal corporations will undertake comprehensive rehabilitation of persons engaged in the act of begging.
- According to the 2011 census, the total population of persons engaged in the act of Begging and vagrants is about 4.13 lakh.
 - Most of them struggle to gain access to basic needs of food, shelter and clothing, which drives them into a loop of poverty.

PM MODI VOWS TO PROTECT ELEPHANTS, INDIA GETS 32ND RESERVE



- On World Elephant Day (12 August), PM Modi said that India is home to about 60% of all Asian elephants and reaffirmed India's commitment to protecting the jumbos.

- Also, the Government of India declared the establishment of a new elephant reserve - **Agasthyamalai** (Tamil Nadu), and resolved to take a number of steps to address human-elephant conflict situations.

Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) in India:

Background:

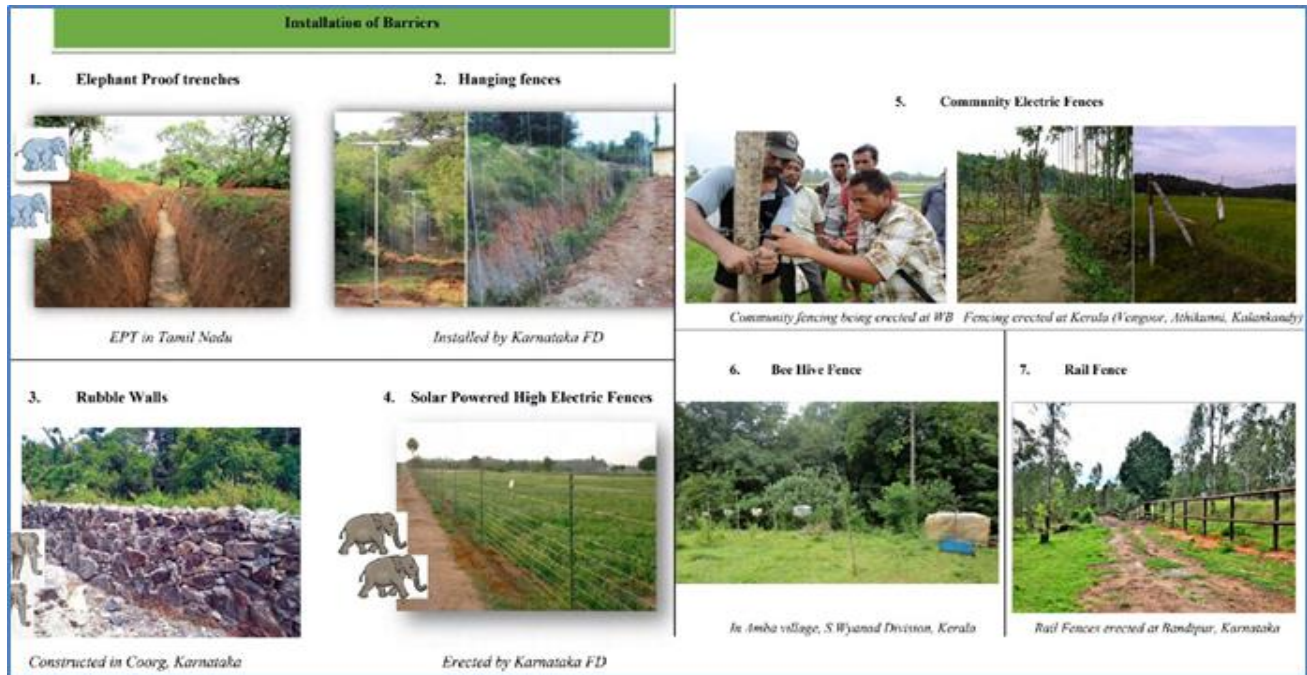
- According to the **2017 census by Project Elephant**, India has the largest number of wild Asian Elephants, estimated at 29,964 - about 60% of the species' global population.
- Friction between humans and elephants occurs mainly over space and is a major conservation concern across the country.
- This is because the human-elephant conflict kills approximately 500 people, 100 jumbos and crops and property worth millions are also damaged each year across the country.

Reasons:

- Natural habitat loss and fragmentation have resulted in the shortage of food and water.
- This has brought wild elephants closer to human settlements, prompting these conflicts.
- Many elephants are killed in retaliation as a result of conflict.

Steps taken to curb these conflicts:

- Active management interventions by state forest departments, participation of diverse stakeholders and sensitization and awareness generation among forest fringe communities.
- Though the majority of present prevention techniques are driven by site-specific factors that provide short-term solutions, many programs have effectively removed elephants from human habitations.
- Steps have also been taken to retain elephants in their natural habitats. This included: development and maintenance of perennial water holes, creation of fodder plantations, grassland management etc.
- It involves installation of barriers such as bio fences, chilly fences, concrete barriers, etc. Some other barriers are depicted in the following figure:



Announcements made by the govt at the World Elephant Day event held at Periyar National Park in Kerala:

- **Agasthyamalai will be the country's 32nd elephant reserve:**
 - Adding another protected area dedicated to conservation of elephants, Tamil Nadu (TN) gets its 5th Elephant Reserve at Agasthyamalai in Tirunelveli district.
 - This has brought the total area under elephant reserves in India to about 76,508 sq km across 14 states.
- **A fresh push to curb unnatural elephant deaths:**
 - At the 17th steering committee meeting of Project Elephant held at Periyar National Park in Kerala, the Union Environment Ministry announced -
 - To curb unnatural elephant deaths by taking up track casualties with the Railway Ministry.
 - To hold workshops across the country to address human-elephant conflict.
 - To set up a panel to look into the deaths of elephants in Odisha (by accidents with trains and electrocution) and Jharkhand and furnish a detailed report to the Centre.

- To develop separate management plans for elephants, which should be incorporated into the management plans of reserves, national parks, sanctuaries and territorial divisions' working plans.
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INDIA & NATO HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH: MEA

In News:

- As per the external affairs ministry, India and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) are in touch at different levels for quite some time now.

In Focus: NATO

- Formed in 1949 with the signing of the Washington Treaty, NATO is a security alliance of 30 countries from North America and Europe.
- NATO's fundamental goal is to safeguard the Allies' freedom and security by political and military means.
- It is a system of **collective defence** where independent member states agree for mutual defence in case of any attack by external party.
 - **Article 5** of the Washington Treaty states that an attack against one Ally is an attack against all.
- Headquarter - Brussels, Belgium.

Functions

- **Political:** NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- **Military:** NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations.

Should India join NATO?

Arguments in favour of joining

- **End of Cold War era**

- During the Cold War, India's refusal was premised on its non-alignment.
- This argument has little justification once the Cold War ended during 1989-91.
- **To combat terrorism**
 - India has seen many terrorist attacks – 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, Pulwama, Uri attack etc.
 - Hence, India should join NATO to combat terrorism on a long-term basis.
- **Members of NATO are well-established partners of India**
 - Indian membership would simply mean having regular contact with a military alliance, most of whose members are well-established partners of India.
 - India has military exchanges with many members of NATO — including the US, Britain, and France — in bilateral and minilateral formats.
 - Hence, collective engagement with NATO should not be problematic.
- **To contain China**
 - NATO is increasing its footprints in Indian Ocean Region where China is aggressive. NATO membership would help India in containing China.

Arguments against joining the alliance

- **Fear of antagonising Russia**
 - Russia has been a long-term ally for India. Even, during the current Ukraine war, India has not openly criticised Russia.
 - India still is heavily dependent on the Russian military equipment. Hence, joining NATO will lead to the deterioration of the relationship.
- **It would hurl India headlong into the Global War on Terror**
 - Joining NATO on full-term basis could become problematic for India as it would drag India into various conflicts around the globe.
 - Collective self-defence article would force India to contribute its troops to support NATO.
- **Sovereignty and Principle of Non-Alignment**
 - Joining the alliance would lead to the establishment of NATO bases on India's territory which may be considered an infringement of our sovereignty.

- So far, India has not joined any military bloc and remained true to the principle of non-alignment which forms the core of India's foreign policy.

News Summary

- India and NATO have kept in touch in Brussels at different levels for quite some time now.
- India held its first political dialogue with the organisation in Brussels on December 12, 2019.
- The second round was to be held in New Delhi in 2020, which was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- This is part of India's contacts with various stakeholders on various issues of mutual interests.

Significance of India's talks with NATO

- **NATO has been engaging both China and Pakistan** in bilateral dialogue.
- Given the role of Beijing and Islamabad in New Delhi's strategic imperatives, reaching out to NATO would add a key dimension to India's growing engagement with US and Europe.
- **Opportunity to know each other's perspective on various issues**
- It would provide India an opportunity to bring about a balance in NATO's perceptions about the situation in regions and issues of concerns to India.
- g., after first dialogue, India felt there was a convergence in the perspectives of both India and NATO on China, terrorism, and Afghanistan, including Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.
- Similarly, in its first round of talks with NATO, New Delhi realised it did not share a common ground with the grouping on Russia and the Taliban.

Conclusion

- India needs to open a strategic dialogue with NATO and work towards areas of common security concern on a case-by-case basis.
- In this context, a pragmatic engagement with NATO countries must be an important part of India's foreign policy.
- However, it must refrain from becoming a formal member of NATO.

WORLD SANSKRIT DIWAS

On the auspicious occasion of Shraavana Poornima occurs the World Sanskrit Diwas.



About:

- This year it falls on August 12, 2022.
 - The mother of all languages, Sanskrit, is one of the oldest languages in the world.
 - It seems to be the first spoken language in ancient India.
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AYUSH GRID PROJECT

An MoU was signed between Ministry of Ayush and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for providing technical support to Ministry of Ayush for digitalisation of Ayush Sector under the Ayush Grid project for a period of 3 years.



About:

- The Ayush Grid project was initiated by the Ministry in 2018 for creating a comprehensive IT backbone for the entire sector.
 - Digitalization of the entire Ayush Sector will lead to its transformation in fields of health care delivery at all levels, including research, education, various health programmes and drug regulations.
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