

MAKING SENSE OF THE 'FREEBIES' ISSUE

Context

- The Supreme Court recently asked the Centre to seek the views of the Finance Commission if revenue allocation to States can account for freebies.
- The Bench of the Supreme Court was hearing a case from a petitioner who sought that the Election Commission of India (ECI) should prevent state and national political parties from promising such “freebies” especially given the fiscal implications of such promises.
- In a written response, the EC said that it cannot regulate state policies and decisions. Such an action without enabling provisions in the law would be an overreach of its powers.

About Freebies

- **Definition:** Freebies are the things that are promised by the political parties in their manifestos of the election to provide for free to the people.
- **Examples:** For instance, free electricity/water supply, loan waivers, monthly allowance to unemployed, daily wage workers and women as well as gadgets like laptops, smartphones etc.

Demonstration of positive outcomes of such schemes

- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):** The world’s largest food security programme by distributing free foodgrain, through the PMGKAY to around 80 crore ration cardholders kept many **away from** the brink of **starvation** during the novel coronavirus **pandemic**.
- **PDS:** Subsidised foodgrain distributed under the PDS not only contribute to ensuring basic **food security** but also act as an **implicit income transfer** allowing the poor to afford commodities that they otherwise could not.
- **Linkages:** The PDS allows foodgrain to be available for cheap for consumers while assuring remunerative prices to farmers through minimum support prices (MSPs).
- **Mid-Day Meal scheme:** The mid-day meals in schools have been proven to contribute to increased enrolment and retention in schools and addressing classroom hunger.

- **Social security:** Other schemes such as old age, single women and disabled pensions, community kitchens in urban areas, free uniforms and textbooks for children in government schools, and free health-care services play a critical role in providing social security and access to basic entitlements in our country.

Conclusion

Undermining the importance of the state interventions by calling them ‘freebies’ exposes the elitism in our society, where the poor are seen as being unproductive and dependent on charity. The lacunae in the welfare programme needs to be fixed by putting in place mechanisms for greater accountability and grievance redressal etc. Also, building public pressure towards making welfare delivery an electoral issue is the need of the hour.

LOK SABHA PASSES BILL TO IMPLEMENT GLOBAL NORMS ON ENDANGERED SPECIES

In News:

- Recently, the Lok Sabha passed the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021.
- The bill seeks to implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES):

- Also known as the Washington Convention, CITES is an international agreement between governments to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species.
 - CITES entered into force on 1 July 1975.
 - Its secretariat is situated at Geneva, Switzerland.
 - With 184 Parties today (India since 1976), CITES is one of the conservation treaties with the largest number of members.
 - Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not replace national legislation.

- Rather, it establishes a framework (on which domestic law of each Party must be enacted) that must be followed by each Party.
- Under CITES, plant and animal specimens are classified into three categories (Appendices) based on the threat to their extinction.
- The Convention requires countries to regulate the trade of all listed specimens of wild animals and plants through permits and also seeks to regulate the possession of live animal specimens.

The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021:

Background:

- The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- The Bill amends the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 which regulated the protection of wild animals, birds and plants.
- The Bill seeks to increase the species protected under the law and implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Key features of the Bill include:

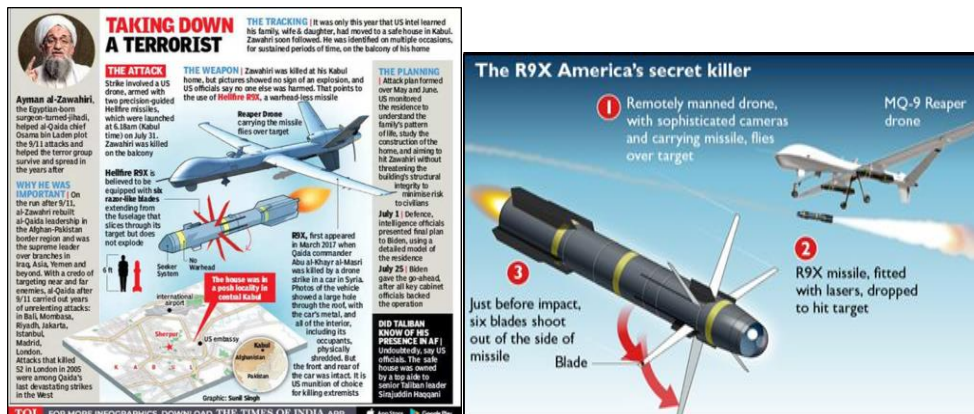
- **Control of sanctuaries:**
 - The 1972 Act entrusts the Chief Wildlife Warden (appointed by the state government) to control, manage and maintain all sanctuaries in a state.
 - The Bill specifies that actions of the Chief Warden must be in accordance with the management plans (to be prepared as per guidelines of the central government and as approved by the Chief Warden) for the sanctuary.
 - For sanctuaries falling under special areas (Scheduled Area or areas where the Forest Rights Act, 2006 is applicable), the management plan must be prepared after due consultation with the concerned Gram Sabha.
- **Conservation reserves:**
 - Under the 1972 Act, state governments may declare areas adjacent to national parks and sanctuaries as a conservation reserve, for protecting flora and fauna, and their habitat.

- The Bill also empowers the central government to notify a conservation reserve.
- **Surrender of captive animals:**
- The Bill provides for any person to voluntarily surrender any captive animals or animal products to the Chief Wildlife Warden.
- **Penalties:**
- The 1972 Act prescribes imprisonment terms and fines for violating the provisions of the Act. The Bill increases these fines.

AL-OAEDA CHIEF KILLED IN U.S. STRIKE IN KABUL

In News:

- President Joe Biden announced that the U.S. had killed al-Qaeda chief **Ayman al-Zawahiri**, one of the world's most wanted terrorists and suspected mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks.
- The US military used its 'secret weapon' — the **Hellfire R9X missile** – to kill Al Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul, Afghanistan on July 31.



- Hellfire missile is an acronym for Heliborne, Laser, Fire and Forget Missile.
- Hellfire R9X missile is basically a modified version of the renowned Hellfire missile which was an anti-tank weapon developed in the 1980s and was later modified numerous times, especially after the 9/11 attacks, to target individuals.

- The precision-guided missiles can be mounted on helicopters and unmanned drones and are used widely in combat around the world.
- The missile is designed in a way that it can shove more than 45 kg of metal in order to kill its target.

Zawahiri's role in raising anti-India rhetoric:

- Al-Zawahiri's killing is important for the global war on terror, as also for India.
- In April 2022, al-Zawahiri spoke on the hijab controversy in Karnataka.
- He had asked Muslims in the Indian subcontinent to fight the perceived assault on Islam “intellectually, using the media and with weapons on the battlefield”.
- He had showered praise on a young Indian student who he claimed had “emboldened the spirit of Jihad” with her defiant response to a “heckling crowd”.
- Earlier, he had announced the formation of a branch of Al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent.

[AS PELOSI LANDS IN TAIWAN, CHINA WARNS HER VISIT WILL HAVE 'SEVERE IMPACT' ON TIES WITH US](#)

In News:

- Pelosi, the top US lawmaker and second in line to the White House, arrived in Taiwan's capital Taipei.
- This visit took place despite warnings from Beijing that such a trip would be disastrous for US-China ties and threats that it would stop the visit by force.

In Focus: China-Taiwan Dispute

Geographical location of Taiwan:



- Taiwan is located north of the Philippines and the South China Sea.
- It is about 180 km off the south-eastern coast of China. It is separated from the mainland by the Taiwan Strait.

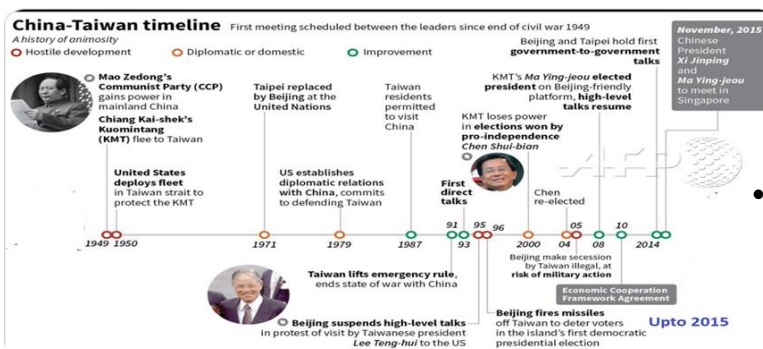
Background

- The island seems to have first appeared in Chinese records in AD239, when an emperor sent an expeditionary force to explore the area.
- This evidence is used by Beijing to back its territorial claim.
- After a relatively brief spell as a Dutch colony (1624-1661), Taiwan was administered by China's Qing dynasty from 1683 to 1895.
- In 1895, Japan won the First Sino-Japanese War, and the Qing government had to cede Taiwan to Japan.
- After World War Two, Japan surrendered and relinquished control of territory.

Civil War

- When Japan surrendered, The Chinese Nationalist Party (also known as the Kuomintang-KMT) began ruling Taiwan with the consent of its allies, the US and UK.
- Chiang Kai-shek was the ruler of this party.
- However, almost immediately following Japan's surrender, the Chinese Civil War broke out between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CPC).
- Chiang and the remnants of his Kuomintang government fled to Taiwan in 1949.

China-Taiwan Timeline (1949 onwards)



Disagreement and confusion about Taiwan

- China regards Taiwan as a breakaway province which it has vowed to retake, by force if necessary.
- China has repeatedly insisted that Taiwan should be called “Chinese Taipei”, in efforts to prevent international recognition of Taiwan as a country.
- But Taiwan's leaders argue that it is a sovereign state. Taiwan continues to participate in international events and dialogues separately.

- It has its own constitution, democratically-elected leaders, and about 300,000 active troops in its armed forces.

Who recognises Taiwan?

- Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China (ROC) government held China's seat on the United Nations Security Council.
- It was recognised by many Western nations as the only Chinese government.
- However, in 1971 the UN switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing and the ROC government was forced out.
- Since then, the number of countries that recognise the ROC government diplomatically has fallen drastically to about 15.
- India does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Like most countries, it maintains commercial ties with Taiwan.

News Summary

- US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi arrived Taiwan on an official visit. She is the highest-ranking US official to visit Taiwan in 25 years.

Key Highlights:

- **Both sides amassed military hardware in the region**
 - More than 20 Chinese military planes flew into Taiwan's air defence zone ahead of this visit.
 - Several Chinese warships have also sailed near the unofficial dividing line between China and Taiwan.
 - On the other hand, four US warships, including the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, were positioned in waters east of Taiwan.
 - Although, US Navy refers this as routine deployments.
- **Chinese stand on this visit**
 - China has said that this visit is a serious violation of the one-China principle and the provisions of the three China-US joint communiqués.
 - As per China, this visit sends a seriously wrong signal to the separatist forces for Taiwan independence.
 - Hence, it seriously infringes upon China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

- **Stand of US**

- US has reiterated that there was no change in US policy on Taiwan.
 - US officials argued that Pelosi is not the first American lawmaker, nor her delegation the first US legislative team to visit Taipei.
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LAWN BOWLS

In the Commonwealth Games, in a major first for India, the women's fours lawn bowls team of Nayanmoni Saikia, Pinki, Lovely Choubey and Rupa Rani Tirkey, scripted history as they won a gold medal by defeating South Africa 17-10 in the finals. This is India's first medal in the sport.



About:

- Bowls, also known as lawn bowls or lawn bowling, is a sport in which the objective is to roll biased balls so that they stop close to a smaller ball called a "jack" or "kitty".
 - It is played on a bowling green, which may be flat (for "flat-green bowls") or convex or uneven (for "crown green bowls").
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PINGALI VENKAYYA

Sri Pingali Venkayya will always be remembered for his immense contribution to design of National Flag, says Andhra Pradesh Governor.



About:

- Pingali Venkayya (1876 – 1963) was an Indian freedom fighter.
 - He was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi and the designer of the flag on which the Indian national flag was based.
 - He designed the National Flag and presented it to Mahatma Gandhi during the latter's visit to Vijayawada city on 1 April 1921.
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KHULNA-MONGLA RAILWAY LINE

Bangladesh Railway Minister Md. Nurul Islam Sujon has said that the Khulna-Mongla railway line will become operational by the end of this year.



About:

- The Mongla-Khulna railway line is funded by the government of India Line of Credit (LOC).
 - The Khulna-Mongla railway project is part of the first Line of Credit extended by India to Bangladesh in 2010.
 - The project is scheduled to be over by the end of this year.
 - According to the IRCON International Ltd, a total 31 bridges and 108 culverts have been built for the train link. The Rupsha bridge was completed on 25 June this year.
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