Asian Giant Softshell Turtle

***Prelims**: General issues on Environmental ecology*

Why in News?

A documentary on saving the Asian giant softshell turtle in Kasaragod wins the Dadasaheb Phalke Award at the 15th Dadasaheb Phalke Film Festival 2025.

- It is called as Asian giant softshell turtle due to its distribution in Asia.
  - **Scientific name** – Pelochelys cantorii
- In the local parlance, it is often referred to as *Bhimanama* (*bhiman* means giant and *aama* is turtle) and *Palapoovan*, since its features resemble *palapoo* or the flower of Indian devil's tree.

*Asian Giant Softshell Turtle is also known as the **Cantor's giant softshell turtle**, after Dr Theodore Edward Cantor, a zoologist and botanist.*

- **Nativity** – It is native to the *rivers of South and Southeast Asia*, including Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and India.
- **Habitat** – Mainly inland, slow-moving, ***freshwater rivers***, lakes, streams, and estuaries but also extends to coastal areas.
- **Characteristics** – The olive-brown turtles, long for a freshwater turtle (1 metre) and one of the largest, weighing up to 100 kgs.
- It has broad head with eyes close to the tip of the snout, a frog-like appearance and so the name '***Frog Head Turtle***'.
- **Secretive nature** – They lie *buried and motionless in the riverbed*, with only their eyes and mouth protruding from the sand.
- They *surface only twice a day* to take a breath and capture their prey by sit-and-wait strategy using an element of surprise.
- **Threat** – Harvesting by local people for meat, accidental killing and persecution from fishermen when caught in fishing gear, and the destruction of its freshwater and coastal habitats.
- **Protection status**
  - **IUCN** – Critically Endangered (CR)
  - **CITES** – Appendix II
  - **Wildlife Protection Act,1972** – Schedule 1



In Kerala, there are continued efforts in Kasaragod to protect the nests and release the hatchlings into the Chandragiri River.

Reference

The Hindu| Documentary on Saving Asian Giant Softshell Turtle

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering