Neelakurinji Conservation

Prelims: *Current events of national importance | Environment & Biodiversity*

Why in News?

MoEFCC has petitioned the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to prepare and submit a structured Annual Plan of Operation (APO) dedicated to conserving the endemic Neelakurinji plant.

- **Mandatory State Operational Plans -** Urges state forest departments to outline annual budgetary allocations, habitat monitoring, and anti-poaching measures.
- **Habitat Restoration-** Aims to mitigate risks from invasive plant species (*e.g., Acacia, Eucalyptus*), illegal land conversions, forest fires, and unregulated eco-tourism.
- **Regional Synchronization -** Ensures coordinated conservation across contiguous forest stretches spanning the Nilgiri Biosphere and surrounding mountain ranges.

Neelakurinji

- **Scientific Name -** *Strobilanthes kunthiana*.
- **Family -** Acanthaceae.
- **Habitat-** Endemic to high-altitude Shola forest-grassland mosaics of the Western Ghats (typically between 1,300 m to 2,400 m elevation) across Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka.
- Minor patches occur in the Eastern Ghats (Shevaroy and Sandur Hills).
- **Flowering Mechanism-** A **plietennial** shrub exhibiting **masting** (mass synchronous flowering).
- It blooms once every **12 years**, sets seeds, and subsequently dies.
- **Cultural Significance -** Gave the Nilgiri Hills ("Blue Mountains") their name.
- Historically, the indigenous Paliyan tribe used its 12-year flowering cycle to calculate individual ages.

Legal Framework

Parameter	Details
Wildlife Protection Act	Listed under **Schedule III** of the *Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972* (as updated by the 2022 Amendment Act).
Prohibited Acts	Uprooting, damaging, cultivating, possessing, or trading the plant or its flowers without explicit government permission is illegal.
Penal Provision	Violations carry penalties of up to 3 years imprisonment along with fines.
Protected Area	**Kurinjimala Sanctuary** (32 sq km in Idukki district, Kerala) was established specifically to preserve the core Neelakurinji habitat.

National Green Tribunal (NGT)

- **Statutory Body-** Formed under the *National Green Tribunal Act, 2010* for rapid disposal of environmental and forest protection disputes.
- **Time-Bound Resolution-** Mandated to dispose of applications within **6 months** of filing.
- **Adjudication Standard -** Governed by principles of **Natural Justice** rather than procedural rigidity under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.

Reference

The Hindu | Plan of operation for Neelakurinji conservation

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