Prelim Bits 01-02-2024 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

Maratha Military Landscapes

India nominates 12 forts of Marathas as 'Maratha Military Landscapes' for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list for 2024-25.

- **Maratha Military Landscapes** – It represent a ***fortification and military system*** envisioned by the Maratha rulers.
- **Development** – Between ***17th and 19th centuries***.
- **Integrated physiography** – ***Sahyadri*** mountain ranges, the ***Konkan Coast***, ***Deccan Plateau and the Eastern Ghats***.
- Thus, this network of forts vary in hierarchies, scales and typological features.
- **Significance** – They *showcase the strategic military powers* of the Maratha rule.

Maratha military ideology started in 17th century during the reign of the Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj from 1670 CE that continued until the Peshwa rule till 1818 CE.

Maratha Military Landscapes in World Heritage List

- ***Only 12 forts are nominated*** as Maratha landscapes.
  - Out of 12, *11 are in Maharashtra* and *1 is from Tamil Nadu*.
- Earlier, it was included in the *Tentative List of World Heritage sites in 2021*.
- It is the *6th* ***cultural property*** nominated from Maharashtra.

In Maharashtra *there are 6 World Heritage Sites, 5 cultural (Ajanta Caves, Ellora Caves, Elephanta Caves, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai) and 1 natural (western Ghats of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala as serial property).*

- **11 in Maharashtra**
  - **Hill forts** – Salher, Shivneri, Lohgad, Raigad and Rajgad.
  - **Hill-forest fort** – Pratapgad.
  - **Hill-plateau fort** – Panhala.
  - **Coastal fort** – Vijaydurg.
  - **Island forts** – Khanderi fort, Suvarnadurg and Sindhudurg.
- **1 in Tamil Nadu**
  - **Hill fort** – Gingee Fort.

At present in India, there are 42 World Heritage sites out of which 34 are

cultural sites, 7 are natural sites and 1 is a mixed site.

Cultural criteria of Maratha Military Landscape
• There are *6 criteria for nomination under cultural* category in World Heritage List. • Among 6, *3 criteria are applied* for nomination in this case. • For bearing a unique or at least exceptional *testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization* that in living or which has disappeared. • For being an outstanding example of a *type of building, architectural or technological ensemble, or landscape* that illustrates significant stage(s) in human history and Criterion. • For being *directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions,* with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

References

1. The Hindu| Nomination of Maratha Military Landscapes in WHS
2. PIB| Criteria for Nominating Maratha Military Landscape

Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) Program

Recently, Indian government released the report, 'Status of Snow Leopards in India' under Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India.

- It is the *1st ever population estimation of Snow Leopard*.

The 1st systematic surveys of snow leopards started in the 1980s, extending towards the western Himalayas particularly in Ladakh and later in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

- **Study period** – From ***2019 to 2023***.
- **Study area** – It systematically *covered over 70% of the potential snow leopard range* in the country, *approximately 120,000 sq km* of snow leopard habitat across the trans-Himalayan region.
- **National Coordinator** – ***Wildlife Institute of India (WII)***, supported by all range states and *2 conservation partners*, Nature Conservation Foundation of Mysuru and WWF-India.
- **Techniques** – Use methods as outlined under the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program's (***GSLEP***) Population Assessment of the World's Snow leopards (***PAWS***) initiative.
- **Findings** – There are *around 718 snow leopards* in the country and a total of 241 unique snow leopards were photographed.
- *Only 34% of the habitat in India legally protected*.
- *Ladakh has the highest estimated population* (477) followed by Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Recommendations** – To *establish a dedicated Snow Leopard Cell at Wildlife Institute of India.*

National Snow Leopard Conservation Plan *is implemented by the Government of India (GOI) for safeguarding and rejuvenating crucial high-altitude habitats, collaborating with local communities in conservation initiatives.*

Snow leopard
• **Habitat** – High rocky areas, alpine meadows, alpine steppe shrub, and high altitude forests, generally live *above the tree line at elevations of 2,700-5,000 m.* • **Range** – *12 countries*, Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. • **Global population** – Estimated at *3020 to 5390*. • **IUCN Status** – *Vulnerable* • **Threats** – Overgrazing, human wildlife conflict, poaching, free-ranging dogs, habitat degradation, and climate change impacts. • **Importance** – Being an apex predator of Himalayan ecosystem, snow leopard exerts *top down regulation of prey* populations and thus influence in *ecological equilibrium of its habitat*.

References

1. Hindustan Times| Status of Snow Leopards in India
2. PIB| Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI)

New Ramsar Wetlands

5 more Indian wetlands have been added to the global list of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

- **Ramsar wetlands in India** – It raises to ***80***.
- **5 New Ramsar Wetlands**
  - **3 in Karnataka** – *Magadi Kere* Conservation Reserve, *Ankasamudra* Bird Conservation Reserve, and *Aghanashini Estuary*.
  - **2 in Tamil Nadu** – *Karaivetti* Bird Sanctuary and *Longwood Shola Reserve Forest*.

The Shola forests *of South India derive their name from the Tamil word solai, which means a 'tropical rain forest'.*

- **Significance** – An *increase of 5,523.87 ha* under Ramsar site and the total area becomes 1.33 million ha.
- *Tamil Nadu continues to have maximum* number of Ramsar Sites (16 sites) followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).

The Ramsar Convention

• An international treaty for the *conservation and wise use of wetlands.*
• It is named after the *Iranian city of Ramsar*, on the Caspian Sea, where the treaty was *signed on February 2, 1971*.
• **Aim** – To develop and maintain an *international network of wetlands* for the *conservation of global biological diversity* and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits.
• **India** – It ratified the convention *in 1982*.
• *Keoladeo National Park* (Rajasthan) and *Chilika lake* (Odisha) were the 1st 2 sites to be placed on the Ramsar list by India.
• **Amrit Dharohar Yojana** – India has launched this for conservation of Ramsar sites through community participation.

World Wetland Day is celebrated every year on February 2.

References

1. The Hindu| Addition of 5 Wetlands to Ramsar Sites in India
2. PIB| Ramsar Wetlands in India

Interim Budget

The interim Budget, a 'stop-gap' arrangement, will be presented by Union Finance Minister of India on February 1 as a full Budget will be presented in June-July.

- **Definition** – It is a ***shorter-term financial statement*** that allows for the *smooth functioning of the government* until a new administration can present a full budget for the entire fiscal year.

  Budget or Annual financial statement *is a statement of the estimated receipts and expenditure of the Government of India for a specific financial year according to Article 112 of the Indian Constitution.*

- **Need** – ***In an election year***, the incumbent Government cannot present a full Budget as there may be a change in the executive.
- **Legality** – There is ***no constitutional provision***, so the Centre can seek the Lower House's approval for the funds for the transition period *via the vote on account provision*.

Vote on Account

• **Article 116** – It allows the Lower House to make *any grant in advance* for the estimated expenditure for part of *any financial year by voting and passing* such a legislation.
• Lok Sabha is empowered to authorise withdrawal of required funds from the Consolidated Fund of India for such expenditure.
• **Coverage** – Centre's fund requirements for salaries, ongoing projects and other expenditure for the transitional period.
• **Limitation** – It cannot make any changes to tax rates.
• **Validity** – Only for *2 months*, can be extended up to *4 months*.

- **Convention** – It has been the trend for outgoing governments to *present an interim budget instead of a vote on account*.
- **Features** - It will present the *current state* of the Indian economy, its fiscal status including India's *revised estimated growth* in the next year and also detail the *government's planned and non-planned expenditure and receipts*.
- The government is *allowed to revise tax rates*.

Similarities of Interim Budget with Full Budget
• It is *presented by Union Finance Minister to both house* of the Parliament and will be *put to vote* and then sent for *Presidential approval*. • It is also *debated in the Lok Sabha before passage* and is *valid for the entire year* though it is merely a transition arrangement.
Differences between Interim Budget and Full Budget
• It would just be to meet with the expenditure till a new government enact a full Budget. • *No spectacular announcements* are made unlike full Budget.

- **In 2024** – India is likely go to polls in April-May, thus Interim Budget will be presented *for the 1st 4 months* of this fiscal year.

> *If the Budget is not passed by the Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet will have to resign.*

References

1. The Hindu| Interim Budget in 2024
2. Business Today| Interim Budget and Full Budget

Geo-tagging

The New Delhi property geotagging deadline has been extended, according to a statement released by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

> *For the financial year 2024–2025, residents of New Delhi will have until February 29 to finish the geotagging procedure and receive a 10% refund on their lump sum advance tax payments.*

- **Geo- tagging** – A process of allotting ***geographic coordinates to media based on the location*** of a mobile device.
- It could also include *time stamps or other contextual information*.
- **Applicability** – Photos, videos, websites, text messages, and QR codes.
- **Geotagging properties** – It is *digitally mapping a property with the geographic information system (GIS)*.
- Thus, a property can be identified on a map with its unique and permanent latitude and longitude coordinates.
- **Improves tax collection** – By distinguishing between tax-paying and non-tax-paying entities.
- **Efficient urban planning** – By *identifying illegal and unauthorised properties* and to take corrective actions.
- **Streamline essential services** – It helps in *recognising area-based residential needs* like sanitation and road repairs.
- **Disaster management** – In times of emergencies, it can be used for quick and *targeted interventions* in future as responders can utilise the data to navigate and address issues.
- **Maintains healthy urban spaces** – By monitoring environmental factors like green spaces, pollution sources, and ecological reserves.

Indian cities that have made attempts to geo-tag the properties were Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Pune.

Reference

The Indian Express| Geo-tagging Properties

Other Important Topics
World Wetlands Day, 2024
• World Wetlands Day is celebrated every year ***on 2 February***. • This day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the ***Iranian city of Ramsar*** on the shores of the Caspian Sea. • In 2024, India has increased its tally of Ramsar sites (Wetlands of International Importance) to **80** from existing 75 by designating 5 more wetlands as Ramsar sites.
PHANGS (Physics at High Angular resolution in Nearby GalaxieS) program

• The Physics at High Angular resolution in Nearby GalaxieS (PHANGS) program is a long-term project that uses telescopes to observe nearby galaxies.
• The program is supported by over ***150 astronomers worldwide***.
• The program uses telescopes like
  - Atacama Large Millimeter Array – (ALMA),
  - Hubble Space Telescope, James Webb Space Telescope, and
  - Very Large Telescope (VLT) to make high-resolution observations.
• PHANGS-ALMA survey examines the molecular gas disks of 90 nearby galaxies.

Subika Painting

• The Subika painting style is intricately linked to the ***Meitei community*** in Manipur's cultural history through its 6 surviving manuscripts.
• **6 surviving manuscripts -** Subika, Subika Achouba, Subika Laishaba, Subika Choudit, Subika Cheithil and Thengrakhel Subika.
• Experts estimate the use of Subika paintings since the 18th or 19th century.
• Unfortunately, awareness about this unique art form has dwindled over the years, leading to its near extinction.

Maritime security in South China Sea

Vietnam and the Philippines have agreed to cooperate on maritime security in the South China Sea recently.
• Vietnam and the Philippines have signed 2 agreements on "incident prevention in the South China Sea" and "maritime cooperation" among coastguards.
• China claims 90% of the South China Sea as its sovereign territory, but is opposed by Southeast Asian states and Taiwan.

Enrollment Ratio in Tamil Nadu

According to the recently released All India Survey on Higher Education by the Ministry of Education, Tamil Nadu's Gross Enrollment Ratio was 47%.
• Among India's large states, Tamil Nadu consistently maintains the highest Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education (colleges and universities) for 5 academic years between 2017-18 and 2021-22.
• The all-India average GER was 28.4% in the 2021-22 period.
• Among all the states and Union Territories, ***Chandigarh*** has the highest GER of 64.8%.
• **Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) -** The number of students enrolled in higher education as a percentage of the eligible population aged 18 to 23 years.

GJ 9827D

NASA's Hubble Telescope recently identified water molecules in the atmoshphere of GJ 9827D.

• GJ 9827d is a Neptune-like ***exoplanet*** that orbits the red dwarf star GJ 9827 and located 97 light-years away from Earth.

• It was discovered in 2017 by ***NASA's Kepler Space Telescope***.

• The recent detection of water on GJ 9827d could signify the first evidence, through atmoshpheric detection, of planets with water-rich atmospheres orbiting stars beyond our solar system.

Sphaerotheca varshaabhu

• Researchers have identified and documented a previously unknown species of frog which has been thriving amidst the urban landscape of ***Bengaluru, Karnataka***.

• It is named as Sphaerotheca varshaabhu, attributed to its behaviour of coming out of burrows during the early showers, it exhibits distinctive characteristics from known frog species.

• It has adapted to its urban surroundings displaying behaviours and physical attributes that enable it to navigate the challenges posed by urbanisation.

Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi Commission

The Law Commission of India is all set to submit its report on the issues regarding Non-Resident Indian (NRI) marriages to the government

• The Commission, headed by Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, is in the process of finalizing the report and is likely to submit it soon, according to the source.

Bio solids

• Biosolids are a semisolid, nutrient-rich product that comes from the wastewater treatment process.

• They are a result of sewage sludge that has been treated to reduce pathogens and volatile organic matter.

• Biosolids are rich in plant nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and organic carbon.

• They can be used as a soil conditioner and fertilizer, and can be applied to timber land, alfalfa, and wheat.

Delhi Solar Policy, 2024

Delhi government introduces the Delhi Solar Policy 2024, allowing residents to install solar panels on their rooftops and earn money while ensuring zero electricity bills.

• Those who opt for the scheme will also be given a capital subsidy of ***Rs 2,000 per kW*** of installation up to a maximum of ***Rs 10,000*** per consumer.

• This will be in addition to the subsidy given by the Centre, which is around ***Rs 16,000-18,000 per kW***.



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