Prelim Bits 07-12-2021 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

Animal Exchange Programme

After a long gap, the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park (IGZP) welcomed a Himalayan goral, Bengal fox and Nilgai as part of its animal exchange programme with National Zoological Park (NZP) in New Delhi.

Himalayan goral

- Himalayan gorals or grey gorals (*Naemorhedus goral*) are medium sized herbivores and are the smallest of the goat-antelopes.
- They have a stout & stocky build, which is advantageous for maneuvering the craggy terrain of the Himalayas.
- Himalayan gorals lack a pre-orbital gland, which is present in closely related Himalayan serows.
- **Behaviour** - Himalayan gorals are diurnal but most active during the early morning and evening (**crepuscular**).
- They make small **altitudinal migrations seasonally**; in the colder months they move to lower altitudes to graze, returning to higher altitudes during warmer months.
- Himalayan gorals are gregarious, but adult males live in solitude until the breeding season.
- **Reproduction** - Himalayan gorals are polygynous (Dominant males have mating rights to all females in their ranges).

Conservation Status	
IUCN	Near Threatened
CITES	Appendix I
Threats - Habitat loss and hunt for its meat	

Bengal fox

- Bengal fox or Indian fox (Vulpes bengalensis) are medium sized omnivorous foxes, which is a species of Asian foxes.
- They are native to the Indian subcontinent, including India, Nepal and Pakistan. They are widely spread in this region.
- **Habitat** - Bengal foxes generally prefer foothills and non-forested regions such as open grassland, thorny scrub, semi-desert and arid environments. They can also be found in agricultural fields.
- They inhabit burrows built 2 to 3 feet below ground surface that have several openings converging towards the center burrow area.
- **Behaviour -** Bengal foxes are diurnal and crepuscular.
- **Reproduction -** Bengal foxes are believed to live in long-term monogamous pairs.

Conservation Status

IUCN	Least Concern
CITES	No special status
Wildlife Protection Act, 1972	Schedule II
Threats - Human interactions with the fox's environment. Habitat loss and degradation, hunting, persecution, roadkills, and changes in native species dynamics due to pathogens or parasites.	

Nilgai

- The Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) or Indian antelope or bluebuck or blue cow is the largest Asian antelope.
- The nilgai is indigenous to the Indian subcontinent.
- The nilgai's conformation is more horselike than cowlike.
- **Habitat** - Nilgai antelopes live in dry areas with a variety of land types.
- In India, they occur in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains southward to Mysore.
- **Behaviour** - Nilgai antelopes are dinural with most activity in the early morning and late afternoon.
- They graze and browse, with grass as the main source of their diet.

Conservation Status	
IUCN	Least Concern
CITES	No special status
Wildlife Protection Act, 1972	Schedule III
Threats - Overhunting	

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/visakhapatnam-zoo-welcomes-new-animals/article37824839.ece
2. https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Naemorhedus_goral/
3. https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Vulpes_bengalensis/
4. https://animalia.bio/bengal-fox
5. https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Boselaphus_tragocamelus/
6. https://www.britannica.com/animal/nilgai

National Medicinal Plants Board

National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) and CSIR-Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, (CSIR-CIMAP) have collaborated to promote the production of quality planting material (QPM) of medicinal plants.

- In order to promote medicinal plants sector, the Government of India set up National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) in 2000.
- Currently, the board is working under the Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha & Homoeopathy).
- NMPB's main objective is the development of medicinal plants sector through developing a strong coordination between various ministries/ departments/ organization for implementation of policies / programs on medicinal plants.

- The NMPB also promote research & development, capacity building through trainings, raising awareness through promotional activities like creation of Home/School herbal gardens.

Reference

1. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1778389
2. https://nmpb.nic.in/

Steps to Enhance Coal Production

- The Government has implemented the Central sector scheme (CSS) to increase domestic exploration of coal and lignite resources.
- **Auction** of commercial mining on Revenue Sharing Mechanism was launched in 2020. This was done for a total of 28 coal mines.
- **Mineral Concession Rules, 1960** was amended by the Ministry of Coal with a view to allow sale of coal or lignite, on payment of additional amount, by the lessee of a captive mine up to 50% of the total production in a financial year.
- This sale will be allowed, after meeting the requirement of the end use plant linked with the mine.
- **Single Window Clearance portal** has been launched. It is a unified platform that facilitates grant of clearances and approvals required for starting a coal mine in India.
- Coal India Ltd. has envisaged 15 Projects identified with a Capacity of about 160 Million Tonnes per Annum (MTPA) to be operated by Mine Developer cum Operator mode.
- Increasing domestic production of coal through allocation of more coal blocks.
- **Coking Coal Mission** has been launched to increase coking coal production from the current level of 45 Million Tonnes (in 2020-21) to the production target of 170 MT (by FY 2029-30).

Reference

https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1778470

Steps to Increase Indigenous Defence Production

- **Defence Industrial Corridors** - In Budget 2018-19, the Central Government had announced setting up of 2 Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs) in the country.
- It was further decided to set up one of these Corridors in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and another in Tamil Nadu (TN).

Defence Industrial Corridor	Nodes
Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor (UPDIC)	6 nodes - Aligarh, Agra, Chitrakoot, Jhansi, Kanpur and Lucknow
Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor (TNDIC)	5 nodes - Chennai, Coimbatore, Hosur, Salem and Tiruchirappalli

- DICs are aimed at providing fillip to the defence manufacturing ecosystem in both the States and attract investment worth Rs 10,000 crore in each of the DICs by the year 2024-25.
- The respective State Governments have taken action for acquisition of land and development of necessary infrastructure like road connectivity, basic amenities and security.
- **Defence Companies** - The production units of Ordnance Factory Board have been converted and corporatized into 7 Defence Companies.
- This restructuring is aimed at enhancing the functional autonomy, efficiency and unleash new growth potential and innovation in Ordnance Factories.

- This is aimed at transforming the Ordnance Factories into Productive and profitable assets; deepen specialization in the product range; enhance competitiveness; and improving quality and cost-efficiency.
- These new Defence Companies has the potential to grow in the domestic market through product diversification and import substitution, in addition to growth in exports.

Reference

https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1778468

Worldwide Cost of Living Report

The Cost of Living Report, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), was released recently.

- The 2021 edition of the report explores the cost of living in 173 cities, measured against impactful global events.
- On average, **prices for goods and services have risen by 3.5%** year-on-year, the highest inflation rate seen in the last five years.
- Tel Aviv tops the rankings, making it the most expensive city in the world to live in.
- Paris and Singapore came joint second, followed by Zurich and Hong Kong. New York came in sixth, and Geneva took seventh place.
- Tel Aviv has climbed in the rankings due to the strength of the Israeli shekel against the dollar, and increases in transport and grocery prices.
- As the index is benchmarked against prices in New York City, the cities with currencies that are stronger against the US dollar would appear higher in the rankings.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/world/tel-aviv-ranked-world-priciest-city-for-first-time-7651026/
2. https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/worldwide-cost-of-living-2021/

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