Prelim Bits 26-02-2022 | Daily UPSC Current Affairs

Sloth Bear

A new study has found that the sloth bear, dhole and tiger are the most affected among apex predators globally due to road development.

- A Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*) is an omnivorous mammal that can live up to 40 years.
- Sloth bears are the only bears to routinely carry their young on their backs.
- **Habitat** - Sloth bears live in a variety of dry and moist forests and in some tall grasslands, where boulders, scattered shrubs and trees provide shelter.
- This shaggy-coated sloth bear is native to India, Sri Lanka and Nepal.
- They are currently considered extirpated, or no longer present, in Bangladesh and may also be absent from Bhutan.
- **Diet** - Sloth bears primarily eat termites and ants.
- **Social Structure** - Sloth bears are considered solitary, although they are occasionally seen in groups when resources are plentiful.

Conservation Status	
IUCN Red List of Threatened Species	Vulnerable
CITES	Appendix I
Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972	Schedule I (Highest Protection)

- **Threats** - Habitat loss and poaching.
- Degradation and loss of forests (caused by fire, overgrazing and over-extraction of forest resources) are believed to have resulted in a 40% decline in the sloth bear's population over the last 30 years.
- **Related Links** - Dholes

Reference

1. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/wildlife-biodiversity/sloth-bear-dhole-tiger-most-affected-among-apex-predators-globally-due-to-road-development-study-81660
2. https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/sloth-bear
3. https://www.thehindu.com/thread/science-health-environment/nothing-slothful-about-a-threatened-bear/article30470904.ece
4. https://wildlifesos.org/chronological-news/the-sloth-bear-necessities-of-life/#:~:text=The%20sloth%20bear%20is%20currently,Indian%20Wildlife%20Protection%20Act%2C%201972.
5. https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/sloth_bear.pdf

Dugong

Marine biologists have welcomed the Tamil Nadu government's decision to go ahead with the establishment of a conservation reserve for the dugong in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay between

India and Sri Lanka.

- Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) is a sirenian herbivorous mammal species native to parts of the Indian littoral.
- Dugongs are cousins of manatees. But, unlike manatees, which use freshwater areas, the dugong is strictly a marine mammal.
- Commonly known as "sea cows," dugongs graze peacefully on sea grasses in shallow coastal waters of the Indian and western Pacific Oceans.

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- **Threats** - Human activities such as the destruction and modification of habitat, pollution, rampant illegal fishing activities, vessel strikes, unsustainable hunting or poaching and unplanned tourism.
- Loss of seagrass beds due to ocean floor trawling was the most important factor behind dwindling dugong populations in many parts of the world.
- They also often become victims of bycatch, the accidental entanglement in fishing nets.
- **Population** - There were just 250 dugongs in the Gulf of Mannar (Tamil Nadu), Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the Gulf of Kutch (Gujarat) according to the 2013 survey of the Zoological Survey of India.
- The dugongs that inhabited waters off the Odisha, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh coasts two centuries back became extinct now.

Reference

1. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/wildlife-biodiversity/better-late-than-never-experts-on-tamil-nadu-s-decision-to-go-ahead-with-dugong-reserve-in-palk-bay-81712
2. https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/dugong
3. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/facts/dugong
4. https://indianexpress.com/article/technology/science/indias-first-dugong-conservation-reserve-7494506/

Chernobyl Accident 1986

After a brief but fierce battle, Russian troops were able to capture the Chernobyl nuclear plant in northern Ukraine.

- Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster Site is located around 16 km away from the city of Chernobyl and a little over 100 km away from Ukraine's capital city of Kyiv.
- This power plant witnessed the world's worst nuclear disaster in 1986.
- The Chernobyl accident in 1986 was the result of a flawed reactor design that was operated with inadequately trained personnel.
- The disaster occurred when in the then Soviet-controlled Ukraine carried out a.
- A botched safety test ran by some technicians led to many explosions at Chernobyl's reactor No. 4 and a partial meltdown of its core.
- The explosions exposed the core and released clouds of radioactive material into the atmosphere.

In 2005, the UN predicted that around 4,000 people may eventually die due to radiation exposure.

- The radiation also affected neighbouring Belarus as well as parts of Russia and Europe.
- To put the scale of the tragedy into perspective — it is said to have released 400 times more radiation than the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in Japan.
- Since the accident, Chernobyl's "exclusion zone(a 32-km radius around the site) has remained largely uninhabited, while the plant's remaining three reactors were all shut down by 2000.
- A sarcophagus built to cover the reactor after the accident has since deteriorated, resulting in radiation leaks.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/why-did-russia-capture-chernobyl-power-plant-7791238/
2. https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/safety-and-security/safety-of-plants/chernobyl-accident.aspx

Lachit Borphukan

The Chief Minister of Assam had announced many projects in connection with the 400th birth anniversary of Lachit Borphukan.

- Lachit Borphukan was the commander of the Ahom forces and an icon of Assamese nationalism.
- In 1669, Aurangzeb dispatched the Rajput Raja Ram Singh I to recapture territories won back by the Ahoms in previous battles.
- So, the Battle of Alaboi was fought the Alaboi Hills in North Guwahati between the Ahoms and Mughals in which the Ahoms suffered severe reverses.
- Lachit Borphukan, after suffering a massive defeat at Alaboi, decimated the Mughals within just two years in 1671 (Battle of Saraighat).
- Lachit won the Battle of Saraighat (Naval battle) on the River Brahmaputra.
- Lachit was an able commander and his courage is all the more lauded because he was terribly ill during the war.
- Today, Lachit Barphukan's victory is honoured with a gold medal given every year to the best cadet graduating from the National Defence Academy (NDA).

Ahom Kingdom

- This kingdom was found by Chaolung Sukapha, who was a 13th century ruler.
- Ahom Kingdom ruled Assam for six centuries.
- The Ahoms ruled the land till the province was annexed to British India in 1826 with the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo.
- They created a new state by suppressing the older political system of the bhuiyans (landlords).
- The Ahom state depended upon forced labour. Those forced to work for the state were called paiks.
- Ahom society was divided into clans or khels. A khel often controlled several villages.
- The Ahom king was the supreme commander of the state as well as the Military. The king himself led the state forces in the time of wars.

- The Paiks (serving and nonserving) were the main army of the state.
- The full contingent of the Ahom Army consisted of infantry, navy, artillery, elephantry, cavalry and spies.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-ahom-warrior-lachit-borphukan-and-the-battles-of-alaboi-saraighat-7791371/
2. https://theprint.in/india/president-kick-starts-400th-birth-anniversary-celebrations-of-lachit-borphukan/848278/

United Nations Environment Assembly

- The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is hosted by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) every two years.
- Created in 2012 to replace the Governing Council, the UNEA is the governing body of the UNEP.
- It brings together representatives of the 193 Member States of the UN, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders to agree on policies to address the world’s most pressing environmental challenges.
- All the members of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) are members of the UNEA.
- Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, the UNEP is led by a Senior Management Team that's chaired by our Executive Director.
- It releases the Global Environment Outlook report (GEO).

Reference

1. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/waste/unea-uruguay-costa-rica-back-formation-of-science-policy-panel-to-manage-chemicals-waste-81698
2. https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/

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