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International Religious Freedom Report 2022

In its 2022 Annual report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended that India be designated a 'Country of Particular Concern' (CPC) for the third time in a row.

- The 'Country of Particular Concern' (CPC) is the category of governments performing most poorly on religious freedom criteria.
- The CPCs are countries whose governments either engage in or tolerate "particularly severe violations" of religious freedom.
- ["Particularly severe violations" of religious freedom are defined as systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion.]
- The other designation, for less serious violations, is Special Watch List (SWL).
- **CPCs** - For 2022, based on religious freedom conditions in 2021, 15 countries have been recommended for the CPC designation.
- They include India, Pakistan, Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Syria and Vietnam.
- **SWLs** - For 2022, countries recommended for a SWL designation include Algeria, Cuba, Nicaragua, Azerbaijan, Central African Republic, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Turkey, and Uzbekistan.
- **Legality** - The USCIRF's decision is not binding on the US government.
- The USCIRF typically recommends more countries for a CPC label than the State Department will designate.
- This happens because the USCIRF is concerned solely with the state of religious freedom when it makes a recommendation.
- But the State Department and its Office of International Freedom (IRF), along with religious freedom, also takes into account other diplomatic, bilateral and strategic concerns before making a CPC designation.

USCIRF's Designation of India as a CPC

- The USCIRF states that religious freedom conditions in India significantly worsened in 2021.
- It noted that India had its promotion and enforcement of policies - including those promoting a Hindu-nationalist agenda - that negatively affect Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and other religious minorities.
- It highlighted the use of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) against those documenting religious persecution and violence.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

- It is an independent bi-partisan US federal government commission that was created by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) 1998.
- It has a mandate to monitor religious freedom violations globally and make policy recommendations to the U.S. President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress.

- It is dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.
- It is a congressionally created entity and not an NGO or advocacy organisation.
- It is led by nine part-time commissioners appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the House and the Senate.
- IRFA requires the USCIRF to annually identify countries that merit a CPC designation.

Reference

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2. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/uscirf-recommends-to-designate-india-14-others-as-country-of-particular-concern/articleshow/91082534.cms
3. https://www.uscirf.gov/countries/india

Spotted Deer

A one-year-old male spotted deer was found dead in Ranipet district, Tamil Nadu.

- Spotted deer (*Axis axis*), or **Axis Deer** or **chital**, is the most common deer species in Indian forests.
- It lives in grasslands and forests in **India** and **Sri Lanka**.
- The deer's golden-rufus coloring is speckled with white spots, and it has a white underbelly.
- Its curved, 3-pronged antlers extend nearly 3 feet and shed each year.
- Spotted deer has a **prolonged mating season**, as the perpetually warm climate allows females to remain fertile and to give birth to fawns any time of year.
- Due to these tropical conditions, males do not have synchronized antler cycles.
- Spotted deer most commonly occur in herds of 10 to 50 individuals, with one or two males and a number of females and young.
- They primarily eat grasses and vegetation but will also ingest their shed antlers as a source of nutrients.
- It is the **State animal of Telangana**.
- IUCN Status - Least Concern.

Reference

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3. https://www.britannica.com/animal/chital

National Cyber Security Strategy

Amid a surge in cyber attacks on India's networks, the Centre is yet to implement the National Cyber Security Strategy which has been in the works since 2020.

- National Cyber Security Strategy was conceptualized by the Data Security Council of India (DSCI), headed by Lt General Rajesh Pant.
- This report focuses on **21 areas** to ensure a safe, secure, trusted, resilient, and vibrant cyberspace for India.
- The main sectors of focus of the report are,
    1. Large scale digitization of public services.

2. Monitoring and mapping of the supply chain of the Integrated circuits (ICT) and electronics products, scaling up product testing and certification, etc
3. Critical information infrastructure protection - Integrating Supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) security with enterprise security, monitoring digitisation of devices, etc
4. Digital payments - Mapping and modeling of devices and platform deployed, supply chain, transacting entities, payment flows, interfaces and data exchange, etc
5. Developing state-level cybersecurity policies, allocation of dedicated funds, critical scrutiny of digitization plans, guidelines for security architecture, operations, and governance
6. Policy intervention in cyber security of small & medium businesses granting incentives for higher level of cybersecurity preparedness, frameworks, architectures for adopting IoT & industrialization.

- To implement cybersecurity in the above-listed focus areas, the report lists the following recommendations:
    1. Minimum allocation of 0.25% of the annual budget, which can be raised up to 1% for cyber security.
    2. Research, innovation, skill-building and technology development
    3. Crisis management by holding cybersecurity drills which include real-life scenarios with their ramifications.
    4. **Cyber insurance** - DSCI recommends developing cyber insurance products for critical information infrastructure and quantify the risks involving them.
    5. **Cyber diplomacy** - DSCI suggests that the government should promote brand India as a responsible player in cyber security and also create 'Cyber envoys' for the key countries/regions.
    6. For a robust internet infrastructure, DSCI suggests keeping critical infrastructure, root server of programs controlling and governing India, inside India.
    7. **Cybercrime investigation** - DSCI suggests charting a 5-year roadmap under section 79A of IT act.

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Gravitational Lensing

Recently, scientists imaged a star that is extremely far away, at a distance of about 12.8 billion light years away, using Gravitational Lensing.

- Despite being the fastest moving object in our universe, even light is diverted from its straight path when it passes near a massive object, like a very massive black hole.
- When we observe the light from a star that passes near an intervening galaxy, again it can get "lensed".
- Gravitational Lensing is a term that implies that the gravity of the galaxy causes it to act like a lens and distort and magnify the light from the star.
- Gravitational lens can occur when a huge amount of matter, like a cluster of galaxies, creates a gravitational field that distorts and magnifies the light from distant galaxies that are behind

it but in the same line of sight.
- **Effects** - Gravitational lensing can magnify the image of the star as we see it.
- So, it allows researchers to study the details of early galaxies too far away to be seen with current technology and telescopes.
- If the star we are observing is exactly behind the intervening large galaxy, there are four images of the star produced around the galaxy's image - a phenomenon known as Einstein cross.
- If it is slightly away from the line joining us on earth and the galaxy, but behind the galaxy, the image we capture will be like an arc of light.
- Gravitational lensing is the key in discovering many celestial objects today.

Reference

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Pranahita River

The mega river festival dedicated to worshipping the Pranahita river drew to a close on a grand note with hordes of devotees swarming Kaleshwaram.

- Pranahita River is the largest tributary of the Godavari.
- This river acts as border between Telangana and Maharashtra.
- **Origin** - Thumbidihatti, Asifabad, Telangana.
- It begins at the confluence of 2 rivers - Wardha and Wainganga.
- **Outflow** - Godavari River near Kaleshwaram
- **States** - Maharashtra, Telangana
- Kaleshwaram irrigation project, one of the two components of the redesigned Pranahita-Chevella project, was proposed across the Godavari after the tributaries - Pranahita and Indravati.

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