UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 10-03-2025

Vanuatu's Golden Passport Scheme

Why in News?

Fugitive former IPL chief Lalit Modi has applied to surrender his passport to the Indian High Commission in London, and acquired the citizenship of Vanuatu recently.

- Vanuatu has a citizenship by investment (CBI) or "golden passport" program, which allows ***wealthy individuals*** to purchase its passport.
- It allows individuals to acquire citizenship in a country by making significant financial contributions to its economy.
- It is the fastest and most simple citizenship program available in Vanuatu.
- The applicant does not even have to set foot in the country to become a citizen, ***all documentation*** can be provided digitally.
- **Cost -** The cost of Vanuatu citizenship ranges from $135,500 to $155,500 (Rs 1.18 cr to 1.35 cr), with options to also purchase citizenship for a family of 4.
- **Processing time -** Vary from 30 to 60 days after the filing of the application.
- *The BBC reported in 2019 that passport sales account for roughly 30% of the country's revenue.*
- **Other countries having CBI -** Malta, Turkey, Montenegro, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and Egypt.
- **Advantages -** At present a Vanuatu passport allows visa-free entry to ***113 countries.***
- Vanuatu is, for all intents and purposes, a ***tax haven*** (offers foreign businesses and individuals minimal or no tax liability, along with a politically and economically stable environment).
- It is a ***zero-tax jurisdiction*** that is free of personal income tax, capital gains tax, inheritance tax, and wealth tax.
- While Vanuatu does charge indirect taxes such as VAT, as well as tax on property transactions, rates are *typically lower than other countries* in the South Pacific.
- It also has lax reporting requirements, which make it a strategic jurisdiction for tax purposes.
- Offshore financial services is one of the biggest revenue-generators for the country.
- **Henley Passport Index** – It ranks the Vanuatu passport as the 51st strongest in the world (out of 199 countries), ahead of Saudi Arabia (57), China (59), and Indonesia (64). India ranks ***80th.***

Vanuatu

• It is a tiny island nation in the ***South Pacific***, comprises 83 fairly small volcanic islands, of which only 65 are inhabited.
• The largest, Espiritu Santo, roughly boasts ***32%*** of the land area of Vanuatu.
• It lies to the east of Australia and the north of New Zealand.
• **Capital -** Port Vila lies on the island of Efate, the third largest by area and largest city by population.
• **Volcanic activity -** Vanuatu has several active volcanoes, including ones that lie underwater. Volcanic activity is common, and poses an ever-present danger to the islands' inhabitants.
• Tombuk eruption, one of the largest volcanic eruptions in the world destroyed the Kuwae island, and led to the formation of two smaller islands — Epi and Tongoa.
• Yasur on the southern island of Tanna is one of the most accessible active volcanoes in the world.

Reference

The Indian Express | Golden passport schemes

Hantavirus

Why in News?

The recent passing of Betsy Hackman, wife of renowned American actor Gene Hackman, has drawn attention to deadly Hantavirus.

- **Cause** – It is a family of viruses carried by certain rodents, such as deer mice, white-footed mice, rice rats, and cotton rats.
- **Transmission** - Humans typically contract Hantavirus through contact with infected rodent urine, droppings, and saliva.
- The most common way the virus spreads is through ***aerosolisation,*** when fresh rodent waste is disturbed, the virus particles become airborne and can be inhaled.
- This often happens during activities like sweeping infested areas, cleaning long-closed spaces such as sheds, or handling contaminated materials.
- Additionally, Hantavirus can enter the body if a person touches their eyes, nose, or mouth after handling contaminated materials or if the virus enters an open wound.
- Though extremely rare, the virus can also spread through rodent bites.
- They do not typically transmit from person to person, although rare cases of human-to-human transmission have been reported with certain strains, such as the Andes virus.
- **Strains -** Several strains exhibiting varying degrees of severity.
- **Stages - Prodromal phase -** Appears one to eight weeks after exposure.
- It begins with flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, muscle aches (often in the thighs, hips, and back), fatigue, headaches, and abdominal pain. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea may also occur.
- **Second Phase -** Signals the onset of HPS, brings more severe symptoms.
- These include a sudden shortness of breath, coughing, and chest tightness as the lungs fill with fluid.
- This stage can escalate quickly, causing acute respiratory distress and, in some cases,

heart failure. Without prompt medical intervention, the condition can be fatal.

- **High risk groups -** People who live or work in areas where rodent populations are more prominent. This includes farmers, construction workers, and those involved in cleaning old or unused spaces.
- It also includes children under 5, pregnant women, and individuals with weakened immune systems.
- **Prevention –** It remains the most effective way to combat hantavirus.
    - Keeping homes and workplaces rodent-free by sealing entry points,
    - Safely disposing of food and garbage, and
    - Wearing protective gear when cleaning areas with rodent activity can significantly reduce the risk.
- **Treatment -** Currently, there is no specific antiviral treatment or cure for Hantavirus.
- Patients are often given oxygen therapy to ease breathing difficulties. Severe cases may require intensive care, including mechanical ventilation to assist lung function.

Reference

The Hindu | Hantavirus

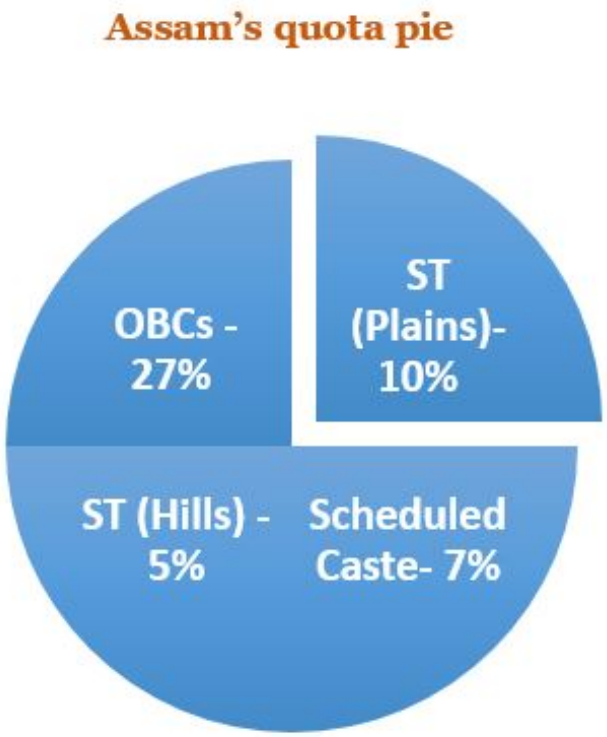
Koch-Rajbongshis

Why in News?

Leaders of the Koch-Rajbongshi Sanmilita Joutha Mancha recently submitted a 15-point memorandum to the Bharatiya Janata Party's Assam unit president Dilip Saikia highlighting their demands.

> *Mancha is an umbrella body comprising 12 organisations of the Koch-Rajbongshi community, which once ruled large swathes across present-day Assam, West Bengal, and Bangladesh.*

- **Demands**
    - They demanded Scheduled Tribes status for their community.
    - Re-establishment of the historic Kamatapur State.
    - Creation of a Chilarai Regiment in the armed forces in honour of the community's legendary warrior.



- **Related Committees –** Mahesh Kumar Singla Committee.
- **Koch-Rajbongshis –** Koch Rajbongshi is an ancient tribe originally from the ancient Koch kingdom.
- Koch Rajbongshi are an indigenous tribe of South Asia who live in Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. They are also known as the Rajbanshi or Rajvanshi.
- The Koch-Rajbongshis are one of 6 ethnic groups seeking ST status for decades and currently enjoy Other Backward Classes status.
- The others are Adivasis, Ahoms, Chutias, Mataks, and Morans.

- **Origin -** The Koch Rajbongshi's called themselves *Kamateshwars* (the rulers of Kamata/Kamatapur Kingdom).
    - But their influence and expansions were so extensive and far reaching that their kingdom is sometimes called the Koch kingdom.
- **Language -** Rajbongshi/Rajbanshi language spoken by one crore people, according to a 2001 census report for West Bengal.
- **Religion -** The Rajbongshi were primarily animist, but later on they followed Hinduism/Sanatana (both Shaiva and Vaishnabhite).
- A few section of Rajbongshi pleople were also found to be followers of Christianity, both Roman Catholic and protestant.

Reference

[The Hindu | Koch-Rajbongshis]

Preventive Detention

Why in News?

The Supreme Court has allowed a plea against preventive detention of a man allegedly engaged in organized smuggling, as the detaining authorities failed to consider conditions imposed on him.

- **Recent SC Ruling -** Preventive detention prescribed safeguards must be strictly observed to ensure due compliance with constitutional and statutory norms and requirements.
- **Preventive detention** – It is the act of detaining someone ***without a court trial or conviction.***
- It is used to ***prevent someone from committing*** a crime or disrupting public order.
- **Purpose -** To prevent someone from committing a crime,
- To prevent someone from disrupting public order,
- To prevent someone from escaping prosecution, and
- To maintain national security.
- **Constitutional provisions -** Article 22(3) of the Constitution allows preventive detention for reasons of state security and public order.
- The Constitution provides safeguards for people in preventive detention.
- Both Parliament and State Legislature have powers to enact a law for preventive detention while Parliament has exclusive power over reasons connected with defence, foreign affairs, or security of India.
- **Related Laws**
    - Foreign Exchange Conservation and Prevention of Smuggling Activities, 1974 (COFEPOSA)
    - Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 2008 (UAPA)
- **Previous rulings of Supreme Court -**The Supreme Court has ruled that advisory boards should prevent the state from using power capriciously
- The Supreme Court has ruled that the grounds for preventive detention should be communicated to the detainee as soon as possible
- **Landmark case -** The A K Gopalan v/s State of Madras case related to the Preventive Detention Act of 1950.

Reference

Hindustan Times | Preventive detention

Madhav National Park

Why in News?

Madhav National Park becomes India's 58th tiger reserve and 9th tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh recently.

- **Location -** It is situated in Shivpuri region of Madhya Pradesh.

- It is situated on the northern fringe of the Central Highlands of India forming a part of the Upper Vindhyan Hills intermixed with plateaus, and valley sections.
- **Notified in -** 1958.
- The park named after ***Madho Rao Scindia***, the former Maharaja of Gwalior was formerly a royal hunting area.
- **Vegetation -** The Park represents the Northern Tropical dry deciduous mixed forest as well as dry thorn forest, typical of North-Western Madhya Pradesh.
    - Kardhai is the dominant tree species.
- **Lakes -** Sakhya Sagar, man-made (Ramsar site in 2022) and Madhav Sagar
    - Marsh Crocodiles are in abundance in Sakhya Sagar lake.
- **Aquatic Life -** Includes a variety of water basins, meadows, and woodlands.
- **Fauna** - The forest is home to antelopes like Nilgai, Chinkara and Chowsinga and Deer including Chital, Sambar and Barking Deer.
- Animals like the Leopard, Wolf, Jackal, Fox, Wild Dog, Wild Pig, Porcupine, Python etc are also sighted in the park.

Reference

Outlook | Madhav National Park

One Liners 10-03-2025

Social Issues

Women in Indian judiciary

• **Cornelia Sorabji** – First Indian Women lawyer (1924).
• **14.27%** – Women judges in high court.
• Out of 25 high courts, only the Gujarat High Court has a woman Chief Justice.

International Relations and Issues

DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency)

• It is a newly established U.S. government committee focused on enhancing federal operations.
• **Led by –** Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy.
• Aims to cut wasteful expenditure from the U.S. federal budget.
• It adopts **Silicon Valley strategies** to streamline operations and reduce inefficiencies, similar to **Margaret Thatcher's 1980s reforms**, targeting workforce reductions and government spending cuts.

Convention on Cluster Munitions

Lithuania recently withdrew from the convention due to security concerns over Russia.

• **International treaty –** Prohibits the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster bombs, which cause indiscriminate harm to civilians.
• It was adopted in **2008** and came into force in **2010**.
• **Members** - 120 countries have joined the convention,
• Major military powers like the **USA, Russia, and China** have not signed it.
• India is **NOT a member of the Convention** on Cluster Munitions (CCM).

Economy

GRIDCON 2025

• **Organized by** – Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID).
• **Significance** – GRIDCON 2025 is a premier event in the power sector, for industry, utilities, professionals, researchers, and academicians across the global.
• To shape the future of renewable integration, grid resilience, asset management and digital transformation.

Climate Friendly Green Freight Transport in India (Green Freight Project)

• **Launched in** – 2019.
• It is an initiative under the Indo-German Development Cooperation.
• **Aim** - To enhance the efficiency and environmental sustainability of India's freight and logistics sector.
• The project focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting sustainable economic development by increasing sector efficiency.

Ponzi Scheme

• **Fraudulent Investment Scheme** – It lures investors with high returns and low risk that pays early investors using money from new investors instead of legitimate profits.
• **Named After Charles Ponzi** – The scheme is named after Charles Ponzi, who conducted a major investment fraud in **1920**.
• Saradha Scam (2013) is a notable ponzi scams in India which is a multi-crore chit fund scam in West Bengal that defrauded lakhs of investors.

Environment

Rusty-Spotted Cat

• The Rusty-Spotted Cat (*Prionailurus rubiginosus*).
• **One of the Smallest Wild Cats** – Measuring 35-48 cm in length and weighing 0.9-1.6 kg.
• **Habitat and Distribution** – It is found in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, inhabiting dry forests, grasslands and scrublands, often *near human settlements*.
• **IUCN Status** – Near Threatened (NT) its population is declining due to habitat loss, poaching and road accidents.

Security

KHANJAR-XII

• **Joint Special Forces Exercise – 12th edition** of the India-Kyrgyzstan KHANJAR-XII is set to take place in Kyrgyzstan.
• **Frequency** – Held annually in alternating venues between India and Kyrgyzstan.
• **Aim** – To exchange experiences and best practices in *Counter Terrorism* and Special Forces Operations in urban and mountainous high altitude terrain scenarios.
• Focus on developing advanced Special Forces skills of sniping, complex building intervention and mountain craft.

T-72 Tank Engines

India signs deal with Russia to upgrade T-72 tanks from 780 HP to 1000 HP.
• The T-72 is the mainstay of the tank fleet of the Indian Army which is at present fitted with a 780 HP Engine.
• The T-72 tank, first introduced in India in the 1970s, is the mainstay of the Indian Army's fleet.
• India has about 2,500 such tanks.

TROPEX

• **TROPEX –** Theatre Level Operational Exercise.
• **Goal** – Evaluate Indian Navy's ability to respond to multifarious challenges in a synchronised and integrated manner.
• To defend national maritime security interests.
• **Held in** – Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.

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