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Rise in Population of Asiatic Lion

- Recently, the Gujarat Forest Department has announced an increase in the population of Asiatic lions in the Gir forest region.
- Total 674 lions were recorded compared to the 523 in the Lion Census of 2015.
- The count was estimated from a population observation exercise called Poonam Avlokan in place of the 15th Lion Census.
- Poonam Avlokan is a monthly in-house exercise carried out every full moon.
- It was a mechanism developed by the Forest Department in 2014 as part of preparations for the 2015 Lion Census.
- According to recent estimates the lion population has grown by almost 29% from the last count in 2015, the lion population in the state of Gujarat has doubled since 2001.

Poonam Avlokan

- The first Lion Census was conducted by the Nawab of Junagadh in 1936.
- Since 1965, the Forest Department has been regularly conducting the Lion Census every five years.
- The regular Lion Census is conducted once every five years. The last Census was conducted in 2015.
- The Lion Census usually runs for more than two days, including a preliminary census and a final census.
- However, the Poonam Avlokan is carried out for 24 hours assessing the number of lions and their locations in their respective jurisdictions.
- The Forest Department invites NGOs, experts and wildlife enthusiasts to join the Census for transparency and augmenting manpower.
- Whereas the Poonam Avlokan exercise is conducted only by forest staff.
- Thus, the Lion Census experiences larger participation of the people compared to the Poonam Avalokan exercise.
- The Lion Census is done using the block counting method — in which census enumerators remain stationed at water points in a given block and estimate abundance of lions in that block, based on direct sighting of lions

who need to drink water at least once in 24 hours during the summer.
- Under Poonam Avlokan exercise, the teams keep moving in their respective territories and make their estimates based on inputs provided by lion trackers and on chance sightings.

Gir National Park

- The Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the Junagadh district of Gujarat.
- The Gir Forests is the only natural habitat of Asiatic lions. It was declared as a sanctuary in 1965 and a national park in 1975.
- Gir is often linked with "Maldharis" who have survived through the ages by having a symbiotic relationship with the lions.
- Maldharis are religious pastoral communities living in Gir. Their settlements are called "nesses".

Protection for Asiatic Lions

- Asiatic lions are protected under IUCN Red List: Endangered, CITES: Appendix I and Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972: Schedule I
- The “Asiatic Lion Conservation Project” has been launched by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- The project has been approved for three financial years from 2018 to 2021.
- The project envisages scientific management with the involvement of communities in coordination with multi-sectoral agencies for disease control and veterinary care for overall conservation of Asiatic lions.

Babesia

- Babesia is a tiny parasite that infects red blood cells.
- Infection with Babesia is called babesiosis.
- The parasitic infection is usually transmitted by a tick bite, Babesiosis occurs in both Animals and Humans.
- Babesiosis outbreak was reported in Girforest in 2020, and around two dozen lions were reported to be killed.

International Religious Freedom Report 2019

- Recently, the US State Department has released its annual International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report 2019, which is a survey of the state of religious freedom across the world.
- It published a report i.e. the country report for India to highlight the issue

of religious freedom in the country.

- Earlier, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF report) downgraded India's religious freedom to the lowest grade — in the 'Country of Particular Concern (CPC)' category.
- The IRF report listed countries for positive developments in religious freedom and negative examples.
- Nicaragua, Nigeria and China were cited as negative examples.
- It stated that in China, state-sponsored repression against all religions continues to intensify because of the Chinese Communist Party and India is not cited in either list.
- It highlighted the developments that took place in 2019 i.e. the status of Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- It discussed in detail about mob lynchings, anti-conversion laws, cow vigilantism and related issues.

Freedom of Religion under Constitution

- Freedom of religion in India is a fundamental right guaranteed by Article 25-28 of the Constitution of India.

1. **Article 25** (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion)
2. **Article 26** (Freedom to manage religious affairs)
3. **Article 27** (Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion).
4. **Article 28** (Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions)

- Further Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution deal with the protection of interest of minorities.

Rise in India's Forex Reserve

- Forex reserves are external assets in the form gold, SDRs (special drawing rights of the IMF) and foreign currency assets (capital inflows to the capital markets, FDI and external commercial borrowings) accumulated by India and controlled by the Reserve Bank of India.
- The International Monetary Fund says official foreign exchange reserves are held in support of a range of objectives like supporting and maintaining confidence in the policies for monetary and exchange rate management including the capacity to intervene in support of the national

or union currency.

- It will also limit external vulnerability by maintaining foreign currency liquidity to absorb shocks during times of crisis or when access to borrowing is curtailed.
- India's foreign exchange reserves are rising and are slated to hit the $500 billion mark soon.
- In the month of May, forex reserves jumped by $12.4 billion to an all-time high of $493.48 billion (around Rs 37.30 lakh crore).
- The level of foreign exchange reserves has steadily increased by 8,400 per cent from $5.8 billion as of March 1991 to the current level.
- The major reason for the rise in forex reserves is the rise in investment in foreign portfolio investors in Indian stocks and foreign direct investments (FDIs).
- Foreign investors had acquired stakes in several Indian companies in the last two months.
- On the other hand, the fall in crude oil prices has brought down the oil import bill, saving the precious foreign exchange.
- The rising forex reserves give a lot of comfort to the government and the Reserve Bank of India in managing India's external and internal financial issues at a time when the economic growth is set to contract by 1.5 per cent in 2020-21.

Role of RBI in handling Forex Reserve

- The Reserve Bank functions as the custodian and manager of forex reserves, and operates within the overall policy framework agreed upon with the government.
- The RBI allocates the dollars for specific purposes.
- For example, under the Liberalised Remittances Scheme, individuals are allowed to remit up to $250,000 every year.
- The RBI uses its forex kitty for the orderly movement of the rupee, It sells the dollar when the rupee weakens and buys the dollar when the rupee strengthens.
- The RBI Act, 1934 provides the overarching legal framework for deployment of reserves in different foreign currency assets and gold within the broad parameters of currencies, instruments, issuers and counterparties.
- As much as 64 per cent of the foreign currency reserves is held in the securities like Treasury bills of foreign countries, mainly the US, 28 per cent is deposited in foreign central banks and 7.4 per cent is also deposited in commercial banks abroad, according to the RBI data.

Border Adjustment Tax

- Border Adjustment Tax (BAT) is a duty that is proposed to be imposed on imported goods in addition to the customs levy that gets charged at the port of entry.
- BAT is a fiscal measure that imposes a charge on goods or services in accordance with the destination principle of taxation.
- Under this principle, a government taxes products based on the location of their sale to the final consumer rather than on the location of their production or origin.
- Thus, to adjust a tax “at the border,” a country taxes imported products and domestically produced products sold on its market on the same basis and at the same rate; and exempts from this tax products exported for sale to foreign consumers.
- Generally, BAT seeks to promote “equal conditions of competition” for foreign and domestic companies supplying products or services within a taxing jurisdiction.
- The World Trade Organization (WTO) rules allow for the adjustment of certain types of internal taxes at the border under certain conditions.
- The main conditions are as follows

1. The tax must be applied equally to imports and "like" domestic products.
2. The tax must be "borne" by a product and not be "direct".
3. A permitted border tax adjustment must not subsidize exports.

- Recently, a NITI Aayog member has favored imposing a Border Adjustment Tax (BAT) on imports to provide a level-playing field to domestic industries.
- This suggestion comes in the backdrop of the USA-China trade tensions (trade war) which are expected to rise even further post-Covid-19.

Uttarakhand New Capital

- Uttarakhand is formerly known as Uttaranchal, It is often referred to as the "Devabhumi" ("Land of the Gods")
- Uttarakhand is known for the natural environment of the Himalayas, the Bhabar and the Terai regions.
- It borders the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north; the Sudurpashchim Pradesh of Nepal to the east; the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh to the south and Himachal Pradesh to the west and north-west.
- The state is divided into two divisions, Garhwal and Kumaon, with a total of 13 districts.

- The winter capital of Uttarakhand is Dehradun, the largest city of the state, which is a rail head.
- Gairsain, a town in Chamoli district is recently declared as the summer capital of Uttarakhand, it is located nearly 270-km from existing temporary capital of Dehradun.
- It is expected that the declaration of a summer capital in the region will expedite development of the hilly areas.

Classification based on Waste water output

- Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will classify railway stations under the red, orange and green category based on the quantity of waste water generated.
- This measure is taken after NGT directed Indian Railways to get a No-Objection certificate (NOC) from the CPCB under the provisions of the Waste Water Act & Air Act.
- Under this railway stations generating waste water equal to or more Litres per day (KLD) would be categorized as red, those greater than 10KLD but less than 100 KLD would come under orange category.
- Railway stations with less than 10KLD waste water generation would be branded green.

Source: Economic Times, the Hindu, Indian Express

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