UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 22-04-2025

International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)

Prelims – *Current events of national Importance | General issues on Bio-diversity.*

Mains (GS III) – *Conservation.*

Why in News?

The Ministry of External Affairs recently announced that Indian Government and the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) signed 'Headquarters Agreement' to establish the alliance's headquarters and secretariat in India.

- It is a ***multi-country, multi-agency*** coalition.
- **Launched on -** April 9, 2023 by India during the 50th anniversary celebration of 'Project Tiger'.

  Project Tiger was Launched in 1973 by National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to protect the India's tiger population.

- **Aim -** To conserve ***7 big cats*** tigers, lions, leopards, snow leopards, cheetahs, jaguars and pumas worldwide.
- **Partnership -** The IBCA aims to bring together 97 range countries (where these big cats live), non-range countries interested in big cat conservation, conservation partners, and scientific organizations.
- **Headquarters & Secretariat -** India.
- **Objective –** To ensure cooperation for the conservation of 7 big cats by arresting decline in population and reverse the trend.
- To establish a *central repository* for knowledge sharing, capacity building, networking, advocacy, finance and support research.

Big Cats

- **Big Cat** – A term that is used in informal speech to apply to ***any large species of the family Felidae.***
- Usually, it applies to the members of the genus Panthera but 2 other cats Puma (Puma concolor) and Cheetah (Acinonyx jubatus) are also usually included in listings of 'big cats'.
- **7 Big cats** – Lion, tiger, leopard, cheetah, snow leopard, jaguar, and puma.



The Indian subcontinent has been historically home to the Bengal tiger, Asiatic lion, Indian leopard, Indian/Asiatic cheetah as well as Snow leopard.

- **In India** – ***5*** out of 7 cats *except jaguar and puma* are found here.
- While cheetah was declared extinct in 1952, it is now reintroduced as a part of Cheetah reintroduction project.

Cheetah reintroduction project involves translocating cheetahs from Africa to Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh and other suitable habitats.
Reference

Economic Times | International Big Cat Alliance

UN Security Council

Prelims – *Current events of International Importance.*

Mains (GS I) – *International Relations | Global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.*

Why in News?

Intergovernmental negotiations Chair Tareq AlBanai said India will surely be a contender if the UN Security Council is expanded.

- It is one of the ***6 main organs*** of the United Nations.

Other 5 main organs of UN are UN General Assembly, UN Economic & Social

Council, Secretariat, International Court of Justice, Trusteeship Council

- **Aim** - It has the primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security.
- **Headquarters -** New York, United States.
- **Founded in –** 1945.
- **Membership** - It is composed of 15 members.
    - **Permanent Members -** China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, all have veto powers.
    - **Non-Permanent Members -** 10 members elected for ***2-year terms by the General Assembly.***
- It is the *only UN organ* that has the power to make ***binding decisions*** on member states.
- **Legal Basis -** UNSC operates under the authority of the UN Charter, which outlines its role and responsibilities.
- **Presidency** - The presidency of the Security Council rotates alphabetically among 15 members every month.
- **Voting Rights** - Each member of the Security Council shall have one vote, while permanent members have veto powers.
- **Powers** - It can investigate and resolve disputes, impose sanctions, authorize the use of force, and establish peacekeeping missions.
- **India & UNSC -** India is ***not a member to UNSC***, India has served as a non-permanent member on the Council 8 times, including its recent term for 2021-2022.
- **G4 Nations -** 4 countries bids for permanent seats in UNSC.
- They are *Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan.*

Reference

India Today | UNSC

Credit Guarantee under e-NWR

Prelims – *Current events of national importance.*

Mains (GS III) – *Economic Development.*

Why in News?

Union finance ministry has asked public, private, regional rural, and cooperative banks to sign up for the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company (NCGTC) and the e-Kisan Upaj Nidhi (e-KUN) portal.

- These platforms support lending against electronic negotiable warehouse receipts (e-NWRs), which allow farmers to use ***stored produce as collateral*** for loans.
- To improve farmers and agri-businesses access to credit.
- Eligible credit facilities include loans provided by eligible lending institutions (ELIs) against e-NWRs under agricultural credit.

- Banks have been encouraged to promote pledge-based financing against e-NWRs through a branch-level outreach and social media campaigns.
- The credit guarantee scheme for e-NWR provides coverage for both credit risk and warehouseman risk.

So far, 8 banks have joined the NCGTC while 26 have signed up for the e-KUN portal, which is part of the Jansamarth portal.

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently increased
  - e-NWR-backed loans under priority-sector lending from Rs.75 lakh to Rs.90 lakh for individual farmers, and
  - For farmer producer organizations, corporate farmers, and cooperatives engaged in agricultural activities from Rs.75 lakh to Rs.4 crore.
- Under the scheme, credit-guarantee coverage varies in accordance with the loan amount and category of the borrower.
- For loans up to Rs.3 lakh, small and marginal farmers, women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and farmers who are specially abled are eligible for 85% guarantee coverage while for other borrowers and beneficiaries it is 75%.
- For loans above Rs.3 lakh and up to Rs.75 lakh, guarantee coverage is 80% for all eligible borrowers.
- For loans above Rs.75 lakh and up to Rs. 2 crore, the scheme currently does not provide coverage.

Reference

Business Standard | Loans on e-warehouse receipts

Revamping of MGNREGS

Prelims – *Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Public Policy.*

Mains (GS II) – *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

Why in news?

The recent report by Parliamentary Standing Committee on rural development and Panchayati raj chaired by Congress MP Saptagiri Sankar recommended to revamp MGNREGS.

MGNREGA

• **MGNREGA** – The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment (MGNREG) is the largest public employment program in the world.
• **Implementation –** By Ministry of Rural Development.
• **Legal provision –** The scheme is legally backed by ***MGNREGA Act, 2005*** which committed to *provide right to work*.
• **Aim –** To enhance livelihood security of people by guaranteeing *100 days of wage-employment* in a financial year to rural household.
To know more about this, click here

Key recommendations of the parliamentary panel

- **Increasing guaranteed workdays** – The panel recommended to increase the guaranteed working days from ***100 to 150***.
- For climate mitigation and disaster relief, the panel recommended increasing *work limit from 150 to 200 days under the Drought Relief Provision.*

  The Drought Relief Provision under MGNREGA Act allows for an increase in guaranteed working days from the standard 100 to 150-200 days in drought-affected areas.

- The committee recommended *extending work limit for Scheduled Tribe* households living in forest areas from 150 to 200 days under the Forest Rights Act.

  The provision of additional 50 days of wage employment (beyond the stipulated 100 days) to Scheduled Tribe Household was mandated by the Ministry of rural development from 2014.

- **Revision of wages** - The panel expressed concern over wage payments not keeping pace with inflation and stressed to raise wages to at ***least Rs 400 per day.***
- **Establish social audit Calendar** – More frequent social audits to ensure transparent and proper implementation of the scheme.
- **Independent national survey** - To assess its effectiveness and determine whether it needs revamping in light of emerging challenges.

- **Compensation for delayed wages** – The report noted *chronic delays in wage payments* and recommended increasing compensation for delayed wages.
- The committee recommended introducing a system for *manual verification and corrections to prevent eligible workers* from being removed from the program.
    - Approximately 5 million job cards were deleted in 2021-22 due to spelling errors or Aadhaar mismatches.

Reference

Financial Express| Revamp of MGNREGS

NISAR (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar) Mission

Prelims – *Current events of national and international importance.*

Mains (GS III) – *Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.*

Why in news?

ISRO Chairman V Narayanan has recently confirmed that the satellite is scheduled for launch in June 2025 from Srihari Kota.

- **NISAR** – NISAR is the 1st collaboration between NASA and ISRO for a ***joint Earth observation satellite mission***.
- **Aim -** To deliver exceptionally precise, *high-resolution image of Earth's dynamic surface* to observe and understand natural processes (solid Earth, ice masses, and ecosystems).
- **Launch vehicle** – GSLV-F16 rocket.



- **Key specification**
  - **Dual-band radar** – NISAR uses dual-band radar frequencies (L-band and S-band) to map the Earth's surface.

    L-band (25-centimeter wavelength) detects larger features like tree trunks and penetrates vegetation, while S-band (10-centimeter wavelength) detects smaller features like leaves and rough surfaces.

  - Together, they provide comprehensive Earth observations by capturing different aspects of surface features.
  - **Orbit**– Sun-synchronous, low Earth orbit (LEO) at an Altitude of 747 km.
  - **Repeat cycle** – It will scan nearly the entire *globe every 12 days*.
  - **Mission life** – 3 years.
- **Contributions - NASA** – It provides the *L-band radar*, reflector antenna, deployable

boom, communication subsystem, GPS receivers, recorder, and data subsystem.

- **ISRO** – It provides the *S-band radar* and handles calibration and data processing.
- ISRO is also ***providing launching service*** with its GSLV Rocket.
- **Significance** – Measuring *land deformation* from earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic activity.
- It will monitor,
  - The movement of glaciers and ice sheets
  - Forest and wetland changes
  - Soil moisture and water resources
- *Detecting surface changes* with centimeter-level precision through dense clouds and vegetation.
- It provides critical data for both scientific research and *disaster management.*
- The mission will help us to understand the *global carbon cycle*.

References

1. Business Today| Launch of NISAR Satellite
2. Business Today| NISAR Mission

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History, Art and Culture

Karnataka Village-Level Antiquities Survey

Recently, Karnataka has become the 1st Indian state to complete a comprehensive village-level antiquities survey.

• **First-of-its-Kind Documentation** – The state's Department of Archaeology is surveying 119 taluks for detailed antiquities documentation.

• **Geo-tagging for Heritage Tracking** – The survey includes geo-tagging inscriptions, sculptures, and monuments for precise location-based records.

• **Expanding Protected Monuments List** – A proposal to add 110 monuments to the protected list is underway, with a future goal of protecting 1,000 more.

• **Addressing Conservation Challenges** – Karnataka faces resource and coordination hurdles in protecting its over 25,000 monuments.

• **CSR Initiatives for Monument Upkeep** – The 'Adopt a Monument' initiative seeks corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding for heritage conservation.

Geography

Davis Strait Proto-Microcontinent

Davis Strait proto-microcontinent, a hidden landmass has been found beneath the icy waters of the Davis Strait recently.

• It is a newly identified submerged microcontinent located in the Davis Strait, lies between Canada's Baffin Island and Greenland.
• **Thickness** – Ranging from 19 to 24 km.
• **Bordered by** – 2 narrow bands of thinner continental crust measuring 15 to 17 km.
• These bands serve as a separation from the mainland of Greenland and Baffin Island.
• **Geological formation** – Its formation linked to the tectonic evolution of the strait.
• Millions of years ago, the tectonic plates beneath the 2 islands shifted, leading to a reconfiguration of the Earth's crust.
• This process resulted in the development of a substantial continental crust beneath the ocean, which is now recognized as a newly discovered primitive microcontinent.

South Eastern Coalfield Limited (SECl)

Recently, SECL is set to be the 1st coal PSU in India to adopt innovative paste fill technology for underground mining.

• **Agreement for Singhali Mine** – SECL has signed a Rs 7040 crore agreement with TMC Mineral Resources Private Limited to implement this technology in the Singhali underground coal mine in Korba.
• **Paste Fill Technology Explained** – This eco-friendly method involves filling mined-out voids with a paste made from fly ash, crushed overburden, cement, water, and binding chemicals, eliminating the need for surface land acquisition.
• **Environmental and Safety Benefits** – Paste filling prevents land subsidence, ensures mine stability, and promotes waste recycling by utilizing industrial byproducts. This is crucial for the densely populated area above the Singhali mine.
• **Revitalizing the Singhali Mine** – Approved in 1989, the Singhali mine with 8.45 million tonnes of reserves can now proceed with large-scale production (8.4 million tonnes over 25 years) without surface disruption.
• **A Landmark for Sustainable Mining** – This initiative marks a significant step towards green mining in India, enhancing coal production while minimizing environmental impact and potentially paving the way for similar applications in other constrained underground mines.

Social Issues

Harare Declaration

Recently, Climate and Health Africa Conference (CHAC) 2024 in Zimbabwe concluded with the adoption of the Harare Declaration.

• It is a collective African commitment to tackle the health impacts of climate change.
• **Aim** – To recognize climate change as a health emergency and strengthen Africa's role in climate and health responses.
• **Fostering Collaboration** – It promotes collaboration among governments, researchers, civil society, and communities.
• **Features** – Upgrading infrastructure, training health workers, and improving healthcare delivery.
• It emphasizes investing in research, surveillance, and the inclusion of local and traditional knowledge.

International Relations and Issues

US Airstrikes Near Hodeidah Port

Recently, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, has voiced serious concern regarding US airstrikes in the vicinity of the Houthi-controlled Ras Isa fuel port near Hodeidah.

• **Ras Isa** – It is a Key Oil Export Hub, primarily known for its facilities dedicated to oil exports.
• **Located in** – Yemen's Red Sea coast.
• **Role** – It plays a significant role in Yemen's maritime trade and crucial for the country's energy export sector.
• **Hodeidah** – A key port city situated on Yemen's western coast.
• **Features** – It serves as a critical hub for importing essential goods and humanitarian aid into Yemen.
• Its strategic importance lies in controlling access to the Red Sea, making it a major focus in the ongoing conflict.

Environment

Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary (GSWS)

GSWS in Madhya Pradesh will be the 2nd relocation site for African cheetahs after Kuno National Park (KNP).

• **Cheetah Relocation** – 2 male cheetahs, Prabhas and Pavak, will be moved from KNP to GSWS as part of India's cheetah reintroduction project.
• **GSWS** – Declared in 1974 and expanded to 362 sq km, the Chambal River bisects it. It's also recognized as an IBA.
• **Located in** – Northwestern Madhya Pradesh along the Rajasthan border, falls within the Khathiar-Gir dry deciduous forests.
• **Features** – Northern tropical dry deciduous, dry mixed deciduous, and dry deciduous scrub forests with species like Khair and Tendu.
• **Fauna** – Chinkara, Leopard, Mugger Crocodile, and diverse birdlife.
• **Chambal River's Role** – It flows through GSWS, supporting aquatic biodiversity and shaping the sanctuary's landscape.

Security

Exercise Desert Flag-10

Recently, Indian Air Force (IAF) has deployed a contingent to Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE for Exercise Desert Flag-10.

• It is a prestigious multinational air combat exercise, hosted by UAE Air Force.
• **Aim** – To facilitate the exchange of operational knowledge and best practices among participating air forces.
• **Participation** – It includes contingents from eleven other nations, fostering a rich training environment.
• **IAF Aircraft Deployment** – It includes combat-proven MiG-29 fighter jets and Jaguar strike aircraft, showcasing diverse capabilities.
• **Enhancing Global Military Cooperation** – India's participation underscores its commitment to strengthening military ties and operational readiness through international collaboration.
• **Exercise Desert Flag-10** – It emphasizes complex and diverse fighter engagements simulating realistic combat scenarios.

Science

Enzymes & Co-enzymes

• **Enzymes** – They are proteins that catalyse reactions in a cell, making metabolism efficient.
• For efficient functioning, many enzymes require some molecules as cofactors.
• These helper molecules are called coenzymes.
• **Coenzymes** – They are naturally occurring organic molecules that bind to and support the activity of enzymes.

Miscellaneous

World Creativity and Innovation Day (WCID)

Recently, WCID observed annually on April 21st, designated by the UN, highlights the vital role of creativity and innovation in human development.

• **UN Recognition** – On April 27, 2017, the UN officially recognized April 21st as WCID, linking it to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.
• **Importance for SDGs** – It underscores how creative and innovative approaches are crucial for achieving the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals.
• **Founded by** – Marci Segal in 2001.
• **Aim** – To encourage positive community impact through creative thinking.
• **Features** – The day encompasses creative problem-solving, driving economic, social, and sustainable development transformations.
• **Driving Global Progress** – It emphasizes human creativity as a key asset for developing sustainable solutions to complex global challenges.

World Liver Day, 2025

Recently, World Liver Day observed annually on April 19th, emphasizes the importance of liver health and disease prevention.

• **Theme** – Food is Medicine.
• It underscores the powerful impact of nutrition on liver health and healing.
• The day serves as a global reminder that informed food choices are powerful tools in preventing liver diseases.
• **Liver's Role** – As the largest internal organ, the liver performs over 500 crucial functions essential for life.
• **Functions** – These include detoxification, aiding digestion, regulating blood sugar, and producing vital proteins.
• A balanced diet and conscious lifestyle choices are key to enhancing liver function and resilience.

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