UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelimbits 25-07-2025

54th Chief Justice of Madras High Court

Prelims - *Current Events of National and International Importance | Indian Polity & Governance.*

Why in News?

Recently, Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava took oath as the 54th Chief Justice of the Madras High Court in a ceremony held at Raj Bhavan, Chennai.

- **Appointed by -** President of India.
- **Oath of office -** Administered by State Governor.
- **Powers derived from -** Article 217.
- **Qualification –**
  - Citizen of India,
  - Held a judicial office in the territory of India for ten years; or
  - An advocate of a high court (or high courts in succession) for ten years.
- **Tenure -** Constitution has not fixed the tenure.
  - He holds office until he attains the ***age of 62 years.***
- Any questions regarding his age are to be decided by the president.
- **Resignation -** He can resign from his office by writing to the president.
- **Salaries and allowance -** The salaries, allowances, privileges, leave, and pension of the judges of a high court are determined from time to time by the Parliament.
- Salaries are drawn from the *consolidated fund of the state* while pensions are from the *Consolidated fund of India.*
- **Removal –** He can be removed from his office by the President on the recommendation of the same session of the Parliament.
- Grounds of removal are *proven misbehavior or incapacity.*
- He can be removed on the same manner and grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.

High Courts

• The high court represents the state's judicial administration.
• **Articles 214 to 231** in Part VI of the Constitution deal with the organization, independence, jurisdiction, powers, procedures and so on of the high courts.
• There are 25 high courts in the country, 3 of which have jurisdiction in more than one state.
• The number of judges, which consists of the chief justice and other judges, varies from state to state and is determined by the president.
• **Functions**
• **Original jurisdiction -** In certain cases, they can hear a case directly, such as those related to fundamental rights or matters transferred from lower courts.
• **Appellate jurisdiction** - High Court judges hear appeals against decisions made by subordinate courts (like district and sessions courts) in both civil and criminal matters.
• **Writs jurisdiction -** High Courts can issue various writs (like Habeas Corpus, Mandamus, Prohibition, Quo-warranto, and Certiorari) to protect fundamental rights and ensure justice.
• **Supervisory jurisdiction** - High Courts have the power to supervise and control all courts and tribunals within their jurisdiction (except those dealing with the armed forces).
• **Court of record** - Its proceedings, judgments, and acts are officially recorded and considered permanent legal documents.
• **Administrative powers**- High Courts also handle administrative tasks like appointing staff, determining salaries, and making rules for subordinate courts.
• **Power of judicial review** - High Courts can review laws and ordinances to ensure they are consistent with the Constitution and declare them unconstitutional if they are not.

Reference

The Hindu| 54th Chief Justice of Madras High Court

India & European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

Prelims - Current events of National & International importance.

Why in News?

Recently, the Commerce and Industry Minister said that the Free Trade Agreement between India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA will be implemented from October 1.

- **EFTA** - It is an intergovernmental organisation established to promote free trade and economic integration, benefiting its four Member States.
- **Member states -** Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland, as well as their trading partners worldwide.

• India's biggest trading partner – **Switzerland.**
• India-EFTA two-way trade - $24.4 billion in 2024-25.
• **Tariff lines or product categories -** Offering 82.7% by India, which cover 95.3% of EFTA exports, of which more than 80% of imports are gold.

Outcomes of EFTA agreement

- India secured a follow-up commitment in the EFTA categories

Countries	EFTA sub-sectors

Switzerland	128
Norway	114
Iceland	110
Liechtenstein	107

- **Reduction of duties -** India will phase out customs duties under the trade pact on these goods over 10 years, allowing several products, such as Swiss watches, chocolates, and cut and polished diamonds.

Benefits

- **Strategic Investment Timeline –** The bloc will invest $100 billion in 15years, consisting of two phases
  - First phase - $50 billion within 10 years after the implementation of the agreement.
  - Second phase - $50 billion in the next five years.
- **Job creation on a large scale -** It facilitates the creation of 1 million direct jobs in India.
- **Access to high-quality products -** Domestic customers will have access to top-grade Swiss products, including watches, chocolates, biscuits, and clocks, at lower prices.
- **Boost to services sector -** India has identified 105 sub-sectors for the EFTA, including legal, audio-visual, R&D, business services, computer services, accounting, auditing, distribution, and Health services.
- **Entry into the EU market -** Over 40% of Switzerland's global services exports are directed to the EU, making it a strategic gateway for Indian firms to expand their presence in the European market.

Reference

The Hindu| India vs European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

Hornbill Conservation Centre

Prelims - *Current events of National & International importance | General issues on Environmental ecology, Bio-diversity & climate change.*

Why in News?

The Tamil Nadu government has announced the establishment of India's first Centre of Excellence for Hornbill Conservation at the Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR) in Coimbatore district.

Hornbills

• Hornbills are birds, easily recognizable by their large, downward-curved bills, often brightly colored and featuring a unique bony structure called a casque on the upper mandible.
• The name "hornbill" itself stems from this prominent, horn-like projection.
• The keystone species often known as “farmers of the forest”, play a crucial ecological role as seed dispersers, helping to regenerate native forests.
• **Habitat –** They inhabit the canopy of tall evergreen forests.
• **Distribution –** They are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, Indian-Subcontinent, Philippines, Indonesia and the Solomon Islands.
• **Diet -** Hornbills are omnivorous
• **Threats -** Deforestation, habitat fragmentation, and the impacts of climate change.

- **Reason behind selection -** Anamalai Tiger Reserve was selected for its ecological richness, existing conservation infrastructure, and for its track record in protecting endangered species, including
    - Tigers,
    - Elephants,
    - Lion-tailed macaques, and
    - Other endemic wildlife.
- **Focus -** Four hornbill species found in the Western Ghats
    - Great Indian Hornbill (IUCN -Vulnerable)
    - Malabar Grey Hornbill (IUCN -Vulnerable)
    - Malabar Pied Hornbill (IUCN – Near threatened)
    - Indian Grey Hornbill (IUCN – Least concern)
- **Funding -** Department of Environment, Climate Change and Forests has sanctioned funds under the ***Endangered Species Conservation Corpus Fund*** to establish the Centre.
- **Collaboration -** Tamil Nadu Forest Department will team up with leading national and international organisations, including
    - Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History,
    - Nature Conservation Foundation,
    - Wildlife Institute of India, and
    - International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Hornbill Specialist Group.
- **Activities -** It include habitat mapping, nest monitoring, scientific research, climate impact assessments, and restoration of degraded forest areas by planting native trees such as fig and Canarium that support hornbill populations.
- **Community participation -** Residents will be involved in conservation efforts through nest adoption programmes, scholarships for students, and sustainable livelihoods such as seed collection.
- **Capacity-building programs -** Forest staff and host awareness activities, including field visits for school children and community outreach.
- **Similar hornbill conservation activities -** In other landscapes such as the Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR), Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR), and parts of Kanyakumari district.

Quick facts

Keystone species
• A keystone species is a plant or animal that plays a unique and crucial role in the way an ecosystem functions.
• Without them, the ecosystem would be dramatically different or cease to exist altogether.
• Its disappearance could affect other species that rely on it for survival.

Reference

The Hindu| TN's Hornbill Conservation Centre

SASCI Scheme

Prelims - Current events of National & International importance

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Tourism has rolled out operational guidelines for the SASCI scheme to state governments.

- **SASCI –** Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment - Development of Iconic Tourist Centres to Global Scale' (SASCI) scheme.
- **Aim -** Transforming select ***tourist destinations*** into globally competitive attractions.
- It is a ***centrally funded initiative*** for advancing select tourist destinations through capital investment and innovation.
- **Launched by -** Ministry of Tourism.
- **Selection method -** These projects are identified based on the project proposals submitted by the relevant state governments.
- **Scrutiny parameters** - Connectivity to the site, tourism ecosystem, carrying capacity, sustainability measures, sustainable operation and management, project impact and value created, and tourism marketing plans, etc.
- **Key features**
  - **Time bounded framework -** projects are to be developed and completed within maximum 2 year's period
  - **State execution -** implemented and managed by the concerned State Government.
  - **Digital interaction -** promotional activities endeavours in the international and domestic markets through social media, promotional websites, events etc.
- **Significance**
  - Developing end to end tourist experience,
  - Funding support to the shortlisted proposals,
  - Strengthening all points of the tourist value chain,
  - Harnessing quality expertise for design and development,
  - Sustainable operations and maintenance etc.

Reference

DD News| SASCI Scheme

PIB| SASCI Scheme

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