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DAILY pre PARE
Current affairs summary for prelims

13 January, 2024

India-US Trade Policy Meeting

Context: *On January 12, 2024, the 14th Ministerial-level meeting of the Trade Policy Forum (TPF) between India and the United States took place in New Delhi.*

- **Significance of TPF:**
  - Emphasized the importance of the Trade Policy Forum (TPF) in strengthening bilateral trade ties and overall economic relationship.
  - Acknowledged the continuous growth in India-US bilateral trade, exceeding $200 billion in 2023 despite global trade challenges.
  - Expressed mutual desire to further enhance engagement for increased and diversified bilateral trade.
- **Progress Since 13th TPF:**
  - Reviewed significant advancements in addressing concerns impacting bilateral trade since the 13th TPF in January 2023.
  - Highlighted the resolution of longstanding trade disputes at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and understandings on market access.
  - Recognized achievements during Prime Minister Modi's visit to the U.S. and President Biden's visit to India for the G20 Summit in 2023.
- **Areas of Cooperation:**
  - Agreed to pursue enhanced engagement in critical areas like critical minerals, customs, trade facilitation, supply chains, and high-tech products.
  - Commitment to develop a forward-looking roadmap for cooperation and establish a foundation for future joint initiatives.
- **G20 and Global Trade Issues:**
  - Congratulated India on hosting the G20 Summit and welcomed positive outcomes in the G20 Trade and Investment Working Group.
  - Agreed to support the implementation of High-Level Principles on Digitalization of Trade Documents.
  - Emphasized the G20 as a valuable platform for constructive dialogue and cooperation on global trade issues.
- **Bilateral Trade Concerns:**
  - Highlighted progress in TPF Working Groups on various trade issues.
  - Established a pathway for mutual recognition of conformity assessment results to reduce compliance costs.
  - Welcomed the finalization of the Turtle Excluder Device (TED) design to minimize the impact on sea turtle populations.
- **Intellectual Property:**
  - Appreciated ongoing engagement on intellectual property (IP) in the TPF IP Working Group.
  - Discussed issues such as modernizing patent systems, protection for geographical indications, and trade secrets.
  - Committed to continuing discussions on IP matters.
- **Agriculture:**
  - Acknowledged pending work for early finalization of market access for certain agricultural products.
  - Expressed interest in enhancing dialogue on food and agricultural trade issues in 2024.
- **Services:**
  - Acknowledged constructive engagement of the Services Working Group.
  - Discussed digital trade, Social Security totalization agreement, and India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA).
  - Emphasized the potential of digital trade to spur economic growth and innovation.
- **Resilient Trade:**
  - Welcomed continued engagement on best practices for customs and trade facilitation.
  - Committed to transparent regulatory practices and policies, including online accessibility and public consultations.
  - Highlighted the importance of eliminating forced labor in global supply chains.
- **Way Forward:**
  - Directed TPF Working Groups to reconvene quarterly.
  - Instructed senior officials to hold an in-person inter-sessional TPF meeting by mid-2024.
  - Planned to reconvene the TPF at the Ministerial level before the end of 2024.

Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhuyday Yojana

Context: *The Scheme found mention in News.*

- **Scheme Integration:**
  - PM-AJAY is a consolidated scheme, implemented since 2021-22, merging three centrally sponsored schemes: Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY), Special Central Assistance to Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCA to SCSP), and Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana (BJRCY).
- **Objective:**
  - Aimed at reducing poverty in Scheduled Caste (SC) communities by generating additional employment opportunities through skill development, income-generating schemes, and infrastructure initiatives.
  - Seeks to improve socio-economic development indicators in SC-dominated villages.
- **Components of the Scheme:**
  - Development of SC-dominated villages into "Adarsh Gram."
  - Grants-in-aid for district/state-level projects for the socio-economic betterment of SCs.
  - Construction of hostels in higher educational institutions and schools funded by the Centre/State/UT Governments.
- **Adarsh Gram Component (Erstwhile PMAGY):**
  - Focus on integrated development of SC majority villages.
  - Objectives include providing adequate infrastructure and improving socio-economic indicators.
  - Monitorable indicators span ten domains such as drinking water, sanitation, education, health, and livelihood development.

Face to Face Centres

DELHI MUKHERJEE NAGAR: 9205274741, 42 | LAXMI NAGAR : 9205212500, 9205962002 | RAJENDRA NAGAR: 9205274743 | UTTAR PRADESH PRAYAGRAJ: 0532-2260189, 8853467068 | LUCKNOW (ALIGANJ): 0522-4025825, 9506256789 | LUCKNOW (GOMTI NAGAR): 7234000501, 7234000502 | GREATER NOIDA: 9205336037, 38 | KANPUR: 7887003962, 7897003962 | GORAKHPUR : 7080847474, 9161947474 | ODISHA BHUBANESWAR: 9818244644/7656949029

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- **Achievement (2023-24):** Declaration of 1834 villages as Adarsh Grams.

➢ **Grants-in-aid for District/State-level Projects (Erstwhile SCA to SCSP):**
- Supports comprehensive livelihood projects, skill development, asset creation, and infrastructure development for SCs.
- Special provisions allocate funds for viable income-generating schemes for SC women and infrastructure development.
- **Achievement (2023-24):** Approval of perspective plans for 17 states.

➢ **Hostel Component (Erstwhile BJRCY):**
- Aims to reduce dropout rates among SC students by providing quality education.
- Implemented through state governments, UT administrations, and central/state universities/institutions.
- Central assistance for construction varies based on regions.

➢ **Recent Changes (Since 2021-22):**
- 100% central assistance for boys' hostels (previously cost-sharing with states).
- Implementation through the PMAJAY portal with online proposal submissions.
- **Achievement (2023-24):** Sanctioning of 15 new hostels.

➢ **Factual Data:**
- Under Adarsh Gram Component, a total of 1834 villages declared as Adarsh Grams during FY2023-24.
- A total of 15 new hostels sanctioned under the Hostel component of the scheme.
- Perspective plans for 17 states approved under the Grants-in-aid component during the current financial year.

Humboldt Enigma

➢ **Biodiversity Exploration Through Centuries:**
- Historically, explorers and naturalists have sought to understand the concentration of biodiversity and its variations across different regions.
- Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) made significant contributions, recording observations across geography, geology, meteorology, and biology during his explorations.

➢ **Humboldt's Observations on Mountains:**
- Humboldt recorded plant distribution on a mountain during his exploration in South America.
- He identified a relationship between temperature, altitude, humidity, and species occurrence, exemplified by Chimborazo mountain in Ecuador.

➢ **Humboldt's Enigma and Modern Biogeography:**
- Modern biogeographers revisit Humboldt's observations and propose "Humboldt's enigma" regarding the biodiversity of mountain regions.
- The enigma questions why mountains, particularly outside the tropics, exhibit high biodiversity contrary to expectations.

➢ **Tropical Areas and Primary Productivity:**
- Tropical areas receive more solar energy, leading to greater primary productivity and biodiversity.
- Humboldt's enigma challenges the notion that only tropical areas contain highly biodiverse regions, highlighting mountains as exceptions.

➢ **Drivers of Mountain Biodiversity:**
- Geological processes, such as uplifts, create new habitats (cradles) for species.
- Climatologically stable mountains act as "museums," accumulating species over time.
- Coastal tropical sky islands, like the Shola Sky Islands in the Western Ghats, illustrate the persistence of old lineages.

➢ **Geological Heterogeneity and Biodiversity:**
- Mountains with high geological heterogeneity exhibit greater biodiversity.
- Unique habitat patches, influenced by soil types linked to geological composition, promote diversification.

➢ **Eastern Himalaya as a Case Study:**
- The eastern Himalaya showcases high biodiversity driven by climate dissimilarity and geological heterogeneity.
- Evolutionary history, including bird dispersal, contributes to increased diversity in this mountain region.

➢ **Factors Driving Diversification:**
- Multiple factors, including climate dissimilarity, geological heterogeneity, and evolutionary history, contribute to diversification.
- Fine data on species distribution, particularly in less-studied regions like the Eastern Ghats, are crucial for a comprehensive understanding.

➢ **Need for Further Research:**
- The lack of fine data on species occurrence is a limitation in explaining biodiversity patterns.
- Ongoing national programs in India, such as the National Mission on Himalayan Studies and National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Wellbeing, aim to address research gaps.

➢ **Call for Strengthened Research Efforts:**
- Emphasis on the need for more research, especially using modern tools like genetics, to understand true biodiversity.
- Recognition of gaps in scientific understanding, with a call to strengthen national programs and support basic research on diversity.

➢ **Mountain Biodiversity as Global Puzzle:**
- Humboldt's enigma is viewed as one of many puzzles in understanding mountain biodiversity.
- Acknowledgment that studying biodiversity in our backyards provides valuable insights into global challenges related to climate and landscape change.

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NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Kalaram Temple

Recently, the Prime Minister of India visited the Kalaram Mandir situated in Nasik district of Maharashtra.

About Kalaram Temple:

- The Kalaram temple derives its name from a **black statue of the Lord -Kala Ram** translates literally to **"Black Ram".**
- Kalaram Temple is **situated on the banks of the Godavari river** in Panchvati area of Maharashtra.
- The name Panchavati comes from the existence of **five banyan trees** in the area.
- According to the epic, **Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman set up a hut here** as the presence of five banyan trees made this spot auspicious and they spent the **first few years of their 14-year exile in Dandakaranya.**
- The temple is also the site of a land mark agitation led by **Babasaheb Ambedkar**, demanding temple entry **rights for Dalits more than 90 years ago.**
- In **1930, BR Ambedkar** and the Marathi teacher and social activist Pandurang Sadashiv Sane, known as Sane Guruji, led an agitation to demand access for Dalits to Hindu temples.
- The temple was built in **1792** with the efforts of one **Sardar Rangarao Odhekar**.

Akash Missile

Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted a successful flight test of the new generation Akash surface-to-air missile (SAM) from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, off the coast of Odisha.

About Akash Missile:

- The Akash missile is a **short to medium range surface-to-air missile** system.
- This missile system is operational with the **Indian Army** and the **Indian Air Force**.
- It can target aircraft up to **45 km (28 mi) away**.
- It can **neutralize aerial targets** like fighter jets, cruise missiles, air-to-surface missiles and ballistic missiles.
- The Akash missile system includes, a **launcher**, a **set of missiles**, a **control center**, a **built-in mission guidance** system, **C4I** (command, control communication and intelligence) centers, **Ground equipment** and a radar named **Rajendra** that accompanies each of the missile batteries.
- The flight-test was conducted against a high-speed, unmanned aerial target at a very low altitude.

Vembanad Lake

Recently, the experts at the International Research and Training Centre for Below Sea Level Farming (IRTCBSF), Kuttanad, have warned that the de-silting will disturb key blue carbon deposits in Vembanad Lake.

About Vembanad Lake:

- Vembanad Lake is the longest lake in India and the largest lake in Kerala.
- It is separated from the **Arabian Sea** by a narrow barrier island
- It is also known as **Vembanad Kayal, Vembanad Kol, Punnamada Lake** (in Kuttanad) and **Kochi Lake** (in Kochi).
- The **Pamba**, **Achankovil**, **Manimala**, **Meenachil** and **Muvattupuzha** rivers flow into the lake.
- The lake is a wetland of international significance, recognized by the **Ramsar Convention in 2002.**
- The **Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary** is also located on the east coast of the lake.
- The lake, acting as **India's largest mud regulator**, bifurcates into two sections, with one containing freshwater from rivers and the other featuring **perennial brackish** water.

The Himalayan Wolf

Recently, the Himalayan Wolf underwent its first-ever assessment on the IUCN Red List.

About the Himalayan Wolf:

- The Himalayan wolf **(Canis lupus chanco),** also known as the Tibetan wolf, is a **prominent lupine predator** found across the Himalayas.
- It is **genetically distinct from gray wolves** found in **Europe** and **North America**.
- It lives in the highest mountains in **Nepal**, **Tibet**, **Ladakh**, **Spiti Valley, Uttarakhand** and **Sikkim**.
- It is **heavily dependent on domestic prey**, such as yak, Dzo cow, goat and sheep.
- It has been classified as **'Vulnerable' under C2a(ii)** based on a population estimate of 2,275-3,792 mature individuals.

Place in News

Cape Verde

Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has certified Cabo Verde (also known as Cape Verde) as a malaria-free country, becoming the third country to acquire the status in the global health organisation's African region.

Cape Verde (Capital: Praia)

Location: The Republic of Cabo Verde, also known as Cape Verde, is an island country in West Africa, located in the central Atlantic Ocean.

Physical Features:

- **Santiago,** a southern island group of the Cape Verde is the **largest** and **most populated island**.
- **Pico do Fogo**, the **largest active volcano**, **erupted in 2014**, with an impressive caldera and interior cone.
- The island is **composed of igneous rocks**, **volcanic structures** and pyroclastic debris.

Official Language: Portuguese is the official language of Cape Verde.

Independence: Cape Verde gained independence from Portugal on **July 5, 1975.**

POINTS TO PONDER

- Who has the authority to grant pardons, suspend, remit, reprieves, respites, or commute the sentence according to Article 72 of the Indian Constitution? **- President of India**
- Whose powers under Article 161 are similar to those granted to the President under Article 72, but limited to matters within the executive power of the state? **- Governor**
- When was the National Clean Air Program (NCAP) launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)? **- 2019**
- Who collaborated with the Geological Survey of India (GSI) to develop the prototype regional Landslide Early Warning System (LEWS) under the LANDSLIP project? **- British Geological Survey (BGS)**
- Which ancient system of religious philosophy did Swami Vivekananda popularize? **- Vedanta**