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Current affairs summary for prelims

6 December 2024

Critically Endangered Species in India

Context: World Wildlife Conservation Day is observed on December 4 to emphasize the importance of protecting wildlife. It serves as a reminder of the urgent need to preserve and safeguard the planet's precious wildlife.

India's Biodiversity Overview:

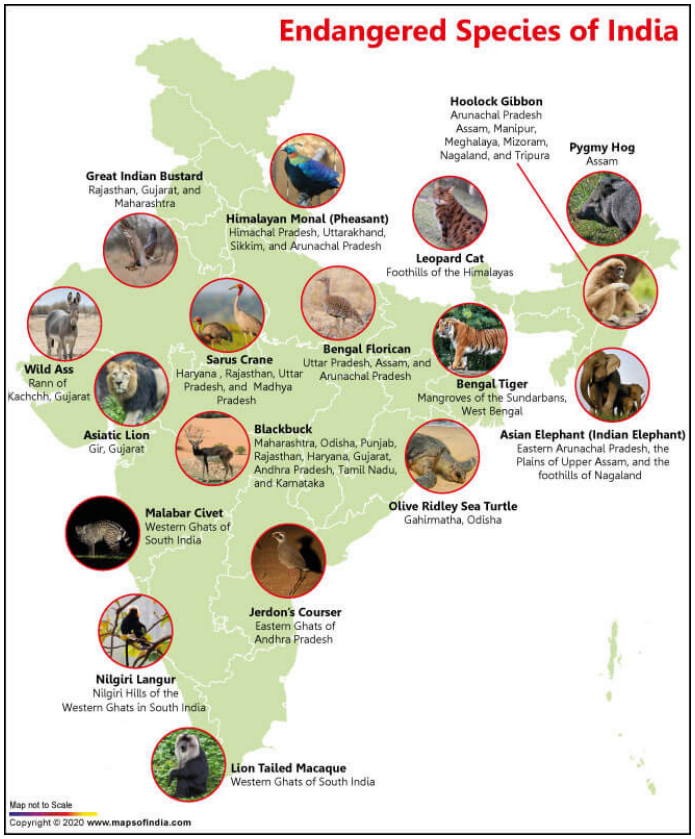
- India covers just 2.4% of the world's land area but accounts for 7-8% of the world's recorded species, including 45,000 plant species and 91,000 animal species. This rich biodiversity is why India is considered a megadiverse country, home to unique ecosystems and wildlife.
- India spans 10 biogeographic zones, with 8.58% of the world's mammals, 13.66% of avian species, and significant portions of other species.
- Four of the 34 global biodiversity hotspots (Himalayas, Indo-Burma, Western Ghats-Sri Lanka, Sundaland) are located in India. Despite this richness, India's natural wealth faces pressures from economic development and a growing population.

Human Impact on Wildlife:

- India's large and young population (65% under 35) increases demand for resources like land, timber, and coal, leading to habitat loss.
- The country's wildlife reserves, unlike fenced African reserves, face threats from encroachment and poaching, despite laws prohibiting hunting.

Critically Endangered Species:

- As of 2022, 73 species are classified as critically endangered in India, a significant increase from 47 in 2011.
- Species at risk include mammals, birds, and reptiles, many of which are endemic to specific regions. Some species that are facing more risk-
  - » **Kashmir Stag (Hangul):** Found in Kashmir's forests, threatened by habitat loss and poaching.
  - » **Malabar Large-Spotted Civet:** Native to the Western Ghats, endangered due to habitat destruction.
  - » **Andaman Shrew, Nicobar Shrew, Jenkin's Shrew:** Endemic to islands, vulnerable due to habitat loss.
  - » **Namdapha Flying Squirrel, Large Rock Rat:** Found in remote regions in north east, endangered due to deforestation.
  - » **Leafletted Leaf-Nosed Bat:** Native to northeast India, at risk from habitat loss.
  - » **Great Indian Bustard:** Threatened by power lines and habitat destruction, found particularly in Rajasthan.
- Lions, tigers, and cheetahs, despite their popularity in tourism, are also facing existential threat. These apex predators face threats like habitat fragmentation, poaching, and human-wildlife conflict.



Conservation Efforts:

- India has set up wildlife reserves and sanctuaries, though they face issues like inadequate funding and encroachment. Global conservation efforts, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), complement national efforts to protect endangered species.

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Key Terms:

- **Critically Endangered Species:** Species at an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild, as per the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- **Endemic Species:** Species found only in specific geographic areas, often facing heightened conservation challenges.

Boilers Bill, 2024

Context: The Boilers Bill, 2024 was recently introduced in the Rajya Sabha by Shri Piyush Goyal, the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry. After detailed discussions, the Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha and is now set for consideration and passing in the Lok Sabha.

- The Bill aims to amend and update the Boilers Act, 1923, ensuring better boiler safety, modernizing the regulatory framework, and decriminalizing certain offenses.

Background of the Bill:

- The Boilers Act, 1923, regulates the safety of boilers and their operation. The Act was amended in 2007, but further reforms were considered necessary.
- The Boilers Bill, 2024 aims to align the law with modern safety practices and incorporates provisions from the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023.

Salient Features of the Boilers Bill, 2024:

- **Modernized Framework:** The Bill is drafted using modern practices, making its provisions clearer. Similar provisions from the old Act are grouped into six chapters for easier understanding.
- **Decriminalization:** Three out of seven offenses have been decriminalized, converting fines for non-criminal offenses into penalties. This reduces legal burdens, benefiting industries, particularly MSMEs.
- **Enhanced Safety:** The Bill emphasizes safety by ensuring that only qualified and competent individuals carry out repairs, reducing the risk of accidents.
- **Streamlined Enforcement:** Enforcement is simplified by allowing penalties to be levied through an executive mechanism instead of through court proceedings, speeding up compliance.
- **Removal of Obsolete Provisions:** Outdated provisions from the old Act have been removed, making the Bill more relevant and effective for modern needs.
- **New Definitions and Provisions:** The Bill introduces new definitions and provisions, clarifying the law. It also includes provisions for the repeal of outdated rules and the integration of new regulatory frameworks.

Benefits and Implications:

- **Ease of Doing Business (EoDB):** The Bill streamlines regulations, particularly benefiting MSMEs, by reducing bureaucratic delays and simplifying boiler safety compliance.
- **Enhanced Safety:** By ensuring that only qualified personnel handle repairs, the Bill prioritizes safety, minimizing risks.
- **Impact on Industry:** The Bill fosters a business-friendly environment, especially for industries using boilers. Shifting from court proceedings to executive penalties simplifies compliance and reduces delays.
- **Modernization and Clarity:** The Bill reorganizes provisions and introduces clearer definitions, helping all stakeholders understand and implement the law more effectively.

In conclusion, the Boilers Bill, 2024 updates boiler safety regulations, reduces bureaucratic hurdles, and creates a more business-friendly environment while ensuring enhanced safety standards.

Agroforestry and its Threat to Endemic Frogs: A Study on the Western Ghats

Context: A new study by the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF-India) and the Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG) found that agroforestry practices can harm certain species of endemic frogs, while some frogs are less affected by these changes in their habitats.

Key Findings:

- **Decline in Amphibian Diversity in Modified Habitats:** The study discovered that the diversity of amphibians, including frogs, was lowest in paddy fields. Frog populations were also smaller in orchards. Agricultural areas like orchards and paddy fields, with monoculture cropping, altered water sources, and less

natural vegetation, were less suitable for frogs than undisturbed plateaus.

- **Impact on Endemic Species:** Endemic species such as the CEPF burrowing frog (Minervarya cepfi) and the Goan fejervarya (Minervarya gomantaki) were found to be significantly less abundant in modified habitats. Agroforestry practices, especially converting plateaus into orchards, destroy important habitats like rock pools that protect tadpoles and eggs during dry spells in the monsoon season.
- **Species Adaptation to Modified Habitats:** More generalist species like Minervarya syhadrensis, which is common across South Asia, were found in higher numbers in paddy fields. However, this does not mean they are adapting to these areas. It likely reflects habitat loss in their natural habitats, forcing them to spread into modified areas.
- **Landscape Transformation:** Lateritic plateaus, formed by volcanic activity, are being converted into agricultural lands, especially mango and cashew orchards. This reduces the availability of vital water bodies for amphibians, threatening species that rely on clean water sources to survive.
- **Importance of Water Resources:** Water resources are crucial for amphibians' breeding and survival. When habitats are converted, it disrupts water systems and causes habitat degradation. Amphibians' presence is often a sign of the health of aquatic ecosystems, which are important for both wildlife and local communities.

Recommendations for Mitigating Habitat Loss:

- **Frog-Friendly Agroforestry Practices:** Agroforestry practices, especially in orchards, should be modified to be more frog-friendly. Retaining natural water bodies and adding artificial water sources in agricultural areas can help reduce habitat loss.
- **Sensitization of Landowners:** Awareness campaigns and incentives should encourage landowners to adopt sustainable agricultural practices that protect amphibian populations and biodiversity.
- **Conservation of Freshwater Habitats:** The study emphasizes the need to conserve and restore freshwater habitats to ensure the survival of amphibians and maintain ecological health.

Importance of Conservation Efforts:

- The study highlights the urgent need for conservation actions to address the transformation of the Western Ghats' lateritic plateaus. The Western Ghats are a biodiversity hotspot and provide ecological services that support local communities. Climate change also adds pressure on these ecosystems, making targeted conservation efforts even more important to protect them.

Martial Law in South Korea

Context: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol recently declared martial law, marking the first such imposition since 1980. This move has thrown the country into political and constitutional turmoil, raising concerns over civil liberties and democratic governance.

What is Martial Law?

- Martial law is a temporary emergency measure in which military authorities replace civilian administration to address severe threats or crises such as war, natural disasters, or internal unrest. Under martial law:
  - » Civil administration is replaced by military control.
  - » Fundamental rights and freedoms are suspended.
  - » Military personnel assume responsibility for law and order.

Current Restrictions in South Korea:

- » **Parliament Access Blocked:** MPs are prohibited from entering the National Assembly.
- » **Ban on Political Activities:** Protests, public gatherings, and political functions are forbidden.
- » **Media Control:** The military now oversees media outlets and publications.
- » **Strikes Banned:** Industrial strikes and walkouts have been declared illegal.
- » **Travel Restrictions:** Checkpoints restrict movement in high-risk regions.
- These measures aim to restore order but significantly limit civil liberties.

South Korea's Constitutional Provisions:

- Article 77 of South Korea's Constitution allows martial law during war, armed conflict, or similar national emergencies. It permits:
  - » Suspension of civil liberties, including freedom of

speech, press, and assembly.
  - » Military authority to override executive and judicial functions.
- Despite constitutional backing, this declaration has faced criticism, even from within the President's party, for undermining democratic institutions.

Martial Law in India: Article 34

- In India, Article 34 addresses martial law, granting Parliament the power to indemnify government personnel for acts committed under martial law. Key features include:
  - » **Suspension of Fundamental Rights:** Civil liberties may be restricted.
  - » **Government and Court Functions Suspended:** Military authority replaces civilian control.
  - » **Application:** Used during crises such as war, rebellion, or external aggression.
- Martial law in India remains a last-resort measure, aimed at restoring order during severe crises.

Martial Law vs. National Emergency in India

Aspect	Martial Law	National Emergency
Scope	Impacts fundamental rights only	Affects rights and federal relations
Government Functioning	Suspends government and courts	Both remain functional
Purpose	To restore law and order	Address war, aggression, or rebellion
Constitutional Basis	No explicit mention	Articles 352–360

Implications of Martial Law in South Korea

- **Political Fallout:** Critics argue it undermines democracy and suppresses dissent.
- **Civil Liberties:** Restrictions on media, protests, and political activities have curtailed freedoms.
- **Economic Impact:** Bans on strikes could affect industrial output and investor confidence.
- **Global Concerns:** South Korea's democratic image is under scrutiny.

Conclusion:

The declaration of martial law reflects South Korea's deep political challenges. While martial law aims to restore order, its imposition raises concerns over democracy, civil liberties, and constitutional safeguards. This crisis highlights the need for democratic solutions to political and social unrest.

Power Packed News

Indian-Origin Artist Jasleen Kaur Wins Turner Prize 2024

- Indian-origin Scottish artist Jasleen Kaur has been awarded the prestigious Turner Prize 2024 for her exhibition "Alter Altar", which reflects themes of plurality, identity, and the personal-political connection.
- The jury praised her work for its thoughtful integration of personal and spiritual elements, describing it as a "visual and aural experience that suggests both solidarity and joy." Kaur's innovative use of materials and her ability to blend diverse voices were also highlighted.
- At 38, Kaur was the youngest nominee for this year's prize, which includes a cash award of £25,000. Born in Glasgow, her family's migrant history from Punjab significantly influences her art.
- "Alter Altar", first exhibited in Glasgow, features symbolic elements such as a vintage red Ford Escort adorned with a crocheted doily, family photographs, worship bells, and soundtracks from her upbringing, blending cultural nostalgia and contemporary art.
- Established in 1984, the Turner Prize is one of Britain's most prestigious art awards, celebrating groundbreaking contributions to contemporary art. Kaur joins past Indian-origin winner Anish Kapoor, who received the prize in 1991.

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Justice Murdu Nirupa Bindushini Fernando Appointed as the 48th Chief Justice of Sri Lanka

- Justice Murdu Nirupa Bindushini Fernando was sworn in as the 48th Chief Justice of Sri Lanka, becoming the second woman to hold this prestigious position in the country's history. Her appointment follows the retirement of Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya and was approved by the Constitutional Council.

- Justice Fernando has had a distinguished career in Sri Lanka's legal system. She began her legal journey as Deputy Solicitor General in 1997 and later served as Additional Solicitor General in 2014.
- Her expertise and leadership in the legal field were further recognized when she was appointed Senior Additional Solicitor General. Throughout her career, Justice Fernando has earned respect for her legal acumen and commitment to upholding the rule of law.
- As the new Chief Justice, Justice Fernando's appointment is seen as a significant milestone in Sri Lanka's legal and judicial history. Her leadership is expected to guide the judiciary in addressing key legal challenges and reinforcing the integrity of Sri Lanka's justice system.

National Legal Metrology Portal (eMaap) to Streamline Legal Metrology Processes

The Department of Consumer Affairs is developing the National Legal Metrology Portal, known as eMaap, with the goal of integrating State Legal Metrology Departments and their portals into a unified national system. Currently, state governments maintain separate portals for the registration of packaged commodities, issuance of licenses, and verification/stamping of weighing and measuring instruments.

Key Features of eMaap:

- The primary goal of eMaap is to streamline processes related to issuing licenses, conducting verifications, and managing enforcement and compliance under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009.
- eMaap is designed to foster ease of doing business and enhance transparency in trade practices. It aims to minimize compliance burdens, reduce paperwork, and ensure better regulation.
- By centralizing data, eMaap will enable data-driven decision-making, facilitate more efficient enforcement activities, and support effective policy formation. Ultimately, it is expected to create a robust and efficient regulatory framework for legal metrology, improving the overall business environment in India.

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