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Attacks of Commercial Ships in Red Sea

Context: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin remarked that over the past four weeks, Houthi militants from Yemen have launched attacks on or taken control of commercial vessels on 12 occasions.

Red Sea Tensions:

- **Ongoing Israel-Hamas Conflict Spillover:** Tensions in the Red Sea escalate due to the spillover of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.
- **Houthi Attacks on Commercial Ships:**
 - In the last four weeks, Houthi militants from Yemen launched 12 attacks on commercial ships.
 - Prominent companies like AP Møller-Maersk and British Petroleum have halted movements through the Red Sea in response.
- **International Response:**
 - Prime Minister Narendra Modi expresses concerns about maritime traffic safety during a call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
 - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announces Operation Prosperity Guardian, a multinational security initiative under Combined Maritime Forces.

Significance of the Red Sea:

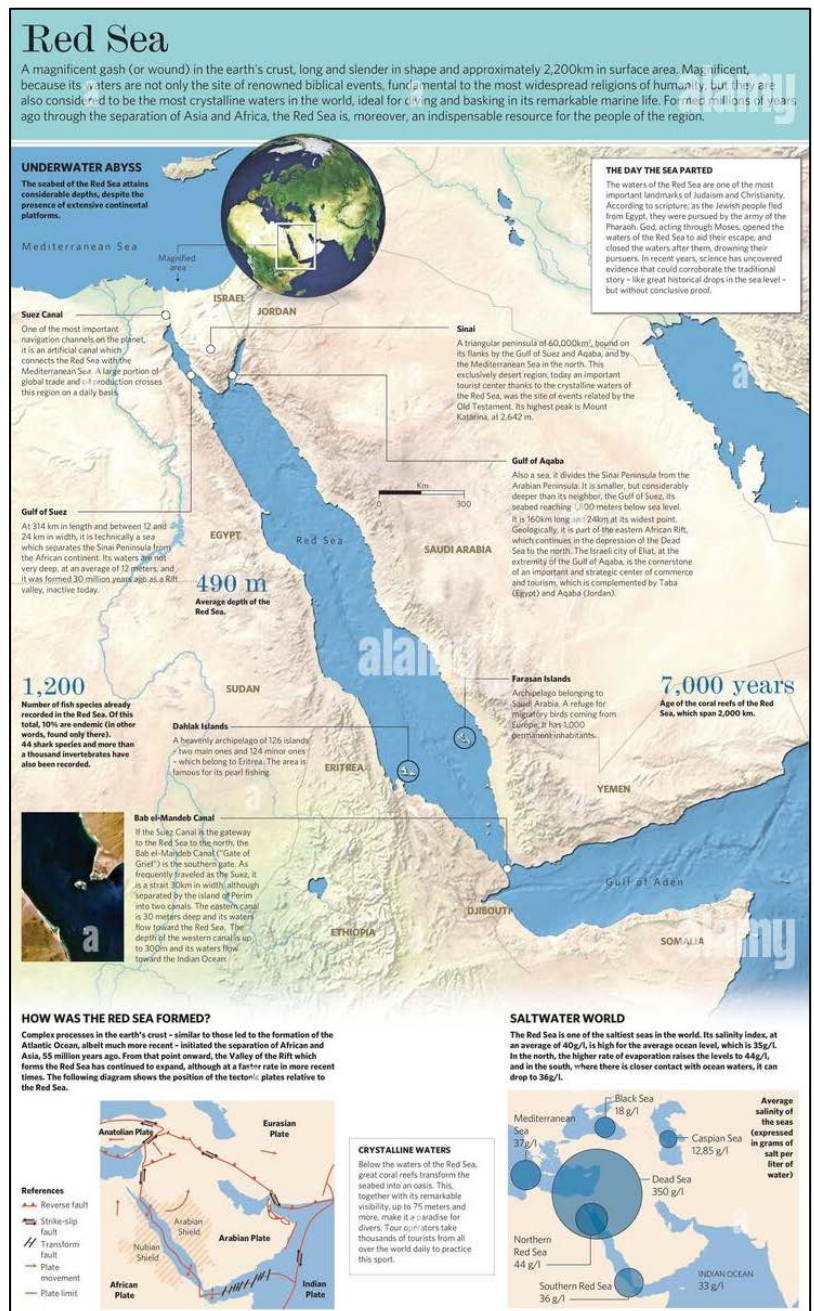
- **Strategic Importance:**
 - The Red Sea, a vital shipping route, connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean.
 - The Suez Canal, a crucial shortcut, significantly impacts global trade and oil flows.
- **Global Trade Dependency:**
 - Approximately 12% of global trade relies on the Suez Canal, compared to 5% on the Panama Canal.
 - In the first half of 2023, the canal accounted for 9.2 million barrels per day of total oil flows.

Houthi Actions and Link to Israel-Hamas Conflict:

- **Houthi Objectives:**
 - Houthis claim attacks on vessels with links to Israel, protesting against Israel's military actions in Gaza.
 - In November, Houthi militants hijacked the India-bound ship Galaxy Leader.
- **Yemen Civil War:**
 - Houthis have been embroiled in a civil war with the Yemen government for nearly a decade.
 - Sectarian and regional factors contribute to the complex political landscape.
- **Regional Dynamics:** Houthis' support for Palestine is considered a manifestation of regional rivalries, with Iran believed to back the Houthis.

Impact on Global Economy:

- **Economic Consequences:**
 - Oil prices rise due to concerns about disruptions to global shipping and logistics.
 - Freight forwarders increase rates, applying a war risk surcharge to shipments.





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➤ **Market Assessments:**

- Goldman Sachs analysts suggest the disruption is unlikely to significantly impact crude and LNG prices.
- Reports of countries, including the UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, and Spain, joining Operation Prosperity Guardian ease market concerns.

Operation Prosperity Guardian:

➤ **Multinational Security Initiative:**

- US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian involves joint patrols in the Red Sea.
- The United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, and Spain, among others, have joined the operation.

➤ **Combined Maritime Forces:**

- The Combined Maritime Forces, comprising 39 member countries, coordinate efforts to enhance maritime security.
- Operation Prosperity Guardian, led by Combined Task Force 153, focuses on improving security in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden.

Supplementary Demand for Grants

Context: Parliament granted approval for an additional net expenditure of ₹58,378 crore in the ongoing fiscal year, concluding in March 2024. A significant portion of this allocation is earmarked for MGNREGA and fertilizer subsidies.

➤ **Constitutional Requirement:**

- Article 113 mandates that any proposal to withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund of India must be presented as demands for grants in the Lok Sabha.
- Any withdrawal from the fund necessitates the passage of a bill in the Lok Sabha.

➤ **Ministry-wise Preparation:**

- Each ministry formulates a demand for grants detailing the anticipated expenditure for the upcoming financial year.
- These demands, covering both charged and voted expenditures, are collectively presented in the Lok Sabha as part of the Union Budget.

➤ **Expenditure Classification:**

- The demand for grants makes a clear distinction between charged and voted expenditures.
- Expenditures are categorized into capital and revenue, with capital expenditures resulting in asset creation and revenue expenditures being operational.

➤ **Presentation and Approval:**

- Lok Sabha's Power:
- According to Article 113, the Lok Sabha possesses the authority to assent, refuse, or reduce the specified amount in a demand for grants.
- Presidential Approval:
- Article 113 stipulates that the President of India's prior approval is necessary before presenting any demand for grants in the Lok Sabha.

➤ **Money Bill Requirements:** Articles 117 and 274 necessitate Presidential recommendations for tabling a Money Bill, such as the Finance Bill accompanying the Union Budget.

➤ **Types of Grants:**

• **Additional Grant:**

- **Definition:** Granted when there's a need for extra expenditure on a new service not considered in the budget for the current financial year.
- **Scenario:** Arises due to unforeseen requirements or emergent situations.
- **Authorization:** Requires approval from the Lok Sabha.

• **Excess Grant:**

- **Definition:** Granted when actual spending on a service exceeds the allocated budget for that particular service in the given financial year.
- **Process:** Voted by the Lok Sabha after the conclusion of the financial year.
- **Approval:** Must be approved by the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament before submission to the Lok Sabha.

• **Supplementary Grant:**

- **Definition:** Granted when the funds authorized by Parliament for a specific service in the current financial year are found to be insufficient.

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- **Trigger:** Usually prompted by unanticipated or exceptional circumstances.
- **Review Process:** The Comptroller and Auditor General of India highlights these excesses, examined by the Public Accounts Committee, which then provides recommendations to Parliament.
- **Vote of Credit:**
 - **Definition:** Granted to meet an unexpected and exceptional demand on the resources of India.
 - **Nature:** Often resembles a blank cheque given to the Executive by the Lok Sabha.
 - **Details:** The demand may not have the usual budget details due to the magnitude or indefinite character of the service.
 - **Presidential Approval:** Requires approval by the President of India.
- **Exceptional Grant:**
 - **Definition:** Granted for a special purpose and does not form part of the current service for any financial year.
 - **Purpose:** Usually allocated for unique or extraordinary situations that don't align with routine government operations.
 - **Authorization:** Subject to the same parliamentary approval process as other grants.
- **Token Grant:**
 - **Definition:** Granted when funds for proposed expenditure on a new service can be made available through reappropriation.
 - **Amount:** Often involves a nominal sum, such as Re 1.
 - **Approval:** A demand for the grant of this token sum is submitted to the Lok Sabha, and if assented, funds become available.
 - **Reappropriation:** Involves the transfer of funds from one head to another without incurring additional expenditure.
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 115:** Governs supplementary, additional, excess, and exceptional grants.
 - **Article 116:** Pertains to Votes on account, Votes of credit, and exceptional grants.
- **Uniform Procedure:** Supplementary, additional, excess, and exceptional grants, along with the vote of credit, adhere to the same procedural requirements as a regular budget.

One Year of COP15 of Convention on Biological Diversity

Context: A year has elapsed since the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) during the 15th Conference of Parties (CoP15) at the Convention on Biological Diversity.

- **Adoption of Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF):**
 - The KMGBF, an ambitious initiative, was officially adopted at the 15th Conference of Parties (CoP15) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).
 - The adoption took place with the setting of a deadline until 2030 to achieve a set of 23 targets.
- **Progress and Deferral:**
 - Despite the passage of one year since its adoption, progress towards the outlined targets has been slow.
 - Most decisions and discussions have been deferred to the upcoming 16th Conference of Parties (CoP16), scheduled to be held in Colombia.
- **Framework Objectives:** The KMGBF aligns with the overarching goals of the CBD, aiming to safeguard biodiversity, ensure sustainable utilization, and promote equitable sharing of benefits derived from its use with the communities that have been its custodians for centuries.
- **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs):**
 - Recognizing the pivotal role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), the KMGBF explicitly mentions them in seven out of the 23 targets.
 - This inclusion marks a significant departure from their historical sidelining since the inception of the CBD in 1993.
- **Article 8 (j) and IPLCs:**
 - Article 8 (j) of the KMGBF mandates that each country respects, preserves, and maintains the knowledge, innovations, and practices of IPLCs.
 - Four indicators have been identified, including linguistic diversity, land-use change, practice of traditional occupations, and respect for traditional knowledge, to ensure IPLC involvement.
- **Funding for IPLCs:**
 - In a progressive move, it has been proposed that IPLCs should receive direct funds for the implementation of projects.
 - Notably, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has committed to allocating 20% of funds under the newly established Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) to IPLCs.

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- **Benefit-sharing from Digital Sequence Information (DSI):**
 - The KMGBF addresses the emerging issue of digital sequence information (DSI) by establishing an Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group.
 - The aim is to develop a multilateral mechanism for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of DSI.
- **SBSTTA-25 and Indicators:**
 - The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-25) convened to discuss progress after the Framework's adoption.
 - A proposal was made to replace simple binary indicators with categorical indicators for a more nuanced reporting approach.
- **Synergies with Other Conventions:**
 - Throughout the year, discussions on the KMGBF extended to meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
 - The convergence of these conventions, established in 1992, reflects a collective effort to address environmental challenges comprehensively.
- **Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty:**
 - A significant development occurred with the formal adoption of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty to safeguard oceanic life.
 - The treaty complements KMGBF's Target 3, advocating for the protection of at least 30% of land and seas by 2030.
- **World Health Organization's Pandemic Agreement:**
 - The World Health Organization (WHO) explored issues related to access to pathogens and benefit-sharing through its pandemic agreement.
 - Draft text discussions concluded in December, emphasizing a multilateral system for access and benefit sharing.
- **Challenges and Deadlines:**
 - Despite these advancements, several decisions, including crucial ones related to IPLCs and DSI, have been deferred to 2024 and later.
 - Concerns arise regarding the feasibility of meeting KMGBF's deadlines, especially with the first global review scheduled during COP17 in 2026.
- **Global Review and Implementation:**
 - The upcoming COP17 in 2026 is slated for the first global review of KMGBF implementation.
 - This timeframe leaves a limited window for successful implementation and necessitates urgent corrective actions to ensure the world stays on course with the Framework's objectives.

NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary



Recently, the South Wayanad Forest Division officials shifted a 13-year-old male tiger from Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary to a quarantine facility at Puthur Zoological Park in Thrissur for safety.

About Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary:

- The Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary was established in **1973** and is located in **Kerala's** Wayanad district.
- The sanctuary is a component of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO-designated area)** and of the **Elephant Reserve No. 7** of South India.
- It covers the **Wayanad Plateau**, situated at the confluence of three biologically distinct and diverse regions- the main **Western Ghat** Mountains, the **Nilgiri Hills** and the **Deccan Plateau**.
- **Kabini river**, a tributary of the **Kaveri River** flows through the sanctuary.
- The flora consists of **moist deciduous forests**, **West coast semi-evergreen forests**, and teak, **eucalyptus**, and Grewelia plantations.
- The fauna includes **Elephant, Gaur, Tiger, Panther, Sambar**, Spotted deer, Barking deer, Wild boar, Sloth bear, Nilgiri langur and more.

Lumpy Skin Disease



Recently, the Parliamentary Committee questioned the accuracy of the Union Animal Husbandry Ministry's data on the deaths of over two lakh cattle and buffaloes due to lumpy skin disease in 2022 and 2023

About Lumpy Skin Disease:

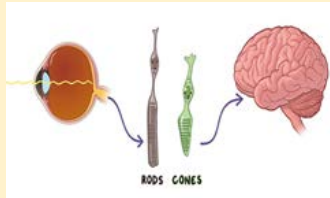
- Lumpy skin disease (LSD) is a **viral disease** that affects **cattle** and **water buffalo**.
- It is **caused by the lumpy skin disease virus (LSDV)**, which is a **member of the Poxviridae family**.
- This skin disease is **transmitted by blood-feeding insects**, such as certain species of flies and mosquitoes or ticks.
- It is characterized by **fever**, **nodules on the skin**, **mucous** membranes and internal organs, emaciation, **enlarged lymph nodes** and sometimes death.
- The first case of LSD in India was reported in **Gujarat** in May **2022**.
- There is **no treatment for the virus**, so prevention by vaccination is the most effective means of control.

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Photoreception



About Photoreception:

- Photoreception is the biological process by which photoreceptors in the **eye detect and convert light into electrical signals** that the brain interprets as vision.
- **Photoreceptors** are specialized cells in the retina that absorb light waves and convert them into electrical signals.
- There are two types of photoreceptors, **Rods and Cones**.
- **Rods detect dim light** (scotopic vision) and are used for night vision while **cones mediate daylight vision and color perception** (photopic vision).
- Humans have three distinct color-sensing cones—for **red, green and blue light**.
- **Diurnal creatures have cone-rich retinas** for clear daylight vision, while **nocturnal animals use rod cells** and rhodopsin for better low-light sight.

Large Magellanic Cloud



About the Large Magellanic Cloud:

- The Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC) is an **irregular satellite galaxy** that orbits the Milky Way every 1,500 million years.
- It is one of the **closest galaxies to Earth**.
- It is about **163,000 light-years away from the earth** and is **visible to the naked eye in the Southern Hemisphere**.
- The **LMC** and the Small Magellanic Cloud (**SMC**) are two irregular galaxies that orbit the Milky Way.
- The **Magellanic Clouds share a gaseous envelope** and lie about 22° apart in the sky near the south celestial pole.
- The **LMC is rich in dark matter**, which makes its mass considerably larger.
- The **interaction of the LMC with the Milky Way is creating new stars**.
- The Magellanic Clouds are named after the Portuguese explorer **Ferdinand Magellan**, who observed them during his voyage.

Place in News

Sierra Leone

Recently, Sierra Leone faced a November 26 coup attempt, stemming from political turmoil after President Bio's disputed re-election and economic hardships marked by high living costs and widespread poverty.

Sierra Leone (Capital: Freetown)

Location: Sierra Leone is a tropical country, located on the southwest coast of West Africa.

Boundaries: Sierra Leone shares its border with **Guinea** (North and Northeast), **Liberia** (southeast) and the **Atlantic Ocean** (southwest).

Physical Features:

- Mount Bintumani is the **highest peak** in Sierra Leone and the Loma mountains.
- The Loma Mountains are a mountain range in **Sierra Leone** that extends in a **north-south direction**.
- The main rivers include the **Rokel** and the **Moa**, which provide essential water resources and support agricultural activities.
- Sierra Leone is known for its rich mineral resources, including, **diamonds, rutile, bauxite and gold**, which contribute to the country's economy.



POINTS TO PONDER

- ❖ Which state government has taken steps to reduce the burden of school bags by cutting 50% of textbooks for students of classes I to X from the academic year 2024-25? - **Karnataka Government**
- ❖ Which acts does the Telecom Sector Bill repeal? - **Indian Telegraph Act 1885, Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act 1933 and Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act 1950**
- ❖ What is the name of the multi-sensor moored observatory India deployed in the Arctic in 2014? - **IndARC**
- ❖ What has the United Nations designated as the International Year in 2024? - **Year of Camelids**
- ❖ What language was Bipin Chandra Pal's book "Deshar Katha" originally published in? - **Bengali**

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