

The Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP)

❖ Context

- Recently, **Indian snow leopard** experts **Charudutt Mishra and Koustubh Sharma**, along with Chyngyz Kochorov of Kyrgyzstan, received the **Madrid-based BBVA Foundation's Worldwide Biodiversity Conservation Award** on behalf of a **12-nation intergovernmental alliance (GSLEP)** that they helped create and manage.

GSLEP

- It was **created in 2013** (Bishkek Declaration (2013))
- It is a **first-of-its-kind intergovernmental alliance** for the conservation of the snow leopard and its unique ecosystem.
- It is **led by the environment ministers of 12 countries** in Asia that form the home range of the snow leopard.
 - These are Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- The total range spans two million square kilometres.
- The GSLEP Program's **secretariat is based in Bishkek**.
 - It is hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- It majorly focuses on the need for awareness and understanding of the value of Snow Leopard for the ecosystem.
- The GSLEP Program (2019) was organized by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change at New Delhi.

Government Efforts to Conserve Snow Leopard

- **Project Snow Leopard (PSL)**
 - It promotes an inclusive and participatory approach to conservation that fully involves local communities.
- **SECURE Himalaya**
 - It is funded by Global Environment Facility (GEF)-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
 - Its objective is to conserve high altitude biodiversity and reduce the dependency of local communities on the natural ecosystem.
 - This project is now operational in four snow leopard range states, namely, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim.

Snow Leopard

- It is **native to the mountain ranges** of Central and South Asia. 
- **Scientific Name-** Panthera uncia
- **Distribution**
 - The snow leopard's habitat range extends across the mountainous regions of 12 countries across Asia: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- **Food**
 - Carnivore
 - Snow leopards prey upon the blue sheep (bharal) of Tibet and the Himalayas, as well as the mountain ibex found over most of the rest of their range.
- **Threats to survival**
 - Expansion of human settlement, livestock grazing, poaching, Vanishing habitat and the decline of the cats' large mammal prey.
- **Conservation**
 - **IUCN Red List** - Vulnerable
 - **CITES**- Appendix I
 - **WPA 1972** - Schedule I

Political Parties' Name and Symbols

❖ Context

- The Election Commission recently told the Supreme Court that there is no express provision which bars associations with religious connotations to register as political parties under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act-1951.

Background

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) was asked by the Supreme Court to submit its response to a petition seeking cancellation of political parties having religious symbols and names, as they violated the Constitution.

ECI's submission

- The ECI **does not have the power to deregister** political parties.

Allotment of symbols

- Symbols are either **reserved or free**.
- In the case of a recognised political party, the Commission allows it to 'reserve' a symbol.
- A person contesting on behalf of a recognised political party will inherit the party's symbol.
- **Two or more recognised political parties can have the same symbol** provided they are not contenders in the same State or Union Territory.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ECI had taken a policy decision in 2005 to not register parties with religious connotations in their names. • The names of parties with religious connotations that have been in use for decades are legacy issues, left up to the wisdom of the Courts. • On the issue of symbols, the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 bars parties from having symbols with religious or communal connotations. • It is not clear how many of the political parties registered with the ECI would be considered to have religious connotations in their names, mainly because it was subject to interpretation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An independent candidate or someone contesting on behalf of an unrecognised political party has to approach the Commission and get a symbol allotted from the list of 'free' symbols available. • A candidate will have to provide three symbols from the free list at the time of submission of nomination papers, one of which will be allocated to him/her. • Any choice other than from the EC's list will be summarily rejected. <p>Section 29A of RPA, 1951</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision provides for any association or body of individual citizens of India, calling itself a political party, to be registered with ECI. • It has to submit the name of the association and other particulars with the application. • The ECI decides whether to register the party or not and its decision is final.
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News in Between the Lines

Scheme for the Procurement of Aggregate Electricity of 4,500 MW for 5 Years



❖ Context

- Recently, **Power Ministry** launched a scheme for the procurement of aggregate electricity of 4,500 MW for five years under the **SHAKTI (Scheme for Harnessing and Allocating Koyala Transparently in India)** policy.

❖ Key Highlights

- **PFC Consulting Ltd**, a wholly-owned subsidiary of PFC Ltd, has been designated as the **nodal agency** by the Ministry of Power.
- Under the scheme, the PFC Consulting Ltd has invited bids for the supply of 4,500 MW.
- The supply of electricity will commence from April 2023.
- The Ministry of Coal has been requested to allocate around 27 MTPA for this.
- **Significance**
 - This scheme is expected to help the states that are facing power shortage and also help generation plants to increase their capacities.

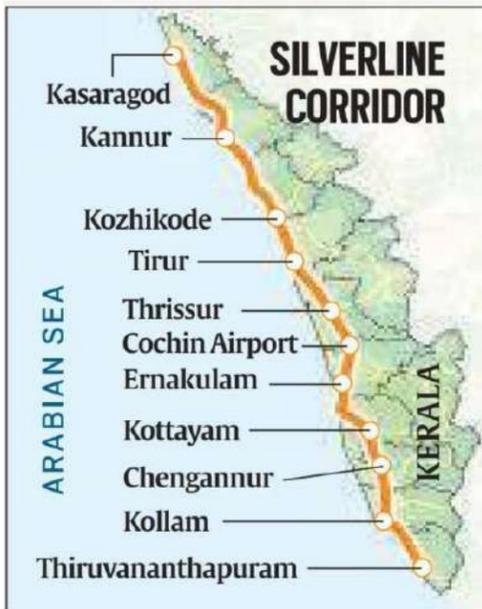
❖ SHAKTI Policy

- It was **approved in May 2017** with the intent of **better allocation of coal** to present and future power plants.
- It **aimed to phase out the present Letter of Assurance and Fuel Supply Agreement (FSA)**-based regime, and instead introduce a more transparent and competitive coal allocation policy.
- The policy also offered a potential solution to the lack of coal linkages to 17 power plants with a capacity of about 15,000 MW, which were part of the 34 power plants (of about 40,000 MW) declared as stressed.
- The policy was **amended in March 2019** specifically to aid stressed projects based on the recommendations of a High-Level Empowered Committee.

❖ Context



Silverline Project



➤ Recently, the **Kerala state government** has decided to recall the revenue officials deployed to conduct a social impact assessment (SIA) study for land acquisition regarding the SilverLine rail corridor project.

❖ About Silverline Project

- The proposed **529.45-km railway line** will link **Thiruvananthapuram in the south to Kasaragod in the north.**
- It will be **covering 11 districts** through 11 stations within four hours, at a speed of **200 km/hr.**
- On the existing Indian Railways network, it now takes 12 hours.
- The deadline for the project, being executed by the Kerala Rail Development Corporation Limited (KRDCL), is 2025.
- **KRDCL**, or K-Rail, is a joint venture between the Kerala government and the Union Ministry of Railways created to execute big railway projects.
- Union Government yet to give its nod for Kerala's proposed semi-high-speed rail corridor, or K-Rail.

❖ Concerns

- The state administration claims that the railway line will cut greenhouse gas emissions, while environmentalists have voiced concerns about **potential ecosystem harm.**
- They are concerned about the state's waterways, paddy fields, and wetlands being irreversibly damaged.
- They believe this will result in **future floods and landslides.**
- The project was financially unviable and would lead to the **displacement of over 30,000 families.**

Bluebugging



❖ Context

➤ Cybersecurity experts note that apps that let users connect smartphones or laptops to wireless earplugs can record conversations, and are vulnerable to hacks.

❖ Bluebugging

- Bluebugging is a technique that **allows skilled hackers to access mobile commands on Bluetooth-enabled devices** that are in discoverable mode.
- Once a device or phone is bluebugged, a hacker can listen to the calls, read and send messages and steal and modify contacts.
- Initially, bluebugging focused on eavesdropping or bugging a computer with Bluetooth capability.
- With the increasing use of smartphones, cybercriminals shifted to hacking mobile phones.
- This attack is often limited due to the range of Bluetooth connections, which goes up to only 10 meters.
- Some attackers use booster antennas to widen their attack range.

Harimau Shakti -2022

❖ Context

➤ Recently, **India - Malaysia joint military Exercise "Harimau Shakti -2022"** commenced at Pulai, Kluang, Malaysia on 28th November and will culminate on 12th December 22.

❖ Key Highlights

➤ Exercise HARIMAU SHAKTI is an **annual training** event between the Indian and Malaysian Army which has been **conducted since 2012.**





- Combat-experienced troops of the **GARHWAL RIFLES Regiment of Indian Army and the Royal Malay Regiment of the Malaysian Army** are participating in the exercise this year.
- They will share experiences gained during operations in order to enhance inter-operability in planning & execution of various operations in jungle terrain.
- It will **enhance the level of defence co-operation** between Indian Army and the Malaysian Army, which in turn will further **foster the bilateral relations** between the two nations.

Har Ghar Gangajal Scheme



❖ Context

- The **Bihar government** is going to launch the Har Ghar Gangajal scheme.

❖ Key highlights

- The scheme will harvest the **excess water in the Ganga during the monsoon flooding season**, to be treated, stored, and piped to households taps in **Rajgir, Gaya, and Bodhgaya**.
- The government plans to lift the floodwater through pumps and store the same in reservoirs, built in Rajgir and Gaya.
- These regions have for long depended on tankers of drinking water from adjoining districts to see them through the hot, dry season.
- The project has been described as a **“lift-store-tame-treat-supply” system**.
- The scheme is part of the Bihar government’s **Jal, Jeevan, Hariyali scheme**.
- Not only the project will meet the water demands of the region but also it will help the state in alleviating distress from the annual flooding of the banks of the Ganga River.

India’s First Buddhist Varsity



❖ Context

- Shakya Gasan, chief monk of the World Buddhist Pope Association of South Korea, will lay the foundation stone for the **International Buddhist University at Manu Bankul in Sabroom of South Tripura district**.

❖ Key highlights

- The **Dhamma Dipa International Buddhist University (DDIBU)** is expected to become the **first Buddhist-run university in India**.
- It will offer Buddhist education along with courses in other disciplines of modern education as well.

Modified Economic Internal Rate of Return

❖ Context

- The Ministry of Railways has sent a set of four new project proposals for appraisal to the NITI Aayog, justifying their investment based on this new ‘Modified Economic Internal Rate of Return’ model.

❖ Key highlights

- The projects that connect backward areas or faraway places, though financially unviable, have a long-term ripple effect in the economy, and those **“intangible benefits”**, social, environmental & network effects, need to be factored in as well.
- Traditionally, Railways could justify a new project if it offered a **minimum internal rate of return of around 12 %**.





- This takes into account the project cost, time taken, maintenance, and future prospects.
- Under the 'Modified Economic Internal Rate of Return' model, a new proposal can obtain a sanction even if its financial rate of return is poor, even 2-4 %.
- The Niti Aayog considers only projects which entail an investment of over Rs 500 crore.

Mahatma Gandhi's bust at UN



❖ Context

- A bust of Mahatma Gandhi will be inaugurated as a gift from India to the United Nations during India's Presidency of the Security Council next month.

❖ Key highlights

- It will be the first sculpture of the Mahatma to be installed at the world body's headquarters, New York, that will be placed in its expansive North Lawns.
- It has been made by renowned Indian sculptor Padma Shree awardee Ram Sutar, who has also designed the 'Statue of Unity' in Gujarat.
- Notable works of art at the UNHQ include a **section of the Berlin wall** donated by Germany, **Soviet sculpture 'Let us Beat Swords into Ploughshares'**, life-size **bronze statue of Nelson Mandela** gifted by South Africa and the **'Guernica' tapestry** after the painting Guernica by Pablo Picasso.
- The only other gift from India on display at the UN Headquarters is an **11th century black-stone statue of 'Surya'**, the Sun God, donated on July 26, 1982.
- The statue, dating from the late Pala period, is currently displayed in the Conference Building.

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