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SURVEY TO ASSESS WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN WORKFORCE

Context

- The Union Ministries of Labour & Employment and Women & Child Development have started a joint survey on increasing women participation in the workforce.

About the survey

- The survey is being taken to assess the spread of women employee-friendly practices in the country.
- The government is seeking details such as formation of **internal complaints committee (ICC)** for Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace (POSH), **creche facilities** for children, equal pay for equal work, flexible or remote working hours for women and transportation facilities during late hours.
- Along with this various ministries of the Central government have issued a series of advisories to bolster the representation of women in the workforce.

Advisories issued by Central government

- **Promoting women** in leadership and management roles and establishing working women hubs complete with dormitories and hostels:
- **Employer rating survey** within the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation, designed to guide employers in fostering an environment conducive to women's economic involvement.
- Enforcement of a **26-week paid maternity leave** for workers in the construction and highway sectors, along with the **establishment of creches** in all facilities with more than **50 employees**.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development released **national minimum standards and protocols** for the operation and management of creches.
- To address factors hindering women's participation in the workforce, including childcare responsibilities and gender pay gaps.

Reason for poor women labor force participation

- **Cultural and Social Norms:** In traditional societies, gender roles may discourage women from entering or staying in the workforce.

Expectations around women's responsibilities for caregiving and homemaking limit their ability to pursue full-time employment.

- **Educational Attainment:** Limited access to quality education can be a barrier for women to acquire the necessary skills and qualifications for certain jobs.
- **Unequal Pay:** Difference between wage gap, discourage women from entering or staying in the workforce.
- **Structural rigidities** in India's manufacturing and service sectors have restricted employment opportunities in the informal sector, where a substantial amount of female workforce is involved.
- **Security Issues:** Sexual harassment at Workplace often hinders women participation in labor force.

Steps taken by Government

- **Code on Wages, 2019:** It provides that there shall be no discrimination in an establishment among employees on the ground of gender in matters relating to wages by the same employer, in respect of the same work or work of similar nature done by any employee.
- **Maternity Benefit Act, 2017:** It was enacted to provide improved maternity benefits and promote a healthier work environment for pregnant and nursing women.
- **The Code on Occupational Safety, Health And Working Conditions (OSH), 2020:** It has proposed tweaks in employment terms and conditions for women workers in the above-ground mines.
- **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK):** It is a national-level organization that provides microfinance services to poor women for various livelihood activities. It supports income-generating projects and promotes women's economic empowerment.
- **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM):** NRLM focuses on creating sustainable self-employment opportunities for rural women. It provides skill training, capacity building, and financial support for women to engage in income-generating activities.
- **MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act):** It guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to rural households. Women's participation in this program is encouraged, and efforts are made to ensure equitable employment opportunities.

Way Ahead

- The sustained government efforts to enhance women's labor force participation by providing them with skills and employment opportunities have increased women labor force participation.
- The results of the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**, released by the Labour Bureau in 2023, had shown considerable increase in the women participation. In 2017-18, the participation rate was **23.3%** and in 2022-23, it was **37%**.

Source: **TH**

'MARATHA MILITARY LANDSCAPES' TO BE INDIA'S NOMINATION FOR UNESCO TAG

Context

- India has nominated the "**Maratha Military Landscapes**", a network of forts that showcase the **strategic military powers of Maratha rule**, for inclusion in the **UNESCO World Heritage list for 2024-25**.

About

- The **12 components** of this nomination are the forts of Salher, Shivneri, Lohagad, Khanderi, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijaydurg and Sindhudurg in **Maharashtra** and **Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu**.
- The "Maratha Military Landscapes" is the **sixth cultural property nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List from Maharashtra** and had been earlier included in the **Tentative List of World Heritage sites** in 2021.
- The inception of the Maratha military ideology dates back to the **17th century** during the reign of the Maratha king **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** from 1670 CE and continued through subsequent rules until the Peshwa rule till 1818 CE.

Maratha Military Landscapes

- The "Maratha Military Landscapes", which developed between the **17th and 19th centuries**, represent an extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha rulers.
- This extraordinary network of forts is a result of integrating the landscape, terrain and physiographic characteristics distinctive to the **Sahyadri mountain ranges, the Konkan Coast, Deccan Plateau and the Eastern Ghats** in the Indian Peninsula.

- Maharashtra has **more than 390 forts out of which only 12 forts are selected** under the "Maratha Military Landscapes".
- **Eight of these are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** while four are protected by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra.

World Heritage sites

- World Heritage sites are landmarks or areas designated by **UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)** for having cultural, historical, scientific, or other forms of **outstanding value to humanity**.
- It derives its mandate from the **World Heritage Convention of 1972**.
- **Criteria:** Sites are nominated by individual countries and evaluated by the **World Heritage Committee** based on specific criteria.
 - ♦ These criteria consider factors like **cultural significance, architectural uniqueness, historical importance, and ecological diversity**.
 - ♦ Only sites deemed to be of **exceptional universal value** are inscribed on the World Heritage List.
- **Types of World Heritage sites:**
 - ♦ **Cultural:** Includes historic buildings, important archaeological sites, monumental sculpture or painting
 - ♦ **Natural:** Restricted to those natural areas like having natural phenomena
 - ♦ **Mixed:** Sites that encompass both cultural and natural significance.
- At present in India, there are **42 World Heritage sites out of which 34 are cultural sites, seven are natural sites and one is a mixed site**.

Cultural:

- Agra Fort (1983)
- Ajanta Caves (1983)
- Archaeological Site of Nalanda Mahavihara at Nalanda, Bihar (2016)
- Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi (1989)
- Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park (2004)
- Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus) (2004)

- Churches and Convents of Goa (1986)
- Dholavira: a Harappan City (2021)
- Elephanta Caves (1987)
- Ellora Caves (1983)
- Fatehpur Sikri (1986)
- Great Living Chola Temples (1987, 2004)
- Group of Monuments at Hampi (1986)
- Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram (1984)
- Group of Monuments at Pattadakal (1987)
- Hill Forts of Rajasthan (2013)
- Historic City of Ahmedabad (2017)
- Humayun's Tomb, Delhi (1993)
- Jaipur City, Rajasthan (2019)
- Kakatiya Rudreshwara (Ramappa) Temple, Telangana (2021)
- Khajuraho Group of Monuments (1986)
- Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya (2002)
- Mountain Railways of India (1999, 2005, 2008)
- Qutb Minar and its Monuments, Delhi (1993)
- Rani-ki-Vav (the Queen's Stepwell) at Patan, Gujarat (2014)
- Red Fort Complex (2007)
- Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka (2003)
- Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas (2023)
- Santiniketan (2023)
- Sun Temple, Konârak (1984)
- Taj Mahal (1983)
- The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement (2016)
- The Jantar Mantar, Jaipur (2010)
- Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai (2018)

Natural:

- Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (2014)
- Kaziranga National Park (1985)
- Keoladeo National Park (1985)
- Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (1985)
- Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks (1988, 2005)
- Sundarbans National Park (1987)

- Western Ghats (2012)

Mixed:

- Khangchendzonga National Park (2016)

Source: TH

UNION GOVERNMENT INKS MOU WITH MP AND RAJASTHAN FOR RIVER LINKING PROJECT

In Context

- **Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh** signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti to implement the **Modified Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal-ERCP (Modified PKC-ERCP) Link Project**.

About

- The project envisages integration of the long-pending PKC river link project with the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project, under the **national perspective plan of interlinking of rivers (ILR) programme**.
- **PKC:** The **Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal (PKC)** link project is **one of the 30 links** included in the National Perspectives Plan.
- **ECRP: The Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP)** is aimed at **intra-basin transfer** of water within the **Chambal basin**, by utilising surplus monsoon water.
- **Linking of Both Project:** Rajasthan came up with the proposal of the ERCP in 2019, and to utilise water resources optimally, the Task Force for Interlinking of Rivers (TFILR) discussed its merger with the PKC link project.
 - ◆ This integration was approved by the Special Committee for Interlinking of Rivers in 2022.

National Perspective Plan of Interlinking of Rivers (ILR) Programme

- The Government of India formulated a **National Perspective Plan (NPP) for interlinking of rivers (ILR) in 1980**.
- **National Water Development Agency (NWDA)** has been entrusted with the work of **Interlinking of Rivers** under the National Perspective Plan (NPP).
- The NPP has two components, viz; **Himalayan Rivers Development Component and Peninsular Rivers Development Component**.

- **30 link projects** have been identified under the NPP.
 - Under the **Himalayan Rivers Development Component of the NPP**, 3 link projects, viz; **Kosi-Mechi Link project**, **Kosi-Ghaghra link project** and **Chunar-Sone Barrage link project**
 - ♦ It envisages transfer of water from Kosi, Ghaghra and Gandak rivers flowing down from Nepal to the other rivers in the State of Bihar.
 - **Peninsular Rivers Development Component** is divided into **four major parts**:
 - ♦ **Interlinking of Mahanadi-Godavari-Krishna-Cauvery Rivers**: This part involves interlinking of the major river systems where surpluses from the Mahanadi and the Godavari are intended to be transferred to the needy areas in the south, through Krishna and Cauvery rivers.
 - ♦ **Interlinking of west flowing rivers, north of Bombay and south of Tapi**: The scheme provides for taking water supply canal to the metropolitan areas of Mumbai; it also provides irrigation in the coastal areas in Maharashtra.
 - ♦ **Interlinking of Ken-Chambal**: The scheme provides for a water grid for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and an interlinking canal backed by as much storage as possible.
 - ♦ **Diversions of other west flowing rivers**: The high rainfall on the western side of the Western Ghats runs down into numerous streams which discharge into the Arabian Sea.
 - The construction of an interlinking canal system backed up by adequate storage could be planned to meet all requirements of Kerala as also for transfer of some waters towards east to meet the needs of drought affected areas.
- distribute excess water during periods of heavy rainfall, reducing the risk of floods in specific regions.
- **Increased Hydropower Potential**: The construction of reservoirs and canals for interlinking projects can create opportunities for hydropower generation, contributing to a cleaner and more sustainable energy mix.
 - **Improved Navigation**: Connecting rivers can enhance the navigability of waterways, facilitating transportation of goods and reducing the dependence on road and rail networks.
 - **Drought Mitigation**: By redistributing water resources, interlinking projects can help mitigate the impact of droughts by providing water to affected regions.
 - **Job Creation**: The construction and maintenance of interlinking infrastructure can create job opportunities, contributing to economic development.
 - **Conflict Resolution**: River interlinking projects can potentially reduce inter-state disputes over water resources by providing a more equitable distribution of water.

Concerns with the River Linking Projects

Significance of River Linking Projects

- **Reduction of Water Scarcity**: Interlinking rivers can help transfer surplus water from water-rich regions to water-deficient areas, addressing water scarcity issues.
 - **Improved Water Availability for Agriculture**: Increased water availability in dry regions can enhance agricultural productivity, supporting the cultivation of crops and promoting food security.
 - **Mitigation of Floods**: Interlinking rivers can help
- **Ecosystem Disruption**: Altering natural river courses and diverting water can disrupt ecosystems, leading to habitat loss, changes in biodiversity, and potential extinction of species.
 - **Displacement of Communities**: The construction of dams, reservoirs, and canals for river interlinking can result in the displacement of communities, leading to social and economic hardships for affected populations.
 - **Inter-State Disputes**: River interlinking projects often involve multiple states, and disagreements can arise over water sharing, leading to inter-state disputes.
 - **Financial Viability**: The construction of large-scale infrastructure for river interlinking projects can be economically challenging, with costs often exceeding initial estimates.
 - ♦ The return on investment for such projects may take a long time, raising questions about their financial viability.
 - **Seismic Risks**: Areas prone to earthquakes may face increased risks due to the construction of large dams and other infrastructure associated with river interlinking.

- **Maintenance Issues:** The proper operation and maintenance of the interconnected water infrastructure are crucial for the success of these projects. Neglecting maintenance can lead to system failures and adverse consequences.
- **Community Resistance:** Local communities and environmental activists may oppose river interlinking projects due to concerns about their impact on the environment, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.

Conclusion

- Addressing the concerns requires comprehensive planning, environmental impact assessments, community engagement, and transparent decision-making processes.
- Sustainable water management practices, incorporating modern technologies and adaptive strategies, are essential to mitigate the potential negative consequences of river interlinking projects.

Source: *IE*

RAISING THE AGE OF MARRIAGE OF WOMEN IN INDIA

In Context

- A parliamentary committee examining Bill seeking to **raise the age of marriage of women** from the **present 18 years to 21** has been given another extension to table its report.

About

- **The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021**, was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2021 and was referred to the **Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports**.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021

- The Bill amends the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** to increase the minimum age of marriage of females to 21 years. Further, the Bill will override any other law, custom, or practice.
- Under the 2006 Act, a person married below the minimum age may apply for annulment within two years of attaining majority (i.e., before 20 years of age). The Bill increases this to five years (i.e., 23 years of age).

Legal Age of Marriage in India

- According to the **National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5)**, **23% of women between the age of 20 and 24** were married before 18 years of age.
- In India, the **practice of child marriage** was first legally prohibited through the **Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929**.
 - ♦ As per the 1929 Act, marriage of girls below the age of **14 years and boys below the age of 18 years was prohibited**.
 - ♦ This Act was amended in **1978** to increase the minimum age to **18 years for females, and 21 years for men**.
- **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** replaced the 1929 Act, with the same minimum age limits.

Arguments in Favour of Increasing the Marriageable Age:

- **Educational Opportunities:** Increasing the marriageable age to 21 in India can contribute to higher educational attainment for women.
- **Career Development:** Raising the marriageable age provides Indian women with the chance to focus on building their careers before entering into marital commitments.
 - ♦ This can lead to increased workforce participation, financial independence, and professional development, contributing to the economic growth of the country.
- **Health and Maternal Well-being:** Women who marry later are generally more physically and emotionally prepared for pregnancy and childbirth, contributing to reduced maternal and infant mortality rates.
- **Gender Equality:** Raising the marriageable age aligns with the principles of gender equality by providing both men and women with similar opportunities for personal and professional growth.
- **Empowerment of Women:** Delaying marriage empowers women by allowing them more time to explore their own aspirations and make informed decisions about their lives.
- **Reducing Child Marriages:** Increasing the marriageable age serves as a legal deterrent to child marriages, protecting young girls from the physical, emotional, and social consequences associated with early unions.

- **Social and Emotional Maturity:** At the age of 21, individuals are likely to have a better understanding of themselves, their goals, and the responsibilities that come with marriage.
- **Population Control:** Delaying marriage can contribute to better family planning and population control.

Arguments Against Increasing the Marriageable Age:

- **Cultural and Traditional Variability:** Critics argue that different communities have their own norms and expectations regarding the appropriate age for marriage. Imposing a uniform age limit may not align with the cultural variability across the nation.
- **Individual Freedom and Autonomy:** Some individuals may be emotionally and mentally prepared for marriage at 18, and imposing a higher age limit may be seen as restricting their personal choices and decision-making abilities.
- **Legal Consistency:** Critics may point out that the legal age for voting and consenting to sexual activity in India is already 18.
 - ♦ Setting a different age for marriage introduces inconsistency in the legal framework, and opponents argue that individuals should be considered mature enough for all legal responsibilities at the same age.
- **Role of Parents and Family Decision-Making:** Increasing the marriageable age undermines the role of parents and families in decision-making.
- **Unintended Consequences on Relationships:** Delaying marriage could result in individuals entering into premarital relationships without the legal commitment of marriage.
 - ♦ This may lead to a shift in societal norms and values, which some may view as having negative consequences.
- **Social Stigma and Marital Status:** Imposing a higher marriageable age could result in social stigma for individuals who choose to marry earlier.
 - ♦ This may lead to societal judgments and challenges for those who do not conform to the new legal age limit.
- **Female Foeticide:** The pressure to educate young girls until 21 among poor families will increase the rate of sex-selective abortion in the country.

- **Safety Concerns:** The fear of rape or elopement will also loom large, especially in the rural areas due to the proposed law.

Way Ahead

- The result lies in **empowering youthful girls**, encouraging them to get educated and achieve fiscal autonomy education for girls, and conducting mindfulness programs on the ill goods of nonage marriages.
- Government should subsidized education and healthcare installations in order to insure that girl's right to live a life of her choice is admired and preserved.
- Government should also come with an on-ground medium to spread mindfulness and apply this policy change rigorously for the benefits to reflect in the society.

Source: TH

INDUSTRIALLY PRODUCED TRANS-FATTY ACIDS (ITFAS)

Context

- WHO has awarded its **first-ever certificates** validating progress in **eliminating industrially produced trans fatty-acids** to Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand.

About

- These five countries have demonstrated they have a **best practice policy for industrially produced trans-fatty acids (iTFA)** elimination.
- WHO also released results from the **first five years of its REPLACE initiative**.
 - ♦ Launched in 2018, the WHO's REPLACE action package provides a **strategic approach to eliminating industrially produced trans fat** from the global food supply by the end of 2023.

Current status

- **A total of 53 countries now have best practice policies in effect for tackling iTFA in food**, vastly improving the food environment for 3.7 billion people, or 46% of the world's population, as compared to 6% just 5 years ago.
 - ♦ These policies are also **expected to save approximately 183 000 lives a year**.

- Accelerating efforts to achieve best-practice policies **in just 8 countries** with the highest needs **would eliminate 90% of the global iTFA burden**, representing a unique opportunity to see in our lifetime a **world free from deaths attributable to iTFA**.

WHO Validation Programme

- The validation programme for iTFA elimination **recognizes those countries which went beyond introducing best practice policies** by ensuring rigorous monitoring and enforcement systems in place.
- Best practices in iTFA elimination policies follow **WHO criteria and limit iTFA use** in all settings.
- There are **two best-practice policy options**:
 - ♦ **mandatory national limit of 2 grams of iTFA per 100 grams** of total fat in all foods; and
 - ♦ **mandatory national ban** on the production or use of partially hydrogenated oils (a major source of trans fat) as an ingredient in all foods.
- WHO has **proposed a revised new target** for virtual elimination of iTFA globally **by 2025**. The target includes:
 - ♦ best-practice elimination policies are passed in countries that account for **at least 90% of the total global iTFA burden**.
 - ♦ best practice policies are passed in countries that account for at least **70% of the total burden within regions**.

Trans-fatty acids (TFA)

- Trans-fatty acids (TFA) are **semi solid to solid fats** that occur in two forms:
 - ♦ industrially produced and
 - ♦ naturally occurring.
- iTFAs are created during the **partial hydrogenation of vegetable oils** to solidify them, making them **ideal for use in processed foods**.
- Unlike naturally occurring trans fats found in meat and dairy, **iTFAs are considered harmful due to their specific chemical structure**.
- **iTFAs are common in various processed foods**.

Need to eliminate iTFA

- iTFAs **increase the levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol**, also known as “bad” cholesterol, while **lowering the levels of**

high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, known as “good” cholesterol.

- ♦ This imbalance contributes to the development of **atherosclerosis**, a buildup of plaque in arteries that can lead to **heart disease, stroke, and other cardiovascular problems**.
- TFA has **no known health benefits**, and foods high in iTFA (e.g. fried foods, cakes and ready meals) are often high in sugar, fat and salt.
- Trans fat elimination is **economically, politically, and technically feasible** and saves lives at virtually no cost to governments or consumers.
- Eliminating iTFA is a **powerful way to prevent heart disease and the high costs** to individuals and economies in medical treatment and lost productivity.

Global effort to regulate trans fatty acids (TFAs)

- **REPLACE framework**: In 2018, the WHO launched the REPLACE framework, a six-point action plan for eliminating industrially-produced TFAs from the global food supply.
- **Target of <1% of total energy intake**: In 2018, the WHO also recommended a global target of reducing industrially-produced TFAs to less than 1% of total energy intake.
- **Denmark** was the first country to implement a **nationwide ban on TFAs in 2003**, followed by other countries like Austria, Iceland, and Hungary.
- **Regional efforts**: The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) adopted a regional plan in 2015 to eliminate TFAs by 2025, and the EU set a maximum limit of 2 grams of industrially-produced TFAs per 100 grams of fat in foodstuffs in 2014.

Indian effort to regulate trans fatty acids (TFAs)

- **2019 Draft Regulation by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**:
 1. Set a **maximum limit of 2% TFA** content in food products.
 2. Require **mandatory labeling** of TFA content on packaged food items.
- **Public awareness campaigns**: The FSSAI launched the “Heart Attack Rewind” campaign to educate consumers about the harmful effects of TFAs
- **Fit India Movement**: It focused on healthy diet along with regular exercise.

Source: **WHO**

PHILIPPINES AND VIETNAM DEAL ON SOUTH CHINA SEA

Context

- The Philippines and Vietnam have signed agreements to avoid incidents in the South China Sea and broaden cooperation between their coast guards.

About

- The Philippines and Vietnam have competing claims over some parts of the South China Sea, a conduit for **\$3 trillion** of annual ship-borne trade that China claims almost in its entirety.
- The two countries also signed a deal for Vietnam to supply the Philippines with **1.5 million to 2 million metric tons of rice** each year at affordable prices.
 - Vietnam** is one of the world's biggest rice exporters whereas the **Philippines** is a top importer of the grain.

South China Sea

- Location:** It is bounded on the northeast by the **Taiwan Strait**, on the east by **Taiwan and the Philippines**; on the southeast and south by **Borneo**, the southern limit of the **Gulf of Thailand**, and the east coast of the **Malay Peninsula**; and on the west and north by the Asian mainland.
- The South China Sea is at the center of territorial tussles between China, the Philippines and other countries.



Dispute in South China Sea

- Southeast Asian countries like **China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan** have had disputes over the contentious South China Sea region for centuries.
- The two primary points of contention are: The **Spratly Islands** and the **Paracel Islands** in the sea.

- Nine-dash line:** Beijing stakes claim to most of the region and at the heart of this claim is the U-shaped '**nine-dash line**' that includes as much as **90 percent** of these waters.
 - This dotted line was adopted from Chinese maps in the 1940s, and represents Beijing's claim over the sea and all the land features that are contained within the line.

Source: *TH*

STATUS REPORT OF SNOW LEOPARDS IN INDIA

Context

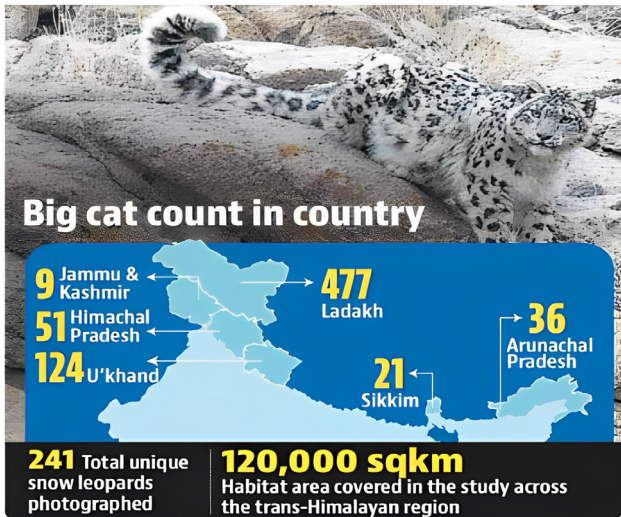
- India's first nationwide report, '**Status Report of Snow Leopards in India**', was released by the Government of India recently.

About

- The assessment estimates **718 snow leopards in India** based on systematic surveys covering over 70% of their potential habitat from 2019-2023.
- For this, the Wildlife Institute of India coordinated the **Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) program** across snow leopard range states.
- The SPAI used a two-step approach aligned with Ministry guidelines. The first **step mapped snow leopard spatial distribution** and habitat analysis. The second step estimated abundance through camera traps in identified areas.
- Until recently, snow leopard ranges in India were **poorly defined and studied only across 5% of their habitat**. The SPAI has significantly expanded habitat surveys to 80% versus just 56% in 2016.

Key Findings of the Report

- Only 34 percent** of the 120,000 square kilometre (sq km) snow leopard habitat in India is **legally protected**. **Almost 70 percent** of it, crucial for the predator, **remains unprotected**.
- According to the report, **the highest number of snow leopards are in Ladakh (477)**.
 - It is followed by **Uttarakhand (124 animals) and Himachal Pradesh (51)**. Sikkim and Jammu and Kashmir recorded 21 and 9 individuals respectively.



Suggestions of the report

- The report emphasised the need for a **dedicated Snow Leopard Cell** at the **Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
 - Its objective should be **long-term population monitoring, organised studies and consistent field surveys**.
- For the same, states and Union territories (UT) can consider **adopting a periodic population estimation approach** (every fourth year) in the snow leopard range.
 - These **regular assessments will offer valuable insights** for identifying challenges, addressing threats, and formulating effective conservation strategies.
- It also underscored the **need to make a revised assessment from the earlier estimate of 400-700 snow leopards** in India, among the 4,000-7,500 estimated to be present across the globe.

Snow Leopard

- Scientific Name:** Panthera uncia.
- Habitat:** Cold High Mountains.
 - These are found in 12 countries including China, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia & Mongolia.
 - China has the world's largest snow leopard population.
- Diet:**
 - Carnivore & hunt blue sheep, Argali wild sheep, ibex, marmots, pikas, hares, etc.

Features:

- One of the world's most elusive cats & are perfectly equipped to thrive in extreme, high-elevation habitats.
- Insulated with thick white-grey coats spotted with large black rosettes & wide, fur-covered feet act as natural snowshoes. The tail helps in balancing and also covers the body while sleeping.

Threats:

- Increased conflict due to expansion of human settlement & livestock grazing.
- Poaching for trade in body parts and fur.
- Climate change & shrinkage in habitat.

Conservation Status:

- IUCN:** Vulnerable
- Schedule I:** Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972

Significance:

- The snow leopard plays a crucial role in maintaining the **delicate balance of high-mountain ecosystems**.

Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

DRAFT INDIAN STAMP BILL, 2023

In Context

- The Union Government has proposed repealing the **Indian Stamp Act, 1899** and bringing **Draft Indian Stamp Bill, 2023** for the stamp duty regime in the country.

About

- A stamp duty is essentially **a government tax**, which is **levied to register documents**, like an agreement or transaction paper between two or more parties, with the registrar.
- Duty to be Paid:** Usually, the amount specified is fixed based on the document's nature or is charged at a certain percentage of the agreement value stated in the document.
- Applicability:** Stamp duties can be levied on bills of exchange, cheques, promissory notes, bills of lading, letters of credit, policies of insurance, transfer of shares, debentures, proxies and receipts.

- **Legality:** Stamp duties are accepted as valid evidence in a court of law.
 - ♦ They are levied by the Centre but appropriated by the concerned states within their territories under **Article 268 of the Constitution**.
- **Need for the Bill:** Several provisions of the Indian Stamp Act, 1899 have now become **redundant or inoperative**, also there is a **lack of uniform legislation** for all Indian states regarding stamp duties.

Indian Stamp Act, 1899

- The Indian Stamp Act, 1899 is a **fiscal or money-related statute** that lays down the law relating to tax levied in the form of stamps on instruments recording transactions.
- **Instrument:** Under Section 2 of the Act, an instrument includes every document by which **any right or liability** is or purports to be, created, transferred, limited, extended, extinguished or recorded.
- **Stamp:** A stamp has been defined as any mark, seal or endorsement by any agency or person duly authorised by the State Government, and includes an adhesive or impressed stamp, for the purposes of duty chargeable under this Act.

Source: *IE*

CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX (CPI) 2023

News

- Recently, the **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2023** was released by Transparency International.

About

- Transparency International is the global civil society organisation founded in 1993 and is based in Berlin, Germany.
- It ranks 180 countries and territories around the globe by their perceived levels of public sector corruption.
- The index uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

Key Findings

- Denmark is at the top, followed by Finland, New Zealand and Norway.

- The bottom of the index included Myanmar (162), Afghanistan (162) and North Korea (172). At rank 180 was Somalia with the lowest score of 11.
- At rank 93, India has tied up with Maldives, Kazakhstan, and Lesotho.

What is Corruption?

- It is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.
- Corruption adapts to different contexts and changing circumstances. It can evolve in response to changes in rules, legislation and even technology.

Source: *TH*

VOLUNTARY CARBON MARKET IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Context

- The Union government has launched a framework to promote voluntary carbon markets in the agriculture sector.

About

- Around **54.6 percent** of the country's workforce is engaged in agriculture and allied sectors' activities, with the share of the agriculture sector in the gross domestic product being **18.6 percent**.
- The initiative will accelerate the adoption of environment-friendly agricultural practices along with benefitting the farmers.

Carbon Markets

- Carbon markets are systems designed to place a price on carbon emissions and create economic incentives for emission reduction, also known as 'carbon credits'.
- **A carbon credit** is a kind of tradable permit that, per United Nations standards, equals one tonne of carbon dioxide removed, reduced, or sequestered from the atmosphere.

Types of Carbon Markets

- **Compliance markets:** The market is regulated by national, regional, or international carbon reduction regimes. These markets operate under a cap-and-trade system where only a certain amount of 'allowances' (permit that 'allows' to emit GHGs) are created.
- **Voluntary Carbon Market:** The market functions outside of the compliance market. Those that participate in this market don't need to reduce their emissions, it's entirely voluntary.

Source: *PIB*

