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(CONSOLIDATION)

RAJASTHAN

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Progress of Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen in Rajasthan

Why in News?

The **Union Minister for Jal Shakti** chaired a **crucial review meeting** to assess **Rajasthan's progress and challenges** in implementing the **Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G)**.

Key Points

- **Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G) & Rajasthan:**
 - It was **launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Jal Shakti** to accelerate the efforts to achieve universal sanitation coverage and to put focus on sanitation.
 - The mission was implemented as a **nation-wide campaign/Janandolan** which aimed at **eliminating open defecation in rural areas**.
 - **Rajasthan has demonstrated notable progress under the SBM-G initiative:**
 - **Ranked 10th nationally for ODF (Open Defecation Free) Plus Model achievements.**
 - **98% of villages** in the state have been **declared ODF Plus**.
 - **85% of villages** have **successfully achieved ODF Plus Model status**.
- **Achievements:**
 - **Faecal Sludge Management (FSM):**
 - **Current Status:** Only 114 blocks have completed FSM verification.
 - No rural **Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs)** have been constructed yet.
 - **Recommendations:** Utilize urban resources effectively.
 - Finalize and implement a robust FSM policy.
 - **Solid Waste Management (SWM):**
 - **Progress:** 94% of villages are covered under SWM initiatives.
 - **Recommendations:** Ensure the proper functioning of segregation sheds and vehicles

while connecting compost markets to enhance sustainability.

- **Plastic Waste Management Units (PWMUs):**
 - Only one operational PWMU exists in rural Rajasthan, needing significant scale-up.
- **Grey Water Management (GWM):**
 - **Progress:** 98% of villages have GWM systems in place, with saturation in remaining villages expected soon.
 - **Focus Areas:** Promote household soak pits for tap water connections under the **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)**.
- Strengthen the role of **self-help groups** in driving sanitation initiatives.
- **Tourism and Cleanliness:**
 - Rajasthan was urged to combine its rich tourism heritage with cleanliness initiatives and adopt the **Swachhta Green Leaf Rating program** to demonstrate tradition and innovation can unite for sustainable sanitation.

Swachhata Green Leaf Rating (SGLR) Program

- It is a government initiative to **promote hygiene and sanitation in the hospitality sector**.
- The SGLR program aims to **improve the quality of life and public health** by:
 - Ensuring world-class cleanliness and hygiene in hotels, resorts, and homestays
 - Improving the reputation of tourist destinations
 - Supporting local Gram Panchayats to achieve ODF Plus Model status

Rajasthan CM Launched Nine New Policies

Why in News?

Recently, **Rajasthan Chief Minister unveiled nine new policies** aimed at promoting investments and **speeding up the State's economic growth**.

- The policies were launched ahead of **the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit-2024** scheduled to be held in Jaipur from **9th to 11th December 2024**.

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Note:

Key Points

- **Policies Aimed at State Development:**
 - The newly approved policies and schemes aim to **ensure economic progress, employment generation, and social prosperity** in Rajasthan.
 - These policies were approved during a recent State Cabinet meeting to drive the all-round development of Rajasthan.
 - **The policies focus on sector-specific initiatives:**
 - **MSME Policy:** Aims to enable **local industries to compete on a global scale.**
 - **Export Promotion Policy:** Focused on **expanding the global reach of Rajasthan's products.**
 - **One District-One Product Policy:** It supports **district-specific crafts** by building infrastructure for local producers.
 - **Tourism Policy:** Promotes **eco-tourism** and **heritage tourism** to create employment.
 - **Clean Energy Policy:** Positions Rajasthan as a leader in **renewable energy** through **solar, wind, and green hydrogen projects.**
 - **Mineral Policy:** Sets an ambitious target of 1 crore jobs and Rs 1 lakh crore annual revenue by 2046.
 - **Cluster Development Scheme:** Encourages cluster-based small industry growth with **access to raw materials and training facilities.**

Kendriya Vidyalayas to be set up in Rajasthan**Why in News?**

Recently, the **Union Government** has approved the opening of nine new **Kendriya Vidyalayas** in Rajasthan that will **increase opportunities for quality education in the State.**

Key Points

- **Approval for New Schools:**
 - The Union Cabinet approved the establishment of **85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas and 28 new Navodaya Vidyalayas** across the nation.

- These schools will provide **affordable and high-quality education to over 82,000 students.**
- In Rajasthan, the newly approved Kendriya Vidyalayas are in **Jodhpur, Ganganagar, Karauli, Nagaur, Rajsamand and Dausa District.**
- The move aims to **expand quality education, enhance educational infrastructure,** and contribute to the **holistic development of the younger generation.**
- **Broader Implications:**
 - The initiative aligns with the government's mission to **improve access to quality education nationwide.**
 - It supports the growth and empowerment of India's youth, **contributing to the nation's overall development trajectory.**

Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024**Why in News?**

Recently, the Prime Minister inaugurated the **Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit, 2024** and the **Rajasthan Global Business Expo** at **Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC).**

Key Points

- **Global Investment Summit 2024:**
 - The Investment Summit **theme** is "**Replete, Responsible, Ready,**" with discussions on **sustainable mining, water security, and women-led startups.**
 - Over 32 countries and 20 international organizations will join thematic sessions and expos showcasing Rajasthan's potential.
- **Rajasthan's Development Potential:**
 - Rajasthan holds significant **mineral reserves,** vast **natural resources,** and a rich **cultural heritage,** positioning it as an **investment destination.**
 - Rajasthan benefits from projects like the **Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor** and **Dedicated Freight Corridor,** improving industrial logistics.

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- With unique attractions like **Ranthambore** and Jaipur, Rajasthan is a **hub for wildlife, heritage, and adventure tourism.**
- **Role in Renewable Energy and Manufacturing:**
 - Rajasthan **contributes to India's renewable energy goals** with large **solar parks** supporting the 500 GW capacity target by 2030.
 - Under **Make in India** and **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes**, Rajasthan is building capacity in automotive, **Electric Vehicles**, and electronics manufacturing.
- **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs):**
 - Rajasthan is **among the top 5 states in MSMEs**, with over 27 lakh units employing 50 lakh people.
 - New MSME policies and credit schemes like the **Emergency Credit Linked Guarantee Scheme** have doubled credit flow to MSMEs since 2014.
 - MSMEs in Rajasthan are playing a pivotal role in enhancing global supply chains.

Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)

- ECLGS was launched in 2020 as part of the Centre's **Aatmanirbhar package** in response to the **Covid-19 crisis.**
- The objective was **to support small businesses struggling to meet their operational liabilities** due to the imposition of a nationwide lockdown.
- **A 100% guarantee is provided by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company (NCGTC)** to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs) - banks, financial institutions and **Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).**
- **The credit product for which guarantee would be provided under the Scheme shall be named as 'Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECL).'**

Leopard Strays Into Residential Colony in Jaipur

Why in News?

Recently, Panic spread in the Vidhyadhar Nagar area after a **leopard strayed into a residential colony and attacked three people.** The wildcat was later tranquillised and rescued by a forest department team.



Key Points

➤ About Leopards:

- Its scientific name is **Panthera pardus.**
- The leopard is the smallest of the Big Cats of genus Panthera namely the **Tiger, Lion, Jaguar, Leopard, and Snow Leopard.** It known for its ability to adapt in a variety of habitats.
- A nocturnal animal, the leopard hunts at night.
- It feeds on smaller species of herbivores found in its range, such as the chital, hog deer and wild boar.
- Melanism is a common occurrence in leopards, wherein the entire skin of the animal is black in colour, including its spots.
 - A melanistic leopard is often called **black panther** and mistakenly thought to be a different species.

➤ Habitat:

- It occurs in a wide range in **sub-Saharan Africa**, in small parts of **Western and Central Asia**, on the **Indian subcontinent to Southeast and East Asia.**
- The **Indian leopard (Panthera pardus fusca)** is a leopard widely distributed on the Indian subcontinent.

➤ Population in India:

- As per a recent report '**Status of leopards in India, 2018**' released by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, there has been a "60% increase in the population count of leopards in India from 2014 estimates".
- The 2014 estimates placed the population of leopards at nearly 8,000 which has increased to 12,852.

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- The largest number of leopards have been estimated in **Madhya Pradesh (3,421)** followed by **Karnataka (1,783)** and **Maharashtra (1,690)**.
- **Threats:**
 - Poaching for the illegal trade of skins and body parts.
 - Habitat loss and fragmentation
 - Human-Leopard conflict
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
 - **CITES:** Appendix-I
 - **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule-I

Dark Age Coins Unearthed in Rajasthan

Why in News?

Recently, archaeological sites in Rajasthan have unearthed a wealth of **punch-mark coins from 600 BC–1000 BC**.

- It offers insights into a “dark age” in Indian history that **spanned the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization to the era of Lord Buddha**. Historians refer to this period from **1900 BC to 600 BC**, as the Dark Age.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - Rajasthan’s archaeological discoveries shed light on its role as a **hub of ancient trade and cultural exchange**.
 - The findings underscore the importance of preserving and studying these artifacts to illuminate India’s lost historical periods.
- **Presentation at National Numismatics Conference:**
 - A retired numismatist from the **Rajasthan Department of Archaeology and Museology**, presented his research on punch-mark coins at the **National Numismatics Conference in Meerut on 5th December 2024**.
 - Museology is the **study of museums and the activities they undertake**.

- It includes the **study of museums’ history, their role in society, and the activities they engage in**, such as curating, preservation, education, and public programming.
- A numismatist is a **person who studies, collects, and analyzes currency and other objects used as money**.
- He highlighted discoveries from sites like **Ahar (Udaipur), Kalibanga (Hanumangarh), Viratnagar (Jaipur), and Jankipura (Tonk)**, showcasing evidence of a thriving ancient trade network.
- **Discoveries and Significance:**
 - **Extensive Coin Studies:**
 - The symbols such as the **Sun, Shadchakra, and Mountains/Meru** were identified on the coins.
 - These coins, **crafted from silver and copper** with a standard weight of 3.3 grams, display similarities to coins found across India, from Peshawar to Kanyakumari.
 - **Major Findings:**
 - Notable discoveries include **3,300 coins unearthed in Tonk in 1935** and **2,400 coins in Sikar in 1998**.
 - **Metallurgical tools** from these regions resemble those found in **Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Peshawar**, linking Rajasthan to a wider cultural and trade network.
- **Historical Context and Archaeological Evidence:**
 - **Documentation by Chinese Travelers:**
 - Chinese travelers **Fa-Hien (399–414 CE)**, **Sunyan (518 CE)**, and **Hiuen-Tsang (629 CE)** documented ruins in these areas, pointing to their historical importance.
 - Their accounts, combined with archaeological evidence, enrich the understanding of Rajasthan’s ancient trade and cultural heritage.
 - **Broader Trade Connections:**
 - Rajasthan’s trade history parallels the **Silk Route** in significance, supported by discoveries of coins from the **Gupta dynasty, Malavas, and Janapadas**.
 - These findings emphasize Rajasthan’s pivotal economic and cultural role in ancient India.

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Note:

➤ Treasure Collection:

- The Rajasthan Department of Archaeology has amassed over 2.21 lakh ancient coins, including 7,180 punch-marked examples, curated under the **Rajasthan Treasure Trove Rules, 1961**.
- These coins provide invaluable insights into the state's historical and economic prominence.

Indus Valley Civilization

➤ About:

- The **history of India begins with the birth of the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)**, also known as Harappan Civilization.
- It flourished around **2,500 BC, in the western part of South Asia**, in contemporary Pakistan and Western India.
- The Indus Valley was home to the **largest of the four ancient urban civilizations** of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China.
- In the 1920s, the Archaeological Department of India carried out excavations in the Indus valley wherein the ruins of the two old cities, viz. **Mohenjodaro and Harappa** were unearthed.
- In 1924, **John Marshall, Director-General of the ASI, announced the discovery** of a new civilisation in the Indus valley to the world.

➤ Decline:

- The **Indus Valley Civilization declined around 1800 BCE**, primarily due to **climate change and migration**.
- Its two major cities, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, disappeared, marking the end of the civilization.
- Harappa is often associated with the civilization's name as it was the first city discovered by modern archaeologists.

Sariska Tiger Reserve

Why in News?

The Supreme Court has emphasized the need to balance the protection of **Sariska Tiger Reserve's wildlife** with the **religious sentiments of devotees visiting the Pandupol Hanuman temple**.

Key Points

➤ Concerns Over Vehicle Traffic:

- The court raised **concerns about unregulated vehicle traffic impacting wildlife in the reserve**, particularly during high footfall days.
- It is suggested that introducing **electric shuttle buses as an alternative to reduce the stress on wildlife** while ensuring visitor access.
- The Supreme Court established a committee comprising local authorities and the **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)** to explore solutions that balance ecological conservation and religious needs.
- The court also recognized the concerns of the temple trust and devotees about the sudden halt of private vehicles, which would affect thousands of visitors on key religious days.

Sariska Tiger Reserve

➤ About:

- Sariska Tiger Reserve is located in **Aravali hills** and forms a part of the Alwar District of Rajasthan.
- It was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1955 and was declared a **tiger reserve** later in 1978, making it a part of India's **Project Tiger**.
- It encompasses ruined temples, forts, pavilions and a palace.
 - **Kankarwadi Fort** is located in the centre of the reserve. It is said that **Mughal emperor Aurangzeb had imprisoned his brother Dara Shikoh** at this fort in the struggle for succession to the throne.
 - It also houses a famous **temple of lord Hanuman at Pandupole** related to Pandavas.

➤ Flora and Fauna:

- It is characterised by **rocky landscapes, arid scrub-thorn forests, grasslands, cliffs, and semi-deciduous forests**.
- It is dominated by **dhok trees**, salar, kadaya, gol, ber, banyan, gugal, bamboo, kair, etc.
- It also supports a **diverse array of other animals** such as Royal Bengal Tiger, leopards, sambhar, chital, nilgai, four-horned antelope, wild boar, hyenas, and jungle cats.

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PM Inaugurates Projects in Rajasthan

Why in News?

Recently, the **Prime Minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for 24 projects** worth over Rs 46,300 crore in Rajasthan.

- Projects span sectors like **energy, roads, railways, and water resources.**

Key Points

- **Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal Project:**
 - It is an inter-state river linking initiative designed to **divert surplus water** from the **Parbati, Newaj, and Kalisindh rivers** to the **Chambal River** in Madhya Pradesh to the **Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP)** in Rajasthan.
 - This integration aims to address issues like **water sharing, cost-benefit distribution, and water exchange** between the concerned states.
 - The project aims to provide irrigation and drinking water to **21 districts in Rajasthan.**
 - Expected to boost development in both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
 - **Rivers Involved in the Project:**
 - **Chambal River:**
 - **Origin:** Singar Chouri Peak, Vindhya Mountains, Indore, Madhya Pradesh.
 - **Major Tributaries:** Banas, Kali Sindh, Sipra, Parbati.
 - **Parvati River:**
 - **Origin:** Vindhya Range, Sehore District, Madhya Pradesh.
 - **Significant Tributaries:** None.
 - **Kali Sindh River:**
 - **Origin:** Bagli, Dewas District, Madhya Pradesh.
 - **Major Tributaries:** Parwan, Newaj, Ahu.
- **Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP):**
 - The state government **approved and expanded the ERCP** to address water issues.
 - The **Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP)**, an **ambitious drinking and irrigation water project,**

was announced by the state government in the state budget 2017-18 as a permanent solution to the problem of drinking and irrigation water in 13 districts of eastern Rajasthan.

- The districts included **Jhalawar, Baran, Kota Bundi, Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Tok, Jaipur, Dausa, Karauli, Alwar, Bharatpur and Dholpur.**
- ERCP aims to harvest surplus water available during rainy season in rivers in Southern Rajasthan such as **Chambal and its tributaries**, including **Kunnu, Parvati, Kalisindh**, and use this water in south-eastern districts of the state, where there is scarcity of water for drinking and irrigation.
- ERCP is planned to meet drinking and industrial water needs of the southern and south eastern Rajasthan, for humans and **livestock** till the year 2051.

Chambal River

- **About:**
 - It originates at the **Singar Chouri peak** in the northern slopes of the **Vindhya mountains** (Indore, Madhya Pradesh). From there, it flows in the North direction in Madhya Pradesh for a length of about 346 km and **then follows a north-easterly direction for a length of 225 km through Rajasthan.**
 - It **enters UP** and flows for about 32 km before joining the **Yamuna River** in Etawah District.
 - It is a rainfed river and its **basin is bounded by the Vindhyan mountain ranges and the Aravallis.** The Chambal and its tributaries drain the Malwa region of northwestern Madhya Pradesh.
 - The **Hadauti plateau in Rajasthan** occurs in the upper catchment of the Chambal River to the southeast of the Mewar Plains.
- **Tributaries:** Banas, Kali Sindh, Sipra, Parbati, etc.
- **Main Power Projects/ Dam:** **Gandhi Sagar Dam, Rana Pratap Sagar Dam, Jawahar Sagar Dam, and Kota Barrage.**
- The **National Chambal Sanctuary** is located along river Chambal on the tri-junction of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It is known for critically endangered gharial, the red-crowned roof turtle, and the endangered **Ganges river dolphin.**

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Note:



Rajasthan CM's Welfare Initiatives at Kisan Sammelan

Why in News?

Recently, The **Chief Minister of Rajasthan** transferred Rs 700 crore as the **second installment of the Kisan Samman Nidhi** to the bank accounts of over 70 lakh farmers and credited Rs 200 crore to 3.25 lakh cattle breeders as assistance of Rs 5 per litre of milk.

Key Points

➤ Direct Benefit Transfers to Farmers:

- Under the **Direct Benefit Transfers** Rs 29 crore transferred to 15,983 farmers for **drip and sprinkler irrigation equipment**.
 - Rs 96 crore disbursed to 14,200 farmers for activities like fencing, laying pipelines, farm pond construction, organic manure, and agricultural equipment.
 - Rs 80 crore allocated for the installation of 8,000 **solar pumps**.

➤ Recognition of Progressive Farmers:

- The Chief Minister honoured 10 innovative farmers under the Centrally sponsored **ATMA Yojana**.

➤ Investment in Agriculture:

- 2,500 MoUs signed for Rs 58,000 crore investment in agriculture during the **Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit** held in Jaipur.

➤ Key Decisions for Farmer Welfare:

- Distribution of short-term crop loans worth Rs 20,000 crore to 30 lakh farmers.
- Issuance of eight lakh soil health cards.
- Installation of 26,000 solar plants.
- Allotment of land for food parks at 31 locations.
- Procurement of wheat, moong, groundnut, and mustard at **minimum support prices (MSP)**.

➤ Launch of New Schemes:

- Introduced a **livestock insurance scheme**.
- Announced a **camel conservation** and development mission.
- Initiated the **installation of cow dung log machines** in 100 gaushalas.

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Note:

- Launched 1,000 new milk collection centres and installed 200 new bulk milk coolers.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

➤ About:

- It was **launched on 24th February, 2019** to supplement financial needs of land holding farmers.

➤ Financial Benefits:

- Financial benefit of **Rs 6000/- per year in three equal installments, every four months** is transferred into the bank accounts of farmers' families across the country through **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode**.

➤ Scope of the Scheme:

- The scheme was initially meant for **Small and Marginal Farmers (SMFs) having landholding upto 2 hectares** but scope of the scheme was **extended to cover all landholding farmers**.

➤ Funding and Implementation:

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** with 100% funding from the Government of India.
- It is being implemented by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.

➤ Objectives:

- To supplement the financial needs of the Small and Marginal Farmers in procuring various inputs to **ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income** at the end of each crop cycle.
- To protect them from falling in the clutches of moneylenders for meeting such expenses and ensure their continuance in the farming activities.

Little Bunting Bird

Why in News?

Recently, **birdwatchers spotted a little bunting in Mount Abu**, marking its first recorded appearance in Rajasthan.



Key Points

➤ Little Bunting Description and Habitat:

○ About:

- Little bunting is a **small passerine bird** belonging to the bunting and sparrow family.
- Its breeding range spans the **taiga of far northeast Europe and northern Asia**.
- The bird **migrates to southern China and northeast India during winter** and typically inhabits agricultural areas, feeding on grains.

○ Features:

- This is a **small bunting**, measuring only 12–14 cm (4.7–5.5 inch) in length.
- It has **white underparts with dark streaking on the breast and sides**.
- With its chestnut face and white malar stripe, it resembles a small female reed bunting, but has black crown stripes, a white eye-ring, and a fine dark border to the rear of its chestnut cheeks.

○ IUCN Red List: Least Concern

➤ Possible Role of Climate Change:

- Experts suggest **climate change** might have pushed the bird to Rajasthan, as it tends to avoid extremely cold conditions.

➤ Sightings in Northern India:

- Little buntings have **recently been spotted in regions like Gurugram, Chandigarh, and northern Punjab**.
- These birds are typically seen in the subtropics of northern India, southern China, and northern Southeast Asia.

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Note:

➤ Significance for Conservation:

- The sighting emphasizes the importance of **preserving forest areas and wetlands** to support such migratory species.

Policy to Manage Sacred Groves

Why in News?

Recently, in a judgment **the Supreme Court** told the Union government to **create a comprehensive policy** for the **management of sacred groves** across the country.

Key Points

➤ Supreme Court's Recommendation:

- The Union government was urged to spearhead efforts for the protection of sacred groves through the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.
- While wildlife and habitat management has been primarily the responsibility of State governments, the Court emphasized the importance of preserving sacred groves as part of cultural and traditional rights.

➤ Action Plan for Sacred Groves:

- The MoEF&CC was tasked with developing a plan for a **nationwide survey of sacred groves, including identifying their area and extent**.
- The Union government was directed to **issue strict instructions to prevent the reduction of sacred groves due to deforestation or land use changes**.
- The boundaries of the groves must be marked but remain flexible for future growth.

➤ Court's Directives for Rajasthan:

- The Court directed the Rajasthan government to map sacred groves using both on-ground and satellite methods.
- These groves should be classified as forests and granted legal protection under the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**, regardless of their size.

➤ Empowerment of Traditional Communities:

- The Court suggested empowering traditional communities, especially under the **Forest Rights Act, 2006**, as custodians of sacred groves.

- These communities should be given authority to regulate harmful activities to preserve their legacy of stewardship and promote **sustainable conservation**.

Sacred Groves

- Sacred groves are **forest patches traditionally protected by local communities** due to their **religious and cultural importance**.
- These groves also play a **significant role in conserving local biodiversity**.
- Sacred groves are commonly found in **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra**.

Milkweed Fiber

Why in News?

Recently, the **Ministry of Textiles** has strengthened collaboration in developing **India's textile industry** by extending its **research and development efforts** into new **natural fibers**, including **milkweed fiber**.

Key Points

➤ Strategic Engagement:

- The Minister of Textiles, in a meeting facilitated by Invest India, engaged with Uniqlo's senior officials to **reaffirm the commitment to strengthening India's textile sector**.
- This also focuses on improving cotton production capabilities, productivity, and quality in India.

➤ Uniqlo's Contribution to India's Textile Ecosystem:

- Uniqlo operates **15 stores across India**, achieving a **retail revenue of Rs 814 crore as of 31st March 2024**, with a growth rate of 30%.

➤ Alignment with India's Textile Growth Goals:

- India targets a textile market size of USD 350 billion and USD 100 billion in exports by 2030.
- The Ministry has invited Uniqlo to invest in the **Prime Minister's Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks**, offering a ready-to-perform ecosystem with sustainable operations.

➤ Upcoming Collaboration Opportunities:

- Uniqlo will participate in the **"Bharat Tex" Global Textile Expo** in February 2025 highlighting innovation, sustainability, and traceability.

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➤ Milkweed Fiber:

○ About:

- It is the **seed fiber obtained from milkweed plants.**
- Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca L*) plant **belongs to the genus Asclepias of the family Asclepiadaceae** and is **also known as stubborn weed.**
- In India, it is found as a wild plant in the states of **Rajasthan**, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- Milkweed contains an **abundance of milk sap in its leaves, stems and pods.**

○ Properties:

- It contains **oily material and lignin, a woody plant substance**, which makes them too brittle for spinning.
- It has a **hydrophobic–oleophobic surface due to the natural waxes** found on the surface of the fiber.

○ Applications:

- It is used in **paper industries.**
- In addition, it is also used as an **insulative filling material.**
- It is used in such **water-safety equipment as life jackets and belts.**
- Researchers discovered that it **readily absorbs oil while simultaneously repelling water**, thus making it an effective fiber to help clean up oil spills.

PM MITRA Scheme

- PM MITRA Park will be developed by a **Special Purpose Vehicle** which will be owned by the Central and State Government and in a **Public Private Partnership (PPP) Mode.**
- Each MITRA Park will have an **incubation centre, common processing house and a common effluent treatment plant** and other textile related facilities such as design centres and testing centres.

55th GST Council Meeting

Why in News?

Recently, the 55th **Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council** meeting was held under the Chairpersonship of

the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs in **Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.**

Key Points

- Chief Ministers of Goa, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Meghalaya, Odisha; Deputy Chief Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Telangana also participated.
- **Recommendations by the GST Council:**
 - **Used Electric Vehicle (EVs):** GST council decided to **raise the rate of tax to 18% from 12% on all used EV sales**, just as in case of non-electric vehicles.
 - GST will apply only to the **margin value** (difference between purchase and selling price, adjusted for depreciation if claimed) in case of **business sales.** **No GST** applies to **individual-to-individual sales.**
 - **Bank's Penal Charges:** No GST applies to penal charges by **banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)** for **loan term violations.**
 - **Payment Aggregators:** **Payment aggregators** handling payments of **less than Rs 2,000** will be eligible for an exemption.
 - This exemption **does not** extend to **payment gateways or other fintech services** unrelated to fund settlement.
 - **Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF):** GST council **did not agree** on bringing **ATF** under the ambit of **GST** because states refused to accept it.
 - States see ATF as part of the **crude petroleum diesel basket**, saying that it alone **cannot be taken out.**
 - 5 products i.e., **crude oil, petrol, diesel, ATF and natural gas** were kept out of purview of GST. The central government levies **excise duty** on them and states **levy VAT.**
 - **GST Exemption: Black pepper and raisins** supplied directly by **farmers** will be exempt from GST.
 - **Gene therapy is fully exempt** from GST, and **Integrated GST** exemption on **surface-to-air missiles** is extended.
 - **Compensation Cess:** Reduced **compensation cess** rate to **0.1% on supplies to merchant exporters.**
 - This Cess is collected on the supply of select goods and or services to **compensate the**

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states for any revenue loss on account of implementation of GST.

- **Popcorn:** GST Council **clarified** (no new tax imposition) that **caramelized popcorn** is taxed at **18% GST**. Ready-to-eat popcorn with **salt and spices attracts 5% GST** if not pre-packaged and labeled, and **12% if pre-packaged and labeled**.
 - **Caramelised popcorn** is classified as **sugar confectionery**, and attracts **18% GST** while **salted popcorn** is a **namkeen** and subject to **5% GST**.

GST Council

- **About:** The GST Council, a **constitutional body** under **Article 279-A (101st Amendment, 2016)**, makes recommendations on GST implementation.
 - GST is a **value-added (Ad Valorem)** and **indirect tax system** that is levied on the supply of goods and services in India.
- **Members:** The Council includes the **Union Finance Minister (Chairperson)**, Union Minister of State (Finance), and a finance or any other minister from each state.
- **Nature of Decisions:** In the **Mohit Minerals case, 2022**, the Supreme Court ruled GST Council recommendations are **not binding**, as Parliament and states have **simultaneous legislative powers** on GST.

Centre of Excellence for Ceramics

Why in News?

A new **Centre of Excellence for Ceramics** is being established in Rajasthan. It is set to promote the industry with exploration, **mining**, processing and world-class research.

Key Points

- **Abundant Ceramic Mineral Reserves:**
 - **Rajasthan possesses vast reserves** of **ceramic minerals** like ball clay, **silica sand**, **quartz**, china clay, and feldspar.
 - **Raw materials are being sent to other states for processing**, despite significant potential for

ceramic-based industries and job creation within Rajasthan.

➤ **Role of the Centre:**

- The **centre will provide technical guidance for mining, processing, and manufacturing** ceramic minerals, optimizing the utilization of local resources.
- Its services will be pre-defined to ensure utility from day one of operation.

➤ **Focus Areas:**

- A major emphasis will be on exploring **silica minerals** for producing:
 - Insulators for electricity supply.
 - Sanitaryware products.
 - Tiles for the real estate sector.
 - Pottery and bricks.
 - **Semi-conductors** for electronics.

➤ **Stakeholder Contributions:**

- Suggestions were received from prominent experts, including officials from **Bikaner Technical University**, **Central Glass & Ceramic Research Institute (CGCRI)**, and **IIT (BHU)**, to refine the centre's objectives and operational framework.

Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute (CGCRI)

- CGCRI is a national research institute **headquartered in Kolkata**, operating under the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)**.
- **Founded in 1950**, the institute **specializes in research and development** in areas such as **glass, ceramics, mica, and refractories**.

NGT Issues Notice Over Gas Leak in Jaipur

Why in News?

The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has directed **the Central Pollution Control Board** and Jaipur's District Magistrate to respond to a case involving the hospitalization of several students following a **suspected gas leak in Jaipur**.

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Key Points

- **The Incident:**
 - The NGT took **suo motu cognisance** on a suspected gas leak incident in Jaipur.
 - The incident, which occurred on 15th December 2024 in the Mahesh Nagar area, resulted in the **hospitalization of 10 students from a coaching institute after they fainted due to the leak from a nearby drain.**
- Observations by the Tribunal:
 - The Tribunal noted that **no compensation for the victims** was mentioned in the report.
 - The Bench highlighted significant issues concerning compliance with **the Public Liability Insurance Act 1991** and **the Environment (Protection) Act 1986.**
 - **Notices were issued to the respondents**, directing them to file their responses or replies.
 - The Tribunal included as **respondents the following parties:**

- **Member secretaries** of the Central Pollution Control Board and Rajasthan State Pollution Control Board.
- Jaipur's District Magistrate.
- The **regional office** of **the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and**
- **Climate Change.**

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

- It is a statutory organisation, was constituted in 1974 under the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.**
- CPCB was also entrusted with the powers and functions under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.**
- It serves as a field formation and also provides technical services to the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate change of the provisions of **the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.**

NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) is a specialised body for swift resolution of environmental and natural resource cases.

About

- ② **Establishment:** By National Green Tribunal Act 2010
- ② **Objective:** Quick resolution of environmental & natural resource cases
- ② **Case Resolution:** Within 6 months
- ② **Places of Sitting:** New Delhi (Principal), Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata, and Chennai

Structure

- ② **Composition:** Chairperson, Judicial Members, and Expert Members
- ② **Tenure:** Up to 5 years/until age 65 (no reappointment)
- ② **Appointments:** Chairperson - Central Government (with the CJI's consultation)
 - 10-20 judicial members & 10-20 expert members - Selection Committee


Powers & Jurisdiction

- ② **Jurisdiction:** Civil cases on environmental issues and rights
- ② **Suo Motu Powers:** Granted since 2021
- ② **Roles:** Adjudicatory, preventative, and remedial
- ② **Procedures:** Follows Principles of natural justice
 - Not bound by the CPC, 1908 or Indian Evidence Act, 1872
- ② **Principles:** Sustainable Development; Precautionary; Polluter pays
- ② **Orders:** Executable as civil court decrees; offers relief and compensation (**decisions are binding**)
- ② **Appeals:** Tribunal can review its decisions.
 - If decision fails - Appeal to the SC to be filed within 90 days

NGT deals with Civil Cases under

- ② Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974
- ② Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977
- ② Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980
- ② Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981
- ② Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
- ② Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991
- ② Biological Diversity Act, 2002

India is the third country globally (after Australia and New Zealand) and the first developing nation to establish a specialised environmental tribunal like NGT.



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Note:

Rajasthan Government Dissolves 9 Districts

Why in News?

Recently, the Rajasthan government **dissolved nine districts and three divisions** created in 2023.

Key Points

➤ Reorganization of Districts and Divisions:

- Rajasthan will now have **41 districts and seven divisions**.
- The divisions of Pali, Sikar, and Banswara have been annulled.
- Eight districts were **retained due to “administrative necessity.”**
- **Abolished Districts:**
 - Dudu, Kekri, Shahpura, Neem Ka Thana, Gangapur City, Jaipur Rural, Jodhpur Rural, Anupgarh, and Sanchore.
- **Retained Districts:**
 - Balotra, Beawar, Deeg, Didwana-Kuchaman, Kotputli-Behror, Khairthal-Tijara, Phalodi, and Salumbar.

➤ Administrative Issues with New Districts:

- **Lack of Infrastructure:**
 - New districts lacked office buildings, administrative infrastructure, and official posts, despite the lapse of over a year.
 - The creation of 18 departmental posts proved to be burdensome.

➤ Committee Recommendations:

- **A High-Level Committee report** recommended abolishing the new districts, finding them unviable.
- **A Cabinet Sub-Committee** was also formed to review the status of these districts.

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Note:

Key Points

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Key Points

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