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National Mission on Edible Oil-Oil Palm

Why in News

Recently, the Prime Minister announced a **National Mission on Edible Oil-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP)**, with an investment of over Rs 11,000 crore over a five-year period.

However, some environmentalists have raised concerns over the **disastrous impact of palm oil plantations**.

Key Points

- **About:**

- NMEO-OP is a new **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**. It is proposed to have an **additional 6.5 lakh hectares for palm oil by 2025-26**.
- It will **involve raising the area under oil palm cultivation** to 10 lakh hectares by 2025-26 and 16.7 lakh hectares by 2029-30.
- Oil palm farmers will be provided **financial assistance** and will get remuneration under a price and viability formula.
- The Viability Formula is a **Minimum Support Price-type mechanism** and the government will fix this at **14.3% of Crude Palm Oil (CPO) price**.
It will eventually go up to 15.3%.
- Another focus area of the scheme is to substantially **increase the support of inputs/interventions**.
- **Special assistance will be given to replant old gardens** for their rejuvenation.

- **Special Focus:**
 - The special emphasis of the scheme will be **in India's North-Eastern (NE) states and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands** due to the conducive weather conditions in the regions.
 - To attract industry to the NE and Andaman regions, a **provision of Rs 5 crore of 5 mt/hr** (million tonne per hectare) with pro-rata increase for higher capacity will be given.
- **Objective:**
 - To **harness domestic edible oil prices** that are dictated by expensive palm oil imports and **become self-reliant in edible oil.**
 - To **raise the domestic production of palm oil** by three times to 11 lakh MT by 2025-26.
- **Significance of the Scheme:**
 - **Raise Farmers Income:**

It is expected to **incentivise production of palm oil to reduce dependence on imports** and help farmers cash in on the huge market.
 - **Rise in Yields & Reduction in Imports:**
 - India is the largest consumer of vegetable oil in the world. Of this, **palm oil imports are almost 55% of its total vegetable oil imports.**

It imports the rest, buying palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia, soyoil from Brazil and Argentina, and sunflower oil, mainly from Russia and Ukraine.
 - In India, **94.1% of its palm oil is used in food products**, especially for cooking purposes. This makes palm oil **extremely critical to India's edible oils economy.**

- **Concerns:**
 - **Impact on Tribal Lands:**
 - The **oil palm is a water-guzzling, monoculture crop with a long gestation period** unsuitable for small farmers and the land productivity for palm oil is higher than for oilseeds, which **create apprehension for more land to be given for oil palm cultivation.**

In southeast Asia, the plantation of palm oil trees has replaced massive tracts of rainforests.
 - It could also **detach tribespeople from their identity linked with the community ownership of land** and “wreak havoc on the social fabric”.
 - **Threat to Wildlife:**

Focus areas are “biodiversity hotspots and ecologically fragile” and **oil palm plantations would denude forest cover and destroy the habitat of endangered wildlife.**
 - **Palm is Invasive:**

The palm is an **invasive species that is not a natural forest product** of northeastern India and its impact on the biodiversity as well as on soil conditions has to be analysed even if it is grown in non-forest areas.

Invasive species **are non-native species that spread and interfere in a new ecosystem by posing a serious threat** to the native biodiversity. They **don't allow local species to grow** and wildlife to move through.
 - **Health Concern:**

Oil palm requires 300 litres of water per tree per day, as well as high **Pesticide** use in areas where it is not a native crop, **leading to consumer health concerns as well.**
 - **Farmers not Getting Fair Price:**
 - The most critical issue in the cultivation of oil palm has been the **inability of farmers to realise a remunerative price** of fresh fruit bunches (FFBs).
 - FFBs (Fresh Fruit Bunches) of oil palm are highly perishable and need to be processed within twenty-four hours of harvest.

Way Forward

- If similar **subsidies and support are extended to oilseeds which are indigenous to India** and suited for dryland agriculture, they **can help achieve self-reliance** without dependence on oil palm.
- A solution would be to **grow oil palm on agricultural land** if farmers are willing to do it and the government incentivises it.
- Lastly, the **success** of mission oil palm will also **depend on import duty on crude palm oil.**

In 2012, It was recommended that **whenever the import price of crude palm oil falls** below USD 800 per tonne, the **import duty needs to be raised.**

- The transformation this crop has brought about in the lives of farmer communities in Andhra Pradesh can help emulate the same in the other potential states as well. A **strong and robust, long-term policy mechanism will give this crop required push** across India.

Source: TH

Fundamental Rights to Reside and to Move About Freely

Why in News

Recently, while setting aside an externment order against a journalist, the **Supreme Court (SC)** ruled that **a person's fundamental right to reside and to move about freely anywhere in India cannot be refused on "flimsy grounds"**.

- **Externment orders** prevent the movement of a person in certain areas.
- According to the SC, the drastic action of externment should only be taken in exceptional cases, to maintain law and order in a locality and/or prevent a breach of public tranquility and peace.

Key Points

- **Freedom to Move Freely Throughout the Territory of India:**
 - **Article 19(1)(d) of the Indian Constitution** entitles every citizen to move freely throughout the territory of the country.
 - This right is protected **against only state action and not private individuals.**
 - Moreover, it is **available only to the citizens and to shareholders of a company** but not to foreigners or legal persons like companies or corporations, etc.
 - The freedom of movement has **two dimensions**, viz, internal (right to move inside the country) and external (right to move out of the country and right to come back to the country).
 - **Article 19 protects only the first dimension.**
 - The second dimension is dealt by Article 21 (Right to life and personal liberty).
 - **Restrictions** on this freedom can only be **imposed on two grounds** which are mentioned in the **Article 19(5)** of the constitution itself, namely, the interests of the general public and the protection of interests of any scheduled tribe. For example:
 - The Supreme Court held that the freedom of movement of prostitutes can be restricted on the grounds of public health and in the interest of public morals.
 - The entry of outsiders in tribal areas is restricted to protect the distinctive culture, language, customs and manners of scheduled tribes and to safeguard their traditional vocation and properties against exploitation.
- **Freedom to Reside and Settle in any part of the Territory of India:**
 - According to **Article 19(1)(e) of the Constitution**, every citizen of India has the right "to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India."
 - The object of the clause is **to remove internal barriers** within India or any of its parts.
 - This right is also **subject to reasonable restrictions mentioned in clause (5) of Article 19.**
 - **Right to reside and the right to move freely** throughout the country **are complementary** and often go together.

Article 19 of the Constitution

- Article 19 entails **freedom of speech and expression.**
- It implies that every citizen has the **right to express his views, opinions, beliefs and convictions freely by word of mouth, writing, printing, picturing** or in any other manner.

- Article 19 guarantees to all citizens the **six rights**. These are:
 - Right to freedom of speech and expression.
 - Right to assemble peaceably and without arms.
 - Right to form associations or unions or co-operative societies.
 - Right to move freely throughout the territory of India.
 - Right to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India.
 - Right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.
- **Restrictions on Freedom of Speech and Expression (Article 19(2)):**

The reasons for such restrictions are in the interests of: Security, Sovereignty and integrity of the country, Friendly relations with foreign countries, Public order, Decency or morality, Hate speech, **Defamation**, **Contempt of court**.
- **SC Judgments Regarding Article 19:**
 - **Right to Protest**: While hearing the case of Shaheen Bagh protests, the SC declared that there is **no absolute right to protest**, and it could be subjected to the orders of the authority regarding the place and time.
 - **Truth and Hate Speech**: In the context of **discussing the limits of free speech and what may tantamount to hate speech**, the SC has recently held that “Historical truths must be depicted without in any way disclosing or encouraging hatred or enmity between different classes or communities.”
 - **Internet as a Medium of Information Diffusion**: While hearing the case of **Internet shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir**, the SC refrained from the view on declaring the right to access the Internet as a fundamental right but still went on to make the Internet as an integral part of the freedom of expression guaranteed under Article 19(1) of the Constitution.
 - **Freedom of Press: *Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras case 1950***, was amongst the earliest cases to be decided by the SC declaring freedom of press as a part of freedom of speech and expression.
 - **Right to Information**: SC in ***Union of India v. Assn. For Democratic Reforms case 2002***, held that the freedom of 'speech and expression' comprises not only the right to express, publish and propagate information, its circulation but also to receive information.
 - **Right to Expression Beyond National Boundaries**: In ***Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India case 1978***, the SC considered whether Article 19(1)(a) of Indian Constitution was confined to Indian territory and held that the freedom of speech and expression is not confined to National boundaries.
 - **Right to Silence**: The SC in ***Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala 1986*** held that the right not to speak or Right to silence is also included in the Right to speech and expression.

Source: IE

Substantial Investment Subsidies for Solar Power

Why in News

In recent years, the Government of India has introduced **several solar irrigation schemes** like **PM KUSUM**, **Suryamitra Skill Development Programme**, **SPaRC Program**, etc.

- These schemes **seek to provide Substantial Investment Subsidies (SIP) and incentivise farmers to conserve groundwater and energy**, increase farmer income and enable more efficient irrigation.
- SIPs promise a low carbon footprint, consistent energy availability, zero fuel costs and low operational costs. However, there are **some issues associated with these schemes**.

Key Points

- **About Substantial Investment Subsidies:**
 - The Government of India through PM KUSUM has been promoting solar irrigation pumps by offering Substantial Investment Subsidies (SIP).
 - The objective of SIP is to **provide subsidies to farmers for buying and installation of solar pumps and power plants**.
 - The farmer will be able to use the generated solar power to meet the irrigation needs and the **excess solar power will be sold to power distribution companies (DISCOMs)** at pre-fixed tariff.
- **Need:**
 - The **massive power subsidies in the Indian agriculture sector** has led to **development of the irrigation-energy nexus**.
Electricity in the agriculture sector is supplied at subsidised rates.
 - This irrigation-energy nexus is **characterised primarily by** depleting groundwater and a growing debt burden of power **DISCOMs**.
SIP can help in breaking this irrigation-energy nexus and provide other benefits.

- **Advantages of Offering SIP:**
 - **Eco-friendly Approach:** SIPs will help move towards a **zero-carbon footprint in the groundwater economy** by decreasing reliability on fossil fuel-based electricity production.
 - **Providing Water and Electricity Security:** The **west-south corridor** spanning from Punjab to Tamil Nadu has **lower groundwater availability** than the **Ganga-Brahmaputra belt**.
 - Farmers in this corridor also face frequent power cuts, low voltage and receive stable electricity only at night.
 - The west-south corridor will benefit significantly from introducing SIPs since the region has **many solar hotspots and receives peak sunlight hours**.
 - **Reducing Burden of DiSCOMs:** It will also help relieve the DISCOM's subsidy burden from Rs 30,000-35,000 per year per SIP.
 - **Favourable Condition for Solar Energy Development:** SIPs now, are more affordable, owing to the falling price of solar photovoltaic [PV] cells.
 - The recent rise in diesel prices has naturally increased the costs of irrigation.
 - Therefore, introducing SIPs may boost agricultural growth while curbing the need to lay rural electric networks.
- **Associated Challenges:**
 - **Over-exploitation of Groundwater:** The only possible drawback of SIPs could be the risk of the over-exploitation of groundwater since on-demand cheap power will always be available after introduction of SIPs in the corridor.
 - **Favours Medium and Large-scale Farmers:** The schemes that are launched for solar energy promotion, gives preference to farmers who are already using water-saving micro-irrigation systems.
 - **High Initial Cost:** Despite subsidies, the initial capital investment remains high, raising questions about the viability of SIPs.

Moreover, the operation and maintenance of solar PV systems require trained professionals and machine components, which may be hard to find in rural areas.
 - **Costly Grid Connection:** The financial costs associated with grid connection can be enormous.
 - According to the Centre for Science and Environment, installing a 100-kilowatt solar-powered system to an electricity grid costs around Rs 85 lakh.
 - Due to this, SIPs might not be the silver bullet to solve the irrigation-energy nexus.

Way Forward

- Awareness programmes about efficient water management practices and the benefits of SIPs must be undertaken through existing networks of farmers.

- Apart from promoting Joint Liability Groups (JLG) among small and marginal farmers, their inclusivity in existing solar irrigation schemes must also be ensured.

Source: DTE

Leaded Petrol Eradicated Globally: UNEP

Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** announced that the use of **leaded petrol has been eradicated from the globe.**

Petrol\Gasoline

- Gasoline, which is also called gas or petrol, is a **mixture of volatile, flammable liquid hydrocarbons derived from petroleum** and used as fuel for internal-combustion engines. It is also used as a solvent for oils and fats.
- Originally a **by-product of the petroleum industry** (kerosene being the principal product), gasoline **became the preferred automobile fuel because of its high energy of combustion and capacity to mix readily with air in a carburetor.**

Leaded vs Unleaded Petrol

The main difference between leaded and unleaded fuel is the **additive tetraethyl lead.**

- The **combustion of leaded petrol causes the lead to be released into the air.**
- Lead is a **heavy pollutant that does damage not only to the environment but also to the people** who are exposed to it.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - It is a milestone that will **prevent more than 1.2 million premature deaths and save world economies over USD 2.4 trillion annually.** It is a huge milestone for global health and environment.
 - UNEP warned that **fossil fuel use in general must still be drastically reduced** to stave off the frightening effects of **climate change.**

- **Era of Leaded Petrol:**
 - Until the **1970s**, **almost all the gasoline sold across the globe contained lead**.
 - When UNEP launched its campaign named **Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles (PCFV)** against leaded petrol in **2002**, many major economic powers had already stopped using the fuel, including the United States, China and India. But the situation in lower-income nations remained dire.
 - **More than 100 countries around the world were still using leaded petrol**, despite studies linking it to premature deaths, poor health and soil and air pollution. Concerns were first raised as early as 1924.
 - In July 2021, it was **eradicated from Algeria - the last country using leaded petrol**.
- **Need of Eradication:**
 - **Pollution:**
 - The **transport sector is responsible for nearly a quarter of energy-related global greenhouse gas emissions** and is set to grow to one third by 2050.
 - Adding that 1.2 billion new vehicles would hit the streets in the coming decades.
 - It includes millions of **poor-quality used vehicles** exported from Europe, the United States and Japan, to mid- and low-income countries.
 - **Global Warming:**

Recently, a report named **Climate Change 2021** by the UN's **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** warned that Earth's average temperature would be 1.5 degrees Celsius warmer around 2030 compared to pre-industrial times.

A decade earlier than projected, the rise has raised alarm bells about the use of fossil fuels.
 - **Health:**

Leaded petrol causes **heart disease, stroke and cancer**. It also affects the development of the human brain, especially harming children.
- **Significance:**
 - The end of leaded petrol is expected to support the **realization of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**, including good health and well-being (SDG3), clean water (SDG6), clean energy (SDG7), sustainable cities (SDG11), climate action (SDG13) and life on land (SDG15).
 - It also offers an **opportunity for restoring ecosystems**, especially in urban environments, which have been particularly degraded by this toxic pollutant.

United Nations Environment Programme

- **About:** The UNEP is a leading global environmental authority established on **5th June 1972**.

- **Functions:** It sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the sustainable development within the **United Nations** system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for global environment protection.
- **Major Reports:** Emission Gap Report, Adaptation Gap Report, Global Environment Outlook, Frontiers, Invest into Healthy Planet.
- **Major Campaigns:** Beat Pollution, UN75, World Environment Day, Wild for Life.
- **Headquarters:** Nairobi, Kenya.
- **Agreements Administered/Provided Secretarial Functions:**
 - Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
 - Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
 - Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)
 - Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal
 - Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants
 - Minamata Convention on Mercury
 - Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer

Source: TH

Small Finance Bank

Why in News

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has received applications from two more entities under the “on-tap” small finance bank licensing guidelines of 2019.

An “on-tap” facility would mean the RBI will **accept applications** and grant licences for banks **throughout the year**.

Key Points

- **About:**

- These are the **financial institutions** which provide **financial services** to the **unserved** and **unbanked region** of the country.
- Registered as a **public limited company** under the **Companies Act, 2013**.
- Needs to open **at least 25% of its banking outlets** in **unbanked rural centres**.
- Required to **extend 75% of its adjusted net bank credit** to the **Priority Sector Lending (PSL)**.

The RBI mandates banks to lend a certain portion of their funds to specified sectors, like agriculture, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), export credit, education, housing, social infrastructure, renewable energy among others.

- At least **50% of its loan portfolio** should constitute **loans and advances of up to Rs. 25 lakhs**.
- The **maximum loan size and investment limit** exposure to a single and group debtor would be restricted to 10% and 15% of its capital funds, respectively. They **cannot extend large loans**.
- If the **initial shareholding by promoters** in the bank is in excess of 40% of paid-up voting equity capital, it should be brought down to 40% within a period of 5 years.
- Subject to **Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR)** and **Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR)** requirements.
 - Banks are required to hold a certain proportion of their deposits in the form of cash known as the CRR.

This **minimum ratio** (that is the part of the total deposits to be held as cash) is stipulated by the RBI.
 - The share of **Net Demand and Time Liabilities** that a bank is required to maintain safe and liquid assets, such as government securities, cash, and gold is termed as SLR.

- **Eligibility for Setting up SFBs:**

- **Resident individuals/professionals** with 10 years of experience in banking and finance.
- The companies and societies owned and controlled by residents.
- **Existing Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs)**, **Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs)**, **Local Area Banks (LABs)** and payment banks that are owned and controlled by residents.

- **Activities:**
 - Primarily undertake **basic banking activities** of acceptance of deposits and lending to unserved and underserved sections including small business units, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries and unorganised sector entities.
 - Undertake other **non-risk sharing simple financial services** activities such as the distribution of mutual fund units, insurance products, pension products, etc. with the prior approval of the RBI.
- **Regulations:**
 - SFBs are governed by the provisions of the:
 - **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934;**
 - Banking Regulation Act, 1949;
 - Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999;
 - Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007;
 - Credit Information Companies (Regulation) Act, 2005;
 - Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation Act, 1961;
 - Other relevant Statutes and the Directives issued by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** and other regulators from time to time.
- **Guidelines for 'on-tap' Licencing:**
 - **Capital Requirement:** The minimum paid-up voting equity capital / net worth requirement shall be Rs. 200 crores.
 - For Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks (UCBs),** desirous of voluntarily transiting into SFBs, initial requirement of net worth shall be at Rs. 100 crores, which will have to be increased to Rs. 200 crores within 5 years from the date of commencement of business.
 - **Scheduled Bank status to SFBs:** SFBs will be given scheduled bank status immediately upon commencement of operations.
 - **Payments Banks Conversion to SFBs:** The **payment banks** can apply for conversion into SFB after 5 years of operations if they are otherwise eligible as per these guidelines.

Scheduled Banks

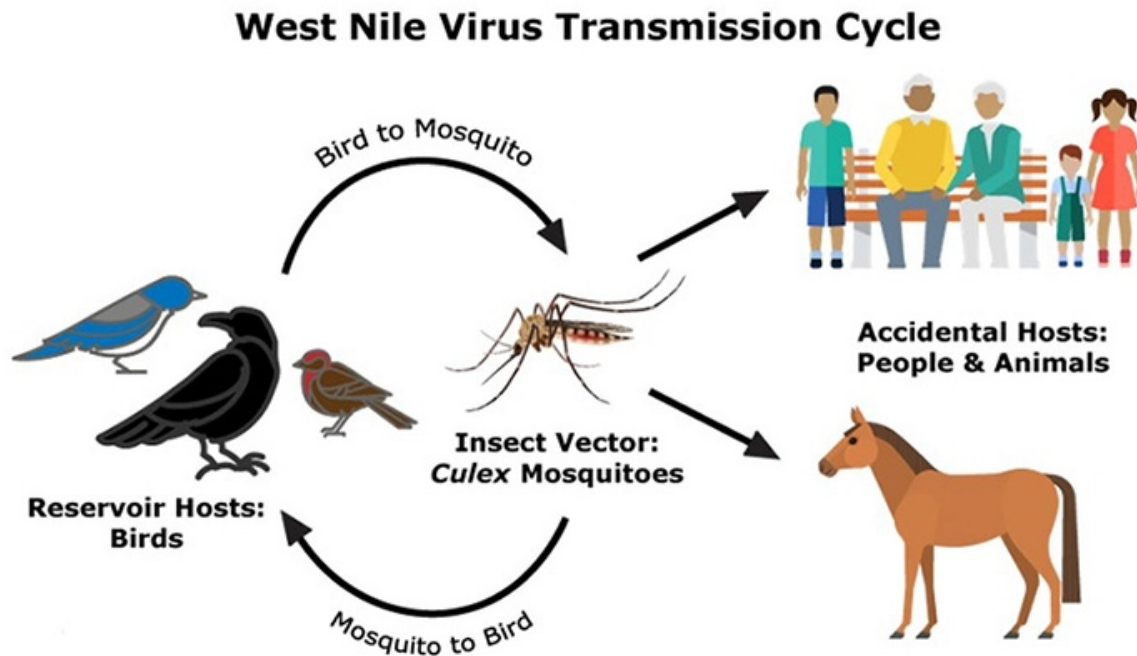
- Scheduled banks are banks that are **listed in the 2nd schedule of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.**
- The bank's paid-up capital and raised funds **must be at least Rs. 5 lakh** to qualify as a scheduled bank.
- Scheduled banks are **liable for low-interest loans from the Reserve Bank of India** and membership in clearinghouses.
- All commercial banks, including nationalized, international, cooperative, and regional rural banks, fall under scheduled banks.

Source: TH

West Nile Virus Infections

Why in News

Recently, **Russia warned of a possible increase in West Nile Virus (WNV) Infections** this autumn as mild temperatures and heavy precipitation create favourable conditions for the mosquitos that carry it.



Key Points

- **About:**
 - It is a **member of the flavivirus genus** and belongs to the Japanese encephalitis antigenic complex of the family Flaviviridae.
 - WNV is **commonly found in** Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North America and West Asia.
 - Older people, children and those with weakened immune systems are most **at risk**.
- **Origin:**
 - WNV was first isolated in a woman in the **West Nile district of Uganda in 1937**.
 - It was **identified in birds** in the Nile delta region **in 1953**. Before 1997, WNV was not considered pathogenic for birds.
 - **Human infections** attributable to WNV have been **reported in many countries for over 50 years**.

- **Transmission:**
 - WNV is an infectious disease spread by infected mosquitoes. It spreads from birds to humans with the bite of an infected Culex mosquito. It can lead to a fatal neurological disease in humans.
 - The virus causes West Nile fever in around 20% of cases, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). It is related to the Zika, Dengue and Yellow Fever Viruses.
- **Symptoms:**
 - Those infected usually have no symptoms or mild symptoms.
 - The symptoms include a fever, headache, body aches, skin rash, and swollen lymph glands. They can last a few days to several weeks, and usually go away on their own.
 - If West Nile virus enters the brain, it can be life-threatening. It may cause inflammation of the brain, called encephalitis, or inflammation of the tissue that surrounds the brain and spinal cord, called meningitis.
- **Treatment:**
 - There are no specific vaccines or treatments for human WNV disease.
 - The best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites.
 - Treatment is supportive for patients with neuro-invasive West Nile virus, often involving hospitalization, intravenous fluids, respiratory support, and prevention of secondary infections.

Source: IE

Dara Shikoh

Why in News

The **Ministry of Culture** recently set up a **seven-member panel of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to locate the grave of the Dara Shikoh.**

He is believed to be buried somewhere in the **Humayun's Tomb** complex in Delhi, one of around 140 graves of the Mughal clan.



Key Points

- **About:**
 - He (1615-59) was the **eldest son of Shah Jahan**. He is described as a “**liberal Muslim**” who tried to find commonalities between Hindu and Islamic traditions.
 - He is known as a **pioneer of the academic movement for interfaith understanding** in India. He had a deep understanding and knowledge of major religions, particularly Islam and Hinduism.
 - He was inclined towards philosophy and mysticism over military pursuits in comparison to Aurangzeb.
 - **In 1655**, his father declared him the Crown Prince, but **was defeated by Aurangzeb, his younger brother, in 1657** after Shah Jahan fell ill.
 - He was **assassinated by Aurangzeb, in a bitter struggle** for the throne on 30th August, 1659 when he was 44.

- **Works:**

- **Connection between Hinduism and Islam:**

His most important works, **Majma-ul-Bahrain** (Mingling of Two Oceans) and **Sirr-i-Akbar** (Great Mystery), are devoted to the cause of establishing connections between Hinduism and Islam.

- **Promotion of Indian Culture:**

- He acquired proficiency in **Sanskrit and Persian, which enabled him to play a key role in popularising Indian culture** and Hindu religious thought.
- **He translated the Upanishads** and other important sources of Hindu religion and spirituality from Sanskrit to Persian. Through these translations, he was **responsible for taking the Hindu culture and spiritual traditions to Europe** and the West.

This is his outstanding contribution to India's intellectual and religious heritage.

Source: IE

Darjeeling Himalayan Railways

Why in News

Recently, **concerns were raised against the Centre's proposed monetisation of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways (DHR).**



Key Points

- **About:**
 - DHR was **built in the British era between 1879 and 1881.**
 - It is **located in the foothills of the Himalayas in West Bengal.**
 - It is the **most outstanding example of a hill passenger railway.** Opened in 1881, its design applies bold and ingenious engineering solutions to the problem of establishing an effective rail link across a mountainous terrain of great beauty.
 - It was **declared a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site** in 1999.
- **Other Mountain Railways Declared as World Heritage Sites:**
 - **Nilgiri Mountain Railways** located in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu (South India) (2005)
 - **Kalka Shimla Railway** located in the Himalayan foothills of Himachal Pradesh (Northwest India) (2008)

UNESCO's World Heritage Sites

- A World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by UNESCO for its special cultural or physical significance.
- The list of World Heritage Sites is maintained by the international 'World Heritage Programme', administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.
- This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972.
- **India has 40 world heritage sites**, 32 cultural, 7 natural and 1 mixed.
In 2021, **Dholavira** (Gujarat) and **Ramappa Temple** (Telangana) have been declared as world heritage sites.

Source: TH

Kilauea Volcano: Hawaii

Why in News

Recently, a surge of **earthquakes** and the ground swelling at the **southern part of the crater** was noticed at **Hawaii's Kilauea volcano**.

A volcano is an **opening on the surface** that allows material warmer than its surroundings to escape from its interior.



Key Points

- **About:**
 - Kilauea, also called **Mount Kilauea** (“Much Spreading” in Hawaiian), is located in **Hawaii Volcanoes National Park** on the **southeastern part of the island of Hawaii, US**.

Kilauea’s slopes merge with those of the nearby **volcano Mauna Loa on the west and north**.
 - It is an **elongated dome built of lava eruptions from a central crater** and from lines of craters extending along east and southwest rifts, or fissures. The **volcano’s 4,090-foot summit** has collapsed to **form a caldera**.

A **caldera is a depression** created after a volcano partially collapses after releasing the majority of its magma chamber in an explosive eruption.

- **Eruptive history:**

- The caldera was the site of **nearly continuous activity** during the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century.
- It is **one of the world's most active volcanoes**, having erupted **34 times since 1952**.

From **1983 to 2018, it erupted almost continuously**. In December 2020, It erupted at the crater, creating a lake with enough lava to fill 10 Hoover **dams**. That eruption ended in May 2021.

- **Volcanoes in India:**

- **Barren Island**, Andaman Islands (**India's only active volcano**)
- **Narcondam**, Andaman Islands
- **Baratang**, Andaman Islands
- **Deccan Traps**, Maharashtra
- **Dhinodhar Hills**, Gujarat
- **Dhosi Hill**, Haryana

Source: TH

Latham's Snipe

Why in News

Urban development continues to threaten Latham's Snipe habitats as several snipe sites in eastern Australia are at risk from housing developments and large infrastructure projects.

Latham's Snipe was **formerly known as the Japanese Snipe**.



Key Points

- **Characteristics:**
 - Latham's Snipe is the **largest snipe in Australia**, with cryptic, mainly brown, plumage.
 - Their **exceptional eyesight helps** them constantly scan for dangers at night, when they **forage for food in open wet and muddy areas**.
- **Habitat:**
 - Breeds in **northern Japan and parts of eastern Russia** during **May-July** and spends the **non-breeding season (September to March)** along **Australia's eastern coast**.
 - Like **other migratory shorebirds**, it has incredible endurance, undertaking a non-stop, over-ocean flight between its breeding and non-breeding grounds.
- **Threats:**

Hunting and wetland loss during the 20th century have contributed to a decline in Latham's Snipe in south-eastern Australia.

The signing of the **Japan Australia Migratory Bird Agreement in 1981** has stopped snipe hunting in both countries to some extent.
- **Protection Status:**

IUCN Red List: Least Concern

Source: DTE
