International Big Cat Alliance

Why in News?

Recently, India has officially joined the **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)**, which was **launched by the Prime Minister in 2023.** IBCA aims to protect big cats and their habitats.

Note:

- Though India launched **the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) as a global institution, it must still sign and ratify its Framework Agreement, similar to its approach with other international agreements and institutions, such as the **Paris Agreement**, the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, and the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).**

What is the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)?

- **About:**
  - The **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)** is a multi-country, multi-agency coalition of **96 big cat range countries**, and non-range countries aimed at conserving 7 big cats and their habitats.
  - The idea was **first proposed** by India's **Prime Minister** in **2019** and officially launched in April 2023 to mark the 50th anniversary of **Project Tiger**.
- **Objectives:**
  - To **prevent the illegal wildlife trade** involving the seven big cat species.
  - To **promote the conservation of natural habitats** for these seven big cats.
  - To **mobilise financial and technical resources** to support the implementation of conservation and protection efforts.
  - IBCA would work towards **mitigating the adverse effects of climate change**.
  - It will advocate for policy initiatives that **align biodiversity conservation efforts** with local needs and contribute towards the attainment of **United Nations** -mandated **Sustainable Development Goals** within member countries.
- **Focus Species:**
  - The initiative focuses on the conservation of **seven** big cat species: the **Tigers**, **Lions**, **Leopards**, **Snow Leopards**, Cheetah, Jaguar and **Puma.**
    - Five of these—**tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, and cheetah—are found in India**, excluding the puma and jaguar.
- **Member Countries:**
  - Currently, 4 countries (**India, Nicaragua, Eswatini,** and **Somalia)** are its members.
- **Budgetary Allocation:**
  - The Union Cabinet allocated a one-time budgetary support of **Rs 150 crore** for the IBCA for five years from **2023-24 to 2027-28.**
- **Governance Structure:**
  - It includes an **Assembly of Members, a Standing Committee**, and a **Secretariat** based in **India**.

- The framework is modelled after the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**, with a Director-General (DG) appointed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
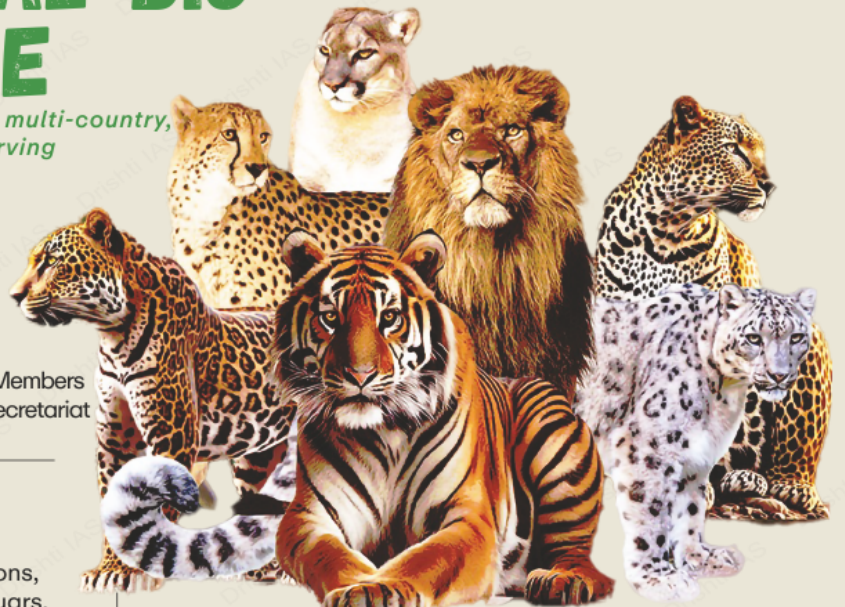
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INTERNATIONAL BIG CAT ALLIANCE

The International Big Cat Alliance is a multi-country, multi-agency coalition aimed at conserving big cat species and their habitats.

Launched by
India (2023)

Headquarters
India

Member states
96 countries

Structure
Consists of Assembly of Members Standing Committee & Secretariat

FUNCTIONS

- Secure the future of big cats (Tigers, Lions, Leopards, Snow Leopards, Pumas, Jaguars, and Cheetahs)
- Mitigate the adverse effects of climate change
- Advocate for policy initiatives
- Attain the United Nations-mandated Sustainable Development Goals

THREATS TO BIG CATS

- Poaching
- Habitat loss & fragmentation
- Human-Leopard conflict
- Climate change & Deforestation

Conservation Status of Big Cats

Species	Scientific Name	IUCN Red List	CITES	Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
Tigers	Panthera tigris	Endangered	Appendix-I	Schedule-I
Lions	Panthera leo	Vulnerable	Appendix-I	Schedule-I
Leopards	Panthera pardus	Vulnerable	Appendix-I	Schedule-I
Snow Leopards	Panthera uncia	Vulnerable	Appendix-I	Schedule-I
Pumas	Puma concolor	Least Concerned	Appendix II (P. c. Costaricensis and cougar: Appendix-I)	NA
Jaguars	Panthera onca	Near Threatened	Appendix-I	NA
Cheetahs	Acinonyx jubatus	Vulnerable	Appendix-I	Schedule-I

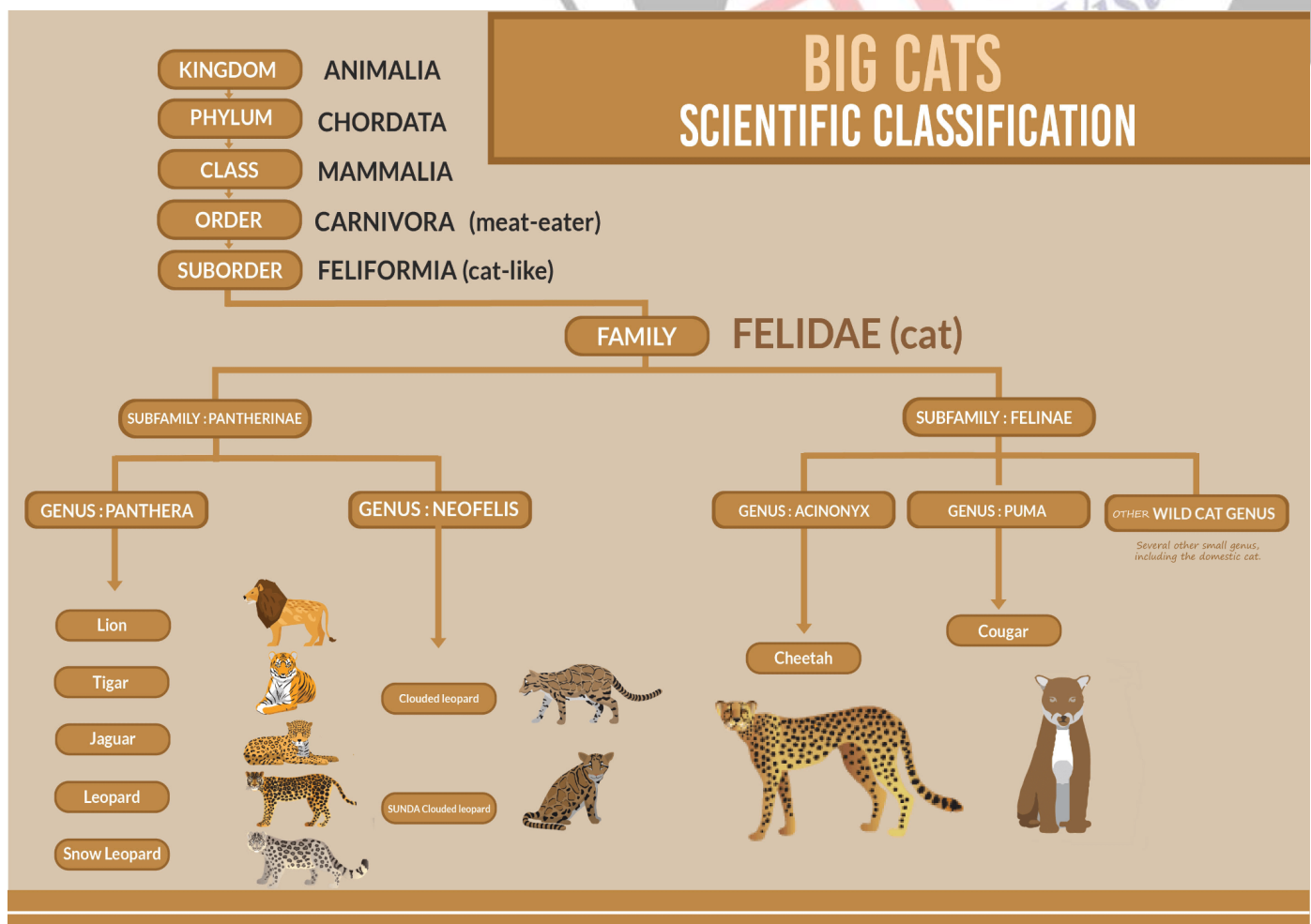## Other Conservation Efforts in India

- Project Tiger (1973)
- Asiatic Lion Reintroduction Project (2004)
- Project Snow Leopard (2009)
- Project Cheetah (2022)

Drishti IAS

What are Big Cats?

- Big cats refer to **large wild cat species,** typically belonging to the *Panthera* genus, though some other species are also included.
    - Smaller and medium cats, including domestic cats, are classified under the genus *Felis*.
- **Key Points:**
    - **Lions** are the only big cats that live in **social groups,** called prides, and hunt cooperatively. Other big cats are solitary, except for mothers with cubs.
    - The **Siberian tiger**, the **largest of the big cats**, is endangered due to threats like trophy hunting and use in traditional Chinese medicine.
    - Big cats are **keystone species** and **critical indicators of ecosystem health** but are increasingly threatened by poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and habitat loss.
    - The Indian subcontinent has historically been home to the **Bengal tiger, Asiatic lion, Indian leopard, Indian/Asiatic cheetah**, and **Snow leopard.**
    - The cheetah was declared extinct in India in 1952. In 2022, the Government launched an ambitious initiative to reintroduce **African cheetahs** into **Kuno National Park** in Madhya Pradesh.

Conservation Efforts for Big Cats in India

- **Project Lion**
- **Project Leopard**
- Project Cheetah
- **Cheetah Reintroduction Project**
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**
- **Snow Leopard** Conservation

BIG CATS
SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

KINGDOM	ANIMALIA
PHYLUM	CHORDATA
CLASS	MAMMALIA
ORDER	CARNIVORA (meat-eater)
SUBORDER	FELIFORMIA (cat-like)
FAMILY	FELIDAE (cat)

SUBFAMILY : PANTHERINAE

GENUS : PANTHERA
- Lion
- Tigar
- Jaguar
- Leopard
- Snow Leopard

GENUS : NEOFELIS
- Clouded leopard
- SUNDA Clouded leopard

SUBFAMILY : FELINAE

GENUS : ACINONYX
- Cheetah

GENUS : PUMA
- Cougar

OTHER **WILD CAT GENUS**
Several other small genus, including the domestic cat.

Read More: [Cheetah Cubs in Kuno National Park](#)

NGT's Directive on Zoning of Nainital

[**Source: IE**](#)

Recently, the [**National Green Tribunal (NGT)**](#) ordered classifying **Nainital town** into **prohibited, regulated, and development zones**.

- This zoning aims to limit the environmental impact of **unchecked [urbanisation](#)** and **manage development** responsibly.
- The NGT emphasised the concept of [**"carrying capacity,"**](#) which refers to the **maximum population and development** that Nainital can support without degrading its environment.
  - The felling of **oak and deodar trees** for parking construction near hotels has caused major **ecological damage** in Nainital's catchment area, affecting [**Nainital Lake's**](#) **recharge.**
- Nainital Lake is a **lunar-shaped freshwater lake** that was formed due to [**tectonic movements**](#). It is located in the **Kumaon region** in Uttarakhand.
- NGT is a **statutory body** established under the **National Green Tribunal Act, 2010** for effective and **expeditious disposal** of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests.

NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL

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

About

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

Structure

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

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

Powers & Jurisdiction

- **Jurisdiction:** Civil cases on environmental issues and rights
- **Suo Motu Powers:** Granted since 2021
- **Roles:** Adjudicatory, preventative, and remedial
- **Procedures:** Follows Principles of natural justice
  - Not bound by the CPC, 1908 or Indian Evidence Act, 1872
- **Principles:** Sustainable Development; Precautionary; Polluter pays
- **Orders:** Executable as civil court decrees; offers relief and compensation **(decisions are binding)**
- **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

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

दृष्टि The Vision / d / **Drishti IAS**

Read More: **National Green Tribunal (NGT)**

Status of Legacy Waste Management under SBM 2.0

Source: TH

According to the dashboard of the **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) 2.0** the **legacy waste management** has progressed slowly, with **only 470 of 2,424 dumpsites remediated** and **16% of the area reclaimed** since 2021.

- **Legacy waste** refers to waste that has been **improperly collected and stored for years**, often

found in **landfills, abandoned mines, and industrial sites**.

- It poses several challenges, including **radiological characterization, safety issues, leachate management, and fire control**.
- Processing methods include **bioremediation, biomining, stabilisation**, and **screening.**
- It can be classified into four types: **containment and storage, buried garbage, soil and groundwater contamination**, and **waste from contaminated construction materials**.

- **Legacy waste dumpsites** have been created by **Municipalities** in India in city outskirts due to the lack of solid waste handling facilities.
- According to government estimates, around **15,000 acres of prime real estate** is buried under **nearly 16 crore tonnes of legacy waste** across the country.
- **State Performance:**
  - **Tamil Nadu** leads in reclaimed **area** with 837 acres (42%).
  - **Gujarat tops by percentage**, reclaiming 75% (698 out of 938 acres) of its landfill area.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission Urban (SBM-U) 2.0** was **launched in 2021**, with a vision of achieving **"Garbage-Free Status"** for all cities **by 2026.**
  - **SBM-U 1.0** was launched to make urban India **Open Defecation Free (ODF).**

No. of Dumpsites:2425 *

* Primarily dumpsites having legacy waste >= 1000 Tonne

Legacy Waste Qty.	Remediated Waste Qty	Waste to be Remediated
2,200	896 (41%)	1,304 (59%)
Area	Area Reclaimed	Area to be Reclaimed
17,098.12	4,552.34 (27%)	12,546 (73%)

* Waste Qty in Lakh Tonne
* Area in Acre

Remediation Status

Remediation Completed

(470)
No of Dumpsite

Legacy Waste Qty.	Remediated Waste Qty	Waste to be Remediated
299	299 (100%)	0 (0%)
Area	Area Reclaimed	Area to be Reclaimed
2,549.38	2,549.38 (100%)	0 (0%)

Read More: [2nd Phase of SBM-U](#), **[Making Swachh Bharat Mission A Reality](#)**

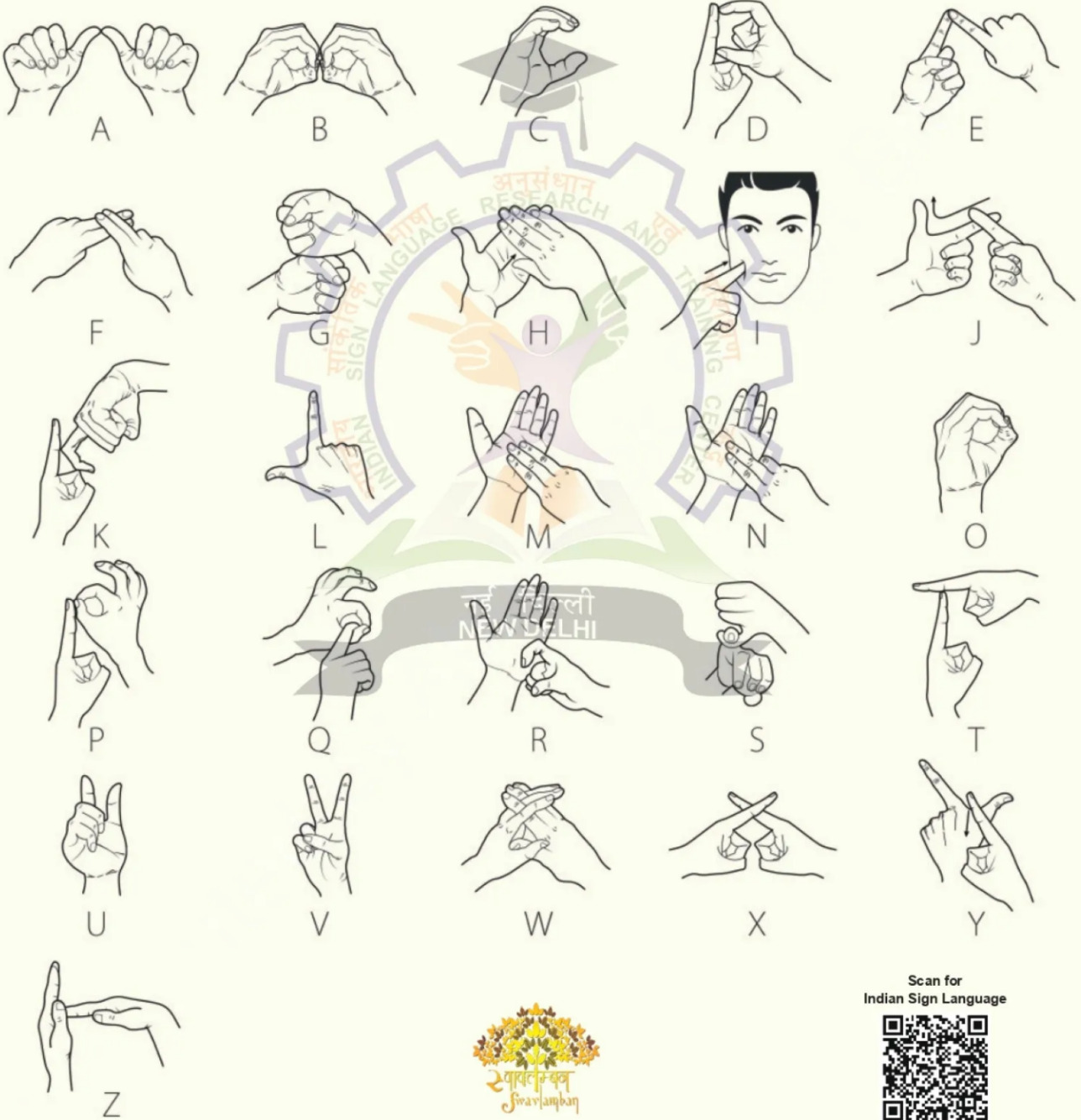
International Day of Sign Languages

[Source: TH](#)

The **[International Day of Sign Languages (IDSL)](#)** is celebrated annually
on **23rd September,** established by the **2017 [UN General Assembly](#) Resolution**. The resolution
emphasises that access to sign language and quality education is crucial for the development of deaf
individuals and the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity.

- **Theme for 2024:** The theme is **"Sign Up for Sign Language Rights,"** encouraging collective
  advocacy for sign language rights.
- The date marks the establishment of the **World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)** in **1951,** which
  advocates for the rights and recognition of deaf individuals globally.
- The **[Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) was adopted by the UN in
  2006** recognizes **sign languages as equal to spoken languages** and obligates states to
  promote the linguistic identity of the Deaf community.
- India was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention in 2007.
- In India, the **Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC)**, an autonomous
  body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, celebrates the IDSL.

भारतीय सांकेतिक भाषा अनुसंधान एवं प्रशिक्षण केन्द्र
दिव्यांगजन सशक्तिकरण विभाग,
सामाजिक न्याय और अधिकारिता मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार
Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre
Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan)
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India
भारतीय सांकेतिक भाषा मे अंग्रेजी अक्षर
English Alphabets in Indian Sign Language

Scan for
Indian Sign Language

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YixXGcYeLQrc7LwwfigL-rf00xjUHydJT_/view?usp=sharing
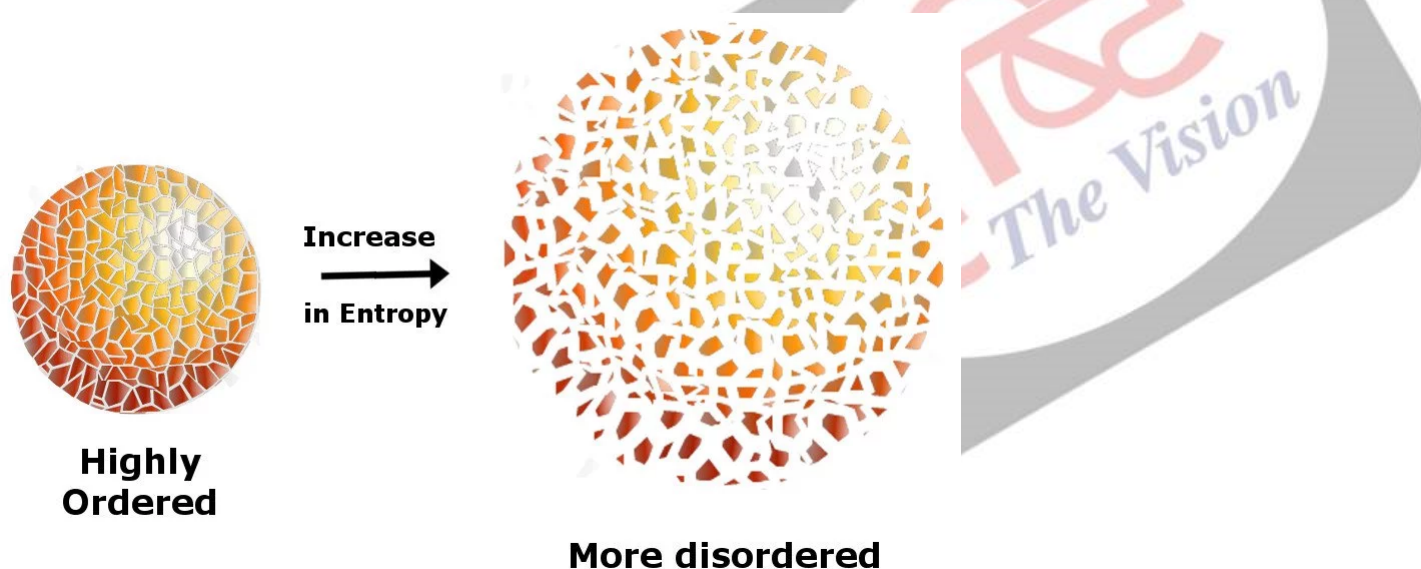
Developed by
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Relationship Between Entropy and Ageing

Source: HT

A recent study reveals that **travel enhances mental and physical health, potentially slowing the ageing process.** It maintains a **low-entropy state,** boosts immunity, reduces stress, promotes physical activity, and enhances overall wellness and resilience.

- Engaging in travel keeps the body in a **low-entropy state,** indicating healthy and efficient bodily functions.
- **Entropy, is a measure of disorder in the system,** correlates with ageing and health decline. **Increased entropy leads to deteriorating biological systems,** contributing to diseases.
    - A higher entropy generation rate shortens lifespans. Maintaining a low-entropy state is crucial for health, highlighting the importance of order in ageing and wellness.
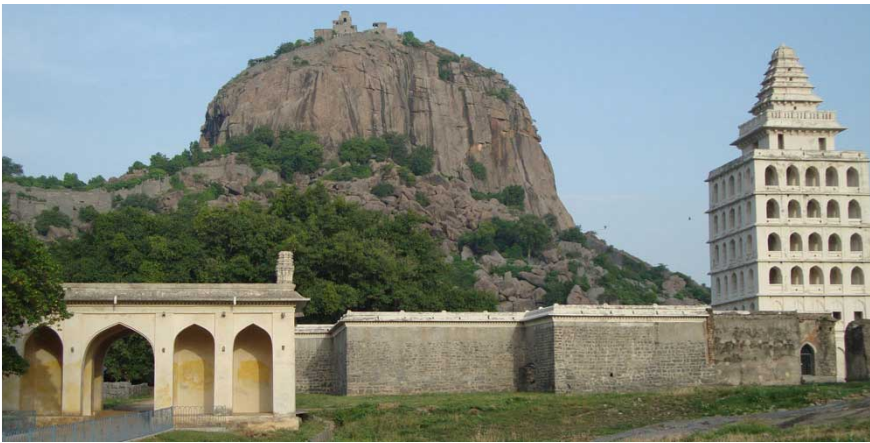

Highly Ordered

Increase in Entropy

More disordered

Gingee Fort Nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site

Source: TH

Why in News?

Recently, the **Gingee Fort** in **Tamil Nadu's Villupuram** district has been nominated for **UNESCO's World Heritage Site** list as part of the **Maratha Military Landscapes** proposal, which includes 11 other forts.

What are the Key Facts Regarding Gingee Fort of Tamil Nadu?

- **Geographical Feature and Significance:** Gingee Fort is renowned for its historical importance and strategic location atop three hillocks: **Rajagiri, Krishnagiri,** and **Chandragiri**.
  - It is also known as the **"Troy of the East,"** as it is one of the most impregnable fortresses in peninsular India.
  - Its strategic location and robust defences, including a **60-foot-wide rampart and an 80-foot-wide moat,** made it vital during the **Carnatic Wars** between the **French and British**.
- **Historical Overview: The fort was originally built by Ananta Kon of the Konar Dynasty in 1200 CE and named it Krishnagiri.**
  - **Vijayanagar Empire** undertook significant renovations of the fort.
  - In 1677, the fort was captured by **Chhatrapati Shivaji** and remained under **Maratha control until 1698**, when it fell to the **Mughals**.
    - The Fort became the **last stronghold for the Marathas (Rajaram I, son of Shivaji)** during their resistance against the Mughal forces.
  - Briefly ruled by **Raja Desingh (Tej Singh)**, it was taken over by the **Nawabs of Arcot in 1714** and remained under their dominion until 1749.
  - From **1750 to 1770, the French** held the fort before it eventually passed into **Britishers**.
- **Architectural Features:**

  - The fort complex houses several temples and shrines.

    - It includes significant structures such as a **stepped well, Kalyana Mahal, durbar hall, cannon, clock tower, armory, elephant tank, stable, granary, gymnasium, Venkataramana temple,** and **Sadathtulla mosque.**
  - **Water Supply Systems: Gingee Fort features two sophisticated water supply systems, ensuring a continuous water supply even at the highest points of the fort.**

  - Rajagiri Hill: It is the tallest hill at 800 metres, featuring a citadel and the temple of Ranganatha.

    - **Krishnagiri Citadel** is notable for its **Indo-Islamic architecture**, including an audience hall with a domed roof.
  - **Venkataramana Swamy Temple:** It is located in the **Lower Fort complex** and adorned with intricate carvings from Hindu epics.
  - **Kalyana Mahal:** It is an architectural jewel with eight storeys, used as the **royal ladies' quarters**.

UNESCO World Heritage Site

- A World Heritage Site is a location **recognized by UNESCO** for its exceptional cultural or natural significance.
- UNESCO promotes the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage sites globally that hold outstanding value to humanity**.**
- As of September 2024, **India has 43 World Heritage Sites** (**cultural sites-35, natural sites-7, mixed-criteria site-1**) with the latest addition being the **Mound-Burial System of Ahom Dynasty**.
- **Process for nominating a site to UNESCO's World Heritage List**
  - A country creates a list of important cultural and natural heritage sites.
  - The **country selects sites from the Tentative List** and prepares nomination details.
  - The **International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)** and **IUCN** evaluate the nominated property.
  - The **Committee meets annually to decide which sites to add** to the World Heritage List, based on advisory recommendations and criteria fulfillment.

Read More: Assam's Moidams to be Considered for World Heritage List, UNESCO, Maratha Military Landscapes

6th Quad Summit 2024

For Prelims: Quad, Pandemic, Indo-Pacific Nations, Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI), **Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), Digital Public Infrastructure, Port, Tsunami,** Quad-plus.

For Mains: Multi-dimensional initiatives of Quad countries for stability and prosperity of Indo-Pacific nations.

Source: PIB

Why in News?

Recently, the **6th Quad Summit** was held at **Delaware in the United States**. It was the 4**th in-person Quad Leaders' Summit**.

- The Quad is leading **ambitious projects** to help partners address **pandemics and disease**, confront the threat of **climate change**, bolster **cybersecurity** among others.

What are the Key Highlights of the 6th Quad Summit?

- **Health:**
  - **Quad Health Security Partnership (QHSP):** QHSP was launched by Quad in **2023** to enhance **health security coordination** in the Indo-Pacific region.
    - New initiatives like the **Quad Cancer Moonshot**, has been announced for treatment of **cervical cancer.**
  - **Pandemic Preparedness:** The United States has pledged over **USD 84.5 million** to enhance infectious disease **prevention and response** capabilities across **fourteen Indo-Pacific nations**.
- **Maritime Security:**
  - **MAITRI:** The Quad has introduced the **Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI)** to enhance regional maritime security capabilities.
    - **The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA)** was launched in **2022** to improve **maritime security** and monitor illegal activities.
  - **Indo-Pacific Logistics Network:** The Quad has initiated a logistics network to improve **airlift capacity** for **rapid disaster response** across the Indo-Pacific, aiming for efficiency in civilian responses.
  - **Coast Guard Cooperation:** A first-ever **Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission** is planned for 2025, to enhance interoperability.
- **Quality Infrastructure Development:**
  - **Digital Infrastructure Principles:** The Quad has established principles for the development of **digital public infrastructure**, focusing on security and inclusivity.
  - **Quad Ports of the Future Partnership:** It aims to support resilient **port infrastructure development** and enhance regional connectivity across the Indo-Pacific region.
    - In 2025, Quad partners intend to hold the inaugural **Regional Ports and Transportation Conference** in **Mumbai.**
  - **Undersea Cables and Digital Connectivity:** Quad partners have committed over USD 140 million to **undersea cable projects**, aiming for primary telecommunication connectivity for all **Pacific island** countries by 2025.
    - For this, **Australia** launched the **Cable Connectivity and Resilience Centre** in July 2024.
  - **Quad Infrastructure Fellowship:** It aims to **improve capacity and deepen professional networks** across the region to design, manage, and attract investment in **infrastructure projects.**
- **Critical and Emerging Technology:**
  - **Open Radio Access Network (RAN) and 5G:** In 2023, the Quad initiated its first **Open RAN** deployment in Palau, aiming to build a secure telecommunications ecosystem, with an investment of approximately **USD 20 million.**
    - The Quad intends to support ongoin**g Open RAN trials and the Asia Open RAN Academy** in the Philippines.
  - **AI-ENGAGE Initiative (2023)**: Through the **Advancing Innovations for Empowering NextGen Agriculture (AI-ENGAGE)**, Quad governments are deepening leading-edge collaborative research to harness artificial intelligence and robotics to empower next-generation agriculture.
  - **BioExplore Initiative**: It aims to utilise AI in studying biological ecosystems to innovate in **disease diagnosis, crop resilience, and clean energy solutions**.
  - **Semiconductors:** The Quad leaders finalised **Memorandum of Cooperation** to facilitate collaboration in addressing semiconductor supply chain risks.
  - **Quantum Technology:** The **Quad Investors Network (QUIN)**, a nonprofit initiative, highlighted ways in which Quad country's **Quantum ecosystems** can **work together** to collectively **leverage capital and expertise.**
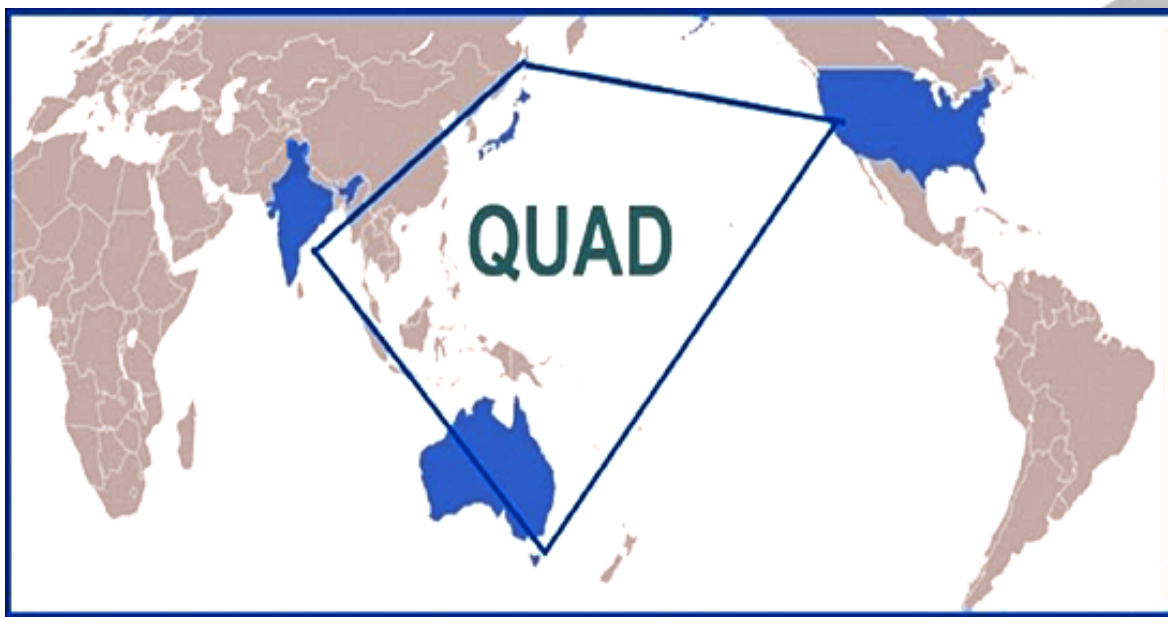- **Climate and Clean Energy:**

- **Enhanced Early Warning Systems**: The US will provide **3D-printed weather stations** to help Pacific Island countries while Australia and Japan are enhancing regional disaster risk reduction efforts.
    - **Japan** is also enhancing cooperation with Pacific Island countries under its **Pacific Climate Resilience Initiative**.
- **Quad Clean Energy Supply Chain Diversification Program (2023):** It aims to support the development of secure and diversified **clean energy supply chains** in the Indo-Pacific region.
    - India committed to invest **USD 2 million** in new solar projects in Fiji, Comoros, Madagascar, and Seychelles.
- **Cybersecurity:** The Quad has developed the **Quad Action Plan** to protect **commercial undersea telecommunications cables**, to advance the Quad's shared vision for future digital connectivity, global commerce, and prosperity.
    - The Quad is working together to foster a **resilient information environment** through its **Countering Disinformation Working Group**, by supporting **media freedom** and addressing **foreign information manipulation** and interference.
- **Space:** Quad partners intend to share expertise and experience in **space situational awareness (SSA),** contributing to long-term sustainability of the space environment.
- **Countering Terrorism:** Quad leaders discussed counter **terrorism threats, Quad counter terrorism good practices**, and ways the Quad can work together to mitigate acts of terrorism through information sharing and strategic messaging.
    - The **Quad Counter Terrorism Working Group (CTWG)** currently focuses on countering the use of **unmanned aerial systems (C-UAS)**, **chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear devices (CBRN),** and the internet for terrorist purposes.
- **People-to-People Initiatives:** India announces a new initiative to award **fifty Quad scholarships, worth USD 500,000**, to students from the **Indo-Pacific** to pursue a **4-year undergraduate engineering program** at a Government of India-funded technical institution.

What are Quad Principles for Development and Deployment of Digital Public Infrastructure?

- **About the Principles:** It was announced by the **Quad countries** that outline a framework for **building and using digital infrastructure** that is inclusive, transparent, and respects democratic values.
- **About Digital public infrastructure (DPI):** It is described as a set of **shared digital systems** that are secure, reliable and interoperable.
    - They are built and leveraged by the public and private sector to provide **equitable access** and improve public service delivery at a large scale.
- **Quad Principles for DPI:** Quad affirmed the **following principles** for the development and deployment of DPI among others.
    - **Inclusivity**: Eliminate barriers to empower end-users and ensure **last-mile access,** avoiding algorithmic bias.
    - **Interoperability**: Use open standards for **interoperability** while considering legal and technical constraints.
    - **Scalability**: Design systems flexibly to manage **unexpected demand** increases or expansions.
    - **Security and Privacy**: Integrate privacy-enhancing technologies and security features to protect individual data and resilience.
    - **Governance for Public Benefit**: Ensure systems are **safe, trusted, transparent,** and promote competition, inclusion, and data protection.
    - **Sustainability**: Ensure continuous operations through **adequate financing** and technological support.
    - **Intellectual Property Protection**: Protect intellectual property rights based on existing legal frameworks.
    - **Sustainable Development**: Align systems with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

What is Quad?

- **About:** Quad, or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, is a **diplomatic partnership** among Australia, India, Japan, and the US.
  - It focuses on stability and prosperity in the **Indo-Pacific region**, promoting an open, stable, and resilient environment.
- **Objectives of Quad:** The Quad aims to address pressing regional challenges, including **health security, climate change, infrastructure, technology, cybersecurity**, humanitarian assistance, maritime security, countering disinformation, and counter-terrorism.
- **Origins of Quad:** The Quad originated in response to the **2004 Indian Ocean tsunami,** where the four nations provided humanitarian assistance.
  - Formally established in **2007** by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the group went dormant due to concerns over **China's reactions,** particularly after Australia withdrew in 2008.
  - It was revived in **2017 a**mid shifting regional attitudes toward China's influence, culminating in its **first formal summit in 2021.**
- **Expansion Potential: "Quad-plus"** meetings have included nations like **South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam,** indicating potential for future expansion.

Conclusion

The Quad is dedicated to enhancing **health security against pandemics**, confronting the climate change threat, and bolstering cybersecurity. By fostering **collaboration and innovation** across these critical areas, the Quad aims to ensure a **resilient and prosperous Indo-Pacific,** contributing to global stability and sustainable development.

> **Drishti Mains Question:**
>
> Q. Discuss the significance of the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) in addressing contemporary challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

Strengthening POCSO Act 2012

For Prelims: **Supreme Court**, **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**, **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)**, **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, **Fast Track Special Court's Scheme**, **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).**

For Mains: Steps taken to address child sexual abuse in India and associated challenges.

Source: HT

Why in News?

Recently, the **Supreme Court** ruled that **watching or possessing** sexually explicit material involving **minors** is **illegal** under the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.**

- It constitutes a punishable offence under the **POCSO Act, 2012** regardless of whether the material is **further shared or transmitted.**
- It **overturned** a prior ruling by the **Madras High Court**, which had determined that **private viewing** of child pornography **did not amount to an offence** without further distribution.

What are Key Highlights of the Supreme Court Ruling?

- **Redefinition of Terminology:** The Supreme Court (SC) has urged the Union government to **replace** the term **"child pornography"** with **"child sexual exploitative and abuse material" (CSEAM)**.
    - This change is significant because the term **"pornography"** often implies **consensual adult conduct,** failing to accurately represent **abuse and exploitation.**
- **Expansion of Section 15 of the POCSO Act, 2012**: The SC provided a **stricter interpretation** of the term **"storage of child pornography"** under **Section 15** of the POCSO Act, 2012. Previously, this provision primarily addressed **storage for commercial purposes**. The court's interpretation of Section 15 introduces **three key offences.**
    - **Possession Without Reporting**: A person who **stores or possesses** child pornography **must delete, destroy, or report it** to the designated authority. Failure to do so can be punishable under **Section 15(1).**
    - **Intent to Transmit or Distribute**: Individuals who possess child pornography **intending to transmit or display** it in any manner, except for the purpose of reporting, can face charges under **Section 15(2).**
    - **Commercial Possession**: Storing child pornography for **commercial purposes** falls under **Section 15(3),** which outlines the most severe penalties.
- **Concept of Inchoate Offences:** The ruling classifies the offences under **Section 15 as "inchoate" offences**, meaning they are **preparatory actions** taken toward committing further crimes.
- **Redefinition of Possession:** The court expanded the definition of **"possession"** in child pornography cases. It now includes **"constructive possession,"** which refers to situations where an individual may **not physically hold** the material but has the **ability to control it** and

knowledge of that control.
- **E.g., Watching** child pornography **online** without downloading it can still be considered in **possession**.
- If an individual receives a **link** to child pornography but closes it without reporting, they may be **held accountable** if they do not inform authorities, even if they **do not retain physical possession** after closing the link.
- **Educational Reforms:** The court urged the government to promote **comprehensive [sex education](#)** in schools and society, countering misconceptions that often **stigmatised** discussions about **[sexual health](#)**.
  - This education should include topics such as **consent, healthy relationships, gender equality, and respect for diversity**.
- **Awareness About Pocso Act, 2012: Sections 43 and 44 of the POCSO Act, 2012** require **central and state governments**, along with the **[National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)](#)**, to promote widespread awareness of the Act.
- **Formation of an Expert Committee:** An expert committee should be tasked with **devising comprehensive programs** for health and sex education and increasing awareness of the **POCSO Act, 2012** among children.
- **Victim Support and Awareness:** The judgement underscored the need for **robust support systems for victims of CSEAM**, including **psychological counselling, therapeutic interventions, and educational support**.
  - Programmes like **[cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)](#)** may help address the **cognitive distortions** that fuel such behaviour among **offenders.**

What is the Status of Crimes Against Children?

- **Booming Market:** According to the **US-based National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)**, India now accounts for the maximum number of **online child sexual abuse imagery** in the world, followed by Thailand.
  - NCMEC estimates that Indian users have **uploaded 25,000 images or videos** between April and August 2024.
- **Geographical Distribution: Delhi** tops the list for the maximum uploads of child porn, followed by **Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal**.
- **Increased Circulation:** According to the **[National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)](#) report 2023**, **781 cases** of creating or storing child porn were recorded in **2018**. In **2017**, there were **331 cases.**
  - The dissemination of inappropriate content featuring children accounted for **1,171 cases in 2022.**

What is the POCSO Act?

- **About:** The law aims to address **offences of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse** of children. The Act defines a child as any person **below the age of 18 years.**
  - It was enacted in consequence to India's ratification of the **[UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) in 1992.**
- **Features:**
  - **Gender-Neutral Nature:** The Act recognises that **both girls and boys** can be victims of **sexual abuse** and that such abuse is a crime regardless of the gender of the victim.
  - **Confidentiality of Victim's Identity: Section 23** of the POCSO Act, 2012 mandates that the identity of child victims **must be kept confidential**. Media reports cannot disclose any details that could reveal the victim's identity, including their name, address, and family information.
  - **Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Cases**: **Sections 19 to 22** compel individuals who have knowledge or reasonable suspicion of such offenses to **report them** to concerned authorities..
- **Gaps in Implementation of the POCSO Act, 2012:**
  - **Lack of Support Persons**: A critical gap identified in the implementation of the POCSO

Act, 2012 is the **absence of "support persons" for victims**. The Supreme Court found that in **96% of POCSO cases**, victims were not provided with the necessary support throughout the legal process.

- A support person may be a **person or organisation** working in the field of **child rights or child protection.**
  - **Insufficient Designation of POCSO Courts**: Not all districts have designated **POCSO courts**. As of 2022, only **408 POCSO courts** were established across 28 states as part of the **Fast Track Special Court's Scheme**.
  - **Shortage of Special Public Prosecutors**: There is a lack of **Special Public Prosecutors** specifically trained to handle POCSO cases.

Conclusion

A **coordinated effort** among stakeholders, including **educators, healthcare providers, and law enforcement**, is vital for early intervention in child sexual exploitation. **Societal responsibility** and a shift in attitudes are essential to **prevent victimisation and support recovery**, ensuring that victims can heal and regain their dignity and hope.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q.Critically analyse the effectiveness of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 in addressing child sexual abuse in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following are envisaged by the Right against Exploitation in the Constitution of India?(2017)

1. Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour
2. Abolition of untouchability
3. Protection of the interests of minorities
4. Prohibition of employment of children in factories and mines

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only

(b) 2, 3 and 4 only

(c) 1 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. Examine the main provisions of the National Child Policy and throw light on the status of its implementation. **(2016)**