



News Analysis (02 Nov, 2018)

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China Lifts Ban on Trade of Tiger Bones and Rhino Horns

China has lifted a 25-year old ban on the scientific and **medical use of tiger bones and rhinoceros horn**.

- According to conservationists, this lifting of ban would have devastating consequences globally for the endangered species.
- Tiger bone and rhino horns are used in **Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)** and are used to treat insomnia and gout.

Background

- Tiger parts were removed from the official TCM pharmacopoeia, a list regulated by China's health ministry, when the country first banned the trade of tiger parts in 1993.
- In 2010, the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies, an international non-profit established in Beijing, urged its members to stop using tiger parts or parts from other endangered wildlife.
- China, under **President Xi Jinping, has sought to portray itself as more environment-friendly**, passing stricter protections over wildlife and natural resources.
- **In 2016, China banned the sale of ivory** which was believed to be a cure for everything from cancer to sore throats in order to reduce poaching of elephants.
- However, the more **stringent regulations have come into conflict with Chinese medicine diplomacy**, an effort to use TCM to expand the **country's soft power** globally.
- Further, **higher living standards have increased Chinese demand for animal parts**, valued for their supposed life-extending powers. A recent fervour for ejiao, a "blood-enriching" gelatin made from animal hides, has spurred scrutiny over donkeys, mainly from Africa, slaughtered annually to meet Chinese demand.

India's Concern

- **Authorities and wildlife conservationists in Assam are concerned** about the detrimental effect on the **state's one-horned** rhino after China has lifted a 25-year-old ban on use and trade of rhino horn and tiger bone- products.
- According to the latest count, **Kaziranga National Park in Assam** has 2,413 one-horned rhinos and in 2018, five rhinos fell to poachers. **Rhino horns poached from here will turn up in China's markets as 'legal' products.** This is an indirect way to open up markets for poached products.
- This might give a boost to rhino poachers and traffickers of horns, who might attempt a spurt in their activities with the hope of laundering the products as legally acceptable in China.
- Multiple researches and study papers have established that **rhino horns poached from Assam land up in China through Myanmar.** A report by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** in 2017 noted that **Myanmar's Shan state was a notorious backdoor wildlife trafficking hub** through which rhino horns are taken to China.
- The **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)**, a leading NGO in wildlife conservation and endangered species, **has urged China to maintain the ban**, adding that the trade will have devastating consequences globally.
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) clearly states that tigers should not be bred for trade in their parts and derivatives.

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

- WWF is an **international non-governmental organization** founded in 1961, working in the field of wilderness preservation, and the reduction of human impact on the environment.
- Its Headquarters is in **Gland, Switzerland.**
- Its mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.
- The **Living Planet Report** published every two years by WWF is based on a Living Planet Index and ecological footprint calculation.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

- CITES is an **international agreement between governments.**
- It was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of **IUCN** (The World Conservation Union).
- Its aim is to ensure that **international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.**

- Although CITES is **legally binding** on the Parties but it **does not take the place of national laws**. Rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.
 - The species covered by CITES are listed in **three Appendices**, according to the degree of protection they need.
 - **Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction**. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
 - **Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction**, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.
 - **Appendix III contains species that are protected in at least one country**, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.
 - A specimen of a CITES-listed species may be imported into or exported (or re-exported) from a State party to the Convention only if the appropriate document has been obtained and presented for clearance at the port of entry or exit.
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US Revokes Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for India

The US government has withdrawn **GSP (Generalized System of Preferences)** benefits to India worth \$70 million on as many as 50 items mostly from handloom and agriculture sector.

Of the total US imports under GSP in 2017 was \$21.2 billion, of which India was the biggest beneficiary with USD 5.6 billion.

Impact of GSP Withdrawal

- **Impact on India**

The products on which India exports under **GSP belong to sectors which employ several thousands of men and women**, especially in rural areas through micro, small and medium enterprises. Thus losing a major market can impact their profits.
- **Impact on the US**
 - FICCI has said that the termination of the GSP would be contrary to the legislative objective and the history of the Trade Reform Act of 1974 of furthering the economic development of developing countries.
 - It would cause **significant distress to the export-oriented sector leading to increased cost for US** industries that use products under the GSP.

Background

- Trade relationships between India and the US have gone downhill in the last few years.
- The US had imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from India and had challenged its export subsidy regime at the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- India had also dragged the US to the WTO on higher steel and aluminum tariffs and has threatened to impose retaliatory tariffs worth \$240 million on US imports.

GSP (Generalized System of Preferences)

- The idea of granting developing countries preferential tariff rates in the markets of industrialized countries was originally presented at the first UNCTAD conference in 1964.
- The **GSP was adopted at UNCTAD in New Delhi in 1968 and was instituted in 1971.**
- There are currently 13 national GSP schemes notified to the UNCTAD secretariat.
- The **following countries grant GSP preferences:** Australia, Belarus, Canada, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Norway, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States of America.
- GSP is the largest and oldest U.S. trade preference program. Established by the Trade Act of 1974, GSP promotes economic development by eliminating duties on thousands of products when imported from one of 120 designated beneficiary countries and territories.

Benefits of GSP

- **For India**
 - Indian **exporters benefit** indirectly - through the benefit that accrues to the importer by way of reduced tariff or duty-free entry of eligible Indian products.
 - It also allows India to **integrate with global value chains (GVC)** and hence, with global markets and furthers the development of the country's export base.
 - Reduction or removal of import duty on an Indian product makes it more competitive to the importer - other things (e.g. quality) being equal.
 - This tariff preference helps new exporters to penetrate a market and established exporters to increase their market share and to improve upon the profit margins, in the donor country.

- **For the US**
 - Indian exports to the **USA under GSP are less-expensive, high-quality alternatives that reduce the costs of final products**, this enables the U.S. economy to be more globally competitive.
 - GSP is **especially important to U.S. small businesses**, many of which rely on the programs' duty savings to stay competitive.
 - GSP supports U.S. jobs, moving GSP imports from the docks to U.S. consumers, farmers, and manufacturers support tens of thousands of jobs in the United States.
- **Globally**
 - GSP has promoted economic growth in a large number of developing countries by allowing increased exports of eligible products. This is of tremendous benefit to the global economy.
 - At the same time it is a small aspect of the U.S. trade balance as of the total \$2.4 trillion U.S. imports in 2017, only \$21.2 billion arrived via GSP, amounting to less than 1% of total U.S. imports

Way Forward

- The GSP remains a central aspect of the overall trade engagement and must remain for Indian exporters keen to address the U.S. markets.
 - The U.S. should have considered continuing India's GSP eligibility as a gesture of goodwill that reaffirms its commitment to the mutually beneficial relationship between our two countries. The India-U.S. relationship has continued to grow stronger as India liberalizes along a positive and steady trajectory.
 - Today, both the US and India engage in countless areas of mutual cooperation and have a convergence of views in a large number of global issues. The relationship must not be seen through transactional prism only. By doing this the broader strategic dimensions of the partnership could get impacted.
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Oceans Heating Faster: IPCC Study

The ocean is warming much faster than previously thought, new research has found, suggesting that global climate goals may be even harder to reach.

- The study concluded that the global oceans may be absorbing up to 60% more heat since the 1990s than older estimates had found.
- The higher-than-expected amount of heat in the oceans means more heat is being retained within Earth's climate system each year, rather than escaping into space. In essence, more heat in the oceans signals that global warming is more advanced than scientists thought.

- Previous estimates from the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that the oceans were taking up around 8 zetajoules of energy each year. (1 Zetajoules= 10^{21} Joules)
 - The new research has put this figure around 13 zetajoules. This suggests that the Earth, as a whole, is more sensitive to climate change than previous estimates, i.e. the planet may respond more strongly to future greenhouse gas emissions than expected.
 - For a perspective, total energy consumption around the world is around half a zetajoule annually, according to the International Energy Agency.
- This may have some grave implications for global efforts to meet the climate targets outlined under the Paris Agreement under which nations are striving to keep global temperatures within 2 degrees Celsius of their pre-industrial levels, or a more ambitious 1.5 degrees Celsius if possible.
- Recently, the IPCC released a report on the 1.5 C threshold, concluding that meeting the target will require an “unprecedented” effort from world leaders and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- The findings suggest if governments are to prevent temperatures from rising above 2 degree Celsius, emissions of carbon dioxide, the chief greenhouse gas produced by human activities, must be reduced by 25 per cent compared to what was previously estimated.
- The new study isn't actually the first to suggest that the IPCC's previous estimates may be too low. In the past few years, other research has also suggested that the oceans may be warming faster—although the exact rate varies from study to study.

Methodology

- Scientists normally measure ocean temperatures using thermometers, but stitching together a global temperature record requires thermometers around the globe.
- But before 2007 or so, ocean floats were much more sparse, and scientists also widely relied on measurements taken by passing ships. That made it a little difficult to estimate ocean changes throughout the world, because these data tended to be concentrated mainly in major shipping routes.
- An international consortium, in 2007 began a program, known as **Argo**, creating an international network of ocean-temperature and salt content measuring instruments.

- Because of the issues with collecting direct ocean data in past decades, the new research attempted to solve the problem without using direct ocean measurements at all. Instead, it relied on measurements of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, dating back to 1991.
 - The oceans absorb more than 90% of the excess energy trapped within the world's atmosphere.
 - There's a strong relationship between ocean heat and the amount of dissolved gas from the atmosphere that oceans can hold. As the ocean warms, its ability to take in oxygen and carbon dioxide decreases and more of those gases remain in the atmosphere.
 - By observing changes in atmospheric oxygen and carbon dioxide levels—controlling for other factors, like human emissions of greenhouse gases—the scientists were able to estimate how the ocean's heat content had changed over the last few decades.
 - However, since this is a novel approach, it is unclear if it will hold up to further scrutiny. Also, this methodology works best over long periods of time but does not detail what happens year to year.
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Living Planet Report 2018

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has recently released **Living Planet Report 2018** along with **Living Planet Index**.

- The report also explores three other indicators measuring changes in species distribution, extinction risk and changes in community composition. All these show severe declines or changes.
- The **Living Planet Index (LPI) is an indicator of the state of global biodiversity and the health of our planet.**
- It was **first published in 1998.**
- LPI tracks the population abundance of thousands of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians around the world.

Key Findings of Report

- **Populations crashing (In the period of 1970-2014)**
 - The main reasons for biodiversity decline continue to be the overexploitation of species, agriculture, and land conversion.
 - 60% Loss of vertebrates(animals with a backbone)
 - 80% decline in freshwater fauna population
 - 90% loss of wildlife in Latin America, which is the worst-hit region

- **Species disappearing**

- The index of extinction risk for five major groups birds, mammals, amphibians, corals and an ancient family of plants called cycads shows an accelerating fall.
- The current rate at which species are going extinct is 100 to 1,000 times greater than the natural rate of extinction.
- This means that Earth has entered a mass extinction event, only the sixth in half-a-billion years.

- **Boundaries breached**

- In 2009, scientists weighed the impact of humanity's expanding appetites on nine processes known as Earth systems within nature. Each has a critical threshold, the upper limit of a "safe operating space" for human species.
- The critical threshold for climate change is global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- So far, humans have clearly breached two of these planetary boundaries: species loss, and imbalances in Earth's natural cycles of nitrogen and phosphorous (mainly due to fertilizer use).
- For two others, climate and land degradation, we have begun breaching critical threshold indicators. Ocean acidification and freshwater supply are not far behind. As for new chemical pollutants such as endocrine disruptors, heavy metals, and plastics are concerned, their full impact is yet to be assessed.

- **Forests shrinking**

- Exploding human consumption is the driving force behind the unprecedented planetary change. Earth is witnessing, through the increased demand for energy, land, and water.
- Consumption indicators – such as the Ecological Footprint – provide a picture of overall resource use.
- Nearly 20 percent of the Amazon rainforest, the world's largest, has disappeared in five decades. Tropical deforestation continues unabated, mainly to make way for soybeans, palm oil, and cattle.
- Globally, between 2000 and 2014, the world lost 920,000 square kilometers of intact or "minimally disturbed" forest, an area roughly the size of Pakistan or France and Germany combined.

- **Oceans depleted**

- Plastic pollution has been detected in all major marine environments worldwide, from shorelines and surface waters down to the deepest parts of the ocean, including the bottom of the Mariana Trench.
- Freshwater habitats, such as lakes, rivers, and wetlands, are most threatened.
- These are strongly affected by a range of factors including habitat modification, fragmentation and destruction; invasive species; overfishing; pollution; disease; and climate change.
- Since 1950, humans have extracted six billion tonnes of fish, crustaceans, clams, squids and other edible sea creatures.
- Climate change and pollution have killed off half of the world's shallow-water coral reefs, which support more than a quarter of marine life.
- Coastal mangrove forests, which protect against storm surges made worse by rising seas, have also declined by up to half over the last 50 years.

Way Forward

- With two key global policy processes underway – the setting of new post-2020 targets for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sustainable Development Goals – there is currently a unique window of opportunity to reverse the trend.
 - Lessons can be learned from progress towards addressing other critical global issues, like climate change, and everyone – governments, business, finance, research, civil society, and individuals – has a part to play.
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Electrocution of Elephants

Electrocution of elephants is turning out to be a critical area in the management of India's elephant population as 461 elephants got electrocuted between 2009 and 2017.

- States in the eastern and northeastern region of the country have accounted for most of these deaths. This is because elephants are expanding base all across the country and moving out of forests towards agricultural areas.
- For instance, there were no elephants in Chhattisgarh for centuries, and now human-elephant conflict is being witnessed there.
- There needs to be greater coordination between the Forest Department and different agencies, including the Power Department, as well as continuous monitoring of electrical wires passing through areas of elephant movement.

- Other measures to check electrocution of Elephants are:
 - stop illegal electrical fencing,
 - have proper guidelines for maintaining the height of high tension electrical wires,
 - proper zone-wise management plan for different elephant landscapes — where to allow elephants and where to restrict their movement.
- According to the all-India synchronised census of elephants in 2017, their population was 27, 312. The States with the highest elephant population are Karnataka (6,049), followed by Assam (5,719) and Kerala (3,054).

Elephants

- There are three subspecies of Asian elephant – the Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan. The Indian has the widest range and accounts for the majority of the remaining elephants on the continent.
- IUCN Red List of threatened species status- African elephants are listed as “vulnerable” and Asian elephants as “endangered”.
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) status- Appendix I. Appendix I lists species that are the most endangered among CITES-listed animals and plants. They are threatened with extinction and CITES prohibits international trade in specimens of these species except when the purpose of the import is not commercial, for instance for scientific research.

Conservation Efforts

- Project Elephant launched by the Government of India in the year 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- Establishment of elephant reserves and adoption of the “World Elephant Day” (August 12) to help conserve and protect elephants in India and improve their welfare.
- ‘Gaj Yatra’ a nationwide awareness campaign to celebrate elephants and highlight the necessity of securing elephant corridors.
- The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), had come out with a publication on the right of passage in 101 elephant corridors of the country in 2017, stressed on the need for greater surveillance and protection of elephant corridors.
- The Monitoring the Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme launched in 2003 is an international collaboration that tracks trends in information related to the illegal killing of elephants from across Africa and Asia, to monitor effectiveness of field conservation efforts.

Important Facts for Prelims (2nd November 2018)

Dharma Guardian- 2018

- Dharma Guardian 2018 is the **joint military** exercise between **India and Japan**.
- It involves the Indian Army and Japan Ground Self Defence Force at Counter Insurgency Warfare School, Vairengte, Mizoram, India.
- It will be a 14-day long exercise, with emphasis on increasing interoperability between forces from both countries.
- Both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well developed tactical drills for neutralization of likely threats that may be encountered in urban warfare scenario.
- Exercise 'DHARMA GUARDIAN-2018' is another step in deepening strategic ties including closer defense cooperation between the two countries.
- **JIMEX and MALABAR** are the **Naval exercises** conducted by Indian and Japanese Navy.

Veer Surendra Sai

- The Union Cabinet has approved renaming of Jharsuguda Airport, Odisha as "Veer Surendra Sai Airport, Jharsuguda".
- Veer Surendra Sai was a well-known freedom fighter of Odisha. He played a significant role in the first Indian struggle for freedom of 1857.
- Surendra Sai began protesting the British at age 18 in 1827, moved operations to the hilly tracts of Western Orissa in 1857 and continued until he surrendered in 1862.
- Though the great revolt of 1857 was suppressed elsewhere in India in 1858, it continued till 1862 in the district of Sambalpur in Orissa, largely due to efforts of Veer Surendra Sai.
- In 2005, Government of India decided to put a statue of Veer Surendra Sai at the premises of Parliament of India to honour him.

LMDC and BASIC

- India is hosting two key meetings in New Delhi with a group of countries called the LMDC (Like Minded Developing Countries-India, China, Venezuela, Iran, etc.) and BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China), ahead of December climate talks in Katowice, Poland.
- BASIC is a group of four large newly industrialized countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China. It was formed in 2009.
- The Conference of Parties (COP), a league of at least 190 countries signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), meets annually to discuss ways to address issues related to climate change.
- The **Katowice talks** will be 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or **COP24**.

Ease of Moving Index, 2018

- Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways has released India's first Ease of Mobility Index 2018.
 - The report has been prepared by Ola Mobility Institute - Ola's research and social innovation arm.
 - As part of report findings, Kolkata ranks the highest in terms of affordability of public transportation with 80% of commuters finding Kolkata's public transport reasonable and affordable.
 - Chennai emerged as the city with the most sustainable mobility practices amongst other metros in the country.
 - The Index offers a source of information to aid transit agencies and urban planners to make informed decisions and align solutions with the preference of commuters.
 - The report further seeks to offer a comprehensive action plan for cities to further strengthen their public transportation systems and improve the overall state of mobility.
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