News Analysis (07 Oct, 2021)

drishtiias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/07-10-2021/print

Proposal to Amend the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

Why in News

Recently, the **Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** has proposed an amendment to the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980** to bring significant changes to forest governance in India.

Key Points

- **About:**
  - **Aim:**
    To liberalise forest laws through facilitating private plantations for harvesting and exploration or extraction of oil and natural gas deep beneath forest land by drilling holes from outside the forest areas.
  - **Definition of Forest:**
    The Supreme Court in *TN Godavarman Thirumulpad versus Union of India and Others* (1996), have defined forest as, all areas which are recorded as 'forest' in any government record, irrespective of ownership, recognition and classification.
  - **Need of Amendment:**
    - **Forests on Private Land:** Identification of forests on private land is **subjective and arbitrary** to some extent.
      - This results in a lot of resentment and resistance particularly from private individuals and organisations.
      - Considering any private area as forest, would restrict the right of an individual to use his/her own land for any non-forestry activity.
      - This has led to the tendency to keep most of the private lands devoid of vegetation even if there's scope for planting activities.
    - **Changes in the Ecological and Economic Needs:** There has been considerable change in the ecological, social and environmental regimes in the country in the last few years.
      Present circumstances, particularly for accelerated integration of conservation and development, have become necessary to amend the Act.
    - **Achieving India's Climate Target**: To achieve the **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** extensive plantations in all possible available lands outside the government forests was necessary.

- **Highlights of the Proposal:**
  - **Defining 'Forests': Deemed forests** listed by state governments up to 1996 will **continue to be considered forest land.**
    - Land that was **acquired by the Railways and the road ministries** before 1980, but on which forests came up, **will no longer be considered forests.**
  - **Strategic Projects:** The forest land for strategic and security projects of national importance should be exempted from the need to obtain prior approval from the Central government.
    - Doing this will allow states to permit diversion of forest land for strategic and security projects that are to be completed in a given time frame.
  - **Oil and Natural Gas Extraction**: Facilitate new technologies such as **Extended Reach Drilling (ERD)** for extraction of oil and natural gas found deep beneath the forest land by drilling holes from outside the forest areas.
    - The use of such technology is quite environment-friendly and as such should be kept outside the purview of Act.
  - **Building in Forests**: To ease the grievances of the individuals whose land fall in state specific private forests act or within the purview of dictionary meaning of forest.
    - The proposal allows them the **right to construct structures for bonafide purposes** including forest protection measures and residential units up to an area of 250 sq mtr as one time relaxation.
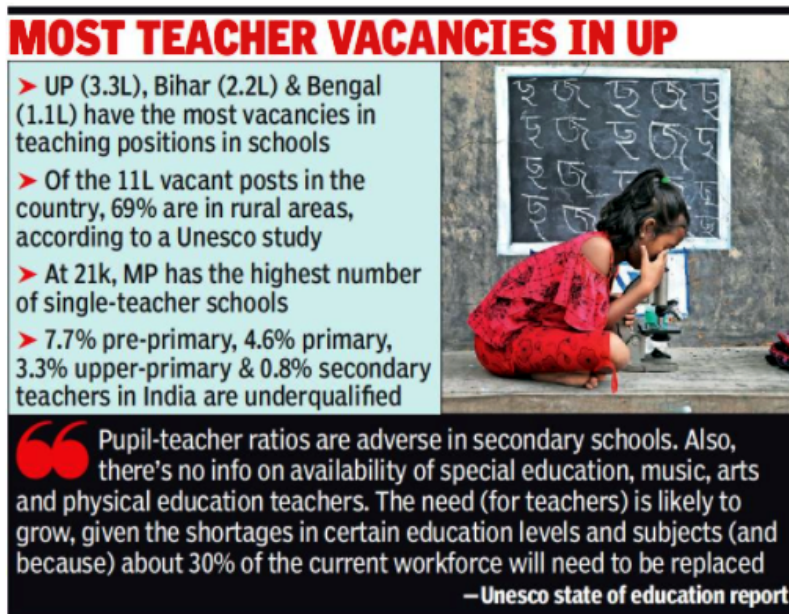
Forest in India

- According to **India State of Forest Report, 2019**, the **Total Forest and Tree cover is 24.56%** of the geographical area of the country.
  - **Forest Cover (Area-wise):** Madhya Pradesh> Arunachal Pradesh> Chhattisgarh> Odisha> Maharashtra.
  - **National Forest Policy of India, 1988** envisages a goal of achieving 33% of the geographical area of the country under forest and tree cover.
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
  - Through the **42nd Amendment Act,** 1976 Forests and Protection of Wild Animals and Birds were **transferred from State to Concurrent List** along with Education, Weights & Measures and Administration of Justice.
  - **Article 51 A (g)** of the Constitution states that it shall be the **Fundamental Duty** of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests and Wildlife.
  - **Article 48 A** in the **Directive Principles of State policy**, mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.

Source: IE

2021 State of the Education Report for India: UNESCO

Why in News

On the Occasion of the **World Teachers' Day (5th October**), the <u>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)</u> launched its **2021 State of the Education Report (SOER) for India: "No Teacher, No Class".**

MOST TEACHER VACANCIES IN UP

➤ UP (3.3L), Bihar (2.2L) & Bengal (1.1L) have the most vacancies in teaching positions in schools

➤ Of the 11L vacant posts in the country, 69% are in rural areas, according to a Unesco study

➤ At 21k, MP has the highest number of single-teacher schools

➤ 7.7% pre-primary, 4.6% primary, 3.3% upper-primary & 0.8% secondary teachers in India are underqualified

❝ Pupil-teacher ratios are adverse in secondary schools. Also, there's no info on availability of special education, music, arts and physical education teachers. The need (for teachers) is likely to grow, given the shortages in certain education levels and subjects (and because) about 30% of the current workforce will need to be replaced

—Unesco state of education report

Key Points

- **About:**
  - The findings are largely based on analysis of <u>**Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**</u> and the <u>**Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE)**</u> data **(2018-19).**
  - It aims to **serve as a reference** for enhancing the **implementation of the <u>National Education Policy (NEP)</u>** and towards the realization of the <u>**Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)**</u> **4** (target 4c on teachers).
    > **Target 4c**: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

- **Findings of the Report:**
  - **Lack of Teachers:**
    - There are nearly **1.2 lakh single-teacher schools** in the country of which an overwhelming **89% are in rural areas**.
    - The report projects that **India needs 11.16 lakh additional teachers** to meet the current shortfall.
  - **Performance of States (Women Teachers):**
    - **Tripura has the least number of women teachers,** followed by Assam, Jharkhand and Rajasthan.
    - **Chandigarh leads** the chart followed by Goa, Delhi, Kerala.
  - **Increase in Number of Teachers in Private Sector:**
    The proportion of teachers employed in the private sector **grew from 21% in 2013-14 to 35% in 2018-19**.
    > The **Right to Education Act** stipulates that the **Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)** should be 30:1 in classes 1-5 and 35:1 in higher grades.
  - **Lack of Digital Infrastructure:**
    - The **overall availability of computing devices** (desktops or laptops) in schools is 22% for all India, with rural areas seeing much lower provisioning (18%) than urban areas (43%).
    - **Access to the internet in schools** is 19% all over India - only 14% in rural areas compared to 42% in urban areas.
  - **Increment in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER):**
    - For **elementary schools,** it has **increased from 81.6 in 2001 to 93.03** in 2018-19 and stands at 102.1 in 2019-2020.
      > **GER** is the **number of students enrolled** in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education.
    - **Overall retention is 74.6%** for elementary education and 59.6% for secondary education in 2019-20.
- **Recommendations:**
  - **Increase the number of teachers** and **improve working conditions** in North Eastern states, rural areas and **'aspirational districts'.**
  - **Increase the number of physical education**, music, art, vocational education, early childhood and special education teachers.
  - Value the **professional autonomy of teachers**.
  - Build **teachers' career pathways.**
  - Provide teachers with **meaningful Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training.**
  - Develop **teaching governance** through consultative processes, based on mutual accountability.

Source: IE

PM MITRA Parks

Why in News

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the setting up of **seven Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks** at an outlay of Rs. 4,445 crore.

The MITRA park **aims** to integrate the entire textile value chain from spinning, weaving, processing/dyeing, printing to garment manufacturing at one location.

Key Points

- **About:**
    - PM MITRA park **will be developed by a Special Purpose Vehicle** which will be owned by the Central and State Government and **in a <u>Public Private Partnership (PPP) Mode.</u>**
    - Each MITRA Park will have **an incubation centre, common processing house and a common effluent treatment plant** and other textile related facilities such as design centres and testing centres.
    - The **Master Developer** will not only develop the Industrial Park but also maintain it during the concession period.
- **Funding:**
    - Under the scheme, the **centre will provide development capital support** for the development of common infrastructure of Rs 500 crore for each **greenfield MITRA park** and upto Rs 200 crore for each **brownfield park.**
        - Greenfield describes a completely new project that has to be executed from scratch, while a brownfield project is one that has been worked on by others.
- **Eligibility for Incentives:**
    - **An additional Rs 300 crore** will be provided as **Competitiveness Incentive Support** for the early establishment of textiles manufacturing units in each of these parks.
    - **Investors who set up "anchor plants" that employ at least 100 people** will be eligible for incentives of **upto Rs 10 crore every year** for upto three years.

- **Significance:**
    - **Reduce Logistics Cost**: It will **reduce logistics cost and strengthen the value chain** of the textile sector to make it globally competitive.
        - High logistics costs are considered a key hurdle to India's goal of boosting textile exports.
        - India had witnessed disruption in supply of key raw materials from China in the recent past as global supply chains got affected during the pandemic.
    - **Generate Employment:**
        Each MITRA park is **expected to directly generate 1 lakh jobs** and indirectly generate a further 2 lakh jobs.
    - **Attract FDI:**
        - The parks are crucial to attract **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).**
        - From April 2000 to September 2020, India's textile sector received Rs 20,468.62 crore of FDI, which is just 0.69% of the total FDI inflows during the period.
- **Other Related Initiatives:**
    - The **Production Linked Incentive Scheme** for man-made fibre segment (MMF) apparel, MMF fabrics and ten products of technical textiles for five years has been approved.
    - A **National Technical Textiles Mission** has already been launched to promote research and development in that sector.

Source: IE

Coal Crunch in India

Why in News

India's thermal power plants are facing a severe coal shortage, with **coal stocks having come down to an average of four days of fuel** across an increasing number of thermal stations.

Key Points

- **Reasons:**
  - **Eruption in Power Demand:**
    - Economy recovering from the **Covid-19 pandemic** coupled with supply issues have led to the current coal shortage.
    - India is suffering from the impacts of a sharp surge in electricity demand, a squeeze on domestic mine output and surging prices of seaborne coal.
  - **Increased Share of Thermal Power Plants:**
    Coal fired thermal power plants have also supplied a higher proportion of the increase in demand leading the share of thermal power in India's power mix increasing to 66.4% from 61.9% in 2019.
  - **Flooding and Rainfall:**
    Lower than normal stock accumulation by thermal power plants in the April-June period and continuous rainfall in coal bearing areas in August and September which led to lower production and fewer despatches of coal from coal mines.
  - **Lowering Imports:**
    A consistent move to lower imports coupled with high international prices of coal have also led to plants cutting imports.
- **Impact:**
  - If Industries face electricity shortages, it could **delay India's economic reopening.**
  - Some businesses **might downscale production.**
  - Providing India's population and underdeveloped energy infrastructure, the **power crisis could hit long and hard.**

- **Steps that can be Taken:**
  - **Ram-up Mining:**
    Government is working to closely monitor stocks and also State run Coal India and NTPC are working to raise output from mines to boost supply.
  - **Supply Controls:**
    - Rationing domestic power supplies, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, may emerge as one of India's easiest solutions.
    - Indian power distributors do typically cut supplies to certain areas on a rotational basis when generation is lower than demand, and an extension of load-shedding would likely be considered if power plants take any further hits.
  - **Increase Imports**:
    India will need to amplify its imports despite the financial cost. From Indonesia for instance, the price rose from USD 60 per tonne in march to 200 per tonne in September.
  - **Hydro-Power Generation:**
    - The same monsoon rains that have flooded coal mines are likely to boost hydro-power generation.
    - Large hydro-electric projects on dams are India's major electricity source after coal and the sector performs at its peak around the rainy season which typically extends from June to October.
  - **Turn to Natural Gas Powered Generators:**
    - There could be a larger role for natural gas to play, even with global prices currently surging.
    - In a desperate situation, the gas-powered fleet could help prevent any widespread power outages. State-run generator NTPC Ltd., for example, has idle capacity that can be fired up in around 30 minutes if needed and is connected to a gas grid.

Coal

- This is the **most abundantly found fossil fuel**. It is used as a domestic fuel, in industries such as iron and steel, steam engines and to generate electricity. Electricity from coal is called **thermal power.**
- The coal which we are using today was formed millions of years ago when giant ferns and swamps got buried under the layers of earth. Coal is therefore referred to as **Buried Sunshine.**
- The **leading coal producers of the world** include China, US, Australia, Indonesia, India.
- The **coal producing areas of India** include Raniganj, Jharia, Dhanbad and Bokaro in Jharkhand.

- Coal is also **classified into four ranks:** anthracite, bituminous, subbituminous, and lignite. The ranking depends on the types and amounts of carbon the coal contains and on the amount of heat energy the coal can produce.

Demand for Right to Health

Why in News

Recently, the demand for the enactment of a legislation on the **right to health** has been revived in Rajasthan.

> The health activists have affirmed that the law would streamline medical services and guarantee the availability of essential facilities to citizens.

Key Points

- **About:**
  - **Right to Health**: The right to health, as with other rights, includes both freedoms and entitlements:
    - Freedoms include the **right to control one's health and body** (for example, sexual and reproductive rights) and to be free from interference (for example, free from torture and non-consensual medical treatment and experimentation).
    - Entitlements include the **right to a system of health protection** that gives everyone an equal opportunity to enjoy the highest attainable level of health.
  - **Significance:**
    - The people are entitled to the right to health and it **puts a compulsion for the government** to take steps toward this.
    - **Enables everyone to access the services** and ensures that the quality of those services is good enough to improve the health of the people who receive them.
    - **Protects people from the financial consequences** of paying for health services out of their own pockets and reduces the risk of people getting pushed into poverty.
  - **Challenges**:
    - The **existing public primary health care** model in the country is **limited in scope**.
      - Even where there is a well-functioning public primary health centre, only **services related to pregnancy care, limited childcare** and certain services related to **national health programmes** are provided.
    - Expenditure on **public health funding** has been consistently low in India (approximately 1.3% of GDP).
      - As per **OECD**, India's total **out-of-pocket expenditure** is around 2.3% of GDP.
      - The government is committed to spend 2.5% of GDP on health by 2025.
    - **Sub-optimal health system**. Due to this, it is challenging to tackle **Non-communicable Diseases**, which is all about prevention and early detection.
      - It diminishes preparedness and effective management for new and emerging threats such as pandemic like Covid-19.

- **Obligations of Government:**
  - **Constitutional:**
    - **Fundamental Rights**: **Article 21** of the Constitution of India guarantees a fundamental right to life & personal liberty. The right to health is inherent to a life with dignity.
    - **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP): Articles 38, 39, 42, 43, & 47** put the obligation on the state in order to ensure the effective realization of the right to health.
  - **Judicial Pronouncements:**
    - The **Supreme Court** in *Paschim Bangal Khet Mazdoor Samity case (1996)* held that in a **welfare state,** the primary duty of the government is to secure the welfare of the people and moreover it is the obligation of the government to provide adequate medical facilities for its people.
    - In *Parmanand Katara Vs Union Of India (1989)* judgement, the Supreme Court had ruled that every doctor whether at a government hospital or otherwise has the professional obligation to extend his services with due expertise for protecting life.
  - **International Commitments:**
    Universal Declaration of Human Rights: India is a signatory of the Article 25 of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)** by the United Nations.
    - It grants the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of humans including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.

Way Forward

- The **health should be shifted to the Concurrent list of the seventh schedule under the Constitution.** Presently, 'Health' is under the State List.
- There is a need for a **Developmental Finance Institution (DFI)** dedicated to healthcare investments.
- A **comprehensive public health legislation** incorporating the right to health may be passed by the Parliament.
- There is a need to **create a designated and autonomous agency** to perform the functions of disease surveillance, information gathering on the health impact of policies of key non-health departments, maintenance of national health statistics, enforcement of public health regulations, and dissemination of information to the public.

Source: TH

First Malaria Vaccine: Mosquirix

Why in News

Recently, the **World Health Organisation (WHO) endorsed the world's first Malaria Vaccine** in the hope that it will spur stalled efforts to curb the spread of the parasitic disease.

> **Malaria** is a life-threatening disease **caused by parasites** that are transmitted to people **through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.** It is **preventable and curable.**

Key Points

- **About:**
    - **RTS,S/AS01, trade name Mosquirix,** is **an injectable vaccine targeting P. falciparum,** the most prevalent malaria strain in Africa. It is the **first and only vaccine to show partial protection in young children.**
        - It was developed by British drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline in 1987.
    - The active substance in Mosquirix is **made up of proteins found on the surface of the Plasmodium falciparum parasites (PFP).**
        - RTS,S **aims to trigger the immune system to defend against the first stages of malaria** when the PFP enters the human host's bloodstream through a mosquito bite and infects liver cells.
    - It also helps **protect against infection of the liver with the Hepatitis B virus.**
- **Potency:**
    - The **vaccine's effectiveness at preventing severe cases of malaria in children is only around 30%**, but it is the only approved vaccine.
        - The **European Union**'s drugs regulator approved it in 2015, saying its benefits outweighed the risks.
    - Its **side effects are rare**, but sometimes include **a fever that may result in temporary convulsions.**

- **Challenges:**
  - **Inconvenient**: A child must receive four injections before age 2, sometimes at intervals that do not match the routine vaccine schedules for most other diseases.
  - **Partly Effective**: Testing in more than 10,000 African children from 2009 to 2014 showed that, even after four doses, the vaccine prevented only about 40% of detectable malaria infections.
  - **Not Long Lasting**: It is unclear how long even those relatively low levels of protection last; previous trials followed vaccinated children for four years. Experts also worry that parents whose children are vaccinated will become less vigilant about using mosquito nets, and less likely to seek medical care when their children develop fevers.
  - **Develop Resistance**: The vaccine reduced the occurrence of severe malaria by about 30%, and the occurrence of **severe anemia** - a complication that often kills children - by about 60%. It did not protect well against parasite strains that were poor genetic matches, raising a concern that, over time, parasites could evolve resistance to the vaccine as they have to drugs.
- **Burden of Malaria:**
  - **Global**:
    - In 2019, there were an estimated 229 million cases of malaria worldwide, and the estimated number of malaria deaths that year stood at 4,09,000.
      - **Children** aged under 5 years are the most vulnerable group affected by malaria in 2019, they accounted **for 67% (2,74,000) of all malaria deaths worldwide.**
  - **India:**
    - In 2019, India had an estimated 5.6 million cases of malaria compared to about 20 million cases in 2020, according to WHO.
- **Countries that Eliminated Malaria**:
  - Over the last two decades, 11 countries have been certified by the WHO Director-General as malaria-free: **United Arab Emirates** (2007), **Morocco** (2010), **Turkmenistan** (2010), **Armenia** (2011), **Sri Lanka** (2016), **Kyrgyzstan** (2016), **Paraguay** (2018), **Uzbekistan** (2018), **Algeria** (2019), **Argentina** (2019), and **El Salvador** (2021).
  - Countries that have achieved at least 3 consecutive years of zero indigenous cases of malaria are eligible to apply for the WHO certification of malaria elimination.

Way Forward

The next steps for the WHO-recommended malaria vaccine will include **funding decisions from the global health community** for broader rollout in endemic countries, and **country decision-making on whether to adopt the vaccine** as part of national malaria control strategies.

Nobel Prize for Chemistry, 2021

Why in News

The **2021 Nobel Prize in Chemistry** was awarded to **Benjamin List and David MacMillan** for the development of **asymmetric organocatalysis.**

- **Last year,** the honour went to **Frenchwoman Emmanuelle Charpentier and American Jennifer Doudna**, for developing the gene-editing technique known as **CRISPR-Cas9** - DNA snipping "scissors".
- **Nobel prizes in physics and medicine** for 2021 have already been announced.

Key Points

- **About the Development:**
  - They have developed a **new and ingenious tool for molecule building: organocatalysis.**
    - Many research areas and industries are **dependent on chemists' ability to construct molecules** that can form elastic and durable materials, store energy in batteries or inhibit the progression of diseases. This **work requires catalysts.**
    - According to researchers, there were **just two types of catalysts available: metals and enzymes. Catalysts** are any substance that **increases the rate of a reaction** without itself being consumed.
  - In 2000, they, independent of each other, **developed a third type of catalysis.** It is called **asymmetric organocatalysis** and **builds upon small organic molecules.**

- **Significance:**
  - Its uses include **research into new pharmaceuticals** and it has also **helped make chemistry greener.**
  - Both these sets of **catalysts (metals and enzymes) had limitations.**
  - **Heavier metals are expensive**, difficult to mine, and toxic to humans and the environment.
    - Despite the best processes, **traces remained in the end product;** this posed problems in situations where compounds of very high purity were required, like in the manufacture of medicines.
    - Also, metals **required an environment free of water and oxygen**, which was difficult to ensure on an industrial scale.
  - **Enzymes** on the other hand, **work best when water is used** as a medium for the chemical reaction. But that is **not an environment suitable for all kinds of chemical reactions.**
- **Organocatalysis:**
  - Organic compounds are **mostly naturally-occurring substances**, built around a framework of carbon atoms and usually containing hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, sulphur, or phosphorus.
  - **Life-supporting chemicals like proteins,** which are long chains of **amino acids** (carbon compounds containing nitrogen and oxygen) **are organic.**
  - **Enzymes are also proteins**, and therefore, organic compounds. These are responsible for many essential biochemical reactions.
  - **Organocatalysts allow several steps** in a production process to be performed in an unbroken sequence, considerably reducing waste in chemical manufacturing.
  - Organocatalysis **has developed at an astounding speed since 2000**. Benjamin List and David MacMillan remain leaders in the field, and have shown that **organic catalysts can be used to drive multitudes of chemical reactions.**
    - Using these reactions, researchers can now more efficiently construct anything from new pharmaceuticals to molecules that can capture light in solar cells.

- **Asymmetric Organocatalysis:**
  - The process called asymmetric organocatalysis, has **made it much easier to produce asymmetric molecules** - chemicals that exist in two versions, where one is a mirror image of the other.
  - **Chemists often just want one of these mirror images** - particularly when producing medicines - but it has been difficult to find efficient methods for doing this.
  - Some molecules with mirror versions have different properties. An example is the **chemical called carvone**, which has one form that smells like spearmint and a counterpart that smells like the herb, dill.
  - **Different versions of the same molecule might have different effects** when ingested. Then it becomes important to be able to make only the mirror image of a drug that has the desired physiological effect.

Source: IE

New Tiger Reserve: Chhattisgarh

Why in News

Recently, the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** has designated the combined areas of the **Guru Ghasidas National Park** and **Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary** as a **Tiger Reserve.**

- NTCA is a statutory body under the **Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change,** established in 2005 for strengthening tiger conservation.
- This will be the 53rd Tiger Reserve in India. **Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary (Rajasthan)** is the 52nd Tiger Reserve in India.

Key Points

- **About:**
  - It is located in the **northern part of Chhattisgarh**, bordering Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand.
  - Approval was granted under Section 38V(1) of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.**
  - This will be the **fourth Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh,** after the **Udanti-Sitanadi**, **Achanakmar** and **Indravati Reserves**.

- **Significance:**
    - Guru Ghasidas National Park was the last known habitat of the **Asiatic cheetah** in the country.
    - It connects Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh and provides a corridor for tigers to move between the **Bandhavgarh** (Madhya Pradesh) and **Palamau Tiger Reserves** (Jharkhand).
- **Guru Ghasidas National Park:**
    - **About:**
        - Named after **the Satnami reformist hero** of the place, **Guru Ghasidas**, is the result of the carving of Chhattisgarh from Madhya Pradesh in the year of 2000. It is located in the Koriya district of Chhattisgarh.
        - The park has **undulating topography** and it falls under the **Tropical climate zone.**
    - **Biodiversity:**
        - **Flora**: The vegetation consists mainly of mixed deciduous forest with teak, sal and bamboo trees.
        - **Fauna**: **Tiger**, **Leopard**, Chital, Nilgai, **Chinkara**, **Jackal**, Sambar, Four-horned Antelope etc.
- **Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary:**
    - **About**:
        - It is **located in the Surajpur district of Chhattisgarh** bordering Uttar Pradesh. It is named after **Tamor hill and Pingla Nalla**.
        - Tamor hill and Pingla Nalla are considered to be the old and prominent features of the sanctuary area.
    - **Biodiversity:**
        - **Flora**: **Mixed deciduous forests dominate the sanctuary**. Sal and bamboo forests are seen all through.
        - **Fauna**: Tigers, Elephants, leopards, bears, sambar deer, blue bulls, chital, bison and many such animals are found here.

National Parks & Sanctuaries of Chhattisgarh

Source: IE

Swadesh Darshan Scheme

Why in News

Recently, under the **Swadesh Darshan Scheme,** the Tourism Ministry sanctioned 5 projects of Rs 325.53 crore for Buddhist circuit development.

- It has also organised a **Buddhist Circuit Train FAM Tour** as part of the Union government's **Dekho Apna Desh initiative.**
- The tour **covers the destinations Gaya-Bodhgaya, Rajgir-Nalanda** in Bihar as well as **Sarnath-Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.**

Key Points

- **About:**
  - Swadesh Darshan, a **Central Sector Scheme,** was **launched in 2014 -15** for integrated development of theme based tourist circuits in the country.
    - This scheme is envisioned to synergise with other schemes like **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill India, Make in India** etc.
  - Under the scheme, the **Ministry of Tourism provides Central Financial Assistance (CFA)** to State Governments/Union Territory Administrations for infrastructure development of circuits.
  - One of the objectives of the scheme is to **develop theme-based tourist circuits** on the principles of **high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability** in an integrated manner.
- **Tourism Circuits:**
  - Under the scheme, **fifteen thematic circuits have been identified-** Buddhist Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Desert Circuit, Eco Circuit, Heritage Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Krishna Circuit, North East Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Sufi Circuit, Tirthankar Circuit, Tribal Circuit, Wildlife Circuit.
- **Other Related Initiatives:**
  - **PRASHAD Scheme:**
    - 30 projects for development of infrastructure have also been undertaken under the PRASHAD Scheme.
  - **Iconic Tourist Sites:**
    - Buddhist Sites at **Bodhgaya, Ajanta & Ellora** have been identified to be developed as **Iconic Tourist Sites** (aimed at enhancing India's soft power).
  - **Buddhist Conclave:**
    - **Buddhist Conclave** is organised **every alternate year** with the objective of promoting India as a Buddhist Destination and major markets around the globe.
  - **Dekho Apna Desh' Initiative:**
    - It was **launched by the Ministry of Tourism in 2020** to encourage the citizens to travel widely within the country thus enabling the development of Domestic Tourism tourist facilities and infrastructure.

Source: PIB

Henley Passport Index 2021

Why in News

India has been **ranked 90th** in the most powerful passport report **'Henley Passport Index 2021'.**

Key Points

- **About the Index:**
  - The **Henley Passport Index** is the **original ranking of all the world's passports** according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa.
  - Originally created by **Dr. Christian H. Kaelin (chairman of Henley & Partners),** the ranking is based on exclusive data from the **International Air Transport Association (IATA)**, which maintains the world's largest and most accurate database of travel information.
  - It was **launched in 2006** and includes 199 different passports.
- **Global Rankings:**
  - **Japan** and **Singapore** stood at the **top** of this year's list, with their passport holders allowed to travel **visa-free to 192 countries**, while South Korea and Germany share the second position.
    - For the third consecutive year, Japan has secured the top position.
  - Meanwhile, **Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, and Yemen** are among the **least powerful.**
- **India's Performance**:
  - India **fell down to the 90th position**, with its passport holders **allowed to travel visa-free to 58 countries.**
    - India shares the rank with **Tajikistan and Burkina Faso.**
  - India was **ranked 85th** in the January 2021's index', (84th) in 2020 and (82nd) in 2019.

Source: IE