

NEWS TODAY

30 YEARS OF PROJECT ELEPHANT

- President of India inaugurates **Gaj Utsav at Kaziranga National Park in Assam to mark 30th anniversary of Project Elephant (PE).**
- Project Elephant was **launched by Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) in 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.**
 - **Objective:** To **protect elephants, their habitat & corridors; address issues of man-animal conflict; and Welfare of captive elephant.**
 - **MoEF&CC provides financial and technical support to major elephant range states** in country through PE.

ELEPHANT PROTECTION STATUS



About Indian Elephant (Elephas maximus)

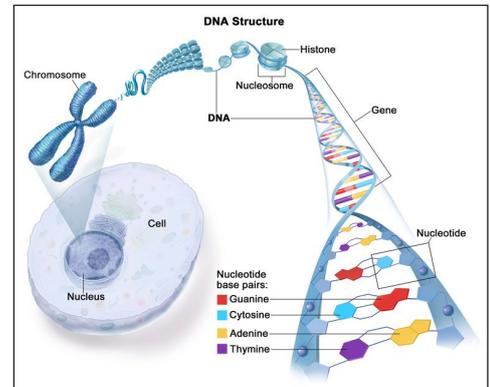
- **Characteristics:** **Highly intelligent** with strong family bonds; **Have longest gestation period** of all mammals (18 to 22 months); Adult male Asian elephants are less social than females.
- As per Elephant Census, 2017, **Karnataka has highest number of elephants**, followed by Assam and Kerala.

Indicators	Asian Elephant 	African Elephant 
IUCN status	Endangered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savanna elephant – Endangered • Forest elephant - Critically endangered
Size	Smaller, weighing between 3000-6000 kg	Larger, weighing between 4000-8000 kg
Ears	Smaller rounded ears	Large fan shaped ears
Skin	Comparatively smoother skin	Skin is more wrinkled
Forehead	Twin domed head	Single dome shape
Tusks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only some male Asian elephants have tusks • Tusks are absent in females (only rudimentary tusks found). 	Both male and female African elephants grow tusks.

- Found in **central and southern Western Ghats, North East India, eastern India and northern India** and in some parts of **southern peninsular India.**
- **Other Elephant's conservation measures:** **Monitoring Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE), Development of Elephant Reserves (ER),** recently **Terai ER in Utter Pradesh became 33rd India's ER.**

10,000 INDIAN GENOMES TO BE SEQUENCED BY 2023 YEAR END UNDER GENOME INDIA PROJECT (GIP)

- Under GIP, Department of Biotechnology (DBT) is **close to sequenced 7,000 genomes and 3,000 of these are already available for public access.**
 - **United Kingdom, China, and United States** are among the countries that have programmes to **sequence at least 1 lakh of their genomes.**
- **DBT initiated GIP in 2020** (inspired from **Human Genome Project**) to **sequence 10,000 Indian human genomes** and create a database.
 - Creating a database of Indian genomes means that **researchers from anywhere** can **learn about genetic variants that are unique to India's population groups** and use that to **customise drugs and therapies.**
 - **GIP is led by Centre for Brain Research at Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Science,** which acts as central coordinator between a **collaboration of 20 leading institutions.**



- **Genome sequencing** is figuring out the **order of DNA nucleotides, or bases, in a genome—the order of Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine, and Thymine** that make up an organism's DNA.
 - **Genome** is the **complete set of genetic information in an organism.**
- **Applications of Genome sequencing:** **Identifying inherited disorders and mutations that drive cancer progression,** and tracking **disease outbreak; Personalised medicines** based on genomic make up etc.

ECONOMIC ADVISORY COUNCIL TO THE PRIME MINISTER (EAC-PM) SUGGESTS CHANGING DEFINITION OF RURAL-URBAN AREAS IN INDIA

- EAC-PM member in a **working paper** titled 'What is Urban/Rural India' suggested that **government needs a more dynamic approach to define rural-urban areas.**
- **Current Definition of Rural and Urban settlements**
 - As of 2017, any **settlement that is not considered 'urban' is automatically considered 'rural'.**
 - There are **2 types of urban settlements**
 - **Administratively urban settlements** are those that are governed by an Urban Local Body (ULB).
 - **Census Urban Settlements** are those that have a **population greater than 5000, 75% of male population working in non-agriculture, and a density of 400 people per sq. Km.**
- **Problems with current labelling of settlement**
 - Current classification often **inadequate in capturing speed and scale of urbanization in India.**
 - **Panchayats in de facto urban areas are ill equipped in terms of human resources.**
 - **Slow transition** from rural administrative panchayats to ULBs **results in incorrect standards** of services being applied; **unmet requirements** of local public goods, etc.

• Solutions provided by EAC-PM

- **Establish "trigger mechanisms"** which automate transition from rural to urban settlement after prescribed threshold is reached.
- Ministries should **utilise census and other settlement wide indicators** to determine rural definition that best suits their particular programme's mandate.



GOVERNMENT APPROVED ARMY'S PROPOSAL TO INDUCT WOMAN OFFICERS IN THE REGIMENT OF ARTILLERY

- With this decision, in artillery, women will be trained to use howitzers (large guns), rocket systems etc.
 - Artillery is a **combat support arm of Army and is largest in size after Infantry.**
 - Artillery Regiments comprise **various calibres of guns, surface to surface missiles, tracked guns, mortars and unmanned aerial platforms.**
- **Women in Armed forces**
 - **Induction of woman officers in Army was approved in 1992** by Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs as Short Service Cadre.
 - Around **13.69 percent of workforces in Indian Air Force** excluding its medical branch **are women**, highest among all three services of armed force.
- **Initiatives taken to induct women in armed forces**
 - Supreme Court in 2020 directed the government to **ensure that women officers in Army be granted Permanent Commission i.e.,** continuing a career in armed force until one retires.
 - Defence services have opened **entry for woman candidates in National Defence Academy.**
 - Women officers are being **considered for Colonel (Select Grade) ranks and are being given command appointments.**
 - Army has opened **avenues for women officers to serve as pilots in Army Aviation Corps.**

NATIONAL MISSION ON CULTURAL MAPPING (NMCM) MISSION TO MAP RURAL INDIA'S CULTURAL ASSETS COVERS OVER ONE LAKH VILLAGES

- In cultural asset mapping, **villages have been broadly divided into seven-eight categories** based on whether they are important **ecologically, developmentally and scholastically,** and if they are connected to some **historical or mythological events.** For example,
 - Ecological category includes **Bishnoi village** (for living in harmony with nature) near **Jodhpur, Rajasthan,** and **Uttarakhand's Raini village** (Chipko movement).
 - Developmental category includes **Modhera in Gujarat** (first solar-powered village in India).
 - Historical category includes **Kandel in Madhya Pradesh** (famous Jal Satyagraha site), **Suketi in Himachal Pradesh** (Asia's oldest fossil park), and villages of **Hanoli Uttarakhand and Vidurashwathar of Karnataka** are linked to **Mahabharata.**
- **Cultural assets mapping exercise** has been carried out under '**Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar**' (My Village My Heritage) programme of NMCM.
- NMCM was launched by **Ministry of Culture (MoC) in 2017 and handed over to Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) in 2021.**
 - It aims to **develop a comprehensive database of art forms, artists and other resources** across the country.
 - **MoC has partnered with Common Services Centres, under Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY)** to conduct NMCM.

OBJECTIVES OF NMCM

- **Preserve rich cultural heritage** of country for future generations
- **Create a strong "Cultural Vibrancy"** throughout the nation
- **Convert vast and widespread cultural canvass of India into an objective Cultural Mapping**

MINISTRY OF FINANCE SET UP COMMITTEE TO REVIEW PENSION SYSTEM FOR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

- Committee will be headed by Finance Secretary and it'll also have 3 other members including Chairman of Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).
- Committee will suggest
 - > Whether any changes are required in existing framework and structure of National Pension System (NPS), also called new pension scheme, as applicable to government employees.
 - > Changes to improve pensionary benefits of government employees covered under NPS ensuring that fiscal prudence is maintained to protect common citizens.
- NPS replaced Old Pension Scheme (OPS) from 1st January 2004 for new entrants. Armed forces personnel are an exception to NPS and are still covered by OPS.

Difference between NPS and OPS

Basis of Difference	New Pension System (NPS)	Old Pension System (OPS)
Nature	NPS is a defined contribution pension where employees contribute towards NPS during their years of employment.	OPS is a defined benefit pension for government employees on the basis of their last drawn salary.
Eligibility	All Indian citizens between 18 and 65 years.	Government employees only.
Risk	It involves risk as the NPS amount is invested in market-linked securities.	No Risk involved.
Tax Benefits	Tax-deductible annual investments of up to ₹1,50,000 are under Section 80C and ₹50,000 under Section 80CCD (1B) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.	No tax benefits are applicable to the employees.
Pension Amount on retirement	60% of pension fund is tax-free when redeemed, while the remainder is taxable and remains invested in annuities.	It provides a fixed monthly pension of 50% of the last drawn salary.

ALSO IN NEWS



Support for Poor Prisoners Scheme

- Ministries of Home Affairs (MHA) to extend financial support to poor inmates.
- Scheme envisages “financial support to poor persons who are in prisons and unable to afford the penalty or the bail amount”.
 - > It was announced in Union Budget 2023-24.
 - > MHA will enable underprivileged prisoners, majority of whom belong to socially disadvantaged or marginalised groups with lower education and income levels, to get out of prison.
 - > It'll ease the burdens on the Indian jails.



United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP)

- Conference on Accelerating Rail Digital Transformation in Asia and Pacific region was organized by ESCAP, an intergovernmental platform, in collaboration with Ministry of Railways.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP)

Bangkok, Thailand

Genesis: First established by Economic and Social Council in 1947 as **United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and Far East (ECAFE)**. Renamed in 1974 as **ESCAP**.

Function: It supports inclusive and sustainable development in region by generating action-oriented knowledge, and by providing technical assistance and capacity-building services in support of national development objectives, regional agreements.

Membership: 53 member States and 9 associate members.

Other key information: It is one of the five regional commissions of United Nations.



Investment Facilitation Agreement (IFA)

- Due to logjam in World Trade Organization (WTO), there is prolific activity taking place with regards to IFA.
- Launched in 2017 by a group of developing and least-developed WTO members, joint initiative aims at developing a multilateral agreement on Investment Facilitation for Development that will improve investment and business climate.
- Backed by more than 100 countries, proposed IFA is meant to create legally binding provisions aimed at facilitating investment flows.
 - > It does not include India.
- Legal obligations will require states to augment regulatory transparency and predictability of investment measures.
- This agreement will be very different from investment protection agreements such as bilateral investment treaties (BITs).

 <p>Environment statistics 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Recently, Volume 1 of Environment statistics 2023 was released by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).● Key findings<ul style="list-style-type: none">➢ In 2022, annual rainfall measured in India has increased in comparison to 2021.➢ In 2022, maximum heatwave days were reported in Rajasthan, followed by Punjab and Haryana, Jharkhand, and Delhi.<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Notably, Assam and Himachal Pradesh have not reported a heatwave day since 2010.➢ Number of cyclonic storms experienced by North Indian Ocean (NIO) increased substantially in 2018 which persisted in subsequent year but again reduced in 2022.
 <p>Cannabis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Himachal Pradesh assembly constituted a committee of legislators to legalise cultivation of cannabis for its medicinal properties.<ul style="list-style-type: none">➢ Under NDPS (Narcotic-Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) Act, state has been given the right to cultivate cannabis and transport of cannabis.● Central government has given legal status to cultivation of cannabis in some districts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.<ul style="list-style-type: none">➢ Apart from this, cannabis is also being cultivated in Uttarakhand for industrial use.● According to WHO, cannabis is a generic term used to denote the several psychoactive preparations of plant Cannabis sativa.<ul style="list-style-type: none">➢ It is most widely cultivated, trafficked and abused illicit drug. Half of all drug seizures worldwide are cannabis seizures.➢ Primary psychoactive constituent in cannabis is Delta9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).
 <p>Carbon Sequestration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● As per a study, Scientists stated that over 2 lakh trees at Aravalli Biodiversity Park have 9,107.9 tonnes of carbon stored in them.<ul style="list-style-type: none">➢ Carbon sequestered annually is 1,253.07 tonnes.➢ Amount of water rechargeable by these trees around 1.1 lakh cubic feet per year.● Carbon Sequestration is a process of capture, removal and storage of carbon dioxide from earth's atmosphere.<ul style="list-style-type: none">➢ It is a method to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in atmosphere.● Top 3 species that store most carbon per tree: Palash trees (Butea monosperma) followed by Arjun trees (Terminalia arjuna) and peelu trees (Salvadora persica).
 <p>Tropospheric Emissions Monitoring of Pollution (TEMPO) instrument</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● NASA launches device called TEMPO to monitor air pollution from space.● TEMPO will allow scientists to monitor air pollutants and their emission sources and air quality across greater North America on an hourly basis during daytime.<ul style="list-style-type: none">➢ Situated in geostationary orbit 35,786 kilometers above the equator.➢ Among the pollutants tracked by TEMPO will be nitrogen dioxide, produced from the combustion of fossil fuels, formaldehyde and ozone.➢ It will be able to measure atmospheric pollution down to a spatial resolution of 10 square kilometers or neighborhood level.
 <p>Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● INCOIS deploys two deep sea gliders into the Bay of Bengal to study climate change. <div data-bbox="422 1624 1516 2128" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"><p>Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">Genesis: It was established as an autonomous body in 1999 under Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and is a unit of the Earth System Science Organisation (ESSO).Mission: To provide ocean data, information and advisory services to society, industry, the government and the scientific communityOrganizational Structure :<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ To establish an Early Warning System for Tsunami and Storm Surges.○ To promote research in field of ocean information and related services including satellite oceanography.Other key information: It is one of the five regional commissions of United Nations.</div>