NEWS TODAY

PRIME MINISTER LAUNCHES INTERNATIONAL BIG CATS ALLIANCE (IBCA) TO MARK 50 YEARS OF PROJECT TIGER

- **IBCA aims to protect and conserve seven major big cats —** tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar and cheetah - in collaboration with **membership of 97 range of countries** harbouring these species.
  - ➤ IBCA will **provide assured support over five years with guaranteed funding of over Rs. 800 crores.**
  - ➤ Earlier in 2019, PM called for an **Alliance of Global Leaders to curb poaching and illegal wildlife trade** in Asia.
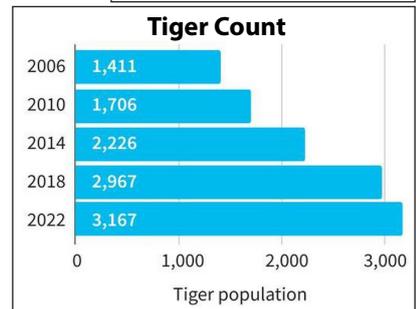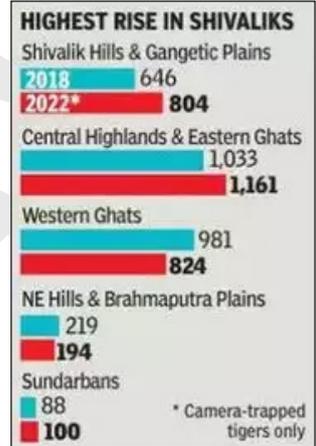- **India** is the **only country in world to have 5 big cats in wild** (except pumas and jaguar).
  - ➤ **IUCN Status: Endangered** (Royal Bengal Tiger, Asiatic Lions); **Vulnerable** (Snow Leopards, African Cheetahs); **Least Concerned** (Common Leopard).
- **Significance of protecting big cats**
  - ➤ Big cats are apex predators whose loss can set off **"trophic cascade,"** wherein prey populations may explode, resulting in overgrazing and degrading health of landscape.
  - ➤ **Protecting tiger habitats** means protecting forests which facilitates **fighting climate change.**
  - ➤ **Supports economies** through ecotourism.
- In addition, PM also released **5th cycle of India's Tiger Census. Key findings include**
  - ➤ Tiger count has increased to **3,167 in 2022** (refer image).
  - ➤ Tiger population **declined in Western Ghats, North East Hills & Brahmaputra Plains** (refer image).
  - ➤ **Periyar Tiger Reserve (TR), Kerala** is best-**maintained of all TRs** followed by Satpura TR (Madhya Pradesh), Bandipur and Nagarhole (Karnataka).

HIGHEST RISE IN SHIVALIKS

Region	2018	2022*
Shivalik Hills & Gangetic Plains	646	804
Central Highlands & Eastern Ghats	1,033	1,161
Western Ghats	981	824
NE Hills & Brahmaputra Plains	219	194
Sundarbans	88	100

*Camera-trapped tigers only

Tiger Count

Year	Tiger population
2006	1,411
2010	1,706
2014	2,226
2018	2,967
2022	3,167

PRADHAN MANTRI MUDRA YOJANA (PMMY) COMPLETES 8 YEARS

- **PMMY,** launched by **Ministry of Finance** in 2015, to facilitate **easy collateral-free microcredit of up to 10 lakh to non-corporate, non-farm small, and micro entrepreneurs** for income generating activities.
  - ➤ **MUDRA (Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd)** Bank is a refinancing Institution.
- Loans are provided by Member Lending Institutions i.e., **Banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) and other financial intermediaries.**
  - ➤ They **do not require any collateral/ security.**
  - ➤ Rate of interest is **decided by lending institutions** in terms of RBI guidelines.
  - ➤ Loans divided into **three categories (refer image).**
- **Achievements under PMMY (as of March, 2023)**
  - ➤ About ₹**23.2 lakh crore has been sanctioned** in 40.82 crore loan accounts.
  - ➤ **About 68% of accounts** under the scheme belong to **women entrepreneurs.**
  - ➤ **51% of accounts** belong to entrepreneurs of **SC/ST and OBC** categories.
- **Significance of PMMY:** Expand **formal loans to informal micro enterprises, Employment Generation;** Special concessions on interest rates for SC/ST entrepreneurs etc.
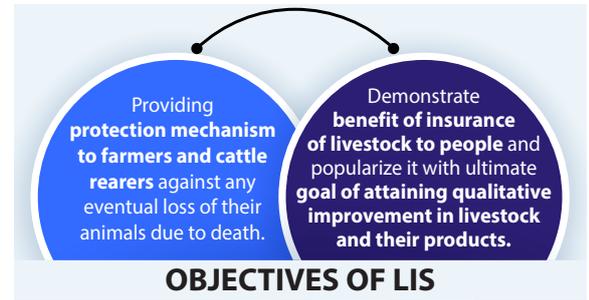- **Concerns:** Lack of **record for employment generated** by loans disbursed, **rise in bad loans** especially in Kishore and Tarun categories etc.

MUDRA Loan

- **SHISHU-**Loans upto **Rs. 50,000** (For Start-ups and First-time Entrepreneurs)
- **KISHOR-**Loans from **Rs. 50,000 - Rs. 5 lakh** (For Entrepreneurs with existing business)
- **TARUN-**Loans from **Rs. 5 lakh - Rs. 10 lakh** (For Businessmen, loan amount to be used for business expansion)

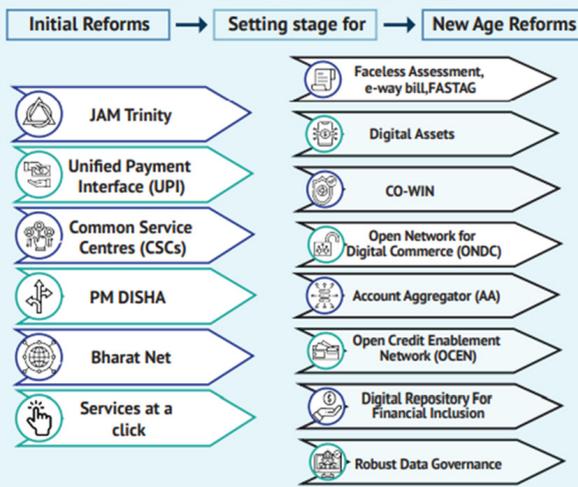# CENTRE PLANS REVAMP OF LIVESTOCK INSURANCE SCHEME TO RAISE COVERAGE

- In backdrop of **zero insurance coverage of livestock in 2022-23,** Centre is considering a **comprehensive livestock insurance scheme** modelling Prime Minister's Fasal Bima Yojana.
  - An **initial proposal** is to **waive off premium for cattle rearers** from **SC/ST communities.** At present, **less than 1% of country's cattle population is insured** and average yearly premium is 4.5% of insured amount.
- Comprehensive livestock insurance will **replace the present Livestock Insurance Scheme (LIS).**
- LIS is a **centrally sponsored scheme,** which was implemented by **Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries** on regular basis from 2008-09 in **100 selected districts.**
  - Under it, **crossbred and high yielding cattle and buffaloes** yielding at least **1500 litre of milk** per lactation are to be considered **high yielding** and are being **insured at maximum of their current market price.**
  - Entire cost of **subsidy is being borne by Central Government.**
  - Benefit of subsidy is being provided to a **maximum of 2 animals per beneficiary** for a policy of maximum of three years.
  - Scheme is **being implemented in all states except Goa** through **State Livestock Development Boards** of respective states.

INDIA'S DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE (DPI) IS EMULATED BY MANY NATIONS: INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (IMF)

- In paper titled **"Stacking up the Benefits: Lessons from India's Digital Journey",** IMF highlighted that India has built a **world-class DPI which is transforming lives and economy and can be a lesson for many countries** to follow.

Digital Public Infrastructure: Formalisation & Financial Inclusion

- DPI refers to a **set of shared digital building blocks,** such as applications, systems, and platforms, powered by **interoperable open standards or specifications.**
  - **India Stack** is the collective name of a set of **commonly used DPIs in India. It consists of three different layers-**
    - **Unique identity** (Aadhaar); **complimentary payments systems** (Unified Payments Interface, Aadhaar Payments Bridge, Aadhaar Enabled Payment Service); and data exchange (DigiLocker and Account Aggregator).
- **Benefits of DPI**
  - Enable **better delivery of health and education services** to accumulate human capital and foster growth.
  - Enhance **access to payment and financial services.**
  - **Support transformation of economy and inclusive growth;** foster innovation and competition; close gaps in financial inclusion; boost government revenue collection etc.
- **Challenges:** Low digital literacy, digital divide appears along familiar geographic, gender and income lines, Comprehensive data protection legislation is still missing etc.
- **Recommendations by IMF:** By leveraging DPI, India could improve **timelines, quality, and coverage of general government fiscal reports.**

OBJECTIVES OF LIS

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES BLOCKCHAIN PROJECT TO EXPLORE POTENTIAL OF WEB3

- Project is titled **'Design and Development of a Unified Blockchain Framework for offering National Blockchain Service and Creation of Blockchain Ecosystem'.**
  - It is a part of government's effort towards **realizing Web3, as blockchain plays a crucial role in it.**
  - It will facilitate the creation of Open Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) for **smooth integration and provision of blockchain-as-a-service (BaaS) over distributed infrastructure.**
- BaaS refers to **third-party cloud-based infrastructure and management for companies.**
  - It allows Government Departments to **leverage Blockchain services to build, host and use their own blockchain apps, smart contracts and functions** on blockchain.
- **Benefits of BaaS:** Facilitate **wider adoption of blockchain** technology; **reduce cost of infrastructure** for smaller companies promoting innovation and entrepreneurship; **enable better security compliance** by ensuring supply chain traceability.
- Project has been launched in accordance with objectives of **National Strategy on Blockchain, 2021** (launched by Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology).
  - It creates a **trusted digital platform** by evolving a national Blockchain infrastructure.

- Blockchain is a **distributed or decentralised ledger technology** that facilitates the process of recording and tracking transactions between users.
  - Each **transaction** in a blockchain is recorded as a **"block" of data which is linked with other blocks before or after it.**

INDIA DEFENDS ITS MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE (MSP) AT WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION (WTO) FOR PROCURING DOMESTIC FOODGRAIN

- Large foodgrain exporters including US and Canada had challenged **India's Public Stockholding (PSH) programme** on grounds that it is **highly subsidized, especially for rice.**

  ➢ India was the **first country to use Bali 'peace clause'.**

    ■ It provides that **no country** would be **legally barred from food security programmes** even if subsidy **breached limits specified in WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA).**

  ➢ India informed WTO that value of its rice production in 2019-20 was $46.07 billion while **it gave subsidies worth $6.31billion, or 13.7% as against the permitted 10%.**

Green Box	Amber Box	Blue Box
Subsidies that do not distort trade, or cause minimal disruption. No limit.	Broad range of subsidies. Limited to 5% of agricultural production (10% for developing countries)*.	Broad range of subsidies allowed but must be designed to minimise trade distortion No limit.

- **Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and Peace Clause**

  ➢ **3 Pillars of AoA**

    ■ **Under market access conditions,** both developed and developing nations were to convert all non-tariff barriers into tariffs.

    ■ **Domestic support** includes the classification of subsidies into 'boxes' depending their effects on production and trade. (refer image)

    ■ **Export Subsidies** and other methods used to make exports artificially competitive.

  ➢ AoA contains a **"due restraint" or "peace clause" which regulates the application of other WTO agreements** to subsidies in respect of agricultural products.

ALSO IN NEWS

Dakar Declaration	• Dakar Declaration has been **adopted in principle by 21 African countries** after the first African sub-regional conference on **implementing Global Plan for Road Safety.** • It is a guiding document to support the **implementation of Decade of Action for road safety 2021–2030.** ➢ It sets the ambitious target of **preventing at least 50% of road traffic deaths** and injuries **by 2030.**
Exercise Kavach	• Conducted by **Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC),** it is joint military exercise involving the assets of **Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard.**
Sukhoi 30 MKI Fighter Aircraft	• Indian President took a sortie on Sukhoi 30 MKI fighter aircraft. • **Sukhoi 30 MKI** is a **multirole combat fighter aircraft** jointly developed by **Sukhoi Design Bureau (Russia) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)** for Indian Air Force (IAF). ➢ It can launch a range of **air-to-surface missiles** such as Nirbhay, BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles etc. ➢ It is fitted with a **tarang radar warning receiver (RWR)** indigenously developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS)	• Ways to strengthen the NM-ICPS were discussed at National Workshop on Technology Innovation in Cyber-Physical Systems (TIPS). • NM-ICPS was launched in 2018 and **Department of Science &Technology is its implementing agency.** • It aims to develop **technology platforms to carry out R&D, translational research, product development, incubating & supporting start-ups, and commercialization.** ➢ It brings together **academia, industry, government and international organizations.** ➢ It has created an ecosystem that **fosters entrepreneurship, develops** next-generation skilled manpower, and **promotes commercialization of Cyber Physical Systems (CPS) technologies.**

Miyawaki method	• Miyawaki forest is being created at Deonar in Govandi in Maharashtra. • Miyawaki method is **named after Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki.** ➢ The technique **involves planting two to four types of Indigenous trees within every square meter.** ➢ These **trees become self-sustainable and grow to their full length within three years.** ➢ It helps lower temperatures in concrete heat islands, reduce air and noise pollution, attract local birds and insects, and create carbon sinks.
Cassiopeia A	• NASA's James Webb telescope reveals never before seen details in Cassiopeia A. • Cassiopeia A is a **remnant of a supernova explosion and is situated in constellation Cassiopeia.** ➢ It is **located nearly 11000 light years away** from earth. ➢ It is **one of the strongest sources of radio emission** in sky beyond solar system. ➢ Cassiopeia Constellation ranks as **25th largest Constellation.** ➢ Constellation **resembles an irregularly shaped letter "W".**
International Prize in Statistics	• Indian American **C R Rao won** the **Nobel Prize equivalent in statistics** at the age of 102. • International Prize in Statistics was **established in 2016** by a group of **five major statistical organizations,** ➢ American Statistical Association, Institute of Mathematical Statistics, International Biometric Society, International Statistical Institute, and Royal Statistical Society • It is **awarded once in every two years** to an individual or a team. • Prize is given for **major achievements using statistics to advance science, technology and human welfare.**
Places in news	**Lebanon (Capital: Beirut)** • Rockets were fired from Lebanon targeting Israel. • **Political Boundaries** ➢ Bounded by **Syria (north and east), Israel (south),** and **Mediterranean Sea (west).** • **Geographical features** ➢ **Four distinct physiographic regions: Narrow coastal plain along Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon Mountains** (Jabal Lubnān), Al-Biqāʻ (Bekaa) valley, and Anti-Lebanon and Hermon ranges running parallel to Lebanese Mountains. ➢ **Highest Point:** Qurnat al-Sawdāʾ. ➢ **Lebanon is included in Mediterranean climatic region.** **Mozambique (Capital: Maputo)** • India's Foreign Minister to visit **Mozambique.** • **Political Boundaries** ➢ Located in **South-eastern coast of Africa.** ➢ Bordered by **Tanzania** (north), **Mozambique Channel** (east) this **separates it from island of Madagascar, South Africa and Swaziland** (south and southwest), **Zimbabwe** (west), and **Zambia, Malawi, and Lake Nyasa** (northwest). ➢ **Maritime borders with Comoros, Madagascar, and Mayotte Island (France).** • **Geographical features** ➢ **Terrain:** Varies from **coastal lowlands to high plateau** in northwest, mountains in west. ➢ **Climate:** Varies from **sub-tropical to tropical** (south to north). ➢ **Major River:** Zambezi river, Limpopo river and Rovuma river. ➢ **Highest point:** Monte Binga.

*Errata: In News Today Dated 8th April 2023, it was incorrectly mentioned that "In cultural asset mapping under National Mission on Cultural Mapping, historical category includes villages of **Hanoli Uttarakhand** that are linked to Mahabharata". **Correct statement is "Historical category includes villages of Hanol in Uttarakhand that are linked to Mahabharata".***