

## Prelim Bits 22-02-2024 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

### Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle

*A team of conservationists, uncovered the nesting site of Cantor's giant softshell turtle on banks of the Chandragiri River in Kerala.*

- It is the 1<sup>st</sup> breeding site that has been discovered in India.

*The Chandragiri River also known as the Perumpuzha River, is the longest river in Kasaragod district in Kerala. River Payaswini is its tributary.*

- **Scientific name** - *Pelochelys cantorii*
- **Nativity** - It is native to the rivers of South and Southeast Asia, including Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and India.
- It is also called **Asian giant softshell turtle**.
- **Habitat** - Mainly inland, slow-moving, freshwater rivers, lakes, streams, and estuaries but also extends to coastal areas.
- **Features** - It is an exceptionally large **freshwater turtle**, which reach over 1m in length and weigh more than 100 Kgs.
- It has broad head with eyes close to the tip of the snout, a frog-like appearance and so the name '**Frog Head Turtle**'.
- They are primarily carnivores (piscivores) feeding on fish, crustaceans, and mollusks but may also eat some aquatic plants.
- **Secretive Nature** - Mostly, they lie buried and motionless, with only their eyes and mouth protruding from the sand.
- They surface only twice a day to take a breath and capture their prey by sit-and-wait strategy using an element of surprise.



- **Threat** - Harvesting by local people for meat, accidental killing and persecution from fishermen when caught in fishing gear, and the destruction of its freshwater and

coastal habitats.

- **Protection status**
  - **IUCN** – Critically Endangered (CR)
  - **CITES** – Appendix II
  - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** – Schedule 1

## References

1. [BBC| Discovery of Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle](#)
2. [Animalia| Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle](#)

## International Mother Language Day (IMLD)

*Recently, International Mother Language Day 2024 was celebrated worldwide.*

- **International Mother Language Day** – On ***February 21, every year*** globally.
- **Started from** – ***2000***, as a commitment towards understanding the importance of the mother language or mother tongue.
- **Aim** – To recognise and *promote linguistic & cultural diversity* and multilingualism.
- **Historical background** – It was *initiated by Bangladesh*, to commemorate a 1952 protest against West Pakistan's imposition of Urdu as the official language in present-day Bangladesh.
- It was ***approved by UNESCO in 1999***, and the UN General Assembly welcomed it in its resolution of 2002.

*UN General Assembly proclaimed **2008 as the International Year of Languages** to promote unity in diversity and international understanding, through multilingualism and multiculturalism.*

- **Significance** – It is a cornerstone for achieving *equitable access to education* and lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals.
- It shows benefits in fostering *better learning outcomes, self-esteem*, and critical thinking skills and also supports intergenerational learning and *cultural preservation*.
- It promotes *inclusive societies* and also aids in preserving non-dominant, minority, and indigenous languages.
- **Threat** – Currently, 40% of the global population lacks access to education in their native language, it exceeds 90% in certain regions.
- *Every 2 weeks a language disappears* taking with it an entire cultural and intellectual heritage.
- At least 45% of the estimated 7000 languages spoken in the world are endangered.

*The theme of International Mother Language Day 2024 is 'Multilingual education is a pillar of intergenerational learning'.*

Oldest Languages in India	
Urdu	Over 700 years
Hindi	Over 800 years, with over 422 million speakers
Gujarati	Over 1000 years
Bangla	Over 1500 years
Marathi	About 1500-2000 years, with 71.9 million speakers
Telugu	About 1500-2000 years
Odia, Kannada & Malayalam	Over 2000 years
Sanskrit	Over 3000 years
Tamil	Over 5000 years

## References

1. [NDTV| Celebration of International Mother Language Day 2024](#)
2. [UN| Background of IMLD](#)
3. [Times of India| India's Oldest Languages](#)

## Nilgiri Marten

Tamil Nadu Government has planned to conserve the lesser-known species such as Nilgiri Marten under its new "TN Endangered Species Conservation Fund".

- It is a rare species of marten, a small carnivores belonging to the weasel and badger families.

*The Nilgiri marten is the only marten species native to India.*

- **Scientific name** - *Martes gwatkinsii*
- **Native** - **Endemic** to the Western Ghats.
- **Distribution** - It spans across the states of *Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu*.
- **Habitat** - 5 clusters in the Western Ghats namely Brahmagiri, Nilgiris, Anamalai, Cardamom Hills and Agasthyamalai.
- They are seen in *Shola ecosystems*, typically semi-evergreen forests, evergreen forests and forest patches interspersed with grasslands and also in tea, acacia, coffee, cardamom, and wattle *plantations*.
- **Features** - It is a small mustelid with a chocolate coloured fur and a canary yellow throat.
- It looks like a civet or a mongoose and it most prefers higher altitudes (300 to 1200 m).



*The Mustelidae are a diverse family of carnivorous mammals, including weasels, stoats, badgers, otters, martens, grisons, and wolverines.*

- **Life style** - They are omnivorous, diurnal, and mainly arboreal but descend to the ground occasionally.
- They are social and spend their time and even hunt in groups.
- **Threats** - Habitat loss & fragmentation and poaching.
- **Protection status**
  - **IUCN Status** - Vulnerable
  - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** - Schedule II

*TN Endangered Species Conservation Fund is 1<sup>st</sup> of its kind fund in India for Endangered Species. With an initial corpus of Rs. 50 crore, it aims to protect and recover lesser-known species facing extinction threats.*

## References

1. [India Today| Need to Conserve Nilgiri Marten](#)
2. [Animalia| Nilgiri Marten](#)

## Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)

*Recently, a digital health platform 'Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)' was launched as agreed upon in India's G20 presidency in 2023.*

**Digital health** refers to use of digital tool and technologies to improve health and provide better health care delivery. It is a proven accelerator to advance health outcomes and achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and health-related Sustainable Development Goals.

- **Launched in** - 2024
- **Launched by** - World Health Organisation (WHO)
- It is a **WHO Managed Network** (Network of Networks), to promote equitable access to digital health.
- **Need** - There is *fragmentation and overlap* because new tools are built without following common standards or shared vision and we need system to communicate with different digital health devices.
- **Objectives** - To assess and prioritize country needs for *sustainable digital health transformation* by aligning country-level *digital health resources*.
- To support the accelerated achievement of the strategic objectives of the *Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025*.
- To build capacity and converge efforts to encourage local development, maintenance, and adaptation of *digital health technologies* to continuously changing needs.
- **Membership** - Open to all institutions engaged in digital health.

*Over 120 WHO Member States have developed a national digital health policy or strategy.*

- **Annual operating Budget** - 14 million USD
- **4 foundational pillars**



- **3 ways of supporting** - By *listening* to their needs, by *aligning* resources to avoid fragmentation and overlap, and by *providing* quality assured products.
- **Significance** - It will help in democratising digital health technologies, especially for countries of the Global South.

*While nearly half the world's population might not have access to health services they need, nearly 90% have access to a 3G connection showing the potential for digital health.*

- **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission** - It works towards creating a seamless electronic health record system in India.
- **E Sanjeevni** - A teleconsultation platform provided 140 million consultations so far.
- **CoWIN platform** - It tracked COVID cases digitally along with managing the largest vaccination drive by issuing digital, verifiable vaccination certificates.

## References

1. [The Indian Express| WHO launches GIDH](#)
2. [WHO| Global Initiative on Digital Health](#)

## Badwater Basin

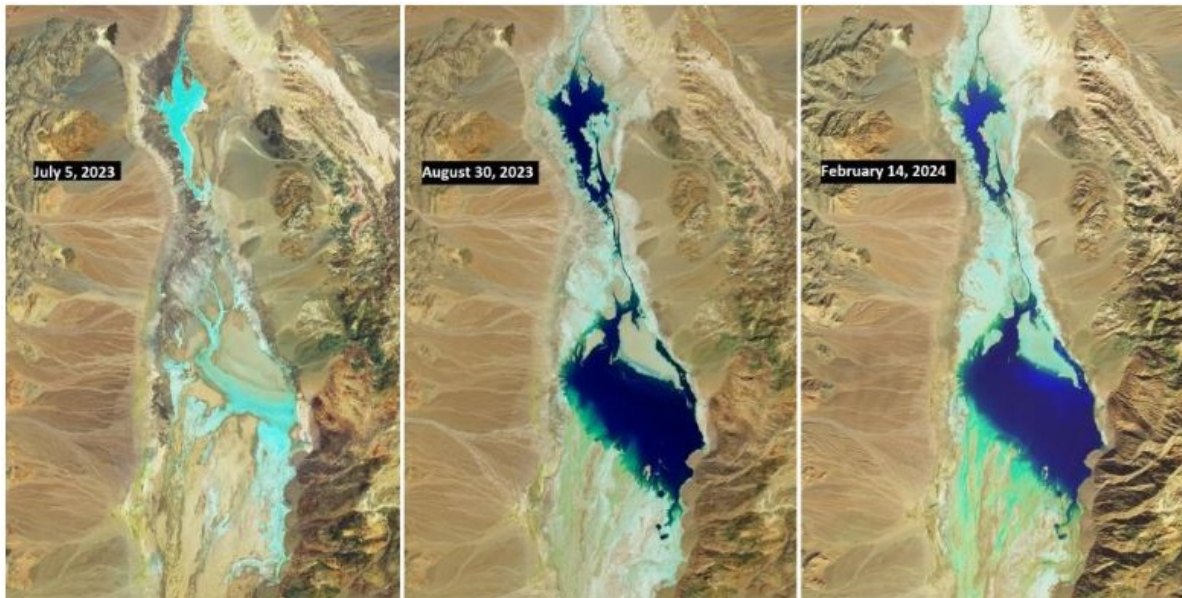
*The recent images of NASA shows that Badwater Basin, the driest place in North America has been home to a lake for 6 months.*

- It is an **endorheic basin** with a depth of 282 feet below sea level.
- **Location** - Death Valley National Park, Death Valley in USA.

*Death Valley is well-known as the hottest place on Earth and the driest place in North America and is essentially a dry salt flat.*

- **Lake formation** - Being endorheic in nature, it allows water flows into it but not out, typically resulting in rapid evaporation and ephemeral lakes.
- **Mainly lake** - It was formed in August 2023 after Hurricane Hilary.
- While the lake initially shrank as expected, it surprisingly persisted through the fall and winter months.
- Its resurgence came in February 2024, when a powerful atmospheric river replenished its waters.
- At its largest, it was about 11 kms long, 6.5 km wide and about 60 cm deep.
- It now fills the low-lying salt flat, spanning several kilometers.





### Quick Facts

- **Basin** - A depression, or dip, in the Earth's surface which are shaped like bowls, with sides higher than the bottom.
- **Ephemeral lakes** - They are basins that remain flooded for short periods of time during a year but may not hold water for several years if the rainfall regime is not suitable to produce flooding.
- **Atmospheric River** - A relatively narrow plume of moisture that forms over an ocean and can produce intense rainfall or snowfall when it reaches land.

### Reference

[Down To Earth| Manly Lake formation in Badwater Basin](#)

### Other Important Topics

#### Kalpana

*Skyroot Aerospace, an Indian private aerospace manufacturer, has launched the Kalpana fellowship for women interested in space tech.*

- This new program is India's first fellowship exclusively dedicated to empowering women engineers in the realm of space technology.
- It is named in honor of the late astronaut [Kalpana Chawla](#).
- It is open to final year students and recent graduates in relevant engineering disciplines.

#### Pigeonpea

*The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has created the world's 1<sup>st</sup> Pigeonpea speed breeding protocol to reduce breeding cycle of Pigeonpea by 3-5 years.*

- **Scientific name** - *Cajanus cajan*; **Family** - Fabaceae
- **India** ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in area and production of Pigeonpea.
- The state-wise trend shows that **Maharashtra** ranks 1<sup>st</sup> both in area and production.
- It is also called as [arhar](#), [tur](#) or red gram.
- It has low glycaemic index and is rich in vitamins and minerals.
- Traditionally, Pigeonpea breeding can take up to 13 years.
- After gram, Pigeonpea is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important pulse crop in the country.

## Iraq's Rivers

*Stricken by drought and depleted by upstream dams, Iraq's rivers - the Tigris and Euphrates are suffocating under pollutants.*

- **Tigris** - It flows south from the mountains of the Armenian Highlands through the Syrian and Arabian Deserts, and empties into the [Persian Gulf](#).
- Surrounded by 4 countries (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria), the Tigris River is the second largest river in western Asia.
- Originating in Lake Hazar in Turkey, the river flows parallel to the Euphrates River.
- **Euphrates** - It is the longest river in the Southwest Asia.
- The river rises in Turkey and flows southeast across Syria and through Iraq and then empties into the Persian Gulf.
- Tigris and Euphrates makes up a river system that borders Mesopotamia in the area known as the **Fertile Crescent**.

*Iraq is known as the "land of two rivers".*



## Mundra Port



To bypass Red Sea, new trade route to Israel involving Mundra port was suggested by Israeli Transport Minister.

- It is India's largest commercial port.
- It is a flagship facility of Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ).
- It is located in the district of Kutch, **Gujarat**.
- In the new route, goods move from [Mundra](#) to ports in the UAE, such as Dubai's Jebel Ali Port and then through Saudi Arabia and Jordan to Israel.



## Safety of Women

Cabinet approved the proposal of Ministry of Home Affairs of continuation of implementation of Umbrella Scheme on 'Safety of Women' during the period from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

- **Funding** - By Ministry of Home Affairs and from Nirbhaya Fund.
- The projects under the [Umbrella Scheme for Safety of Women](#):
  1. [Emergency Response Support System \(ERSS\)](#) 2.0;
  2. Upgradation of Central Forensic Sciences laboratories, setting up of National Forensic Data Centre;
  3. Strengthening of DNA Analysis, Cyber Forensic capacities in State Forensic Science Laboratories (FSLs);
  4. [Cyber Crime](#) Prevention against Women and Children;
  5. Capacity building and training of investigators and prosecutors in handling sexual assault cases against women and children;
  6. Women Help Desk & Anti-human Trafficking Units.

## Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP)

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approves 'Fair and Remunerative Price' (FRP) of sugarcane for 2024-25 at Rs. 340 per quintal at sugar recovery rate of 10.25%.

- FRP is the minimum price to be paid by sugar mills to farmers for buying sugarcane.
- The FRP has been determined on the basis of recommendations of the **[Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices \(CACP\)](#)**.
- The new FRP is 107% higher than [A2+FL cost](#) (Includes value of unpaid labour of family workers in addition to A2) of sugarcane.
- Sugarcane is grown mainly in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka.
- It is based on the [Rangarajan Committee report](#) of reorganizing the sugarcane industry.

## Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)

*Union Finance Minister chairs the 28<sup>th</sup> meeting of Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) in New Delhi.*

- [FSDC](#) is an autonomous body constituted by the Union Government as a non-statutory apex body under the Ministry of Finance in 2010.
- The [Raghuram Rajan Committee](#) (2008) on financial sector reforms first proposed the creation of FSDC.
- **Chairman** - The Finance Minister
- **Members** - [Reserve Bank of India](#) (RBI); [Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority](#) (IRDA); [Securities and Exchange Board of India](#) (SEBI); [Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority](#) (PFRDA)
- Other members are Finance Secretary, Chief Economic Advisor and Secretary of the Department of Financial Services.

### **World Day of Social Justice 2024**

*The World Day of Social Justice is observed every year on 20<sup>th</sup> February*

- The UN General Assembly has declared the World Day of Social Justice in 2007.
- The theme for the year 2024 - Bridging Gaps, Building Alliances.
- This day is dedicated to promoting social justice and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

### **Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP)**

*The Union Cabinet has recently approved the Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP) for the period 2021-22 to 2025-26.*

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme that supplements the efforts of the State Governments in flood management.

The scheme has two components:

1. **Flood Management Programme (FMP) Component** - Central assistance is provided to State Governments and the expenditure on these schemes are shared between the centre and state.
2. **River Management and Border Areas (RMBA) component** - Taken up with 100% central assistance.

The scheme was initially launched during [XI plan](#) & has continued thereafter.