



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper III

- National Monetisation Pipeline and the infrastructure deficit
- Agencies flag surge in the number of foreign ultras in north Kashmir
- '28% of 1,38,000 assessed species face extinction
- Punjab breathes innovation, finds gainful uses for paddy stubble

Prelims

- Taliban say Panjshir Valley 'completely captured'
- 12-year-old dies as Nipah reappears in Kozhikode



National Monetisation Pipeline and the infrastructure deficit

1. The government's announcement of the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), a scheme to transfer the rights to operate public infrastructure for a fixed period, has received attention in the media.
2. Hopefully, in the skirmish over the details of the scheme, not to mention the partisan allegations flying around, the fact of the severe infrastructure deficit that India faces, and the imperative to address it, will not get overlooked.
3. We need infrastructure not only to speed up growth in a slackened economy but also to lead a dignified life, even after we have seen off the COVID-19 pandemic.

Criticism:

- A significant criticism of the NMP is that the transfer would end up creating monopolies, leading to a rise in price.

Counter:

- Monopolisation is inevitable in the case of highways and railway lines, while it is not in the case of warehouses as all the warehouses need not be sold to a single bidder.
- On the issue of the price, it has emphasised that the price would be regulated and any increase of it capped in line with inflation when the government signs the contract with the concessionaire.

Degrowth in the economy:

1. India's infrastructure has not expanded precisely because the assets generate too little revenue for even their maintenance, leave alone upgradation, due to pricing practices in the public sector. This has held back the growth of the economy.
2. The important consideration in an evaluation of the NMP would be the volume of funds expected to be generated. The government has announced an indicative value of ₹6 lakh crore accruing over four years.
3. This is extraordinarily low in relation to the two comparators. First, it is only 10% higher than the budgeted capital expenditure of the Government of India actually for 2021-22.



4. Next, see it in relation to the figure of ₹100 lakh crore estimated as the infrastructural investment India needs.
5. Any claim of the innovativeness of the NMP pales beside this astute estimation made by the government itself. As for the carping by the Opposition, it distracts attention from the severe infrastructural deficit we face and the need to erase it.

Agencies flag surge in the number of foreign ultras in north Kashmir

1. Taking the security agencies by surprise, foreign militants outnumber local militants in north Kashmir — comprising the three districts of Baramulla, Bandipora and Kupwara — in a changing trend, according to official figures.
2. It is for the first time in a decade that north Kashmir is witnessing heightened militant activities compared with south Kashmir, which remained the hub of militants after the hanging of Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru in 2013.
3. “The foreign militants’ build-up was taking place for a long time and cannot be connected with the recent situation in Afghanistan. The changing trend was visible in the past two months,” a police officer said.

States warned of ‘aggressive’ infiltration

1. The Union government has warned of possible infiltration by battle-hardened militants into India along the Afghanistan border, taking advantage of the weak and porous security systems there.
2. A Central agency, in an alert sent to all States and Central Armed Paramilitary Forces, cautioned that armed terrorists owing allegiance to the Islamic State Khorasan Province, the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed could attempt to aggressively infiltrate into India, particularly Jammu & Kashmir.

Organized Crime

Besides the congregation of trained militants who were equipped with improvised explosive devices and sophisticated weaponry, the release of prisoners lodged in jails, including several foreign nationals, was also a matter of concern since it would revive organised crimes with a trans-national network like smuggling of drugs, counterfeit Indian currency, weapons and so on, the sources said.



'28% of 1,38,000 assessed species face extinction

1. Some 28% of the 1,38,374 species assessed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for its survival watchlist are now at high risk of vanishing forever, the global conservation body said on Saturday.



2. Habitat loss, overexploitation and illegal trade have hammered global wildlife populations for decades, and climate change is now kicking in as a direct threat as well, the IUCN reported.

3. Komodo dragons, the largest living lizards, which are found only in the World Heritage-listed Komodo National Park and neighbouring Flores, were listed as "endangered".

4. Some 37% of the 1,200 shark and ray species assessed by experts are directly threatened by extinction, a third more than only seven years ago, it warned on Saturday.

5. The IUCN officially launched its "green status" — the first global standard for assessing species recovery and measuring conservation impacts. It makes the invisible work of conservation visible.

The IUCN Green Status of Species

- The IUCN will soon be launching the IUCN Green Status of Species, a new assessment tool that will illuminate the ecological functionality of species within their ranges, and also show how much a species has recovered due to conservation efforts.
- The new framework will classify species into nine recovery categories, and measure the impact of past and present conservation efforts and recovery potential in the short term and long term.
- A team of more than 200 international researchers presented preliminary Green Status assessments for 181 species in a new paper.
- The IUCN Green Status for Species will officially launch online at the start of the IUCN World Conservation Congress in September.



Punjab breathes innovation, finds gainful uses for paddy stubble

1. Close to autumn every year, stubble burning returns to worsen air pollution across India's northern plains.
2. The Punjab government is working to present "paddy straw" as a resource that creates value and wealth for industry and the farming community, rather than being a waste product of paddy cultivation.
3. The government recently decided to permit certain categories of industries to install paddy straw-fired boilers, for which the industries will be given fiscal incentives. The industries included in this scheme are sugar mills, pulp and paper mills, besides any industry having boiler installation with a steam-generating capacity of more than 25 tonnes per hour (TPH).

Fiscal incentives

1. To spur the use of straw, the government has decided to provide cumulative fiscal incentives of ₹25 crores to the first 50 existing industries on a 'first-come, first-served' basis.
2. Besides, the government has also approved non-fiscal incentives to industries in terms of the availability of 'panchayat' land for storage of paddy straw with a lease agreement of up to 33 years.
3. Despite the ban on stubble burning and action against those burning crop residue under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, farmers continue to resort to the practice, claiming a lack of alternatives.

PUSA Decomposers:

- The decomposers are in the form of capsules made by extracting fungi strains that help the paddy straw to decompose at a much faster rate than usual. The fungi help to produce the essential enzymes for the degradation process.
- It involves making a liquid formulation using decomposer capsules and fermenting it over 8-10 days and then spraying the mixture on fields with crop stubble to ensure speedy bio-decomposition of the stubble.
- It takes around 20 days for the degradation process to be completed. Under usual circumstances, shredded and watered paddy straw, which is mixed with soil, takes at least 45 days to decompose. It does not give enough time for farmers to prepare fields for the wheat crop on time.
- The decomposer improves the fertility and productivity of the soil as the stubble works as manure and compost for the crops and lesser fertiliser consumption is required in the future



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- The soil loses its richness due to stubble burning and it also destroys the useful bacteria and fungi in the soil, apart from causing harm to the environment.

Taliban say Panjshir Valley 'completely captured'

Taliban say Panjshir Valley 'completely captured', according to an AFP report. It said that the last Afghanistan province resisting Taliban have acknowledged suffering major battlefield losses and called for a ceasefire. Resistance front leader Ahmad Massoud said he welcomed proposals from religious scholars for a negotiated settlement to end the fighting. The Taliban and resistance front fighters had been locked in a battle for days.

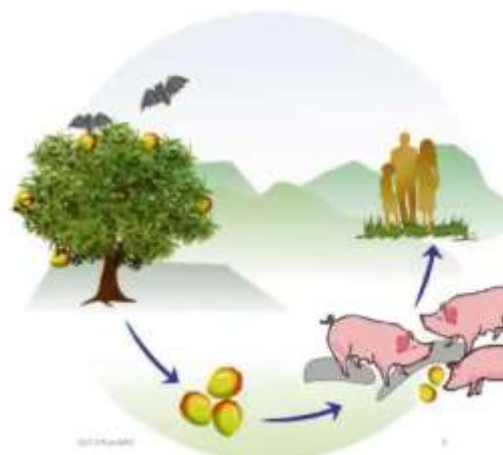


12-year-old dies as Nipah reappears in Kozhikode

- After a gap of over three years, a case of the zoonotic Nipah virus infection was reported in the Kozhikode district of Kerala. Kozhikode is reporting the deadly infection for the second time in three years.

Origin of Name

- Its name originated from **Sungai Nipah**, a village in the Malaysian Peninsula where pig farmers became ill with **encephalitis**.



- The virus is transmitted to people from animals and can also be passed on through contaminated food or directly from person to person. Fruit bats are considered to be a natural reservoir of the virus. Symptoms include acute encephalitis and respiratory illnesses.