Today's Prelims Topics

National Board for Wildlife - History, Role & Impact

Context

Recently, Prime Minister **Narendra Modi chaired his first-ever meeting** of the **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)** at **Gir National Park, Gujarat**.

About National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)

- **Formation:** In 2003 (Statutory Body under Wildlife Protection Act,1972)
- **Composition:**
  - **Chairperson:** The Prime Minister of India
  - **Vice-Chairperson:** The Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
  - **Members - 47**
    - **Members of Parliament (3):** 2 (Lok Sabha) + 1 (Rajya Sabha)
    - **5** representatives from NGOs.
    - **10** eminent ecologists, conservationists and environmentalists.
    - Other Members including **Chief of Army Staff, Secretaries** of key ministries: Information & Broadcasting, Defence, Tribal Affairs etc.

Standing Committee of NBWL:

- **It is a sub-body of NBWL delegated with key decision-making powers.** It is responsible for evaluating development projects affecting protected areas or forest lands within 10 km of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.
- **Chairman:** The Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
- **Members:** Up to **10** members nominated by the Vice-Chairperson from the NBWL's members
- It meets every **3** months.
- The standing committee's decisions are **recommendatory**, which the environment ministry can **overrule**.

- **Functions:**
  - **Advises** the central and state governments on policies and programs for wildlife conservation and development.
  - Prevent the illegal trade of wildlife and its products & control poaching activities.
  - Recommends the establishment of national parks, sanctuaries, and other protected areas.
  - It has the power to **review** all wildlife-related matters and approve projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.

No Alteration of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done **without the approval** of the National Board for Wildlife.

Criticism & Controversies Around NBWL

- **Approval of Development Projects in Wildlife Areas:** The NBWL has approved several controversial development projects, leading to criticism from ecologists.
- **Examples:**
  - **Ken-Betwa River Linking Project (Daudhan Dam)**
    - Will **submerge nearly 100 sq km of Panna National Park & Tiger Reserve**.
  - **Oil Exploration Project in Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary (Assam)**

        - Home to **Hoolock Gibbon**, India's **only ape species**.
    - **Denotification of Galathea Bay Sanctuary (Andaman & Nicobar Islands)**
        - Important nesting site for **endangered Leatherback sea turtles**.
- **Frequent Meetings Without Proper Members**: Since 2014, **50** standing committee meetings have been held without the required number of conservation experts.

Historical Background of NBWL

- **Evolution from Indian Board for Wildlife (IBWL)**
    - Originally established as the **Central Board for Wildlife (1952)**.
    - Renamed **Indian Board for Wildlife (IBWL) in 1952**.
    - **Sri Jayachamaraja Wadiyar (Maharaja of Mysore)** was the **first chairman**.
- **Key Contributions of IBWL:**
    - Declared Peacock as National Bird (1961).
    - Established Gir National Park for Asiatic Lions.
    - Declared Tiger as National Animal.
    - Laid foundation for Project Tiger (1973).
- **Important Chairs & Meetings:**
    - **Indira Gandhi (1980s)**: Strengthened wildlife policies, created Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan), adopted **National Wildlife Action Plan (1983)**.
    - **1988-1997:** No IBWL meetings were held.
    - **2003:** IBWL **restructured as NBWL** under PM **Atal Bihari Vajpayee**.
- **Meetings Chaired by Prime Ministers:**
    - **Atal Bihari Vajpayee (2003)**: First NBWL meeting.
    - **Manmohan Singh (2004-2012)**: Chaired **5 full-body meetings**.
    - **Narendra Modi (2025)**: Chaired his **first NBWL meeting**.

Source:

- Indian Express - NBWL

Installation of Solar Fencing/ Ele Fence

Context

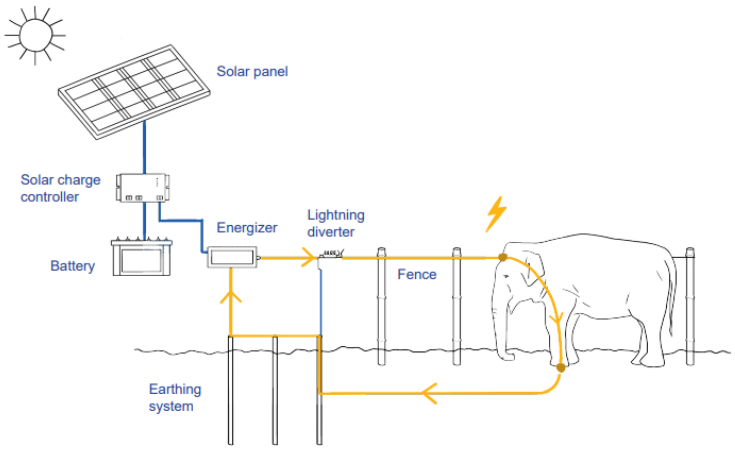
The Kerala Forest department has initiated the construction of a solar fence in Kannur district to prevent wild elephants from straying into human settlements.

About Ele- Fence

- **Ele-Fencing (Electric Fencing)** refers to the use of **electrified barriers** to prevent animals, especially **elephants**, from entering human habitations or agricultural fields.
- It is also called **Solar Fencing** when powered by **solar energy**.
- Elephants (and other animals) receive a non-lethal shock when they stand on the ground and touch the fence.

How does a power fence work ?

- Electricity needs to travel in a complete loop for a circuit to work. **In an incomplete circuit, the flow of electricity will stop.**
- Similarly, in a single-strand fence, an electric shock will be received only when the circuit is complete.
- When an elephant touches the live wire, the current can flow from the fence, through the body of the elephant, into the ground, and back to the energizer, completing the circuit and giving a non-lethal shock to the elephant.



Alternative Methods for Conflict Mitigation

- **Bio-fencing**: Using thorny plants or chili-based fences as a natural barrier.
- **Early Warning Systems**: SMS alerts, drones, and AI-based tracking of elephant movements.
- **Community Participation**: Involving local communities in monitoring and maintenance of fences.

Source:

- The Hindu - Solar Fencing

First Tranche of Exploration Licence (EL) Auctions

Context

The **Ministry of Mines** has launched the first tranche of **Exploration Licence (EL) auctions**, five months after amending rules to take control of EL auctions from state governments.

What is an Exploration Licence (EL)?

- **EL** is a permit given to **private or government entities** to conduct early-stage **mineral exploration** in specific blocks of land.
- Holders of an EL can survey, test, and assess the **presence, quality, and quantity** of mineral deposits.
- If viable minerals are found, the block is further auctioned for **Mining Licence (ML),** allowing commercial extraction.

Importance of EL Auctions

- **Reduces Import Dependency:**
  - India imports **lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements (REEs)** crucial for **batteries, semiconductors, and defense technology**.
  - EL auctions will **increase domestic mineral production**, reducing **dependence on China, Australia, and Africa**.
- **Encourages Private Investment in Mining:**
  - Earlier, only **government agencies like GSI and MECL** conducted exploration.
  - EL allows **junior mining companies** to explore, creating a **competitive** mineral market.
- **Fast-Tracks Mineral Discovery:**
  - Private firms can bring **advanced exploration technology** like **AI-based mineral detection, geophysical surveys, and remote sensing**.
- **Boosts Revenue for Government:**
  - Discovered mineral blocks are auctioned for **Mining Licences (MLs)**, generating **royalties, premium payments, and revenue for the government**.

Key Amendments in August 2023 for EL

- **Introduction of Exploration Licence (EL):**
  - Earlier, only the **government and PSUs** could explore deep-seated and critical minerals.
  - The amendment allows **private players** to obtain **EL through auctions**.
- **Transfer of EL Auction Responsibility to Central Government:**
  - State governments were slow in conducting auctions.
  - In **October 2023**, the **Ministry of Mines** took over the **EL auction process** to ensure faster and more coordinated exploration.
- **Reverse Bidding Auction System:**
  - EL is awarded to bidders who **quote the lowest percentage of premium** to be paid by the final **Mining Licence (ML) holder** ➡ Encouraging **cost-effective exploration**.
- **Validity & Income Benefits for Explorers:**
  - EL holders can **benefit for 50 years** from mining revenues if they discover viable mineral deposits.
- **Coverage of Deep-Seated and Critical Minerals:**
  - EL now applies to **key minerals** such as **lithium, gold, copper, zinc, REEs, vanadium, platinum-group elements (PGE), tantalum and diamonds**.

Source:

- Indian Express - EL

Swadesh Darshan Scheme

Context

The **Central Government** has sanctioned **116 new tourist destinations** across India under **SD 2.0 & CBDD scheme** in partnership with **State Governments**.

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme

- It was launched in **2015** by the **Ministry of Tourism**.
- The scheme is aimed at **integrated development** of theme-based **tourism circuits** across India.
- It provides **financial assistance** to **State Governments** and **UT Administrations** for developing tourism infrastructure.
- **Key Features:**
    - **Theme-Based Circuits:** Promotes tourism through specific themes.
    - **Infrastructure Development:** Funds road connectivity, signage, tourist facilities, and basic amenities.
    - **Government Support:** 100% funding by the Central Government.
    - **State Implementation:** Executed through State Governments and UTs.

Swadesh Darshan 2.0 (SD2.0)

- It was launched in 2022.
- Focus Shifted from circuit-based to destination-based approach.
- It encouraged public-private partnerships (PPP).
- **Key Focus Areas:** Tribal tourism, rural tourism, and heritage tourism.

Challenge-Based Destination Development (CBDD) (Sub-Scheme under SD2.0)

- It promotes holistic development of select destinations.
- Enhances visitor experience through better facilities and branding.

List of Tourism Circuits Under Swadesh Darshan

- **Buddhist Circuit** – Bihar, UP, MP, Gujarat
- **Ramayana Circuit** – Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, Rameswaram
- **Himalayan Circuit** – J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand
- **Coastal Circuit** – Maharashtra, Kerala, Goa, Tamil Nadu
- **Heritage Circuit** – Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Assam
- **Wildlife Circuit** – Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan
- **Tribal Circuit** – Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, MP
- **Eco Circuit** – Kerala, Uttarakhand, Mizoram
- **North-East Circuit** – Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland
- **Spiritual Circuit** – Maharashtra, MP, Kerala

Source:

- The Hindu - 116 new tourist spots

ISRO's Successful Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) and Undocking Manoeuvre

Context

ISRO has successfully **undocked** its two experimental satellites, **SDX01 (Chaser)** and **SDX02 (Target)**.

About SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment)

- It aimed at demonstrating in-space docking and undocking of two satellites while in motion.
- It is made up of 2 small spacecraft - **Chaser & Target. (Launch Vehicle- PSLV C-60)**
- Both spacecraft will be launched **simultaneously but independently** into a **470-km wide circular orbit at 55° inclination** & With a **local time cycle of about 66 days.**
- **Stages:**
    - **Rendezvous** – Aligning orbits of 2 spacecraft
    - **Docking** – Connecting 2 spacecraft
    - **Undocking** – Disconnecting the 2 spacecraft.
- **Objectives:**
    - **Primary Objective - Docking Manoeuvre:** The satellites will demonstrate docking (joining) and undocking (separating) while in orbit.
    - **Secondary Objective - Electric Power Transfer:** Transfer of electric power between docked spacecraft. It is a critical technology for:
        - In-space robotics.
        - Composite spacecraft control.
        - Payload operations post-undocking.

Significance of the Docking and Undocking Experiment - Crucial for future ISRO missions

- **Chandrayaan-4**: A **lunar sample return mission** that will require **multiple dockings** in Moon and Earth orbit.
- **Bharatiya Antariksha Station (Indian Space Station)**: Planned for **2035**, requiring modular assembly in space.
- **Human spaceflight missions**: Future astronaut missions will require docking for crew and cargo transfer.

Bharatiya Docking System (ISRO's Indigenous Docking Mechanism)

- ISRO developed its own **Bharatiya Docking System** for the experiment.
- It is similar to the **International Docking System Standard (IDSS)** but has **key differences**:
    - **Androgynous system**: Both **Chaser and Target satellites** have identical docking mechanisms.
    - **Simplified design**:
        - IDSS uses **24 motors** for docking.
        - ISRO's system achieves docking with **only 2 motors.**

Facts

- With this achievement, India is now among **four** countries with docking and undocking capabilities: **United States, Russia, China & India.**

Source:

- Indian Express - Undocking of satellites

News in Shorts

Pratibimb Module

- The Union Home Ministry's Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) launched the 'Pratibimb' module to track the locations of criminals and map crime infrastructure.

About Pratibimb

- **Pratibimb'** is a **cybercrime tracking and mapping platform** launched by the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** under the **Union Home Ministry**.
- It is designed to **track criminals' locations**, **map crime infrastructure**, and **support cybercrime investigations** across India.
- The platform enhances coordination among **Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs)** for **faster and more efficient cybercrime resolution**.
- **Pratibimb** is part of **I4C** , which was set up to **combat cybercrime in a coordinated manner**.
- Other I4C initiatives include:
    - **Samanvaya** – Data-sharing & analytics platform.
    - **National Cyber Forensic Laboratory (Investigation)** – Provides forensic support to law enforcement.
    - **Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** – Public platform for cybercrime complaints.

Source:

- Business Standard- Pratibimb Module

Editorial Summary

India's choice between Progress and Parochialism

Context

Linguistic policies risk undermining India's global and technological ambitions.

Importance of English in Global And Technological Sphere

- **Global Language of Business and Technology:** English dominates global trade, business communication, and technological research.
  - Over 93% of global technical courses, research papers, and patents are published in English.
  - AI, cybersecurity, and data science fields rely heavily on English for collaboration and innovation.
- **Gateway to Higher Education and Employment:** Most global universities and research institutions use English as the medium of instruction.
  - 82% of remote tech roles demand English proficiency.
  - Lack of English skills reduces access to high-growth sectors by 68%–85%.
- **Diplomacy and Global Influence:** English is the working language of international organizations (UN, WTO, IMF, etc.).
  - It is essential for soft power, including media, entertainment, and international relations.
- **Cultural and Technological Exchange:** English facilitates global cultural exchange, from Hollywood to K-pop to tech forums.
  - It enables access to global knowledge networks and innovation hubs.
- **AI and Digital Economy:** AI models and coding languages are predominantly built on English.
  - Data sharing, global collaborations, and industry standards are all English-driven.
- **Tourism and Hospitality:** English is the global standard for tourism, hospitality, and customer service industries.
  - Countries with higher English proficiency attract more international tourists and business investments.

Issues in India

- **Linguistic Nationalism vs Economic Necessity:** Push for Hindi and regional languages in education and government policies undermines global competitiveness.
  - Maharashtra's mandate for Marathi in government offices reflects this tension.
- **Educational Disparity:** Just 10% of Indians are fluent in English, creating a two-tier education system.
  - Private school students gain access to global opportunities, while government school students face limited prospects.
- **Employment Barriers:** NITI Aayog identifies English proficiency as a major barrier to employment in high-growth sectors.
  - Industries are forced to hire outside talent due to lack of English-speaking workforce.
- **Regional Disparities:** States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which emphasize English and mother tongues, have higher STEM enrolment and employment rates.
  - Hindi-first states lag behind in educational and economic outcomes.
- **Policy Ambiguity:** National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promotes multilingualism but lacks clarity on prioritizing English for competitive skills.
  - Lack of systemic investment in English training leads to inconsistent outcomes.

- **Social and Cultural Resistance:** English proficiency is viewed as cultural betrayal by some political and social groups.
    - Pushback against western influence creates resistance to learning English.

Global Best Practices

- **China:** Since 2001, English has been taught from primary school.
    - The Gaokao (national entrance exam) includes English as a core subject (150 points).
    - Huawei and other major firms have in-house English language programs.
    - English proficiency supports China's global infrastructure expansion under the Belt and Road Initiative.
- **South Korea:** English makes up 25% of the Suneung (national exam).
    - Companies like Samsung and Hyundai require English for research and development roles.
    - K-pop groups release English tracks to target global markets.
- **Vietnam:** National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) launched in 2008, extended to 2030.
    - 70% of high school graduates and 100% of civil servants targeted for English proficiency.
    - $1.4 billion investment in teacher training and rural digital classrooms.
    - English proficiency supports Vietnam's rise as a middle-tech manufacturing hub.
- **Israel:** English fluency is mandatory alongside STEM education.
    - Strategic focus on English ensures access to global research and innovation.
    - Israel's tech sector benefits from bilingual workforce capable of global collaboration.
- **European Union:** Despite multiple official languages, English remains the working language for EU institutions.
    - English fluency ensures smooth diplomatic, trade, and research collaboration.
- **Singapore:** English is the official language for business, governance, and education.
    - Strategic adoption of English enabled Singapore's rise as a global financial and tech hub.

Future Ahead for India

- **Policy Reforms:** Clear policy mandate for English instruction from primary level, alongside mother tongue education.
    - Treat English as a skill (like coding) rather than a cultural threat.
- **Investment in Language Training:** Develop large-scale teacher training programs.
    - Provide digital learning platforms for English language skills.
- **Education System Overhaul:** Include English as a core subject in national exams.
    - Ensure equal access to English education in government and private schools.
- **Industry Integration:** Mandate English training for AI, tech, and manufacturing sectors.
    - Encourage industry-academia collaboration to develop bilingual technical workforce.
- **Global Workforce Readiness:** Focus on STEM + English to equip India's workforce for global markets.
    - Promote Indian talent in global AI, cybersecurity, and tech fields.
- **Balancing Linguistic Identity and Economic Competitiveness:** Kerala's model (mother tongue + English) can serve as a blueprint.
    - English proficiency should be treated as a tool for empowerment, not a threat to cultural identity.

Conclusion

- English is no longer just a colonial legacy — it is a strategic asset for global competitiveness.
- Nations like China, South Korea, and Vietnam have shown that English proficiency can drive economic growth without compromising cultural identity.
- India's demographic advantage will translate into a global leadership position only if English fluency is mainstreamed alongside STEM and AI training.

- India must see English not as a threat but as a bridge to global opportunities and technological dominance.

Source: The Hindu: India's choice between progress and parochialism

Modern day summit diplomacy

Context

Despite the shortcomings and complexities associated with Trump-style diplomatic meetings, summit diplomacy is likely to remain a crucial tool in modern international relations due to the growing need for collective action and cooperation in addressing global challenges.

Nature of Trump-Style Meets

- Trump-style diplomacy is characterized by high-profile, leader-centric engagements that often prioritize optics over substance.
- These meetings tend to be:
    - Unpredictable and transactional.
    - Focused on immediate political gains rather than long-term strategic outcomes.
    - Publicized events rather than closed-door negotiations.

What is Meant by Summit Diplomacy and Its Importance

Summit diplomacy refers to high-level meetings between heads of state or government to discuss and resolve critical international issues.

Importance of Summit Diplomacy

- **Conflict Resolution and Peace Building:** Summit diplomacy has played a pivotal role in ending wars and fostering peace agreements.
    - **Example:** The *Camp David Accords* (1978) between Egypt and Israel led to a peace treaty.
- **Strategic Partnerships and Alliances:** Summits provide a platform for countries to build and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships.
    - **Example:** The *India-U.S. summit* in February 2025 discussed defence cooperation and trade issues.
- **Crisis Management:** In times of geopolitical tension, summits help defuse conflicts through direct dialogue.
    - **Example**: The *Reagan-Gorbachev Summits* (1980s) helped reduce Cold War tensions.
- **Economic and Trade Agreements:** Trade barriers, tariffs, and market access are often discussed and resolved through summits.
    - **Example:** The Modi-Trump summit in 2025 involved discussions on U.S.-India trade barriers and defence deals.
- **Climate and Global Challenges:** Summits enable collective action on global issues like climate change and pandemics.
    - **Example**: The *COP28 Summit* focused on accelerating global climate action.
- **Public Diplomacy and Image Building:** Leaders use summits to project strength, leadership, and influence on the global stage.
    - **Example**: Trump's handling of the Ukraine conflict reinforced his image as a decisive leader.

Challenges of Summit Diplomacy

- **Lack of Substance:** Outcomes from such meetings are often vague or superficial, focusing more on political messaging than concrete agreements.
- **Power Imbalance:** Stronger parties may pressure weaker nations into accepting deals that lack fairness or long-term viability.
- **Public Spectacle:** When conducted under media scrutiny, the diplomatic process can become more about political theater than conflict resolution.

- **Populism and Nationalism:** Leaders with strong domestic political agendas may push for aggressive or protectionist policies.
    - **Example**: Trump's 'America First' stance could weaken global cooperation.

Future of Summit Diplomacy

- **Rise of Bilateral and Mini-Lateral Summits:** Increased focus on smaller groupings (like QUAD and AUKUS) to address specific regional issues.
- **Technology and Defence Cooperation:** Military hardware and tech agreements will dominate future summits.
    - **Example**: U.S.-India F-35 deal could shape defence dynamics in Asia.
- **Shifting Global Power Balance:** Growing influence of China and the realignment of alliances will impact summit outcomes.
    - **Example**: U.S. pressure on India to counterbalance China's military expansion.
- **Climate and Energy Security:** Energy transition and securing supply chains for critical minerals will be key agenda points.
    - **Example**: Ukraine's offer to trade mineral rights for U.S. support reflects this shift.
- **Cybersecurity and AI Regulation:** Future summits are likely to focus on regulating AI, data privacy, and cyber warfare.
    - **Example**: Expected talks between U.S., EU, and China on AI governance.

Source: **The Hindu: Modern day summitry, its perils and its prospects**