

7. Short News

1. White-Bellied Heron

The Union Environment Ministry has granted environmental clearance to the Kalai-II Hydropower Project on the Lohit River amid concerns over impacts on the critically endangered White-bellied Heron.

The White-bellied Heron

Introduction- The White-bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*) is the second-largest living heron and one of the rarest birds in the world.

Habitat- It inhabits mature swamp forests and forested river systems, preferring free-flowing, undisturbed rivers for foraging and tall trees for nesting.

Diet- The species feeds solitarily, mainly on aquatic organisms such as fish and large crayfish, often foraging in fast-flowing river rapids.

Range- Its present range is limited to Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, with key Indian sites including Namdapha National Park and Kamlang Tiger Reserves.

Threats- Major threats include habitat loss due to dams, hunting, human disturbance, and degradation of riverine ecosystems.

Conservation Status- Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, with an estimated global population of fewer than 250 individuals. It is also listed under Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (highest level of legal protection in India).

The Kalai-II Hydropower Project

1. Kalai-II is a 1,200 MW run-of-river hydropower project to be developed by Tehri Hydro Development Corporation India Limited (THDC) India Limited.
2. It is aimed at enhancing clean energy and strategic energy security in the eastern Himalayas.
3. Location- On Lohit River (tributary of the Brahmaputra) in Anjaw district, Arunachal Pradesh.
4. Environmental Concerns- Environmentalists have flagged that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report failed to mention the White-bellied Heron, despite the Lohit basin being a known habitat for the species

India Rice Production

India has become the world's largest rice producer, surpassing China, with production reaching about 150 million tonnes, as stated by the Union Agriculture Minister.

Key Highlights of Rice Production in India

Global Position- India ranks first in rice production and remains the world's largest rice exporter, supplying over 20 million tonnes annually to global markets.

Major Producing States (2024-25)- Uttar Pradesh leads rice production, followed by Telangana, West Bengal, Punjab, and Chhattisgarh. Punjab consistently leads India in paddy productivity (yield per hectare) due to high-yield varieties, mechanization, and irrigation

Export Destinations- Indian rice is widely exported to West Asia, Africa, and South Asia, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Benin, and the UAE.

Productivity Push- The release of 184 new high-yielding and climate-resilient seed varieties is expected to further enhance output and farmer income.

Paddy Cultivation - Rice (paddy) is a major food crop of the world and the staple diet of tropical and sub-tropical regions, especially Asia.

Climatic Requirements

1. Thrives in warm and humid climates

2. Optimal temperature- Around 30°C during the day and 20°C at night

Soil Requirements

1. Grows well in alluvial, loamy, and clayey soils
2. Best suited to impermeable subsoil with a pH range of 5.5–6.5
3. Can tolerate slightly acidic to alkaline soils

Rainfall Requirement

1. Requires 100–150 cm of rainfall
2. Paddy is a semi-aquatic crop needing standing water (10–15 cm) for most of its growing period

Types Based on Season of Cultivation

1. Aman (Winter rice)- Sown in June–July; harvested in November–December
2. Aus (Autumn rice)- Sown in May–June; harvested in September–October
3. Boro (Summer rice)- Cultivated between November and May in moist or irrigated areas
4. Examples of GI Tagged Rice Variety in India - Thooya Malli Rice (Tamil Nadu), Gobindobhog (West Bengal), Kalanamak (UP/Uttarakhand), Wayanad Jeerakasala (Kerala), and Tulapanji (West Bengal).

3. Savitribai Phule (1831–1897)

The Prime Minister and Union Home Minister paid tribute to Savitribai Phule on her birth anniversary, remembering her pioneering role in education and social reform.

Savitribai Phule (1831–1897)

Savitribai Phule was a social reformer, educationist, poet, and women's rights pioneer, widely regarded as the mother of Indian Feminism.

Early Life- Born on January 3, 1831, in Naigaon, Maharashtra, she belonged to the Mali community. She was married young to Jyotirao Phule, who educated her at home, enabling her to emerge as India's first female teacher and first woman headmistress of a girls' school in Pune.

Associated Organisations- Played a key role in the Satyashodhak Samaj (1873), founded by Jyotirao Phule, leading its women's initiatives for social equality. Established Native Female School, Pune, and Mahila Seva Mandal to promote women's education and rights.

Social Reforms - Co-founded India's first girls' school, Bhide Wada School, Pune (1848). Actively opposed child marriage, dowry, caste discrimination, and advocated widow remarriage. Established Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha to prevent female infanticide and protect vulnerable women. Promoted Satyashodhak marriages, free from dowry and Brahminical rituals.

Literary Contributions

1. Kavya Phule (1854), the first poetry collection by a modern Marathi woman poet.
2. Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar, emphasising education and social justice.

Legacy- Died in 1897 while serving plague patients, embodying compassion and courage. Her legacy endures through expanded access to education, social justice movements, and institutions such as Savitribai Phule Pune University, inspiring India's vision of inclusive development.

4. Samudra Pratap

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned ICGS Samudra Pratap, India's first indigenously designed Pollution Control Vessel, at Goa, strengthening maritime environmental protection.

Samudra Pratap

Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Samudra Pratap is the largest vessel in the Indian Coast Guard fleet and the first of two pollution control vessels. Built by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) with over 60% indigenous content, it reflects progress under Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence shipbuilding.

Design and Capabilities

1. The vessel is 114.5 metres long, 16.5 metres wide, with a displacement of about 4,170 tonnes, and is manned by 14 officers and 115 sailors.
2. Primarily designed for marine pollution response, the vessel integrates multi-role capabilities including fire-fighting, maritime safety, coastal patrol, and long-range surveillance.
3. Equipped with advanced pollution detection systems, specialised pollution response boats, and modern fire-fighting equipment.
4. Features aviation facilities with a helicopter hangar, enabling operations in rough sea conditions.

Strategic Significance - Enhances India's capability to protect marine ecosystems, coastal livelihoods, and the blue economy. Positions India among a select group of nations with advanced marine environmental response capabilities. Reinforces India's role as a responsible maritime power in the Indo-Pacific region.

Role of Indian Coast Guard (ICG) in Marine Pollution Control

Central Coordinating Authority- The Indian Coast Guard acts as the national authority for oil spill response under the National Oil Spill-Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP), coordinating ministries, states, ports, and agencies during marine pollution incidents.

Surveillance & Early Detection- Conducts continuous maritime surveillance using ships, Dornier aircraft, helicopters, and drones to detect oil spills and pollution threats in India's maritime zones.

Pollution Response Operations- Deploys containment booms, skimmers, and approved oil spill dispersants for containment, recovery, and mitigation of marine pollution, including firefighting support during maritime accidents.

Preparedness & Capacity Building- Operates Pollution Response Centres (PRCs), conducts national-level drills and provides technical expertise and training to ensure rapid, coordinated pollution response.