

13 MARCH 2019

India's newest frog evolved 60 million years ago

In News

- The discovery of the starry dwarf frog, a nocturnal amphibian that lives under leaf litter on a mountain top in Kerala's Wayanad Sanctuary.

Morphological Characters:

It is just 2 cm long and sports pale blue spots and brilliant orange thighs. Its physical, skeletal and genetic characteristics were compared with specimens of similar species in museum collections across the world. While scans of its skeletons showed it to be completely different from any other similar-sized frog seen in Wayanad, some of its physical characteristics (such as its triangular finger- and toe tips) closely resembled frogs in South America and Africa.



Genetic studies, however, revealed a different story: its closest relatives are the Nycibatrachinae group of frogs that dwell in the streams of Western Ghats, and the Lankanectinae frogs of Sri Lanka.

The new species was named as the starry dwarf frog *Astrobatrachus kurichiyana* (genus *Astrobatrachus* after its starry spots and *kurichiyana* in honour of the Kurichiya tribal community who live in the area). It is not only a new species but different enough to be assigned to a new 'subfamily'.

Genetic analysis reveal that the species is at least 60 million years old.

The presence of *Astrobatrachus* and other ancient lineages in the southern Western Ghats highlights the mountain range's role as a historical refugium and as an important centre of diversification.

Though additional surveys would be necessary, the starry dwarf frog is currently known only from Wayanad's Kurichiyarmala peak, outside legally protected areas.

India's biodiversity-rich zones also 'hotspots' of human impacts

In News

- Human impacts on species occur across 84% of the earth's surface, Southeast Asian tropical forests — including India's biodiversity-rich Western Ghats, Himalaya and the north-east — also fall in this category; India ranks



Note



16th in such human impacts, with 35 species impacted on average.

- When distribution of eight human activities were mapped — including hunting and conversion of natural habitats for agriculture — in areas occupied by 5,457 threatened birds, mammals and amphibians worldwide.

Roads poses threat

- Using sources, including the recently-updated Human Footprint data, they found that a staggering 1,237 species are impacted by threats in more than 90% of their habitat; 395 species are affected by threats across their entire range. While the impact of roads is highest (affecting 72% of terrestrial areas), crop lands affect the highest number of threatened species: 3,834.

Country-wise Data

- Malaysia ranks first among the countries with the highest number of impacted species (125).
- India ranks 16th (35 threatened species affected on average).
- Southeast Asian tropical forests — including those in India’s Western Ghats, Himalaya and north-east — are among the ‘hotspots’ of threatened species. For instance, the average number of species impacted in the South Western Ghats montane rainforests is 60 and in the Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests, 53.
- The maps show that roads and croplands are extensive in India and conversion of habitat for such activities could be a main threat.

Cool spots

- However, these very areas are also ‘cool-spots’ (the world’s last refuges where high numbers of threatened species still persist).
- Cool-spots could be the result of protection or because of intact habitat that has not been cleared yet, India still has crucial refuges that need protecting. Identifying such areas could aid conservation and development planning for countries. However, these refugia do not necessarily have to be off-limits to human development, just free of the actions that directly threaten species there.

Measures

- With India having the world’s second largest road network, really need to plan for development that keeps wildlife conservation as a primary goal in biodiversity-rich areas. Similarly, if wildlife-friendly cropping patterns lead to conservation of wildlife, that would be a victory too. For instance, agricultural crops such as pulses have supported the conservation of the critically endangered great Indian bustard.

10% reservation for a casteless society

Why in news?

- The 103rd constitutional amendment act has spurred recent controversy since the reservation is based on the economic backwardness. There is also a question whether it affects the basic structure of the constitution. Obviously it needs enormous debates! It is up to the Supreme Court to decide.

In brief:

- **It is meant to help a large section that is below the poverty line, Centre tells SC**
- The Union government has mentioned that it is a step towards casteless society.
- The Union government has referred to the court’s decisions earlier, which

Note



called for the attainment of economic equality as the final and only solution to the besetting problems. The Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act, 2019, was meant “to benefit the economically weaker sections of society who were not covered by the existing schemes of reservation...”

- It said the law was meant to benefit a “large section of the population of 135 crore people,” who are mostly lower middle class and below the poverty line.

- **2010 report of the Commission for Economically Backward Classes:**

- The government quoted the 2010 report of the Commission for Economically Backward Classes, chaired by Major General S.R. Sinho (retired), which said **18.2% of the general category** came under the below poverty line (BPL).

- **K.C. Vasanth Kumar Vs Karnataka**

- The 1985 Constitution Bench judgment in K.C. Vasanth Kumar vs Karnataka, which quotes Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi to drive home the point that the economy of a family, and not its caste, should be the determining factor of social and educational backwardness.

- The government argued that the new law was inspired by “quantifiable data” collected by “several committees” that underscored the need for the economically weaker sections to enjoy the benefits of reservation in order to access higher education and employment.

- It said unaided educational institutions should also comply with the state’s wish to provide greater numbers access to higher education.

- Background:

- The government was responding to petitions that the Amendment to create 10% reservation for the poor in the unreserved category violated the basic structure of the Constitution and breached the 50% ceiling.

Response to the petitions:

1. It argued that a “mere amendment” to an Article would not violate the basic structure of the Constitution. “Article 15(6) and Article 16(6) are enabling provisions for advancement of the economically weaker sections and are, in fact, in conformity with the principle of reservation and affirmative action,” it reasoned.

2. Furthermore, the 50% ceiling applied to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. The new provision dealt with the economically weaker sections.

3. “The limit of 50% is only applicable to reservation under Articles 15(4), 15(5) and 16(4) and does not apply to Article 15(6).”

- **In the Iran row, Next comes Venezuela:** Don’t help the Maduro regime – USA to India

Why in news:

- Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale discussed the situation in Venezuela and Venezuelan oil purchases with U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo during their meeting.

In Brief:

- USA wants India not be the economic lifeline of Venezuela
- India and seven other countries were given a six month exemption from U.S. sanctions on trade with Iran and allowed to purchase a limited quantity of Iranian oil without facing sanctions.

Twitter warning:

- Regarding Venezuela, U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton had warned India and other countries on Twitter last month against purchasing oil from Venezuela in response to Venezuelan Oil Minister Manuel Quevedo making

Note



a trip to India to pitch for more oil sales.

Why India is targeted?

- **Venezuela the third largest supplier of oil to India, the world's third-biggest oil consumer.**
- **Prelims titbits- Must read Links**
- **1.Go through the Map of South America**
- **- Equator passing countries, Tropic of Capricorn, bordering countries of Venezuela.**
- **2. OPEC countries(in which Venezuela is the founding member)**

OPEC:

1. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was founded in Baghdad, Iraq, with the signing of an agreement in September 1960 by five countries namely Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. They were to become the Founder Members of the Organization.

2. These countries were later joined by Qatar (1961), Indonesia (1962), Libya (1962), the United Arab Emirates (1967), Algeria (1969), Nigeria (1971), Ecuador (1973), Gabon (1975), Angola (2007), Equatorial Guinea (2017) and Congo (2018).

3. Ecuador suspended its membership in December 1992, but rejoined OPEC in October 2007. Indonesia suspended its membership in January 2009, reactivated it again in January 2016, but decided to suspend its membership once more at the 171st Meeting of the OPEC Conference on 30 November 2016. Gabon terminated its membership in January 1995. However, it rejoined the Organization in July 2016. Qatar terminated its membership on 1 January 2019.



This means that, currently, the Organization has a total of 14 Member Countries.

The OPEC statute distinguishes between the Founder Members and Full Members- those countries whose applications for membership have been accepted by the Conference.

The Statute stipulates that “any country with a substantial net export of crude petroleum, which has fundamentally similar interests to those of Member Countries, may become a Full Member of the Organization, if accepted by a majority of three-fourths of Full Members, including the concurring votes of all Founder Members.”

The Statute further provides for Associate Members which are those countries that do not qualify for full membership, but are nevertheless admitted under such special conditions as may be prescribed by the Conference.

Note



FIRE CRACKERS ISSUE

Supreme court order:

- The Supreme Court order on October 2018 said that only firecrackers with reduced emission and decibel levels will be permitted during all festivals. On Diwali, firecrackers could be burst between 8 pm and 10 pm. People can burst firecrackers on Christmas and New Year between 11:55 pm and 12:30 am. Crackers cannot be sold online and if they are, the sites will be hauled up for contempt.
- The order also banned the manufacture, sale and use of loud and toxic firecrackers while allowing only green and improved crackers.
- At the same time, it allowed the manufacture and sale of green and improved crackers
- As of now, there is no clarity about the composition of green crackers.

Green Crackers:

- “Green crackers” are so named because they “do not contain harmful chemicals” that would cause air pollution. Components in firecrackers are replaced with others that are “less dangerous” and “less harmful” to the atmosphere,
- The idea, proposed by Science & Technology Minister Harsh Vardhan, was announced in January. It was carried forward by a network of CSIR labs, including Central Electro Chemical Research Institute (CECRI), Indian Institute of Chemical Technology, National Botanical Research Institute and National Chemical Laboratory.
- CSIR-CECRI has developed flower pots by using “eco-friendly materials” that can potentially reduce particulate matter by 40%.
- Scientists have also developed potential sound-emitting functional prototypes that do not emit sulphur dioxide, and are testing a prototype of flower pots substituting barium nitrate with an eco-friendly version.
- SWAS (Safe Water Releaser), STAR (Safe Thermite Cracker) and SAFAL (Safe Minimal Aluminium) are the names given to these crackers.
- **Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation** is the chief coordinating agency for the formulation of green crackers.
- This situation has forced fire crackers industries of Sivakasi to shut down, which resulted in huge unemployment of workers of those industries.
- **That is why the Supreme Court felt sorry for its October judgement**

Supreme Court’s present position:

“We cannot give money or jobs or support people who will lose their jobs if we shut down firecrackers manufacturing units... We do not want to generate unemployment,” Justice Bobde Justice S.A. Bobde

About Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation:

It was established in 1995 to administer the usage of explosives, petrol stations in India.

It comes under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

FACEBOOK’S ASSURANCE:

- Facebook’s public policy director in India and South Asia Shivnath Thukral

Note



assured that the Facebook will track political advertising and limit fake news during the Lok Sabha election.

- He said the Facebook will employ independent fact-checkers to check the Fake news.
- Regarding political advertisement it assured that no political advertisement on our platform is without a disclaimer or without a person who is authorised to it.
- It will maintain ad-archive and library for tracking the top spenders and how much money is spent by the ad-givers of political content.
- For fact-checking the Facebook intends to use the well-recognised fact checking agency, IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network) or the Poynter Badger.
- The International Fact-Checking Network is a unit

IIP growth slows to 1.7%, retail inflation rises to 2.57%

Why in News?

Industrial activity slowed in January 2019 growing by just 1.7% due in large part to a deceleration in the manufacturing, electricity, and capital goods sectors, official data released on Tuesday showed. In a separate release, government data showed that retail inflation in February snapped a four-month declining trend by rising to 2.57%.

In brief

- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) saw growth slip below the 2% for the second time in three months in January, with the previous occurrence being the 0.32% growth seen in November 2018. Growth in the IIP was at 2.6 in December.
- Within the IIP, the mining and quarrying sector was one of the only major sectors that saw growth accelerating, from a contraction of 0.39% in December to a growth of 3.9% in January.

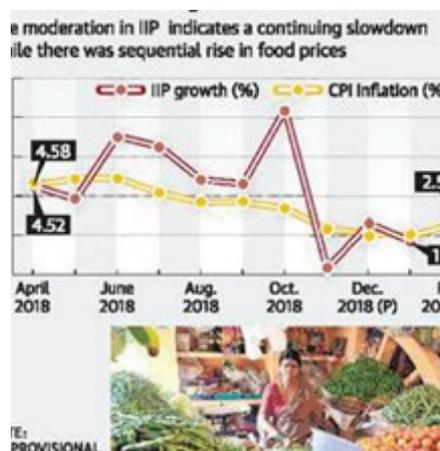
Declining inflation

- Retail inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), quickened for the first time in five months in February to 2.57% from 1.97% in January, mainly due to firming food prices, official data showed. Inflation in food and beverages sector stood at -0.07% in February compared with -1.29% in January.
- Core inflation moved down slightly as expected, reflecting easing of input costs, pricing powers and growing slack in the economy

Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an index which shows the growth rates in different industry groups of the economy in a stipulated period of time. The IIP index is computed and published by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) on a monthly basis.

- **Description:** IIP is a composite indicator that measures the growth rate of industry groups classified under,
 1. Broad sectors, namely, Mining, Manufacturing and Electricity
 2. Use-based sectors, namely Basic Goods, Capital Goods and Intermediate Goods.



Note

• Currently IIP figures are calculated considering 2011-12 as base year.



No names removed based on draft NRC: Election Commission

Why in News?

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday assured the Supreme Court that names have not been deleted from the Assam electoral roll on the basis of their exclusion from the draft National Register of Citizens (NRC), which was published in July last year.

In brief

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court alleging that that several categories of persons were deprived of voting rights ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Category I	One category included persons whose names figured in the draft NRC but not in the voter list.
Category II	Second category included persons whose names were deleted from the voter list appeared in the draft NRC published on July 30, 2018
Category III	The third category of people were those declared foreigners by the foreigners' tribunal as well as by the Guwahati High Court; the court order was stayed by the Supreme Court.
Category IV	The fourth category comprised those already declared foreigners by the tribunal; this was set aside by the Supreme Court. However, their names had been deleted from the voters list pursuant to the order of the tribunal.
Category V	In the fifth category were those whose names had not been included in the draft NRC, but their family members were included; these had filed a claim for the inclusion of their names.

National Register of Citizens (NRC)

•The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is the list of Indian citizens of Assam. It was prepared in 1951, following the census of 1951. It is being updated to weed out illegal immigration from Bangladesh and neighbouring regions.

For a person's name to be included in the updated NRC list of 2018, he/ she will have to furnish:

- Existence of name in the legacy data: The legacy data is the collective list of the NRC data of 1951 and the electoral rolls up to midnight of 24 March 1971.
- Proving linkage with the person whose name appears in the legacy data.

Note



LISTS OF DOCUMENTS

LIST A

A person's name on any one of these documents, if issued before the midnight of March 24, 1971, will make him/her eligible for inclusion in the updated NRC:

- (1) 1951 NRC
- (2) Any Assam voter list up to March 24, 1971
- (3) Land and tenancy records
- (4) Citizenship certificate
- (5) Permanent residential certificate
- (6) Refugee registration certificate
- (7) Passport
- (8) LIC policy document
- (9) Any government-issued licence/certificate
- (10) Any govt service/ employment certificate
- (11) Bank or post office accounts
- (12) Birth certificate
- (13) Board/university educational certificate
- (14) Court records/processes

LIST B

If a person has no List A document that carries his/her name, he/she can furnish a List A document that carries the name of a direct ancestor (father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, and so on), along with a List B document to establish his/her relationship with the ancestor. The List B documents — which are not subject to the March 24, 1971, cut-off date — are:

- (1) Birth certificate
- (2) Land document
- (3) Board/university certificate
- (4) Bank/LIC/post office records
- (5) A certificate from a circle officer or gram panchayat secretary in case of a married woman
- (6) Voter list
- (7) Ration card
- (8) Any other legally acceptable document.

Note

