

1. Koalas

Why in News?

- Australia has recently officially classified koalas as ‘endangered’.

Highlights:

- Australia’s Koala population has been on the road to extinction for over two decades now. The number of Koalas in NSW (New South Wales) declined by between 33% and 61% since 2001.
- But despite several demands by animal rights groups and conservationists, the government has been accused of doing little to protect the species. Koalas were classified as “vulnerable” only in 2012.
- During the catastrophic 2019 bushfires in Australia, now known as the ‘Black Summer’, an estimated 60,000 koalas were impacted, with vast swathes of their habitat being blackened and rendered unliveable.
- Another major threat is the spread of chlamydia, a sexually transmitted disease known to cause blindness and cysts in the koalas reproductive tract.
- The Endangered status of the koala means they and their forest homes should be provided with greater protection under Australia’s national environmental law.
- Koala is (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) an arboreal (lives in trees) marsupial.
- A marsupial is born in a very incomplete state. They are minute, hairless and with hind limbs only partially formed. Around 2/3rd of them live in Australia. The other third live mostly in South America.
- Instead of the placenta, the mother’s milk nourishes the young and allows it to grow and develop.
- They share a number of characteristics with wombats, who are their closest living relatives, including a backward-facing pouch.
- The Typical Habitat for Koalas is open eucalypt woodlands, and the leaves of these trees make up most of their diet. In terms of societal behavior, Koalas are asocial animals and typically emotional bonding is seen only between mothers and dependent offspring.
- They are endemic to Australia.
- Due to the low nutrient levels of the Eucalyptus leaves they feed on, the koala can sleep up to 18 hours each day.

- It's IUCN status are Vulnerable
- Habitat Destruction, Climate Change & Severe weather (Droughts, extreme temperatures).

2. Solomon Islands

Why in News?

- Recently, the US says it will open an embassy in the Solomon Islands, laying out in unusually blunt terms a plan to increase its influence in the South Pacific nation before China becomes “strongly embedded.”

Highlights:

- Solomon Islanders cherished their history with Americans on the battlefields of World War II (1939-45), but that the US was in danger of losing its preferential ties as China “aggressively seeks to engage” elite politicians and business people in the Solomon Islands.
- The move comes after rioting rocked the nation of 7,00,000 in November, 2021.
- The riots grew from a peaceful protest and highlighted long-simmering regional rivalries, economic problems and concerns about the country’s increasing links with China.
- The embassy announcement fits with a new Biden administration strategy for the Indo-Pacific and emphasises building partnerships with allies in the region as a way to counter China’s growing influence and ambitions.
- In the Quad meeting held recently, the US has said that it is committed to a “free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient” Indo-Pacific region.
- Solomon Islands is a nation in Melanesia, east of Papua New Guinea, comprising more than 990 islands. Its capital is Honiara, located on the island of Guadalcanal.
- The Solomon Islands have been inhabited by Melanesian people for at least 30,000 years.
- It consists of a double chain of volcanic islands and coral atolls in Melanesia.
- Melanesia is a subregion of Oceania in the southwestern Pacific Ocean.
- The country comprises most of the Solomons chain—with the exception of Buka and Bougainville, two islands at the north western end that form an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea.
- The Island is a constitutional monarchy, with the British monarch, represented by a Governor-General, serving as the formal head of state.
- Still, the country, a member of the Commonwealth, is independent, and the governor-General is appointed on the advice of the unicameral National Parliament.

3. Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 (PMLA)

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court (SC) has Recently Examining Allegations of rampant misuse of Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 (PMLA) by the government and the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Highlights:

- It is pulled into the investigation of even “ordinary” crimes and assets of genuine victims have been attached. It was enacted in response to India’s global commitment (including the Vienna Convention) to combat the menace of money laundering. Instead, rights have been “cribbed, cabined and confined”.
- It was a comprehensive penal statute to counter the threat of money laundering, specifically stemming from trade in narcotics.
- Currently, the offences in the schedule of the Act are extremely overbroad, and in several cases, have absolutely no relation to either narcotics or organised crime.
- Even the Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) – an equivalent of the FIR – is considered an “internal document” and not given to the accused.
- The ED treats Itself as an exception to these principles and practises [of criminal procedure law] and chooses to register an ECIR on its own whims and fancies on its own File.
- There is also a lack of clarity about ED’s selection of cases to investigate. The initiation of an investigation by the ED has consequences which have the potential of curtailing the liberty of an Individual.
- It forms the core of the legal framework put in place by India to combat Money Laundering.
- The provisions of this act are applicable to all financial institutions, banks (Including RBI), mutual funds, insurance companies, and their financial intermediaries.
- Adds the concept of ‘reporting entity’ which would include a banking company, financial Institution, Intermediary etc. PMLA, 2002 levied a fine up to Rs 5 lakh, but the amendment act has removed this upper limit.
- It has provided for provisional attachment and confiscation of property of any person involved in such activities.

4. Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

Why in News?

- As per official estimates for the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), India's industrial recovery slowed sharply in December 2021, with output growing just 0.4% year-on-year, and manufacturing activity contracting 0.1%.

Highlights:

- Contrary to Expected Growth of 2.5%, growth has come in at 0.4% which is disappointing.
- IIP is an indicator that Measures the changes in the volume of production of industrial products during a given period.
- It is compiled and published monthly by the National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- It is a composite indicator that measures the Growth Rate of industry groups classified under:
 - Broad sectors, namely, Mining, Manufacturing, and Electricity.
 - Use-based sectors, namely Basic Goods, Capital Goods, and Intermediate Goods.
 - Base Year for IIP is 2011-2012.
- It is used by government agencies including the Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank of India, etc, for policy-making purposes.
- IIP remains extremely relevant for the calculation of the quarterly and advance GDP (Gross Domestic Product) estimates.
- About Eight Core Sectors:
 - These comprise 40.27% of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
 - The eight core sector industries in decreasing order of their weightage: Refinery Products> Electricity> Steel> Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilizers.