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Project PRAYAS

- Recently, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) launched Project PRAYAS to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration for Indian workers and students.

❖ Key Highlights

- The project, PRAYAS (Promoting Regular & Assisted Migration for Youth and Skilled Professionals), was launched in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs.
- PRAYAS is one of the first attempts to consolidate all the state-level initiatives for safe, orderly, and well-managed international migration.
- The project aims to foster improved coordination between state and central governments on international migration practices.
- The initiative will undertake a study, capturing the key migration trends, the needs and aspirations of migrants and the major international migration and mobility initiatives taken by the union, as well as the state governments sharing the analysis with the ministry.
- India has already established itself as a key player in international migration dynamics, with more than 32 million Indians and people of Indian origin residing abroad.

❖ About IOM

- Established in 1951, IOM is a UN agency dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration.
- It was granted Permanent Observer status to the UN General Assembly in 1992. It is part of the UN now.
- It is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.
- With 175 member states, a further 8 states holding observer status and offices in 171 countries, IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all.
- It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants.
- Headquarters- Geneva, Switzerland
- IOM works in the **four broad areas of migration management** : 1. Migration and development, 2. Facilitating migration, 3. Regulating migration, 4. Forced migration.

❖ Side Note

- India accounts for the highest share with 17.5 million Indians living outside the country.
- India is the leading recipient of remittances.
  - International remittances in 2018 (2020 report) reached $689 billion, out of which India received $78.6 billion from the 17.5 million living abroad.
- The top migration corridors for Indians are the United Arab Emirates, the US, and Saudi Arabia.
  - Highest number of migrants entering India come from Bangladesh.

Namdapha Flying Squirrel

- Recently, A nocturnal flying squirrel has resurfaced in Arunachal Pradesh after going missing for 42 years.

❖ About

- The Namdapha flying squirrel (Biswamoyopterus biswasi) is a flying squirrel endemic to Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India, where it is known from a single zoological specimen collected in Namdapha National Park in 1981.
- It has reddish, grizzled fur with white above and a pale grey crown; its patagium is orangish and its underparts are white.
- It is an arboreal and nocturnal flying squirrel.
- **Distribution and Habitat**
  - The Namdapha flying squirrel is endemic to Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India.
  - It inhabits tall Mesua ferrea jungles, often on hill slopes in the catchment area of Dihing River, particularly on the western slope of Patkai range in northeastern India.
- **Threat :** It is threatened by poaching and possibly habitat destruction.
- **Conservation Status** : **IUCN Status**: Critically Endangered
  - **Wildlife Protection Act Status:** Schedule I

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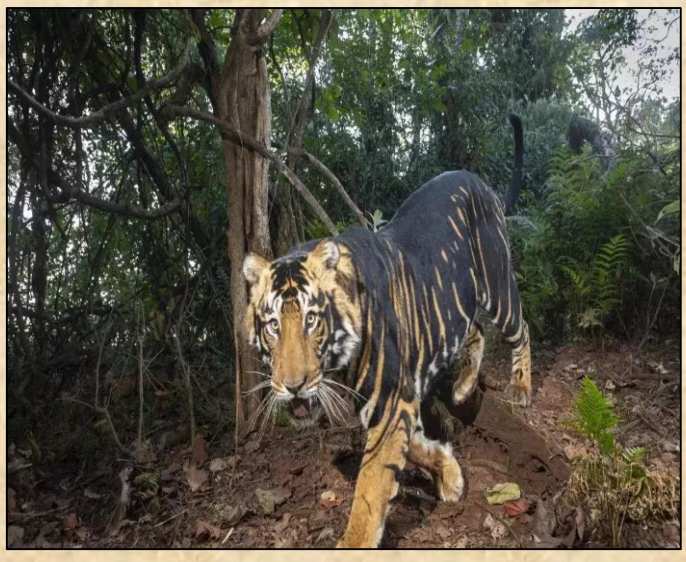
Melanistic Tigers

- The Similipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha has become the centre of the Internet's attention after a melanistic tiger was caught on a camera trap.

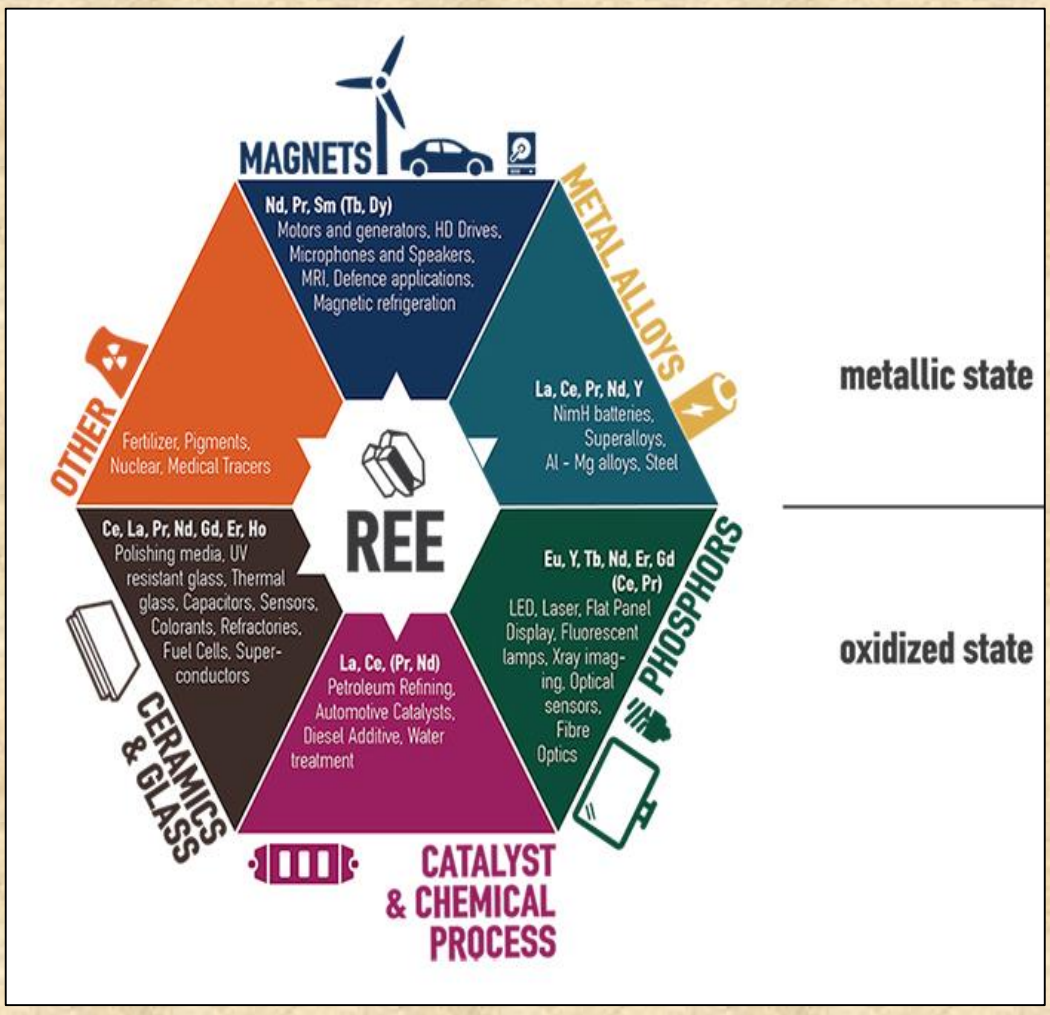


❖ About Melanistic Tiger

- Melanistic tigers, often referred to as 'black tigers' due to their dense and dark stripe patterns, are a genetic variation of the Bengal tiger, caused by a mutation that results in an increased amount of melanin.
- The coat colouration and patterning that make the wild cats appear dark boil down to a single mutation in the Transmembrane Aminopeptidase Q (Taqpep) gene.
- The first confirmed record dates back to 1993 when a tribal youth killed a pseudo-melanistic tigress in self-defense.
- Melanistic tigers tend to grow faster and are said to be heavier.
- It wasn't until 2007 that these tigers were officially discovered within the reserve, marking the beginning of a series of documented sightings.
- The Similipal Tiger Reserve is currently the only known habitat for these unique tigers, making it an invaluable conservation site.

Rare Earth Element Processing Technologies

- China, the world's top processor of rare earths, banned the export of technology to make rare earth magnets, adding it to a ban already in place on technology to extract and separate the critical materials.
- Rare earths are a group of 17 metals used to make magnets that turn power into motion for use in electric vehicles, wind turbines and electronics.



❖ About Rare Earth Element

- The rare earth elements (REE) are a **set of seventeen metallic elements.**
- These include the fifteen lanthanides on the periodic table plus scandium and yttrium.
- The REEs are lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, yttrium, hafnium, tantalum, niobium, zirconium, and scandium.
- They are called **"rare earth" because they occur in low concentrations** of minerals and were difficult to extract from their oxide forms.
- **Characteristics**
  - They have unique magnetic, luminescent, and electrochemical properties and are used in many modern technologies.
  - They are all metals having many similar properties, and that often causes them to be found together in geologic deposits.
- **Applications**
  - These elements are key components in many electronic devices and whose industrial applications span sectors like imaging, aerospace, and defence.
- **Nodal Agency in India**
  - Mining and processing of rare earth in India are concentrated in the hands of IREL (India) Limited, a PSU under the Department of Atomic Energy.
- **Trade and Production**
  - China has **one-third of the world's known rare earth element reserves.** It controls 90% of the worldwide REE market.
  - **China produce 60% REE,** with the remainder produced by other countries, including the Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the United States).
  - India **has 6% of the world's rare earth reserves**, but it only produces **1% of global output** and imports most of its needs from China

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Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)

- The 8th edition of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs (CoC) was conducted by the Royal Thai Navy at Bangkok, Thailand from 19 – 22 Dec 23.
- Chiefs of Navies/ Senior Delegates from 27 Members/ Observer countries participated in the event.

❖ Key Highlights

- During the Conclave of Chiefs, Thailand assumed the duties of Chair of IONS, and the Work Plan for the next two years was finalized.
- As a first, the Flag designed by India was selected as the IONS Flag.
- India also took over as the co-chair of IONS Working Groups on Maritime Security and HADR for the forthcoming cycle.

❖ About Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)

- IONS was conceived by the Indian Navy in 2008 as a forum.
- It seeks to enhance maritime cooperation among Navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region.
- It provides an open and inclusive platform for discussions on regionally relevant maritime issues that would lead to common understanding on the way ahead.
- It also serves to develop an effective response mechanism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) against natural disasters.
- IONS includes 24 member nations that touch or lie within the IOR, and 8 observer nations.
- The inaugural edition of IONS was held in Feb 2008 at New Delhi, with the Indian Navy as the Chair for two years (2008 - 2010).
- India is also scheduled to take over as the Chair of IONS (2025-27) during 9th CoC planned to be conducted in India at the end 2025.

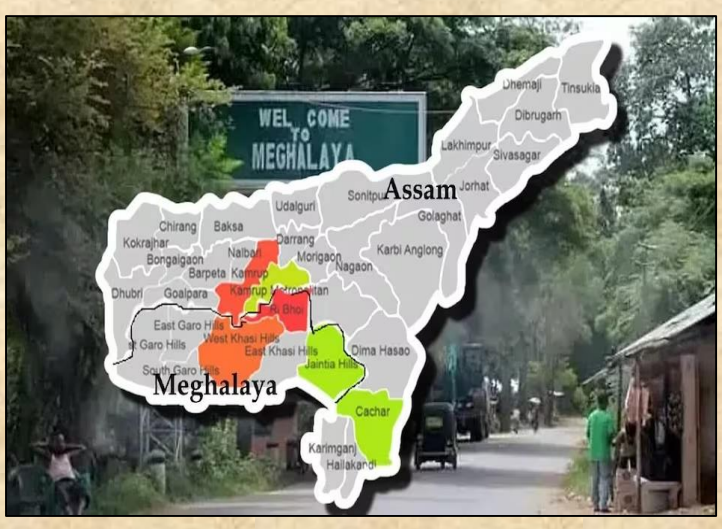
Chillai Kalan

- Chillai Kalan', the 40-day-long harsh winter period, has descended upon Kashmir, causing temperatures to plummet to a freezing extent.

❖ About Chillai Kalan

- Chillai Kalan is a **Persian word** which literally means **forty days of Major cold.** It is the **harshest winter period** in Kashmir starting from **21st December to 29th January** every year.
- Chillai-Kalan is followed by **20-day long Chillai Khurd** (small cold) and a **10-days long Chillai Bachha** (baby cold).
- Due to subzero temperature, tap water pipelines freeze partially during this period and world-famous Dal Lake also freezes.
- Kashmiris celebrate with **sumptuous Harissa**, a dish made of lean mutton mixed with rice and flavoured with spices like fennel, cardamom, clove and salt.

Assam-Meghalaya Panels on Boundary



- The regional committees on the **boundary dispute between Assam and Meghalaya** have been asked to submit their reports by December 31.

❖ About:

- The boundary dispute between the two States has persisted **since Meghalaya was carved out of Assam in 1972.**
- Assam and Meghalaya had **12 disputed sector**s along their 884.9-km boundary.
- **The disputes in six of these sectors were settled** through an agreement signed on March 29, 2022.
- **The six disputed sectors that remain** are Langpih, Borduar, Nongwah-Mawtamur, Deshdoomreah, Block-I, Block-II, and Psiar-Khanduli.
- **Three regional committees for three districts were set up by both States** to study the disputed sectors, meet the stakeholders, and submit a report to their respective governments.

❖ Do you know?

- Assam and Arunachal Pradesh resolved their boundary disputes over 37 of 123 villages with the signing of the **Namsai Declaration** on July 15, 2022.

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