DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 12-08-2024

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Lake Turkana

Syllabus: GS-1; Geography-Mapping

Context

- *First comprehensive survey in 50 years highlights key findings-The initial findings from the 10-year research project led by UNESCO and WFP, funded by the Dutch Government, reveal high fish potential in Africa's fourth-largest lake.*

About

- *Lake Turkana is a* **saline lake in the Kenyan Rift Valley**, *in northern Kenya, with its far northern end crossing into Ethiopia.*
- *It is the world's largest permanent* **desert lake** *and the world's largest* **alkaline lake.**

Hydrology

- **Primary Inflows**: *The Omo River (main), Turkwel River, and Kerio River.*
- **Outflows:** *The lake has no significant outflow, leading to high evaporation rates, making it a closed basin system.*

- **Water Level Fluctuations***: Subject to fluctuations due to changes in rainfall patterns and river inflows.*

Climate

- **Arid and Semi-Arid Climate:** *The surrounding region experiences high temperatures and low rainfall.*
- **Temperature:** *Average temperatures range from 26°C to 40°C.*
- **Rainfall:** *Annual rainfall is minimal, averaging less than 250 mm.*

Ecological Significance

- **Biodiversity***: Lake Turkana is home to a rich diversity of flora and fauna, including several endemic species.*
- **Fish Species***: Hosts over 60 species of fish, including the Nile perch and tilapia. It is a vital habitat for the Nile crocodile, hippopotamus, and various bird species.*
- **National Parks:** *The lake is surrounded by three national parks: Sibiloi National Park, Central Island National Park, and South Island National Park, which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.*

Human Settlements and Culture

- **Indigenous Communities:** *The Turkana people, along with other communities like the Dassanech, Rendille, and Samburu, inhabit the region. They primarily rely on fishing, livestock herding, and limited agriculture.*
- **Cultural Significance:** *The lake holds cultural and spiritual significance for the indigenous communities.*

Economic Importance

- **Fishing Industry:** *The lake supports a significant fishing industry, providing livelihoods to thousands of local inhabitants.*
- **Tourism:** *The unique landscape and biodiversity attract tourists, contributing to the local economy.*

Environmental Concerns

- **Climate Change Impact:** *Rising temperatures and reduced rainfall threaten the lake's water levels, leading to increased salinity and ecological imbalances.*
- **Hydropower Projects***: The construction of the Gibe III Dam on the Omo River in Ethiopia has raised concerns over reduced inflows, which could further lower the lake's water levels and affect the local ecosystem.*
- **Overfishing:** *Unregulated fishing practices have led to the depletion of fish stocks.*

Historical and Paleoanthropological Importance

- **Fossil Evidence:** *The Lake Turkana region is a rich archaeological site, with numerous hominid fossils discovered, contributing to our understanding of human evolution.*
- **Koobi Fora***: An important archaeological site on the eastern shore of the lake, where significant fossil finds have been made.*

International and Geopolitical Issues

- **Water Disputes:** *The lake and its inflow rivers are subject to regional disputes between Kenya and Ethiopia, particularly concerning water usage and conservation efforts.*
- **Transboundary Water Management***: Efforts are ongoing to develop cooperative frameworks between the two countries to manage the lake's resources sustainably.*

Conservation Efforts

- **UNESCO World Heritage Site***: The designation of surrounding national parks as World Heritage Sites helps in conservation efforts.*
- **NGO Involvement***: Various non-governmental organizations are working to promote sustainable fishing practices, protect biodiversity, and address the challenges posed by climate change.*

PMAY-U 2.0

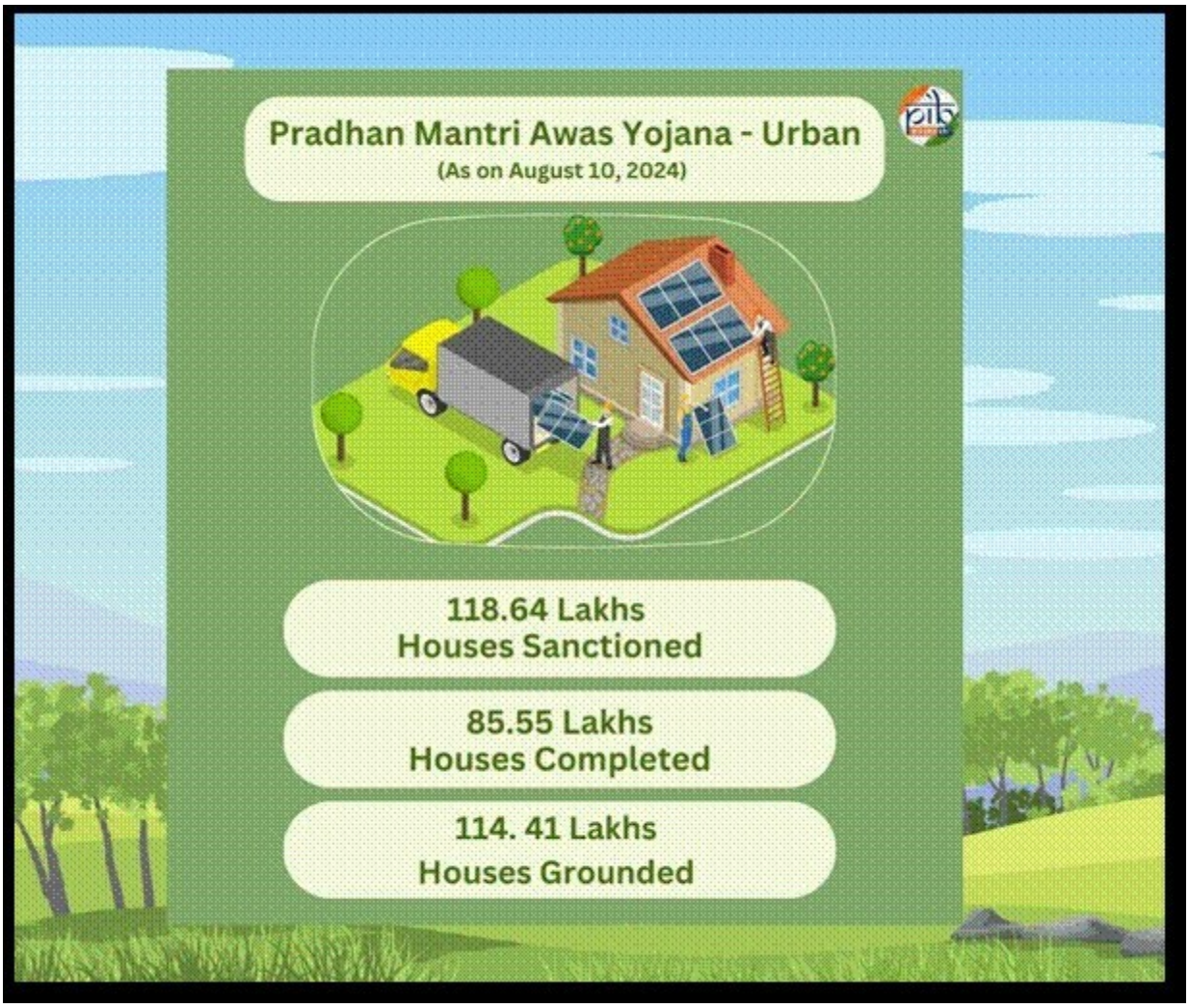
Syllabus: GS-2; Government policies and Interventions

Context

- *The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) 2.0.*

Scope and Vision

- *PMAY-U 2.0 is designed to* **extend financial assistance** *to urban poor and middle-class families for constructing, purchasing, or renting houses at affordable costs in urban areas.*
- *This initiative aligns with the Government of India's vision* **to ensure that every citizen has access to a pucca house, thereby enhancing their quality of life.**



Impact

- *The scheme aims to benefit 1 crore families, with a particular focus on equity among different segments of the population. Special attention will be given to marginalized groups, including slum dwellers, SC/STs, minorities, widows, persons with disabilities, and other underprivileged sections of society.*
- *Additionally, groups like Safai Karmi, street vendors, artisans, anganwadi workers, and residents of slums/chawls will receive focused support under this scheme.*

Components of PMAY-U 2.0

The scheme includes the following key verticals to address the housing needs in urban areas:

- **Beneficiary-Led Construction (BLC)**
  Financial assistance will be provided to eligible EWS families to construct new houses on their own available vacant land. States/UTs may also provide land rights (pattas) to landless beneficiaries.
- **Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP)**

This component provides financial assistance to EWS beneficiaries for owning houses constructed in partnership with States/UTs, cities, public, and private agencies.
Additional grants, such as the Technology Innovation Grant (TIG) of ₹1,000 per sqm/unit, will be provided for projects using innovative construction technologies.

- **Affordable Rental Housing (ARH)**

  This vertical focuses on creating rental housing for working women, industrial workers, urban migrants, and other eligible beneficiaries.
  The ARH vertical will be implemented through two models: utilizing existing government-funded vacant houses and constructing new rental housing units.
  TIG of ₹3,000 per sqm will be provided for projects using innovative technologies.

- **Interest Subsidy Scheme (ISS)**

  The ISS vertical offers a 4% interest subsidy on home loans up to ₹25 lakh for EWS/LIG and MIG families.
  The subsidy will be provided in five yearly installments, with a maximum subsidy of ₹1.80 lakh.

Technology & Innovation Sub-Mission (TISM)

- *A TISM will be established under PMAY-U 2.0 to guide the adoption of modern, innovative, and green technologies for faster and higher-quality construction of houses.*
- *This initiative will* **promote disaster-resistant and climate-smart housing solutions across India.**
- *States/UTs are required to formulate an "Affordable Housing Policy" that includes reforms and incentives to encourage public and private sector participation in the affordable housing ecosystem.*

- *This policy will play a crucial role in improving housing affordability and achieving the scheme's objectives.*
- *The PMAY-U 2.0 is a transformative initiative aimed at realizing the vision of "Housing for All."*
- *By addressing the housing needs of EWS, LIG, and MIG segments, the scheme seeks to uplift the lives of millions of Indian citizens, ensuring that every individual has access to safe, secure, and affordable housing.*

e-Sankhyiki Portal

Syllabus: GS-2; Government policies and Interventions

Context

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has launched the e-Sankhyiki portal to enhance data management and sharing.

About

It aims to enhance the accessibility and dissemination of official statistical data, serving as a comprehensive repository for a wide range of statistical information relevant to various sectors.

Key Features and Significance

- **Data Availability**
  - *The portal hosts a vast array of data collected by different government agencies, covering topics such as population statistics, economic indicators, agriculture, health, education, and more.*
  - *It provides easy access to both historical data and the latest statistical releases, ensuring that users have up-to-date information.*
- **User-Friendly Interface**
  - *The e-Sankhyiki Portal is designed with a user-friendly interface that allows researchers, policymakers, students, and the general public to navigate through the data effortlessly.*
  - *It includes various search and filter options to refine data retrieval, making it easier to locate specific information.*
- **Interactive Tools**
  - *The portal offers interactive tools like data visualization, which helps users to interpret complex data through charts, graphs, and maps.*

- *These tools enhance the analytical capability of users, enabling them to draw meaningful insights from the data.*

- **Support for Research and Policy-Making**
  - *By providing reliable and accessible data, the e-Sankhyiki Portal supports evidence-based policy-making and academic research.*
  - *It serves as a critical resource for scholars, analysts, and government officials involved in planning and evaluation processes.*
- **Data Standardization**
  - *The portal promotes the standardization of statistical data across various government departments, ensuring consistency and comparability of information.*
  - *This standardization is crucial for maintaining the integrity of data used in national and international comparisons.*
- **Digital Accessibility**
  - *The e-Sankhyiki Portal is a step towards the digitization of statistical data in India, aligning with the government's broader digital initiatives.*
  - *It reduces the need for physical data collection and distribution, making information readily available to anyone with internet access.*

Debt for Development Swaps

Syllabus: GS-3; Economy

Context

- *A new study by the* **International Institute For Environment & Development (IIED)** *has suggested that more than US$100 billion of debt in developing countries could be cancelled to spend on restoring nature and adapting to climate change by using debt-for-climate and debt-for-nature swaps.*

More to know

- **Debt-for-development swaps (DDS)** *are financial mechanisms that allow a country's external debt to be forgiven or reduced in exchange for commitments to invest in specific development projects.*
- *This tool is especially useful for developing nations that are burdened with high levels of external debt, as it provides a way to redirect resources towards* **sustainable development goals (SDGs)** *rather than debt servicing.*

Concept and Mechanism

- *In a typical debt-for-development swap,* **a portion of a debtor country's foreign debt is purchased by a third party (such as a government, non-governmental organization, or international financial institution) at a discounted rate.**
- *The debtor country then agrees to repay the* **debt in local currency**, *which is used to fund development projects within the country.*
- *These projects often focus on areas like education, healthcare, environmental protection, and poverty alleviation.*

Types of Debt-for-Development Swaps

- **Bilateral Swaps:** *These involve agreements between two governments. A creditor nation agrees to reduce or cancel part of the debt owed by the debtor nation, provided the latter uses the savings for agreed-upon development projects.*
- **Multilateral Swaps:** *These involve multiple stakeholders, including international organizations like the World Bank or regional development banks, working together to convert debt into funding for development projects.*
- **Debt-for-Nature Swaps:** *A subtype of debt-for-development swaps, these focus specifically on environmental projects. In exchange for debt relief, the debtor country commits to invest in conservation efforts, such as protecting rainforests or reducing carbon emissions.*

Advantages of Debt-for-Development Swaps:

- **Reduction of Debt Burden:** *DDS helps reduce the financial pressure on heavily indebted countries, allowing them to focus on development rather than debt repayment.*
- **Promotion of Sustainable Development:** *The funds generated through DDS are directed towards projects that promote long-term development goals, contributing to overall economic and social progress.*
- **Environmental and Social Benefits:** *Debt-for-nature swaps, in particular, help protect the environment and promote sustainable use of natural resources, while other swaps can improve education, health, and infrastructure.*
- **Strengthening International Cooperation:** *DDS fosters cooperation between debtor and creditor nations, international organizations, and non-governmental actors, enhancing global solidarity and partnership.*

Challenges and Criticisms

- **Complex Negotiations:** *The process of negotiating DDS agreements can be complex and time-consuming, requiring the alignment of multiple stakeholders' interests.*

- **Limited Scope:** *The amount of debt typically swapped under these agreements is often small relative to the overall debt burden, limiting their impact on a country's overall financial situation.*
- **Implementation and Monitoring:** *Ensuring that funds are properly allocated and effectively used for development projects can be challenging, especially in countries with weak governance structures.*
- **Economic Sovereignty:** *Critics argue that DDS may undermine a country's economic sovereignty, as they often require the debtor nation to commit to specific policies or projects dictated by external entities.*

Case Studies:

- **Poland (1990s):** *Poland engaged in a series of debt-for-environment swaps, where portions of its foreign debt were forgiven in exchange for investments in environmental protection projects, particularly in the areas of forest conservation and air pollution control.*
- **Madagascar (2003):** *In a debt-for-nature swap, Madagascar received debt relief from the United States in exchange for investing in the protection of its unique biodiversity and natural habitats.*

What's causing Antarctica's deep-winter heatwave, what could be its fallout?

Syllabus: GS-3; Environmental Concern

Context

- *For the second time in two years, a record-breaking heatwave is sweeping through Antarctica at the height of its winter season. Ground temperatures have been 10 degrees Celsius higher than normal on average since mid-July, and up to 28 degrees higher on certain days.*

Unusual Deep-Winter Heatwave

- *Antarctica experienced an unprecedented heatwave during its deep winter (June 2024), with temperatures rising up to 20-30°C above normal.*
- *Some areas, like the Antarctic Peninsula, recorded temperatures close to or above the freezing point, which is highly unusual for the region and season.*

Cause of the Heatwave

- *The heatwave is primarily attributed to a* **combination of strong westerly winds, high-pressure systems, and low sea ice levels.**
- *These atmospheric conditions caused* **warm air masses to move into Antarctica, leading to the significant rise in temperatures.**
- **Reduced sea ice**, *which typically reflects sunlight, has resulted in the absorption of more solar energy, further contributing to warming.*

Potential Fallout

- **Impact on Ice Sheets:** *The heatwave could accelerate the melting of Antarctica's ice sheets, leading to rising sea levels globally.*
- **Threat to Biodiversity:** *Native species, which are adapted to extreme cold, could be threatened by such temperature anomalies, affecting the region's delicate ecosystem.*
- **Global Climate Implications:** *The heatwave highlights the vulnerability of polar regions to climate change, which could have far-reaching effects on global weather patterns and climate stability.*

Long-term Concerns

- *Recurrent heatwaves in Antarctica could weaken the continent's ice structure, contributing to the destabilization of ice shelves.*
- *If such heatwaves become more frequent, they could lead to more rapid changes in global sea levels and increase the frequency of extreme weather events worldwide.*