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1. Govt. sets up new panel to review all NSO data: The Hindu – Page 1

Why is it in news?	The Union government has constituted a new internal oversight mechanism for official data, revamping a Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES) set up in late 2019, soon after the findings from the last round of household surveys on consumption expenditure and employment were junked over “data quality issues”.
UPSC SYLLABUS RELEVANCE for prelims and Mains	<p>Prelims: Current events of national and international importance - Government Policies.</p> <p>Mains: General Studies II - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.</p>
Important concepts	<p>Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation</p> <p>National Statistical Office (NSO)</p> <p>National Statistical Commission (NSC)</p>

Today's prelims practice question:

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES) will now be replaced by a Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS).
2. K.C. Venugopal has been named the chair of the new panel.

Which among the statements mentioned above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

Correct answer: A

Explanation:

Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES), which was tasked with examining economic indicators only, will now be replaced by a Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) which has a broader mandate to review the framework and results of all surveys conducted under the aegis of

the National Statistical Office (NSO). Pronab Sen, former Chairman of the National Statistical Commission (NSC), has been named the chair of the new panel.

DETAILED EXPLANATION OF IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

About the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation:

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation came into existence as an independent Ministry on 15th October 1999 after the merger of the Department of Statistics and the Department of Programme Implementation.
- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation attaches considerable importance to coverage and quality aspects of statistics released in the country.

Wings of MoSPI:

- The Ministry has two wings, one relating to Statistics and the other relating to Programme Implementation.
- The Statistics Wing re-designated as National Statistics Office (NSO) consists of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- CSO is an attached Office and NSSO is subordinate Office under the control of Ministry of S&PI.

National Statistical Organisation (NSO):

- In pursuance to the decisions of the Union Cabinet on 19.05.2005, the Government, through its resolution dated 01.06.2005, decided to set up the National Statistical Commission.
- It also decided to merge the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) and National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) into a single entity called the National Statistical Organisation (NSO).
- The Government followed the due process of inter-ministerial consultation as an integral part of the decision-making process.

National Statistical Commission:

- The Government of India through a resolution dated 1st June, 2005 set up the National Statistical Commission (NSC).
- The setting up of the NSC followed the decision of the Cabinet to accept the recommendations of the Rangarajan Commission, which reviewed the Indian Statistical System in 2001.
- The NSC was constituted with effect from 12th July 2006 with a mandate to evolve policies, priorities and standards in statistical matters.
- The NSC has four Members besides a Chairperson, each having specialization and experience in specified statistical fields.

Recent developments:

- The Union government has constituted a new internal oversight mechanism for official data, revamping a Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES) set up in late 2019, soon after the findings from the last round of household surveys on consumption expenditure and employment were junked over “data quality issues”.
- In an order issued recently, the Statistics Ministry said that the SCES, which was tasked with examining economic indicators only, will now be replaced by a Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) which has a broader mandate to review the framework and results of all surveys conducted under the aegis of the National Statistical Office (NSO).
- Pronab Sen, former Chairman of the National Statistical Commission (NSC), has been named the chair of the new panel.
- The SCoS with “enhanced terms of reference” vis-à-vis the SCES, “to ensure more coverage” has 10 official members, and four non-official members who are eminent academics.
- It can have up to 16 members, as per the order issued by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The development comes amid sharp critiques of India’s statistical machinery by members of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, including its chairperson Bibek Debroy.

- He had mooted an overhaul of the system, and contended that the Indian Statistical Service has “little expertise in survey design”.
- The term of the SCES was coming to an end in any case, so it was decided to expand the committee’s mandate beyond economic data and advise the Ministry on technical aspects for all surveys, such as sampling frame, design, survey methodology and finalisation of results.
- Apart from addressing issues raised from time to time on the subject, results and methodology for all surveys, the terms of reference of the SCoS include identification of data gaps that need to be filled by official statistics, along with a strategy to plug those gaps.
- It has been mandated to explore the use of administrative statistics to improve data outcomes.
- While the panel will help finalise survey results, the NSC will have the ultimate authority to approve the publication of those results.

2. Panel wants Kuno cheetahs to undergo medical review: The Hindu – Page 14

Why is it in news?	Following the deaths of two more cheetahs at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh over the past week, the expert advisory committee overseeing the implementation of Project Cheetah has recommended that all the animals undergo a thorough physical and medical review.
UPSC SYLLABUS RELEVANCE for prelims and Mains	<p>Prelims: Environmental ecology, Bio-diversity and Climate Change</p> <p>Mains: General Studies III - Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.</p>
Important concepts	Project Cheetah
<p align="center">Prelims PYQ Exercise-Find answer:</p> <p>Q. Consider the following: (2012)</p>	

1. Black-necked crane

2. Cheetah

3. Flying squirrel

4. Snow leopard

Which of the above are naturally found in India?

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 1, 3 and 4 only

(c) 2 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Today's prelims practice question:

Q. Consider the following statements about Cheetah:

1. The scientific name of Asiatic Cheetah is *Acinonyx jubatus jubatus*.

2. Cheetahs were officially declared extinct by the Indian government in 2001.

How many of the statements given above is /are correct?

A. Only One

B. Only Two

C. Both statements

D. None

Correct answer: D

Explanation: The scientific name of Asiatic Cheetah is *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*, whereas the scientific name of African Cheetah is *Acinonyx jubatus jubatus*. Cheetahs were officially declared extinct by the Indian government in 1952.

Today's mains

practice question:

Discuss the challenges faced by the project cheetah. Were the deaths of cheetahs expected? What are the causes behind this?

DETAILED EXPLANATION OF IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

About Cheetah:

- The Asiatic Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*), the subspecies of Cheetah that is found in Iran.
- Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* has most recently been assessed for The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species in 2021.
- *Acinonyx jubatus* is listed as Vulnerable.
- The Cheetah is assessed as Vulnerable under criterion A4b based on a population size reduction of 37% (21–51%) over three generations (approximately 15 years) between 2017 and 2032 and criterion C1 based on a global population size (tentatively estimated at 6,500 mature individuals) and a projected averaged continuing decline.
- Data from a comprehensive national assessment in Zimbabwe, the only large area that includes protected and unprotected landscapes with reliable population estimates from two points in time, indicates a decline of 85% over 15 years.

Project Cheetah:

- Project Cheetah has been a decade in the making, but the first translocation took place only last year.
- The project aims to reintroduce the graceful feline in India.
- Cheetahs are the fastest land animals and can, in short sprints on open ground, reach speeds in excess of 100 kph.
- Asiatic Cheetahs were once abundant in India but their numbers dwindled over the centuries due to loss of habitat and widespread hunting.
- The last cheetah in the country died in 1952. Cheetahs were officially declared extinct by the Indian government in 1952.
- After being reported extinct in India for seven decades, the cheetah is set to make a comeback through 'Project Cheetah'.
- The Government of India reintroduced eight African cheetahs, consisting of five females and three males, at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh.
- The animals brought from Namibia and South Africa are the Southeast African cheetahs – a different sub-species.

- Since last year, Kuno National Park has received 20 cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa with the aim of establishing a free-ranging population.

Origin and Approval of Project Cheetah:

- Project Cheetah received approval from the Supreme Court of India in January 2020 as a pilot program to reintroduce the cheetah species to the country.
- The initiative was first proposed in 2009 by Indian conservationists in collaboration with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), a non-profit organization headquartered in Namibia.
- The CCF is dedicated to the preservation and rehabilitation of cheetahs in their natural habitats.

Objectives of Project Cheetah:

- Potential to revive India's natural heritage and strengthen its commitment to wildlife conservation.
- Re-establish a viable population of the Asiatic cheetah in India, which is currently considered critically endangered and on the brink of extinction.
- Enhance India's global standing as a responsible custodian of endangered species.
- The project could attract ecotourism, generating economic opportunities for local communities and promoting environmental awareness.
- By reintroducing this species, the project seeks to restore the ecological balance, enhance biodiversity, and conserve the unique genetic heritage of the cheetah.

Potential challenges to Project Cheetah:

- Lack of abundant areas with abundant prey, sufficient cover, and minimal human-wildlife conflicts.
- Captivity and changes in habitat induce anxiety and stress, hindering reproduction.
- Non-availability of suitable Habitats for the cheetah's re-introduction i.e., to match with the Savannah landscape of Africa.

- Anthropogenic threats like snaring for bush meat and retaliatory killings pose risks to the cheetahs.
- Non-availability of a safe environment, free from poaching and habitat destruction is essential for the cheetah's long-term survival.
- Maintaining cheetahs and their prey base in an enclosure is considered impossible due to fencing issues.
- Genetic diversity in the Asiatic cheetah population is severely fragmented, with a limited gene pool.
- Maintaining genetic diversity during the reintroduction process is vital to avoid inbreeding depression and preserve the species' long-term viability.
- The climate, prey species, and overall conditions in Kuno forest may not stimulate mating and reproduction.
- Concerns are raised about the prolonged captivity of cheetahs before translocation, which may have increased stress and vulnerability.
- Poor adaptive management strategies, community participation and lack of effective monitoring to mitigate potential conflicts between humans and cheetahs.

Conclusion:

- Overall, Project Cheetah holds immense importance in terms of wildlife conservation and biodiversity management in India.
- Its successful implementation requires eliminating the challenges and can contribute to restoring keystone species, ecosystem balance, and preserving India's natural heritage.
- Its efforts are crucial for the long-term survival of this magnificent species and the overall health of ecosystems.
- The relocation program is considered an experiment, and every death and birth should not be seen as a definitive success or failure.
- However, clear criteria and timelines must be established for project managers to determine if adjustments are necessary.

3. Lightning not a natural disaster, says Centre: The Hindu – Page 16

Why is it in news?	The Union government is not in favour of declaring lightning a natural disaster as deaths caused by it can be prevented by making people aware of safety steps.
UPSC SYLLABUS RELEVANCE for prelims and Mains	Prelims: Disaster management Mains: General Studies III - Disaster and disaster management.
Important concepts	State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)
<p style="text-align: center;">Prelims PYQ Exercise-Find answer:</p> <p>Q. 2015</p> <p>In the South Atlantic and South-Eastern Pacific regions in tropical latitudes, cyclone does not originate. What is the reason?</p> <p>a) Sea surface temperatures are low b) Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone seldom occurs c) Coriolis force is too weak d) Absence of land in those regions</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Today's prelims practice question:</p> <p>Q. Consider the following statements about lightning:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The deaths caused by lightning made up 15% of all accidental deaths caused by “forces of nature”. The frequency of lightning was the highest in northeastern States. <p>Which among the statements mentioned above is/are correct?</p> <p>A. 1 only B. 2 only C. Both 1 and 2 D. Neither 1 nor 2</p> <p>Correct answer: B</p> <p>Explanation: National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data show that 2,880 people died in lightning strikes in 2021. The deaths made up 40% of all accidental deaths caused by “forces of</p>	

nature". The frequency of lightning was the highest in northeastern States and in West Bengal, Sikkim, Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar.

Mains PYQ exercise:	Vulnerability is an essential element for defining disaster impacts and its threat to people. How and in what ways can vulnerability to disasters be characterized? Discuss different types of vulnerability with reference to disasters. (2019)
Today's mains practice question:	Describe the important phases of disaster cycle. Discuss the importance of disaster preparedness with reference to issues and problems associated with it.

DETAILED EXPLANATION OF IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF):

What is the SDRF?

- The State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) is constituted under Section 48 (1) (a) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- The fund is available for state governments to respond to notified disasters.
- The SDRF was formed in accordance with the recommendations of the 13th Finance Commission.
- The fund is used for providing immediate relief for notified disasters that occur within the state.
- It is annually audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).
- A State Government may use up to 10% of the funds available under the SDRF for providing immediate relief to the victims of natural disasters that they consider to be 'disasters' within the local context in the State and which are not included in the notified list of disasters of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

How is SDRF Funded?

- The Central government contributes 75% to the SDRF for general category states and UTs while it contributes 90% for special category states and UTs (Northeast and Hilly states/UTs).
- The central contribution is released in two installments annually.
- The remaining amount will be contributed by the respective state governments.

What disasters are covered under the SDRF?

- Cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslip, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, frost and cold wave are now considered disasters under the SDRF.

About SDRF:

- As per of National Policy on Disaster Management 2009, the State Governments are required to raise their own SDRF for quickly responding to disasters.
- The SDRF are also be used for Community Capacity Building and Awareness Generation programmes within the State.
- During these programmes, SDRF can familiarize themselves with terrain, critical buildings and other existing infrastructure for prompt responses at the time of disasters and simultaneously work with the community, including school children, village volunteers and other stakeholders on what to do during disasters.

Recent developments:

- The Union government is not in favour of declaring lightning a natural disaster as deaths caused by it can be prevented by making people aware of safety steps.
- The States such as Bihar and West Bengal have been demanding that lightning deaths be covered as a natural disaster.
- The States such as Bihar and West Bengal have been demanding that lightning deaths be covered as a natural disaster.
- Once this is notified, the victims will be entitled to compensation from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).
- The Centre makes 75% of the contribution to the SDRF.

Recent statistics:

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data show that 2,880 people died in lightning strikes in 2021.
- The deaths made up 40% of all accidental deaths caused by “forces of nature”.
- While 2,862 people died in 2020, the number stood at 2,876 in 2019.
- There has been an increase in proportion of such deaths compared with the total accident deaths caused by events related to nature.
- For instance, in 2003, deaths from lightning made up just 0.2% of the total deaths caused by “forces of nature”.
- A presentation made by the Director-General, India Meteorological Department (IMD) at the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction Conference (NPDRR) in March said the frequency of lightning was the highest in northeastern States and in West Bengal, Sikkim, Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar, but the number of deaths is higher in the central Indian States of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

MODEL MAINS ANSWER FOR TODAY'S EXPECTED MAINS QUESTION

Q. Discuss the challenges faced by the project cheetah. Were the deaths of cheetahs expected? What are the causes behind this?

<p><u>First step is to understand the demand of the question</u></p>	<p>Question has two parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenges faced by Project Cheetah. 2. Causes behind deaths of Cheetahs.
<p>Introduction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Cheetah received approval from the Supreme Court of India in January 2020 as a pilot program to reintroduce the cheetah species to the country. • The initiative was first proposed in 2009 by Indian conservationists in collaboration with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), a non-profit organization headquartered in Namibia.

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Body	<p>Challenges faced by Project Cheetah</p> <table> <tr> <th data-bbox="432 405 652 465">Dimension</th><th data-bbox="652 405 1321 465">Content</th></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="432 465 652 1491" rowspan="6">Challenges</td><td data-bbox="652 465 1321 589">Maintaining cheetahs and their prey base in an enclosure is considered difficult</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="652 589 1321 768">Lack of abundant areas with abundant prey, sufficient cover, and minimal human-wildlife conflicts.</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="652 768 1321 947">The climate, prey species, and overall conditions in Kuno forest may not stimulate mating and reproduction.</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="652 947 1321 1189">Maintaining genetic diversity during the reintroduction process is vital to avoid inbreeding depression and preserve the species' long-term viability.</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="652 1189 1321 1312">Captivity and changes in habitat induce anxiety and stress, hindering reproduction.</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="652 1312 1321 1491">Anthropogenic threats like snaring for bush meat and retaliatory killings pose risks to the cheetahs.</td></tr> </table> <p>Causes behind deaths of Cheetahs</p> <table> <tr> <th data-bbox="432 1608 652 1668">Dimension</th><th data-bbox="652 1608 1321 1668">Content</th></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="432 1668 652 1980">Were the deaths of cheetahs expected?</td><td data-bbox="652 1668 1321 1980"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project anticipated a high mortality rate, and its short-term goal was to achieve a 50% survival rate for the first year, which is 10 out of 20 cheetahs. </td></tr> </table>	Dimension	Content	Challenges	Maintaining cheetahs and their prey base in an enclosure is considered difficult	Lack of abundant areas with abundant prey, sufficient cover, and minimal human-wildlife conflicts.	The climate, prey species, and overall conditions in Kuno forest may not stimulate mating and reproduction.	Maintaining genetic diversity during the reintroduction process is vital to avoid inbreeding depression and preserve the species' long-term viability.	Captivity and changes in habitat induce anxiety and stress, hindering reproduction.	Anthropogenic threats like snaring for bush meat and retaliatory killings pose risks to the cheetahs.	Dimension	Content	Were the deaths of cheetahs expected?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project anticipated a high mortality rate, and its short-term goal was to achieve a 50% survival rate for the first year, which is 10 out of 20 cheetahs.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> However, experts pointed out that the project had overestimated Kuno National Park's carrying capacity for cheetahs, and this added pressure on the project staff to look for alternative sites. 	
	Causes of Death of Cheetahs	Cheetahs suffer very high cub mortality – up to 90% in protected areas – mainly due to predation.	
		A South African study found that predation was the biggest killer, accounting for 53.2% of cheetah mortality. Lions, leopards, hyenas, and jackals were primarily responsible.	
		In Africa, the lion is the chief predator of cheetahs; in India, where lions are absent (except in Gujarat), leopards are likely to slip into that role in potential cheetah landscapes.	
		Other causes of mortality can be holding camps, immobilization/transit, tracking devices, and other wildlife killing cheetah (cubs) including warthogs, baboons, snakes, elephants, crocodiles, vultures, zebras, and even ostriches.	
Conclusion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relocation program is considered an experiment, and every death and birth should not be seen as a definitive success or failure. However, clear criteria and timelines must be established for project managers to determine if adjustments are necessary. The success of the cheetah project should align with India's traditional conservation ethos. 		

- India's conservation approach emphasizes protecting naturally dispersing wildlife in viable non-fragmented habitats.
- The Cheetah Project can choose to cut the risk by settling for the South African model of retaining a few pocket populations in fenced-in reserves.
- However, keeping cheetahs in leopard-proof enclosures might not be a sustainable solution.
- Also, repeated sedate-and-recover interventions to restrict cheetahs to sanctuaries and national parks can harm the animals.