

EDEN IAS

NEWS
IMPULSE

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BHASHAN CHAR ISLAND

Syllabus section: International Relations

Why in News?

The Bangladesh Authorities recently moved around 1,750 Rohingya Muslims to a controversial island in the Bay of Bengal called the “Bhashan Char Island”.

Highlights:

- The Government of Bangladesh have planned to construct 1,440 buildings on the island.
- The building will also include 120 cyclone shelters.
- The buildings were constructed with the objective of relocating the 100,000 Rohingya refugees from the mainland camps of Cox’s Bazar.

About Bhashan char island:

The island is also known as Char Piya. It is in Hatiya Upazila, Bangladesh. The island is located in the Bay of Bengal at about 6 kilometres from Sandwip island and 60 kilometres from the mainland. It has an area of 40 square kilometres. The island was formed in the year 2006 by Himalayan silt.

Cox’s Bazar

It is a city, fishing port, tourism centre and district headquarters of southern Bangladesh. This city is famous for long natural sandy beach. It is also known as the Panowa.

VOLUNTARY SCRAPPAGE POLICY

Syllabus Section: Environment

Why in News?

To curb pollution, Sitharaman announces voluntary vehicle scrappage policy

About:

- Vehicle scrappage scheme is to phase out old vehicles to curb environmental pollution and oil imports.
- The fitness of personal vehicles will be checked after 20 years and those of commercial vehicles after 15 years, to get off roads old polluting ones.
- The policy would cover an estimated 51 lakh light motor vehicles (LMV) that are above 20 years of age, while another 34 lakh LMVs are above 15 years. It would also cover 17 lakh medium and heavy motor vehicles, which are above 15 years, and currently without valid fitness certificates.
- It would lead to recycling of waste metal, improved safety, reduction in air pollution, reduction in oil imports due to greater fuel efficiency of current vehicles, and stimulate investment.

Source: PIB

GOVERNMENT TO INTRODUCE SINGLE SECURITIES MARKETS CODE

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the Government will consolidate the provisions of SEBI Act, 1992, Depositories Act, 1996, Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956, and Government Securities Act, 2007 into a rationalized single Securities Markets Code.

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FINANCIAL CAPITAL

- Single Securities Markets Code :
By consolidating SEBI Act, 1992, Depositories Act, 1996, Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956 and Government Securities Act, 2007.
- Development of a world class Fin-Tech hub at the GIFT-IFSC.
- A permanent institutional framework to be created to purchase investment grade debt securities both in stressed and normal times and help in the development of the Bond market.
- Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority will be strengthened to set up a commodity market eco system arrangement including vaulting, assaying, logistics etc in addition to warehousing.
- An Investor Charter for investor protection

SIGNIFICANCE:

- To instill confidence amongst the participants in the Corporate Bond Market during times of stress
- Enhance secondary market liquidity,
- The proposed body would purchase investment-grade debt securities both in stressed and normal times and help in the development of the Bond Market.

Source: PIB

STRATEGIC CRUDE OIL RESERVES

Why in News?

Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Limited (ISPRL), a Government of India Special Purpose Vehicle, has established Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).

- Strategic Petroleum Reserves are huge stockpiles of crude oil to deal with any crude oil-related crisis like the risk of supply disruption from natural disasters, war or other calamities.
- According to the agreement on an International Energy Programme (I.E.P.), each International Energy Agency (IEA) country has an obligation to hold emergency oil stocks equivalent to at least 90 days of net oil imports.

- In case of a severe oil supply disruption, IEA members may decide to release these stocks to the market as part of collective action.

About:

- The facilities with a total capacity of 5.33 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) at 3 locations, namely (i) Vishakhapatnam, (ii) Mangaluru, and (iii) Padur will be established
- As per the consumption pattern of 2019-20, the total capacity is estimated to provide for about 9.5 days of crude oil requirement.
- Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) in the country have storage facilities for crude oil and petroleum products for 64.5 days, thus the current total national capacity for storage of crude oil and petroleum products currently is 74 days.
- The government has also given approval for setting up of two additional facilities at Chandikhol (Odisha) and Padur (Karnataka).

Source: PIB

REPORT OF THE 15TH FINANCE COMMISSION FOR FY 2020-21

Why in News?

The report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, along with an Action Taken Report, was recently tabled in Parliament

- The Finance Commission is a constitutional body formed by the President of India to give suggestions on centre-state financial relations.
- The Fifteenth Finance Commission (XVFC)'s Term of Reference (ToR) was unique and wide-ranging in many ways. The Commission was asked to recommend performance incentives for States in many areas like the power sector, adoption of DBT, solid waste management etc.
- Another unique ToR was to recommend funding mechanism for defence and internal security.

Recommendations:

[A] Devolution of taxes to states:

- The criteria used by the Commission to determine each state's share in central taxes is Census 2011 population, income distance, demographic performance, forest and ecology and tax Effort

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(i) Vertical Devolution

- The share of states in the centre's taxes is recommended to be decreased from 42% during the 2015-20 period to 41% for 2020-21.
- The 1% decrease is to provide for the newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh from the resources of the central government.

(ii) Horizontal Devolution:

On horizontal devolution, XVFC agreed on the Census 2011 population.

[B] Grants in Aid:

- The following grants will be provided to states:

(i) **Revenue deficit grants:** The Commission recommended revenue deficit grants for 14 states

(ii) **Grants to local bodies:** The total grants to local bodies for 2020-21 has been fixed at Rs 90,000 crore, of which Rs 60,750 crore is recommended for rural local bodies (67.5%) and Rs 29,250 crore for urban local bodies (32.5%).

- o This allocation is 4.31% of the divisible pool. This is an increase over the grants for local bodies in 2019-20, which amounted to 3.54% of the divisible pool.

- o The grants will be divided between states based on population and area in the ratio 90:10. The grants will be made available to all three tiers of Panchayat-village, block, and district.

(iii) **Disaster management grants:** The Commission recommended setting up National and State Disaster Management Funds (NDMF and SDMF) for the promotion of local-level mitigation activities.

- o The Commission has recommended retaining the existing cost-sharing patterns between the centre and states to fund the SDMF (new) and the SDRF (existing).

- o The cost-sharing pattern between centre and states is (i) 75:25 for all states, and (ii) 90:10 for north-eastern and Himalayan states.

- The Commission has also proposed a framework for sector-specific and performance-based grants.

Sector-specific grants for the following sectors will be provided in the final report: (i) nutrition, (ii) health, (iii) pre-primary education, (iv) judiciary, (v) rural connectivity, (vi) railways, (vii) police training, and (viii) housing

Performance-based grants: Guidelines for performance-based grants include: (i) implementation of agricultural reforms, (ii) development of aspirational districts and blocks, (iii) power sector reforms, (iv) enhancing trade including exports, (v) incentives for education, and (vi) promotion of domestic and international tourism.

Recommendations on Fiscal Roadmap

1) **Fiscal deficit and debt levels:** It recommended that both central and state governments should focus on debt consolidation and comply with the fiscal deficit and debt levels as per their respective Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Acts.

2) **Off-budget borrowings:** It recommended that both the central and state governments should make full disclosure of extra-budgetary borrowings. The outstanding extra-budgetary liabilities should be clearly identified and eliminated in a time-bound manner.

3) **Statutory framework for public financial management:** The Commission recommended forming an expert group to draft legislation to provide for a statutory framework for sound public financial management system. It observed that an overarching legal fiscal framework is required which will provide for budgeting, accounting, and audit standards to be followed at all levels of government.

4) **Tax capacity:** The Commission noted that tax revenue is far below the estimated tax capacity of the country. Further, India's tax capacity has largely remained unchanged since the early 1990s. In contrast, tax revenue has been rising in other emerging markets. The Commission recommended: (i) broadening the tax base, (ii) streamlining tax rates, (iii) and increasing capacity and expertise of tax administration in all tiers of the government.

5) **GST implementation:** The Commission highlighted some challenges with the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). These include (i) large shortfall in collections as compared to original forecast, (ii) high volatility in collections, (iii) accumulation of large integrated GST credit, (iv) glitches in invoice and input tax matching, and (v) delay in refunds.

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Other recommendations

Financing of security-related expenditure: The ToR of the Commission required it to examine whether a separate funding mechanism for defence and internal security should be set up and if so, how it can be operationalised. In this regard, the Commission intends to constitute an expert group comprising representatives of the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs, and Finance. The Commission noted that the Ministry of Defence proposed following measures for this purpose: (i) setting up of a non-lapsable fund, (ii) levy of a cess, (iii) monetisation of surplus land and other assets, (iv) tax-free defence bonds, and (v) utilising proceeds of disinvestment of defence public sector undertakings. The expert group is expected to examine these proposals or alternative funding mechanisms.

“MON SHUGU’ PAPER ATTRACTED PM

Why in News?

A type of paper called ‘Mon Shugu’, which has been made in the hilly regions of Arunachal Pradesh for centuries, got a special mention in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s monthly radio programme ‘Mann Ki Baat’.

About Mon Shugu:

- Locals make this paper from the bark of a plant named ‘Shugu Sheng’, hence trees do not have to be cut to make this paper.
- No chemical is used in making this paper, thus, this paper is safe for the environment and for health too.
- There was a time when this paper was exported but with modern techniques, large amount of paper started getting made and this local art was pushed to the brink of closure.
- Now a local social worker Gombu has made an effort to rejuvenate this art, this is also giving employment to tribal brothers and sisters there
- Tawang is a town of Arunachal Pradesh’s capital Itanagar where locals make ‘Mon Shugu’ paper.

Source: The Tribune.

INDIA TO HOST INDIAN OCEAN REGION DEFENCE MINISTERS’ CONCLAVE ON THE SIDELINES OF AERO INDIA 2021

Why in News?

India will host Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Defence Ministers’ Conclave on February 04, 2021 on the margins of Aero India 2021.

About

- The broad theme of the conclave will be ‘Enhanced Peace, Security and Cooperation in the Indian Ocean’
- The conclave is an initiative to promote dialogue in an institutional, economic and cooperative environment that can foster the development of peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region.
- The conclave would address aspects related to Defence Industry co-operation amongst participating countries, sharing of resources available in Indian defence shipyards for design & shipbuilding, Indian Ports with friendly countries, Information-sharing towards increased maritime domain awareness, maritime surveillance and co-operation, Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HADR), Marine Pollution Response activities, Development of technologies and capabilities for harnessing marine resources, etc.
- The conclave will be instrumental in realising IOR into a region of ‘Peace, Progress and Prosperity’ and enhancing the co-operation and coordination among countries of the region for sustainable development and mutual coexistence
- India’s vision for Security and Growth for All (SAGAR), cannot be realised without close cooperation and engagements amongst countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- India is taking the lead in organizing an international platform for the world Aerospace and Defence (A&D) leaders to exchange ideas and forge partnerships towards synergizing the efforts in the A&D sector.

Aero India:

- Aero India exhibition is organized every alternate year.
- It is one of the major exhibition for aerospace and defence industries with a public air show. Aero India offers a unique platform to the international aviation sector to bolster business.
- Aero India 2021 is the 13th edition of Aero India being organised at Bengaluru, Karnataka from 03 - 05 February 2021.
- Aero India 2021 provides the opportunity to demonstrate products to the potential customer and investors.

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- The logo for Aero India is inspired by the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA). The Tejas LCA together with its variants is the smallest and lightest Multi-Role Supersonic Fighter Aircraft of its class.
- The tri-coloured silhouette of the Tejas LCA with the Ashok Chakra in the centre is the core motif of this logo, reminiscent of the spirit of New India.
- The defined outlines of the 'A' in Aero is symbolic of a fighter jet while conveying that Aero India is a premier global aerospace exhibition.

Source: PIB

PRELIMINARY SURVEY SHOWS DEPOSITS OF LITHIUM IN MANDYA DISTRICT OF KARNATAKA

Why in News?

- Surveys on the surface and limited subsurface by Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD), a constituent unit of the Department of Atomic Energy have shown the presence of Lithium resources of 1,600 tonnes (inferred category) in the pegmatites of Marlagalla – Allapatna area, Mandya district, Karnataka.

About:

- Lithium is a key element for new technologies and finds its use in ceramics, glass, telecommunication, and aerospace industries.
- The well-known uses of Lithium are Lithium-ion batteries, lubricating grease, high energy additive to rocket propellants, optical modulators for mobile phones, and as convertor to tritium used as a raw material for thermonuclear reactions i.e. fusion.
- The thermonuclear application makes Lithium as a "Prescribed substance" under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 which permits AMD for exploration of Lithium in various geological domains of the country.
- Due to the continuously increasing demand of Lithium-ion batteries, the requirement of Lithium has increased over the last few years.
- Plan for commercial exploitation of the lithium deposits can commence after the technical, social, and economic feasibility studies in the area.

Source: PIB

CONSUMER WELFARE FUND

A written reply by the Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Shri DanveRaosahebDadarao in Lok Sabha has been given regarding the same in Budget Session.

About Consumer Welfare Fund:

The government has set up the Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF) to promote and protect the welfare of the consumers, under the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Act, 1917.

It has worked successfully under the extant Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF) Guidelines, 2019 and achieved the objective for which it has been set up.

The Government has not revised these guidelines, except during the Covid-19 period.

The Government has taken the following other steps to promote and protect the welfare of the consumers by creating awareness and strengthening consumer movements in the country:

- 1) A Pan-India consumer awareness campaign "JagoGrahakJago" through print, electronic, outdoor, and social media through various agencies/ organizations/ Ministries.
- 2) Participation in various fairs/festivals/ events to generate awareness among the consumers living in rural and backward areas of the country.
- 3) Providing grant-in-aid to States/UTs to generate awareness in regional languages.
- 4) Dissemination of consumer awareness messages through social media.
- 5) Celebration of World Consumer Rights Day/National Consumer Day.
- 6) Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS) Mobile Care App.
- 7) The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 (CP Act 2019) has been implemented w.e.f. 20th July 2020.
- 8) The new Act covers e-commerce transactions, it allows electronic filing of complaints, hearing, and/or examining parties through video-conferencing for procedural ease and reduces inconvenience.
- 9) Consumer awareness programs are organized through the network of BIS Offices across the country for promoting the concept of standardization, certification and quality consciousness among consumers as well as manufacturers.

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- BIS has a full-fledged department, namely the Complaints Management and Enforcement Department.

Source: PIB

PM INAUGURATES 'CHAURI CHAURA' CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

Syllabus Section: History

Why in News?

Chauri Chaura' Centenary Celebrations at Chauri Chaura, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh has been inaugurated by Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi on 4th Feb 2021.

- The Prime Minister also released a postal stamp dedicated to the Chauri Chaura centenary event.
- The day marks 100 years of the 'Chauri Chaura' incident, a landmark event in India's fight for independence.

About:

- The incident happened hundred years ago in Chauri Chaura, Gorakhpur District of UP.
- In this, a large group of protesters participating in the Non-cooperation movement clashed with police who opened fire.
- In retaliation the demonstrators attacked and set fire to a police station, killing all of its occupants.
- The UP government has planned a year of celebrations in all 75 districts of the state in the memory of the martyrs.
- Mahatma Gandhi, who was strictly against violence, halted the non-co-operation movement on the national level on 12 February 1922, as a direct result of this incident.

KALIVELI WETLANDS

Syllabus Section: Environment

Why in News?

Move to declare Kaliveli wetlands a sanctuary: first declaration issued.

About :

- The Villupuram district administration has released the first declaration under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 with an aim to declare Kaliveli wetlands a bird sanctuary.
- Kaliveli is the second-largest brackish water lake in South India after Pulicat Lake.

- This declaration has been issued under Section 18 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 by the District Administration.
- This decision will enhance the conservation activities in the wetland.
- As per a 2004 assessment of BirdLife International and the Indian Bird Conservation Network, Kaliveli Lake supports more than 20,000 birds each year.
- The wetland is a feeding ground for long-distance migrant birds from the cold subarctic regions of Siberia and Central Asia.
- Migratory birds coming to the lake are Eurasian Curlew, Black-tailed Godwits, Ruff, White Stork, and Dublin.
- It is located near to the Marakkanam on the East Coast Road of Kaliveli Lake.

Source: PIB

THE COLOMBO PORT SETBACK FOR INDIA

Syllabus Section: International Matters

Why in News?

- After strong opposition from trade unions across the country, Sri Lanka has unilaterally pulled out of a 2019 agreement with India and Japan for developing the strategic East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.

Background:

- In 2019, India and Sri Lanka signed a memorandum of understanding for "co-operation on economic projects". The development and operation of the container terminal was one of the projects in the MoU.
- India had roped Japan into at least two of the projects listed in the MoU – the ECT, and an LNG Terminal/Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Kerawalapitiya/Colombo with a piped gas distribution system along with retail outlets for CNG etc — believing this would ensure the project comes through.
- As per a Memorandum of Co-operation signed by the previous Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority would have 100 per cent ownership of the ECT.

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- The Terminal Operations Company (TOC) conducting all East Container Terminal operations was to be jointly owned, with Sri Lanka retaining a 51% stake, and the joint venture partners 49%, according to a statement by the Ports and Shipping Ministry at the time.

Issue:

- Although India and Sri Lanka have seemingly friendly ties and much cultural affinity and people-to-people contact, the relationship is complex — and the majority Sinhala-Buddhist public opinion is layered with the memory of Indian intervention in the ethnic conflict.
- Unlike Chinese projects, big projects by India have always faced opposition in Sri Lanka.
- Sinhala-Buddhist politicians either ride such opposition opportunistically when it suits them, sometimes using this as a pretext over the real reason, or are reluctant to go counter to the public sentiment for fear of being attacked for surrendering to India.
- For this reason, India had roped Japan into at least two of the projects listed in the MoU – the ECT, and an LNG Terminal/ Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Kerawalapitiya/Colombo with a piped gas distribution system along with retail outlets for CNG, etc — believing this would ensure the project comes through.
- However, the old relationship between Sri Lanka and Japan has undergone changes as China's footprint over Colombo has grown.
- Just before the 2020 elections, port workers striking against the agreement ended their protest only after (now Prime Minister) Mahinda Rajapaksa assured them that there would be no Indian involvement in the port.

Source: The Indian Express

ASI UNEARTH'S ANCIENT TEMPLE FLOOR NEAR SUKA-SARI COMPLEX IN BHUBANESWAR

Why in News?

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) officers in Odisha have written to the organization's director normal and sought an inquiry into demolitions by Bhubaneswar Growth Authority (BDA) across the 12th century Lingaraj temple.

About:

- ASI, is the custodian of the Lingaraj shrine, which is protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act).
- Under AMASR Act, the 100-metre space surrounding a monument is said a prohibited zone.
- Other 200 metres within the periphery a regulated space for building, reconstruction, repairs and renovation work.
- Any building or restore work in that periphery requires permission from the Nationwide Monument Authority and ASI.

Lingaraj Temple:

- Built during the 11th century AD. The temple has been described as “One of the finest examples of purely Hindu Temple in India” by noted critic and historian James Fergusson (1808-1886).
- The temple marks the culmination of the temple architecture in Bhubaneswar which was the cradle of the Kalinga School of Temple Architecture. The sprawling temple complex has one hundred and fifty subsidiary shrines.
- The temple can broadly be divided into four main halls. The Garba Griha (Sanctum Sanctorum), the Yojana Mandapa (the hall for prayers) the Natya Mandapa (dance and music hall), and the Bhoga Mandapa (where devotees can have the Prasad (offering) of the Lord)
- The exquisite carvings depicting chores of daily life, the activity centers, apart from being a place of worship makes the temple a place for social and cultural gathering, somewhat like a modern community center.
- Lingaraj is referred to as ‘Swayambhu’ – (self-originated Shivling). Another important aspect of the temple is that it signifies the syncretization of Shaivism and Vaishnavism sects in Odisha.
- The other attraction of the temple is the Bindusagar Lake, located in the north side of the temple.

Source: The Indian Express

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MYANMAR'S MILITARY COUP

Syllabus Section: International Affairs

What is the news?

- Myanmar's military staged a coup detaining de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and declaring it had taken control of the country for one year under a state of emergency.
- The intervention came with rising tensions between the military, which ruled the country for nearly five decades, and the civilian government over allegations of fraud in November's elections.
- The military had signaled its intentions to seize power to settle its claims of irregularities in the polls, which Suu Kyi's party won easily.

How was the coup carried out?

- The military detained the leaders of the governing NLD party and Myanmar's civilian leadership, including Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, along with various ministers and even the opposition.
- The military quickly seized control of the country's infrastructure, suspending most television broadcasts and canceling all domestic and international flights, according to reports.
- Telephone and internet access was suspended in major cities.
- The stock market and commercial banks were closed, and long lines were seen outside ATMs in some places.
- In Yangon, the country's largest city and former capital, residents ran to markets to stock up on food and other supplies.

Aung San Suu Kyi

- Suu Kyi came to power as state councilor in 2016 after the country's first fully democratic vote in decades.
- Her ascension to leadership was seen as a critical moment in the transition of Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, to democracy from military dictatorship.
- Suu Kyi, the daughter of the country's independence hero General Aung San, spent more than 15 years under house arrest.

- Her time in detention made her an international icon, and she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.
- Since her release, her reputation has been tarnished by her cooperation with the military and her deadly campaign against the Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority group.

India's response

- India is "deeply concerned" with the return to military rule, which is a repeat of events thirty years ago.
- It sees only the option to engage, building on its outreach in recent years via the security and defense establishment.
- India seeks a more pragmatic approach, engaging the military while pushing for more freedoms and democracy in Myanmar.

Source: The Hindu

PM SVANIDHI SCHEME: MOU WITH ZOMATO

Syllabus Section: Indian Economy

Why in news?

- As a part of Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme, MoHUA entered into MoU with Zomato, one of the largest online platforms for ordering and delivery of food in India, to onboard street food vendors on its food-tech platform.
- This will give street food vendors online access to thousands of consumers and help these vendors grow their businesses.
- Further, MoHUA launched the Mobile Application for PMSVANidhi to link beneficiaries and their families to various Central Government Schemes

About

- Covid-19 pandemic has restricted consumers from stepping out and forced them to follow physical distancing norms.
- In the given scenario it is important to connect Street Food Vendors with technology-enabled platforms to help them grow their business, thus helping them gain financially.

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- In a first of its kind initiative, MoHUA entered into an MoU with Swiggy on October 5, 2020, and it is now joining hands with Zomato to empower Street Food Vendors with digital technology and facilitate greater income-earning opportunities by being present on a popular food-tech platform.
- MoHUA has coordinated with the key stakeholders including Municipal Corporations, fssai, Zomato and GST officials to ensure that street food vendors are facilitated in completing the necessary prerequisites for this initiative.
- Under the MoU, initially MoHUA and Zomato will run a pilot program by on-boarding 300 vendors across six cities namely – Bhopal, Ludhiana, Nagpur, Patna, Raipur, Vadodara.
- The street vendors will be helped with PAN and fssai registration, training on technology/ partner app usage, menu digitization and pricing, hygiene and packaging best practices.
- Upon the successful completion of the pilot, MoHUA and Zomato plan to expand this initiative across the country in phases.
- As on February 4th, 2021, data collection of over 95,000 PMSVANidhi beneficiaries along with their 50, 000 family members is done.
- First batch of Camps are ongoing in the select cities (1st to 6th February 2021) to facilitate linkages of PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families to eligible Central Schemes.

Source: PIB

KERALA TO OPEN ITS FIRST HUMAN MILK BANK

Syllabus Section: Events related to current issues

Why in news?

- The Health Minister of Kerala will open the state's first Human Milk Bank, a state-of-art facility, at the Ernakulam General Hospital on February 5, 2021.
- The Human Milk Bank which has been set up with the support of the Rotary Club of Cochin Global will ensure the breast milk for the newborn babies in the hospital, who are not being breastfed by their own mothers who may be deceased or sick or because of the insufficient production of the breast milk.
- Although, approx. 3600 babies are born in the general hospital in a year, around 600 to 1000 babies are admitted into the newborn intensive care unit- NICU. The concept of Human Milk Bank had come to India almost 32 years back, however, Kerala did not have a milk bank till now.

Bringing Human Milk Bank to Kerala:

- The Rotary Club of Cochin Global took the responsibility of bringing the project to Kerala with two such breast milk banks- one at Ernakulam and the other at the Jubilee Medical Mission

Hospital at Thrissur.

- Providing the low-birth-weight premature babies, whose mothers are not able to provide sufficient milk or the babies who are separated from their mothers because of many reasons, with the pasteurized breast milk from the bank will help in reducing the risk of infections and will boost their immunity.

PMSVANidhi

- A mobile application under PMSVANidhi se Samriddhi was launched today to assist city officials to conduct door to door data collection. MoHUA launched the program PMSVANidhi se Samriddhi— socio-economic profiling of PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families in 125 select cities, on 4th January 2021, as an additional component of the PMSVANidhi Scheme.
- This mobile application is available on Google Play store. The application will enable ULB field functionaries to conduct the socio-economic profiling activity even without any internet connection as well. Quality Council of India- implementing partner for this program, partnered with MoHUA to develop this mobile application.
- The program aims to map the socio-economic profile of the PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families, assess their potential eligibility for various Central welfare schemes and facilitate the linkages to these schemes, for their holistic development and socio-economic upliftment.

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About

- The bank will consist of refrigerators, pasteurization units, RO plants, deep freezers, computers, and sterilizing equipment. It has been set up at the cost of Rs. 35 lakh.
- All the safety protocols, procedures for preserving, collecting, and providing milk to needy children will be ensured as per the guidelines by the government.
- The collected milk for babies can be stored up to 6 months safely in the bank if needed before it is given to an infant.
- The milk, in the beginning, will be provided free of cost to only the babies who are admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit of the hospital.
- The donors of the milk will be the mothers from the hospital who delivered their babies there. The hospital will also have their health statistics.
- The mothers with the excess milk will be encouraged to participate in the cause to save the lives of other newly born babies.
- The Indian Medical Association- IMA along with the Indian Association of Paediatricians also provided a trained nursing staff for operating the milk bank at the hospital in Kerala.

Source: The Hindu

'SWITCH DELHI' CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Syllabus section: Polity and Governance/ Environment

Why in news

Delhi Government recently launched the 'Switch Delhi' campaign to promote electric vehicles and appealed to people to buy such vehicles to combat pollution in the city and the government will hire only electric vehicles for various purposes in the next six weeks.

About

- Government asked delivery chains and big companies, resident welfare associations, market associations, malls, and cinema halls to promote electric vehicles and set up charging stations at their premises.
- It also appealed to the youth to buy an electric vehicle as their first vehicle to make the campaign a mass movement.

- "In the 'Switch Delhi' campaign, awareness will be created about the benefits of electric vehicles and how it can contribute to making Delhi clean and pollution-free.
- It appeals to people to take part in the campaign to promote the replacement of polluting petrol and diesel vehicles with electric vehicles and make a contribution towards a pollution-free Delhi.
- Under its electric vehicle policy, the Delhi government has planned extensive subsidies on the purchase of electric two-wheelers and four-wheelers, besides waiving road tax and registration charges.
- More than 6,000 electric vehicles have been purchased since the policy launch in August 2020. The government has also issued tenders for setting up 100 charging stations across the city.
- The government has fixed an ambitious target of 25 percent electric vehicles among total vehicle registrations in Delhi by 2024.

Source: The Hindu

RELIANCE INDUSTRY GETS WORLD'S FIRST 'CARBON-NEUTRAL' OIL FROM US

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology/ Economy

Why in news?

- Reliance has sourced the world's first consignment of 'carbon-neutral oil' from the United States. The move comes as the company looks to become a net zero-carbon company by 2035.
- The US supplier said in a statement that Reliance got 2 million barrels of the consignment. The Oxy Low Carbon Ventures (OLCV), which is a division of US oil major Occidental had delivered the carbon-neutral oil to Reliance.
- Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance operates the world's largest single-location oil refining complex at Jamnagar in Gujarat with a capacity of 68.2 million tonnes a year.

How will the oil be carbon-neutral?

- The Oxy Low Carbon Ventures and Macquarie will offset carbon dioxide equivalent to that associated with the production, delivery and refining of the crude oil and the use of the resulting product through the retirement of carbon offset credits.

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- This will make the oil 'carbon-neutral'.
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Key Highlights

- A Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) Sea Pearl containing the carbon-neutral oil unloaded the cargo at Jamnagar on January 28.
- The Oxy Low Carbon Ventures stated that the oil was produced in the US Permian Basin by Occidental and delivered to Reliance in India.
- Macquarie had arranged and structured the bundled offset supply and retirement.
- The transaction is a first step in the creation of a new market for climate-differentiated crude oil.
- It is also an immediate executable solution that helps promote investments in longer-term, industrial-scale decarbonization strategies.
- It will also bridge the development of a further differentiated petroleum product, net-zero oil, which will mark a major step towards fulfilling Occidental's net-zero ambitions and commitment to addressing climate change.
- The net-zero oil will be developed through the capture and sequestration of atmospheric CO₂ via industrial-scale direct air capture (DAC) facilities and geological sequestration.

Background

- Reliance had in July 2020 unveiled the plans to turn Reliance into a net carbon zero company by 2035.
- This can be done by adopting new technologies to convert its carbon dioxide emissions into useful products and chemicals.
- Occidental, on the other hand, is the first US-based international energy company to announce an ambition to achieve net-zero GHG emissions associated with the use of its products by 2050.

- The company has been using carbon-dioxide in its enhanced oil recovery operations in the Permian Basin for over 40 years.

Source: Economic times

GEOTHERMAL POWER PROJECT

Syllabus section: Geography

Why in news?

The first geothermal power project of India will be established at Puga village of eastern Ladakh.

About:

- In the first phase of the pilot project, one megawatt (MW) power generation capacity will be generated.
- India's first-ever geothermal power project, known as Geothermal Field Development Project is planned to commission by the end of 2022. The tripartite MOU was signed between ONGC Energy, LAHDC, Leh, and the Power Department of UT Ladakh.
- In the first phase, the pilot project implemented by the ONGC-OEC will explore within the depth of 500 meters and it is planned to supply 24 hours free power to 10 neighboring villages that are not connected with the northern grid for power supply.
- The second Phase is proposed for deeper and lateral exploration of geothermal reservoirs by drilling the optimal number of wells and setting up of a higher capacity demo plant in Ladakh. The second phase will be the Research and Development stage or demonstration of the project.
- In the third phase, it is planned to promote joint ventures and commercial projects. Puga is a place where it is uncovered with a potential of more than 100 MW of geothermal energy.

Source: News on Air

GLACIAL LAKE BURST OR AVALANCHE

Syllabus section: Geography and disaster management

Why in News?

A glacial lake burst, a cloud burst or an avalanche, the impact of climate change or "development" — scientists are not sure what triggered the sudden surge of water near Chamoli in Uttarakhand Sunday morning that briefly raised fears of a repeat of the 2013 disaster in the state.

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About glacial lake burst:

- A GLOF is a type of outburst flood that occurs when the dam containing a glacial lake fails.
- An event similar to a GLOF, where a body of water contained by a glacier melts or overflows the glacier, is called a Jökulhlaup.
- The dam can consist of glacier ice or a terminal moraine.
- Failure can happen due to erosion, a buildup of water pressure, an avalanche of rock or heavy snow, an earthquake, volcanic eruptions under the ice, or a glacier collapses into it.

Retreating glaciers

- Retreating glaciers, like several in the Himalayas, usually result in the formation of lakes at their tips, called proglacial lakes, often bound only by sediments and boulders.
- If the boundaries of these lakes are breached, it can lead to large amounts of water rushing down to nearby streams and rivers, gathering momentum on the way by picking up sediments, rocks, and other material, and resulting in flooding downstream.

Source: Indian Express

NITI AAYOG ORDERS STUDY ON 'ECONOMIC IMPACT' OF JUDICIAL DECISIONS

Syllabus section: Polity

Why in News?

Government think tank NITI Aayog has asked Jaipur-headquartered research organization Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) International to conduct a study on the “economic impact” of various judgments delivered by the Supreme Court, the high courts, and quasi-judicial bodies such as the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the “judicial activism” of such courts and tribunals, according to documents

Objective:

Narrative building for sensitizing the judiciary on the economic impact of their decisions” and the findings will be used as a “training input for judges of commercial courts, NGT, HCs, SC

Highlights:

- Judicial decisions have far-reaching economic impacts that are often not taken into account at the time of decision making.

- The absence of ex-ante analysis of the economic costs associated with a decision is further exacerbated when judicial activism by courts and tribunals is also in play.
- The study is to do an objective cost-benefit analysis of the economic impact of the decisions.
- The study is also a part of the larger umbrella project undertaken by NITI Aayog under which it wants to establish a judicial performance index, which would measure the performance of judges at district courts and subordinate levels, as per senior government official.

The five judgment include:

- Economic impact of the ban imposed by the SC in March 2019 on the construction of a greenfield airport at Mopa, Goa.
- SC’s February 2018 ban on iron ore mining in Goa.
- NGT ban on sand mining in the Yamuna river in Gautam Buddha Nagar in the year 2013.
- SC ban on construction of buildings in Delhi and National Capital Region
- SC’s decision to reject the opening of Vedanta’s Sterlite copper plant.

Source: Indian Express

SRIVILLIPUTHUR-MEGAMALAI - 5TH TIGER RESERVE IN TN

Syllabus section: Environment and Ecology

Why in News?

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has approved the creation of the fifth tiger reserve in Tamil Nadu.

About:

- The tiger reserve will surround the Meghamalai and the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuaries within it.
- The approval was given in the backdrop of the demand by the environmental activists.
- The activists were demanding the creation of a tiger reserve linking the two sanctuaries in the adjoining areas of Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala.
- They also demand to connect the tiger reserve with the Tirunelveli Wildlife Sanctuary and the Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve.

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- The environmentalists seek to make a contiguous corridor for the tigers to move.
- The tiger reserve will spread to 1.48 lakh hectares of land comprising of the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary, Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary, and Tirunelveli Wildlife Sanctuary.

Srivilliputhur Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is also known as the Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary (GSWS).
- The sanctuary was established in the year 1988 with the objective of protecting the Near-threatened grizzled giant squirrel.
- It is bordered by the Periyar Tiger Reserve in the southwest.
- The sanctuary is also called one of the best-preserved forests lying south of the Palghat Gap.

Source: The Hindu

TIANWEN-1

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in news?

China's Tianwen-1 space probe has sent back its first image of Mars. The image was released by the China National Space Administration (CNSA)

About:

- The Mars probe sent back a black and white photo, which shows geological features of Mars including the Schiaparelli crater and the Valles Marineris, a vast stretch of canyons on the Martian surface.
- The photo was taken about 2.2 million kilometers from Mars, as per the China National Space Administration.

The Tianwen-1 Mission:

- It will lift off on a Long March 5 rocket, from the Wenchang launch center.
- It will carry 13 payloads (seven orbiters and six rovers) that will explore the planet.
- It is an all-in-one orbiter, lander and rover system.
- Orbiter: It is a spacecraft designed to orbit a celestial body (astronomical body) without landing on its surface.
- Lander: It is a strong, lightweight spacecraft structure, consisting of a base and three sides "petals" in the shape of a tetrahedron (pyramid-shaped). It is a protective "shell" that houses the rover and protects it, along with the airbags, from the forces of impact.

- Rover: It is a planetary surface exploration device designed to move across the solid surface on a planet or other planetary-mass celestial bodies.

Source: Space.com

400 CRORE INVESTMENT IN GOA'S FISHERIES SECTOR

Syllabus section: economy

Why in News?

The Union Fisheries Minister Giriraj Singh announced on February 7, 2021, that an investment of 400 crores will be made in Goa to make this state a fisheries hub of India.

About:

- Goa has the potential to become the fisheries hub of the country.
- Sea cage culture will be promoted in Goa.
- It will lead to an increase in the export of fishes from the state. To be started with 1000 cages, along with the state's fisheries department.
- The amount will be used to revive the fisheries industry and it will also ensure safe fishing.
- As per the plan, 30 fish landing jetties will be created in order for the fishermen to anchor their boats near their villages.
- The jetties would also be linked to the mainstream by constructing roads.
- Goa has nine landing jetties already that are used for fishing and tourism purposes.
- Further, the central government will also be appointing "Sagar Mitra" for all the 70 fishing villages in Goa.
- The Sagar Mitra would help fishermen to communicate with the government.

Source: Livemint

YUDH ABHYAS

Syllabus section: internal security

Why in news?

The 16th edition of 'Yudh Abhyas', India-US joint military exercise has begun in Rajasthan. The drill has come days after the air forces of France and India held a 5-day joint exercise in Rajasthan in January 2021.

Objective:

The joint military exercise near the India-Pakistan border aims at enhancing the interoperability and cooperation between the two armies. It will also be focusing on counter-terrorism operations under the United Nations mandate.

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Importance:

- The exercise with the United States Army is significant in terms of the security challenges that are faced by both India and the US in the backdrop of global terrorism.
- It will enhance the level of defence cooperation between the armies which will foster bilateral relations between both countries.
- The military exercise will also reiterate India's role as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The exercise at this time will also be significant in the backdrop of recent developments on the Northern borders.
- The military exercise between two powerful nations will convey their strategic postures as well as an enhanced upward trajectory in India-US relations.

Source: PIB

WORLD'S FIRST ENERGY ISLAND

Syllabus section: Geography

Why in News?

Denmark recently approved a plan of constructing the world's first energy field island in the North Sea. The energy island will be producing and storing enough green energy for covering the electricity needs of 3 million European households.

About:

- The artificial island in the North Sea, which is in its initial phase, will be the size of 18 football fields.
- It will be linked to hundreds of offshore wind turbines and will be supplying power to the households and green hydrogen for use in aviation, shipping, industry, and heavy transport.
- The move of building an energy island has come as the European Union unveiled plans of transforming its electricity system to rely mainly on renewable energy within a decade and for increasing its offshore wind capacity 25-fold by the year 2050.
- The energy island in the North Sea will be costing around 210 billion Danish crowns (\$33.9 billion). It will be located 80 kms off the west coast of Denmark and its surrounding wind turbines will have an initial capacity of 3 gigawatts.
- The island will be operational around 2033.

- The energy island in the North Sea is a significant part of Denmark's legally binding target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 70% by 2030 from 1990 levels. It is one of the world's most ambitious targets.

Source: Economic times

HOPE: UAE'S MARS MISSION

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in News?

The United Arab Emirates' first mission to Mars entered the orbit of the red planet on Tuesday, seven months after the Emirati-built 'Hope Probe' was launched from Tanegashima in Japan. With this, the UAE has become the fifth country after the US, Russia, China, the EU, and India, to reach the Martian orbit.

About:

- First announced in July 2014, the Emirates Mars Mission was developed and operated by the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in collaboration with the University California, Berkeley, Arizona State University and the University of Colorado-Boulder in the United States.
- In July 2020, it was launched from the Tanegashima Space Centre in Japan aboard a Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' H-II A rocket and its launch became the 45th for H-II A. Carrying three instruments, including a high-resolution camera and a spectrometer, the spacecraft is on an orbital mission to collect data on Martian climate dynamics and help scientists understand why Mars's atmosphere is decaying into space.
- Hope is the UAE's fourth space mission and first interplanetary one.
- Once it is successfully able to reach the planet, it will start orbiting the planet. Its overall mission life is one Martian year, which is about 687 days on Earth.

What is the objective of the mission?

- The primary objective of the mission is to study Martian weather dynamics. By correlating the lower atmosphere and upper atmosphere conditions, the probe will look into how weather changes the escape of hydrogen and oxygen into space.
- By measuring how much hydrogen and oxygen is spilling into space, scientists will be able to look into why Mars lost so much of its early atmosphere and liquid water.

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- Al-Amal will be the first “true weather satellite” orbiting around the planet. But the UAE also wants the mission to inspire the country’s youth to take up careers in the sciences.
- The government also hopes that the mission will boost the UAE’s science and technology sector.

How did the Hope Probe swing into orbit around Mars?

In order to be captured by Mars’ gravity, the spacecraft had to pull off an intricate braking manoeuvre known as the Mars Orbit Insertion (MOI) to slow down its speed considerably. It was approaching the planet at over 120,000km/h (relative to the Sun) and had to execute a 27-minute burn on its braking engines so that it could avoid the risk of missing its orbit or getting lost in deep space.

Source: Indian Express

UNITED STATES TO RE-JOIN UNHRC

Syllabus section: International relation

Why in News?

The US will rejoin the UNHRC three years after the former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the global body.

Background:

- Donald Trump withdrew from the world body’s main human rights because of its disproportionate focus on Israel.
- Israel had received the largest number of critical council resolutions so far with respect to any other country.
- So, the Trump administration discussed the issue with the body’s membership.
- The members include Cuba, China, Russia, Eritrea and Venezuela. All these countries have been accused of human rights abuses.

What will be the US’s role once it returns to the council?

- Washington will be returning to the council as a nonvoting observer and the full membership will be assessed later in 2021.
- According to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in the immediate term, the country will engage with the Council as an observer. In that capacity, it will have an opportunity to speak in the Human Rights Council, participate in negotiations as well as partner with others for resolutions.

- The return of the US to the council has come after the nations facing widespread criticism for the human rights violation tried to influence how the Council assesses wrongdoings.

About UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR)

- UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the UN system.
- The agency is involved in strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights across the world.
- It looks after the situations of human rights violations and recommends on the situations.
- The council was created in the year 2006 by the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251.
- The first session of the council took place in 2006 three months after its establishment.
- The agency is involved in discussing all the thematic human rights issues.
- The UNHRC was created after replacing the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).
- The council comprises of the 47 UN Member States. The member states are elected by the UNGA by a direct and secret ballot.

Source: Times of India

FORMATION AND PROMOTION OF 10,000 FARMER PRODUCE ORGANIZATIONS (FPOS)

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in news?

In a bid to transform agriculture into a sustainable enterprise through farmer producer organisations (FPOs), the central government has proposed to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs in the country with budgetary provision of Rs 6,865 crore.

About:

- Formation and promotion of FPOs is the first step for converting Krishi (farmer) into “Atmanirbhar Krishi”, which will enhance cost-effective production and productivity and higher net incomes to the member of the FPO.
- The move would also help improve rural economy and create job opportunities for rural youths in the villages themselves.

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- FPOs will be developed in produce clusters, wherein agricultural and horticultural produces are grown or cultivated, for leveraging economies of scale and improving market access for members.

Benefits of the scheme:

- The scheme has been launched because the agriculture sector plays a crucial role in economic development and Nation building. The country is also be at the forefront in the development of agriculture across the world.
- Further, India wants to double its agricultural export by 2022.
- But, more than 86% of farmers in India are small and marginal. They need the facilities of improved technology, better input, credit, and more markets in order to incentivize them. It would help them to produce the better quality commodity.
- Thus, if these small, marginal, and landless farmers are aggregated into FPOs, it would help them to enhance the economic strength & market linkages of farmers. This in turn will help in enhancing their income.

Source: Business today

KARNATAKA DIGITAL ECONOMY MISSION (KDEM)

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister announced that Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM) will be creating around 10 lakh jobs in the state by the year 2025.

About:

- These jobs will be created in the Information Technology (IT) sector for the unemployed youths in the state.
- The Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM) aims to increase the contribution of GSDP to the digital economy by 30 percent and launch the 'Beyond Bengaluru' report.
- Government would also focus on reducing the rural-urban divide by establishing the necessary infrastructure to improve connectivity, provide power round the clock and strengthen the digital economy, even in remote parts of the state.
- 51 percent stake in industries have been allowed in order to make this office more industry-friendly.

- While 49 percent of the stake has been kept with the government.
- The government will act as a facilitator in the "Karnataka digital economy mission office" rather than an authority.

KDEM is founded on a public-private partnership model, where industry organizations such as NASSCOM, The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham), India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA), and Vision Group Startup-holds 51 percent stake.

Source: Economic times

WORLD'S SMALLEST REPTILE

Syllabus section: environment and ecology

Why in News?

A chameleon discovered in the island country of Madagascar by scientists from Germany and Madagascar may be the world's smallest adult reptile. The discovery has been reported in the journal Scientific Reports.

About:

- The team found one male and one female of the species, named *Brookesia nana*, during an expedition in 2012.
- The male has a length (snout to vent) of 13.5 mm and a total length of 21.6 mm when the tail is included.
- Previously, the chameleon species *Brookesia Micra* was thought to be the smallest.
- It is the smallest species among the 11,500 known species of reptiles. This has been stated by the Bavarian State Collection of Zoology in Munich
- The chameleon is tiny enough to perch comfortably on a fingertip
- Brookesia Micra* lives on less than two square kilometers
- It, however, has the same world-weary expression as its larger cousins around the world.

Source: Indian express

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MAKHANA

Syllabus section: economy

Why in news?

Union Minister of Agriculture informed Lok Sabha about National Research Centre for Makhana.

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About:

- ICAR-National Research Centre (NRC) for Makhana, Darbhanga (Bihar) was sanctioned by the Department of Agricultural Research & Education, Govt. of India, as a new scheme during the 9th Five Year Plan period (1997–2002) for Conservation, Research & Development of the Makhana crop.
- However, during the 10th plan period (2002–2007), the NRC for Makhana was merged and brought under the administrative control of ICAR-Research Complex for Eastern Region (RCER), Patna, without changing the mandate.
- Darbhanga in particular and Mithila, in general, is the major Makhana producing region in the country.

About Makhana:

- In India, makhana cultivation takes place mainly in West Bengal, Bihar, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and UP.
- But, Bihar alone is the largest producer of Makhana with 90 percent of overall production across the world.
- It belongs to the Nymphaeaceae family.
- It is a perennial plant.
- It grows in stagnant water like ponds, swamps, and wetlands in the tropical climatic areas very much similar to the lotus.

Source: PIB

NATIONAL MONSOON MISSION

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in News?

Under the Monsoon Mission, Ministry has developed state-of-the-art weather and climate prediction models, which are now in operational use.

Objective:

- The overall objective of NMM is to improve the monsoon prediction over India on all time scales and hence it is implemented for the whole country which includes all the States and UTs.
- Augmentation of observations and their assimilation into weather and climate models
- Understanding the physical processes through field campaigns

- Developing and running of high-resolution models for giving forecast in all scales
- Translating science to service and its itdelivery to society
- Improving and acquiring the required infrastructure

About:

- These models include models for short-range to medium range (1-10 days), extended-range (10days to 30 days) and seasonal (up to one season).
- The models developed under the National Monsoon Mission (NMM) have shown very high skill in predicting important weather events on different time scales during the last 3years.

Following are the targets of the Monsoon Mission:

- Development of a seamless prediction system using monsoon mission model, on different time scales, like Seasonal (for whole Monsoon season), Extended range (up-to 4 weeks), Short range prediction (up-to 5days).
- Initiate and coordinate working partnership between Indian and foreign institutes to develop a system for prediction of extremes and climate applications
- Develop and implement system for climate applications having social impacts (such as agriculture, flood forecast, extreme events forecast, wind energy,etc.)
- Advanced data assimilation system for preparing high quality data for model predictions.

Source: PIB

MAJOR PORT AUTHORITIES BILL 2020

Syllabus section: Polity

Why in news?

The “Major Ports Authorities Bill, 2020” was passed in the Rajya Sabha on February 10, 2021. The bill was passed using the ballot votes. 84 votes were in favor while 44 votes were against it.

About:

- The Bill aims to provide for the regulation, operation and planning of Major Ports in India and to vest the administration, control and management of such ports upon the Boards of Major Port Authorities and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

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- The Bill was moved so that India's major ports can compete with major world-class ports.
- The bill also boosts port land usage and it will amplify competition in port tariffs.

Provisions of the bill

- The bill aims to provide more autonomy in decision-making.
- It will provide autonomy to the 12 major ports of India, namely Deendayal (erstwhile Kandla) port, Mumbai port, JNPT port, Mormugao port, New Mangalore port, Cochin port, Chennai port, Kamarajar (erstwhile Ennore) port, V O Chidambaranar port, Visakhapatnam port, Paradip port, and Kolkata (including Haldia) port.
- The bill will also professionalize the governance of the port with the formation of boards.
- The bill will replace the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.
- It comprises of the provisions of creating a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port that in turn will replace the existing Port Trusts.

Source: Indian Express

NORD STREAM 2 PIPELINE

Syllabus section: International relation

Why in News?

In a development that could increase tensions between the USA and Germany, the association which is building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline has said that it has resumed work on the controversial project.

Background:

- In 2015, Gazprom and 5 other European energy firms decided to build Nord Stream 2, valued at around \$11 billion. The 1,200 km pipeline will run from Ust-Luga in Russia to Greifswald in Germany, and will carry 55 billion cubic metres of gas per year.
- The under-construction pipeline will run along the already-completed Nord Stream 1 system, and the two together will supply an aggregate of 110 billion cubic metres of gas to Germany per year.
- The pipeline falls in German and Danish territory, and all but 150 km of pipes for the project have already been laid.

Significance:

The project, which will double the amount of natural gas exported from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea.

Why is the pipeline controversial?

- Nord Stream 2 has drawn criticism from the US, where it is believed that the project would increase Europe's dependence on Russia for natural gas, thus strengthening its President.
- Currently, EU countries already rely on Russia for 40% of their gas needs.

Source: Indian express

SAKSHAM PORTAL AND SEAWEED CULTIVATION MISSION

Syllabus section: governance

Why in News?

The Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC) have launched a job portal called SAKSHAM to map the skills of workers as required by the MSMEs. It also launched a Seaweed Cultivation Mission.

About SAKSHAM Portal

- TIFAC highlighted that the Saksham portal will help in eliminating the middlemen and labour contractors.
- It will also help to identify the skill proficiency level.
- The portal will also help in the development of skill cards for 'shramiks' (workers).
- This initiative will facilitate the placement of 10 lakh blue-collar jobs across India.
- The portal will directly connect the workers with MSMEs and eliminate the need of middlemen or labour contractors.
- This portal will also reduce the hardship of workers to find the jobs in nearby MSMEs.
- The portal is significant because it would help the labourers to find workers who were compelled to return to their native place amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Seaweed Cultivation Mission

- The Seaweed Cultivation is also called as kelp farming. It is the practice of cultivating and harvesting the seaweed. The process comprises of management of naturally found batches in the simplest form. While in the advanced form, the process comprises of fully controlling the life cycle of the algae.

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- As per the estimate of the department, if seaweed cultivation is done in 10 million hectares or in the 5% of the Exclusive Economic Zone area in India, it would help in providing employment to 50 million people.
- Thus, with this objective, TIFAC will showcase a model, in collaboration with other in-line ministries, of the commercial farming of seaweeds and its processing. Seaweed Cultivation would help in boosting the economy.

Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC)

- It is an autonomous organization.
- It was set up in the year 1988. It works under the Department of Science & Technology.
- The organization works in the technology domain and assess technology trajectories. It strives for the development of technology by leveraging technology innovation.

Source: PIB

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Syllabus section: Polity

Why in News?

NITI Aayog has constituted a sub-group to prepare a National Action Plan for Migrant Workers.

About:

- Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 was subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSH Code)
- The Code was notified in September 2020
- Provision of OSH Code: Decent working conditions, minimum wages, grievance redressal mechanisms, protection from abuse and exploitation, enhancement of skills, and social security.
- All categories of organised and unorganized workers including Migrant workers are targeted.
- Applicability: Every establishment in which 10 or more inter-state migrant workers are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding 12 months.
- **Composition:** Members from various Ministries, subject experts, NGOs, and civil society organizations.
- **Objective:** To prepare a tangible action plan to address issues related to migrant workers.

Source: PIB

INDIA'S FIRST CNG TRACTOR

Syllabus section: environment and ecology

Why in News?

The Union Minister recently launched the country's first CNG tractor that will be able to save about Rs. 1 lakh annually on fuel costs.

About:

- The first-ever tractor of India, converted to CNG, was formally launched by the Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways.
- It will help the Indian farmers in increasing their income by lowering the costs as well as help in creating job opportunities in rural India.
- The farmers, with this tractor, can save more than Rs. 1 lakh annually, which will further help them in improving their livelihoods.
- The retrofitted tractor produces more power/equal in comparison to the vehicles running on diesel.

Conversion to CNG: What are the benefits?

- It is a clean fuel that has the lowest content of carbon and other pollutants.
- CNG is economical as it has zero lead and is non-dilutive, non-corrosive, and non-contaminating, which in return helps in increasing the engine's life as well as require less regular maintenance.
- CNG is cheaper as its prices are far more consistent than the fluctuating petrol prices.
- The average mileage given by CNG vehicles is better than that of petrol/diesel driven vehicles.
- It is also safer as CNG tanks come with a tight seal, which further reduces the possibility of an explosion in the event of a spill or while refueling.

About CNG:

- CNG in the future, as at present, around 12 million vehicles have already been powered by natural gas around the world and more municipalities and companies are joining the CNG movement every day.
- The overall emissions have also been reduced by 70% as compared to diesel. CNG will help in saving up to 50% on the fuel cost as the current diesel prices are Rs. 77.43 liters, whereas CNG is only Rs. 42 per kg.

Source: LiveMint

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JALABHISHEKAM CAMPAIGN

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

The Union Defence Minister recently, virtually inaugurated more than 57,000 water structures in Madhya Pradesh under the 'Jalabhishekam Campaign'.

Key Highlights

- Under the campaign, 57,000 water structures costing over Rs. 2,000 crores have been inaugurated under the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Irrigation Scheme.

The structures were created in the COVID-19 era.

- These water structures by the government will irrigate 2.50 lakh hectares of land without submerging an inch of it and these small structures will do the work that the big dams cannot do.
- Jalabhishekam Campaign will be helpful in achieving the goal of water conservation and building self-reliant Madhya Pradesh.
- The campaign will be fulfilling the intention of 'water for every farm and work for every hand' and will prove to be helpful for the betterment of the villages.
- The campaign becomes significant in the light of climate change.
- More than 57000 water structures were constructed during the COVID era. The construction work for the water structure was carried by linking it with the MNREGA scheme.

Source: News on AIR

TROPEX-21

Syllabus section: international relations

Why in News?

The largest war game of the Indian Navy-Theatre level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX-21)- which started in early January 2021, is currently underway in the Indian Ocean.

About:

- The exercise is seeing the participation of all operational units of the Indian Navy including submarines, aircraft, ships as well as the units of the Indian Army, Coast Guard, and Indian Air Force.
- TROPEX-21 is being conducted over a vast geographical expanse in the Indian Ocean Region including its adjunct waters.

- The conduct of the Indian Navy's largest exercise is being overseen by the Naval Headquarters with the participation from all three commands of the Navy and the tri-services command at Port Blair.

Objective:

- TROPEX-21 aims at testing the combat readiness of the Indian Navy in a complex multi-dimensional scenario set in the context of the current geostrategic environment.
- The Theatre level exercise also aims at validating the Indian Navy's offensive-defense capabilities, safeguarding national interest in the maritime domain, and promote peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region.

Source: PIB

VIJAYANAGARA BECAME KARNATAKA'S 31ST DISTRICT

Syllabus section: Polity

Why in News?

The Karnataka government recently issued a notification demarcating boundaries of the newly-formed Vijayanagara district. With Vijayanagara, the state now has 31 districts. Named after the capital of the Vijayanagar Empire, the new district was carved out from Ballari under the Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964.

Background:

- The plan for a new Vijayanagara district was first officially mooted by Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa in September 2019, when Singh was a disqualified legislator.
- In 2019, in a note written to the Chief Secretary of the state, Yediyurappa had stated that it was necessary to create a new district citing administrative reasons, and also in the note he added that some parts of the Ballari district were about 200km from the present headquarters.
- The Chief Minister had cited it is required to create a new district for administrative reasons. He was of the view that. The creation of the new district will help in promoting tourism to the places like Hampi temple.
- He also said, the move will help in the development of six talukas that are part of the district.

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- Thus, the Karnataka Cabinet formally approved the creation of a new Vijayanagara district on November 18, 2020.

About Vijayanagara District

- Vijayanagara is located in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region.
- The district also be home to UNESCO World Heritage sites namely the Hampi and Virupaksha Temple.
- Vijayanagara district has been named after the capital of the Vijayanagar Empire.
- The district was established out of the ore-rich Ballari district in accordance with the Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964.
- The district will comprise of six taluks namely the Hosapete, kotturu, Kudligi, Hagaribommanahalli, Harapanahalli and Hoovina Hadagali.

Source: Indian Express

NATIONAL COAL INDEX

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Ministry of Coal has started Commercial Auction of coal mines on a revenue share basis. In order to arrive at the revenue share based on market prices of coal, National Coal Index (NCI) was conceptualized.

What is the NCI?

- The NCI is a price index that reflects the change of price level of coal on a particular month relative to the fixed base year.
- The base year for the NCI is FY 2017-18.
- Rolled out on 4th June 2020.
- The aim is to have an index that will truly reflect the market price of coal.

Benefits:

- For taxation purposes, the Coal Index will be the base indicator.
- For future calculation of the upfront amount and intrinsic value of mine, this Index will be helpful.
- For calculation of annual escalation (monthly payment), this index can be the basis.

Source: PIB

RUSSIAN CARGO SHIP

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in News?

An unmanned Russian cargo ship launched successfully Monday with a load of supplies for the International Space Station.

About:

- The cargo ship was launched using the Soyuz rocket from Site 31 of the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.
- It is carrying water, propellant and other supplies
- The space outpost is now operated by NASA's Kate Rubins, Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover and Shannon Walker; Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Soichi Noguchi; and Russian Space Agency Roscosmos' Sergey Ryzhikov and Sergey Kud-Sverchkov.

Soyuz

- The Soyuz (SAW-yooz) is a Russian spacecraft. Astronauts and cosmonauts travel to the International Space Station on the Soyuz.
- The Soyuz transports crews to the International Space Station and returns them to Earth after their missions.
- The Soyuz is like a lifeboat for the space station. At least one Soyuz is always docked at the space station. If there is an emergency, the station crew can use the Soyuz to return to Earth.
- The Soyuz is the only means of reaching the ISS since the U.S. retired the space shuttle in 2011.

Source: Economic times

WHY KAILASH RANGE MATTERS?

Syllabus section: Geography

Why in news?

The Kailash Range was the theatre of conflict during the 1962 Chinese offensive, with key battles at Rezang La and Gurung Hill. In 2020, Indian troops secured Kailash Ridge in an operation that took the Chinese by surprise.

About Kailash range:

- The Karakoram Range ends on the northern side of the Pangong Tso.
- The Kailash Range originates from the southern bank and runs northwest to southeast for over 60 km.

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- The Kailash Ridge is characterized by rugged, broken terrain with heights varying between 4,000-5,500m.
- Its key features include Helmet Top, Gurung Hill, Spanggur Gap, Muggar Hill, Mukhpari, Rejang La, and Rechin La. The Ridge dominates Chushul Bowl; an important communications center.

Source: Indian Express

SOIL HEALTH CARD SCHEME

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

The scheme is being implemented in 32 States and UTs.

Soil Health Card (SHC)

- SHC is a printed report that a farmer will be handed over for each of his holdings.
- Soil Health Card provides two sets of fertilizer recommendations for six crops including recommendations of organic manures.
- It will contain the status of his soil with respect to 12 parameters, namely: pH, Electrical Conductivity (EC), Organic Carbon (OC), Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K), Sulphur (S), Zinc (Zn), Boron (B), Iron (Fe), Manganese (Mn), Copper (Cu) of farm holdings.

About the Scheme:

- Launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare on December 5, 2015.
- Under the scheme, village-level Soil Testing Labs will be set up by youth having education in agriculture, Women Self Help Groups, FPOs, etc.
- The scheme also focuses on enabling employment generation after appropriate skill development.
- Soil Health Card (SHC) is a Government of India's scheme promoted by the Department of Agriculture & Co-operation under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.
- A SHC is meant to give each farmer soil nutrient status of his/her holding and advice him/her on the dosage of fertilizers and also the needed soil amendments, that s/he should apply to maintain soil health in the long run.

Source: PIB

BHUVAN

Syllabus section: Science and tech

Why in News?

ISRO has joined hands with MapmyIndia to create an indigenous geospatial portal

About:

- The collaboration will enable them to jointly identify and build a holistic geospatial portal utilizing earth observation datasets, 'NavIC', Web Services, and APIs (application programming interface) available in MapmyIndia.
- The geospatial portals will be called 'Bhuvan', 'VEDAS' and 'MOSDAC'.
- Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System also known as NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation), is an indigenous navigation system, developed by ISRO.
- Bhuvan is the national geo-portal developed and hosted by ISRO comprising geospatial data, services, and tools for analysis.
- VEDAS (Visualisation of Earth observation Data and Archival System) is an online geoprocessing platform that uses optical, microwave, thermal, and hyperspectral EO data covering applications particularly meant for academia, research, and problem-solving.
- MOSDAC (Meteorological and Oceanographic Satellite Data Archival Centre) is a data repository for all the meteorological missions of ISRO and deals with weather-related information, oceanography, and tropical water cycles.

Significance:

- The services will combine the power of the company's digital maps and technologies with ISRO's catalogue of satellite imagery and earth observation data.
- It is a path-breaking milestone in India's journey towards 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', wherein Indian users would not be dependent on foreign organizations for maps, navigation, and geospatial services, and instead they can leverage made-in-India solutions.
- Maps reflect the true sovereignty of the country, depicting India's borders as per the Government of India, and hosts its maps in India.

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- It would be a much better, more detailed, and comprehensive, as well as privacy-centric, hyper-local, and indigenous mapping solution for Indians, compared to foreign map apps and solutions

Source: Outlook India

E-CHHAWANI PORTAL

Why in News?

Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh launched E-Chhawani portal and mobile app in New Delhi.

- o The portal has been created to provide online civic services to over 20 lakh residents of 62 Cantonment Boards across the country.

About:

- Through the portal, the residents of cantonment areas will be able to avail basic services like renewal of leases, application for birth & death certificates, water & sewerage connections, trade licences, mobile toilet locators and payment of different types of taxes and fees, with just a click of a button.
- The portal, jointly developed by eGov Foundation, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Directorate General Defence Estates (DGDE) and National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- The E-Chhawani portal as an innovative effort to transform the functioning of Cantonment Boards, in line with the vision of 'New India.
- The portal will ensure effectiveness and transparency of the services distribution system of the Cantonment Boards and provide time-bound solutions to the residents.
- India has emerged as a global powerhouse and a land of opportunities due to its strong presence in the fields of defence, economy, trade, IT, agriculture & investment.

INDIA-MYANMAR: KALADAN MULTI-MODAL TRANSIT TRANSPORT PROJECT

Syllabus section: International relations

Why in News?

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is in the final stages however, the project was delayed because of various challenges.

Highlights:

- Kaladan is in a very difficult part of Myanmar. There were a lot of logistical challenges even to get to the place. Work has progressed in some parts.
- For example, the Sittwe port has been operational for some time. The Paletwa Inland Water Terminal has also progressed. But the real challenge we had was to bring it up the waterway.
- The road building has been the cause of delay because there are some law and order challenges in that region.

About the project:

The US \$484 million projects will connect the Kolkata seaport with the Sittwe seaport in the Rakhine State of Myanmar by sea. In Myanmar, it will link the Sittwe seaport with Paletwa in the Chin State via the Kaladan riverboat route, and then from Paletwa by road to Mizoram. The project was originally scheduled to be completed by 2014.

Source: Indian express

THIRD EDITION OF INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE DICTIONARY

Syllabus section: society

Why in News?

The third edition of the Indian Sign Language (ISL) Dictionary with 10,000 terms will be released by Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment.

Background:

The dictionary also contains regional signs used in different parts of the country. The first edition of the ISL Dictionary was launched on March 23, 2018, with 3,000 terms and the second edition with 6,000 terms (including earlier 3,000 terms) was launched on February 27, 2019.

About:

- The dictionary has been brought out by the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC), an autonomous institute under the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- The third edition of the ISL Dictionary contains a total of 10,000 terms of everyday use, academic terms, legal and administrative terms, medical, technical and agricultural terms.

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What is Indian Sign Language (ISL)?

- It is a set of hand and facial gestures that is used to communicate.
- It is commonly used by the hearing and speech impaired.
- The ISL has its own grammar, syntax and regional dialects. It comprises of different gestures for same word or sentiment.
- The sign language is a recognized official language in many countries including USA.

Source: The Hindu

NETWIRE

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in News?

Activist Rona Wilson has filed a petition in the Bombay HC to seek a stay on proceedings against him. He is in prison in connection with the Bhima Koregaon violence case.

Background:

- A digital forensics consulting company, Arsenal Consulting, was hired by Mr. Wilson's defense team.
- Its report states that for 22 months, Mr. Wilson's computer was controlled by an attacker
- His goal was to deliver incriminating documents onto Wilson's computer, which formed the basis of the case against him.

About:

- NetWire, which first surfaced in 2012, is a well-known malware.
- It is also one of the most active ones around.
- It is a remote access Trojan, or RAT, which gives control of the infected system to an attacker. Such malware can log keystrokes and compromise passwords.

Threats posed

This malware essentially does two things:

- One is data exfiltration, which means stealing data. Most anti-virus software is equipped to prevent this.
- The other involves infiltrating a system, and this has proven to be far more challenging for anti-virus software.

NetWire is described as an off-the-shelf malware, while something like Pegasus, which used a bug in WhatsApp to infiltrate users' phones in 2019, is custom-made and sold to nations.

Source: The Hindu

CREDIT DEFAULT SWAPS

Syllabus section: economy

Why in News?

Unveiling draft guidelines on credit default swaps (CDS), the RBI said non-retail users will be allowed to undertake transactions in credit derivatives for both hedging and other purposes.

About:

- Exchanges may offer standardized single-name CDS contracts with a guaranteed cash settlement.
- Retail users shall undertake transactions in exchange-traded CDS only for hedging their underlying credit risk.
- CDS is a derivative or contract that allows an investor to swap or offset his credit risk with that of another investor.
- If a lender is worried that a borrower is going to default on a loan, the lender could use a CDS to offset or swap that risk. To swap the risk of default, the lender buys a CDS from another investor who agrees to reimburse the lender in case the borrower defaults.
- The commercial papers, listed or unlisted rated rupee corporate bonds, Unrated bonds issued by the special purpose vehicles, certificates of deposit, and non-convertible debentures of maturity up to 1 year are eligible to be a reference or deliverable obligation in the CDS contract.
- Market participants can exit their CDS contract by unwinding the contract with the original counterparty or assigning the contract to any other eligible market participant.
- CDS contracts should be denominated and settled in Indian rupees. "CDS contracts can be cash-settled or physically settled.

The Fixed Income Money Market and Derivatives Association of India, in consultation with market participants and based on international best practices, should devise standard master agreement/s for the Indian CDS market, which should include credit event definitions and settlement procedures. A credit derivative is a contract whose value is derived from the credit risk of an underlying debt instrument.

Source: Indian Express

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RESTRICTION LIFTED ON GEOSPATIAL DATA SECTOR

Why in News?

The Ministry of Science and Technology Monday released new guidelines for the Geo-spatial sector in India, which deregulates existing protocol and liberalizes the sector to a more competitive field.

Present Policy:

- There are strict restrictions on the collection, storage, use, sale, dissemination of geo-spatial data, and mapping under the current regime.
- The policy had not been renewed in decades and has been driven by internal as well as external security concerns.
- The sector so far is dominated by the Indian government as well as government-run agencies such as the Survey of India
 - Private companies need to navigate a system of permissions from different departments of the government (depending on the kind of data to be created) as well as the defence and Home Ministries, to be able to collect, create or disseminate geospatial data.

Geospatial Data:

Geospatial data is data about objects, events, or phenomena that have a location on the surface of the earth.

The location may be static in the short-term, like the location of a road, an earthquake event, malnutrition among children, or dynamic like a moving vehicle or pedestrian, the spread of an infectious disease.

Geospatial data combines location information, attribute information (the characteristics of the object, event, or phenomena concerned), and often also temporal information or the time at which the location and attributes exist

Reason Behind the Deregulation of Geo-spatial data:

- This system of acquiring licenses or permission, and the red tape involved, can take months, delaying projects, especially those that are in mission mode – for both Indian companies as well as government agencies.
- The deregulation eliminates the requirement of permissions as well as scrutiny, even for security concerns.

- Indian companies now can self-attest, conforming to government guidelines without actually having to be monitored by a government agency- these guidelines therefore place a great deal of trust in Indian entities.
- Geo-spatial data has now become imperative for the government in planning for infrastructure, development, social development, natural calamities as well as the economy, with more and more sectors such as agriculture, environment protection, power, water, transportation, communication, health (tracking of diseases, patients, hospitals, etc) relying heavily on this data.

Impact of the Action:

- By liberalizing the system, the government will ensure more players in the field, the competitiveness of Indian companies in the global market, and more accurate data available to both the government to formulate plans and administer, but also for individual Indians.
- Startups and businesses can now also use this data in setting up their concerns, especially in the sector of e-commerce or geo-spatial-based apps – which in turn will increase employment in these sectors.
- Indian companies will be able to develop indigenous apps, for example, an Indian version of google maps.
- There is also likely to be an increase in public-private partnerships with the opening of this sector with data collection companies working with the Indian government on various sectoral projects.
- The government also expects an increase in investment in the geospatial sector by companies, and also an increase in the export of data to foreign companies and countries, which in turn will boost the economy.

ECOPACT: NEW LOW-CARBON RANGE OF CONCRETE

Syllabus Section: Environment and ecology

Why in News?

ACC Ready Mix Concrete has introduced its new low carbon range of concrete: ECOPact – the Green Concrete for high-performing, sustainable and circular construction.

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About:

- The innovative manufacturing process of the ECOPact range, reduces CO2 emissions by up to 100 percent and further enhances our sustainable product offerings for the construction industry.
- ECOPact is a concrete with 30-50 percent lower embodied carbon content compared to a reference concrete designed with OPC.
- The innovative product range uses CO2-reduced binders and is manufactured with optimized mix designs to reduce its carbon footprint and offers superior durability and finish when compared to conventional concrete.
- Using ECOPact range by developers will help them obtain Green Points from Indian Green Building Council (IGBC).
- The sustainable product range is suitable for all structural components: from foundations to roof – including elements like columns, beams, slabs, external or internal walls, driveways, walkways etc.
- ECOPact ZERO is a combination of concrete technology excellence and climate action that offers the opportunity to eliminate the carbon footprint of concrete and greatly reduce the overall carbon footprint of the structures.

Types of the ECOPact range products

The customers can choose the concrete on the basis of the desired level of CO2 reduction and sustainability objectives.

- ECOPact PRIME- It offers CO2 reduction up to 50-70 percent.
- ECOPact MAX- It offers CO2 reduction greater than 70 percent.
- ECOPact ZERO- It is a combination of concrete technology excellence and climate action. Thus, it offers the elimination of carbon footprint of concrete. Thus, reduces the overall carbon footprint of any structures.

Source: Business standard

ARJUN MAIN BATTLE TANK MK-1A

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in News?

Prime Minister handed over the indigenously developed Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A) to the Indian Army at a ceremony in Chennai. The army will get 118 units of the Main Battle Tank, indigenously designed, developed and manufactured by CVRDE and DRDO along with 15 academic institutions, eight labs and several MSMEs.

About:

- The Arjun Main Battle Tank project was initiated by DRDO in 1972 with the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) as its lead laboratory.
- The Arjun tanks stand out for their 'Fin Stabilised Armour Piercing Discarding Sabot (FSAPDS)' ammunition and 120-mm caliber rifled gun.
- It also has a computer-controlled integrated fire control system with a stabilized sighting that works in all lighting conditions.
- The secondary weapons include a co-axial 7.62-mm machine gun for anti-personnel and a 12.7-mm machine gun for anti-aircraft and ground targets.

Objective: To create a "state-of-the-art tank with superior firepower, high mobility, and excellent protection.

How is the Mk-1A different?

The Mk-1A version has 14 major upgrades on the earlier version. It is also supposed to have missile firing capability as per the design, but this feature will be added later as final testing of the capability is still on. However, the biggest achievement with the latest version is 54.3 percent indigenous content against the 41 percent in the earlier model.

Source: Indian express

SKILL MINISTRY ROLLS OUT MGNF

Syllabus section: society

Why in news?

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) today launched Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) 2021-23 in partnership with nine IIMs.

EDEN IAS - Educational Development & Enrichment Network

About:

- The fellowship is rolled out under the World Bank loan assisted programme SANKALP (Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion).
- Fellows after getting training from IIMs will further strengthen the district skill administration and the District Skill Committees (DSCs) under the fellowship.
- The fellows under MGNF will acquire academic expertise and technical competency in understanding the overall skill ecosystem along with being attached to DSCs and help them manage the skill development planning at district level through the mechanism of formulating District Skill Development Plans (DSDPs).
- SANKALP programme will also support in Training of Trainer (ToT) system in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode that a collaborative approach between industry and the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) ecosystem.
- The first pilot MGNF which had 69 fellows working across 69 districts was successful.
- The Ministry is now expanding MGNF to all remaining districts in India.
- The Ministry has sought academic partnership with only the IIMs.

Source: Indian express

SCHEMES IN BUDGET TO BOOST S&T ECOSYSTEM

Why in News?

According to the Science and Technology Ministry, the Budget 2021 includes several initiatives to promote science, technology and innovation with applications in the country.

About:

National Research Foundation:

- This includes a total allocation of Rs 50,000 crore over 5 years.
- It is an autonomous body envisaged to support researchers working across several streams of S&T with special focus on universities.
- This will ensure that the overall research ecosystem of the country is strengthened with a focus on identified national-priority thrust areas.

Deep Ocean Mission

- With an outlay of more than Rs 4,000 crore over five years to better understand this new realm which offers exceptional opportunities in mapping, exploring and utilising oceanic resources.
- The mission to be coordinated by the Ministry of Earth Sciences will cover deep ocean survey, development of technologies for exploration and harnessing of ocean resources as well as projects for the conservation and bio-prospecting of deep-sea biodiversity.

National Language Translation Mission (NLTM)

- It will enable the translation of the wealth of governance- and policy-related knowledge on the internet to major Indian languages using technologies such as AI-based Machine Translation together with traditional methods.

Hydrogen Energy Mission:

- It was launched by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy was declared for generating hydrogen from green power sources, its storage, transport and utilization.

The Department of Biotechnology is developing a Biomass to Hydrogen Mission which will be important from the R&D perspective. Department of Science and Technology and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research will also be contributing to this mission.

Source: The Rahnuma Daily

LEOPARD POPULATION TRACKING GETS NEW APPROACH

WHY IN NEWS?

Experts from three organizations, one of them Assam-based Aaranyak, have come up with a system that helps in properly estimating the leopard population in areas sustaining a mix of rosette and melanistic individuals.

- Rosettes are jagged black circular marks on the tawny coat of a leopard. Like the tiger's stripes, the rosettes of each leopard are unique in shape and size, making the species identifiable individually.
- Melanistic leopards — commonly called black leopards or black panthers or ghongs (Assamese) — have been difficult to estimate as their rosettes are invisible.

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ABOUT :

- Wildlife specialists have for long faced challenges estimating the density of leopards in areas where some of the spotted cats are melanistic or black.
- The Spatial Mark-Resight (SMR) models applied by the scientists of Aaranyak, Panthera and World Wide Fund for Nature-India have provided a way of counting the melanistic leopards too.
- This is a significant analytical development that can help assess the population of leopards across a great part of the species range from where population estimates are scant.
- The SMR method is expected to make it easier to assess the population status of leopards for informed conservation measures by applying the conventional camera trapping field method.
- It can also be widely applied for other species that exhibit similar colour variation in nature,

The problem in Estimation:

- “When a population has only rosette leopard, estimating their population size becomes easy because all the individuals can be identified. Unlike rosette leopards, a black leopard can often not be reliably identified individually, although special cases exist.
- “This problem is acute in the tropical and subtropical moist forests of South and Southeast Asia where the frequency of melanistic leopards is high and leopards also face the greatest threat.

Source: The Hindu

MAHABAHU-BRAHMAPUTRA

Syllabus section: economy

Why in News?

PM launches ‘Mahabahu-Brahmaputra’ and lays the foundation stone of two bridges in Assam.

About:

- To mark the launch of ‘Mahabahu-Brahmaputra’, he inaugurated the Ro-Pax vessel operations between Neamati-Majuli Island, North Guwahati-South Guwahati, and Dhubri-Hatsingimari.

- He laid the foundation stone of Inland Water Transport (IWT) Terminal at Jogighopa and various tourist jetties on River Brahmaputra and launched digital solutions for Ease-of-Doing-Business.
- Physical and Cultural Integrity of the whole North East including Assam has been strengthened over the recent years.
- Bogibeel Bridge, Saraighat Bridge is making the life of Assam easier today.
- This strengthens the security of the country and provides great convenience for our soldiers.
- This will strengthen water connectivity by Brahmaputra water through port-led development. The three Ro-Pax services which were launched today make Assam a front-runner state to be connected with Ro-Pax services at this scale. This, along with the four tourist jetties will significantly improve Assam’s connectivity with the Northeast.

Jogighopa IWT Terminal

Jogighopa IWT Terminal will strengthen an alternative route to connect Assam with Haldia Port and Kolkata through a waterway. Bhutan and Bangladesh cargoes at this terminal and cargoes at Jogighopa Multi-modal logistics park would get facilities for movement to different places on the Brahmaputra River.

Car-D portal

The Car-D portal will help in collating real-time information on all the cargo and cruise traffic data of the National Waterway. It will also provide information related to the infrastructure o

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Car-D portal

The Car-D portal will help in collating real-time information on all the cargo and cruise traffic data of the National Waterway. It will also provide information related to the infrastructure of the Waterway. GIS-based India Map Portal would help those who want to come here for business.

Source: PIB

LEATHERBACK SEA TURTLE

Syllabus section: environment and ecology

Why in News?

Some conservationists are worried about the fate of the Giant Leatherback turtles. NITI Aayog has laid down proposals for tourism and port development in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Highlights:

- NITI Aayog's tourism vision includes a proposal for a mega-shipment port at Galathea Bay on Great Nicobar Island.
- Also, the Little Andaman plan proposes phased growth of tourism on this untouched island, which may lead to the de-reservation of over 200 sq km of rainforests and also of about 140 sq km of the Onge Tribal Reserve.

Leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

- It is the largest of the seven species of sea turtles.
- Other species are: Olive Ridley turtle, Green turtle, Hawksbill turtle, Loggerhead turtle, Leatherback turtle
- Except the Loggerhead, the remaining four species nest along the Indian coast.
- It is found in all oceans except the Arctic and the Antarctic.
- Within the Indian Ocean, they nest only in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- It is the only living species in the genus *Dermochelys* and family *Dermochelyidae*.
- It can easily be differentiated from other modern sea turtles by its lack of a bony shell.
- They are listed in Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Source: The Hindu

ARROW-4 SYSTEM

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in News?

Israel has begun developing a long-range ballistic missile interceptor, named Arrow-4, together with the US.

About:

- Arrow-4 will be "the next generation" of Israel's multi-layered defense doctrine to intercept missiles in the atmosphere and space, the Xinhua news agency.
- Arrow-4 will be an advanced and innovative anti-missile system with enhanced capabilities to "address a wide range of evolving threats in the region and will replace the Arrow-2 interceptors over the next decades."
- The development of Arrow-4 in collaboration with the united states will result in the technological and operational leap forward.
- It will prepare the countries for the future battlefield and the evolving threats in the Middle East and beyond.

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Arrow or Hetz

It is a family of anti-ballistic missiles. It has been designed to make the Israeli missile defense system more effective against ballistic missiles in comparison to other surface-to-air missiles that the country has procured. These missiles are being jointly funded and produced by Israel and United States. The missiles started developing in the year 1986. The missile system is overseen by Israeli Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Missile Defense Agency. The missile system comprises of joint production of hypersonic Arrow anti-missile interceptor and Israel Aerospace Industries Brown Hazelnut.

Source: Buisness standard

UPSC FINAL RESULTS 2019 - TOPPERS LIST

EDEN IAS congratulates toppers of UPSC IAS EXAM 2019. The result came yesterday on 04th August 2020, bright colours of glory all around!! Everyone is eager to know about toppers, their background, education and much more...

In this situation of COVID 19, this result of UPSC 2019 is like an alarm for students who are preparing to attempt the UPSC Prelims exam 2020 on 4th October 2020 and also for those students, who are waiting to start their preparation for UPSC 2021 or further. Dear aspirants it's the time to fasten your seat belts and get ready for the show... because whatever it be the situation UPSC has always come up with fighting spirit!!

Start preparing because it takes time to cover the syllabus and UPSC exam is going to be on its time.

EDEN IAS is proud to announce the names of the aspirants mentored by our experienced faculty members through various courses. Firstly EDEN IAS would like to congratulate some of our own shining stars from the Classroom courses, Daily IAS mains answer writing, Mission batches for revision, Current affairs classes etc... who made it to IAS, IPS, IRS officers.....

Congratulations Mr. Jangam Kuladeep (Rank 135), Mr. Ravi Teja (Rank 77), Ms. Yasaswani B(Rank 71), Mr. Abhishek Kumar (Rank 73), Mr. Sameer Ahmed (Rank 193), Mr. Abhishek Kumar (Rank 288), Puneet Dwivedi (Rank 123), Mr. Pruthvi S (Rank 582), Mr. Nikhil Dubey (Rank 733), Mr. Shunham Aggarwal (Rank 828), Mr. Meshram Rajeev Ramesh (Rank 735), Mr. Prateek Rao (Rank 724), Mr. Hrishikesh (Rank 688), Ms. Asma Garg(Rank 709), Mr. Ratan Jana (Rank 754)

The result is under process of updation...

We also congratulate the Top 10 rankers of this year...

The list of TOP 10 toppers of UPSC CSE 2019

- RANK 1- PRADEEP SINGH
- RANK 2- JATIN KISHORE
- RANK 3- PRATIBHA VERMA
- RANK 4- HIMANSHU JAIN
- RANK 5- JEYDEV C S
- RANK 6- VISHAKHA YADAV
- RANK 7- GANESH KUMAR BASKAR
- RANK 8- ABHISHEK SARAF
- RANK 9- RAVI JAIN
- RANK 10- SANJITA MOHAPATRA

UPSC is among the toughest examinations and cracking this examination demands midnight oil to burn!! Aspirants work very hard to get it. We wish all the aspirants a happy and fruitful preparation.

UP TO EXPORT 20 TONNES OF 'KALA NAMAK' RICE TO SINGAPORE

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

In what appears to be a major boost to farm exports from Uttar Pradesh, the state is set to send a consignment of 20 tonnes of Buddha Rice, popularly known as "Kala Namak" Rice, one of the finest varieties of aromatic rice in India, to Singapore soon, according to a release by the state government.

Highlights:

- The rice is being packaged in attractive glass jars with all its qualities clearly mentioned on it.
- The export of the rice is being seen as a morale booster for farmers cultivating Buddha Rice in Gorakhpur, Deoria, Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Siddharth Nagar, Sant Kabeer Nagar, Bahraich, Balrampur, Gonda, Shravasti, which according to the Geographical Indications (GI) share a similar climate.
- In order to promote the production, processing, packaging, and branding of Kala Namak Rice, the UP Government has declared it as the One District One Product (ODOP) of Siddharth Nagar

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About Kala Namak Rice:

Also known as 'Buddha ka Mahaprasad' (an offering to Lord Buddha), the Kala Namak Rice has been rebranded as 'Buddha Rice', presenting it as an offering made to the Buddhist monks, in order to promote it in Buddhist countries. The packaging of the rice carries a popular quote of Mahatma Buddha saying 'The unique aroma of the rice will remind people about me'

Meanwhile, a Kala Namak Rice festival on the pattern of Strawberry Festival will be held in the state in near future. There is also a plan to set up a Kala Namak Rice Research Centre at Siddharth Nagar in cooperation with the International Rice Research Centre, Varanasi.

Source: Business Standard

GO ELECTRIC CAMPAIGN

Syllabus section: environment and ecology

Why in News?

Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways said that he will make electric vehicles mandatory for officials of his department. The idea behind this initiative is to encourage the use of electric vehicles rather than those running on petrol and diesel.

About:

- With the aim to create awareness on the benefits of e-mobility as well as EV Charging Infrastructure electric cooking in India.
- The "Go Electric" campaign is an important initiative as it would be an important step towards a cleaner and greener future and help in reducing the import dependence of our country in the coming years
- Electric fuel is a major alternative to fossil fuels which have an import bill of Rs 8 lakh crores.
- Ministry of Power should promote the generation of green power from biomass and agriculture waste which can also benefit farmers across the country.
- This energy transition is the need of the hour so as to reduce the dependency on imported fossil fuels.

Go Electric Campaign

- The Go Electric Campaign was launched with the objective of helping India in reducing its fossil fuel import dependence in upcoming years.
- This campaign was also launched as a step forward towards a greener and cleaner future.

- This campaign also aims to create awareness at the PAN-India level. It is expected that the campaign will boost the confidence of Electric Vehicle manufacturers.

Source: Business Standard

INTENSIFIED MISSION INDRADHANUSH 3.0

Syllabus section: Society

Why in News?

Union Health Minister launched Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0 which will be conducted in two rounds starting from February 22 and March 22 across 250 districts/urban areas identified in 29 States/Union Territories.

About:

- Focus of the IMI 3.0 will be the children and pregnant women who have missed their vaccine doses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- They will be identified and vaccinated during the two rounds of IMI 3.0.
- Each round will be for 15 days each.
- Beneficiaries from migration areas and hard to reach areas will be targeted as they may have missed their vaccine doses during COVID19,
- As per the guidelines released for IMI 3.0, the districts have been classified to reflect 313 low risk; 152 as a medium risk; and 250 as high-risk districts.
- Mission Indradhanush is indeed a successful strategy to reach out to every dropped out and left out child and pregnant woman.

Mission Indradhanush

- The aim is to fully immunize more than 89 lakh children who are either unvaccinated or partially vaccinated under UIP.
- It targets children under 2 years of age and pregnant women for immunization.
- It provides vaccination against 12 Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD) i.e. diphtheria, Whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, meningitis and pneumonia, Hemophilus influenzae type B infections, Japanese encephalitis (JE), rotavirus vaccine, pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) and measles-rubella (MR).
- However, Vaccination against Japanese Encephalitis and Haemophilus influenzae type B is being provided in selected districts of the country.

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- It is a nationwide initiative with a special focus on 201 high focus districts. These districts accounted for nearly 50% of the total partially vaccinated or unvaccinated children in the country.
- The rate of increase in full immunization coverage increased to 6.7% per year through the first two phases of 'Mission Indradhanush'.

Source: News on AIR

ENVIRONMENT MINISTER INAUGURATES ATAL PARYAVARAN BHAVAN

Syllabus section: environment and ecology

Why in News?

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change inaugurated the Atal Paryavaran Bhavan at Lakshadweep.

About:

- Lakshadweep will undergo a comprehensive development, without compromising its commitment to nature.
- The minister attended high-level meetings with the Secretaries of various departments in UT's administration.
- He will also attend programmes at Suheli, Kadmat and Bangaram islands and evaluate major innovative initiatives of the Forest and Environment Department of the Union Territory.

Lakshadweep

- This group of islands is located 200 to 440 km off the southwestern coast of India.
- It is administered as a union territory and a district of India.
- It has a total surface area of 32 km².
- It comprises of 10 subdivisions. The capital of the island is Kavaratti. This region comes under the jurisdiction of the Kerala High Court.

Source: News on AIR

ARUNACHAL PRADESH AND MIZORAM CELEBRATE STATEHOOD DAY

Syllabus section: Polity

Why in News?

The north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram observed their statehood day. Both states attained statehood on February 20, 1987 following the 53rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution in 1986.

About Arunachala Pradesh:

- In 1972, the North-East Frontier Agency was named Arunachal Pradesh and granted union territory status.
- It took 15 more years before Arunachal Pradesh attained its statehood. It is a state in Northeast India.
- The state shares the border with Assam and Nagaland to its south.
- It also has its international borders with Bhutan to the west and Myanmar to the east.
- The state also has a disputed border with China to the north at McMahon Line.
- The length of the border across China's autonomous region called Tibet is 1,129 KMs.
- The state is the largest state by area among the Seven Sister States of Northeast India.

About Mizoram:

- Mizoram has one of the largest bamboo cover in the country.
- It is now recognised, developed and promoted in a manner ensuring ecological security for all round sustainable development of the state and well-being of the people.
- Like several other northeastern states of India, Mizoram (with current population of around 11 lakh) was previously part of Assam until 1972 when it was carved out as a union territory.
- It became the 23rd state of India on February 20, 1987

Source: Business standard

KHAJURAHO DANCE FESTIVAL

Syllabus section: art and culture

Why in News?

The six-day Khajuraho Dance Festival will begin on Saturday at the UNESCO World Heritage site in Madhya Pradesh, known for its ancient Hindu and Jain temples. It is being held on the temple premises after 44 years following the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) permission. The ASI has also waived the fee for conducting the festival this year.

Background:

The dance festival was introduced 46 years ago on the premises to promote heritage and tourism. But ASI cancelled the permission after the reports of destruction of monuments and defacement of idols. For the past 44 years, the state government has been organising the festival in an open garden developed near Western Group of Temples.

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About:

- This dance festival is organised by the Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad annually from February 20th to February 26th.
- It is a one-week festival of classical dances.
- It is organised in the premise of the Khajuraho temples in Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh.
- The dance festival showcases the richness of Indian classical dance styles including the Odissi, Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, and Kathakali. Recently, the Modern Indian dance was also added to the festival.

Khajuraho temple

- Khajuraho is the group of monuments comprising of Hindu temples and Jain temples.
- It is located in the Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh.
- It is located at around 175 kilometres southeast from the Jhansi. It is included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site list.
- Khajuraho temples are famous for nagara-style architectural symbolism. Most of the temples were built between 885 AD and 1050 AD by Chandela dynasty.

Source: HT

VL-SRSAM MISSILE SYSTEM

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in News?

The Defence Research and Development Organisation- DRDO conducted two successful launches of indigenously designed and developed Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM).

Objective:

- VL-SRSAM has been indigenously developed and designed by DRDO for the Indian Navy.
- The missile system is meant for neutralizing various aerial threats at close ranges which also includes sea-skimming targets.

About:

- The two trials by DRDO were carried out for a demonstration of vertical launch capability as part of the missile's maiden launch campaign. The missile, on both the occasion, intercepted the simulated targets with pinpoint accuracy.

- The missiles were tested for minimum and maximum range and VL-SRSAM with Weapon Control System- WCS were deployed during the trials.
- During the test-launch by DRDO, the vehicle performance and flight path parameters were also monitored using the flight data which was captured by various range instruments.

Source: The Hindu

MICROBES FROM EARTH COULD TEMPORARILY SURVIVE ON MARS

Syllabus section: science and tech

Why in News?

Some microbes found on Earth may temporarily survive on the surface of Mars, according to a study that could be vital for the success of future missions to the Red Planet.

About:

- The researchers from NASA and German Aerospace Center tested the endurance of microorganisms to Martian conditions by launching them into stratosphere, the second major layer of Earth's atmosphere which closely represents key conditions on Mars.
- New way to expose bacteria and fungi on Mars-like conditions has been tested by using a scientific balloon to carry the experimental equipment up to stratosphere.
- During the trip it was found that, some microbes particularly the spores from black mold fungus, were able to survive even when they were exposed to high ultraviolet radiation.
- The microbes were launched into the stratosphere inside the MARSBOx (Microbes in Atmosphere for Radiation, Survival and Biological Outcomes experiment) payload, which was kept at Martian pressure and filled with artificial Martian atmosphere throughout the mission.

About Mars

- It is the second-smallest planet in the solar system. The planet carries the name of Roman god of war.
- It is also called as the Red Planet because of presence of iron oxide on Mars's surface. Iron Oxide provides reddish appearance.

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- It has a thin atmosphere. Some of the surface features resembles the impact craters of Moon, and deserts, valleys, & polar ice caps of Earth.
- Days and seasons are similar to Earth because its rotational period and tilt of the rotational axis are similar to that of Earth.
- It is also a site of Olympus Mons. Olympus Mons is the largest volcano and highest known mountain on any planet.

Source: The Hindu

MUMBAI'S UNDERSEA TUNNEL

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Mumbai will be home to India's first undersea tunnel, which will be part of the city's Coastal Road project.

About:

- The twin tunnels, which have a length of 2.07 km of which a kilometer will be under the sea, are being built as part of the Mumbai Coastal Road Project, a 10.58-km stretch starting from the Marine Drive promenade to the Worli-end of the Bandra-Worli Sea Link.
- The road, which will comprise of land-filled roads on areas reclaimed from the sea, bridges, and tunnels, is part of a plan to link South Mumbai with North with a toll-free freeway that is expected to ease up traffic in one of the most congested cities in the world.
- Unlike the big undersea tunnels in the world include the Channel Tunnel that connects England and France, the twin tunnels in Mumbai are being built at a relatively shallow depth. Mumbai's undersea tunnel will be 20 meters below the seabed.
- A 2,800-tonne tunnel boring machine, the biggest of its kind in India, has been deployed to dig these tunnels.

Major challenges

- The two primary issues of concern are the seepage of seawater into the tunnel and the fear of the tunnel caving in due to the pressure exerted by seawater.
- The fact that the tunnel is very close to the coast and not in mid-sea has made things easier for engineers who say that all safety measures are being used while constructing these tunnels to ensure that the stability of the structure is maintained.

Mumbai Coastal Road Project

- It is a 10.58-km long road project that starts from the Marine Drive and terminates at the Worli-end of Bandra-Worli Sea Link.
- It comprises land-filled roads, bridges, and tunnels.
- This project was started under the plan of linking South Mumbai with North Mumbai with a toll-free road.
- It will also ease the traffic run in the city.

Source: Indian express

NEW ALPINE PLANT SPECIES DISCOVERED IN ARUNACHAL'S TAWANG DISTRICT

Syllabus section: Environment and ecology

Why in News?

A new species of alpine plant in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang district has been discovered by a group of scientists of three institutes of the country, according to a journal that published their research paper.

About:

- The new species belongs to the family of the Himalayan sunflower.
- The discovery of the species was published in the international peer-reviewed publication 'Biodiversitas: Journal of Biological Diversity'
- It is named as 'Cremanthodium indicum' and the plant species, which generally flowers from July to August, is endemic to Penga-Teng Tso Lake of Tawang district, where it was discovered
- The alpine plant species is assessed as critically endangered, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines
- Tawang district holds one of the assemblages of flowering plants in the northeastern state, which attracts botanists across the world.

Source: The Hindu

INDIA URBAN DATA EXCHANGE (IUDX)

Syllabus section: society

Why in News?

The India Urban Data Exchange has been developed in partnership between the Smart Cities Mission and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.

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About:

- IUDX serves as a seamless interface for data providers and data users, including ULBs, to share, request, and access datasets related to cities, urban governance, and urban service delivery.
- IUDX is an open-source software platform that facilitates the secure, authenticated, and managed exchange of data amongst various data platforms, 3rd party authenticated and authorized applications, and other sources.
- As the number of cities on IUDX expands, this will scale up to uniform and seamless sharing between data producers and data consumers across urban India.
- IUDX is designed to address the problem of data silos, both within and across cities.
- Cities generate large volumes of data, which are recorded by a wide range of entities, both within government and across the industry, academia, and civil society.
- The combination of these datasets can enable rapid innovation, as well as a better understanding of and planning for urban needs and challenges.
- IUDX creates a secure and reliable channel for data producers or owners to share their data, with complete control over what is shared and with whom, in order to enable sharing while addressing security and privacy protections by design.

About Smart City Mission:

- The Smart Cities Mission is an innovative and new flagship initiative by the Government of India to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local development and harnessing technology as a means to create smart outcomes for citizens.
- The Mission will cover 100 cities and its duration will be five years from 2015 to 2020. The Mission is implemented by the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD). SCM will be operated as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) wherein the central Government proposes to provide financial support up to Rs. 100 crore per city per year. An equal amount, on a matching basis, will have to be contributed by the State/ULB.

Source: PIB

NATIONAL URBAN DIGITAL MISSION (NUDM)

Syllabus section: society

Why in News?

National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM) & Several Digital Initiatives Launched For Transforming Urban Governance

About:

- The National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM) will create a shared digital infrastructure for urban India, working across the three pillars of people, process, and platform to provide holistic support to cities and towns.
- It will institutionalize a citizen-centric and ecosystem-driven approach to urban governance and service delivery in 2022 cities by 2022, and across all cities and towns in India by 2024.
- NUDM will create a shared digital infrastructure that can consolidate and cross-leverage the various digital initiatives of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, enabling cities and towns across India to benefit from holistic and diverse forms of support, in keeping with their needs and local challenges.
- NUDM is citizen-centric, ecosystem-driven, and principles-based in both design and implementation.
- NUDM has articulated a set of governing principles and inherits the technology design principles of the National Urban Innovation Stack (NUIS), whose strategy and approach were released by MoHUA in February 2019.
- The principles in turn give rise to standards, specifications, and certifications, across the three pillars of people, process, and platforms.

Source: PIB

PM KISAN SCHEME

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

The flagship scheme of the central government, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM KISAN) has completed its two years

About:

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India.

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- It is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare.
- Under the scheme, the Centre transfers an amount of Rs 6,000 per year, in three equal installments, directly into the bank accounts of all landholding farmers irrespective of the size of their landholdings.
- It intends to supplement the financial needs of the Small and Marginal Farmers (SMFs) in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of each crop cycle.
- The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families rests with the State / UT Governments.
- A non-banking institution which is a company and has principal business of receiving deposits under any scheme or arrangement in one lump sum or in installments by way of contributions or in any other manner is also a non-banking financial company (Residuary non-banking company).

Source: The Hindu

RBI RELEASES THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OMBUDSMAN SCHEMES

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in news?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the Annual Report of the Ombudsman Schemes for 2019-20 recently.

About:

- RBI has 3 Ombudsmen- Banking, Non-Banking Finance Company (i.e. NBFC), and digital transactions.
- A common man can approach these Ombudsmen for their grievances.
- These Schemes are being merged and integrated into a single scheme which will be rolled out from June 2021.
- There was an increase of around 65% in the receipt of complaints.
- 92% of them have been resolved.

Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC)

- A Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) is a company registered under the Companies Act, 1956 engaged in the business of loans and advances, acquisition of shares/stocks/bonds/debentures/securities issued by Government or local authority or other marketable securities of a like nature, leasing, hire-purchase, insurance business, chit business but does not include any institution whose principal business is that of agriculture activity, industrial activity, purchase or sale of any goods (other than securities) or providing any services and sale/purchase/construction of the immovable property.

Features of NBFCs

- NBFC cannot accept demand deposits.
- NBFCs do not form part of the payment and settlement system and cannot issue cheques drawn on themselves.
- Deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs.

Source: News on AIR

SMARTCODE PLATFORM

Syllabus section: society

Why in news?

SmartCode Platform was recently launched.

About:

- SmartCode is a platform that enables all ecosystem stakeholders to contribute to a repository of open-source code for various solutions and applications for urban governance.
- It is designed to address the challenges that ULBs face in the development and deployment of digital applications to address urban challenges, by enabling cities to take advantage of existing codes and customizing them to suit local needs, rather than having to develop new solutions from scratch.
- As a repository of open-source software, the source code available on the platform will be free to use without any licensing or subscription fees, thus limiting costs to those involved with customizing the code and developing a locally-relevant solution.

Source: PIB

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E-DAAKHIL PORTAL

Why in News?

E-Daakhil portal for Consumer grievance redressal is now operational in 15 States/UTs.

About:

- The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, which has come into force from 20th July, 2020, has provision for e-filing of consumer complaints in the Consumer Commissions and online payment of the fees for filing a complaint.
- A web application for E-filing of consumer complaints named “edaakhil.nic.in” has been developed by NIC for the purpose
- The e-daakhil portal empowers the consumer and their advocates to file the consumer complaints along with payment of requisite fees online from anywhere for the redressal of their complaints.
- It also facilitates the consumer commissions to scrutinize the complaints online to accept, reject or forward the complaint to the concerned commission for further processing.
- To facilitate the rural consumers for e-filing, it has been decided to integrate the Common Service Centres (CSC) with the e-daakhil portal.
- E-filing was launched by National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission (NCDRC) on 7th September 2020.
 - Delhi was the first state to implement it on 8th September 2020.
 - Later Maharashtra, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Chandigarh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka & Haryana implemented facility of e-filing in their respective States/UTs.

Source: PIB

TASK FORCE ON RIVER-LINKING APPROVES THE MAHANADI-GODAVARI LINK

Syllabus section: Polity

Why in News?

The task force on Interlinking of Rivers (ILR) has agreed and approved the preparation of final detailed project report (DPR) on the proposed Mahandi (Barmul)-Godavari (Dowlaiswaram) link by ensuring utilisation of the allocated Godavari waters by Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, en route the link canal of the project.

Key highlights:

- The decision, considered a major foot forward on the interlinking of rivers involving the two Telugu States.
- The meeting discussed mainly three proposals put forward by the task force chairman based on the draft DPR prepared on the diversion of water from Godavari basin to Cauvery basin.
- The proposals were based on draft detailed project report that was prepared with respect to the diversion of water from Godavari basin to Cauvery basin.
- The task force also emphasised on the several priority links under the interlinking of rivers programme by the central government.
- The draft detailed project report was prepared on Godavari-Cauvery link the National Water Development Authority (NWDA).

National Water Development Agency (NWDA)

- It is a Registered Society working under the Ministry of Irrigation which is now called as Ministry of Water Resources.
- The agency was set up in 1982.
- The agency is involved in carrying out the detailed studies, surveys and investigations with respect to the Peninsular Component of National Perspective for the Water Resources Development.
- Later its function was modified to include the Himalayan Component of National Perspective for Water Resources Development in the year 1994.
- The composition of Society and Governing Body was also modified in the year 2003 & 2004 respectively.
- The NWDA was authorised to explore the feasibility of linking sub-basins of rivers in States such as Bihar in the year 2006.
- It then worked for preparation of Detailed Project Report of Ken-Betwa river link in accordance with the priority links under Peninsular Component of National Perspective Plan.

Source: The Hindu

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PAKISTAN TO REMAIN ON FATF 'GREY LIST

Syllabus section: international relations

Why in News?

Global terror financing watchdog, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) retained Pakistan on its "grey list" till June after concluding that Islamabad failed to address its strategically important deficiencies, to fully implement the 27 point action plan that the watchdog had drawn up for Pakistan.

Key highlights:

- This decision by the FATF was taken in the light of the country's failure to fully comply with the 27-point action plan of to combat terrorism.
- This decision was taken following a virtual plenary session that was over three days.
- The FATF has decided to keep Pakistan into the grey list and will remain under the increased monitoring because serious deficiencies were observed with respect to terror financing.
- Though, Pakistan has taken several steps but it needs to act upon three important points out of 27 action points.

What should Pakistan do?

Pakistan should continue to work on implementing the three remaining items in its action plan to address its strategically important deficiencies, including "demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all 1267 and 1373 designated terrorists, specifically those acting for or on their behalf.

Financial Action Task Force

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 during the G7 Summit in Paris.
- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- Its Secretariat is located at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) headquarters in Paris.
- Member Countries: it consists of thirty-seven member jurisdictions.
- India is one of the members.

FATF has two lists:

Grey List: Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.

Black List: Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.

- The FATF Plenary is the decision-making body of the FATF. It meets three times per year.

Source: The Hindu

ARTISAN-BASED SFURTI CLUSTERS

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

50 artisan-based SFURTI clusters, spread over 18 States were recently inaugurated.

Highlights:

- Artisans shall be supported in the traditional segments of muslin, khadi, coir, handlooms, woodcraft, pottery, carpet weaving, agro-processing, etc.
- The Center is implementing the Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) to organize traditional industries and artisans into clusters to make them competitive and increase their income.
- SFURTI clusters are of two types:
 - Regular Cluster (500 artisans) with Government assistance of up to Rs.2.5 crore
 - Major Cluster (more than 500 artisans) with Government assistance up to Rs.5 crore
- The artisans are organized into SPVs which can be:
 - a Society registered under Societies (Registration) Act, 1860,
 - a Co-operative Society under an appropriate statute,
 - a Producer Company under Section 465 (1) of Companies Act, 2013 (18 of 2013),
 - a Section 8 Company under the Companies Act, 2013 (18 of 2013) or (v) a Trust.

Source: News on AIR

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ASSAM POWER TRANSMISSION PROJECT

Syllabus section: economy

Why in News?

The Finance Ministry informed that the Central government has inked a loan agreement worth \$304 million with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank- AIIB for strengthening the electricity transmission system of Assam.

Highlights:

- The total estimated cost of the project in Assam is \$365 million, out of which \$304 million will be provided by AIIB and the rest of the amount by the Assam State Government.
- The loan from AIIB comes with a maturity of 24 years along with a grace period of 5 years.

Objective:

The funds from AIIB will be used for improving the existing power transmission network in Assam and will build new networks for ensuring affordable and reliable power supply in the state.

Assam Power Transmission Project:

- The Assam Power Transmission project seeks to address the substantial energy deficit faced by the state on the account of congestion in transmission networks and electricity distribution.
- The project will include laying a transmission line and construction of 10 transmission substations. Apart from this, 15 other existing substations will also be upgraded and the existing transmission lines will be converted to the optical power wire.
- It will also help in reducing greenhouse emissions and will also improve the quality of the power supply to the ultimate consumers.
- It will strengthen the existing intrastate transmission network of the state by augmenting it with new networks for achieving secure, affordable, reliable, and efficient power.

Assam faces energy deficit:

- Assam has been currently witnessing an energy deficit, especially during peak hours and one of the main reasons behind it is the transmission networks and congestion of electricity distribution.

- Currently, the Assam Electricity Grid Corporation, the sole transmission utility of the state, manages the maintenance, operation, and development of 66 substations along with 6,882 megavolt-ampere capacity as well as a network of 5,701 circuit km of the transmission lines.

Source: Economic times

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR COAL SECTOR

Why in News?

Ministry of Coal has moved forward with a comprehensive Sustainable Development Plan and has initiated its speedy implementation. The primary focus is on making an immediate social impact through Out of Box (OoB) measures besides regular environmental monitoring and mitigation during the mining operations.

- o These OoB measures include the use of surplus Mine Water for irrigation & drinking purpose in and around mining areas, extraction & use of Sand from Overburden (OB), promoting Eco-Mine Tourism, encouraging Bamboo Plantation, etc

About:

Utilization of Mine Water:

- Topmost priority is being given to gainful utilization of Mine Water for irrigation & providing treated water for drinking to the rural population in & around the command area of mining subsidiaries of CIL, SCCL & NLCIL.
- Huge volume of mine water released during mining operation is partially utilized for internal consumption by coalmines for providing drinking water in their colonies, dust suppression, industrial use, plantation etc.
- The internal consumption constitutes about 45 % of total mine water leaving a substantial volume for community use.
- Some of the subsidiaries of CIL are already providing mine water for irrigation purposes & drinking water to nearby villages.

Eco Parks:

- 10 new Eco-Parks in different mining areas are under different stages of development in various subsidiaries of CIL, SCCL & NLCIL and will be completed in the next 2 years.

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- Coal companies have already developed 15 eco-parks in various coalfields.

Extraction and use of Sand from Over Burden (OB)

- Extraction of sand from Over Burden (OB) for use as construction & stowing material is another unique initiative promoting sustainable development through gainful utilization of wastes generated during mining.
- This initiative also lowers the adverse footprint of riverbed mining of sand.

First Mile Connectivity

- First Mile Connectivity (FMC) is another major sustainable initiative by coal companies, where coal is being transported through conveying or belt from Coal Handling Plants to Silo for loading.
- This process eliminates the movement of coal through the road and thus not only minimizes the environmental pollution but also reduces the carbon footprint.

Bio Reclamation and Tree Plantation

- Bio-Reclamation and massive tree plantation have been one of the key thrust areas of coal companies in promoting environmental sustainability.
- New techniques like seed ball plantation have been adopted in many mines for providing green cover on OB Dumps.

Source: PIB

PSLV ROCKET'S ONE OF LONGEST MISSIONS

Why in News?

The Indian rocket numbered PSLV-C51 carrying the 637-kg Brazilian satellite Amazonia-1 and 18 other satellites (including 13 from USA) is scheduled to lift-off from the first launch pad at Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC)

About:

- It is India's first space mission for 2021 and is one of the longest for a PSLV rocket.
- The rocketing is a fully commercial one of NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL) with the primary passenger being the Amazonia-1 satellite.
- Amazonia-1 is the optical earth observation satellite of National Institute for Space Research (INPE).

- o This satellite would further strengthen the existing structure by providing remote sensing data to users for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon region and analysis of diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory

- The 18 co-passenger satellites include four from IN-SPACe (three UNITYsats from the consortium of three Indian academic institutes (Jeppiaar Institute of Technology, Sriperumbudur, G.H.Raisoni College of Engineering, Nagpur and Sri Shakthi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Coimbatore) And One Satish Dhawan Sat from Space Kidz India) and 14 from NSIL.
- The other 14 satellites ferried on commercial basis are SindhuNetra, an Indian technology demonstration satellite and 13 satellites from the USA viz., SAI-1 NanoConnect-2, a technology demonstration satellite and 12 SpaceBees satellites for two way satellite communications and data relay.
- Third-time ISRO will be using the PSLV rocket's DL variant that will have two strap-on booster motors.
- The PSLV is a four-stage/engine rocket powered by solid and liquid fuels alternatively with six booster motors strapped onto the first stage to give higher thrust during the initial flight moments.
- The PSLV-C51 mission is one of the longest ones.

Source: The Financial Express

SARAS AAJEEVIKA MELA

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister for Rural Development inaugurated Saras Aajeevika Mela 2021 at Noida Haat.

About:

- It is a program to transform rural India in general and the lives of rural women in particular.
- During the Mela, workshops on product packaging and design, communication skills, social media publicity, and Business to Business marketing will be organized to educate the rural self-help groups and craftsmen.

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- It is an initiative by the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) under the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) organized by the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART).
- Objective: To bring the Rural women Self Help Groups (SHGs) under one platform so that they can showcase their skills, sell their products and help them build linkage with bulk buyers,
- Through participation in SARAS Aajeevika Mela, there rural SHG women will get vital national level exposure to understand the demand and taste of urban customers.

Source: PIB

INDIA-CHINA HOTLINE

Why in News?

Recently, India and China announced that both have agreed to establish a Hotline.

About:

- New Delhi and Beijing announced that both have agreed to establish a hotline — “for timely communication and exchange of views”.
 - Hotline is a direct telephone line in constant operational readiness so as to facilitate immediate communication

India's View:

- MEA made it clear that disengagement, followed by de-escalation, will lead to peace along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and eventually normalization of ties.
- Reiterated the ‘three mutuals’ (mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests) as the approach to the relationship.

China's View:

- The boundary situation should not be placed at the front and centre of the relationship, but instead at a “proper place” in overall ties.
- The indication two sides should return to business as usual while the issue is dealt with.

Way Forward:

- As two big emerging economies, China and India need to pursue development alongside each other, move forward in partnership instead of a hindrance, and work together for shared progress rather than erecting walls against each other.

- The two sides need to commit to the strategic consensus reached between their leaders, stay on the right path toward mutual trust and cooperation between big neighbors, and never take the wrong path of mutual misgivings and suspicion, still less the path of retrogression.

Source: Indian Express

MARITIME INDIA SUMMIT 2021

Why In News?

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will inaugurate ‘Maritime India Summit 2021’ on 2nd March via video conferencing

About Maritime India Summit 2021

- The Maritime India Summit 2021 is being organized by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways on a virtual platform
- The Summit will visualize a roadmap for India's Maritime sector for next decade and will work to propel India to the forefront of the Global Maritime Sector.
- Speakers from several countries will attend the Summit and explore the potential business opportunities and investments in the Indian Maritime domain. Denmark is the partner country for the three-day summit.

Source: PIB

CARACAL

Syllabus section: Environment and ecology

Why in News?

Recently The National Board for Wildlife and Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change month included the caracal, a medium-sized wildcat found in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat, in the list of critically endangered species.

About:

- Besides India, the caracal is found in several dozen countries across Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia.
- While it flourishes in parts of Africa, its numbers in Asia are declining.
- The wildcat has long legs, a short face, long canine teeth, and distinctive ears — long and pointy, with tufts of black hair at their tips.
- **Name:** The iconic ears are what give the animal its name — caracal comes from the Turkish karakulak, meaning ‘black ears’. In India, it is called siya gosh, a Persian name that translates as ‘black Ear’. A Sanskrit fable exists about a small wild cat named deergha-karn or ‘long-eared’.

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- The earliest evidence of the caracal in the subcontinent comes from a fossil dating back to the civilisation of the Indus Valley c. 3000-2000 BC, according to a reference in 'Historical and current extent of occurrence of the Caracal in India', one of the few published studies on the animal.

Do you know?

- Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1351-88) had siyah-goshdarkhana, stables that housed large numbers of coursing caracal. It finds mention in Abul Fazl's Akbarnama, as a hunting animal in the time of Akbar (1556-1605). Descriptions and illustrations of the caracal can be found in medieval texts such as the Anvar-i-Suhayli, Tutinama, Khamsa-e-Nizami, and Shahnameh.
- The caracal's use as a coursing animal is believed to have taken it far beyond its natural range to places like Ladakh in the north to Bengal in the east. The East India Company's Robert Clive is said to have been presented with a caracal after he defeated Siraj-ud-daullah in the Battle of Plassey (1757).

Source: Indian express

NATIONAL BAMBOO MISSION

Syllabus section: economy

Why in News?

The National Bamboo Mission anchored at the Department of Agriculture Cooperation & Farmers Welfare organized a two-day conference 'National Consultation on Opportunities and Challenges for Bamboo in India' through the virtual platform on the 25th and 26th of February 2021.

About:

- NITI Aayog and Invest India also joined hands with the National Bamboo Mission to conduct the event.
- The aim of the brainstorming session was to deliberate on the bamboo ecosystem for promoting the holistic growth of the sector across the entire value chain.
- The deliberations of experts and stakeholders from various fields would further accelerate the efforts of the National Bamboo Mission to pinpoint solutions to issues facing the sector.
- This conference provided benefit because of the participation of eminent professionals related to bamboo farming, innovation, research, industry, entrepreneurs, and attendees from research institutes, farmers and entrepreneurs.

- It held discussions on all subjects related to the bamboo industry starting from planting material to high-end engineered products & marketing.
- The topics of discussion in the conference include-
 - Bamboo for Atma Nirbhar Bharat,
 - Promoting Exports & Global Branding,
 - Availability of Feedstock & Plantations,
 - Innovations, Research & Development,
 - Skill Development and
 - Access to Institutional Credit & International Cooperation.

Some important ideas/challenges that emerge from the discussions were as follows:

- Adoption of agro-forestry models by the farmers, especially to tide over the initial 3-4 years of gestation of bamboo plantation
- Intercropping with ginger, pulses, lemongrass, etc were suggested as a viable option.
- Use of good credible planting material and improved agronomic practices to increase yields were considered to be absolutely vital for the sector.
- Plantations on culturable wastelands should be encouraged on a large scale to provide feed stock to the industry.
- Integrated primary processing units for the complete utilization of bamboo i.e. a zero waste policy would lead to optimum use of bamboo in the country.

What else can be done?

- To overcome the issue of high transport cost especially from the North Eastern Region, use of waterways and transport subsidy options need to be explored.
- Incentives available across sectors for bamboo need to be compiled for use by potential entrepreneurs.
- Steps need to be taken to encourage startups, entrepreneurship in the bamboo sector.
- The GeM portal will create a dedicated window for registration of bamboo products to add visibility of bamboo products in the electronic market space for Government procurement.
- The need for mass production related to bamboo in areas such as construction, bio CNG, ethanol etc. would provide a real fillip to the sector and add to the income of farmers. Import substitution should be an important aim such as for agarbatti and engineered wood.

Source: DD News

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“SUGAMYA BHARAT APP” AND “ACCESS - THE PHOTO DIGEST”

Why in News?

Union Minister for Social justice and Empowerment Shri Thaawarchand Gehlot will virtually launch the “Sugamya Bharat App” and a handbook entitled “Access – The Photo Digest”.

About:

Sugamya Bharat APP

- It is a Crowdsourcing Mobile Application.
- It is meant for sensitizing and enhancing accessibility in the 3 pillars of the Accessible India Campaign i.e. built environment, transportation sector and ICT ecosystem in India.
- The app provides for five main features, 4 of which are directly related to enhancing accessibility, while the fifth is a special feature meant only for Divyangjan for COVID-related issues.

- The accessibility-related features are: the registration of complaints of inaccessibility across the 3 broad pillars of the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyaan; positive feedback of examples and best practices worth emulating being shared by people as jan-bhagidhari; Departmental updates; and guidelines and circulars related to accessibility.
- It is available in 10 regional languages, namely, Hindi, English, Marathi, Tamil, Odiya, Kannada, Telugu, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Malayalam.
- DEPwD has also prepared a handbook entitled “Access - The Photo Digest” with a collection of photographs from across different States and UTs

Source: PIB