CURRENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY

WEEK-1 MARCH 2021

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— Disclaimer —

The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST
WEEK- 1 (MARCH, 2021)

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SECTION: A
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

THE WORLD'S WETTEST PLACE IS WITNESSING A DECLINE IN RAINFALL

CONTEXT

A recent analysis of 119 years of rainfall measurements at different *rain gauge stations* across North East India, has revealed a *decreasing trend in summer* rainfall since 1973, including in rainy Meghalaya, reputed for hosting the world's wettest place.

◉ BACKGROUND

- Parts of India, especially Northeast India, one of the wettest places on the Earth, are facing a severe impact of the climate crisis with reduced rainfall and increase in dry, or no rain, and heavy rain days.

- The monsoon, which generally begins in June and retreats by September, delivers around 70% of India's annual rainfall.

- The monsoon is key to replenishing reservoirs, groundwater and addressing water shortages.

- However, the current study has shown significant decreasing trends in Meghalaya, where Cherrapunji is known as one of the places with the highest precipitation globally.

  ➤ Climate change is bringing erratic weather—flood and drought, sometimes in the same area (for example-Kerala (2018).

  ➤ The monsoons now bring less rain in total, while the demand for water increases as the population, economy, and industry grows.

  ➤ The rains come in increasingly violent deluges, but with little storage options, most of the rainwater is lost as run-off.

◉ ANALYSIS

Assessing North East India on the rainfall track

- North East India is **mostly hilly** and is an **extension of the Deccan plateau.**

- The region is highly sensitive to changes in regional and global climate.

  ➤ Northeast India has the highest vegetation cover in India and included in 18 biodiversity hotspots of the world, indicating the importance of the region in terms of its greenery and climate-change sensitivity.

- Pre-monsoon and monsoon are the rainy seasons of North East India.

- **Rain-bearing summer air currents** (the Bay of Bengal branch of monsoons) that move north from Bangladesh's hot and humid floodplains hit the funnel-shaped relief of the Meghalaya hills with deep valleys and gorges.

- The steep parallel mountains (**Garo, Khasi and Jaintia hills**) in Meghalaya block the movement of the clouds to the north; they are squeezed in through the gorges and then forced to ascend the steep slopes and shed most of their rainfall in the region.

About Cherrapunji

- Cherrapunji, known to locals as Sohra, is located in the East Khasi Hills in the Indian state of Meghalaya.

  ➤ Sandwiched between Assam in the north and Bangladesh in the south, Meghalaya is a part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot--one of the most threatened biodiversity hotspots in India after the Himalayas--due to rapid resource exploitation and habitat loss.

  ➤ The hills of the eastern sub-Himalayas-Garo, Khasi and Jaintia, run through most of Meghalaya, and the rest of the landscape is a high plateau.

- Cherrapunji was declared the **wettest land-based location** on Earth after it receive an average of 11,872 mm in annual rainfall — more than 10 times India's national average (of 1,083 mm).

What is meant by 'wettest'?

- When it comes to describing locations on planet Earth in terms of "wet", some clarifications are needed.

- Here, the average annual precipitation is addressed– i.e. rainfall, snow, drizzle, fog, etc. – measured in mm (or inches).

Reasons for the torrential rains

- The reason for these torrential rains is complex, but, essentially, monsoon clouds from the Bay of Bengal fly over hundreds of kilometers of open, relatively flat terrain to reach Cherrapunji.

- Once the clouds reach Cherrapunji, they are faced with the rather steep rise of the **Khasi Hills,** and in order to rise with the hills, they must first dump much of their moisture.

- Cherrapunji's location between the Bay of Bengal on one side and the Khasi Hills on the other justifies the heavy rainfall it receives.

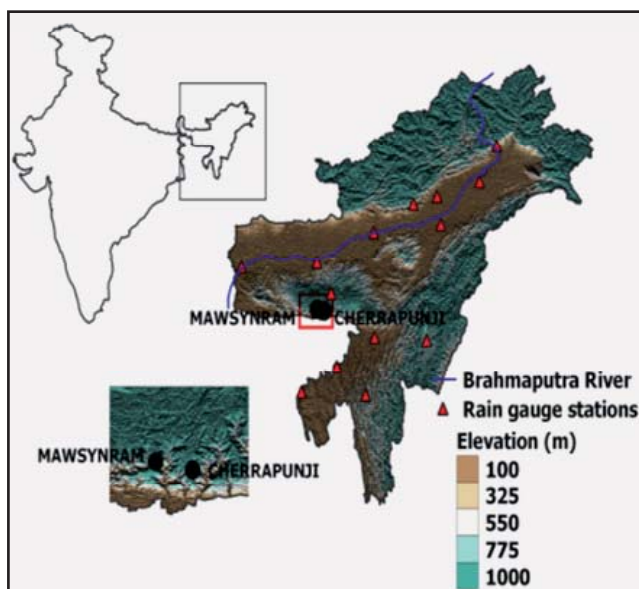- Moisture from the Arabian Sea also brings heavy rainfall to Mahabaleshwar.

Other Important locations:

Beyond northeastern India, there are several other locations on Earth that experience over 10 meters (32.8 feet) of annual precipitation.

- The town of **Tutunendo, Colombia**, experiences an average of 11,770 mm (463.38 in) of annual rainfall.

- **Mount Waialeale**, a shield volcano located on the island of Kaua'i on the Hawaiian Islands.

  ➤ As the the second highest point on the island, its name literally means "rippling water. This mountain has had an average of 11,500 mm (452 in) of rainfall since 1912.

- However, in 1982, its summit experienced 17,300 mm (683 in), making it the wettest place on Earth in that year.

- Between, 1978-2007, Big Bog – a spot in Haleakala National Park on the island of Maui, Hawaii – experienced an average of 10,300 mm (404 in) of rainfall, putting it in the top ten.

Key-highlights of the Study

- According to the study, most stations in North East India show **negative trends in rainfall**, with the largest decreasing trends in rainfall in summer and the lowest in winter.

- The annual mean rainfall for the period 1973–2019 showed decreasing trends of about 0.42 mm per decade.

  ➤ The reduction in winter rainfall is statistically significant at North Lakhimpur, Pasighat and Shillong.

- These long-term rainfall changes in the region are responsible for the observed shift of the world's wettest place from Cherrapunji to Mawsynram (separated by 15-km) in recent decades.

  ➤ **Mawsynram** receives an average annual rainfall of 11,871 mm while **Cherrapunji** braces for torrential rains every year with an annual average at 11,430 mm.

The Study

- The current study used daily and continuous rain gauge measurements from 16 stations, which are managed by the **India Meteorological Department**, spread across seven states of North East India for the period 1901–2019.

- As for rainfall measurements from the Mawsynram station, the scientists used data from the annual reports of the **Meghalaya Planning Department** (1970s to 2010) since Mawsynram does not have an IMD-managed rain gauge set up.

What factors are responsible for the dip in rainfall?

- **Variation in temperature of water bodies:** The decline in rainfall is driven by changes in the **Indian Ocean temperature and Arabian Sea**.

- **Human factor:** Population growth and human activities such as agriculture have caused deforestation and reduction in ice and snow in northeast India. This has increased water bodies, and urban and built-up lands between 2001 and 2018.

- **Climate change:** Human-induced climate change has been causing widespread changes to weather patterns in India.

- **Conversion of forestlands:** It is also due to conversion of forestlands and vegetation cover to croplands in the last two decades.

  ➤ The analysis also showed reductions in vegetation with 104.5 sqkm lost per year.

  ➤ On the other hand, there were significant increases in crop-land (182.1 sqkm per year) and urban and built-up lands (0.3 sqkm per year) during the period 2001–2018.

- **Fragmented forests:** The fragmentation and isolation of once contiguous forests because of infrastructure projects is also why a fourth of Meghalaya's forests are now vulnerable to climate change.

- It is also due to change in moisture content in air due to changes in vegetation pattern.

Significance of rainforests

- A sq km of rainforest can harbour as many as 1,000 different plant species.

- India's rainforests are primarily scattered across the Western Ghats, along the country's western coast and parts of the Eastern Ghats along the east coast.

- Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Assam in the northeast are the other areas that support such forests.

- Around 10% of Meghalaya's forests are tropical wet evergreen forests or rainforests.

- Several species of plants and animals--vultures, frogs, turtles and orchids--in Meghalaya's rainforests are "critically endangered" or "vulnerable". These are endemic to the region, found nowhere else in the world.

- Meghalaya's sacred groves, some of which are rainforests, are home to 1,886 plant species, including orchid, bamboo, timber and medicinal plants.

It is these forests that Meghalaya is losing, a decline, the government hopes, can be halted by local communities.

To sum up, changes in land-use patterns, coupled with variations in temperature in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, remarkably contributed to a decreasing trend in rainfall.

Implications

The changing climate in Meghalaya would have widespread implications for forests, water resources, biodiversity, agriculture, livestock and human health.

- **Forest fire, landslides & siltation of water bodies:** Due to significant rise in temperature, forest fires may go up while extreme rainfall events will increase risk of landslides in high altitude areas causing siltation of water bodies downstream.

- **Threat to flora and fauna:** The rise in temperature will also threaten endemic plant species many of which are already on the verge of extinction.

- **Adverse effects on agriculture:** Rain-fed agriculture in the state will be adversely hit with crop yields and production declining.

Why reliable rainfall data of NEI is important?

- In North East India, long-term, dense and reliable daily rainfall data from IMD is infrequent due to remoteness of the region with low population density, extended periods of regional conflicts and environmental disasters and change in location of the observatories in some stations within the same locality resulting in fragmented or inconsistent data series.

- A better understanding of the physical mechanisms of the NEI's rainfall variability is crucial for developing advanced projections of future rainfall variability.

India is planning to set up a **Regional Climate Centre (RCC)** for the **Third Pole (Himalayan)** region during the next five years for weather and climate service up-gradation in the Himalayan region and high mountain ranges through impact-based forecasting and risk-based warning, sectoral applications and research and development.

⊙ CONCLUSION

India is currently facing a difficult environmental situation. Climate change seems to have come knocking early, and there is no way of predicting with precision what path it will take in the coming decades. Only if the country is able to begin with present-day climate variability effectively, then it will be moving in the right direction, otherwise, things can go worse. Preparedness and global cooperation is the best way forward.

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COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND MAURITIUS

CONTEXT

In a positive development, the Union Cabinet has approved signing of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius.

⊙ BACKGROUND

- India and Mauritius enjoy excellent bilateral relations, sustained by historic cultural affinities, frequent high-level political interactions, development cooperation, defence and maritime partnership, and people to people linkages.

- Mauritius is an important development partner of India.

- India had extended a 'Special Economic Package' of USD 353 million to Mauritius in 2016.

- The new Supreme Court building project is one of the five projects being implemented under this package and was jointly inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth in July 2020.

- In October 2019, Prime Minister Modi and the PM of Mauritius had jointly inaugurated the Phase-I of the Metro Express Project and the 100-bed state of the art ENT hospital project in Mauritius, also built under the special economic package.

- The India-Mauritius CECPA will further cement the already deep and special relations between the two countries.

> **SAGAR (security and growth for all)**
>
> - In 2015, Indian PM unveiled an ambitious policy called **the SAGAR (security and growth for all).**
> - It was India's first significant policy statement on the Indian Ocean in many decades.

⊙ ANALYSIS

What is in the India-Mauritius CECPA?

- The India-Mauritius CECPA will be the **first trade Agreement** to be signed by India with a country in Africa.

> India has implemented free trade pacts with countries like Japan, Korea and ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations). It is also negotiating similar agreements with Australia, New Zealand and European Union.

- The Agreement is a **limited agreement**. It will cover
  - ➤ Trade in Goods
  - ➤ Rules of Origin
  - ➤ Trade in Services
  - ➤ Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)
  - ➤ Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures
  - ➤ Dispute Settlement
  - ➤ Movement of Natural Persons
  - ➤ Telecom
  - ➤ Financial services
  - ➤ Customs Procedures and Cooperation in other Areas

- The CECPA between India and Mauritius covers 310 export items for India, including food stuff and beverages (80 lines), agricultural products (25 lines), textile and textile articles (27 lines), base metals and articles thereof (32 lines), electricals and electronic item (13 lines), plastics and chemicals (20 lines), wood and articles thereof (15 lines), and others.

What is Automatic Trigger Safeguard Mechanism (ATSM)?

- Both sides have also agreed to negotiate an **Automatic Trigger Safeguard Mechanism (ATSM)** for a limited number of highly sensitive products within two years of the Signing of the Agreement.

- It will automatically increase levies once imports cross a given threshold.

- ATSM is considered as an effective tool in balancing trade among multilateral partners.

- It was also part of the **trans-pacific partnership (TPP),** negotiations before the Donald Trump Administration pulled out from it.

Assessing the trade relationship of India and Mauritius

- Since 2005, India has been among the **largest trading partners** of Mauritius, and has been one of the largest exporters of goods and services to Mauritius.

- According to the International Trade Centre (ITC), in 2019, the main import partners of Mauritius were India (13.85%), China (16.69%), South Africa (8.07%), and UAE (7.28%).

- The bilateral trade between India and Mauritius has registered a growth of 233% from USD 206.76 million in Financial Year (FY) 2005-06 to USD 690.02 million in FY 2019-20.

- India's exports to Mauritius surged 232% from USD 199.43 million in FY 2005-06 to USD 662.13 million in FY 2019-20, while India's imports from Mauritius increased 280% from USD7.33 million in 2005-06 to USD 27.89 million in FY 2019-20.

What is the importance of Mauritius for India?

- **Diaspora:** Communities of Indian origin constitute a significant majority in the island.

- **Power contestation in Indian Ocean:** India has certainly begun to see the strategic significance of Mauritius due to the renewed great power contestation in the Indian Ocean.

  ➤ Mauritius is all about location and the genius of its people. As early European explorers sailed around the African continent and ventured eastwards to India, they began to call Mauritius, the **"Star and Key of the Indian Ocean".**

  ➤ If the Portuguese and the Dutch were the first to gain a foothold in Mauritius, it was the French who gained effective control over the island in the early 18th century.

- **A significant gateway:** The Mauritius pivot can facilitate a number of Indian commercial activities in the south western Indian Ocean — as a banking gateway, the hub for flights to and from Indian cities and tourism.

How significant is this agreement?

- **Improvement in trade:** CECPA provides for an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade between the two countries.

- **Preferential market access for Mauritius:** Mauritius will benefit from preferential market access into India for its 615 products, including frozen fish, speciality sugar, biscuits, fresh fruits, juices, mineral water, beer, alcoholic drinks, soaps, bags, medical and surgical equipment, and apparel.

- **Wide access to service sectors:** As regards trade in services, Indian service providers will have access to around 115 sub-sectors from the 11 broad service sectors. On the other hand, India has offered around 95 sub-sectors from the 11 broad services sectors.

⦿ CONCLUSION

Mauritius is "at the heart" of India's policy in the wider Indian Ocean Region for its strategic value. And this latest development will further strengthen India's game in the region.

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MAPPING THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

CONTEXT

China's internationalization—as laid out its Belt and Road Initiative—is not simply a pursuit of geopolitical influence but also, in some tellings, a weapon, which can be even riskier for India.
Thus it becomes essential to have a definitive analysis of multiple aspects of the BRI.

⊙ BACKGROUND

- ⊙ China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping during official visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, is among the world's most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived.

- ⊙ It is a union of development and investment initiatives that would stretch from East Asia to Europe, and in the process significantly expand China's economic and political influence in these massive regions.

- ⊙ Belt and Road, or *yi dai yi lu*, is a "21st century silk road," confusingly made up of a "belt" of overland corridors and a maritime "road" of shipping lanes.

- ⊙ The plan, initially named 'One Belt, One Road', is two-pronged:

  - ➤ **Overland Silk Road Economic Belt:** On land, Beijing aims to connect the country's underdeveloped hinterland to Europe through Central Asia.

  - ➤ **Maritime Silk Road:** The maritime component will build ports and railways to connect the fast growing Southeast Asian region to China's southern provinces and beyond till Europe via Middle East and East Africa.

⊙ ANALYSIS

What is the 'actual aim' of China through BRI?

- ⊙ **Strengthening economic leadership:** Viewed from the geopolitical lens, Beijing's aim, through the BRI, is to strengthen its economic leadership.

- ⊙ **Asserting presence at global level:** While gaining political leverage over its neighbours, China aims to assert its presence on the global stage. It runs parallel to China's growing assertiveness in its bilateral relations, as seen in its increasingly hawkish actions in its immediate region, like South China Sea and beyond.

- ⊙ **Expansion of Chinese currency:** It further aims to create a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, highways, and some 50 special economic zones—all of which would expand the international use of Chinese currency, the **Renminbi.**

Is China trying to 're-engage' its ties?

◎ The BRI, however, is not only an initiative; it is a response: for one, to former US President Barack Obama's '**pivot to Asia**'; and to the growing salience of the Indo-Pacific maritime geography as well.

➤ In recent years, the Indo Pacific has become central to the security and foreign policies of countries like the US, Japan, Australia, India, the UK, France, Germany, and the countries of ASEAN.

◎ China is working to strengthen global economic links to its western regions, which historically have been neglected.

◎ Promoting economic development in the western province of Xinjiang, where the Communist Party of China has waged a brutal campaign of intimidation and violence against the Uighur Muslims, is seen as a priority.

◎ So is securing long-term energy supplies from Central Asia and the Middle East.

Why is the initiative sparking global concern?

As Belt and Road raises various concerns for countries around the globe.

◎ **Economic imperialism:** It is a form of economic imperialism that gives China too much leverage over other countries, often those that are smaller and poorer.

◎ **Expanding military presence:** Some worry expanded Chinese commercial presence around the world will eventually lead to expanded military presence.

➤ In 2016 China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti. Analysts say almost all the ports and other transport infrastructure being built can be dual-use for commercial and military purposes, called **militarization of supply chain.**

What is India's say in the project?

● India, for its part, had taken an early stance against the BRI and refused to participate in the inaugural Belt and Road Forum in 2017 as it passes through Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK).

● It had long emphasised that connectivity projects should respect the participating country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, not create unsustainable debt burden, involve transparent accounting, and create benefits for the local economy.

Is the plan becoming a debt trap?

China has often been accused of a non-transparent financing model for BRI, which has led to a debt trap in certain countries due to Chinese loans offered for the BRI projects.

The affected nations – Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, the Maldives, Mongolia, Montenegro, Pakistan and Tajikistan – are among the poorest in their respective regions and will owe more than half of all their foreign debt to China.

◎ The story of Sri Lanka, for example, being saddled by the burden of unsustainable debt to China is well-documented. In 2018, former Malaysian President Mahathir Mohamad suspended work on certain BRI ventures in his country over concerns of mounting debts to China.

◎ For similar reasons, the government of Myanmar has significantly scaled down the **Kyaukpyu port project.**

◎ In Pakistan, too, the voices against the conditionalities tied to Chinese activities and loans have grown louder.

Major initiatives by other countries (to counter China's BRI)

◎ **Asia-Africa Growth Corridor:** Japan, along with India has unveiled their own development cooperation with third countries under the banner of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor.

◎ **US International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC):** The US, meanwhile, has launched a new development finance institution, the **US International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC)** to compete with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), headquartered in Beijing, China, which substantially finances BRI.

◎ **Blue Dot Network:** And the US and Australia have joined Japan in announcing plans through the Blue Dot Network for an alternative to BRI.

➤ Led by the USIDFC, the Blue Dot network was jointly launched by the US, Japan (Japanese Bank for International Cooperation) and Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) in November 2019 on the sidelines of the **35th ASEAN Summit** in Thailand.

➤ It is meant to be a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to bring governments, the private sector and civil society together to promote "high quality, trusted standards for global infrastructure development".

➤ However, there is not financing component involved in this.

◉ CONCLUSION

In this era of global politics when Chinese belligerence is heightening alongside its expanding global footprint, countries around the globe, especially India must recognize how this Chinese initiative is aiming to reshape the global order in fundamental ways. Such knowledge and understanding would serve as an anchor for an appropriate response to China.

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CONCLUSIVE LAND TITLING

CONTEXT

Niti Aayog, the country's planning body has crafted a new model bill in which states will guarantee the accuracy of 'land titles' and provide compensation in case of disputes.

⦿ BACKGROUND

- The Union Government wants to reform the country's land markets through a fundamental legal and procedural shift in how land titles are awarded.

- In 2020, even as laws for farm reform and labour code reform were being enacted, the government's think tank, NITI Aayog, took steps to initiate land reforms.

- A **Model Bill on Conclusive Land Titling** was sent to States and Union Territories last June seeking their comments.

- In September, after many States failed to send in their feedback, the Centre warned that their agreement would be presumed.

Land conflicts in India

- The **World Bank** estimates about two-thirds of pending case in courts are related to land.

- **Land Conflict Watch**, a group of researchers, estimates that roughly 800 disputes in India impact 7.3 million people and threaten more than $200 billion in investments across an area bigger than the country of Israel.

- A **NITI Aayog** study on strengthening arbitration estimated that disputes on land or real estate take an average time of 20 years in the courts to be resolved.

⦿ ANALYSIS

What is the current procedure?

- India currently follows a system of presumptive land titling. This means that land records are maintained, with information on possession, which is determined through details of past transactions.

- Ownership, then, is established on the basis of current possession.

- Land titles were now awarded, under the **Transfer of Property Act, 1882**, and **Civil Procedure Code, 1908**, on the basis of documentation and possession of the property.

- Any dispute was fought in a civil court.

- Registration of land is actually a registration of transactions, such as sale deeds, records of inheritance, mortgage and lease.

- Holding registration papers does not actually involve the government or the legal framework guaranteeing the ownership title of the land.

The conclusive land titling system

- Under a conclusive land titling system, land records designate actual ownership.

- The title is granted by the government, which takes the responsibility for accuracy.

- Once a title is granted, any other claimant will have to settle disputes with the government, not the title holder.

- Further, under conclusive land titling, the government may provide compensation to claimants in case of disputes, but the title holder is not in any danger of losing ownership.

What is the proposed process?

- **Setting up of land authority:** Under the proposal, each state is to set up a **land authority** that will have a **title registration officer (TRO)** who will prepare a title record based on document-based claims from the presumptive owners and any claimants.

- **Draft list of presumptive ownership:** The authority will then publish a draft list of the presumptive ownership of every plot (on which it has received applications) and invite claims within a given deadline from anyone else with an interest in the property.

- **Dispute resolution:** The TRO will be free to mention any number of people as owners of a particular plot if satisfied with their documents. If the official cannot come to a decision, he or she might refer the case to the land **dispute resolution officer (LDRO),** appointed under the land authority.

- **Record of titles:** A "record of titles" will then be notified. Over the next three years, "land titling appellate tribunals", made up of retired or serving district judges, will hear disputes arising out of the orders passed by the TRO and the LDRO.

- **Conclusive title:** Once three years have passed since the notification, the title will be deemed conclusive, open to challenge only through writ petitions in the higher courts.

- Plots already enmeshed in court cases will remain outside the ambit of the conclusive titling process, which an official said would provide an incentive

to a dubious claimant to quickly lodge a legal case before the proposal is enacted.

How Land conflicts are hindering India's growth?

⊙ **Black market for land transaction:** While the Digital India Land Records Modernization Program dashboard shows that land records in 90.1% of villages have been computerized, many records haven't been properly updated -- forcing investors to deal with multiple parties to acquire land and often face requests for bribery.

⊙ **Issue in taxation:** In cities, urban local bodies depend on property taxes that can be levied properly only if there is clear ownership data available. Ambiguity in ownership also deprives the government of taxes.

⊙ **Debt burden in rural areas:** In rural areas, access to agricultural credit is dependent on the ability to use land as collateral. Without being able to prove their ownership of land and access formal credit from banks, small and marginal farmers are often left at the mercy of unscrupulous moneylenders, entrenching themselves in a mountain of debt.

⊙ **Stalled investments:** Land conflicts have also stalled investments across cement, steel, mining and power sectors.

⊙ **Clogged judiciary:** Land disputes account for the largest set of cases in Indian courts- 25 percent of all cases decided by the Supreme Court involved land disputes. The average pendency of a land acquisition dispute case, from its creation to its resolution by the Supreme Court, is 20 years.

> **Judicial causes for pendency**
> ● Once a land dispute goes to court, serious judicial incapacity leads to pendency of cases because of three reasons:

> ➤ India's low judge-to-people ratio
> ➤ lack of financial, technical, and infrastructural capacity necessary to resolve disputes quickly, particularly at the judiciary's lowest levels
> ➤ poor enforcement of court decisions by the government, and limited judicial capacity to follow up on such enforcement

What hurdles will be faced in the process?

⊙ The biggest challenge is that land records have not been updated for decades, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

⊙ Land records are often in the name of the grandparents of the current owner, with no proof of inheritance.

⊙ Unless they are based on updated records, conclusive land titles could create even more problems.

Wrapping Up

Due to increasing population pressure on land, and the corresponding demand for land to fuel the development engine, the scale and scope of land conflict today has assumed gigantic proportions, stalling development projects and threatening livelihoods and investments. Since land is central to India's developmental trajectory, finding a solution to land conflict should be the foremost priority of the Government.

In this regard, equitable and efficient intergenerational management of land is necessary not just for India's economic development, but also for its political and social stability.

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CHANDIGARH, FIRST IN THE RACE TO ASSESS THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF INDIVIDUALS

CONTEXT

Chandigarh became the first state or Union Territory in India to launch Carbon Watch, a mobile application to assess the carbon footprint of an individual.

◉ BACKGROUND

- India is among the fastest-growing economies and the third largest emitting country in the world but has always held the onus of climate change on developed countries for their historical emissions.

- India has high ambitions of industrial growth, while it also has the most vulnerable population, which will be impacted by climate change and would need protection.

- The dichotomy that the country is in today is just one reason why India needs to do more to protect itself and its citizens from climate change.

- With increasing extreme-weather events and threats of global warming, it is time to prepare for climate change on a war footing.
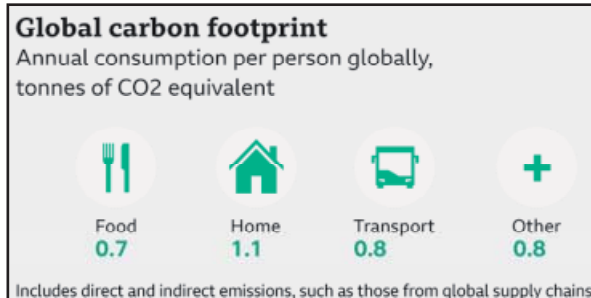
◉ ANALYSIS

What is Carbon Watch?

- Carbon Watch is a mobile app for city residents to assess their **carbon footprints.**

- The app focuses on individuals' actions and calculates carbon footprint based on transport, energy, waste, and water consumption.

- It also suggests remedial actions and sensitizes people about their lifestyle emissions, their impact, and possible countermeasures to mitigate the same.

- Its objective is to reduce it to make them climate-smart citizens.

- It is developed by the **Department of Environment and Forest.**

- The initiative will help keep the city and the country at the vanguard of the initiatives to protect the climate.

How will it work?

- As a person downloads the application, they will need to fill details in four parts — Water, Energy, Waste Generation, and Transport (Vehicular movement).

  - **Water:** In the category of Water, the person will be required to inform about the consumption of water.

- **Energy:** In the Energy category, the details regarding the electricity units consumed every month at the house, monthly bill, etc, and usage of solar energy will have to be furnished.

- **Waste:** In the Waste category, the individual will need to inform about the waste generated on their part and their family.

- **Transport:** In the transport section, the individual will have to inform about the mode of transport used by them- four wheeler, two-wheeler or bicycle.

Global carbon footprint
Annual consumption per person globally, tonnes of CO2 equivalent

Food	Home	Transport	Other
0.7	1.1	0.8	0.8

Includes direct and indirect emissions, such as those from global supply chains

Carbon footprint

- A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) that are generated by our actions.

- It includes carbon dioxide — the gas most commonly emitted by humans — and others, including methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases, which trap heat in the atmosphere, causing global warming.

> According to **WHO,** a carbon footprint is a measure of the impact your activities have on the amount of carbon dioxide (CO_2) produced through the burning of fossil fuels and is expressed as a weight of CO_2 emissions produced in tonnes.

Recent Government efforts to address climate change

- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**: It covers eight major missions on Solar, Enhanced Energy Efficiency, Sustainable Habitat, Water, Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, Green India, Sustainable Agriculture and Strategic Knowledge on Climate Change

- International Solar Alliances (ISA)

- State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC)
- FAME Scheme – for E-mobility
- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation & Urban Transformation (AMRUT) – for Smart Cities
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana – for access to clean cooking fuel
- UJALA scheme - for embracing energy-efficient LED bulbs
- Swachh Bharat Mission

Paris Agreement

- India has pledged under the Paris Agreement to reduce the carbon intensity of its economy by 33-35% by 2030, compared to 2005 levels.

Measures to reduce carbon footprints

Top options for reducing your carbon footprint
Average reduction per person per year in tonnes of CO2 equivalent

Live car-free 2.04	Refurbishment /renovation 0.895
Battery electric car 1.95	Vegan diet 0.8
One less long-haul flight per year 1.68	Heat pump 0.795
Renewable energy 1.6	Improved cooking equipment 0.65
Public transport 0.98	Renewable-based heating 0.64

Significance of mapping carbon footprint

- It helps to prepare for future environmental legislation
- Manage carbon risk exposure and identify areas for improvement will become easy
- It will improve efficiency and cut costs through reduced energy consumption
- It helps to motivate and engage citizens by involving them in carbon reduction plans

Conclusion

To decrease the carbon footprints, India needs to remain on track and for this, it needs consistent 'challengers' whether in the form of an empowered and aware population or through a grassroots movement that informs the national policy while demanding sustainable and healthy growth for the country.

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SYSTEM OF WHISTLEBLOWING IN INDIA

CONTEXT

With the rise in whistleblower complaints in India, the need for a robust legal regime for protection of whistleblowers has gained importance.
In this context, it is important to do in-depth examination of the current system of whistleblowing in India.

⊙ BACKGROUND

- The complicated mechanism of governance, corporate structures & other non-governmental organizations abrupt power.

- With these complicated structures, the give and take of consideration is not limited to two hands but the process of give and take of this consideration itself has turned out into complicated process.

- India is now caught in a situation where many sectors are steeped in endemic corruption, including those charged with controlling corruption itself.

- However, in this entire organization or structure, there is often one person who is committed to his job and cannot see scams right under his nose.

- Committed to their job with utmost honesty, these people bear all the risks to themselves, their families, property and decide to expose the scams.

- These people are called 'Whistleblowers' as they make people cautious of the insider scams in the organization by exposing them.

⊙ ANALYSIS

What is Whistleblowing?

- Whistleblowing is an act whereby an individual discloses any unethical, illegal or unauthorised act of an individual to the public at large.

- Whistleblowers are the best source of information on malpractices in any organisation — public or private.

According to the **Companies Act, 2013,** whistleblowing is an action aimed at drawing the attention of stakeholders to instances of unethical practices in an organization.

- The **RTI Act, 2005** has come to be as 'twin sister' of whistleblowing.

  ➤ The Act has been used effectively to expose off the illegal activities. Much of the information that comes out through this is related to development projects, illegal mining, land acquisitions, welfare schemes, money laundering etc.

- But, the large number of whistle-blowers has to meet drastic fate for their noble intention and work.

- The vulnerable condition in our country can be anticipated from the fact that 68 RTI activists have been killed since 2005, while six (6) committed suicide and many more have been assaulted, attacked and victimised.

Case Study

- **NHAI scam paved way or whistleblowers law:** In 2003, Satyendra Dubey, a project engineer with National Highways Authority of India, exposed corruption in the Golden Quadrilateral project in Bihar.

  ➤ He was shot dead in November 2003 in Gaya. Three persons were given life term in 2010 for the murder.

  ➤ Calls for a law to protect whistleblowers arose in the wake of his murder.

- **ICICI loan scam:** Arvind Gupta, a shareholder activist, exposed the alleged loan fraud and quid pro quo between the bank's then CEO Chanda Kochhar and her family and the Videocon group. Kochhar stepped down following the allegations.

Categorization of whistleblowers

- **Informants:** Whistleblowers who enjoy the legal protection of a whistleblower law fall within the first of three categories of "informants".

- **Leakers:** The second category of whistleblowers are those that fall outside the realm of this protection and are referred to, opprobriously, as "leakers".

The state of whistleblowing programmes in India

- Samuel Shaw and Richard Marven, two naval officers, witnessed the torture of British prisoners of war at the hands of their commanding officer, Esek Hopkins. Outraged by his action, they reported him, which resulted in their dismissal from the US Navy. That was 1777.

- Shaw and Marven sought Congressional support and testified before the Congress. A year later, on July 30, 1778, the US Congress passed a

whistleblower resolution, now widely considered as the **world's first whistleblower protection law.**

⊙ Many countries have since enacted laws for the protection of whistleblowers. Two hundred years later, India almost did the same.

⊙ In 2011, the Whistleblowers Protection Act was drafted. The Act was later renamed The **Whistleblowers Protection Act, 2014.**

➤ This statute was framed to provide public servants with a mechanism that safeguards person/s making such complaints from being victimized.

⊙ The Act passed by both Houses of Parliament, but never notified.

⊙ Meanwhile, whistleblowers were encouraged to call out corporations for corporate fraud, with requisite provisions under the Companies Act, 2013 and the SEBI legislations.

⊙ But protections for whistleblowers against the government remained elusive.

• India is a signatory to **UN Convention Against Corruption since 2005** which provides adequate safeguards and protection to person making complaints and facilitate reporting against corrupt public officials.

• The **OECD 2010 Good practice Guidance on Internal Controls, Ethics and Compliance** also recommends companies to ensure protection of whistle-blowers both internally and externally.

Important Reports

⊙ The need of protection for whistle-blowers was first highlighted in **Report of Law Commission of India in 2001.** The Committee even drafted a bill to address the issue.

⊙ The **Hota Committee (Committee on Civil Service Reforms) 2004** considered to protect civil servants who report confidential information of misuse of power and authority. However, it did not make any recommendation.

⊙ Then, in response to the petition of Satyendra Dubey, government in 2004 came up with a resolution titled 'Public Interest Disclosure and Protection of Informers Resolution (PIDPIR)' which gave Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) the authority to act on complaints from whistle-blowers.

⊙ Further, the report of **Second Administrative Reforms Commission** in 2007 also expressed the need to settle a law for protecting whistle-blowers.

⊙ The Whistle-blowers Protection Act came into being in 2014 but since then it has not been enforced yet.

Corruption Perception Index (CPI)

• Transparency International, an organisation based in Berlin, shows corruption trends among nations released its Corruption Perception Index (CPI), 2020 and reports that India has slipped six places to 86th position among 180 countries.

Anti-corruption champion

• In a latest development, Indian social activist Anjali Bhardwaj, an Indian social activist working on issues of transparency and accountability, has been awarded by US.

• She is among 12 anti-corruption champions awarded by Biden administration.

• According to the State Department, Bhardwaj has served as an active member of the **Right to Information Movement** in India for over two decades.

• Anjali Bhardwaj, the 48-year-old activist is also the founder of the Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS), a citizens' group with a mandate to promote transparency and accountability in government.

International Practices/ Principles

Many nations have passed legislations to ensure protection of public sector and private sector employees. Some countries like Canada, USA, UK have 'one stop shop' approach to receive, manage, and investigate all whistleblowing matters.

⊙ **Canada:** Canada has set up an Office of Public Sector Integrity Commissioner to receive reports and investigate the matters maintaining the confidentiality of the whistle-blower.

⊙ **United Kingdom:** Similarly, UK has Office of the Civil Service Commissioners to promote honesty, integrity and impartiality through public sector disclosures.

⊙ **United States:** US do so through Office of Special Counsel (OSC) and Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) to adjudicate decisions.

Thus to ensure the proper enforcement of the legislative provisions, an independent agency needs to be established. The mechanism should be set up for dealing with frivolous complaints. The individuals must be imposed with hefty compensation for their malicious activities.

Issues/Challenges

- **Implementation hurdles:** The country is witnessing growing uptake is the use of whistleblowing programmes, although implementation remains an issue.

- **Lack of awareness:** Various problems emerge in the way these programmes are implemented. Awareness is one major issue.

- **Lack of infrastructure:** Then there is the lack of infrastructure. Nearly half of all respondents invest less than 5 lakhs per annum on whistleblower mechanisms. As a result, employees are given a single channel to come forward in most cases, with only a third opening up multiple avenues.

- **Threat to life:** In India there have been innumerable instances of whistle blowers being killed. So it's hardly a surprise that such few people come forward with instances of wrong doing.

- **Fear of social stigma and job risk:** The fact that plays an essential role in whistleblowing is the individual coming up to report instances of potential fraud or abuse. But the fear of social stigma and losing their job makes it difficult for even those who are aware of such frauds to come up.

- **Dilemma between professional and organizational responsibility:** Further, such whistleblowers are shunned by management and as such, it becomes very difficult for them to make a choice between professional responsibility and organizational responsibility.

Recommended measures

There are three major recommendations to improve whistleblower mechanisms.

- **Communication and transparency:** Clear communication is key, be it about the policy or about action taken with respect to individual complaints.

- **Promotion of ethical behaviour:** The second pillar is to use employees as a channel to promote ethical behaviour.

- **Rewarding system:** When examples of ethical behaviour emerge, these should be rewarded publicly.

The way forward

In recent times, where large corporate scams have become far too common, India urgently needs to improve governance and enhance transparency. Moving forward, there is need of greater emphasis placed on internal controls and fraud fighting. Increased transparency and accountability will lead to an improvement in the standards of corporate governance and a cleaner business environment.

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(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

ANCIENT BUDDHIST MONASTERY FOUND IN JHARKHAND

⦿ **CONTEXT:** **The Archaeological Survey of India has unearthed a Buddhist monastery, believed to be at least 900 years old, buried under a mound in a village situated in a hilly area of Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand.**

⦿ **ABOUT:** **Key-findings**

- The findings are made in **Burhani village** near **Juljul Pahar** of **Sitagarhi Hills** located around 12 km from district headquarters **Hazaribagh.**

- The monastery is believed to be at least 900 years old.

- The sculptures each stand two to three feet tall.

- As per the evidence found at the current site, it appeared that the structures had been built during the **Pala period.**

- Following findings have been made:

  ◉ Four statues of deity Tara in **Varad Mudra**

    ➤ Varad Mudra is the gesture of hand showing dispensing of boons

> **Tara** is known as a deity in **Hinduism** and a female **bodhisattva**—central figures who delay personal enlightenment in order to offer earthbound worshippers salvation—or Buddha in different Buddhist traditions.

  ◉ Six statues of the Buddha in **Bhumisparsa Mudra**

    ➤ Bhumisparsa Mudra is the gesture of hand showing five fingers of right hand towards the earth symbolising the Buddha's enlightenment.

Other important Mudras

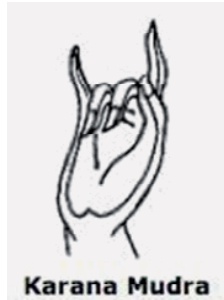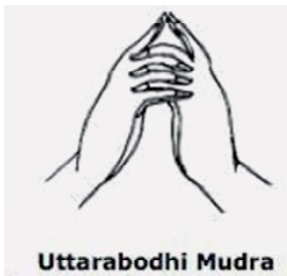| Mudras	Symbol
Dhyana Mudra The gesture of absolute balance, of meditation. The hands are relaxed in the lap, and the tips of the thumbs and fingers are touch each other.	 Dhyana Mudra
Abhaya Mudra Gesture of reassurance, blessing and protection	 Abhaya Mudra
Dharmachakra Mudra The gesture of teaching, usually interpreted as turning the Wheel of Law. The hands are held level with the heart, the thumbs and index fingers form circles.	 Dharmachakra Mudra
Vitarka Mudra (Intellectual argument discussion) **The circle formed by the thumb and index finger is the sign of the Wheel of Law.**	 Vitarka Mudra
Tarjani Mudra (Threat warning**)** **The extended index finger is pointed at the opponent.**	 Tarjani Mudra
Jnana Mudra (Teaching) The hand is held at chest level and the thumb and index finger again form the Wheel of Law	 Jnana Mudra

Karana Mudra Gesture with which demons are expelled	 Karana Mudra
Uttarabodhi Mudra (The gesture of Supreme Enlightment) Two hands placed together above the head with the index fingers together and the other finger interwined.	 Uttarabodhi Mudra

Role of Pala Dynasty in Buddhism

- The Pala Dynasty ruled the regions of Bengal and Bihar between the 8th and 11th centuries.
- It supported the establishment of Buddhist institutions, including monasteries, while also permitting the flourishing of Hinduism, the majority religion of the area.

Importance of the findings

- The findings assume significance since the monastery is on the old route to Varanasi, 10 km from **Sarnath**, where the Buddha gave his first sermon.
- Furthermore, the presence of statues of deity Tara shows possible proliferation of Vajrayana form of Buddhism in this region.
- Vajrayana is a form of Tantric Buddhism, which flourished in India from **6th to 11th century.**

SHRI GURU RAVIDAS VISHVA

⊙ **CONTEXT:** President Kovind recently addressed 'Shri Guru Ravidas Vishva Mahapeeth Rashtriya Adhiveshan in Delhi.

⊙ **ABOUT:** **Key-points made by the President**

- India's constitutional values of social justice, freedom, equality and fraternity are in line with Guru Ravidas's philosophy of life.
- The Guru not only paved the way for the welfare of his contemporary society but also of future generations.
- Guru Ravidas did not exclude any person or class of society from the periphery of his compassion and love.

Who was Guru Ravidas?

- Guru Ravidas was born in the **14th century**, to a low caste family, in Seer Goverdhanpur, UP. He was among the first people to fight for basic human rights and tried to spread the message of equality by opposing the Indian caste system.

- **Contribution to Sikhism:** He taught spirituality and contributed 41 devotional poems and songs in *Guru Granth Sahib*. It is believed that his teachings were studied by Sikh Gurus as well.

- He was one of the most famous and leading stars of the nirguna sampradaya (sant parampara).

- He was also one of the prominent leaders of the North Indian **Bhakti movement** and taught spirituality and tried to bring forward a message of **equality** message based on freedom from the oppression of the **Indian caste system.**

Bhakti movement

- The movement started in the 9th century A.D. by Shankaracharya which continued up to 16th century A.D. by a number of Hindu devotees, preachers and religious reformers.

- Main Features of the movement:

  ➤ Unity of God or one God though known by different names

  ➤ Bhakti, intense love and devotion, the only way to salvation

  ➤ Self-Surrender

  ➤ Condemnation of rituals, ceremonies and blind faith

  ➤ Rejection of idol worship by many saints

  ➤ Open- mindedness about deciding religious matters

  ➤ No distinction of different castes, higher or low

  ➤ Need of a guru for guidance advocated by some

  ➤ Preaching's through local or regional languages and travelling from place to place for spreading the religious message

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- **Association with Meera Bai:** Sant Guru Ravidas Ji is considered as a spiritual Guru of Meera Bai.

  ◉ She was the queen of Chittoor and daughter of one of the famous kings in Rajasthan naming Rao Dudaji.

Guru Ravidas's Jayanti

- Guru Ravidas's Jayanti is celebrated as the birthday of Guru Ravidas.

- It is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Magh according to Hindu calendar and will fall on 27th February in 2021.

PUDUCHERRY POLITICAL CRISIS

⊙ **CONTEXT:** **The Congress government in the Union Territory of Puducherry has fallen after the Narayanamasy government failed to prove its majority.**

⊙ **ABOUT:** **What is a floor test?**

- A floor test is a motion initiated by the government seeking to know if it enjoys the **confidence of the legislature.**

- It is a **constitutional mechanism.**

- A confidence motion or a vote of confidence or a trust vote allows elected representatives to determine if the council of ministers (CoM) commands the confidence of the House.

- The idea behind the trust vote is to uphold the political accountability of the elected government to the state legislature.
- A no-confidence motion, or vote of no-confidence, or a no-trust vote, can be sought by any House member to express that they no longer have confidence in the government.
- The chief minister, in the case of a coalition government, may be asked to move a vote of confidence and win a majority.
- The governor may call for a special session to see who has the majority to form the government in the absence of a clear majority, when there is more than one individual staking claim to form the government.
- Some legislators may be absent or choose not to vote. The numbers are then considered based only on those MLAs who were present to vote.

How is the voting done?

These are the modes by which voting can be conducted:

- **Voice vote:** In a voice vote, the legislators respond orally.
- **Division vote:** In case of a division vote, voting is done using electronic gadgets, slips or in a ballot box.
- **Ballot vote:** Ballot box is usually a secret vote - just like how people vote during state or parliamentary elections.

What is the role of Speaker?

- The speaker conducts the floor test.
- The main duty of the speaker is to administer the oath to the newly elected members of the house and to overlook the resignation of the members of the house. The role of the speaker is crucial during a confidence vote.
- In case of a tie, the speaker, by convention, can cast its vote.

Constitutional provision

- **Article 356** of the India Constitution provides the if governor of a state feels that there has been a breakdown of constitutional machinery in a state, he can request the President of India to take direct control of the state, which is called the **'President's Rule'.**
- The Governor is appointed by the President with the advice of the council of ministers.

EL SALVADOR BECOMES FIRST CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRY TO BE DECLARED MALARIA-FREE

⊙ **CONTEXT:** **El Salvador has become the first country in Central America and the third in all Americas to get the malaria-free certificate from the World Health Organization (WHO) in recent years.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**
- Malaria is a life-threatening disease. It's typically transmitted through the bite of an infected *Anopheles* mosquito.

- Infected mosquitoes carry the *Plasmodium* parasite. When this mosquito bites, the parasite is released into bloodstream.

  ◉ Once the parasites are inside your body, they travel to the liver, where they mature. After several days, the mature parasites enter the bloodstream and begin to infect red blood cells.

  ◉ Within 48 to 72 hours, the parasites inside the red blood cells multiply, causing the infected cells to burst open.

  ◉ The parasites continue to infect red blood cells, resulting in symptoms that occur in cycles that last two to three days at a time.

Items for Box

- Over 200 million cases of malaria are reported across the world and more than 400,000 people die of the disease every year.

- The Americas recorded a 66 per cent rise in malarial infections since 2015 due to growth in transmission in some countries, according to WHO.

- In 2019, 229 million cases of malaria and over 409,000 deaths from the disease were recorded across the world.

- An astounding 94 per cent of these cases and deaths were in WHO African Region.

- Half the global malaria-related deaths in 2019 were in six African countries — Nigeria (23 per cent), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (11 per cent), Tanzania (5 per cent), Burkina Faso (4 per cent), Mozambique (4 per cent) and Niger (4 per cent each).

What is the Malaria elimination certificate?

- Malaria elimination certificate is awarded to a country when the chain of indigenous transmission of the disease has been disrupted nationwide for at least three consecutive years.

- El Salvador, which received the certificate on February 25, 2021, didn't report a single case of malaria that was acquired locally (indigenous) since 2017. It recorded it last malaria death in 1984.

- In the three decades between 1990 and 2010, the cases in the country fell from 9,000 to 26. There was only one malaria outbreak in this period in 1996.

Other malaria-free countries

- The only other countries in the WHO Regions of Americas to have eliminated malaria in recent years are Paraguay (2018) and Argentina (2019).

- The other countries that eliminated malaria in the last decade are Morocco and Turkmenistan in 2010, Armenia in 2011, Maldives in 2015, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan in 2016 and Uzbekistan in 2018.

- El Salvador is among 21 countries identified in 2016 as having the potential to eliminate the mosquito-borne disease by 2020 in a WHO initiative called 'E-2020'.

What is the status of India?

- In India, the malaria infections fell by 14.4 million between 2000 and 2019 — the largest reduction in South-East Asia, according to **World Malaria Report 2020.**

- In 2019, the country accounted for about 86 per cent of all malaria deaths in the region,

NATIONAL URBAN DIGITAL MISSION

⊙ **CONTEXT:** Indian Central government recently launched 'National Urban Digital Mission' to establish digital infrastructure for cities.

⊙ **ABOUT:**

What is National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM)?

- The National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM) has been launched by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** along with the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.**

- 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.

- It will help in supplementing **Digital India initiative along with Smart Cities Mission.**

- **Objective:** The mission 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.

Key- features of the mission

- NUDM is **citizen-centric, ecosystem-driven, and principles-based** in both design and implementation.

- NUDM has **articulated a set of governing principles.**

- It inherits **the technology design principles** of the National Urban Innovation Stack (NUIS).

Other major initiatives

- Several other digital initiatives of MoHUA *vis.* India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX), SmartCode, Smart Cities 2.0 website, and Geospatial Management Information System (GMIS) were also launched.

- **India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX):** IUDX is an open-source software platform which facilitates the secure, authenticated, and managed exchange of data amongst various data platforms.

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

- **SmartCode Platform:** SmartCode is a platform designed to address the challenges that ULBs face in the development and deployment of digital applications.

These initiatives are among the ongoing efforts of both Ministries to realize the Prime Minister's vision of Digital India and AtmaNirbhar Bharat, by making cities more self-reliant and enabled to meet the needs of and provide services to their citizens.

SEBI MOOTS INTRODUCTION OF 'ACCREDITED INVESTOR' CONCEPT

⊙ **CONTEXT:** Regulator Sebi sought comments on the proposal to introduce the concept of "accredited investors" in the Indian securities market.

⊙ **ABOUT:**

Who are 'accredited investors'?

- Accredited investors, also called **qualified investors** or **professional investors**, are those who have an understanding of various financial products and the risks and returns associated with them.

- They are able to take informed decisions regarding their investments.

- They are recognized by many securities and financial market regulators around the globe.

Eligibility criteria

While proposing a framework for accredited investors, Sebi laid out eligibility criteria for both Indian and non-resident Indians and foreign entities.

- For **Indian individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs) and Family Trusts**, Sebi proposed an annual income of over or equal to Rs 2 crore or net worth over or equal to Rs 7.5 crore with not less than Rs 3.75 crore of financial assets.

  ⊚ Alternatively, such entities with an annual income above or over Rs 1 crore besides net worth higher or equal than Rs 5 crore with not less than Rs 2.5 crore of financial assets may also be eligible.

- For **trusts and body corporates**, proposed asset under management (AUM) and net worth, respectively, is equal to higher than Rs 50 crore.

- For **NRI and foreign individuals and family trusts**, Sebi proposed an annual income of over or equal to USD 3 lakh or net worth over or equal to USD 1 million with not less than USD 5 lakh of financial assets.

- Besides, **multilateral agencies, sovereign wealth funds, international financial institutions and Category-I foreign portfolio investors** may also be eligible. The regulator said the accreditation once granted shall be valid for one year from the date of accreditation.

Significance of the concept

- The accredited investor concept may offer benefits to investors and financial product/ service providers, such as:

  ⊚ flexibility in minimum investment amount

  ⊚ flexibility and relaxation in regulatory requirements

  ⊚ access to products/ services offered exclusively to accredited investors

STATES/UTS ROLL OUT INTENSIFIED MISSION INDRADHANUSH (IMI) 3.0

⊙ **CONTEXT:** **Various States and UTs have started implementation of the Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0.**

⊙ **ABOUT:** **What is Intensified Indradhanush Mission?**

- Intensified Indradhanush Mission (IMI) was launched in 2017, "to reach each and every child up to two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme."

- The program was to further intensify the existing **Mission Indradhanush**, which the government launched in December 2014.

- The government launched the second version of the mission IMI 2.0 from December 2019-March 2020, "to achieve targets of full immunization coverage in 272 districts in

27 States and at block level (652 blocks) in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar among hard-to-reach and tribal populations."

What areas are to be focused in IMI 3.0?

- The campaign is aimed to reach those children and pregnant women who have been missed out or been left out of the Routine Immunisation Programme.
- This is aimed to accelerate the full immunization of children and pregnant women through a mission mode intervention.
- In IMI 3.0, the government has placed a strong emphasis on Covid-19 appropriate behaviour because of the pandemic.
- States have been asked to follow "Staggered Approach" to avoid crowding at the session sites and even plan break-up sessions if a staggered approach is not effective to avoid crowding.
- The sessions are also planned in such a way that not more than 10 beneficiaries are present at the session site at one given point in time.

BLACK-NECKED CRANE SIGHTED IN ASSAM

⊙ **CONTEXT:** **Black-necked cranes (Grus nigricollis) native to the Tibetan plateau have been sighted for the first time in Assam.**
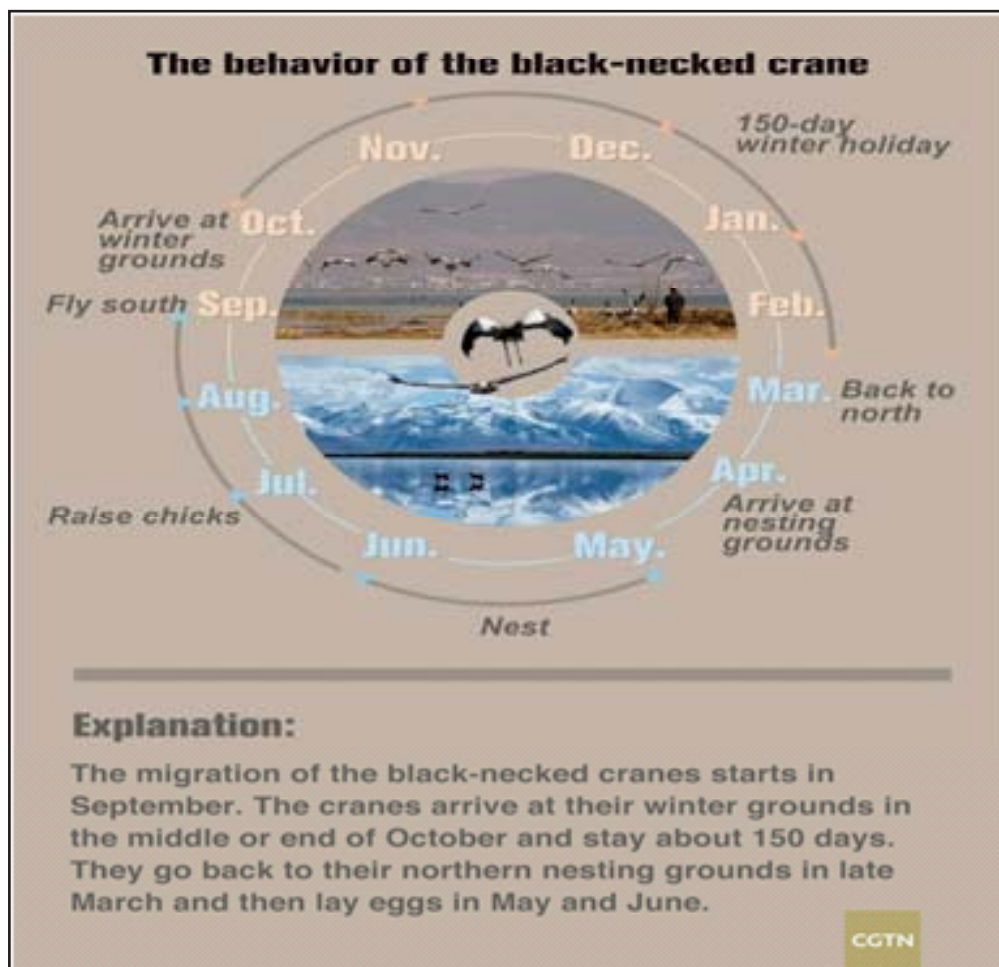
⊙ **ABOUT:** **What are Black-necked cranes?**

- Black-necked cranes are iconic birds of the Tibetan Plateau, and are integral to the landscape's biophysical ecosystem.
- They are of great spiritual and cultural significance to Tibetan Buddhism.

> - The Monpa community (major Buddhist ethnic group of Arunachal Pradesh) in particular holds black-necked cranes in high stature because the sixth Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Tsangyang Gyatso, born in Tawang, had paid it glowing tributes in the 17th century.
>   ▸ Monpas inhabit the **West Kameng** and **Tawang districts**.
>   ▸ They are essentially Buddhists who follow the Mahayana sect.

- These medium-sized **alpine cranes**, weighing about 5 kg each and standing about 115 cm tall, have a patch of red on their crowns, grey bodies and a characteristic black-neck.
- **Habitat:** Meadows are their favoured habitat, where they can feed on roots, insects, snails, fish, frogs, small birds and rodents.
  ⊙ They breed exclusively in alpine meadows, at altitudes of 2,600 to 4,900 m, and as a protection from predators nest in marshes where the water is about 30 cm deep.

The world's only alpine crane species

- The black-necked crane is endemic to China's Tibetan Plateau.
- In summer, the black-necked cranes are mainly found in altitudes between 3,000 and 5,000 meters.
- The migration of the black-necked cranes starts in September via sheltered valleys or lower altitudes.

The behavior of the black-necked crane

Explanation:

The migration of the black-necked cranes starts in September. The cranes arrive at their winter grounds in the middle or end of October and stay about 150 days. They go back to their northern nesting grounds in late March and then lay eggs in May and June.

- About two thirds of the birds spend the winter in the valleys of **Yarlung Tsangpo River** and south-central Tibet Autonomous Region.

- The remaining population winter in **Yunnan** and **Guizhou Provinces**, and a small number are known to winter in **Bhutan** and **India.**

Conservation status

- These birds are threatened by human- and climate-change-induced habitat loss, and of late also by free-ranging dogs in their breeding areas and food shortage in wintering areas.

- It is now listed in **Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.**

- In 2020, a re-assessment of the crane's population led its status to change from Vulnerable to Near **Threatened** on the **IUCN Red List.**

INVISIBLE PARTICLES IN AIR MATTERS THE MOST: STUDY

⊙ **CONTEXT:**   **The smallest, invisible particles matter the most when it comes to dealing with air pollution, researchers have found in two recent studies, published in journals Faraday Discussion and Nature NPJ cli mate and atmospheric science.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

Key-takeaways from the study

- **Ultrafine particles** — which have almost negligible weight and surface area and are hence are not considered a threat to the air we breathe — do have an effect on haze formation, visibility and air pollution.

- The smallest particles are formed from **gaseous sulfuric acid** and **ammonia or amines**, which are ubiquitous.

- The particles grow via condensation of organics and nitrate which are equally available throughout the city.

- The new particle formation and growth were equally important in contribution to haze formation as traffic and other anthropogenic activities.

A slow killer

- Atmospheric air pollution kills more than 10,000 people every day.

> Some 1.7 million Indians died due to air pollution in 2019, according to a report by interdisciplinary journal *Lancet Planetary Health* published December 2020.

- Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal and Rajasthan account for over 50 per cent deaths attributed to air pollution in India, according to the same report.

- An old study in China claimed that Particulate Matter (PM) 1 contributed to 80 per cent of PM2.5. Evidence for health effects of PM1 is very limited, because it is not routinely monitored internationally.

- So far, the standards for PM1 have not been proposed by the World Health Organization or any other government agencies.

- While PM2.5 can reach lungs, PM1 can enter bloodstream.

WILL CHHATTISGARH DECLARE BHORAMDEO WILDLIFE SANCTUARY A TIGER RESERVE?

⊙ **CONTEXT:**

Chhattisgarh, which has three tiger reserves, wants to add another one but the wildlife experts and government have locked horns over its location.

⊙ **ABOUT:**

What is Tiger Reserve?

- It is notified by the state government on the recommendation of **NTCA** under Section 38V Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

- **Zonation:** A Tiger Reserve consists of a 'Core' or 'Critical Tiger Habitat', which is to be managed as an inviolate area, and a 'Buffer' or Peripheral area immediately abutting a Core area, which may be accorded a lesser degree of habitat protection.

> **Status of Tiger in Chhattisgarh and its Tiger Reserve**
> - Chhattisgarh's tiger population is in a delicate state.
> - The tiger population in Chhattisgarh is not in a very healthy condition as the present number is 19 (in 2018) compared to 46 tigers in 2014.
> - It has three tiger reserves –
>   ➤ Indravati National Park and Tiger Reserve

> ➤ Achanakmar
> ➤ Udanti Sitanadi
> • **Guru Ghasidas National Park** is also a vital corridor stretching from Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh to the Palamau Tiger Reserve in Jharkhand.

Why Bhoramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary?

- Bhoramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary is an important tiger habitat and thus various PILs have been filed in the Chhattisgarh High Court in 2019 demanding it to be declared the tiger reserve.

- The Sanctuary shares a border with **Kanha National Park** in Madhya Pradesh making it an important tiger habitat in central India.

- **National Tiger Conservation Authority** (NTCA) has recommended notifying the Bhoramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary as a tiger reserve in 2017.

About National Tiger Conservation Authority

- NTCA was constituted under section 38 L (1) of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.**

- Power and Functions
  - ➤ to approve the tiger conservation plan prepared by the State Government
  - ➤ to approve, co-ordinate research and monitoring on tiger, co-predators, prey habitat, related ecological and socio-economic parameters, and their evaluation
  - ➤ to lay down normative standards for tourism activities and guidelines for **Project Tiger** from time to time for tiger conservation in the buffer and core area of tiger reserves and ensure their due compliance
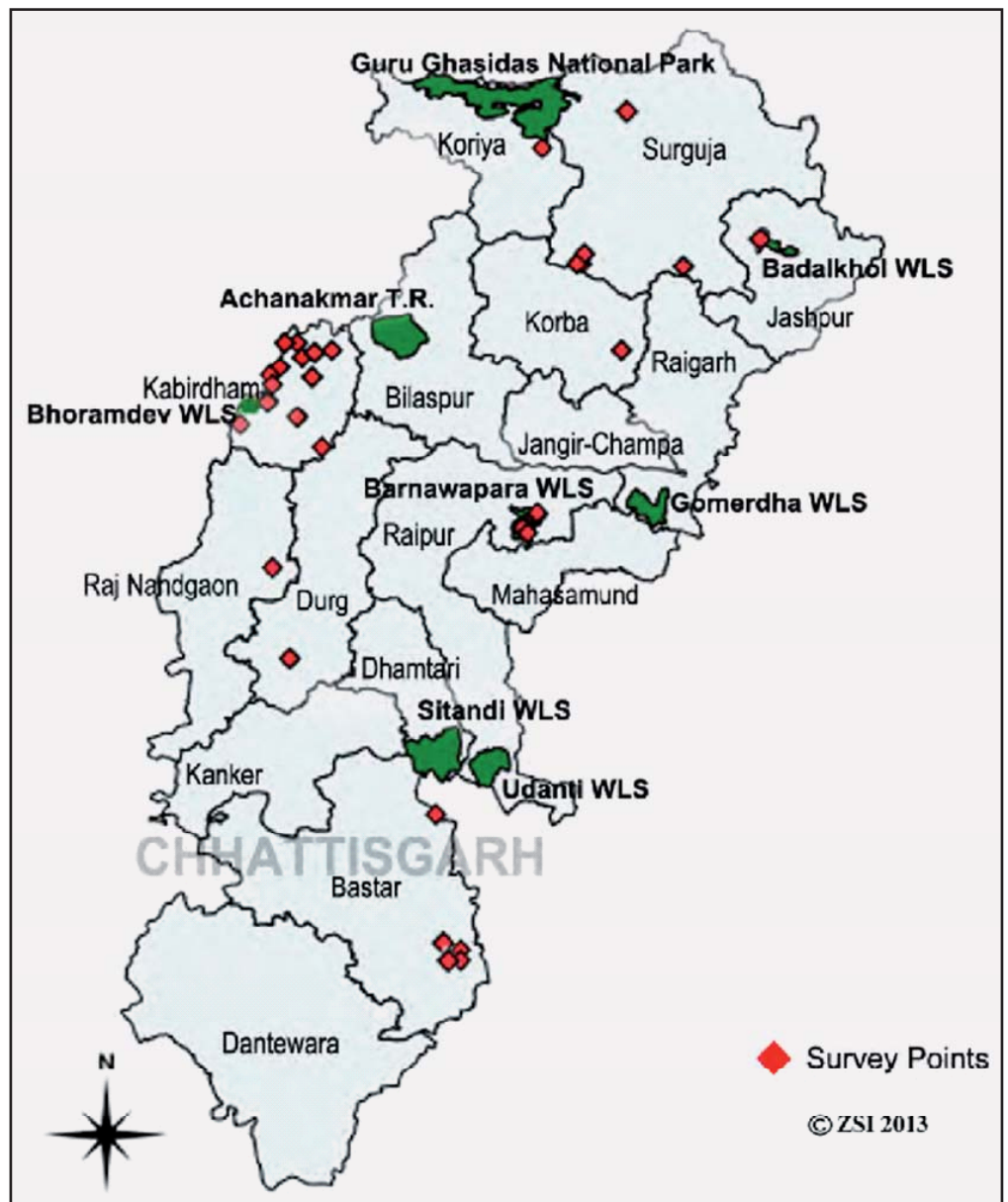
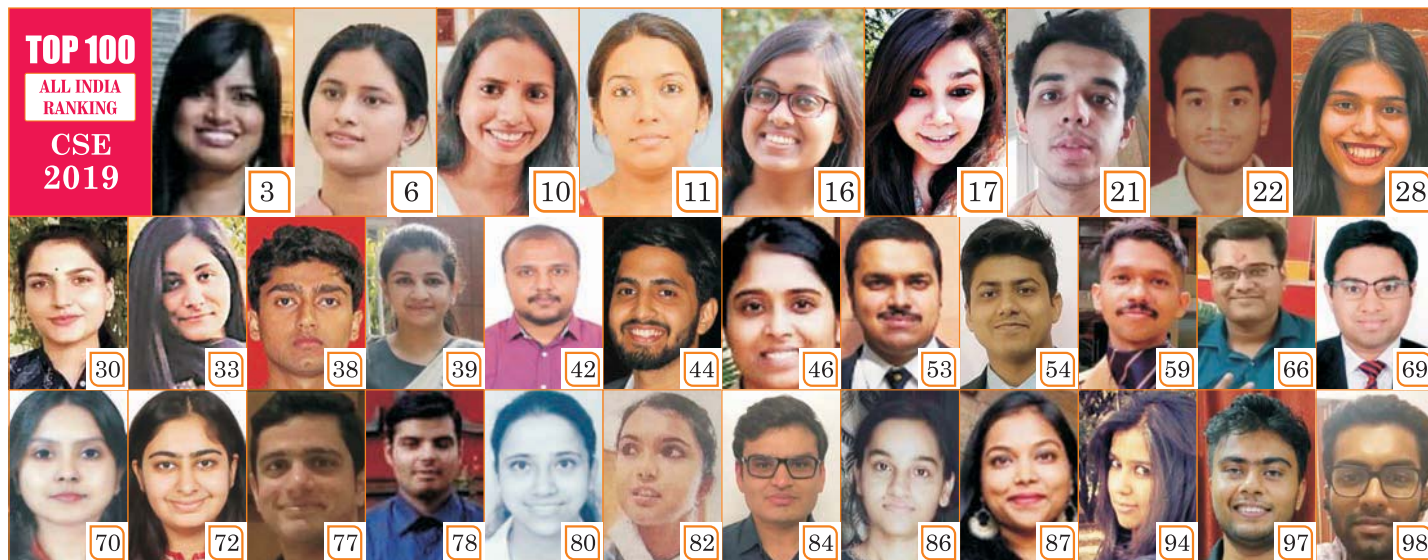### Why Chhattisgarh did not accept the recommendation of NTCA in 2017?

- There was a large-scale protest from locals especially, **Baigas** over apprehensions of displacement and restriction on their activities due to different autonomy in the core, buffer, and transition area of the tiger reserve.

Baigas

- The Baiga, meaning sorcerers, is one of the **particularly vulnerable tribal groups** (PVTG).

- They are spread across Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh.

- Traditionally, the Baiga lived a semi-nomadic life and practiced slash-and-burn cultivation. Now, they are mainly dependent on minor forest produce for their livelihood.

- After a death in the family, the Baiga just leaves the house and builds another.

- Tattooing is an integral part of Baiga culture—every age and body part has a specific tattoo reserved for the occasion.

Location of Protected Areas in Chhattisgarh

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