

# CURRENT AFFAIRS

## WEEKLY

WEEK - 3  
JUNE, 2020

### PRELIMS

- Asiatic Lions' population risen by 29% over five years

- Centre issues rules for import, possession of exotic species

- Direct Seeding of Rice

- Diversion of forest land

#### CONSERVATION

- New guidelines on 'Sale of Loan Exposures' and 'Securitisation of Standard Assets'

- Proposal to set up National Land Management Corporation

- Rights Issue

- Rise in India's Forex Reserves

#### ECONOMY

- Conserving the Mangroves
- Environment Performance Index

#### ENVIRONMENT

- International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report

- Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890

#### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- Astronomers find Jupiter-like cloud bands on closest brown dwarf

- IFLOWS-Mumbai

- National Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020)

#### SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

### MAINS

- Universal Basic Income

#### ECONOMY

- Sixth Mass Extinction

#### ENVIRONMENT

- Failure of Indian healthcare strengths call for Universal Health Coverage

- World Day Against Child Labour

#### GOVERNANCE

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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- 3 (JUNE, 2020)

## CONTENTS

Section - A: MAINS CURRENT AFFAIRS		
Area of GS	Topics in News	Page No.
ECONOMY	• Universal Basic Income	02
ENVIRONMENT	• Sixth Mass Extinction	04
GOVERNANCE	• Failure of Indian healthcare strengths call for Universal Health Coverage	07
	• World Day Against Child Labour	09

Section - B: PRELIMS CURRENT AFFAIRS		
Area of GS	Topics in News	Page No.
CONSERVATION	• Asiatic Lions' population risen by 29% over five years	14
	• Centre Issues rules for import, possession of Exotic Species	15
	• Direct Seeding of Rice	16
	• Diversion of Forest Land	17
ECONOMY	• New guidelines on 'Sale of Loan Exposures' and 'Securitisation of Standard Assets'	19
	• Proposal to set up National Land Management Corporation	20
	• Rights Issue	21
	• Rise in India's Forex Reserves	22
ENVIRONMENT	• Conserving the Mangroves	23
	• Environment Performance Index	24
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	• International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report	26
	• Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890	27
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY	• Astronomers find Jupiter-like cloud bands on closest brown dwarf	28

<b>SCIENCE &amp; TECHNOLOGY</b>	• IFLOWS-Mumbai	28
	• National Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020)	30
<b>Section - C: MISCELLANEOUS</b>		
<b>Topics in News</b>		<b>Page No.</b>
• 38 <sup>th</sup> Parallel		33
• Aditya: India's first solar-powered ferry		33
• Anti-Viral "Virolock" textile technology		33
• Border Adjustment Tax (BAT)		33
• Coral Triangle Day		35
• Gairsain becomes Uttarakhand's summer capital		35
• First estimation exercise of Indian gaur in Nilgiris		36
• LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging)		36
• Lonar lake		36
• Magnetocaloric Material		37
• Ramon Magsaysay Awards		37
• Sahakar Mitra Scheme		37

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**SECTION: A**  
**(MAINS)**

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**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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# UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

## CONTEXT

India is considering Universal Basic Income, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has told the United Nations. In this regard, NHRC, submitted a mid-term report 'Universal Periodic Review (UPR)-III' to the United Nations.

### ◎ BACKGROUND

- The idea of a universal basic income has gained currency in the West because of the threat of automation-induced job losses.
- In India, the idea first gained currency as a solution to chronic poverty and government's failure to effectively target subsidies towards the poor.
- Amid persistent farm distress and weak wage growth across occupations, the idea of an income support scheme seems to be gaining ground once again.
- Some advocate an income support scheme for farmers while others advocate a broader income support for all.
- Still others favour an income support scheme targeted towards the poor, that is, a non-universal basic income.

### ◎ ANALYSIS

#### What is Universal Basic Income?

- Universal basic income refers to regular cash payments made to a given population with minimal or no requirements for receiving the money, in order to increase people's income, according to the International Monetary Fund.
- Simply put, Universal basic income (UBI) refers to periodic cash transfers to every citizen.
- Countries across the world, including Kenya, Brazil, Finland, and Switzerland, have bought into this concept and have begun controlled UBI pilots to supplement their population.

#### Why UBI?

- Though the idea of Universal Basic Income is nothing new. In the past few years, it has resurfaced globally as a means of redistributing income.
- Several experiments/pilots are being currently run across the world, but not yet adopted by any country as such.
- The primary reasons for the tilt towards UBI are two:

- ▶ Growing and vast inequality
- ▶ Threat of automation affecting jobs and creating joblessness
- Some experts think the existing system "would falter and fail if confronted with vast inequality and tidal waves of joblessness." (Annie Lawrey, author of "Give People Money: How a Universal Basic Income Would End Poverty, Revolutionize Work, and Remake the World")

#### Basic premise of Economic Survey (ES) of 2016-17's UBI:

- "A just society needs to guarantee to each individual a minimum income which they can count on, and which provides the necessary material foundation for a life with access to basic goods and a life of dignity."
- Three components of this UBI model are:
  - ▶ Universality
  - ▶ Un-conditionality
  - ▶ Agency (by providing support in the form of cash transfers to respect, not dictate, recipients' choices)
- Its key features:
  - ▶ Poverty line: Poverty line for 2016-17 has been fixed at Rs 7,620 per year, using Tendulkar's poverty line formula (inflation indexing @ Rs 5,400 per year fixed for 2011-12 to 2016-17 with a target poverty level of 0.45%) to lift all poor above the Tendulkar poverty line.
  - ▶ Target: It takes 75% of population as universal for UBI purpose.
  - ▶ Cost and fiscal space: ES model will cost 4.9% of GDP - as against 5.2% of GDP spent on all 950 central sector and centrally sponsored sub-schemes (actual allocation of 2016-17). So, fiscal space exists - but only if UBI replaces all existing Central govt. schemes.
  - ▶ Income transfer: Income transfer through DBT and by replacing all Central schemes, using Aadhaar.
  - ▶ Use gradualism - like starting with women, elderly, widows, disabled etc.



## Pros and Cons of Universal Basic Income

Pros	Cons
Workers could afford to wait for a better job or better wages	Inflation could be triggered because of the increase in demand for goods and services
May help remove the "poverty trap" from traditional welfare programs	There won't be an increased standard of living in the long run because of inflated prices
Citizens could have simple, straightforward financial assistance that minimizes bureaucracy	Free income may not incentivize people to get jobs, and could make work seem optional
The government would spend less to administer the program than with traditional welfare	Free income could perpetuate the falling labor force participation rate
The payments could help stabilize the economy during recessionary periods	A reduced program with smaller payments won't make a real difference to poverty-stricken families

## Key-highlights of Universal Periodic Review (UPR)-III

- In a first, NHRC, submitted a mid-term report to the United Nations on the human rights situation in the country, highlighting the government's policies on climate change, rights of women, children, disabled, and the elderly, and the right to food, work and health.
- In the report, Universal Periodic Review (UPR)-III, the UN has been informed that the Indian government is examining and "actively considering" the possibility of a universal basic income to reduce poverty.
- The government has focused cash transfer schemes aimed at farmers, especially, but no universal cash transfer programme.
- As part of UPR-III, the Indian government accepted 152 recommendations out of 250 by 112 UN member states in September 2017 pertaining to poverty alleviation, rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, elderly, marginalized populations and right to education etc.

- However, it refused to accept 98 recommendations including repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, a moratorium on the death penalty, violence against marginalized groups and concerns over the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), a law regulating foreign funding to non-governmental organizations etc.

### Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

- UPR is an international peer review mechanism based on a periodic self-assessment by each country of its human rights record, achievements and challenges, which is supplemented by reports from UN human rights experts, entities, treaty bodies, national human rights institutions, and civil society organizations.
- India was one of the first countries to be reviewed under the UPR mechanism.

## Why UBI is urgently needed in India?

- Universal basic income (UBI) programme can be a solution that could mitigate the looming crisis caused by dwindling job opportunities.
- UBI is also deliberated as an effective poverty-eradication tool. Supporters of this scheme include Economics Nobel Laureates Peter Diamond and Christopher Pissarides, and tech leaders Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk.
- UBI in its true sense would entail the provision of an unconditional fixed amount to every citizen in a country.
- Nevertheless, countries across the world, including Kenya, Brazil, Finland, and Switzerland, have bought into this concept and have begun controlled UBI pilots to supplement their population.
- India's huge capacity and infrastructure-building requirements will support plenty of hands in the foreseeable future.

## ◎ CONCLUSION

The concept of UBI, if becomes a reality in India will promote many of the basic values of a society which respects all individuals as free and equal. It would also promote liberty because it is anti-paternalistic, opens up the possibility of flexibility in labour markets. It promotes equality by reducing poverty. It promotes efficiency by reducing waste in government transfers. And it could, under some circumstances, even promote greater productivity.

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# SIXTH MASS EXTINCTION

## CONTEXT

According to new research published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS), the ongoing sixth mass extinction may be one of the most serious environmental threats to the persistence of civilisation.

### ◎ BACKGROUND

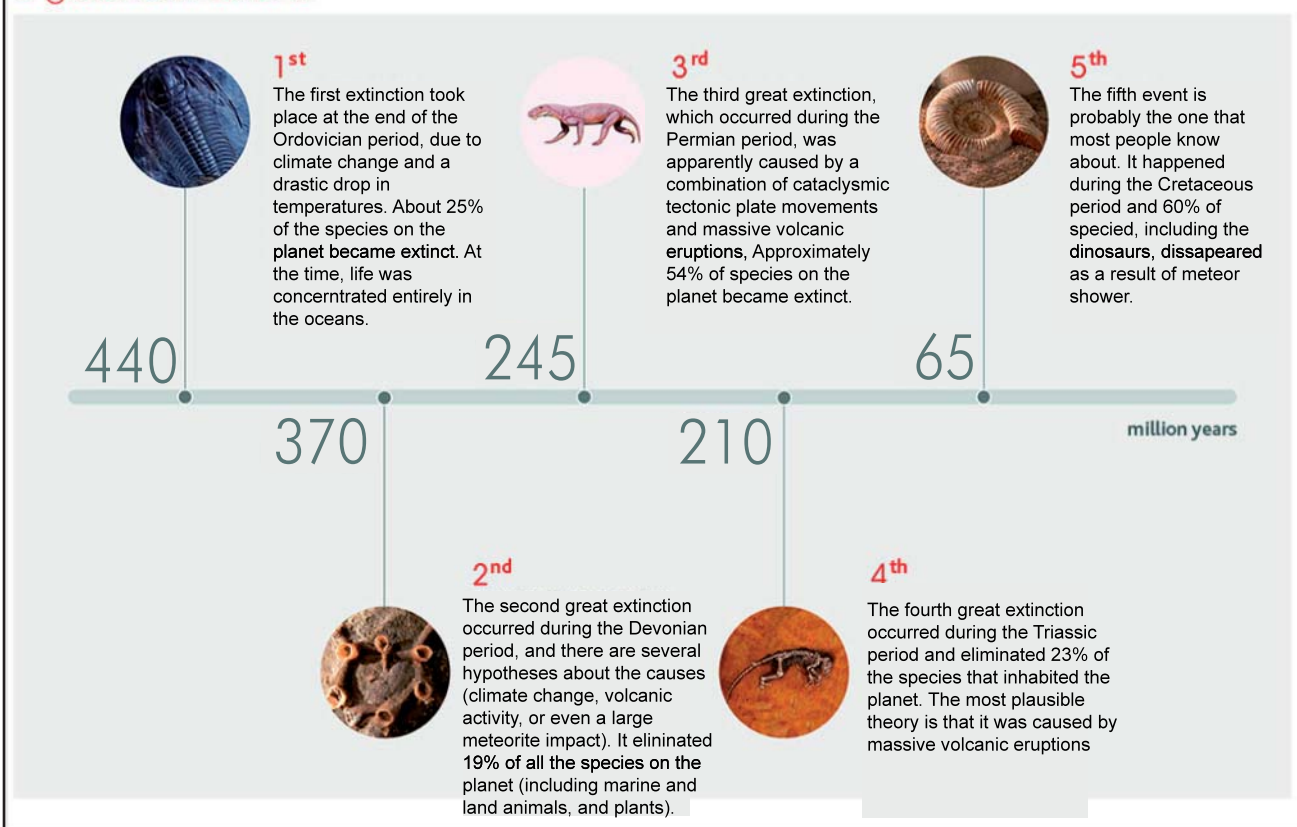
- The ongoing sixth mass extinction may be the most serious environmental threat to the persistence of civilization, because it is irreversible.
- Thousands of populations of critically endangered vertebrate animal species have been lost in a century, indicating that the sixth mass extinction is human caused and accelerating.
- The acceleration of the extinction crisis is certain because of the still fast growth in human numbers and consumption rates.
- In addition, species are links in ecosystems, and, as they fall out, the species they interact with are likely to go also.
- In the regions where disappearing species are concentrated, regional biodiversity collapses are likely occurring.

### ◎ ANALYSIS

#### Understanding the mass extinction of species:

- Mass extinction refers to a substantial increase in the degree of extinction or when the Earth loses more than three-quarters of its species in a geologically short period of time.
- Five mass extinctions: So far, during the entire history of the Earth, there have been five mass extinctions.
- The five mass extinctions that took place in the last 450 million years have led to the destruction of 70-95 per cent of the species of plants, animals and microorganisms that existed earlier.
  - These extinctions were caused by “catastrophic alterations” to the environment, such as massive volcanic eruptions, depletion of

### 5 great extinctions



oceanic oxygen or collision with an asteroid.

- ▶ After each of these extinctions, it took millions of years to regain species comparable to those that existed before the event.
- The sixth, which is ongoing, is referred to as the **Anthropocene extinction**.

### The sixth extinction

- Researchers have described it as the “most serious environmental problem” since the loss of species will be permanent.
- The study analysed 29,400 species of terrestrial vertebrates and determined which of these are on the brink of extinction because they have fewer than 1,000 individuals.
- Out of the studied species, researchers concluded-
  - ▶ over 515 of them are near extinction
    - Most of these 515 species are from South America (30 per cent), followed by Oceania (21 per cent), Asia (21 percent) and Africa (16 percent) among others.
    - of the 515 species, forest owlet in Central India, Nilgiri marten (Western Ghats), Bugun liocichla (Arunachal Pradesh), Bengal florican (Assam), great Indian bustard (northwest India), white-winged wood duck (northeast India) will disappear soon.
  - the current loss of species has been occurring since the 1800s.
- More than 400 vertebrate species went extinct in the last century, extinctions that would have taken over 10,000 years in the normal course of evolution.
- In a sample of 177 species of large mammals, most lost more than 80 per cent of their geographic range in the last 100 years, and as per a 2017 study published in the same journal, 32 per cent of over 27,000 vertebrate species have declining populations.
- Among those facing extinction, 243 (47%) are continental and 272 (53%) insular (island-dwelling). Most of them are from South America, followed by Oceania, Asia, Africa, North and Central America, and then Europe with less than 1% of them.
- The greatest numbers of mammals on the brink extinction are in Asia and Oceania. Most such birds live in South America and Oceania.
- The distribution of species on the brink extinction shows they also include those in the biodiversity hotspots of the Himalayas and the Western Ghats.

### What's leading to the extinction?

In contrast to the Big Five, today's species losses are driven by a mix of direct and indirect human activities, such as the destruction and fragmentation of habitats, direct exploitation like fishing and hunting, chemical pollution, invasive species, and human-caused global warming.

- **Uncontrolled human population:** One of the reasons that humanity is an “unprecedented threat” to many living organisms is because of their growing numbers. The loss of species has been occurring since human ancestors developed agriculture over 11,000 years ago. Since then, the human population has increased from about 1 million to 7.7 billion.
- **Overexploitation of resources:** Human overpopulation, combined with a great need for resources and our growing impact on the environment. The progressive disappearance of species is mainly down to two factors:
  - ▶ Overexploitation of natural resources (deforestation, hunting and fishing, etc.)
  - ▶ An economy based on fossil fuels (that pollute the atmosphere) and are producing global warming with dire consequences for ecosystems.

### How will it impact India?

- The species are on the verge of extinction which will also lead to larger collapses. In India this is specially pertinent as the country have species that are naturally or historically low in number. And a wide range of factors are interacting with them.
- Several Indian species are mentioned in the paper.
  - ▶ The **Kolar-leaf nosed bat**, named in this paper is found in only one cave in Kolar. If the stigma against bats due to fake covid spreads, the entire population could be made extinct.
  - ▶ And the **Great Indian Bustard** is threatened by increasing transmission lines in Kutch, Gujarat.
  - ▶ The **White-bellied Heron** has less than ten known individuals in India and its habitat is threatened by submergence by proposed dams like Demwe in Arunchal Pradesh.
- National Autonomous University of Mexico and Stanford University scientists led the analysis based on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and Birdlife International database. The analysis said in view of the current extinction crisis and the lack of widespread actions to halt it, it is very important that scientists “should metaphorically

take to the streets". This is because the current mass extinction

### What after extinction?

- ◉ **Loss in crop pollination & water purification:** When species go extinct, the impact can be tangible such as in the form of a loss in crop pollination and water purification.
- ◉ **Impacting the food chain:** Further, if a species has a specific function in an ecosystem, the loss can lead to consequences for other species by impacting the food chain.
- ◉ The effects of extinction will worsen in the coming decades as the resulting genetic and cultural variability will change entire ecosystems. When the number of individuals in a population or species drops too low, its contributions to ecosystem functions and services become unimportant, its genetic variability and resilience is reduced, and its contribution to human welfare may be lost.

- ◉ Humanity would be deprived of many of biodiversity's benefits, much of which make life on Earth possible.

### Suggestive measures

Complete ban on wildlife trade: Significantly, the study calls for a complete ban on wildlife trade as many of the species currently endangered or on the brink of extinction are being decimated by legal and illegal wildlife trade.

### ◎ CONCLUSION

The current COVID-19 pandemic, while not fully understood, is also linked to the wildlife trade. "There is no doubt, for example, that there will be more pandemics if we continue destroying habitats and trading wildlife for human consumption as food and traditional medicines."

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# FAILURE OF INDIAN HEALTHCARE STRENGTHS CALL FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE'

## CONTEXT

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the fault lines of Indian healthcare. This has strengthened calls for universal health coverage (UHC) in the country as a long-term reform.

### ◎ BACKGROUND

- Public health services, politically neglected for decades in most Indian states, have proven their irreplaceable value during this crisis.
- Although despised by the rich and middle classes, they are shouldering the lion's share of not just preventive and outreach services but also clinical care.
- Nearly 80%-90% of critical Covid-19 cases are currently being treated by public health services.
- States with robust public health systems like Kerala have been far more successful in containing Covid-19, compared to richer states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, which have understaffed public health systems.
- Given this background, now is the time to reinvent and rejuvenate public health services across the country, for which health budgets must be substantially upgraded.

### ◎ ANALYSIS

#### Health Infrastructure of India

- In the 2019 Global Health Security Index, which measures pandemic preparedness for countries based on their ability to handle the crisis, India ranked 57, lower than the US at 1, the UK at 2, Brazil at 22, and Italy at 31, suggesting it is more vulnerable to the pandemic than countries that have seen a high number of fatalities so far.
- India's low investment in the health sector, dedicating only 1.3% of its GDP, is now making it vulnerable to COVID-19.
- It contrasts with other developing countries such as Brazil, which spends 7.5% of its annual GDP on health, Bhutan, which has allocated 3.6%, and Bangladesh, which dedicates 2.2%.
- Among developed nations, South Korea has kept its healthcare expenditure at a whopping 8.1%, Japan 10.9%, and the US at 8.5%.
- According to data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

available for India for 2017, India has 0.53 beds for 1,000 people compared with 0.87 in Bangladesh, 1.1 in Indonesia, 2.11 in Chile, 2.73 in Turkey, 1.38 in Mexico, 4.34 in China and 8.05 in Russia.

- In a recent study, the Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy (India) and Princeton University said the country currently has 713,986 beds, including 35,699 in intensive care units, and 17,850 ventilators for 1.3 billion people.
- India lags behind its BRICS peers on the health and quality index (HAQ index).
- As per the National Health Profile 2018, India's public health spending is less than 1 per cent of the country's GDP, which is lower than some of its neighbours, countries such as Bhutan (2.5 per cent), Sri Lanka (1.6 per cent) and Nepal (1.1 per cent).
- According to the World Health Organisation, India finishes second from the bottom amongst the 10 countries of its region for its percentage spending of GDP on public health.

#### What is Universal Health Coverage?

- Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.
- This definition of UHC embodies three related objectives:
  - Equity in access to health services - everyone who needs services should get them, not only those who can pay for them
  - The quality of health services should be good enough to improve the health of those receiving services
  - People should be protected against financial-risk, ensuring that the cost of using services does not put people at risk of financial harm
- UHC is firmly based on the **WHO constitution of 1948** declaring **health a fundamental human**

right and on the Health for All agenda set by the Alma Ata declaration in 1978.

### Why Health matters?

- Health is clearly tied to other socio-economic indicators which signify the development of a nation. Health related policies strongly impact our national progress.
- The health policies that we plan and implement as a nation is imperative for us to achieve the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) by 2030. The dynamics associated with health has largely boiled down to one topic that compendiously covers it all; Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

### Key roadblocks for India's healthcare industry:

- Population:** India has the world's second-largest population, rising from 760 million in 1985 to an estimated 1.3 billion in 2015.
- Lack of Skilled Medical Personnel:** India has a severe shortage of healthcare workers. There is one doctor for every 11,082 people. *The WHO mandates that the doctor to population ratio should be 1:1,000*, while India had a 1:1,404 ratio as of February 2020. In rural areas, this doctor-patient ratio is as low as 1:10,926 doctors as per National Health Profile 2019.
- Insurance:** India has one of the lowest per capita healthcare expenditures in the world. Government contribution to insurance stands at roughly 32 percent.
- Lack of infrastructure:** India's existing infrastructure is just not enough to cater to the growing demand.
- Concentration in urban areas:** The majority of healthcare professionals happen to be concentrated in urban areas where consumers have higher paying power, leaving rural areas underserved.
- Dominance of private sector:** While the private sector dominates healthcare delivery across the country, a majority of the population living below the poverty line (BPL). It continues to rely on the under-financed and short-staffed public sector for its healthcare needs, as a result of which these remain unmet.
- Politicisation:** Another important point is politicisation of the pandemic, which is visible through the Centre-state divide. There have been attempts to centralise the authority and dictate terms with states. This is visible in the allocation of relief funds to states, there was no transparency over why there was inequitable distribution of the

funds.

### How Universal Health Coverage can change the situation?

- In ideal conditions, universal health coverage would extend to legions of currently uninsured citizens and reduce financial barriers to care, both over a short period.
- It could also help bring a large chunk of private healthcare under the public ambit, reduce informality in healthcare provision, pave the way for better regulation and oversight, and allow monopsonistic power to the state to negotiate for better and affordable care.
- It may also contribute to reducing regional disparities in healthcare services and fostering the adoption of cost-effective healthcare innovations.

### Suggestive measures

- Making health universal:** UHC is expected to bridge inequalities relating to health and its access. As UHC evolves, it must take into consideration providing additional benefits to poor and vulnerable belts of people. Health equality has to transcend into health equity for the policies to stay relevant and sustainable.
- Incentivizing medical personnel:** Incentivizing medical personnel to work in rural areas would be a great idea, additionally leveraging the help of technology for preventative measures can help complement the ongoing reformative efforts.
- Better coordination:** Better coordination of the various technological developments through greater synergy between the government, academia and industry concerning research and manufacturing, could help minimise the duplication of efforts. It could hence result in more effective use of resources at this time of crisis.

### ◎ CONCLUSION

In India, the state's depth of ambition for public health failed to match the provision of infrastructure and resources and the state continued to rely on 'narrowly targeted, techno-centric programmes assisted by foreign aid'. India, over the decades, has invested in many vertical programmes like malaria, tuberculosis, vaccine preventable diseases, population control and HIV. However, these programmes had limited success because of the limited integration with general health services, fragmentation of the health system and decision making being concentrated with a few, and they are formulated based on evidence that are not context specific.

# WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

## CONTEXT

The World Day Against Child Labour is observed on June 12 every year. However, in 2020, child labourers are worse off: The nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has left them with no source of income and no means of protection against the disease.

### ◎ BACKGROUND

- Poverty, growing demand for unskilled and cheap labor, and unequal distribution of benefit generated from natural resource have led to the massive employment of child labor in India.
- Despite having several laws, rules, policy, programmes, and schemes in place, the practice of child labor, especially in the mining sector, has continued as a problem.
- The persistence of child labor is due to the availability of working place with the inefficiency of the law, administrative system and as such, it benefits the employers by reducing general wage levels.
- Lack of application of fair methodology in determining- who is a child- has been a key challenge to child rights workers in India.

### ◎ ANALYSIS

#### What is World Day Against Child Labour?

- Every year on June 12, the World Day Against Child Labour is observed on June 12 in almost 100 countries all around the globe.
- The ILO launched World Day Against Child Labour in 2002, after which it is annually celebrated to raise awareness about the plight of child labourers worldwide.
- Child labour: Child labor refers to deprivation of basic human rights; a healthy life, education, health, and an enabling environment for development

#### Who is a child?

- According to the UNCRC, a child refers 'every human being below the age of 18 years'.
- POCSO Act 2012 defines a child as 'any person below eighteen years of age'.
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 has changed the definition of 'child to any person who has not completed 18 years of age'.

- The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 defines a child as 'a person who has not completed fourteen years of age'.
- The Factories Act, 1948 and Plantation Labour Act 1951 states that 'a child is one that has not completed fifteen years of age'.

#### Magnitude of child labour in India

- According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there are about 152 million children globally who are engaged in child labour, 72 million of whom are in hazardous work.
- One in ten of all children worldwide is in child labour.
- While the number of children in child labour has declined by 94 million since 2000, the rate of reduction slowed by two-thirds in recent years.

#### Governance

##### 1. At Global level:

- ▶ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) : The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989.
- The scope of this convention — that India ratified in 1990 — extends to individuals up to the age of 18.
- The parties (of the convention) recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, stated Article 32 of the CRC.

##### • At National level:

- ▶ The child labor (prohibition and regulation) Act, 1986 prohibits the employment of children. However, it allows children to work with certain process being banned in certain industries below 14 years of age.

- ▶ The Child and Adolescent Labor (prohibition and protection) Act, 2016 imposes a blanket ban on employment of children below 18 years of age. However, it allows children to be employed in family-based enterprises and the employment of children in most hazardous occupations like tanning, bangle-making, zari work, carpets, domestic work, e-waste and numerous.
- ▶ The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 and Amendment Act, 2006, imposes an absolute ban on employment of a child below 18 years in line with international conventions on child rights.

#### **Constitutional Provisions safeguarding Children:**

- Article 24: No child below the age of 14 years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment.
- Article 21 (A): The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to 14 years.
- Article 39 (e): The State shall direct its policy towards securing that the health and strength of workers, men and women and the tender age of children are not abused and that they are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age and strength.
- Article 39(f): Children shall be given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth shall be protected against moral and material abandonment.
- Article 45: The State shall endeavor to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years.

#### **Assessing the impacts:**

- Loss of childhood: Child labor leads to loss of quality childhood. Children are deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the experiences that come with being young.
- Various health issues: Child labor leads to various health complications due to various reasons such as undernourishment and poor working conditions. Furthermore, working in places such as mines and badly conditioned factories can result in lifetime health issues.

- Illiteracy: Children that are employed do not have the time to go to school. The lack of education and illiteracy makes them individuals with limited opportunities as far as employment is concerned.
- Mental trauma: Issues such as bullying, sexual exploitation, and unfavorable working hours may result in mental trauma. It may also result in the lack of emotional growth and thus insensitivity.
- Indulging into criminal activities: Illiteracy and insensitivity can easily influence the children by the criminal activities.

#### **Indian laws and inconsistency: Issues and challenges**

- One of the biggest hurdles standing against fighting child labour is the confusion around the definition of a child, in terms of age, in various laws dealing with child labor jeopardizing the spirit of the Acts. The age of the child has been defined differently in various existing laws.
- The child labor (prohibition and regulation) Act, 1986 prohibits the employment of children. However, it allows children to work with certain process being banned in certain industries below 14 years of age.
- The Child and Adolescent Labor (prohibition and protection) Act, 2016 imposes a blanket ban on employment of children below 18 years of age. However, it allows children to be employed in family-based enterprises and the employment of children in most hazardous occupations like tanning, bangle-making, zari work, carpets, domestic work, e-waste and numerous.
- However, in order to determine the age of the child, Government of India chooses to use the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which provides free and compulsory education for the children below 14 years as the yardstick.
- There still exists a number of interpretations of each law facilitating the inconsistency in Indian judicial system and how it looks at Child Labour.

#### **Significance of the Day**

- The reason June 12 is marked as World Day Against Child Labour is to bring attention to the problem of child labour and to find ways to eradicate it or fight against it.
- The day is used to spread awareness about the harmful mental and physical problems faced by children forced into child labour, around the world.
- The day also gives an opportunity for people to develop efficient mechanisms to combat specific issues that leads to child labour.



**© CONCLUSION**

In the darkest corners of starvation, malnutrition and muted humanity, child labor flourishes in the country. It is killing the future of the nation silently.

Though, India has a plethora of laws and policies in place to combat child labour. However, the result is ineffective. The need of the hour is to have a wholehearted commitment with a holistic approach to eradicate child labor.

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## ASIATIC LIONS' POPULATION RISEN BY 29% OVER FIVE YEARS

◎ **CONTEXT:** June 5 census of Asia's exclusive population indicates population of Asiatic Lions have risen by 29% over five years.

- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- Asiatic lions (*Panthera leo persica*) were once distributed upto the state of West Bengal in east and Rewa in Madhya Pradesh, in central India. At present Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary is the only abode of the Asiatic lion.
  - Also known as the "Indian lion" and the "Persian lion", it is one of five pantherine cats. Others are:
    - Bengal tiger
    - Indian leopard
    - Snow leopard
    - Clouded leopard
  - Conservation status:** They are listed in:
    - Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972
    - Appendix I of CITES
    - Endangered on IUCN Red List
  - Threat:** Factors which are threats to the lion conservation are encroachment, forest fire, natural calamities, grazing, collection of fuelwood, Non-timber forest produce (NTFP), poaching, tourism, religious pilgrimage and accidental lion deaths due to human causes

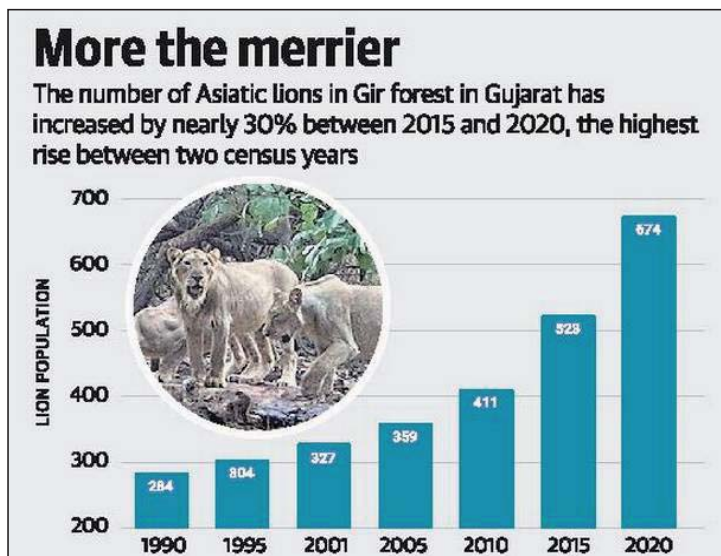
### The increase

- The number of Asiatic lions have risen to an estimated 674 in the **Gir forest region** and other revenue areas of coastal Saurashtra.
  - There are 161 male, 260 female, 45 sub adult male, 49 sub adult female, 22 unidentified and 137 cubs.
  - The male-female ratio was healthy in the Gir region with 161 males vs 260 females.

### The Census

- The Lion Census is conducted once every five years.
- This year, the Census was due on June 5-6 this year, but was postponed after the lockdown was announced on March 24.
- The first Lion Census was conducted by the Nawab of Junagadh in 1936; since 1965, the Forest Department has been regularly conducting the Lion Census every five years.
- The 2015 Census had counted 523 lions, up from 411 in 2010. But 12 lions were killed in a flash flood in Amreli just a month after the 2015 census, followed by deaths of more than two dozen lions in an outbreak of **canine distemper virus (CDV)** and **babesiosis** in 2018.
- A babesiosis outbreak was reported in Gir (east) this summer too, and around two dozen lions are reported killed.
- Once seen as threatened by extinction, the lion population has grown by almost 29% from the last count in 2015.

- Today, Asiatic lions are present in Protected Areas and agro-pastoral landscapes of Saurashtra covering nine districts, over an expanse of about 30,000 sq. km.



#### What led to this growth?

- This rise in population is powered by-
  - community participation
  - emphasis on technology
  - wildlife healthcare
  - proper habitat management
  - steps to minimise human-lion conflict

## CENTRE ISSUES RULES FOR IMPORT, POSSESSION OF EXOTIC SPECIES

### ◎ CONTEXT:

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the wildlife division of the Union environment ministry has issued rules for dealing with the import of exotic species and will assess the existing scale of possession within the country.

### ◎ ABOUT:

- Exotic live species are both plants and animals that are moved from their source (original) habitat to a new one due to human intervention.
- An **exotic species**, known also as **introduced**, **alien**, **non-native** or **non-indigenous** species, is that foreign species that have been introduced in a zone out of its natural distribution.
- This introduction usually happens for human causes, either voluntarily or involuntarily.
- In India as in the world, much of the exotic live species is currently legal.
- There exists a large demand and market for animals like ball pythons, pocket monkeys, crocodile skins, hissing cockroaches and a wide range of exotic birds.

#### Reason behind the move

- The decision comes in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, its suggested linkage with wet markets in China, and the zoonotic factor.

- So far there was no mechanism to regulate the process. There is no unified information system available of such stock of species at the State or Central level.
- There has been no detail about the population status, numbers poached, illegal trade hubs and dynamics of these species.
- This makes it difficult to know the impacts of illegal trade on the population status of many of these captured animals
- The Centre intends to streamline the process by officially identifying those handling such species or involved in their legal trade, as per mandates of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which India is a signatory to.

### How will it be done?

- Environment Ministry has decided to collect stock information from the holders of such species through voluntary disclosure in next six months.
- The registration will be done for the stock of animals, new progeny, as well as for import and exchange.
- The animals named under the Appendices I, II and III of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora" will be part of the advisory and does not include species from the Schedules of the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972.
- The declarer would not be required to produce any documentation in relation to the exotic live species if the same has been declared within six months of the date of issue of the advisory.
- For any declaration made after six months, the declarer shall be required to comply with the documentation requirement under the extant laws and regulations.

### Significance of the initiative

- This will help in better management of the species and guide the holders about proper veterinary care, housing and other aspects of well-being of the species.
- The database of exotic animals will also help in control and management of zoonotic diseases on which guidance would be available from time to time to ensure safety of animals and humans.

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## DIRECT SEEDING OF RICE

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◎ **CONTEXT:** The Punjab government has decided to deploy direct seeding of rice (DSR) technique instead of the traditional transplantation of paddy this year due to the shortfall of agricultural labourers triggered by reverse migration in the wake of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- Direct Seeding of Rice refers to the process of establishing a rice crop from seeds sown in the field rather than by transplanting seedlings from the nursery.
- It has been recognized as the principal method of rice establishment since 1950's in developing countries.
- The cultivation technique involves fertilising and planting directly into the soil in one or two steps. The soil is mildly disturbed by the seeding machine.
- Direct seeding is be done by sowing of pre-germinated seed into a puddled soil (wet seeding) or standing water (water seeding) or prepared seedbed (dry seeding).

**Quick facts of rice**

- Rice (*Oryza sativa*) is the seed of the grass species *Oryza glaberrima* or *Oryza sativa*.
- With a high carbohydrate content, rice is known to provide instant energy.
- Rice consumes about 4,000 - 5,000 litres of water per kg of grain produced. But it is no aquatic crop: it has great ability to tolerate submergence. Water creates unfavourable conditions for weeds, by cutting off sunlight and aeration to the ground.
- India is the largest consumer of rice crop. Not only this, India is also the second largest producer of rice, after China.

**What is the conventional method of growing rice?**

- Transplanting after repeated puddling is the conventional method of rice (*Oryza sativa*) growing which is not only intensive water user but also cumbersome and laborious.
- Different problems like lowering water table, scarcity of labour during peak periods, deteriorating soil health demands some alternative establishment method to sustain productivity of rice as well as natural resources.

**The concern**

- Farmers and agricultural economists, however, expressed reservations about the shift.
- From the lack of know-how among farmers to rampant problem of weeds — they are sceptical if the new method would be feasible.
- There are several constraints associated with shift from PTR to DSR, such as high weed infestation, evolution of weedy rice, increase in soil borne pathogens (nematodes), nutrient disorders, poor crop establishment, lodging, incidence of blast, brown leaf spot etc.
- One another major issue with the DSR is that of weeds. In traditional system, the sapling is taller than the weeds right from the time of transplanting and there is no problem at the time of harvest.
- But in DSR both the weeds and the plant grow simultaneously and it is bound to cause major problem at the time of harvest

**Significance of DSR**

- Improved short duration and high yielding varieties, nutrient and weed management techniques encouraged the farmers to shift from traditional system of transplanting to DSR culture.
- Direct seeding offers certain advantages like saving irrigation water, labour, energy, time, reduces emission of greenhouse-gases, better growth of succeeding crops, etc.

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## DIVERSION OF FOREST LAND

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**◎ CONTEXT:**

The Government has released the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Annual Report 2019-20.

**Diversion of forest land**

- Diversion of forest land in India is governed by the provisions under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 (FCA).
- As per the FCA, any diversion of land for non-forest purposes has to be pre-approved by the **Advisory Committee** instituted under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.

- Proposals seeking diversion of forest land upto 40 hectares are processed by regional offices of MoEFCC under the instituted Regional Empowered Committees (REC).
- Proposals that pertain to diversion of land greater than 40 hectares are sent directly to the central ministry.

### What about the local communities?

- To recognise the rights of local communities whose livelihoods are inextricably linked to the forest lands they inhabit, the central government enacted the **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006**, more commonly known as the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)**.
- The Act aims to protect the marginalised socio-economic class of citizens and balance the right to environment with their right to life and livelihood.

### Key-highlights of the Report

- The diversion of forest land for other purposes continued throughout India.
- A total 11,467.83 hectares (114.68 square kilometre) forest lands were diverted in 22 states between January 1 and November 6, 2019.
- This diversion was for 932 non-forestry projects under the **Forest (Conservation) Act (FCA), 1980**.
- More than a third of the diversion (4,514 ha) was for 14 projects was in Odisha, followed by Telangana — 2,055 ha for 11 projects — and Jharkhand (869.99 ha for 11 projects).
- The most number of projects — 251 — were in Haryana, which led to the diversion of 519.53 ha. Madhya Pradesh diverted 795.36 ha for 220 projects.

State	Number of Projects	Total Forest Land approved for diversion (in ha)
Andhra Pradesh	3	37.82
Bihar	28	453.43
Chhattisgarh	1	207.99
Goa	1	0.93
Gujarat	99	114.01
Haryana	251	519.53
Himachal Pradesh	52	434.36
Jharkhand	11	869.99
Karnataka	11	162.61
Kerala	2	0.26
Madhya Pradesh	220	795.36
Maharashtra	2	151.81
Mizoram	1	23.69
Odisha	14	4514.00
Punjab	123	411.07



<b>Rajasthan</b>	27	370.34
<b>Tamil Nadu</b>	6	18.45
<b>Telangana</b>	11	2055.05
<b>Tripura</b>	2	1.80
<b>Uttar Pradesh</b>	1	63.27
<b>Uttarakhand</b>	64	159.74
<b>West Bengal</b>	2	102.33
<b>TOTAL</b>	932	11467.83

- The annual report also gave the category-wise details of the divisions. The largest area of forest land was diverted for irrigation and mining projects.
- **Irrigation projects:** Twenty-four irrigation projects led to the diversion of 4,287.50 ha of forest land.
- **Mining projects:** 22 mining projects led to the diversion of 3,846.09 ha of forest land.
- **Construction project:** Other than this, 227 road construction projects also led to the diversion of 1,487.82.

#### What is Forest Cover?

- Forest cover includes land that is larger than 0.01 sq km, or one hectare, and has a tree canopy density of more than 10%, notwithstanding the legal status of the land.
- "Recorded forest area" by the FSI includes land that is legally considered a forest, as per government records, regardless of the actual canopy density.

## NEW GUIDELINES ON 'SALE OF LOAN EXPOSURES' AND 'SECURITISATION OF STANDARD ASSETS'

#### ◎ **CONTEXT:**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the draft framework for 'sale of loan exposures and securitisation of standard assets' for the purpose of securitisation of the Indian market.

#### ◎ **ABOUT:**

- Aimed at development of a strong and robust securitisation market in India, while incentivising simpler securitisation structures, the revised guidelines attempt to align the regulatory framework with the **Basel guidelines on securitisation**.
- **Applicability:** These guidelines are to be followed by-
  - Scheduled Commercial Banks (excluding Regional Rural Banks)
  - All India Financial Institutions (NABARD, NHB, EXIM Bank, and SIDBI)
  - All Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) including Housing Finance Companies (HFCs).

#### Key-features of the Guidelines:

##### • **Framework for Sale of Loan Exposures:**

- Sale of standard assets may be by assignment, novation or a loan participation contract (either funded participation or risk participation) whereas the sale of stressed assets may be by assignment or novation.

- Direct assignment transactions shall be subsumed as a special case of these guidelines.
- Requirement of MRR for sale of loans has been done away with.
- The price discovery process has been deregulated to be as per the lenders' policy.
- Stressed assets may be sold to any entity that is permitted to take on loan exposures by its statutory or regulatory framework.
- Some of the existing conditions for sale of NPAs have been rationalised.
- Framework for Securitisation of Standard Assets**
  - Only transactions that result in multiple tranches of securities being issued reflecting different credit risks will be treated as securitisation transactions, and accordingly covered under these guidelines;
  - In line with the Basel III guidelines, two capital measurement approaches have been proposed: Securitisation External Ratings Based Approach (SEC-ERBA) and Securitisation Standardised Approach (SEC-SA).
  - Further, a special case of securitisation, called Simple, Transparent and Comparable (STC) securitisations, has been prescribed with clearly defined criteria and preferential capital treatment.
  - The definition of securitisation has been modified to allow single asset securitisations. Securitisation of exposures purchased from other lenders has been allowed.
  - Carve outs have been provided for Residential Mortgage Backed Securities (RMBS) in prescriptions regarding MHP, MRR and reset of credit enhancements.
  - A quantitative test for significant transfer of credit risk has been prescribed for derecognition for the purpose of capital requirements, independent of the accounting derecognition

### What is securitisation?

- Securitisation refers to the conversion of loans such as auto, house, credit cards etc. of banks and lenders into debt instruments.
- It is a process by which a company clubs its different financial assets/debts to form a consolidated financial instrument which is issued to investors. In return, the investors in such securities get interest.
- This process enhances liquidity in the market. This serves as a useful tool, especially for financial companies, as it helps them raise funds.

## PROPOSAL TO SET UP NATIONAL LAND MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

### ◎ CONTEXT:

A government panel on boosting infrastructure investment has recommended setting up a National Land Management Corporation, which would help in monetising state-owned surplus land assets in a systematic and specialised way.

### About National Land Management Corporation

- The proposed Corporation will identify and manage surplus land assets.
- Such a corporation should be set up under **Companies Act** to function as the facilitator for land monetisation and an asset manager for lands owned by government of India and Central Public Sector Enterprises.
- The Corporation can raise capital from the equity market, based on the value of its leased assets, just like it has been done recently by some private-owned Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs).

- The Corporation should have representation from:
  - Finance Ministry
  - Department of Public Enterprises
  - Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
  - Independent directors from finance and real estate industry

### The need

- India's public land holdings are one of government's most significant tangible assets, whether in the hands of central ministries, state governments, or local bodies.
- In a rapidly modernizing and urbanizing society such as India's, managing public lands represents an opportunity to respond to these urgent needs.
- A more proactive management of public land assets should be part of a strategy for managing its balance sheet in the public interest.
- There is a need for a separate organisation, which can work with various government departments including Railways and Defence Ministry to utilise their surplus land assets.

### What is National Infrastructure Pipeline?

- It is estimated that Indian economy would need to spend \$4.5 trillion on infrastructure by the year 2030 to sustain its growth rate.
- The endeavour of the National Infrastructure Pipeline or NIP, is to make this happen in an efficient manner.
- The new pipeline consists of 39 per cent projects each by the Centre and states and the balance by 22 per cent by private sector.

- ◎ **SIGNIFICANCE:**
- **Economy:** Well-planned NIP will enable more infra projects, grow business, create jobs, improve ease of living and provide equitable access to infrastructure for all, making growth more inclusive.
  - **Government:** Well-developed infrastructure enhances level of level of economic activity, creates additional fiscal space by improving revenue base of the government, and ensures quality of expenditure focused in productive areas.
  - **Developers:** Provides better view of project supply, provides time to be better prepared for project bidding, reduces aggressive bids/ failure in project delivery, ensures enhanced access to sources of finance as result of increased investor confidence.
  - **Banks/Financial Institutions (FIs)/Investors:** Builds investors confidence as identified projects are likely to be better prepared, exposures less likely to suffer stress given active project monitoring, thereby less likelihood of NPAs.

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## RIGHTS ISSUE

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- ◎ **CONTEXT:** In the times of Coronavirus pandemic, several companies are planning to raise funds (aggregating to over Rs 10,000 crore) through rights issue amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- A rights issue is a mechanism by which companies can raise additional capital from existing shareholders.
  - While existing shareholders may not necessarily be able to participate in other fund-raising mechanisms like QIPs, preferential allotment etc, rights issue is a more democratic approach to raising funds as it allows the existing shareholders the right to invest first in the company.

**Why rights issue is an 'efficient' option?**

- For a rights issue, there is no requirement of shareholders' meeting and an approval from the board of directors is sufficient and adequate.
- Therefore, the turnaround time for raising this capital is short and is much suited for the current situation unlike other forms that require shareholders' approval and may take some time to fructify.
- Thus the rights issue are a more efficient mechanism of raising capital.

**Recent reforms undertaken for rights issue:**

- Streamlined process: In November 2019, SEBI streamlined the rights issue process and the timelines for completion was significantly reduced from T+55 days to T+31 days — a 40 per cent cut in the time.
- It has also reduced the advance notice for the record date from seven working days to three working days.
- Dematerialised REs framework: In a major move that makes it possible for eligible investors to subscribe and trade their rights entitlement (RE) and also makes it possible for interested investors to subscribe to more shares than they are eligible for, Sebi on January 22, 2020, laid down the detailed procedure of the improved rights issue process and the dematerialised REs framework.

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## RISE IN INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES

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◎ **CONTEXT:** India's foreign exchange reserves are rising and are slated to hit the \$500 billion mark soon.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- Forex reserves are external assets in the form gold, SDRs (special drawing rights of the IMF) and foreign currency assets (capital inflows to the capital markets, FDI and external commercial borrowings) accumulated by India and controlled by the Reserve Bank of India.
- The foreign exchange reserves are held in support of a range of objectives like supporting and maintaining confidence in the policies for monetary and exchange rate management including the capacity to intervene in support of the national or union currency.
- It will also limit external vulnerability by maintaining foreign currency liquidity to absorb shocks during times of crisis or when access to borrowing is curtailed.

**Highlights:**

- In the month of May, forex reserves jumped by \$12.4 billion to an all-time high of \$493.48 billion (around Rs 37.30 lakh crore) for the week ended May 29.
- The level of foreign exchange reserves has steadily increased by 8,400 per cent from \$5.8 billion as of March 1991 to the current level.
- Reasons behind the rise:
  - **Rise in investment:** *The major reason for the rise in forex reserves is the rise in investment in foreign portfolio investors in Indian stocks and foreign direct investments (FDIs).*
  - **Increase in FPI:** *Foreign Portfolio Investments (FPIs) have now returned to the Indian markets.*
  - **Fall in crude oil price:** *The fall in crude oil prices has brought down the oil import bill, saving the precious foreign exchange.*

**What manages the forex reserves in India?**

- The Reserve Bank of India functions as the custodian and manager of forex reserves, and operates within the overall policy framework agreed upon with the government.

- The RBI allocates the dollars for specific purposes. The RBI uses its forex kitty for the orderly movement of the rupee.
- It sells the dollar when the rupee weakens and buys the dollar when the rupee strengthens.
- When the RBI mops up dollars, it releases an equal amount in the rupees. This excess liquidity is sterilized through issue of bonds and securities and LAF operations.
- Significance of rising forex reserves:
  - Helpful in managing financial issues: The rising forex reserves give a lot of comfort to the government and the Reserve Bank of India in managing India's external and internal financial issues.
  - A relief in the time of crisis: It's a big cushion in the event of any crisis on the economic front and enough to cover the import bill of the country for a year.
  - Strengthening rupee value: The rising reserves have also helped the rupee to strengthen against the dollar. The foreign exchange reserves to GDP ratio is around 15 per cent.
  - Boosting confidence: Reserves will provide a level of confidence to markets that a country can meet its external obligations, demonstrate the backing of domestic currency by external assets, assist the government in meeting its foreign exchange needs and external debt obligations and maintain a reserve for national disasters or emergencies.

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## CONSERVING THE MANGROVES

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### ◎ **CONTEXT:**

To conserve mangroves, GMR Energy has been directed to stop dredging in mudflats off Kakinada coast in Andhra Pradesh to protect the mangroves.

### **Highlights**

- The company was directed by the State Forest Department to remove a bund close to the mudflat adjacent to the company's 220 MW barge-mounted power plant., comes in the backdrop of some environmentalists and former top bureaucrats flagging off environment concerns.
- The directive to remove the bund is aimed at protecting the mangroves and the flora and fauna in the region.
- Not only is the mudflat under threat, there is potential for mangrove cover being affected and possibly lead to destruction of the prime habitat of birds, especially-
  - endangered Great knots (*Calidris tenuirostris*)
  - Indian skimmers (*Rynchops albirostris*), which are listed as a vulnerable species.

### **Mudflats**

- Mudflats refer to land near a water body that is regularly flooded by tides and is usually barren (without any vegetation).
- Also known as tidal flats, mudflats are formed upon the deposition of mud by tides or rivers.
- This coastal landform usually occurs in sheltered areas of the coast like bays, coves, lagoons, estuaries, etc. Since most of the sedimented area of a mudflat is within the intertidal zone, the mudflat experiences submersion under water and exposure twice daily.
- Mudflats protect the inland landforms from erosion. They act as a barrier to waves from eroding land in the interior.

### What is dredging?

- Dredging is the removal of sediments and debris from the bottom of lakes, rivers, harbors, and other water bodies.
- It is a routine necessity in waterways around the world because **sedimentation**—the natural process of sand and silt washing downstream—gradually fills channels and harbors.
- It is also performed to reduce the exposure of fish, wildlife, and people to contaminants and to prevent the spread of contaminants to other areas of the water body.
- Removing large parts of the seabed and dumping it elsewhere can have a major impact on the ecosystem, particularly sensitive areas such as coral reefs and fish nurseries.
- Dredging impacts marine organisms negatively through entrainment, habitat degradation, noise, remobilization of contaminants, sedimentation, and increases in suspended sediment concentrations.

### The threatened species

- **The Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*)**
  - The Great Knot is a medium-sized shorebird with a straight, slender bill of medium length and a heavily streaked head and neck.
  - It is an international migratory wading bird that travels vast distances between the northern hemisphere breeding grounds and southern hemisphere summer feeding grounds around the coastal fringe of Australia (including Victoria) where it frequents coastal wetlands and sand flats.
  - **Family:** The great knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) belongs to the family of sandpipers and knots, the Scolopacidae.
  - **IUCN Red List Category:** Endangered
- **Indian skimmers (*Rynchops albirostris*)**
  - The Indian skimmer grows to a length of 40-43 cm. It has black upper parts, white forehead, collar and lower parts, long, thick, deep orange bill with a yellow tip and longer lower mandible. In flight, it has a white trailing-edge to wing and a short forked tail with blackish central feathers.
  - More widespread in winter, the Indian skimmer is found in the coastal estuaries of western and eastern India.
  - It occurs primarily on larger, sandy, lowland rivers, around lakes and adjacent marshes and, in the non-breeding season, in estuaries and coasts.
  - **Family:** The Indian skimmer is one of the three species that belong to the skimmer genus *Rynchops* in the family Laridae.
  - **IUCN Red List Category:** Vulnerable

## ENVIRONMENT PERFORMANCE INDEX

### ◎ CONTEXT:

India secured 168 rank in the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the biennial Environment Performance Index (EPI Index 2020).

### What is EPI Index?

- The **Environment Performance Index** ranks 180 countries on 32 performance indicators across 11 categories covering environmental health and ecosystem vitality.
- The global index considered 32 indicators of environmental performance, giving a snapshot of the 10-year trends in environmental performance at the national and global levels.



- **Publisher:** The Index was developed by the Center for Environmental Law & Policy at Yale University and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University in collaboration with the World Economic Forum and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission.

### India's performance

- India's rank was 177 (with a score of 30.57 out of 100) in 2018. The country scored 27.6 out of 100 in the 2020 index.
- India scored below the regional average score on all five key parameters on environmental health, including air quality, sanitation and drinking water, heavy metals and waste management.

### The Global Findings

- Denmark came in first place, followed by Luxembourg and Switzerland. The United Kingdom ranked fourth.
- China, which is plagued by poor air quality, has made investments that have helped it climb to 120<sup>th</sup> place, ahead of India's 168<sup>th</sup>-place ranking.
- The 11 countries lagging behind India were — Burundi, Haiti, Chad, Solomon Islands, Madagascar, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Liberia.
- All South Asian countries, except Afghanistan, were ahead of India in the ranking.

Country	Global Score in the EPI Index	Ranking in South Asia	Global ranking
Bhutan	39.3	1	107
Sri Lanka	39.0	2	109
Maldives	35.6	3	127
Pakistan	33.1	4	142
Nepal	32.7	5	145
Bangladesh	29.0	6	162
India	27.6	7	169
Afghanistan	25.5	8	178

### Suggestions for India

- India needs to re-double national sustainability efforts on all fronts, according to the index.
- The country needs to focus on a wide spectrum of sustainability issues, with a high-priority to critical issues such as air and water quality, biodiversity and climate change.

### Significance of the Index

- **Identify best policy practices:** EPI indicators provide a way to spot problems, set targets, track trends, understand outcomes, and identify best policy practices.
- **Formulation of policies:** Good data and fact-based analysis can also help government officials refine their policy agendas, facilitate communications with key stakeholders, and maximize the return on environmental investments.
- **Helpful to meet targets:** The EPI offers a powerful policy tool in support of efforts to meet the targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to move society toward a sustainable future.

# INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM (IRF) REPORT

◎ **CONTEXT:** The U.S. State Department has released its annual International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report, a survey of the state of religious freedom across the world.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- The annual Report to Congress on International Religious Freedom is also known as the International Religious Freedom Report.
- The Report describes the status of religious freedom, government policies violating religious belief and practices of groups, religious denominations and individuals, and U.S. policies promoting religious freedom.
- The report is published annually by the US State Department as part of the legal requirement to the US Congress.

## Key-highlights of the Report

- The report listed countries for positive developments in religious freedom and negative examples (India was not cited in either list).
- Nicaragua, Nigeria and China were cited as negative examples.
- In China, state-sponsored repression against all religions continues to intensify. The Chinese Communist Party is now ordering religious organisations to infuse communist dogmas into their teachings and practice of their faith.
- Uighurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong followers and Christians were being repressed by China.

## The India section of the report

- The country report for India, which looks back on the developments in 2019, takes note of the change in the status of Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- It discusses in detail mob lynchings and anti-conversion laws and related issues.
- It details incidents of "cow vigilantism" and other types of mob violence — such as the attack last year on Tabrez Ansari in Jharkhand.
- The report also takes note of the Babri Masjid decision by the Supreme Court and the challenges to the 2018 reversal of a ban on some women entering the Sabarimala temple.
- It outlines the U.S. engagement with India on the issues.

## US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Report

- In April this year, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent bipartisan commission and separate from the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, recommended to Secretary of State Michael Pompeo that the State Department downgrade India's religious freedom to the lowest grade — 'Country of Particular Concern (CPC)'.
- The Secretary of State is not obliged to accept the recommendation and has not always done so.
- As per law, the CPC and the Special Watch List (one level less severe than CPC) designations have to be made by the administration no later than 90 days after the publication of the IRF Report.

## How India reacted?

- India rejected the US State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report for 2019.
- The Ministry of External Affairs said Washington has no locus standi to comment on the matters.



## SIKKIM-TIBET CONVENTION OF 1890

### ◎ **CONTEXT:**

The recent standoff between Indian and Chinese troops at Naku La in Sikkim, in an area of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) highlighted the historical Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890.

### ◎ **ABOUT:**

- According to the Convention, the boundary in the area is based on the watershed principles.
- Article 1: As per Article (1) of Convention of 1890, it was agreed that the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluents, from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet.
- The line commences at Mount Gipmochi, on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above-mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory.
- Article 2: The second article recognised the British government's control over Sikkim.
- The Convention of 1890 was entered by the King of Great Britain on behalf of India before independence and around the time of independence, the Indian Independence (International Arrangement) Order, 1947 was notified by Secretariat of the Governor-General (Reforms) on August 14, 1947.

### **Why China is raking it up now?**

- The Convention, according to Beijing, settles the border between the two regions.
- But India maintains that the borders in Doklam, the area in question, are yet to be settled.
- China stresses that the Sikkim section of the China-India boundary was defined by the 1890 treaty.
- China has accused India of "betrayal" of the treaty, a colonial era understanding of the boundary alignment relating to Tibet and Sikkim.

### **The dispute**

- The border between India and China is not clearly demarcated throughout. There is no mutually agreed Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- Of the entire 3,488km Sino-Indian border, the only section on which both countries agree that there is no dispute is the 220km Sikkim-Tibet section of the boundary.
- This is because under the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890, the Sikkim-Tibet border was agreed upon and in 1895 it was jointly demarcated on the ground.
- Not only that, but the new government of People's Republic of China, which took power in 1949, confirmed this position in a formal note to the government of India on 26 December 1959.

### **So, Nathu La belongs to which country?**

- The Gazetteer of Sikkim in 1894, while describing the physical features of Sikkim, also mentions the boundary that runs along Naku la - Chorten Nyima La.
- The geographic alignment of the features were so prominent that it could easily be identified and recognized.
- Even analysing the available Google images of the pass, the location of Naku La could be discerned by anyone as the watershed parting line in the area was very prominent.
- There exists no ambiguity with respect to the location of the pass, since geographic realities cannot be altered.

## ASTRONOMERS FIND JUPITER-LIKE CLOUD BANDS ON CLOSEST BROWN DWARF

◎ **CONTEXT:** A team of astronomers has discovered that the closest known brown dwarf, Luhman 16A, shows signs of cloud bands similar to those seen on Jupiter and Saturn.

### What are Luhman 16A?

- Luhman 16A is part of a binary system containing a second brown dwarf, Luhman 16B.
- At a distance of 6.5 light-years, it's the third closest system to our Sun after Alpha Centauri and Barnard's Star.
- Both brown dwarfs weigh about 30 times as much as Jupiter.
- Despite the fact that Luhman 16A and 16B have similar masses and temperatures (about 1,900° F or 1,000° C), and presumably formed at the same time, they show markedly different weather.
- Luhman 16B shows no sign of stationary cloud bands, instead exhibiting evidence of more irregular, patchy clouds.
- Luhman 16B therefore has noticeable brightness variations as a result of its cloudy features, unlike Luhman 16A.

### Brown dwarfs

- Brown dwarfs are objects heavier than planets but lighter than stars, and typically have 13 to 80 times the mass of Jupiter.
- They do not have enough mass to produce energy by nuclear fusion.
- Rather, the small amount of energy emitted by these objects comes almost exclusively from the heat stored in them during the collapse of the parent gas cloud from which they formed.
- Brown dwarfs therefore gradually cool and fade with cosmological time.

### The research

- The researchers used an instrument on the Very Large Telescope in Chile to study polarized light from the Luhman 16 system.
- Polarization is a property of light that represents the direction that the light wave oscillates. Polarized sunglasses block out one direction of polarization to reduce glare and improve contrast.
- This is the first time scientists have used the technique of polarimetry to determine the properties of atmospheric clouds outside of the solar system, or exoclouds.

### How these findings are significant?

- Subsequently, many astronomers detected polarisation of brown dwarfs. But what is special in the newest study of Luhman 16 is that the researchers have found the actual structure of the clouds — that they form bands over one of the pair (Luhman 16A) of brown dwarfs.
- Understanding the cloud system over a brown dwarf can shed light on the pressure, temperature and climate on the surface of the celestial body.

## IFLOWS-MUMBAI

◎ **CONTEXT:** The state government of Maharashtra launched an Integrated Flood Warning System called 'IFLOWS-Mumbai'.

**◎ ABOUT:**

- IFLOWS is a monitoring and flood warning system that will be able to relay alerts of possible flood-prone areas anywhere between six to 72 hours in advance.
- It is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).
- The system can provide all information regarding possible flood-prone areas, likely height the floodwater could attain, location-wise problem areas across all 24 wards and calculate the vulnerability and risk of elements exposed to flood.
- Mumbai is only the second city in the country after Chennai to get this system.
- Similar systems are being developed for Bengaluru and Kolkata.

**Working of the system**

- Sources: The primary source for the system is the amount of rainfall, but with Mumbai being a coastal city, the system also factors in tidal waves and storm tides for its flood assessments.
- The system has provisions to capture the urban drainage within the city and predict the areas of flooding.
- The system comprises seven modules-
  - Data Assimilation
  - Flood
  - Inundation
  - Vulnerability
  - Risk
  - Dissemination Module
  - Decision Support System
- The system incorporates weather models from the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), India Meteorological Department (IMD), field data from the rain gauge network of 165 stations set up by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), BMC and IMD.

**The need**

- Mumbai, the financial capital of India, has been experiencing floods with increased periodicity. The recent flood on 29 August 2017 had brought the city to a standstill.
- Last year, post-monsoon and unseasonal rainfall as late as October, two tropical cyclones in the Arabian Sea had caught authorities off guard and left a trail of destruction.
- The flood during 26<sup>th</sup> July 2005, when the city received a rainfall of 94 cm, a 100 year high in a span of 24 hours had paralyzed the city completely.
- Urban flooding is common in the city from June to September, resulting in the crippling of traffic, railways and airlines.

**How will it benefit the state?**

- As advance preparedness for floods before they occur, the system will help in warning the citizens so that they can be prepared in advance for flooding conditions.
- It is designed to generate flood warnings for specific geographical areas of the city. The system, initially only to be accessed by the civic body will enable them to issue alerts for citizens who can then avoid such zones.

## NATIONAL SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION POLICY (STIP 2020)

◎ **CONTEXT:** *The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India (Office of PSA) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST) have jointly initiated a decentralized, bottom-up, and inclusive process for the formulation of a new 'national Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020)'.*

◎ **ABOUT:**

- The fifth S&T policy of India is being formulated at a crucial juncture when India and the world are tackling the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This is only the latest among the many important changes in the past decade that have necessitated formulation of a new outlook and strategy for Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI).
- As the crisis changes the world, the new policy with its decentralized manner of formation will reorient STI in terms of priorities, sectoral focus, the way research is done, and technologies are developed and deployed for larger socio-economic welfare.
- The STI Policy for the new India will also integrate the lessons of COVID-19 including building of an Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliance) through ST&I by leveraging our strengths in R&D, Design, S&T workforce and institutions, huge markets, demographic dividend, diversity and data.

### The formulation process

- The STIP 2020 formulation process will be six-months long.
- It is organised into 4 highly interlinked tracks, which will reach out to around 15000 stakeholders for consultation in the policy formulation.
  - Track I involves an extensive public and expert consultation process through Science Policy Forum - a dedicated platform for soliciting inputs from larger public and expert pool during and after the policy drafting process.
  - Track II comprises experts-driven thematic consultations to feed evidence-informed recommendations into the policy drafting process. Twenty-one (21) focused thematic groups have been constituted for this purpose.
  - Track III involves consultations with Ministries and States
  - Track IV constitutes apex level multi-stakeholder consultation

### About the Organisations

- **Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser**
  - India has had a Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) since 1999.
    - ▶ Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam was the first PSA from 1999—2001
    - ▶ Dr. R. Chidambaram succeeded Dr. Kalam and was the PSA from 2001-2018.
    - ▶ Professor K. Vijay Raghavan succeeded Dr. Chidambaram on April 3, 2018 and is the current PSA.
  - The Office aims to help enable and empower all spheres of science and technology so that the execution of programmes is effective for society and the economy.
- **Department of Science and Technology (DST)**
  - Department of Science & Technology (DST) was established in May 1971.
  - The organisation aims to promote new areas of Science & Technology and to play the role of a nodal department for organising, coordinating and promoting S&T activities in the country.

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## **38<sup>th</sup> PARALLEL**

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- ▶ The 38<sup>th</sup> parallel is a circle of latitude 38 degrees north of the equatorial plane.
- ▶ This line divides the Korean peninsula roughly in half (leaving about 56% of Korean territory on the northern side).
- ▶ 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, popular name given to latitude 38° N that in East Asia roughly demarcates North Korea and South Korea.
- ▶ The line was chosen by U.S. military planners at the Potsdam Conference (July 1945) near the end of World War II as an army boundary, north of which the U.S.S.R
- ▶ The actual border between North and South Korea slants across this circle of latitude, finishing some distance north of it on the east coast.

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## **ANTI-VIRAL “VIROLOCK” TEXTILE TECHNOLOGY**

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Arvind Ltd, the leading textile-to-retail conglomerate has entered into technical collaboration with Swiss textile innovator HeiQ Materials AG and Taiwanese speciality major Jintex Corporation to introduce Anti-Viral “Virolock” textile technology for the first time in India under its brand “Intellifabrix”.

### **What is HeiQ Viroblock?**

- ▶ HeiQ Viroblock is one of the most advanced global antiviral products created by HeiQ, a Swiss textile innovator.
- ▶ It significantly enhances the antiviral log reduction and reduces viral infectivity by 99.99% and is one of the first textile technologies in the world to claim such efficacy on SARS-CoV-2.
- ▶ It has been designed to stay active on treated garments for 30 gentle domestic washes, ensuring safety for the consumer that lasts for a good part of the garment's life.

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## **ADITYA: INDIA'S FIRST SOLAR-POWERED FERRY**

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- India's first solar-powered ferry, Aditya, which runs on the Vaikom-Thavanakadavu route in Kerala, has been shortlisted for the Gustave Trouvé Award.
- It is the sole entrant from Asia.
- Operated by the Kerala State Water Transport Department (KSWTD), the vessel was built by Navalt Solar and Electric Boats, Kochi
- Gussies Electric Boat Awards were instituted in memory of Gustave Trouvé, a French electrical engineer and pioneer in electric cars and boats.

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## **BORDER ADJUSTMENT TAX (BAT)**

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In a recent development, NITI Aayog member has favoured imposing a border adjustment tax (BAT) on imports to provide a level-playing field to domestic industries.

### **What is BAT?**

- BAT is a duty that is proposed to be imposed on imported goods in addition to the customs levy that gets charged at the port of entry.
- Various taxes like electricity duty, mandi tax, clean energy cess, royalty etc lead to escalation of price.
- Such taxes which are imposed on domestic goods, give them (imported goods) a price advantage in India.



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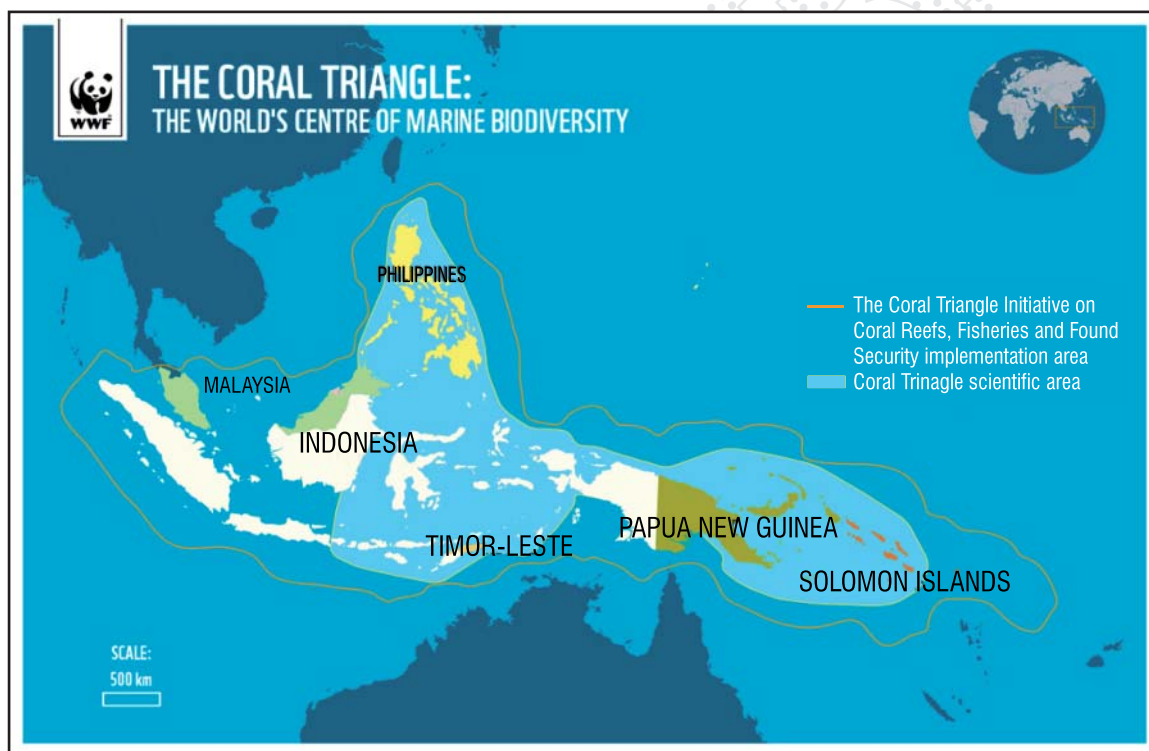


## CORAL TRIANGLE DAY

- The Coral Triangle Day is held on June 9 every year. It is a massive celebration of the Coral Triangle.
- The first Coral Triangle Day was celebrated on June 9, 2012.

### What is Coral Triangle?

- The Coral Triangle, the world's epicentre of marine diversity, is one of the 3 mega ecological complexes on our planet, together with the Congo Basin and the Amazon Rainforest.
- It is a vast ocean expanse that geographically spreads across 6 countries in Asia and the Pacific: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Timor Leste (the "CT6" countries).
  - ▶ It occupies just 1.5% of the world's total ocean area, but represents 30% of the world's coral reefs.
- It has the highest coral diversity in the world - 76% of the world's coral species are found here. Fifteen of are endemic to the region, which means they aren't found anywhere else.
- It is also home to the highest diversity of coral reef fishes in the world. Thirty-seven percent of the world's coral reef fish species, and 56% of the coral reef fishes in the Indo-Pacific region live here.



## GAIRSAIN BECOMES UTTARAKHAND'S SUMMER CAPITAL

- The tiny hill town of Gairsain has officially been decreed the summer capital of the state of Uttarakhand.
- Gairsain also known as Bhararisen, in the Chamoli district has been the subject of debate for over two decades since Uttarakhand gained statehood in 2000.
- Now, it would be developed as an ideal seat of the administration.
- The Legislative Assembly of the state is located at Dehradun, the winter capital city.

## FIRST ESTIMATION EXERCISE OF INDIAN GAUR IN NILGIRIS

- The first population estimation exercise of the Indian gaur carried out in the Nilgiris Forest Division in recent years, has revealed that more than an estimated 2,000 Indian gaurs inhabit the entire division.

### About Indian Gaur

- The Gaur (*Bos frontalis*) is a big relative of the cow, being a bovine itself, and is the largest known wild cattle on the planet.
- The Indian Gaur is listed as Schedule I species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and is tagged as 'vulnerable' on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List.

## LiDAR (LIGHT DETECTION AND RANGING)

Scientists have discovered Roman large embanked settlement enclosures in Tamar Valley, England using data from a new technique called Lidar.

### What is LiDAR?

- LiDAR (*Light Detection and Ranging*) is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure ranges (variable distances) to the Earth. These light pulses—combined with other data recorded by the airborne system— generate precise, three-dimensional information about the shape of the Earth and its surface characteristics.
- A lidar instrument principally consists of a laser, a scanner, and a specialized GPS receiver. Airplanes and helicopters are the most commonly used platforms for acquiring lidar data over broad areas.
- Two types of lidar are
  - Topographic- Topographic lidar typically uses a near-infrared laser to map the land
- Bathymetric- Bathymetric lidar uses water-penetrating green light to also measure seafloor and riverbed elevations.
- Lidar systems allow scientists and mapping professionals to examine both natural and manmade environments with accuracy, precision, and flexibility.
- Scientists are using lidar to produce more accurate shoreline maps, make digital elevation models for use in geographic information systems, to assist in emergency response operations, and in many other applications.

## LONAR LAKE

- A team of scientists from the city-based National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) will examine the Lonar lake in Maharashtra to analyse why it has turned pink.
- The oval-shaped Lonar lake, formed after a meteorite hit the Earth some 50,000 years ago, is a popular tourist hub and also attracts scientists from across the world.
- The mean diameter of the lake is around 1.2 km.
- The colour of the lake water has recently turned pink, which has not only surprised locals, but nature enthusiasts and scientists as well.
- Lonar crater lake was identified as a unique geographical site by a British officer named C J E Alexander in 1823.

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## **MAGNETOCALORIC MATERIAL**

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- Scientists at the International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials (ARCI), an autonomous R&D Centre of Department of Science and Technology (DST) have developed a rare-earth-based magnetocaloric material that can be effectively used for cancer treatment.
- The magnetocaloric materials (certain materials in which application and removal of a magnetic field causes the materials to become warmer or cooler).
- Advancements in magnetic materials led to the development of magnetic hyperthermia to try to address the issues of side effects of cancer treatment like chemotherapy.
- In magnetic hyperthermia, magnetic nanoparticles are subjected to alternating magnetic fields of few Gauss, which produce heat due to magnetic relaxation losses.

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## **RAMON MAGSAYSAY AWARDS**

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- The Ramon Magsaysay awards are regarded as Asia's version of the Nobel Prize.
- The awards are named after a popular Philippine president, Ramon Magsaysay, who died in a 1957 plane crash and honour "greatness of spirit in selfless service to the peoples of Asia."
- Ramon Magsaysay was the third president of the Republic of the Philippines after World War II.
- The Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation awards Asian individuals achieving excellence in their respective fields and have been known to help others generously without anticipating public recognition.
- The awards were traditionally given in five categories: government service; public service; community leadership; journalism, literature, and creative communication arts; and peace and international understanding. 5 of these, however, were discontinued post 2009.
- The more than 330 awardees so far had included leaders like the late President Corazon Aquino, an icon of nonviolent democratic struggle across the world, and Mother Teresa, who has been honored in the Catholic church as Saint Teresa and known globally for her missionary work for the poorest of the poor.

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## **SAHAKAR MITRA SCHEME**

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- The Union Ministry for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare launched the Sahakar Mitra Scheme on Internship Programme (SIP).
- It is a program that will provide young professionals with an opportunity of practical exposure and learning from the working of the **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)**.
- This scheme will be helpful to youth and also praised the NCDC for several such initiatives in the cooperative sector entrepreneurship development ecosystem.
  - The scheme will provide paid internships to attract the youth. The scheme would also rope in professionals from various academic institutions to develop professionals that can take various roles in the Farmers Producers Organizations (FPO).
  - The scheme also aims to train youth for entrepreneurial roles to tap into the large scale potential of the market.
  - The scheme will provide the interns with valuable field experience.

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