

# CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK-4  
SEPTEMBER  
2020

## MAINS

- In Three Ordinances, the provisions that bother Protesting Farmers

AGRICULTURE

- How to Reverse Global Wildlife Declines by 2050

BIODIVERSITY

- Climate Migration Primarily in Middle Income, Agri-dependent Countries: Study

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Abolition of AIHB in consonance of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance

GOVERNANCE

- Singapore Convention on Mediation enters into Force

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- How COVID-19 is hitting India's Children

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- New study helps monitor trends in phytoplankton biomass in Bay of Bengal

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- SAROD Ports
- RBI issues draft Rupee interest rate derivatives

ECONOMY

- Five Star Villages scheme

GOVERNANCE

- Government launches Postage Stamp commemorating Mission Shakti's success
- India Now Has Its Own Brain Template & an Atlas As Well
- RPF busts Real Mango
- Solar Cycle 25 Is Here: NASA & NOAA
- Trans fat intake: WHO warning to India

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— **NOTE** —

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- 4 (SEPTEMBER, 2020)

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

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**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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# IN THREE ORDINANCES, THE PROVISIONS THAT BOTHER PROTESTING FARMERS

## CONTEXT

Farmers in Punjab and Haryana have been protesting against three ordinances promulgated by the Centre.

### Three ordinances and the reasons for the protest

- The government has introduced three Bills to replace these ordinances. Lok Sabha passed one of these recently and the other two are listed for consideration and passing during the current session.
- **They are called:**
  - ▶ The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020;
  - ▶ The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020; and
  - ▶ The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020.
- It is the Bill replacing the third that has been passed in Lok Sabha.
- While farmers are protesting against all three ordinances, their objections are mostly against the provisions of the first.
- And while there is no uniform demand among the protesters or a unified leadership, it emerges that their concerns are mainly about sections relating to "**trade area**", "**trader**", "**dispute resolution**" and "**market fee**" in the first ordinance. A look at these sections, one by one:

#### Ordinance:

- Ordinance is the special legislative power conferred upon the President of India to formulate a legislation when at least one of the Houses of the Parliament are not in session.

#### Article 123 of the Indian Constitution

- If at any time, except when both Houses of Parliament are in session, the President is satisfied that circumstances exist which render it necessary for him to take immediate action, he may promulgate such Ordinances as the circumstances appear to him to require.
- An Ordinance promulgated under this article shall have the same force and effect as an Act of Parliament, but every such Ordinance-

- ▶ shall be laid before both Houses of Parliament and shall cease to operate at the expiration of six weeks from the reassembly of Parliament, or, if before the expiration of that period resolutions disapproving it are passed by both Houses, upon the passing of the second of those resolutions; and
- ▶ may be withdrawn at any time by the President

#### Trade area:

- Section 2(m) of The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020 defines "trade area" as any area or location, place of production, collection and aggregation including (a) farm gates; (b) factory premises; (c) warehouses; (d) silos; (e) cold storages; or (f) any other structures or places, from where trade of farmers' produce may be undertaken in the territory of India.
- The definition does not, however, include "the premises, enclosures and structures constituting (i) physical boundaries of principal market yards, sub-market yards and market sub-yards managed and run by the market committees formed under each state APMC (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) Act".
- It also excludes "private market yards, private market sub-yards, direct marketing collection centres, and private farmer-consumer market yards managed by persons holding licences or any warehouses, silos, cold storages or other structures notified as markets or deemed markets under each State APMC Act in force in India".
- In effect, existing mandis established under APMC Acts have been excluded from the definition of trade area under the new legislation. The government says the creation of an additional trade area outside of mandis will provide farmers the freedom of choice to conduct trade in their produce.
- The protesters say this provision will confine APMC mandis to their physical boundaries and give a free hand to big corporate buyers.

### Trader and its link to the protests

- Section 2(n) of the first ordinance defines a "trader" as "a person who buys farmers' produce by way of inter-State trade or intra-State trade or a combination thereof, either for self or on behalf of one or more persons for the purpose of wholesale trade, retail, end-use, value addition, processing, manufacturing, export, consumption or for such other purpose". Thus, it includes processor, exporter, wholesaler, miller, and retailer.
- According to the Ministry of the Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, "Any trader with a PAN card can buy the farmers' produce in the trade area."
- A trader can operate in both an APMC mandi and a trade area. However, for trading in the mandi, the trader would require a licence/registration as provided for in the State APMC Act. In the present mandi system, arhatiyas (commission agents) have to get a licence to trade in a mandi.
- The protesters say arhatiyas have credibility as their financial status is verified during the licence approval process. This also explains why the protests have mostly been concentrated in Punjab and Haryana. The arhatiya system is more influential in these two states than in other states, agriculture experts said.

### Reasons for the provision on 'market fee' that worry protesters

- Section 6 states that "no market fee or cess or levy, by whatever name called, under any State APMC Act or any other State law, shall be levied on any farmer or trader or electronic trading and transaction platform for trade and commerce in scheduled farmers' produces in a trade area". Government officials say this provision will reduce the cost of transaction and will benefit both the farmers and the traders.

- Under the existing system, such charges in states like Punjab come to around 8.5% — a market fee of 3%, a rural development charge of 3% and the arhatiya's commission of about 2.5%.
- The protesters say that by removing the fee on trade, the government is indirectly incentivising big corporates. They said this provision does not provide a level playing field to APMC mandis.
- A government official, on the other hand, questioned why the states do not make transactions in mandis cost-efficient.

### Objection against dispute resolution

- The protesters say that the provision on dispute resolution under Section 8 does not sufficiently safeguard farmers' interests. It provides that in case of a dispute arising out of a transaction between the farmer and a trader, the parties may seek a mutually acceptable solution through conciliation by filing an application to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, who shall refer such dispute to a Conciliation Board to be appointed by him for facilitating the binding settlement of the dispute.
- Farmers fear the proposed system of conciliation can be misused against them. They say the ordinance does not allow farmers to approach a civil court.

### ◎ CONCLUSION:

Agricultural markets are over-strained by a web of outdated laws that were codified with a food scarcity mindset. State intervention at every step is not a smart idea and can often be counter-productive. There is need to protect the interest of farmers that are protesting. At the same time, there is need to remove many restrictions on trade in agricultural commodities so as to stabilise food markets and help agricultural growth.

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# HOW TO REVERSE GLOBAL WILDLIFE DECLINES BY 2050

## CONTEXT

Biodiversity loss is a disturbing threat with few parallels. Of the nine greatest threats to the world ranked by the World Economic Forum, six relate to the ongoing destruction of nature.

### Decline in wildlife population

- Species are going extinct at an unprecedented rate. Wildlife populations have fallen by more than two-thirds over the last 50 years, according to a new report from the World Wildlife Fund.
- The sharpest declines have occurred throughout the world's rivers and lakes, where freshwater wildlife has plummeted by 84 per cent since 1970 — about four per cent per year.

### How health of nature is intimately linked to the health of humans?

- The emergence of new infectious diseases like COVID-19 tend to be related to the destruction of forests and wilderness.
- Healthy ecosystems are the foundation of today's global economies and societies, and the ones we aspire to build.

- As more and more species are drawn towards extinction, the very life support systems on which civilisation depends are eroded.

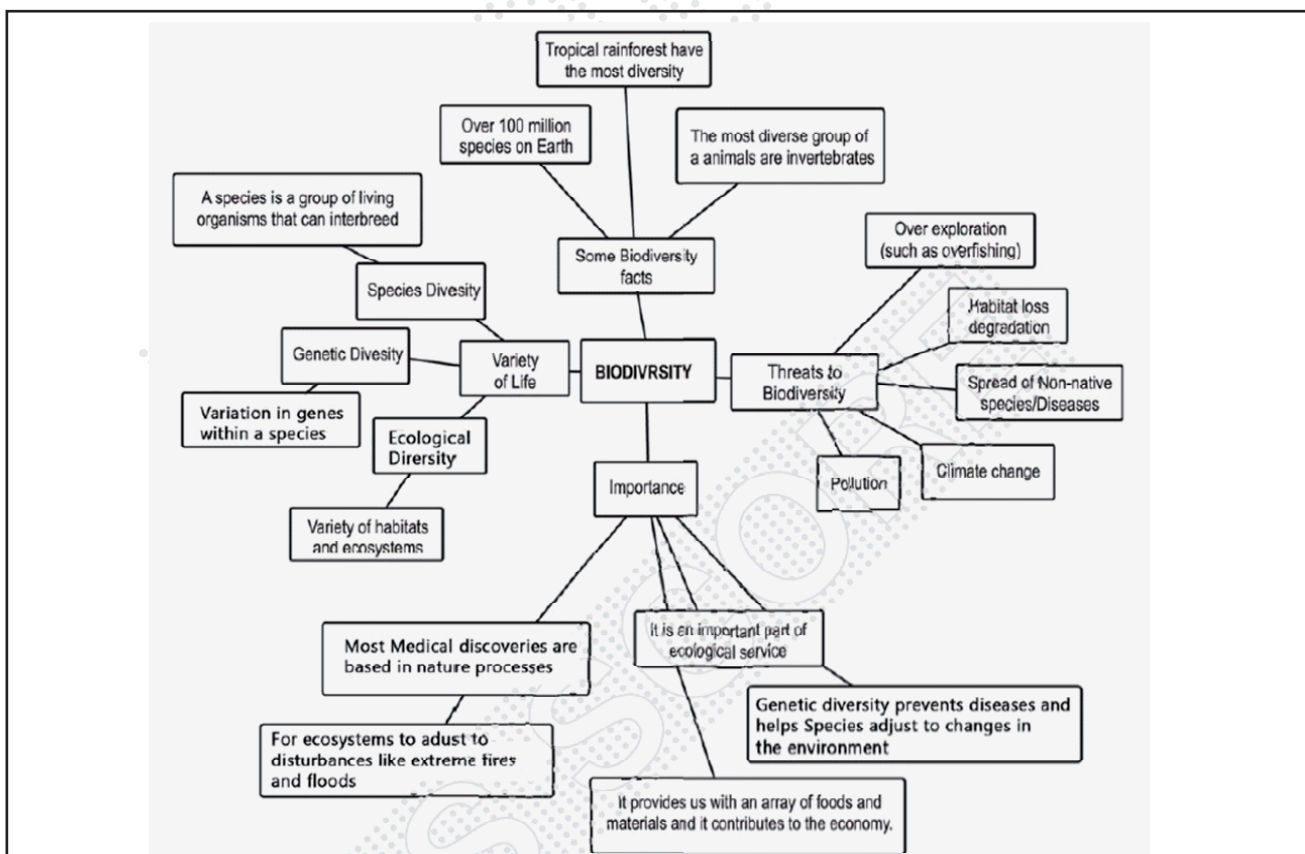
### Why is Biological Diversity Important?

#### Bending the curve

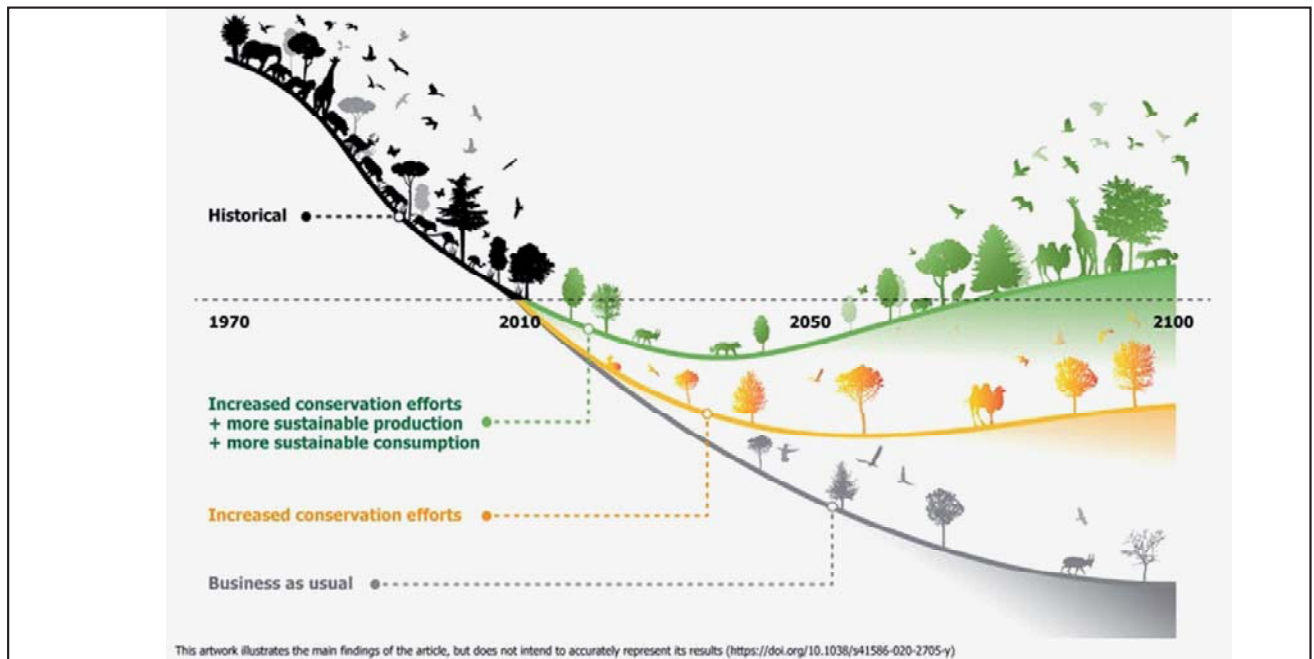
- The targets of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity call for global trends of terrestrial wildlife to stop declining and start recovering by 2050 or earlier. Changes in how land is used – from pristine forest to cropland or pasture – rank among the greatest threats to biodiversity on land worldwide.

The necessary conditions for biodiversity to recover during the 21st century while still supporting growing and affluent human societies:

- Renewed ambition from the world's governments:**







- ▶ First, there must be renewed ambition from the world's governments to establish large-scale conservation areas, placed in the most valuable hotspots for biodiversity worldwide, such as small islands with species found nowhere else. These reserves, in which wildlife will live and roam freely, will need to cover at least 40% of the world's land surface to help bend the curve from decline to recovery for species and entire ecosystems.
- ▶ The location of these areas, and how well they are managed, is often more important than how big they are. Habitat restoration and conservation efforts need to be targeted where they are needed most – for species and habitats on the verge of extinction.
- ▶ The next 30 years will prove pivotal for Earth's biodiversity.
- **Need to transform our food systems :**
  - ▶ Second, we must transform our food systems to produce more on less land. If every farmer on Earth used the best available farming practices, only half of the total area of cropland would be needed to feed the world. There are lots of other inefficiencies that could be ironed out too, by reducing the amount of waste produced during transport and food processing, for example. Society at large can help in this effort by shifting towards healthier and more sustainable diets, and reducing food waste.
  - ▶ This should happen alongside efforts to restore degraded land, such as farmland that's becoming unproductive as a result of soil erosion, and land that's no longer needed as agriculture becomes more efficient and diets shift. This could return 8% of the world's land to nature by 2050. It will be necessary to plan how the remaining land is used, to balance food production and other uses with the conservation of wild spaces.
- ▶ Without a similar level of ambition for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, climate change will ensure the world's wildlife fares badly this century. Only a comprehensive set of policy measures that transform our relationship with the land and rapidly scale down pollution can build the necessary momentum. Our report concludes that transformative changes in our food systems and how we plan and use land will have the biggest benefits for biodiversity.
- ▶ But the benefits wouldn't end there. While giving back to nature, these measures would simultaneously slow climate change, reduce pressure on water, limit nitrogen pollution in the world's waterways and boost human health. When the world works together to halt and eventually reverse biodiversity loss, it's not only wildlife that will thrive.

◎ **CONCLUSION:**

The great variety of life on earth has provided for man's needs over thousands of years. The diversity of life on earth is so great that if we use it sustainably we can go on developing new products from biodiversity for many generations. This can only happen if we manage biodiversity as a precious resource and prevent the extinction of species.

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# CLIMATE MIGRATION PRIMARILY IN MIDDLE INCOME, AGRI-DEPENDENT COUNTRIES: STUDY

## CONTEXT

Human migration due to changing climate happens primarily in middle income and agricultural-dependent countries, a new study published in the journal Nature Climate Change.

### ◎ BACKGROUND

- The environmental changes and natural disasters have played a role in how the population is distributed on our planet throughout history.
- The human migration from the Indus Valley Civilisation is very similar to the one that would take place, or is already been happening, from regions impacted by human-induced climate change, especially in low-lying coastal regions and islands that often bear the brunt of extreme weather events and sea level rise.
- Back in 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted that the **single greatest impact of climate change will be on human migration.**
- Experts believe that by 2050, more than 200 million people will be forced to flee their homes. They are referred as climate migrants or climate refugees.
- A second study, **World Migration Report 2020**, was released by the UN in December 2019.
  - ▶ The report establishes the role of natural disasters in migration and says: "Many more people are newly displaced by disasters in any given year, compared with those newly displaced by conflict and violence, and more countries are affected by disaster displacement."

### ◎ ANALYSIS

#### Revelations made in the new study:

- The research analysed 30 studies on the subject of migration and climate change from different countries.
- It found that the strongest relationship between migration and climate-related environmental hazards was found in countries from Latin America, the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, west, south and south east Asia.
- Research has also shown that these populations are also most at risk from climate change disasters such as tropical cyclones, hurricanes, typhoons, extreme rainfall and floods.
- The impacts of climate change that caused migration of people were mainly changes in temperature, rainfall variability and rapid onset events like storms, cyclones and floods.

### Defining Terms

The International Organization for Migration has proposed three categories of environmental migration. Below are their working-definitions describing these categories:

- **Environmental migrant**
  - ▶ Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.
- **Environmentally displaced person**
  - ▶ Persons who are displaced within their country of habitual residence or who have crossed an international border and for whom environmental degradation, deterioration or destruction is a major cause of their displacement, although not necessarily the sole one.
- **Migration influenced by environmental change**
  - ▶ Where environmental change can be identified as affecting the drivers of migration, and thus is a factor in the decision to migrate"

### High level of migration in middle-income regions

- In both, low and high income countries, environmental impacts on migration are weaker — presumably because people are either too poor to leave and therefore essentially become trapped, or in wealthy countries, they have enough financial means to absorb the consequences.
- It is mainly in middle-income regions and those with a dependency on agriculture that we see strong effects.

### What role does climate change play in the decision of people to migrate?

- Climate change is a global environmental and development challenge with significant implications related to security and migratory pressures.
- The Earth's climate is changing at a rate that has exceeded most scientific forecasts. Some families and communities have already started to suffer from disasters and the consequences of climate change, forced to leave their homes in search of a new beginning.
- There are many factors that cause displacement due to climate change and **cannot always be** separated from the political, social and economic aspects.
  - Increasing occurrence of natural disasters:** The increasing occurrence of natural disasters due to changes in climate conditions increases the number of humanitarian emergencies and therefore displacements of affected population.

- The last two years saw a significant rise in number, intensity and unpredictability of cyclones in the North Indian Ocean region, the most severe among these being-
  - super Cyclone Amphan in the Bay of Bengal in May 2020
  - extremely severe Cyclone Fani in the Bay of Bengal in May 2019
- Both these massive storms caused massive destruction of property, livelihoods and lives on the eastern coast of India and in Bangladesh.

- Consequences of global warming:** The impact of global warming and its consequences on living conditions, health and food in a developing area can enhance migration by worsening an already complicated situation.
- Sea level rise:** If sea level rises, many coastal areas and small islands can significantly worsen their conditions of human life until they just become uninhabitable and even disappear.
- Scarcity of natural resources:** Problems arising from the scarcity of natural resources such as water or food can lead to tense situations or armed conflicts, which force the civilian population to leave their place of origin.
- Decline in agriculture:** In countries where individuals are not extremely poor, a decline in agricultural income strengthens the incentives to migrate to cities or abroad. Decreasing agricultural productivity may encourage a mechanism that ultimately leads to economic success of migrants.

- Climate change alters habitats and disrupts ecosystems. Displacement due to climate change is also common in other species including mammals, birds and amphibians.

### Calculating human pressure on Earth

- With increasing human activities, the consumption of resources and production of wastes are increasing simultaneously.
- The ecological footprint helps to calculate human pressure on the planet.
- The consumption pattern of the earth's resources on a world map reveals that the citizens from the most industrialized countries are consuming more, and the least developed countries have less impact on the planet.
- The bio-capacity per person on earth is currently 1.7 global hectares, which should be equal to the world's ecological footprint.

### Who causes climate change?

- Over the past century, a sharp increase has been observed for the global average of combined land and ocean surface temperature, greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations (including CO<sub>2</sub>, methane and nitrous oxide) and for global anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions mostly from the burning of fossil fuels, cement and flaring.
  - Human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic emissions of GHGs are the highest in history.
  - An increase in warm temperature extremes, an increase in extreme high sea levels and an increase in the number of heavy precipitation events are evident in a number of regions
  - Continued emissions of GHGs will cause further warming and it would cause increasing likelihood of severe and irreversible impacts on people and ecosystems.
  - The global mean surface temperature change for the end of the twenty-first century (2081-2100) is projected to likely exceed 1.5°C to 2°C
    - extreme precipitation events over the wet tropical regions will very likely become more intense and more frequent
    - the global ocean will continue to warm and the sea level will continue to rise at the rate of 8-16 mm/year
  - About 70 per cent of the coastlines worldwide are projected to experience significant increase in sea level rise.

### Recent mass migration episodes

- Over the past 40 years or so, both Europe and the United States have experienced a dramatic rise in immigration.

- Recent mass migration episodes such as the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 and the 'migrant caravan' from Central America to the United States in 2018 have been partly attributed to severe droughts experienced in these countries.
- India continued to be the largest country of origin of international migrants
  - ▶ India had the largest number of migrants living abroad (17.5 million), followed by Mexico and China (11.8 million and 10.7 million respectively).
  - ▶ The top destination country remained the United States (50.7 million international migrants).

### Urbanization boom?

- Climate change will accelerate an urbanization boom that is already well underway—a trend that is frequently unmanaged and unsustainable.
- In places like Dhaka, Rio de Janeiro, Lagos, Jakarta, Mexico City, and Cairo, migration and the resulting urban sprawl are skyrocketing.
- In India, glitzy metropolises like Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, and Kochi are hotspots for in-migration.
  - ▶ Some of that migration will be forced by India's climate-exacerbated cyclones and flooding.
    - Extreme and sudden climate shocks, such as the 2013 flash floods in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, lead to temporary, and often reversible migration.

### The Global Compact for Migration:

- In the past decade, there has been a growing political awareness of the issues around environmental migration, and increasing acceptance that this is a global challenge.
- As a result, many states have signed up to landmark agreements, such as the-
  - ▶ Paris Climate Change Agreement

- ▶ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
- ▶ Global Compact for Migration

### What measures can be taken?

- **Human rights-based protection measures:** Solutions can range from tweaking migration practices, such as visa regimes, to developing human rights-based protection measures.
- **Coordinated approach:** Most importantly, they involve a coordinated approach from national governments, bringing together experts from different walks of life.
- **Comprehensive solution:** The intersection of climate change and migration requires new, nimble, and comprehensive solutions to the multidimensional challenges it creates.
- **Effective adaptation measures:** For countries in those vulnerable regions of the global south, climate change adaptation must include an overhaul of cities, not only to insulate them from climate impacts but to make them a safer, more humane refuge.
- **Understanding climate-migration nexus:** Mass migration and climate change are intertwined problems. Therefore, understanding the climate-migration nexus can become a key to both solving the climate crisis and the migration crisis. If we continue to treat them separately we are failing to see the bigger picture.

### ◎ CONCLUSION

Today, the narrative of climate refugees is not a simple movement of people from low income countries towards high income countries but a complex process that involves many economic and socio-political factors. As climate change impacts become more and more common globally, the triggers for human populations to move away from the most affected regions will keep on increasing. Studies like the current one will go a long way in understanding and pin pointing the future hot spots for such migration.

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# ABOLITION OF AIHB IN CONSONANCE OF MINIMUM GOVERNMENT, MAXIMUM GOVERNANCE

## CONTEXT

The Union textile ministry recently abolished the All India Handicrafts Board, Handloom Board and the Power Loom Board in consonance with the government's vision of minimum government, maximum governance.

The ministry also changed the status of the eight Textile Research Associations to "approved bodies", instead of the earlier "affiliated bodies".

## ◎ BACKGROUND

- ▶ It was in 1950, in a newly independent India that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had invited noted cultural and handloom activist Jayakar to study the handloom sector and work out plans for its revival.
  - ▶ Eventually, she served as chair of the All India Handloom Board and Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation.
  - ▶ Jayakar also founded the **National Crafts Museum** in 1956. The board also has an imprint of Chattopadhyay, who was the driving force behind the renaissance of Indian handicrafts and handlooms post-independence.
  - ▶ She was instrumental in establishing the All India Handicrafts Board and the Central Cottage Industries Emporia.
  - The **All India Handloom Board** was set up in 1992, to advise the Government in the formulation of overall development programs in the handloom sector.
    - ▶ It was also responsible for advising the Government on how to make handlooms an effective instrument for reducing unemployment and underemployment, and how to achieve higher living standards for weavers.
  - The board soon became a leading voice for the revival of Indian handloom and handicrafts.
  - Thereafter, the All India Handloom Board has been reconstituted from time to time.
  - As India celebrated the **National Handloom Day** on **August 7 2020**, this was the first time it does so without the All India Handloom Board.
- ▶ formulating frameworks for policies
  - ▶ conducting research
  - ▶ preserving the cultural heritage
  - Institutes imparting technical, medical and higher education fall in this category.
  - Most of the ABs receive money from the Central Government by way of grants-in-aid (GIA). Since 2016-17, the Union budget accounts for the GIA figures to ABs separately.
  - As per statement no. 24, 2017-18 (revised estimates), the amount disbursed to autonomous/grantee bodies was Rs 799.55 billion, which, in 2019-20, was increased to Rs 943.84 billion.
  - These ABs employ a sizeable number of people as well. The apex administrative body of ABs is called **governing council** or **governing body** and is chaired by the minister or the secretary of the respective ministry.
  - Besides, the ABs have specialised committees such as the purchase committee, works committee, finance committee, with nominated ministry officials.
  - These ABs are audited by the **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)**, and the annual report is presented in the Parliament every year.

### Welfare Schemes under AIHB

Some of the welfare schemes introduced by the AIHB include:

### The Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme

- Launched in 2018, all weavers and workers between the ages of 18 – 50 were covered under the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY).
- As part of the same scheme, a maximum of two children of the weavers would be given an annual scholarship for their education.

## ◎ ANALYSIS

### What are Autonomous Bodies?

- Autonomous bodies (ABs) are a major stakeholder in the government's functioning as they are engaged in diverse activities, ranging from-

### National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP)

- This scheme focussed on the education of handloom weavers and their children. Ministry of Textiles provides reimbursement of 75% of the fee towards admission to the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) courses for SC, ST, BPL, and Women learners belonging to handloom weavers' families.

### Handloom Marketing Assistance

- One of the components of the NHDP, this aims to provide a marketing platform to the handloom agencies and weavers to sell their products directly to the consumers.
- Financial assistance is provided to the eligible handloom agencies for organising marketing events in domestic as well as overseas markets.

### Weaver MUDRA Scheme:

- Under the Weavers' Mudra Scheme, credit at a concessional interest rate of 6% is provided to the handloom weavers.
- Margin money assistance to a maximum of Rs.10,000 per weaver and credit guarantee for 3 years is also provided.
- The MUDRA portal has been developed in association with Punjab National Bank to cut down delay in disbursement of funds for margin money.

### Yarn Supply Scheme –

- Under this scheme Yarn warehouses were set up in handloom dense areas, and yarn was provided to weavers at a 10% subsidy.
- In 2015, the same study conducted among 146 weavers in Madhya Pradesh showed that 98% were happy with the scheme as they got all kinds of yarn at mill gate price.

### Where 'Autonomous bodies' are required in the process?

- Ministries and departments frame policies and ensure their implementation.
- They are supported by a number of organisations such as autonomous bodies, statutory bodies, subordinate and attached offices, and affiliated organisations, etc.

- Their mode of establishment and funding, and functional autonomy differs.

### Reason behind the latest development

- This is a bold step in achieving leaner government machinery and to introduce systematic rationalisation of government bodies.
- The intention to review the "other" government organisations has been evident for quite some time.
- In the 2016 Union Budget speech, then finance minister Arun Jaitley announced that a task force has been constituted for rationalisation of human resources in various ministries. He also contemplated a comprehensive review and rationalisation of autonomous bodies.

### Governance Issues in ABs

Despite a laid out administrative structure in ABs, there are a number of governance issues that needs review.

- On one side of the debate are proponents who believe that since these bodies are funded by taxpayer's money, they should follow the policies of the government and be accountable the way the government departments are.
- Others claim that they being "autonomous" have the right to make their own financial and administrative policies.
- **Not clearly defined:** Obviously the stronger side wins, as autonomous bodies are not clearly defined.
  - ▶ To compound matters, the exact count of ABs is not known, with estimates ranging from 400 to 650 plus.
  - ▶ Then, ABs employ a considerable number. For example, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, an AB under the ministry of agriculture, has almost 17,000 employees.
- **No uniform recruitment:** However, unlike the government and the public sector undertakings, in which the recruitment rules are uniform and the recruitment is done by a centralised body such as the Staff Selection Committee (SSC), the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), and the Public Enterprise Selection Board, there is no such body for CAB recruitments.
- **Accountability issues:** Finally, there is an accountability issue. Even though the senior ministry officials are required to attend ABs' committee meetings, they mostly don't due to their busy schedules. They nominate junior officials who often lack the jurisdiction to take meaningful decisions during the meetings. As regards audits, some ABs are audited by CAG whereas many are done by chartered accountants.

### What needs to be done?

There is an urgent need to review the governance of ABs, and devise uniform procedures. The following measures should be adopted at the earliest:

- **Legal framework:** First, a legal framework to describe an AB should be drawn up, which defines the boundaries of its working, its autonomy, and the various policies that it must follow. This will simultaneously help identify the numbers.
- **Comprehensive review:** Based on a laid-out framework, each ministry will need to undertake a comprehensive review of ABs under their jurisdiction.
- **Objective oriented:** ABs that have outlived the cause for which they were established may need to be closed or merged with a similar organisation or their memorandum altered as per the new charter.
- **Dedicated task force:** In order to bring about uniformity in the policies, a task force needs to be set up under a pan-Indian agency such as SSC or UPSC to streamline the recruitment rules, salary structure, allowance and perks paid to employees, and mode of recruitment.

- **Focus on participation:** To ensure the participation of ministry officials, committee meetings of similar ABs should be held together so that the appropriate authorities could provide meaningful suggestions.
  - ▶ It is also alleged that most of the agenda items raised by ABs are routine in nature. This should be discouraged, and only the important policy issues that need the ministry's intervention should be taken up in such meetings.
- **Performance audit:** A one-time performance audit of ABs should be undertaken by an independent agency. CAG had done an exhaustive performance audit of autonomous scientific bodies in 2016, highlighting the gaps in their performance. Such a theme-based audit should be done for other ABs as well.

### CONCLUSION

As of now, the board is not there. In future, the government may set up a central body to regulate handlooms and handicrafts in the country.

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# SINGAPORE CONVENTION ON MEDIATION ENTERS INTO FORCE

## CONTEXT

Singapore Convention on Mediation, an international convention that aims to help businesses resolve cross-border disputes and further facilitate international trade took effect.

### ◎ BACKGROUND

- Over the years, mediation has garnered recognition and preference in India, as the Indian legislature and courts have been inclined towards the development of **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** mechanism in the country, in line with the international standards.
- It also stems from the fact that commercial entities actively opt for procedures like mediation over litigation.
- Although mediation as a form of alternate dispute resolution is commonly used in India when settling family and civil law cases, active measures are being taken by different organs of the Government to promote mediation as a means of dispute resolution.
- In furtherance of same, India has taken various steps.
- The signing of the Singapore Mediation Convention, 2019 ("**the Convention**") comes as a welcome change.
- On 7 August 2019, 46 countries signed the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation (2019 Singapore) ("**the Singapore Convention**").
- As on September 1, the Convention has 53 signatories, including India, China and the U.S.
- On September 12, 2020, the Singapore Convention comes into effect.

### ◎ ANALYSIS

- Singapore Convention on Mediation**
- Also known as the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation, this is also the first UN treaty to be named after Singapore.
  - Singapore had worked with the UN Commission on International Trade Law, other UN member states and non-governmental organisations for the Convention.
- It applies to international settlement agreements resulting from mediation.

- The Convention is an instrument to facilitate international trade and the promotion of mediation as an alternative and effective method of resolving trade disputes.
- It is also expected to bring certainty and stability to the international framework on mediation, thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), mainly the SDG 16, i.e. peace, justice and strong institutions.

#### What is Mediation?

- Mediation is a procedure in which the parties discuss their disputes with the assistance of a trained impartial third person(s) who assists them in reaching a settlement.
- It may be an informal meeting among the parties or a scheduled settlement conference.
- The dispute may either be pending in a court or potentially a dispute which may be filed in court.
- Cases suitable for mediation are disputes in commercial transactions, personal injury, construction, workers compensation, labor or community relations, divorce, domestic relations, employment or any other matters which do not involve complex procedural or evidentiary issues.
- Mediator:** The mediator is a person with patience, persistence and common sense.
  - She/he has an arsenal of negotiation techniques, human dynamics skills and powers of effective listening, articulation and restatement.
  - The mediator is a facilitator who has no power to render a resolution to the conflict.

#### Applicability of the Convention

- The Singapore Convention can be resorted to only in case of an international commercial dispute, and specifically excludes disputes arising from personal, family, inheritance or employment matters.
- The convention also does not apply to settlement agreements that have been approved by a court or



concluded in the course of court proceedings, and which are otherwise enforceable as a judgment.

- In addition, it does not include settlement agreements that have been recorded and are enforceable as an arbitral award.

### The need

- Presently, a settlement agreement made in one country has no legal force in another.
- A party seeking to enforce a mediated settlement agreement in another country or multiple countries will have to commence legal proceedings in each country. This can be costly and time-consuming, especially for international settlement agreements.

### Why mediation?

- In commercial disputes, mediation often proves to be the cheapest, quickest and the most confidential mode for dispute resolution.
- Often, corporates find themselves in a situation where they have multiple dealings with one another, and do not wish to spoil the relationship due to a disagreement in a particular transaction.
- Mediation is the answer as it helps to preserve business relationships. It also affords the parties greater control over the outcome, leading to a more commercially-sound resolution as opposed to a determination through an adjudicatory mechanism.
- **Drawbacks:** However, mediation, unlike arbitration or court litigation, suffers from a drawback.
  - ▶ Mediated settlements typically take shape in the form of a settlement agreement. This is unlike a court judgment or arbitral award, where a party could directly file for execution and/or initiate contempt proceedings.
    - Therefore, mediated settlements would generally be recorded in the form of court orders or consent awards.
    - This leads to unnecessary costs, delays and, in certain cases, to loss of confidentiality.
  - ▶ Therefore, there is a need for an international framework to enforce such settlement agreements.

### India and mediation

- **India has had a long history of mediation.**
  - ▶ The **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**, has long recognised the concept of mediation as an effective alternative dispute resolution.
  - ▶ Mediation centres have been established in many districts and High Courts in India.

- ▶ The **Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee**—consisting of Supreme Court and High Court judges, and senior advocates—has taken the lead in evolving policy matters relating to mediation.
- ▶ The recently introduced **Commercial Courts (Pre-Institution Mediation and Settlement) Rules, 2018**, prescribe the mechanism for convening a mediation before the institution of a commercial dispute.
- ▶ The **Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996**, provides a conciliation mechanism whereby the resultant settlement agreement has the status or effect of an award.

### India's obligations under the Convention

- Pursuant to **Article 253** of the Constitution of India, the Parliament is required to promulgate a legislation in order to give effect to any international Convention.
- Consequently, India must enact a law that would govern the mediation mechanism in the country.
- An essential advantage of such promulgation is that it will aid the development of a formal structure to conduct mediations.
- Additionally, India is under an obligation to have adequate state machinery in place to ensure smooth functioning of the mediation process.
- In furtherance of the same, the Government has approved the establishment of **New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC)** as a statutory body. NDIAC was proposed through the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Act, 2019 in order to-
  - ▶ Effectively manage ADR mechanisms in India
  - ▶ Conduct arbitration, mediation, and conciliation proceedings
  - ▶ Promote research and development in the ADR sector through seminars, conferences, training programs, etc.
  - ▶ Establish and maintain a permanent Panel of Arbitrators, and other committees for provision of administrative support to ADR facilities
  - ▶ Maintain records of grants provided by the Government

### Significance of the Convention

- **Effective enforcement:** It will provide a more effective way for enforcing mediated settlements of corporate disputes involving businesses in India and other countries that are signatories to the Convention.

- **Boost to ease of doing business:** It would boost India's 'ease of doing business' credentials by enabling swift mediated settlements of corporate disputes.
- **Better cross-border trade:** The Convention will surely improve cross-border trade by making it easier to enforce the outcomes of mediated settlement agreements, and save both cost and time for the parties.
- **Reduction of burden:** This will promote mediation and could consequently reduce the burden on other forms of dispute resolution procedures.

## ◎ CONCLUSION

The Singapore Convention is a positive development for mediation of crossborder disputes, and one which should enable easier enforcement of international mediated settlement agreements around the world. Again, forward planning is essential to an enforceable result, including an understanding of the requirements of jurisdictions where enforcement is sought, and express agreement by the parties to the approach to be adopted and implemented by the mediator.

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# HOW COVID-19 IS HITTING INDIA'S CHILDREN

## CONTEXT

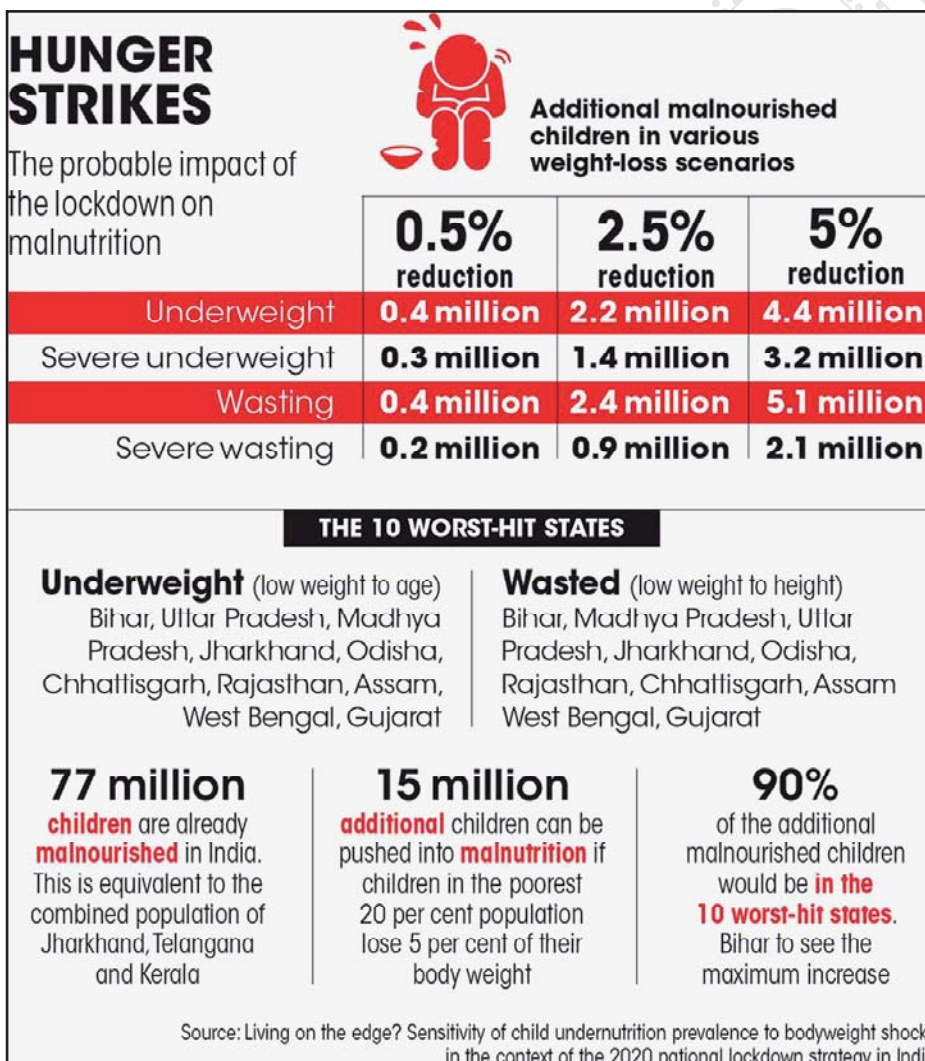
Worldwide, children have been profoundly affected by the social and economic upheavals caused by COVID-19. The pandemic unleashed a perfect storm into the lives of most marginalised children.

### ◎ ABOUT:

- Nearly half of India's children are already undernourished and the country's handling of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is expected to push many more to malnutrition.
- **Ineffective Anganwadis:** Anganwadis have not provided food to children since April, when the centres were either converted into quarantine centres or closed down due to the pandemic. The food served at anganwadi centres is the only nutritious and filling meal of the day. Yet the lockdown has meant that none of the women self-help groups responsible for running these rural

child care centres have served food in the past five months.

- The damage such disruptions can cause is scary. It can, for example, make millions of children malnourished, says a paper published in the Journal of **Global Health Science**. In Jharkhand alone, 0.35 million children can become severely malnourished and another 0.36 million underweight, warns the paper, *Living on the edge? Sensitivity of child undernutrition prevalence to bodyweight shocks in the context of the 2020 national lockdown strategy in India*.
- The worry does not end there. Another 0.5 million children in Jharkhand can become wasted and 0.4 million severe wasted. A child is wasted when s / he has low weight for height. It is triggered either by poor diet or infectious diseases like diarrhoea. Underweight is defined as low weight-for-age. A child who is underweight may be stunted, wasted or both.



The study has a similar prediction for the rest of the country. It warns the food shock, defined as the disruption in nutritious food due to the lockdown, would be worst felt in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

They have the highest child population base along with high levels of poverty head count ratio, maternal mortality, infant mortality and low coverage of public health and nutrition services.

The three states can record over five million new malnourished children due to the lockdown. Every second child in India is already malnourished, suggests the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of 2015-16, which is the basis for the study.

- It means roughly 77 million children — which is the combined population of Jharkhand, Telangana and Kerala — are undernourished in the country. Using this data, the researchers have ascertained the additional children population that will become malnourished in three distinct scenarios — if children lose 0.5 per cent, 2.5 per cent and 5 per cent of their weight during the lockdown.

#### Effects on children of migrant workers:

- The exodus of migrant workers from hostile metropolises has severely affected the well-being of their children who took arduous road trips to reach their homes in villages. The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights has issued an advisory for care and protection of children moving with migrant families, and children living on streets and childcare institutions during the pandemic.

#### Effect on informal urban space children

- Children in India's informal urban spaces, particularly those on streets, are exposed to hazardous environmental conditions of dilapidated housing, poor sanitation, vector- and water-borne diseases, toxic air, and land pollution.
- Children in conflict-affected areas who are spending their childhood amid bombs and shells are much familiar with disruptions due to curfew, riots, and Internet ban. Children in refugee camps have experienced displacement, exploitation, abuse, and trafficking.
- These resilient childhoods had their distinct battles to win on an everyday basis. Across the spatial and temporal dimensions, there are many more childhood narratives of deep vulnerabilities and resilience at the same time.
- In the COVID context, these children are mostly viewed as passive recipients of sufferings and rarely as active citizens of society. While we envisage a new normal future for us, these children are still waiting for a "normal" future to unfold.
- These little architects of resilience are often "seen but not heard". Our thematic representations of children's issues amid the pandemic are mainly devoted to the portrayal of miseries rather than having a discourse on child rights.

#### Sluggishness in children advocacy group

- In COVID times, there is a noticeable sluggishness in exploring and propagating children's commentaries — their versions of realities amid the pandemic. There are only a handful of organisations, media, and advocacy groups that take real efforts for active listening and acting upon what children have to say.
- We have too little evidence of children speaking out their experiences, needs, ideas, and opinions in diverse settings amid the pandemic. Until now, we have not seen an ideological shift from sympathy-relief approach to participation-empowerment approach when dealing with matters affecting children.

#### ◎ WAY FORWARD:

- Given the challenge in the current scenario, it is critical to ensure an uninterrupted supply of nutritious meals and food supplements to the poor children while arresting the infection spread.
- It is incumbent upon government partners, civil society, professionals, and the public to provide vulnerable children with a platform to express their perspectives and become active partners.
- There is a need to identify the keys to unlock their capacities to contribute to their well being through opinion formation, expression, and action.
- Children's voices must be sought and integrated into planning on matters of public health, school, social services, media use, and juvenile justice. Children's narrations of their experiences require documentary evidence to gain deeper insights into their world.
- It is time to strengthen children's expressions, ideas, and skills through deep engagements, particularly with most vulnerable children. This would give us a scope for critical inquiry into the multiple childhoods.
- Media is one of the most powerful tools for accentuating "voices" of resilient childhoods and propagating its translation into actions. Jean Jacques Rousseau once famously wrote, "Childhood has its own way of seeing, thinking, and feeling, and nothing is more foolish than to try to substitute ours for theirs." Let us use these troubled times as an opportunity to empower our children with a "voice".

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## CYCLES OF WET AND DRY IN ETOSHA PAN

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- ◎ **CONTEXT:** A bright salt pan to a wet and lush landscape — the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) recently captured images depicting the wet and dry cycles of Etosha Pan in Africa's Namibia through the year.
- ◎ **ABOUT**
- The Etosha pan is hollow in the ground, wherein water may collect or in which a deposit of salt remains after water has evaporated.
  - The 120-kilometre-long dry lakebed and its surroundings are protected as Etosha National Park, Namibia's second-largest wildlife park.
  - The pan is mostly dry, but after a heavy rain, it acquires a thin layer of water that is heavily salted by the mineral deposits on the surface.
    - According to NASA Earth Observatory, the salt pan receives most rainfall — as much as 46 centimetres — every year between October and March.
    - During the dry season from April through September, water in the basin evaporates — depositing salt and other minerals on the land.
  - Etosha National Park supports large populations of elephants, lions, rhinos, and several other animals.
  - The dry season is one of the best times for visitors to see animals because they often congregate around shrinking bodies of water.

### Cycles of Wet and Dry in Etosha Pan

- Almost all of the 46 centimeters (18 inches) of rain that falls in Etosha National Park each year arrives between October and March.
- The influx of moisture—a boon for the wildlife—completely transforms the landscape.
- It greens parched grasslands, replenishes ephemeral streams and watering holes, and sometimes pools enough to cover a flat basin with a layer of water that extends for thousands of square kilometers.
- When the rains slow and then cease during the dry season (April through September), any water in the basin slowly evaporates, depositing salt and other minerals on the land surface in the process.
- Over time, this cycle of flooding and evaporation has built up a mineral-encrusted surface called a salt pan.

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## NEW STUDY HELPS MONITOR TRENDS IN PHYTOPLANKTON BIOMASS IN BAY OF BENGAL

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- ◎ **CONTEXT:** Researchers have discovered way to measure the quantity of chlorophyll-a in the Bay of Bengal, a dominant pigment found in phytoplankton cell and present in a few areas of the ocean, in real-time.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- **What are Phytoplanktons?**
    - Phytoplanktons are tiny microscopic plants found in the ocean. They are important ecological indicators that regulate life in ocean.
    - They have chlorophyll to capture sunlight, and use photosynthesis to turn it into chemical energy. They consume carbon dioxide and release oxygen.

- All phytoplankton **photosynthesise**, but some get additional energy by consuming other organisms.
- Like terrestrial plants, the eco-friendly phytoplankton is largely dependent on light, temperature and nutrients.

### Chlorophyll

- Chlorophyll is a pigment or a chemical compound that absorbs and reflects specific wavelengths of light.
- Chlorophyll is found within cells in the **thylakoid membrane** of an organelle called the **chloroplast**.
- The **primary pigment** of photosynthesis is chlorophyll A.
  - ▶ Chlorophyll A absorbs light from the orange-red and violet-blue areas of the electromagnetic spectrum.
  - ▶ Chlorophyll A transfers energy to the reaction center and donates two excited electrons to the **electron transport chain**.
- Chlorophyll B is an **accessory pigment** because it is not necessary for photosynthesis to occur.
- All organisms that perform photosynthesis have chlorophyll A, but not all organisms contain chlorophyll B.

### Key-findings of the Study

- The findings were published in journal *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*.
- The study was based on in-situ and satellite data spanning over the last 16 years.
- They observed significant increase of chlorophyll-a concentration during pre-southwest monsoon seasons.
- The other parameters studied were total suspended matter (TSM) and coloured dissolved organic matter (CDOM), which are optically active substances in water.
- There were two peaks of chlorophyll-a —
  - the primary peak occurred during the pre-southwest monsoon due to the recurrent phytoplankton bloom in the coastal water
  - the secondary peak occurred during the end of the southwest monsoon, spreading to far offshore areas.

### Major controlling factors for the abundance and distribution of phytoplankton

- **Salinity and nutrients:** The study area experienced maximum spatial variability during pre-southwest monsoon with salinity and nutrients — the major controlling factors for the abundance and distribution of phytoplankton.
- **Physical forces:** Apart from **phytoplankton bloom** contributing to this increase of chlorophyll-a in nearshore waters, the study found physical forces such as upwelling, wind-induced vertical mixing, convective overturn and local circulation pattern influenced the peaks by supplying dissolved chemical input.

### How Phytoplanktons are 'beneficial' for the environment?

- Phytoplanktons contribute to more than half of the oxygen that we breathe.
- That apart, they influence our climate by absorbing human-induced carbon dioxide, a heat-trapping greenhouse gas.
- They also serve as the foundation of the aquatic food web.



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## SAROD PORTS

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◎ **CONTEXT:** The government recently launched 'SAROD-Ports' (Society for Affordable Redressal of Disputes - Ports) through a virtual ceremony to sort out dispute in the Maritime Sector.

◎ **ABOUT:**

• **What is SAROD-Port?**

- SAROD-Port is a dispute redressal mechanism for all kinds of disputes related to the maritime sector.
- It consists of members from the-
  - ▶ Indian Ports Association (IPA)
  - ▶ Indian Private Ports and Terminals Association (IPTTA)
- SAROD-Ports have been established under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860** with the objectives of affordable and timely resolution of disputes in a fair manner, Enrichment of Dispute Resolution Mechanism with the panel of technical experts as arbitrators.
- 'SAROD-Ports' is similar to the provision available in the highway sector in the form of SAROD-Roads constituted by the **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)**.

◎ **BACKGROUND**

- The Union Cabinet has approved amendments in the **Model Concession Agreement (MCA)** in January 2018.
- The amendments in the MCA envisaged the constitution of SAROD-PORTS as a dispute resolution mechanism for PPP Projects in major ports.

**Functions of the SAROD-Ports**

- It will advise and assist in the settlement of disputes through arbitrations in the maritime sector, including ports and shipping sector in Major Port Trusts, Non-major Ports, including private ports, jetties, terminals, and harbours.
- It will also cover disputes between granting authority and Licensee/Concessionaire/ Contractor and also disputes between Licensee/Concessionaire and their contractors arising out of and during the course of execution of various contracts.

**Significance of the development**

- It will become the pivotal mechanism of ummeed (hope), vishwas (trust) and nyay (justice) in the Port sector Enforcement of concession agreements in the letter and spirit is on the utmost priority.
- SAROD-Ports will resolve the disputes in a fair and just manner while saving a huge amount of legal expenditure and time.

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## RBI ISSUES DRAFT RUPEE INTEREST RATE DERIVATIVES

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◎ **CONTEXT:**

The Reserve Bank of India proposed allowing foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to undertake exchange-traded rupee interest rate derivatives transactions subject to an overall ceiling of Rs 5,000 crore.

## ◎ ABOUT:

### • What are Interest Rate Derivatives?

- Interest Rate Derivatives (IRD) are contracts whose value is derived from one or more interest rates, prices of interest-rate instruments, or interest rate indices.
- These may include interest rate futures, options, swaps, swaptions, and FRAs.
- Entities with interest rate risk can use these derivatives to hedge or minimize potential losses that may accompany a change in interest rates.
- The proposed **Rupee Interest Rate Derivatives (Reserve Bank) Directions, 2020** are aimed at-
  - ▶ encouraging higher non-resident participation
  - ▶ enhance the role of domestic market makers in the offshore market
  - ▶ improve transparency
  - ▶ achieve better regulatory oversight

## THE PROPOSAL

- ▶ Local companies with minimum networth of ₹500 cr can participate
- ▶ Retail participants can only hedge, but non-retail can use it for any purpose
- ▶ Exchanges to decide on design and participants; in OTC, banks and primary dealers can participate
- ▶ TFPIs can take exposure of up to ₹5,000 crore all put together

### Where FPIs will be allowed?

- FPIs may transact in permitted exchange-traded IRDs subject to the conditions that, at any point in time "the net long position of FPIs, collectively, and across all exchanges, in exchange-traded IRDs shall not exceed Rs 5,000 crore".
- Also, the net short position of an FPI on exchange-traded IRDs should not exceed its long position in government securities and other rupee debt securities.

### User classification:

- For the purpose of offering Rupee IRD contracts to a user, the market-maker (entities which provide bid and offer prices to users in order to provide liquidity to the market) should classify the user either as a retail user or as a non-retail user.
- Non-retail users are entities regulated by RBI, SEBI, IRDAI or PFRDA; resident companies with a minimum net worth of Rs 500 crore; and non-residents, other than individuals.
- Any user who is not eligible to be classified as a non-retail user shall be classified as a retail user.

## FIVE STAR VILLAGES SCHEME

### ◎ CONTEXT:

The department of Posts/ Postal department of India has recently launched 'Five Star Villages scheme' which ensures 100% rural coverage of postal schemes.

### ◎ ABOUT

- The scheme seeks to bridge the gaps in public awareness and reach of postal products and services, especially in interior villages.
- The main aim of this scheme is to ensure universal coverage of flagship postal schemes in rural areas of the country.
- All postal products and services will be made available and marketed and publicized at village level, under the scheme.
- Branch offices will function as one-stop shop to cater all post office – related needs of villagers.

### Coverage

- Two rural districts / regions of each region have been identified under this scheme.
  - Akola and Washim in Nagpur region, Parbhani and Hingoli in Aurangabad region, Solapur and Pandharpur in Pune region, Kolhapur and Sangli in Goa region and Malegaon and Palghar in Navi Mumbai region are included.
- A total of 50 villages in each district will be covered during the current financial year 2020-2021.

### Schemes covered

- The schemes covered under the Five Star scheme include:
  - Savings Bank accounts, Recurrent Deposit Accounts, NSC / KVP certificates,
  - Sukanya Samridhi Accounts/ PPF Accounts,
  - Funded Post Office Savings Account linked India Post Payments Bank Accounts,
  - Postal Life Insurance Policy/Rural Postal Life Insurance Policy and
  - Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana Account / Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana Account.

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## GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES POSTAGE STAMP COMMEMORATING MISSION SHAKTI'S SUCCESS

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- ◎ **CONTEXT:** A customized My Stamp on India's First Anti Satellite Missile (A-SAT) was launched on the occasion of Engineers Day on September 15.
- ◎ **ABOUT**
  - 'My Stamp' was first introduced in India during the World Philatelic Exhibition, 'INDIPEX-2011'.
  - My Stamp is the brand name for personalized sheets of Postage Stamps of India Post.
  - The release of Stamp reminds the nation about the technological achievement, which has made the nation proud.
  - The stamp was released by Department of Posts.

### Department of Posts

- The Department of Posts, trading as India Post, is a government-operated postal system in India, which is a subsidiary of the Ministry of Communications.
- Generally called "the Post Office" in India, it also acts as an agent for Government of India in discharging other services for citizens such as **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)** wage disbursement and old age pension payments.
- With 1, 55,531 Post Offices, the DoP has the most widely distributed postal network in the world.

### Engineer's Day in India

- The birth anniversary of **Sir M Visvesvaraya** (September 15) is celebrated every year as Engineer's Day in India.
  - Popularly called 'Sir MV', he was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1955 for his immense contribution to India's early infrastructure development, education and social welfare.

- M Visvesvaraya was born in 1861 at Chikkaballapur, on the outskirts of Bengaluru.
- After completing his undergraduate degree in Arts, M Visvesvaraya changed track and went for a degree in civil engineering from the College of Engineering in Pune.
- As the Diwan of Mysore, M Visvesvaraya founded the **Mysore Soap Factory, Bangalore Agricultural University, State Bank of Mysore and Mysore Iron and Steel Works.**
- He also founded the **Government Engineering College**, now known as **University Visvesvaraya College of Engineering.**

### Mission Shakti

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted an **Anti-Satellite (A-SAT) missile test 'Mission Shakti'** from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha in 2019.
- DRDO developed A-SAT Missile successfully engaged an Indian orbiting target satellite in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in a 'Hit to Kill' mode.
- The interceptor missile was a three-stage missile with two solid rocket boosters.
- Tracking data from range sensors had confirmed that the mission met all its objectives. The entire effort was indigenous which demonstrated the Nation's capability to develop such complex and critical missions.
- A number of industries also participated in the mission.
- With this success, India became fourth nation in the world to possess such capability. Till now, only the US, Russia and China had the capability to hit a live target in space.

## INDIA NOW HAS ITS OWN BRAIN TEMPLATE & AN ATLAS AS WELL

### ◎ CONTEXT:

An 'Indian brain template' for five distinct age groups as well as a 'brain atlas' to help accurate assessment of psychiatric illnesses and conduct neuro-surgical operations have been developed by neuroscientists at the Bengaluru-based National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS).

### ◎ ABOUT:

- The human brain is highly different in shape and size between individuals and basic demographics.
- It contains hundreds of cortical and subcortical areas with different structures and functions, making it rather challenging to accurately define these areas and map their functions and connections.
- The human brain is the largest brain of all vertebrates relative to body size.
- The brain makes up about 2 percent of a human's body weight. It weighs about 3.3 lbs. (1.5 kilograms).
  - The average male has a brain volume of 1,274 cubic centimeters.
  - The average female brain has a volume of 1,131 cm<sup>3</sup>.
- The largest part of the human brain is the cerebrum, which is divided into two hemispheres.
- Underneath lies the **brainstem**, and behind that sits the **cerebellum**.
- The outermost layer of the cerebrum is the cerebral cortex, which consists of four lobes:
  - frontal

- parietal
- temporal
- occipital
- Like all vertebrate brains, the human brain develops from three sections-
  - the forebrain develops into the cerebrum and underlying structures
  - the midbrain becomes part of the brainstem
  - the hindbrain gives rise to regions of the brainstem and the cerebellum

#### Brain template

- Brain template is a gross representation from various brain images to understand brain functionality in diseased conditions.

#### Brain atlas

- A brain atlas is composed of serial sections along different anatomical planes of the healthy or diseased developing or adult animal or human brain where each relevant brain structure is assigned a number of coordinates to define its outline or volume.

#### Templates for five age groups

- The team has developed five brain templates for age groups ranging from 6 to 60 for both males and females based on the study of nearly 500 brain scans.
- In each of the groups, 41 to 47% of the scans studied are that of females.
- The age groups are divided in the
  - 6-11 years (late childhood)
  - 12-18 years (adolescence)
  - 19-25 years (young adulthood)
  - 26-40 years (adulthood)
  - 41-60 years (late adulthood)
- The idea of studying the scans of brains in various age groups was because "there is a period of remarkable change that occurs from early adolescence to young adulthood (till about 25). It is a process called **pruning**. The thickness of the cortex starts reducing.
- Till about 5 to 6 years, the size of the brain increases. As exposure to various kinds of environment increases, the grey matter gets pruned, then stabilises and very gradually starts reducing.

#### Current universal standard

- It was in 1993 that the MNI and the International Consortium for Brain Mapping (ICBM) created the first digital human brain atlas.
- More recently, MNI and ICBM have released other brain atlases that are widely used as a standard in neuroscience studies.
- However, these 'standard' brain templates created using Caucasian brains are not ideal to analyze brain differences from other ethnicities, such as the Indian population.
  - The MNI was developed by averaging **Caucasian brains**. Over a period of time, neuroscientists discovered that Caucasian brains are different from Asian brains.
  - The Chinese have their own scale to measure. So do the Koreans and the French, among others.

- The significance of the current study is that neuroscientists need not be dependent upon the current universal standard of using the Montreal Neurological Index (MNI) template.

### Significance of the Study

- **More precise reference:** The templates and atlas will provide more precise reference maps for areas of interest in individual patients with neurological disorders like strokes, brain tumours, and dementia.
- **Better understanding:** These templates and atlas will also help pool information more usefully in group studies of the human brain and psychological functions, aiding the understanding of psychiatric illnesses like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, substance dependence, schizophrenia, and mood disorders.

## RPF BUSTS REAL MANGO

### ◎ CONTEXT:

Continuing with the crackdown on touts involved in a rail ticketing racket, the Railway Protection Force (RPF) has busted an illegal software operation called “Real Mango” — used for cornering confirmed train reservation during the coronavirus pandemic.

### ◎ ABOUT:

#### • What is ‘Real Mango’?

- “Real Mango” is illegal software used for cornering confirmed Railway reservation.
- The software was earlier with the name ‘Rare Mango’.
- In view of the apprehension of increase in touting activity after restart of the passenger services, drive against touts was intensified by Railway Protection Force (RPF) in entire Indian Railways.
- Operation of an illegal software called “Rare Mango” (later changed its name to “Real Mango”) was revealed on September 9 during action against touts by the field units of RPF.
- The software has now been fully decimated and the RPF has apprehended around 50 criminals so far across West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Gujarat.

#### What made it ‘illegal’ software?

- In course of systematic unravelling of the working of the illegal software, it has been found that-
  - Real mango software bypasses V3 and V2 captcha
  - It synchronises bank OTP with help of a mobile app and feeds it to the requisite form automatically
  - The software auto-fills the passenger details and payment details in the forms
  - The software logs in to the IRCTC website through multiple IRCTC Ids
  - The illegal software is sold through five-tiered structure: System Admin & his team, Mavens, Super sellers, Sellers and Agents
  - System admin is receiving payment in bitcoins.

## SOLAR CYCLE 25 IS HERE: NASA & NOAA

### ◎ CONTEXT:

NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) discussed their analysis and predictions about the new solar cycle – and how the coming upswing in space weather will impact our lives and technology on Earth, as well as astronauts in space.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- The new solar cycle, called Solar Cycle 25 is believed to have begun.
  - Solar Cycle 25 officially began in December 2019, when solar minimum occurred, marking the end of Solar Cycle 24. Because the sun is so variable, it can take months to calculate when the new cycle starts.
- Solar Cycle 24 had the fourth-smallest intensity since regular record keeping began with Solar Cycle 1 in 1755. It was also the weakest cycle in 100 years. Scientists forecast that Solar Cycle 25 will be a fairly weak one, similar to Solar Cycle 24.
  - The Sun is a huge ball of electrically-charged hot gas. This charged gas moves, generating a powerful magnetic field.
  - The Sun's magnetic field goes through a cycle, called the solar cycle.
  - Every 11 years or so, the Sun's magnetic field completely flips. This means that the Sun's north and south poles switch places.
  - Then it takes about another 11 years for the Sun's north and south poles to flip back again.
  - As the magnetic fields change, so does the amount of activity on the Sun's surface.

**Tracking solar activity**

- Scientists track a solar cycle by using sunspots, which are the dark blotches on the Sun that are associated with solar activity.
- Sunspots are associated as the origins for giant explosions such as solar flares that can spew light, energy and solar material into space.

**What is Sunspot?**

- A Sunspot is an area on the Sun that appears dark on the surface and is relatively cooler than the surrounding parts.
- These spots, some as large as 50,000 km in diameter, are the visible markers of the Sun's magnetic field, which forms a blanket that protects the solar system from harmful cosmic radiation.
- When a Sunspot reaches up to 50,000 km in diameter, it may release a huge amount of energy that can lead to solar flares.

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## TRANS FAT INTAKE: WHO WARNING TO INDIA

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◎ **CONTEXT:**• **What are trans fats?**

- Trans fats, or trans-fatty acids, are a form of unsaturated fat.
- They come in both natural and artificial forms.
- Natural, or ruminant, trans fats occur in the meat and dairy from ruminant animals, such as cattle, sheep, and goats. They form naturally when bacteria in these animals' stomachs digest grass.

**The Report**

- Fifteen countries, including India, account for approximately two-thirds of the worldwide deaths linked to trans-fat intake.
- Of these, four countries -- Canada, Latvia, Slovenia, United States of America -- have implemented **WHO-recommended best-practice policies** since 2017, either by setting mandatory limits for industrially produced trans fats to 2% of oils and fats in all foods or banning partially hydrogenated oils (PHO).

- But the remaining 11 countries- Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, still need to take urgent action.

**WHO Recommendations:**

- WHO recommends that trans fat intake be limited to less than 1% of total energy intake, which translates to less than 2.2 g/day with a 2,000-calorie diet.
- To achieve a world free of industrially produced trans fats by 2023, WHO recommends that countries:
  - ▶ develop and implement best-practice policies to set mandatory limits for industrially produced trans fats to 2% of oils and fats in all foods or to ban partially hydrogenated oils (PHO);
  - ▶ invest in monitoring mechanisms, e.g. lab capacity to measure and monitor trans fats in foods; and
  - ▶ advocate for regional or sub-regional regulations to expand the benefits of trans fat policies.

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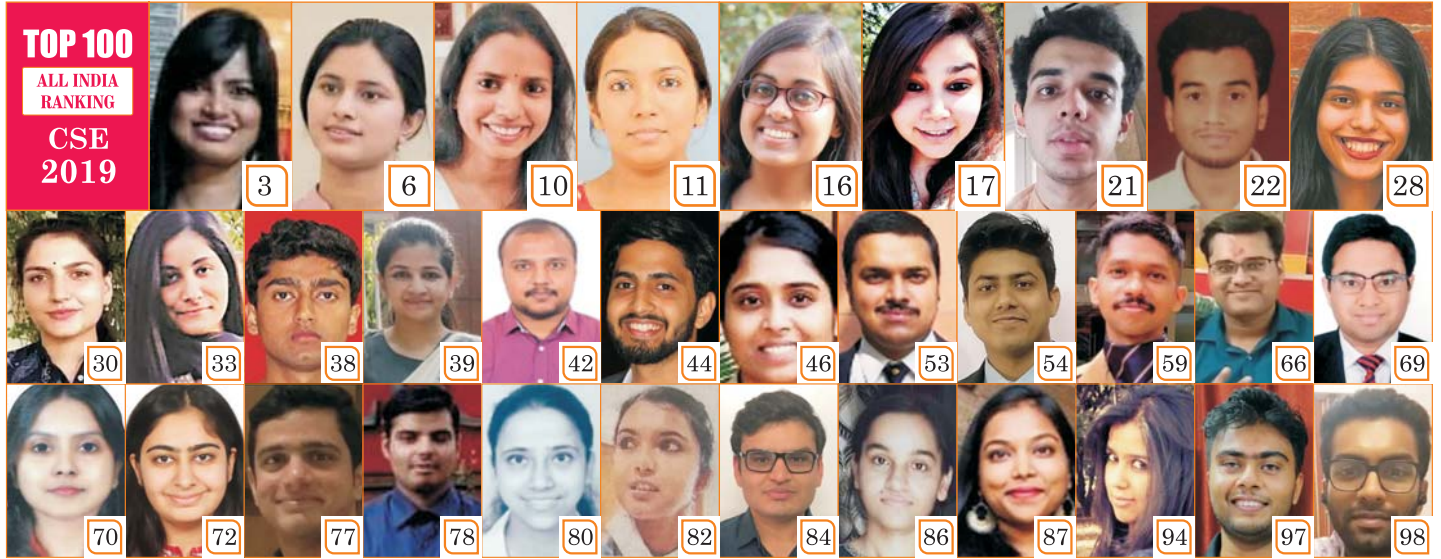


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