

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK: 2
NOVEMBER
2021

MAINS

GS-I **ADI**

SHANKARACHARYA

GS-II **HUMAN TRAFFICKING
IN INDIA**

GS-II **ENERGY ACCESS IN
INDIA**

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VACCINE'**

PRELIMS

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■ Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ■ American B-1B bomber flies over Mideast amid Iran tensions

POLITY & GOVERNANCE ■ Health Insurance for India's Missing Middle
■ Supreme Court Uses "Extraordinary Power" To Acquit Man in SC/ST Act Case

ENVIRONMENT ■ Climate vulnerability index released by CEEW
■ India pledges new climate crisis goal: Net zero by 2070

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY ■ Autosomal DNA
■ Dengue fever outbreak in different part of country
■ Samudrayaan Mission

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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- 2 (NOVEMBER, 2021)

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SECTION: A

(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

ADI SHANKARACHARYA

CONTEXT:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled a 12-foot statue of Adi Shankaracharya at Kedarnath, where the acharya is believed to have attained samadhi at the age of 32 in the ninth century.

Who was Adi Shankaracharya?

- Adi Shankaracharya is generally considered an **eighth-century** religious teacher. But there are differences of opinion about this actual birthday.
 - According to a commonly held view, Adi Shankaracharya was born in 788 AD.
- Adi Shankara, as he is popularly known among his followers, was born in Kalady village - now a small town in the Ernakulam district - situated on the bank of a river of the same name in Kerala.
- He was an exceptional child as Adi Shankara had become fluent in Sanskrit by the age of two. By four, he was comfortably reciting scriptures including Vedas.
- The burning quest for attaining superior knowledge from an early age pushed Adi Shankara to leave his home and set on the search for a guru.
- His quest ended with **Govind Bhagvatpad** at Omkareshwar (Madhya Pradesh) on the bank of the Narmada river.
- Adi Shankara excelled under the tutelage of **Govind Bhagvatpad**, who instructed him to write commentaries on scriptures on completion of his learning. Adi Shankara was just 12 at the time.
- Following his guru's command, Adi Shankara wrote commentaries explaining the subtle meanings hidden in scriptures. He finished the task by the age of sixteen, after which Adi Shankaracharya is said to have stopped writing as he had completed writing all the major treatises on religion and philosophy.
- To his ardent followers, Adi Shankaracharya was an incarnation of Lord Shiva, who came to the earth for 32 years.

What was his mantra?

- Adi Shankaracharya championed the Advait branch of philosophy that declared that god and humans were not two. He then set out to spread the message of his guru.
- From the age of 16 to 32, Adi Shankaracharya traveled across the length and breadth of India with the message of Vedas.
- He pronounced that 'Brahman or pure consciousness is the absolute reality that is attainable by human beings and that the material world is an illusion.

- He established his supremacy in religion and philosophy in debating duels with experts and chief of ashram after ashram from north to south and east to west.
- The defeat would end up hitherto expert philosophers accepting young Adi Shankara as their guru and accepting his interpretation of the scriptures.

Important Literary work

- Adi Shankaracharya wrote 18 commentaries on the scriptures including the **Brahma Sutras**, the **Bhagavad Gita**, and 12 major Upanishads.
- He wrote about two dozen books elucidating the fundamentals of the **Advaita Vedanta philosophy**. Some of these books are **Viveka Chudamani**, **Atma Bodha**, **Vaakya Vritti**, and **Upadesa Sahasri**.
- Adi Shankaracharya is credited to have composed 72 devotional and meditative hymns such as **Soundarya Lahari**, **Sivananda Lahari**, **Nirvana Shalkam**, **Maneesha Panchakam**.

Important Ashram founded by Adi Shankaracharya

- Having established his superiority among all exponents of religion and philosophy of the time, Adi Shankaracharya founded four ashrams in the four corners of the country—
 - Badrinath for Atharva Veda.
 - Puri for Rig Veda
 - Dwaraka for Sama Veda
 - Sringeri for Yajur Veda
- These were the centres to elucidate the essence of **Advaita philosophy**.

What is the Kedarnath Connection?

- It is believed Adi Shankaracharya took samadhi at Kedarnath.
- It is said he was seen last by his disciples walking into the Himalayan woods at Kedarnath. He was not seen thereafter.
- It was in the memory of Adi Shankaracharya, who is also addressed as Jagatguru (the universal teacher), PM Modi inaugurated a statue in Kedarnath.

About the statue

- The statue weighs around 35 tonnes.
- Its construction had begun in 2019 under the guidance of architect **Arun Yogiraj** from Mysuru.
- The statue is made using **chlorite schist** – a rock popular for withstanding rain, sunshine, and harsh weather.



HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN INDIA

CONTEXT:

Human trafficking is one of the most distressing problems faced by many countries in the world. Currently, India is facing a huge challenge in curbing the menace of trafficking.

What is Human Trafficking?

- According to the UNODC, Human Trafficking is "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, to exploit them for profit.
- Human trafficking involves recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, for exploitation.
- Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs.

Severity of the problem (at global level)

- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report, 2019 shows that 60% of the trafficking occurs internally in a country. As per the UNODC report,
 - 90% of the sexual victims are women and girls.
 - In the South Asia region, 85% of the victims are exploited for forced labor.
- Human trafficking is the third most challenging crime in the world in terms of turnover and human misery. The first is drugs and the second is weapons.

Causes of Trafficking

Some of the causes or reasons for human trafficking are described below.

- **Poverty**
 - Trafficking grows at places where there is widespread poverty.
 - Unfortunately, Parents sell their kids because lack of access to income and necessities and this leaves them with no other choice often thinking that selling their children will take them to much better places and where their lives will improve.
- **Social Factors**
 - One of the most vulnerable sections of the society that are more prone to trafficking are

young women, and this is because in most societies both socially and culturally women are de-valued and unwanted, and as such, they are more vulnerable to the practice of trafficking.

◦ Migration

- The yearning to migrate from places where their lives are miserable makes individuals open to approaches from traffickers who in the beginning stages lure them with promises of better lives, but once the victims came under their control, coercive measures are enforced to bend them.

◦ Other Factors

- Other causes are the permeable nature of borders, corrupt government officials, the involvement of international organized criminal groups or nexus, and the limited capacity of or commitment by immigration and law enforcement officers to control borders.

Legal and Constitutional Frameworks to Counter Human Trafficking in India

Constitution of India

- Article 23 **prohibits human trafficking and beggar** (forced labor without payment).
- Article 24 **forbids the employment of children** below the age of 14 years in dangerous jobs like factories and mines.

Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1986

- The purpose of this Act is to give effect to the Trafficking Convention and to prohibit immoral human trafficking.
- It constitutes authorities at the centre and state level to combat trafficking. However, it does not elaborate on the role, function, and composition of these authorities

Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013

- It has come into force wherein Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code has been substituted with Section 370 and 370A IPC which provide for comprehensive measures to counter the menace of human trafficking.

◎ WAY FORWARD

Foresight and preparedness amid the current lockdown can save the lives of crores of women, men, and children and avoid an impending humanitarian crisis

- **Collaboration is key:** A lot of work needs to be done collaboratively, between key stakeholders such as the government and civil society organizations, for any substantial change to be seen.
- **Assessment and review of legal framework:** The central government must assess the existing criminal law on trafficking and its ability to counter the crime and meet the needs of the victim. The lapsed anti-trafficking bill needs to be amended and passed in Parliament urgently.
- **Increase in budgetary allocation for law enforcement and victim rehabilitation:** There

is a gross deficit in the budgetary allocation to combat human trafficking.

- **Curbing the rise of online Child Sexual Abuse material:** The upsurge of child sexual abuse material and its easy access can only be controlled by placing greater accountability on Internet Service Providers and digital platforms that host this content. They must be accountable to not only identify and remove content but also to trace its source and cooperate with law enforcement to crack down on its supply and demand.
- **Spreading a wide safety net in source areas of trafficking:** Schools, communities, religious authorities, and the local administration need to recognize and control trafficking and bonded labor in villages.

ENERGY ACCESS IN INDIA

CONTEXT:

In August 2021, India achieved the milestone of installing 100 GW of renewable energy generation capacity. However, India's clean energy transition must engage beyond greenhouse gas emissions and gigawatt targets to ensure a nurturing and equitable future for its people and the planet.

Therefore, it's important to analyze the current scenario of 'energy' in India.

The energy framework

- Energy is essential in raising standards of living and enhancing development.
- It is imperative in promoting and saving lives — in situations of intense heat, for instance, access to air cooling systems is imperative.
- Energy access is also required to improve worker productivity.

According to the World Bank estimates, 750 million people live without adequate access to basic electricity and live with energy poverty. The majority of them are from low and middle-income countries.

On the other hand, the rich countries easily avail relative energy affluence in energy usage. This draws attention towards the energy crisis the world is facing today and the need for reducing energy poverty.

What are energy equity and energy poverty?

- Energy inequality leads to lower living standards, which hurts the poor acutely. There are a couple of dimensions to this.
- The first is inequality within the energy systems, manifest in underprivileged people who don't have access to energy like electricity.
- The second, at a worldwide level, there exists a global energy inequality, with wealthier countries consuming extra energy, per capita and in absolute terms, compared to poorer countries.
 - Note:** In 2019-20, India's per capita electricity consumption was at 1208 kWh.
- If a section of people has a lack of access to sustainable modern energy services and products, then the World Economic Forum terms the condition as energy poverty.

What is the link between energy access and the poverty cycle?

- Energy access is requisite for poverty mitigation. Energy inequity traps poor people in the vicious cycle of poverty. Inequality in energy access undermines economic activity and efforts to lift people out of poverty.

- There are circumstances where poor people spend more of their incomes on energy than affluent families — at times, the poor spend more per unit of energy than wealthier people. For example,
 - energy transferred through a grid is less costly than using batteries to power appliances.
 - Poor people also usually have older vehicles that are less fuel-efficient. So, they use extra fuel to travel the same distance as others.
- Thus, the poverty-stricken people spend more on energy and can't save or invest in other major areas.
- Moreover, energy inequality spins out cycles of poverty — the UN finds worldwide, women pay the heaviest price for energy poverty. For example, Girls in households depending on unclean fuels lose up to 30 hours each week gathering wood or water — this impacts their education and livelihoods.
- This is why access to affordable, inclusive, and clean energy is the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).

How does energy access improve standards of life?

- Energy is the bedrock humans need to achieve their potential through education and economic productivity.
- Consistent energy availability shores up essential social services, including life-saving healthcare.
- Energy access makes people demand the right to electricity. The electricity connection is the first step that leads to the use of appliances and services associated with electricity like TVs, electric cookers, refrigerators, mobile phones, etc.
- State regulations significantly shape energy access.
- There are regulations in many countries which stipulate one needs to be a house owner to have an electricity connection. Now, in many such countries, people tend to own houses.

How does the pandemic highlight the importance of energy access?

- The World Bank finds that the Covid-19 pandemic's harsh impacts have made basic electricity unaffordable for 30 million more people worldwide.
- The pandemic has also had an impact on poor sections of people living in developed countries.
 - ▶ **For example**, even in the US, poorer communities suffered more because of working conditions that exposed them to the virus. The poor couldn't stay at home, working on their computers remotely. Lacking energy access, they had to go out to earn their livelihoods.
- In many countries, the poor received inadequate healthcare, due to lack of quality energy and associated power outages, etc.

What are the challenges India faces in ensuring energy equity?

- **Policy Uncertainty is bad for Economy:** The section on legal systems and contract enforcement in the Economic Survey 2018–2019 emphasized the importance of policy certainty for the enforcement of contracts and the rule of law. The value of the certainty of contracts and the importance of consistency and stability in rules and policy cannot be overstated in the energy sector in India.
- **Heavy dependence on fossil fuels:** coal, oil, and natural gas are the most important primary energy sources in India. But due to inadequate domestic supplies, India is importing them, which will limit India's ability to provide energy access.

Important Government Schemes to enable universal energy access

- Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY)
- Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY)
- Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana or Saubhagya scheme
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

What can India do to provide energy access?

- **Focus on basic energy access:** The government has to find the energy gap and keep the focus on efforts to resolve it. For that, India needs to prioritize basic energy access, from electricity to cooking technologies, etc., for the extremely poor. Alongside, developing countries need to broaden energy access for businesses and the middle class.
- **Better planning:** In 2018, India reported around 35.2% of its population of 1.38 billion people live in slums. India will see a massive urban housing construction in the next ten years at a scale no other country has seen.
 - ▶ India has to plan the projects with adequate natural ventilation or sunlight access. Else it will lead to a host of issues. Such as an increased purchase of highly energy-intensive cooling devices, the rise of urban heat islands, microclimatic conditions, etc.
- **Focus on Marginalised sections:** India made a concerted effort to provide hundreds of millions of people access to electricity through schemes such as PM Saubhagya Scheme. Now, it's important to engage the energy marginalized and understand their needs.
- **Focus on energy-related meetings:** To avoid gender bias in appliance selection, India can create energy centers and conduct energy-related meetings at local levels. This will create a focus on women's energy needs and empower women. Thus improving equity in society.
- **Make energy production climate-resilient:** One of the world's greatest challenges is to reduce energy poverty while supporting economic growth. On the other hand, India has the largest projected energy demand globally. So, India must plan to transition as rapidly as possible while securing its ability to generate electricity in the near future.

◎ CONCLUSION

India has already set an example for emerging economies by reaching 100GW of renewables, and India's goal of reaching 450 GW of renewable energy (RE) by 2030 is doable now. However, efforts are required to bridge the energy access gap.

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE FORESTS

CONTEXT:

As per UNESCO's assessment on World Heritage forests, India's Sundarbans National Park is among five sites that have the highest blue carbon stocks globally.

◎ ABOUT SUNDARBAN NATIONAL PARK



- It is **located in the southeast of Kolkata in the District of West Bengal** and forms part of the Gangetic Delta.
- The Sundarbans are a **mangrove forest**, on the delta of the **Ganges, Brahmaputra** and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal.
- The area is **known for its wide range of fauna**.

- It is **home to many rare and globally threatened wildlife species** such as the estuarine crocodile, Royal Bengal **Tiger**, Water monitor lizard, **Gangetic dolphin**, and **olive ridley turtles**.

UNESCO World Heritage Forests

- Forests are some of the most biodiversity-rich habitats on Earth.

- These forests play a crucial role in climate regulation by absorbing carbon dioxide (CO₂) and are considered as one of the most cost-effective forms of climate action.
- As of today, more than 200 World Heritage sites harbor unique forest ecosystems.
- Ranging in size from 18 hectares (Vallée de Mai, Seychelles), to more than 5 million hectares (Central Amazon Conservation Complex, Brazil), World Heritage forest sites now have a total surface area of over 69 million hectares (roughly twice the size of Germany).

Key Finding of new Study

- It is the first-ever scientific assessment of the amounts of greenhouse gases emitted from and absorbed by forests in UNESCO World Heritage sites during 2001 and 2020.
- The assessment involved the researchers from UNESCO, the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- UNESCO World Heritage forests in 257 separate sites, absorbed the equivalent of approximately 190 million tons of CO₂ from the atmosphere each year.
 - However, 10 forests released more carbon than they sequestered due to pressure from human activity and climate change, which is alarming.
 - These forests also store substantial amounts of carbon.
 - The study described blue carbon as organic carbon that is mainly obtained from decaying plant leaves, wood, roots and animals and is captured and stored by coastal and marine ecosystem.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

- It was founded in 1945 to develop the "intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind" as a means of building lasting peace.
- It is located in Paris, France.

What has been found about Indian Sundarbans?

- According to the research, India's Sundarbans National Park has a large amount of blue carbon stocks globally.
- The other four sites are the
 - Bangladeshi portion of the Sundarbans
 - the Great Barrier Reef in Australia

- Everglades National Park in the United States
- the Banc d'Arguin National Park in Mauritania

What is Blue Carbon?

- Blue carbon is an organic carbon that is mainly obtained from decaying plant leaves, wood, roots and animals.
- It is captured and stored by coastal and marine ecosystems.

Forests Emitting Carbon

- As per the research, 10 of 257 forests emitted more carbon than they captured between 2001 and 2020 due to different anthropogenic disturbances and pressures.
- The reasons for emissions to be greater than **sequestration** included
 - clearance of land for agriculture
 - the increasing scale and severity of wildfires due to drought
 - extreme weather phenomena such as hurricanes
- **The 10 sites are:**
 - Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra (Indonesia)
 - Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (Honduras)
 - Yosemite National Park (US)
 - Waterton Glacier International Peace Park (Canada, US)
 - Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains (South Africa)
 - Kinabalu Park (Malaysia)
 - Uvs Nuur Basin (Russian Federation, Mongolia)
 - Grand Canyon National Park (US)
 - Greater Blue Mountains Area (Australia)
 - Morne Trois Pitons National Park (Dominica)

What are the suggestions given by the Report?

- Strong and consistent protection of UNESCO World Heritage sites and their surrounding landscapes to make sure their forests could continue to act as powerful carbon sinks and stores for future generations.
- Maintaining and strengthening ecological connectivity through improved landscape governance.
- Integrating the continued protection of Unesco World Heritage sites into international, national and local climate, biodiversity and sustainable development strategies.

WE NEED A 'VALUES VACCINE'

CONTEXT:

The festive season has begun in India and it is also the time for buying and gifting for ourselves and those we care for. It is perhaps the best time to remember the lives lost to the pandemic and reflect on the need for a "values vaccine" as much as one for the virus.

ANALYSIS

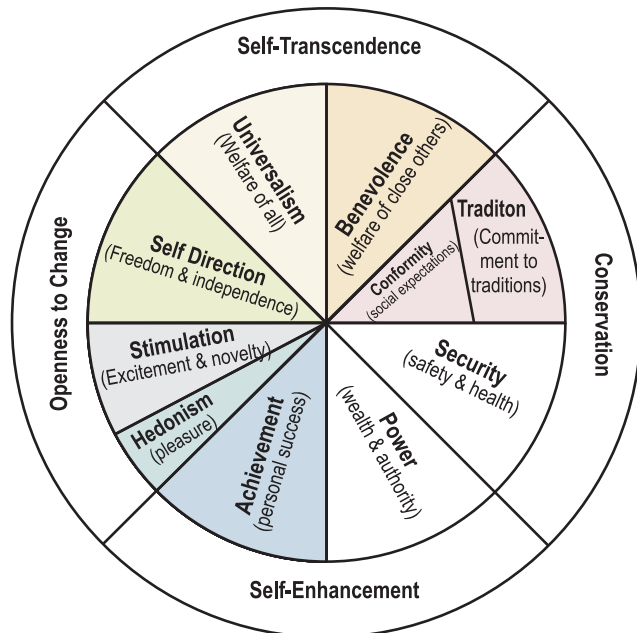
The COVID-19 threat and change of values

- The pandemic is teaching us key lessons about crisis, communication, and misinformation, and is spurring changes in the way scientists study public-health questions.
- The **COVID-19** lockdown restrictions introduced in many countries to prevent the spread of the virus provided a unique opportunity to study the impact of a severe global threat on people's psychological functioning.
- The urban feudalism was on starker display when countless fled the city, including those who worked in our homes and for us such as domestic help, cooks, drivers, hawkers and daily-wage workers.
- During the first phase of lockdown, their salaries were frozen, their safety nets were in tatters, their employers unable or, in some cases, not willing to support them in a lockdown and many hit the road.
- It has been perceived in the society that the responsibility of making India swachha is in the hands of the lower castes and class.
- The pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and just as with the disease, co-morbidities play a critical role.

Why do we need Values Vaccine?

- We need an institutionalized system to ensure that vital indicators are being tracked in real-time because nobody from the top in the health establishment visited villages before the pandemic, and nobody counted them with such excitement and sense of purpose.
- The values determine the things that people consider to be important and worthwhile.
- They guide intentional behavior and motivate people to pursue ideas and activities consistent with their values and to avoid those that go against them
- Cultural values motivate people to engage in practices that are consistent with their values and to avoid practices that are contrary to these values.

- The conservation values represent one of the key elements explaining the population's adherence to government measures in times of pandemic.
- The circular structure of values also allows for the grouping of values into higher-order dimensions:
 - ▶ **Openness to change:** self-direction thought, self-direction action, stimulation, hedonism;
 - ▶ **Self-enhancement:** achievement, power-dominance, power-resources;
 - ▶ **Conservation:** humility, conformity-interpersonal, conformity-rules, tradition, security-personal, security-societal, face; and
 - ▶ **Self-transcendence:** universalism-tolerance, universalism-nature, universalism-concern, benevolence-caring, benevolence-dependability.



Change in values and circumstances

- Values will likely change in response to external circumstances because their function is to channel energy and skills to effectively cope with upcoming challenges and normative forces.
- The negative situations result in changes towards focusing on security, while positive changes bring

attention to self-expression.

- The worldwide financial crisis in 2008 impacted the values of youth and young adults; specifically, values such as security, tradition, benevolence, and conformity significantly increased, while the importance of hedonism, self-direction, and stimulation decreased.
- The communal values of cooperation, consideration and caring are prioritized, whereas individualistic ones of prestige, popularity and power lose some of their cachets.
- Openness values, seeking stimulation excitement and challenge in life, had been decreasing in importance; however this decrease accelerated at the start of the pandemic.

Importance of Values in Human Life

- Values are generally regarded as the moral standards of human behaviors in the society. It is a kind of quality of humans, which is applied to human activities.
- The knowledge of our values helps us achieve clarity regarding why we do what we do, and accordingly stay on track and live a consistent life.
- The values help us design our life goals since we know what is most important for us today and they are as important as competencies to achieve

our goals.

- The terminal values provide us a sense of fulfillment, richness, and reward, and the instrumental or temporary values provide us a direction to achieve our life goals sticking to the terminal values.

◎ CONCLUSION

- The existing evidence suggests that human values, and the extent to which they are shared by fellow citizens, are likely to be important factors for tackling the COVID-19 crisis.
- The individuals who attach higher importance to self-transcendence (e.g., responsibility) and conservation (e.g., security) values are likely to be more compliant with COVID-19 behavioural guidelines.
- The communications to promote COVID-19 mitigating behaviours could seek to tailor messages to the motives underlying people's values.
- The interventions may encourage individuals to reflect on links between their own values and COVID-19 mitigating behaviours themselves, thereby embedding the behaviours more deeply in their values and facilitating long-term commitment.

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SECTION: B

(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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GURUPURAB PROPOSED TO BE DECLARED “WORLD PEDESTRIAN DAY”

◎ CONTEXT

Proposals have been put forward to the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways that the birth anniversary (Gurpurab) of Guru Nanak Dev be declared as ‘World Pedestrian Day’ to spread awareness on road safety.

- Guru Nanak’s 552nd Gurpurab is going to be celebrated on 19th November, 2021.
- The proposal highlights the government’s commitment towards “Right to walk” or pedestrian rights.

About Guru Nanak

- He was born in 1459 in the village of **Talwandi Rai Bhoi near Lahore**.
- Sikhism was founded by **Guru Nanak** and later led in succession to nine other Gurus.
- His teachings are based on the fact that there is only one God, and that all people can have direct access to God without rituals or priesthood.
- His teachings condemn the system of segregation and teach that all are equal, regardless of race or gender.
- He introduced the concept of a god - namely ‘**Vahiguru**’, an entity that is shapeless, timeless, omnipresent and invisible.. Other names for God in Sikh religion are **Akal Purakh and Nirankar**. He promoted the form of ‘**Nirguna**’ (devotion to and worship of formless divine) form of bhakti.
- He died in 1539 in Kartarpur, Punjab (now Pakistan).
- **Guru Granth Sahib**, a Sikh holy book, contains 974 poetic hymns composed by Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak’s Journey (by foot)

- To spread the message of unity and breaking up religious barriers by engaging in spiritual dialogues, Guru Nanak Dev travelled far and wide during the 15th and 16th centuries.
- It is believed that in those days, when the early modes of transport were limited and were mostly restricted to boats, animals (horses, mules, camels, bullock carts), Guru Nanak Dev, along with his companion **Bhai Mardana**, undertook most part of his journeys on foot.

Traveled locations

- From Mecca to Haridwar, from Sylhet to Mount Kailash, he visited hundreds of interfaith sites related to **Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Jainism** during his journey (also called *udaasis*).
- In some places, **gurdwaras** are built to commemorate his visit.
- His journey was later recorded in inscriptions called ‘**janamsakhis**’.
- These sites are now spread across nine countries as per current geographical divisions - India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, China (Tibet), Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan.

PASUMPON MUTHURAMALINGA THEVAR

◎ CONTEXT

Recently, Prime Minister paid homage to **Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar** on **114th Thevar Jayanthi (Guru Pooja)**.

- It is celebrated on 30th October every year to commemorate the birth anniversary of **Pasumpon Muthuramalingam Thevar**.

About Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar

- He was born on the **30th of October 1908** in Pasumpon in the Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu.
- He was a spiritual freedom fighter cum spiritual leader.
- He is seen as a deity among the Mukulathor community, a cluster community comprising the Kallar, Maravar and Ahambadiar.
 - The people of the Mukulathor community still make offerings as is done for the deities in temples to the statue on his Jeyanthi and Guru Pooja celebrations.
- He did not accept traditional Hinduism because it supported the '**Varnashrama**'. He regularly fought against the evils of the Hindu religion.
 - He openly rejected religious superstition and narrow-mindedness.
- Being a social worker and a colleague of Subhash Chandra Bose, he served as deputy chairman of the **All India Forward Bloc (AIFB) since 1952**.
 - He has been elected three times to the AIFB national parliament constituency.
- **The Temple Entry Authorization and Indemnity Act** was passed by the government of C. Rajagopalachari in 1939.
 - It removes restrictions that prevent Dalits from entering Hindu temples.
- He supported the change and in July 1939 assisted activist A. Vaidyanatha Iyer took Dalits to the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai.
- **The Criminal Tribes Act (CTA)**, enacted by the British in 1920, was against the Mukulathor community, in which Thevar protested by mobilizing people and starting protests that was a major milestone in his career.
 - CTA criminalized entire communities by designating them as habitual criminals.
- He was instrumental in getting the act repealed after continuous efforts in 1946.
- He died on October 30, 1963, from an illness.

All India Forward Bloc

- Built in May 1939 by Subhash Chandra Bose. It was a left-wing political party in India that emerged as a party within the 1939 India Congress.
 - The First All India Conference of Forward bloc was held in Nagpur in June 1940. It also passed a resolution entitled 'All Power to the Indian People', calling for steps to be taken against the British colonial rule.
- The prime objective of the Forward Bloc was to bring all radical elements of the Congress party together. So that it could spread the meaning of complete independence of India with adherence to the application of principles of equality and social justice.
- It was declared banned on 23 June 1942. Even when it was declared illegal, it played a revolutionary role to crown the struggle of the people with success and glory.
 - The party has also re-established itself as an independent political party after the independence of India.

AMERICAN B-1B BOMBER FLIES OVER MIDEAST AMID IRAN TENSIONS

◎ CONTEXT

The US Air Force flew a **B-1B strategic bomber** over key maritime chokepoints in the Mideast with allies including Israel amid ongoing tensions with Iran as its nuclear deal with world powers remains in tatters.

Important Locations

- The B-1B Lancer bomber flew over the **Strait of Hormuz**, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of all oil traded passes.
- It also flew over the **Red Sea**, its narrow **Bab el-Mandeb Strait** and **Egypt's Suez Canal**.
- The **Strait of Hormuz has been the scene of attacks** on shipping blamed on Iran in recent years, while the Red Sea has seen similar assaults amid an ongoing shadow war between Tehran and Israel.

Strait of Hormuz

- The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow channel, approximately 30 miles wide at the narrowest point, between the Omani Musandam Peninsula and Iran.
- Shaped like an inverted V, it connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman. The Strait is deep and relatively free of maritime hazards.
- Its depth is greatest near the **Musandam Peninsula** and tapers as you move north toward the Iranian shore.



- It's almost 100 miles (161 kilometers) long and 21 miles wide at its narrowest point, with the shipping lanes in each direction just two miles wide.
- Its shallow depth makes ships vulnerable to mines, and the proximity to land — Iran, in particular — leaves large tankers open to attack from shore-based missiles or interception by patrol boats and helicopters.

Persian Gulf

- The Strait contains eight major islands, seven of which are controlled by Iran.
- Iran and the United Arab Emirates disagree as to the ownership of the strategically located Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb islands.
- Nonetheless, Iran has maintained a military presence on these islands since the 1970s.

- Additionally, Iran's navy has good access to open sea from bases at Bandar Abbas, Bushehr, and Chah Bahar.
- The de facto Iranian control of these islands certainly strengthens Iranian influence in the waters of the Strait.

Gulf of Oman

- Gulf of Oman, northwest arm of the Arabian Sea, between the eastern portion (Oman) of the Arabian Peninsula to the southwest and Iran to the north.
- The gulf is 200 miles (320 km) wide between Cape al-Hadd in Oman and Gwādar Bay on the Pakistan–Iran border.
- It is 350 miles (560 km) long and connects with the Persian Gulf to the northwest through the Strait of Hormuz.

HEALTH INSURANCE FOR INDIA'S MISSING MIDDLE

◎ CONTEXT

Recently, NITI Aayog in a report titled '**Health Insurance for India's Missing Middle**' suggested extending **Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)** coverage to 'missing middle'.

Key-highlights of the Report

- Around 20 per cent of the population -- 25 crore individuals are covered through social health insurance, and private voluntary health insurance.
- The remaining 30 per cent of the population is devoid of health insurance.
- The actual uncovered population is higher due to the existing coverage gaps in PM-JAY and overlap between schemes.

About AB-PMJAY

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme and the nodal agency to implement it is the National Health Authority (NHA).
- PMJAY provides cashless and paperless access to services for the beneficiary at the point of service.
- The AB-PMJAY and State Government extension schemes provide comprehensive hospitalization cover to the bottom 50% population (70 crore individuals).
- Around 20% of the population is covered through social health insurance and private voluntary health insurance.
- The remaining 30% of the population is devoid of health insurance; the actual uncovered population is higher due to existing coverage gaps in PMJAY and overlap between schemes.

Challenges in health sector for middle class

- Expensive treatment
- Lack of access to proper healthcare
- Unawareness
- Inadequate reach
- Inadequate Fund
- Optimal Insurance
- No focus on Preventive Care

- Shortage of Medical Workforce
- Inadequate outlay for health
- Lack of structure

Important Government on Health

- National Food Security Act (NFSA)
- Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana
- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)
- Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana

Right to Health in India

- Articles 39, 41, 42 and 47 in the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) contain provisions regarding Health.
- Article 21 provides for the right to life and personal liberty and is a fundamental right.

SUPREME COURT USES “EXTRAORDINARY POWER” TO ACQUIT MAN IN SC/ST ACT CASE

◎ CONTEXT

Using “extraordinary powers” granted to the Supreme Court, it set aside proceedings against a man convicted under the **scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act**.

What is SC/ST Act?

- The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, or the SC/ST Act protects the marginalised communities against discrimination and atrocities.
- Popularly known as POA, the SC/ST Act, was enacted on September 9, 1989.
- The Act lists 22 offences relating to various patterns or behaviours inflicting criminal offences and breaking the self-respect and esteem of the scheduled castes and tribes community.
 - This includes denial of economic, democratic and social rights, discrimination, exploitation and abuse of the legal process.
- **Objective:** To deliver justice to marginalised through proactive efforts, giving them a life of dignity, self-esteem and a life without fear, violence or suppression from the dominant castes.

The case

- The case, dating back to 1994, pertained to a clash between two neighbours – Ramawatar and Prembai – over a land dispute in Panna district of Madhya Pradesh.
- In the heat of the moment, Ramawatar had thrown a brick at Prembai and used casteist slurs and derogatory remarks at her.

SC’s Extraordinary Power

- Supreme Court uses extraordinary powers under **Article 142** of the Constitution of India.

- Article 142 of the Constitution empowers the Supreme Court with extraordinary or absolute powers to pass any decree to ensure the delivery of “complete justice”.
- The provision is usually used in cases involving **human rights and environmental protection**.

CLIMATE VULNERABILITY INDEX RELEASED BY CEEW

◎ CONTEXT

Environmental think tank **Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)** has carried a first-of-its-kind district-level climate vulnerability assessment, or **Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI)**.

What is Climate Vulnerability Index?

- In the Index, CEEW has analyzed 640 districts in India to assess their vulnerability to extreme weather events such as cyclones, floods, heatwaves, droughts, etc.
- The CVI maps:
 - **exposure** (that is whether the district is prone to extreme weather events)
 - **sensitivity** (the likelihood of an impact on the district by the weather event)
 - **adaptive capacity** (what the response or coping mechanism of the district is)
- It helps map critical vulnerabilities and plan strategies to enhance resilience and adapt by climate-proofing communities, economies and infrastructure.
- Instead of looking at climate extremes in isolation, the study looks at the combined risk of hydro-met disasters, which is floods, cyclones and droughts, and their impact.
- The study does not take into consideration other natural disasters such as earthquakes.

Key-highlights of the Index

- Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Bihar are most vulnerable to extreme climate events such as floods, droughts and cyclones in India.
- While 27 Indian states and union territories are vulnerable to extreme climate events, 463 districts out of 640 are vulnerable to extreme weather events.
- Dhemaji and Nagaon in Assam, Khammam in Telangana, Gajapati in Odisha, Vizianagaram in Andhra Pradesh, Sangli in Maharashtra, and Chennai in Tamil Nadu are among India's most climate-vulnerable districts
- More than 80 per cent of Indians live in districts vulnerable to climate risks – that is 17 of 20 people in India are vulnerable to climate risks, out of which every five Indians live in extremely vulnerable areas
- More than 45 per cent of these districts have undergone “unsustainable landscape and infrastructure changes”.
- 183 hotspot districts are highly vulnerable to more than one extreme climate events
- 60% of Indian districts have medium to low adaptive capacity in handling extreme weather events – these districts don't have robust plans in place to mitigate impact
- North-eastern states are more vulnerable to floods
- South and central are most vulnerable to extreme droughts
- 59 and 41 per cent of the total districts in the eastern and western states, respectively, are highly vulnerable to extreme cyclones.

INDIA PLEDGES NEW CLIMATE CRISIS GOAL: NET ZERO BY 2070

◎ CONTEXT

As part of a five-point action plan, the Indian government has announced that the country will reach carbon neutrality by 2070.

What is 'net zero'?

- Net Zero refers to a balance where emissions of greenhouse gases are offset by the absorption of an equivalent amount from the atmosphere.
- It is seen as a critical measure to successfully tackle climate change and its devastating consequences.

The other important commitments

- India will increase its non-fossil energy capacity to 550GW by 2030.
- India will meet 50% of its energy requirement from renewable energy by 2030.
- India will reduce the total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes from now to 2030.
- India will reduce the carbon intensity of its economy by 45% (from a previous target of 35%).

Important Facts

- India has the lowest per capita emissions of the world's major economies -- emitting 5% of the total, despite accounting for 17% of the world's population.
- In absolute terms, India is the **fourth-largest carbon emitter** after China and the United States.
- China has pledged to turn **carbon neutral** by **2060** while the US and the **European Union** – as a block, EU nations together account for the third-largest volume of emissions – aim to do so by 2050.
- India hasn't submitted an updated **nationally determined contribution (NDCs)** with these commitments to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** yet.

AUTOSOMAL DNA

◎ CONTEXT

A technique based on '**autosomal DNA**' has been used for the first time to identify the great-grandson and closest living relative of Sitting Bull, a prominent 19th century Native American leader.

What is Autosomal DNA?

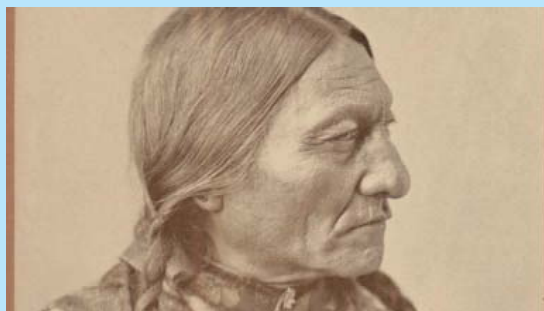
- Autosomal DNA is our non-gender-specific DNA.
- The technique searches for 'autosomal DNA' in the genetic fragments extracted from a body sample.
- The autosomal DNA technique can be used even when very limited genetic data are available, like in this case.
- It could be used in the future to identify living descendants of other long-dead historical figures.

The usual technique

- Usually, DNA techniques such as mitochondrial DNA, which means DNA passed from the mother or Y chromosome DNA passed down the male line, have been used in genetic searches.

Sitting Bull

- Sitting Bull is most famous for his victory over US General George Armstrong Custer in the Battle of the Little Bighorn River in 1876.
- Five companies of the US Army were completely wiped out in the battle, considered widely to be the most significant Native American military victory in US history.
- Sitting Bull, who hailed from the Lakota branch of the Great Sioux Nation or Oceti Sakowin, was killed in 1890 by 'Indian Police', acting on behalf of the US government.



DENGUE FEVER OUTBREAK IN DIFFERENT PART OF COUNTRY

◎ CONTEXT

To help manage the dengue outbreak, the Union Government has deployed central teams of experts in nine states and Union Territories to bolster efforts to contain the mosquito-borne disease.

About Dengue

- Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral disease that has rapidly spread in all regions.
- **Transmitted by:** Dengue virus is transmitted by female mosquitoes mainly of the species *Aedes aegypti* and, to a lesser extent, *Ae. albopictus*.
 - These mosquitoes are also vectors of chikungunya, yellow fever and Zika viruses.
- Dengue is widespread throughout the tropics, with local variations in risk influenced by rainfall, temperature, relative humidity and unplanned rapid urbanization.

Virus:

- The dengue fever is caused by the virus of the family Flaviviridae or the dengue virus (DENV).
- DENV has four distinct but closely related, variants, known as:
 - DENV-1
 - DENV-2
 - DENV-3
 - DENV-4

- DENV-2 and DENV-4 are associated with severe dengue cases. In India, DENV-1 AND DENV-2 are more prominent

How does it spread?

- Mosquitoes generally acquire the virus while feeding on the blood of an infected person.
- After an incubation period that lasts between 8-10 days, an infected mosquito can spread the virus to people for the rest of its life.
- Humans are the main host of the virus, although monkeys have been found to pick up the infection in some parts of the world.

Vaccines for Dengue

- There are no vaccines for Dengue yet.
- WHO has allowed Dengvaxia- tetravalent live vaccine in a few countries like Mexico, Thailand, Indonesia, Brazil and the Philippines but research is still underway to know about its overall side effects and benefits.

SAMUDRAYAAN MISSION

◎ CONTEXT

Recently, the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** has launched India's first manned ocean mission "Samudrayaan" in Chennai.

- With this Unique Ocean Mission, India joined the elite club of nations such as the US, Russia, France, Japan, and China to have niche technology and vehicles to carry out subsea activities.

About

- It is the first unique manned ocean mission that aims to send men to the depths of the ocean by submarine to explore the deep sea and excavation of rare minerals.
- It will send three people to a **MATSYA 6000 submarine** at a depth of 6000 meters at sea for deep underwater studies.
 - Shipmarines can travel only 200 feet [200 m].
- It is part of the Rs 6000-crores Deep Ocean Mission.

Deep Ocean Mission

- Received in June 2021 by (MoES). It aims to explore the depth of the ocean to find resources, improve the depth of marine technology for the sustainable use of marine resources, and support the Indian Government's blue economy.
- The costs are estimated at Rs. 4,077 crore over five years and will be used in phases.

MATSYA 6000

- It is an indigenously developed manned submersible vehicle.
- It will facilitate the MoES in conducting in-depth ocean exploration of resources such as gas hydrates, polymetallic manganese nodules, hydro-thermal sulfides, and cobalt crusts which are found at approximate depths between **1000 and 5500 meters**.
 - **Polymetallic nodules**, also called manganese nodules, are mineral concretions on the sea bottom formed of concentric layers of iron and manganese hydroxides around a core.

Significance

- This will open up more growth channels to test marine resources for **clean energy, drinking water, and blue economy**.
- Developed countries are already engaged in similar maritime activities. India is the first country in the developing world to engage in deep ocean activity.

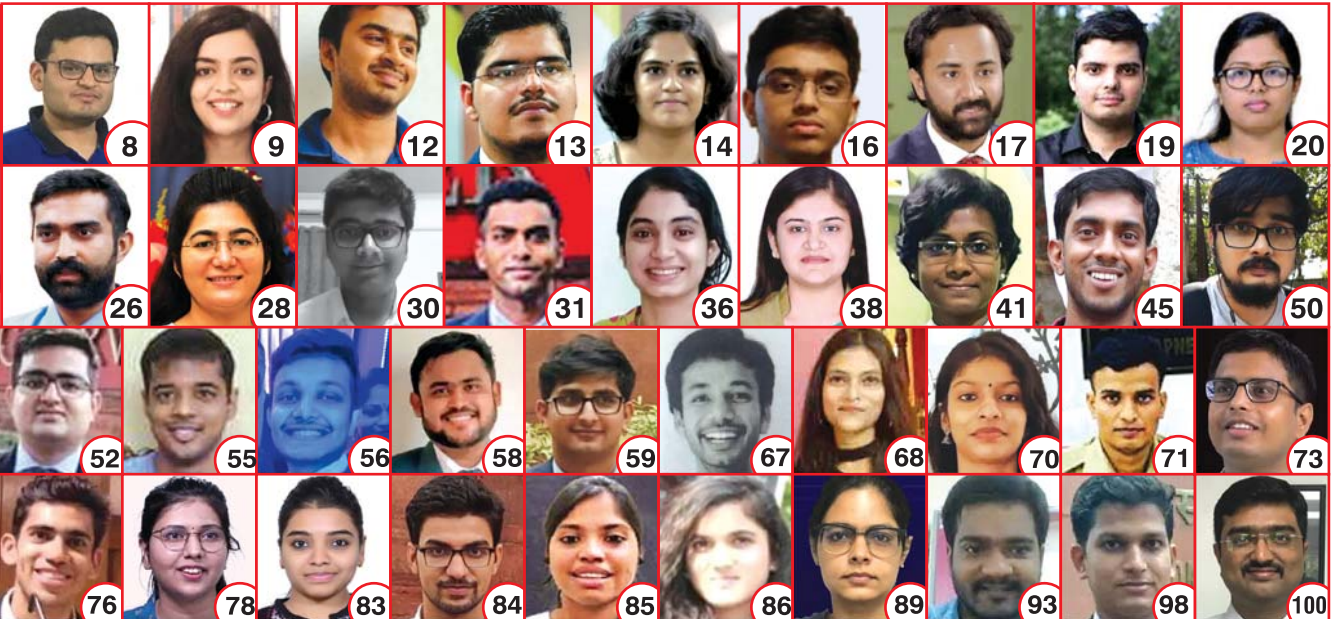
Other Related initiatives

- India-Norway Task Force on Blue Economy for Sustainable Development
- Sagarmala Project
- O-SMART
- Integrated Coastal Zone Management
- National Fisheries Policy

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