

PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

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INDEX

Contents

Prelims	3
NATIONAL	3
Performance Grading Index.....	3
Kerala's Smart Kitchen project.....	4
Pran Vayu Devta Pension Scheme and Oxy Van scheme of Haryana	5
Maharashtra government's EWS quota to Maratha community.....	6
Hike in MSP for paddy, pulses, oilseeds	7
Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2019-20	8
Energy efficiency measures in India.....	10
Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell (CAR-T) therapy	10
The Maharashtra govt's proposed amendment for protection of 'heritage trees'	11
The Beed model of crop insurance	12
Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan	13
Mango export from India.....	14
Indo-Thai CORPAT.....	14
INTERNATIONAL	15
European Space Agency's EnVision mission to Venus	15
Aducanumab	16
How is the UN Secretary-General appointed?.....	17
CIBER-2	18
The For the People Act	19
'Sea snout' outbreak in Turkey.....	19
G7.....	20
Mains	23
GS II	23
The rope of federalism and an unwanted tug-of-war.....	23
State interventions, Lakshadweep's future	24
COVID-19 vaccines and the indemnity clause.....	26
U.S. delays tariffs against digital services tax	28
First human infection of the H10N3 bird flu	29
GS III	30
Making peace with nature	30

Current Affairs Quiz	32
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Prelims

NATIONAL

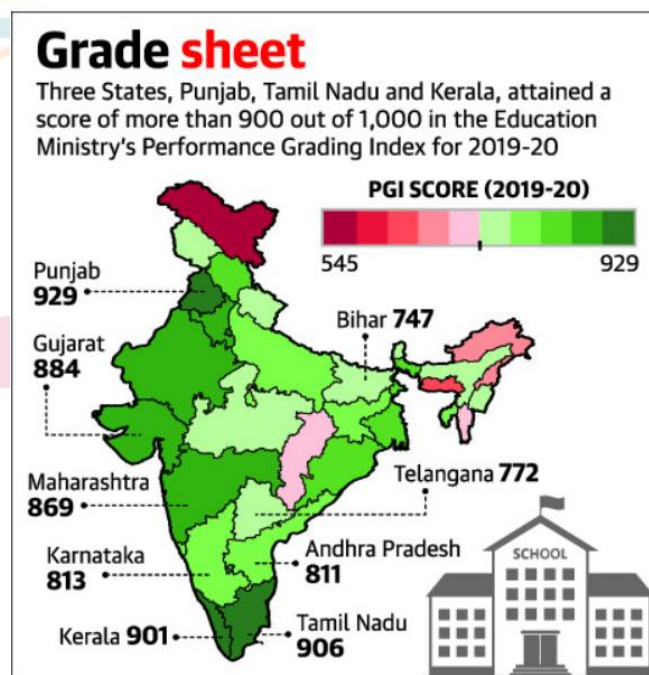
Performance Grading Index

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The Education Ministry released the latest edition of the Performance Grading Index or PGI. This relatively new index measures the performance of states in school education.

How is PGI worked out?

- It assesses states' performance in school education based on data drawn from several sources, including the Unified District Information System for Education Plus, National Achievement Survey, and Mid-Day Meal.
- States are scored on a total of 1,000 points across 70 parameters, which are grouped under five broad categories: access (eg. enrolment ratio, transition rate and retention rate); governance and management; infrastructure; equity (difference in performance between scheduled caste students and general category students) and learning outcomes (average score in mathematics, science, languages and social science).
- States are graded and not ranked to discourage the practice of one improving only at the cost of others, "thereby casting a stigma of underperformance on the latter".
- According to the government, the objective is to help the states prioritise areas for intervention in school education. The Education Ministry released the first PGI in 2019 for the reference year 2017-18.



What does the grading system reflect?

- The PGI grading system has 10 levels. Level 1 indicates top-notch performance and a score between 951 and 1,000 points. Level II, also known as Grade 1++, indicates a score between 901 and 950.
- Those with Grade 1+ (or Level III) have scored between 851 and 900. The lowest is Grade VII, and it means a score between 0 and 550 points.

PGI REPORT CARD, 2019-20

STATE	SCORE	STATE	SCORE	STATE	SCORE
Punjab	929	Himachal	839	Manipur	767
Chandigarh	912	Odisha	838	J&K (UT)	763
Tamil Nadu	906	W Bengal	834	Lakshadweep	754
Kerala	901	Daman & Diu	818	Uttarakhand	752
Andaman	901	Karnataka	813	MP	748
Delhi	898	Andhra	811	Bihar	747
Puducherry	889	UP	804	Assam	738
Gujarat	884	Tripura	801	Mizoram	723
Maharashtra	869	Jharkhand	790	Chhattisgarh	700
D&NH	867	Goa	783	Arunachal	698
Haryana	862	Telangana	772	Nagaland	667
Rajasthan	859	Sikkim	772	Meghalaya	649

How have states performed this time?

- In PGI 2019-20, no state or Union Territory could achieve the highest grade, that is Level I. Even in the 2017-18 and 2018-19 editions, no state had reached Level 1 and Grade 1++.
- Chandigarh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar and Kerala have scored more than 90% and obtained Grade 1++ (or Level II), which makes them the best performing states.
- This is the first time that any state has reached Level II. The top-performing states of Gujarat, Chandigarh, and Kerala in 2018-19 were given Grade 1+ (or Level III), that is, a score between 851 and 900 points.
- Only the UT of Ladakh has been placed in the lowest grade, that is Grade VII, but that's because it was the first time it was assessed after it was carved out of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019.

Kerala's Smart Kitchen project

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The Kerala government's revised budget for the current fiscal has announced the introduction of a Smart Kitchen project, which is meant to modernise kitchens and ease the difficulty faced by homemakers in household chores.

What is the Smart Kitchen project?

- Under the scheme, KSFE would give soft loans to women from all walks of life for purchasing household gadgets or equipment.
- The cost of household equipment can be repaid as instalments within a particular period.



- The interest of the loan/cost would be equally shared among the beneficiary, local self-government body and the state government.
- To implement the scheme, KSFE would start smart kitchen chits.
- One of the highlights of the last budget of the first Vijayan government was the thrust on job creation, with women as major beneficiaries. The government believes that for better participation of women in labour, the burden on household chores has to be reduced.
- By enhancing mechanisation in kitchens, women participation in labour could be increased. Hence, the Smart Kitchen project was proposed.

Pran Vayu Devta Pension Scheme and Oxy Van scheme of Haryana

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Amid the ongoing pandemic, several states including Haryana witnessed a crisis of medical oxygen that was needed for severely ill Covid-19 patients. To avoid such a deficit in the future, the Haryana government has come out with what it says is a “unique and first of its kind initiative” “Pran Vayu Devta Pension Scheme”, and Oxy Van (Oxygen Forests).

What is the Pran Vayu Devta Pension Scheme (PVDPS)?

- Chief Minister Khattar said: “The state government has taken an initiative to honour all those trees which are of the age of 75 years and above and have served humanity throughout their life by producing oxygen, reducing pollution, providing shade and so on. Such trees will be identified throughout the state and these will be looked after by involving local people in this scheme”.
- He added, “We get pure air from the environment which benefits the entire humanity. For this, Oxy Forests will be planted on land ranging from 5 acres to 100 acres in the cities of Haryana.”
- For maintenance of trees older than 75 years, a “pension amount” of Rs 2,500 would be given per year in the name of PVDPS.
- This ‘tree pension’ shall continue to increase every year, on lines similar to the Old Age Samman Pension Scheme in the state.
- The pension shall be given by the Urban Local Bodies department for the upkeep of the trees, installing plates, grilles etc.
- According to state government officials, at least 2,500 such trees have been identified so far. The Forest Department had commissioned a survey to identify these old trees. Village panchayats will now be paid Rs 2,500 as ‘pension’ per tree for their upkeep.

What is an Oxy Van (Oxygen Forest)?

- What the state government is calling an Oxy Van are identified pieces of land, on which as many as 3 crore trees would be planted. The Oxy Vans will occupy 10 per cent of the 8 lakh hectares of land across Haryana.
- “Oxy Van, Panchkula, will be established in Bir Ghaggar over an area of 100 acres to create Mother Nature’s green lungs so that residents of Panchkula can breathe in fresh oxygen. Total cost of project shall be Rs 1 crore,” the government said.
- Oxy Van, Karnal, shall come up along the Old Badshahi Canal (also known as Mughal Canal), on an area of 80 acres, covering a total length of 4.2 km. This park will have components named: *Chit Van* (Forest of Beauty), *Paakhi Van* (Forest of Birds), *Antriksh Van* (Forest of Zodiac Signs), *Tapo Van* (Forest of Meditation), *Arogya Van* (Healing/herbal Forest), *Neer Van* (Forest of Waterfalls), *Rishi Van* (Sapt Rishi), *Panchvati* (Five Trees), *Smaran Van* (Forest of Memories), and *Sugandh Suvaas/Sugandh Van* (Forest of Fragrance).



- The park will also have an information centre and a souvenir shop, and people will be able to buy plants at subsidized rates related to their *Rashi* (zodiac sign) to grow in their homesteads. An amphitheatre will be constructed where artists can perform for the entertainment of the public. Light and sound show will be shown to the visitors covering various aspects of this Oxy Van.

What kind of trees will the Oxy Vans have, and how have they been identified?

- Chit Van will contain ornamental and flowering plants like the Orchid Tree (Kachnar), Indian Laburnum (Amaltas), Pride of India, Red silk cotton tree (Semal), Indian Coral, Sita Ashok, Java Cassia, Red Gulmohar, Golden Shower, Passion Flower, etc.
- Pakhi Van will house plants like Peepal, Banyan, Pilkhan, Neem etc.
- Antriksh Van will have “luck-boosting” plants like Flame of the Forest (Palash/Dhak), Jackfruit, Cluster Fig (Gullar), Amla, Krishan Neel, Champa, Khair, Bilwa, etc.
- Arogya Van will have medicinal plants like Tulsi, Ashwagandha, Neem, Aloe Vera, Chebulic Myrobalan (Harad), Baheda, and Amla, etc.
- Sugandh Vatika will contain fragrant plants like Sugadhray, Chameli, Night Queen, Day King, Night-blooming Jasmine (Parijat), Champa, Rose, Honeysuckle, Passiflora etc. According to the government, the sweet fragrance of these plants will allow those who cannot see, to also enjoy the surroundings.
- Panchvati has cultural, mythological, and environmental significance. Panchvati literally means five trees. These trees are Banyan/Barh/Bargad, Sacred Fig/Peepal, Stone Apple (Bilwa/Bil), Aonla, and Sita Ashok. Besides mythological significance, these trees provide a lot of ecological and environmental benefits.
- Barh and Peepal are known as “umbrella trees” which provide food and shelter to a variety of life forms including birds and insects, and offer the best shade as well. They fight sound pollution due to their thick foliage, and are known for producing more oxygen than any other tree.
- Bilwa is associated with Lord Shiva, and its leaves and flowers are offered to Him. It is also a good shady tree. Besides being a good food plant, its ripe pulp has medicinal value. It has liver-cleansing properties and removes even old plaque from the intestine, according to the government.
- Ashok or the Sorrowless Tree is associated with Sita, as it is said she spent time in Ashok Vatika in Lanka when she was abducted by Ravana. Its bark is used in urinary diseases. It is ornamental and provides shade as well. When in bloom in spring, it looks very attractive.
- As per Indian Vastu, these trees in Panchvati are to be planted in different directions. As mentioned in the Shastras, Peepal is to be planted in the East, Barh in the West, Bilwa in the North, Aonla in the South, and Ashok in Agney (south-west) direction. Panchvati Vatikas will be established in 134 Kurukshetra Tirthas (pilgrimages) located in Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Karnal and Panipat districts.

Maharashtra government's EWS quota to Maratha community

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Weeks after the Supreme Court struck down the Maratha reservation, the Maha Vikas Aghadi government issued an order on May 31, stating that eligible candidates from the Maratha community could avail benefits under the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) quota. The EWS quota is open to all those not covered by any other quota and whose family annual income is below Rs 8 lakh.

Why did the government issue an order for something that is obvious?

- The government resolution on opening EWS to Maratha candidates came weeks after the May 5 Supreme Court order striking down the Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC) reservation given to the Maratha community.



- It was done to correct a procedural anomaly arising out of the SEBC quota enacted by the state in 2018. Soon after this quota came into existence, the Centre enacted the EWS quota providing 10 per cent reservation in jobs and educational institutions to the economically weaker sections in the general category in January 2019.
- Acting on complaints that Maratha community candidates had started availing benefits from both SEBC and EWS, the state government in July 2020 issued an order stating that those availing the benefits of the SEBC were not eligible to get the benefits of the EWS. Instructions were issued to the concerned authorities for ensuring its implementation.
- However, when the SC placed a stay on the Maratha quota on September 9, 2020, the state cabinet decided to allow Maratha candidates to avail of EWS category. Sources in the government said that the Maratha leaders and organisations opposed the move at the time fearing that the government was trying to get out of the SEBC quota, and that it would impact the legal prospects of retaining the quota.
- On account of the opposition, the government was initially forced to put the cabinet decision on hold for some time, and issue an order in December 2020 stating that availing EWS benefits would be “optional”, sources said.

What are the benefits given to the Maratha community in the new order?

- With the Maratha quota struck down by SC, the government issued a new order on May 31 stating that the SEBC candidates can avail benefits of the EWS depending on their eligibility.
- It was to make it evident to the Maratha community that these benefits are no longer “optional” for them and they can avail EWS benefits now, said an official adding that all the orders issued for the SEBC have been cancelled.
- It further said that the new order would be in force with retrospective effect for candidates who have been selected in the recruitment process before September 9, 2020, but their appointments are pending.
- The candidates awaiting the appointments are being protected with this clause to ensure that their posts remain untouched, said an official, adding that the “optional” EWS benefits will end with the new order.
- The state government has asked the chief secretary to review the recruitment process and compile data on this within the next few days.
- The order says the EWS reservation will remain in force for all future admissions in the educational institutes. Officials said it was necessary to put out the order as the legal battle in the apex court on the Maratha quota is a long-drawn process and hence all the measures have been taken to provide EWS benefits to the Maratha community in the near future.

Hike in MSP for paddy, pulses, oilseeds

((Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: The Central government has hiked the minimum support price (MSP) for common paddy to ₹1,940 a quintal for the coming kharif season, less than 4% higher than last year's price of ₹1,868.

Details:

- The decision was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday.
- In a bid to encourage crop diversification, there were slightly higher increases in the MSP for pulses, oilseeds and coarse cereals.
- Both tur and urad dal saw the MSP rise by ₹300, a 5% increase to ₹6,300 a quintal, while the highest absolute increase was for sesamum, whose MSP rose 6.6% to ₹7,307. Groundnut and nigerseed saw an increase of ₹275 and ₹235 respectively.
- However, maize saw a minimal hike of just ₹20 to ₹1,870 a quintal.

- **The MSP is the rate at which the government purchases crops from farmers, and is based on a calculation of at least one-and-a-half times the cost of production incurred by the farmers.**
- This year, the MSP for bajra was set at 85% above the cost of production, while the MSP for urad and tur will ensure 60% returns. The MSPs for the remaining crops were mostly set around the stipulated 50% above the cost of production.

Minimum Support Price:

- MSP is a “**minimum price**” for any crop that the government considers as remunerative for farmers and hence deserving of “support”.
- It is **also the price** that government agencies pay whenever they procure the particular crop.
- The **Union Budget for 2018-19** had announced that MSP would be kept at levels of **1.5 the cost of production**.

MSP is given for the following crops:

- The Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP) recommends MSPs for **22 mandated crops** and fair and remunerative price (FRP) for **sugarcane**.
 - CACP is an attached office of the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**, Government of India.
 - It came into existence in **January 1965**.
 - It is an advisory body whose recommendations are **not binding on the Government**.
- The mandated crops include **14 crops of the kharif season, 6 rabi crops and 2 other commercial crops**.
- In addition, the MSPs of **toria and de-husked coconut** are fixed on the basis of the MSPs of rapeseed/mustard and copra, respectively.
- The **list of crops** are as follows:
 - **Cereals (7):** Paddy, wheat, barley, jowar, bajra, maize and ragi,
 - **Pulses (5):** Gram, arhar/tur, moong, urad and lentil,
 - **Oilseeds (8):** Groundnut, rapeseed/mustard, toria, soyabean, sunflower seed, sesamum, safflower seed and niger seed,
 - Raw **cotton**, Raw **jute**, **Copra**, De-husked **coconut**, and
 - **Sugarcane** (Fair and remunerative price).

Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2019-20

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: Union Education Minister approved the release of Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2019-20 for States and Union Territories of India.

About the Performance Grading Index:

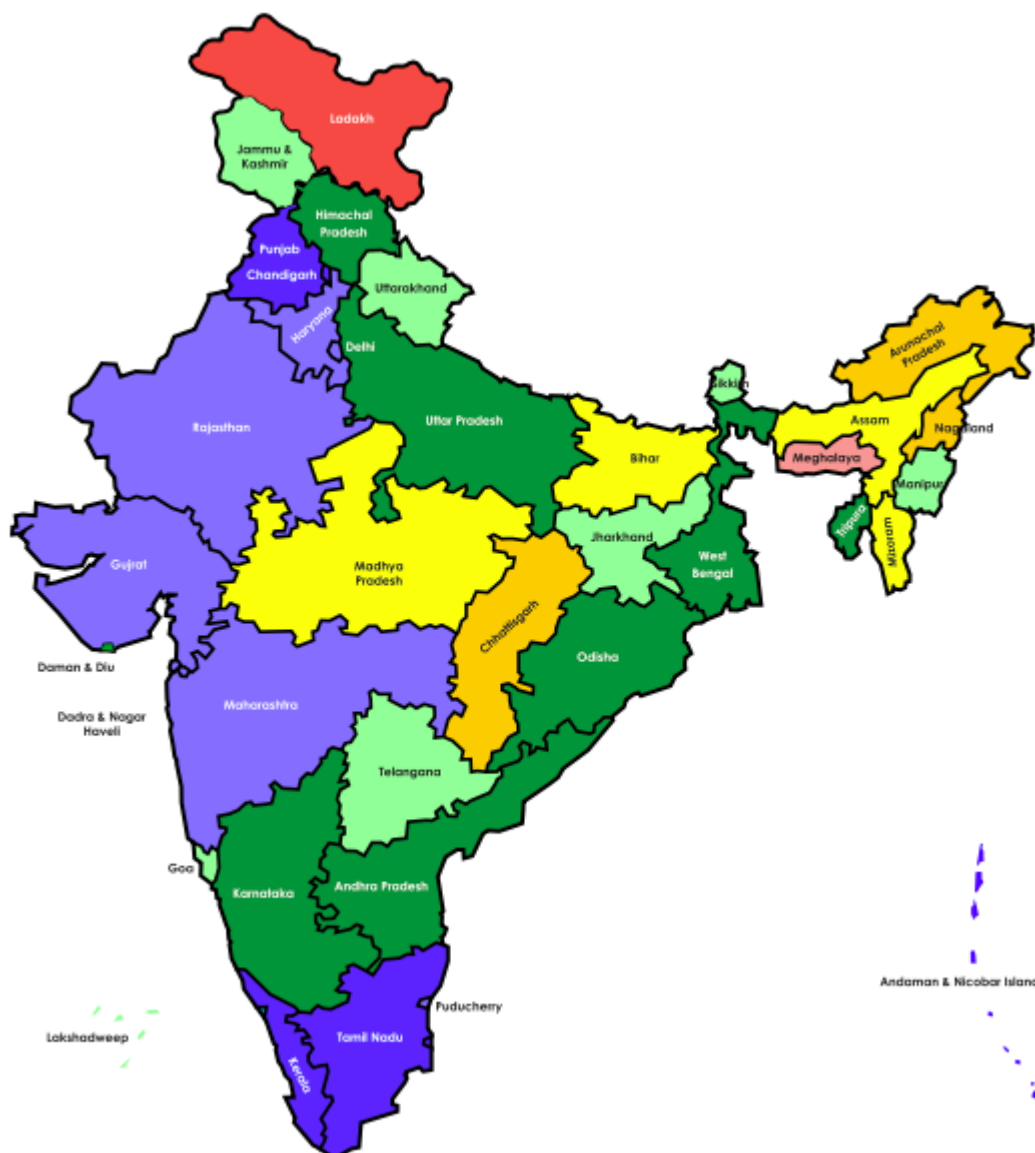
- The Government has introduced the Performance Grading Index with a set of 70 parameters to catalyse transformational change in the field of school
- The PGI for States and Union Territories was first published in 2019 with the reference year 2017-18.
- The PGI exercise envisages that the index would propel States and UTs towards undertaking multi-pronged interventions that will bring about the much-desired optimal education outcomes.
- The PGI helps the States/UTs to pinpoint the gaps and accordingly prioritise areas for intervention to ensure that the school education system is robust at every level.



Highlights of the 2019-20 PGI:

- Punjab, Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Kerala occupy the highest grade (Grade A++) for 2019-20.
- Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Puducherry, Punjab and Tamil Nadu have improved overall PGI score by 10%, i.e., 100 or more points.
- Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and Punjab have shown improvement by 10% (8 points) or more in the PGI domain: Access.
- In the PGI domain: Infrastructure and Facilities, thirteen States and UTs have shown improvement by 10% (15 points) or more. Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Odisha have shown improvement by 20% or more.
- Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Odisha have shown more than 10% improvement in the PGI domain: Equity.
- Nineteen States and UTs have shown improvement by 10% (36 points) or more in the PGI domain: Governance Process. Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Punjab, Rajasthan and West Bengal have shown improvement by at least 20% (72 points or more).

Score range	colour
901-950	Dark Purple
851-900	Light Purple
801-850	Dark Green
751-800	Light Green
701-750	Yellow
651-700	Orange
601-650	Light Orange
551-600	Red
0-550	Dark Red



Energy efficiency measures in India

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The Ministry of Power is implementing measures to save energy with an objective to reduce CO₂ emission levels in the environment from industries, establishments and by using equipment/appliances.*

Schemes: *The Power Ministry is implementing the PAT Scheme in this regard.*

PAT Scheme:

- The Perform Achieve and Trade (PAT) Scheme is a key programme for large industries and establishments.
- This scheme aims to enhance the cost-effectiveness of energy savings by upgrading technologies or by taking in-house actions to minimize energy consumption.
- The scheme provides mandatory targets for the identified Large Units and the excess energy saved by them is issued as Energy Saving Certificate, which are tradable instruments.
- Different industries and establishments are assigned separate energy efficiency targets based on their levels of energy consumption and the potential for energy savings.
- Currently, the scheme extends to 13 most energy intensive sectors in the country including cement, iron and steel, fertilizer, thermal power plants, refineries, petrochemicals, railways and others.
- This initiative is currently leading to energy savings of about 17 MTOE (Million Tonnes of Oil Equivalent) and has resulted in the mitigation of about 87 million tonnes of CO₂.

Standards and Labeling (S&L) Program:

- The Standards and Labeling (S&L) Program was introduced by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).
- The objective of the program is to provide consumers with an informed choice about the energy savings potential and thereby the cost saving due to the products available in the market.
- The scheme includes the display of energy performance labels on key energy consuming equipment & appliances, with stipulation for minimum energy performance standards.
- As of now, it covers 28 appliances and 15000 models of energy efficient products have been awarded Star labels.
- This initiative has been effective in reducing the CO₂ emissions of about 46 Million Tonnes every year.

Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell (CAR-T) therapy

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Department of Biotechnology supported first CAR-T cell therapy conducted at ACTREC, Tata Hospital in Mumbai.*

Background:

- The Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell (CAR-T) therapy has emerged as a breakthrough in cancer treatment.
- Clinical trials have shown remarkable results especially for patients suffering from Acute Lymphocytic Leukaemia.



- However it is extremely expensive (each patient's CAR-T therapy costs Rs 3-4 crores) in India and therefore, unavailable in the country.
- The manufacturing complexity is a major reason for the therapy cost.
- In order to promote and support development of CAR-T cell technology against cancer and other diseases, BIRAC and DBT have taken initiatives and launched specialized calls to invite proposals in the last 2 years.

CAR-T Therapy in India:

- In June 2021, the first CAR-T cell therapy was done at the Bone Marrow Transplant unit at ACTREC, Tata Memorial Centre in Mumbai.
- This is a "first in India" gene therapy in early phase pilot clinical trial.
- The trial was conducted by IIT Bombay and Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai partly supported by the BIRAC-PACE scheme.
- The central government's National Biopharma Mission-BIRAC has approved 19.15 Cr to the team for conducting a first-in-human phase-1/2 clinical trial of the CAR-T cells.

Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell Therapy:

- It is a type of treatment in which a patient's T cells (a type of immune system cell) are changed in the laboratory so they will attack cancer cells.
- T cells are taken from a patient's blood. Then the gene for a special receptor that binds to a certain protein on the patient's cancer cells is added to the T cells in the laboratory.
- The special receptor is called a chimeric antigen receptor (CAR). Large numbers of the CAR T cells are grown in the laboratory and given to the patient by infusion.
- It is used to treat certain types of blood cancers and is being studied for the treatment of other cancers also.

The Maharashtra govt's proposed amendment for protection of 'heritage trees'

(Source: [Indian Express](https://www.indianexpress.com))

Context: The Maharashtra government **will make amendments** to the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act of 1975, to introduce provisions for the protection of 'heritage trees'. The Maharashtra Cabinet also green-lighted the formation of the Maharashtra Tree Authority in local civic bodies and councils which will take all decisions regarding the protection of trees.

What are heritage trees?

- Under the proposed amendment, a tree with an estimated age of 50 years or more shall be defined as a heritage tree. It may belong to specific species, which will be notified from time to time.
- Experts believe that in addition to the age, the state climate change department (which will be implementing the Tree Act), should also consider a tree's rarity, its botanical, historical, religious, mythological and cultural importance in defining a heritage tree.
- The local Tree Authority will have to ensure tree census to be carried out every five years along with counting of heritage trees

How is the age of the tree determined?

- The most common method of determining the age of the tree is Dendrochronology – or tree-ring dating also called growth rings. Each year, roughly a tree adds to its girth, the new growth is called a tree ring. By counting the rings of a tree, the age can be determined.

- However, the process is invasive. To analyse the rings, core samples are extracted using a borer that's screwed into the tree and pulled out, bringing with it a straw-size sample of wood. The hole in the tree is then sealed to prevent disease.
- The environment department, in consultation with the forest department, will issue guidelines to determine the age of the tree.

Why was the concept of heritage tree introduced?

- A heritage tree will get special protection. Crucially, the tree's age will determine the number of trees to be planted as part of the compensatory plantation – that is anyone cutting a heritage tree will need to plant trees in the same numbers as the cut tree's age.
- According to the current Compensatory Plantation in the state, one sapling has to be planted for each tree that is cut.
- In Mumbai, as per the Tree Authority set up in 1976, to help in regulating the felling of trees and providing for the planting of an adequate number of new trees through the Garden Department, the compensation ratios are 1:3.
- As per the amendment, the number of trees planted will be equal to the age of the heritage tree that is cut. For instance, if a 52-year-old tree is to be felled, then the party felling the tree will have to plant 52 trees in compensation, with each compensatory tree at least 6-8 ft in height at the time of planting.
- The organization planting the compensation trees will also have to ensure the survival of the plantation for seven years and geo-tag the trees. Such plantations can be carried out either in the same plot or a common amenity plot.
- Through the introduction of a heritage tree, the state environment wants to discourage the cutting of heritage trees.

The Beed model of crop insurance

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asked him for state-wide implementation of the 'Beed model' of the crop insurance scheme Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bhima Yagna (PMFBY).

How does the insurance scheme work?

- Launched in 2016, the flagship PMFBY insures farm losses against inclement weather events. Farmers pay 1.5-2% of the premium with the rest borne by the state and central governments.
- It is a central scheme implemented by state agriculture departments as per central guidelines.
- For farmers, the low rate of premium and relatively decent coverage make the scheme attractive. A premium of Rs 1,300 can insure an hectare of soyabean for Rs 45,000.
- Prior to 2020, the scheme was optional for farmers who did not have loans pending, but mandatory for loanee farmers. Since 2020, it has been optional for all farmers. In Maharashtra, over the years, more non-loanee farmers have enrolled, although it was optional for them.
- A total of 422 lakh farmers in the country had enrolled for the scheme paying a combined premium of Rs 3,018 crore (farmers' share only) and insuring 328 lakh hectares in 2019-20.
- Till date, 184.9 lakh farmers have received claims worth Rs 20,090 crore (according to the Fasal Bhima Yagna website; some kharif claims are yet to be finalised.)



What is Beed model the state government wants implemented?

- Located in the drought-prone Marathwada region, the district of Beed presents a challenge for any insurance company. Farmers here have repeatedly lost crops either to failure of rains or to heavy rains.
- Given the high payouts, insurance companies have sustained losses. The state government had a difficult time getting bids for tenders to implement the scheme in Beed.
- During the 2020 kharif season, tenders for implementation did not attract any bids. So, the state Agriculture Department decided to tweak the guidelines for the district. The state-run Indian Agricultural Insurance Company implemented the scheme.
- Under the new guidelines, the insurance company provided a cover of 110% of the premium collected, with caveats. If the compensation exceeded the cover provided, the state government would pay the bridge amount.
- If the compensation was less than the premium collected, the insurance company would keep 20% of the amount as handling charges and reimburse the rest to the state government.
- Last kharif season, Beed reported premium collection of Rs 803.65 crore (farmers' share was Rs 60.82 crore while the rest was borne by the state and central governments). Kharif claims stood at Rs 8.61 crore, and thus insurance companies reimbursed the state with Rs 6341.41 crore of premium after deducting Rs 160.63 crore as handling charges.
- In a normal season where farmers report minimal losses, the state government is expected to get back money that can form a corpus to fund the scheme for the following year. However, the state government would have to bear the financial liability in case of losses due to extreme weather events.

PMFBY IN MAHARASHTRA

Year	Premium collected	Claims paid
2016-17	₹ 3,995.02 cr	₹ 1,924.72 cr
2017-18	₹ 3,544.33 cr	₹ 2,707.81 cr
2018-19	₹ 4,914.16 cr	₹ 4,655.46 cr
2019-20	₹ 4,925.57 cr	₹ 5,511.68 cr
2020-21	₹ 5,801.73 cr	₹ 823.19 cr*

* Rabi claims for 2020-21 yet to be finalised

Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: NITI Aayog & Piramal Foundation launched Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan in 112 Aspirational Districts.

About the Program:

- The Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan was launched to assist district administrations in providing home-care support to Covid-19 patients who are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms.
- It is part of a special initiative, Aspirational Districts Collaborative, in which local leaders, civil societies and volunteers work with district administrations to address emerging problems across key focus areas of the Aspirational Districts Programme.
- It will be led by district magistrates in partnership with over 1000 local NGOs.
- The program will train over 1 lakh volunteers to connect with patients through inbound/outbound calls.
- The campaign is expected to play a key role in district preparedness for managing nearly 70% of Covid cases at home, reducing pressure on the health system, and stemming the spread of fear amongst the people.
- The campaign will also undertake capacity building of citizens for correct usage of Oxygen concentrators that have been supplied to these districts.

- NGOs will mobilize local volunteers to provide home-care support to those affected, based on the guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Mango export from India

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: Sixteen varieties of mangoes including three GI certified varieties exported to Bahrain from West Bengal & Bihar

What's in News?

- In a major boost to mango exports potential from the eastern region, sixteen varieties of mangoes including three GI certified namely, Khirsapati & Lakshmanbhog (West Bengal), Zardalu (Bihar) are being exported to Bahrain.
- **Khirsapati Mangoes:** The Khirsapati or Himsagar mango is a popular mango cultivar, originating in West Bengal. The inside is yellow to orange in colour and does not have any fibre. The fruit is medium-sized and weighs between 250 and 350 grams, out of which the pulp content is around 77%. It has good keeping quality. It received the GI tag in 2008.
- **Lakshmanbhog Mangoes:** The 'Lakshmanbhog' mango is a mango cultivar from West Bengal. It is considered as the ideal alternative to the Alphonso mango.
- **Zardalu Mangoes:** It is a unique variety of mango grown in Bhagalpur and adjoining districts of Bihar. It is a creamy yellow coloured fruit which possesses exceptional fruit quality and an enticing aroma. It received the GI tag in 2018.

Indo-Thai CORPAT

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: The 31st edition of the **India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol (Indo-Thai CORPAT)** between the Indian Navy and the Royal Thai Navy is being conducted from 09 – 11 June 2021.

Details:

- India and Thailand have been conducting CORPAT biannually along their International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) since 2005.
- CORPAT builds up understanding and interoperability between navies and facilitates institution of measures to prevent and suppress unlawful activities like Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) fishing, drug trafficking, maritime terrorism, armed robbery and piracy.
- It further helps enhance the operational synergy by exchange of information for prevention of smuggling, illegal immigration and for the conduct of SAR operations at sea.

INTERNATIONAL

European Space Agency's EnVision mission to Venus

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Following NASA's footsteps, the European Space Agency (ESA) announced that it has selected EnVision as its next orbiter that will visit Venus sometime in the 2030s. Last week, NASA selected two missions to the planet Venus, Earth's nearest neighbour. The missions called DAVINCI+ and VERITAS have been selected based on their potential for scientific value and the feasibility of their development plans. NASA is expected to allot \$500 million to each of these missions that will launch between 2028-2030.*

What is EnVision?

- EnVision is an ESA led mission with contributions from NASA. It is likely to be launched sometime in the 2030s.
- The earliest launch opportunity for EnVision is 2031, followed by 2032 and 2033. Once launched on an Ariane 6 rocket, the spacecraft will take about 15 months to reach Venus and will take 16 more months to achieve orbit circularisation.
- The spacecraft will carry a range of instruments to study the planet's atmosphere and surface, monitor trace gases in the atmosphere and analyse its surface composition. A radar provided by NASA will help to image and map the surface.
- EnVision will follow another ESA-led mission to Venus called 'Venus Express' (2005-2014) that focussed on atmospheric research and pointed to volcanic hotspots on the planet's surface. Other than this, Japan's Akatsuki spacecraft has also been studying the planet's atmosphere since 2015.

About Venus

- For those on Earth, Venus is the second-brightest object in the sky after the moon. It appears bright because of its thick cloud cover that reflects and scatters light.
- But while Venus, which is the second closest planet to the Sun, is called the Earth's twin because of their similar sizes, the two planets have significant differences between them.
- For one, the planet's thick atmosphere traps heat and is the reason that it is the hottest planet in the solar system, despite coming after Mercury, the closest planet to the Sun. Surface temperatures on Venus can go up to 471 degrees Celsius, which is hot enough to melt lead, NASA notes.
- Further, Venus moves forward on its orbit around the Sun but spins backwards around its axis slowly.
- This means on Venus the Sun rises in the west and sets in the East. One day on Venus is equivalent to 243 Earth days because of its backward spinning, opposite to that of the Earth's and most other planets. Venus also does not have a moon and no rings.

Which missions did NASA announce?

- Both missions called DAVINCI+ and VERITAS are part of the space agency's Discovery Program, which began in 1992 to give scientists the chance to launch some missions that use fewer resources and have shorter developmental times.
- The two selections are a part of the ninth Discovery Program and were made from proposals submitted in 2019.
- DAVINCI+ is short for 'Deep Atmosphere Venus Investigation of Noble gases, Chemistry, and Imaging' and is the first US-led mission to the planet's atmosphere since 1978.
 - It will try to understand Venus' composition to see how the planet formed and evolved. This mission also consists of a descent sphere that will pass through the planet's thick atmosphere and make observations and take measurements of noble gases and other elements.



- Significantly, this mission will also try to return the first high resolution photographs of a geological feature that is unique to Venus. This feature, which is called “tesserae” may be comparable to Earth’s continents, NASA says. The presence of tesserae may suggest that Venus has tectonic plates like Earth.
- The second mission called VERITAS is short for ‘Venus Emissivity, Radio Science, InSAR, Topography, and Spectroscopy’ and will map the planet’s surface to determine its geologic history and understand the reasons why it developed so differently from Earth.
 - VERITAS will orbit Venus with a radar that will help to create a three dimensional reconstruction of its topography which might be able to tell scientists if processes such as plate tectonics and volcanism are still active there.
 - This mission will also map the emissions from Venus’s surface that may help in determining the type of rocks that exist on Venus—a piece of information that is not exactly known yet. It will also determine if active volcanoes are releasing water vapour into the atmosphere.

Aducanumab

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *A new drug for treatment of Alzheimer’s disease holds promise, but comes with several caveats. For one thing, it is not a cure, but is aimed at slowing down cognitive decline. Aducanumab, from the company Biogen, has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) — the first new medication for Alzheimer’s to get FDA approval in nearly two decades.*

What is Alzheimer’s disease?

- Dementia is an umbrella term for a range of conditions that involve a loss of cognitive functioning. Alzheimer’s dementia is the most common type and involves plaques and tangles forming in the brain.
- Forgetfulness and memory problems are often early symptoms, but as the illness progresses, patients tend to become confused, may lose their way around familiar places, and have difficulties with planning and completing simple tasks.
- According to World Health Organization (WHO) estimates for 2017, dementia affects approximately 50 million people worldwide, a number that is projected to grow to 82 million by 2030.
- In India, it is estimated that 5.3 million people (1 in 27) above the age of 60 have dementia in 2020, according to the Dementia in India 2020 report published by the Alzheimer’s and Related Disorders Society of India. This is projected to rise to 7.6 million by 2030.

How does the new drug work?

- The hallmark of Alzheimer’s disease is the accumulation of the debris caused by the breakdown of neurons in the brain, leading to plaque formation. The drug aducanumab, with brand name Aduhelm, is a monoclonal antibody that is designed to reduce the presence of amyloid beta, a protein that forms plaques in the brain.
- Aduhelm (aducanumab) aims at altering the course of the disease by slowing the deterioration of brain function.



How is the UN Secretary-General appointed?

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The United Nations Security Council formally approved Secretary-General António Guterres for a second term, assuring that the former Prime Minister of Portugal retains the top job for five more years starting January 1, 2022.*

How is the UN Secretary-General chosen?

- The Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. The Secretary-General's selection is therefore subject to the veto of any of the five permanent members of the Security Council, as per the UN website.
- Essentially, the Secretary-General is chosen during closed-door sessions of the Security Council, and approval by the General Assembly is seen more as a formality.
- The five permanent members of the 15-nation-strong Security Council – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – are the most powerful players in this process as any one of them can eliminate a candidature by a veto.
- The US used this power to deny Egypt's Boutros-Ghali a second term in 1997 and China did the same in 1981 for denying Austria's Waldheim a third term.
- The 10 elected non-permanent members of the Security Council, of which India is currently a part, do not have veto powers, but their backing is still crucial as a candidate requires at least nine out of 15 votes to be recommended for the top job.
- For any candidate to have a real chance at being considered for the top post, a recommendation by any UN member state is essential. In the current race, Guterres was endorsed by Portugal for a second term, and none of his seven other challengers received backing from a member state, making Guterres all but certain of retaining his job.
- A resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 2015 made the selection process more open and transparent, allowing member states for the first time to see basic information about all candidates, including their resumes, and to question them at open sessions, as per the Associated Press.
- Guterres was appointed in 2016 under the 2015 rules, and the same process was followed this year, which involved holding a question and answer session with UN diplomats in the General Assembly in May, followed by private meetings with members of the Security Council.

What does the UN Secretary-General do?

- The UN Charter refers to the Secretary-General as the body's "chief administrative officer", who shall act in that capacity and perform "such other functions as are entrusted" to them by the Security Council, General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and other United Nations organs.
- The UN website defines the role as "equal parts diplomat and advocate, civil servant and CEO," and "a symbol of United Nations ideals and a spokesperson for the interests of the world's peoples, in particular the poor and vulnerable among them".
- The Secretary-General's day-to-day work includes attendance at sessions of United Nations bodies; consultations with world leaders, government officials, and others; and worldwide travel intended to keep the Secretary-General in touch with the peoples of the UN member states, as per the body's website.
- So far, all Secretaries-General have come from member states considered to be small- or medium-sized neutral powers, and a regional rotation is observed, as per the Council on Foreign Relations. All nine occupants of the post have been men.

Previous UN chiefs

- Ban Ki-moon (Korea), who held office from January 2007 to December 2016;



- Kofi A. Annan (Ghana), who held office from January 1997 to December 2006;
- Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Egypt), who held office from January 1992 to December 1996;
- Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (Peru), who served from January 1982 to December 1991;
- Kurt Waldheim (Austria), who held office from January 1972 to December 1981;
- U Thant (Burma, now Myanmar), who served from November 1961, when he was appointed acting Secretary-General (he was formally appointed Secretary-General in November 1962) to December 1971;
- Dag Hammarskjöld (Sweden), who served from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in Africa in September 1961; and
- Trygve Lie (Norway), who held office from February 1946 to his resignation in November 1952.

CIBER-2

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: A NASA-funded rocket's launch window will open at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, USA. The aim of this mission is to count the number of stars that exist in the Universe.

While this is not the first time that such a mission has been undertaken, the CIBER-2 instrument has been improved upon to see if any stars had been undercounted in the previous counting attempts.

What is CIBER-2?

- In order to roughly estimate the number of stars in the Universe, scientists have estimated that on average each galaxy consists of about 100 million stars, but this figure is not exact. The figure of 100 million could easily be an underestimation, probably by a factor of 10 or more.
- To put this into perspective, an average of 100 million stars in each galaxy (there are an estimated 2 trillion of them as per NASA), would give a total figure of one hundred quintillion stars or 1 with 21 zeroes after it. NASA notes that if this figure is accurate it would mean that for every grain of sand on Earth, there are more than ten stars.
- But this calculation assumes that all stars are inside galaxies, which might not be true and this is what the CIBER-2 instrument will try to find out.
- This instrument will launch aboard a sounding rocket, a small suborbital rocket that will carry scientific instruments on brief trips into space before it falls back to Earth for recovery.
- The European Space Agency (ESA) says there could be 100 thousand million stars in the Milky Way alone. So if there are 10¹¹ to 10¹² stars in the galaxy and around the same number of galaxies, it would mean a total of 10²² to 10²⁴ stars in the Universe.



How will CIBER-2 count stars?

- Once the instrument is above Earth's atmosphere, it will survey a patch of sky that will include dozens of clusters of galaxies.
- Even so, NASA notes that the instrument will not actually count individual stars but it will instead detect the extragalactic background light, which is all of the light that has been emitted throughout the history of the Universe.



- From all of this extragalactic background light, the CIBER-2 will focus on a portion of this called cosmic infrared background, which is emitted by some of the most common stars. Essentially, this approach is aiming to look at how bright this light is to give scientists an estimate of how many of these stars are out there.
- The ESA infrared space observatory Herschel also counted the number of galaxies in infrared and measured their luminosity previously.

The For the People Act

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Senator Joe Manchin, the Democrat who represents the state of West Virginia, Sunday said he will not vote for a partisan legislation that wants to expand voting rights. This bill aims to combat a series of bills introduced in Republican controlled states recently that aim to make it harder for people to cast their votes.*

What is this bill?

- The bill in question is called the “For the People Act” and was passed by the House of Representatives on March 3 this year. On March 17, a Senate version of this bill was introduced and an earlier version was passed by the House in March 2019.
- The Brennan Center for Justice notes that this “historic legislation” will make it “easier to vote in federal elections, end congressional gerrymandering, overhaul federal campaign finance laws, increase safeguards against foreign interference and strengthen government ethics rules”.
- The bill aims to counter a series of others that have been passed recently by Republican legislatures and are meant to restrict voting rights. In May, one such bill titled SB 7 backed by Republican lawmakers in Texas was passed in the House of Representatives.
- Broadly, this bill aims to limit how local officials can expand voting rights, set new rules for voting by mail and set new rules for removing people from voter rolls. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, this year, various states have already enacted more than 20 laws that will make it harder for Americans to vote.
- Since the US general elections last year, mail-in voting has been a contentious issue in the country, especially after Republican candidate Donald Trump repeatedly called this process into question and alleged that mail-in voting allows for greater chances of fraud.
- Critics of the SB 7 bill see the move as an attempt by Republicans to make it harder for voters, especially minorities to cast their vote.

‘Sea snot’ outbreak in Turkey

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *There has been growing environmental concern in Turkey over the accumulation of ‘sea snot’, a slimy layer of grey or green sludge in the country’s seas, which can cause considerable damage to the marine ecosystem.*

Details:

- Turkey’s Sea of Marmara, that connects the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea, has witnessed the largest outbreak of ‘sea snot’.

- The sludge has also been spotted in the adjoining Black and Aegean seas.
- As the slimy layer spreads across the country's seas, there are urgent calls now to tackle the crisis.
- Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said considerable steps will be taken to solve the problem and protect the country's seas. But what is 'sea snot' and how did it cause the present crisis? We explain.

What is causing 'sea snot' in the seas of Turkey?

- 'Sea snot' is marine mucilage that is formed when algae are overloaded with nutrients as a result of water pollution combined with the effects of climate change.
- The nutrient overload occurs when algae feast on warm weather caused by global warming. Water pollution adds to the problem.
- Environmental experts have said that overproduction of phytoplankton caused by climate change and the uncontrolled dumping of household and industrial waste into the seas has led to the present crisis.
- The thick slimy layer of organic matter, which looks like a viscous, brown and foamy substance, has spread through the sea south of Istanbul and also blanketed harbours and shorelines.
- Erdogan has said dumping of sewage in the sea along with rising temperatures is causing the crisis. He has blamed the outbreak on discharge of untreated water from cities like Istanbul, which is home to 16 million people, into the seas.
- A 'sea snot' outbreak was first recorded in the country in 2007. Back then, it was also spotted in the Aegean Sea near Greece. But the current outbreak in the Sea of Marmara is by far the biggest in the country's history.

How badly can the crisis affect the marine ecosystem?

- The growth of the mucilage, which floats up on the surface of the sea like a brown phlegm, is posing a severe threat to the marine ecosystem of the country.
- Divers have said that it has caused mass deaths among the fish population, and also killed other aquatic organisms such as corals and sponges.
- The mucilage is now covering the surface of the sea and has also spread to 80-100 feet below the surface. If unchecked, this can collapse to the bottom and cover the sea floor, causing major damage to the marine ecosystem.
- Over a period of time, it could end up poisoning all aquatic life, including fishes, crabs, oysters, mussels and sea stars.
- Besides aquatic life, the 'sea snot' outbreak has also affected the livelihoods of fishermen. They have said that the sludge is getting collected in their nets, making them so heavy that they break or get lost. Moreover, the mucilage coating the strings make the nets visible to fish and keep them away.
- Some fishermen have also pointed out that the problem has already existed for a long time and aquatic life was getting poisoned by the dumping of waste and global warming. Over the years, their catch has considerably reduced and there have been less fish in the sea. This has compounded the economic crisis for fishermen.

G7

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Advanced economies making up the G7 grouping have reached a "historic" deal on taxing multinational companies. Finance ministers meeting in London agreed to counter tax avoidance through measures to make companies pay in the countries where they do business. They also agreed in principle to ratify a global minimum corporate tax rate to counter the possibility of countries undercutting each other to*

attract investments. The deal involves the US, the UK, Germany, France, Canada, Italy and Japan, and is likely to be put before a G20 meeting in July.

What are the decisions taken?

- The first decision that has been ratified is to force multinationals to pay taxes where they operate.
- The second decision in the agreement commits states to a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15% to avoid countries undercutting each other.
- The agreement will now be discussed in detail at a meeting of G20 financial ministers and central bank governors in July.

Why the minimum rate?

- The decision to ratify a 15% floor rate follows from a declaration of war on low-tax jurisdictions around the globe announced by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who had urged the world's 20 advanced nations to move in the direction of adopting a minimum global corporate income tax in April.
- She said in a virtual speech to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs that the move to put a minimum rate in place attempted to reverse a "30-year race to the bottom" in which countries have resorted to slashing corporate tax rates to attract multinational corporations.
- The US proposal had proposed a higher 21 per cent minimum corporate tax rate, coupled with cancelling exemptions on income from countries that do not legislate a minimum tax to discourage the shifting of multinational operations and profits overseas.
- One of the reasons the US pushed for this is purely domestic. It aims to somewhat offset any disadvantages that might arise from the Biden administration's proposed increase in the US corporate tax rate. The proposed increase to 28% from 21% would partially reverse the previous Trump administration's cut in tax rates on companies from 35% to 21% by way of a 2017 tax legislation.
- More importantly, the US proposal includes an increase to the minimum tax that was included in the Trump administration's tax legislation, from 10.5% to 21% — the benchmark minimum corporate tax rate that Yellen has propounded for other G20 countries.

Landmark deal

A look at some key points from the deal and why it is significant for India

- The G7 move will close loopholes for MNCs to shift profits and tax revenues to low-tax jurisdictions
- OECD has been overseeing tax talks among 140 countries to curb tax base erosion
- According to the U.K.-based Tax Justice Network, India suffers an annual loss of \$10.3 billion from global tax abuse

■ A November 2020 study by TJN estimates that countries are losing \$427 billion every year to tax havens



Who are the targets?

- Apart from low-tax jurisdictions, the proposal for a minimum corporate tax are tailored to address the low effective rates of tax shelled out by some of the world's biggest corporations, including digital giants such as Apple, Alphabet and Facebook, as well as major corporations such as Nike and Starbucks.
- These companies typically rely on complex webs of subsidiaries to Hoover profits out of major markets into low-tax countries such as Ireland or Caribbean nations such as the British Virgin Islands or the Bahamas, or to central American nations such as Panama.
- The US Treasury loses nearly \$50 billion a year to tax cheats, according to the Tax Justice Network report, with Germany and France also among the top losers. India's annual tax loss due to corporate tax abuse is estimated at over \$10 billion, according to the report.

What are the problems with the plan?



- Apart from the challenges of getting all major nations on the same page, especially since this impinges on the right of the sovereign to decide a nation's tax policy, the proposal has other pitfalls.
- A global minimum rate would essentially take away a tool that countries use to push policies that suit them.
- For instance, in the backdrop of the pandemic, IMF and World Bank data suggest that developing countries with less ability to offer mega stimulus packages may experience a longer economic hangover than developed nations.
- A lower tax rate is a tool they can use to alternatively push economic activity. Also, a global minimum tax rate will do little to tackle tax evasion.

Group of Seven (G7):

- It is an **intergovernmental organisation** that was **formed in 1975**.
- The bloc **meets annually** to discuss issues of common interest like global economic governance, international security and energy policy.
- The G7 **does not have a formal constitution or a fixed headquarters**. The **decisions** taken by leaders during **annual summits** are **non-binding**.
 - The **groundwork for the summit**, including matters to be discussed and follow-up meetings, is **done by the "sherpas"**, who are generally personal representatives or members of diplomatic staff such as ambassadors.
 - The **leaders of important international organizations** like European Union, **IMF**, World Bank and the United Nations are also invited.

Mains

GS II

The rope of federalism and an unwanted tug-of-war

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Centre-West Bengal controversy on the conduct of Bengal's former Chief Secretary, Alapan Bandyopadhyay in the final days of his tenure, in May, has thrown up several political and administrative issues that deserve our attention for the future health of our federal polity.*

Details:

- In the overall context, there are two elements which need to be kept in mind while discussing this subject.
- First, India is a 'union of states' and in this union, the State governments are not subordinate agencies of the central government.
- There are, no doubt, matters enunciated in our Constitution, where the Centre's decisions have primacy over those of the State governments, but this does not extend to holding of meetings, even if these are called by the Prime Minister.
- A State's functionaries — both political and administrative — are requested or advised to attend such meetings and this necessitates courtesy and consideration on the part of both sides.
- It is possible that due to the no-holds-barred electoral campaigns in the recently held Assembly elections, which included West Bengal, these considerations were given a go-by; the result is an unseemly controversy which is best avoided for healthy Centre-State relations.

Relief and the third tier

- Second, the meeting that became a flashpoint was the one called by the Prime Minister on May 28 to review cyclone relief work — in connection with cyclone Yaas — in West Bengal.
- The allegation is that Mr. Bandyopadhyay reached the meeting late and then left abruptly along with West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, to visit the cyclone-affected areas in her State. In real life, most relief and rehabilitation work in the event of a natural calamity or management of a disaster is of a local nature and is carried out by the district, sub-divisional and village level officials working under the State governments.
- Over time, the States have conceded space to the Centre for disaster management for getting financial, technical and logistical support. Even then, the comprehensive framework under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 operates mainly at the State, district and local levels.
- The conduct of Mr. Bandyopadhyay, an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, must be seen in this overall context along with the central government's reactions which together raise issues regarding the norms of civil service conduct, political and administrative arrogance and revengeful behaviour.
- New Delhi has sent showcause notices and a charge sheet for Mr. Bandyopadhyay's failure in fully and properly participating in the meeting called by the Prime Minister in West Bengal for cyclone relief review. He has since replied to the Centre.

The services and fine balance

- The All-India Services, that includes the IAS, were conceived by the makers of our Constitution to provide uniformity and high standards of public service in both the Centre and the States, and to provide a measure of administrative unity in our diverse and plural society.

- The architecture has been exquisitely designed. To ensure quality and as a measure of convenience, IAS officers are recruited by the Union Public Service Commission and formally appointed by the President of India.
- But they are ultimately borne in State cadres which makes them subject to the control of the respective State governments as well, especially when they are in the employment of their States. To that extent their position is somewhat different from that of the central services who go through similar recruitment procedures but are under the Centre's total control.
- The IAS officers work for the central government on "deputation" from their respective State cadres and during their central deputation, their loyalty is of course to the central government.
- IAS officers will face acute trust-deficit, if while working for a State government, they show preferential allegiance or loyalty to central government functionaries by reason of the fact that they were initially appointed by the President of India.

High-handed approach

- As a measure of the vindictive assertion of its rights and power, Mr. Bandyopadhyay was initially called to the Centre on 'deputation' and asked to report in New Delhi on the day he was to superannuate. It is a different matter that he chose to retire on that day instead of availing himself of the three-month extension given to him earlier.
- Several commentators have pointed out that the "concurrence" of the relevant State government is required before an officer of its cadre is deputed to the Centre. Also, there must be prior consultation between the Centre and the State for the latter's viewpoint to be overruled. The Central government did not exactly cover itself with glory by violating these requirements.
- Further, action has been initiated against Mr. Bandyopadhyay under Section 51(b) of the Disaster Management Act for failing to comply with the Centre's direction to attend the review meeting taken by the Prime Minister.
- This is an absurd interpretation of the provision that is meant to deal with cases of defiance of the lawful orders or action of the competent authorities (handling disaster management) under the Act. Besides, Mr. Bandyopadhyay was with the Chief Minister, his administrative boss.
- It is obvious that in the performance of his official duties, an All-India service officer, or any officer for that matter, will have to act under the direction of his official superior.
- Obviously, Mr. Bandyopadhyay listened to his boss; this is what it should be when IAS officers work for a State government or any other government; otherwise, there will be chaos and indiscipline in administration.
- It is very unfortunate that for some inexplicable reasons, a mountain has been made of a molehill, as the cliché goes. In these circumstances one misses the sagacity, wisdom and sophistication of some of our tall political leaders who steered the destiny of our nation in the past.

State interventions, Lakshadweep's future

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Lakshadweep Administration, which is now facing a storm over its draft rules introduced by its Administrator, has now provided a fresh rationale for its proposals, shifting from public policy to public purpose ignoring public interest, whereas the strategic issue is the interplay of ecological fragility, insular cultural geography and strategic location.*

Details:



- There are two competing visions for its future. NITI Aayog, in 2019, identified water villas and land-based tourism projects as the development issue faced by the islands, suggested zoning based on land acquisition and focused on sustainable development ignoring the fragile environment and culture.
- The Integrated Island Management Plan prepared under the guidance of the Supreme Court and National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, in 2016, had rejected ‘home stays’ in view of the strict social customs and strong resistance of the vast majority.
- It stipulated that development programmes be implemented in consultation with the elected local self-government bodies adhering to scientifically determined plans.

Questionable public purpose

- The rationale, or thinking, of the appointed Administrator of the Union Territory, planning for flight loads of tourists, through four controversial proposals — the Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation, Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation, Lakshadweep Panchayat Regulation and Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation — as “regulations of peace, progress and good government”, has apparently not even been able to convince the Union Home Minister.
- For the local people, and across the political spectrum, these changes are arbitrary, authoritarian and will destroy the way of life. The Administrator’s fresh response is reliance on the power of government or ‘public purpose’ for acquiring private land, unnecessarily opening the door to conflict and the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court in the case of Dev Sharan vs State of Uttar Pradesh, in 2011, pointed out that, “Any attempt by the State to acquire land by promoting a public purpose to benefit a particular group of people or to serve any particular interest at the cost of the interest of a large section of people especially of the common people defeats the very concept of public purpose....”
- The proposals have been challenged before the High Court of Kerala, which had, in 2019, in a separate case, recognised the special status given to the inhabitants for protecting their ethnic culture and traditions, and to maintain the serene atmosphere in these islands without unnecessary interference by mainlanders.
- Lakshadweep is unique. It is an egalitarian coconut tree owning society, with little economic inequality, a very high level of both literacy and unemployment. The Muslim community is designated as Scheduled Tribes.
- The land area is fully covered with coconut trees, the main agricultural crop, and fisheries is the main economic activity employing a quarter of the working population. Electricity generation is mainly through diesel generators and is expensive and solar electricity has limitations as it requires a large land area. They need employment in the mainland.

Review tourism strategy

- The Lakshadweep Administration has framed the development issue as the development of the islands on the lines of the Maldives, whereas the fact is that it is adopting a very different strategy without any real consultation.
- In the Maldives, tourism since the 1970s is centred on water villas in uninhabited islands, ensuring that very few coconut trees are cut with limited home stays introduced in 2015, and few cultural and other conflicts. Second, a ‘one island, one resort’ policy has kept pressure on reefs low due to a wide distribution of the tourist population.
- Third, the business model is about giving coral reefs economic significance where rich and healthy reefs are essential for private capital’s economic returns.
- Fourth, tourists come because of the natural beauty and the sheer amount of marine life; resort owners commit to conserve the reefs and divers at the resorts are quick to report illegal activities.
- Fifth, regulation is limited to ban on reef fishing and collection of corals, having no centrality to land acquisition.
- In Lakshadweep, the separation of resorts from villages, including for drinking water, sewage disposal and electricity, gives priority to the fragile ecosystem, socio-economic conditions and well-being of the

inhabitants. Groundwater occurs as a thin lens floating over the seawater and is tapped by open wells replenished by the monsoon; all the inhabited islands have a scarcity of drinking water supply.

- The conventional method of sewage treatment is not feasible because of the coral sandy strata and high water table. The existing water balance is already under stress and inhabited villages cannot accommodate tourism. Why the Ministry of Environment is quiet about this is not clear.

Political insensitivity

- Meanwhile, public interest is being re-defined, shifting the debate from private tourism to urbanisation, both inappropriate for inhabited islands.
- Despite inhabited islands being defined as ‘cities’ in the Census, they do not need to be developed as ‘smart cities’ with a focus on infrastructure requiring large-scale construction and land acquisition.
- The irony is that the Administration has anticipated public opposition and, despite there being no case of murder, robbery or local involvement in smuggling, the new draft legislation seeks preventive detention for ‘anti-social activities’, and covers “cruel person” and “depredator of environment”.
- The relation between state and society is being arbitrarily changed, despite the constitutional protection.
- The powers of the panchayats have been withdrawn on grounds of corruption, an unusual step. The two-child policy for those seeking election to panchayats does not exist in other Union Territories or States.
- A ban on beef has been instituted, contrary to the practice in Northeast India. Liquor is being permitted for tourists in inhabited islands.

Innovation needed

- Lakshadweep is a uni-district Union Territory with a top-heavy administrative system of more than half-a-dozen All-India Service officers essentially creating work for themselves.
- Interventions should be limited to setting boundary conditions for both resorts and development institutions, with income from taxing resorts given to the inhabitants.
- Active state intervention should be limited to generation of electricity in partnership with public sector units, and water, sewage and health as well as education, technology-enabled employment in call centres and future employment in the mainland.

COVID-19 vaccines and the indemnity clause

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Union government is in talks with foreign manufacturers of COVID-19 vaccines on their demand for indemnity from liability as a condition for selling their vaccines to the country. Pfizer, which supplies the Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA vaccine, is said to have requested that the government indemnify it from any claim that may arise from vaccine users in the future based on any adverse effects after getting the jab. No decision has been made yet on the request. However, it has already given rise to a similar demand from domestic vaccine-maker Serum Institute of India (SII), which says all players should be treated the same way.*

What is indemnity and why is it sought?

- Indemnity is a form of contract. The law on drugs in India does not have a provision for indemnity related to the grant of approval for any new drug or vaccine in the country.
- If at all any indemnity is to be granted to any company for a particular drug or vaccine, it can only be in the form of an indemnity bond executed on behalf of the government of India, or a clause or set of

clauses in any contract that the government may sign with the supplier. There appears to be no precedent for any company getting such indemnity in India for any drug.

- Section 124 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872, defines a contract of indemnity as one by which one party promises to save the other from any loss caused to the latter.
- Once the government of India grants such indemnity to the vaccine manufacturer or importer, it would mean that if a particular vaccine is perceived to have caused death or any lasting damage to a recipient, any claim of compensation arising from it will have to be met by the government, and not by the company. In the event of a court ordering payment, the company will be in a position to recover the amount from the government.

Is the demand for or grant of indemnity a standard practice?

- Indemnity is essentially a contractual matter between the supplier and recipient, and therefore, a good deal of confidentiality is attached to such agreements. Pfizer is believed to have obtained such indemnity from several countries, including the United Kingdom, from which it has received supply orders. However, it has declined to discuss the issue in public.
- Normally, it is the company applying for approval of a new drug or vaccine that submits itself to various conditions, processes and regulations.
- Approvals in most countries come with stringent conditions regarding conformity to national guidelines, quality standards, safety assessments and requirements regarding various phases of clinical trials.
- For imported drugs, a local clinical trial may not be required if it has been approved and marketed in countries specified by the Central Licensing Authority and if no major adverse events have been reported.
- However, given the peculiar global situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the severe shortage of vaccines faced by countries such as India, which urgently needs to inoculate hundreds of millions of people, some vaccine suppliers may be in a position to set conditions.

What have the overseas companies got so far?

- The Drugs Controller-General of India has already taken a big step towards fast-tracking the import of vaccines by dispensing with the need for local trials.
- Earlier, the Centre had decided that foreign-produced vaccines that had been granted emergency approval for restricted use by regulators in the U.S., the U.K., the European Union and Japan, or those included in the WHO's Emergency Use Listing, would be granted Emergency Use Authorisation in India. The condition was that there would be a post-approval parallel bridging trial.
- However, this condition was waived a few days ago and no bridging trial is now necessary. The significance of this exemption is that both the delay attached to such trials and the risk of adverse events to participants have been avoided.
- The New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules, 2019, set down stringent regulations for grant of approval as well as for trials.
- The Rules provide for payment of compensation by the sponsor of the trial or its representative to any participant who dies or suffers disability as a result of such trials. Exemption from these trials has reduced the risk to overseas manufacturers. However, companies probably fear that they would still be liable under the ordinary law of tort, arising from future claims by anyone adversely affected after receiving the shot.

What does India gain by giving indemnity?

- In the absence of indemnity, overseas manufacturers may load the risk onto the price of the vaccines, making each dose more expensive.
- By indemnifying the companies in respect of these vaccines, the government of India may be able to negotiate lower prices and higher volumes. It may help accelerate India's national vaccination drive.



- On the flip side, the government may be forced to make it a level playing field for local manufacturers, too, by extending indemnity to them, and thereby inviting upon itself the entire risk associated with more than a billion vaccine shots.

U.S. delays tariffs against digital services tax

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: During the past week, the United States announced and then immediately suspended a 25% tariff on \$2 billion of imports from six countries, including India, as a retaliatory measure against each of these countries' imposition of a digital services tax impacting the giant tech corporations of Silicon Valley, including the likes of Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft. The purported logic of suspending the tariff for up to 180 days after announcing it is to allow time for ongoing international tax negotiations to continue, and, in the words of U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai, seek "a multilateral solution ... while maintaining the option of imposing tariffs under Section 301 if warranted in the future". Other than India, the countries slapped with this tariff proposal are Austria, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

What is the basis of the U.S.'s action?

- The essence of the argument made by the USTR office is that a "Section 301" investigation initiated by the Trump administration in June 2020 found digital services taxes imposed by each of these countries to be discriminatory against U.S. tech firms.
- The Biden administration was likely aware that the deadline for authorising tariff action based on these investigations would have lapsed this week, thus necessitating the approval of the 25% tariff.
- The immediate suspension of the tariff is likely in part a recognition of the fact that the six countries potentially impacted are limping through a feeble post-COVID-19 recovery and opening a new trade war front could be damaging not only to them, but also to the broader global economy.
- The combination of depressed economic activity owing to the effects of the pandemic and tectonic shifts in global supply chains engendered by the Trump administration's trade war with China has already left many economies in a weakened condition.

Why is Section 301 significant?

- Under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, the USTR enjoys a range of responsibilities and authority to investigate and take action to enforce U.S. national interests under trade agreements and respond to certain foreign trade practices.
- Until recently, this facility was used by multiple administrations to build cases and pursue dispute settlements at the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- Under former President Donald Trump, however, this authority was used to promote what his administration considered to be "free, fair and reciprocal" trade, specifically to close the gap or balance of trade between the U.S. and foreign governments in cases where the latter had deployed trade practices that allegedly disadvantaged or discriminated against U.S. firms.
- To a great extent, the Trump administration trained its Section 301 guns on China, leading to an escalating tariff war that ultimately engulfed the final years of its tenure.
- Now, the Biden administration appears to be unwilling to walk back Trump-era 301 investigations in their entirety; rather, it appears to be seeking a middle path of waving the stick of the USTR while allowing some space for continued tax negotiations with the nations concerned.

How will it affect India?



- The Finance Bill, 2021, introduced an amendment imposing a 2% digital service tax on trade and services by non-resident e-commerce operators with a turnover of over ₹2 crore. According to reports, early estimates by the USTR suggest this tax could yield approximately \$55 million annually.
- Negotiations with Washington that may result in the scaling back of this tax would imply that a part of this revenue would be lost to the exchequer, depending on the final rate agreed.
- On the other hand, close to \$118 million of India's exports to the U.S. would be subject to the tariff proposed by the USTR, impacting 26 categories of goods, including basmati rice, cigarette paper, cultured pearls, semi-precious stones, certain gold and silver jewellery items and specific types of furniture products.
- India will have to consider its options carefully at this juncture. On the one hand, it would seek to avoid getting into any escalating matrix of retaliatory taxation with the U.S., as that would damage its growth prospects at a crucial point in its laborious recovery.
- However, it will also not be able to simply abandon its articulated intent to tax global tech firms, which have generally enjoyed low-tax operations across numerous jurisdictions.

First human infection of the H10N3 bird flu

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: China has confirmed the first instance of human infection from H10N3, a rare strain of a virus that normally infects poultry. On Tuesday, the National Health Commission of Beijing reported that a 41-year-old man in the eastern Jiangsu province had been infected with the rare strain but no details were given as to how he caught it.

What do we know so far about H10N3?

- Chinese authorities said the 41-year-old man was the first human case of an infection with the strain. They said the person was hospitalised on April 28 and was diagnosed with the strain after a month.
- The Beijing-based National Health Commission said the strain has low pathogenesis — the ability to cause disease — among birds, implying that the virus did not spread easily among poultry and was likely to be restricted to limited populations.
- “As long as avian influenza viruses circulate in poultry, sporadic infection of avian influenza in humans is not surprising, which is a vivid reminder that the threat of an influenza pandemic is persistent,” Reuters quoted the World Health Organization (WHO) as saying.

What is avian influenza?

- H5N1 is the most common virus causing bird flu, or avian influenza. Though largely restricted to birds, and often fatal to them, it can cross over to other animals, as well as humans.
- According to the WHO, the H5N1 was first discovered in humans in 1997 and has killed almost 60% of those infected. Though it is not known to transmit easily among humans, the risk remains.
- There are several subtypes of the avian influenza virus. Since 2003, these avian and other influenza viruses have spread from Asia to Europe and Africa. In 2013, human infections with the influenza A(H7N9) virus were reported in China.
- An outbreak of the H7N9 strain killed around 300 people in 2016 and 2017. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, “All known subtypes of influenza A viruses can infect birds, except subtypes H17N10 and H18N11, which have only been found in bats.
- Only two influenza A virus subtypes (i.e., H1N1, and H3N2) are currently in general circulation among people.

- Some subtypes are found in other infected animal species. For example, H7N7 and H3N8 virus infections can cause illness in horses, and H3N8 virus infection cause illness in horses and dogs.” So far, the H10N3 appears mild and not very transmissible, and hence, its categorisation status remains unclear.

What are the typical symptoms of an avian influenza infection?

- According to the WHO, avian, swine and other zoonotic influenza virus infections in humans may cause disease with symptoms like mild upper respiratory tract infection (fever and cough), early sputum production and rapid progression to severe pneumonia, sepsis with shock, acute respiratory distress syndrome, and even death.
- Conjunctivitis, gastrointestinal symptoms, encephalitis and encephalopathy have also been reported in varying degrees depending on the subtype.

Why are bird flu viruses a cause of concern?

- Speculation about the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 has heightened worries about animal- and bird-borne viruses. The emergence of new strains, particularly among domesticated animals and birds, is a story of evolution and inevitability, and sporadic reports of new viruses infecting humans abound.
- An outbreak of the H5N8 virus in birds led to hundreds of thousands of poultry being culled in various European countries.
- In February, Russia reported that seven poultry workers in a plant were infected by the H5N8 strain. All of them recovered. India, too, faced an outbreak of the virus in flocks of poultry in January and undertook culling.

GS III

Making peace with nature

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *There has never been a more urgent need to restore damaged ecosystems. The COVID-19 pandemic is a direct result of the degradation of natural areas, species loss, and exploitation. Zoonotic pathogens are more frequently jumping from wildlife to humans, creating public health emergencies. Healthier ecosystems and a healthier respect for the wild spaces of our world will give us a healthier planet and healthier people.*

Details:

- It is time to change how we cultivate our land, use our soils, exploit coastal and marine ecosystems, and manage our forests. The damage has been done over decades and the destruction cannot be reversed overnight.
- But we need to start somewhere. That’s why this World Environment Day, the UN Environment Programme and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization launched the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean.
- India must participate actively in this decade of restoration. Ten years of sustained action to protect and revive the country’s ecosystems will help India to end poverty by enhancing livelihoods, combat climate change by reviving natural carbon stores, and halt the collapse of biodiversity by rebuilding homes for wildlife. Ecosystem restoration benefits people and nature.

Path towards restoration

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already set India on this path. In 2019, he announced that India would raise its ambition for restoration, promising an increase in restored degraded land from 21 to 26 million hectares by 2030. There are several steps we can take to build on this commitment.
 - First, there must be a concerted effort to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.
 - Climate change is dangerous to humans, but also to the fragile ecosystems that sustain all life on earth.
 - Globally, we must reduce net carbon dioxide emissions by 45% by 2030 compared to 2010. And we must reach net-zero emissions by 2050 to have a hope of achieving the 1.5°C Paris Agreement target.
 - India needs to work towards this by transforming energy systems, land use, agriculture, forest protection, urban development, infrastructure, and lifestyles. Crucially, this has to be aligned with conserving and restoring biodiversity and minimising air and water pollution and waste.
 - Given the interconnectedness of nature, all problems have to be dealt with simultaneously. We already have the goals, targets, commitments, and mechanisms under international environmental conventions that can direct this ambition. Let us use them.
- Second, we need to transform our economic, financial and production systems towards sustainability.
 - Including natural capital in decision-making, eliminating environmentally harmful subsidies, and investing in low-carbon and nature-friendly technologies are key elements of this.
 - By making investments in sustainable development financially attractive, we can shift the financial flows and investment patterns towards sustainability.
 - We already have the knowledge base, the scientific expertise, and the policymaking know-how through national and international scientific bodies that can guide this process. Let us use it.
- Finally, the power to revive our environment lies with us as individuals.
 - For a better future, India must work towards creating food systems that work with nature, reduce waste, and are adaptive to change and resilient to shocks.
 - Empowering small-scale farmers and women farmers, changing patterns of consumption and challenging social norms and business practices are key.
 - This can be achieved through capacity building and education. We already have the power to effect change through cooperation and collaboration, and through changing how we consume, travel and use energy. Let us not shirk this responsibility.
 - As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has stated, making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century.

Current Affairs Quiz

- 1) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Performance Grading Index (2019-20)?
1. The Index, with a set of 70 parameters, was prepared to catalyse transformational change in the field of industrial development.
 2. The index provides grades to the states and Union territories, as opposed to ranks.
 3. Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Kerala reached the Level-1 category of Performance Grading Index (PGI).

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 2 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 2 and 3 only

Answer : a

- 2) The EAGLE Act, 2021 was recently introduced in -

- a. France
- b. Republic of China
- c. Russian Federation
- d. United States of America

Answer : d

- 3) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Cosmic Infrared Background Experiment ?

1. The mission of the experiment is to count the number of asteroids that exists in the Kuiper belt.
2. It is joint initiative of ISRO and European Space Agency which will use a research rocket.
3. CIBER-2 will survey a patch of sky that will include dozens of clusters of galaxies.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : b

It is a mission of NASA that aims to count the number of stars that exist in the Universe.

- 4) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Global Minimum Tax (GMT) ?

1. It is a minimum corporate tax rate for corporations all over the world to pay regardless of which jurisdiction they are registered in.
2. It would help countries to tackle Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPF).

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

- 5) Consider the following statements with respective to T Cells:

1. T cells are born from hematopoietic stem cells, found in the bone marrow.



2. It can be distinguished from other lymphocytes by the presence of a T-cell receptor on their cell surface.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

6) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to Corbevax?

- 1. It is the first “recombinant protein sub-unit” Covid vaccine, made up of spike protein on SARS-CoV-2.
- 2. It is indigenously produced by Serum Institute of India along with ICMR.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

Corbevax

It is manufactured by Biological E, headquartered in Hyderabad.

7) The Pran Vayu Devta Pension Scheme has been launched in -

- a. Punjab
- b. Karnataka
- c. Himachal Pradesh
- d. Haryana

Answer : d

8) Testing of Anti Hail Guns to protect crops from hailstorms will be conducted in-

- a. Arunachal Pradesh
- b. Sikkim
- c. Himachal Pradesh
- d. Uttarakhand

Answer : c

9) Match the following:

GI tagged Mango Variety – States

- 1. Zardalu – a. West Bengal
- 2. Gir Kesar – b. Bihar
- 3. Appemidi – c. Gujarat
- 4. Lakshmanbhog – d. Karnataka

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- a. 1-a; 2-c; 3-b; 4-d
- b. 1-c; 2-a; 3-d; 4-b
- c. 1-d; 2-c; 3-b; 4-a
- d. 1-b; 2-c; 3-d; 4-a

Answer : d

10) The Global Liveability Index, 2021 is released by-

- a. World Bank
- b. UN Habitat
- c. Economist Intelligence Unit
- d. Institute of Economics & Peace

Answer : c

11) Consider the following statements with respect to Black Carbon :

- 1. It is a short-lived pollutant that is the second-largest contributor to warming the planet behind carbon dioxide (CO₂).
- 2. It is quickly washed out and can be eliminated from the atmosphere if emissions stop.
- 3. Black carbon (BC) deposits produced by human activity accelerate the pace of glacier and snow melt in the Himalayan region.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : d

12) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to Sea Snot Outbreak?

- 1. It is marine mucilage formed when algae are overloaded with nutrients due to water pollution combined with the effects of climate change.
- 2. It can also cause an outbreak of water-borne diseases such as cholera.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : d

13) Consider the following statements with respect to Election Commissioners?

- 1. The Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners have equal powers and receive equal salary, which are similar to those of a judge of the Supreme Court.
- 2. In case of difference of opinion amongst the Chief election commissioner and the other election commissioners, the matter is decided by the Commission by majority.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

14) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to 47th G7 Summit, 2021?

- 1. France currently holds the Presidency of G7 countries.
- 2. The theme for the 47th Summit is 'Build Back Better'.
- 3. It is for the first time an India Prime Minister will be participating in a G7 meeting.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 2 only
- b. 1 and 2 only

- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : a

United Kingdom (UK) currently holds the Presidency of the G7 and has invited India, along with Australia, Republic of Korea and South Africa, as Guest Countries for the G7 Summit.

This is the second time the Prime Minister will be participating in a G7 meeting.

India had been invited by the G7 French Presidency in 2019 to the Biarritz Summit as a "Goodwill Partner" and Prime Minister participated in the Sessions on 'Climate, Biodiversity and Oceans' and 'Digital Transformation'.

15) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to I-STEM Portal?

1. The portal aims to encourage women in S&T domain, preferably those having a break in career and not having regular employment, to explore possibility of re-entry into the profession.
2. It is an initiative of Department of Science and Technology under the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) mission.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : d

- It is an initiative of Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Govt. of India under the PM-STIAC mission.
- The goal is to strengthen the R&D ecosystem by connecting researchers with resources, in part by promoting technologies and scientific equipment development indigenously and providing necessary supplies and supports to researchers and enable them to access existing R&D facilities through the I-STEM web portal.

16) Dihing Patkai National Park is located in-

- a. Assam
- b. Manipur
- c. Meghalaya
- d. Arunachal Pradesh

Answer : a

17) Smart Kitchen Project has been introduced in-

- a. Kerala
- b. West Bengal
- c. Himachal Pradesh
- d. Gujarat

Answer : a

18) Which one of the following statements regarding All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20 is incorrect?

- a. Enrolment of female students is higher in Institutes of National Importance (INI)
- b. Female enrolment in higher education increases over 18% from 2015-16 to 2019-20
- c. Female participation in professional courses is lower in comparison to academic courses
- d. None of the above

Answer : a

19) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Ethanol Blending?

1. Ethanol is an organic compound which is considered as renewable fuel.
2. In comparison to petrol, Ethanol offers a higher octane number and reduced emissions due to complete combustion.
3. Under Ethanol Blended Programme (EBP) government has set a target of reaching 50% ethanol blending in petrol by end of 2021.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a. 3 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : b

Target for 20% blending was earlier to be achieved by 2030 which was later forwarded to 2025 and now to be achieved by 2023

20) Consider the following statements with respect to Banking Regulation Act 2020:

1. It brought cooperative banks under the direct supervision of the RBI.
2. It empowers RBI to supersede the board of directors of cooperative banks after consultations with the concerned state government.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : d

Both statements are correct