

PRAYAS 4 IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

SEPTEMBER WEEK 1



September (Week 1)

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Prelims

NATIONAL

The Vanniyar movement

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: With local body polls round the corner, the DMK government in Tamil Nadu has announced the construction of a memorial in Villupuram to people killed in police firing and clashes in 1987, during a movement demanding reservation for the Vanniyar community.

The movement

- Vanniyars are one of the largest and most consolidated backward communities in the state.
- They had raised massive protests in the mid-1980s demanding 20% reservation in the state, and 2% in central services.
- Their movement was backed by the Justice Party as well as the Self-Respect Movement.
- Organised protests began with the formation of Vanniyar Sangam, headed by S Ramadoss, a medical practitioner who later founded the political party PMK.
- The agitation began in 1986 with activists sending hundreds of letters and telegrams to then Chief Minister M G Ramachandran seeking an audience.
- As there was no response from MGR and the then Rajiv Gandhi government, agitators started demonstrations in community strongholds, then went on to blockading rail and road traffic.
- The blockades were effective because community members in each village would block busy highway stretches on their village borders. They would cut revenue trees on either side of the state highway.
- One blockade in May 1986 brought traffic in the entire state to a halt, and thousands were arrested.
- A one-day blockade of trains followed in December 1986. The peak was in September 1987, when road traffic in northern Tamil Nadu came to a halt for an entire week.

ICGS Vighraha

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: The seventh Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV), ICGS Vighraha was commissioned.

Details:

- It is built indigenously by Larsen & Toubro for the Coast Guard (ICG)
- ICGS Vighraha will be based out of Visakhapatnam and will operate on India's Eastern Seaboard under the operational and administrative control of the Commander, Coast Guard Region (East).

Appointment of Supreme Court judges

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Nine judges of the Supreme Court took oath recently, the biggest ever number at one go. A third of the new judges are women, another first, even though the 33-strong Bench still has only four women.*

Who appoints Supreme Court judges?

- Articles 124(2) and 217 of the Constitution governs the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts respectively.
- Under both provisions, the President has the power to make the appointments “after consultation with such of the Judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Courts in the States as the President may deem necessary”.
- Over the years, the word “consultation” has been at the centre of debate on the executive’s power to appoint judges. In practice, the executive held this power since Independence, and a convention of seniority was evolved for appointing the Chief Justice of India.
- This changed, however, in the ’80s in a series of Supreme Court cases, in which the judiciary essentially impounded the power of appointment to itself.

What were these cases?

- The tussle between the executive and the judiciary over judges’ appointment began following the Indira Gandhi-led government’s move in 1973 to supersede three senior judges and appoint Justice A N Ray as the CJI.
- In three cases — which came to be known as the Judges Cases — in 1981, 1993 and 1998, the Supreme Court evolved the collegium system for appointing judges.
- A group of senior Supreme Court judges headed by the CJI would make recommendations to the President on who should be appointed. These rulings not only shrank the executive say in proposing a candidate for judgeship, but also took away the executive’s veto power.
- In the First Judges Case — *S P Gupta v Union of India* (1981) — the Supreme Court ruled that the President does not require the “concurrence” of the CJI in appointment of judges. The ruling affirmed the pre-eminence of the executive in making appointments, but was overturned 12 years later in the Second Judges Case.
- In the Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v Union of India (1993), a nine-judge Constitution Bench evolved the ‘collegium system’ for appointment and transfer of judges in the higher judiciary. The court underlined that the deviation from the text of the Constitution was to guard the independence of the judiciary from the executive and protect its integrity.
- In 1998, President K R Narayanan issued a Presidential Reference to the Supreme Court over the meaning of the term “consultation” — whether it required “consultation” with a number of judges in forming the CJI’s opinion, or whether the CJI’s sole opinion could by itself constitute a “consultation”.
- The ruling on this established a quorum and majority vote in the collegium to make recommendations to the President.
- In 2014, the NDA government attempted to claw back control on judicial appointments by establishing the National Judicial Appointments Commission through constitutional amendments. Although the law, which gave the executive a greater foot in the door in appointments, had support across political parties, the Supreme Court struck it down as unconstitutional.

How many judges does the Supreme Court have? How is the number decided?

- Currently, the Supreme Court has 34 judges including the CJI. In 1950, when it was established, it had 8 judges including the CJI.

- Parliament, which has the power to increase the number of judges, has gradually done so by amending the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act — from 8 in 1950 to 11 in 1956, 14 in 1960, 18 in 1978, 26 in 1986, 31 in 2009, and 34 in 2019.

Naval Anti-Drone System (NADS)

(Source: PIB)

Context: *The Indian Navy has signed a contract with Navaratna Defence PSU Bharat Limited (BEL) for the supply of the first indigenous comprehensive Naval Anti Drone System (NADS) with both hard kill and soft kill capabilities.*

About NADS:

- It is the first indigenously developed anti-drone system to be inducted into the Indian Armed Forces.
- It was developed by DRDO and manufactured by BEL.
- The NADS can instantly detect and jam micro drones and use a laser-based kill mechanism to terminate targets. It will be an effective all-encompassing counter to the increased drone threat to strategic naval installations.
- The system offers 360 degree coverage.
- The NADS uses the help of Radar, Electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) sensors and Radio Frequency (RF) detectors to detect and jam the micro drones.
- The DRDO's RF/Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) detects the frequency which is being used by the controller and the signals are then jammed.

Rights issue

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The board of directors of Bharti Airtel has approved the company's plan to raise up to Rs 21,000 crore by way of a rights issue.*

What is a rights issue and how does it work?

- Under Company Laws, a rights issue is one of the many ways in which a company can raise additional capital when they need it.
- A rights issue gives investors the option, or a right to buy new shares of the company at a discount to the current market price.
- Only existing shareholders of a company can participate in the rights issue. This means that instead of going to the general public at large, only the existing shareholders of the company can buy additional shares in the company if they so wish to.
- Companies also declare a rights entitlement ratio when declaring a rights issue. For example, if a company declares an entitlement ratio of 1:4, it means that for every four shares that a shareholder already has, they can buy one more share in the rights issue.
- In most circumstances, since the number of shares of the company in the market increases, the market price of the share is diluted.
- In some cases, however, if there is a belief that the funds being raised through the rights issue are for a positive intent and may help the company in the short or long run, the stock price as well as the market capitalisation of the company increases.

The 'school bubble'

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Covid-19 technical advisory committee (TAC) constituted by the Karnataka government has proposed the 'school bubble' concept to mitigate the spread of the disease among children (aged below 18) attending offline classes at schools and pre-university colleges across the state.*

What are school bubbles?

- School bubbles are physical classifications made between groups comprising a small number of students.
- As per the concept, each such bubble will include students who tend to remain as a group during school hours throughout the term or an academic year.
- The concept would help managements easily isolate a fewer number of students in case anyone gets infected.
- For instance, a school bubble can include 30 students. If one among them gets infected, the others can self-isolate but the school need not be closed completely. This would allow uninterrupted learning to others as well.

Indian Royal Jelly

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *For the first time, Indian Royal Jelly has been found to surpass top-quality sellers, including those produced in Thailand and Taiwan. Known for being a good antioxidant, and helping women with fertility issues, among other health benefits, the Indian Royal Jelly meets the ISO-prescribed standards imposed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) in 2019, according to Pune-based researchers.*

What is Royal Jelly?

- It is a pearly white or pale yellow-coloured cohesive mixture of honey and secretions from the hypopharyngeal and mandibular glands of worker honeybees.
- It contains moisture or water (60-70 per cent), lipids (1-10 per cent), minerals (0.8-3 per cent), proteins (9-18 per cent), sugar (7 per cent) and other elements.
- Being highly nutritious, this substance is used as food to young larvae and adult queen honeybees.
- Commercially, royal jelly is produced artificially by stimulating bee colonies to produce queen bee, grown outside its natural habitat. The larvae in the queen cells are fed with nutritious royal jelly.
- The perfect time to harvest royal jelly is when the maximum amount gets accumulated upon the larva turning 5 days old.





- Extraction of royal jelly requires specially trained manpower with expertise in extraction and excellent larvae grafting skills.
- Royal jelly needs to be stored in sub-zero temperatures immediately after production, during packaging and also at the consumer's end.
- Recommended temperature for fresh royal jelly is below –20 degrees Celsius. Freezee drier, a special machine, is needed to remove moisture from the fresh produce. At present, there are three such machines in India, which are imported from Germany.
- In a season of five to six months, a well-maintained hive can produce an estimated 900gms of royal jelly.

Who are the global market rulers and consumers of royal jelly?

- In the 1940s, the production techniques of royal jelly were first developed by Japan. But due to the laborious work involved in its production, the Japanese trained beekeepers and sent them to Taiwan.
- At 600 metric tonnes/year, China tops the production charts and is followed by Taiwan (350 metric tonnes/year). Thailand and Italy are among the other top producers in the world.
- With over 400 metric tonnes/ year, Japan is the world's largest importer followed by Germany, America and some other European nations.
- For its high quality, Thailand-made fresh royal jelly sells at Rs 12,000 per kg whereas the powdered variant costs Rs 30,000 per kg in India.
- On the other hand, royal jelly from China, which experts say is of low quality as it contains even larvae and not pure royal jelly mixture, sells at Rs 8,000 (fresh) and 15,000 (powder) per kg, each.
- Delhi and north Indian markets mostly supply Chinese-manufactured royal jelly whereas markets in Mumbai have imports available from Thailand.

What are the benefits of consuming royal jelly and why is the consumption growing worldwide?

- Royal jelly is no medicine but a nutritious substance. An average healthy person needs to consume only about 500 mg (fresh) and 200mg (powder) in a day to get maximum health benefits.
- Royal jelly is known for its antioxidant properties. Besides, it cures damaged cells in the body and rejuvenates them. Hence, some cancer patients are advised consumption of royal jelly up to 10mgs.
- Its consumption is suggested to women for improving their fertility. It is also found effective for women suffering from premenstrual and post-menopausal problems.
- Royal jelly is believed to cut down body ageing and makes people look much younger than their actual age, and is thus popular among celebrities.
- The Japanese — who are among the oldest living humans crossing the age of 100 — could have some links for their longevity with high consumption of royal jelly, experts said.

Mumbai Climate Action Plan

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is drafting a Mumbai Climate Action Plan (MCAP) in a bid to tackle climate challenges. It recently launched a website for the same.*

What is the Mumbai Climate Action Plan?

- Amid warnings of climate change leading to extreme weather events in the city, the civic body has started preparing the Mumbai Climate Action Plan (MCAP).



- It will look at climate resilience with mitigation and adaptation strategies by focusing on six areas — sustainable waste management, urban greening and biodiversity, urban flooding and water resource management, building energy efficiency, air quality, and sustainable mobility.
- The plan is currently being drafted.
- A website was launched seeking suggestions and ideas from citizens and experts on climate action. Entries are accepted till September 20.
- The plan is expected to be ready by November ahead of the United Nations Climate Change (COP26) conference.

Why does Mumbai need a climate action plan?

- As per a study conducted by the World Resource Institute (WRI) India on Mumbai's vulnerability assessment, the city will face two major climate challenges — the rise in temperature, and extreme rain events which will lead to flooding.
- The city has seen a constant rise in temperature after 2007, and a substantial increase in intense rainfall and storm events in the last five years.
- A recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that at least 12 Indian coastal cities including Mumbai will face sea rise of 0.1 metres to 0.3 metres in next three decades due to climate change.
- Before this, in February 2020, a report from McKinsey India stated that by 2050, Mumbai will see a 25 per cent increase in the intensity of flash floods and a 0.5 metre rise in sea level, which will affect two to three million people living within 1-km from the coastline.
- Mumbai's climate action plan will help set a vision and implement strategies to fight these climate challenges with mitigation and adaptation steps.
- This has been done following Mumbai's commitment to C40 Cities climate leadership group. Mumbai joined C40 Cities group in December 2020.
- There are 97 cities across the world connected in C40 Cities, who are pushed to develop and implement climate action plans to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emission significantly.

The rules for taxing interest on Provident Fund

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Following its Budget announcement in February, the Finance Ministry has now notified the rules for taxing interest income on contributions made to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) beyond Rs 2.5 lakh (for private sector employees) and Rs 5 lakh (for government sector employees). Beginning this fiscal, the government will tax interest on contributions made in excess of these limits, with separate accounts to be maintained within the provident fund account for 2021-22 and subsequent years for taxable contribution and non-taxable contribution made by an individual.*

What is the tax on EPF contributions?

- In February, the Budget proposed that tax exemption will not be available on interest income on PF contributions exceeding Rs 2.5 lakh in a year.
- Although this has been a concern for salaried individuals contributing to EPF, it will impact only those who contribute more than Rs 2.5 lakh in a year — and it will not affect their existing corpus or the aggregate annual interest on that.
- In March, the government introduced an amendment to the Finance Bill, 2021 in which it proposed to double the cap on contribution from Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 5 lakh for tax-exempt interest income, if the contribution is made to a fund where there is no contribution by the employer.

- With this, the government provided relief for contributions made to the General Provident Fund that is available only to government employees and there is no contribution by the employer.

What are the rules to enable this taxation?

- The rules were notified by the Finance Ministry on August 31.
- In an amendment to the Income-Tax Rules, 1962 that will come into effect from April 1, 2022, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has inserted Rule 9D, according to which income through interest accrued during the previous year that is not exempt (over Rs 2.5 lakh for private and Rs 5 lakh for government employees) shall be computed as the interest accrued during the previous year in the taxable contribution account.
- Separate accounts within the provident fund account shall be maintained during 2021-2022 and subsequent years for an individual's taxable contribution and non-taxable contribution.
- The EPFO, however, is yet to formalise the separation of taxable and non-taxable contribution in their accounts.
- Some EPF board members said the task to separate the accounts for such contributors will take time.
- The CBDT has stated that the closing balance on March 31, 2021 and the interest accrual on it will be treated as the non-taxable component.
- The taxable contribution account will consist of contributions made by the individual in the account during the previous year (2021-22) and subsequent years in excess of the threshold limit.

Blue straggler

Context: *Carrying out the first-ever comprehensive analysis of blue stragglers, Indian researchers found that half of the blue stragglers in their sample are formed through mass transfer from a close binary companion star, one third are likely formed through collisions of 2 stars, and the remaining are formed through interactions of more than 2 stars.*

What are blue stragglers?

- Blue stragglers are a class of star observed in old, dense stellar systems such as globular clusters.
- They stand out because old stellar populations are expected to be devoid of blue (high-mass) stars which possess very short lifespans. The blue stragglers in an old stellar population must therefore have formed long after the system as a whole.

How are they formed?

- A clue to their origin is that they are only found in dense stellar systems, where distances between stars are extremely small (a fraction of a light year).
- In these dense environments (for example the cores of globular clusters), collisions between stars are relatively common, and it has long been believed that blue stragglers are the result of the merger of two old, red stars.
- This merger produces a star with a greater mass (hence bluer in colour), and severely disrupts the two stars involved, mixing hydrogen into the stellar core and giving the star a new lease on life.



The Panj Piare

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Former Uttarakhand chief minister Harish Rawat has apologised for comparing Punjab Congress chief Navjot Sidhu and his four advisers to the Panj Piare.*

Who are the Panj Piara?

- 'Panj Piare' is not just a group of five baptised people but a concept and tradition founded by 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh.
- Guru Gobind Singh established the institution of Panj Piare while founding the Khalsa on the day of Baisakhi in 1699. Addressing a large gathering, he asked for five heads for sacrifice. Five men responded to his call and the Guru baptised them and called them Panj Piare.
- Since then, every group of five baptised Sikhs is called Panj Piare and accorded the respect enjoyed by the first five Sikhs.

Who were the first Panj Piare?

- The Panj Piare were from different castes and states of India. While Bhai Daya Ram hailed from Lahore, Bhai Dharam Rai was from Hastinapur in Uttar Pradesh, Bhai Himmat Rai came from Jagannath in Odisha, Bhai Mohkam Rai from Gujarat and Bhai Sahib Chand was from Bidar, Karnataka.
- In return, Guru Gobind Singh made them drink Amrit (sweet water prepared by reciting Gurbani) from one utensil.
- Then he suffixed Singh with their names and renamed them Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dharam Singh, Bhai Himmat Singh, Bhai Mohkam Singh and Bhai Sahib Singh.
- Apart from defining the religious and social protocol for the Khalsa by dictating it to the Panj Piare, Guru Gobind Singh himself got baptised from them at the same stage to tell the Sikhs that Panj Piaras have higher authority and decision making power than anyone in the community.
- The Panj Piare are also seen as a manifestation of the Guru himself.

How did the Guru establish the authority of Panj Piare?

- Once, Guru Gobind Singh and his Khalsa army were besieged at Chamkaur by the joint army of Mughal and mountain kings. The Khalsa troops wanted Guru Gobind Singh to leave Chamkaur but he refused.
- It was then that the Panj Piare ordered the Guru to leave Chamkaur. Guru Gobind Singh did as orders as he was duty bound to follow their command like other Sikhs.
- This event is behind the deep-rooted respect accorded to Panj Piare. They have taken many important decisions throughout Sikh history.

Who can become a Panj Piara?

- Any baptised Sikh can become a Panj Piare.
- The unanimous decision taken by Panj Piare has to be followed by everyone in the community.
- Akal Takht Jathedar also can't take any decision unilaterally and every diktat from the Akal Takht has to be signed by all the five Jathedars of the five Takhts (Temporal seats) or their representatives.

Odisha's Kendrapara

(Source: [Down to Earth](#))

Context: *Odisha's Kendrapara became the only district in India to be home to all three species of crocodilians found in the country. This was after forest officials found a baby gharial (Gavialis gangeticus) in a river system of the district.*

Details:

- On October 25, 2016, the forest department in the district had rescued a live 12-foot-long mugger (*Crocodylus palustris*) from a fishing net in the Luna river.
- Bhitarkanika National Park in the district is also the home of saltwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*).
- The crocodilian family consists of 27 different species that are subdivided into three families: True crocodiles, alligators and caimans and gharials.
- All three species of crocodilians in the river systems of Odisha were on the verge of extinction by the 1970s. Piecemeal efforts were being made from the 1960s onwards to save them.
- The gharial and saltwater crocodile conservation programme was first implemented in Odisha in early 1975 and subsequently, the mugger conservation programme was initiated.
- The Ramatirtha centre, meant for mugger crocodiles within the Similipal Tiger Reserve, initially started with eggs and juveniles of muggers procured from Tamil Nadu.
- Since 1984, more than 600 muggers have been captive-bred and released in Similipal, according to Pati.
- A gharial project was started at Tikarpada in Angul district in 1975 with an aim to increase their population.
- In 1975, the Union ministry of forest and environment, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, had started a crocodile breeding and rearing project in Dangamala within the Bhitarkanika.
- In January 2021, there were 1,768 saltwater crocodiles in Bhitarkanika, up from 96 in 1974.

INTERNATIONAL

ZAPAD 2021

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Indian army to participate in multi-lateral exercise Zapad 2021 in Russia.*

About Zapad:

- Zapad is a multi-nation military exercise going to be held in Russia in September 2021.
- It is one of the theatre level exercises of the Russian Armed Forces and will focus primarily on operations against terrorists.
- Over a dozen countries from the Eurasian and South Asian regions will participate in this signature event.
- From India, the NAGA Battalion group participating in the exercise will feature an all Arms combined task force.
- 200 Indian personnel will take part in this 13-day exercise.
- The exercise aims to enhance military and strategic ties amongst the participating nations while they plan & execute this exercise.
- China and Pakistan are also expected to take part in the exercise as observers.

IPCC report

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

Context *The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, described the latest report on climate change from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as 'a code red for humanity.' According to him 'the alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk.'*

What is it?

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established in 1988, is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.
- It was created to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and potential future risks. Its assessment reports are a key input into the international negotiations to tackle climate change.
- The work of IPCC is spread amongst three expert working groups (WGs) — WGI, which assesses the physical scientific basis of climate change; WGII, which assesses the vulnerability of socio-economic and natural systems to climate change; WGIII, which assesses options for mitigating climate change.
- Last week, WGI published its contribution to what is known as the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) —
- The Physical Science Basis of Climate Change. WG2 and WG3 will also subsequently publish their contribution and a final comprehensive AR6 is expected to be ready next year.

Why is it important?



- This is the most comprehensive report on climate change yet, and the conclusion is ‘it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land.’
- It is the combined output of 234 authors/scientists who have volunteered their time to assess thousands of scientific papers published each year and provide a comprehensive summary.
- This report was approved by 195 countries before it was published. The report makes it irrational to refute the fact of climate change, notwithstanding conspiracy theories.
- According to the report, each of the last four decades has been successively warmer than any decade that preceded it since 1850. Human induced climate change is already affecting every region across the globe.
- Despite recent efforts by many nations to address risk from carbon emissions and commitments by corporates to become carbon neutral, things are going to get worse for a while.
- In the assessment of the IPCC, global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century under all emission scenarios considered.
- The 2015 Paris Agreement amongst nations to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels will be breached.
- This limit was originally set due to assessment that problems could grow exponentially beyond that level. This not comforting
- Climate change will impact you and me in whichever part of the world we live in. One could live in a carbon neutral country and still face the worst effects of climate change.
- Unlike borders that can be defended with an army, there is no such defence when it comes to global warming. Hence this calls for global cooperation on an unprecedented scale.
- The extreme weather patterns in every part of the world the report mentions have far reaching consequences for the quality of our lives and health. Equally worse is the impact of drought and floods on agriculture and food production and its economic and humanitarian consequences.
- Not to forget its impact on ecology — the Black Summer of 2019-20 in Australia was in itself a wakeup call to the world to accelerate the process of reversing climate change.
- If not anything else, at least a look at the video of ‘Lewis the Koala’ from the Black Summer, should get the conscience of ordinary citizens moving and make them put pressure on their governments and corporates for faster change.
- The way the world responds to this will impact the path of global economies, career opportunities and your investments.
- Whether it is the fossil fuel industry renewables, food (meat and faux meat) etc, or derivative industries linked to it, one can expect a sea change in how these will transition in the next decade. Trying to understand the trends early can help make appropriate decisions.

Bangladesh garment workers’ safety pact with global retailers

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Leading global retailers have **agreed to extend a health and safety agreement** with garment workers and factory owners in Bangladesh. The International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry – a legally-binding pact – comes into effect from September 1, and will be valid for two years.*

What was the previous accord?

- The pre-existing Accord on Fire and Building Safety had come into effect in the aftermath of the collapse of the eight-story Raza Plaza complex in Savar near Dhaka that killed more than 1,100 people.



- Put in place by IndustriALL, UNI and 17 textile and garment brands, the accord was the first legally binding agreement that was brought in to ensure and improve the safety of workers. More than 200 companies had signed the agreement.
- Brands like Primark and Mango used the factories in the building and were called out to look into the highly unsafe factory conditions that Bangladesh workers had been working in.
- The accord made it mandatory for brands to set basic standards of workplace, minimum wages, independent factory inspections, public reports on the factories, constant repairs and renovations.
- The 2013 Accord specifically focused on fire, electrical and building safety hazards.
- The agreement signatories decided to continue the 2013 Accord for three more years in 2018, until May 31, 2021. It was further extended for three more months until August 31, 2021.
- The 2018 accord involved brands to conduct independent safety inspections, remediation programmes, establish safety committees and safety training programmes, disclosure of inspections reports, setting up complaints mechanisms, safely implement the right to refuse unsafe work and take corrective actions plans.

What is the new health and safety accord?

- The new agreement is being managed by the Ready-Made Garments Sustainability Council (RSC).
- According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the ready-made garment sector accounts for 80 per cent of Bangladesh's export earnings and employs about 4.2 million people.
- ILO's 2017 report stated, "It is estimated that over 11,000 workers suffer fatal accidents and a further 24,500 die from work related diseases across all sectors each year in Bangladesh. It is also estimated that a further 8 million workers suffer injuries at work – many of which result in permanent disability."
- According to the official website of The Accord on Fire and Building Safety, the new agreement maintains the essence of the earlier accord and includes, "respect for freedom of association, independent administration and implementation, a high-level of transparency, provisions to ensure remediation is financially feasible, safety committee training and worker awareness program, and a credible, independent complaints mechanism."
- Instead of specifically focusing on fire and building safety, the agreement broadens its scope of covering general health and safety, according to a report by IndustriALL. It will work towards expanding the scope of the agreement in order to address "human rights due diligence along the brands' global supply chains".
- The new accord will also set in place an optional arbitration process to implement its terms in a streamlined manner, stated the report.

What is the Ready-Made Garments Sustainability Council (RSC)?

- Ready-Made Garments Sustainability Council (RSC) was formed in 2019 by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).
- RSC was handed over the responsibility of looking after the implementation of the 2018 Accord.
- RSC was set in place to ease the functioning of businesses under the Accord and to look after the implementation of the Accord in a more streamlined manner.
- RSC was also set up to work towards encompassing "industrial relations, skill development and environmental standards", Huq added.

Vaccinated Travel Lanes

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The reopening of international travel in the aftermath of Covid-19 was never going to be a straightforward affair. Since the end of last year, several countries have ideated and experimented with*

various concepts to allow the movement of passengers between nations. These include air bubbles, **vaccine passports**, travel corridors and even a **traffic light system**. The latest addition to this list is Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL), introduced by Singapore.

What are Vaccinated Travel Lanes?

- VTLs are basically an extension of travel corridors albeit only for travellers who have been fully vaccinated.
- As of date, Singapore has established VTLs with two jurisdictions — Germany and Brunei Darussalam — allowing fully vaccinated passengers from these two places to arrive in Singapore for any travel purpose without quarantine requirements, which are otherwise mandatory for those flying to Singapore.

How will these VTLs work?

- Singapore will designate specific flights with the country on the other side of the lane only for passengers having a Vaccinated Travel Pass (VTP) issued by the Singapore government.
- Fully vaccinated passengers will be able to apply for a VTP from September 1 for travel from September 8 onwards on the designated flights.
- Singapore citizens and permanent residents do not need to apply for the VTP to travel back home under the VTL.

KAZIND-21

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Opening ceremony of Indo-Kazakhstan joint military exercise Kazind-21.*

About Kazind-21:

- This is the 5th edition of the annual bilateral joint exercise of the armies of India and Kazakhstan.
- This year, it is taking place at Training Node Aisha Bibi, Kazakhstan.
- The previous Kazind exercise was held in India in 2019.
- This exercise will provide an impetus to the ever growing military and diplomatic ties between the two nations.
- The joint exercise also reflects the strong resolve of both nations to counter terrorism and will to stand shoulder to shoulder to combat the same.

China's new maritime law

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *From Sept.1, China's new maritime rules designed to control the entry of foreign vessels in what Beijing calls "Chinese territorial waters" take effect. The move is expected to have far-reaching consequences for passage of vessels, both commercial and military, in the disputed South China Sea, East China Sea and Taiwan Strait, and is likely to escalate the existing tension with the US and its neighbours in the region.*

What is the new law?

- Foreign vessels, both military and commercial, will be henceforth required to submit to Chinese supervision in "Chinese territorial waters," as per the new law.



- The state-run Global Times, quoting the country's Maritime Safety Administration, said that "operators of submersibles, nuclear vessels, ships carrying radioactive materials and ships carrying bulk oil, chemicals, liquefied gas and other toxic and harmful substances are required to report their detailed information upon their visits to Chinese territorial waters".
- The report goes on to add that vessels that "endanger the maritime traffic safety of China" will be required to report their name, call sign, current position and next port of call and estimated time of arrival.
- The name of shipborne dangerous goods and cargo deadweight will also be required.

Why is this important?

- The South China Sea, which lies between China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam, is of great economic importance globally. Nearly one-third of the world's shipping passes through its lanes, and the waters house numerous important fisheries.
- It is also a critical route for India, both militarily and commercially. The South China Sea plays a vital role in facilitating India's trade with Japan, South Korea and ASEAN countries, and assists in the efficient procurement of energy supplies.
- In fact, the Ministry of External Affairs estimates that more than 55% of India's trade passes through the South China Sea and Malacca Straits.
- India is also involved in oil and gas exploration in offshore blocks in the margins of the Sea, which has led to standoffs with Chinese authorities.
- The waters around China are hotly contested. Under a "nine-dash line" map, China claims most of the South China Sea as its sovereign territory.
- This claim is contested by its neighbours in the region and by the United States, which, though it has no claim in the Sea, backs the smaller nations in the fight against Chinese overreach.
- The two countries recently sparred over the issue at a UN meeting on maritime security, with US saying that it has seen "provocative actions to advance unlawful maritime claims" and China retorting that the US has been "arbitrarily sending advanced military vessels and aircraft into the South China Sea as provocations".

International position

- Currently, international maritime activities are governed by an international agreement called the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of which China, India and over a hundred other countries are signatories (the US, significantly, is not).
- Accordingly, states have the right to implement territorial rights up to 12 nautical miles into the sea.
- The UNCLOS also states that all vessels have the right of "innocent passage" through this region – China's new law violates this.
- As the law comes into effect, several questions remain. For one, it is unclear how China intends to implement the regulation.
- The US, which routinely holds naval exercises in the region, is unlikely to abide by Beijing's law.
- It also remains to be seen how the rest of the UNCLOS signatories react to this challenge to the agreement.

China's 'common prosperity' drive

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *President Xi Jinping has called for China to achieve “common prosperity”, seeking to narrow a yawning wealth gap that threatens the country’s economic ascent and the legitimacy of Communist Party rule.*

“Common prosperity” as an idea is not new in China, but a sharp escalation in official rhetoric and a crackdown on excesses in industries including technology and private tuition has rattled investors in the world’s second-largest economy.

What does ‘common prosperity’ mean?

- “Common prosperity” was first mentioned in the 1950s by Mao Zedong, founding leader of what was then an impoverished country, and repeated in the 1980s by Deng Xiaoping, who modernised an economy devastated by the Cultural Revolution.
- Deng said that allowing some people and regions to get rich first would speed up economic growth and help achieve the ultimate goal of common prosperity.
- China became an economic powerhouse under a hybrid policy of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, but it also deepened inequality, especially between urban and rural areas, a divide that threatens social stability.
- The push for common prosperity has encompassed policies ranging from curbing tax evasion and limits on the hours that tech sector employees can work to bans on for-profit tutoring in core school subjects and strict limits on the time minors can spend playing video games.
- This year, Xi has signalled a heightened commitment to delivering common prosperity, emphasising it is not just an economic objective but core to the party’s governing foundation.
- Officials say that common prosperity is not egalitarianism. A senior party official said last month that “common prosperity” does not mean “killing the rich to help the poor”.
- A pilot programme in Zhejiang province, one of China’s wealthiest, is designed to narrow the income gap there by 2025.

How will it be achieved?

- Chinese leaders have pledged to use taxation and other income redistribution levers to expand the proportion of middle-income citizens, boost incomes of the poor, “rationally adjust excessive incomes”, and ban illegal incomes.
- Beijing has explicitly encouraged high-income firms and individuals to contribute more to society via the so-called “third distribution”, which refers to charity and donations.
- Several tech industry heavyweights have announced major charitable donations and support for disaster relief efforts. Online gaming giant Tencent Holdings has said it will spend 100 billion yuan (\$15.47 billion) on common prosperity.
- Long-discussed reforms such as implementing property and inheritance taxes to tackle the wealth gap could gain new impetus, but policy insiders believe such changes are years off.
- A property tax has been discussed for years and two pilots have been implemented in Shanghai and Chongqing since 2011, but little progress has been made.
- Other measures would include improving public services and social safety net.



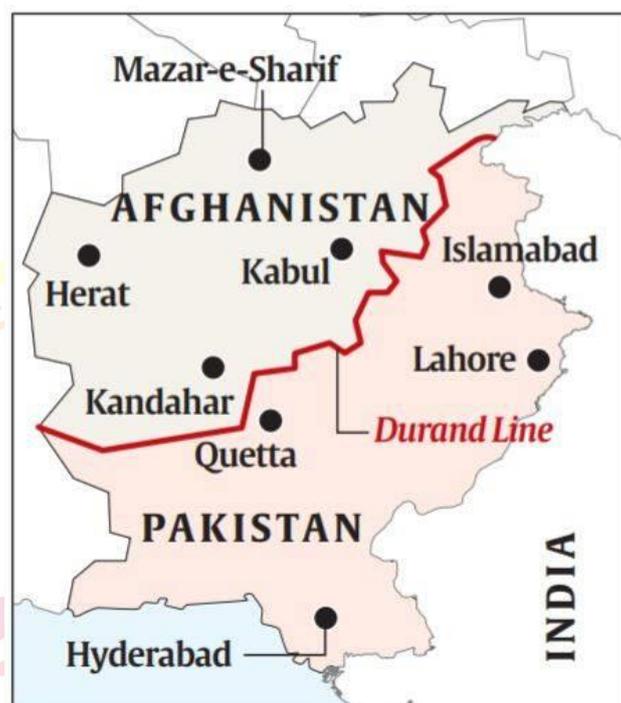
Durand Line

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told a Pashto channel in Pakistan that Afghans oppose the fence erected by Pakistan along the Durand Line. The issue has sowed distrust between Afghans and Pakistan for decades, and is a potential flashpoint in relations between the Taliban and Pakistan.*

Line dividing Pashtun

- The Durand Line is a legacy of the 19th century Great Game between the Russian and British empires in which Afghanistan was used as a buffer by the British against a feared Russian expansionism to its east.
- The agreement demarcating what became known as the Durand Line was signed on November 12, 1893 between the British civil servant Sir Henry Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdur Rahman, then the Afghan ruler.
- Abdur Rahman became king in 1880, two years after the end of the Second Afghan War in which the British took control of several areas that were part of the Afghan kingdom. He was essentially a British puppet.
- His agreement with Durand demarcated the limits of his and British India's "spheres of influence" on the Afghan "frontier" with India.
- The seven-clause agreement recognised a 2,670-km line which Durand drew on the spot on a small map of Afghanistan during his negotiations with the Amir.
- The line stretches from the border with China to Afghanistan's border with Iran.
- Clause 4 said the "frontier line" would be laid down in detail and demarcated by British and Afghan commissioners "whose object will be to arrive by mutual understanding at a boundary which shall adhere with the greatest possible exactness to the line shown in the map attached to this agreement, having due regard to the existing local rights of villages adjoining the frontier".
- In reality, the line cut through Pashtun tribal areas, leaving villages, families, and land divided between the two "spheres of influence".
- It has been described as a "line of hatred", arbitrary, illogical, cruel and a trickery on the Pashtuns.
- Some historians believe it was a ploy to divide the Pashtuns so that the British could keep control over them easily. It also put on the British side the strategic Khyber Pass.



Cross-border tensions

- With independence in 1947, Pakistan inherited the Durand Line, and with it also the Pashtun rejection of the line, and Afghanistan's refusal to recognise it. Afghanistan was the only country to vote against Pakistan joining the United Nations in 1947.
- 'Pashtunistan' — an independent country of the Pashtuns — was a demand made by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan at the time of Partition, although he later resigned himself to the reality of Partition.
- The proximity of the 'Frontier Gandhi' to India was a point of tension between the two countries almost immediately.
- The fear of Indian support to Pashtun nationalism haunts Pakistan to date, and is embedded in its Afghan policy.



- Pakistan's creation and support for the Taliban is seen by some as a move to obliterate ethnic Pashtun nationalism with an Islamic identity. But it did not work out the way Pakistan had planned.
- When the Taliban seized power in Kabul the first time, they rejected the Durand Line. They also strengthened Pashtun identity with an Islamic radicalism to produce the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, whose terrorist attacks since 2007 left the country shaken.



Mains

GS II

Where liberalism and nationalism are placed in Asia

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Liberalism and nationalism mean different things to different people, and the two concepts are often considered mutually exclusive. Over 70 years after Indian independence, it is worth recalling that the British claimed that their empire rested on liberal foundations and the transfer of power to nationalists evidenced this claim. But liberalism often clashed with anti-colonial nationalism; the greatest material support to anti-colonial movements during the Cold War came from the illiberal Soviet Union.

A 'cause' of war

- After the rise of the nation state, wars were attributed to the power and expansionist policies of nations.
- In Europe, nations were in almost constant conflict, and Japanese nationalism led to wars, particularly with China.
- In the early period of the last century, nationalism was regarded as the root cause of war, but this was an oversimplification, since many, especially Marxists, would argue that capitalism, which led to colonialism, was equally if not mainly responsible.
- In Europe, as the national idea spread, it became ethnic-oriented and increasingly illiberal, with an exception being Giuseppe Mazzini's nationalist activism.

The early decades

- Before Indian independence, nationalism was regarded with suspicion; Rabindranath Tagore had considered it a malign ideology, making a subtle distinction between the Nation of the West, which he critiqued as a mechanical and soulless, and the Spirit of the West representing Enlightenment values of internationalism and universalism.
- There were alternative strands of thinking; Vinayak Damodar Savarkar contrasted his espousal of Hindutva nationalism with Buddha's universalism, the latter's non-violence being regarded by him as weakening Indian patriotism, since "Buddhism had its centre of gravity nowhere".
- Jawaharlal Nehru saw merit in nationalism as the focus of the Independence movement.
- In 1950, he asserted that "the strongest urge in Asia ...is the anti-colonial urge and the positive side of it is nationalism", and in 1953, "nationalism has been and is a very good thing.
- It has been a great liberating force in certain stages of a country's history". Yet, he feared that extreme nationalism among colonised peoples could degenerate into fascism and expansionism.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party's dogma harks back to the thinking of Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, representing Indian cultural nationalism and attempting an impossible balance between the projection of hard power and promotion of peace.
- Nationalism may take various forms but essentially, it is about collective identity, whereas liberalism implies the defence of individual freedom and self-determination, the state's role being to protect the private sphere.
- In practice, liberalism has advantages and disadvantages; it can underpin universal rights and Adam Smith's natural laws of economics, but its appeal is mainly to the professional educated class, and lacks nationalism's emotional appeal.

Asian democracy

- Asian politics are politically conservative when the economy is booming, shown by lengthy autocratic governments in China, Singapore and Vietnam, whereas the Asian financial crisis of 1997 led to a democratic impulse in Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea, and intermittently in Thailand.
- Democracy in Asia is not shaped by the liberalism of the West; the centrality of civil and political rights is less dogmatic and a degree of state intervention considered acceptable when it comes to individual autonomy.
- The liberal tradition contributes the ideas underlying the post-Second World War international system, embracing democracy, free trade, international law, multilateralism, environmental protection and human rights.
- Problems arise when such ideas become a doctrine for nation-building irrespective of context, with western intervention in the developing world and its consequences of turmoil and Islamist extremism and terror. The current example of Afghanistan is a case in point.

Power hierarchy

- Liberalism is now attacked in the West by both the far-right populism illustrated by former U.S. President Donald Trump, and the left represented by such as Senator Bernie Sanders who regard the global situation as the neo-liberal preserve of the rich and powerful.
- Despite American diplomatic rhetoric, there never has been a community of mutually supportive liberal democracies.
- International relations are conducted at the axial point of an egalitarian order of law and a hierarchical order of power: the United Nations represents this tension in the differing principles on which the Security Council and General Assembly are based.
- This is why the reform of the UN to include India, Japan, Germany and a few others as permanent members of the Security Council proves so difficult to achieve.

In a future Asia

- How will nationalism and liberalism be reflected in a future Asia? Both India and China were at the receiving end of western imperialism and emerged as supporters of principles of international society reflected in the Panchsheel, namely sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference.
- This implies rejection of western efforts to qualify sovereignty by making it dependent on human rights protection.
- The Non-Aligned Movement and Afro-Asianism were efforts to project a soft power model, but soon China, India and Pakistan joined the nuclear weapons club of hard power.
- The two leading Asian nations, India and China, used the present world system to fashion their rise while protesting against the control of the United Nations and world financial institutions but have not formulated any alternative based on Asian nationalism.
- Their current rivalry makes such a desirable outcome a remote prospect.

It's time to build BRICS better

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The 13th BRICS summit is set to be held on September 9 in digital format under India's chairmanship.*

Details:

- This plurilateral grouping comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa is chaired by turn. India held the chair in 2012 and 2016 too.
- The preparatory meeting of Foreign Ministers in June and dialogue at the BRICS Academic Forum in early August offered an important opportunity to present an objective assessment of the grouping's record amid differing views of believers and sceptics.
- The importance of BRICS is self-evident: it represents 42% of the world's population, 30% of the land area, 24% of global GDP and 16% of international trade.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, noting that BRICS was 15 years old, recently portrayed it as a young adult, equipped with "thoughts shaped and a worldview concretised, and with a growing sense of responsibilities." Others tend to view it as caught up in angst and confusion typical of a teenager.
- Still, member states have been carrying BRICS forward in an era of complex geopolitics. They have bravely continued holding dozens of meetings and summits, even as China's aggression in eastern Ladakh last year brought India-China relations to their lowest point in several decades.
- There is also the reality of the strained relations of China and Russia with the West, and of serious internal challenges preoccupying both Brazil and South Africa. On the other hand, a potential bond emerged due to the battle against COVID-19. In this backdrop, does BRICS truly matter?

Four priorities

- Launched by a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2006 and riding on the political synergy created by regular summits since 2009, BRIC turned itself into BRICS in 2010, with the entry of South Africa.
- The grouping has gone through a reasonably productive journey. It strove to serve as a bridge between the Global North and Global South.
- It developed a common perspective on a wide range of global and regional issues; established the New Development Bank; created a financial stability net in the form of Contingency Reserve Arrangement; and is on the verge of setting up a Vaccine Research and Development Virtual Center.
- What are its immediate goals now? As the current chair, India has outlined four priorities.
 - The first is to pursue reform of multilateral institutions ranging from the United Nations, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to the World Trade Organization and now even the World Health Organization.
 - This is not a new goal. BRICS has had very little success so far, although strengthening multilateralism serves as a strong bond as well as a beacon. Reform needs global consensus which is hardly feasible in the current climate of strategic contestation between the U.S. and China and the devastation caused by COVID-19 to health, lives and livelihoods.
 - Nevertheless, Indian officials rightly remind us that BRICS emerged from the desire to challenge dominance (by the U.S.) in the early years of the century, and it remains committed to the goal of counter-dominance (by China) now.
 - Mr. Jaishankar observed that the "counter-dominance instinct and principled commitment to multipolarity in all forms" is "written into the DNA of BRICS."
- The second is the resolve to combat terrorism. Terrorism is an international phenomenon affecting Europe, Africa, Asia and other parts of the world.
- Tragic developments concerning Afghanistan have helped to focus attention sharply on this overarching theme, stressing the need to bridge the gap between rhetoric and action.
- China, for example, feels little hesitation in supporting clear-cut denunciations of terrorist groups, even as its backing of Pakistan, which is heavily enmeshed with a host of international terrorist groups, remains steadfast.
- In this context, BRICS is attempting to pragmatically shape its counter-terrorism strategy by crafting the BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan containing specific measures to fight radicalisation, terrorist



financing and misuse of the Internet by terrorist groups. This plan is expected to be a key deliverable at the forthcoming summit and may hopefully bring some change.

- Promoting technological and digital solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals and expanding people-to-people cooperation are the other two BRICS priorities. Digital tools have helped a world adversely hit by the pandemic, and India has been in the forefront of using new technological tools to improve governance.
- But enhancing people-to-people cooperation will have to wait for international travel to revive. Interactions through digital means are a poor substitute.
- Among other concerns, BRICS has been busy deepening trade and investment ties among its member states.
- The difficulty stems from China's centrality and dominance of intra-BRICS trade flows. How to create a better internal balance remains a challenge, reinforced by the urgent need for diversification and strengthening of regional value chains, all exposed during the pandemic.
- Policymakers have been encouraging an increase in intra-BRICS cooperation in diverse areas like agriculture, disaster resilience, digital health, traditional medicine and customs cooperation.

Takeaways

- The idea of BRICS – a common pursuit of shared interests by the five emerging economies from four continents – is fundamentally sound and relevant. The governments have invested huge political capital in pushing the BRICS experiment forward, and its institutionalisation has created its own momentum.
- The five-power combine has succeeded, albeit up to a point. But it now confronts multiple challenges: China's economic rise has created a serious imbalance within BRICS; Beijing's aggressive policy, especially against India, puts BRICS solidarity under exceptional strain; and BRICS countries have not done enough to assist the Global South to win their optimal support for their agenda.
- It is necessary for leaders, officials and academics of this grouping to undertake serious soul-searching and find a way out of the present predicament.
- A parting thought: BRICS negotiators need to master the art of brevity and tight drafting. When they do so, they will realise that unduly lengthy communiqués are an index to the grouping's weakness, not strength.

Will post-Afghanistan US foreign policy shift focus to Southeast Asia?

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The calamity of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan over the past two weeks has drawn scathing rebukes of US foreign policy, while raising serious questions over how the US intends to project power in the future.*

Details:

- In Southeast Asia, the US has been working to shore up regional alliances vis a vis China. Last week, US Vice President Kamala Harris concluded a weeklong trip to Singapore and Vietnam, where she reaffirmed Washington's commitment to Southeast Asia.
- However, Harris' Southeast Asia trip came amid the greatest foreign policy debacle for the US in decades.
- Several Southeast Asian governments were forced to hurriedly evacuate their citizens from Afghanistan as the result of Washington's decisions, and there are concerns that a surge of Islamic extremism in Afghanistan could increase the threat of terrorist attacks in Southeast Asia.

Monitoring US commitment



- During a joint briefing with Harris on August 23, Singapore's prime minister, Lee Hsein Loong, said that "what will influence perceptions of US resolve and commitment to the region will be what the US does going forward."
- In the decades after the end of the Vietnam War, US interest in Southeast Asia was typified in foreign policy circles as a form of "benign neglect."
- However, with the rise of the region's economies, as well as the threat of a more assertive China, Southeast Asia became a key region for Washington, marked by the so-called pivot to Asia policy from the Obama administration in 2011.
- The United States is a key economic and security partner of most Southeast Asian governments and has a treaty alliance with Thailand and the Philippines, as well as close defense ties to Singapore and Vietnam, one of its major partners in Asia today
- Washington has taken the side of Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia in their disputes with China over territory in the South China Sea.
- But over the past several weeks, the hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan has forced some governments to question whether Washington will come to their defense if a violent conflict broke out with China.

Southeast Asia is not Afghanistan

- For the most part, however, Southeast Asian governments are aware that US interests in their region are vastly different from what the US has tried to achieve elsewhere.
- While US intervention in countries like Afghanistan revolved around anti-terrorism efforts and nation-building, in Southeast Asia, Washington's interests focus on improving already close relations with stable states.
- Moreover, the US in Afghanistan tasked itself with providing much of the country's security, as well as bankrolling a weak and impoverished state.
- Southeast Asia is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies, from which American businesses can profit. The Southeast Asian bloc is America's fourth-largest trading partner, according to US government data.

Will Southeast Asia now get more US attention?

- Some analysts in Southeast Asia are now watching whether the US withdrawal from Afghanistan will actually allow the US to engage more deeply in other key regions.
- The Biden administration came to office stating that it intended to recalibrate from Central Asia and the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific.
- Withdrawing from Afghanistan was part of this plan, except that it was very poorly executed.
- What matters most for Southeast Asian governments will be how quickly the United States moves to reinforce the message that the Indo-Pacific lies at the heart of American foreign policy.
- Should the retreat from Afghanistan mean a more effective and robust recalibrated US presence in Southeast Asia, the United States may be able to maintain a presence and expand on its options, and limit any [Chinese influence] over its actions, in the region.
- Many Southeast Asian governments expressed confusion during the last years of the Trump administration, especially after he seemingly snubbed the region by not sending a senior official to the ASEAN summit in 2019.
- And in the first months of the Biden administration, there were complaints that the US had lost interest in the region, the likely reason for vice-president Harris' visit in late August.
- The trip was intended to "build on the Biden-Harris Administration's message to the world: America is back," Harris' office said in a statement before her visit to Vietnam and Singapore.
- As well as Harris' trip, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam in late July. In May, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman visited Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia.



- US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has also recently participated in ministerial meetings of the ASEAN bloc.

US building alliances against China

- Then there is the fact that Southeast Asia is a key area in Washington's rivalry with China.
- This can be taken two ways by Southeast Asian leaders. Because Southeast Asia is an integral region in Washington's rivalry with Beijing, especially over issues like territorial disputes in the South China Sea and resource conflict on the Mekong River, regional governments can expect to maintain the attention of officials in Washington.
- Southeast Asia wants the US and China to compete for their attention, but countries in the region resent being forced to choose [between the two].
- However, because some regional governments "worry the US only cares about them because of China," American "staying power" could also diminish if Washington alters its current opinion of China as a major rival.

How was the backward classes policy restored?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The 105th Constitution Amendment was notified on August 19 after it received the assent of President Ramnath Kovind. It is aimed at restoring to the States their power to identify socially and educationally backward classes. The Opposition set aside its differences with the government and supported the Amendment, which was passed during the stormy monsoon session with the required special majority. The Amendment became necessary to undo the effect of a Supreme Court verdict that States had lost their power to include or exclude communities in the 'Backward Classes' list after Parliament enacted the 102nd Constitution Amendment.*

Why was the Amendment required?

- Through the 102nd Constitution Amendment, Parliament created a National Backward Classes Commission, vesting it with the power to be consulted by the Centre as well as the States in all matters concerning the 'socially and educationally backward classes' (SEBCs).
- In a bid to clothe the Commission with the same powers as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission, Parliament used wording identical to the existing provisions relating to the SC/ST Commission. Thus, under Article 342A, it was laid down that the President shall notify a list of SEBCs in relation to each State and Union Territory in consultation with the Governors.
- This was called the 'Central List', and once it is notified, only Parliament alone could make changes to it.
- Based on this, the Supreme Court, while considering a challenge to the Maratha reservation in Maharashtra on various grounds, concluded that after this Amendment came into force, States can no more notify or identify backward classes, and only the President could do so, and further changes could be made by Parliament.

What was the reaction of political parties?

- The Union government had argued vociferously in court that neither the Centre nor Parliament intended to take away the State's power to identify SEBCs.
- The use of the term, 'Central List', meant that what the President notified was a list of backward classes for the purpose of the Central government and its instrumentalities, and did not affect the lists maintained by the various States.



- Political parties in the Opposition blamed the Centre for enacting a flawed law that led to the court coming to such a conclusion.
- As there was a political consensus that the Supreme Court's interpretation required to be undone by law, it was decided to amend the Constitution once again to clarify the State's role in identifying SEBCs. It was introduced as the Constitution (127th Amendment) Bill, 2021.
- After its passage and on receiving presidential assent, it was notified as the Constitution (105th Amendment) Act, 2021.

What does the 105th Amendment do?

- Parliament adopted fresh legislation to undo the effects of the Supreme Court's interpretation. Therefore, it contains specific clauses that seek to restore the original intention of having a 'Central List' for the purposes of the Union and letting States retain their respective lists.
- It first adds a proviso to the effect that the requirement that the National Backward Classes Commission should be consulted on policy matters will not apply to the State lists of SEBCs.
- It specifies that the list of SEBCs notified by the President shall be only for the purposes of the Central government alone, and that the 'Central List' means only the list "prepared and maintained by and for the Central Government".
- Further, the 105th Amendment clarifies that every State or Union Territory may, by law, prepare and maintain for its own purposes a list of SEBCs and this may be different from the Central List.
- These changes are aimed at undoing the conclusion of three judges on the five-Judge Bench in the Maratha reservation case that the term 'Central List' applied to all SEBCs notified by the President and that it was the only List "for the purposes of the Constitution".
- Finally, to end all debate on how SEBCs are defined, the latest Amendment also changed the definition given in the 102nd Amendment.
- Originally, "socially and educationally backward classes" were described as "such backward classes as are so deemed under Article 342A for the purposes of this Constitution", that is, those found in the List notified by the President under Article 342A.
- This has now been changed to the effect that SEBCs are those so deemed under the same Article for the purposes of the Central government, or the State or the Union Territory.

What has the Supreme Court ruled on 'creamy layer'?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: On August 24, a Division Bench of the Supreme Court, led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao, observed that economic criterion cannot be the sole basis for identifying the 'creamy layer' of a backward class, and that other factors like social advancement, education, employment, too, matter. The judgment came on a writ petition filed by a group from Haryana, the Pichra Warg Kalyan Mahasabha, challenging two notifications issued by the State government in 2016 and 2018, under the Haryana Backward Classes (Reservation in Services and Admission in Educational Institutions) Act, 2016.

What were the notifications?

- The 2016 notification identified as 'creamy layer' backward class members whose gross annual income exceeded ₹6 lakh.
- It said backward class sections whose families earn less than ₹3 lakh would get priority over their counterparts who earn more than ₹3 lakh but less than ₹6 lakh.

- The Supreme Court struck down the notifications as a “flagrant violation” of the 2016 Act. It said Section 5 (2) of the Act required the State to consider social, economic and other factors together to identify and exclude backward class members as ‘creamy layer’.

Who belongs to the ‘creamy layer’?

- The ‘creamy layer’ concept was introduced in the Supreme Court’s Indra Sawhney judgment, delivered by a nine-judge Bench on November 16, 1992.
- Though it upheld the government’s decision based on the Mandal Commission’s report to give 27% reservation to Other Backward Classes, the court found it necessary to identify sections of backward classes who were already “highly advanced socially as well as economically and educationally”.
- The court believed that these wealthy and advanced members form the ‘creamy layer’ among backward classes. The judgment directed the State governments to identify the ‘creamy layer’ and exclude them from the purview of reservation.
- However, certain States like Kerala did not promptly implement the judgment. This led to the Indra Sawhney-II case, reported in 2000. In this, the court went to the extent of determining the ‘creamy layer’ among backward classes.
- The judgment held that persons from backward classes who occupied posts in higher services such as IAS, IPS and All India Services had reached a higher level of social advancement and economic status, and therefore, were not entitled to be treated as backward. Such persons were to be treated as ‘creamy layer’ without any further inquiry.
- Likewise, people with sufficient income who were in a position to provide employment to others should also be taken to have reached a higher social status and treated as “outside the backward class”. Other categories included persons with higher agricultural holdings or income from property.
- Thus, a reading of the Indra Sawhney judgments shows that social advancement, including education and employment, and not just wealth, was key to identify the ‘creamy layer’.

Why is it difficult to draw the line?

- The identification of ‘creamy layer’ has been a thorny issue. The basic question here is how rich or advanced should a backward class section be to invite exclusion from reservation.
- Justice Jeevan Reddy, in the Indra Sawhney judgment, wondered “how and where to draw the line” between the deserving and the creamy layer among backward classes. “The basis of exclusion should not merely be economic, unless, of course, the economic advancement is so high that it necessarily means social advancement,” he pointed out.
- Justice Reddy highlighted the pitfalls of identifying the creamy layer merely on economic basis. For example, a person who earns ₹36,000 a month may be economically well-off in rural India. However, the same salary in a metropolitan city may not count for much. Here, Justice Reddy warned that “while the income of a person can be taken as a measure of his social advancement, the limit to be prescribed should not be such as to result in taking away with one hand what is given with the other. The income limit must be such as to mean and signify social advancement”.



GS III

Managing natural resources

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Just about 50 km from Meghalaya's capital Shillong is Umdohbyrthih village. It was once known for its rocky terrains, streams, springs and verdant valleys. In recent years, however, its forest cover and natural resources have rapidly deteriorated.*

Accessibility to knowledge

- Many villages are facing a similar crisis. The State, known to have spots designated as the 'wettest places' on earth, is now facing a severe water crisis. Natural resource management becomes critical in this context.
- This is not a new concept, especially in Meghalaya where traditional practices on sustainable use of natural resources have been passed down from one generation to another.
- This indigenous knowledge began to slowly fade, however, owing to population growth, the quest for unsustainable developmental activities and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, among other factors.
- Another roadblock to natural resource management was of knowledge inaccessibility among rural communities. When free access to information on an issue is not made available to communities, they begin to rely on external agencies for solving their local problems.
- The government wanted to see if, when provided with correct knowledge, solutions to problems can be devised and even implemented by community members themselves, with proper facilitation support. Reactivating the community's connection to natural resources and enabling them to tackle the resource crisis became a priority for the State.
- We got an opportunity to do this through the World Bank-supported Meghalaya Community-Led Landscape Management Project. We set up a cross-functional team with diverse expertise. The team worked with many facilitators and empowered them with digital infrastructure.
- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme became the main scheme channelising resources to impact poor households so that there was systematic convergence of all line departments such as agriculture, horticulture, soil and water conservation. The programme leverages technology and the youth population.
- Leveraging technology, more than 2,000 village community facilitators have already been trained and are working towards climate change reversal. These facilitators take informed action pertaining to their environment.
- The idea is to bring at least 14,000-18,000 community facilitators (three from each village) to the fore. This has been made possible with the help of digital applications like Participant Digital Attestation. This app allows community cadres to record their attendance by scanning QR codes.
- It provides them content, training sessions and digital certification. These tools help create a free flow of knowledge without hierarchy and empower communities to overcome knowledge barriers.
- To build autonomy, we use simple tools. They have been designed keeping in mind many things: creating community agency, building the capacities of all persons in the programme, and ensuring frequent interactions among them.
- Technology empowers us with real-time data, which in turn results in better programme governance, transparency and accountability. Communities are now able to articulate the complexities of their problems through a scientific lens and create their own natural resource management plans.

A one-stop centre

- To carry forward this momentum, we are launching a Centre of Excellence in Meghalaya, a one-stop centre for natural resources management.



- Its mandate is to build leadership capabilities to enable close cooperation among departments, democratise access to knowledge, and continue with research and development on every aspect of natural resource management.
- Through our work, we intend to empower thousands of village community facilitators.

Why are hydropower projects in the Himalayas risky?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Environment Ministry, in an affidavit placed in the Supreme Court earlier this month, has disclosed that it has permitted seven hydroelectric power projects, which are reportedly in advanced stages of construction, to go ahead. One of them is the 512 MW Tapovan Vishnugadh project, in Joshimath, Uttarakhand that was damaged by a flood in February.*

What's the history of hydel projects in the Himalayas?

- In the aftermath of the Kedarnath floods of 2013 that killed at least 5,000 people, the Supreme Court had halted the development of hydroelectric projects in Uttarakhand pending a review by the Environment Ministry on the role such projects had played in amplifying the disaster.
- A 17-member expert committee, led by environmentalist Ravi Chopra, was set up by the Ministry to examine the role of 24 such proposed hydroelectric projects in the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi basin, which has the Ganga and several tributaries. The Chopra committee concluded that 23 projects would have an “irreversible impact” on the ecology of the region.
- Following this, six private project developers, whose projects were among those recommended to be axed, impleaded themselves in the case on the ground that since their projects had already been cleared for construction before the Kedarnath tragedy, they should be allowed to continue.
- The SC directed a new committee to be set up to examine their case. This committee, led by Vinod Tare of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, concluded that these projects could have a significant environmental impact.
- The Environment Ministry in 2015 set up yet another committee, led by B.P. Das, who was part of the original committee, but had filed a “dissenting report”. The Das committee recommended all six projects with design modifications to some.
- The Water Resources Ministry, then led by Minister Uma Bharti, has been consistently opposed to hydropower projects in the Ganga. In charge of the National Mission for Clean Ganga, the Water Ministry has maintained that the cleanliness of the river was premised on minimum levels of water flow in all seasons and the proposed projects could hinder this.
- By 2019, however, the renamed Jal Shakti Ministry had changed its stance to accommodate seven out of the 24 projects. Its current position is that barring these, it is “not in favour” of new projects in the Ganga river basin.
- Though hearings in the Supreme Court are ongoing, this is the first time that the government has a formal uniform position on hydropower projects in the Uttarakhand region.

What are the challenges such projects face?

- Following the break in the Raunthi glacier that triggered floods in the Rishiganga river in Uttarakhand on February 7, which washed away at least two hydroelectric power projects — the 13.2 MW Rishiganga hydroelectric power project and the Tapovan project, environmental experts have attributed the glacial melt to global warming.
- Glacier retreat and permafrost thaw are projected to decrease the stability of mountain slopes and increase the number and area of glacier lakes. Moreover, with increased instances of cloudbursts, and

intense spells of rainfall and avalanches, residents of the region were also placed at increased risk of loss of lives and livelihood.

How can these conflicts be resolved?

- The challenges facing development in the Himalayan region are multi-faceted. The Uttarakhand government has said that it's paying over ₹1,000 crore annually to purchase electricity and therefore, the more such projects are cancelled, the harder for them to meet their development obligations.
- Several environmentalists and residents of the region say that the proposed projects being built by private companies allot only a limited percentage of their produced power for the State of Uttarakhand itself.
- Thus the State, on its own, takes on massive environmental risk without being adequately compensated for it or its unique challenges accounted for.
- Though the Centre is committed to hydropower projects because it's a renewable source of power, the ecological damage combined with the reduced cost of solar power means that it has in recent times said that it is not in favour of greenfield hydropower projects in the region.
- But several environmental activists say that the Centre will continue to prioritise infrastructural development in the region, even if it comes at a heavy environmental cost.

Why is there a push for asset monetisation?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), which is expected to fetch around ₹5.96 lakh crore to the government. Following through on the Budget's plan to monetise public assets to fund fresh capital expenditure on infrastructure, the government released a list of projects and facilities to be offered to private investors over the next four years through structured leasing and securitisation transactions.

What is the National Monetisation Pipeline?

- The NMP names a list of public assets that will be leased to private investors. Only brown-field assets, which are assets that are already operational, are planned to be leased out under the NMP.
- So, to give an example, an airport that is already operational may be leased out to an investor. Assets that are yet to be developed, such as an undeveloped piece of land, for example, may not be leased out.
- Importantly, there won't be any transfer of ownership from the government to the private sector when assets are leased out. The government only plans to cede control over its assets for a certain period of time, after which the assets must be returned to the government unless the lease is extended.

Will NMP help the economy?

- The government believes that leasing out public assets to private investors will help free capital that is stuck in these assets. For example, say the government has invested thousands of crores in a road project.
- It may take the government decades to recover its investment through the annual toll revenues. Instead, the government can recover a good chunk of its investment by leasing out the right to collect toll for the next 30 years to a private investor.
- The government can use this money, in turn, to build fresh infrastructure under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP). In fact, the proceeds from the NMP are expected to account for about 14% of the total outlay for infrastructure under the NIP.
- The government believes all this spending will boost economic activity. Analysts also believe that the government has now through the NMP found the right model for infrastructure development.



- The government, they say, is best suited to tackle the ground-level challenges in building infrastructure, while the private sector can operate and offer indirect finance to these projects through the NMP.

What are the risks?

- The allocation of assets owned by governments to private investors is often subject to political influence, which can lead to corruption. In fact, many in the Opposition allege that the NMP will favour a few business corporations that are close to the government.
- The expected boost to economic activity due to higher government spending may also need to be weighed against the opportunity costs.
- For one, the money that the government collects by leasing out assets comes from the pockets of the private sector. So higher government spending will come at the cost of lower private spending. The NMP also does not address the various structural problems such as legal uncertainty and the absence of a deep bond market that hold back private investment in infrastructure.
- However, it is worth noting that assets are perceived to be better managed and allocated by the private sector than by the government. To the extent that the NMP frees assets from government control, it can help the economy.
- There are also concerns that the leasing of airports, railways, roads and other public utilities to private investors could lead to higher prices for consumers. If the government merely cedes control of public utilities to private companies without taking steps to foster greater competition, it can indeed lead to poor outcomes for consumers.

What lies ahead?

- The success of the NMP will depend on the demand for brown-field government assets among private investors.
- The government's past disinvestment projects such as the sale of Air India did not catch the fancy of investors owing to the stringent conditions set by the government. In the case of Air India's sale, the buyers were supposed to possess a certain minimum net worth and stay invested in the airline for at least three years.
- Many analysts also believed that the government was expecting buyers to pay too much for a debt-ridden airline. The pricing of assets and the terms of sale will thus determine the level of interest that private investors show for assets leased under the NMP.
- In the past, doubts have been raised about the allocation of airports and other assets to certain private business groups. So the process that the government adopts this time to allocate assets may come under scrutiny. There is likely to be the demand for an open, competitive auction of assets.

India must commit to net zero emissions

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com))

Context: *India is at the risk of being cast globally as an outlier on climate action, with a negative fallout. With over 50% of the global economy already committed to net zero emissions by 2050 — and China committing to be so before 2060 — this is not where you want to be. The pace and scale of climate action is only set to increase, with the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report unequivocal on the need for urgent and stronger responses. Events around the world underline the point — towns washed away in Germany, subways turned into storm water drains in China, forests fried in the United States and so many more lives lost to flooding in India.*

Massive opportunities



- It is not only governments that are increasing climate action. The business world is too, not just to protect themselves against the risks of climate change but also to take advantage of the massive opportunities arising as the global economy shifts to net zero emissions.
- Last year, investors injected over \$500 billion into climate transition. In my country, Australia, the number of major companies that have put in place a target of reaching net zero emissions by 2050 has more than trebled in the past year.
- The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November in Glasgow is shaping up to be the most important climate meeting since the Paris Agreement in 2015.
- It is squarely focused on supercharging global ambition and action on climate change, as all countries, including India, agreed to do in the historic Paris Agreement.
- Over 100 countries have already committed to net zero emissions by 2050, with more expected at COP26.
- Two key holdouts are India and Australia. In the case of my country, under mounting pressure at home and internationally, the government is moving toward such an announcement.
- India is resolutely not committing to net zero by 2050, including on the basis that as a developing country, it needs to see significant support from developed countries for climate action as part of making any such commitment.
- **First**, India itself has a national interest in ambitious global and national climate action. Like Australia, it is among the most vulnerable countries to climate change and, therefore, should be among the more active against the threats. India faces harmful impacts related to sea level rise, heat stress, drought, water stress and flooding, biodiversity and natural disasters. Climate change is not coming — it is here.
- **Second**, as a rising power, India naturally seeks stronger influence globally. Being an outlier on the global challenge facing our generation does not support this aim. India is already the third largest emitter in the world, and is set to be the largest as the United States, China, and the European Union are all now signed up to net zero.
- This will become a significant drag on India's international diplomacy. This applies not just to key relationships like with the U.S., where President Joe Biden's administration is mainstreaming climate action into its economic, foreign and security policy, but also with much of the Group of 77 (G77) states, who are increasingly concerned to see climate action, and in multilateral groupings such as the United Nations and ASEAN-APEC.

No longer a trade-off

- Finally, as the famous phrase goes, "it's the economy, stupid". There is no longer a trade-off between reducing emissions and economic growth. Solar energy costs have fallen 90% in recent years, providing the cheapest electricity in India ever seen.
- Also, given the negative impacts, addressing climate change in India's economic development is now central to success, not an added luxury to consider. For example, agricultural policy that does not consider adaptive approaches to maximise productivity in the face of increased flooding and drought due to climate change is derelict.
- The transition of the global economy to net zero emissions is the biggest commercial opportunity in history. In just the energy sector alone, an estimated \$1.6 to \$3.8 trillion of investment is required every year until 2050.
- China gets this, which is why it is investing heavily in gaining an advantage in the technologies of the new economy, be it renewable energy and storage, electric and hydrogen transport, low emissions industry, green cities or sustainable agriculture.
- It is not as if India is at a standing start. It is set to significantly exceed its Paris Agreement commitment of reducing the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35% below 2005 levels by 2030, providing ready room for higher ambition.
- India is impressing the world with its leading roll-out of renewable energy and target for 450GW by 2030, linked to its leadership on the International Solar Alliance and recent national hydrogen strategy.



Indian corporates are also stepping up, with the Tata Group winning awards on sustainability, Mahindra committing to net zero by 2040 and Reliance by 2035. There is plenty on which to build.

- And India should not be expected to build alone. India's national interests on climate action are now engaged in ways that go significantly beyond waiting for donor support to drive ambition, notwithstanding reasonable arguments about historical responsibility, per capita emissions and equity.
- With growing wealth and stature, India is increasingly disinclined toward handouts. But that does not mean well-targeted donor investments and international partnerships should not be a factor in raising India's climate ambition.
- This could come in many guises, from stronger political engagement and dialogue to policy support in areas of mutual challenge such as energy policy, carbon markets and post-COVID green economic recovery.
- Practical support and cooperation in areas like rolling out renewable energy and integrating it with the national grid, zero emissions transport, decarbonising hard to abate sectors like steel, cement and chemicals and decarbonising agriculture offer significant scope to raise ambition.
- As does working with India on innovative green financing for decarbonising investments, including using donor support to mobilise private sector finance, green bonds and climate transition funds. Whichever it is, they need to be lasting partnerships that deliver results.
- Yet, in the end, India's tryst with destiny rests in its own remarkable hands, as it always has been. In a land where the earth is called mother, and Mahatma Gandhi, major religions and the Constitution enshrine environmental care, commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 should almost be foretold. The world hopes we will see it soon.



Current Affairs Quiz

- 1) Which of the following statement is incorrect with respect to Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)?
- These are investment vehicles that pool investor money and use it to buy a portfolio of real estate assets
 - The structure of a REIT is similar to a mutual fund
 - The minimum investment amount in a REIT should be Rs. 50,000
 - REITs need to mandatorily distribute 90% of their income to unit-holders

Answer : c

- 2) Consider the following statements about Nine Dash Line:

- It is a straight line representing China's claim over 90% areas in South China Sea that traces its origin back to 1947.
- It is a continuous line meaning that other countries cannot pass through the lines freely without its permission

Select the CORRECT answer code:

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : d

- It is a U-shaped line that owes its origin back to 1947, demarcated by Chinese geographer Yang Huaiaren.
- It is a discontinuous line meaning that other countries can pass through it freely.

- 3) Consider the following statements about Morheen Yoga Mat:

- It is a 100% biodegradable and compostable mat made from Mangrove species.
- It is named after a resident bird of Deepor Beel Wildlife sanctuary.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

It is named after Kam Sorai (Purple moorhen, a resident bird of Deepor Beel Wildlife sanctuary in Assam).

- 4) Consider the following statements with respect to POSHAN Abhiyaan:

- It is a flagship programme to improve nutritional outcomes for children, adolescent Girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- The programme will be funded 50% by the Government of India and 50% by World Bank or other Multinational Development Banks.
- Every year, the month of October is celebrated as POSHAN Maah across the country.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

- 1 only
- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Answer : b

In order to ensure community mobilization and bolster people's participation, every year, the month of September is celebrated as POSHAN Maah across the country.

- 5) India's Highest Herbal Park is in -
- Tamil Nadu
 - Uttarakhand
 - Arunachal Pradesh
 - Jammu & Kashmir

Answer : b

- 6) Consider the following statements with respect to Geological Survey of India (GSI):
- It was set up in 1851 primarily to find coal deposits for the Railways.
 - Presently, GSI is an attached office to the Ministry of Mines.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

- 7) Consider the following statements about Pashmina Shawls:

- Pashmina comes from an animal fibre Cashmere, derived from the Shahtoosh wool of Chiru Antelope.
- Changpa tribes from Changthang region of Ladakh rear the goat for its wool.
- Kashmiri Pashmina was given the GI tag in the year 2013 owing to its unique methods of making.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

- 1 only
- 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Answer : c

Pashmina comes from an animal fibre Cashmere, derived from the Changthangi goat of Ladakh.

- 8) Which of the following statements is/are correct about The Factoring Regulation (Amendment) Act 2021?

- It allowed the participation of NBFCs in the TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System) platform.
- For NBFCs, the income from the factoring business should be more than 50% of the gross assets/net income.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

The act removes the threshold of NBFCs in which 50% of the gross assets/net income from factoring business.

- 9) Consider the following statements with respect to Cyanobacteria:

- Cyanobacteria are prokaryotes belong to Monera kingdom and often called as Blue-Green Algae.
- They are mainly aquatic that photosynthesize their own food.
- It is capable of producing toxins that can be ingested by livestock and enter the food chain.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer : d

10) Consider the following statements about to Black-necked Crane:

- 1. The species is found in India, China and Bhutan.
- 2. It has been classified as Vulnerable under the IUCN Red list of Threatened species.
- 3. The major threat to the successful breeding of black-necked crane is the damage to the eggs and chicks, caused by feral dogs.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer : b

It has been listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List.

11) Consider the following statements about to Snow Leopard:

- 1. The range of the species extends from the Himalaya in the south to the mountains of southern Siberia in the north.
- 2. It has been listed as Vulnerable under the IUCN Red list of threatened species.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer : c

12) Consider the following statements about ZAPAD 2021:

- 1. It is one of the theatre level exercises of Russian armed forces that focus primarily on operations against terrorists.
- 2. India is one among the 9 participating countries that are invited for the exercise.
- 3. China, Pakistan is taking part as observers in this multinational exercise.

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

13) Panjshir Valley is located in-

- a. Pakistan
- b. Mongolia
- c. Tajikistan
- d. Afghanistan

Answer : d

14) Ashok Kumar Tandon Committee was constituted -

- a. To probe Pegasus snooping issue

- b. To reform Journalists Welfare Schemes
- c. To suggest measures for Sustainable Fisheries Management
- d. To study the impact of traditional health practices in rural villages

Answer : b

15) Consider the following statements regarding Special Drawing Right (SDR):

- 1. The Special Drawing Right (SDR) is an interest-bearing international reserve asset created by the IMF.
- 2. The value of the SDR is directly determined by supply and demand in the market.
- 3. It can be held and used by member countries, private entities or individuals.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer: c)

The value of the SDR is not directly determined by supply and demand in the market, but is set daily by the IMF on the basis of market exchange rates between the currencies included in the SDR basket. It can be held and used by member countries, the IMF, and certain designated official entities called “prescribed holders”—**but it cannot be held, for example, by private entities or individuals.**

16) Great Barrier Reef is located in-

- a) South of Kimberley Plateau
- b) Off the coast of Queensland in North-eastern Australia
- c) Near Timor Sea in Southern Australia
- d) None of the above

Answer: b)

17) Consider the following statements with respect to Off-budget borrowing:

- 1. Off-budget borrowing helps keep the country’s fiscal deficit within acceptable limits.
- 2. Off-budget borrowings is not part of the calculation of the fiscal indicators and does not have any fiscal implications.
- 3. Public sector banks are not authorised to fund off-budget expenses.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: a)

Public sector banks are also used to fund off-budget expenses. For example, loans from PSU banks were used to make up for the shortfall in the release of fertiliser subsidy.

18) Consider the following statements with respect to Freedom of navigation (FON):

- 1. Freedom of navigation (FON) is a principle of customary international law that ships flying the flag of any sovereign state shall not suffer interference from other states, without any exceptions.
- 2. Not all UN member states have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer: b)

Freedom of navigation (FON) is a principle of customary international law that ships flying the flag of any sovereign state shall not suffer interference from other states, **apart from the exceptions provided for in international law.**

19) Guam Island is located in-

- a) Indian ocean
- b) Sea of Japan
- c) Western Pacific Ocean
- d) Tasman Sea

Answer: c)

20) Consider the following statements with respect to Golden rice:

1. Golden rice is a variety of rice produced through genetic engineering to include genes that increase the beta carotene content.
2. India became the first country in the world to approve commercial production of genetically modified golden rice.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer: a)

Philippines became the first country in the world to approve commercial production of genetically modified golden rice.