VISHNU I A S

APRIL
11.04.2021

CURRENT AFFAIRS

A MAGAZINEFOR CIVILSERVICESPREPARATION

JOIN OUR TELEGRAM:https://t.me/vishnuiasmentor

Articles of the day
THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS

UPSC

Online & Offline classes

Test Series

One-Stop Solution

Free daily materials

General Studies

THE HINDU

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. The abolition of FCAT

Context:

- The **Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021**, issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Background:

Film certification:

- Films meant for distribution in theatres require to be certified as 'U' (unrestricted public exhibition), 'UA' (unrestricted public exhibition subject to parental guidance for children below the age of 12), 'A' (restricted to adult audiences) or 'S' (restricted to specialised audiences such as doctors or scientists) by the **Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).**

Concerns with the process:

- According to observers, the CBFC was increasingly getting stacked with people close to the ruling dispensation. Of late, the body has been headed by chairpersons who have ruled with a **heavy hand and ordered cuts to films critical of the government.**
- The clash between the film fraternity and the certification body became more pronounced over the years. Such moves have been criticized for being **against the constitutional right of freedom of express**

Film Certificate Appellate Tribunal:

- The Film Certificate Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) was established in 1983 as a **statutory body under The Cinematograph Act.**
- FCAT had been set up to hear appeals of filmmakers against decisions of the Central Board of Film Certification.

Significance:

- The FCAT has been envisaged as a **buffer for filmmakers**. Before the FCAT, filmmakers had no option but to approach the court to seek redressal against CBFC certifications or suggested cuts.
- The FCAT has often stepped in to **sort out disputes between the CBFC and the filmmakers**.
- Though the decisions taken by the FCAT were not beyond reproach, the FCAT could be credited with **taking quick decisions.**
- Among other objectives, the rationale for setting up the FCAT was to **reduce the burden on courts by functioning as an appellate body.**

Details:

- The ordinance scraps the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT), a statutory body that had been set up to hear appeals of filmmakers against decisions of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), and transfers its function to other existing judicial bodies.
    o The ordinance has amended **The Cinematograph Act, 1952**, and replaced the word 'Tribunal' with 'High Court'.
- **Eight other appellate authorities have also been disbanded** with immediate effect.

Reasons for the ordinance:

- The move to abolish the FCAT along with other tribunals follows a **Supreme Court order in Madras Bar Association vs. Union of India.**
- The two-member Bench had directed the government to constitute a **National Tribunals Commission.**
    o The National Tribunals Commission was envisaged to act as an **independent body** to supervise the appointments and functioning of Tribunals, as well as to conduct disciplinary proceedings against members of Tribunals and to take care of administrative and infrastructural needs of the Tribunals, in an appropriate manner.
- The Supreme Court's recommendations were intended to **strengthen the functioning of the tribunals by addressing the issue of dependence of tribunals on the executive for administrative requirements.**

Concerns:

Against expert committee recommendations:

- The move to abolish the FCAT is surprising as it comes in the backdrop of the recommendations of two influential panels — the Mudgal Committee and the Benegal Committee — both of which suggested an expansion of the body's jurisdiction.

- Neither the **Mukul Mudgal committee** nor the **Shyam Benegal committee** had recommended that the FCAT be scrapped.
  - The Justice Mukul Mudgal Committee had examined the certification process and suggested recommendations.

Over burdening the judiciary:

- With the disbanding of the FCAT, it will be left to the already overburdened courts to adjudicate on appeals against the CBFC orders.
- The role played by the FCAT will now have to be performed by courts.
- With the government tightening its control on over-the-top (OTT) content and ordering players in this area to set up a grievance redressal body to address the concerns of the viewers, many observers point out that the courts will have to play a greater role as an avenue of appeal.

Impact on the filmmakers:

- The recent ordinance will impact filmmakers seeking redressal on certification and cuts.
- The expected delays in the appeal process would only **dis-incentivize the filmmaking fraternity to take up emotive or controversial topics as film subjects**, thus placing an **indirect restriction on right of freedom of expression**.

2. SC hears plea to decriminalise begging

Context:

- The Supreme Court has asked the Centre and four States to file their response on a plea seeking a direction to repeal the provisions criminalising begging.

Plea in the Supreme Court:

- A plea was filed in the Supreme Court against the provisions of the statute criminalising begging.
- The Supreme Court in February 2021 had sought a response from the Centre, and five States on the plea.
- Despite the notice issued to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Bihar on the plea, only Bihar had so far filed its response.

Arguments by the petitioner:

Provisions violative of constitutional rights:

- The plea claimed that the sections of the statute criminalising begging were violative of constitutional rights.
- The criminalising of begging had put people in a situation to make an unreasonable choice between committing a crime or not committing one and starving, which goes against the very spirit of the Constitution and violates **Article 21 i.e. Right to Life.**
    - As per the 2011 Census 2011, the total number of beggars in India is 4,13,670 and the current number would have only increased from the last census.
- The plea argues that a person, who is compelled to beg due to certain circumstances, cannot be faulted for his actions.

Against socialistic principles:

- The government has the mandate to provide **social security** to everyone and ensure that all had basic facilities, as embedded in the **Directive Principles of State Policy** in the Constitution. The presence of beggars is indicative of the failure of the state to provide basic facilities to all its citizens.
- Criminalising the act of beggary goes against the approach of a **socialist nation as embedded in the preamble of the Indian Constitution.**

Judicial precedent:

- The plea had referred to the August 2018 verdict of the Delhi High Court which had decriminalised begging in the national capital holding that provisions of the **Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959**, which treats begging as an offence cannot sustain constitutional scrutiny.

3. India, China agree to avoid new incidents on border

Context:

- 11th round of talks between the Corps Commanders recently held at Chushul.

Background:

- With disengagement complete on both banks of Pangong Tso in February, the focus of the talks was on disengagement from patrolling points (PP) at **Gogra and Hotsprings.**

Details:

- The two sides had a detailed exchange of views regarding disengagement along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.
- The two sides agreed on the need to resolve the outstanding issues in an expeditious manner in accordance with the existing agreements and protocols.
- India and China have agreed that the completion of disengagement at Gogra and Hotsprings would pave the way for the two sides to consider de-escalation of forces and ensure full **restoration of peace and tranquillity and enable progress in bilateral relations.**

4. Steps taken to prevent spread of brucellosis

Context:

- Animal Husbandry officials in Kerala have launched preventive measures after a few cases of brucellosis were detected in animals.

Brucellosis:

- Brucellosis is a disease caused by a group of bacteria from the genus Brucella. These bacteria can infect both humans and animals.
- **Brucellosis is a zoonotic infection**. It is a bacterial infection that spreads from animals to people. It affects thousands of people worldwide.
- Most commonly, people are **infected by eating raw or unpasteurized dairy products.** Sometimes, the bacteria that cause brucellosis can **spread through the air or through direct contact with infected animals.**

5. 'Reduce health inequities to tackle pandemic challenges'

Context:

- A study by the Jaipur-based **Indian Institute of Health Management Research (IIHMR),** on the public health situation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background:

- The rapid spread of the pandemic in the country had led to the loss of livelihood and productivity, increase in poverty and decline in nutrition levels.

Details:

Social determinants of health:

- The study identifying some primary aspects of inequities had noted that **around 40% of the health outcomes could be measured through social determinants**.
- The **lack of accessibility and affordability, poverty, lack of education, inequitable distribution of income and lack of proper nutrition** were the gaps which had caused major concerns in the health sector during the pandemic.

Recommendations:

- There is the need for urgent action for **reducing health inequities in India**. The transformation of public health could only be achieved through equity.
- India needs to adopt an **integrated approach** to address the various determinants at the individual, community and the health system levels. The integrated approach may require the state to work on **aspects such as nutrition and sanitation along with improved access to healthcare facilities.** Along with the bridging of gaps caused by inequities, a larger picture of health should be highlighted through **Sustainable Development Goals** with the focus on **universal health coverage**.
- There is the need for **enhanced global collaboration.** The global health leadership should work together and act beyond borders by sharing resources such as testing kits, treatment drugs and vaccinations with the low-income countries.

6. A dozen quasars discovered

Context:

- Astronomers have discovered a dozen quasars.

Quasars:

- **Quasars are extremely luminous cores of distant galaxies that are powered by supermassive black holes**.
- The Quasars are warped by a naturally occurring **cosmic "lens"** and are observed as being split into four similar images. Hence they are termed as "**quadruply imaged quasars**" or quads for short.

Significance of the finding:

- This discovery increases the number of known quasars or quads by about 25% and can help determine the expansion rate of the universe and address

other unanswered questions regarding the birth and evolution of the universe.

7. 'India, U.S. differ on rules-based order'

Context:

- S.'s freedom of navigation operation in India's Exclusive Economic Zone near Lakshadweep.

Background:

UNCLOS:

- Under the **UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea)** there is a 12 nautical mile **territorial sea**, an additional 24 nautical miles as a **contiguous zone** where a country can have some law and order, policing etc., and a 200 nautical mile **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** which a country is free to exploit the natural resources like fisheries or sea-bed mining but cannot exercise territorial rights.

FONOP controversy:

- The U.S. has conducted a patrol in the Indian Ocean in India's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near Lakshadweep.
- While India protested against the U.S. move, the U.S has argued that it conducted the **"freedom of navigation operation" (FONOP)** to challenge what it has termed as India's excessive maritime claims.

Points of differences:

Prior notification:

- Military ships of other countries can go through even territorial waters of claimant countries on what is called innocent passage.
- However, **India insists on prior notification for passage of military ships not only for its territorial waters but even in its EEZ.**

Straight baseline issue:

- In Lakshadweep, there is another complicated issue called **Straight Baselines, which allows countries to claim a larger area of water around an island group**.

- UNCLOS does not permit continental states like India to claim Straight Baselines, but only archipelago states like Indonesia or the Philippines.
- The U.S. has challenged the use of straight baselines by India in the Lakshadweep islands.

The U.S's hypocrisy:

- The **S. has itself not ratified UNCLOS.**

Implications:

On bilateral relations:

- The India U.S. bilateral relations have been on the upswing in recent times, especially in the defence domain.
- The change in the Presidentship of the U.S. which was expected to alter India and U.S. bilateral dynamism has not happened. There have been high level visits from the U.S. administration to India.
- However, the recent event may become an **irritant in the India- U.S. relationship**.

On Quad grouping:

- The recent development does not augur well for the Quad grouping.
- **The Quad advocates a rules-based order for the region.** The latest FONOP controversy underlines the fact that both countries have huge differences when it comes to what a "rules-based order" means for the region.
- The difference in understanding of the UNCLOS provisions among the Quad member states of India and India might lead to weakening of the Quad grouping.

Encourage similar moves by other countries:

- The other future scenario to consider is that other countries like the Pakistan may consider similar moves by sending a ship through India's EEZ, or the Chinese and Pakistanis may carry out a joint exercise there.
  - Notably, in a recent development, a Chinese surveillance which came near the Andamans, was allegedly chased away by the Indian Navy.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

8. The 'armed struggle' that goes nowhere

Context:

- The Maoist's recently conducted an ambush and killed more than 20 paramilitary personnel in the Tarrem area in the Bijapur-Sukma district border in southern Chhattisgarh

Background:

Formation of CPI (Maoist):

- The **CPI (Maoist) came into being after the merger of two of the strongest Naxalite groups — the Peoples' War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre — in 2004.**
  - The PWG was formed in 1980 by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah from the splinter groups that had broken away from the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), led by general secretary Charu Mazumdar in the early 1970s.
  - The MCC was founded by Kanai Chatterjee in 1975 and had strongholds in the Jharkhand forests.

Modus Operandi:

- The PWG had a sizeable following in the 1980s and 90s in undivided Andhra Pradesh as it had led mass agitations on various issues, including peasant wages and land struggles. The PWG graduated into a military force by forming guerrilla zones in northern Telangana, extending up to the Nallamalla forests.
- Anticipating state actions, a group from the PWG had already moved to present-day Chhattisgarh in the early 1990s and had formed **mass organisations like the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (DAKMS)** in the tribal areas in the southern part of Chhattisgarh. The armed cadres of the PWG also used the difficult terrain to build **guerrilla zones.**
- The Indian Maoists have sought refuge in remote forested areas which offer them the camouflage and difficult terrain to engage in guerrilla warfare and to seek support from tribal people living in areas that are either under-developed or have limited access to the institutions of the Indian state.
- The Maoists claim to have set up **"janathana sarkars"** — local government units in places such as the Abujmarh forested areas in southern Chhattisgarh.

Governmental measures:

- The Indian government has launched a **military campaign** against the guerrillas, while taking steps to cut their popular support in remote villages through **developmental work and infrastructure building.**

Pressure on the Maoists:

- The Maoists have been dealt a severe blow by incarcerations and "encounter" killings of senior leaders.
- The Maoists have been facing desertions due to surrenders by cadres to security forces in various States.
- The Maoists have also been at the end of strong attacks by paramilitary and police forces in areas such as the Andhra-Odisha border that is close to south Chhattisgarh, in Gadchiroli in Maharasthra and even as far as the western ghat forests in the tri-state junction between Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The constant pressure on the Maoists has not allowed them to build a workable organisation in new areas, and are being hemmed into what seems to be their last stronghold — South Bastar.

Concerns:

Evolution as a military force:

- The CPI(Maoist) has evolved into a military force. By 2010, the Indian government already identified the Maoists as the **"single biggest internal security challenge".**

Attacks on security personnel:

- Maoist insurgents, despite facing desertions and counter-attacks, stick to armed struggle, continuing to target security personnel. The recent attack has raised the number of security forces killed in the Bastar region to more than 175 since the killing of 76 CRPF personnel in the Chintalnar attack in April 2010.

Ideology:

- The Indian Maoists have steadfastly held that **violent armed struggle** is a must in its aims to achieve a socialist revolution in India. The CPI (Maoist) **rejects Indian democracy and electoral politics.**
- The Maoists have refused to change their understanding of the nature of the Indian state and continue to insist on an armed struggle.

- The Maoists remain committed to militant insurgency even as they reject any call for recourse to peaceful agitations or to enter the democratic process to further their goal.
- The Maoist movement in India seems headed in the same direction that several violent and failed insurgencies, inspired by the Chinese revolution, went — from the Shining Path in Peru to the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Tribals caught in the crossfire:

- The Indian government's recourse to counter-mobilisize tribals into armed resistance groups such as Salwa Judum was met by militant backlash by the Maoists that severely affected the tribal population.
- The **Tribals have had to face both severe state repression as well as Maoist violence in the last decade.**

9. Dolphin boom in Odisha's Chilika lake

Context:

- **Dolphin census data** released by wildlife wing of the Odisha State Forest and Environment Department.

Details:

- The population estimation exercise for dolphins and other cetacean species covered almost the entire coast of Odisha.
- Three dolphin species were recorded during the census- **Irrawaddy, bottle-nose and humpback dolphins.**
- The population of dolphins in Chilika and along the Odisha coast has doubled this year compared with last year, thus indicating a spectacular growth in numbers.
  - Of particular interest is the sizeable growth in the population of **endangered Irrawaddy dolphins. The Irrawaddy dolphins are mostly found in Chilika lake**. Apart from Chilika, Irrawaddy dolphins were also sighted in the Rajnagar mangrove division.
    - **Chilika lake is India's largest brackish water lake.**
  - The highest growth has been noticed in the case of **humpback dolphins.** Large groups of humpback dolphins have been spotted near Ekakula and Habelikhati areas, close to the Gahirmatha Olive Ridley nesting ground.

> ▪ The humpback dolphins are not part of any riverine systems and so they cannot be identified as residential mammals.

10. Indus and Ganges river dolphins are two different species

Context:

- Study of the Indus and Ganges river dolphins.

Background:

- The **South Asian river dolphin (Platanista gangetica) is an endangered freshwater or river dolphin**found in the region of the Indian subcontinent, which is split into two subspecies, the Ganges river dolphin (P. g. gangetica) and the Indus river dolphin (P. g. minor).
- The Ganges river dolphin is primarily found in the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers and their tributaries in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, while the Indus river dolphin is now found only in the main channel of the Indus River in Pakistan and in the River Beas (a tributary of the Indus) in Punjab in India.

Details:

- Detailed analysis of South Asian river dolphins has revealed that the **Indus and Ganges River dolphins are not one, but two separate species.**
- The research team studied body growth, skull morphology, tooth counts, colouration and **genetic makeup**. The researchers studied ancient DNA that they got out of skulls and skeletons which were 20 to 30 to even 150 years old.
- The study estimates that Indus and Ganges river dolphins may have diverged around 550,000 years ago.

Ganges Dolphin:

- The Ganges river dolphin **can only live in freshwater** and is essentially blind. They hunt by emitting ultrasonic sounds, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to "see" an image in their mind.
- The Ganges river dolphin has been recognized by the government of India as its **national aquatic animal.**

Conservation status:

- The Ganges dolphin is a **Schedule I animal under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972**, and has been included in **Annexure – I of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).**

- The Ganges River dolphin is classified as **'Endangered' species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).**

Threats:

- Ganges river dolphins once lived in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh. But the species is extinct from most of its early distribution ranges.

Declining river flow:

- The fast declining river flow due to diversion through the barrages has adversely affected the dolphin habitats.

Accidental deaths:

- Previously fishermen used to hunt dolphins and use their oil as bait, though that practice of directed killing has stopped they still end up as accidental catches. The increasingly mechanized boat fleet being used for fishing increase the chances of accidental injury to the dolphins.

River Pollution:

- The point and non-point source of pollution in the Ganges River is severely affecting the dolphin habitat.

Reduced gene flow:

- The **physical barriers such as dams and barrages** created across the river have reduced the gene flow to a great extent making the species vulnerable.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. SC turns down release of Rohingya in Jammu:

Context:

The Supreme Court has said **the Rohingya illegal migrants, detained in Jammu, will not be deported to Myanmar without following law.**

- Centre assured court that law will be scrupulously followed in deporting Rohingya migrants.

What's the case?

A plea was filed in the court to "release the detained Rohingya refugees immediately and direct the Union Territory government and the Ministry of Home Affairs to expeditiously grant refugee identification cards for the Rohingyas in the informal camps".

What has the court said?

Though **Article 14 and Article 21 enshrined in the Constitution are available to both citizens and foreigners,** the right "not to be deported" is ancillary to citizenship.

- The right not to be deported, is ancillary or concomitant to the right to reside or settle in any part of the territory of India guaranteed under **Article 19(1)(e).**
- Article 19 (1) (e) of the Constitution guarantees to every citizen of India, the right "to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India".

Laws and regulations regulating refugees in India:

In India, no legislation has been passed that specifically refers to refugees. Hence, the Rohingya refugees are often clubbed with the class of illegal immigrants deported by the government under **the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Foreigners**

Order 1948. Legally, however, a refugee is a special category of immigrant and cannot be clubbed with an illegal immigrant.

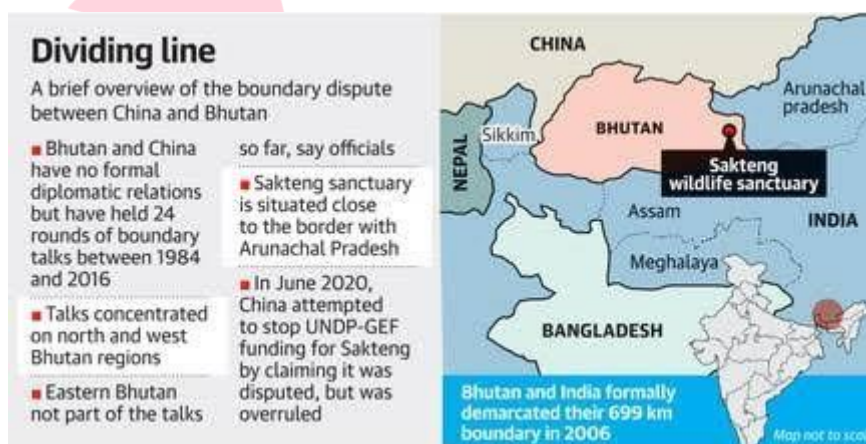## 2. Bhutan, China to schedule boundary discussions:

Context:

Bhutan and China have agreed to hold boundary talks between them "as soon as possible" and discuss a roadmap for expediting the boundary resolution.

- The upcoming talks, the 25th round of the boundary talks mechanism, will be the first since the Doklam standoff in 2017, and the first since China made new claims on Bhutan's eastern boundary bordering Arunachal Pradesh in June 2020.

Disputed areas:

The talks have thus far focused on **two areas of dispute: Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys** to the North of Bhutan and **Doklam** to the West of Bhutan, along the tri-junction with India. However, at a UN environmental meeting in June 2020, China raised an objection to a grant for Bhutan's **Sakteng Sanctuary** to the East frontier as well, saying that it was disputed as well.

Dividing line

A brief overview of the boundary dispute between China and Bhutan

- Bhutan and China have no formal diplomatic relations but have held 24 rounds of boundary talks between 1984 and 2016
- Talks concentrated on north and west Bhutan regions
- Eastern Bhutan not part of the talks

so far, say officials

- Sakteng sanctuary is situated close to the border with Arunachal Pradesh
- In June 2020, China attempted to stop UNDP-GEF funding for Sakteng by claiming it was disputed, but was overruled

Bhutan and India formally demarcated their 699 km boundary in 2006

Concerns for India:

- China's new territorial claim is a part of the larger Chinese tactics of putting pressure on India's smaller neighbours, to punish them for any closeness to India.

- In 2017 China had intruded into Doklam plateau, which is claimed by Bhutan, leading to a standoff between Indian and Chinese Armies.

3. Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP):

Context:

The US Navy has publicly declared it conducted **"freedom of navigation operations"** in India's **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** near Lakshadweep earlier this week, without deliberately seeking New Delhi's prior consent.

- However, India has protested this decision, rejecting the U.S.'s claim that its domestic maritime law was in violation of international law- (the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)).

Background:

India's domestic laws hold any country carrying out military maneuvers in its EEZ must provide prior notification.

- While a country has full sovereignty over its territorial waters, which end at 12 nautical miles from the coast, it only has special rights in exploration and use of marine resources in its EEZ, which stretch to 200 nautical miles from the baseline.

What's the issue?

The US said, India's requirement of prior consent is inconsistent with international laws and the "freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs)".

- The **US — which has not ratified the UNCLOS unlike India, China and many other countries —** does regularly conduct FONOPs in the contentious South China Sea to challenge China's aggressive territorial claims as well as in other areas including the Indian Ocean Region.

What's the concern now?

The "tone and tenor of the aggressive public declaration" of FONOPs in India's EEZ, at a time when the US is seeking India's closer cooperation through the Quad and other mechanisms to foster "credible deterrence" against China in the Indo-Pacific, raised the hackles of the Indian security establishment.

What is FONOP?

Freedom of Navigation Operations involves passages conducted by the US Navy through waters claimed by coastal nations as their exclusive territory.

- According to the US Department of Defense (DoD), the FON Program has existed for 40 years, and "continuously reaffirmed the United States' policy of exercising and asserting its navigation and overflight rights and freedoms around the world".
- These "assertions communicate that the United States does not acquiesce to the excessive maritime claims of other nations, and thus prevents those claims from becoming accepted in international law".

4. India -Netherlands Virtual Summit

In news

- Indian Prime Minister and Prime Minister of the Netherlands held a Virtual Summit.

- It was the first high level Summit attended by Netherlands' PM Mark Rutte after the general elections held in March 2021.
- During the Summit, the two leaders exchanged views on further expanding the relationship in trade and economy, water management, agriculture sector, smart cities, science & technology, healthcare and space.
- The two Prime Ministers also agreed on instituting a 'Strategic Partnership on Water' to further deepen the Indo-Dutch cooperation in the water related sector, and upgrading the Joint Working Group on water to Ministerial-level.
- Netherlands' Indo-Pacific Policy was also welcomed.

5. E9 Partnership meeting

In news

- Minister for Education (India) addressed the consultation meeting of Education Ministers of E9 countries on E9 initiative: Scaling up digital learning to accelerate progress towards **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – Quality Education.**

Important value additions

- Spearheaded by the United Nations (UN), the E9 Partnership was first established in 1993.
- **E9 Countries:** Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Pakistan.
- **Aim**: To advance the SDG 4 agenda by driving rapid change in education systems in three of the 2020 Global Education Meeting priorities: (i) support to teachers; (ii) investment in skills; and (iii) narrowing of the digital divide.

GS 3 :Economy, Science and Technology,Environment

6. Ken-Betwa project:

Context:

Congress president Sonia Gandhi has written to Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar, asking him not to implement **the Ken-Betwa river linking project.**

- It is because **Panna Tiger reserve** will be damaged by the river linking project. The state government's open estimate is that around 40 per cent of the area of the tiger reserve will be irretrievably damaged.

Background:

Union jal shakti minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat signed **a tripartite agreement with the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh** on the occasion of World Water Day to start the work on **India's first major river interlinking project that will connect the Ken and the Betwa Rivers.**

- The Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) was signed almost 18 years after the idea of the project was conceived owing to disagreement between the two states over sharing of water.

About Ken- Betwa project:

The project aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken river in MP to Betwa in UP to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region spread across the districts of two states mainly Jhansi, Banda, Lalitpur and Mahoba districts of UP and Tikamgarh, Panna and Chhatarpur districts of MP.

Key facts:

- Ken and Betwa rivers originate in MP and are the tributaries of Yamuna.
- Ken meets with Yamuna in Banda district of UP and with Betwa in Hamirpur district of UP.
- Rajghat, Paricha and Matatila dams are over Betwa river.
- Ken River passes through Panna tiger reserve.

7. NanoSniffer:

- It is a microsensor based explosive trace detector.
- It is the world's first microsensor based Explosive Trace Detector (ETD) developed by NanoSniff Technologies, an IIT Bombay incubated startup.
- NanoSniffer is a 100% 'Made in India' product in terms of research, development & manufacturing. The core technology of NanoSniffer is protected by patents in the U.S. & Europe.
- NanoSniffer can detect explosives in less than 10 seconds and it also identifies and categorizes explosives into different classes

8. Average spot power price at Indian Energy Exchange jumps 65%

Average spot power price rose by 65% to ₹4.06 per unit in March 2021 at the Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) due to increase in demand on account of **rise in temperature and revival of economic activities.**

About Indian Energy Exchange

- INDIAN ENERGY EXCHANGE LIMITED (IEX) is the **first and largest energy exchange in India**.
- It provides a nationwide, **automated trading platform** for physical delivery of electricity, **Renewable Energy Certificates** and **Energy Saving Certificates**.
- The **Exchange is a publicly listed company with NSE and BSE**.
- IEX is approved and **regulated by Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC)** and has been operating since 27 June 2008.
- The exchange platform **enables efficient price discovery** and **increases the accessibility and transparency of the power market** in India while also enhancing the speed and efficiency of trade execution.

- **More than 6600 participants are registered** this exchange from 29 States, 5 Union Territories (UTs).
- In addition to participants who traded electricity contracts, **participants registered to trade** RECs included **renewable energy generators** and **corporate customers.**
- In August 2016, IEX received three ISO Certifications - ISO 9001:2015 for quality management, ISO 27001:2013 for Information security management and ISO 14001:2015 for environment management.

New species from Arunachal added to India's bird list

A bird spotted in **Arunachal Pradesh** at an altitude higher than its recorded perch has become the 1,340th species of the bird family in India.

- A team of scientists from Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) spotted and photographed this rare species of bird in Arunachal Pradesh on February 8.

About Three-banded Rosefinch:

- The three-banded rosefinch is a **resident of southern China** and a vagrant in Bhutan.
- Its natural habitat is temperate forests.
- The three-banded rosefinch belongs to the family **Fringillidae**, which are **seed-eating passerine birds** with a distinctively conical bill.
- It has a distinctive and uncommon rosefinch with a long tail.
- Male possess a grayish "peppery" cheeks, white wing patches, and dark pink crown, back, and breast.
- Female is **predominantly brownish**, but also has white slashes on the wings, buffy wingbars, and orangish chest coloration.
- **Breeds in forests with dense thickets**, preferring coniferous growth but varying locally, between approximately 2100 and 3050 meters; winters at slightly lower altitudes.
- Forages on the ground or in low vegetation, typically in **pairs or small flocks**.
- The species is evaluated as **Least Concern** in the IUCN Red List Category.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. *SARTHAQ Initiative* **was launched recently by which of the following ministries?**

- a. Ministry of Education
- b. Ministry of Tribal Affairs
- c. Ministry of Minority Affairs
- d. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Answer : a

- Union Education Ministry has recently launched the SARTHAQ initiative.
- The initiative will help in the implementation of National Education Policy in the country.
- The students and teachers holistic advancement through quality education, SARTHAQ has been initiated as a part of the Amrit Mahotsav celebrations.
- The initiative will pave the way for the children and youths to meet the diverse national and global challenges.
- It will also help them to imbibe 21st century skills, indian tradition, culture and value system as envisioned in National Education Policy.

2. Consider the following statements:

1. Neutrinos are fundamental particles belonging to the lepton family.
2. Neutrinos have a higher mass than neutrons.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

- In particle physics, a lepton is an elementary particle of half-integer spin that does not undergo strong interactions.

- Two main classes of leptons exist: charged leptons (also known as the electron-like leptons or muons), and neutral leptons (better known as neutrinos).
- Neutrons have a higher mass than neutrinos.

3. Consider the following statements with respect to NanoSniffer:

1. It is the world's first microsensor based Explosive Trace Detector (ETD).
2. It is a 100% Made in India product in terms of research, development & manufacturing.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

- NanoSniffer is the world's first microsensor based Explosive Trace Detector (ETD) developed by NanoSniff Technologies, an IIT Bombay incubated startup.
- NanoSniffer is a 100% 'Made in India' product in terms of research, development & manufacturing. The core technology of NanoSniffer is protected by patents in the U.S. & Europe.
- NanoSniff has passed tests conducted by DRDO's High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL), Pune; and by the National Security Guard (NSG) as well.

4. Consider the following statements:

1. Both India and Seychelles are the members of the Indian Ocean Commission.
2. India and Seychelles are the founding members of the International Solar Alliance.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

A 1 only
B 2 only
C Both 1 and 2

D Neither 1 nor 2

Answer :D

- Diplomatic ties of India were established with Seychelles after its independence in 1976.
- When Seychelles attained freedom, a contingent from the Indian Naval Ship, INS Nilgiri, took part in the Independence Day celebrations.
    - Since then the tradition of Indian military participation at the Seychelles National Day celebrations has continued till date.
- India is a reliable and trusted partner to Seychelles.
- Recently, India has been accepted as an observer of the **Indian Ocean Commission**, of which Seychelles is a member. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- With the ratification of the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** Framework Agreement in September 2017, **Seychelles has officially become one of the Founding Members of ISA**.
    - **ISA is an Indian Initiative. Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

5. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

1. It was founded in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, independent India's first Education Minister.
2. It works under the administrative control of Ministry of Culture.

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

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

Answer : a

- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is celebrating its 71st Foundation Day recently.

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

- It was founded in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, independent India's first Education Minister.

- ICCR is a society registered in the year 1957 under Society Registration Act 1860.
- The organization was under the administrative control of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs till 1970.
- Since its mandate involved interaction with foreign entities, ICCR was in 1970 transferred from Ministry of Human Resource Development to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).
- Since then it has been functioning as an autonomous body under the administrative control of MEA.

6. With respect to UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), consider the following statements:

1. It is an International treaty adopted and signed in 1982.
2. United States of America (USA) has both signed and ratified the convention.

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

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

Answer : a

Explanation:

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- It is also called the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea treaty.
- It is an international agreement that resulted from the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III), which took place between 1973 and 1982.
- The Law of the Sea Convention defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources.
- USA has signed the Agreement but has not ratified it.

Mains Practice Questions

1Q. What are the prospects of rural tourism in North-east? Discuss the steps taken by the government to boost it. (250 words)

Approach

- Describe briefly Rural tourism.
- Assess the strengths and challenges of rural tourism in North-East.
- Give the details of the steps taken by the government to promote rural tourism.
- Give a conclusion.

2Q. At a time when the idea of developing smart cities dominates the policy discourse, India faces challenges due to unplanned urbanisation. Comment. (250 words)

Approach

- Discuss trend of urbanization in India
- Elaborate on the various areas like homelessness , sanitation, and urban governance vis-a-vis unplanned urbanization
- Suggest a way forward with respect to importance of green field projects, how smart cities can solve this etc.
- Conclude with improvement in existing infrastructure.