

# OFFICERS' Pulse

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## Coverage.

The Hindu  
PIB  
Yojana  
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## At a Glance & In Depth.

Polity and Social Issues  
Economy  
International Relations  
Environment  
Science and Tech  
Culture..

**CURRENT AFFAIRS  
WEEKLY**

THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT  
YOUR FINGER TIPS.



# News @ a glance

## **POLITY ..... 3**

- 1) India ranked 77th on a sustainability index.... 3
- 2) Report analysing the Rajya Sabha MPs' performance ..... 4
- 3) Political Funding..... 4
- 4) Assam Accord..... 4

## **ENVIRONMENT ..... 6**

- 1) Kawal Tiger reserve..... 6
- 2) Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary..... 6
- 3) Namdapha National Park..... 8
- 4) Craspedotropis gretathunbergae ..... 8
- 5) World Air Quality Report 2019 ..... 9

## **ECONOMY ..... 11**

- 1) National Technical Textiles Mission..... 11
- 2) Govt puts restrictions on import of refined palm oil ..... 13
- 3) ADB lists masala bonds on India INX ..... 13
- 4) National Statistical Office (NSO)..... 14
- 5) Mauritius FPIs can continue to invest in India15
- 6) How crop insurance changes? ..... 15
- 7) India VIX..... 16

## **ART & CULTURE ..... 18**

- 1) Yakshagana..... 18

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ..... 19**

- 1) Namaste Trump.....19
- 2) India Economic Strategy (IES) - of Australia ..19
- 3) Malaysia ..... 20
- 4) India to attend U.S.-Taliban peace deal ceremony in Doha .....21
- 5) Afghanistan .....21
- 6) Qatar.....23
- 7) United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).....23

## **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY .....25**

- 1) Govt. eyes public-private fund to boost R&D25
- 2) Microdots in vehicles .....26

## **PIB ANAYSIS.....27**

- 1) National Sports Development Fund .....27
- 2) EASE 3.0.....27
- 3) Market Intelligence and Early Warning System (MIEWS) Portal.....28
- 4) Bay of Bengal Offshore Sailing Expedition ....28
- 5) CPGRAMS .....29
- 6) SARAS .....29
- 7) Exercise Indradhanush .....29

# News in Depth

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**AIR NEWS..... 31**

1) 25 th Vasantotsav ..... 31

**THE HINDU EDITORIALS ..... 32**

1) A browning east: On climate change and the Eastern Ghats..... 32

2) The issues around data localisation..... 33

2) "Counting birds together" .....35

**RSTV BIG PICTURE .....37**

1) Balakot Airstrike - Lessons learnt.....37

2) India - Myanmar ties .....38

3) Facial Recognition - Uses and Concerns.....40

# News @ a glance

## POLITY

### 1) India ranked 77th on a sustainability index

#### Why in News?

- India ranked **77th on a sustainability index** that takes into account per capita carbon emissions and ability of children in a nation to live healthy lives and secures **131st spot on a flourishing ranking that measures the best chance at survival and well-being for children**, according to a UN-backed report.
- The report is commissioned by the **WHO, UNICEF** and the **Lancet** assesses the capacity of 180 countries on the issue.

#### Key Findings of the report

- According to the report, **no single country is adequately protecting children's health**, their environment and their future.
- It says that the health and future of every child and adolescent worldwide is under **immediate threat from ecological degradation, climate change** and exploitative marketing practices that push heavily processed fast food, sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco at them.
- According to the report, while the poorest countries need to do more to support their children's ability to live healthy lives, excessive carbon emissions — disproportionately from wealthier countries — threaten the future of all children.
- If global warming exceeds 4°C by 2100 in line with current projections, this would lead to devastating health consequences for children, due to rising ocean levels, heatwaves, proliferation of diseases like malaria and dengue and malnutrition.
- The report says globally, the number of children and adolescents who are obese has increased from **11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016 — an 11-fold increase**.

- The report also highlights the distinct threat posed to children from **harmful marketing**.
- Evidence suggests that children in some countries see as many as 30,000 advertisements on television alone in a single year, while youth exposure to vaping (e-cigarettes) advertisements increased by more than 250% in the U.S. over two years, reaching more than 24 million young people.

#### Global Statistics

- **Norway** leads the table for **survival, health, education and nutrition rates** - followed by South Korea and the Netherlands. Central African Republic, Chad and Somalia come at the bottom.
- However, when taking into account per capita CO2 emissions, these top countries trail behind, with Norway 156th, the Republic of Korea 166th and the Netherlands 160th.
- The only countries on track to beat the CO2 emission per capita targets by 2030, while also performing fairly (within the top 70) on child flourishing measures are Albania, Armenia, Grenada, Jordan, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uruguay and Vietnam.

#### Way Forward:

- To protect children, the experts call for a new global movement driven by and for children.
- Specific recommendations include stopping CO2 emissions with the utmost urgency, to ensure children have a future on this planet; placing children and adolescents at the centre of global efforts to achieve sustainable development.
- New policies and investment in all sectors to work towards child health and rights; incorporating children's voices into policy decisions and tightening national regulation of harmful commercial marketing, supported by a new Optional

Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the need of the hour.

## 2) Report analysing the Rajya Sabha MPs' performance

### Why in News?

- The first edition of the report analysing the Rajya Sabha MPs' performance on party lines during the recently concluded Parliament session was released by Rajya Sabha Chairman.

### News in Detail:

- The report shows that each political party got a proportional share of time, with the Opposition getting a little more. The BJP, accounting for 34% of the strength of the House, got 480 opportunities amounting to 33% of the total.
- The Congress, constituting 19% of the strength, got 345 opportunities, which comes to 24% share of the total.
- The 10 recognised parties in the House with five members and above each with a total of 190 members — accounting for 80% of the strength of the Council — got about 81% of the total opportunities.
- Others, including regional parties and Independents coming to 20% of the membership of the House, got a 19% share of participation indicating broad correspondence between the strength and share of opportunities.

## 3) Political Funding

### Why in News?

- The BJP received three times more donations over ₹20,000 than all other national political parties combined in 2018-19, according to an analysis by the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)**.

### Constitutional Provisions and legal Provisions:

- **Section 29B** of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) entitles parties to accept voluntary contributions by any person or company, except a Government Company or foreign source.
- **Section 29C** of the RPA mandates political parties to declare donations that exceed 20,000 rupees. Such a declaration is made by making a report and submitting the same to the EC. Failure to do so on time disentitles a party from tax relief under the Income Tax Act, 1961.

- **Section 13A of the Income Tax Act 1961** provides for exemption of all voluntary contributions received by a political party from payment of income tax. But such exemption is conditional on the recipient party maintaining such books of accounts and other documents as would enable the officers of the I-T department to properly deduce the income received by it and also maintaining a record of such contributions and the names and addresses of donors as well as amounts above ₹20,000.
- **The Finance Act, 2017** amended both these Acts and exempted electoral bonds from the purview of section 29 C of the RP Act 1951 as well as section 13 A of the IT Act 1961.
- This means the income received by way of electoral bonds is not required to be disclosed in the report which goes to the Election Commission.
- Further, political parties are not required to maintain any record of the same or the names and addresses of donors of these bonds.

### News in Detail:

- The national parties declared a total of ₹951.66 crore in such donations in 2018-19 and much of the amount — ₹742.15 crore — was declared by the BJP.
- The donations declared by the BJP is more than three times the aggregate declared by the Congress, NCP, CPI, CPI(M) and the Trinamool for the same period.
- The BSP declared that the party did not receive any donations above ₹20,000 during FY 2018-19, as it has been declaring for the past 13 years.
- Compared with the previous financial year 2017-18, the national parties' declared donations increased by 103% in 2018-19, which was an election year.
- The bulk of donations to the parties came from Maharashtra among the States and corporate or business sectors when looking at the category of donors.

## 4) Assam Accord

### About Assam Accord:

- The Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement signed by the Governments of India and Assam, and the **All Assam Students' Union (AASU)** and the **All**

**Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP)** in New Delhi on August 15, **1985**.

- The accord brought an **end to the Assam Agitation** and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.
- As per the Accord, those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.
- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

#### **What does Clause 6 state?**

- **Clause 6** deals with safeguards for the Assamese people.
- It reads: "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."

#### **Why in News?**

- The high-powered committee that the Centre constituted in July 2019 for the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord of 1985 submitted its report to the State's Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

# ENVIRONMENT

## 1) Kawal Tiger reserve

### About

- This sanctuary is located in the Adilabad district, Telangana which is 50 kilometers from Mancherial and 250 kilometers from Hyderabad. The Tiger Reserve covers areas in Adilabad, Kumram Bheem Asifabad, Mancherial and Nirmal districts, which had once formed undivided Adilabad.
- The wildlife sanctuary is a **dry and dense forest with teak, bamboo** and many other varieties of trees. During summer, the Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary witnesses hot and dry climate.



- The sanctuary houses several species of animals including Cheetal, Sambar, Barking Deer, Nilgai, Sloth Bear, Indian Bison, Panther and Tiger.
- The sanctuary is one of the richest Teak forests in the State with dense pristine areas free of human disturbance. **The River Kadam** flows through this area. Dry Deciduous Teak Forests mixed with Bamboo, Terminalia, Pterocarpus, Anogeisus and Cassias are present in the forest.

### Why in news?

- New arrangements are being made in the Kawal tiger reserve to check the water scarcity in the upcoming summer. New solar pumps, check dams etc are being constructed in the tiger reserve.

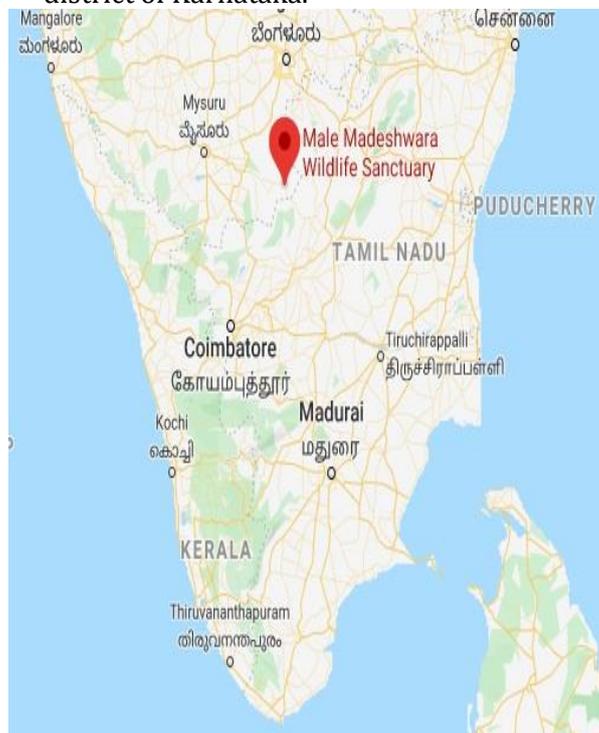
## 2) Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary

### Why in news?

- The Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary is soon going to be converted as a tiger reserve.
- The final notification is being expected from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). The State government will declare the status once notification from NTCA is received.
- With this Chamarajanagar district will have the rare distinction in the country of harbouring **three tiger reserves**. It already has Bandipur and Biligiri Ranganatha Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve within its territorial limits.
- **After this Karnataka will have six tiger reserves**, the others being Nagarahole, Bhadra, and Anshi-Dandeli, apart from Bandipur and BRT Tiger Reserves.

### About MM wildlife sanctuary

- Male Mahadeshwara Hills (MM Hills) wildlife sanctuary came into being in 2013. It is located in the Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka.



- The forests of MM Hills wildlife sanctuary are **principally of dry deciduous type** degrading to scrub forest in the fringe

areas, and are interspersed with patches of moist deciduous, semi-evergreen, evergreen and shola forests occurring at varying altitudes.

- Animals including tiger, elephant, leopard, wild dog, bison, sambar, spotted deer, barking deer, sloth bear, wild boar, four horned antelope, black naped hare, common langur, bonnet macaque, honey badger (ratel), varieties of reptiles, birds, etc. are found in the wildlife sanctuary.

- The sanctuary presently has about 20 tigers as evident in photographs from camera traps. Being part of Mysore Elephant Reserve, these forests also support nearly 300 elephants.
- It is a unique geographical zone that acts as a bridge between the Western and Eastern Ghats. There are about 285 bird species documented in this landscape as per a 2014 survey.
- **Tiger Reserves:**



- Project Tiger was launched by the Government of India in the year 1973 to save the endangered species of tiger in the country. Starting from nine (9) reserves in 1973-2016 the number is

grown up to fifty (50). A total area of 71027.10 km<sup>2</sup> is covered by these project tiger areas.

**National Tiger Conservation Authority:**



- The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a **statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change** constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it under the said Act.

### 3) Namdapha National Park

#### Why in news?

- A part of the East-West Industrial Corridor highway project has been cleared which passes through Namdapha National Park. this has been criticized by many environmentalists as it destroys the national park and its biodiversity.

#### About Namdapha National park

- Namdapha National Park is the largest protected area in the Eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot and is located in **Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India**.
- It is also the third largest national park in India in terms of area. The park harbours the **northernmost lowland evergreen rainforests in the world at 27°N latitude**. The area is also known for extensive **Dipterocarp forests. (forests which are dominated by dipterocarp trees (a kind of tree genus))**
- Because of many different vegetation zones, the park is home to a great diversity of mammal species. **Four big cat species occur in the park: snow leopards, clouded leopards, common leopards and tigers.**
- The park has about 425 bird species with many more to be recorded from work in

the higher areas. There are **five species of Hornbills** recorded from the area. Several species of rare wren-babblers have been recorded in Namdapha.



### 4) *Craspedotropis gretathunbergae*

#### What is it?

- A new species of land snail has been discovered in Brunei and it has been named as *Craspedotropis gretathunbergae*, in honour of Swedish climate activist **Greta Thunberg**.
- The new species comes from tropical rainforests and is sensitive to drought and extreme temperatures, which are likely to be more frequent as climate change continues. Hence the honour to Thunberg, who has been making efforts to raise awareness about climate change.
- They are very sensitive to the droughts and temperature extremes that are likely to be more frequent as climate change continues.



### Greta Thunberg

- Greta Thunberg is the Swedish teenager who skipped school and inspired an international movement to fight climate change.



## 5) World Air Quality Report 2019

### About Air pollution

- Air pollution constitutes the most pressing environmental health risk facing our global population. It is estimated to contribute toward 7 million premature deaths a year, while 92% of the world's population are estimated to breathe toxic air quality (WHO, 2016).
- In less developed countries, 98% of children under five breathe toxic air. As a result, air pollution is the main cause of death for children under the age of 15, killing 600,000 every year (WHO, 2018).
- In financial terms, premature deaths due to air pollution cost about \$5 trillion in welfare losses worldwide (The World Bank, 2016).

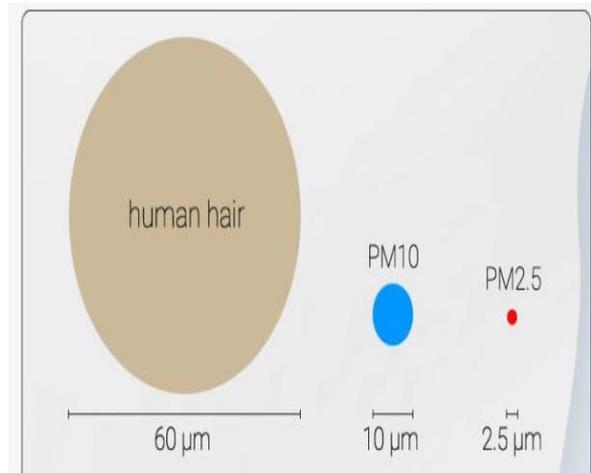
### What is the report all about?

- World Air Quality Report 2019 is compiled by IQAir Visual.
- It includes only PM2.5 (fine particulate matter) data as acquired from ground-

based air quality monitoring stations with high data availability.

### What is PM2.5?

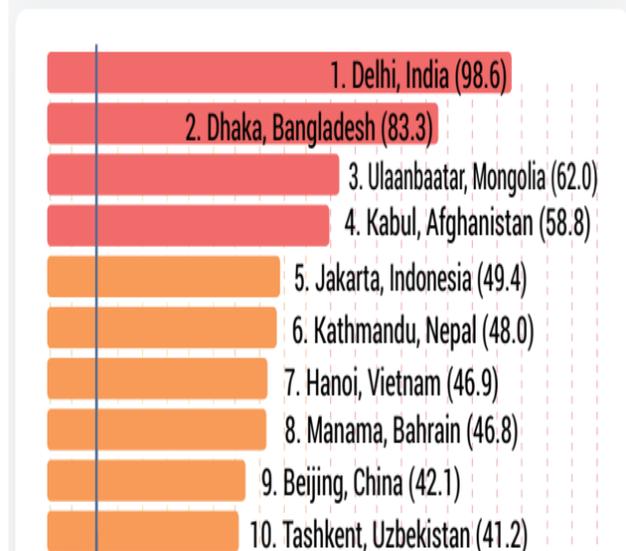
- PM2.5 is defined as ambient airborne particles measuring up to 2.5 microns in size. Its microscopic size allows the particles to enter the bloodstream via the respiratory system and travel throughout the body, causing far-reaching health effects, including asthma, lung cancer and heart disease.



### Some Highlights:

- According to country-wise data, **India ranked fifth in the world's most polluted countries** with Bangladesh on top of the list followed by Pakistan, Mongolia and Afghanistan.

Arranged by average annual PM2.5 concentration ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )



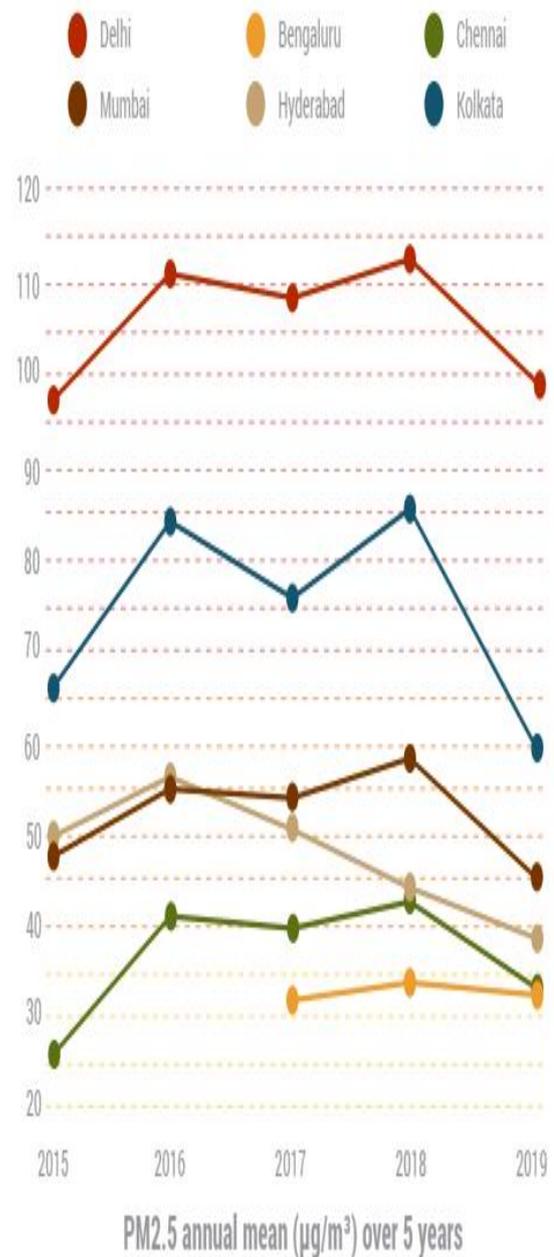
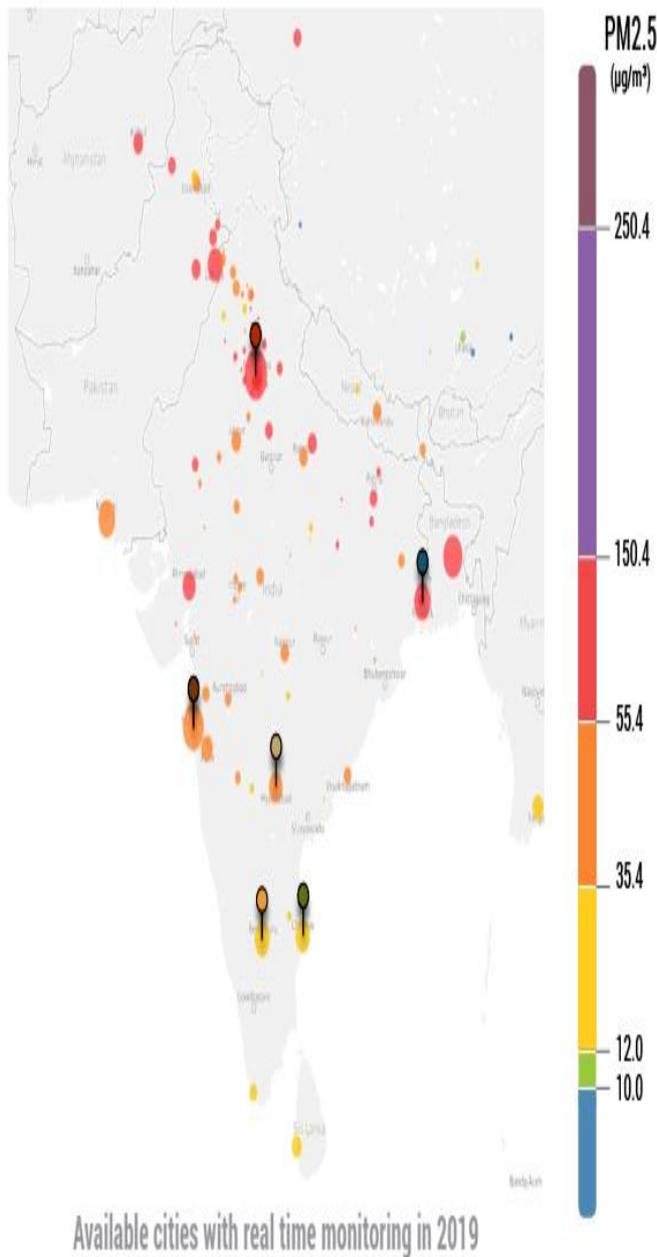
- Delhi tops this ranking for the second consecutive year, with its annual PM2.5 level nearly 10 times the WHO target.
- The 21 Indian cities which are in world's 30 most polluted cities, in the order of

their ranking, are, Ghaziabad, Delhi, Noida, Gurugram, Greater Noida, Bandhwari, Lucknow, Bulandshahr, Muzaffarnagar, Baghpat, Jind, Faridabad, Coraut, Bhiwadi, Patna, Palwal, Muzaffarpur, Hisar, Kutail, Jodhpur and Moradabad.

- India saw widespread improvements in PM2.5 levels in 2019, compared to the

year prior as a result of economic slowdown, favourable meteorological conditions, as well as more dedicated efforts towards cleaning the air.

- No Indian cities included in this report met the WHO target for annual pollution exposure (10ug/m3) during 2019.



# ECONOMY

## 1) National Technical Textiles Mission

### What are Technical Textiles?

- Technical or engineered textiles are defined as products that are used for **functional purposes**.
- These textiles have applications in multiple areas of economic activity, such as

**aerospace, shipping, sports, agriculture, defense and health care.**

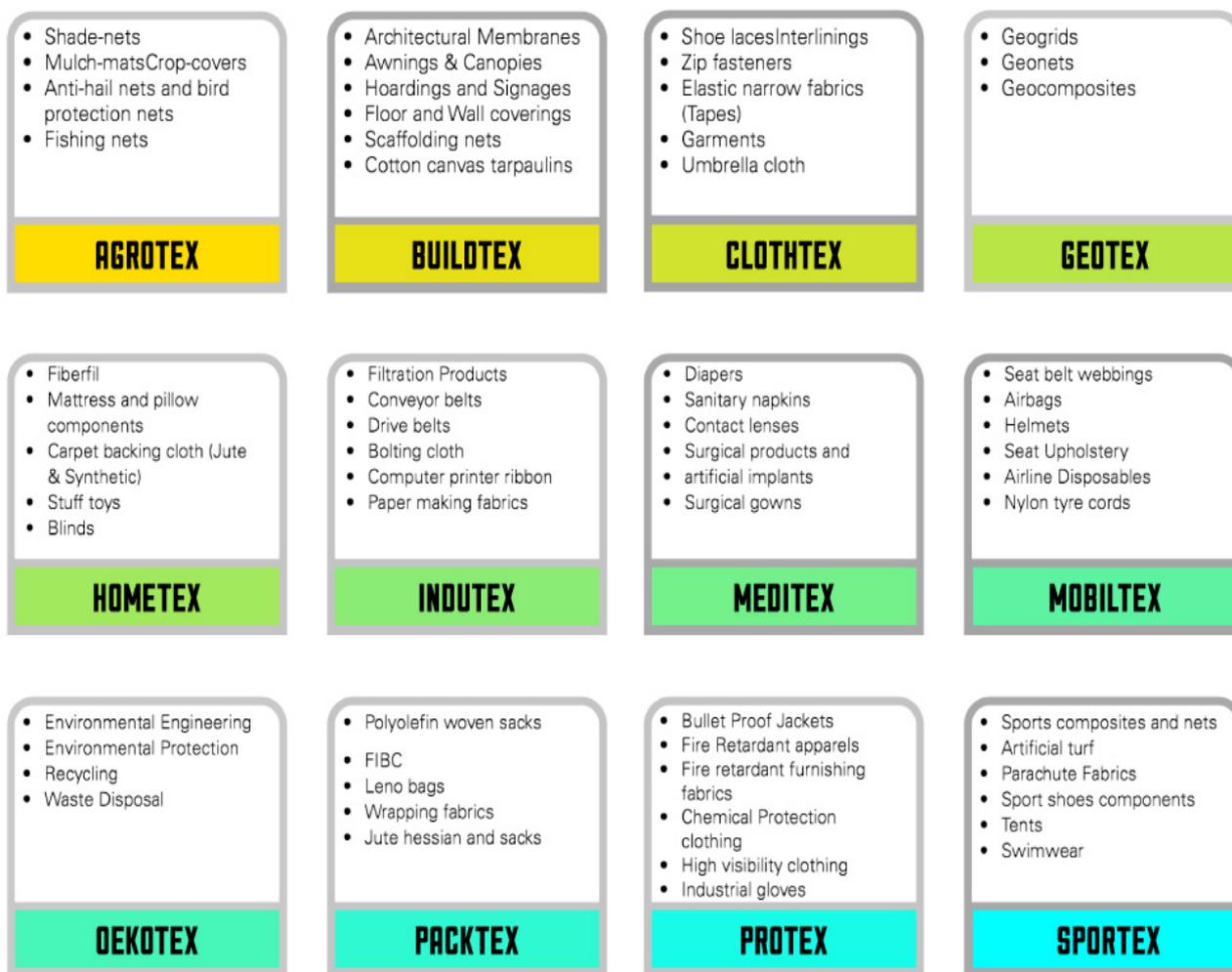
- Technical Textile products derive their demand from development and industrialization in a country.

### Segments of Technical Textiles

- Technical textiles are segregated into **12 major segments**:



▪



### Need for promotion

- Technical Textiles is a high technology sunrise sector which is steadily gaining ground in India.
- The technical textiles industry is **import-intensive**.
- Though the country currently spends a significant amount on imports, the dependence can eventually be reduced by further investing in technology-heavy products.
- The **penetration level of technical textiles is low** in India, varying between 5-10% against the level of 30-70% in developed countries.
- This presents a **huge scope for import substitution**.
- The key growth drivers for the Indian technical textile market include a rising disposable incomes, growing end-user industries including automobiles,

healthcare, sports and infrastructure and the ongoing industrial development.

- Apart from these factors, the country has witnessed growing awareness about the superior usage of these textiles.

### Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the setting up of a **National Technical Textiles Mission** at an total outlay of Rs. 1,480 Crore.

- There had already been a National Technology Mission for Technical Textiles, which was launched for a period of five years (2010-11 to 2014-15) and later extended until 2017.

### News in Detail

- The aim is to position the country as a global leader in technical textiles and increase the use of technical textiles in the domestic market.

- The Mission will be implemented for **four years** from 2020-2021 and will have **four components**.
- The first component will focus on **research and development** and innovation and will have an outlay of Rs. 1,000 crore.
- The research will be at both, **fibre level and application-based** in geo, agro, medical, sports and mobile textiles and development of bio-degradable technical textiles.
- Research activities will also focus on development of indigenous machinery and process equipment.
- The second component will be for promotion and **development of market** for technical textiles.
- Indian technical textiles segment is estimated at \$16 billion which is approximately 6% of the \$250 billion global technical textiles market.
- The penetration level of technical textiles in India varies between 5% and 10% against the level of 30% to 70% in developed countries.
- The Mission will aim at taking domestic market size to \$40 billion to \$50 billion by 2024.
- The third component will focus on **export promotion** so that technical textile exports from the country reach from Rs. 14,000 crore now to Rs. 20,000 crore by 2021-2022 and ensure 10% average growth every year till the Mission ends.
- An export promotion council for technical textiles will be set up.
- The last component will be on **education, training and skill development**.
- The Mission will promote technical education at higher engineering and technology levels related to technical textiles and its application areas.

## 2) Govt puts restrictions on import of refined palm oil

### Why in News?

- The government recently put restrictions on import of refined palm oils.

### News in Detail

- According to a notification of the **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)**, "import policy" is amended from "free to **restricted**" for **refined bleached**

### **deodorised palm oil and refined bleached deodorised palmolein.**

- Both refined and crude edible oils were under the free category of foreign trade, resulting in an unrestricted inflow into the country.
- Now refined palm oil can be imported only after obtaining an import licence while crude oils can continue to be shipped in on the basis of the import export code, without the requirement of any kind of licences.
- This will help India encourage import of more crude oils, **facilitating better utilisation of the refining capacity of the domestic industry.**
- The need to amend the existing trade policy has arisen as the duty on both crude and refined palm oil had been lowered from January 1, 2020.
- The duties were down to 37.5% from 40% on crude palm oil and to 45% from 50% on refined palm oil, affecting a low differential of 7.5 percentage points between the import duty of crude and refined palm oil, making import of refined palm oil more lucrative.

### India's scenario

- According to the Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA), a trade body, the existing refining capacity in the country is around 30 million tonnes, but only 45% this is being utilised.
- By putting refined edible oils in the restricted category, the import of crude oil will increase and domestic refiners will get business and in turn jobs will also be created. Currently, due to lower tariffs, refined oils are directly imported and packaged for selling in the market.
- The country imports around 15 million tonnes of edible oil a year, forking out Rs 70,000 crore.
- Out of this, around 20% is refined oils and the rest is crude. Now more crude oil will be imported.
- India imports only palm oil in both refined and crude forms while other edible oils like sunflower, soybean and rapeseed are imported only in the crude form.

## 3) ADB lists masala bonds on India INX

### About India INX

- **India International Exchange (IFSC) Limited** (India INX) is **India's first international exchange** in International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) located at the Gujarat International Finance-Tec City (GIFT City).
- India INX is a **subsidiary of BSE Limited**.
- Operating on an advanced technology platform of **EUREX T7**, the Exchange is the **fastest in the world** with a turn-around time of 4 microseconds.
- The exchange offers a **first of its kind single segment approach for all asset classes** - equities, currencies, commodities, fixed income securities providing significant cost advantages to participants.
- The Exchange provides **competitive advantage in terms of tax structure** and supportive regulatory framework that is comparable with any other global financial centres.
- India INX launched **Global Securities Market**, India's **first international primary market platform** that connects global investors with Indian and foreign issuers.

#### What Is the Asian Development Bank?

- Founded in **1966**, the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) **headquarters are in Manila**, Philippines.
- The Asian Development Bank's primary mission is **to foster growth and cooperation among countries in the Asia-Pacific Region**.
- It has been responsible for a number of major projects in the region and raises capital through the international bond markets.
- The ADB also relies on member contributions, retained earnings from lending, and the repayment of loans for funding of the organization.

#### About Masala bonds

- Masala Bonds are **rupee-denominated borrowings** issued by Indian entities in **overseas markets**.
- Masala means spices and the term was used by International Finance Corporation (IFC) to popularise the culture and cuisine of India on foreign platforms.
- The objective of Masala Bonds is to fund infrastructure projects in India, fuel internal growth via borrowings and internationalise the Indian currency.

#### How Masala Bonds help in supporting the rupee

- The bonds are directly pegged to the Indian currency.
- So, **investors will directly take the currency risk** or exchange rate risks.
- If the value of Indian currency falls, the foreign investor will have to bear the losses, not the issuer which is an Indian entity or a corporate.
- If foreign investors eagerly invest in Masala Bonds or bring money into India, this would help in supporting the rupee.
- The issuer of these bonds is shielded against the risk of currency fluctuation, typically associated with borrowing in foreign currency.
- Besides helping in diversifying funding sources, the costs of borrowing via masala bonds could also turn out to be lower than domestic markets.

#### Why in News?

- Asian Development Bank (ADB) has listed its 10-year masala bonds worth ₹850 crore on the global debt listing platform of India INX.

#### 4) National Statistical Office (NSO)

- **About NSO**
- The National Statistical Office (NSO) is the Statistics Wing of the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**.
- It consists of the **Central Statistical Office (CSO)**, the Computer centre and the **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)**.
- The NSO headed by a Director General is responsible for conduct of large scale sample surveys in diverse fields on All India basis.
- Primarily data are collected through nation-wide household surveys on various socio-economic subjects.
- Besides these surveys, NSO collects data on rural and urban prices and plays a significant role in the improvement of crop statistics through supervision of the area enumeration and crop estimation surveys of the State agencies.
- NSO compiles and releases the **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** every month in the form of 'quick estimates'; conducts the **Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)**.

#### Why in News?

- The Indian economy grew at 4.7 per cent in the October-December quarter, down from the revised estimate of 5.1 per cent in the second quarter as per NSO.

#### More in News

- Growth continues to be propped up by higher government spending which is a cause for concern.
- At the aggregate level, gross value added grew by 4.5 per cent in the third quarter, down from 4.8 per cent in the previous quarter.
- But excluding public administration, defence and other services, which largely connote government spending, value added by the rest of the economy grew by a mere 3.7 per cent in the third quarter, down from 5.2 per cent in the same quarter last year.
- The manufacturing sector continues to disappoint, contracting for two consecutive quarters.
- For the full year, the sector is expected to grow barely at one per cent, down from 5.7 per cent in the last year.
- Construction activity also slowed down reflecting the continued dismal performance of the real estate sector.
- The other worrying aspect is that **gross fixed capital formation**, which represents investment in the economy, has now **contracted for two straight quarters**, with the decline accelerating.
- The NSO now expects investments to contract by 0.6 per cent in 2019-20, after growing by 9.8 per cent in the previous year, underscoring the continued weakness in investment activity.

#### Future prospects

- The latest data suggests that the statistics office believes that the economy has bottomed out.
- Gross value added is expected to pick up to 5 per cent in the fourth quarter, up from 4.5 per cent in the third quarter.
- Data of the eight core sectors, which have now grown for two consecutive months, offer some encouragement.

#### Persisting risks

- However, there are downside risks. For one, the Centre's revenues may well fall short of the revised estimates.
- This may impinge on its ability to maintain its spending at current levels in the fourth quarter.

- Second, the full impact of the coronavirus is yet to play out.
- Economic activity in February and March is likely to be impacted directly and indirectly, depending on the duration and intensity of its spread.
- Disruptions in supply chains and lower external demand may further add to domestic issues.

## 5) Mauritius FPIs can continue to invest in India

#### Why in News?

- The **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** has clarified that foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) from Mauritius will continue to be eligible for registration as foreign investors in India but subject to increased monitoring.

#### News in Detail

- The regulatory clarification was necessitated after the island nation was placed in the list of '**jurisdictions under increased monitoring**' by the **FATF** — commonly referred to as the **grey list** — leading to apprehensions that the Mauritius-based FPIs will not be able to trade in the Indian capital market.
- This assumes significance since Mauritius accounts for the **second-largest chunk of foreign investments**, as per data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL).
- In January 2020, Mauritius-based FPIs had total assets under custody (AUC) of ₹4.37 lakh crore, second only to that of the U.S. with ₹11.63 lakh crore.
- Meanwhile, the SEBI further clarified that the FATF website mentions that when a jurisdiction is placed under increased monitoring, it construes that the country has committed to swiftly resolve the identified strategic deficiencies within agreed time frames and is subject to increased monitoring.
- The FATF does not call for the application of enhanced due diligence to be applied to these jurisdictions, but encourages its members to take into account this information in their risk analysis.

## 6) How crop insurance changes?

#### Why in News?

- The Centre decided to **restrict its premium subsidy** in its flagship crop

insurance schemes to **30% for unirrigated areas and 25% for irrigated areas** (from the existing unlimited), and to make enrolment of farmers in the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS) voluntary** from the 2020 Kharif season.

#### What were the schemes?

- At present, under PMFBY and RWBCIS, farmers pay a premium of **2%** of the sum insured for all crops of **Kharif**; **1.5%** for all crops of **Rabi**; and **5% for all horticultural crops**.
- The difference between actuarial premium rate and the rate of insurance premium payable by farmers, which is called the **Rate of Normal Premium Subsidy**, is **shared equally between the Centre and the states**.
- However, states and Union Territories are free to extend additional subsidy over and above the normal subsidy from their budgets.
- Until now, there was no upper limit for the central subsidy.
- While PMFBY is based on yield, RWBCIS is based on proxies and farmers are provided insurance protection against adverse weather conditions such as excess rainfall, wind and temperature.
- The number of insured farmers under RWBCIS is relatively low.

#### What are the effects with this move?

- The burden of premium subsidy will go up for the states.
- So long as the premium for a crop in a particular district is below the cut-off figure of 30%, the Centre will equally split the subsidy burden with the State.
- If the premium is above 30%, the State will have to pay the entire additional amount.
- For example, in the old regime, if a farmer's Kharif crop was insured for Rs 1,00,000 and the rate of actuarial premium was 40%, then the premium paid by the farmer was 2% (Rs 2,000), and the remaining premium was shared by the Centre and the state equally (19% or Rs 19,000).
- In the new regime, for the same sum insured (Rs 1,00,000) and the same rate of premium (40%), the Centre will give subsidy for premium rates up to 30%.

- This means that from the Kharif 2020 season, the Centre will have to pay premium at the rate of 14% (out of 30%, the farmer's share is 2%, and the Centre's and state's 14% each) instead of the 19% it paid (out of 40%) in the last Kharif season; the state has to bear the entire burden of the premium subsidy in cases where the rate of premium goes beyond the threshold of 30%.

#### Why has the government taken it?

- While the **average premium rate** under PMFBY and RWBCIS **at the national level** was **12.32%** for 2018-19, for some crops in certain districts, the rate of premium has been higher than 30% in recent years.
- For instance, the rate of premium for Kharif groundnut has reached 49% in Rajkot of Gujarat, and the rate for Rabi paddy crop Ramnathapuram (Tamil Nadu) has reached 42%.
- After the new changes come into effect, the share of the states is expected to go up in those states in which such crops are cultivated.
- Sources said that by capping the subsidy for premium rates up to 30%, the Centre wants to **disincentivise certain crops in such areas** where growing these crops involve **high risks in terms of crop insurance premiums**.

#### Which are the other changes in crop insurance schemes?

- The government has given **flexibility to states/UTs** to implement PMFBY and RWBCIS, and given them the **option to select any number of additional risk covers/features** like prevented sowing, localised calamity, mid-season adversity, and post-harvest losses.
- Earlier, these risk covers were mandatory.
- This change will have two main impacts.
  - 1) it may bring down the rates of overall premium as the state governments now will not be required to invite bids factoring these risks.
  - 2) it will make these schemes less attractive for farmers.
- However, states/UTs can offer specific single peril risk/insurance covers like hailstorms etc under PMFBY.

## 7) India VIX

### About Volatility Index

- Volatility Index is a measure of the **market's expectation of volatility** over the **near term**.
- Usually, during periods of market volatility, the **market moves steeply** up or down and the volatility index tends to rise.
- As volatility subsides, the volatility index declines.
- It is denoted as an annualised **percentage**.
- The **Chicago Board of Options Exchange (CBOE)** was the **first to introduce the volatility index** for the US markets in **1993** based on S&P 100 Index option prices.
- Investors use it to gauge the market volatility and base their investment decisions accordingly.

#### **About India VIX**

- India VIX is a volatility index **computed by NSE** based on the order book of **NIFTY Options**.

- India VIX indicates the **investor's perception of the market's volatility** in the near term i.e. it depicts the expected market volatility **over the next 30 calendar days**.
- **Higher the India VIX values, higher the expected volatility** and vice versa.

#### **Why in News?**

- The India VIX index surged almost 28% and was now not very far from its 52-week high of 30.18 on account of uncertainty arising over global impact of COVID-19 outbreak.
- Most equity benchmarks the world over lose heavy ground as concerns on the global impact of COVID-19 outbreak made investors turn cautious towards risky assets such as equities.

# ART & CULTURE

## 1) Yakshagana

### About:

- Yakshagana is one of the most popular **folk theatre** forms of **Karnataka**. Yakshagana literally means the song (gana) of the yaksha (nature spirits). It is a traditional theatre form that combines dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up, and stage techniques with a unique style and form.

### Yakshagana has two styles:

- **The tenkutittu style:** It is prevalent in Dakshina Kannada. Tenkutittu is noted for its incredible dance steps; its high flying dance moves; and its extravagant rakshasas (demons).
- **The Badagutittu style:** It is prevalent in Uttara Kannada District and places more emphasis on facial expressions, matugarike (dialogues), and dances appropriate for the character depicted in the episode.



- Yakshagana is strongly influenced by the Vaishnava Bhakti movement. Its stories are mainly drawn from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata and other Hindu epics.
- A typical Yakshagana performance consists of background music played by a group of musicians (known as the himmela); and a dance and dialog group (known as the mummela), who together enact poetic epics on stage. Yakshagana is traditionally presented from dusk to dawn.

- It is based on mythological stories and Puranas. The most popular episodes are from the Mahabharata i.e. Draupadi swayamvar, Subhadra vivah, Abhimanyu vadh, Karna-Arjun yuddh and from Ramayana i.e. Rajyabhishek, Lav-kush Yuddh, Baali-Sugreeva yuddha and Panchavati.

### Why in News?

- Arshiya, a Yakshagana artist from Mangaluru is likely the first woman from the Muslim community in Yakshagana. There are far fewer women Yakshagana artistes compared to men, and a Muslim woman exponent is rare. At one time, this traditional art form was forbidden for women.

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## 1) Namaste Trump

### Why in News?

- U.S. President Donald Trump was in India on February 24-25 on a state visit, his first such visit to the country.

### Outcomes of the visit

- Upgradation of bilateral relationship to a **Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership** that will include issues such as defence, security cooperation.
- Mr. Trump also said the U.S. and India were working to **revitalise the quadrilateral initiative** consisting of **Japan, the U.S., India and Australia**.
- Both sides also called upon Pakistan to rein in cross-border terror threats.
- They called for concerted action against all terrorist groups including Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, the Haqqani Network, TTP, D Company, and all their affiliates.
- Both sides also took note of the efforts of the ASEAN region to create a code of conduct in the South China Sea region.
- Both sides had resolved to maintain the **Internet as a free and secure arena**.

### Deals signed

- India signed defence deals worth around \$3 billion with the U.S.
- The deals are for **24 MH-60R Multi-Role Helicopters** for the Navy worth \$2.2 billion and **six AH-64E Apache attack helicopters** for the Army worth \$800 million.
- The other big ticket deals in the pipeline are for armed drones, air defence system, MK-45 127mm naval guns and six more P-8I long range maritime patrol aircraft among others which are at various stages of procurement.
- US firm **Exxon Mobil** and **Indian Oil** have signed an agreement to help India import more Liquefied Natural Gas (LPG).

### Not so much on trade

- Bilateral trade between the two countries totalled \$142.6bn in 2018.
- But in June 2019, the US ended preferential trade status for India.

- India imposed retaliatory tariffs on 28 US products, causing a diplomatic rift between the two countries.
- Though Mr Trump's visit has helped improve relations, a trade deal could not be finalised.

### What is the chronology of U.S.-India trade squabbles?

- At the heart of the US foreign policy strategy are concerns about the trade deficit that the U.S. has with its economic partners worldwide.
- However India does not rank among the top 10 in this regard — for example, its 2019 **trade deficit with the U.S. of \$23.3-billion** is dwarfed by China's corresponding figure of \$346-billion.
- But there have been a series of skirmishes between Washington and New Delhi over tariffs in specific sectors, and that has destabilised the bilateral balance to a certain extent.
- In March 2018, the Trump administration slapped "national security" tariffs of 25% on \$761-million worth of steel and of 10% on \$382-million of aluminium imported from India.
- Despite formal World Trade Organisation disputes initiated by India protesting these tariffs, Washington ended a year-long review of the U.S. **Generalised System of Preferences (GSP)** in June 2019 by removing India from the tariff concession system. (*Pulse 3*)
- This is said to have impacted nearly \$5.8 billion of India's exports, or more than 12% of exports to the U.S. in 2017.
- India immediately imposed higher retaliatory tariffs on 28 U.S. products including almonds, walnuts, cashews, apples, chickpeas, wheat, and peas.
- The U.S. also recently changed the status of India, among other countries, to a "developed" country, to further reduce trade concessions that it could receive from the U.S. (*Pulse 36*)

## 2) India Economic Strategy (IES) - of Australia

### About IES

- 'India Economic Strategy to 2035: Navigating from Potential to Delivery' was released in July, 2018.
- The India Economic Strategy is an ambitious plan to transform Australia's economic partnership with India out to 2035.
- According to this, India will be the single largest growth opportunity for Australia in the next 20 years.
- The strategy recommends to lift India into Aussie's top three export markets, to make India the third largest destination in Asia for Australian outward investment, and to bring India into the inner circle of Australia's strategic partnerships, and with people to people ties as close as any in Asia.
- The report judges that no single market over the next 20 years will offer more growth opportunities for Australia than India.
- The report identifies **ten sectors** where **Australia's competitive advantages** match India's needs, and ten states in India where they should focus efforts.

#### Why in News?

- Australian Trade Minister Simon Birmingham visited India recently. He said Australia pushes forward with implementing its 'India Economic Strategy' (IES).

### 3) Malaysia



#### Why in News?

- Muhyiddin Yassin was sworn in as Prime Minister of Malaysia after the king picked

#### Location and Geography



- It is located in **Southeast Asia**, just **north of the Equator**.
- The country of Malaysia consists of **Peninsular Malaysia**, which is part of mainland Southeast Asia, and on the northern edges of the **island of Borneo (East Malaysia)**.
- Malaysia is bordered by the waters of the **South China Sea**, assorted smaller seas, and the countries of **Brunei, Indonesia and Thailand**.

him to replace 94-year-old Mahathir Mohamad who resigned earlier.

## Indo-Malaysia relationships - recent developments

- Malaysia has been antagonising her relationship with India by repeated expression of concerns regarding India's domestic matters such as revocation of Article 370 with respect to Kashmir and the Citizenship Amendment Act.
- Malaysia, along with Turkey, had also taken a pro-Pakistan stand in the FATF review meetings, supporting against blacklisting of Pakistan.
- India had put **import of refined palm oil and palmolein** on its list of **restricted items** on Jan. 8, a move sources said was in response to Mahathir's criticism of its actions in Kashmir and the new citizenship law.
- Malaysia's January palm shipments to India tanked 85% from a year earlier to 46,876 tonnes, the lowest since 2011.
- India accounted for nearly a quarter of Malaysia's total palm oil exports last year and has been the biggest buyer of Malaysian palm oil for five years.
- India's curbs on Malaysian imports disrupted global edible oil trade flows, with Indonesia diverting supplies to India, Malaysia rushing to tap markets left behind by Indonesia and India substituting palm with other oils.

## 4) India to attend U.S.-Taliban peace deal ceremony in Doha

### Why in News?

- India has accepted an invitation to witness the signing of the U.S.-Taliban peace deal in Doha, Qatar.

### News in Detail

- It was earlier indicated that India would like the peace process to be inclusive — Afghan owned, Afghan led and Afghan controlled — and the participation of the Afghan government's delegation in the ceremony in Doha would show that the upcoming intra-Afghan peace negotiations would be following the path desired by India.
- Afghanistan has sent a six-member official delegation, which would begin the intra-Afghan negotiations with the Taliban soon after the peace deal with the U.S. is signed.

- India would consider the sensitivities of the Kabul government while framing future policies regarding Afghanistan.
- The peace deal between the Taliban and the U.S. comes after a long and risky negotiation and includes several difficult proposals that will unfold in phases after the deal is signed.
- During this time, the Taliban had opened up formal channels of communication with other countries like China, Russia, Iran.
- However, India did not conduct any negotiations with the group.

### Uncertain waters

- The deal would face its first test when Kabul sits for negotiations with the Taliban as the latter has extracted a promise from the U.S. for freeing a large number of its cadre from the Afghan government's prisons.
- That apart, the Taliban's participation in the overground political process remains a difficult issue that would also be worked on after the signing of the accord.

### India's efforts for Afghan peace

- India has been a key stakeholder in the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.
- In a significant move, India had sent two former diplomats in "non-official" capacity to a conference on Afghan peace process in Moscow in November 2018.
- The conference organised by Russia was attended by a high-level Taliban delegation, representatives of Afghanistan as well as from several other countries, including the U.S., Pakistan and China.
- India has been supporting a national peace and reconciliation process which is **Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan controlled**.
- India has also been maintaining that care should be taken to ensure that any such process does not lead to any "ungoverned spaces" where terrorists and their proxies can relocate.
- Ahead of the peace deal, India has conveyed to the U.S. that **pressure on Pakistan to crack down on terror networks operating from its soil** must be kept up though Islamabad's cooperation for peace in Afghanistan is crucial.

## 5) Afghanistan

## Location and Geography



- Meaning, "Land of the Afghans," Afghanistan's name originated in ancient times, and refers to the Pashtun people.

- Afghanistan is a landlocked multiethnic country, positioned in the Middle East, a recognized geographical region of south-western Asia.
- It is situated in both the northern and eastern hemispheres.
- The capital of Afghanistan is its largest city, **Kabul**.
- Significant rivers include the **Amu Dar'ya, Hari, Helmand,** and the **Kabul** - directly east of the capital city, flowing down into the Indus River in Pakistan.
- It is bounded to the east and south by **Pakistan and India**, to the west by **Iran**, and to the north by the Central Asian states of **Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan**.
- It also has a short border with Xinjiang, China, at the end of the long, narrow **Vākhān (Wakhan Corridor)**, in the extreme northeast.



### Why in News?

- The US and the Taliban have signed an "agreement for bringing peace" to Afghanistan after more than 18 years of conflict. (will be dealt in *Pulse 39*)

### Indo-Afghan relations

- Bilateral relations between Afghanistan and India have traditionally been strong and friendly.
- India and Afghanistan had been historical neighbours.
- Deep cultural ties exist through links in fields such as music, food and language, as well as Bollywood and cricket.

- Relations between Afghanistan and India received a major boost in 2011 with the signing of a **strategic partnership agreement**.
- **Salma Dam, officially the Afghan-India Friendship Dam**, is a hydroelectric and irrigation dam project located on the Hari River in Chishti Sharif District of Herat Province in western Afghanistan.
- India has also constructed a **new Parliament complex** for the Afghan government at a cost of Rs 710 crores (\$115 million).
- The Indian government is investing more than US\$100 million in the expansion of the **Chabahar port** in southeastern Iran which will serve as a hub for the transportation of transit goods to and from Afghanistan.
- Read more about Chabahar port, Zaranj-Delaram road and Garland road in *Pulse Issue No. 29*.

## 6) Qatar

### Location and Geography



- Qatar is positioned in the **Middle East** and is located in both the **northern and eastern hemispheres**.
- The capital is the eastern coastal city of **Doha (Al-Dawḥah)**.
- It **shares a border** with eastern **Saudi Arabia** where the peninsula connects to the mainland and is north and west of the **United Arab Emirates**.

- The **island country of Bahrain** lies some 40 km northwest of Qatar.



### Why in News?

- The U.S.-Taliban peace talks was hosted by Qatar in Doha recently.

## 7) United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

### About UNHRC

- The Human Rights Council is an **inter-governmental body within the United Nations** system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them.
- It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year.
- It meets at the UN Office at **Geneva**.
- The Council is made up of **47 United Nations Member States** which are **elected by the UN General Assembly**.
- The Human Rights Council **replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights** in 2006.

### Predecessor of UNHRC

- Between **1946 and 2006** the **UN Commission on Human Rights**, created as a **subsidiary body of ECOSOC**, served as the UN's central policy organ in the human rights field.

- In the early 21st century the Commission on Human Rights came to be viewed as ineffective, in part because its membership included countries with poor human rights records.
- It therefore was replaced by the UN Human Rights Council in 2006.

#### **Why in News?**

- India told the Human Rights Council that Jammu and Kashmir will remain an integral part of India forever, and the world should act against countries that shelter terrorists.
- The remarks came a day after Pakistan alleged that India continues to violate the human rights of the Kashmiri people and demanded the immediate repeal of all actions by it on Aug. 5, 2019.

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## 1) Govt. eyes public-private fund to boost R&D

### Why in News?

- In an effort to stimulate investment in research and development (R&D), the Department of Science and Technology is mooting a fund that will match the contributions made by private companies in R&D.

### News in Detail

- The idea is to pool funds from a group of companies willing to invest in fundamental research, such as quantum computers or artificial intelligence, and the government will match it with equal contributions.
- The scheme will be coordinated through the department's Science and Engineering Research Board, which funds a variety of basic science projects in several universities.

## Research bill

In 2017, the global R&D spend was estimated to be \$1.7 trillion in PPP terms, with the United States, China and Japan being the top spenders. India's share was around 2.8%

### India's top three R&D spenders in 2017-18

1. Department of Atomic Energy
2. Department of Space
3. Department of Science and Technology



### Top three Indian companies who have contributed to R&D spend in 2017

- |                                   |                    |                                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. SAP Labs India Private Limited | 2. Mphasis Limited | 3. Olympia Tech Park Private Limited |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|

Source: R&D Expenditure Ecosystem, EAC-PM

- A major beneficiary of such private sector funds could be the Indian Institutes of Technology.

### Need for the move

- Though India is among the top five countries in terms of its output of scientific publications, it doesn't match up in investments.
- The total expenditure on R&D has tripled in the last decade in nominal (revenue sans

inflation) terms — from ₹24,117 crore in 2004-05 to an estimated ₹1,04,864 crore in 2016-17, however as a fraction of GDP, public expenditures on R&D has been stagnant — between 0.6-0.7% of GDP — over the past two decades.

- It is well below that in major nations such as the U.S. (2.8), China (2.1), Israel (4.3) and Korea (4.2), according to a 2019 report by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister.

- Public sector institutions form the lion's share of India's investment in R&D.
- In 2004-2005, the private sector accounted for 28% of India's research spend and in 2016-17 this increased to 40%.
- In most advanced economies, private R&D accounts for the bulk of investment in R&D.
- Moreover, while the government is the major source of funds for R&D, it's also the major user — in terms of money consumed by public sector enterprises or Central institutions.
- As a lower middle-income country, it is not surprising that India's spending on R&D lags upper-middle income and high-income countries such as China, Israel, and the U.S.
- However, it currently underspends even relative to its income level.
- In fact, in 2015, there was a sizable decline in R&D spending even as GDP per capita continued to rise.

## 2) Microdots in vehicles

### Why in News?

- The government issued a draft notification for amending the Motor Vehicles Rules, which proposed that **invisible microdots** would be affixed on vehicles and their parts **to prevent theft as well as to check fake spare parts.**

### News in Detail

- Microdot technology involves **spraying** the body and parts of the vehicle or any other machine with **microscopic dots**, which give a **unique identification.**
- Use of this technology will help check the theft of vehicles and also the use of fake spare parts.
- The microdots and adhesive will become permanent fixtures/affixation which cannot be removed without damaging the asset, that is the vehicle itself.
- The microdots **can be read physically with a microscope** and identified with an **ultraviolet light** source.

# PIB ANALYSIS

## 1) National Sports Development Fund

### About the National Sports Development Fund (NSDF):

- The Fund was established in 1988 to impart momentum and flexibility to assist the cause of sports in India.
- The Fund helps sportspersons excel by providing them opportunities to train under coaches of international repute with technical, scientific and psychological support and giving them exposure to international competitions.
- It also provides financial assistance for the development of infrastructure and other activities for the promotion of sports.

### NSDF Objectives:

- To administer the Fund for prescribed purposes.
- To impart special training and coaching in relevant sports disciplines to

sportspersons, coaches and sports specialists.

- To construct and maintain infrastructure for promotion of sports and games.
- To supply sports equipment to organizations and individuals for promotion of sports and games.
- To identify problems and take up research and development studies for providing support to excellence in sports.
- To promote international cooperation, in particular, exchanges which may promote the development of sports.
- To provide low-interest or interest-free loans for projects and activities related to any of the aforesaid objects.

### Why in News?

- Under CSR initiative, Security Printing & Minting Corporation of India (SPMCIL) contributes Rs 1 crore towards the National Sports Development Fund.

## 2) EASE 3.0

### EASE 3.0: Digital & data-driven PSBs

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Smart Lending for Aspiring India</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Dial-a-loan for doorstep facilitation</li> <li> Credit@click: End-to-end digital retail and MSME lending</li> <li> Alternate-data-based lending using cash-flow analysis</li> <li> Analytics-based credit offers</li> <li> Tech-enabled agricultural lending and export credit</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Hard-wiring sound banking through IT systems</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Collections and Recovery Management Systems</li> <li> Risk Scoring &amp; Scrutiny Platform</li> <li> Early Warning Signals System for SOP-driven remedial actions</li> <li> Cloud-based banking solutions</li> <li> AML Compliance Monitoring System</li> <li> Alternate-data- and technology-based monitoring</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tech-enabled Ease of Banking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Palm Banking: End-to-end digital delivery of financial services</li> <li> "Banking on the go" through EASE Banking Outlets: Paperless, digitally enabled banking at frequently visited spots like malls, stations, complexes and campuses</li> <li> Digitalising the branch experience for customers</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Governance and outcome-centric HR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Board oversight for alignment of structures and processes with strategic goals</li> <li> Succession Planning</li> <li> Productivity assessment and IT-system based HR deployment</li> <li> Scientific and business-focussed Performance Mgmt System</li> <li> Specialised job families and cadres</li> </ul>

### What is EASE 3.0?

- EASE 3.0 seeks to enhance **ease of banking in all customer experiences, using technology, fintech, alternate data and analytics.**
- Dial-a-loan for doorstep loan facilitation, Credit@click for end-to-end digitised lending, on-the-spot EASE Banking Outlets at well-frequented places like malls and stations, palm banking, digitalised branch experience, analytics-based instant credit offers, cash-flow-based credit and tech-enabled agriculture lending are part of a wide array of tech-enabled ease enhancements that PSBs would effect during FY2020-21.
- EASE 3.0 sets the agenda and roadmap for FY21 for the transformation of PSBs into **digital and data-driven NextGen Banking of the Future for an aspiring India.**
- EASE 3.0 emphasizes the use of digital, analytics & AI, FinTech partnerships across customer service, convenient banking, end-to-end digitalised processes for loan sourcing and processing, analytics-driven risk management as well as decision support systems for HR.

#### **EASE Reforms Index:**

- It measures the performance of each PSB on 100+ objective metrics across six themes.
- It provides all PSBs a comparative evaluation showing where banks stand vis-à-vis benchmarks and peers on the Reforms Agenda.
- The Index follows a fully transparent scoring methodology, which enables banks to identify precisely their strengths as well as areas for improvement.
- The goal is to continue driving change by spurring healthy competition among PSBs and also by encouraging them to learn from each other.

#### **Why in News?**

- Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs unveiled EASE 3.0, the Public Sector Bank (PSB) Reforms Agenda 2020-21 for smart, tech-enabled banking, and the PSB EASE Reforms Annual Report 2019-20.

### **3) Market Intelligence and Early Warning System (MIEWS) Portal**

#### **About the MIEWS Portal:**

- The MIEWS Dashboard and Portal is a 'first-of-its-kind' platform for '**real time monitoring**' of the prices of **tomato, onion and potato (TOP).**
- It also generates alerts for intervention under the terms of **Operation Greens (OG) scheme.**
- The portal would disseminate all relevant information related to TOP crops such as prices and arrivals, area, yield and production, imports and exports, crop calendars, crop agronomy, etc. in an easy to use visual format.
- As per the terms of the OG Scheme, during a glut situation, evacuation of surplus production from producing areas to consumption centres will be undertaken.
- The MIEWS system is designed to provide advisories to farmers to avoid cyclical production as well as an early warning in situations of gluts. For decision-makers, the MIEWS system will help in:
  - Monitoring of supply situation for timely market intervention,
  - Assist in rapid response in times of glut to move produce from glut regions to deficit/consuming regions and
  - Providing inputs for export/import decision making.

- **"Operation Greens"** was launched to promote Farmer Producers Organizations, agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management.
- It seeks to stabilize the supply of Tomato, Onion and Potato (TOP) crops and to ensure availability of TOP crops throughout the country round the year without price volatility.
- The Ministry of Food Processing Industries launched the scheme. NAFED will be the Nodal Agency to implement price stabilisation measures.

#### **Why in News?**

- The Union Minister of Food Processing Industries launched the Market Intelligence and Early Warning System (MIEWS) Web Portal.

### **4) Bay of Bengal Offshore Sailing Expedition**

#### **Why in News?**

- Indian Naval Sailing Vessels Mhadei and Tarini set sail for the Bay of Bengal Offshore Sailing Expedition on 22 February 2020 from the Indian Naval Ocean Sailing Node at Goa.

#### News in Detail:

- This would be the maiden major mixed crew sailing expedition of the Indian Navy with crew composition of five naval officers including two women officers in each boat, covering a total distance of 6,100 Nautical miles each and will be at sea for 55 days.
- This expedition would showcase harnessing of renewable energy namely wind energy to propel the boats. The expedition is also in pursuance of the mission of 'Nari Shakti' providing opportunity to women officers at par with men.

#### About INS Mhadei and Tarini

- Mhadei and Tarini inducted in the Indian Navy have been the vessels of choice for the naval expeditioners in various sailing expeditions, including three circumnavigations and thus have thousands of miles tucked under their belt.
- Mhadei has successfully completed two circumnavigations, three Cape to Rio trans-Atlantic races and several other expeditions around various continents.
- The vessel has covered in excess of 1,36,000 nautical miles.
- Tarini created history in 2017-18 when six Indian Naval women officers sailed the vessel on maiden circumnavigation voyage titled **Navika Sagar Parikrama**.

### 5) CPGRAMS

#### About Centralized Public Grievance Redress And Monitoring System:

- The Centralized Public Grievance Redress And Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), is an online web-enabled system over NICNET developed by NIC in association with the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG).
- It has been developed with an objective of speedy redress and effective monitoring of grievances by Ministries/Departments/Organizations of Government of India.
- CPGRAMS aims at submission of grievances by the aggrieved citizens from anywhere and anytime (24x7) basis for instant and

easy communication between the nodal PG officers of Government Organizations and citizens resulting in the speedy redress of their grievances.

#### Key statistics:

- There is nearly 10 fold increase in Public Grievance since 2014. The public grievances have increased from 2 lakh in 2014 to 19 lakh at present with more than 95 percent disposal of cases. The Government of India in 2019 has received 18.7 lakh public grievances and disposed of 18.1 lakh of them.

#### Why in News?

- CPGRAMS Reforms were launched in the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, the Department of School Education and the Ministry of Road Transport

### 6) SARAS

#### Why in News?

- Coal India's flagship subsidiary NCL (Northern Coalfields Limited) has set up a centre named "**Science and Applied Research Alliance and Support**"(SARAS) to promote Innovation, Research & Development and skill development along with improving company's operational efficiency and utilize resources at optimum level.
- **Key features of SARAS:**
- SARAS will help and enable the company in Integration of Innovation and Research for enhancing coal production, productivity, and safety in mines.
- The SARAS would also help establish centres of excellence to ensure technical support to R&D along with thrust on quality skill development and employment to local youths in and around company's operational area.
- Continuous improvement of the existing technical infrastructure of the company for operational efficiency and integrating all initiatives with common tech platforms for optimum utilization of resources are also the objectives of setting up this centre.

### 7) Exercise Indradhanush

#### About Exercise Indradhanush:

- Exercise Indradhanush is a joint **Air force exercise** conducted by the **Royal Air Force (RAF)** of the United Kingdom and **the Indian Air Force (IAF)**.
- The exercise is tasked to enhance mutual operational understanding between the two air forces via close interaction. The exercise started in 2006.
- The focus of this edition of the exercise is 'Base Defence and Force Protection'. This theme is of significance considering the

recent threats to military establishments from terror elements.

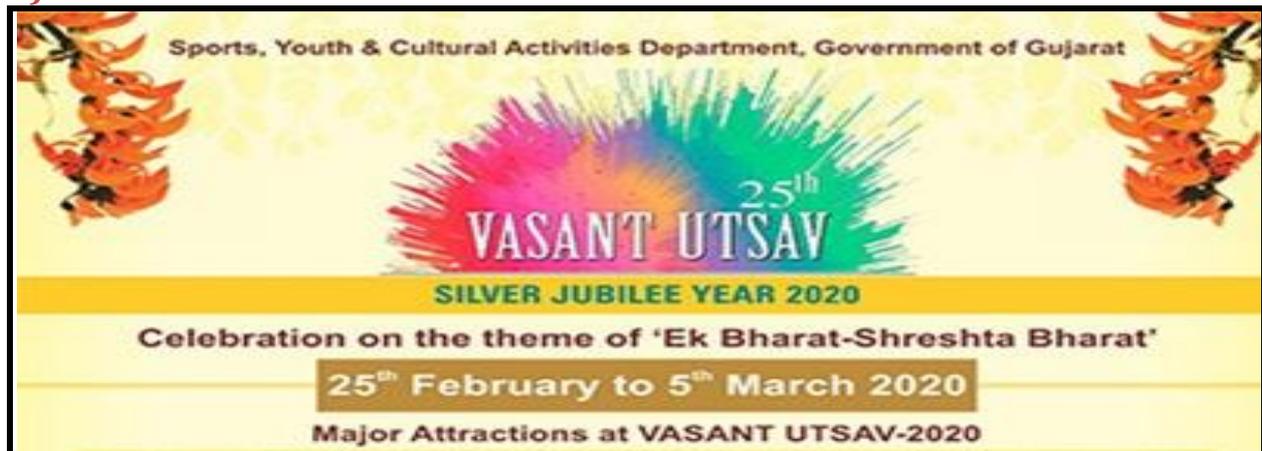
#### **Why in News?**

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) and Royal Air Force (RAF) jointly commenced the fifth edition of Exercise Indradhanush at Air Force Station Hindan on 24 Feb 2020. The exercise would formally conclude on 29 Feb 2020.

# News in Depth

## AIR NEWS

### 1) 25 th Vasantotsav



#### Why in News?

- The Eight day cultural fair called Vasantotsav was inaugurated at Sanskruti Kunj in Gandhinagar.

#### About Sanskruti Kunj:

- Sanskruti Kunj Fair is an annual festival organised by the Government of Gujarat to celebrate the rich diverse heritage of the country.
- The meaning of the two words are; 'Sanskriti' meaning "culture" and 'Kunj' meaning 'hub'.
- Sanskriti Kunj fair is often referred to as the state's spring festival or 'Basant Mahotsava' as it aptly celebrates the joyous spirit associated with the onset of spring.

#### About Ek Bharat Shreshta Bharat:

- The PM announced the plan on October 31, 2015 -- Rashtriya Ekta Diwas -- to commemorate the birth anniversary of **Sardar Patel to revive a sense of 'nationhood'**.
- The broad objectives of the initiative are as follows
- **To CELEBRATE** the Unity in Diversity of our Nation and to maintain and strengthen

the fabric of traditionally existing emotional bonds between the people of our Country;

- **To PROMOTE** the spirit of national integration through a deep and structured engagement between all Indian States and Union Territories through a year-long planned engagement between States;
- **To SHOWCASE** the rich heritage and culture, customs and traditions of either State for enabling people to understand and appreciate the diversity that is India, thus fostering a sense of common identity
- **TO ESTABLISH** long-term engagements and,
- **TO CREATE** an environment which promotes learning between States by sharing best practices and experiences.
- <http://newsonair.com/News?title=8-day-Vasantotsav-begins-in-Gandhinagar&id=381942>
- <https://ekbharat.gov.in/Pages/About>
- <https://www.gujaratexpert.com/sanskriti-kunj-fair/>

# THE HINDU EDITORIALS

## 1) A browning east: On climate change and the Eastern Ghats

### Context:

- Climate change impact warnings for Eastern Ghats underscore the need for forest protection.

### About Eastern ghats:



### Geographical Location :

- Eastern Ghats are a **discontinuous range of mountains** set along Eastern coast.
- Eastern Ghats pass through states like Orissa, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.**
- These Ghats are ripped through by rivers like **Godawari, Mahanadi, Krishna and Kaveri**, the four major rivers of South India.

### Characteristics of Eastern Ghats :

- Eastern Ghats are **older than Western Ghats.**
- The elevation of eastern ghats is lower than the western ghats.
- It covers an total area of around **75,000 sq.**

km.

- Sirumalai and Karanthamalai hills of Tamil Nadu lie in the southernmost part of the Eastern Ghats.
- North of Kaveri river are higher Kollimalai, Pachaimalai, Shevaroy, Kalrayan Hills, Palamalai and mettur hills in north Tamil Nadu.
- The Ghat is said to be the **watershed of many rivers** as the Ghat gets higher average waterfall. Due to **higher annual average rainfall of 1,200 mm to 1,500 mm**, the fertile land results in better crops.
- Often referred to as "**Estuaries Of India**", Eastern Ghats give its inhabitants the popular profession of fisheries as its coastal area is full of fishing opportunity.

### Flora and Fauna :

- The diversified ecological niches and environmental situation provide habitat for rich fauna.
- Eastern ghats is home to the largest number of Asiatic elephants, large **animals** such as Nilgiri Tahr, Leopards, Gaurs, Sambar, and tigers abound the landscape.
- Reservoir of about **3,000 flowering plant species**, nearly 100 of them endemic, occurring in the dry deciduous, moist deciduous and semi-evergreen landscapes.
- Around **400 bird species** are found here.

### Tribal Population :

- The land is also occupied by quite a few tribes which include **Savara, Jatapu, Konda Dora, Gadaba, Khond, Manne Dora and mukha Dora.**

### Key functions

- Modulates climate,
- Fosters biodiversity
- Provides sustenance.

### What is the issue?

- New research findings argue that the Ghats face a **serious threat from climate change**, and temperature variations which are a cause for worry.

### Why to conserve Eastern ghats?

- Disruption of the annual average temperature and diminished rainfall would **rob the productivity of these forests**, in

terms of their ability to store carbon, and provide subsistence material.

- Protecting the Eastern Ghats, which are separated by powerful rivers, the Godavari and Krishna, is an **ecological imperative**.
- India is committed, under the **Paris Agreement on Climate Change**, to create an **additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes** through enhanced forest and tree cover.
- The Ghats have **shrunk by 16% over the past century**, and just one region, Papikonda National Park, lost about 650 sq. km. in two decades 1991. from

#### Way forward:

- Relieving the pressure on forests can be done through **policies that reduce extraction of scarce resources and incentivise settled agriculture**.
- **Schemes for restoration of forest peripheries** through indigenous plant and tree species, matching national commitments, could qualify for international climate finance.
- Decisive steps to **mitigate carbon emissions** must also be taken.
- **Improving tree cover nationally** is certain to confer multiple benefits, including modulation of the monsoon, improved air quality and wider spaces for biodiversity to persist.

## 2) The issues around data localisation

#### Context:

- The contentious clauses on local data storage in the revised Personal Data Protection Bill need re-examination.

#### What is Personal Data?

- Personal data is data which **pertains to characteristics, traits or attributes of identity**, which can be used to identify an individual.

#### About Personal Data Protection Bill and its Provisions:

- The Bill seeks to provide for protection of personal data of individuals, and establishes a Data Protection Authority for the same.
- **Applicability:** The Bill governs the processing of personal data by: (i) government, (ii) companies incorporated in India, and (iii) foreign companies

dealing with personal data of individuals in India.

- **Obligations of data fiduciary:** A data fiduciary is an entity or individual who decides the means and purpose of processing personal data which will be subject to certain purpose, collection and storage limitations.
- **Rights of the individual:** The Bill sets out certain rights of the individual which includes the right to: (i) obtain confirmation from the fiduciary on whether their personal data has been processed, (ii) seek correction of inaccurate, incomplete, or out-of-date personal data, (iii) have personal data transferred to any other data fiduciary in certain circumstances, and (iv) restrict continuing disclosure of their personal data by a fiduciary, if it is no longer necessary or consent is withdrawn.
- **Grounds for processing personal data:** The Bill allows processing of data by fiduciaries only if consent is provided by the individual. However, in certain circumstances, personal data can be processed without consent which includes: (i) if required by the State for providing benefits to the individual, (ii) legal proceedings, (iii) to respond to a medical emergency.
- **Social media intermediaries:** The Bill defines these to include intermediaries which enable online interaction between users and allow for sharing of information.
- **Data Protection Authority:** The Bill sets up a Data Protection Authority which may: (i) take steps to protect interests of individuals, (ii) prevent misuse of personal data, and (iii) ensure compliance with the Bill.
- It will consist of a chairperson and six members, with at least 10 years' expertise in the field of data protection and information technology. Orders of the Authority can be appealed to an Appellate Tribunal. Appeals from the Tribunal will go to the Supreme Court.
- **Transfer of data outside India:** Sensitive personal data may be transferred outside India for processing if explicitly consented to by the individual, and subject to certain

additional conditions. However, such sensitive personal data should continue to be stored in India. Certain personal data notified as critical personal data by the government can only be processed in India.

- **Exemptions:** The central government can exempt any of its agencies from the provisions of the Act under certain instances.
- **Offences:** Processing or transferring personal data in violation of the Bill is punishable offence.
- **Sharing of non-personal data with government:** The central government may direct data fiduciaries to provide it with any: (i) non-personal data and (ii) anonymised personal data (where it is not possible to identify data principal) for better targeting of services.
- **Amendments to other laws:** The Bill amends the Information Technology Act, 2000 to delete the provisions related to compensation payable by companies for failure to protect personal data.

#### Significance of the bill:

- The draft law is a **comprehensive piece of legislation** that seeks to give individuals greater control over how their personal data is collected, stored and used.
- Being inadequate and improperly enforced Indian privacy law, once passed, the law promises a huge improvement on it.

#### Criticisms of the bill:

- It has attracted criticism on various grounds such as the
- exceptions created for the state,
- the limited checks imposed on state surveillance, and
- various deficiencies in the structures and processes of the proposed Data Protection Authority.

#### About Data Localisation:

- The Bill enables the transfer of personal data outside India, with the sub-category of sensitive personal data having to be mirrored in the country (i.e. a copy will have to be kept in the country).
- Data processing/collecting entities will however be barred from transferring critical personal data (a category that the government can notify at a subsequent stage) outside the country.

- These provisions have been changed from the earlier version of the draft Bill, released by the Justice Srikrishna Committee in 2018 which required both personal and sensitive personal data to be mirrored in the country (subject to different conditions).
- The changes in the 2019 draft reflect a more proportionate approach to the issue as they implement a tiered system for cross-border data transfer, based on the sensitivity/vulnerability of the data which seems in accord with the Supreme Court's dicta in the 2017 Puttaswamy case.

#### Supreme Court Judgement on Puttaswamy case:

- Interference in the fundamental right to privacy would only be permissible if inter alia deemed necessary and proportionate.
- However, on closer examination it appears that even the revised law may not actually stand the test of proportionality.

#### Purpose of localisation

- There are broadly three sets of arguments advanced in favour of imposing stringent data localisation norms:

#### Sovereignty and government functions

- Referring to the need to recognise Indian data as a resource to be used to further national interest (economically and strategically), and to enable enforcement of Indian law and state functions.

#### Economic benefits:

- Economic benefits will accrue to local industry in terms of creating local infrastructure, employment and contributions to the AI ecosystem.

#### Protection of civil liberties

- Local hosting of data will enhance its privacy and security by ensuring Indian law applies to the data and users can access local remedies.
- But if data protection was required for these purposes, it would make sense to ensure that local copies were retained of all the categories of personal data provided for in the Bill.

#### Way forward;

- The degree of protection afforded to data will depend on the effectiveness of the applicable data protection regime. Hence, the joint parliamentary committee should

ideally, identify the need, purpose and practicality of putting in place, the provisions contained in the PDP Bill.

- Broader thinking at the policy level is need of the hour which may include for instance
  - 1) reforming surveillance related laws,
  - 2) entering into more detailed and up-to-date mutual legal assistance treaties,
  - 3) enabling the development of sufficient digital infrastructure, and
  - 4) creating appropriate data-sharing policies that preserve privacy

## 2) “Counting birds together”

### Context:

- Recently, the **State of India’s Birds 2020 (SoIB)** report was released at the global conference (held at Gandhinagar, Gujarat) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.

### About the report:

- The State of India’s Birds Report 2020 represents the first collective attempt in India to understand and assess how the avifauna are doing.
- Abundance trends and distribution of 867 species of Indian birds assessed
- Citizen Science forms the basis of this report
- Analysis based on more than 10 million observations contributed by over 15,500 birdwatchers

### Key findings of the report:

- More bird species are showing declines in population than that are showing population stability or increases.
  - 1) 48% of species stable or increasing in the long term;
  - 2) 79% decreasing in the last five years
- During the last two decades, over half the species assessed have declined.
- Declines are particularly acute for certain groups of birds, including birds of prey, migrant shorebirds, birds of forests and grasslands, and endemic birds of the Western Ghats.
- 101 species classified as high conservation concern, including 34 species not considered globally threatened by the IUCN Red List (as critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable)

### Challenges in assessing the status of birds:

- Assessing the status of our birds poses a variety of challenges.

- Difficulty in assessing quiet and nocturnal birds having to look in a wide variety of habitats.
- Difficulty in assessing migratory birds as hundreds of species migrates into and out of our country at different times of the year.

### Significance of the report:

- The report provides strong reasons for hope that we can further strengthen the understanding and conservation of our avian heritage.
- The report has two distinctive features that define a new approach:
  - 1) The information it builds on comes from citizens
  - 2) The report’s data and analysis are in the public domain, inviting critique and further refinement.

### A collaborative effort:

- Addressing the challenges and achieving a coverage both of species and of habitats has been possible only because of an alignment in the formidable energies and efforts of a large and inspired community of birdwatchers across the country.
- A large multi-institutional consortium of researchers drawn from both non-governmental and government institutions collaborated to analyse and put together the report.

### Open access to data:

- A better public and scientific understanding of our biodiversity can grow only from wider and open access not only to data, but also from opening the entire process of scientific inquiry to wider peer and public scrutiny and challenge.
- The data that has gone into this report are not only collected by thousands of citizens, but are open for any researcher to use.
- Remain engaged with the results, and continue to further not only an understanding of our avifauna but also actions to conserve them is need of the hour.

### Reasons for declining population:

- **Conversion of natural habitats for human use**
  - 1) Forests into plantations and mining sites,
  - 2) Grasslands into plantations or agriculture, and
  - 3) Wetlands reclaimed for agriculture or buildings.

- **Hunting and trapping**

- 1) For consumption

- 2) For pet trade

- **Environmental toxins**

- 1) Veterinary drug diclofenac

### **Conservation Efforts:**

#### **Participation in international conventions**

- India's commitment to conservation is emphasized by its participation in key international conventions and initiatives, including the Convention on Migratory Species, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

#### **Legal Protection through Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972**

- The main approach to conservation is legal protection which is extended to species through the Wildlife (Protection) Act (1972 and further amendments), and to habitats through the Protected Area network.

#### **National initiatives**

- A number of national initiatives support and expand on existing conservation law which includes

- 1) National Wildlife Action Plan

- 2) Central Asian Flyway Action Plan (Specifically focussed on migratory birds and their habitats.)

#### **Important Bird Area**

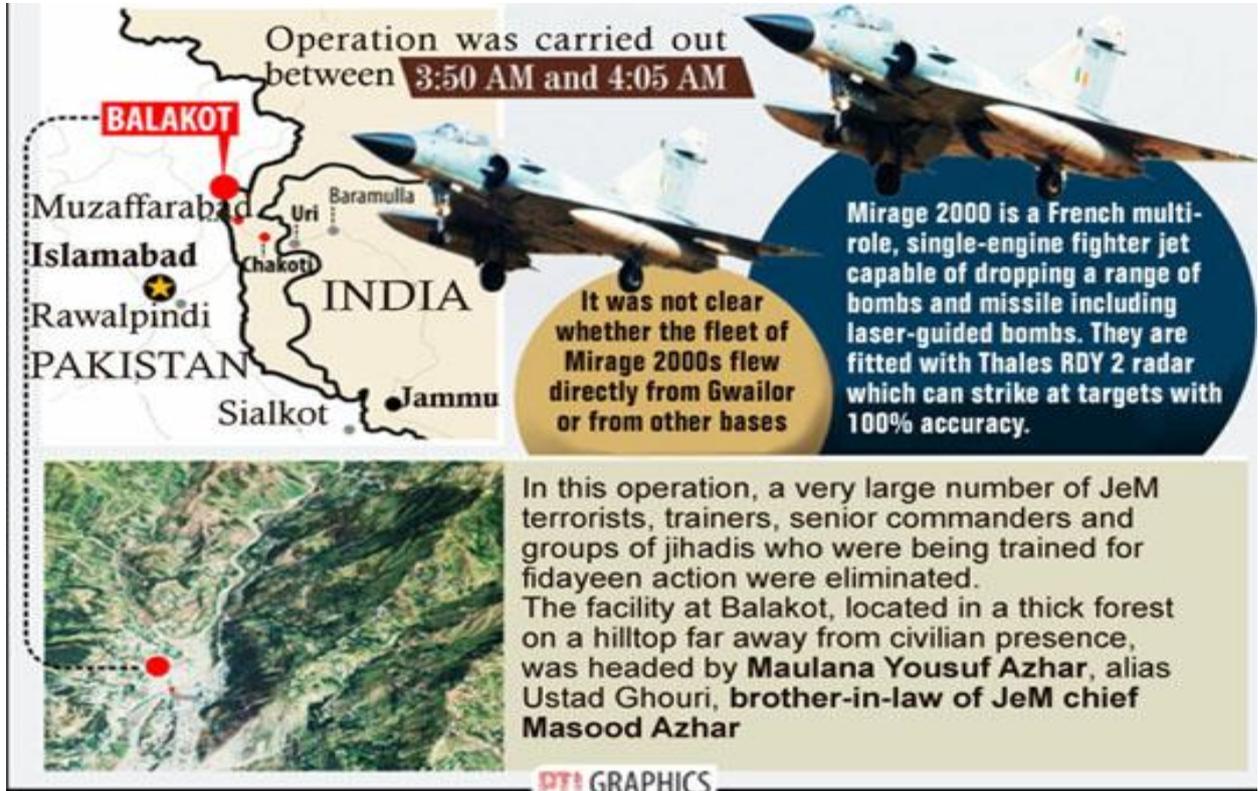
- The notion of Important Bird Areas, now integrated into the concept of Key Biodiversity Areas, is a significant component of India's conservation planning.

#### **Way forward:**

- Additional conservation needs include the
  - careful regulation and monitoring of environmental toxins,
  - the management and conservation of key habitats that are under-represented in the Protected Area network (like grasslands), and
  - maximisation of the conservation potential of multi-use landscapes.
- To support these efforts, India needs to expand monitoring efforts to track the abundance and ranges of species, to promote more research to understand the cascade of causes of population and range change, and to create an enabling framework to respond rapidly to early warnings of decline.

# RSTV BIG PICTURE

## 1) Balakot Airstrike - Lessons learnt



### Why in News?

- February 26th marks the first anniversary of the Balakot airstrike which was conducted by the Indian Air Force to target the terrorist camps operating in the town of Balakot in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.
- On February 26, 2019, in the wee hours, India carried out airstrikes 12 days after a convoy of vehicles carrying CRPF personnel was attacked by a suicide bomber - plotted by Jaish-e-Mohammed in Pulwama district of Jammu.

### What is the Background?

- On 14 February last year, 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed in the attack.
- In retaliation, Indian Air Force destroyed the biggest terror training camp of JeM at Balakot on February 26, 2019.
- A dozen IAF Mirage 2000 fighter jets crossed the India-Pakistan border to attack terror camp.
- According to media reports, the terrorist camps at Balakot have undergone a revamp

ahead of the first anniversary of the IAF bombings.

- Today, one year on, we will analyse the lessons learnt from the Balakot airstrike.
- ### How has the attack proved Pakistan a terror launch pad?
- Any involvement in the region's instability due to terrorism or it acting as a safe haven to terrorism claims have been always refused by Pakistan.
  - But still it continues to remain a safe haven for terrorist organisations such as Jaish-e-Mohammad, Jamaat-ud-dawa which continues to operate in Pakistan unabatedly.
  - There have been multiple attacks launched on Indian soil by Terrorist outfits ranging from 2001 parliament attack, 26/11 Mumbai attack, and Uri attack in 2016 to the latest Pulwama attack in February 2019.
  - This attitude of shirking away from its responsibility has changed with Indian government building international pressure on Pakistani dispensation and

providing proof to both the international community as well as Pakistani government wherever required.

- International community too believes that Pakistan does harbour terrorist groups that act against India irrespective of whether the state facilitates them or not.

#### **How has India responded traditionally?**

- India's most preferred and usual response has always been one of defence.
- Outraged Indian sentiment has often been cooled down through sheer diplomacy and political management.
- India has resorted to composite dialogue to promote cooperation, address outstanding issues and handle humanitarian concerns.
- Indian conventional military considerations are belittled by Pakistan's nuclear threat overhang, paralysing any efforts towards military escalation.
- Indian government has never considered the terrorism problem as a strategic challenge and has looked at it from the cross border infiltration angle.
- Steps such as withdrawing Pakistan's status of most favoured nation, denial of visas to sports teams and the decision to use all the waters of the eastern rivers under the Indus Water Treaty have done little to no change in Pakistani stand.

#### **How has it helped India enter a new phase?**

- The post - Uri attack surgical strikes had marked a major shift in India's response to Pakistani terror.
- Indian military action in Pakistan controlled territory to destroy terrorist launch pad was seen as a major strategic win as it provided Pakistan an opportunity to deny them and therefore, limiting any possibility of military escalation.
- It comes at the cost of **erosion of Pakistan's nuclear overhang doctrine**, with India downplaying any threat from its nuclear capable neighbour.
- Air force strikes in Balakot are even a one step further in India's resolve to eliminate any foreign based terror camp as it not only crossed LOC but entered Pakistan mainland **(the area falls about 50 km from the LoC and 81 km away from Uri, Jammu and Kashmir)**.
- India called these strikes as non-military pre-emptive strike, with no intention on

hitting military establishment and causing any civilian casualties.

- Indian strikes marked not only the first intentional crossing by the IAF since the 1971 war between the two countries, but the first-ever use of conventional airpower by one nuclear-armed state against the territory of another nuclear-armed state.

#### **What is the way forward?**

- India in order to end cross border terrorism has to start considering the issue as a strategic challenge and use all elements of national power in sustained manner over a long period.
- India should continue its recent **policy of active engagement** as all the previous measures however effective in bringing down Indian anger have done little in moderating Pakistani thinking or action.
- **India should insist on complete eradication of terrorist launch pads** and banning of terrorist outfits used for perpetrating crime and attacks on India from Pakistani soil before resuming any dialogue.
- India should build **international pressure and ensure a crack down on the funding** of these institutions.

#### **Conclusion**

- India should be clear about its position towards terrorism and should **project the same to international community** emphasising India's drying patience towards Pakistani terrorist misadventure. There is a **need to ensure a serious rethinking of India-Pakistan relationship** which should look forward to India's interest and at the same time avoid any war-like aggression which is disastrous for India.

## **2) India - Myanmar ties**

#### **Why in News?**

- India and Myanmar exchanged 10 agreements in a number of fields ranging from infrastructure, energy, communication and health.
- The agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed and exchanged after talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting Myanmar President at Hyderabad House.



### What is the Background?

- The two leaders held discussions on a wide range of bilateral issues.
- The visiting dignitary arrived in India on a four-day official visit.
- Earlier in the day, Myanmar's President was given a ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- He also visited Rajghat and paid tributes to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.
- India and Myanmar have close religious, linguistic and ethnic ties.
- Myanmar is the only ASEAN country bordering India which provides a gateway to South East Asia.
- In line with its Act East and Neighbourhood First policies, India has laid emphasis on boosting its cooperation with Myanmar.
- India is the fifth largest trading partner of Myanmar and the current bilateral trade stands at US \$ 1.7 billion.

### What are the different aspects of Indo-Myanmar relations?

- India is the second largest market for Burmese exports after Thailand. The bilateral trade stands at approximately \$2.2 billion (2016-17).
- By 2001, Border Roads Organisation had constructed the Indo- Myanmar Friendship road to improve connectivity between the

two countries. Also under construction is the India-Myanmar Thailand Trilateral Highway that connects Guwahati in India with Mandalay and Yangon in Myanmar and finally culminates in Thailand.

- Another connectivity project underway is the Kaladan multi-modal Highway that connects Kolkata with Sittwe via sea and Sittwe with Myanmar via Kaladan river, thereby reducing transit time and costs. These projects will help boost bilateral trade between the countries.
- India has also assisted Myanmar in humanitarian relief operations following natural calamities like Cyclone Mora (2017), Komen (2015) etc apart from monetary support in rehabilitation and reconstruction.
- India has built on the cultural affinities shared with Myanmar by assisting in restoration work at Anand temple in Bagan. This gives India an enormous goodwill.
- India also aids Myanmar for military modernization.
- India also provides power from Moreh in Manipur to Myanmar.
- Apart from bilateral exchanges, India and Myanmar engage on multilateral platforms such as ASEAN, BIMSTEC etc. Myanmar also joined SASEC as a member.
- India showed diplomatic fine balancing by abstaining from voting against Myanmar during the Bali declaration and also condemned the terrorist attacks in Rakhine district led by ARSA.

### What is the strategic importance of Myanmar for India?

- Myanmar is the only ASEAN member that shares its borders with India and thus provides opportunity for deepening ties with south-east Asian nations under the Look East and Act East policies.
- Myanmar is a key component of India's ambitions at bridging South Asia and South-East Asia through BIMSTEC which brings together 21% of the world's population and has a combined GDP of nearly \$2.5 trillion.
- Cooperation with Myanmar is crucial for controlling insurgency in North Eastern states.
- Myanmar has rich reserves of oil and natural gas. Since India imports nearly 80% of its fuel, Myanmar is important for India.

- Import of pulses and beans from Myanmar is vital to ensuring food security in India.
- India needs to increase its presence in Myanmar so as to counter the growing Chinese dominance in the region. Myanmar thus has strategic significance for India.

#### What are the challenges?

- Bilateral trade between the two countries remains far below potential. A major reason for this is the movement of infrastructure projects at snail's pace. Notably, India's project implementation capacity is very lacklustre.
- Rohingya Influx India hosts nearly 40,000 Rohingya Muslims who are denied citizenship in Myanmar and who sought refuge in India in order to escape religious persecution.
- Growing Chinese presence Myanmar agreed to be a part of the Belt and Road Initiative and has also welcomed Chinese investments in various infrastructure projects including port projects such as Kyaukpyu port.
- Conflict in Rakhine state is central to many a connectivity projects currently underway between India and Myanmar such as the

Kaladan Multi-modal highway. Conflict in the region has slowed the progress of such projects. This does not augur well for a bilateral trade.

- India imposed restrictions on the import of pulses in order to improve price realization for Indian farmers. This decision did not go down well with the Mynamarese government as it impacted Myanmar's exports to India.

#### Conclusion

- India shares many common concerns with Myanmar that range from socio-economic development, similar ecological and climatic concerns, shared concerns over insurgency and regional peace and preserving sovereignty in light of growing Chinese assertiveness. These offer tremendous scope for cooperation. India needs to seize this opportunity and expedite the work on ongoing projects while at the same time exercising soft power through constructive aid and cultural exchange.

### 3) Facial Recognition - Uses and Concerns

## Face value

A step-by-step process to enable yourself for facial scans at airports:

**Step 1** Register your name, e-mail, mobile number, ID proof on a designated portal

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**Step 2** One-time verification at an airport is a must and if you use Aadhaar as ID proof, then verification can be done online

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**Step 3** Your photo has to be added to your Digi Yatra profile and an id number should be generated

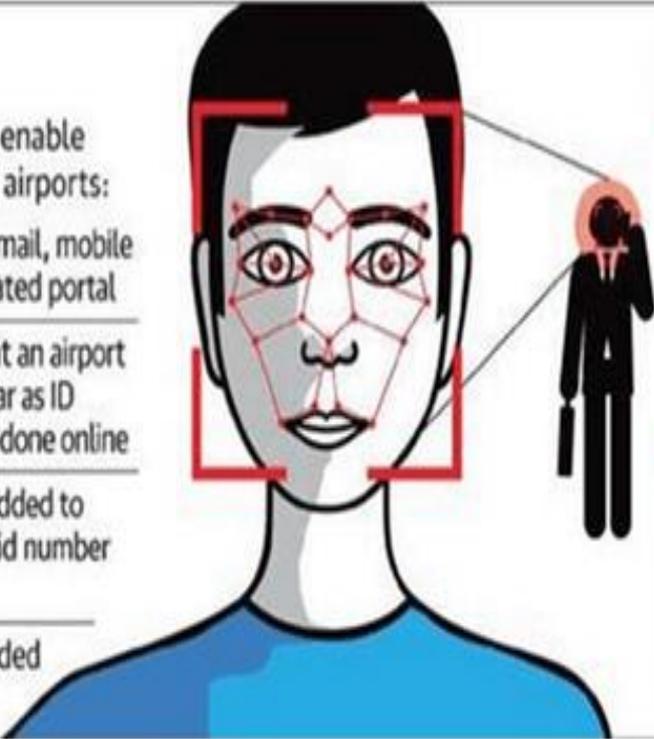
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**Step 4** This id number is needed while booking tickets

**Step 5** Scan QR code and undergo facial recognition before entering airports. Facial id along with ticket PNR is made into a single token

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**Step 6** Carry out self-check in, drop baggage & access security and embarkation area with a facial scan



- Facial recognition has become a cause for concern in western democracies.
- The European Commission is considering imposing a five-year moratorium on the

#### Why in News?

use of facial recognition technologies in the European Union (EU).

### **What is the Background?**

- In the United States (US), municipalities have passed, or are considering passing prohibitions, India, however, is rushing to adopt public facial recognition.
- Facial recognition systems have been active at several major Indian airports, including the Delhi airport.
- These systems at airports have been installed under the DigiYatra initiative.
- Telangana's election commission piloted a facial recognition app in its civic elections on January 22, and claimed that it could address the issue of voter impersonation.

### **What do we know about Facial Recognition Technology?**

- Facial recognition is a biometric technology that uses distinctive features on the face to identify and distinguish an individual.
- From the first cameras that could recognise faces in the mid-1960s up to now, facial recognition has evolved in many ways — from looking at 3D contours of a face to recognising skin patterns.
- With machine learning, the technology has become capable of sorting out types of faces.

### **How does it work?**

- It works by maintaining a large database with photos and videos of peoples' faces.
- Then, a new image of an unidentified person is compared to the existing database to find a match and identify the person.
- Neural networking is the artificial intelligence technology used for pattern-finding and matching.
- It will not only create a biometric map of our faces, but also track, classify, and possibly anticipate our every move.

### **How does it violate privacy?**

- Government says that there is no violation of privacy as it will only track criminals and be accessed only by law enforcement.
- Government says that there is no violation of privacy as it will only track criminals and be accessed only by law enforcement.
- Technically speaking, it is impossible for the AFRS to be truly used only to identify, track and verify criminals, despite the best of intentions.

- Recording, classifying and querying every individual is a prerequisite for the system to work.

### **What is the argument of efficiency?**

- It is assumed that facial recognition will introduce efficiency and speed in enforcing law and order.
- In August 2018, a facial recognition system used by the Delhi police was reported to have an accuracy rate of only 2%.
- This is a trend worldwide, with similar levels of accuracy reported in the U.K. and the U.S.
- Accuracy rates of facial recognition algorithms are particularly low in the case of minorities, women and children, as demonstrated in multiple studies across the world.
- Use of such technology in a criminal justice system where vulnerable groups are overrepresented makes them susceptible to being subjected to false positives (being wrongly identified as a criminal).
- Image recognition is an extremely difficult task, and makes significant errors even in laboratory settings.
- Deploying these systems in consequential sectors like law enforcement is ineffective at best and disastrous at worst.

### **What are the fears of mass surveillance?**

- Facial recognition makes data protection close to impossible as it is predicated on collecting publicly available information and analysing it to the point of intimacy.
- It can also potentially trigger a seamless system of mass surveillance, depending on how images are combined with other data points.
- The AFRS is being contemplated at a time when India does not have a data protection law.
- In the absence of safeguards, law enforcement agencies will have a high degree of discretion.

### **What is the way forward?**

- The notion that sophisticated technology means greater efficiency needs to be critically analysed.
- The Personal Data Protection Bill 2018 is yet to come into force, and even if it does, the exceptions contemplated for state agencies are extremely wide.
- A deliberative approach will benefit Indian law enforcement, as police departments

around the world are currently learning that the technology is not as useful in practice as it seems in theory.

### **Conclusion**

- Police departments in London are under pressure to put a complete end to use of

facial recognition systems following evidence of discrimination and inefficiency. San Francisco recently implemented a complete ban on police use of facial recognition. India would do well to learn from their mistakes.

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