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JANUARY - 2021

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DEEMED FORESTS

GENERAL STUDIES - III (CONSERVATION)

Recently, the Karnataka Forest Minister announced in the Assembly that the state government would soon **declassify 6.64 lakh hectares of the 9.94 lakh hectares of deemed forests** in the state (nearly 67%) and hand it over to Revenue authorities.

- The move has been taken after **a study of the actual extent of deemed forest areas by local committees** headed by officials from the Revenue, Forest and Land Records Departments in every district.

What are deemed forests?

While the **concept of deemed forests has not been clearly defined in any law** including the **Forest Conservation Act of 1980**.

The **Supreme Court in the case of T N Godavarman Thirumalpad (1996)** accepted a wide definition of forests under the Act.

- "The word 'forest' must be understood according to its dictionary meaning. **This description covers all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise for the purpose of Section 2 (1) of the Forest Conservation Act,**" the Supreme Court said in its December 12, 1996 order.
- "The term '**forest land**' occurring in Section 2 will not only include 'forest' as understood in the dictionary sense, but also any areas recorded as forest in the government record irrespective of the ownership.
- **The provisions enacted in the Forest Conservation Act 1980** for the conservation of forest and the matters connected therewith **must apply clearly to all forest** so understood irrespective of the ownership or classification thereof,".

'Deemed Forests' as per Expert Committee

An **expert committee constituted by the Karnataka government after the Supreme Court order** identified 'deemed forests' as "**Land having the characteristic of forests irrespective of the ownership**".

According to the Committee-

Thickly wooded areas of the Revenue Department not handed over to the Forest Department; **thickly wooded areas recommended to be handed over to the Forest Department**; **thickly wooded land distributed to grantees but not cultivated**; and **thickly wooded plantations** of the Forest Department **could all be 'deemed forests'**.

Demands to reclassify

A deemed forest fits “dictionary meaning” of a forest, “irrespective of ownership”.

Amidst **claims that the move hit farmers**, as well as barred large tracts from mining, the state has been arguing that the classification was done without taking into account needs of people.

The Way Forward

Preservation of forest areas in India under the **Forest Conservation Act, 1980** has been continuously **monitored by the Supreme Court** since the Godavarman case judgment in 1996.

- The state government must obtain clearances from the Supreme Court for affecting changes to land classified as deemed forests since the verdict, said officials of the Forest, Ecology and Environment department in Karnataka.
- In 2019, the state had filed an interim application in the Supreme Court for exclusion of 5.18 lakh.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 2nd JANUARY – 2021

ARGENTINA'S HISTORIC LEGALISATION OF ABORTION

GENERAL STUDIES - II (EFFECT OF POLICIES OF OTHER COUNTRIES ON INDIAN DIASPORA)

Argentina's Congress **legalised abortions up to the 14th week of pregnancy** this week.

This change is historic and its implications may be witnessed beyond Argentina, in Latin America at large.

What does this bill mean?

Prior to the passing of the bill, **abortions were only permitted in cases of rape or when the woman's health was at serious risk.**

- Activists have been campaigning for years, calling for an overturning of **this law that has been in existence since 1921.**
- The bill **calls for greater autonomy for women over their own bodies and control of their reproductive rights**, and also provides better healthcare for pregnant women and young mothers.

Why is it a landmark bill?

Prior to this, **girls and women were forced to turn to illegal and unsafe procedures because abortion was against the law in Argentina.**

- For **girls and women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds**, the scope of access to safe medical procedures for abortion was even narrower.

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- According to Human Rights Watch, **unsafe abortion was the leading cause of maternal mortality in the country.**

The existing provisions in Latin America

Activists are hopeful that the passage of this law will have an impact in other countries in Latin America.

- At present, **abortions are illegal in Nicaragua, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic.**
- In **Uruguay, Cuba, Guyana, and in some parts of Mexico**, women can request for an abortion, but only in specific cases.
- **Each country has its own laws on the number of weeks of pregnancy** within which the abortion is legal.
- The countries also have **varying degrees of punishment and penalties** meted out to girls and women, including jail.

What impact will this have in Latin America?

Activists are hopeful that the passage of this law will have an impact in other countries in Latin America.

- Women's rights activists have acknowledged **that despite the new law in Argentina, the fight is far from over in the region.**
- **Anti-abortion groups and their religious and political backers** have attempted to stall any progress in the process.
- Most recently, in **Brazil's conservative president Jair Bolsonaro had vowed to veto** any pro-abortion bills in the country.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 4th JANUARY – 2021

DON'T IGNORE THE WOMEN FARMERS

GENERAL STUDIES - II (GOVERNMENT POLICIES)

Eminent agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan once said:

"Some historians believe that it was women who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming.

While men went out hunting in search of food, **women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating** those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fibre and fuel."

A common misconception

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In India, whenever we talk about agriculture, we think of men as farmers. However, this is far from the truth.

- **According to the agricultural census**, 73.2% of rural women are engaged in farming activities but only 12.8% own landholdings.
- Due to cultural, social and religious forces, **women have been denied ownership of land**. This stems from the perception that farming is a man's profession.

Land titles in the country

The India Human Development Survey reports that **83% of agricultural land in the country is inherited by male members of the family** and less than 2% by their female counterparts.

- Thus, **women are mostly left without any title of land in their names** and are excluded from the definition of farmers.
- Besides, **81% of women agricultural labourers belong to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes**, so they also contribute to the largest share of casual and landless labourers.

Non-recognition as a Farmer

The government too turns a blind eye to their problem of non-recognition and **conveniently labels them as 'cultivators' or 'agricultural labourers' but not 'farmers'**.

- Without any recognition, **women are systematically excluded from all the benefits of government schemes**.
- Moreover, **they are not guaranteed the rights** which they would otherwise be given if they were recognised as farmers, such as loans for cultivation, loan waivers, crop insurance, subsidies or even compensation to their families in cases where they commit suicide.

The farm laws

Now the **women farmers have a new worry**: the farm laws.

Since the **government's policies never aimed to reduce disparity or alleviate their distress**, women farmers fear that the farm laws will further deepen gender inequality in the sector.

Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM), has highlighted several issues with the laws.

- The first is the **lack of any mention of MSP** (minimum support price) that protects farmers from exploitation.
- **Women are barely in a position as empowered agents who can either understand or negotiate (written) agreements** with traders and corporate entities who are seeking to enter into agreements with the farmers to purchase their produce or for other services.
- It is clear that **farmers will have no bargaining power in the corporatisation of agriculture**, where corporates will decide the price with no safety net or adequate redressal mechanism for the farmers.

- Consequently, **the small marginal and medium farmers will be forced to do sell their land to big agro-businesses and become wage labourers.**

Conclusion

But while this struggle rages on, we must not forget the troubles of our women farmers.

Perhaps that is why they are at the front line of this protest — to remind us that they are too are farmers and have an equal stake in this fight.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 5th JANUARY – 2021

EASE OF DOING BUSINESS: HOW STATES ARE RANKED?

GENERAL STUDIES - II (ISSUES RELATING TO PLANNING)

The **absence of more industrialised states such as Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra**, in the latest ease of doing business rankings from the top rungs and **the presence of states such as Uttar Pradesh in the top ranks** has surprised many.

What is the Ease of doing business ranking of states of India?

Ease of doing business ranking of states of India **is the annual ease of doing business index of states and union territories of India.**

It is based on the completion percentage scores of action items points of annual **Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP)** under the make in India initiative.

- This ranking of states has been **done by World Bank since 2015 and facilitated by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP)**, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (India).
- It is based on the **progress of states in completing annual reform action plan covering 8 key areas** which has a number of points that vary every year.

Performance of the states

- **Andhra Pradesh secured the top spot for the third time** since the ranking was first released in 2015.
- **Uttar Pradesh jumped ten spots to number two and Telangana slipped to three.**
- **Gujarat**, which was first in the first-ever edition of the rankings, **was ranked 11 this year;**
- *Haryana slipped all the way to 17.*

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TABLE 1: EASE OF DOING BUSINESS RANKS, TOP 10 IN 2019

State	2015	2016	2017	2019
Andhra Pradesh	2	1	1	1
Uttar Pradesh	10	14	12	2
Telangana	13	1	2	3
Madhya Pradesh	5	5	7	4
Jharkhand	3	7	4	5
Chhattisgarh	4	4	6	6
Himachal	17	17	16	7
Rajasthan	6	8	9	8
West Bengal	11	15	10	9
Gujarat	1	3	5	10

Source: DPIIT

TABLE 2: REFORMS, APPLICABLE/IMPLEMENTED

State	Applicable	Implemented
Andhra	187	187
UP	186	184
Telangana	186	184
MP	187	187
Jharkhand	187	186
Chhattisgarh	187	186
Himachal	185	175
Rajasthan	186	183
W Bengal	187	187
Gujarat	187	187

Source: DPIIT

TABLE 3: SHARE (%) IN NEW INVESTMENTS ANNOUNCED

State	2017-18	2018-19
Andhra	6.56	16.29
Haryana	3.37	15.74
Tamil Nadu	4.01	9.32
Gujarat	6.76	7.74
Maharashtra	18.09	6.32
Karnataka	3.32	6.08
Rajasthan	2.01	3.04
MP	2.87	2.73
Odisha	8.25	2.43
NCT Delhi	1.38	1.76

Source: CMIE

Criticism of these rankings

DPIIT'S methodology **does not consider the actual number of reforms implemented by the states.**

- States like **Haryana and Gujarat have implemented all the reforms recommended by the DPIIT**, but were ranked low on the EoDB list.
- Gujarat has reportedly attributed this to **poor response from the survey respondents.**
- The methodology used by the **DPIIT awards points on a reform to a state only if there was an adequate response from users of that response.**
- Ideally, **the number of respondents for every state should be decided based on population** or number of business clusters to ensure that the sample is representative of the state. It is not clear if DPIIT used representative samples.
- Also, business owners' expectations from the governments can differ. **A business owner from Tamil Nadu may assess their state government's IT portal differently from one in UP.**

Ease of doing business index

Ease of doing business is an **index published by the World Bank.**

- It is an aggregate figure that includes different parameters which define the ease of doing business in a country.
- The ease of doing business index is **an index created jointly by Simeon Djankov and Gerhard Pohl, two leading economists at the Central and Eastern Europe sector of the World Bank Group.**
- **Higher rankings (a low numerical value)** indicate better, usually simpler, regulations for businesses and stronger protections of property rights.

NEW DELHI'S CENTRAL VISTA PROJECT

GENERAL STUDIES - II (INFRASTRUCTURE)

The Supreme Court, recently allowed the central vista project to go ahead.

The central vista project

The project aims to renovate and redevelop 86 acres of land in Lutyens's Delhi.

- Lutyens's Delhi is an area which have the **landmark structures of the Indian government**, including Parliament House, Rashtrapati Bhavan, India Gate, North Block and South Block, etc. stand.

Litigation over the project

A petition was filed in the Supreme Court in April 2020, **challenging the Centre's change-of-land-use notification of March 2020** with regard to the 86 acres of land.

- The petitioner, submitted that **the order violated the citizen's Right to Life guaranteed under Article 21** by depriving people of open and green spaces.
- The petition also argued that the **notification violated the Master Plan of Delhi 2021**.
- The **Centre's notification sought to override an earlier (December 2019) notice issued by the Delhi Development Authority** inviting objections against the proposed changes in land use, which was itself under challenge in the top court at the time.

Bhumi Pujan

The ground breaking ceremony for the new Parliament building was held on December 10.

- Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for a new, triangular Parliament building, with the **capacity to seat between 900 and 1,200 MPs**.
- The **building is expected to be constructed by August 2022** when the nation will be celebrating its 75th Independence Day.

History of Lutyens's Delhi

At his coronation as Emperor of India on December 12, 1911, **Britain's King George V** had announced, "We have decided upon the transfer of the seat of the Government of India from Calcutta to the ancient Capital of Delhi."

- Thereafter, a 20-year-long project to build modern New Delhi was spearheaded by **architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker**.
- They built Parliament House, Rashtrapati Bhavan, North and South Blocks, Rajpath, India Gate, National Archives and the princes' houses around India Gate.
- **New Delhi was unveiled in 1931.**

SVAMITVA SCHEME

GENERAL STUDIES - II (DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES)

The SVAMITVA Scheme was launched by the Prime Minister on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day, April 24, earlier this year and distribution of property cards began on October 11.

What is the SVAMITVA card?

The acronym SVAMITVA stands for Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas.

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme**.
- It aimed at “providing ‘record of rights’ to village household owners possessing houses in inhabited rural areas in villages and issuance of property cards to the property owners.”
- The plan is to survey all rural properties using drones and prepare GIS based maps for each village.

What are the Property cards?

- Property card for every property in the village will be prepared by states using accurate measurements delivered by drone-mapping.
- These cards will be given to property owners and will be recognised by the land revenue records department.

Who will own the SVAMITVA data?

According to the framework, the orthorectified base maps shall be jointly owned by the Survey of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the state government.

- The GIS data will also be jointly owned by Centre and State.
- However, the data related to property details will be owned by the State Revenue Department as it has the authority to mutate the Right of Records (RoRs) and update the maps.

Benefits of a SVAMITVA property card

According to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, which has piloted SVAMITVA, the scheme will benefit rural residents in many ways.

1. It will enable rural households to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits.
2. It will help in determination of property tax, which would accrue to the Gram Panchayats directly in states where they are empowered to collect such taxes.

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3. The cards will help increase liquidity of land parcels in the market and increase the financial credit availability to the village.
4. The scheme will also pave the way for creation of accurate land records for rural planning.
5. All the property records and maps will be available at Gram Panchayat, which will help in taxation of villages, construction permits, elimination of encroachments, etc.
6. The property maps will be made using the GIS technique and the same can also be used for better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

GIST OF EDITORIALS 8th JANUARY – 2021

US CAPITOL HILL SIEGE

GENERAL STUDIES - II (EFFECT OF DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ON INDIA'S INTERESTS)

US President Donald Trump's relentless efforts to reverse the results of the 2020 election took a dangerous turn recently, when an armed and angry mob of his supporters stormed Capitol Hill and clashed with police just as Congress convened to validate Joe Biden's presidential win.

So, what happened at the US Capitol?

The Capitol in Washington DC was placed under lockdown after hundreds of Trump supporters stormed the historic building and wreaked havoc in an attempt to stall the certification of the election results.

- The mob managed to **get past the guards and enter the Senate chamber**, where just moments earlier the election results were being certified.
- Four hours after the breach, officials announced that the demonstrators had been cleared out of the building and the Capitol was secure.
- Senators were escorted back into the Senate chamber to complete the certification of Electoral College votes.

What were the incidents that led up to the siege?

Hours before the rioters stormed the US Capitol, huge crowds of Trump supporters had already filled the streets **to protest against the certification of Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election**.

- Many had even camped out overnight at **the 'Save America Rally'** that took place at the Ellipse, a park near the White House.
- Trump spoke to the Rally for around an hour, **following which thousands began marching towards the Capitol**.

Why is Trump being blamed for the violence?

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Several lawmakers, **including members of the Republican Party**, have blamed Trump for the violence that broke out in and around the Capitol.

- At the rally held in Ellipse park, lawmakers and critics have pointed out, **the president directed his followers to head to Capitol Hill.**
- Trump has repeated his claims that **the election had been “rigged” by “radical democrats”** and the “fake news media”, urging his supporters not to accept the results of the election.

How have lawmakers reacted to the incident?

Lawmakers from both parties, many of whom were present in the Capitol, condemned the violent uprising, calling it “despicable” and “unacceptable” and called for peace.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 11th JANUARY – 2021

U.S. CAPITOL: THE SIEGE OF A HISTORICAL POWER CENTER

GENERAL STUDIES - III (EFFECT OF POLITICS OF DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ON INDIAN DIASPORA.)

Trump’s call to march on the Capitol after his refusal to concede defeat appeared to have led to the assault on the seat of U.S. legislative power

The U.S. Capitol siege:

The grand U.S. Capitol building in Washington is home to the Senate and House of Representatives, has hardly been immune to attacks historically.

- **On January 6**, it saw an attempt to a siege by a violent mob.
- Earlier that day, outgoing President Donald Trump appeared **to incite hundreds of his supporters, gathered on the National Mall close to the Capitol**, into taking imminent action by marching on the Capitol.

History of previous attacks on US Capitol:

- The building faced its first attack, a **fire set off by British troops in August 1814**, during the 1812 War.
- The **first major incident of violence at the Capitol came on January 30, 1835**, when a British immigrant, **attempted to assassinate President Andrew Jackson** while he was leaving the building from a Congressional funeral.
- Less than two decades later, in 1915, a **German-born Harvard University professor set off a dynamite explosion near the Senate Reception Room** — miraculously there were no injuries.

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- In 1954, four armed Puerto Rican nationalists opened fire indiscriminately as they waved a Puerto Rican flag, **apparently for in protest for independence for the commonwealth.**
- On March 1, 1971, a **violent anti-war extremist outfit, Weather Underground**, set off a bomb inside a bathroom on the Senate side of the Capitol.

International flavour

Capitol attacks took on an international flavour a little more than a decade later, in 1983, **when a leftist group calling itself the Armed Resistance Unit set off a bomb hidden under a bench outside the Senate chamber**, apparently to protest the U.S. military's actions in Grenada and Lebanon.

- Following this incident, the House and Senate chambers took the precautionary step of adding metal detectors and heightened security, **both of which were breached by the pro-Trump mob on January 6.**
- Given the bitter polarisation of the U.S. electorate at this time, it may be wise for the administrators of the Capitol building to fortify its defences further.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 12th JANUARY – 2021

K-SHAPED ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

GENERAL STUDIES - II (INDIAN ECONOMY AND ISSUES RELATING TO PLANNING)

The eminent economist states that the **prospects of a K-shaped recovery from COVID are increasing both in India and across the world.**

What is a K-shaped recovery?

A K-shaped recovery happens **when different sections of an economy recover at starkly different rates.**

- In K-shaped recovery, Households at the top of the pyramid are likely to have seen their in- comes largely protected, and savings rates forced up during the lockdown, increasing 'fuel in the tank' to drive future consumption.
- Meanwhile, households at the bottom are likely to have witnessed permanent hits to jobs and incomes.

The macro implications of a K-shaped recovery

With the **top 10 per cent of India's households responsible for 25-30 per cent of total consumption**, it could be argued consumption would get a boost as this pent-up demand expresses itself.

Upper-income households have benefitted from higher savings for two quarters. The economy are currently witnessing is a sugar rush from those savings being spent.

1. **To the extent that households at the bottom** have experienced a permanent loss of income in the forms of jobs and wage cuts. If the labour market does not heal faster this will be a recurring drag on demand.
2. **To the extent that COVID has triggered an effective income transfer from the poor to the rich**, this will be demand-impeding. It's because the poor have a higher marginal propensity to consume (ie they tend to spend (instead of saving) a much higher proportion of their income.
3. **If COVID-19 reduces competition or increases the inequality of incomes and opportunities**, it could impinge on trend growth in developing economies by hurting productivity and tightening political economy constraints.

Way forward:

Policy will, therefore, need to look beyond the next few quarters and anticipate the state of the macro-economy post the sugar rush.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 13th JANUARY – 2021

SINGLE-WINDOW CLEARANCE FOR COAL

GENERAL STUDIES - III (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT)

The Union government, recently has announced a **new online single window clearance portal for the coal sector to speed up the operationalisation of coal mines.**

The announcement was made alongside the signing ceremony for the **first tranche of coal blocks to be auctioned for commercial use.**

What is a single-window clearance portal?

A single window clearance portal is **aimed at allowing successful bidders for coal blocks to be able to obtain all required clearances, including environmental and forest clearances**, from a single portal with progress monitoring, instead of having to go to multiple authorities. The portal should allow successful bidders to operationalise coal mines more quickly.

Need for:

- Presently, **about 19 major approvals, or clearances are required** before starting the coal mine in the country.
- In the **absence of unified platform for grant of clearances** companies were required to approach different departments, leading to delay in operationalization of the coal mines.

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How will this help?

Industry sources said that the sector has long sought a single window clearance system to help with quicker operationalisation.

- As obtaining the requisite clearances was taking over 2-3 years for successful bidders in many cases.
- It is definitely a good move as coal blocks which were auctioned off in earlier tranches used to take more than a 2-3 year period to get operationalised.
- The expert added that some coal blocks auctioned as far back as 2015 has still not been operationalised due to delays in obtaining required clearances.

Parivesh mechanism

The **Parivesh mechanism for forest and environment** related clearances would likely be merged into the single window clearance mechanism.

What is PARIVESH?

PARIVESH stands for **Pro Active and Responsive facilitation by Interactive, Virtuous and Environmental Singlewindow Hub**.

The PARIVESH is a single window system for appraisal and granting Environmental Clearances and Forest Clearances.

What is environment impact assessment?

Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is a **planning tool to integrate the environmental concerns into developmental process right at the initial stage** of planning and suggest necessary mitigation measures. EIA essentially refers to the assessment of environmental impacts likely to arise from a project.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 14th JANUARY – 2021

DECLASSIFIED DOCUMENT ON THE U.S. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC

GENERAL STUDIES - II (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)

The Trump administration has **declassified a sensitive document on the U.S. strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific'** from 2018. The document outlines objectives and strategies with regard to **China, North Korea, India and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region**.

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Act-East policy in the document:

The U.S. aims to support India's "Act East" policy and "its aspiration to be a leading global power, highlighting its compatibility with the U.S., Japanese and Australian vision" of the Indo-Pacific.

- **A strong India**, in cooperation with like-minded countries, would act as a counterbalance to China, is one of the underlying assumptions of the strategy.
- **China aims to dissolve U.S. alliances and partnerships across the region.** China will exploit vacuums and opportunities created by these diminished bonds.
- **On Russia**, it says the country will "remain a marginal player" in the region relative to the U.S., China and India.
- **On North Korea**, a stated U.S. objective is to, "Convince the Kim regime that the only path to its survival is to relinquish its nuclear weapons."

Declassified document outlines objectives on China

As per the document, **The U.S.'s first national security challenge are:**

- Maintaining "U.S. strategic primacy" in the region and promoting a "liberal economic order".
- Stopping China from establishing "illiberal spheres of influence".
- Ensuring that North Korea does not threaten the U.S. and
- Advancing U.S. economic leadership globally.

Objectives towards India:

The U.S. aims to help India become a net security provider in the region, solidify a lasting strategic partnership with India.

- These objectives it plans to achieve via enhanced defence cooperation and interoperability;
- Working with India "toward domestic economic reform" and greater leadership roles for India in the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus.

The reason for the early declassification of the document:

To communicate to the American people and to our allies and partners, the enduring commitment of the U.S. to keeping the Indo-Pacific region free and open long into the future.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 15th JANUARY – 2021

1971 INDO-PAK WAR: VICTORY FLAME TO REACH HISAR

GENERAL STUDIES - I (HISTORY OF THE WORLD)

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On **December 16, 1971**, the Indian Armed Forces achieved a stellar and historic victory over the Pakistan Army which led to the creation of Bangladesh and **the largest military surrender in conventional war after World War II**.

'Victory flame'

- To commemorate 50 years of the 1971 war and mark 2021 as '**Swarnim Vijay Varsh**' (**golden victory year**), Hisar Military Station is all geared up for the 11-days' stay of the 'victory flame'.
- The '**Victory flame**' was handed over to the Indian Army by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi on December 16.

Victory Flame to Hisar

- As part of the Swarnim Vijay Varsh celebrations, various events including a ceremonial welcome of the victory flame at the **Hisar war memorial**.
- Felicitation of **war veterans and veer naris**, exhibition and screening of motivational and educational movies and equipment and band display are being organised.

Significance:

- To showcase historic victory over the Pakistan Army of the Indian Armed Forces, **2021 is to be celebrated as 'Swarnim Vijay Varsh'** wherein nationwide yearlong celebrations are being undertaken.
- Through these events, an effort is being made to recognise and honour **the valour, bravery and sacrifices made by gallant soldiers** of Indian Armed Forces in the 1971 war.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 16th JANUARY – 2021

JALLIKATTU: PRIDE & POLITICS

GENERAL STUDIES - I (INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE)

With Assembly polls round the corner in Tamil Nadu, **the Pongal festival and Jallikattu, the traditional bull-taming sport**, have caught the attention of the BJP and Congress.

What is Jallikattu?

The bull-taming sport is popular in **Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Theni, Pudukkottai and Dindigul districts — known as the Jallikattu belt**.

- A tradition over 2,000 years old, **Jallikattu is a competitive sport** as well as an event to honour bull owners who rear them for mating.
- It is a **violent sport** in which contestants try to tame a bull for a prize; if they fail, the bull owner wins the prize.

Importance of Jallikattu important in Tamil culture

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Jallikattu is considered a **traditional way for the peasant community to preserve their pure-breed native bulls.**

- At a time when **cattle breeding is often an artificial process**, conservationists and peasants argue that Jallikattu is a way to protect these male animals which are otherwise used only for meat if not for ploughing.
- **Kangayam, Pulikulam, Umbalachery, Barugur and Malai Maadu are among the popular native cattle breeds** used for Jallikattu.
- The owners of these premium breeds command respect locally.

Why has Jallikattu been the subject of legal battles?

In India, **legal battles surrounding animal rights issues emerged in the early 1990s.**

A **notification from the Environment Ministry in 1991** banned the training and exhibition of bears, monkeys, tigers, panthers and dogs.

- **Jallikattu first came under legal scrutiny in 2007** when the Animal Welfare Board of India and the animal rights group PETA moved petitions in the Supreme Court against Jallikattu as well as bullock cart races.
- The Tamil Nadu government, however, **worked its way out of the ban by passing a law in 2009, which was signed by the Governor.**
- In 2011, the UPA regime at the **Centre added bulls to the list of animals whose training and exhibition is prohibited.**
- In May 2014, days before the BJP was elected to power, **the Supreme Court banned the bull-taming sport**, ruling on a petition that cited the 2011 notification.

Present status of legality

That is the **subject of a case pending in the Supreme Court.** The **state government has legalised these events**, which has been challenged in the court.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 18th JANUARY – 2021

WHAT IS 5G AND HOW PREPARED IS INDIA TO ADAPT TO THIS TECH?

GENERAL STUDIES - III (SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY)

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has sought inputs from telcos and other industry experts on the sale and use of radio frequency spectrum over the next 10 years, including the 5G bands.

What is 5G technology and how is it different?

5G or fifth generation is the latest upgrade in the long-term evolution (LTE) mobile broadband networks.

- 5G technology has a theoretical peak speed of 20 Gbps, while the peak speed of 4G is only 1 Gbps.
- **5G mainly works in 3 bands**, namely low, mid and high frequency spectrum — all of which have their own uses as well as limitations.

Low, mid and high frequency spectrum:

1. **The low band spectrum** has shown great promise in terms of coverage and speed of internet and data exchange, but **the maximum speed is limited to 100 Mbps** (Megabits per second).
2. **The mid-band spectrum**, on the other hand, **offers higher speeds compared to the low band**, but has **limitations in terms of coverage area and penetration of signals**.
3. **The high-band spectrum** offers the **highest speed of all the three bands**, but has extremely limited coverage and signal penetration strength.

Where does India stand in the 5G technology race?

On par with the global players, **India had, in 2018, planned to start 5G services as soon as possible**, with an aim to capitalise on the better network speeds and strength that the technology promised.

- **All the three private telecom players, Reliance Jio Infocomm, Bharti Airtel and Vi**, have been urging the DoT to lay out a clear road map of spectrum allocation and 5G frequency bands.
- **One big hurdle**, however, is the lack of flow of cash and adequate capital with at least two of the three players, namely Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea.
- On the other hand, **Reliance Jio plans to launch an indigenously built 5G network** for the country as early as the second half of this year.

What is the global progress on 5G?

More than governments, **global telecom companies have started building 5G networks and rolling it out to their customers on a trial basis**.

- **In countries like the US**, companies such as AT&T, T-mobile, and Verizon have taken the lead when it comes to rolling out commercial 5G for their users.
- **In other countries such as China**, some of the telcos such as China Unicom had started 5G trials as early as 2018, and have since rolled out the commercial services for users.
- **South Korean company Samsung**, on the other hand, has taken the lead when it comes to building the hardware for 5G networks for several companies.

WHAT ARE TRANS FATS, AND WHY ARE THEY HARMFUL?

GENERAL STUDIES - III (ISSUES RELATING HEALTH)

Recently, the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** reduced the **permissible limit of trans fatty acids (TFA)** in oils and fats to **3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022**, against the earlier cap of 5%.

- The decision was effected by an amendment to the **Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations**.
- **The new rules apply to** edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings, and other cooking media like vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.
- In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) had called for a **global elimination of industrially produced TFAs by 2023**.

What are trans fats and why are they harmful?

There are two broad types of trans fats found in foods: naturally-occurring and artificial trans fats.

All natural fats and oils are a **combination of monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and saturated fatty acids or trans fatty acids**.

- **Our body needs the first two categories of 'healthy' fats** as apart from being a major source of energy, they **help absorb some vitamins and minerals and build cell membranes and the sheaths** surrounding nerves.
- These fats are free-flowing.

Artificial trans fats:

- These are considered harmful, **are created in an industrial process** that adds hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils to make them more solid, increase their shelf life, and for use as an adulterant as they are cheap.
- They are **present in baked and fried foods** as well as adulterated ghee, which becomes solid at room temperature.
- The saturated fatty acids or trans fats, which are considered harmful as they clog arteries and result in hypertension, heart attacks, and other cardiovascular issues.

Impact of trans fats

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Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death globally, causing over 1.8 crore deaths every year.

- **The WHO** estimates that over 5 lakh people with cardiovascular issues die globally **every year due to the consumption of industrially produced TFAs**.
- **As per FSSAI**, about 77,000 deaths take place annually in India due to TFAs.

Way forward

The FSSAI will need to pursue local governments to improve surveillance, inspection of food premises, sampling of food products, regular training of officers, upgradation of food labs, etc., which are also among concerns raised by a Parliamentary panel on the regulator's ineffectiveness.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 20th JANUARY – 2021

MUGHAL HISTORY WHITEWASHED IN TEXTS, SAY TWO EDUCATIONISTS

GENERAL STUDIES - II (ISSUES RELATING TO EDUCATION)

At its meeting on **textbook reforms**, the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education** heard presentations from right-wing organisations and educationists.

- One of whom was at the centre of a **debate on the “saffronisation” of textbooks** under the Vajpayee government.
- They argued that Mughal history is being whitewashed in Indian textbooks, and crowding out space for history from the Vedic era.

Agenda of this meeting:

- To remove “references to un-historical facts and distortions about our national heroes”,
- To ensure “equal or proportionate references to all periods of Indian history” and
- To highlight the role of great women in Indian history.

The proposed arguments

The amount of **space given to the Mughal era versus the reign of Hindu kings needed to be balanced**.

- The **Indian history was falsely written as though foreign rule** existed only for 200 years of the British Raj, without taking into account the 1,000 years before that.
- The **Mughal era had been whitewashed**, and their role as invaders had been muted.
- There was a need for children to be taught **“Indian culture” from the Vedic era onwards**.

NCERT revision

- The NCERT is currently in the process of revising textbooks, and is likely to complete the process by 2024.
- Recommendations has been given to change higher education syllabi as well, to ensure that it aligns with the changes in school textbooks.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 21st JANUARY – 2021

WHAT IS NEW SHEPHARD, THE ROCKET SYSTEM BUILT BY BLUE ORIGIN?

GENERAL STUDIES - II (SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY)

Recently, a **rocket system meant to take tourists** to space successfully completed its seventh test launch after it took off from a test facility in Texas.

Called New Shepard, the system is built by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's space company called Blue Origin and will eventually allow space tourists to experience microgravity by taking them over 100 km above the Earth.

- In 2018, **Blue Origin** was one of the ten companies selected by NASA to conduct studies and advance technologies to collect, process and use space-based resources for missions to the Moon and Mars.
- In 2019, both signed an agreement that gives Blue Origin permission to use NASA's historic test stand, as a part of a growing number of partnerships between the space agency and the commercial space industry.

So, what is New Shepard?

New Shepard has been named after astronaut Alan Shepard, **the first American to go to space, and offers flights** to space over 100 km above the Earth and accommodation for payloads.

- Essentially, it is a rocket system that has been designed to take astronauts and research payloads past the Karman line – the internationally recognised boundary of space.
- The idea is to provide easier and more cost-effective access to space meant for purposes such as academic research, corporate technology development and entrepreneurial ventures among others.

What was the test launch about?

During the seventh launch on Tuesday referred to as NS-13, **there were 12 payloads onboard including the Deorbit, Descent and the Landing Sensor Demonstration** under the NASA Tipping Point partnership.

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- The lunar landing sensor demo, for instance, was the first payload to be mounted onto the exterior of the space vehicle and was meant to test the technology that helps to achieve high accuracy landings such as those done on the lunar surface.
- There were **no passengers on board this test launch**.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 22nd JANUARY – 2021

CHANGES IN LABOUR LAWS: THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CODE

GENERAL STUDIES - II (GOVERNMENT POLICIES)

Three Codes on labour law were passed by Parliament recently, amid strident criticism and vociferous protests by many trade unions.

What are the main features of the Industrial Relations Code?

The Industrial Relations Code **combines the features of three erstwhile laws** — the Trade Unions Act, 1926, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

- It defines **‘workers’** to include, besides all persons employed in a skilled or unskilled, manual, technical, operational and clerical capacity, supervisory staff **drawing up to ₹18,000 a month as salary**.
- It introduces **‘fixed term employment’**, giving employers the flexibility to hire workers based on requirement through a written contract.
- **Fixed term employees should be treated on a par with permanent workers** in terms of hours of work, wages, allowances and other benefits, including statutory benefits such as gratuity.
- The Code says any establishment **that employs 300 or more workers** must prepare standing orders relating to classification of workers, manner of intimating to them periods and hours of work, holidays, pay days etc.
- Earlier, **the 2019 Bill applied this to units with 100 employees or more**. The threshold has been raised to 300 in the 2020 Code.
- It confers on the **‘appropriate Government’**, that is the Centre or the State governments, the **power to exempt, any industrial establishment or class of industrial establishments from all or any of the provisions of the Code**.

What are the provisions on lay-off and closure?

- The provisions that **require the prior permission of the government for lay-off**, retrenchment and closure are made **applicable to only establishments that had**

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employed **300 or more workers** on an average per working day in the preceding 12 months.

- A prior permission requirement is in place also **for closure of a unit**, with the application to be **filed 90 days prior** to the intended closure.

How does the new Code affect the right to strike?

The Code **prohibits strikes and lock-outs in all industrial establishments** without notice.

- **No unit shall go on strike in breach of contract without giving notice 60 days before the strike**, or within 14 days of giving such a notice, or before the expiry of any date given in the notice for the strike.
- The **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**, had placed such restrictions on announcing strikes only in respect of public utility services.
- However, **the present Code extends it to all establishments**.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 23rd JANUARY – 2021

GOOGLE AND FB'S AUSTRALIAN TUSSLE AND CONCERN FOR INDIA

GENERAL STUDIES - III (CHALLENGES TO INTERNAL SECURITY THROUGH COMMUNICATION NETWORKS)

Google and facebook has threatened Australia, respectively, to remove and its search engine from the country, and could block Australian users from posting or sharing news links if proposed norms on royalty payments are rolled out.

- **Australian government** is planning to make provision to **global tech platforms for sharing of royalties with news publishers**.
- **Policymakers in India** have so far focused on the **dominance of intermediaries such as Google and Facebook**, which are positioned in a way that service providers cannot reach customers except through these platforms.

Cause of this issue?

- The showdown in Australia seems centered rather, **on how much control these companies would get to retain on their payout process** – operational aspects such as deciding the quantum of payments for news feed sources, and having to reveal changes in their algorithms.
- **Hefty fines proposed by Canberra are being** seen as an added disincentive.

Global tech companies' arguments:

- The companies said in the Senate hearings is that **the media industry is already benefiting from traffic being routed to them** by each of the digital platforms.

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- The new rules proposed by the Australian authorities would expose them to “unmanageable levels of financial and operational risk.”

Significance for India

According to a FICCI-EY report on India’s media and entertainment sector for 2020, there are 300 million users of online news sites, portals and aggregators in the country.

- It is approximately 46 per cent of Internet users and 77 per cent of smartphone users in India at the end of 2019.
- With 282 million unique visitors, **India is the world’s second largest online news consuming nation after China.**

Implications

- The issues being thrashed out in Australia and elsewhere could have broader implications for the regulation of the digital economy in India in the longer term.
- A substantial discussion on the impact of intermediary platforms on the health of news media outlets is yet to commence in any meaningful way here.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 25th JANUARY – 2021

WHY ANTI-RADIATION MISSILE RUDRAM MATTERS?

GENERAL STUDIES - III (INDIGENIZATION OF TECHNOLOGY)

India’s first indigenous anti-radiation missile, Rudram, developed for the Indian Air Force, was successfully flight-tested from a Sukhoi-30 MKI jet off the east coast on Friday.

What is an anti-radiation missile?

Anti-radiation missiles are **designed to detect, track and neutralise the adversary’s radar, communication assets and other radio frequency sources**, which are generally part of their air defence systems.

- Such a **missile’s navigation mechanism** comprises an inertial navigation system, **coupled with GPS**, which is satellite-based.
- **For guidance**, it has a “**passive homing head**” — a system that can detect, classify and engage targets (radio frequency sources in this case) over a wide band of frequencies as programmed.
- Once the Rudram missile locks on the target, it is capable of striking accurately even if the radiation source switches off in between.
- The missile has an **operational range of more than 100 km**, based on the launch parameters from the fighter jet.

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How was Rudram developed?

- Rudram is an **air-to-surface missile**, designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**).
- The **Sanskrit name Rudram** was given in keeping with tradition, because it includes the letters ARM (the acronym for anti-radiation missile) and the word in Sanskrit describes a “**remover of sorrows**” (one of its meanings).

How significant are such missiles in aerial warfare?

- Rudram has been **developed for the IAF’s requirement to enhance its Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD)** capability.
- Scientists said modern-day warfare is more and more network-centric, which means it comprises elaborate detection, surveillance and communication systems that are integrated with the weapons systems.

What next for Rudram?

- Rudram hit the radiation target with pinpoint accuracy, DRDO said. After the test, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted to say the test is “a remarkable achievement”.
- Officials said some more flights would take place before the system is ready for induction.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 27th JANUARY – 2021

YUMAI: SETTLING THE FRONTIERS

GENERAL STUDIES - III (SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT IN BORDER AREAS)

In 2017, the **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)** government embarked on a plan to build what it calls moderately well-off villages in border areas.

- New residents were brought in **Yumai** by the government, some of whom were herders living elsewhere in Tibet. Yumai’s population jumped seven-fold to 191 residents.
- New houses were built, as well as a hydropower generator and transmission infrastructure that connected the village to the national grid.

The history of Yumai:

Until 1996, **there were only three residents in the border village of Yumai, located in Tibet** in the foothills of the Himalayas.

- It is situated at few kilometres from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that separates India and China.
- By 2011, 25 others would join **Zhoigar, a Tibetan herder**, and her two family members, but Yumai would still hold the distinction of **China’s least populated village**.

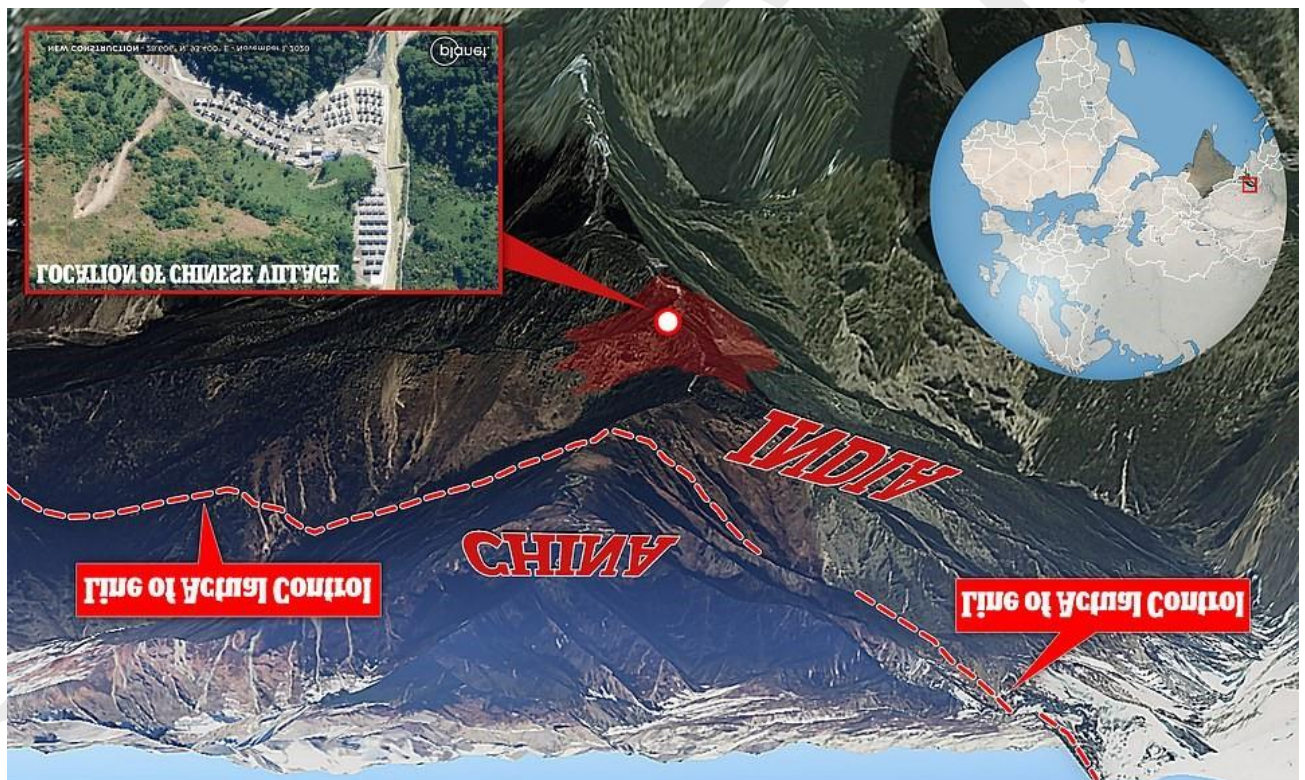
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- It is, also, as remote as border villages come, a long 200-km drive from Lhunze, the county capital, which itself is a 400-km drive from Lhasa.

Newly built village in territory in Arunachal

Considering the remoteness of the location, national security appears to be the abiding priority.

- Some of the **new settlements are in disputed territory**, as in the case of the new village of Pangda, built last year 2-3 km into what Bhutan sees as its land.
- On January 18, **another newly built village, barely 30 km from Yumai and 4-5 km into what India sees as its territory in Arunachal**, came to light via satellite images, completed sometime before last November.
- **Indian officials said this land has been under China's effective control since 1959** and there were military barracks there.



Significance

The civilian settlements are, however, a way for China to solidify its territorial claims and effectively settle the dispute unilaterally.

- In Shannan prefecture, **border counties like Lhunze**, where Yumai is located, and Cona, **administer thousands of square kilometres of disputed territory along the LAC.**
- 'The **residents always patrol around and write 'China' with brushes and red paint** on some mountain walls and stones' the newspaper reported.

THE UAE'S NEW RESIDENCY LAWS FOR FOREIGN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

GENERAL STUDIES - II (EFFECT OF POLICIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON INDIAN DIASPORA)

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has approved an **amendment to its residency laws allowing foreign university students to bring their families with them to the UAE**, as long as they can afford suitable accommodation and have the financial means to support them.

The UAE has become a **regional educational destination** with more than 77 universities and tens of thousands of students annually.

What is the latest amendment to the UAE's residency laws?

As per the recent amendment:

- The foreign students studying at one of UAE's many universities now have the **option of bringing their families to the country to live with them**.
- However, the **students must have sufficient income to support the move and afford suitable housing**.
- **Expatriate students over the age of 18**, who are sponsored either by a parent or accredited university in the UAE, are usually granted a one-year student visa.
- Students who **graduate with a GPA of at least 3.75** from universities both within and outside the country are permitted to apply for the special 5-year visa.

Why did the UAE Cabinet approve the amendment?

The latest amendment was introduced with the **aim of achieving "moral stability" and supporting the country's education sector** to "reinforce its position as a leading global destination for work and study".

Other programmes introduced to bring in more foreign residents:

Unique residency programme:

In October, **Dubai launched a unique residency programme** which permitted overseas working professionals, **who were working from home**, to live in the UAE while continuing to serve their employers in their home country.

- The scheme **allows remote workers and their families to relocate to the UAE** on an annual basis.
- They should have a passport with six-month validity, health insurance with UAE coverage, proof of employment and a minimum salary of \$5,000 per month.

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Five-year renewable Retirement Visa:

In September, the Dubai government launched a five-year renewable Retirement Visa **for foreigners aged 55 and over to live in the emirate.**

The programme, **called Retire in Dubai**, is open to all retirees **as long as they earn a monthly income of at least \$5,500**, have savings of \$275,000, or own a property in Dubai worth \$550,000.

Golden residency visa:

In November, the government was expanding the categories of eligible individuals for the 10-year **golden residency visa to include PhD holders, doctors, engineers** as well as graduates from accredited universities with a GPA of 3.8 or more.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 29th JANUARY – 2021

PATHARUGHAT: THE FORGOTTEN PEASANT UPRISING OF ASSAM IN 1894

GENERAL STUDIES - I (THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE – IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY)

Twenty five years before the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre, more than a hundred peasants fell to the bullets of the British on January 28, 1894 in Assam.

- The **unarmed peasants were protesting against the increase in land revenue levied by the colonial administration**, when the military opened fire.
- Today a “martyrs column” stands where the incident took place — Patharughat, a small village in Assam’s Darrang district, 60km northeast of Guwahati.

What led to the Patharughat uprising?

After the **British annexation of Assam in 1826**, surveys of the vast lands of the state began. On the basis of such surveys, the British began to impose land taxes, much to the resentment of the farmers.

- **In 1893**, the British government decided **to increase agricultural land tax reportedly by 70- 80 per cent.**
- Up until then the peasants would pay taxes in kind or provide a service in lieu of cash.
- The Pothorughat — on the incident, despite these gatherings being democratic, the British perceived them as “breeding grounds for sedition”.

Why was the incident significant?

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- The incident as one of the “most tragic and inspiring episodes in the saga of the Indian freedom movement.” However, it rarely features in mainstream historical discourse of the freedom struggle.
- For the larger Assamese community, **Patharughat comes second only to the Battle of Saraighat**, when the Ahoms defeated the Mughals in 1671.

What about the site today?

A martyrs column was erected at the site on 28 January, 2001 by the Army at the site.

- Every year on **January 28**, the government and local people pay respects to the martyrs of the incident (**Krishak Swahid Diwas**) in an official function.
- On January 29, the **Indian Army pays its respects in military style**.

GIST OF EDITORIALS 30th JANUARY – 2021

STATE OF ORGANIC FARMING IN INDIA

GENERAL STUDIES - III (AGRICULTURE)

Organic farming is in a nascent stage in India. **About 2.78 million hectare of farmland was under organic cultivation as of March 2020**, according to the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

This is **two per cent of the 140.1 million ha net sown area in the country**.

Organic farming in states

A few states have taken the lead in improving organic farming coverage, as a major part of this area is concentrated only in a handful of states.

- **Sikkim is the only Indian state to have become fully organic so far.**
- **Madhya Pradesh tops the list with 0.76 million ha** of area under organic cultivation — that is over 27 per cent of India's total organic cultivation area.
- **The top three states — Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra — account for about half the area under organic cultivation.**
- The top 10 states account for about 80 per cent of the total area under organic cultivation.

Only a fraction of area is converted under organic

A majority of the states have only a small part of their net sown area under organic farming.

- **A few states such as Meghalaya, Mizoram, Uttarakhand, Goa and Sikkim have 10 per cent or more of their net sown area under organic cultivation.**
- Union Territories such as Delhi, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep and Chandigarh **also have 10 per cent or more of their net sown area under organic cultivation**, but their **agricultural area is very small**.

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- Almost all other states have less than 10 per cent of their net sown area under organic.
- States like, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh **have expressed their desire to become fully organic or natural-farming states.**

Organic coverage largely under National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP)

India introduced the **organic farming policy in 2005.**

- **NPOP scheme, which started in 2001,** covers about 70 per cent of the organic area of the country of which 30 per cent is under conversion.
- **India's top organic state Madhya Pradesh has about 90 per cent of its organic area under NPOP.**
- The top three states — Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan — collectively have over 80 per cent of their organic area under NPOP.

Way forward

Even though India has very small organic area under cultivation, in terms of number of organic farmers it is being ranked first.

- India has over 1.9 million farmers as of March 2020, which is 1.3 per cent of 146 million agricultural landholders.
- In addition, there are farmers who are not certified and hence not counted, especially by-default organic farmers in hilly, tribal and rain-fed regions.



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