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Climate Change and Crop Production

According to a recent study, India's **grain production is vulnerable to climate change**, primarily because of the **decline in yield of rice crop during extreme weather conditions**.

- Researchers from Columbia University in the US studied the effects of climate on **five major crops in India**: finger millet, maize, pearl millet, sorghum, and rice.
 - These five grains are essential for meeting India's nutritional needs.
 - These crops make up the vast majority of grain production during the June-to-September monsoon season with rice contributing three-quarters of the supply for the season.
- It can be noted that recently, the **United Nations' State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report 2018** said that climate change is already having a **negative effect on global agriculture** and is driving up the **number of hungry people around the world**.
- The study, however, found that **the yields from grains** such as millet, sorghum, and maize are **more resilient to extreme weather**.
- On the other hand, **yields from rice** experiences **larger declines during extreme weather conditions**.
 - By relying more and more on rice, India's food supply is **potentially vulnerable** to the effects of varying climate.
- Therefore, expanding the area planted with alternative grains like finger millet, maize, pearl millet, sorghum can reduce variations in Indian grain production caused by extreme climate.
- The study shows that **diversifying the crops** that a country grows can be an effective way to adapt its food-production systems to the growing influence of climate change.
 - It also offers benefits like **improving nutrition, saving water, reducing energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture**.
- Of late, there has been growing awareness about these alternative grains, often

clubbed as “**Smart Food**”. Few important developments are:

- **India celebrated 2018 as the national year of millets.** Moreover, India's proposal to observe an **International Year of Millets in 2023** has been approved by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).
- **ICRISAT** which conducts research on six highly nutritious drought-tolerant crops, recently discovered important factors for **heat and drought tolerance in chickpea.**

RBI Panel's Recommendations on MSME

A Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expert committee on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) has recommended doubling **the cap on collateral-free loans to Rs 20 lakh** from the current Rs 10 lakh.

- This will be extended to borrowers falling under the Mudra scheme, self-help groups, and MSMEs.
- The current limit of Rs 10 lakh on collateral-free loans was prescribed by RBI in June 2010.
 - **A collateral free loan** means that borrowers do not have to offer any asset or pledge collateral to borrow against.
- The committee has also suggested various long-term solutions for the economic and financial sustainability of MSMEs.
- The report has also **recommended the mainstreaming the restructuring of stressed loans**, considering the central bank had given a one-year window to banks to do so in January 2019.
- The proposal is part of a report prepared **by the eight-member RBI committee** tasked with reviewing the current framework for the MSME sector.
 - The panel was **headed** by former Securities and Exchange Board of India chairman **U K Sinha.**

The MSME definition

- The Micro Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are defined under the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Development (**MSMED) Act, 2006** on the basis of capital investment made in plant and machinery, excluding investments in land and building.
- Manufacturing units having investment:
 - below Rs 25 lakh are termed as Micro,
 - those between Rs 25 lakh and Rs 5 crore as Small
 - and from Rs 5 crore to Rs 10 crore as Medium.
- Service units, corresponding investment thresholds are:
 - up to Rs 10 lakh are termed as Micro,
 - between Rs 10 lakh to Rs 2 crore as Small

- and between Rs 2 crore to Rs 5 crore as Medium
- **However, the government is contemplating to change the definition of MSMEs.**
 - The proposed change under a new draft is that **annual turnover, rather than investment size**, should be the criterion for such units.
 - Under the draft, there would be **no difference between a manufacturing and service unit.**
 - Micro can be up to Rs 5 crore of turnover, small up to Rs 75 crore, and medium up to Rs 250 crore of turnover should be considered.

Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)

- The PMMY is a scheme launched in 2015 for providing loans up to 10 lakh to the non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises.
- These loans are classified as MUDRA loans under PMMY.
- These loans are given by Commercial Banks, RRBs, Small Finance Banks, Cooperative Banks, MFIs and NBFCs.
- Under the aegis of PMMY, MUDRA has created three products namely 'Shishu', 'Kishore' and 'Tarun' to signify the stage funding needs of the beneficiary/entrepreneur and also provide a reference point for the next phase of graduation/growth.
 - **Shishu:** covering loans up to Rs.50,000
 - **Kishore:** covering loans above Rs.50,000 and up to Rs.5,00,000
 - **Tarun:** covering loans above Rs.5,00,000 and up to Rs.10,00,000
- As of Feb 1, 2019, over 157 million loans amounting to Rs 7.59 trillion have been extended under PMMY since its inception.

Seven Million Jobs Created in Formal Sector

The Indian Staffing Federation (ISF) has reported the formalisation of over seven million jobs between 2015-2018 **due to reforms and initiatives taken by Indian government.**

- **The report titled, 'Impact of key reforms on job formalisation and flexi-staffing'** mentioned that 1.2 million workers have been added to the flexi-workforce since 2015 and a further 1.53 million are to be added over the next three years.
- The government's current agenda of job creation can be achieved by boosting the aggregate effective demand in the economy through formalisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, financialisation and skilling.
- India will have a 6.1 million flexi-workforce by 2021.
 - Sectors such as logistics, banking, financial services and insurance (**BFSI**), **IT/ITeS, retail and government** would be the **top five sectors, employing over 55 per cent of the total flexi-workforce by 2021.**

- **The flexi staff space grew** at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of **16.3 per cent in 2018** and is expected to further accelerate to **22.7 per cent from 2018-2021**.
- The report establishes **flexi-staffing as a key job creation engine**.
- The acceleration in momentum towards formal employment witnessed in the past three years clearly means the reforms such as the payment of wages act and EPF are having a positive impact.

Flexi-staffing

- **Flexible Staffing** is an arrangement in an organization where the employees can be from **temporary agencies, leased employees or contract workers**.
- It is more commonly known as temporary staffing and predominantly focuses on the white collar industry.

Indian Staffing Federation (ISF)

- The ISF is the apex body representing the Staffing industry/Private Employment Services that is **authorised to discuss with government agencies and other trade bodies on behalf of the staffing industry/ private employment services**.
The Staffing / private employment services is an enabler **to provide social security** and long term **medical**, and **retirement benefits to temp/flexi-staff**.
- The purpose of ISF is to enhance long-term growth and ensure its continued ability to make positive contributions to the economy as well as the society **through the services of the Staffing Industry**.
- **Staffing Industry covers a meager 2% penetration of the possible employable size in India.**
 - Of the 400m employable in India, about 10% are employed in the organised sector, and while about 250m are self-employed.
 - This leaves **almost 110m** who are **employed by the temp/ flexi-staffing and the unorganised sector**. ISF is working towards growing this market.
 - To bring effect, **the laws and regulations haven't taken Staffing industry/ Private Employment Services into cognizance**.
 - ISF expects to interact with law making authorities to recognize Staffing industry / Private Employment Services and create adequate and appropriate laws to manage it.

ICANN and NASSCOM Collaboration

Global internet body **Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers(ICANN)** and **Indian IT industry body NASSCOM** to develop identifier technology that can be used for managing devices and infrastructure using the internet.

- Both the bodies will first focus on updating the Internet of Things (IoT) devices using domain name system (DNS) even in the situation when the manufacturer or supplier has closed down the business.
- This collaboration provides a structure to jointly identify research projects, particularly in new technologies related to the internet's system of unique identifiers.
- The first research project focuses on testing the use of the DNS to update IoT firmware and studying how the proposed technology could scale outside a lab environment.

Internet of Thing (IoT)

- The Internet of Things is made up of devices from simple sensors to smartphones and wearables connected together.
- IoT allows devices on closed **private internet connections** to communicate with others and the Internet of Things brings those networks together. It gives the opportunity for devices to communicate not only within close silos but across different networking types and creates a much more connected world.

Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)

- ICANN is a non-profit body that administers domain names and Internet protocol addresses (IPs) globally. It was formed in 1988 by the US Department of Commerce. It has become independent of US control since October 1st, 2016.
- It also ensures that computers across the internet can find one another through defined unique pathways and identifiers.
- It is responsible for coordinating the maintenance and methodologies of several databases, with unique identifiers, related to the namespaces of the Internet – and thereby, ensuring the network's stable and secure operation.
- ICANN is governed by an internationally diverse Board of Directors overseeing the policy development process. ICANN's President directs an international staff, working from three continents, who ensure that ICANN meets its operational commitment to the Internet community.

National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM)

- NASSCOM, a not-for-profit industry association, is the apex body for the IT industry in India.
- Established in 1988, NASSCOM's relentless pursuit has been to constantly support the IT and BPO industry.
- Members of NASSCOM are Indian Co software development, software services, IT-enabled/BPO services. NASSCOM role has primarily been to make sure that service quality and enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights have been properly

implemented in the Indian software and BPO industry.

Jal Shakti Mantralaya

National River Conservation Directorate (NRCD) has been shifted from the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change to Jal shakti Ministry.

- Move aims at **consolidating** administration and bringing water-related issues like conservation, development, management, and abatement of pollution under a **single ministry**.
- **National River Conservation Directorate (NRCD)** is responsible for implementing the centrally sponsored national river conservation plan for all rivers across the country except river Ganga and its tributaries (as issues related to Ganga and its tributaries are taken up by National Mission for Clean Ganga).

Jal Shakti Mantralaya

- The government has created a new Ministry called '**Jal Shakti**' after merging **Ministries of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation** along with **Drinking Water and Sanitation**.
- 'Jal Shakti' ministry will encompass issues ranging from providing **clean drinking water**, international and inter-states **water disputes**, to the **Namami Gange** project aimed at cleaning Ganga and its tributaries, and sub-tributaries.
- The ministry will roll out the government's ambitious **plan ('Nal se Jal' scheme** under jal jivan plan) to provide **piped water connection** to every household in India by **2024**.

Libra Cryptocurrency

- Facebook has unveiled its own cryptocurrency named "**Libra**". Based on the Libra

Blockchain, it's backed by the **Libra Reserve**.



- It has also officially announced a **digital wallet service named Calibra**. The company managing this wallet is going to be a subsidiary and will be operating independently from Facebook.
 - Calibra is going to be available as a standalone app on the App Store and Play Store. Apart from that, users can also use Libra within Facebook's own messaging apps including WhatsApp and Messenger, making it much more accessible.
- The name is inspired by the origins of money in Ancient Rome, where the Libra was a unit of weight used to mint coins.
- Libra also evokes the French libre ("free") and reflects the corresponding astrological symbol—the scales of justice, relevant in theory because the crypto is meant to make financial inclusion standard around the globe.
- The new crypto's symbol, a wave, "represents the energy that flows between us, the borderless nature of water, and the movement between people, places, and money."

Cryptocurrency

- A cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency that uses cryptography for security.
- Cryptocurrencies use decentralized technology to let users make secure payments and store money without the need to use their name or go through a bank.
- They run on a distributed public ledger called blockchain, which is a record of all transactions updated and held by currency holders.
- The most common cryptocurrencies are Bitcoin, Ethereum, Ripple, and Litecoin.

Coringa Mangroves

The Andhra Pradesh Government has constituted a seven-member committee for fulfilment of norms required **for proposing the Godavari Mangroves** (Mada forests), **at Coringa, as a World Heritage Site**.

- Godavari Mangroves at the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (CWLS) are touted to be the **second largest mangroves** in India. The **largest** mangrove forest in the world is **Sundarbans**, West Bengal.
- The **mangrove forests in Andhra Pradesh** are located in the **estuaries of the Godavari and the Krishna rivers**. The Godavari mangroves are located in Godavari estuary of East Godavari district.
- Located in Andhra Pradesh, **the CWLS** is home to numerous **endangered species** including the **fishing cat**, otter, jackal, sea turtles, sea gull, pelican, stork, heron, snipes, flamingos among others.
- Along with the mangrove forest, **the Hope Island**, a naturally formed sandy stretch amidst the sea that turned into a synonym for biodiversity, too comes under the purview of the sanctuary.
- The sanctuary also has a site where **Olive Ridley Sea Turtles** nest from January to March every year.
- Once the Coringa sanctuary gets the heritage site tag, UNESCO will help develop tourism and protect the wildlife in the mangroves.

Mangroves

- Mangroves are the plant communities occurring in **inter-tidal zones** along the coasts of **tropical and subtropical countries**.
- Mangrove forests perform **multiple ecological functions** such as production of woody trees; provision of habitat, food, and spawning grounds for fin-fish and shellfish; provision of habitat for birds and other valuable fauna; protection of coastlines and accretion of sediment to form new land.
- According to the India State of Forest Report, 2017, **India has nearly 3.3% of the world's mangrove vegetation**.

