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High Forex Reserves

Why in News

As per the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** data, India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves touched a record high of USD 541.431 billion in the week ended 28th August 2020.

Key Points

- **Forex Reserves:**

- **Definition: Foreign exchange reserves** are assets denominated in a foreign currency that are held on reserve by a central bank. These may include foreign currencies, bonds, treasury bills and other government securities.
- **Objectives Behind Holding Forex Reserves:**
 - Supporting and maintaining **confidence in the policies for monetary and exchange rate management**
 - Provides the capacity to intervene in **support of the national or union currency.**
 - **Limits external vulnerability** by maintaining foreign currency liquidity to absorb shocks during times of crisis or when access to borrowing is curtailed.
- **Forex Reserves in India:** Forex reserves are external assets accumulated by India and controlled by the RBI in the form of:
 - **Gold**
 - **SDRs** (special drawing rights of the **International Monetary Fund - IMF**)
 - **Foreign currency assets** (capital inflows to the capital markets, Foreign Direct Investment and external commercial borrowings)
 - **Reserve Position with IMF**
- **Forex Reserves Storage:** The **RBI Act, 1934** provides the **legal framework for deployment of reserves in different foreign currency assets and gold** within the broad parameters of currencies, instruments, and issuers.

- **Reasons for High Forex Reserves:**

- Rise in investment by **foreign portfolio investors** and increased **foreign direct investments (FDIs)**.

The sharp jump in reserves started with the Finance Ministry's announcement in 2019, **cutting corporate tax rates.**
- **Fall in crude oil prices** has brought down the oil import bill, saving precious foreign exchange.
- **Dollar outflow** from **overseas remittances and foreign travels** have fallen steeply.

- **Significance of rising forex reserves:**
 - **Comfortable Position for the Government:** The rising forex reserves give **comfort** to the government and the RBI in managing India's **external and internal financial issues** at a time of **major contraction (23.9%) in economic growth.**
 - **Managing Crisis:** It serves as a **cushion in the event of a Balance of Payment (BoP) crisis** on the economic front.
 - It is **enough to cover the import bill** of the country for a year.
 - Assist the government in meeting its **foreign exchange needs and external debt obligations.**
 - **Rupee Appreciation:** The rising reserves have also helped the **rupee to strengthen against the dollar.**
 - **Confidence in Market:** Reserves will provide a level of **confidence to markets and investors** that a country can meet its external obligations

Using Forex for Infrastructure

- **Arguments in Favour:** There was a demand from some quarters that forex reserves should be used for infrastructure and other development needs in the country because of:
 - **Adequate Forex Reserves:** Sufficiency of forex reserves is sometimes measured on how many months' worth of imports can a country afford. Six months is the safer limit and at present reserve is sufficient for the whole year.
 - **Adequate Contingency Arrangement:** In case of a credit shock, India can mitigate any balance of payment crisis situation, as there are sufficient arrangements for foreign exchange reserves in the form of a credit line from the IMF and many central bank **liquidity swap agreements** with countries like Japan.
 - **Leveraging Forex as a Last Resort:** Tax revenues, in this fiscal year, will be affected by lower-than-expected economic activity. Also, non-tax revenue will remain subdued as the RBI has already given a huge dividend payment to the government in 2019.

Thus, the lack of considerable space both on the monetary and fiscal front to support economic growth, part of the country's forex reserves can be used for stimulating the economy.

- **Arguments Against:** The RBI had opposed the plan. Reasons may include the considerations of:
 - **Oil Price unpredictability:** Current low crude oil prices are due to several issues, one such is the **price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia**. As soon as a common ground is agreed between the two, the crude prices will tend to rise again.
 - **Unreliable Portfolio Investments:** Another issue is the high ratio of volatile flows (portfolio flows and short-term debt) to reserves which is around 80%. This money can exit at a fast pace. FIIs by their nature are investments based on speculation.
 - Therefore, the current surge in forex reserves should not be treated of permanent nature.
 - In March 2020 alone, foreign institutional investments in India fell by Rs. 65,000 crore.
 - **Confidence of High Forex:** High forex reserves also help India to maintain its global rating, especially in the context of falling GDP growth rate.

The depletion in forex reserves may have a negative impact on these ratings, which in turn may reduce foreign investment inflows into India.
 - **Volatility in Indian Rupee:** RBI has been fundamentally using India's foreign exchange to ensure rupee stability.

Way Forward

If the government intends to use forex reserves as an emergency fund, it should ensure that they do not shrink just when they are most needed. Apart from it, there is a need for separate attention to carry out structural reforms that can really pull out the Indian economy from persistent slowdown.

Source IE

Report on Literacy Rate

Why in News

Recently, the report on '**Household Social Consumption: Education in India as part of 75th round of National Sample Survey - from July 2017 to June 2018**' has been released.

- It is based on the **National Statistical Office (NSO) survey** and provides for state-wise **detail of literacy rate among the persons aged seven years and above.**

- The report comes before the **International Literacy Day** which is celebrated on **8th September** every year.

Key Points

Data Analysis: India's **Overall Literacy Rate** is **77.7%**.

- Urban Areas: 87.7%.
- Rural areas: 73.5%.
- Male Literacy Rate: 84.7%.
- Female Literacy Rate: 70.3%.

The **male literacy rate is higher than the female literacy rate** among all states with a considerable gap in the worst-performing states.

- **Best Performers:** Kerala > Delhi > Uttarakhand > Himachal Pradesh > Assam.
- **Worst Performers:** Andhra Pradesh < Rajasthan < Bihar < Telangana < Uttar Pradesh.
- **Digital Literacy:**
 - 23% of urban households and 4% of rural households possess computers.
 - Among persons of age 15-29 years, nearly 56% in urban areas and 24% in rural areas were able to operate a computer.
 - In the same age group, nearly 25% in rural areas and 58% in urban areas reported the use of the internet.

International Literacy Day 2020

- The importance of literacy was **first observed at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) General conference in 1966** and following this, the **first International Literacy Day** was celebrated on **8th September 1967** and the tradition has been held annually since then.
- **Objective:** To raise awareness and remind people of the importance of literacy as a matter of dignity and human rights.
- **Literacy Day 2020:** It will focus on the **changes and challenges in learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

It will reflect on the innovative and effective pedagogies that can be used in youth and adult literacy programmes to face the pandemic and beyond.
- The international community is **focusing on 2030** with **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) and has aimed to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning” within its goals of **SDG 4.**

- The **50-year review of South Asia** (which includes Bangladesh, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Nepal and Pakistan) states that the **large scale illiteracy is ever-present among adults.**

As per UNESCO, **India will achieve universal literacy by 2060.**

Government Initiatives

- **For Education and Literacy:**
 - **National Education Policy, 2020:** It aims at making “India a global knowledge superpower” by introducing several changes from the school to college level in the Indian education system.
 - **Samagra Shiksha:** It is an integrated scheme for school education extending from pre-school to class XII to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels of school education.
 - **Mid Day Meal Scheme:** It provides that every child within the age group of six to fourteen years studying in classes I to VIII who enrolls and attends the school, shall be provided hot cooked nutritional meals, free of charge every day except on school holidays.
 - **Eklavya Model School and Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Scheme (RGNF):** These aim to encourage the students belonging to **Scheduled Tribes (ST)** community to pursue higher education.
- **For Digital Literacy:**
 - **Digital India Programme:** It pulls together many existing schemes by restructuring and re-focusing them and then implementing them in a synchronized manner.
 - **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan:** It is one of the largest initiatives of the country with the target of making citizens digitally literate.
 - **National Digital Literacy Mission:** It aims to empower at least one person per household with crucial digital literacy skills by 2020.
 - **Bharat Net Programme:** It aims to have an optical fibre network in all gram panchayats.

Way Forward

There is a need for real emancipation of the people. Education systems across the world should provide the training required for children and working adults so that they can learn to read and write. National educational plans should include schooling for children and literacy training for adults as parallel elements.

Source: IE

International Day of Clean Air For Blue Skies

Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** has organised a webinar on the occasion of the **first-ever International Day of Clean Air For Blue Skies**.

- In **December 2019**, the **United Nations General Assembly** adopted a resolution to observe this day on **7th September every year, starting from 2020**.
- **The Day aims to** demonstrate the close link of air quality to other environmental/developmental challenges and raise public awareness related to air quality at all levels.

Key Points

- **Indian Government's Efforts:**

- It is committed to **reducing the air pollution level in 122 most polluted cities.**
- In 2014, the **Air Quality Index** (AQI) was launched which currently tracks the levels of pollution on **eight parameters.**
 - These **parameters are ground-level ozone, Particulate Matter (PM) 10, PM 2.5,** carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ammonia and lead.
 - **Ground-level ozone and airborne particles are the two pollutants that pose the greatest threat** to human health in India.
- The Prime Minister in his Independence day speech also **highlighted the issue of air pollution** and put across the **goal of holistic improvement in air quality in 100 cities** by drawing up **micro-plans to target hotspots.**
- A brochure on **Integrated Measures to Combat Air Pollution** under the **National Clean Air Programme** (NCAP) has been launched in the webinar.

In **January 2019, NCAP was launched** to tackle the problem of air pollution in a comprehensive manner with a **target to achieve 20 to 30% reduction in PM 10 and PM 2.5 concentrations by 2024** keeping 2017 as the base year.
- India has migrated to **BS-VI standards, quality petrol and diesel,** which is an important initiative to fight against pollution.
 - The **Bharat Stage (BS) are emission standards** instituted by the Government of India to regulate the output of air pollutants from motor vehicles.
 - The **Environment Ministry is responsible for deciding** the fuel standard in the country. The **Central Pollution Control Board** (CPCB) **implements** these standards.

- **Suggestions for Improvement:**

- States must work with **city-specific plans,** as every city has a different source of pollution.

A city is not equally polluted in all areas so the **most effective way to reduce air pollution in cities is to identify the hotspots and then disburse funds** for solutions in these identified areas.
- Use of **electric vehicles** must be encouraged and the **public transport should be modernised.**
- Augmenting **waste management infrastructure,** paving roads to make **them dust free** and **imposing stringent norms on industry** and ensuring that they switch to cleaner fuels.
- **People's participation** is a must to clean the air. **Car-pooling and use of public transport** must be promoted.

Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle

Why in News

Recently, the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** successfully flight tested the **Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV)**.

Key Points

About: HSTDV is an unmanned scramjet demonstration aircraft that can travel at **hypersonic speed**.

- It uses **hypersonic air-breathing scramjet technology**.
- The vehicle travelled its desired flight path at a velocity of six times the speed of sound i.e. **Mach 6**.

Mach number: It describes an aircraft's speed compared with the speed of sound in air, with **Mach 1 equating to the speed of sound i.e. 343 metre per second**.

Air Breathing Engine

- Air-breathing engines use oxygen from the atmosphere in the combustion of fuel. They include the **turbojet, turboprop, ramjet, and pulse-jet**.
- This system is **lighter, efficient and cost-effective** than other systems in use.
- Worldwide efforts are on to develop the technology for **air breathing engines for satellite launch vehicles**.
 - Presently, satellites are launched into orbit by multi-staged **satellite launch vehicles** that can be used only once (expendable). These launch vehicles carry oxidiser along with the fuel for combustion to produce thrust.
 - A **propulsion system which can utilise the atmospheric oxygen** during their flight will considerably reduce the total propellant required to place a satellite in orbit.
 - If those vehicles are made **reusable**, the cost of launching satellites will further come down significantly.

- **Types of Air Breathing engines**

- **Ramjet:** A ramjet is a form of air-breathing jet engine that uses the vehicle’s forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion without a rotating compressor.

Ramjets work most efficiently at **supersonic speeds** but they are **not efficient at hypersonic speeds.**

- **Scramjet:** A scramjet engine is an improvement over the ramjet engine as it efficiently operates at **hypersonic speeds** and allows **supersonic combustion.**
- **Dual Mode Ramjet (DMRJ) :** A dual mode ramjet (DMRJ) is a type of jet engine where a **ramjet transforms into a scramjet over Mach 4-8 range**, which means it can efficiently operate both in **subsonic and supersonic combustion modes.**

Speed Range	Mach Number	Velocity in m/s
Subsonic	< 0.8	< 274
Transonic	0.8–1.2	274–412
Supersonic	1.2–5	412–1715
Hypersonic	5–10	1715–3430
High-hypersonic	10–25	3430–8507

- **Conducted at:** The test was conducted from **Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Launch Complex** at APJ Abdul Kalam island off the coast of Odisha.

- **Implications:** India became the fourth country to have demonstrated this technology after the **USA, Russia and China.**

China successfully tested its first **waverider hypersonic flight vehicle** in 2018.

- **Advantages:**

- The indigenous development of the technology will boost **the development of the systems built with hypersonic vehicles** at its core.
- It can be developed as a carrier vehicle for **long range cruise missiles** in the defence sector. This includes both **offensive and defensive hypersonic cruise missile systems,**

Due to its high speed, most RADARs will be **unable to detect** it. It will also be able to **penetrate most missile defence systems.**

- This technology will be helpful in the space sector in **development of low-cost, high efficiency reusable satellites.**

- **Disadvantages:** Very high cost.

- **Background:** The DRDO started on the development of the HSTDV engine in early 2010s.
 - The **Indian Space Research Organisation** (ISRO) has also worked on the development of the technology and successfully tested a system in 2016.
 - DRDO **conducted a test of this system in June 2019** also.

Way Forward

- The successful demonstration is certainly a significant milestone towards **Atmanirbhar Bharat**. DRDO with this mission, has demonstrated capabilities for highly complex technology that will serve as the **building block for NextGen Hypersonic vehicles in partnership** with industries.
- While the successful test is a major milestone, **many more rounds of tests** will have to be done to achieve the level of technology with countries like the US, Russia and China.

Source: TH

Review of National Forest Policy, 1988

Why in News

Recently the Director General of Forests has advocated for the amendment of National Forest Policy, 1988.

The recommendations are based on a research paper published in 2016 in the *Natural Resources Forum*, a **United Nations Sustainable Development Journal** which called for sustainable forest management based on certification and a policy characterised by restoration, conservation and production equally.

Key Points

- **Data unavailability:** There is a lack of reliable data relating to growing stock, consumption and production of timber, which constrained forecast of supply and demand projections.

- **Focus on TOFs:**
 - The potential of timber production from Trees Outside Forests (TOFs) i.e. grown outside government Recorded Forest Areas (RFAs) must be explored and tapped.
 - **Recorded Forest Area (RFA)** refers to all the geographic areas recorded as **forest** in government records. **Recorded forest** areas comprises **Reserved Forests (RF)** and Protected Forests (PF), which have been constituted under the provisions of **Indian Forest Act, 1927**.
 - According to **India State of Forest Report (2011)**, timber production from government forests is 3.17 million m³ and **potential timber production from TOFs** is 42.77 million m³. **India State of Forest Report (ISFR)** is a biennial publication of **Forest Survey of India (FSI)**, an organization under the Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change.
 - The Supreme Court ruling in the **Godavarman Case, 1996** stopping felling of trees in forest areas led to decrease in domestic production of timber.
 - Production forestry should focus on sustainable increase in forest productivity from TOFs and RFAs.
 - To boost production through RFA States must devise working plans and demarcate **10% of the forests for plantations**.
 - For TOFs, a synchronised nationwide policy could be developed.
 - Increasing wood production will also **push carbon sequestration, and help in mitigating effects of climate change**.
 - Increasing timber production from TOFs can **revive the rural economy**.
- **Review of Import-Export Policy:** Since the domestic timber production has declined and imports have increased manifolds, there is a need to review **Export-Import Policy**.
 - The domestic demand of timber has grown owing to increasing population and per capita GDP. Dependency on imports is not viable as **exporters worldwide are shifting to a conservation-based approach**.
 - **The Export Import Policy should be reviewed to rectify** the pricing in the market so that it is economically viable to grow trees on farmlands,
 - **Export Import Policy** or better known as Exim **Policy** is a set of guidelines and instructions related to the import and **export** of goods. The Government of **India** notifies the **Exim Policy** for a period of five years under the **Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation Act), 1992**.

- **Revision of Indian Forest Policy:** The paper emphasized on revising the Indian Forest Policy **to boost domestic production.**
 - The conservation policies must focus on **maintaining ecological balance and improving biodiversity** through protected area management.
 - The restoration policies must target **reclamation, rehabilitation and regeneration** of degraded landscapes and wastelands.

Background

- India's forests are currently governed by the **National Forest Policy, 1988**
- It has environmental balance and livelihood at its centre.
- **Salient Features and Goals:**
 - Maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and restoration of ecological balance.
 - Conservation of Natural Heritage (existing).
 - Checking Soil Erosion and Denudation in catchment areas of rivers, lakes, and reservoirs.
 - Checking extension of sand dunes in desert areas of Rajasthan and along coastal tracts.
 - Substantially increasing Forest/Tree Cover through Afforestation and Social Forestry.
 - Taking steps to meet requirements of fuel, wood, fodder, minor forest produces, soil and timber of Rural and Tribal Population.
 - Increasing the productivity of Forests to meet National Needs.
 - Encouraging efficient utilization of Forest Produce and Optimum Use of Wood (Timber).
 - Generation of Work Opportunities, the involvement of Women.
- **Criticism:** It has not been updated in a long time while the situation of forests and climate has substantially changed.

Key policies regarding forests and forest management are either missing, delayed or left open-ended. For example, at present, there is no clear definition of forest that is accepted nationally and states are left to determine their definition of forests.
- **A draft National Forest Policy** was released in 2019. The basic thrust of the draft is **conservation, protection and management of forests along with safeguarding the interest of tribals and forest-dependent people.**
- **Other Legislations that Govern Indian Forests:**
 - **Indian Forest Act 1927**
 - **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act 2016**
 - **Forest Conservation Act 1980**
 - **Forest Rights Act 2006**
 - **Wildlife Protection Act 1972**

Forestry in India

- According to **India State of Forest Report, 2019, tree and forest cover** together made up **24.56% (8,07,276 sq km)** of India's area/
- In landmark **1996 Godavarman Case**, the Supreme Court **defined forests** as all areas that are forests in the dictionary meaning of the term irrespective of the nature of ownership and classification thereof.
 - The court also ordered all non-forest activity like sawmills and mining to be suspended in forest areas and stopped felling of trees in this order.
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - Forests and Protection of Wild Animals and Birds are included in the **Concurrent List in the (Seventh Schedule)** of the Constitution of India.
 - Through the **42nd Amendment Act, 1976** Forests and Protection of Wild Animals and Birds were transferred from State to Concurrent List along with Education, Weights & Measures and Administration of Justice.
 - **Article 51 A (g)** of the Constitution states that it shall be the **fundamental duty** of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests and Wildlife.
 - **Article 48 A** in the **Directive Principles of State policy**, mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.

Source: TH

Resolution Plan by RBI for Covid-19 Stressed Assets

Why in News

The **Reserve Bank of India**(RBI) has specified **five financial ratios and sector-specific thresholds** for resolution of **Covid-19 related stressed assets in 26 sectors**.

Key Points

- **Recommended by:** This resolution plan is based on the recommendations of the **K.V. Kamath committee**.

- **Financial Ratios:** The key financial ratios to be considered in the restructuring of loans impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic are:
 - **Total Outside Liability to Adjusted Tangible Net Worth Ratio :** This ratio is arrived at by addition of long-term debt, short term debt, current liabilities and provisions and deferred tax liability divided by tangible net worth net of the investments and loans. **It indicates a company's financial leverage over the total net worth of the company.**
 - **Total debt to EBIDTA ratio:** It is total debt divided by Earnings Before Interest, Depreciation, Taxes and Amortisation (EBIDTA). This ratio indicates **the cash position of a company to pay back its debt.** Higher ratio means the company has more leverage.
 - **Current ratio** Current assets divided by current liabilities. Current ratio indicates the **company's ability to pay short term debt and other liabilities** which are due within a year's time.
 - **Debt Service Coverage Ratio:** is the **available cash to pay current debt.**
 - **Average Debt Service Coverage Ratio.**
- **Sectors:** The 26 sectors specified by the RBI include automobiles, power, tourism, cement, chemicals, gems and jewellery, logistics, mining, manufacturing, real estate, and shipping among others.
- **Eligibility:** The resolution under this framework is applicable only to those borrowers **who have been impacted on account of Covid.**
 - Only those borrowers which were classified as **standard and with arrears less than 30 days as at March 1, 2020** are eligible under the Framework.
 - The resolution plans shall take into account **the pre-Covid-19 operating and financial performance** of the borrower **and impact of Covid-19** on its operating and financial performance.
- **Graded Approach:** The lending institutions may, at their discretion, adopt a **graded approach depending on the severity of the impact on borrowers** while implementing the resolution plan.
 - The banks can classify the accounts into **mild, moderate and severe** as recommended by the committee.
 - Simplified restructuring may be done for mild and moderate stress. Severe stress cases would require comprehensive restructuring.

- **Background:**
 - The RBI took a number of steps to give relief to companies affected by Covid-19 in its **Monetary Policy Report**.
It permitted lenders a one-time restructuring of loans without classifying these as **Non-Performing Assets**.
 - It allowed lenders to grant a **loan moratorium** for three months on Equated Monthly instalments (EMIs) falling due between March 1 and May 31, 2020. Later, it **extended this for another three months** until August 31.
- According to a report by **India Ratings and Research**, a high proportion of debt from the real estate, airlines, hotels, and other sectors had been restructured, the **largest contribution had been from infrastructure, power, and construction**.
 - Banks are likely to restructure up to Rs. 8.4 lakh crore of loans, or 7.7% of the overall system's credit.
 - The restructuring quantum from the corporate sector in FY21 could range between **3% and 5.8% of the banking credit**, amounting to Rs 3.3-6.3 lakh Crores.
 - At least **Rs. 210,000 crore (1.9% of banking credit) of non-corporate loans** is likely to undergo restructuring after the announcement, which would have otherwise slipped into the **Non-Performing Asset** category.
 - India Ratings and Research is a credit rating agency that provides credit opinions regarding India's credit markets.

Way Forward

The loan restructuring must be a temporary step as continuing it for long may lead to an **inflation surge, currency crisis, and financial instability** due to **accumulation of bad loans**. It is important that post-Covid-19, regulatory measures are rolled out in a very careful and orderly manner and the financial sector returns to normal functioning **without relying on the regulatory relaxations as the new norm**.

Kiran: Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline

Why in News

The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has launched a **24/7 toll-free helpline 'Kiran'** to provide **support to people facing anxiety**, stress, depression, suicidal thoughts and other mental health concerns.

Earlier, the **Ministry of Education** had launched the '**Manodarpan**' initiative to provide psycho-social support and **counselling to students** for their mental health and well-being.

Key Points

- **About the Helpline:**

- It will **cater to** - People in Distress, pandemic induced psychological issues and Mental Health Emergency.
- It will **offer mental health rehabilitation services** with the objective of early screening, first-aid, psychological support, distress management, promoting positive behaviours, etc.
- It will be **available in 13 languages** and has **660 clinical/rehabilitation psychologists** and 668 psychiatrists as volunteers.
- It is being **coordinated** by the **National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (NIEPMD)**, Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and **National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation (NIMHR)**, Sehore (Madhya Pradesh).
NIEPMD and NIMHR are under the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**.
- Helpline operators had been sensitised **not to ask the caller for name or any identification details**.

- **Need:**
 - **Uncertainties due to Covid-19 pandemic:** From the personal risk to be infected to what economic prospects might look like.
 - **Mental Illness:**
 - There was a **shortage of qualified mental health professionals** while **10.6% of adults** and **7.3% of adolescents faced mental illness**, according to a **NIMHANS survey in 2015-2016**. Greater prevalence is amongst persons living in Urban Metros.
 - **Treatment Gap ranges from 70% to 92%.**

The treatment gap is the number of people with an illness, disease, or disorder who need treatment but do not get it (expressed as a percentage). It can be used as an outcome measure in health care.
 - **Suicide was the leading cause of death in India in 2016** for those aged 15–39 years; 71.2% of the suicide deaths among women and 57.7% among men were in this age group.
 - As per the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, **mental health workforces in India (per 1,00,000 population)** include **psychiatrists (0.3)**, **nurses (0.12)**, **psychologists (0.07)** and **social workers (0.07)**.
 - As per **WHO global health report 2019**, out of every four persons, one person will have some mental problem at a given point of time in their lives. **Mental illness is among the leading causes of disability and ill- health** in the world.

- **Steps Taken by the Government:**

- **National Mental Health Program (NMHP):**

- To address the huge burden of mental disorders and shortage of qualified professionals in the field of mental health, the government has been implementing the National Mental Health Program (NMHP) since **1982**.
- The Program was **re-strategized in 2003** to include two schemes, viz. Modernization of State Mental Hospitals and Up-gradation of Psychiatric Wings of Medical Colleges/General Hospitals.

- **Mental HealthCare Act 2017:**

- It guarantees every affected person access to mental healthcare and treatment from services run or funded by the government.
- It has **significantly reduced the scope for the use of Section 309 IPC** and made the attempt to commit suicide punishable only as an exception.

Section 115(1) of the MHCA states: “Notwithstanding anything contained in section 309 of the Indian Penal Code any person who attempts to commit suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished under the said Code.”

Way Forward

- Mental health needs to be a priority, from immediate crisis intervention and helplines to focusing on preventive mental health and reducing stigma around help seeking. It’s time the government advocates for mental health outcomes, strives for early identification and treatment, and uses the digital transformation (**National Digital Health Mission**) to provide mental health care to all.
- The need of the hour is to provoke masses to learn about mental health through campaigns like **Swachh Mansikta Abhiyan**.
- Further, spending on mental health care needs to be increased. **India has spent only 0.05% of its health budget annually on mental health over the last few years**, much lower than even the average spending of low-income countries, which comes to about 0.5% of their healthcare budgets.

Source: PIB

Administration of Assam Rifles

Why in News

Recently, the Delhi High Court has directed the Centre to take a decision on the issue of **bringing Assam Rifles out of the dual control of the Ministry of Home Affairs**

(MHA) and the **Ministry of Defence** (MoD).

Key Points

- **Background:**

A petition was filed by the **Assam Rifles Ex-Servicemen Welfare Association** seeking direction to the government for **placing Assam Rifles under one control**, preferably under the MoD.

- **Issue:**

- The **administrative control of the Assam Rifles is with the MHA** and the **operational control of Assam Rifles rests with the MoD.**

This duality of administrative control and operational control leads to **problems of coordination.**

- The objectives and functions of Assam Rifles are that of military and paramilitary force and considering it anything less than that **is arbitrary, unreasonable and in violation of the rights of Assam Rifles personnel.**
- There is a **disparity in the pay scale** between the Assam Rifles personnel operating alongside the Army on similar duties.

- **Delhi High Court's Direction:**

- The issue has been **pending for nearly three years** and now the **Centre should resolve it within 12 weeks with cooperation** from all the stakeholders.
- It noted that "The matter **involves servicemen/ex-servicemen and whose interest is not only to be paramount** but is proclaimed from various platforms of the Government, to be paramount".

- **Centre's Stand:**

- The in-principle decision, that Assam Rifles like other **Central Armed Police Forces** (CAPFs) **should come under the exclusive control of MHA**, appears to have already been taken but the final decision has not been made official yet.
- The Centre has asked for a period of **further six months** as the process has been **affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.**

Assam Rifles

- Assam Rifles is a **Central Paramilitary Force** under the **Central Armed Police Forces.**
- It came into being in **1835**, as a **militia called the 'Cachar Levy'**, to primarily **protect British Tea estates and their settlements** against tribal raids.

- It significantly **contributed to the opening of Assam region to administration and commerce** and over time it came to be known as the “**right arm of the civil and left arm of the military**”.
- **Major role post-Independence:**
 - Conventional combat role during the **Sino-India War 1962**.
 - Operations in a foreign land as part of the **Indian Peace Keeping Force to Sri Lanka** in 1987 (**Operation Pawan**).
 - Peacekeeping role in the North-Eastern areas of India.
- In November 2019, **MHA proposed to merge it** with the **Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)**.
 - ITBP is a specialized mountain force, raised in October 1962.
 - It is deployed on border guarding duties from **Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh** covering 3488 km of Indo-China Border.

Source: TH

Indira Gandhi Peace Prize 2019

Why in News

Sir David Attenborough has been conferred with Indira Gandhi Peace Prize for 2019 at a virtual ceremony.

Key Points

- **Indira Gandhi Peace Prize**
 - The **Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development** is an annual **prestigious award** named after former prime minister **Indira Gandhi**.
 - It is conferred every year by **Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust** since **1986**.
 - It consists of a citation and a monetary award of **Rs. 25 lakh**.
 - The award recognizes creative efforts by **individuals/organizations** working towards:
 - Creating new international economic order,
 - Promoting international peace & development,
 - Ensuring that scientific discoveries are used for the larger good of humanity and enlarging the scope of freedom.

- **David Attenborough**

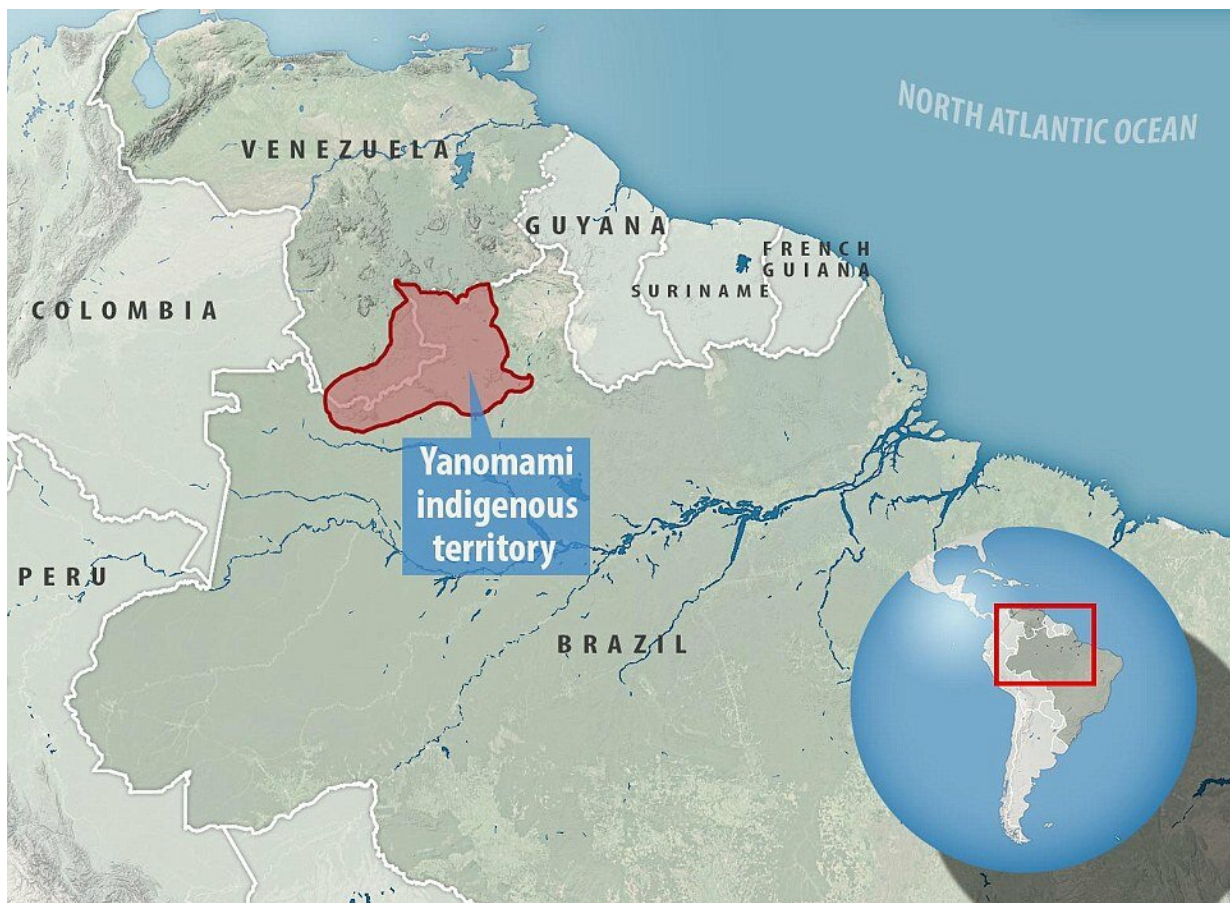
- Sir David is an **English broadcaster and natural historian**.
- He is best known for writing and presenting the BBC Natural History Unit. The nine **natural history documentary series** forming the Life collection that together constitute a **comprehensive survey of animal and plant life** on Earth.
- He has worked to make aware about the need to- **preserve and protect biodiversity** of the planet, to live in a sustainable and harmonious way with all life.

Source TH

Yanomami Tribe of South America

Why in News

The Yanomami tribe has launched a global campaign to expel 20,000 gold miners from their land amid the coronavirus pandemic.



Key Points

- The Yanomami live in the **rainforests and mountains of northern Brazil and southern Venezuela**, and are, according to Survival International, the **largest relatively isolated tribe in South America**.
 - Guarani, Kaingang, Pataxó, Hã Hã Hãe, Tupinambá, Yanomami, Tikuna and Akuntsu are popular tribes of the Amazon basin. **Amazon** is a river of South America and its basin is the **largest tropical rainforest in the world**.
 - **Survival International** is an international human rights advocacy based in London (UK), which campaigns for the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples around the world.
- The tribe **numbers around 38,000** today, and its members **live in contiguous forested territory** of around 9.6 million hectares in Brazil and 8.2 million hectares in Venezuela.
- They live in large, circular houses called **yanos or shabonos**, some of which can hold up to 400 people.
- The Yanomami consider all people to be equal, and do not have a chief. Instead, all decisions are based on consensus after long discussions and debates.
- They are **speakers of a Xirianá language**.
- A Brazilian indigenous leader **Davi Kopenawa** who secured the land rights of the Yanomami people was awarded the **Right Livelihood Award-2019**, also known as **Sweden's alternative Nobel Prize**.

Source: IE
