



## News Analysis (25 Mar, 2021)

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### The Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019

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#### Why in News

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Recently, the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** informed the Lok Sabha that presently, there is no proposal to implement **Panchayati Raj System** in **Sixth Schedule** areas of Assam.

- In January 2019, **the Constitution (125<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Bill, 2019** was introduced in the Rajya Sabha to **amend** the provisions related to the **Finance Commission** and the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**.
- The **Sixth Schedule** relates to the **administration of tribal areas** in the states of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**.

#### Key Points

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- **Proposed Amendments:**
  - **Village and Municipal Councils:**
    - **Village and Municipal Councils:**  
It provides for **Village and Municipal Councils in addition to the District and Regional Councils.** Village Councils will be established for villages or groups of villages in rural areas, and Municipal Councils will be established in urban areas of each district.
    - **Structure of the Village and Municipal Councils:**  
The **District Councils may make laws** on various issues, including:
      - Number of Village and Municipal Councils to be formed, and their composition,
      - Delimitation of constituencies for election to the Village and Municipal Councils.
      - Powers and functions of Village and Municipal Councils.
    - **Rules for Devolution of Powers:**
      - **Governor may make rules** for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the Village and Municipal Councils.
      - Such rules may be framed in relation to:
        - Preparation of plans for economic development.
        - Implementation of land reforms.
        - Urban and town planning.
        - Regulation of land-use, among other functions.
  - **State Finance Commission:**
    - The Bill provides the appointment of a Finance Commission for these states, to review the financial position of District, Village, and Municipal Councils.
    - The Commission will make recommendations regarding:
      - Distribution of taxes between states and District Councils.
      - Grants-in-aid to District, Village, and Municipal Councils from the Consolidated Fund of the state.
  - **Elections to Councils:**  
All elections to the District Councils, Regional Councils, Village Councils, and Municipal Councils will be conducted by the **State Election Commission** appointed by the Governor, for these four states.
  - **Disqualification of Members of Councils:**
    - The Sixth Schedule provides that the Governor may make rules for the constitution of District and Regional Councils, including qualifications for being elected as members of these councils.
    - The Bill adds that the **Governor may make rules for the disqualification of such members on the grounds of defection.**

- **Sixth Schedule:**

- **About:**

- The Sixth Schedule was originally intended for the predominantly tribal areas (tribal population over 90%) of undivided Assam, which was categorised as “excluded areas” under the **Government of India Act, 1935** and was under the direct control of the Governor.
    - It **provides for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram** to safeguard the rights of the tribal population in these states.

- This special provision is provided under **Article 244 (2)** and **Article 275 (1)** of the Constitution.

- It **provides for autonomy in the administration of these areas** through **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)**.

- ADCs are **empowered to make laws in respect of areas under their jurisdiction**, which cover the land, forest, cultivation, inheritance, indigenous customs and traditions of tribals, etc. and also to collect land revenues and certain other taxes.
        - ADCs are like **miniature states having specific powers and responsibilities** in respect of all the three arms of governance: Legislature, executive and judiciary.

- **Autonomous Districts:**

- **About:**

- The Governor is empowered to **organise and re-organise the autonomous districts**. Thus, he can **increase or decrease their areas or change their names or define their boundaries** and so on.
      - If there are different tribes in an autonomous district, the **governor can divide the district into several autonomous regions**.

- **Composition:**

- Each autonomous district has a district council consisting of **30 members**, of whom **four are nominated by the governor** and the remaining **26 are elected on the basis of adult franchise** and they hold office for five years.
        - Each autonomous region also has a **separate regional council**.
          - The district and regional councils administer the areas under their jurisdiction.
          - The **district and regional councils within their territorial jurisdictions can constitute village councils** or courts for trial of suits and cases between the tribes. They hear appeals from them.
          - The jurisdiction of the high court over these suits and cases is specified by the Governor.

- **Sixth Schedule Areas:**

<b>MEGHALAYA</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council</li></ul>	● Mara Autonomous District Council
● Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council	<b>TRIPURA</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council</li></ul>
● Garo Hills Autonomous District Council	<b>ASSAM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Dima Hasao Autonomous Council</li></ul>
<b>MIZORAM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Chakma Autonomous District Council</li></ul>	● Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council
● Lai Autonomous District Council	● Bodoland Territorial Council

## Panchayati Raj Institutions

- **About:**

- Panchayats were included in **Article 40** under the **Directive Principles of the Constitution** of India.
- Government in 1992 introduced the **73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment** to make the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) Constitutional machinery.

- **Scheduled Areas:**

- The tribal dominated states under **5<sup>th</sup>** and **6<sup>th</sup>** schedules of the Constitution were, however, **given the option either to introduce Panchayati Raj institutions or to continue with their traditional self-government institutions.**
- All the states of India including **5<sup>th</sup>** and **6<sup>th</sup>** schedule states **except Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram** and the **autonomous areas of Assam and Tripura** amended their Panchayati Raj Act to accommodate the provisions of the **73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act.**

- **Provisions of PRIs:**

- Establishment of a **three-tier structure** (Village Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti or intermediate level Panchayat and Zilla Parishad or district level Panchayat).
- Establishment of Gram Sabhas at the village level. **Regular elections to Panchayats every five years.**
- Proportionate seat **reservation** for **SCs/STs.**
- Reservation of not less than **1/3 seats for women.**
- Constitution of **State Finance Commissions** to recommend measures to improve the finances of Panchayats.

- **Power to Panchayats:**

The Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act, 1992 vests power in the State Government to endow Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government such as:

- **Preparation of plans and their execution** for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects listed in the **XI schedule** of the Constitution.
- **To levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.**  
Transfer of taxes, duties, tolls and fees collected by the States to Panchayats.

**Source:TH**

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## **The Juvenile Justice Amendment Bill, 2021**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, the Lok Sabha passed the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2021** that seeks to strengthen and streamline the provisions for protection and adoption of children.

The Bill amends the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015** and contains **provisions related to children in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection.**

### **Key Points**

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- **Need of the Amendment:**
  - The **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)** audit of **Child Care Institutions (CCIs)** in 2020, 90% of which are run by NGOs, found that 39% CCIs were not registered, even after the 2015 amendment was brought in.
  - It also found that less than 20% CCIs, especially for girls, had not been set up in some states, 26% child welfare officers were not there.
  - Moreover, three-fifths have **no toilets**, one-tenth have **no drinking water** and 15% homes don't have provisions of separate beds, no diet plans.
  - Rehabilitation of children is not a priority for childcare homes and children are reportedly kept in such institutions to get funds.

- **Key Amendments Proposed by the Bill:**

- **Serious offences:** Serious offences will also include offences for which maximum punishment is imprisonment of more than seven years, and minimum punishment is not prescribed or is of less than seven years.
  - Serious offences are those for which the punishment under the Indian Penal Code or any other law for the time being is **imprisonment between three and seven years.**
  - Juvenile Justice Board inquires about a child who is accused of a serious offence.
- **Non-cognizable Offences:**

The present Act provides that an offence which is punishable with imprisonment between three to seven years to be cognizable (where arrest is allowed without warrant) and non-bailable.

The Bill amends this to provide that **such offences will be non-cognizable.**
- **Adoption:** Presently, the **adoption order issued by the court** establishes that the child belongs to the adoptive parents. The Bill provides that instead of the court, the **District Magistrate (including Additional District Magistrate) will issue** such adoption orders.
- **Appeals:** The Bill provides that any person aggrieved by an adoption order passed by the District Magistrate **may file an appeal before the Divisional Commissioner**, within 30 days from the date of passage of such order.

Such appeals should be disposed within four weeks from the date of filing of the appeal.
- **Additional Functions of the District Magistrate:** These include: (i) supervising the District Child Protection Unit, and (ii) conducting a quarterly review of the functioning of the **Child Welfare Committee.**
- **Designated Court:** The Bill proposes that all offences under the earlier Act be tried in children's court.
- **Child Welfare Committees (CWCs):** It provides that a person will **not eligible** to be a member of the CWC if he/she
  - has any record of **violation of human rights** or child rights,
  - has been **convicted of an offence** involving moral turpitude,
  - has been removed or dismissed from service of the central government, or any state government, or a government undertaking,
  - is part of the management of a child care institution in a district.
- **Removal of Members:** The appointment of any member of the committee shall be terminated by the state government after an inquiry if they fail to attend the proceedings of the CWCs consecutively for three months without any valid reason or if they fail to attend less than three-fourths of the sittings in a year.

- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 **replaced the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000.**
- **Change in Nomenclature:**
  - The Act changes the nomenclature from ‘juvenile’ to ‘child’ or ‘child in conflict with law’. Also, it removes the negative connotation associated with the word “juvenile”.
  - It also includes several new and clear definitions such as orphaned, abandoned and surrendered children; and petty, serious and heinous offences committed by children.
- **Special Provisions for Age 16-18 years:**

Included special provisions to tackle child offenders committing heinous offences in the age group of 16-18 years.
- **Mandatory Constitution of the JJ Board:**

It mandates setting up Juvenile Justice Boards and Child Welfare Committees in every district. Both must have at least one woman member each.
- **Adoption Related Clauses:**
  - A separate new chapter on Adoption to streamline adoption procedures for an orphan, abandoned and surrendered children.
  - Also, the **Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)** was granted the status of a statutory body to enable it to perform its function more effectively.
  - The Act states that the adoption of a child is final on the issuance of an adoption order by the court. Currently, there are 629 adoption cases pending in various courts.
- **Child Care Institutions (CCI):**

All Child Care Institutions, whether run by State Government or by voluntary or non-governmental organisations are to be mandatorily registered under the Act within 6 months from the date of commencement of the Act.

**Source: IE**

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## **The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, **the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020** was passed unanimously by the Lok Sabha.

- The Bill seeks to **regulate and standardise the education and practice of allied and healthcare professionals.**
- The group of allied professionals is large and the Bill is **trying to regulate this field by providing dignity to their roles.**

## Key Points

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- **Allied Health Professional:**

- The Bill **defines an ‘allied health professional’** as an associate, technician, or technologist trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury, or impairment.
- Such a professional should have obtained a **diploma or degree**.  
The duration of the degree/diploma should be at least **2,000 hours (over a period of two to four years)**.

- **Healthcare Professional:**

- A **‘healthcare professional’** includes a scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, researches, supervises, or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, or promotional health services.
- Such a professional **should have obtained a degree**.  
The duration of the degree should be at least **3,600 hours (over a period of three to six years)**.

- **Allied and Healthcare Professions:**

- The Bill specifies certain categories of allied and healthcare professions as recognised categories.
- These are mentioned in the Schedule to the Bill and include **life science professionals, trauma and burn care professionals, surgical and anaesthesia related technology professionals, physiotherapists, and nutrition science professionals**.  
The central government may amend this Schedule after consultation with the **National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Profession**.



- **National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions:** The Bill sets up the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions.
  - **Structure:**

It will consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, five members representing various Departments/Ministries of the central government, one representative from the **Directorate General of Health Services**, three Deputy Directors or Medical Superintendents appointed on a rotational basis from amongst medical institutions and 12 part-time members representing State Councils, among others.
  - **Functions:** The Commission will perform the following functions with regard to Allied and Healthcare Professionals:
    - Creating and maintaining an **online Central Register** of all registered professionals.
    - Providing **basic standards** of education, courses, curriculum, staff qualifications, examination, training, maximum fee payable for various categories.
  - **Professional Councils:**
    - The Commission will constitute a Professional Council for every recognised category of allied and healthcare professions.
    - The Professional Council will consist of **a president and four to 24 members**, representing each profession in the recognised category.
    - **The Commission may delegate any of its functions to this Council.**
- **State Councils:**
  - Within **six months** from the passage of the Bill, **state governments will constitute State Allied and Healthcare Councils.**
  - It will **complement the functioning of the National Commission** and **maintain a State Register.**
- **Permission for Establishment of Institutions:**
  - **Prior permission of the State Council** will be required to:
    - Establish a new institution.
    - Open new courses, increase the admission capacity, or admit a new batch of students to existing institutions.
  - If such **permission is not sought**, then any qualification granted to a student from such an **institution will not be recognised under the Bill.**
- **Offences and Penalties:**
  - No person is allowed to practice as a qualified allied and healthcare practitioner other than those enrolled in a State Register or the National Register.
  - Any person who contravenes this provision will be punished with a **fine of Rs. 50,000.**

**Source:TH**

# Anti-Corruption Strategies

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## Why in News

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Recently, the **Lokpal of India** organized a Webinar on '**Bringing Synergies in Anti-Corruption Strategies**'.

## Key Points

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- **Corruption** can be defined as the **abuse of entrusted power for private gain**. It can impact a nation's development in various ways.
- **Impact of Corruption:**
  - **Political Costs:** The political costs of corruption are manifested in weakened public trust in political institutions, reduced political participation, perversion of the electoral process, restricted political choices available to citizens and loss of legitimacy of the democratic system.
  - **Economic Costs:** Corruption reduces economic efficiency by misallocation of resources in favour of **rent seeking** activities, increasing the cost of public transactions, acting as an additional tax on business thereby reducing investment, reducing genuine business competition.

## Rent Seeking

- It is a concept in public choice theory as well as in economics, that involves seeking to increase one's share of existing wealth without creating new wealth.
- It results in reduced economic efficiency through misallocation of resources, reduced wealth-creation, lost government revenue, heightened income inequality, and potential national decline.
- **Social Costs:** Corruption distorts the value systems and wrongly attaches elevated status to occupations that have rent seeking opportunities. This results in a disillusioned public, a weak civil society, which attracts unscrupulous leaders to political life.
- **Environmental Costs:** Environmentally devastating projects are given preference in funding, because they are easy targets for siphoning off public money into private pockets.
- **Issues of national security:** Corruption within security agencies can lead to a threat to national security, including through distortion of procurement, recruitment of ineligible persons, providing an easy route for smuggling of weapons and terrorist elements into the country and money laundering.

- **Legal Framework for Fighting Corruption:**

- **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988** provides for penalties in relation to corruption by public servants and also for those who are involved in the abetment of an act of corruption.

Amendment of 2018 criminalised both bribe-taking by public servants as well as bribe giving by any person.

- **The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002** aims to prevent instances of money laundering and prohibits use of the 'proceeds of crime' in India.

The offence of money laundering prescribes strict punishment, including imprisonment of up to 10 years and the attachment of property of accused persons (even at a preliminary stage of investigation and not necessarily after conviction).

- **The Companies Act, 2013** provides for corporate governance and prevention of corruption and fraud in the corporate sector. The term 'fraud' has been given a broad definition and is a criminal offence under the Companies Act.

- In cases involving fraud specifically, the **Serious Frauds Investigation Office (SFIO)** has been set up under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, which is responsible for dealing with white collar crimes and offences in companies.

- The SFIO conducts investigation under the provisions of the Companies Act.

- **The Indian Penal Code, 1860** sets out provisions which can be interpreted to cover bribery and fraud matters, including offences relating to criminal breach of trust and cheating.

- **The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010** regulates the acceptance and use of foreign contributions and hospitality by individuals and corporations.

Prior registration or prior approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs is required for receipt of foreign contributions and in the absence of such registration or approval, receipt of foreign contributions may be considered illegal.

- **Regulatory Framework:**

- **The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013** provides for an establishment of an ombudsman for the central and state governments (Lokpal and Lokayuktas, respectively).

These bodies are required to act independently from the government and have been empowered to investigate allegations of corruption against public servants, which include the prime minister and other ministers.

- The **Central Vigilance Commission** though created in 1964, became an independent statutory body only in 2003 by an Act of Parliament.

Its mandate is to oversee the vigilance administration and to advise and assist the executive in matters relating to corruption.

## **Lokpal and Lokayukta**

- **The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013** provided for the establishment of Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States.

The Bill was passed in 2013 in both the Houses of Parliament and came into force on 16th January 2014.

- These institutions are **statutory bodies** without any constitutional status.
- They perform the function of an "**ombudsman**" and inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries and for related matters.
- The term Lokpal and Lokayukta were coined by Dr L. M. Singhvi.
- **Composition:**
  - Lokpal is a **multi-member body**, that consists of one chairperson and a maximum of 8 members.
  - Out of the maximum eight members, half to be judicial members and minimum 50% of the Members will be from SC/ ST/ OBC/ Minorities and women.
  - The Chairperson of the Lokpal should be either the former Chief Justice of India or the former Judge of Supreme Court or an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability.
- The **term of office** for Lokpal Chairman and Members is 5 years or till the age of 70 years.
- **Jurisdiction of Lokpal** includes Prime Minister, Ministers, members of Parliament, Groups A, B, C and D officers and officials of Central Government.
  - However, the jurisdiction of the Lokpal included the Prime Minister except on allegations of corruption relating to international relations, security, the public order, atomic energy and space.
  - The Lokpal does not have jurisdiction over Ministers and MPs in the matter of anything said in Parliament or a vote given there.

## Way Forward

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- **Strengthen oversight institutions** to ensure resources reach those most in need. Anti-corruption authorities and oversight institutions must have sufficient funds, resources and independence to perform their duties.
- **Publish relevant data and guarantee access to information** to ensure the public receives easy, accessible, timely and meaningful information.
- All agencies should cooperate to eradicate corruption. **Preventive corruption measures** must be appreciated and adopted as "**Prevention is better than cure**".

**Source: PIB**

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## Double Mutant Coronavirus Variant

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### Why in News

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A unique “**double mutant**” coronavirus variant with a combination of mutations, not seen anywhere else in the world, has been found in India.

## Key Points

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- **Meaning of Mutation:**

- **Mutation** is an **alteration in the genetic material (the genome)** of a cell of a living organism or of a virus that is more or less permanent and that can be transmitted to the cell’s or the virus’s descendants.
- The genomes of organisms are all composed of **Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA)**, whereas viral genomes can be of **DNA or Ribo Nucleic Acid (RNA)**.

- **Double Mutant:**

- **Genome sequencing** of a section of virus samples by the **Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG)**, revealed the presence of **two mutations, E484Q and L452R** together, in virus samples from states such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Punjab and Gujarat.
- The INSACOG will submit details of this variant to a global repository called **Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (GISAID)** and, if it merits, classify it as a **Variant of Concern (VOC)**.

So far, only three global VOCs have been identified: the **U.K. variant** (B.1.1.7), **the South African** (B.1.351) and the Brazilian (P.1) lineage.

## Variant of Concern

These are variants for which there is evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures.

- **Challenges of Double Mutant:**

- The double mutation in key areas of the **virus’ spike protein** may increase the risks and allow the virus to escape the immune system.  
The spike protein is the part of the virus that it uses to penetrate human cells.
- Presence of a VOC or suspected VOC does not automatically mean that they are causing the outbreak, but rather suggests challenges to **public health measures for containment**.
- While the double mutants have been associated with a **reduction in vaccine efficacy as well as infectivity**, their combined effect and biological implication has not yet been understood.

- **Other Variant:**
  - Also genome variation studies from Kerala have **revealed the presence of other mutations.**
    - It is associated with the ability to help the **coronavirus evade antibodies.**
  - The **N440K mutation** that is associated with immune escape has also been reported from 16 other countries, including the UK, Denmark, Singapore, Japan and Australia.
- **Solution:**
  - It would require the same epidemiological and public health response of increased testing, comprehensive tracking of close contacts, prompt isolation of positive cases & contacts as well as treatment as per “National Treatment Protocol” by the States/UTs.
- **Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG):**
  - INSACOG is a multi-laboratory, multi-agency, pan-India network to monitor genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2.
  - It helps in the understanding of how the virus spreads and evolves.
  - Genomic surveillance can generate a rich source of information for tracking pathogen transmission and evolution on both national and international levels.

## Genomic Sequencing

- It is a testing process to map the entire genetic code of an organism, in this case, the virus.
- The genetic code of the virus works like its instruction manual.
- Mutations in viruses are common but most of them are insignificant and do not cause any change in their ability to transmit or cause serious infection.
- But some mutations, like the ones in the UK or South Africa variant lineages, can make the virus more infectious and in some cases even deadlier.

## Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data

- The Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (GISAID) Initiative promotes the rapid sharing of data from **all influenza viruses and the coronavirus causing Covid-19**
- The fast and open sharing of genetic sequences has allowed researchers to continuously track the spread of the virus.
- GISAID has also catalysed the development of diagnostic kits, prototype viruses for research, and medical countermeasures like vaccines and antibodies.

- The GISAID platform was launched on the occasion of the Sixty-first **World Health Assembly** in May 2008.

Since its launch, GISAID has played an essential role in the sharing of data among the **World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centers and National Influenza Centers** for the bi-annual influenza vaccine virus recommendations by the **WHO Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS)**.

**Source:TH**

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## **Suez Canal**

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### **Why in News**

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A large cargo ship named 'Ever Given' got stuck near the southern end of the Suez Canal due to a mishap caused by bad weather.

This is causing a huge jam of vessels at either end of the vital international trade artery.

### **Key Points**

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- **About:**
  - The Suez Canal is an **artificial sea-level waterway** running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez in **Egypt**, to **connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea**.
  - The canal **separates the African continent from Asia**.
  - It provides the **shortest maritime route** between Europe and the lands lying around the Indian and western Pacific oceans.
  - It is **one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes**, carrying over **12% of world trade by volume**.
    - It provides **a crucial link for oil, natural gas and cargo** being shipped from East to West.
    - As per Suez Canal Authority (SCA) data, in 2020, nearly **19,000 ships**, or an average of **51.5 ships per day**, with a net **tonnage of 1.17 billion tonnes** passed through the canal.
  - The canal is **a major source of income for Egypt's economy**, with the African country earning USD 5.61 billion in revenues from it last year.

In **2015**, Egypt announced plans to further expand the Suez Canal, aiming to reduce waiting times and double the number of ships that can use the canal daily by **2023**.

- **History:**

- The Suez Canal is actually the **first canal that directly links the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea**. It was **opened for navigation in November 1869**.

- The 150-year-old canal was **controlled by British and French interests in its initial years**, but was **nationalised in 1956 by Egypt**.

**Suez Crisis**, international crisis in the Middle East, precipitated in July 1956, when the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal. The canal had been owned by the Suez Canal Company, which was controlled by French and British interests.

- The Canal **was closed five times**; the last time was the most serious one since it lasted for 8 years. The Canal was then reopened for navigation in June 1975.



Source IE

Sundarbans



## Why in News

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Promises related to development of Sundarbans are being made by different political parties, ahead of West Bengal assembly elections.

Sundarbans region was badly damaged by **Cyclone Amphan** in 2020.

## Key Points

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- It is a **vast contiguous mangrove forest ecosystem** in the coastal region of Bay of Bengal **spread over India and Bangladesh** on the **delta (world's largest)** of the **Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers**.

It **contains the world's largest mangrove forests**.

- Much of the area has long had the status of a forest reserve, but **conservation efforts in India** were stepped up with the **creation of the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve in 1973**.
- **Sundarbans National Park**, established in **1984**, constitutes a core region within the tiger reserve; it was **designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987**.
- Sunderbans was designated as a **Biosphere Reserve** by UNESCO in 2001.
- **Sundarban Wetland**, India was recognised as the '**Wetland of International Importance**' under the **Ramsar Convention** in January 2019.
- **Sunderban National Park** is known for its wide range of fauna, including 260 bird species and is home to many rare and globally threatened wildlife species such as the **Estuarine Crocodile**, Royal Bengal Tiger, Water Monitor Lizard, **Gangetic Dolphin** and **Olive Ridley Turtles**.
- The **Sunderbans Delta is the only mangrove forest in the world inhabited by tigers**.

For its preservation, Discovery India and **World Wide Fund (WWF)** India partnered with the Government of West Bengal and local communities in the Sundarbans in 2019.



## 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.
- Among the states and Union Territories, **West Bengal has the highest percentage of area under total Mangrove cover** followed by Gujarat and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- The **India State of Forest Report** gives the data about mangroves and their conditions in the country.

**Source: TH**

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## Shigmotsav: Goa

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### Why in News

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The **Goa government** has limited the **Shigmotsav (Shigmo festivities)** parades to three locations only (Panaji, Ponda and Mapusa), owing to rising cases of **Covid-19** in the state.

### Key Points

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- **About:**
  - Shigmo is the celebration of a ‘rich, **golden harvest of paddy**’ by the **tribal communities** of Goa.
  - Agricultural communities including the **Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips** celebrate the festival that **also marks the onset of spring**.
- **Two Variants of the Festival:**
  - **Dhakto Shigmo:** It is celebrated by the rural population, farmers and the labour class.
  - **Vhadlo Shigmo:** It is of greater importance and is celebrated by everyone.
- **Celebrations:**
  - **Time:**

Shigmo celebrations **last over a fortnight** in the months of **Phalgun-Chaitra** months of the Hindu calendar that **correspond with March-April** every year.
  - **Invocation of Deities:**

The festival begins with ‘**Naman**’ that is the **invocation of the local folk deities** on the village ‘**maand**’ or the **village stage** to the beats of **percussion instruments** like the Ghumat, Dhol, Mhadle and Tashe by the male folk.

It is called the ‘**romta mell**’ that moves from one village to another.
  - **Dances:**

Folk dances like **Ghode Modni** (a dance of equestrian warriors), **Gopha** and **Phugadi**.
  - **Shigmo Street Parade:**
    - Shigmo street parade floats as the highlight. It is held as **an annual affair** in the state capital, Panjim and other major cities like Margao, Mapusa, Vasco, and Ponda.
    - These **colour-parties** usually see **people dressed in vibrant clothing performing traditional folk dances** to depict the **historical legacy of the Maratha War that backs this festival**.
    - The float parades have, over the years, been a draw for tourists both domestic and international.
- **Other Names:**

Shigmo is celebrated all over India but in different names:

  - **North India** - Holi.
  - **Assam and Bengal** - Dolyatra.
  - **South India** - Kamadahan.
  - **Maharashtra** - Shimga.

**Source: IE**

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