



News Analysis (29 Apr, 2020)

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XI Petersberg Climate Dialogue

Why in News

Recently, the **Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change** attended the **11th Petersberg Climate Dialogue**.

The dialogue was **held virtually for the first time** in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key Points

- **Petersberg Climate Dialogue**
 - It has been **hosted by Germany since 2010** to provide a **forum for informal high-level political discussions**, focusing both on **international climate negotiations** and the **advancement of climate action**.
 - The virtual XI Petersberg Climate Dialogue was **co-chaired by Germany and the United Kingdom (UK)** and was attended by about 30 countries including India.
 - The UK is the incoming Presidency of the 26th Conference of Parties (COP 26) to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change** (UNFCCC).
 - **COP 25** was held at **Madrid, Spain in December 2019**.
 - This year's dialogue was crucial because of the efforts to contain coronavirus as well as countries preparing to move into the **implementation phase of the Paris Agreement 2015** in the **post-2020 period**.

- **India's Contributions in the Dialogue:**
 - India **expressed solidarity with the world** as it combats the Covid-19 pandemic and **emphasised on adopting more sustainable consumption patterns** in line with the requirement of sustainable lifestyles.
 - India **suggested having climate technology as an open source** available to all countries at affordable prices.
 - India **stressed on climate finance** and urged to plan for 1 trillion USD in grants to the developing world immediately.
 - India **highlighted its Nationally Determined Contributions** spanning a ten-year time frame and in compliance with the **temperature goal** of the Paris Agreement.
 - India **focused on the opportunity to accelerate renewable energy deployment** and create new green jobs in the renewable energy and energy efficiency sector.

Paris Agreement 2015

- **Parties to UNFCCC** agreed to **strive to limit the rise in global warming** to well **under 2 degrees Celsius**, over **pre-industrial levels, by 2100**, under Paris Agreement 2015.
- **Nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** were conceived at the Paris summit which require each Party to prepare, communicate and maintain successive NDCs that it intends to achieve.
- Parties shall **pursue domestic mitigation measures**, with the aim of achieving the objectives of such contributions.
- Paris Agreement **replaced** earlier agreement to deal with climate change, **Kyoto Protocol**.

Kyoto Protocol

- It was an **international agreement** linked to the UNFCCC, which committed its parties by **setting internationally binding emission reduction targets**.
- It was adopted in **Kyoto, Japan in 1997** and entered into **force in 2005**.
- It recognized that **developed countries are principally responsible** for the current **high levels of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions** in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity.
- The detailed rules for the implementation of the Protocol were adopted at **COP-7 in Marrakesh, in 2001** and are referred to as the **Marrakesh Accords**.
 - **Kyoto Protocol Phase-1 (2005-12)** gave the target of cutting down emissions by 5%.
 - **Phase-2 (2013-20)** gave the target of reducing emissions by at least 18% by the industrialized countries.

Source: PIB

USCIRF Annual Report-2020

Why In News

Recently, **the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** has downgraded India to the lowest ranking of “**Countries of Particular Concern**” (CPC) in its 2020 report on religious freedom.

- USCIRF has **placed India alongside** China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. India was categorised as a “**Tier 2 country**” in last year’s listing.
- This is the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in the CPC category.

Key Points

- Designation of the CPC is the top tier recommendation by the USCIRF when it comes to **violation of international religious freedom**. It is followed by **Special Watch List Countries** for severe violations.
- **Reasons:**
 - **India took a sharp downward turn in 2019**, which included specific concerns about the **Citizenship Amendment Act**, the proposed **National Register for Citizens**, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.
 - Indian government used its parliamentary majority to institute **national-level policies violating religious freedom of minorities**, especially for Muslims. Earlier, the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) had criticised the Indian government** for “growing Islamophobia” in the country.
- **Steps suggested to U.S:**
 - The U.S. government should take stringent action against India under the “**International Religious Freedom Act**” (IRFA).
 - The **International Religious Freedom Act of 1998** was passed to promote religious freedom **as a foreign policy of the United States**.
 - It **aims to promote greater religious freedom** in countries which engage in or tolerate violations of religious freedom, and to advocate on the behalf of individuals persecuted for their religious beliefs and activities in foreign countries.
 - To impose **targeted sanctions** on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom.
- **India’s stand:** The **Indian government has rejected** the USCIRF report and termed it “**biased and tendentious**”.

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

- USCIRF is an **independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission**, dedicated to **defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad**.
- The USCIRF is also an **advisory body** to the US Congress.
- USCIRF reviews **the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations** and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.
- It is **Headquartered at Washington DC**.

Source: TH

Human Challenge Trials

Why in News

In the race to **develop a vaccine for the novel coronavirus**, many people have volunteered to take part in the **Human Challenge Trials (HCTs)**.

It involves **intentionally infecting volunteers** with the novel coronavirus, in order to **speed up the vaccination development**.

Key Points

- **Vaccine Development**
 - In most of the regulatory regimes, vaccines take several **years to develop** and their development typically proceeds through **three phases of clinical trials**.
 - **Phase 1:** Small groups of people receive the trial vaccine.
 - **Phase 2:** Clinical study is expanded and the vaccine is given to people who have characteristics (such as age and physical health) similar to those for whom the new vaccine is intended.
 - **Phase 3:** Vaccine is given to several thousand people and tested for efficacy and safety. During this phase, participants either receive the vaccine or a placebo.

Placebo is anything which **looks like real treatment but it is actually not**. For example- sugar pills and saline injections.
 - The vaccine's **efficacy is determined by comparing the prevalence of infection** in the **group that was administered the vaccine** with the **one which received a placebo**.
 - The **hypothesis** that those in the vaccine group will be infected significantly less is thus tested.

- **Human Challenge Trials**

- Under HCTs, participants of both the vaccine group and placebo group are **deliberately exposed to the infection** after their **consent** and thus are **challenged by the disease organism**.
- HCTs are **not new** and they are usually carried out in developing medications for **diseases** which are considered **less lethal and have been better understood** by scientists over the years like **malaria**.
- Few scientists have suggested **replacing the conventional Phase 3 testing** of vaccines **by controlled HCTs of Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2)** vaccine which can **accelerate the testing** and potential rollout of efficacious vaccines.

Such trials **may reduce many months from the licensure process**, making efficacious vaccines available **more quickly** and will also **require significantly less number of people** than regular Phase 3 trials.

- **Ethical Concerns**

- HCTs for Covid-19 have been questioned by critics because it is a **potentially deadly disease for even those who are less at risk**, and has **not been studied fully yet**.
- In 2016, the **World Health Organisation** (WHO) emphasised on the **ethical framework of the challenge studies** and also highlighted the **importance of informed consent**.
- Human challenge studies should be **conducted with abundant forethought, caution, and oversight**. The **value of the information** to be gained should clearly **justify the risks to human subjects**.

Source: IE

No Improvement in Ganga Water Quality

Why in News

According to a report published by the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**, the pollution in Ganga has not reduced significantly during lockdown.

The CPCB assessed pollution a week before lockdown and weeks after at 36 locations in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Key Points

- The **Dissolved Oxygen (DO)** concentration **improved marginally**.
- There is a **gradual increase in Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD)** levels towards downstream stretches of the river, with the maximum values in West Bengal.
- There is **marginal reduction in Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)** levels which is attributed due to the stoppage of industrial activities.

- The **pollution in Ganga is highest in Uttar Pradesh.**
- **Causes of Pollution:** Domestic wastewater from 97 towns situated near river Ganga, and industrial effluents, are the main sources of water pollution in the river.
- There was **notable improvement in water quality in the Yamuna.**

Dissolved Oxygen

- Dissolved Oxygen is a **measure of the amount of free oxygen available in river systems.**
- Presence of **organic and inorganic wastes** in water **decreases** the **dissolved oxygen** content of the water.
- A number of **factors** like surface turbulence, photosynthetic activity, O₂ consumption by organisms and decomposition of organic matter are the factors which determine the amount of DO present in water.
- The **quality of water increases** with an **increase in DO levels.**

Biochemical Oxygen Demand

- **Water pollution by organic wastes** is measured in terms of Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD).
- BOD is the **amount of dissolved oxygen needed by bacteria** in decomposing the organic wastes present in water. It is expressed in milligrams of oxygen per litre of water.
- The **higher value of BOD** indicates **low DO** content of water.
- Since BOD is **limited to biodegradable materials**, it is not a reliable method of measuring water pollution.

Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)

COD measures the amount of oxygen in parts per million required to oxidise **organic (biodegradable and non-biodegradable)** and **oxidizable inorganic** compounds in the water sample.

The Ganga River System

- The headwaters of the Ganga called the '**Bhagirathi**' is fed by the Gangotri Glacier and joined by the **Alaknanda** at Devprayag in Uttarakhand.
- At **Haridwar**, Ganga emerges from the mountains to the plains.
- The Ganga is joined by many **tributaries** from the Himalayas, a few of them being major rivers such as the Yamuna, the Ghaghara, the Gandak and the Kosi.
- The Ganga bifurcates at Farakka Barrage; the **Bhagirathi-Hooghly** (a distributary) flows southwards through the deltaic plains to the Bay of Bengal. The mainstream flows southwards into Bangladesh and is joined by the Brahmaputra leading to the **Sunderbans Delta.**

THE GANGA RIVER MAP



Central Pollution Control Board

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) of India is a **statutory organisation under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.**
- It was established in 1974 under the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.**
- The CPCB is also entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

Source: TH

NITI Aayog Questions GTI

Why in News

A report compiled by NITI Aayog has **questioned the methodology** adopted by the **Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)**, to rank **India as the seventh worst terrorism affected country.**

- IEP is an **Australian based institute** which releases the **annual Global Terrorism Index (GTI)**.
- It is based on **four parameters**:
 - Number of terrorist incidents per year.
 - Number of fatalities caused by terrorists per year.
 - Number of injuries caused by terrorists per year.
 - Total property damage caused by terrorism per year.

Key Points

- In **GTI 2019**, India has moved to the **seventh** position from the **previous year's eighth** position.
 - **Countries Ahead:** Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan and Somalia. (top 6).
 - **Countries Behind:** Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Palestine and Lebanon. (at different ranks)
- NITI Aayog was being asked to **track various global indices**. The **purpose** was to see:
 - How they can **help drive reforms and growth**.
 - Which of these **require some amount of engagement with the publishing agency** to make the indices **more relevant**.
 - In **2017**, India challenged at the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)**, the country's ranking in a **Global Slavery Report** published by the **Walk Free Foundation, Australia**.
- **Use of GTI scores in other rankings**:
 - **Direct Use:** In **Global Peace Index**, the **Global Slavery Report**
 - **Indirect Use:** In the **World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness and Global Competitiveness Indices** and compilation of **Safe Cities Index** by the **Economist Intelligence Unit**.
 - The position in the global indices **impact investments and other global opportunities**.

Highlights of the Report

- The NITI Aayog **questioned the rankings** as well as the **funding of the IEP**. The funding source and the list of donors **has not been revealed**.

- **Findings:**

- The GTD is based **solely on unclassified media articles**, with more than 100 structured variables such as each attack's location, tactics and weapons, perpetrators, casualties and consequences etc.
- The organisation has **only 12 full-time staff, 12 full-time equivalent staff and 6 volunteers.**

It is something to focus on how the organization is able to annually collect, meaningfully analyse and disseminate data about 163 countries in the Global Terrorism and Peace Indices and provide country wise national peace reports with such **minimal resources.**

- **Criticism of the Methodology:**

- The GTD **lacks mechanisms to engage with Governments** or to further **classify and verify open source media reports** through Government databases in any of the 163 countries it covers.
- The **lack of a universally accepted definition of terrorism** leads to **ambiguity.**

The Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) is pending in the United Nations General Assembly since 2014.

- The **definition of mass shootings** used in the GTI is **limited to indiscriminate rampages in public places resulting in four or more victims killed by the attacker.**

It **leaves out lone wolf attacks** which may have lesser fatalities and more injuries, and **attacks foiled by security and intelligence agencies.**

- The NITI Aayog report concluded that the GTI has **low direct value for policymakers** due to the **absence of a robust data collection and analysis methodology** and any engagement with Governments facing the scourge of terrorism. Given the reasons, it **cannot be used as an aid to understand and alleviate challenges** to countries from domestic and cross border terrorism.

Source: TH

BRICS Foreign Ministers Meet

Why in News

Recently, the **External Affairs Minister of India attended the BRICS Foreign Ministers meet** through video conferencing.

This **meeting was convened by Russia** to discuss the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Key Points

- BRICS nations have set up a "**special loan instrument**" of **\$15 billion fund** for member nations to revive the economy amid Covid-19 pandemic
- BRICS nations exchanged views on **possible joint measures to be taken by the member states to counter Covid-19** and overcome the financial, trade, economic and social consequences of the pandemic.
- **India** showcased its **pharmaceutical support to around 85 countries** to deal with the viral infection. It also highlighted the **need for reforms in the multilateral bodies like the United Nations.**

The UN Security Council members are currently discussing draft resolutions on the Covid-19 pandemic.

BRICS

- **BRICS** is an **acronym** for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.**
 - In **2001**, the British Economist **Jim O'Neill** coined the term **BRIC** to describe the four emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
 - The grouping was **formalised** during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers in **2006.**
 - South Africa was invited to join BRIC in December 2010, after which the group adopted the acronym BRICS.
- It comprises 42% of the world's population, has **23%** of the **global GDP** and around 17% of the world trade.
- The **chairmanship** of the forum is **rotated annually** among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- The **BRICS Leaders' Summit** is convened **annually.**
- During the Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza (2014) the leaders signed the Agreement establishing the **New Development Bank (NDB).** They also signed the **BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement.**

Source: TH

\$1.5 Billion ADB Loan to India

Why in News

Recently, the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** has provided a \$1.5 billion loan to India to fund India's immediate response to the **Covid-19 pandemic.**

Earlier, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) **had assured Indian government of \$2.2 billion (about Rs 16,500 crore)** support to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key Points

- The loan will help the Central government to focus on immediate priorities such as:
 - Covid-19 containment and prevention.
 - Social protection for the poor and economically vulnerable sections of the society.
- The loan has been provided under ADB's **Covid-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES) Program**. The CARES Program
 - **support the government's stimulus package** geared to expand existing social assistance programs,
 - boost resources for Covid-19 prevention and control,
 - safeguard productive sectors and workers from the economic downturn.
- The CARES Program is **funded through the Covid-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO)** under ADB's Countercyclical Support Facility.

CPRO was introduced as part of a \$20 billion package approved by ADB on 13th April, 2020 to assist its developing member countries in their fight against Covid-19.
- The CARES Program will be **implemented through a country engagement framework** focused on policy dialogue and monitoring of the government's countercyclical strategy and measures.

Asian Development Bank

- ADB is a **regional development bank** established on **19th December 1966**.
- ADB now has **68 members, 49 from within Asia**.
- As of 31 December 2019, ADB's five largest shareholders are **Japan and the United States (each with 15.6% of total shares)**, the People's Republic of China (6.4%), India (6.3%), and Australia (5.8%).
- It aims to promote social and economic development in Asia.
- ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.
- ADB is **headquartered in Manila, Philippines**.

Source: TH

Anti-corruption Law Covers Deemed Universities

Why in News

The **Supreme Court** has held that **bribery and corruption in a deemed university can be tried under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988**.

It has said that **individuals, authorities connected to a deemed university** come under the definition of ‘**public servant**’ and can be tried and punished under the anti-corruption law.

Key Points

- The Supreme Court observed that the **officials of a deemed university do not perform any less of a public duty** than their counterparts in other universities.
- Deemed universities come within the ambit of the **term ‘university’ in Section 2(c)(xi) of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988.**
 - A deemed institution under the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act of 1956 has the **same common public duty like a university to confer academic degrees**, which are recognised in the society.
- The object of the PC Act was not only to prevent the social evil of bribery and corruption, **but also to make the same applicable to individuals who might conventionally not be considered public servants.**

Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988

Section 2(c)(xi) of the Prevention of Corruption Act states that a “**public servant**” includes “any person who is a vice-chancellor or member of any governing body, professor, reader, lecturer or any other teacher or employee, by whatever designation called, of any university.

Deemed University

- The status of deemed-to-be-university is awarded in accordance with the **Section 3 of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956.**
- An Institution of Higher Education, other than universities, working at a very high standard in a specific area of study, can be declared by the **Central Government on the advice of the UGC** as an Institution ‘deemed-to-be-university’.
- Institutions that are ‘deemed-to-be-university’ **enjoy academic status and privileges of a university.**

Source: TH

Jal Shakti Abhiyan

Why in News

The Centre has decided to utilize the forthcoming monsoon season to expand its water conservation efforts under the **Jal Shakti Abhiyan.**

Such interventions would **ensure water source sustainability** in rural areas and would strengthen the ongoing **Jal Jeevan Mission** being implemented by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

Key Points

- The Jal Shakti Abhiyan was launched by the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** in 2019.
- It is a **campaign for water conservation** and **water security** in the country through a collaborative effort of various ministries of the Government of India and state governments.
- The **focus** of the campaign is on **water stressed** districts and blocks.
- The **important water conservation interventions** are :
 - Water conservation and rainwater harvesting,
 - Renovation of traditional and other water bodies/tanks,
 - Reuse of water and recharging of structures,
 - Watershed development and
 - Intensive afforestation.
- Last year Jal Shakti Abhiyan covered 256 water stressed districts across the country. More than seventy- five lakh traditional and other water bodies and tanks were renovated and around a crore water conservation & rainwater harvesting structures were created.

Jal Jeevan Mission

- Jal Jeevan Mission, a central government initiative under the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**, aims to ensure access of piped water for every household in rural India.
- Government of India has **restructured and subsumed** the **National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) into Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)** to provide Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household i.e., **Har Ghar Nal Se Jal (HGNSJ)**.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission is **based on various water conservation efforts** like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of greywater (wastewater from sinks, kitchen) for agriculture and source sustainability. It will be based on a **community approach** to water.
- The Prime Minister has appealed to all states to generate maximum community participation in the form of '**Jan Andolan**' to achieve the target of functional household tap connection by 2024.

Source: PIB

Raja Ravi Varma

Why in News

29th April is the **birth anniversary** of the famed **Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma** (1848-1906).

He is remembered for giving Indians their western, classical representations of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Key Points

- **Early days and training:**
 - Varma was born into **an aristocratic family in Travancore (Kerala)**.
 - At the age of 14, Varma was **patronised by Ayilyam Thirunal**, the then **ruler of Travancore**, and went on to receive training in **watercolours from Ramaswamy Naidu, the royal painter**.
- **Contributions:**
 - Made around **7,000 paintings**.
 - Apart from painting Hindu mythological figures, Varma also made **portraits of many Indians as well as Europeans**.
 - Varma worked on both **portrait and landscape paintings**, and is considered **among the first Indian artists to use oil paints**.
 - He continues to be regarded as the most important representative of the **Europeanised school of painting in India**.
- **Lithographic press:** He mastered the **reproduction of his work** on the lithographic press— through which his paintings spread far and wide.
 - Lithographic press is a method of printing based on the principle that **oil and water do not mix**.
 - Paintings were earlier sent to Germany and Austria to be lithographed.
 - Varma set up his **own printing press in Maharashtra** — first in Ghatkopar and eventually in Lonavala in 1894.
 - Through his printing press, Varma's **paintings travelled into the prayer and living rooms of working-class homes**.
- **Famous works:** Damayanti Talking to a Swan, Shakuntala Looking for Dushyanta, Nair Lady Adorning Her Hair, and Shantanu and Matsyagandha.
- **Awards and Honours:**
 - In 1904, the British colonial government awarded Varma with the **Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal**.
 - In 2013, a **crater on the planet Mercury** was named in his honour.



Source: IE

South Asia Seasonal Climate Outlook Forum

Why in News

The **spatial forecast** which shows wide variations in rainfall across India has been **provided by the South Asia Seasonal Climate Outlook Forum.**

Key Points

- South Asian nations, **supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**, have been conducting the **SASCOF since 2010.**
- SASCOF is a consortium of meteorologists and hydrological experts from South Asian countries, including **Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Maldives and Myanmar.**
- They work collectively to **issue regional forecasts** and the team **releases forecasts for the Southwest and Northeast monsoon seasons, every year.**
The experts usually meet ahead of preparing the forecasts, but it **was called off in 2020 in the wake of Covid-19.**

World Meteorological Organization

- The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is an **intergovernmental organization** with a membership of 193 Member States and Territories. **India** is a member.

- Established by the ratification of the WMO Convention on 23 March 1950, WMO became the **specialized agency of the United Nations** for meteorology (weather and climate), operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences.
- It is **headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.**

Source: TH
