



## News Analysis (11 Jun, 2021)

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### AISHE-2020

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#### Why in News

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Recently, the Union Education Minister announced the release of the report of **All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)** 2019-20.

- This Report **provides key performance indicators** on the current status of **Higher education in the country**.
- It is the **10<sup>th</sup>** in the series of AISHE **annually released** by the Department of Higher Education.

#### Key Points

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- **Total Student Enrolment:**
  - In the **last five years from 2015-16 to 2019-20**, there has been a **growth of 11.4%** in student enrolment.
  - Total Enrolment in Higher Education stands at **3.85 crore in 2019-20** as compared to **3.74 crore in 2018-19**, registering a **growth of 11.36 lakh (3.04 %)**. **Uttar Pradesh has highest student enrolment** in India, it has **49.1% male and 50.9% female** students followed by **Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra**.
- **Gross Enrolment Ratio:**
  - The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) **increased by a minuscule 0.8%** in 2019-20. **GER is the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage** of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education.
  - The percentage of students belonging to the eligible age group enrolled in higher education in **2019-20 is 27.1%** against **26.3% in 2018-19** and **24.3% in 2014-2015**.

- **Female Enrolment:**
  - There has been an overall **increase of over 18%** in female enrolment in higher education from **2015-16 to 2019-20**.
  - However, the **share of girl students is lowest in institutes of national importance** while female participation in **professional courses is lower in comparison to academic courses**.
- **Gender Parity Index:**

**Gender Parity Index (GPI)** in Higher Education in **2019-20 is 1.01 against 1.00 in 2018-19** indicating an **improvement in the relative access to higher education for females** of eligible age group compared to males.

A GPI of 1 indicates parity between the sexes; a GPI that varies between 0 and 1 typically means a disparity in favour of males; whereas a **GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favour of females**.
- **Teacher's:**
  - Total Number of Teachers stands at 15,03,156 comprising **57.5% male and 42.5% female**.
  - **Pupil Teacher Ratio** in Higher Education in 2019-20 is **26**.
- **Attractive Disciplines:**

Nearly 85% of the students (2.85 crore) were enrolled in the six major disciplines such as **Humanities, Science, Commerce, Engineering & Technology, Medical Science and IT & Computer**.
- **Recent Initiatives:**
  - **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020:**

It aims at increasing the GER in higher education to **50% by 2035**.
  - **Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC):**

It aims at improving the **research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions** by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian institutions and the best institutions in the world.
  - **Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA):**

It aims at providing **strategic funding to higher educational institutions** throughout the country.
  - **Prime Minister's Research Fellowship (PMRF):**

It will attract the talent pool of the country to **doctoral (Ph.D) programmes for carrying out research** in cutting edge science and technology domains, with focus on national priorities.

Source:PIB

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**Rengma Nagas Demand Autonomous District Council**

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**Why in News**

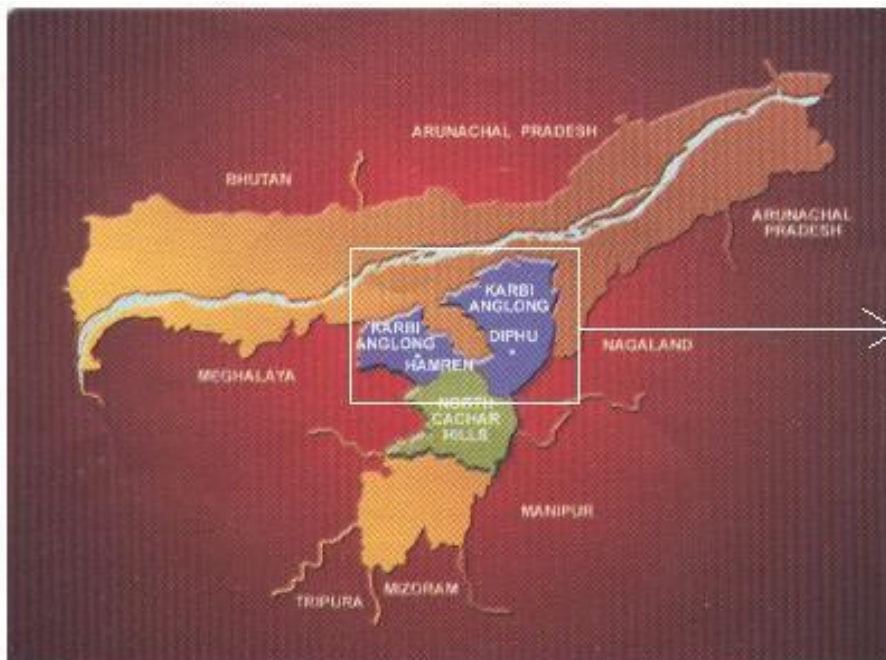
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The Rengma Naga Peoples' Council (RNPC) or **Rengma Nagas** have **demanding an Autonomous District Council (ADC)** in Assam.

- The Central and the State governments recently upgraded the **Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC)** and the **North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC)** to territorial councils like the **Bodoland Territorial Council**.

The '**status of territorial council**' will provide **more autonomy and financial grant** to them.

- It is alleged that the creation of these tribal councils deprived the Rengma Nagas, the "legitimate owners", of the land. Both the **KAAC** and the **NCHAC share boundaries with Nagaland**.



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## Key Points

- **About the Rengma Naga Tribe:**
  - **Found in:**

Rengma is a **Naga tribe** found in **Nagaland, Assam** and **Arunachal Pradesh**.
  - **History:**
    - The **first official recording of the Rengma Nagas staying in Assam's Karbi Hills (then known as Mikir Hills)** was made in 1855 by Major John Butler, a British officer posted in the Northeastern region.
    - Butler recorded that the **Rengmas in Karbi Anglong had migrated there from the Naga Hills in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century**, abandoned many of their tribal customs and married within the local communities.
  - **Festival:** The harvest festival of the Rengmas is called **Ngada**.

- **Autonomous District Council (ADC):**

- **About:**

- The **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution deals with the administration of the **tribal areas** in the four northeastern states of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**.

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

- The tribals have been given freedom to exercise legislative and executive powers through an **autonomous regional council and ADCs**.

- **Composition of Autonomous Councils:**

- Each autonomous district and regional council **consists of not more than 30 members**, of which four are nominated by the governor and the rest via elections. All of them **remain in power for a term of five years**.
- However, the **Bodoland Territorial Council is an exception** as it can **constitute up to 46 members**.

- **Governor's Control:**

- Despite various degrees of autonomy, the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule area **does not fall outside the executive authority of the state concerned**.
- The **governor is empowered to organise and re-organise** the autonomous districts.

- **Applicability of Central and State Laws:**

The **Acts passed by Parliament** and **state legislatures** may or may not be levied in these regions unless the **President and the governor gives her or his approval**, with or without modifications in the laws for the autonomous regions.

- **Civil and Criminal Judicial Powers:** The Councils have also been endowed with wide civil and criminal judicial powers, for example **establishing village courts** etc.

However, the jurisdiction of these councils is subject to the jurisdiction of the concerned High Court.

- **Existing Autonomous Councils:** The sixth schedule to the Constitution includes **10 autonomous district councils in 4 states**. These are:

- **Assam:** Bodoland Territorial Council, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and North Cachar Hills/Dima Hasao Autonomous Council.
- **Meghalaya:** Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council and Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council.
- **Tripura:** Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council.
- **Mizoram:** Chakma Autonomous District Council, Lai Autonomous District Council, Mara Autonomous District Council.

- **Arguments of Rengma Naga Peoples' Council (RNPC):**

- **Rengmas** were the **first tribal people in Assam to have encountered the British in 1839.**

But the existing **Rengma Hills** was eliminated from the political map of the State and replaced with that of **Mikir Hills (now Karbi Anglong)** in **1951.**

- The Rengmas gave shelter to the **Ahom** refugees during the Burmese invasions of Assam in 1816 and 1819.

The **Ahom** are an ethnic group from the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

- The **Rengma Hills and Mikir Hills** were **two separate entities until 1951.** The **Rengma Hills** was partitioned in **1963** between Assam and Nagaland.

- Karbis have no history in the Rengma Hills.
- At the time of creation of Nagaland State, the **Karbhis** were known as **Mikirs till 1976.**

They were the **indigeneous tribal people of Mikir Hills.**

- The **Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC)** population is around 12 lakh and the Karbis constitute only 3 lakh, the remaining are non-Karbhis, including the Rengma Nagas, whose population is around 22,000.

- **NSCN (I-M) Stand:**

- The **National Socialist Council of Nagaland or NSCN (Isak-Muivah)** has said that the Rengma issue was one of the important agendas of the “**Indo-Naga political talks**” and no authority should go far enough to override their interests.

- NSCN (IM) had signed a Naga Peace Accord with the Government of India in August 2015, but the final accord is yet to be finalised.

One of the most contentious demands of the NSCN (IM) was the **creation of a unified Naga homeland, called 'Greater Nagalim'** by integrating the Naga-inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal with Nagaland.

Source: TH

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## **Maldives' UNGA Presidency**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, the Maldives' Foreign Minister **Abdulla Shahid** was elected the **President of the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA)** for 2021-22.

- The win was **welcomed by India** as Indian diplomats had been helping the Maldives and **India expects close cooperation with Maldives at the UN.**
- However, **the Maldives has made no decision** on opening an **Indian consulate in its southern Addu Atoll** even as the Indian Cabinet cleared a proposal for it.



## Key Points

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- **President of UNGA:**

- This is a **post held on an annual basis**, rotated amongst various regional groupings. The **76<sup>th</sup> session (2021-22) is the turn of the Asia-Pacific group**. This is the first time Maldives will be occupying the office of the President of UNGA.
- Maldives also sees it as a win for the 52-member **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**, which are battling climate change vulnerability and other developmental challenges.

- **Addu Atoll:**

Addu Atoll, also **known as Seenu Atoll**, is the **southernmost atoll of the Maldives**.

Apart from its **strategic location in the Indian Ocean**, Addu is the second largest city in the archipelago, home to over 30,000 people.

- **India's Stand:**

- India approved the opening of a new consulate in the Maldivian city of Addu, in reflection of the **importance India attaches to its ties with the strategically located island nation**.
- India's decision to expand its diplomatic presence in the Maldives comes amid **China's consistent efforts to increase its influence in the island nation**.
- Also Indian rationale for the consulate was **to help Addu residents with speedy visa services**.

- **Opposition of the Initiative:**

Some Maldivians **see a new consulate with suspicion**, especially on the heels of a USD 33-million **Maldivian police training facility** that **India is helping build in Addu**.

There is already an Indian Embassy in **Male**.

- **Geo-Strategic Importance of Maldives to India:**
  - **Maldives, a Toll Gate in Indian Ocean:**
    - Located at the southern and northern parts of this island chain lies the two important **sea lanes of communication (SLOCs)**.
    - These SLOCs are critical for maritime trade flow between the Gulf of Aden and **Gulf of Hormuz** in West Asia and the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia.
    - Nearly **50% of India's external trade and 80% of its energy imports transit these SLOCs in the Arabian Sea.**
  - **Part of Important Groupings:**

Besides, Maldives is a member of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** and the **South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)**.

## India - Maldives Relations

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- **Cooperation Between India & Maldives:**
  - **Security Cooperation:**
    - Through the decades, **India has rushed emergency assistance to the Maldives, whenever sought.**
    - In 1988, when armed mercenaries attempted a coup against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, **India sent paratroopers and Navy vessels** and restored the legitimate leadership under **Operation Cactus**.
    - India and Maldives conduct the joint military exercise '**Ekuverin**'.
  - **Disaster Management:**
    - The 2004 **tsunami** and the drinking water crisis in Male a decade later were other occasions when **India rushed assistance.**
    - The Maldives has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of the **Covid-19** assistance and **vaccines delivered** by India among India's all neighbouring countries.
    - When the world supply chains were blocked because of the pandemic, India continued to provide crucial commodities to the Maldives under **Mission SAGAR**.
  - **People To People Contact:**

**Maldivian students attend educational institutions in India** and patients fly here for superspeciality healthcare, aided by a liberal visa-free regime extended by India.
  - **Economic Cooperation:**

Tourism is the mainstay of Maldivian economy. Given the geographical limitations imposed on the Maldives, **India has exempted the nation from export curbs on essential commodities.**

- **Irritants in Relations:**

- **Political Instability:**

- India's major concern has been the **impact of political instability in the neighbourhood on its security and development.**
- The February **2015 arrest of Maldives' opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed on terrorism charges** and the consequent political crisis have posed a real diplomatic test for India's neighbourhood policy.

- **Radicalisation:**

- In the past decade or so, the number of **Maldivians drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS)** and Pakistan-based madrassas and jihadist groups has been **increasing.**
- Political instability and **socio-economic uncertainty** are the main drivers fuelling the rise of Islamist radicalism in the island nation.

- **China Angle:**

- China's strategic footprint in India's neighbourhood has increased. The Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in China's "**String of Pearls**" construct in South Asia.
- Also, the **Maldives have started using the China card to bargain with India.**

## Way Forward

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- It is hoped that **India in the UN Security Council and the Maldivian President of the General Assembly will work in tandem** as India pursues its goals for **multilateral reform, and re-energise the dormant process of effecting change in the old power structures in the global body.**
- In accordance with the **Neighbourhood First Policy** of the government, India remains a committed development partner for a stable, prosperous and peaceful Maldives.

### Source:TH

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## El Salvador Adopts Bitcoin as Legal Tender

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### Why in News

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**El Salvador, a small coastal country in Central America** has become the **first in the world** to adopt **Bitcoin**, as legal tender.

**Legal tender** is the **legally recognized money** within a given political jurisdiction.





## Key Points

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- **Bitcoin:**
  - **Introduction:**
    - Introduced in 2009, it is a type of **cryptocurrency** that enables instant payments to anyone.
      - **Cryptocurrency** is a specific type of **virtual currency**, which is decentralised and protected by cryptographic encryption techniques.
      - **Bitcoin, Ethereum, Ripple** are a few notable examples of cryptocurrencies.
    - Bitcoin is based on an **open-source protocol** and is not issued by any **central authority**.
  - **Use:**

Originally, Bitcoin was intended to provide an alternative to **fiat money** and become a universally accepted medium of exchange directly between two involved parties.

Fiat money is a government-issued currency that is not backed by a commodity such as gold.
- **Reason behind this Decision:**
  - **Loss on Remittances:**
    - **El Salvador** relies heavily on **money sent back from workers abroad**.
    - Bitcoin adoption may make these **remittances quicker and cheaper**.
  - **Boost Financial Inclusion:**

It is also expected to **boost financial inclusion** in their country as the majority of the population does not have access to formal banking channels.
- **Concerns:**

In the absence of a **central regulating authority**, legalizing bitcoin will have potential for **fraud and money laundering, high energy costs and extreme volatility**.

- **Implications for the Crypto World:**

- This could **potentially encourage** other **smaller countries with weaker economies** to open up to **crypto** as an alternative to **fiat currencies**, paving the way for mainstream future adoption worldwide.
- Already, **Venezuela and many African countries** have started using cryptocurrencies as a long term store of value, as their currencies are deflating quickly.

- **Some Lessons for India:**

- **Not a Instance for Monetary Policy:**

- El Salvador does not have its **own monetary policy**, hence, no local currency to protect. It runs on the monetary policy of the US Federal Reserve.

Therefore, any changes in Federal Reserve policies will definitely affect the Country. Hence, it is looking at such alternatives.

- Since, **India has its own currency and a central bank**, therefore coexistence of bitcoin and rupee side by side becomes difficult.

- **Impact on Remittances:**

The impact **Bitcoin has on remittance inflows** would be worth monitoring for India, which is home to the **largest remittance market in the world**.

According to a **World Bank report**, **India** received over **USD 83 billion** in remittances in **2020**.

- **Impact on Money Laundering:**

- The implication of this move for money laundering is unclear at the moment.
- Currently, El Salvador is not considered deficient under the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** money laundering requirements.
- However, with large scale cryptocurrency inflows and outflows, it would be expected that El Salvador would comply with the 2019 FATF guidance on Virtual Currencies.

- **India's Current Stand on Cryptocurrency:**

- In 2018, **The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** issued a circular preventing all banks from dealing in cryptocurrencies. This circular was declared unconstitutional by the **Supreme Court** in May 2020.
- Recently, the government has announced to introduce a bill; **Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021**, to create a sovereign digital currency and simultaneously ban all private cryptocurrencies.
- In India, the funds that have gone into the Indian blockchain start-ups account for less than 0.2% of the amount raised by the sector globally.
- The current approach towards cryptocurrencies makes it near-impossible for blockchain entrepreneurs and investors to acquire much economic benefit.

## Way Forward

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- The **overall takeaway** for India from the El Salvador case is **not** in the **monetary sense** at all but as an example of how far countries are willing to go to attract what they believe is the ultimate prize – **innovators and entrepreneurs working on this emerging sector**.
- This is the **wealth that India has definitely and has barely protected with policy**.
- While deliberations continue in India on the monetary and financial regulations around cryptocurrency, it is important that attention be paid to incentives for India's developers working on key innovations in the space.

**Source: IE**

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## **India's Ethanol Roadmap**

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### **Why in News**

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The central government has released an expert committee report on the **Roadmap for Ethanol Blending in India by 2025**.

The roadmap proposes a **gradual rollout of ethanol-blended fuel** to achieve E10 fuel supply by April 2022 and phased rollout of E20 from April 2023 to April 2025.

### **Key Points**

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- **About the Report:**

The **Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoP&NG)** had instituted an Expert Group to study the issues such as pricing of ethanol, matching pace of the automobile industry to manufacture vehicles with new engines with the supply of ethanol, pricing of such vehicles, fuel efficiency of different engines etc.

- **Ethanol Blending:**

- **About Ethanol:**

- It is one of the principal **biofuels**, which is naturally produced by the fermentation of sugars by yeasts or via petrochemical processes such as ethylene hydration.

- **Blending Target:**

- The Government of India has **advanced the target for 20% ethanol blending in petrol (also called E20) to 2025** from 2030.
    - **Currently, 8.5% of ethanol is blended with petrol** in India.

- **Objectives of Ethanol Blending:**

- **Energy Security:**

- Increased use of ethanol can help **reduce the oil import bill**. India's net import cost stands at USD 551 billion in 2020-21.
      - The E20 program **can save the country USD 4 billion (Rs 30,000 crore) per annum**.

- **Incentives for Farmers:**

- The oil companies procure ethanol from farmers that **benefits the sugarcane farmers**.
      - Further, the government plans to **encourage use of water-saving crops, such as maize**, to produce ethanol, and **production of ethanol from non-food feedstock**.

- **Impact on Emission:**

- Use of ethanol-blended petrol **decreases emissions such as carbon monoxide (CO), hydrocarbons (HC) and nitrogen oxides (NOx)**.
      - The **unregulated carbonyl emissions**, such as acetaldehyde emission **were, however, higher with E10 and E20** compared to normal petrol. However, these emissions were relatively lower.

- **Recommendations:**

- **Notifying Ethanol Blending Roadmap:** MoP&NG should immediately notify the plan for pan-India availability of E10 fuel by April, 2022 and its continued availability thereafter until 2025 for older vehicles, and launch of E20 in the country in phases from April, 2023 onwards so as to make E20 available by April, 2025.
- **Augmenting Infrastructure for Oil Marketing Companies:** OMCs will need to prepare for the projected requirement of ethanol storage, handling, blending and dispensing infrastructure.
- **Expediting Regulatory Clearances:** Currently, ethanol production plants/distilleries fall under the “Red category” and require environmental clearance under the Air and Water Acts for new and expansion projects.
  - This often takes a long time leading to delays.
  - While several steps have been taken to expedite Environment Clearances (EC) under **the Environment Protection Act** there are few areas of concern which if addressed, will facilitate early setting up of ethanol distillation capacities in the country.
- **Incentivising Ethanol Blended Vehicle:** Globally, vehicles compliant with higher ethanol blends are provided with tax benefits.

A similar approach may be followed so that the cost increase due to E20 compatible design may be absorbed to a certain extent, as is being done in some states for promoting **Electric Vehicles**.
- **Pricing of Ethanol Blended Gasoline:** For better acceptability of higher ethanol blends in the country, retail price of such fuels **should be lower than normal petrol** to compensate for the reduction in calorific value and incentivize switching to the blended fuel.

Tax breaks on ethanol as a fuel may be considered by the government.

### Initiatives Already Taken

- The **National Policy on Biofuels–2018**, provides an indicative target of 20% ethanol blending under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme by 2030.
- The **Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** has **mandated stickers on vehicles mentioning their E20, E85 or E100 compatibility**.
  - This will pave the way for flex fuel vehicles.
  - Flex fuel engines can run any ratio of blended petrol from E20 to E100.
- **E100 pilot project:** It has been inaugurated in Pune.

TVS Apache two-wheelers are designed to run on E80 or pure ethanol (E100).
- **Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana, 2019:** The scheme aims to create an ecosystem for setting up commercial projects and boost Research and Development in the 2G Ethanol sector.

- **GOBAR (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources) DHAN Scheme, 2018:** The scheme aims to positively impact village cleanliness and **generate wealth and energy** from cattle and organic waste.  
It also aims at creating new rural livelihood opportunities and enhancing income for farmers and other rural people.
- **Repurpose Used Cooking Oil (RUCO):** The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has launched this initiative that will enable collection and conversion of used cooking oil to biodiesel.

**Source: DTE**

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## **Fast Radio Bursts**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, researchers from the **Pune-based Tata Institute for Fundamental Research (TIFR)** and the **National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA)**, have assembled the largest collection of **Fast Radio Bursts (FRBs)** catalogue.

- The data is from **Canadian Hydrogen Intensity Mapping Experiment (CHIME)**.
- In 2020, the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** spotted **FRB for the first time in the Milky Way.**

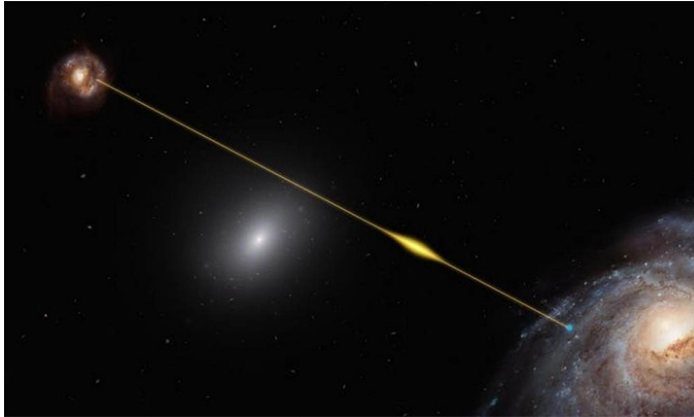
### **Key Points**

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- **Fast Radio Bursts:**

- FRB are **bright bursts of radio waves** (radio waves can be produced by astronomical objects with changing magnetic fields) whose **durations lie in the millisecond-scale**, because of which it is difficult to detect them and determine their position in the sky.

It was first **discovered in 2007**.



A defining property of these

◦

bursts is their **dispersion** (scattering or separation), the bursts **produce a spectrum of radio waves**, and as the waves travel through matter, they spread out or disperse with bursts at higher radio frequencies arriving at telescopes earlier than those at lower frequencies.

**Dispersion** can result in **signal degradation in many applications, especially over large distances**.

- This dispersion allows researchers to learn about two important things:
  - They can measure this dispersion to **learn about the stuff that radio bursts pass through as they travel toward Earth**
  - They can indirectly **determine how far apart things are**.

- **FRBs Catalogue & Findings:**

- The new catalogue significantly **expands the current library of known FRBs**, and is already **yielding clues as to their properties**.
- For instance, the newly discovered bursts appear to fall in **two distinct classes: those that repeat, and those that don't**.
  - The **repeaters looked different**, with **each burst lasting slightly longer** and emitting more focused radio frequencies than bursts from single, non-repeating FRBs.
  - These differences strongly suggest that emission from repeaters and non-repeaters is generated either by different physical mechanisms or in different astrophysical environments
- The bursts were **evenly distributed in space, seeming to arise from any and all parts of the sky**.
- Bright FRBs occur at a rate of about **800 per day** across the entire sky - the most precise estimate of FRBs overall rate to date.

- **Origin of FRBs:**
  - FRBs have been spotted in various and distant parts of the universe, as well as in our own galaxy. Their **origins are unknown and their appearance is highly unpredictable.**
  - The **CHIME** project has nearly quadrupled the number of fast radio bursts discovered to date.
    - The telescope has detected **535 new FRBs** in its first year of operation itself, **between 2018 and 2019.**
    - With more observations, astronomers hope soon to **find the origins of the FRBs.**
- **Chime:**
  - It is a **novel radio telescope that has no moving parts.** Originally **conceived to map the most abundant element in the universe - hydrogen** - over a good fraction of the observable universe, this unusual telescope is **optimized to have a high mapping speed.**
  - It is located at the **Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory**, operated by the **National Research Council of Canada in British Columbia, Canada.**
  - The telescope **receives radio signals each day from half of the sky as the Earth rotates.**
- **Significance of Studying FRBs:**
  - The unique properties of fast radio bursts and their host galaxies combined with recent technological advancements have given researchers **hope that these phenomena can be used to answer some long-standing questions** about the **universe.**
  - It can be **used to understand the three-dimensional structure of matter** in the universe and to learn about **poorly understood early moments in the evolution of the universe.**

Source: DTE

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## Rescuing Gharials: Mahanadi River

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### Why in News

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Recently, **Odisha announced a cash award of Rs. 1,000 to conserve gharials in Mahanadi River Basin.**





## Key Points

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- **About Gharials:**
  - Gharials, sometimes **called gavials**, are a **type of Asian crocodilian distinguished by their long, thin snouts**. Crocodilians are a group of reptiles that includes crocodiles, alligators, caimans, and more.
  - **India has three species of Crocodilians namely:**
    - **Gharial** (*Gavialis gangeticus*): **IUCN Red List- Critically Endangered**
    - **Mugger crocodile** (*Crocodylus palustris*): **IUCN- Vulnerable**.
    - **Saltwater crocodile** (*Crocodylus porosus*): **IUCN- Least Concern**.
      - All the three are listed on **Appendix I of CITES** and **Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**.
      - **Exception: Saltwater Crocodile populations of Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea are included in Appendix II of CITES.**
  - **Habitat of Gharials:**
    - **Natural Habitat:** Fresh waters of the northern part of India.
    - **Primary Habitat:** **Chambal river** (a tributary of Yamuna).
    - **Secondary Habitat:** **Ghagra**, Gandak river, Girwa river (Uttar Pradesh), the Ramganga river (Uttarakhand) and the Sone river (Bihar).
  - **Significance:** Population of Gharials are a **good indicator of clean river water**.
  - **Conservation Efforts:**
    - Breeding Centres of **Kukrail Gharial Rehabilitation Centre in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh**, **National Chambal Sanctuary (Gharial Eco Park, Madhya Pradesh)**.
  - **Threats:**
    - Increased river pollution, dam construction, massive-scale fishing operations and floods.
    - Illegal sand mining and poaching.

- **Mahanadi River:**

- **About:**

- The Mahanadi River system is the **third largest of peninsular India after Godavari and Krishna**, and the **largest river of Odisha state**.
    - The **catchment area** of the river extends to **Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Maharashtra**.
    - Its **basin is bounded by** the Central India hills on the north, by the Eastern Ghats on the south and east and by the Maikala range on the west.

- **Source:**

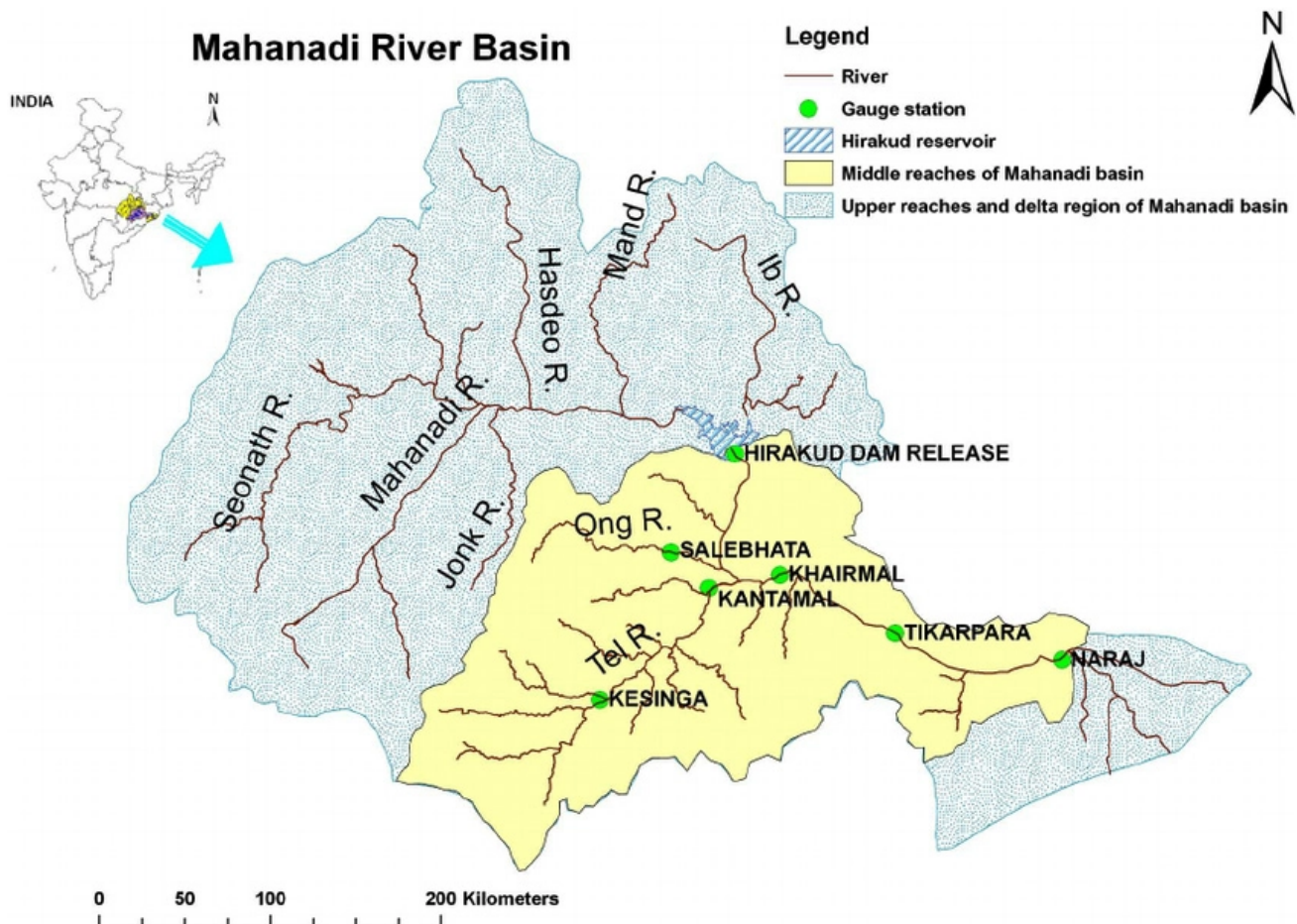
It rises from a place near **Sihawa in Bastar hills in the state of Chhattisgarh** to the south of Amarkantak.

- **Major Tributaries:** Seonath River, Hasdeo river, Mand river, Ib river, Jonking river, Tel river

- **Mahanadi River Dispute:** The Central Government constituted **Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal** in 2018.

- **Major Dams/Projects on Mahanadi:**

- **Hirakud Dam**: This is the longest dam of India.
    - Ravishankar Sagar, Dudhawa Reservoir, Sondur Reservoir, Hasdeo Bango and Tandula are other major projects.



**Source: DTE**

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## Heritage Trees

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### Why in News

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The Maharashtra Cabinet has passed an action plan to protect and preserve **trees older than 50 years in urban areas** by terming them heritage trees.

### Key Points

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- **Concept of Heritage Tree:**
  - Few important criteria for considering a tree as a "heritage tree" are: size, shape, rarity, aesthetical/historical values, association with historic person, place or even myths.
  - A certain species **need not be native** to an area for this tag.
- **Components of Plan:**
  - The provisions included in the plan are the concept of heritage trees and a plan of action for conservation, method to define the age of the tree, rules to be followed before hacking trees etc.
  - **Compensatory Plantation:**
    - It will include **planting the number of trees equivalent to the age** of trees to be cut.
    - The saplings need to be **six to eight feet in height** while planting and they will undergo **geo-tagging** with **seven years of caring period**.
    - The option of **monetary compensation** has also been given, instead of compensatory plantation.
  - **State-level Tree Authority:** The authority will be formed to protect and preserve heritage trees.
    - **Tree Census:** It will ensure that the tree census is conducted after **every five years**.
    - **Land Use:** Ensuring that **33% of government land** is used for tree plantation.

Source: TH

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## Padma Awards

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### Why in News

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Online nominations/recommendations for the **Padma Awards** to be announced on the occasion of **Republic Day**, 2022 are open.

In 2021, a total of **119 Padma awards** were conferred, including **7 padma vibhushan**, **10 padma bhushan** and **102 padma shri**.



## Key Points

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- **Background:**
  - The Padma Awards are announced **annually on Republic Day (26<sup>th</sup> January)**.
  - **Instituted in 1954**, it is one of the **highest civilian honours** of India.
- **Objective:**

To **recognize achievements in all fields** of activities or disciplines where an **element of public service is involved**.
- **Categories:**
  - The Awards are given in **three categories**:
    - **Padma Vibhushan** (for exceptional and distinguished service),
    - **Padma Bhushan** (distinguished service of higher-order) and
    - **Padma Shri** (distinguished service).
  - **Padma Vibhushan is highest in the hierarchy** of Padma Awards followed by Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri.
- **Disciplines:**

The Awards are given in **various disciplines/ fields of activities**, viz.- art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service etc.
- **Eligibility:**

**All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex** are eligible for these Awards.

- **Selection Process:**

- **Padma Awards Committee:**

- The Awards are conferred on the recommendations made by the Padma Awards Committee, which is **constituted by the Prime Minister every year.**

- **Awarded by President:**

- The awards are **presented by the President** of India usually in the month of March/April every year.

## **Bharat Ratna**

- It is the **highest civilian award of the country**. It is **awarded in recognition of exceptional service/performance** of the highest order in any field of human endeavour.
- It is treated on a different footing from Padma Award. The **recommendations for Bharat Ratna are made by the Prime Minister** to the President of India.
- The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is restricted to a **maximum of three in a particular year**.

**Source: PIB**

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## **Global Liveability Index: EIU**

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### **Why in News**

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**Auckland (New Zealand) has topped the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Global Liveability Index of 140 cities** around the world.

### **Key Points**

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- **About Global Liveability Index:**

- The index takes into account more than **30 qualitative and quantitative factors** spanning **five broad categories: stability (25%), healthcare (20%), culture and environment (25%), education (10%), and infrastructure (20%)**.
  - Due to the **pandemic**, the EIU added **new indicators** such as stress on health-care resources as well as restrictions around local sporting events, theatres, music concerts, restaurants and schools.
  - Each factor in a city is **rated as** acceptable, tolerable, uncomfortable, undesirable or intolerable.

- **General Scenario:**

- Overall, the **Covid-19 pandemic caused liveability to decline** - as cities experienced lockdowns and significant strains on their healthcare system. This **led to an unprecedented level of change in the rankings**, with many of the cities that were previously ranked as the most liveable tumbling.
  - Austria's Vienna, number one in both 2018 and 2019**, has completely **dropped out of the top 10** after being heavily affected by Covid-19, and now **ranks 12**.
- **Auckland rose to the top** of the ranking **owing to its successful approach in containing the Covid-19 pandemic**, which allowed its society to remain open and the city to score strongly on a number of metrics including education, culture and environment.
- **Damascus remains the world's least liveable city**, as the effects of the civil war in Syria continue to take their toll.
- Most of the previous ten least liveable cities **remain in the bottom ten this year**, including **Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Karachi (Pakistan)** in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region.
- However, there is a strong contingent of cities in the **APAC region at the top of the rankings**, with **Osaka, Adelaide, Tokyo and Wellington** rounding out the **top five**.

Apart from cities in New Zealand, Australia and Japan, other cities in the Asia-Pacific region such as **Taipei (Taiwan) (33<sup>rd</sup>)** and **Singapore (34<sup>th</sup>)** have also performed well.

- **Top 3 Liveable Cities:**

Auckland (New Zealand), Osaka (Japan), Adelaide (Australia).

- **Bottom 3 Liveable Cities:**

Damascus (Syria), Lagos (Nigeria), Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea).

**Source: IE**

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