Forest Fires

For Prelims: Forest Fires, Climate Change

For Mains: Forest Fires and its Precautions, Government Policies and Interventions, Environment Pollution and Degradation

Why in News?

In recent weeks, **[Forest Fires](#)** have ravaged Europe, especially in southwest Europe.

- There was blazing heatwave destroying thousands of acres of land, forcing people to leave their homes and killing several emergency personnel.

What is forest Fire?

- **About:**
  - Also called **bush or vegetation fire** or wildfire, it can be described as any **uncontrolled and non-prescribed combustion or burning of plants in a natural setting** such as a forest, grassland, brush land or tundra, which consumes the natural fuels and spreads based on environmental conditions (e.g., wind, topography).
  - There are **three conditions** that need to be present in order for a wildfire to burn: **Fuel, Oxygen, and a Heat source.**
- **Causes:**
  - **Natural Causes:**
    - any forest fires start from natural causes such as [lightning](#) **which set trees on fire.**
    - However, rain extinguishes such fires without causing much damage. High atmospheric temperatures and dryness (low humidity) offer favourable circumstance for a fire to start.
  - **Man-made Causes:**
    - Fire is caused when a source of fire like **naked flame, cigarette or bidi, electric spark or any source of ignition comes into contact with inflammable material.**

How are forest fires Classified?

- **Surface Fire:**
  - A forest fire may burn primarily as a surface fire, **spreading along the ground as the surface litter (senescent leaves and twigs and dry grasses etc) on the forest floor** and is engulfed by the spreading flames.
- **Underground Fire:**
  - The fires of **low intensity, consuming the organic matter beneath and the surface litter of forest floor are sub-grouped as underground fire.** In most of the dense forests a thick mantle of organic matter is find on top of the mineral soil.
  - These fires usually spread entirely underground and burn for some meters below the

surface.
- This fire spreads very slowly and in most of the cases it becomes very hard to detect and control such type of fires.
- They may continue to burn for months and destroy vegetative cover of the soil.
- **Ground Fire:**
  - These fires are fires in the sub surface organic fuels, such as **duff layers under forest stands, Arctic tundra or taiga, and organic soils of swamps or bogs.**
  - There is no clear distinction between underground and ground fires.
  - The smouldering underground fires sometime changes into Ground fire.
  - This **fire burns root and other material on or beneath the surface i.e., burns the herbaceous growth on forest floor** together with the layer of organic matter in various stages of decay.
  - They are more damaging than surface fires, as they can destroy vegetation completely. Ground fires burn underneath the surface by smouldering combustion and are more often ignited by surface fires.

What about Forest Fire Incidents in India?

- **About:**
  - There has been **a ten-fold increase in forest fires in the past two decades,** and more than 62% of Indian states are prone to high-intensity forest fires.
  - Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra **are the most prone to high-intensity forest fire events** caused by rapid **change in climate.**
  - **Mizoram has had the highest number of forest fire incidences** in the last two decades, with more than 95% of its districts being forest fire hotspots.
  - **Districts that were earlier** flood **prone have now become** drought **prone** due to a "swapping trend" as a result of climatic changes.
  - **More than 75 % of Indian districts are extreme climate event hotspots**, and more than 30 % of districts are extreme forest fire hotspots.
- **Initiatives Taken:**
  - **National Action Plan for Forest Fires (NAPFF)**, **was** started in 2018 with the goal of **reducing forest fires by informing, enabling, and empowering forest fringe communities** and incentivizing them to collaborate with state forest departments.
  - **The Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FPM)** is the only government-sponsored programme dedicated to assisting states in dealing with forest fires.

What are the Measures needed to Overcome Forest Fires?

- Fire could be prevented in the summer through the removal of forest litter all along the forest boundary.
- **The creation of a Forest line could** prevent fire from breaking into the forest from one compartment to another.
- The best way to control a forest fire is therefore, to prevent it from spreading, which can be done by **creating firebreaks in the shape of small clearings** of ditches in the forests.
- Need to adopt safe practices in areas near forests viz. factories, coalmines, oil stores, chemical plants and even in household kitchens.
- Also, to incorporate fire reducing and firefighting techniques and equipment.

Source: TH

RBI Seeks Ban on Cryptocurrency

Why in News?

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has **recommended a ban on** cryptocurrencies **citing 'destabilising effects'** for the country's monetary and fiscal health.

- China has declared **all cryptocurrency transactions illegal**, effectively imposing a complete ban, whereas **El Salvador has permitted Bitcoin as legal tender.**

What is the Current Status of Crypto?

- At the moment, there is **no legislature that covers cryptocurrencies in India**. In India, owning cryptocurrencies is still not illegal. In 2020, the **Supreme Court had struck down a ban** on trading of crypto currency in India, which was imposed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- Central bank has been cautioning people against the use of virtual currencies since as far back as 2013.
- In April 2018, the **RBI had prohibited regulated entities from dealing in virtual currencies** or providing services for facilitating any person or entity in dealing with or settling them. The directive was set aside by the Supreme Court in March 2020.
- Subsequently, in May 2021, the **central bank advised its regulated entities to continue to carry out customer due diligence processes** for transactions in such currencies, in line with regulations governing standards for **Know Your Customer (KYC)**, **Anti-Money Laundering**, **Combating of Financing of Terrorism**, obligations under Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, etc. and **Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA)** Norms for overseas remittances.
- The **Union Budget 2022-2023** also proposed to introduce a **digital currency** in the coming financial year.

What are the RBIs Concerns?

- **Not a Fiat Money:**
  - Cryptocurrencies are not a currency because **every modern currency needs to be issued by the central bank** or Government.
- **Speculative and Destabilising:**
  - The value of **fiat currencies is anchored by monetary policy and their status as legal tender**, however the value of cryptocurrencies **rests solely on the speculation and expectations of high returns** that are not well anchored, so it will have a destabilising effect on the **monetary** and **fiscal** stability of a country.

What is Cryptocurrency?

- **About:**
  - **Cryptocurrency**, sometimes called crypto-currency or crypto, is any form of currency that exists digitally or virtually and uses cryptography to secure transactions.
  - Cryptocurrencies **don't have a central issuing or regulating authority**, instead use a decentralized system to record transactions and issue new units.
    - It is supported by a **decentralized peer-to-peer network called the** blockchain.
- **Benefits:**
  - **Fast and Cheap Transactions:** Cryptocurrencies are **way cheaper to use to execute international transactions** because the transactions don't have to be handled by a series of intermediaries before they reach their destinations.
  - **Investment Destination:** There is a limited supply of cryptocurrency – partially like gold. Moreover, the last few years have seen the price of cryptocurrencies rising faster than

other financial instruments.
- Due to this, **cryptocurrencies can become a preferred investment destination.**
  - **Anti-Inflationary Currency:** Due to the high demand for cryptocurrency its prices have largely remained on a growing trajectory. In this scenario, **people tend to hold more cryptocurrency than spending it.**
    - This will cause a deflationary effect on the currency.

What are the Concerns Associated with Cryptocurrency?

- **Bombardment of Advertisement:** The crypto market is seen as a way to earn quick profits. Due to this, there is bombardment of advertising, both online and offline, **to lure people into speculating in this market.**
  - However, there are concerns that these are attempts to **mislead the youth through "over-promising" and "non-transparent advertising".**
- **Counterproductive Utility:** Unregulated crypto markets can become **avenues for money laundering and terror financing.**
- **Cryptocurrencies are Extremely Volatile:** Bitcoin skyrocketed from USD 40,000 to reach an all-time high of USD 65,000 (between January to April 2021).
  - Then in May 2021, it plunged and throughout June it remained below USD 30,000.
- **Risk to Macroeconomic and Financial Stability**: The extent of investment exposure of Indian retail investors in this unregulated asset class, **poses a risk to Macroeconomic and Financial Stability.**
  - According to a Group of Crypto exchanges, crores of Indians have invested over Rs 6,00,000 crore in crypto assets.
- **Stock Market Issues:** Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has flagged the issue that it has no control over the **"clearing and settlement"** of crypto currencies, and it cannot offer counterparty guarantee as is being done for stocks.
  - Further, whether cryptocurrency is a currency, commodity, or security has not been defined.

Way Forward

- India is **yet to table the Cryptocurrency and Regulation** of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021, which will lay down the regulatory framework for the launch of an "official digital currency".
  - Thus, there is **a need to expedite passing of the bill and design a regulatory framework** to deal with cryptocurrencies.
- Regulation is **needed to prevent serious problems,** to ensure that cryptocurrencies are not misused, and to protect unsuspecting investors from excessive market volatility and possible scams.
- A law to **regulate or ban cryptocurrencies can only be effective once there's some form** of international agreement in place.
  - Cryptocurrencies are by **definition borderless and require international collaboration to prevent regulatory arbitrage.**
- Therefore, any legislation for regulation or for banning can be effective **only after significant international collaboration on evaluation of the risks and benefits and evolution of common taxonomy and standards.**

National Emblem

Why in News?

The Prime Minister of India unveiled the 6.5 metre-tall **National Emblem** on top of the under-construction **new Parliament building** recently.

What do we know about the National Emblem of India?

[//](#)

- **About:**
  - The **State Emblem of India is the national emblem of the Republic of India** and is used by the union government, many state governments, and other government agencies.
- **History:**
  - The State emblem is an adaptation from the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka **(Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh).**

- In the original, there are **four lions**, standing back to back, mounted on an abacus with a frieze carrying sculptures in high relief of an **elephant**, a **galloping horse**, a **bull** and a **lion** separated by **intervening wheels over a bell-shaped lotus.**
- **Carved out of a single block** of polished sandstone, the capital is crowned by the **Wheel of the Law (Dharma Chakra).**

- **Emblem Adopted:**
  - In the State emblem, adopted by the Government of India on **26ᵗʰ January 1950, only three lions are visible,** the fourth being hidden from view.
  - The **wheel appears in relief in the centre** of the abacus with a **bull on right** and a **horse on left** and the outlines of other wheels on extreme right and left.
  - **The bell-shaped lotus has been omitted.**

What are the salient features of the National Emblem of India?

- The State emblem of India is the **official seal of the Government of India.**
- Four animals are shown **representing four directions:**
  - **A Galloping Horse:** West
    - The Horse represents the horse **Kanthaka,** which **Buddha** **is said to have used** for leaving his princely life.
  - **An Elephant:** East
    - The Elephant depicts the **dream of Queen Maya,** where a white elephant enters her womb.
  - **A Bull:** South
    - The Bull depicts the **Zodiac sign of Taurus,** the month in which **Budhha was born.**
  - **A Lion:** North
    - The Lion shows the **attainment of enlightenment.**
- The animals seem to follow each other turning the wheel of existence till eternity.
- The words **Satyameva Jayate from Mundaka Upanishad**, meaning **'Truth Alone Triumphs'**, are inscribed below the abacus in **Devanagari Script.**
- The Capital is crowned by the **Wheel of the Law (Dharma Chakra)**
- The four **Lions** symbolise **Buddha spreading Dharma in all directions**.
  - It was built in the commemoration of the **first sermon by Buddha known as Dharmachakrapravartna.**
- **Legal Provisions:**
  - **State Emblem of India (Prohibition of Improper Use) Act 2005** and the **State Emblem of India (Regulation of Use) Rules 2007:**
    - According to these rules, the National Emblem of India **can only be used as per provisions of the State Emblem of India (Prohibition of Improper Use) Act 2005** and any unauthorized use is punishable under law.
    - There is a **punishment for imprisonment** of up to 2 years or a fine up to Rs 5000 if someone violates the law.
- **Usage:**
  - On the **Letterheads** of the Central Government, State Government and other government agencies.
  - On the **Currency** of India
  - On the **Passports** of India
  - The **Ashoka Chakra in the National Flag** is taken from the National Emblem
  - **Buildings:**
    - Rashtrapati Bhawan
    - Parliament House
    - **Supreme Court**
    - **High Courts**
    - Central Secretariat
    - Secretariat Buildings of States and Union Territories
    - Raj Bhawan/Raj Niwas
    - State Legislature
    - Premises of India's Diplomatic Mission abroad
    - Residence of Heads of Missions in the countries of their accreditation

- At the entrance doors of buildings occupied by Indian Consulates abroad

What do we need to know about Mauryan Pillars?

- The Mauryan pillars are **rock cut** **pillars** thus displaying the carver's skills
- **Stone pillars were erected by Ashoka**, which have been found in the **north Indian part of the Mauryan Empire** with inscriptions engraved on them.
- The top portion of the pillar was carved with capital figures like the **bull, the lion, the elephant, etc.**
- All the capital figures are **vigorous** and carved **standing on a square or circular abacus.**
  - Abacuses are decorated with stylised lotuses.
- **Some examples of Mauryan Pillars:**
  - Lauria Nandangarh Pillar (West Champaran, Bihar)
  - Ashoka Pillar (Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh)
  - Lion Capital of Ashoka (Sarnath, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh)

What are some other National Symbols of India?

- **National Flag:**
  - The National Flag is a horizontal tricolour of **India saffron (kesaria) at the top, white in the middle** and **India green at the bottom in equal proportion**. The ratio of width of the flag to its length is **two to three.** In the centre of the white band is a **navy-blue wheel which represents the chakra.**
  - The design of the National Flag was adopted by the **Constituent Assembly of India on 22 July 1947.**
- **National Anthem:**
  - The National Anthem of India Jana-gana-mana, composed originally in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore, **was adopted in its Hindi version by the Constituent Assembly as the National Anthem of India on 24 January 1950.**
  - It was first sung on **27 December 1911** at the **Kolkata Session** of the **Indian National Congress.**
- **National Song:**
  - The song Vande Mataram, composed in Sanskrit by **Bankimchandra Chatterji.**
  - **On January 24, 1950, the President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad** came up with a statement in the Constituent Assembly, **"the song Vande Mataram, which has played a historic part in the struggle for Indian freedom, shall be honoured equally with Jana Gana Mana and shall have equal status with it."**
- **National Animal:**
  - The magnificent **tiger, Panthera tigris** is a striped animal. It has a thick yellow coat of fur with dark stripes
- **National Flower:**
  - **Lotus (Nelumbo Nucifera Gaertn)** is the National Flower of India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. The national motto of India, 'Satyameva Jayate' inscribed below the Emblem of India is taken from (2014)

(a) Katha Upanishad
(b) Chandogya Upanishad
(c) Aitareya Upanishad
(d) Mundaka Upanishad

Ans: (d)

Source: TH

Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction 2022

For Prelims: Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, UN, UNGA, Sendai Framework, Sustainable Development Goals, GreenHouse Gases

For Mains: Significance of Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Challenges in DRR, Role of Climate Change in Disaster Risk, Related Government Initiatives

Why in News?

Recently, the **Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2022 (GP DRR 2022)** took place in Indonesia.

- The outcome was summarised in the Bali Agenda for Reilience

What do we need to know about Global Platform 2022?

- **Theme:**
  - **From Risk to Resilience:** Towards Sustainable Development For All in a Covid-19 Transformed World.
- **About Global Platform:**
  - It was the **first global gathering for disaster risk reduction (DRR)** actors since the Covid pandemic, and fell exactly midway **between the UNFCCC COP26 and UNFCCC COP27 negotiations.**
  - It is a biennial multi-stakeholder forum, a critical component of the monitoring and implementation process of the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030).**
    - **The UN General Assembly** recognizes the same.

What are the Important Outcomes of the Global Platform for DRR 2022?

- There is a **need for a whole-of-society approach** to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), ensuring no one is left behind

- DRR must be at the **core** of development and finance policies, legislation and plans to achieve the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the** Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- Current **greenhouse gas emission levels far exceed their mitigation**, resulting in an increase in frequency and intensity of catastrophic events.
- DRR and **climate change** adaptation **have the common objective of reducing vulnerability and enhancing capacity as well as resilience.**

What is GP 2022 Suggestions for Resilience Building?

- **Greater resources for grounded local action, government support and strict enforcement of law and international conventions:**
    - This calls for **greater budgetary allocation** at central and state levels, revision of national/state disaster response funds norms which were there from 2015-2020, more resources at gram panchayat level and so on.
- **Greater focus on building resilience and sustainable livelihoods focusing on community level:**
    - Need to build **rural infrastructure in the disaster-prone areas in the country** but **not at the cost of livelihood recovery** (climate-resilient, sustainable livelihoods) and meeting of the immediate needs.
- **Greater accountability and transparency in relief and rehabilitation efforts:**
    - Need to **standardise transparency mechanisms** to include transparency boards, clearly mentioning the cost, quality and quantity of relief items, social audits and citizens' reports.
        - This needs to be the standard practice in all relief operations, both by government and civil society actors.
- **Other Suggestions:**
    - Third World countries are fighting to revive their economy after **Covid-19.**
        - There is a need to **focus on the most vulnerable and their awareness, mobilisation as well as leadership in rebuilding.**
    - There should be **sufficient groundswell at the community level** to influence the policy makers to include DRR in all its investments.
    - Women, persons with disability, uncared aged, people affected by war and conflicts and **informal labour** are some of the vulnerable groups which need to be mobilised, led and heard with sensitivity.

What are the Initiatives for Disaster Risk Reduction?

- **Global:**
    - **Sendai Framework:**
        - It was adopted at the **Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in 2015 in Sendai, Miyagi, Japan.**
        - The Sendai Framework is the successor instrument to the **Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)**
        - **The present Framework applies to** the risk of small-scale and large-scale, frequent and infrequent, sudden and slow-onset disasters caused by natural or man-made hazards, as well as related environmental, technological and biological hazards and risks.
        - It aims to **guide the multi hazard management of disaster risk** in development at all levels as well as within and across all sectors.
    - **The Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS):**
        - **The specialized Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS)** an initiative under World Meteorological Organization, saves lives, assets and livelihoods through **increased access to early weather warnings and risk information** for people in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
    - **Green Climate Fund's Sectoral Guide on Climate Information & Early Warning Systems:**
        - It provides an **overview of country needs and evidence-based programming experiences** in the relevant sector.

- It also aims to identify opportunities for high impact, change investments in each sector, to guide proposal development for the GCF, in line with its investment criteria during its first replenishment period 2020-2023.
  - **India's Initiatives:**
    - **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure Society (CDRIS):**
      - CDRI is a global partnership of national governments, **United Nations** agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, and academic and research institutions.
      - It aims to **increase the resilience of infrastructure systems** to climate and disaster risks, thereby ensuring sustainable development.
    - **National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP):**
      - Its primary purpose is to **coordinate response to natural or man-made disasters** and for capacity-building in disaster resiliency and crisis response.
      - It lays down policies, plans and guidelines for Disaster Management to ensure timely and effective response to disasters.

Source: DTE

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

For Prelims: Members of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Its official language, Objectives and Initiatives

For Mains: Issues and Challenges of SCO

Why in News?

Ahead of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** Summit to be held in September 2022, Varanasi has been selected as the **SCO region's first "Tourism and Cultural Capital for 2022-23.**

- The SCO summit will be held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan where **Iran and Belarus are likely to be the two newest additions to the SCO**. Earlier, the Cabinet was apprised of the Agreement signed among the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, SCO, member states on cooperation in the field of youth work among the authorized bodies of the member states of SCO.
- India will host the SCO summit next year 2023.

What is the Initiative?

- Varanasi' **"Cultural and Tourism Capital"** has been decided under a **new rotating initiative** to promote people-to-people contacts and tourism among the member states.
- Each year **a city of the cultural heritage of a member country that will take over the rotating Presidency** of the organisation will get the title to highlight its prominence.
- The new initiative will come into force **after the Samarkand summit following which India will take over the Presidency and host the next Heads** of the State summit.

Why does the SCO Seek Expansion?

- It is seen that the SCO's international influence is rising and **the principles of the SCO charter are being widely accepted.**
- With expansion, China and Russia are looking to frame the grouping as **a counter to the West**,

especially the **expansion of** NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation).
- However, it is believed that SCO and NATO have **stark contrasts between them.**
  - The expansion of NATO is totally different as the **SCO is a cooperative organisation based on** non-alignment and not targeting a third party.
  - NATO is based on **Cold War** thinking. The logic of NATO is creating new enemies to sustain its own existence.

What is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation?

- **About:**
  - SCO is a permanent intergovernmental **international organization.**
  - It's a Eurasian political, economic and military organization aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
  - It was **created in 2001.**
  - The SCO **Charter was signed in 2002**, and entered into force in 2003.
- **Genesis:**
  - Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, **Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan were members of the Shanghai Five.**
  - Shanghai Five (1996) emerged from a series of border demarcation and demilitarization talks which the four former Soviet republics held with China to ensure stability along the borders.
  - Following the accession of Uzbekistan to the organization in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO.
  - **India and Pakistan became members in 2017.**
- **Objectives:**
  - Strengthening **mutual trust and neighbourliness** among the member states.
  - Promoting **effective cooperation** in -politics, trade & economy, research & technology and culture.
  - Enhancing **ties in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection,** etc.
  - Maintain and **ensure peace, security and stability** in the region.
  - Establishment of **a democratic, fair and rational new international political & economic order.**
- **Membership:**
  - Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan.
- **Structure:**
  - **Heads of State Council:** The supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States & international organisations, and considers international issues.
  - **Heads of Government Council:** Approves the budget, considers and decides upon issues related to economic spheres of interaction within SCO.
  - **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs:** Considers issues related to day-to-day activities.
  - **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** – Established to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- **SCO Secretariat:**
  - Based in Beijing to provide informational, analytical & organizational support.
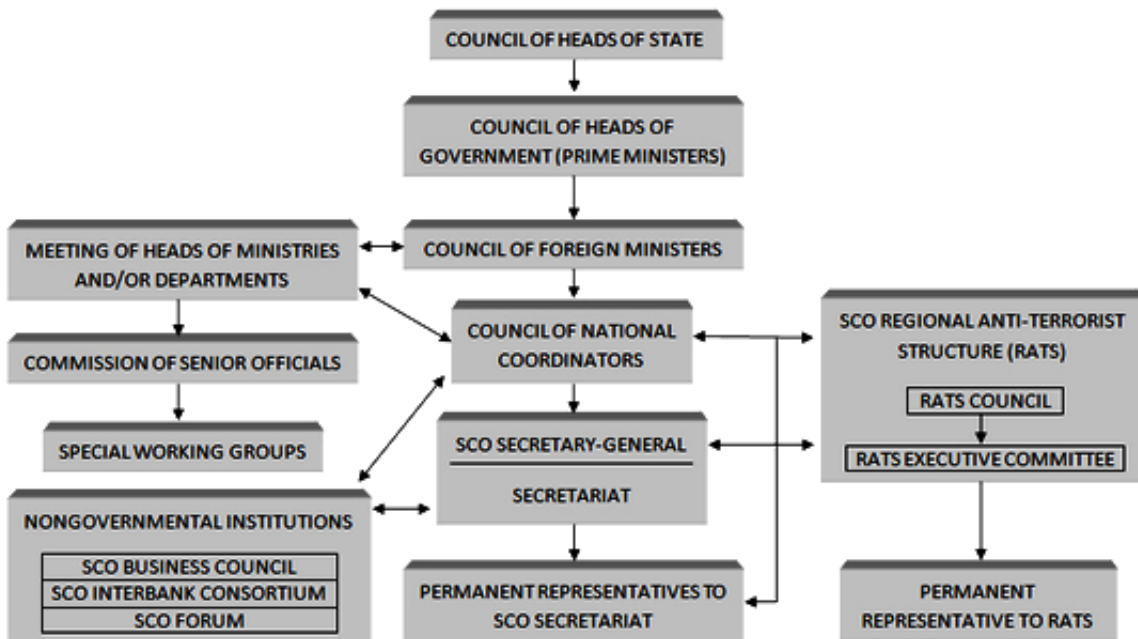- **Official language:**
  - The official working language of **the SCO Secretariat is Russian and Chinese.**

What is the Relevance of the Grouping for India?

- Through the years, the **SCO hosts have encouraged members to use the platform to discuss differences with other members** on the sidelines.
  - It was on such an occasion that current Indian Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 2015 and Foreign Minister **negotiated a** five-point agreement with his Chinese counterpart **on the side-lines of the Moscow conference in 2020.**
- India is also a part of the **'Quadrilateral' grouping with the U.S., Japan and Australia.**

- ◦ **Its association with the grouping of a rather different nature** is part of its foreign policy that emphasises on principles of "strategic autonomy and multi-alignment".

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION

Kerala's Protest against ESZ Notification

For Prelims: Eco Sensitive Zones, Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986, National Wildlife Action Plan, National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary, Protected Forests

For Mains: Biodiversity and its Conservation, Eco Sensitive Zones, Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986, National Wildlife Action Plan

Why in News?

Farmers in Kerala are protesting against **Supreme Court's** order to establish **Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs).**

- The SC has directed to have a **mandatory ESZ of minimum one kilometre measured from the demarcated boundary of every protected forest**, including the **national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.**
- The Kerala State Assembly demands the Centre to notify the zones by considering the State government's proposals that marked the **ESZ as zero around 10 protected areas of the State.**

What are Eco-Sensitive Zones?

- **About:**
  - The **National Wildlife Action Plan** (2002-2016) of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** stipulated that state governments should declare land falling within 10 km of the boundaries of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries as eco fragile zones or Eco Sensitive Zones (ESZs) under the **Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986**.
  - While the 10-km rule is implemented as a general principle, the extent of its application can vary.
  - Areas **beyond 10-km can also be notified by the Union government as ESZs**, if they hold larger ecologically important **"sensitive corridors."**
- **Significance:**
  - ESZs are created as **"shock absorbers" for the protected areas**, to minimize the negative impact on the "fragile ecosystems" by certain human activities taking place nearby.
  - They are meant to act as **a transition zone from areas requiring higher protection to those requiring lesser protection.**
  - The ESZs are not meant to hamper the daily activities of people living in the vicinity, but are meant to guard the protected areas and **"refine the environment around them".**

What is the Background?

- The order comes a decade after the **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) report** (Gadgil report) that had **radically influenced the socio-political, economic and ecological narratives in the State.**

- Though not to the level of the high-pitched public unrest and protests that the State witnessed during the days preceding the WGEEP report, the **ESZ notification too has triggered state-wide protests.**
  - Earlier, the State Government had **taken care to exclude the areas with high population density, government and quasi-government institutions, and public institutions from the ambit of its Draft ESZ notification.**
  - The marking of the ESZ for the protected areas that shared the forest boundary with the **neighbouring States was a peaceful affair as there were no human habitations** in between.
  - However, the **apex court's recent order has changed the picture and forced the State government to re-look the ESZs of at least 10 protected areas** which were earlier marked as zero.

Why Protests Over ESZ notification?

- The notification has stirred an unpleasant situation in Kerala where **any regulatory mechanism on land and land use patterns would have political ramifications.**
- Kerala is concerned about the **possible impact on its unique landscape.**
  - **Nearly 30% of Kerala is forested land and the** Western Ghats **occupies 48% of the State.**
- Due to the high density of human population near the notified protected areas, farmer's groups and political parties **have been demanding that all human settlements be exempt from the ESZ ruling.**
- The State Government **apprehends that the SC's notification may worsen the ground situation as it would adversely impact the interests of the State** besides upsetting the lives of millions living near the protected areas.

Way Forward

- The States **should act as a trustee for the benefit of the general public** in relation to natural resources so that sustainable development can be achieved in the long term.
- The government **should not confine its role to that of a facilitator of economic activities** for the immediate upliftment of the fortunes of the State.
- Afforestation and reforestation of degraded forest, regeneration of lost habitats, **promoting carbon footprints can be done.**
- Propagating Conservation techniques and creating awareness about overexploitation of resources and its adverse impacts among masses.

Source: IE

Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules 2011

Why in News?

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution has amended the **Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules 2011** for **ease of doing business** and reducing the compliance burden for the **electronic industries.**

- Earlier, **Rule 5 of the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities), Rules 2011 was omitted to safeguard interest of consumers.**
  - Rule 5 defines the Schedule II prescribing the pack sizes of various types of commodities.

What are the Amendments?

- Allows the electronic products **to declare certain mandatory declarations through the QR (Quick Response) Code** for a period of one year, if not declared in the package itself.
  - The option is given for one year because the **government is trying to use the technology for the first time on a pilot** basis and will decide to extend it based on the feedback.
- But the industry, however, will have to declare on the package itself the mandatory details like maximum retail price (MRP), phone number and e-mail address.
  - The additional mandatory declarations such as the address of the manufacturer, the common name of the commodity, the size and dimension of the commodity and customer care are allowed through QR code.
- Earlier, all the prepackaged commodities including the electronic products are required to declare all the mandatory declarations as per the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities), Rules 2011 on the package.

What are Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011?

- It **regulates pre-packaged commodities in India** and inter – alia mandate certain labelling requirements prior to sale of such commodities.
- The main aim of the Legal Metrology Act, 2009 is to establish and enforce standards of weights and measures, **regulate trade and commerce in weights, measures and other goods which are sold or distributed by weight,** measure or number and any other matter that is connected to the same.
  - According to the Act, the Central Govt. may appoint a Director of Legal Metrology **to perform duties related to inter-state trade and commerce.**
  - The State Govt. may appoint a Controller of Legal Metrology to perform duties related to intra-state trade and commerce.

What are the Related Initiatives?

- **Consumer Protection Act, 2019**
- **Draft Food Safety And Standards (Labelling And Display) Regulation.**
- **Consumer Welfare Fund**
- **Central Consumer Protection Council**
- **Consumer Protection Rules, 2021**
- **Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020**
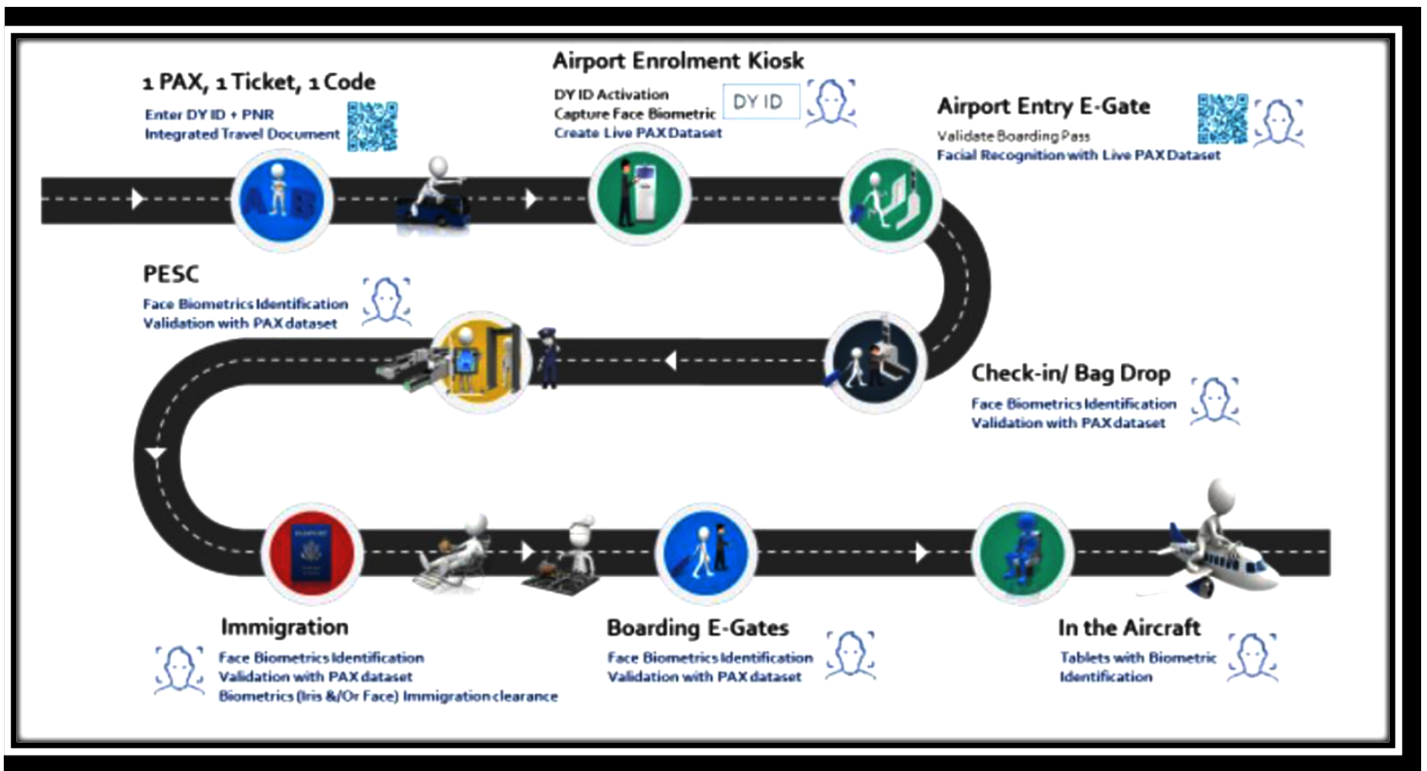- **National Consumer Day**

Source: PIB

DIGI YATRA

Why in News?

Recently, **the Consultative Committee meeting of the Ministry of Civil Aviation** was held in New Delhi to discuss **'DIGI YATRA'.**

What do we need to know about DIGI YATRA?

- **About:**
  - It is a project conceived to achieve **contactless, seamless processing** of passengers at Airports, based on **Facial Recognition Technology (FRT).**
  - The project envisages that any traveller may pass through various checkpoints at the airport through a **paperless and contactless processing,** using facial features to establish the identity which would be linked to the boarding pass.
  - It provides a **decentralized mobile wallet-based identity management platform** which is cost effective and addresses **privacy/data protection** issues in implementation of Digi Yatra.
- **Digi Yatra Foundation:**
  - It has been set up as a **joint venture (JV)** company in 2019 under Section 8 of the **Companies Act, 2013.**
  - The Foundation was formed, with the objective of **creating the Digi Yatra Central Ecosystem (DYCE).**
  - Digi Yatra Foundation will be a **pan-India entity and the custodian** of the Passenger ID validation process.
  - It will also develop **consensus** amongst the Aviation Stakeholders in India.
  - It would also define the criteria for compliance and guidelines for the local airport systems.
- **Implementation:**
  - In the first phase, Digi Yatra is proposed to be rolled out at two Airports namely **Varanasi and Bengaluru in August 2022** and at five Airports namely **Pune, Vijayawada, Kolkata, Delhi and Hyderabad by March next year.**
  - **Airports Authority of India (AAI)** will identify their airports where Digi Yatra would be implemented in a phased manner.

What are the Objectives of DIGI YATRA?

- **Enhance passenger experience and provide a simple and easy experience to all air travellers.**
- **Achieve better throughput through existing infrastructure using "Digital Framework".**
- **Result in lower cost operations.**
- **Digitize current manual processes and to bring better efficiencies**
- **Enhance security standards and improve current system performance.**
- Rollout of "Digi Yatra" system with a digital "ID" backed by a strong verifiable government issued identity like AADHAAR.
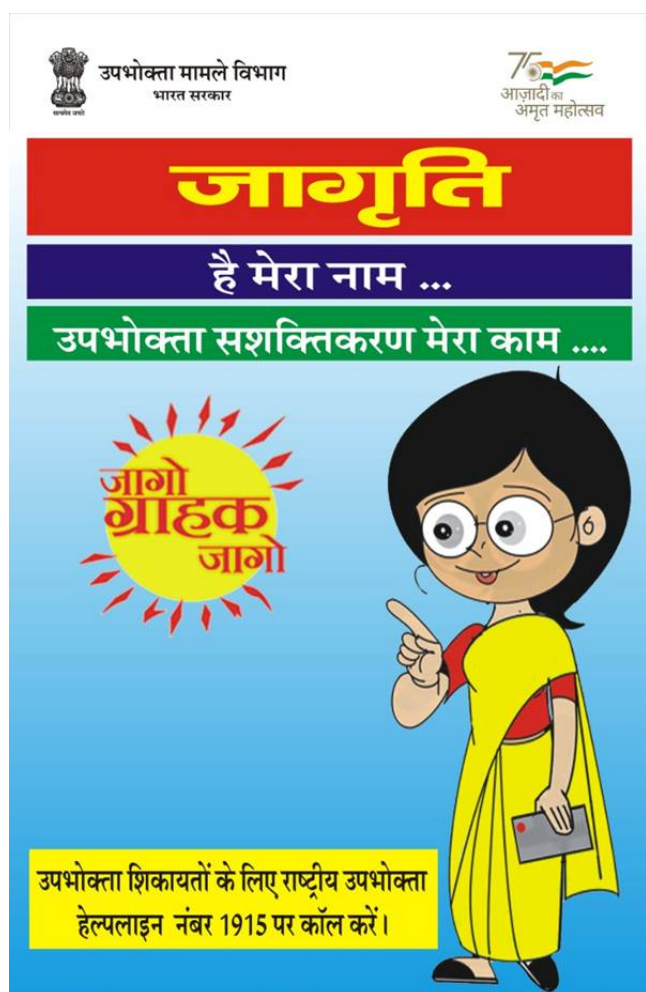
Jagriti Mascot

Why in News?

Recently, a mascot named Jagriti has been launched by **the Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA)** to empower consumers and further generating awareness of their rights.

How will Jagriti work?

- It would be **projected as an empowered consumer** who is spreading awareness about consumer rights & addressing solutions to the problems faced by the consumers.
- It would help to generate consumer awareness about the various government initiatives like:
    - Provisions of **Consumer Protection Act 2019**
    - **Hallmarking**
    - National Consumer Helpline toll free number 1915
    - Provisions of weights & measures Act
    - Decisions of the Central Consumer Protection Authority
    - Testimonials by consumers on grievance redressal

What is the Significance of Jagriti Mascot?

- In addition to increasing the campaign's presence in digital and multimedia channels, it would **heighten consumer rights awareness.**
- It would be shown with the tagline **"Jago Grahak Jago"** in various media campaign.

Source: PIB