



Governor

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Governor

Eligibility Criteria

- Must be a **citizen of India**
- At least **35 years** of age
- Must **not be a member of (either) house** of Parliament/State Legislature
- Must not hold any **office of profit**

Appointment and Tenure (Part VI)

- Appointed by President (**Article 153**)
- One person can be appointed as Governor for **2+ States (7th Const. Amendment in 1956)**
- Holds the office at the **Pleasure of the President** (maximum **5 years**)

Powers (Part VI)

- Article 161: **Pardoning powers**
- Article 164: Power to **appoint the CM and other Ministers**
- Article 176: **Special Address** by Governor
- Article 200: Power to **(withhold) assent/reserve a bill** (Legislative Assembly)
- Article 213: Power to **promulgate Ordinances**

'Dual Capacity'

- **Constitutional head of the state** and **Representative of the Union government**

Ending Tenure before 5 Years

- **Dismissal by President** (on advice of the Council of Ministers headed by PM)
 - Dismissal of governors without a valid reason is not permitted
- On grounds of **acts upheld by courts as unconstitutional** and malafide
- **Resignation** by the governor

Responsibilities

- **Appoints** – CM, other Ministers, Advocate General of State, Members of State PSC, judges of HC and districts
- Act as **ex-officio chancellor** of state Universities

[Governor \(Part - II\)](#) and [\(Part - III\)](#)

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Report on Municipal Finances: RBI

For Prelims: Local governance, RBI, Municipal Corporations, GDP, GST.

For Mains: Report on Municipal Finances, RBI.

Why in News?

Recently, the [Reserve Bank of India \(RBI\)](#) has released the **Report on Municipal Finances**, compiling and analyzing budgetary data for 201 [Municipal Corporations \(MCs\)](#) across all States.

- The RBI Report explores **'Alternative Sources of Financing for Municipal Corporations'** as its theme.

What is a Municipal Corporation?

- **About:**
 - In India, the Municipal Corporation is the **urban local government** that is responsible for the development of any Metropolitan City having a **population of more than one million people**.
 - Mahanagar Palika, Nagar Palika, Nagar Nigam, City Corporation, and so on are some of the other names for it.
 - The Municipal Corporations are established in the states by the **acts of the state legislatures**, whereas in the Union Territories through the acts of the Parliament.
 - Municipal governments **rely heavily on property tax revenue** to fund their operations.
 - The first municipal corporation in India was created in **Madras in 1688, followed by municipal corporations in Bombay and Calcutta in 1726**.
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - In the Constitution of India, no provision was made for the establishment of local self-government, except the incorporation of **Article 40 in the [Directive Principles of State Policy](#)**.
 - The **74th Amendment Act, 1992** has inserted a new Part IX-A into the Constitution which deals with the administration of Municipalities and Nagar Palikas.
 - It consists of Article 243P to 243ZG. It also added a new **twelfth schedule** to the Constitution. The 12th schedule consists of 18 items.

What are the Findings?

- **Poor working of MCs:**
 - There have been several lacunae in the working of MCs and **no appreciable improvement in their functioning despite institutionalisation** of the structure of

local governance in India.

- The availability and quality of essential services for **urban populations in India has consequently remained poor.**
- **Lack of Financial Autonomy:**
 - Most municipalities only prepare budgets and **review actuals against budget plans but do not use their audited financial statements** for balance sheet and cash flow management, resulting in **significant inefficiencies.**
 - While the size of the municipal budgets in India are much smaller than peers in other countries, **revenues are dominated by property tax collections and devolution of taxes and grants from upper tiers of government,** resulting in **lack of financial autonomy.**
- **Minimal Capital Expenditure:**
 - MCs' committed expenditure in the form of establishment expenses, administrative costs and interest and finance charges is rising, **but capital expenditure is minimal.**
 - MCs mostly rely on borrowings from banks and financial institutions and loans from centre/ state governments to finance their resource gaps in the absence of a **well-developed market for municipal bonds.**
- **Stagnant Revenues/Expenditure:**
 - Municipal revenues/expenditures in India have stagnated at around **1 % of GDP (Gross Domestic Product)** for over a decade.
 - In contrast, municipal revenues/ expenditures account for 7.4 % of GDP in Brazil and 6 % of GDP in South Africa.
- **Ineffective State Financial Commissions:**
 - Governments have not set up **State Financial Commissions (SFCs)** in a regular and timely manner even though they are required to be set up every five years. Accordingly, in most of the States, SFCs have not been **effective in ensuring rule-based devolution of funds to Local governments.**

What are the Suggestions?

- MCs need to adopt **sound and transparent accounting practices** with proper monitoring and documentation of various receipt and expenditure items, and explore different innovative bond and land-based financing mechanisms to augment their resources.
- The rapid rise in urban population density, however, calls for **better urban infrastructure,** and hence, requires greater flow of **financial resources to Local governments.**
- With the revenue generation capacity of municipal corporations declining over time, dependence on the devolution of taxes and grants from the upper tiers has risen. This calls for **innovative financing mechanisms.**
- Municipalities in India need to balance **their budgets by law,** and any municipal borrowing needs to be approved by the State government.
- In order to improve the **buoyancy of municipal revenue,** the Centre and the States may share one-sixth of their **GST (Goods and Services Tax).**

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. In India, the first Municipal Corporation was set up in which one among the following? (2009)

- (a) Calcutta
- (b) Madras
- (c) Bombay
- (d) Delhi

Ans: (b)

Source: IE

Edible Oil Sector in India

For Prelims: Genetically Modified (GM) mustard, Dhara Mustard Hybrid (DMH-11).

For Mains: GM Crops and their significance, Edible Oil Sector of India and its Significance.

Why in News?

Recently, Centre pointed out that India is **already importing and consuming oil derived from Genetically Modified (GM) crops** in a **plea challenging the clearance for environmental release of [GM mustard](#)**.

- Also, **around 9.5 million tonnes (mt) of GM cotton seed is produced annually** and 1.2 mt of GM cotton oil is consumed by human beings, and about 6.5 mt of cotton seed is consumed as animal feed.

What is the State of Edible Oil Sector in India?

- **Place in Country's Economy:**
 - India is **one of the largest producers of oilseeds** in the world.
 - Oil sector occupies an important position in the agricultural economy.
 - It accounts for the estimated **production of 36.56 mt of nine cultivated oilseeds during the year 2020-21** as per the data released by the Ministry of Agriculture.
 - India is the **world's second-largest consumer and number one importer of vegetable oil**.
 - The **present rate of edible oil consumption** in India **surpasses the domestic production rate**. Hence, the country has to rely on imports to meet the gap between demand and supply.
 - At present, **India meets nearly 55% to 60% of its edible oil demand through imports**. Therefore, India needs to be independent in oil production to meet the domestic consumption demand.
 - **Palm oil (Crude + Refined)** constitutes roughly around **62% of the total edible oils imported** and are imported mainly from **Indonesia and Malaysia**, while **Soyabean oil (22%)** is imported from **Argentina and Brazil** and **Sunflower oil (15%)** is imported mainly from **Ukraine and Russia**.
- **Types of Oils Commonly Used in India:**
 - In India, **groundnut, mustard, rapeseed, sesame, safflower, linseed, niger seed and castor** are the major traditionally cultivated oilseeds.
 - **Soyabean** and **sunflower** have also assumed importance in recent years.
 - **Coconut** is most important amongst the plantation crops.
 - Among the non-conventional oils, **rice bran oil** and **cottonseed oil** are the most important.
- **Export Import Policy on Edible Oils:**
 - Import of edible oils is under **Open General License (OGL)**.
 - In order to harmonize the interests of farmers, processors and consumers, Government reviews the duty structure of edible oils from time to time.

What are the Related Government Initiatives?

- The government of India launched [National Mission on Edible Oils-Oil Palm](#) as a centrally-

sponsored scheme, being implemented jointly by the central and state governments with a **special focus in the northeast region and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.

- It is proposed to have an additional 6.5 lakh hectares for palm oil by 2025-26.
- In order to improve and systemize the data management system in the vegetable oil sector, the **Directorate of Sugar & Vegetable Oils under Department of Food and Public Distribution** has developed a **web-based platform (evegoils.nic.in)** for online submission of inputs by vegetable oil producers on monthly basis.
 - The portal also provides **window for online registration and submission of monthly production returns**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQ)

Prelims

Q1. Consider the following statements: (2018)

1. The quantity of imported edible oils is more than the domestic production of edible oils in the last five years.
2. The Government does not impose any customs duty on all the imported edible oils as a special case.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (a)

Q2. Other than resistance to pests, what are the prospects for which genetically engineered plants have been created? (2012)

1. To enable them to withstand drought
2. To increase the nutritive value of the produce
3. To enable them to grow and do photosynthesis in spaceships and space stations
4. To increase their shelf life

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (c)

Exp:

- Genetically modified crops (GM crops or biotech crops) are plants used in agriculture, the DNA of which has been modified using genetic engineering methods. In most cases, the aim is to introduce a new trait to the plant which does not occur naturally in the species. Examples of traits in food crops include resistance to certain pests, diseases, environmental conditions, reduction of spoilage, resistance to chemical treatments (e.g., resistance to a herbicide), or improving the nutrient profile of the crop.
- Some potential applications of GM crop technology are:
 - Nutritional enhancement – Higher vitamin content; more healthful fatty acid profiles; **Hence, 2 is correct.**
 - Stress Tolerance – Tolerance to high and low temperatures, salinity, and drought; **Hence, 1**

is correct.

- There is no such prospect that enables GM crops to grow and do photosynthesis in spaceships and space stations. **Hence, 3 is not correct.**
- Scientists have been able to create certain genetically modified crops which stay fresh for a month longer than usual. **Hence, 4 is correct. Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.**

Q3. Bollgard I and Bollgard II technologies are mentioned in the context of (2021)

- (a)** clonal propagation of crop plants
- (b)** developing genetically modified crop plants
- (c)** production of plant growth substances
- (d)** production of biofertilizers

Ans: (b)

Exp:

- Bollgard I Bt cotton (single-gene technology) is first biotech crop technology approved for commercialization in India in 2002, followed by Bollgard II- double-gene technology in mid-2006, by the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee, the Indian regulatory body for biotech crops.
- Bollgard I cotton is an insect-resistant transgenic crop designed to combat the bollworm. It was created by genetically altering the cotton genome to express a microbial protein from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*.
- Bollgard II technology contains a superior doublegene technology - Cry1Ac and Cry2Ab, which provides protection against bollworms and *Spodoptera caterpillar*, leading to better boll retention, maximum yield, lower pesticides costs, and protection against insect resistance.
- Both Bollgard I and Bollgard II insect-protected cotton is widely planted around the world as an environmentally friendly way of controlling bollworms. Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.

Mains

Q. How can biotechnology help to improve the living standards of farmers? **(2019)**

Source: IE

India-Belarus Relation

For Prelims: Location of Belarus

For Mains: India-Belarus relation, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests

Why in News?

Recently, the **11th Session of the India-Belarus Inter-Governmental Commission** on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation was held.



What are the Highlights of the Session?

- The Intergovernmental Commission **reviewed the results of bilateral cooperation** that took place after the tenth session of the Commission in 2020.
- While expressing satisfaction at the progress made in regard to some projects, **the Commission also directed concerned Ministries and Departments to focus on key sectors** in the trade & investment spheres to finalise concrete outcomes.
- **India and Belarus reiterated their strong desire to further broaden their cooperation** with emphasis on key sectors such as pharmaceuticals, financial services, science and technology, heavy industries, culture, tourism, and education.
- The two ministers **directed their respective business communities to engage with each other** in these sectors to further mutually beneficial cooperation.
- The **two sides agreed to promote cooperation among various states in India** and regions in Belarus, especially in focus areas.

How Has Been India-Belarus Relations?

- **Diplomatic Relations:**
 - India's relations with Belarus have been traditionally warm and cordial.
 - India was one of the **first countries to recognize Belarus as an independent country in 1991** after the break-up of the Soviet Union.
- **Supports at Multilateral Fora:**
 - The cooperation between the two countries is **visible at many multilateral fora such as the [UN Security Council \(UNSC\)](#) and [Nuclear Suppliers Group \(NSG\)](#).**
 - Belarus was **one of the countries whose support helped in consolidating India's candidature** for the non-permanent seat at the UNSC in July 2020.
 - India has also **reciprocated Belarus's support at various international fora**, such as Belarus's membership in the **[Non Aligned Movement \(NAM\)](#)** and other international and multilateral groups like **[IPU \(Inter-Parliamentary Union\)](#).**
- **Comprehensive Partnership:**

- The two countries **enjoy a comprehensive partnership and have established mechanisms for exchanging views on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues** through Foreign Office Consultations (FOC), Intergovernmental Commission (IGC), and Joint Commission on Military Technical Cooperation.
- The two countries have signed a number of Agreements/MoUs on various subjects, including trade and economic cooperation, culture, education, media and sports, tourism, science & technology, agriculture, textiles, Avoidance of **Double Taxation**, Promotion and Protection of Investments, and defence and technical cooperation.
- **Trade and Commerce:**
 - In the economic sector, **the annual bilateral trade turnover in 2019 stands at USD 569.6 million.**
 - India's special gesture in 2015 that granted **Belarus the Market Economy Status** and a USD 100 million Line of Credit has also helped in the growth in the economic sector.
 - Market Economy status is a status conferred on the country exporting the goods accepted as the benchmark. Prior to this status, the country was considered as a Non-Market Economy (NME).
 - India's encouragement to the Belarusian businessmen to invest in **'Make in India'** projects are bearing fruits.
- **Indian Diaspora:**
 - The **Indian Community in Belarus consists of around 112 Indian nationals** and 906 Indian students pursuing studies in medicine in State medical universities in Belarus.
 - **Indian art and culture, dance, yoga, ayurveda, films, etc.** remain popular among Belarusian nationals.
 - Many young Belarusians also take keen interest in learning Hindi and dance forms of India.

Way Forward

- Belarus **needs several footholds in Asia diversified by geographical subregions.**
 - **India could become one of such pillars in South Asia**, but Belarusian initiatives should definitely fall into the "matrix" of India's national interests and sacred meanings.
- There are **also certain hidden reserves for cooperation** in the field of cybersecurity.
 - Belarus may become an **"entry point" for Indian pharmaceutical companies** to the Eurasian market.
- The **potential of military and technical cooperation**, including shared developments, has not been fully disclosed.
 - Cinema (Bollywood) could stimulate the interest of the Indian business community and tourists.
- An **additional increase in the export of tourism and medical services could be ensured by recreational centres** being established in Belarus based on Indian traditional medicine models (Ayurveda + Yoga).

Source: PIB

2nd BIMSTEC Agriculture Ministers Meeting

For Prelims: BIMSTEC, IFPRI

For Mains: Neighbourhood first policy, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests

Why in News?

Recently, India hosted the **Second Agriculture Ministerial-level meeting** of the [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#).

What are the Highlights of the Meeting?

- India urged the **member countries to cooperate in developing a comprehensive regional strategy** to strengthen cooperation for the transformation of agriculture.
- It also **urged the member countries to adopt a conducive agricultural food system and a healthy diet for all** by referring to the **importance of millet as a nutritious food and the efforts made by India to promote millet** and its products during the [International Year of Millets - 2023](#).
- **Natural and ecological farming** should be promoted to conserve agricultural biodiversity and reduce the use of chemicals.
 - **Along with digital farming and precision farming**, initiatives under the **'One Health' approach** are also taking shape in India.
- **Highlighted India's statement at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit held in Colombo in March, 2022** on enhancing regional cooperation between BIMSTEC nations for food security, peace and prosperity in the region.
- Adopted the **Action Plan for Strengthening BIMSTEC Agricultural Cooperation (2023-2027)**.
- An MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the BIMSTEC Secretariat and the [International Food Policy Research Institute \(IFPRI\)](#) has been signed and approval has been given to bring fisheries and livestock sub-sectors under the Agricultural Working Group.

What is BIMSTEC?

- **About:**
 - The BIMSTEC is a **regional organisation comprising seven Member States:** five deriving from South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.
 - This sub-regional organisation came into being on **6th June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration**.
 - The BIMSTEC region is **home to around 1.5 billion people which constitute around 22% of the global population** with a combined **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** of 2.7 trillion economy.
 - The BIMSTEC Secretariat is in **Dhaka**.
 - **Institutional Mechanisms:**
 - BIMSTEC Summit
 - [Ministerial Meeting](#)
 - Senior Officials' Meeting
 - BIMSTEC Working Group
 - Business Forum & Economic Forum
- **Significance:**
 - The BIMSTEC has **huge potential as a natural platform for development cooperation** in a rapidly changing geopolitical calculus and can leverage its unique position as a pivot in the [Indo-Pacific region](#).
 - The **growing value of BIMSTEC can be attributed to its geographical contiguity**, abundant natural and human resources, and rich historical linkages and a cultural heritage for promoting deeper cooperation in the region.
 - The **Bay of Bengal region has the potential to become the epicentre of the Indo-Pacific idea**, a place where the strategic interests of the major powers of East and South Asia intersect.
 - It **serves as a bridge between two major high-growth centres of Asia** — South and Southeast Asia.

What are the Challenges with BIMSTEC?

- **Inconsistency in Meetings: BIMSTEC planned to hold summits every two years,** ministerial meetings every year, but only five summits have taken place in 20 years.
- **Neglected by member states:** It seems that India has used BIMSTEC only when it fails to work through SAARC in the regional setting and other major members like Thailand and Myanmar are focused more towards ASEAN than BIMSTEC.
- **Broad Focus Areas:** The focus of BIMSTEC is very wide, **including 14 areas of cooperation like connectivity, public health, agriculture etc.** It is suggested that BIMSTEC should remain committed to small focus areas and cooperate in them efficiently.
- **Bilateral Issues between Member Nations:** Bangladesh is facing one of the worst refugee crises of Rohingyas from Myanmar who are fleeing prosecution in the state of Rakhine in Myanmar. There is a border conflict between Myanmar and Thailand.
- **BCIM:** The formation of another sub-regional initiative, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum, with the proactive membership of China, has created more doubts about the exclusive potential of BIMSTEC.
- **Inadequate Focus on Economic Cooperation:** A quick look at the unfinished tasks and new challenges gives an idea of the burden of responsibilities on the grouping.
 - **Despite signing a framework agreement for a comprehensive [Free Trade Agreement \(FTA\)](#) in 2004,** BIMSTEC stands far away from this goal.

Way Forward

- There is a **need for finalisation of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement among the member countries.**
 - As the region is facing challenges of health and economic security and stressed the need for solidarity and cooperation, the FTA will make the Bay of Bengal a bridge of connectivity, a bridge of prosperity, a bridge of security.
- India would have to counter the impression that **BIMSTEC is an India-dominated bloc, in that context India can follow the [Gujral doctrine](#)** that intends to chalk out the effect of transactional motive in bilateral relations.
- BIMSTEC should focus more in the future on new areas such as the **[blue economy](#), the [digital economy](#)**, and promotion of exchanges and links among start-ups and **[Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises \(MSMEs\)](#).**

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Do you think that BIMSTEC is a parallel organisation like the SAARC? What are the similarities and dissimilarities between the two? How are Indian foreign policy objectives realized by forming this new organisation? **(2022)**

Source: [PIB](#)

Wetlands Conservation

For Prelims: Wetland Conservation, Mangrove, Peatlands, eco-systems

For Mains: Wetland and its Importance, Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Why in News?

In this **Anthropocene** era, human interference can be seen in every component of Earth's ecosystem. Due to such human-mediated changes, the loss of Shallow Wetlands such as lakes, ponds are becoming a major concern.

- The **Anthropocene Epoch** is an unofficial unit of geologic time, used to describe the **most recent period in Earth's history** when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystem.

What are the Shallow Water Wetlands?

- **About:**
 - These wetlands are **areas of permanent or semi-permanent water** with little flow. They include vernal ponds, spring pools, salt lakes and volcanic crater lakes.
 - They are of enormous ecological importance and human need (such as drinking water and inland fisheries).
 - Because of its shallow nature, **sunlight penetrates the bottom of the water body**.
 - The temperature is isothermal, with a continuous mixing process (circulating top-to-bottom on a regular basis, **especially in a tropical country like India**).
- **Concerns:**
 - Over time, these water bodies **get filled by sediments coming from the catchment**.
 - Hence, the depth of the water column gradually declines. It is quite obvious that a small change in the temperature and rainfall pattern would have a cascade of ecological effects on this type of water body.
 - From 1901-2018, **India's average temperature has risen by 0.7 degrees Celsius**. The rise is attributed to greenhouse gas-induced warming as well as land-use and land-cover change, according to a 2020 report by the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences.
 - Such changes in temperature and heat distribution across the regional scale will have an impact on the rainfall pattern. Therefore, there is an **increasing threat to India's natural ecosystems**, freshwater resources, and agriculture, which ultimately impact biodiversity, food, water security, public health and society as a whole.
 - An example of **Surajpur Bird Sanctuary** (an urban wetland in Yamuna River basin) -In October 2019, the water level in Surajpur wetlands was low with high algal production as well as smell and odour issues.

What are Wetlands?

- **About:**
 - Wetlands are areas where water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated plant and animal life. They occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land, or where the land is covered by water.
 - Wetlands are defined as: "lands transitional between terrestrial and aquatic eco-systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water".
 - Often called **"nature's kidneys" and "nature's supermarket"**, wetlands support millions of people by providing food, and water, and controlling floods and storm surges.
- **Types:**
 - **Coastal Wetlands:**
 - Coastal wetlands are found in the areas between land and open sea that are not influenced by rivers such as shorelines, beaches, mangroves and coral reefs.
 - A good example is the mangrove swamps found in sheltered tropical coastal areas.
 - **Marshes:**
 - These are periodically saturated, flooded, or ponded with water and characterized by herbaceous (non-woody) vegetation adapted to wet soil conditions. Marshes are further characterized as tidal marshes and non-tidal marshes.
 - **Swamps:**
 - These are fed primarily by surface water inputs and are dominated by trees and

shrubs. Swamps occur in either freshwater or saltwater floodplains.

- **Bogs:**
 - Bogs are waterlogged peatlands in old lake basins or depressions in the landscape. Almost all water in bogs comes from rainfall.
- **Estuaries:**
 - The area where rivers meet the sea and water changes from fresh to salt can offer an extremely rich mix of biodiversity. These wetlands include deltas, tidal mudflats and salt marshes.

What is the Importance of Wetlands?

- **Highly Productive Ecosystems:** Wetlands are highly productive ecosystems that provide the world with nearly two-third of fish harvest.
- **Integral Role in the Ecology of the Watershed:** The combination of shallow water, high levels of nutrients are ideal for the development of organisms that form the base of the food web and feed many species of fish, amphibians, shellfish and insects.
- **Carbon Sequestration:** Wetlands' microbes, plants and wildlife are part of global cycles for water, nitrogen and sulphur. Wetlands store carbon within their plant communities and soil instead of releasing it to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide.
- **Lowering Flood Heights and Reduces Soil Erosion:** Wetlands function as natural barriers that trap and slowly release surface water, rain, snowmelt, groundwater and flood waters. Wetland vegetation also slow the speed of flood waters lowering flood heights and reduces soil erosion.
- **Critical to Human and Planet Life:** More than one billion people depend on them for a living and 40% of the world's species live and breed in wetlands.

What are the Threats to Wetlands?

- **Urbanisation:** Wetlands near urban centres are under increasing developmental pressure for residential, industrial and commercial facilities. Urban wetlands are essential for preserving public water supplies.
 - Delhi has more than 1,000 lakes, wetlands and ponds, according to the estimates of the Delhi Wetland Authority.
 - But most of these are threatened by **rampant encroachment (both planned and unplanned), pollution through dumping of solid waste** and construction debris.
- **Agriculture:** Vast stretches of wetlands have been converted to paddy fields. Construction of a large number of reservoirs, canals and dams to provide for irrigation significantly altered the hydrology of the associated wetlands.
- **Pollution:** Wetlands act as natural water filters. However, they can only clean up the fertilizers and pesticides from agricultural runoff but not mercury from industrial sources and other types of pollution.
 - There is growing concern about the effect of industrial pollution on drinking water supplies and the biological diversity of wetlands.
- **Climate Change:** Increased air temperature, shifts in precipitation, increased frequency of storms, droughts, and **floods, increased atmospheric carbon dioxide** concentration, and sea level rise could also affect wetlands.
- **Dredging:** The removal of material from a wetland or river bed. Dredging of streams lowers the surrounding water table and dries up adjacent wetlands.
- **Draining:** Water is drained from wetlands by cutting ditches into the ground which collect and transport water out of the wetland. This lowers the water table and dries out the wetland.

What are the Efforts towards Wetlands Conservation?

- **Initiatives at Global Level:**
 - The **United Nations declared 2021-2030 the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration** with the aim to conserve and restore the terrestrial, aquatic and marine ecosystems.
 - **Ramsar Convention**
 - **Montreux Record**

- [World Wetlands Day](#)
- **Initiatives at National Level:**
 - [Wetlands \(Conservation and Management\) Rules, 2017.](#)
 - [Action Plan of MoEFCC](#)

Way Forward

- To counter unplanned urbanization and a growing population, management of wetlands has to be **an integrated approach in terms of planning, execution and monitoring.**
- Effective **collaborations among academicians and professionals**, including ecologists, watershed management specialists, planners and decision makers for overall management of wetlands.
- Spreading awareness by **initiating awareness programs** about the importance of wetlands and constant monitoring of wetlands for their water quality would provide vital inputs to safeguard the wetlands from further deterioration.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q1. "If rainforests and tropical forests are the lungs of the Earth, then surely wetlands function as its kidneys." Which one of the following functions of wetlands best reflects the above statement? (2022)

- (a) The water cycle in wetlands involves surface runoff subsoil percolation and evaporation.
- (b) Algae form the nutrient base upon which fish, crustaceans, molluscs, birds, reptiles and mammals thrive.
- (c) Wetlands play vital role in maintaining sedimentation balance and soil stabilization.
- (d) Aquatic plants absorb heavy metals and excess nutrients.

Ans: (c)

Exp:

- Wetlands are great filters. They trap sediments and remove pollutants, which helps to purify water. Wetlands help to control erosion. Wetlands work like giant sponges. They store water and then slowly release it and this helps to deal with dry seasons with little rainfall. Thus, wetlands play an important role in maintaining sediment balance and soil stabilization.
- **Hence, option (b) is correct.**

Q2. Consider the following statements: (2019)

1. Under Ramsar Convention, it is mandatory on the part of the Government of India to protect and conserve all the wetlands in the territory of India.
2. The Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2010 were framed by the Government of India based on the recommendations of Ramsar Convention.
3. The Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2010 also encompass the drainage area or catchment regions of the wetlands as determined by the authority.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only

- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. What is wetland? Explain the Ramsar concept of 'wise use' in the context of wetland conservation. Cite two examples of Ramsar sites from India. **(2018)**

[Source: DTE](#)

Report on SVAMITVA Scheme

Why in News?

Recently, the Report of the **Expert Committee on SVAMITVA Scheme** was released during the **National Conference on SVAMITVA Scheme and Rural Planning** in Madhya Pradesh.

- The report provides the guiding principles that States may adopt, in order to realize the objectives of the SVAMITVA Scheme holistically.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

- **About Expert Committee:**
 - **The Expert Committee** was formed in 2022 consisting of domain experts from Land Governance, Banking, Survey of India, [National Informatics Centre \(NIC\) -Geographic information system \(GIS\)](#), State Revenue and [Panchayati Raj](#) Departments, Industry and premier Planning and Architecture Institutes.
- **Report's Recommendations:**
 - To create systems that **promote transparency** in the implementation of the scheme.
 - Promote the **adoption of record of rights** for availing bank loan.
 - Develop **linkages between different departments** for informed decision-making related to property tax assessment and collection.
 - **Wider adoption of SVAMITVA data-sets** by government and private agencies as per new [geospatial](#) guidelines.
 - Adoption of [RADPFI \(Rural Area Development Plan Formulation and Implementation\)](#) Guidelines and SVAMITVA data for accurate village level-planning
 - **Increasing capacity** at State, District and Block level for GIS skill sets, among others.

What is the SVAMITVA Scheme?

- **About:**
 - SVAMITVA stands for **Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas**.
 - It is a [center sector scheme](#) which was launched nationally on the occasion of [National Panchayati Raj Day](#) on 24th April 2021.
- **Nodal Ministry:**
 - Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR)

- Survey of India is a Technology Implementation Agency.
- **Aim:**
 - To provide an **integrated property validation solution** for rural India.
 - To provide the **'record of rights'** to village household owners in rural areas and **issue Property Cards**.
 - The **demarcation of rural areas** would be done using [Drone Surveying Technology](#).
- **Features:**
 - The demarcation of rural inhabited areas would be done using **CORS (Continuously Operating Reference Stations) Networks** which provides mapping accuracy of 5 cm.
 - This would provide the **'record of rights'** to village household owners **possessing houses in inhabited rural areas** in villages.
 - It will cover around 6.62 Lakh villages of the entire country during 2021-2025.
- **Nomenclature for Property Cards:**
 - Property Cards are known as **'Title deed'** in Haryana, **'Rural Property Ownership Records (RPOR)'** in Karnataka, **'Adhikar Abhilekh'** in Madhya Pradesh, **'Sannad'** in Maharashtra, **'Svमित्वा Abhilekh'** in Uttarakhand, **'Gharauni'** in Uttar Pradesh.

[Source: PIB](#)

Pashmina Shawl

Why in News?

Recently, Custom officials complained about the **presence of 'Shahtoosh' guard hair** in [Pashmina shawl](#), which is obtained from **endangered Tibetan antelopes** in many of their export consignments.

What is Pashmina?

- **About:**
 - Pashmina is a [Geographical Indication \(GI\)](#) **certified wool** that has its origin from Kashmir region of India.
 - Originally **Kashmiri people used Pashmina shawls** to keep themselves warm during the winter season.
 - The term **'Pashmina'** has been derived from a Persian word **"Pashm"** meaning a **weavable fiber precisely wool**.
 - Pashmina Shawls are very **costly due to their fine quality** of wool and the hard work involved in making one single piece.
 - Weaving a single Pashmina Shawl takes a long time depending on the type of work involved. It generally **takes around 72 hours or more to complete one shawl**.
- **Source:**
 - The wool that is used in weaving the Pashmina Shawl is **obtained from the Changthangi goats (Capra Hircus)** domesticated in the Ladakh.
- **Fibre Processing:**
 - The raw Pashm is **harvested by the Changpa tribes of Ladakh who herd the Changthangi goats**.
 - The Changpa are **semi-nomadic community** which inhabit Changthang (which is spread across Ladakh and Tibet Autonomous Region) or other regions of Ladakh.
 - As of 2001, the **Changpa were classified as a Scheduled Tribe** under the Indian Government's reservation program of affirmative action.
 - The **Kashmiri weavers buy the raw pashm** from the middle men, the only connecting link between the Changpa tribe & the Kashmiris; clean the grubby raw pashm fibre.
 - They then **comb the fibre & segregate it** according to the fineness.

- It is then **hand spun** & then set up into warps & **put up on the handloom**.
- The **yarn is then hand woven & transformed** into the beautifully luxurious pashmina shawls that are renowned the world over.
- This art of weaving Pashmina Shawls is passed on from generation to generation as a tradition in Kashmir.

▪ **Significance:**

- Pashmina is one of the **finest and highest quality wool** in the whole world.
- Pashmina Shawl **attracted the attention of people from all across the world** and hence this became one of most demanding shawls in the whole world.
 - Its high demand **boosted the local economy**.

▪ **Concern:**

- Due to restricted availability and high prices, **adulteration of Pashmina with sheep wool/ultra-fine merino wool is a common practice** by manufacturers.
 - In 2019, the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** published an **Indian Standard for identification**, marking and labelling of Pashmina products to certify their purity.

▪ **GI Certifying Criteria for Pashmina:**

- The shawl should be **made from 100% pure Pashm**.
- The fineness of the fibers should be up to **16 Microns**.
- The shawl should be **handwoven by local artisans of Kashmir**.
- The yarn should be **only spun by hand**.

What is Shahtoosh?

- Shahtoosh is the **fine undercoat fibre obtained from the Tibetan Antelope, known locally as 'Chiru'**, a species living mainly in the northern parts of the Changthang Plateau in Tibet.
 - As per the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red list**, Chiru has been classified as **'Near Threatened'**.
- As they offer high levels of smoothness and warmth, Shahtoosh shawls became a **highly expensive commodity**.
- Unfortunately, due to **commercial poaching of the animal**, their population declined dramatically.
 - **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES)** included the Tibetan Antelope in 1979 leading to **prohibition in sale and trade of Shahtoosh shawls and scarves**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. With reference to 'Changpa' community of India, consider the following statements: (2014)

1. They live mainly in the State of Uttarakhand.
2. They rear the Pashmina goats that yield a fine wool.
3. They are kept in the category of Scheduled Tribes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
 (b) 2 and 3 only
 (c) 3 only
 (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Exp:

- The Changpa are semi-nomadic community which inhabit Changthang (which is spread across Ladakh and Tibet Autonomous Region) or other regions of Ladakh. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- They herd Changthangi (Pashmina) goats and are among the few suppliers of authentic cashmere

wool of the finest quality. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

- As of 2001, the Changpa were classified as a Scheduled Tribe under the Indian Government's reservation program of affirmative action. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- **Therefore, option B is the correct answer.**

[Source: TH](#)

UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review

Why in News?

Recently, the [Human Rights Council \(HRC\) Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#) session was held in Geneva, where India's human rights record was examined by the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group**.

What is UPR?

- **About:**
 - The UPR is a unique process which **involves a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States.**
 - Since its first meeting was held in April 2008, all 193 UN member States have been reviewed **thrice within the first, second and third UPR cycles.**
 - The ultimate aim of this mechanism is to **improve the human rights situation in all countries and address human rights violations** wherever they occur. Currently, no other universal mechanism of this kind exists.
 - During the review process, **States outline specific steps they have taken to implement recommendations** posed during their previous reviews and highlight their recent human rights developments.
- **UPR for India:**
 - The three country representatives serving as rapporteurs ("troika") for the review of India are: **Sudan, Nepal and the Netherlands.**
 - This review marks the beginning of the **UPR fourth cycle.** India's first, second and third UPR reviews took place in April 2008, May 2012 and May 2017, respectively.
- **Reviews are Based on:**
 - National report - information provided by the State under review
 - Information contained in the reports of independent human rights experts and groups, known as the Special Procedures, human rights treaty bodies, and other UN entities
 - Information provided by other stakeholders including national human rights institutions, regional organizations and civil society groups.

What are the Highlights of the Review?

- Greece, the Netherlands and Vatican City called upon the Government of India to ensure **freedom of religion and end discrimination against human rights defenders** and religious minorities.
 - India appreciates the role of human rights defenders, journalists and activists in the democratic system but the activities of these groups and individuals should be in conformity with the law of the land.
- **Germany** expressed concern about the **rights situation in India** especially religious minorities as well as women and girls.
- Germany also said that the [Foreign Contribution Regulation Act](#) should not "unduly restrict"

the “freedom of association” in India.

- The **German representative called upon India to strengthen the National Human Rights Commission** and said the discrimination against Dalits should end.
- Nepal called for India to **strengthen measures to end violence against women** and end child marriage.
- Russia asked India to continue to **take policies that will eradicate poverty** and called for “responsible corporate behaviour”.
- India said that actions were taken against some organizations due to their illegal practices including malafide re-routing of money and wilful and continuing violations of extant legal provisions, foreign exchange management rules and tax law of India.

What is UNHRC?

▪ About:

- The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of **human rights** around the world.

▪ Formation:

- The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006. It replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) serves as the Secretariat of the Human Rights Council.
- OHCHR is headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**.

▪ Members:

- It is made up of 47 United Nations Member States which are elected by the UN General Assembly (UNGA).
- The Council's Membership is based on equitable geographical distribution. Seats are distributed as follows:
 - African States: 13 seats
 - Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
 - Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
 - Western European and other States: 7 seats
 - Eastern European States: 6 seats
- Members of the Council serve for a period of **three years** and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.

▪ Procedures and Mechanisms:

- **Advisory Committee:** It serves as the Council's “think tank” providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues.
- **Complaint Procedure:** It allows individuals and organizations to bring human rights violations to the attention of the Council.
- **UN Special Procedures:** These are made up of **special rapporteurs**, special representatives, independent experts and working groups that monitor, examine, advise and publicly report on thematic issues or human rights situations in specific countries.

Source: TH