

GEOGRAPHY**Perseid Meteor Shower**

- The Perseid Meteor Shower, which has been active from 17th July 2019 onward, can be seen until 26th August, 2019.
- The Perseids occur as the Earth runs into pieces of cosmic debris left behind by the comet Swift-Tuttle.
- The cloud of debris is about 27 km wide — and at the peak of the display, between 160 and 200 meteors streak through the Earth's atmosphere every hour as the pieces of debris, travelling at some 2.14 lakh km per hour, burn up a little less than 100 km above the Earth's surface.
- The Perseids currently visible in the night sky are not due to the debris left behind by the comet Swift-Tuttle during its most recent pass, which happened in 1992.
 - This particular comet goes around the Sun once every 133 years, and the meteors now visible were left behind by the pass before the last one — or perhaps even earlier.

Meteor Shower

- The cosmic debris are the remnants of comets — great frigid chunks of matter that leave behind dirty trails of rocks and ice that linger long after the comets themselves have passed.
- As the Earth wades through this cloud of comet waste, the bits of debris create what appears from the ground to be a fireworks display in the sky — known as a meteor shower.
- Meteor showers take their name from the location of the radiant.
- The Perseid radiant is in the constellation Perseus. The Geminid meteor shower, which is observed each December, is named for a radiant in the constellation Gemini.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Western Zonal Council**

- The 24th meeting of the Western Zonal Council, to be chaired by Union Home Minister, will be held in Panjim (Goa) on August 22, 2019.
- Speedy investigations into sexual assault cases, a comprehensive security plan and improved security at railway stations will top the agenda of the meeting.
- The council, functioning under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)'s Inter-State Council Secretariat, comprises Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and the Union Territories of Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.
- The previous meeting of the council was chaired by the then Home Minister in April, 2018 at Gandhinagar (Gujrat).

Zonal Council

- The Zonal Councils are the statutory (and not the constitutional) bodies. They are established by an Act of the Parliament, that is, States Reorganisation Act of 1956.

- The act divided the country into five zones (Northern, Central, Eastern, Western and Southern) and provided a zonal council for each zone.
- While forming these zones, several factors have been taken into account which include: the natural divisions of the country, the river systems and means of communication, the cultural and linguistic affinity and the requirements of economic development, security and law and order.
- Each zonal council consists of the following members:
 - Home Minister of Central government.
 - Chief Ministers of all the States in the zone.
 - Two other ministers from each state in the zone.
 - Administrator of each union territory in the zone
- In addition to the above Zonal Councils, a North-Eastern Council was created by a separate Act of Parliament—the North-Eastern Council Act of 1971.
 - Its members include Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim.
- These are advisory bodies that will discuss and make recommendations with regard to any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning between the Centre and States.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan-Dhan Yojana

Recently the central government has started the registration of beneficiaries under the pension scheme for farmers i.e. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan-Dhan Yojana (PM-KMY).

Salient Features

- The scheme has been started to provide social security to all landholding Small and Marginal Farmers (farmers whose land holdings are less than two hectares of land in the country).
- Under this scheme, a fixed pension of Rs.3,000/- will be provided to all eligible small and marginal farmers.
- It is a voluntary and contribution based pension scheme.
- Pension will be paid to the farmers from a Pension Fund managed by the Life Insurance Corporation of India.
- Farmers will have to contribute an amount between Rs.55 to Rs.200 per month in the Pension Fund till they reach the retirement date i.e. the age of 60 years.
- The Central Government will also make an equal contribution of the same amount in the pension fund.
- Those farmers who are of the age of 18 years and above and upto 40 years are eligible to join the scheme.
- Spouses of the Small and Marginal farmers are also eligible to join the scheme separately and they will also get separate pension of Rs.3000 when they reach the age of 60 years.

- The eligible farmers can enroll in the scheme at the nearest Common Service Centre (CSC).
- It can be noted that, to augment the income of the Small and Marginal Farmers (SMFs), the government has recently launched the new Central Sector Scheme, namely, "Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)".

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

India-China

India and China have signed four agreements to strengthen cultural and people-to-people ties.

The 4 agreements are on:

- Cultural Exchanges: To promote cultural exchanges for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, organisation of cultural activities and management of archaeological heritage sites.
- Healthcare: To enhance cooperation in the field of traditional medicine, where both India and China have a rich knowledge, accumulated over centuries.
- Sports: To promote exchanges between national sports associations, sports persons and youth for strengthening cooperation on international sports events.
- Cooperation in Museum Management: To promote collaboration between Hubei Provincial Museum, Wuhan and the National Museum, New Delhi in exhibitions, protection and restoration of collections and archaeological excavations.
 - The Hubei Provincial Museum is one of the best known museums in China, with a large amount of state-level historic and cultural relics.
 - The National Museum is one of the largest museums in India. Established in 1949, it holds a variety of articles ranging from pre-historic era to modern works of art.

China's Initiatives at Kailash Mansarovar

- To improve the material comforts of the pilgrims to Kailash Mansarovar, the Chinese government has built accommodation facilities, called reception centres, at various points of the pilgrimage.
- The reception centres, each with about 150 beds, have rooms with charging points, a common kitchen and a common washroom, and provide food for the pilgrims.
- The Chinese government has spent \$5.21 million in building these centres.

Ladakh and Line of Actual Control

- The External Affairs Minister has assured China that India's decision to exercise greater administrative control over Ladakh would have no implications for India's external boundaries or the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China.
- LAC is a 4,057-km porous border running through glaciers, snow deserts, mountains and rivers that separate India and China.

- The LAC traverses three areas— Western (Ladakh, Kashmir), middle (Uttarakhand, Himachal) and eastern (Sikkim, Arunachal).
- In 1993, India and China signed an accord to reduce tensions along their border and respect the LAC. Three years later in 1996, the two countries agreed to delimit the LAC and institute confidence building measures.
- In October 2013, the two sides signed the Boundary Defence Cooperation Agreement to prevent any flare up along the un-demarcated border. This encompasses both military and diplomat level dialogue mechanism.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Extension of Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary

Recently, the Forest Department identified around 300 hectares of revenue land for inclusion in the Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS). The land is being diverted as compensation, for setting up a new Missile Test Launch Facility by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)

The move has also been recommended by the National Board for Wildlife.

Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary

- Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Andhra Pradesh, India.
- The sanctuary is a part of the mangrove wetland in Andhra Pradesh and is located in the coastal plain of Krishna delta, spread across Krishna and Guntur districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- The estuary of the Krishna River passes through the sanctuary.
- It is believed that this region potentially holds one of the most significant populations of fishing cats in the world.

Wild Buffalo

Recently, the government has decided to translocate five female wild buffaloes from Manas National Park in Assam to Udanti Wildlife Sanctuary in Raipur district, Chhattisgarh.

- This will be the longest such translocation in the country ever, that seeks to revive the waning population of Chhattisgarh's State animal.
- The survival hazard of inbreeding, poaching for horns and increasing male population have necessitated the translocation.
- The Central India Wild Buffalo Recovery Project aims to stabilise the wild buffalo population in Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve.

Wild Buffalo (*Bubalus arnee*)

- The wild buffalo is mainly found in the alluvial grasslands, marshes, swamps and river valleys. They are generally found in areas that have plenty of water holes and resources
- The estimated population of the wild buffaloes in the Northeast is around 3,000-4,000, the largest in the country and accounting for 92% of the world population.
- It is listed under Schedule 1 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

- It is classified as endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

MISC**International Youth Day**

International Youth Day (IYD), observed on August 12, is an awareness day designated by the UN. The purpose of the day is to draw attention to a given set of cultural and legal issues surrounding youngsters.

Theme: "Transforming education".

Significance of the theme:

- It highlights efforts to make education more relevant, equitable and inclusive for all youth, including efforts by youth themselves.
- Rooted in Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, IYD will examine how Governments, young people and youth-led and youth-focused organizations, as well as other stakeholders, are transforming education and how these efforts are contributing to the achievement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Background:

- IYD was first celebrated on August 12, 2000, after the UN General Assembly passed a resolution accepting the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Lisbon in 1998.

Challenges ahead:

- Statistics remind us that significant transformations are still required to make education systems more inclusive and accessible:
- Only 10% of people have completed upper secondary education in low income countries.
- 40 % of the global population is not taught in a language they speak or fully understand.
- Over 75 % of secondary school age refugees are out of school. In addition, indigenous youth, young people with disabilities, young women, young people belonging to vulnerable groups or in vulnerable situations, etc. are facing additional challenges to access education that respects their diverse needs and abilities as well as reflects and embraces their unique realities and identities.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Nothing can dim the light that shines from within.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns: Examine the concerns and impacts associated with China's Belt Road Initiative, which has expanded itself from being just an infrastructural project

One Belt One Road (OBOR) is an ambitious project by China, that focuses on connectivity and cooperation among multiple countries spread across the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe. According to official figures, OBOR currently involves 126 countries. When it was announced in 2013, the BRI was an initiative focused solely on building infrastructure projects; it now has a much broader framework, which includes financial and humanitarian aid projects.

Concerns and impacts associated with China's Belt Road Initiative

- Threat of 'Debt Trap': OBOR's financing is through loans extended to member countries. Chinese Loans for infrastructure projects are made with understanding that the developing countries award construction contracts to Chinese companies. China benefits from both financing and construction of infrastructure projects, while developing countries will bear the financial risk. The Centre for Global Development in Washington reckons that eight belt-and-road countries are at risk of debt distress; among them are Laos, Mongolia and Pakistan.
- Strategic loss to member countries: China will acquire controlling interests in the OBOR ports if member countries fail to repay the loans. This situation can prove strategically disadvantageous to member countries.
- BRI in disputed regions: India has not supported OBOR. China's insistence on establishing the CPEC which is part of BRI project, through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) is seen by India as infringing its sovereignty. China is building roads and infrastructure in the disputed territory of Gilgit-Balistan, which is under Pakistan's control but which India claims as a part of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Security Issues with BRI: CPEC part of BRI passes through (PoK) and Baluchistan, both of which are home to a long-running insurgency where it faces terrorism and security risks.
- Lack of transparency: BRI project's lack of transparency and accountability is a cause of concern, as it may be skewed in favour of China economically and strategically. Chinese approach of not partnering with local companies will not help member countries create job opportunities.
- Chinese Cultural domination: China is using BRI to disseminate its ideology and culture in member countries e.g. in Pakistan through terrestrial distribution of broadcast TV, which will cooperate with Chinese media in the "dissemination of Chinese culture". A similar Sinification is visible in the Mandalay town of Myanmar which has impacted local architecture and culture.

Conclusion:

- Even though China continues to pitch OBOR as project for regional development involving Infrastructure development to enhance transnational and cross-regional connectivity as a priority area for cooperation, the enormous concerns can lead to conflict and delays.

- China should allay the fears of international community regarding BRI through more transparency in funding and fixing its own accountability in case member countries face adverse circumstances due to BRI project.