

GEOGRAPHY- PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC**Sinkhole**

6 people were killed and 10 are believed to be missing after a bus and some pedestrians were swallowed by a sinkhole in China's Xining city on January 13, 2020.

About:

- Sinkholes are depressions formed in the ground when layers of the Earth's surface start collapsing into caverns.
- They can occur suddenly and without warning, because the land under the surface of the Earth can stay intact for a period of time until the spaces get too big.
- Their formation can be caused due to natural processes or human activity.
- Typically, sinkholes form in areas of "karst" terrains, where the rock below the surface of the Earth can be easily dissolved by groundwater.
- Essentially, this means that when rainwater seeps into the ground, the rock below the surface of the Earth starts dissolving, leading to the creation of spaces. This process is a slow and gradual one and can sometimes take hundreds or thousands of years.
- Such terrains are most commonly found in areas with limestone, gypsum or carbonate rocks. The formation of karst terrains is dependent on geology and climate.
- Sinkholes can also be formed due to human activity. This can happen due to broken land drains, water mains and sewerage pipes, increased rainfall, storm events, underlying limestone and diverted surface water, among other reasons.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Article 131**

The Kerala government, the first state to challenge the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, filed a petition under Article 131 of the Constitution to declare the law unconstitutional and in violation of Articles 14 (equality before law), 21 (protection of life and personal liberty) and 25 (freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion).

About:

- Article 131 of the Constitution vests the Supreme Court with original jurisdiction over disputes occurring between states or between states and the Centre.
- The original jurisdiction of a court means the power to hear a case for the first time, as opposed to appellate jurisdiction, in which the court reviews the decision of a lower court.
- This jurisdiction shall not extend to a dispute arising out of any agreement having been entered into or executed before the commencement of this Constitution.
- In 'State of Rajasthan vs Union of India', 1977, the Supreme Court ruled that "mere wrangles between governments have no place in the scheme of that Article."

Article 32 vs Article 131: Unlike the original jurisdiction under Article 32 (which gives the top court the power to issue writs, etc.), the jurisdiction in Article 131 is exclusive, meaning it is only the Supreme Court which has this authority. Under Article 226, the High Courts too have the power to issue writs, directions etc.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**'Blue Flag' Certification**

The Centre issued an Extraordinary Gazette Notification declaring a list of activities and facilities that would be permissible in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) areas of certain beaches, which have been identified for obtaining the 'Blue Flag' certification.

Background:

- In July 2019, the Ministry of Environment had identified 13 beaches across the country for the Blue Flag certification.
- According to the latest notification, the following activities and facilities would be permitted in the CRZ of these beaches, including Islands, subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from the High Tide Line (HTL): Grey water treatment plant; Solar power plant; Landscaping lighting; CCTV surveillance; First aid station; Parking facilities etc.

- These activities and facilities would be exempt from prior clearance under the provisions of CRZ Notification, Island Protection Zone Notification and Island Coastal Regulation Zone Notifications respectively.

What is 'Blue Flag' certification?

- The 'Blue Flag' is a certification that can be obtained by a beach, marina, or sustainable boating tourism operator, and serves as an eco-label. The certification is known as an indication of high environmental and quality standards.
- The certification is awarded by the Denmark-based non-profit Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) with 33 stringent criteria under four major heads for the beaches: (i) Environmental Education and Information (ii) Bathing Water Quality (iii) Environment Management and Conservation and (iv) Safety and Services.
- The Blue Flag Programme started in France in 1985 and in areas outside Europe since 2001.
- 47 countries currently participate in the program, and 4,573 beaches, marinas, and boats have this certification.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hallmarking Made Mandatory For Gold Jewellery

Consumer Affairs Minister announced that from January 15, 2021, onwards, No jeweller will be allowed to sell gold jewellery or artefacts without hallmark from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).

About:

- Gold hallmarking is a purity certification. Mandatory hallmarking will protect the public against lower caratage and ensure consumers do not get cheated while buying gold ornaments.
- Consumers have to watch out for four marks on hallmarked gold jewellery: (1) BIS mark, (2) purity in carat, (3) assay centre's name and (4) jewellers' identification mark.
- Grades available: Jewellers will be allowed to sell only 14, 18 and 22 carat gold jewellery. Instead of 10 grades earlier, hallmarked gold jewellery will now be available in three caratage of 14 carat, 18 carat and 22 carat.
- Deadline: Jewellers have been given a year's time (i.e. till January, 2021) to register themselves with the BIS.
- Penalty: If jewellery or artefacts made of 14, 18 and 22 carat gold are sold without a BIS hallmark, then the jeweller could be charged penalty five times the cost of the object or even given imprisonment up to one year.

Related Info:

- The BIS Act 2016 has enabling provisions under Section 14 & Section 16 for mandatory hallmarking of Gold jewellery & artefacts by the Central Government.
- BIS (Hallmarking) Regulations, 2018 were notified w.e.f. 14.06.2018.

RBI Deputy Governor

Michael Patra has been appointed deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of India, according to a Personnel Ministry order.

About:

- Michael Patra has been appointed to the post for a period of three years from the time of his appointment.
- He will be the fourth deputy governor of the RBI. The post was lying vacant after Viral V Acharya had resigned from the post in June last year.
- The RBI, headed by Governor Shaktikanta Das, can have a maximum of four deputy governors. N S Vishwanathan, B P Kanungo and M K Jain are the other deputy governors in RBI.

RBI central board of directors

- The Reserve Bank's affairs are governed by a central board of directors. The board is appointed by the Government of India in keeping with the Reserve Bank of India Act.
- They are Appointed/nominated for a period of four years. It comprises:
- Official Directors:
- Full-time: Governor and not more than four Deputy Governors.
- Non-Official Directors
- Nominated by Government: ten Directors from various fields and two government Official.
- Others: four Directors - one each from four local boards.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES
Green Credit Scheme

The Forest Advisory Committee has approved a scheme that could allow “forests” to be traded as a commodity. If implemented, it allows the Forest Department to outsource one of its responsibilities of reforestation to non-government agencies.

Present scenario:

- In the current system, industry needs to make good the loss of forest by finding appropriate non-forest land — equal to that which would be razed.
- It also must pay the State Forest Department the current economic equivalent — called Net Present Value — of the forest land.
- It's then the department's responsibility to grow appropriate vegetation that, over time, would grow into forests.

Problems:

- Industries have often complained that they find it hard to acquire appropriate non-forest land, which has to be contiguous to existing forest.
- Nearly ₹ 50,000 crore had been collected by the Centre over decades, but the funds were lying unspent because States were not spending the money on regrowing forests.

Green Credit Scheme:

- The proposed ‘Green Credit Scheme’ allows agencies — they could be private companies, village forest communities — to identify land and begin growing plantations.
- After three years, they would be eligible to be considered as compensatory forest land if they met the Department's criteria.

Related Info: The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Environment Ministry is a statutory body. It is tasked with adjudicating requests by the industry to raze forest land for commercial ends. It comprises official members in the Centre's forestry division and independent experts, who are the non-official members.

PRELIMS SPECIFIC FACTS- INDICES, DAYS, EVENTS, AWARDS ETC
Henley Passport Index 2020

The latest edition of the Henley Passport Index, widely acknowledged to be the most reliable of such rankings, was released recently.

Methodology:

- According to Henley & Partners, the residence and citizenship planning firm that publishes the ranking, the Index lists the world's passports “according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa”.
- The ranking is based on data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), a trade association of some 290 airlines, including all major carriers.
- The index includes 199 different passports and 227 different travel destinations. The data are updated in real time as and when visa policy changes come into effect.

Key findings:

- Japan has been topping the Index for three straight years; according to the 2020 index, its citizens are able to access 191 destinations without having to obtain a visa in advance.
- Singapore is in second place. Germany and South Korea are ranked at No. 3.
- Afghanistan, at rank 107, has the world's weakest passport.
- The Indian passport is ranked 84th in the world. It was ranked higher in both 2019 (82 rank) and 2018 (ranked at 81). Since the index began in 2006, the Indian passport has ranked in a band of 71st to 88th.

Harivarasanam Award

Renowned music composer Ilaiyaraaja was awarded the Harivarasanam Award for 2020 by the Kerala Government.

Harivarasanam:

- 'Harivarasanam' is a Malayalam devotional song written in eight stanzas, called 'Ashtakam'.
- It was written by Kambakudi Kulathur Srinivasa Iyer, a guruswami, in 1947.

- It is recited at Sabarimala (the principal Ayyappan pilgrimage site), before closing the temple door every night.

Harivarasanam Award:

- Criteria: The award is given to a person for their contribution to propagate the spirit of secularism, equanimity, and universal brotherhood of Sabarimala through the songs.
- Cash prize: ₹ 1,00,000.
- Instituted by: Kerala state government and the Travancore Devaswom Board.
- Instituted in: 2012.
- Previous recipients of the award: KJ Yesudas (2012), KG Jayan (2013), M Jayachandran (2014), SP Balasubrahmanyam (2015), MG Sreekumar (2016), Gangai Amaran (2017) and KS Chitra (2018) and P Susheela (2019).

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns: The real challenge to India's food security is poor grain management rather than a shortage of grain production. Comment.

Ans:

As per FAO, India's present food grain production is over 275 million tonnes while annual per capita consumption is nearly 160 kg. Despite sufficient grain production, what India lacks currently is efficient grain management, which includes proper storage and distribution.

With an increasing population (touching 1.8 billion by mid-21st century), limited net sown areas, rising fiscal deficit, inflation and objectives to be fulfilled under National Food Security Act the supply-demand congruency has to be achieved from efficient grain management.

Current Challenges in Grain Management

- Procurement being open-ended while distribution limited through PDS.
- Inadequate storage with FCI, leading to wastages.
- Not efficiently monetizing excessive stocks apart from Buffer Stocks through Open Market Operations.
- Centralised role of FCI in procurement and distribution: less involvement of private entities.
- MSP regime focusing on certain crops like wheat and rice leaving less market space for other cereals like coarse grains.
- NFSA coverage over 67%, despite India's growing purchasing power at an individual level. This increases the subsidy burden on the state exchequer.
- Poor targeting: Some states provide the bulk of grain in FCI's basket-like Haryana and Punjab; beneficiaries.
- Leakages and inefficient working of institutions like FCI. Shanta Kumar committee observed 47% leakage in whole procurement to the beneficiary supply chain.

Steps for efficient grain management

- Rationalizing subsidy: Antyodaya category should receive foodgrains at prices notified in NFSA while for others, the prices can be set more rationally.
- Better Targeting: Keeping in line with Tendulkar Committee poverty estimation, NFSA coverage should be rationalised.
- Diversifying procurement basket:
- Eastern and hinterland states should be focussed upon while rationalising food crops especially from Green Revolution belt like north-west India where environmental challenges have also started creeping like soil alkalinity, depleting groundwater table.
- MSP regime should make coarser grains marketable by incentivising farmers, especially in drylands. This will help in better nutritional security also.
- De-centralised procurement by states.

Way Forward: These along with other recommendations of Shanta Kumar Committee can help overcome the challenge of grain management in India thereby making India food secure along with curtailing Fiscal Deficit.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs

1. With reference to the Green Credit Scheme, consider the following statements:
 1. The proposed 'Green Credit Scheme' allows agencies like private companies, village forest communities etc to identify land and begin growing plantations.
 2. The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Environment Ministry is a statutory body.

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
2. With reference to the Sinkholes, consider the following statements:
 1. They are depressions formed in the ground when layers of the Earth's surface start collapsing into caverns.
 2. Their formation can be caused only due to natural processes.

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
3. With reference to the Blue Flag' certification, consider the following statements:
 1. It can be obtained by a beach, marina, or sustainable boating tourism operator, and serves as an eco-label.
 2. The certification is awarded by the NITI Aayog.

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
4. With reference to the Henley Passport Index 2020, consider the following statements:
 1. Japan has been topping the Index for three straight years.
 2. The Indian passport is ranked 84th in the world.

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
5. The disputes occurring between states or between states and the Centre is under which of the following jurisdiction of the Supreme Court?

(a) **Original**
(b) Writ
(c) Advisory
(d) Appellate
6. With reference to the RBI central board of directors, consider the following statements:
 1. The board is appointed by the Government of India for a period of four years in keeping with the Reserve Bank of India Act.
 2. The board comprises of only official directors.

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
7. With reference to the Gold hallmarking, consider the following statements:
 1. From January 15, 2021, onwards, No jeweller will be allowed to sell gold jewellery or artefacts without hallmark from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).
 2. Jewellers will be allowed to sell only 10, 14, 18 and 22 carat gold jewellery.

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
8. Who among the following was awarded the Harivarasanam Award for 2020 by the Kerala Government?

(a) Hariprasad Chaurasia
(b) Yuvan Shankar Raja
(c) G. V. Prakash Kumar
(d) **Ilaiyaraaja**