

GEOGRAPHY**Siachen Glacier**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced that the Siachen Glacier will be open for tourists, between the base camp and Kumar logistics base. As of now, civilian tourists are restricted to the Nubra Valley, which is the gateway to the Siachen Glacier, and well away from the base camp.

About:

- The Siachen Glacier is a glacier located in the eastern Karakoram range in the Himalayas, just northeast of the point NJ9842 where the Line of Control between India and Pakistan ends.
- The glacier lies between the Saltoro Ridge immediately to the west and the main Karakoram range to the east. The Saltoro Ridge originates in the north from the Sia Kangri peak on the China border in the Karakoram range.
- The entire Siachen Glacier, with all major passes, is currently under the administration of India since 1984. Pakistan controls the region west of Saltoro Ridge, far away from the glacier.
- The glacier's melting waters are the main source of the Nubra River in the Indian region of Ladakh, which drains into the Shyok River. The Shyok in turn joins the 3000 kilometre-long Indus River which flows through Pakistan. Thus, the glacier is a major source of the Indus.
- At 76 km long, it is the longest glacier in the Karakoram and second-longest in the world's non-polar areas.

Cosmic Yeti

Astronomers accidentally discovered the footprints of a monster galaxy in the early universe that has never been seen before.

About:

- Like a cosmic Yeti, the scientific community generally regarded these galaxies as folklore, given the lack of evidence of their existence, but astronomers in the United States and Australia managed to snap a picture of the beast for the first time.
- Published in the Astrophysical Journal, the discovery provides new insights into the first growing steps of some of the biggest galaxies in the universe.
- The researchers estimate that the signal came from so far away that it took 12.5 billion years to reach Earth, therefore giving us a view of the universe in its infancy.
- They think the observed emission is caused by the warm glow of dust particles heated by stars forming deep inside a young galaxy. The giant clouds of dust conceal the light of the stars themselves, rendering the galaxy completely invisible.

Australia's Uluru Rock

Australia's giant Red Monolith- Uluru (Also known as Ayers Rock) has been permanently closed for trekking by the Australian government. The spiritual significance for Anangu (An aboriginal tribe of Australia) is responsible for the ban.

Uluru

- It is the huge red rock monolith located in the Central Australian desert.
- Ayers Rock (now Uluru) was first declared a national park in 1950 and renamed as Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in 1993.
- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List for both its natural and cultural values.
- Uluru is made up of sandstone and is about half a billion years old.
- It stands 348 metres high and has a circumference of 9.4 km.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**RTI Rules**

The Ministry of Personnel notified the Right to Information (Term of Office, Salaries, Allowances and Other Terms and Conditions of Service of Chief Information Commissioner, Information Commissioners and State Information Commissioners) Rules, 2019.

About:

- The rules have reduced the tenure of Information Commissioners from five years to three.
- It give the government the discretion to decide on “conditions of service” for which no express provisions are made in the rules.
- The Chief Information Commissioner’s salary has been fixed at Rs. 2.5 lakh and an Information Commissioner’s at Rs.2.25 lakh.

Opposition to rules:

- According to activists, the rules had been drafted and promulgated in violation of the procedures laid down in the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy of 2014.
- The policy requires all draft rules to be placed in the public domain for comments/suggestions of people. The draft was not available in the public domain and no consultations were held with members of the public.
- The changes would affect the independence of ‘Information Commissions who will function like caged parrots.’

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Sukhna Lake

The Chandigarh administration issued a draft notification for declaring Sukhna Lake as a wetland under the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rule, 2017. Suggestions and objections have been invited from residents for the same.

About:

- Sukhna Lake in Chandigarh is a reservoir at the foothills (Shivalik hills) of the Himalayas.
- This rainfed lake was created in 1958 by Le Corbusier and the Chief Engineer P L Verma by damming the Sukhna Choe, a seasonal stream coming down from the Shivalik Hills.
- The catchment area of Sukhna Wetland spreading over 10,395 acres as finalised by the Survey of India includes 2,525 acres of Haryana and 684 acres of Punjab.
- Declaring Sukhna a wetland will help preserve the lake and conserve its ecological and biodiversity. A major threat to Sukhna is the discharge of pollutants from neighbouring areas.
- With this, various activities will be prohibited/regulated/ promoted both in the wetland as well catchment areas.

Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017:

- These rules notified by the environment ministry, decentralise wetlands management by giving states powers to not only identify and notify wetlands within their jurisdictions but also keep a watch on prohibited activities.
- It also indirectly widens the ambit of permitted activities by inserting the 'wise use' principle, giving powers to state-level wetland authorities to decide what can be allowed in larger interest.
- The Centre's role under the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, will be restricted to monitoring its implementation by states/UTs, recommending trans-boundary wetlands for notification and reviewing integrated management of selected wetlands under the Ramsar Convention.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC

Sycamore

Using the company's state-of-the-art quantum computer, called Sycamore, Google has claimed "quantum supremacy" over the most powerful supercomputers in the world by solving a problem considered virtually impossible for normal machines.

About:

- The quantum computer completed the complex computation in 200 seconds. That same calculation would take even the most powerful supercomputers approximately 10,000 years to finish.
- Google's quantum computer consists of microscopic circuits of superconducting metal that entangle 53 qubits in a complex superposition state.

- Although this Google achievement is certainly a feat in the world of quantum computing, the field is still in its infancy and practical quantum computers remain far on the horizon.

Quantum supremacy:

- Quantum supremacy, or “quantum advantage” is the point at which quantum computers can solve problems that are practically unsolvable for “classical” (non-quantum) computers to complete in any reasonable timeframe.
- It is generally believed that at least 49 qubits are required to cross the quantum supremacy line.
- Qubits behave very differently to bits in classical computers. Bits represent either a “1” or a “0”. In contrast, qubits can represent a combination state made up of both “1” and “0,” due to the peculiar quantum effects in which properties like particle position, direction, and momentum are not well-defined.

Indigen Genome Project

Union Minister for Science & Technology, Harsh Vardhan announced details of the IndiGen Genome project.

About:

- The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) has conducted Whole Genome Sequencing of 1,008 Indians from different populations across the country under the IndiGen Genome project.
- The IndiGen initiative was undertaken by CSIR in April 2019, which was implemented by the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB), Delhi and CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad.
- This has enabled benchmarking the scalability of genome sequencing and computational analysis at population scale in a defined timeline. The ability to decode the genetic blueprint of humans through whole genome sequencing will be a major driver for biomedical science.
- The outcomes of the IndiGen will have applications in a number of areas including predictive and preventive medicine with faster and efficient diagnosis of rare genetic diseases.

DEFENCE & SECURITY

Open General Export Licences (OGELs)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved issuance of two Open General Export Licences (OGELs) for export of certain parts and components and intra-company transfer of technology to select countries. The decision will give a boost to defence exports.

About:

- Following a demand by the exporters, the DPP held extensive consultations with various stakeholders and formulated this OGEL policy and submitted for Defence Minister’s approval.
- The OGEL is a one-time export licence to be granted to a company for a specific period which is two years initially.
- The application for grant of OGEL will be considered by Department of Defence Production (DPP) on a case-to-case basis.
- For acquiring the licences, the applicant is mandatory to have Import-Export certificate.
- The items permitted under OGEL includes components of ammunition and fuse setting device without energetic and explosive material, firing control and related ing and warning equipment and related system and body protective items.
- Complete aircraft or complete unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and any components specially designed or modified for UAVs are excluded under this licence.
- The countries allowed under the OGELs are: Belgium, France, Germany, Japan, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, UK, USA, Canada, Italy, Poland and Mexico. Export of items to a Special Economic Zone is not permitted.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Patience, persistence and perspiration make an unbeatable combination for success.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns: Critically Examine the implications of the RTI Act since its implementation.

Ans

The objective of the RTI Act is to establish a practical regime for citizens to access information held by Public Authorities. This in turn led to increased transparency and accountability at the Public Authorities. RTI since its enactment led to many stories of defacing corrupt practices. But still there are many issues present that prevented RTI to be a full success.

- Enabled citizen rights: RTI has become a weapon in the hands of common citizens to fight for their rights. Earlier citizens had to struggle to get what was rightfully theirs. RTI has removed such bottlenecks.
- Anti-corruption tool: In the past 14 years, it has been instrumental in uncovering a list of major scams. The success of the Act earned it the fourth place among 111 countries in the annual rating of similar empowering laws across the world in the year 2016. Scams like Adarsh Society Scam, 2g scam, Commonwealth Games Scam, Indian Red Cross Society Scam are some noticeable achievements under RTI.
- Empowered people's voice: It has given ordinary citizens the confidence and the right to ask questions to government authorities. The RTI Act has empowered people in containing corruption and bringing transparency and accountability in the working of the Government. According to estimates, nearly 60 lakh applications are being filed every year. It is used by citizens as well as the media.
- Strengthened democracy: Every citizen has right to claim information from public authorities under the act. Public authorities have an obligation to provide the sought information to the applicants with certain restrictions related to national security, personal information and third party information. This strengthened democracy through active participation of public.
- Features leading to transparency: A large amount of information has to be placed in the public domain by ways of manuals prescribed under the Act. All the Government departments along with a number of bodies which receive substantial funding from the Government have been brought under the RTI. This has ushered an era of transparency.

Issues and loopholes in RTI:

- Increasing pendency of cases: These Commissions particularly the Central Information Commission, have kept a strong vigil over the functioning of

administrative machinery relating to the implementation of the Act. However, their performance has often been restricted by increasing number of appeals. This has resulted in increase in pendency as well as increase in waiting time for hearing of appeals.

- **Definition of information:** An important issue is the definition of information. Supreme Court stated that ‘information’ for the purpose of this Act would mean information held by the PIO or under his control. However, if the information is not held by the PIO the public authority is not under obligation to provide that information.
- **Not all institutions under RTI:** Another issue is that some institutions are not being covered under the Act. E.g. judiciary is not under the act.
- **Lack of infrastructure:** The Implementation of RTI requires the PIOs to provide information to the applicant through photocopies, soft copies etc. These facilities are not available at Block and Panchayat level.
- **Low awareness level:** Awareness about RTI is yet very low. Awareness level is low especially among the disadvantaged communities such as women rural population, OBC/SC/ST population.
- **Constraints faced in filing applications:** Under Section 26 of the RTI Act, the appropriate Government is expected to publish and distribute user guides (within 18 months of enactment of the Act) for information seekers. However Nodal Departments have not published these guides in many states.

Since the implementation of the RTI Act, it has established itself as an important tool in handling corruption and inefficiency in the Government. Although there have been instances of misuse of the Act, but it has served its purpose well. Issues and loopholes in RTI should be removed through proper amendment to further the objectives of transparency and accountability.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQS

1. With reference to the IndiGen Genome project, consider the following statements:
 1. The IndiGen initiative was undertaken by DRDO.
 2. This has enabled benchmarking the scalability of genome sequencing and computational analysis at population scale in a defined timeline.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 Open General Export Licences (OGELs), consider the following statements:
 1. The OGEL is a one-time export licence to be granted to a company for a specific period which is two years initially.
 2. Complete aircraft or complete unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and any components specially designed or modified for UAVs are included under this licence.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. Which of the following glacier's melting waters are the main source of the Nubra River in the Indian region of Ladakh, which drains into the Shyok River?
 - (a) Nanda Devi Glacier
 - (b) Siachen Glacier**
 - (c) Gangotri Glacier
 - (d) Rongbuk Glacier
 4. With reference to the Quantum supremacy, consider the following statements:
 1. Using the company's state-of-the-art quantum computer, called Sycamore, Google has claimed "quantum supremacy" over the most powerful supercomputers in the world by solving a problem considered virtually impossible for normal machines.
 2. It is the point at which quantum computers can solve problems that are practically unsolvable for "classical" (non-quantum) computers to complete in any reasonable timeframe.
- 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. With reference to the Right to Information (Term of Office, Salaries, Allowances and Other Terms and Conditions of Service of Chief Information Commissioner, Information Commissioners and State Information Commissioners) Rules, 2019, consider the following statements:
 1. The rules have reduced the tenure of Information Commissioners from five years to three.
 2. The Chief Information Commissioner's salary has been fixed at Rs.2.5 lakh and an Information Commissioner's at Rs.2.25 lakh.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
6. Sukhna Lake, recently seen in news, located in:
 - (a) Nagaland
 - (b) Mizoram
 - (c) Chandigarh**
 - (d) Andaman and Nicobar Islands
7. Recently in news, and a famous trekking site Ulluru Rock is located in which country?
 - (a) Russia
 - (b) Vietnam
 - (c) Indonesia
 - (d) Australia**