

GOVERNANCE

World Press Freedom Index 2021

World Press Freedom Index has recently unveiled the rank of 180 nations and India has ranked 142nd in the world. The index is published each year by the international journalism not-for-profit body, Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

Key Points

About:

- It has been published every year since .Based in Paris, RSF is an independent NGO with consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF). OIF is a 54 french speaking nations collective.
- The Index ranks countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists. However it is not an indicator on the quality of journalism.
- The parameters include pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, and the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.

Global Scenario:

- Only 12 of the Index's 180 countries (7%) can claim to offer a favourable environment for journalism.
- The Report has raised concern about the larger Asia-Pacific region as several nations in an attempt to curb freedom of press have in place draconian laws on 'sedition,' 'state secrets' and 'national security'.
- Norway has topped yet again for the fifth year in the row, followed by Finland and Denmark.
- Eritrea is at the bottom meanwhile China is ranked 177, and is only above North Korea at 179 and Turkmenistan at 178.

India's Performance Analysis:

- India has fared poorly amongst its neighbours with Nepal at 106, Sri Lanka at 127 and Bhutan at 65. Pakistan is a close follower at 145th spot. India was ranked 142 in the year 2020 as well, thus showing no improvement in the environment it provides to its journalists.
- India is among the countries classified "bad" for journalism and is termed as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists trying to do their jobs properly.
- The report has blamed an environment of intimidation created by the nationalist government for any critical journalist often brandishing them as anti state or anti national.

Reasons Behind India's Poor Performance:

- Journalists are exposed to every kind of attack, including police violence against reporters, ambushes by political activists, and reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials.
- The journalists have often been subjected to coordinated hate campaigns on social networks.
- Such campaigns are particularly violent when the targets are women.

Matters related to interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

2.INDIA-CHAD

Chad's President Idriss Deby has been killed on the frontline against rebels in the north. He was battling rebels belonging to the group 'FACT (the Front for Change and Concord in Chad)'.

Key Points

About Chad's President:

- The news of his death came only the day after he was proclaimed the winner of a presidential election that had given him a sixth term in office.
- He had been ruling Chad since 1990, taking power on the back of a coup..
- Deby was a major French ally in the fight against Islamic extremism in Africa, hosting the base for the French military Operation Barkhane and supplying critical troops to the peacekeeping effort in northern Mali.

About the Group FACT:

The Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), is a political and military organisation in the north of Chad, with the goal of overthrowing the government of Chad.

Some Aspects of Chad:

- It is a landlocked state in Africa.
- It is named after Lake Chad.
- This is the second-largest lake in Africa (after Lake Victoria) .The Sahara Desert roughly covers one third of the country.
- Chad became an oil-producing nation in 2003, with the completion of a USD 4bn pipeline linking its oilfields to terminals on the Atlantic coast.

India-Chad Relations:

- Chad is a member country of International Solar Alliance (ISA), an India-France initiative.
- The country is a member of TEAM-9 initiative (Techno Economic Approach for African Movement) comprising eight West and Central African countries seeking to benefit in technical and economic spheres through cooperation with India.
- The increase in the import of Crude Oil from Chad is the main reason for the significant increase in the bilateral trade (USD 513.59 million in 2018-19).
- India has offered a Line of Credit of USD 27.45 million for establishment of Solar PV Module Manufacturing Plant at N'djamena.
- India implemented a Technical Assistance Programme (TAP) for cotton in six African countries, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda, from 2012 to 2018.
- Many civilians and Chad public servants have been offered courses and provided training under ITEC (Indian Technical Economic Cooperation).

2.Kulbhushan Jadhav Case INDIA-PAKISTAN

Pakistan has urged India to appoint a lawyer to represent death row convict Kulbhushan Jadhav to implement the verdict of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Key Point

About:

- India approached the ICJ against Pakistan for denial of consular access (Vienna Convention) to Jadhav and challenging the death sentence. Kulbhushan Jadhav was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017.
- ICJ ruled in July 2019 that Pakistan must undertake an “effective review and reconsideration” of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav, and also grant consular access to India without further delay.
- It had asked Pakistan to provide a proper forum for appeal against the sentence given to Jadhav by the military court.

Implications of 'Effective Review and Reconsideration' for India:

- Effective review and reconsideration is a phrase which is different from ‘review’ as one understands in a domestic course.
- It includes giving consular access and helping Jadhav in preparing his defence.
- It means that Pakistan has to disclose the charges and also the evidence which it has been absolutely opaque about uptill now.
- Pakistan would also have to disclose the circumstances in which Jadhav’s confession was extracted by the military.
- It implies that Jadhav will have a right to defend whichever forum or court hears his case.

Vienna Convention:

- The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations is an international treaty that defines consular relations between independent states.
- A consul (who is not a diplomat), is a representative of a foreign state in a host country, who works for the interests of his countrymen.
- Article 36 of the Vienna Convention states that foreign nationals who are arrested or detained in the host country must be given notice without delay of their right to have their embassy or consulate notified of that arrest.

International Court of Justice:

- ICJ is a principal judicial organization of the United Nations (UN). It was established in 1945 by a UN Charter and began working in 1946 as the successor to the Permanent Court of International Justice.
- It settles legal disputes between member countries and gives advisory opinions to authorized UN Organs and Specialized Agencies.

- An Indian, Judge Dalveer Bhandari has been a member of the ICJ since April 2012.
- It is seated in the Peace Palace of Hague, Netherlands.

ECONOMY

SISFS

Recently, the Government has launched the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS). The Scheme was announced during the 'Prarambh: Startup India International Summit' which marked the five-year anniversary of the Startup India initiative.

Key Points

About:

- **Aim:** To provide financial assistance to startups for proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry, and commercialization.
- **Launched by:** Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) with an outlay of Rs. 945 Crore.
- **Some Eligibility Conditions:** A startup, recognized by DPIIT, incorporated not more than 2 years ago at the time of application. Startups should not have received more than Rs. 10 lakh of monetary support under any other Central or State Government scheme.
- **Features:** It will support an estimated 3,600 entrepreneurs through 300 incubators in the next 4 years. An Experts Advisory Committee (EAC), constituted by DPIIT, will be responsible for the overall execution and monitoring of the Scheme. Grants of up to Rs. 5 crore will be provided to the eligible incubators selected by the committee. The selected incubators will provide grants of up to Rs. 20 lakh for validation of proof of concept, or prototype development, or product trials to startups. Investments of up to Rs. 50 lakh will be provided to the startups for market entry, commercialization, or scaling up through convertible debentures or debt-linked instruments.
- **Expected Benefit:** It will help in creating a robust startup ecosystem in Tier 2 and 3 regions, as the smaller towns in India are often not provided with appropriate funding.

About Startup India Initiative: It envisages building a robust Startup ecosystem in the country for nurturing innovation and providing opportunities to budding entrepreneurs. It was launched in 2016. The action plan of this initiative focuses on following three areas:

- Simplification and Handholding.
- Funding Support and Incentives.
- Industry-Academia Partnership and Incubation.

Related Government Initiatives:

- **Startup Innovation Challenges:** It is a fantastic opportunity for any startup to leverage their networking and fund-raising efforts.
- **Ranking of States on Support to Startup Ecosystems:** It is an evolved evaluation tool aimed to strengthen the support of States and UTs to holistically build their startup ecosystems.
- **SCO Startup Forum:** The first-ever Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Startup Forum was launched in October 2020 to develop and improve startup ecosystems collectively.
- **Prarambh:** The 'Prarambh' Summit aims to provide a platform to the startups and young minds from around the world to come with new ideas, innovation and invention.
- **National Startup Awards:** It seeks to recognize and reward outstanding startups and ecosystem enablers that are contributing to economic dynamism by spurring innovation and injecting competition.

Seed Funding:

- It typically represents the first official money that a business venture or enterprise raises.
- It helps a company to finance its first steps, including things like market research and product development.
- There are many potential investors in a seed funding situation: founders, friends, family, incubators, venture capital companies and more.
- One of the most common types of investors participating in seed funding is a so-called "angel investor." Angel investors tend to appreciate riskier ventures (such as startups with little by way of a proven track record so far) and expect an equity stake in the company in exchange for their investment.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Humans Cells In Monkey Embryos

Recently, researchers at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in the US in a research called Chimera Research have for the first time grown human cells in monkey embryos.

Key Points

About the Research:

- By integrating human cells into the embryos of macaque monkeys, a chimeric tool has been created.
- Chimeras are organisms that are made up of the cells of two distinct species, in this case humans and monkeys.
- For instance, if this hybrid embryo was placed in the womb of a monkey, it could possibly grow into a new kind of an animal (however this was not the aim of this study).

Purpose of the Research:

- Understanding Human Development & Drug Evaluation:
- Ability to grow cells of two different species together offers scientists a powerful tool for research and medicine, advancing current understanding about early human development, disease onset and progression and ageing.
- It could also help in drug evaluation and address the critical need for organ transplantation.

Provides New Platform to Study Diseases:

- Chimeric tools provide a new platform to study how certain diseases arise. For instance, a particular gene that is associated with a certain type of cancer could be engineered in a human cell.
- It can help in studying the course of disease progression using the engineered cells in a chimeric model, which may be able to tell them more about the disease than results obtained from an animal model.

Reason for Choosing Macaque:

- In a 2017 study, researchers integrated human cells into pig tissues as they thought that pigs, whose organ size, physiology and anatomy are similar to that of humans, could help them in creating organs that could ultimately be transplanted to humans.
- As the experiment failed due to evolutionary distance between pigs and humans (about 90 million years) the researchers decided to pick a species that was more closely related to humans, hence macaque monkeys were chosen.

Concerns:

- Not Natural and have Survival Issue:
- Some rare hybrid animals exist naturally and were probably the result of unintentional cross breeding between animals of different species.
- In 2014, a rare hybrid animal called Geep (Goat+Sheep) was born in an Irish farm. Geep was a hybrid between a goat and a sheep, a result of the two mating.
- Generally, different species don't cross-breed and if they do, their offspring don't survive for long and are prone to infertility.

Injustice Against Animals for Human Benefit:

- Although researchers have made it clear that the chimeras created with macaques will not be used for human organs still there is skepticism since others feel that one of the goals of chimera research is to create organs that can be transplanted to humans.
- Chimera research has the potential to worsen injustice against animals and also point out the fairness in using part-human animals to meet human needs.

In 2018 a scientist in China claimed to have produced genetically modified babies using the gene editing technique CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats). He was sentenced to prison for three years, with a fine of 3 million yuan (approx. Rs 3 crore), for illegal medical practice.

BIODIVERSITY & ENVIRONMENT

State Of The Global Climate For 2020

Recently, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) released its annual State of the Global Climate for 2020.

Key Points

Global Temperature:

- 2020 was one of the three warmest years on record, despite a cooling La Niña event.
- The global average temperature was about 1.2° Celsius above the pre-industrial (1850-1900) level.
- The other two warmest years are 2016 and 2019. The six years since 2015 have been the warmest on record. 2011-2020 was the warmest decade on record.

Greenhouse Gases:

- Emission of major greenhouse gases increased in 2019 and 2020.
- Concentrations of the major greenhouse gases in the air continued to increase in 2019 and 2020.
- Globally, averaged mole fractions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) have already exceeded 410 parts per million (ppm), and if the CO₂ concentration follows the same pattern as in previous years, it could reach or exceed 414 ppm in 2021.

Oceans:

- In 2019, the oceans had the highest heat content on record. In 2020, it has broken this record further. Over 80% of the ocean area experienced at least one marine heatwave in 2020.
- A marine heatwave is defined when seawater temperatures exceed a seasonally-varying threshold for at least 5 consecutive days.
- The percentage of the ocean that experienced “strong” marine heat waves (45%) was greater than that which experienced “moderate” marine heat waves (28%).

Sea-level Rise:

- Since record-taking started in 1993 using the satellite altimeter, sea-level has been rising. It is due to the La Niña induced cooling.
- Sea level has recently been rising at a higher rate partly due to the increased melting of the ice sheets in Greenland and **Antarctica**.

The Arctic and the Antarctica:

- In 2020, the Arctic sea-ice extent came down to second lowest on record.
- The 2020 minimum extent was 3.74 million square kilometre, marking only the second time (after 2012) on record that it shrank to less than 4 million sq km.
- In a large region of the Siberian Arctic, temperatures in 2020 were more than 3°C above average.
- A record temperature of 38°C was noted in the town of Verkhoyansk, Russia.
- The Antarctic sea-ice extent remained close to the long-term average.
- However, the Antarctic ice sheet has exhibited a strong mass loss trend since the late 1990s.
- This trend accelerated around 2005, and currently, Antarctica loses approximately 175 to 225 Gigaton per year, due to the increasing flow rates of major glaciers in West Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula.

Extreme Weather Events in India:

- India experienced one of its wettest monsoons since 1994, with a seasonal surplus of 9% that led to severe floods and landslides.
- Cyclone Amphan, which hit Kolkata in May 2020, has been named as the costliest tropical cyclone for the North Indian Ocean region that brought about an estimated loss of USD 14 billion.

World Meteorological Organization:

- It is an intergovernmental organization with a membership of 192 Member States and Territories. India is a member.
- It originated from the International Meteorological Organization (IMO), which was established after the 1873 Vienna International Meteorological Congress.
- **Establishment:** Established by the ratification of the WMO Convention on 23rd March 1950, WMO became the specialized agency of the United Nations for meteorology (weather and climate), operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

RESPOND Programme

Recently, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced that it will support eight joint research projects mooted by the Space Technology Cell (STC), IIT-Delhi.

The ISRO has extended support to the projects under its RESPOND programme.

Key Points

- ISRO started the RESPOND (Research Sponsored) programme in the 1970s, with the objective of encouraging academia to participate and contribute in various Space related research activities.
- Under the Programme, ISRO provides financial support for conducting research and development activities related to Space Science, Space Technology and Space Applications in Academic Institutions in India.

- This is the flagship programme of ISRO to promote extramural research in emerging areas of Space at Academia.
- It looks to enhance the Academic base, generate human resources and infrastructure at the Academic Institutions to support the Space Programmes.
- India is on course to launch its first human spaceflight mission, Gaganyaan, where Indian astronauts will spend time to conduct space experiments. This ambitious mission will help the country prepare for future deep-space missions.
- RESPOND is also participating in the National Missions like IMPRINT (IMPacting Research INnovation and Technology) programme and Uchhatar Avishkar Yojana (UAY).

IMPRINT Programme:

- The scheme was released in 2015 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (now Ministry of Education).
- It is a first-of-its-kind Pan-IIT and IISc joint initiative to address the major science and engineering challenges that India must address and champion to enable, empower and embolden the nation for inclusive growth and self-reliance.
- IMPRINT provides the overarching vision that guides research into areas that are predominantly socially relevant.

Uchhatar Avishkar Yojana:

It was launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 2015. It promotes innovation of a higher order that directly impacts the needs of the Industry and thereby improves the competitive edge of Indian manufacturing.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Q. Analyse the factors and implications of India's recent exit from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). (250 words)

Ans:

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a trade deal that is being negotiated since 2012, between the 10 ASEAN members with their 5 free trade pact partners namely Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand.

Body

Reasons for India's Exit:

- Inadequate Protection against Import-surge: India has apprehensions that the rising imports due to the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would lead to flooding of Chinese products in the Indian market.
- Trade Deficit: Though trade has increased post-FTA with South Korea, ASEAN countries and Japan, imports have risen faster than exports from India.
- According to a paper published by NITI Aayog, India has a bilateral trade deficit with most of the member countries of RCEP.
- India already has a trade deficit of over \$50 billion with China, and the current deal will further lead to increasing of this deficit.
- Lack of Market Access: India has not received any credible assurance on its demand for more market access with respect to mobility of Indian labour, services and agricultural commodities, and its concerns over non-tariff barriers.
- Protection of Domestic Industry: India had expressed apprehensions on lowering and eliminating tariffs on several products like dairy, steel, etc.
- For instance, the dairy industry was expected to face stiff competition from Australia and New Zealand.

Impact of RCEP Exit:

- Protection of Domestic Industry: Refraining from RCEP will provide protection to the Indian domestic industry from cheap imports.
- India can still keep a check on China's dumping of goods in India. However, from needles to the turbine, Chinese goods are all over the Indian market.
- Manufacturing: India envisages becoming a manufacturing hub. However, staying out of the RCEP reduces opportunities for trading with these countries, which together account for roughly a third of global trade.

- In the current economic scenario, manufacturing requires greater integration with global supply chains.
- Geo-politics: RCEP is a China-backed trade deal, signing it without India will further strengthen China's economic power.
- It will affect India's neighbourhood as China already tries to influence the region through its deep pockets.

Conclusion:

RCEP provides a chance for India to bring in historic trade reforms in the economic sector, which in itself will cement India's position as a major global economy and make Indian industry globally competitive. India needs to work on reforms and frame policies to prepare the economy for facing global competition. This can be done by easing land acquisition, reforming labour laws and bridging infrastructure deficit.

DAILY QUIZ

Q.1 Consider the following statements.

1. More than 100 countries are parties to Antarctic treaty.
2. According to treaty, Antarctica shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes.
3. It prohibits military activity, except in support of science and prohibits nuclear explosions and the disposal of nuclear waste.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) **2,3**
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.2 Substantive equality adopted by some countries, means that

- a) All people must be equally treated at all times
- b) Absolute equality in all spheres and to every person.
- c) **Providing equal opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalized groups**
- d) Abolition of all special rights and privileges

Q.3 Consider the following statements.

1. Union Finance Commission tries to rectify the vertical and horizontal imbalances in resources and expenditure responsibilities between Union and States.
2. State Finance Commissions that supplement the resources of panchayats and municipalities are constituted along with Union Finance Commission.
3. The Fifteenth Finance Commission for the first-time recommended performance-based grants to panchayats and municipalities.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

4. Swiss challenge method, sometimes seen in news is related to

- a) Resolving Stressed Assets Conservation International
- b) **Public Procurement**
- c) Reducing Interest rate in the economy
- d) Public Private Partnership

5. Which of the following states do have the common frontier with Myanmar?

1. Manipur
2. Tripura
3. Mizoram
4. Arunachal Pradesh

- a) 1,2
- b) 1,2,3
- c) **1,3,4**
- d) Neither 1 nor 2