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Investment in Coal Mining

Why in News

The **Union Cabinet** has approved an **ordinance** to attract **investment in coal mining**.

- The ordinance amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 and the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015.
- The **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957** regulates the mining sector in India and specifies the requirement for obtaining and granting mining leases for mining operations.
- The **Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015** is an Act that provides for allocation of coal mines and vesting of the right, title and interest in and over the land and mine infrastructure together with mining leases to successful bidders with a view to ensure continuity in coal mining operations and production of coal.

Key Points

- The amendment opens up **coal mining to any firm whose office is registered in India**.
 - **Open To All: Earlier**, the government used to auction coal and lignite mining licences only to companies **engaged in iron and steel**, power coal washing sectors. By opening to everyone, the government seeks to democratize the coal mining sector.
 - **Foreign Direct Investment:** The move will **promote foreign direct investment in the sector**. This will help India gain access to sophisticated technology for underground mining used by global miners.
 - This may also bring an **end to state-run Coal India Ltd's** (a Maharatna company) **monopoly** in the sector.
 - **Coal Production:** With this move, the government aims at greater participation in commercial mining of coal and targets **1000 Million Tonnes (MT) coal production by Financial Year (FY) 2023 -24**.
 - The country produced 730 million tonne of coal in 2018-19.
 - **Import Substitution:** The move will boost both production and mining efficiency besides **substituting import of coal worth Rs 30,000 crore**.
 - Despite having the world's fourth largest coal reserves, India imported 235 million tonnes (mt) of coal in 2019.
 - **Enhanced Competitiveness:** The **steel industry would get cheaper inputs**, leading to an increase in 'competitiveness'.
- The amendment **extends the policy of composite mining licence to the coal sector**.
 - **Composite Mining Licence** is a prospecting license which is followed by a grant of Mining Lease.
 - Earlier, the policy of composite mining licence was in force for unexplored blocks of most non-coal minerals.
 - This move will add to the **certainty of tenure from the prospecting to the production stages**.

Coal in India

- Coal is the **main source of energy** in India. This fossil fuel is found in a form of **sedimentary** rocks and is often known as '**Black Gold**'.
- **Formation:** It originates from **organic matter wood**. When large tracts of forests are buried under sediments, wood is burnt and decomposed due to heat from below and pressure from above. The phenomenon makes coal but takes centuries to complete.

- **Classification:** Coal can be classified on the **basis of carbon content** as follows:
 - **Anthracite:** It is the best quality of coal which **carries 80 to 95% carbon content**. It has the highest calorific value. It is found in small quantity in **Jammu and Kashmir**.
 - **Bituminous:** It **carries 60 to 80% of carbon content** and a low level of moisture content. It is widely used and has high calorific value. It is found in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.
 - **Lignite:** It is often brown in colour. It carries 40 to 55% carbon content. It has high moisture content so it gives smoke when burnt. It is found in Rajasthan, Lakhimpur (Assam), and Tamil Nadu.
 - **Peat:** It has less than 40% carbon content. It has low calorific value and burns like wood.
- **Regulation**
 - **Ownership of Mineral**
 - The State Governments are the owners of minerals located within the boundary of the State concerned.
 - The Central Government is the owner of the minerals underlying the ocean within the territorial waters or the Exclusive Economic Zone of India.
 - **Granting Mineral Concessions**
 - The State Governments grant mineral concessions for all the minerals located within the boundary of the State, under the provisions of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 and Mineral Concession Rules, 1960.
 - However, for **minerals specified in the First Schedule** to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 **approval of the Central Government is necessary**. **Schedule I** contains minerals such as coal and lignite, minerals of the “rare earths” group containing Uranium and Thorium.
- Also, the **Central Government notifies certain minerals as 'minor' minerals** from time to time for which the absolute powers for deciding on procedures of seeking applications for and **granting mineral concessions**, fixing rates of royalty, dead rent, and power to revise orders rest only with the **State Government**. **Example of minor minerals include** building stones, gravel, ordinary clay, ordinary sand.

Source: TH

Mandatory Re-grassing After Mining: SC

Why in News

Recently, the **Supreme Court of India** ordered the government to **include re-grassing of**

mined areas as a mandatory condition in every mining lease, environmental clearance and mining.

It also held that mining leaseholders should take responsibility for re-grassing mined areas so that biodiversity can flourish in such areas.

Key Points from the Order

- The SC ordered the government to **file a report in three weeks after taking appropriate actions** and directed it to devise methods to ensure compliance by mining leaseholders.
- The **cost of re-grassing** the mined area and wherever damage was caused, would be entirely **borne by the licence holder**.
- **Mine closure plan** imposes conditions on the licence holder to restore biodiversity. The mandatory re-grassing would be in addition to these conditions.
- The apex court held that mined areas result in the complete elimination of grass and denies fodder to herbivores.

Re-grassing of such mined areas is the only solution so that grass and other vegetation, including trees, can grow in the mining area for the benefits of animals and the land is restored to a condition which is fit for the growth of fodder, flora, fauna, etc.

Environmental Issues Caused by Mining

- Erosion.
- Formation of sinkholes.
- Loss of biodiversity.
- Contamination of soil, groundwater and surface water by chemicals from mining processes.

Mine Closure Plan

It involves effective planning of the after-mining landscape of a mine after its operating life has ended. These activities include **Water Quality Management, Air Quality Management, Waste Management, Top Soil Management, Disaster Management and Risk Assessment, Safety and Security etc.**

Source: TH

Revised Norms for Data-led Probes

Why in News

The **Ministry of Home Affairs** has issued revised guidelines to streamline the process of seeking **legal assistance from foreign countries in criminal matters**. The revised guidelines will direct how data requests are processed in any criminal investigations.

- The revised guidelines also include the process for **issuing directives on drafting and processing letters of request, mutual legal assistance requests and service of summons, notices and other judicial documents**.
- Most intermediaries and social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, Yahoo!, Twitter and YouTube have their servers outside India. And thus Indian investigation agencies need to follow a particular procedure to access the data from these platforms.
- The revised norms have come in the backdrop of recently tabled **Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019** in the parliament.

Key Points

- **Criteria to seek information from foreign countries:**
 - Before seeking information about a person's e-mail account hosted on servers in foreign countries, **investigating agencies will have to establish that it is linked to a crime**.
- **Data Preservation:**
 - Data preservation is the key to the **investigation of cyber-offences and those involving digital evidence**.
 - Accessing the internet through an Internet Service Provider (ISP) creates **important records and other information** such as customer records, connection information and stored data.
 - These are very **important evidence** to prove the guilt intention of the accused.
 - Since this type of evidence **can disappear quickly**, it is important to get the data preserved through appropriate channels.
- **Place for Data Preservation:**
 - The **G-8 24/7 Network** allows law enforcement agencies to make urgent preservation requests of the digital data before it perishes.
 - The request for data may be sent to the service provider or to the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** — **the contact point for India with respect to G-8 24/7 Network**.

- **Time Period:**

- The requested country has to be informed about the time period for **which the data is required**.
- Such period shall be consented by the requested country.
- The transferred data shall be kept for no longer than the period required for the purpose for which it has been received and shall be returned to the requested country or deleted at the end of the period specified.

G-8 24/7 Network

- The G8 24/7 provides for investigations involving electronic evidence that require urgent assistance from foreign law enforcement.
- Therefore, to enhance and supplement (but not replace) traditional methods of obtaining assistance, the G8 has created the network.
- It is a new mechanism to expedite contacts between the Participating States or other autonomous law enforcement jurisdictions of a State.
- It is a point to point network for urgent assistance in cybercrime matters.

G7

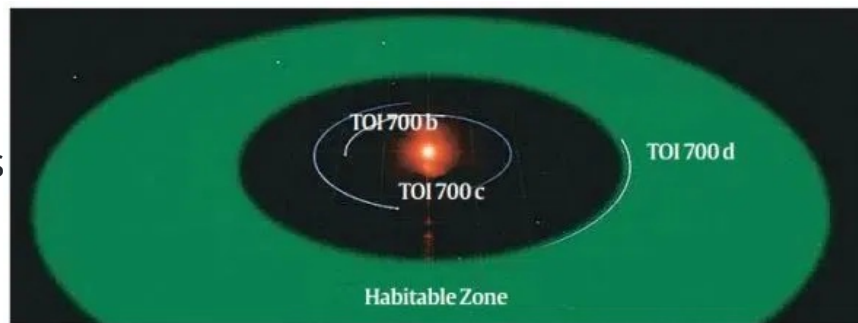
- The Group of Seven (G7) is a forum of the world's seven largest developed economies whose government leaders meet annually to discuss international economic and monetary issues.
- The G-7 has its roots in an informal meeting of the finance ministers of France, West Germany, the U.S, Great Britain, and Japan (the Group of Five) in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.
- The 45th G7 summit was hosted by France from August 24-26, 2019, in Biarritz in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France.\
- The G7 members are recognized as the seven wealthiest and most advanced nations in the world. The members are:
 - France
 - Germany
 - The United Kingdom
 - Italy
 - The United States of America
 - Canada
 - Japan
- The European Union is sometimes considered an eighth member of the G-7 since it holds all the rights and responsibilities of full members except to chair or host the meeting.

- In 1998, after urging from leaders including U.S. President, **Russia** was added to the G-7 group as a full-time member, **creating a formal G-8**. However, in **2014, Russia was suspended from the group after the annexation of Crimea and tensions in Ukraine**.

Source: TH

TOI 700 d

Why in News



The **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** has reported the discovery of an **Earth-size planet**, named **TOI 700 d**.

- The planet was found by **NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) mission**, which was launched in 2018. With TOI 700 d, TESS has discovered its first Earth-size planet in its star's habitable zone.
- **In comparison to the Earth:** TOI 700 d measures **20% larger than Earth**. It **orbits its star, TOI 700, once every 37 days**.
 - The star, TOI 700, is an "**M dwarf**" located just over 100 light-years away in the southern constellation Dorado. It is roughly 40% of the Sun's mass and size, and has about half its surface temperature.
 - Two other planets orbit the star:
 - TOI 700 b, which is almost exactly Earth-size, probably rocky, and which completes an orbit every 10 days.
- TOI 700 c, the middle planet, which is 2.6 times larger than Earth, is probably gas-dominated, and orbits every 16 days.
- **Orbits in Habitable Zone:** TOI 700 d is the outermost planet, and the only one in the TOI 700's habitable zone.

- A habitable zone, also called the "**Goldilocks zone**" is the area around a star where it is not too hot and not too cold for liquid water to exist on the surface of surrounding planets.
 - **Earth is in the Sun's Goldilocks zone.** If Earth were where the dwarf planet Pluto is, all its water would freeze; on the other hand, if Earth were where Mercury is, all its water would boil off.
 - Goldilock Zone is always defined with **reference to a particular star**. It can be different for different stars.

M-dwarf Star

- M dwarf or M-type star, also called Red Dwarf Star are the most numerous type of star in the universe and the smallest type of hydrogen-burning star.
- These have masses from about 0.08 to 0.6 times that of the Sun.
- In the Milky Way Galaxy, about three-fourths of the stars are red dwarfs.

Source: IE

Plea on Scheduled Caste Status to be Religion Neutral

Why in News

The Supreme Court will examine a plea related to Dalit Christians who demand the same quota benefits reserved for Scheduled Castes.

- The plea also requests that reservation for government jobs and admissions in educational institutions should be made "**religion-neutral**".
- **Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950** restricts Christians of Scheduled Castes origin from availing the Scheduled Castes status.

Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 states that **no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism** shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste.

Arguments in favour of the reservation to be religion-neutral

- The change in religion does not change social exclusion.
- The social hierarchy and specifically caste hierarchy continues to remain within Christianity and Muslims even though the religion forbids it.
- Considering the above scenario, the reservation needs to be delinked from religion.

Source: TH

Operation Sankalp

Why in News

Indian Navy continues to deploy one warship for **Operation SANKALP** in order to ensure the safe passage of Indian Flag Vessels transiting through the **Strait of Hormuz** amidst deteriorating US-Iran relations.

- Indian Navy launched Operation SANKALP in the Gulf Region on 19th June 2019.
- Indian Navy warships and aircraft are deployed to **establish presence, provide a sense of reassurance to the Indian merchantmen, monitor the ongoing situation and respond to any emergent crises** like deteriorating US-Iran relations in the recent times.

US-Iran

- **1979: US-backed Shah of Iran was overthrown** and the country became an Islamic republic.
Dozens of Americans were taken hostage inside the US embassy in the capital Tehran.
- **2015: Iran agreed on a landmark deal to limit its nuclear programme** in return for the lifting of tough economic sanctions.
This move improved Iran's diplomatic relations with other nations.
- **2018: The US President abandoned the Nuclear Accord** and reinstated US sanctions to force Iran's leaders to agree to a new deal.
Iran rejected it even the economy of the country was sent into recession.
- **2019: The pressure was stepped up in May by application of **secondary sanctions on countries that continued to do business with Iran.****
 - Relations further deteriorated when **oil tankers were sabotaged** in the **Gulf of Oman.**
 - Later, Tehran started suspending some of the commitments under the nuclear deal.
 - It was followed by attacks and counter-attacks by both countries until January 2020.
- **2020: On 3 January, Qasem Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike at Baghdad airport.**
Iran **abandoned the last limit on its enrichment of uranium** imposed by the nuclear accord as a way of revenge.
- These issues have led to turbulent situations in the Gulf region.

Source: PIB

Sea Guardians

Why in News

The **sixth joint naval exercise between China and Pakistan** started on 6th January, 2019. It is being held in the **Arabian Sea**.

- For the first time, the exercise has been named as '**Sea Guardians**'.
- 'Sea Guardians' is expected to become a series of naval exercises between China and Pakistan, similar to:
 - **Warrior**: Series of joint land exercises
 - **Shaheen**: Series of joint air exercises.

Note: 'Dharma Guardian' is the joint military exercise between **India and Japan**.

Seke Language

- Seke means "**golden language**" which originated in the **Mustang district of Nepal**.
- It is an **unwritten** language.
- It is spoken in just **five villages** of Chuksang, Chaile, Gyakar, Tangbe, and Tetang, a region close to the border with Tibet.
- There are just **700 or so Seke speakers left in the world**.
- The three reported dialects of Seke are **Tangbe, Tetang, and Chuksang**.
- It is one of the **endangered languages** in the world.
 - According to the criteria adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a language becomes extinct when nobody speaks or remembers the language. The UNESCO has categorized languages on basis of endangerment as follows:-
 - Vulnerable
 - Definitely Endangered
 - Severely Endangered
 - Critically Endangered
 - UNESCO has recognised 42 Indian languages as Critically Endangered.

Degree of Endangerment

Intergenerational Language Transmission

Safe

Language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted.

Vulnerable	Most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains.
Definitely endangered	Children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home.
Severely endangered	Language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves.
Critically endangered	The youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently.
Extinct	There are no speakers left.
