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News Analysis (15 Feb, 2020)

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Judgement on Netherland's Digital Identification Scheme

Why in News

In a **first anywhere in the world**, a **court in the Netherlands has ruled against** a digital identification mechanism called **SyRI (System Risk Indicator)** due to **data privacy and human rights concerns**.

The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs developed SyRI in 2014 **to weed out those who are most likely to commit fraud and receive government benefits**.

Key Points

- **Working of SyRI:**
 - It is based on the algorithm that analyses data (such as taxes, land registries, employment records,etc.) provided by the government and calculates **risk scores**.
 - The calculated risk scores are sent to relevant government arms, which **stores** these on government databases for a **maximum of two years**.
 - The government, in that time period, **could open an investigation on the targeted person**.

- **Court' Ruling :**
 - The Court found using new technology to control fraud as acceptable, but it held SyRI was **invasive and violative of the privacy guarantees given by European Human Rights Law as well as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation**.
 - It called it a case of '**Algorithmic Governance**'. As the algorithm would link socio-economic parameters like poverty and immigrant statuses with fraud risk.
 - Such **opaque algorithmic decision-making** may put citizens at a disadvantage to challenge the resulting risk scores, consequently threatening democratic features of the country.
 - It also ruled that SyRI was **violative of principles of transparency and data minimisation**.
- **Dutch Government's Stand:**
 - The government claimed that the new technology **prevented abuse and** acted as **only a starting point for further investigation instead of a final determination**.
 - The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs has released a statement stating it will study the ruling, not declaring a complete removal of their system.

Significance of the Ruling

- The ruling is an example of **how a data protection regulation can be used against government surveillance**.
 - Other European tech initiatives have been stalled by the EU's General Data Protection Regulation including a **facial recognition system on students in Sweden and France**.
- The ruling sets a **strong legal precedent for other countries to follow**, as this is one of the **first times a court** anywhere has stopped the **use of digital technologies and abundant digital information by welfare authorities on human rights grounds**.
- It also demonstrates that legislative arms need to balance the usage of technology in the social security system and the protection of the rights of their citizens.

Netherlands Court Ruling and India

- Similar to the **Supreme Court's Aadhaar judgment setting limits on the ID's usage**, the Hague Court attempted **to balance social interest with personal privacy**. However, the Aadhaar judgment was about data collection and not regarding algorithmic decision-making.
- **India's proposed Personal Data Protection Bill (2019) also contains many loopholes** that could be potentially exploited **like the USA**.
 - The usage of the **open-ended terms like 'National security' or 'reasonable'** may lead **to intrusion of the state into the private lives of citizens**.

Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill, 2020

Why in News

Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved an amendment to the '**Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill, 2020**' in order to widen its scope to cover litigation pending in various **Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs)**.

- The **amendment also** includes certain **search and seizure cases** where the recovery is up to **₹5 crore**.
- Therefore, the Bill in current form allows taxpayers to settle cases pending before the **Commissioner (Appeals), Income Tax Appellate Tribunals (ITATs), Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs), High Courts and the Supreme Court**.
- The **Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill, 2020** is **similar** to the '**Sabka Vishwas Scheme**', which was brought in to reduce litigation in indirect taxes in the year 2019. It resulted in settling over 1,89,000 cases.

Under the Sabka Vishwas Scheme, the government expected to raise around **₹39,500 crore**. However, after the closure of the amnesty window in January 2020 application in relation to taxes worth **₹90,000 crore** were received. This shows the success of the scheme.

Key Points

- **Objective:** The Bill provides a mechanism for resolution of pending tax disputes related to direct taxes (**Income Tax and Corporate Tax**) in **simple and speedy** manner.
- **Reduce Litigation:** According to the **Finance Ministry**, at present there are 4.83 lakh pending direct tax cases worth **Rs.9 lakh crore** in the courts. Through this scheme, the government wants to recover this **money** in a **swift and simple way**.
- **Addressing Revenue Shortfall:** The government is witnessing a **big shortfall in revenues**, especially tax revenues, hence, increasing revenues in one of the priorities of the government.

Direct Tax collections have been **lower than their budget targets** due to the overall economic slowdown and a **cut in the corporate tax rate** in September, 2019.

- **Mechanism:** In case of **payment of tax**, a taxpayer would be **required to pay only the amount of the disputed taxes** and will get **complete waiver of interest, penalty and prosecution** provided he/she pays by **March 31, 2020**.
 - But, if the tax arrears relate to disputed **interest or penalty only**, then **25%** of disputed penalty or interest will have to be paid.
 - Those who avail this scheme **after** March 31, 2020 will have to pay some **additional amount**.

However, the scheme will remain open till **June 30, 2020**.
- **Immunity to Appellant:** Once a **dispute is resolved**, the designated authority **cannot levy interest or penalty** in relation to that dispute.

Further, **no appellate forum** can make a decision in relation to the matter of dispute **once it is resolved**.
- **Revival of Disputes:** However, if an appellant provides **false information or violates the Income Tax Act, 1961**, then case of dispute can be revived.

Source: IE

Toxic Air: The Price of Fossil Fuels - Greenpeace Report

Why in News

The Greenpeace Southeast Asia has released a report titled '**Toxic Air: The Price of Fossil Fuels**'.

The report provides a **global assessment of the health impact of air pollution** from fossil fuels in 2018 and a first-of-its-kind estimate of the **associated economic cost**.

The study is limited to the following pollutants: **fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), ozone (O₃) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂)**, and only that pollution which is **emitted by fossil fuel combustion (coal, oil and gas)**.

Pollutants and Their Effects

- **PM_{2.5}** refers to fine particles with diameters that are generally 2.5 micrometers and smaller. PM_{2.5} particles are respirable, which means that they are small enough to reach the gas exchange region of the lungs.
- **Ozone (O₃)** formed at near-ground level is an air pollutant that causes smog. Ground level ozone forms when Nitrogen oxide (NO_x) pollution reacts with chemicals called volatile organic compounds (chemicals from sprays, paints etc.). Ozone pollution causes acute human health problems, including chest pain, throat irritation and inflammation of the airways. It also adversely affects vegetation and crops.

- **Nitrogen oxides:** When fossil fuels are burned in air, nitrogen oxides (NO and NO₂, collectively referred to as NO_x) are created from molecular nitrogen in the air and in the fuel that is being burned. NO_x pollution, along with sulfur dioxide, which is also produced when fossil fuels are burned, reacts with water to form acid rain, snow and fog, and with other substances to form particulate matter. The health impacts of exposure to nitrogen oxides include cardiovascular diseases, exacerbated symptoms of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder and other respiratory diseases.

Key Findings

- **Impact of Air Pollution on Health**
 - Exposure to an air pollutant or combination of air pollutants, such as PM_{2.5}, NO₂ or ozone, is associated with increased incidence of diseases including Ischaemic Heart Disease (IHD), Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), lung cancer, lower respiratory infections, type II diabete, etc.
 - Health impacts from air pollution generate economic costs through the cost of treatment, management of health conditions, and from work absences.
- **Economic Cost of Air Pollution**
 - Air pollution from burning fossil fuels costs an estimated 3.3% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), equivalent to US \$8 billion per day and 12,000 premature deaths every day.
 - China, the US and India bear the highest economic cost of soaring pollution, at an estimated \$900 billion, \$600 billion and \$150 billion (5.4% of the India's GDP) a year, respectively.
- **Burden of PM_{2.5}**
 - PM_{2.5} air pollution leads to the greatest health impact and the greatest financial cost of the three pollutants (PM_{2.5}, O₃, NO₂).
 - Globally, air pollution is estimated to cause 4.5 million premature deaths each year. This includes 3 million deaths attributable globally to PM_{2.5}.
 - Pollution from PM_{2.5} costs 2.5% of the global GDP whereas pollution from O₃ and NO₂, each costs equivalent to 0.4% of global GDP.

- **Suggestions**

- **Sustainable Transport System:** Creating a sustainable transport system by setting a phase-out date for diesel and petrol cars, while implementing various urban transport measures, such as restricting cars' access into certain neighborhoods or districts, promoting car-free days, etc.

One of the longest-running examples of a car-free day event in a city is the Ciclovía in Bogotá, Colombia which was initiated in 1974. This is a weekly event that takes place every Sunday and public holiday in central Bogotá, in which roads are closed to motorised traffic to allow cyclists, skaters and pedestrians traffic-free access to 120 kilometres (74.6 miles) of roads.

- **Switch to Renewable Energy:** The phaseout of fossil fuels and switch to renewable forms of energy is beneficial both for reducing **air pollution** and mitigating **anthropogenic (man-made) climate change**.

India-Related Findings

- PM_{2.5} is one of the principal pollutants in northern Indian cities including Delhi.
- The 2 million preterm births globally due to PM_{2.5} include 9,81,000 preterm births in India.
- The report links approximately 3,50,000 new cases of child asthma in India to nitrogen dioxide. As a result of this, over 1.28 million more children in India live with asthma, which is linked to fossil fuel pollution.
- In India, exposure to fossil fuels also leads to a loss of around 490 million workdays.

Way Forward

- India needs to increase its spending on the health sector.
 - It needs to be noted that India spends around 1.28% of the GDP on health while air pollution from burning fossil fuels costs an estimated 5.4% of India's GDP.
 - The central government has allocated only Rs 69,000 crore for the health sector in the **Union Budget 2020-21**.
- The coal fired power plants in India have repeatedly **missed the emission deadline** set by the Union Environment Ministry. Strict action should be taken against non-compliance of thermal power plants.
- The government should ensure the construction of new coal-fired power plants is halted and existing plants should be shut down in phases.
- Moving the energy generation sector from fossil fuels to renewables would help to prevent premature deaths and vast savings in health costs.

Source: IE

11th Expedition of an Indian Mission to the Southern Ocean

Why in News

The **South African** oceanographic research vessel **SA Agulhas** has started its journey for the **11th expedition of an Indian mission to the Southern Ocean, or Antarctic Ocean** from Port Louis (Mauritius).

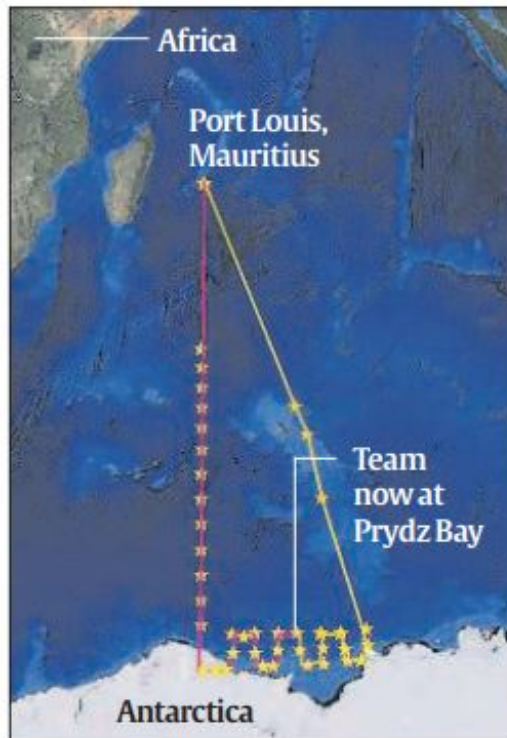
Currently, the research vessel was located at **Prydz Bay**, in the coastal waters of **“Bharati”, India’s third station in Antarctica.**

NOTE: The research vessel SA Agulhas is named after **Agulhas warm ocean current** that runs **south along the east coast of southern Africa.**

India’s Antarctic Missions

- India officially acceded to the **Antarctic Treaty System on 1st August 1983.** On 12 September 1983, India became the fifteenth Consultative Member of the Antarctic Treaty.
- India is expanding its infrastructure development in Antarctica. The newest base commissioned in **2015 is Bharati.**
- India is rebuilding its station, **Maitri**, to make it bigger and last for at least 30 more years.
- **Dakshin Gangotri**, the **first Indian base** established in **1984**, has weakened and become just a supply base.

Key Points



- **Objectives:**

- The **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCOPR)** stated that the mission intends to **quantify changes** in the oceanic remote area and the **impact of these changes** on large-scale weather phenomenon, like the Indian monsoon.
- It also aims to understand the influence of **the Southern Ocean across ecosystem** and atmospheric changes and how it affects the tropical climate and weather conditions.

- **The Expedition consists of six core projects:**

- **Hydrodynamics and biogeochemistry of the Indian Ocean sector of the Southern Ocean** at different depths. It will help to understand the formation of Antarctic bottom water.
- **Observations of movement of trace gases** (halogens and dimethyl sulphur) **from the ocean to the atmosphere** which will help to improve parameterisations that are used in global models.
- **Study of organisms namely, coccolithophores** (existed in the oceans for several million years).The study of their concentrations in sediments will create a picture of past climate.
- **Investigate atmospheric aerosols and their optical and radiative properties.** Its continuous measurements will quantify the impact on Earth's climate.
- **Study the Southern Ocean's impact on Indian monsoons.**
- **Dynamics of the food web in the Southern Ocean** which will help to implement sustainable fishing.

Significance of the Expedition

- **Cyclic Movement of Carbon Dioxide:**

- The carbon dioxide (CO₂) is emitted in tropical regions and through atmospheric circulation, it reaches to the Antarctic and polar regions.
- Due to the low temperature in these regions, CO₂ is absorbed and converted into dissolved inorganic carbon or organic carbon.
- Further, through water masses and circulation it is coming back to tropical regions. Since it is warmer in these areas, it re-enters the atmosphere,
- The expedition will help to plot the **quantity and time period for such cyclic movement of CO₂.**

- **The Southern Ocean- A Transport Agent :**

The expedition will help to study the **Southern Ocean as it connects all the major oceans** around the world. Thus the **conveyor belt that circulates heat** around the world is **connected through the Southern Ocean** and can have a **large impact on climate change** due to anthropogenic forces.

National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research

- National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) was established as an autonomous **research and development institution** of the **Ministry of Earth Sciences in 1998.**
- It is located in **Goa.**
- It is responsible for the **country's research activities in the Polar and Southern Ocean realms.**
- It is the nodal agency for planning, promotion, coordination and execution of the entire gamut of polar and southern ocean scientific research in the country as well as for the associated logistics activities.
- Its major responsibilities include:
 - Management and upkeep of the Indian **Antarctic Research Bases "Maitri" and "Bharati"**, and the **Indian Arctic base "Himadri"**.
 - Management of the Ministry's research vessel ORV Sagar Kanya as well as the other research vessels chartered by the Ministry.

Source: IE

National Organic Food Festival

Why in News

The Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) will host the first **National Organic Food Festival** in **New Delhi** between February 21 to February 23, 2020.

- It aims to **strengthen the organic market** and **empower women entrepreneurs** in the area of production and processing of organic products.
- **Theme:** Unleashing India's Organic Market Potential.

Key Points

- Women Entrepreneurs and Self Help groups (SHG's) from all over the country will be exhibiting their organic products in various segments such as fruit & vegetables, ready to eat products, spices and condiments, honey, cereals, dry fruits etc..
- It will also focus on **facilitating business linkages** and **empowering women entrepreneurs** through pre-arranged B2B and B2G meetings.
- Government is already making efforts to connect women entrepreneurs with financial schemes like **MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency)** and **Startup India**.

Business to Business

- There are **3 basic business models:** Business to Consumer (B2C), Business to Business (B2B), and Business to Government (B2G).
- B2B is a form of transaction between businesses, such as one involving a manufacturer and wholesaler, or a wholesaler and a retailer. Business to business refers to business that is conducted between companies, rather than between a company and individual consumers. Business to business stands in contrast to Business to Consumer (B2C) and Business to Government (B2G) transactions.

Business to Government (B2G)

Business to Government (B2G) is the sale and marketing of goods and services to federal, state, or local agencies.

India's Organic Market Potential

- India has the **9th largest World's Organic Agricultural Land** and the **largest number of producers**.
Sikkim is the **first organic state** in the world. All of its farmland is **certified organic**.
- Organic Food Segment of India grew at rate of 10% during 2016-20.
As per the **Indian Organic Sector – Vision 2025** report, India's organic business is expected to reach Rs.75,000 Crores by 2025.

- **Factors for growth of organic food in India:** Increasing disposable incomes, increasing awareness around health and wellness and increasing acceptability.
 - At the global level, demand for Indian organic food products is on constant increase.
 - The major demands under the organic product category are for oil seeds, cereals & millets, sugar, fruit juice concentrates, tea, spices, pulses, dry fruits, medicinal plant products etc.

Source: PIB

BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise -2020

Why in News

The 2nd **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** Disaster Management Exercise was conducted (11-13 February, 2020) in **Bhubaneswar, Odisha**.

- The focus of the **2nd edition of Exercise** is on **heritage structures' protection**.
- The **first edition of the BIMSTEC DMEx** was also **hosted by India in 2017** with the focus on testing the region's preparedness and resilience towards effective activation of inter-Governmental interaction/dialogue/agreements for immediate deployment of regional resources for disaster response.

Key Points

- The exercise seeks to provide a platform for member states to evaluate existing capabilities, share best emergency response practices, **improve emergency preparedness** and **strengthen regional response mechanisms, to conduct risk assessment** in the context of **cultural heritage sites at the time of disasters and to test the multi-stakeholders' coordination** in a disaster scenario **involving international, national, state, district and local agencies**.
- **Participants** in the exercise include BIMSTEC members except Bhutan and Thailand along with other global institutions like **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, **International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG)**, **International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration Cultural Property (ICCROM)** etc.
- The **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)** is building the capacity of its forces to play the role of **first responder** at heritage sites, which are vulnerable to disasters such as **earthquake, floods, cyclones** and **tsunami** across India.

- **Reasons for Focus on the Heritage Sites:** In the backdrop of recent losses suffered in an earthquake in Nepal(2015), damages to Heritage Sites in Gujarat earthquake (2001), the need was felt to protect the Heritage Sites during disasters and build the capacity of NDRF personnel.

According to **Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)** in India, there could be 11 lakh sites in towns and villages out of which close to 10,000 sites and buildings are protected and about 70,000 sites have heritage value.

International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration Cultural Property

- The creation of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration Cultural Property (ICCROM) took place as a result of a proposal at the UNESCO General Conference held in New Delhi, in 1956.
- In 1959, the Centre was established in Rome, Italy.
- India is a member (1961).
- It is an intergovernmental organization which works with its members to promote the **conservation of all forms of cultural heritage, in every region of the world.**
- It operates in the spirit of the **UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001).**

Declaration states that “Respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security.”

International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG)

- The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) was established in 1991.
- It is a global network of more than 90 countries and organisations under the **United Nations** umbrella.
- INSARAG deals with **Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)** related issues, aiming to establish minimum international standards for international coordination in earthquake response based on its Guidelines.

India and Disaster Management

- **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI):** Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the establishment of an **International Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)** in New Delhi.
- The **National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM)** organized the **1st International Conference on “Landslides Risk Reduction and Resilience”** in November, 2019 in New Delhi.

- India has been at the forefront of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) efforts by hosting the **South Asian Annual Disaster Management Exercise (SAADMEx)** and the **Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR)**.
- India has also offered its expertise and capabilities in DRR such as the **South Asia satellite, GSAT-9, and the Tsunami Early Warning Centre to other countries.**
- Disaster Management was one of the important Agenda items the BIMSTEC leaders deliberated upon during the **Goa BRICS Summit in October 2016** where BIMSTEC leaders were the Special Invitees.

Source:TH

Indian Pangolin

Why in News

The **Madhya Pradesh** forest department, for the first time, has **radio-tagged an Indian Pangolin.**

- Radio-tagging involves attaching a transmitter to an animal to monitor its movements. Several wild animals — tigers, leopards and migratory birds — have been tagged over decades.
- Indian Pangolin has been radio-tagged in order to know its ecology and develop an effective conservation plan for it.
- This measure comes as the world gets ready to observe the ninth **'World Pangolin Day'** on 15th February, 2020.
World Pangolin Day, celebrated on the third Saturday in February every year, is an international attempt to raise awareness of pangolins and bring together stakeholders to help protect these species from extinction.
- The radio-tagging is part of a joint project by the forest department and non-profit organisation, the Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT).



Pangolins in India

- Out of the eight species of pangolin, the Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and the Chinese Pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) are found in India.
- Indian Pangolin is a large anteater covered by 11-13 rows of scales on the back. A terminal scale is also present on the lower side of the tail of the Indian Pangolin, which is absent in the Chinese Pangolin.
- **Habitat**
 - **Indian Pangolin** is widely distributed in India, except the arid region, high Himalayas and the North-East. The species is also found in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
 - **Chinese Pangolin** is found in the Himalayan foothills in Eastern Nepal, Bhutan, Northern India, North-East Bangladesh and through Southern China.
- **Threats to Pangolins in India:** Hunting and poaching for local consumptive use (e.g. as a protein source and traditional medicine) and international trade for its meat and scales in East and South East Asian countries, particularly China and Vietnam.
- **Protection Status**
 - **IUCN Red List**
 - Indian Pangolin: Endangered
 - Chinese Pangolin: Critically Endangered
 - Both these species are listed under **Schedule I, Part I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.**

Source: TH
