News Analysis (28 Sep, 2020)

Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict

Why in News

Recently, **territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan** over the **Nagorno-Karabakh region** has re-erupted with heavy clashes.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are part of **Transcaucasia or South Caucasia** (geographical region in the vicinity of the southern Caucasus Mountains on the border of Eastern Europe and Western Asia consisting of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan).

Key Points

- **Reasons for Dispute:**
  - **Territorial:** Nagorno-Karabakh region has 95% of the population as **ethnically Armenian** and is controlled by them but it is **internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan.**
  - **Religious:** Armenia is **Christian majority,** while Azerbaijan is **Muslim majority** country.
  - **Domestic Politics:** The leaders of both the nations have fueled the issue time and again for their vested political interests.
- **History of Dispute:**
  - **1920:** Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region was **established within Azerbaijan by the then Soviet Union.**
  - **1988:** Nagorno-Karabakh legislature passed a **resolution to join Armenia** despite the region's legal location within Azerbaijan's borders.
  - **1991 :** The autonomous region officially **declared that it would not join either of the countries** after a referendum which was boycotted by Azerbaijan. **War erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan** over the region, leaving roughly tens of thousands of casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees.
  - **1994:** Russia mediated a **cease-fire** which has remained in place since.
  - **2016:** In April 2016, the region was particularly tense because of violent fighting between the two countries, which was known as the **Four Day War.**
  - Apart from this, intermittent ceasefire violations between Azerbaijani and Armenian troops have caused hundreds of deaths in the past decade.
- **Impact:**
  - **Destabilize the Region:** Renewed tensions threaten to reignite a military conflict between the countries and **destabilize the South Caucasus region.** This may cause social unrest in the region which is already suffering from the **Covid-19 pandemic.**
  - **Civilian Casualties:** In this disputed region, there are hundreds of civilian settlements, residents of which would be **directly impacted and potentially displaced** if any large-scale war were to break out between the two countries
  - **Economic Impact:** This could also disrupt oil and gas exports from the region, since Azerbaijan, is a **significant oil and gas exporter to Europe and Central Asia.** This may even lead to **higher oil prices** globally.
  - **International Involvement:** Russia has closer ties with Armenia while Turkey and USA support Azerbaijan, and Iran has a large **Azeri minority,** which could escalate a crisis and entangle actors involved. Any military escalation would draw regional powers like **Turkey and Russia** more deeply into the conflict.
    - Russia, Israel and many other countries have been supplying Arms to both the countries despite the **arms embargo by the United Nations.**

Effect on India

- **India- Armenia:** In recent years, **Indian-Armenian bilateral cooperation** has seen rapid growth.
  - The then Vice-President of India visited Yerevan (Armenia) in 2017.
  - Armenia bought the India **SWATHI military radar system** in March 2020.
  - Many Indian students study in Armenian medical Universities and in recent years Armenia has witnessed an increasing flow of Indian labour migrants.
  - For Armenia, close relations with India are vitally important as India provides a counter balance to the **rival strategic axis between Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Turkey.**
- **India-Azerbaijan:** India is part of the **International North–South Transport Corridor** (INSTC), a multimodal network of ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

  - Azerbaijan is a dialogue partner of **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** (SCO), which India is a member of.
  - In 2018, the then Indian External affairs minister had visited Baku (Azerbaijan), the first-ever bilateral visit of an Indian External Affairs Minister to Azerbaijan.
  - India's ONGC-Videsh is an investor in Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (ACG) oil fields and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.
  - However, Azerbaijan supports Pakistan's position on the **Kashmir issue.**
- **Pakistan Angle:**
  India has supported Armenia while Azerbaijan has been supported by Pakistan. Pakistan was the second country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence after Turkey. Also, Pakistan is the only country that **does not recognize Armenia as an independent state** and fully supports Azerbaijan's position.
- **China Angle:**
  - China has grown **increasingly active in the caucasian region,** conducting a number of programs and signing economic, political and military agreements with Armenia. Armenia has also agreed to participate in the Chinese **Belt and Road project.**
  - However, **China is an ally of its rival Azerbaijan** and Armenia is also aware of **its support to Pakistan.**

Way Forward

- The conflict between the two countries has reached alarming levels and the international mediators should intervene immediately and push sides for substantive negotiations to prevent any further escalations.
- Growing Pakistan- China-Turkey's influence in the south caucasus region is a source of concern for India. It is important for it to strengthen its ties with both the countries in line continuing its **non-aligned** stance, and call for peace in the region.

Source: TH

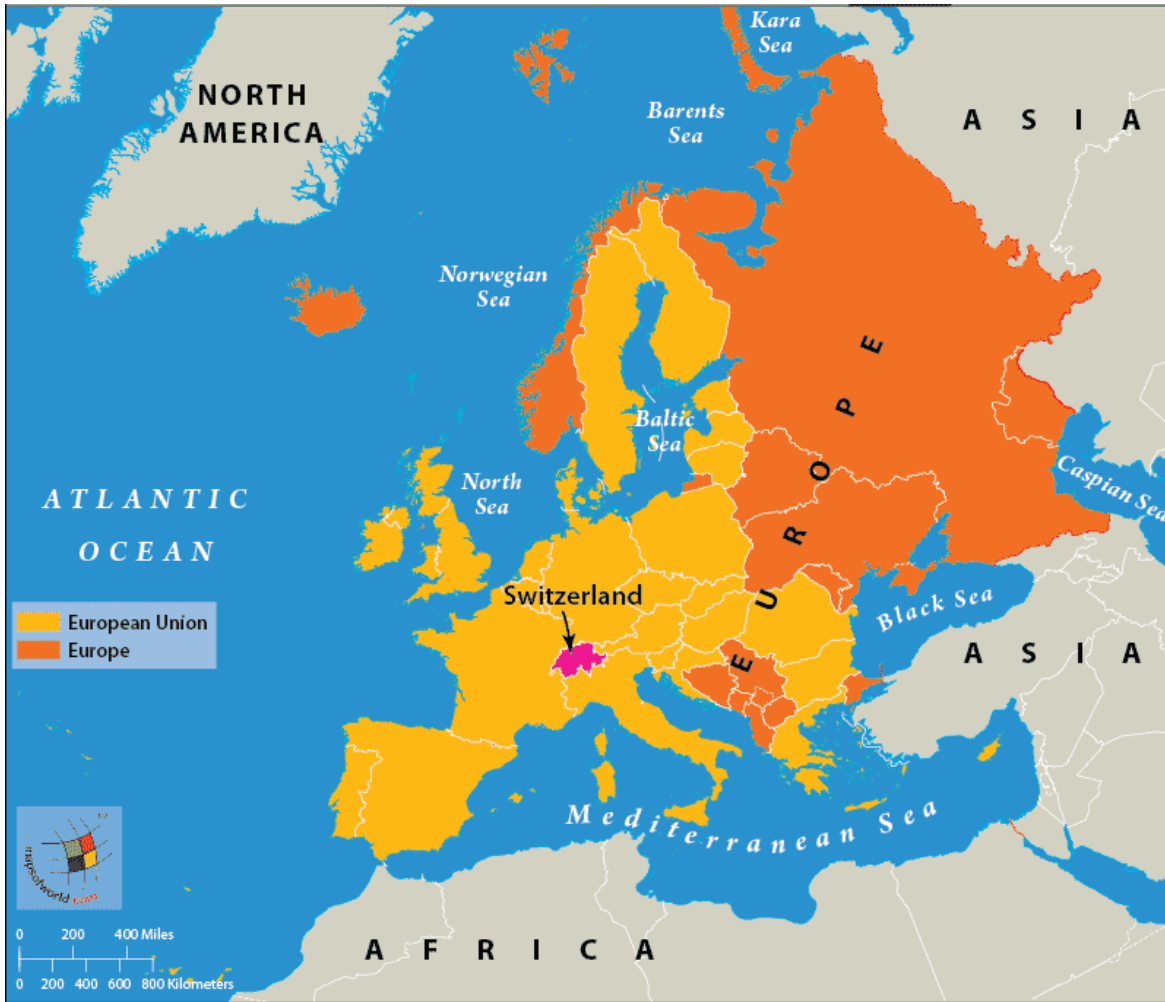# Referendum on Free Movement: Switzerland-EU

Why in News

In a recent referendum, the Swiss people have **rejected a bid to reduce immigration from the European Union** (EU). Over five million Swiss voters cast ballots to decide whether to abandon an **agreement with the EU which allows for the free movement of people** across the country.

Key Points

Agreement:
- **Switzerland is not a member of the EU** but has a **series of interdependent treaties with Brussels** (EU Headquarter) which allow it access to Europe's free trade area.
  - **1992-2002:** Switzerland negotiated and signed **first bilateral agreements with the EU,** making them **interdependent and included the free movement** of people which was again backed by a vote in 2000.
- It is a member of the **EU's Single Market,** which **allows people to move and work freely in all 27 EU countries as well as in Switzerland.**
  - Around 1.4 million out of the 8.2 million people residing in Switzerland are EU citizens and an average of 5,00,000 Swiss citizens are believed to be living in other EU countries at the moment.
- If people choose to end the agreement, the Swiss government will have to **unilaterally void its free movement agreement** with the EU by invoking a so-called **guillotine clause.**
  - This clause would have **impacted other bilateral deals on transport, research and trade** with the EU, disrupting economic activity.

- **Current Referendum:**
  - The **right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) initiated** it, believing that the agreement has resulted in a significant strain on the welfare system and has led to overpopulation in the country.
    - The vote was initially slated to take place in May but was postponed due to the **Covid-19** pandemic.
    - A **similar referendum took place in 2014,** where a **majority voted in favour of limiting access of EU citizens** to live and work in Switzerland but **lawmakers refused to enforce** the referendum.
  - The move, sometimes called **Swexit,** has **not been very popular** among Swiss voters.
    A recent survey showed that **more than 60% of respondents were against** it, while a mere 35% backed it and the remaining were undecided.
  - **Supporters:**
    - The anti-free movement plan would **allow Switzerland to control its borders** and **select only the immigrants it wants.**
    - Swiss citizens will also **get preference for jobs and benefits** in the country.
  - **Opponents:**
    - Scrapping the agreement would **severely strain Swiss-EU relations.**
    - It would **plunge a healthy economy into recession** at an uncertain time and **deprive** hundreds of thousands of Swiss **citizens of their freedom to live and work across Europe.**
- **Other Referendums:**
  - The freedom of movement measures were being considered **alongside four other major nationwide referendums** on paternity leave, tax breaks for child care, the right to hunt wolves and acquisition of around USD 6.5 billion worth of new fighter planes by 2030.
  - Swiss people are **given a direct say in their own affairs under the country's system of direct democracy.** They are **regularly invited to vote** on various issues in **national or regional referendums.**

Source: IE

World Tourism Day 2020

Why in News

27th September has been celebrated as **World Tourism Day since 1980.** It was on this day in 1970 when the Statutes of the **United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)** were adopted which are considered a milestone in global tourism.

The UNWTO is the **United Nations specialised agency** responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

Key Points

- **Significance:**
  - The World Tourism Day **highlights the unique role of the tourism sector** in **preserving cultural and natural heritage** all around the world. It acts as an auxiliary in safeguarding habitat and endangered species.
  - It addresses the **importance of the tourism sector in providing jobs and opportunities,** mostly for women and youth, in rural as well as big cities.
- **2020 Celebrations:**
  - **Theme for 2020:** 'Tourism and Rural Development'.
    The theme encourages the celebration of the unique role played by tourism in job creation outside of the big cities.
  - **Joint Hosts:**
    - In the history of 40 years, the official celebration of World Tourism Day will not be hosted by a single member state of the **UNWTO.**
    - Nations from the **MERCOSUR bloc** (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, with Chile joining as member associate status) **will also be the joint hosts.**
  - **Covid-19 Impact:** As per the data of the UNWTO, about 100 to 120 million jobs in the tourism industry are at risk directly.

Tourism and India

- India has **significant potential for tourism.** Its wealth of **culture, heritage, archaeology and nature** uniquely places it to provide such experiences for people to rediscover themselves.
  There are 38 **World Heritage Sites** located in India. The World Heritage Sites are important places of cultural or natural heritage as described in the **UNESCO World Heritage Convention,** established in 1972.
- The industry's contribution to **India's Gross Domestic Product** in 2019 stood at 9.3%, and is said to account for over 8% of the total employment.

- Some **Initiatives** taken to **promote tourism** in India:
  - **Swadesh Darshan Scheme**: It is a **Central Sector Scheme**, and was launched in 2014 -15 for **integrated development of theme based tourist circuits** in the country.
  - **PRASHAD Scheme**: The 'National Mission on **Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive' (PRASHAD)** was launched by the Ministry of Tourism in the year 2014-15 with the objective of **holistic development of identified pilgrimage destinations.**
  - **Iconic Tourist Sites**: The government is developing 17 "Iconic Tourist Sites" in the country as world class tourist destinations which in turn would serve as a model for other tourism sites. It is aimed at enhancing India's **soft power**.
  - **Webinar Series Dekho Apna Desh:** It was launched in January 2020 with the **objective of creating awareness** among the citizens about the rich heritage and culture of the country.
    > It encourages citizens to travel widely within the country and enhances tourist footfalls leading to development of the local economy and creation of jobs at the local level.
  - **Destination North East-2020**: It **aims** to bring the rest of India closer to **North East (NE)** India.
  - **SAATHI Application:** It is an initiative **of the Ministry of Tourism with the Quality Council of India**, launched **to assist the hospitality industry** to continue to operate safely and thereby instill confidence among the Staff, employees and the guests about the safety of the hotel/unit.
- **Challenges:**
  - The **Swacch Survekshan** (cleanliness survey) has projected many tourist hotspots such as Amritsar, Jaipur, Mumbai, Delhi, Srinagar, Varanasi and Shillong **in poor light.**
    - Almost half of the world's 50 most-polluted cities are in India.
    - The **habit of littering and ineffective waste management** has led to widespread pollution.
  - Tourists in India still face many **infrastructure related problems** like inadequate roads, water, sewer, hotels and telecommunications etc. **Safety and security of tourists,** especially of the foreign tourists, is a major hurdle to tourism development.
  - Tourism sector **got largely affected due to pandemic and associated lockdown.** The travel ban hugely **impacted tour operators and travel agencies, hotels, and the aviation industry.**
    - In 2019, foreign tourist arrivals in India stood at 10.89 million, achieving a yearly growth rate of 3.20% from 2018, earning USD 29.90 billion in foreign exchange earnings.
    - But the top countries that once contributed to foreign tourists in India, namely China, Germany, the United States and the UK have been badly hit by the pandemic.

Way Forward

- Strengthening the waste collection system and **educating common citizens about the importance of responsible disposal of various types of plastics** would ensure less waste littered at tourist hotspots and other Indian cities. The government has also asked all the **tourist hotspots cities to switch completely to clean fuel.**
- Indian tourism has, for a long, just focused on creating more and more tourist destinations in the name of economic upliftment of local communities, rather than **striking a balance between the needs of the host, visitor and the environment.** It is time to turn the pandemic into an opportunity by redesigning the current business model into a long-term sustainable and resilient tourism industry.

Source: PIB

Climate Change and Forest Fire Link

Why in News

Scientists note that **human-induced climate change promotes the conditions on which wildfires depend.**

Key Points

- **Wildfire:** Also called forest, bush or vegetation fire, can be described as any uncontrolled and non-prescribed combustion or burning of plants in a natural setting such as a forest, grassland, brush land or tundra, which consumes the natural fuels and spreads based on environmental conditions (e.g., wind, topography).
  - Wildfires can be **incited by** human actions, such as land clearing, extreme drought or in rare cases by lightning.
  - There are **three conditions** that need to be present in order for a wildfire to burn: fuel, oxygen, and a heat source.
- **Human-induced Climate Change:** Increases in **greenhouse gases** resulting from human activities have led to a net effect of warming of the climate system leading to direct impacts including increased air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level. The increases in greenhouse gases can be attributed to **fossil fuel use, land-use change**, etc.

- **Concerns:**
  - Forest fires have become an **issue of global concern.** In many countries, wildfires are burning larger areas, and fire seasons are growing longer due to global warming.
  - **Australia** recently battled its **largest bushfire on record,** while **parts of the Arctic,** the **Amazon** and **central Asia** have also experienced **unusually severe** fires.
    - **Wildfires in Western USA** (California) are another example.
  - Globally, forest fires release **billions of tons of CO_2** into the atmosphere, while hundreds of thousands of people are believed to die due to illnesses caused by exposure to smoke from forest fires and other landscape fires.
- **Factors:**
  - **Fire Weather:**
    - Climate change increases the frequency and severity of fire weather around the world.
    - **Increased fire weather** from **climate change** amplifies fire risk where fuels remain available.
    - **Fire weather** is a combination of conditions that set the stage for the rapid spread of wildfires.
      - High temperature
      - Low Relative humidity
      - Strong sustained winds (> 20 mph) carry oxygen and spread flames.
  - **Poor land and forest management** also contributes to the wildfires, however, it does not alone account for the recent increases in the extent and severity of the wildfires globally.
  - **Factors Identified by the IPCC:** The **Fifth Assessment Report** of the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**, published in **2013,** identified a few factors that could influence the way wildfires play out. These include:
    - **Global increase in average temperatures.**
    - Global increases in the frequency, intensity and extent of **heatwaves** (breaching of historically extreme temperature thresholds).
    - **Regional increases** in the frequency, duration and intensity of droughts.

Climate change is fueling wildfires. Here's how.

Temperatures are rising
Average annual temperatures in the Western US have increased 1.9°F since 1970.

Snow melts sooner
Winter snowpack melts up to 4 weeks earlier than in prevous decades.

Fires are getting worse
Wildfires are larger and costlier than ever before, and their emissions are worsening global warming.

Area burned by 2018 Californa Camp Fire

Chicago, IL

Forests are drier, longer
Ecosystems are primed for wildfires to ignite and spread.
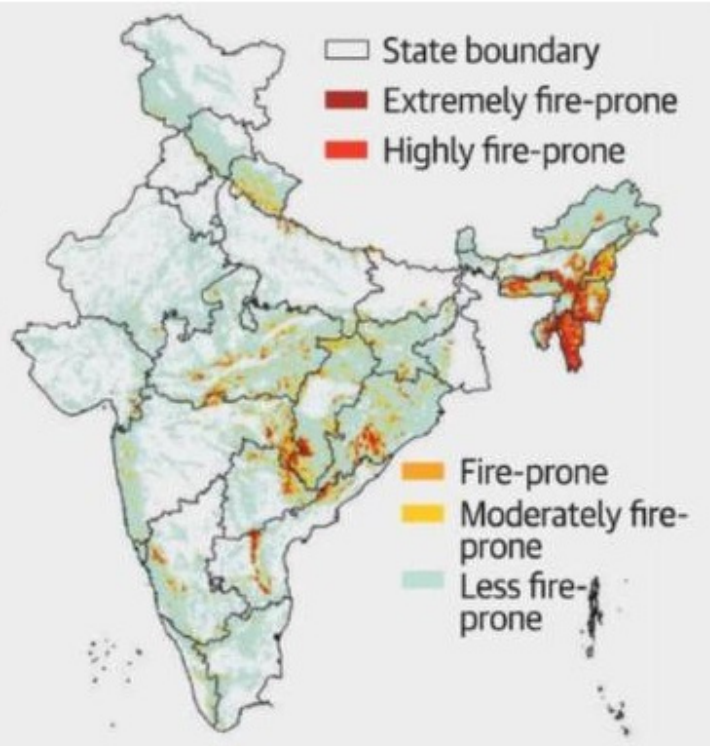
Indian Scenario

Forest Fire & Monitoring:

- A joint study report of **the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF&CC)** and **World Bank** titled **"Strengthening Forest Fire Management in India"** released in June 2018 revealed that in the year 2000, 20 districts, representing 3% of India's land area and 16% of forest cover accounted for 44% of all fire detections.
- The upgraded version of the **Forest Fire Alert System** (FAST 3.0) was released in January, 2019 with a separate activity of monitoring large forest fires.
- Forest Cover of States & UTs under different fire prone classes:
  - Extremely Fire Prone: Mizoram > Tripura
  - Very Highly Fire Prone: Mizoram > Manipur
  - Highly Fire Prone: Nagaland > Manipur
  - Moderately Fire Prone: Punjab > Nagaland
- It is seen that most of the fire prone forest areas are found in the **north-eastern region and the central part** of the country.

In the line of fire

The forests in the north-eastern and central parts of India have more fire-prone areas in the country. Close to 30% forest cover in Mizoram are under "extremely fire-prone category" — highest in the country. Map shows India's fire-prone forest areas

Legend:
- State boundary
- Extremely fire-prone
- Highly fire-prone
- Fire-prone
- Moderately fire-prone
- Less fire-prone

India's Initiative to Tackle Forest Fire:

- **National Action Plan on Forest Fires, 2018**
  - MoEF&CC, has come up with the National Action Plan on Forest Fires, 2018 to revamp forest fire management in the country.
  - **Objectives:** Informing, Enabling and Empowering forest fringe communities and Incentivizing them to work in tandem with the State Forest Departments (SFDs).
  - The plan proposes nine strategies to address the issue, including establishment of a "Centre of Excellence on Forest Fire Management"at **Forest Survey of India (FSI).**

- **Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme:**
  - The Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FPM) is the only centrally funded program specifically dedicated to assist the states in dealing with forest fires.
  - The FPM replaced the Intensification of Forest Management Scheme (IFMS) in 2017.
  - Funds allocated under the FPM are according to a center-state cost-sharing formula, with a 90:10 ratio of central to state funding in the Northeast and Western Himalayan regions and a 60:40 ratio for all other states.
  - It also provides the states the flexibility to direct a portion of the **National Afforestation Programme (NAP)** and **Mission for Green India (GIM)** funding toward forest fire work.

Way Forward

- Climate change is the reality, so are the increased severe forest fires. Management of forest fire needs to be tackled at various levels.
- First, **at local or regional level** by minimising the accidental chances of man-made fires.
- At **national level** it requires a specific approach to manage resources like Land and Forest to reduce the chance of such fires. Also, the need to handle climate change must be a part of policy making and implementation.
- At **global level** a sincere effort to reduce the impact of climate change along with reduction in factors causing climate change should be a united priority of all nations. Only then the link between climate change and forest fires can be weakened.

Source: IE

Sandalwood Spike Disease

Why in News

India's sandalwood trees are facing a serious threat due to **Sandalwood Spike Disease (SSD).**

Key Points

- The natural population of sandalwood in **Marymoor Sandal Forest** of Kerala and various reserve forests in Karnataka, including **MM Hills (Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary)**, are heavily infected with SSD.
- **Sandalwood Spike Disease:**
  - It is an infectious disease which is **caused by phytoplasma.**
    Phytoplasmas are **bacterial parasites** of plant tissues — which are **transmitted by insect vectors** and involved in plant-to-plant transmission.
  - There is **no cure** as of now for the infection.
    Presently, there is **no option but to cut down** and remove the infected tree to prevent the spread of the disease.
  - The disease was **first** reported in **Kodagu, Karnataka in 1899.**
    More than a million sandalwood trees were removed in the Kodagu and Mysore region between 1903 and 1916.
- **Concerns:** About **1% to 5%** of sandalwood trees lost every year due to the disease, scientists warn that it could **wipe out the entire natural population** if measures are not taken to prevent its spread.
  Another concern is, any delay in arresting the trend may result in the disease spreading to cultivated sandalwood trees.

- **Reason:** The present rapid spread of the infection is largely due to **restrictions on green felling** in forests, which has allowed vectors to spread the disease to healthy trees.
    - **Green felling (silviculture felling)** is the felling of green trees of one or more types.
    - **Silviculture** is the art and science of controlling the establishment, growth, composition, health, and quality of forests and woodlands to meet the diverse needs and values of landowners and society such as wildlife habitat, timber, water resources, restoration, and recreation on a sustainable basis.
- **Recent Steps:** In an effort to combat the killer disease, the **Institute of Wood Science and Technology (IWST),** Bangalore will join hands with the **Pune-based National Centre for Cell Sciences** for a three-year study, initiated by the **Union Ministry of AYUSH** with a financial allocation of Rs. 50 lakh.
    - IWST is a **Centre of Excellence** for Sandalwood Research and Wood Science.

Red Sandalwood

- Red sanders *(Pterocarpus santalinus)* is endemic to South India.
- They are found in the **Tropical Dry Deciduous forest** of the **Palakonda** and **Seshachalam hill** ranges of Andhra Pradesh and also found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- Red Sanders usually grow in the rocky, degraded and fallow lands with Red Soil and hot and dry climate.
- **The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** has put it under the category of **near threatened** from earlier **endangered species** in the Red List.
- It is listed in **Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).**
    - **Appendix II –** Species which are not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival.
- It is known for its **rich hue and therapeutic properties,** is high in demand across Asia, particularly in China and Japan, for cosmetics and medicinal products, wood-works and musical instruments.
- Its popularity can be gauged from the fact that a tonne of red sanders costs anything between Rs. 50 lakh to Rs. 1 crore in the international market.

Source: TH

Bhagat Singh's Birth Anniversary

Why in News

28th September is the **birth anniversary** of revolutionary freedom fighter **Bhagat Singh.**

Key Points

- **Born in 1907** in Lyallpur district (now in Pakistan), Bhagat Singh grew up in a Sikh family deeply involved in political activities.
    - He belonged to a generation that was to intervene between two decisive phases of the Indian national movement - the phase of the **'Extremism' of Lal-Bal-Pal** and the **Gandhian phase of nonviolent mass action.**
- In 1923, Bhagat Singh joined the **National College,** Lahore which was **founded and managed by Lala Lajpat Rai** and **Bhai Parmanand.**
    - The College was set up as an alternative to the institutions run by the Government, bringing to the **field of education the idea of Swadeshi.**
- In 1924 in Kanpur, he **became a member of the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA),** started by **Sachindranath Sanyal** a year earlier. The main organiser of the Association was **Chandra Shekhar Azad** and Bhagat Singh became very close to him.
    - It was as a member of the HRA that Bhagat Singh began to take seriously the **philosophy of the Bomb.**
    - **Armed revolution** was understood to be the only weapon with which to fight British imperialism.
    - In 1928, HRA was renamed from **Hindustan Republican Association to Hindustan Socialist Republic Association (HSRA).**
- In **1925,** Bhagat Singh returned to Lahore and within the next year he and his colleagues started a militant youth organisation called the **Naujawan Bharat Sabha.**
- In April 1926, Bhagat Singh established contact with **Sohan Singh Josh** and through him the **'Kirti Kisan Party'** which brought out the monthly magazine **Kirti** in Punjabi.
    - For the next year Bhagat Singh worked with Josh and **joined the editorial board of Kirti.**
- In 1927, he was first **arrested on charges of association with the Kakori Case** accused for an article written under the pseudonym Vidrohi (Rebel).
- To take revenge for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai, **Bhagat Singh and his associates plotted the assassination of James A. Scott,** the Superintendent of Police. However, the revolutionaries **mistakenly killed J.P. Saunders.** The incident is famously known as **Lahore Conspiracy case (1929).**
    - In 1928, Lala Lajpat Rai had led a procession to protest against the arrival of the **Simon Commission.** The police resorted to a brutal lathi charge, in which Lala Lajpat Rai was severely injured and later succumbed to his injuries.

- **Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw a bomb** on 8 April, 1929 in the Central Legislative Assembly, in protest against the passing of two repressive bills, the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Dispute Bill.
    - The **aim,** as their leaflet explained, **was not to kill but to make the deaf hear,** and to **remind the foreign government of its callous exploitation.**
    - Both Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt **surrendered** thereafter and faced trial so they could further promote their cause. They were awarded life imprisonment for this incident.
- However, Bhagat Singh was **re-arrested for the murder of J.P. Saunders and bomb manufacturing** in the **Lahore Conspiracy case.** He was found guilty in this case and was **hanged on 23rd March, 1931** in Lahore along with Sukhdev and Rajguru. Every year, **March 23** is observed as **<u>Martyrs' Day</u>** as a **tribute to freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru.**

<u>Source: TH</u>

Education Through Radio in Odisha

Why in News

Recently, the state government of **Odisha has decided to reach out to children in remote areas through the <u>radio</u>** as online classes fail to reach most students due to poor mobile connectivity.

Key Points

- **Education Through Radio:**
    - The state's **School and Mass Education Department** has launched **classroom teaching through All India Radio.**
    - Students from **Class I to VIII** can learn their lessons through **15-minutes of teaching by experienced teachers** through radio.
        - It has been highlighted that a student can **cover six pages of his textbook within 15 minutes** of a radio programme.
    - Although teaching through radio **would not be effective as it could have been in a physical classroom,** the dire situation has **forced the administration to try different methods** for reaching students.
- **Other Initiatives:**
    - Students have been provided with textbooks even though schools in Odisha have been closed since **17th March 2020.**
    - **Three hours of classroom instruction** are also available **through Doordarshan.**
    - Since considerable time has been lost due to the closure of schools, school **syllabus has been reduced by 30%.**

- **Reasons for the Move:**
  - The schools could not be opened due to **Covid-19** pandemic so the education department **tried to reach students with online classes,** mostly through smartphones.
    > However, out of the 60 lakh students, hardly 22 lakhs were being reached during the lockdowns.
  - The **situation worsened when the lockdown was lifted** and **parents started going to their workplaces taking the only smartphone in the family** with them.
    > It led to a further **drop of 6 to 7 lakh students attending virtual classes.**
  - Those who have a sufficient number of smart devices for students, **suffer due to poor network coverage.**

Other Nationwide Initiatives for Education

- Centre's announcement to **start the 2020-21 academic year virtually.**
  > **Plans to distribute laptops or tablets to 40% of all college and university students** over the next five years and to equip all government schools with **Information and Communication Technology** (ICT).
- **Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA) mobile app** has been offered to the states as a platform to provide content in local languages.
- The **Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan** has deployed its **SWAYAM Prabha** portal which has lectures on **direct-to-home** (DTH) and online, to help students.
- **Different e-learning techniques through virtual platforms** like YouTube, Zoom app and Google Classroom are being used by some institutions.
- **PRAGYATA guidelines** on **digital education**.

Source: TH