



News Analysis (04 Mar, 2021)

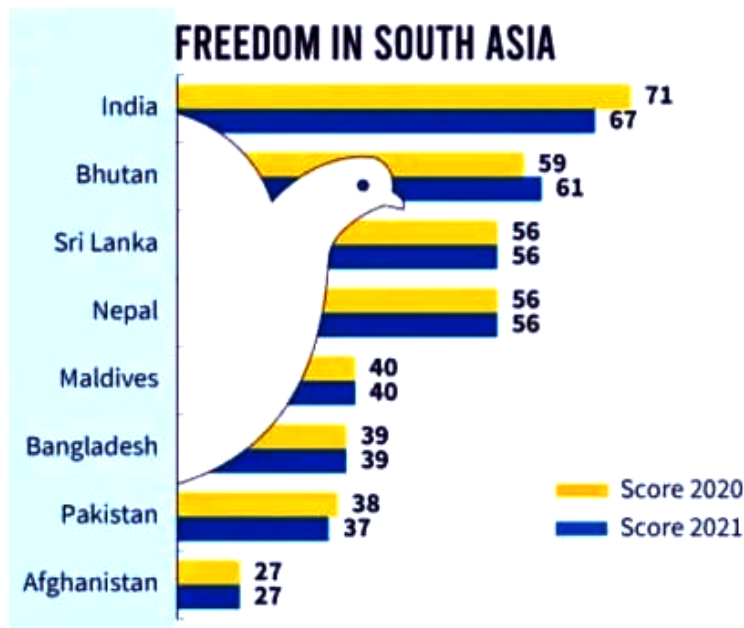
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Freedom in the World 2021 Report

Why in News

The **Freedom in the World 2021** report has downgraded India's status from 'Free' to 'Partly Free'.

- Pointing to a decline in global democracy over the last 15 years, the report said that nearly **75% of the world's population lived in a country that faced deterioration** over the last year.
- The **most free countries** in the world, with a score of 100, are **Finland, Norway and Sweden**, while the **least free with a score of 1 are Tibet and Syria**.



Key Points

- **About the Report:**
 - **Published By:**

USA based human rights watchdog **Freedom House**, which is largely **funded through USA government grants**, has been **tracking the course of democracy since 1941**.
 - **Scores are Based on:**
 - **Political rights** indicators such as the electoral process, political pluralism and participation and government functioning.
 - **Civil liberties** indicators related to freedom of expression and belief, associational and organisational rights, the rule of law and personal autonomy and individual rights.
 - Countries are declared as “**free**”, “**partly free**” or “**not free**”.
- **India’s Score:**

India’s **score was 67, a drop from 71/100 from last year** (reflecting 2019 data) downgrading it from the free category last year (i.e., based on 2020 data).
- **Reasons for India’s Fall:**
 - **Freedom of Media:**

Attacks on press freedom have escalated dramatically, and reporting has become significantly less ambitious in recent years, citing the use of **security, defamation, sedition and contempt of court** laws to quiet critical media voices.
 - **Elevation of Hindu Nationalist Interests:**

India appears to have abandoned its potential to serve as a global democratic leader, **elevating narrow Hindu nationalist interests** at the expense of its founding values of inclusion and equal rights for all.
 - **Internet Freedom:**

In a year when **social media** censorship has been hotly seated, while the government shut down **Internet connectivity in Kashmir** as well as on Delhi’s borders, **India’s Internet freedom score dropped to just 51**.
 - **Covid Response:**
 - Response to **Covid-19** included a hamfisted lockdown that resulted in the dangerous and unplanned **displacement of millions of internal migrant workers**.
 - It added that **Muslims were disproportionately blamed** for the spread of the virus and faced attacks by vigilante mobs.
 - **Crackdown on Protesters:**

The government intensified its crackdown on protesters opposed to a discriminatory **citizenship law** and arrested dozens of journalists who aired criticism of the official pandemic response.
 - **Laws:**

Uttar Pradesh’s law prohibiting forced religious conversion through interfaith marriage was also listed as a concern.

Source:TH

National Cyber Security Strategy 2020

Why in News

A **National Cyber Security Strategy 2020** is being formulated by the Office of National Cyber Security Coordinator at the **National Security Council Secretariat**.

- **Cyber Security** is protecting cyber space including critical information infrastructure from attack, damage, misuse and economic espionage.
- The **National Security Council** (NSC) of India is a three-tiered organization that **oversees political, economic, energy and security issues of strategic concern**.

Key Points

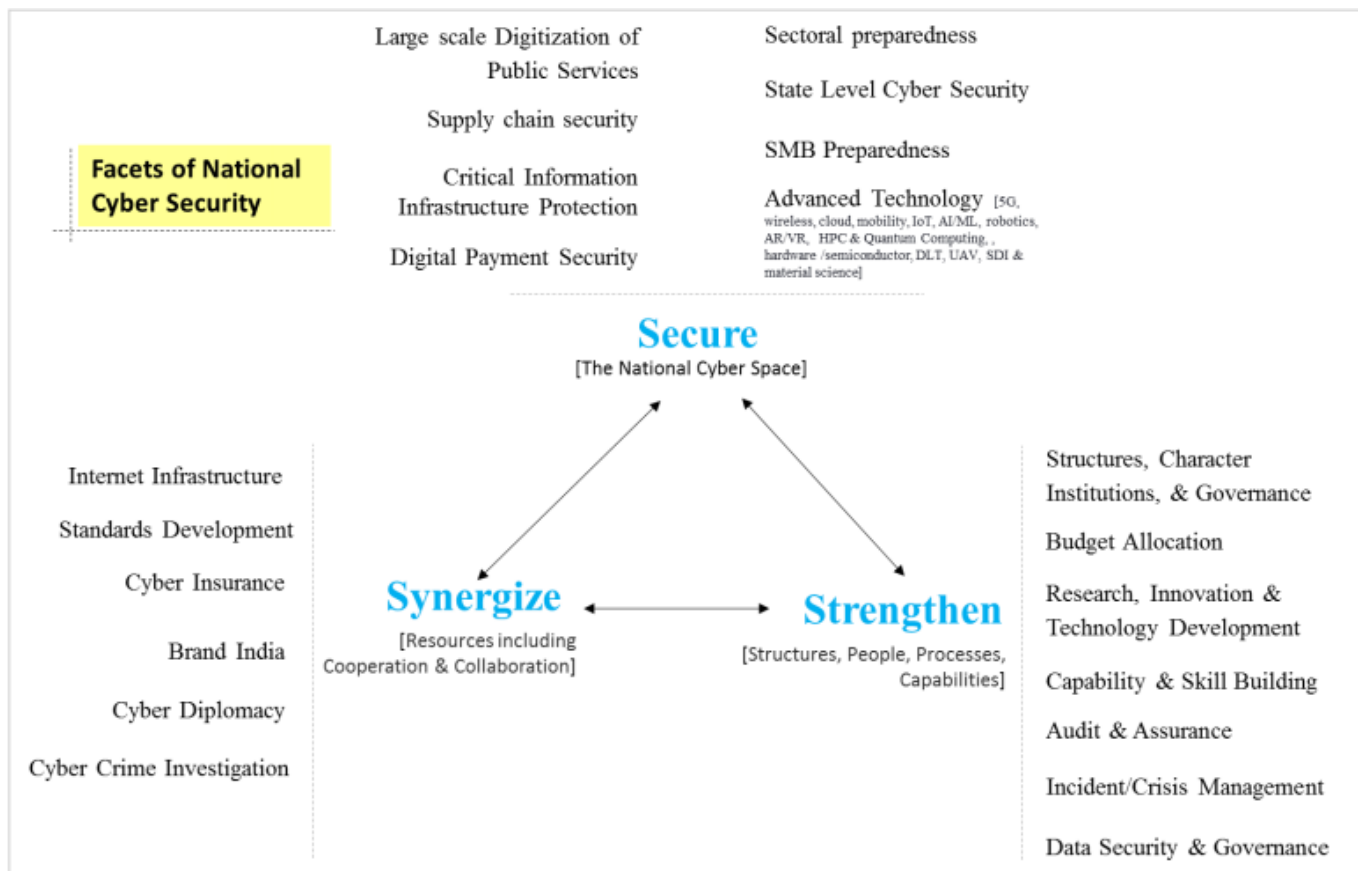
National Cyber Security Strategy 2020:

- **Aim:**

To **improve cyber awareness and cybersecurity** through more **stringent audits**. Empanelled cyber auditors will look more carefully at the security features of organisations than are legally necessary now.

- **About:**

- There will be **table-top cyber crisis management exercises** regularly to reinforce the idea that cyber attacks can take place regularly.
- It does call for **an index of cyber preparedness**, and attendant monitoring of performance.
- A **separate budget for cybersecurity** is suggested, as also to synergise the role and functions of various agencies with the requisite domain knowledge.



Need:

- **Cyber warfare offensives:**
 - The **United States is just one of many countries that have invested significant amounts of money in developing** not just defences against attack, but the **ability to mount damaging cyber warfare offensives.**
 - The countries which are believed to have the **most developed cyber warfare capabilities** are the **United States, China, Russia, Israel and the United Kingdom.**
- **Increased Digital usage Post-Covid:**

Critical infrastructure is getting digitised in a very fast way — this includes **financial services, banks, power, manufacturing, nuclear power plants, etc.**
- **For Protecting Critical Sectors:**
 - It is particularly significant given the increasing interconnectedness of sectors and proliferation of entry points into the internet, which could further grow with the adoption of **5G.**
 - There were **6.97 lakh** cyber security incidents reported in the **first eight months of 2020**, nearly equivalent to the previous four years combined, according to information reported to and tracked by **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In).**
- **Recent Cyber Attacks:**
 - There has been a steep rise in the use of resources like **malware** by a Chinese group called **Red Echo** to target “a large swathe” of India’s power sector.

Red Echo used malware called **ShadowPad**, which involves the use of a backdoor to access servers.
 - Chinese hacker group known as **Stone Panda** had “identified gaps and vulnerabilities in the IT infrastructure and supply chain software of Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India.
 - **SolarWinds hack**, impacted national critical infrastructure in the USA.
- **For Government:**

A local, state or central government maintains a huge amount of confidential data related to country (**geographical, military strategic assets** etc.) and citizens.
- **For Individuals:**

Photos, videos and other **personal information shared** by an individual on **social networking sites** can be inappropriately used by others, leading to serious and even life-threatening incidents.
- **For Businesses:**

Companies have a lot of data and information on their systems. A cyber attack may lead to **loss of competitive information** (such as patents or original work), **loss of employees/customers’ private data** resulting into complete loss of public trust on the integrity of the organization.

Way Forward

- India is the **second-fastest digital adapter among 17 of the most-digital economies globally**, and rapid digitisation does require forward-looking measures to boost cybersecurity.

- It is important for the corporates or the respective government departments to **find the gaps in their organisations and address those gaps** and create a **layered security system**, wherein security threat intelligence sharing is happening between different layers.
- There is a **need for an apex body** to ensure operational coordination amongst various agencies and ministries.
- **Cyber deterrence can be envisaged on the lines of strategic deterrence to dissuade cyberattackers. We need to acquire offensive capabilities** for effective deterrence in cyberspace.

Source: IE

Cyber Crime Volunteers

Why in News

The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), a digital liberties organisation, has written to the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** that the **cyber crime volunteers concept** will lead to a “culture of surveillance and constant suspicion in society creating potential social distrust”.

Key Points

- **About the Cyber Crime Volunteers Concept:**
 - **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** has envisaged the Cyber Crime Volunteers Program to bring together citizens with passion to serve the nation on a single platform and contribute in the fight against **cybercrime** in the country.
The programme **targets to rope in around 500 persons** to flag unlawful content on the Internet.
 - **Good Samaritans** are welcomed to register as Cyber Crime Volunteers in the role of unlawful content flaggers for facilitating law enforcement agencies in identifying, reporting and removal of illegal/unlawful online content.
 - Volunteers have been advised to study **Article 19** of the Indian Constitution, which deals with freedom of expression.
 - Further, the volunteer shall “maintain strict confidentiality of tasks assigned/carried out by him/her”. The **State Nodal Officer of States/UTs** also reserves the **right to take legal action against the Volunteer**, in case of violation of terms and conditions of the Program.
- **Unlawful Content:** In general, content that violates any law in force in India. Such content may fall under following broad categories:
 - Against sovereignty and integrity of India.
 - Against defence of India.
 - Against Security of the State.
 - Against friendly relations with foreign States.
 - Content aimed at disturbing Public Order.
 - Disturbing communal harmony.
 - Child Sex Abuse material.

- **Concerns Raised:**
 - **Chances of Misuse:** There is no information available on how the Ministry will ensure that the program is not misused by certain elements to extract misguided personal or political vendettas.
 - There is **no process in place for withdrawal of complaints** once submitted.
 - **Cyber-Vigilantism:** The programme will **essentially result in a similar situation to the one which East Germany was in the 1950s.**
 - The state asking citizens to report their fellow citizens would lead to cyber-vigilantism, and would lead to peers turning against their peers to snitch on them.
 - **No Clear Definition:** The Ministry has failed to clearly define unlawful content and content which would relate to “anti-national” activities.
 - This could **allow the volunteers to exercise far more discretion than is necessary** and report on citizens who are well within their rights to post content which is critical of the State.
 - Such a program seems to be in direct violation of the decision of the Supreme Court in ***Shreya Singhal v Union of India*** (2013) which highlights the need to ensure that overbroad restrictions on online speech are not used as a tool by the State to criminalise free speech on the internet.

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre

- It has been established under the **Ministry of Home affairs (MHA)** to act as a **nodal point at National level** in the fight against cybercrime.
 - The scheme to set up I4C was approved in October 2018, to deal with all types of cybercrimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
 - This state-of-the-art Centre is located in **New Delhi.**
 - Various States and Union Territories have given their consent to set up Regional Cyber Crime Coordination Centres.
- **Seven Components of the Scheme:**
 - National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit,
 - National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal,
 - National Cyber Crime Training Centre,
 - Cyber Crime Ecosystem Management Unit,
 - National Cyber Crime Research and Innovation Centre,
 - National Cyber Crime Forensic Laboratory Ecosystem and
 - Platform for Joint Cyber Crime Investigation Team.

- **Objectives:**

- To provide a **platform to deal with cybercrimes** in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.
 - To coordinate all activities related to implementation of **Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLAT)** with other countries related to cybercrimes in consultation with the concerned nodal authority in MHA.
- To **create an ecosystem** that brings together academia, industry, public and government in prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of cybercrimes.
 - To identify the research problems and take up R&D activities in developing new technologies and forensic tools in collaboration with academia/research institutes within India and abroad.
- To prevent **misuse of cyberspace** for furthering the cause of extremist and terrorist groups.
- **Suggest amendments**, if required, in cyber laws to keep pace with fast changing technologies and International cooperation.

Source: TH

Right To Education

Why in News

Delhi High Court asked the Central government to respond to a petition against the authorities for **not deciding upon extension of free education under the Right To Education (RTE) Act to children of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) beyond Class 8 and up to Class 12 in school.**

Key Points

- **Constitutional Provisions for Right To Education:**

- Originally Part IV of Indian Constitution, **Article 45 and Article 39 (f) of DPSP**, had a provision for state funded as well as equitable and accessible education.
- The first official document on the Right to Education was the **Ramamurti Committee Report** in 1990.
- In 1993, the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in the ***Unnikrishnan JP vs State of Andhra Pradesh & Others*** held that **Education is a Fundamental right flowing from Article 21.**
- **Tapas Majumdar Committee (1999)** was set up, which encompassed insertion of Article 21A.
- The **86th Constitutional Amendment in 2002**, provided Right to Education as a fundamental right in Part-III of the Constitution.
 - It **inserted Article 21A** which made Right to Education a fundamental right for children between 6-14 years.
 - It provided for a follow-up legislation **Right to Education Act 2009.**

- **Feature of Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:**
 - The RTE Act aims to provide primary education to all children **aged 6 to 14 years**.
 - **Section 12(1)(c)** mandates that **non-minority private unaided schools should reserve at least 25% of seats in entry-level grades for children from economically weaker** and disadvantaged backgrounds.
 - It also makes **provisions for a non-admitted child** to be admitted to an age appropriate class.
 - It also states about **sharing of financial and other responsibilities** between the Central and State Governments.
 - Education in the Indian constitution is a **concurrent issue** and both centre and states can legislate on the issue.
 - It lays down the **norms and standards** related to: Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs), Buildings and infrastructure, School-working days, Teacher-working hours.
 - It also **provides for prohibition of deployment of teachers for non-educational work**, other than decennial census, elections to local authority, state legislatures and parliament, and disaster relief.
 - It provides for the **appointment of teachers with the requisite entry and academic qualifications**.
 - **It prohibits**
 - Physical punishment and mental harassment.
 - Screening procedures for admission of children.
 - Capitation fee.
 - Private tuition by teachers.
 - Running of schools without recognition.
 - It focuses on making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety through a system of **child friendly and child centred learning**.
- **Argument for Extension of Free Education under RTE beyond Class 8 for EWS:**
 - The **parents of children are required to pay hefty fees to unaided private schools in classes 9** and onwards which they can not afford.
 - Changing school from unaided private to government after class 8 **may affect the children's state of mind and education** and thus, an extension of the RTE benefits will ensure continuity in the education.

Reservation for Economically Weaker Section in Higher Education

- **103rd Constitutional Amendment Act** introduced an economic reservation (10% quota) in jobs and admissions in education institutes for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) by amending Articles 15 and 16.
- It inserted **Article 15 (6) and Article 16 (6)**.
- It was enacted to promote the **welfare of the poor** not covered by the 50% reservation policy for SCs, STs and **Socially and Educationally Backward Classes** (SEBC).
- It enables both Centre and the states to provide reservation to the EWS of society.

Source:IE

West Container Terminal Offer to India-Japan: Sri Lanka

Why in News

Sri Lanka has decided to offer the **West Container Terminal (WCT)** to Indian and Japanese companies.

The decision comes a month after the Sri Lanka government ejected the two partners from a 2019 tripartite agreement to jointly develop the **East Container Terminal (ECT)**, citing resistance to “foreign involvement”.

Key Points



- **About:**

Sri Lanka has approved the proposal to develop the WCT on **Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT)** basis for a period of 35 years as a public-private partnership with India's Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited and its local representative in Sri Lanka. Japan is yet to name an investor.

- **Stakes:**

- In the ECT project agreed upon earlier, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) was to hold a majority 51% stake, but in the WCT proposal, India and Japan will be accorded 85% stake.
- This is similar to the terms set for the Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT), where China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited holds 85% stake.

- **Significance:**
 - The WCT is **adjacent to the China-run CICT** and just **a couple of kilometres away from the China-backed Port City** being built on reclaimed land, making it a strategically desirable spot for India, whose concerns over China's presence in Sri Lanka are well known.
 - It will support India in accomplishment of its strategic vision (**SAGAR**) for the Indian Ocean, '**Neighbourhood First policy**', and in countering China's **String of Pearls** strategy.
 - Colombo's alternative comes at a time when Sri Lanka is seeking **support at the ongoing UN Human Right Council session**, where a resolution on the country's rights record will soon be put to vote.

India - Sri Lanka Relations

- **Background:** **India-Sri Lanka relationship** is more than 2,500 years old and both sides have built upon a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic intercourse.
- **Support Against Terrorism:** During the course of the civil war, India supported the right of the Government of Sri Lanka to act against terrorist forces.
- **Support For Rehabilitation:** The **Indian Housing Project** is Government of India's flagship project of developmental assistance to Sri Lanka. Its initial commitment is to build 50,000 houses for those affected by the civil war as well as for the estate workers in the plantation areas.
- **Assistance during Covid-19:** **The Reserve Bank of India** (RBI) had signed an agreement for extending a **USD 400 million currency swap** facility to Sri Lanka to boost the foreign reserves and ensure financial stability of the country, which was badly hit by **Covid 19 pandemic**. Recently, India has also supplied **Covid-19 Vaccines** to Sri Lanka.
- **Joint Exercises:** India and Sri Lanka conduct joint Military (**Mitra Shakti**) and Naval exercise (**SLINEX**).
- **Participation in Groupings:** Sri Lanka is also a member of groupings like **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and **SAARC** in which India plays a leading role.

Source:IE

First World Report on Hearing: WHO

Why in News

The **First World Report on Hearing** was released by the **World Health Organization (WHO)** - a day ahead of **World Hearing Day on 3rd March**.

The Report underlines the need to rapidly step up efforts to prevent and address hearing loss by investing and expanding access to ear and hearing care services.

Key Points

- **Findings:**
 - Nearly 2.5 billion people worldwide — or **1 in 4 people** — will be living with **some degree of hearing loss by 2050**.
 - At least **700 million of these people will require access to ear and hearing care** and other rehabilitation services unless action is taken.
- **Issues:**
 - **Adverse Health Effects:**

Untreated hearing loss can have a devastating impact on **people's ability to communicate, to study and to earn a living**. It can also impact **people's mental health and their ability to sustain relationships**.
 - **Lack of Specialists among Low-Income Countries:**
 - About 78% have fewer than one Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist per million population.
 - 93% have fewer than one audiologist per million.
 - Only 17% have one or more speech therapists per million.
 - 50% have one or more teachers for the deaf per million.
- **Hearing Impairment in India:**
 - **About:**

Over 27,000 children are born deaf every year in India. Hearing impairment or loss is often neglected as it cannot be seen and in most cases the diagnosis is delayed.
 - **Causes:**
 - There are many **children** who can benefit through advanced hearing technology but are **missed out because of low awareness** around hearing issues in babies.
 - One major reason is the **unavailability of newborn screening programmes** at birth and low awareness among parents.
 - **Government Initiative:**

National Programme for the Prevention & Control of Deafness (NPPCD) under **National Health Mission** aims:

 - To **prevent the avoidable hearing loss** on account of disease or injury.
 - **Early identification, diagnosis** and treatment of ear problems responsible for hearing loss and deafness.
 - To **medically rehabilitate persons** of all age groups, suffering with deafness.
 - To **strengthen the existing inter-sectoral linkages** for continuity of the rehabilitation programme, for persons with deafness.
 - To **develop institutional capacity for ear care services** by providing support for equipment and material and training personnel.
 - **Required Interventions:**
 - Holding screening programmes can help in early diagnosis, which in turn will lead to early treatment.
 - The **Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS)** helps in early detection of congenital hearing loss and this test is vital to detect hearing impairment in newborn babies and to ensure early intervention.

While **UNHS screening is mandatory in developed countries**, it is not included in the list of mandatory health screening procedures for newborns in India, except Kerala.

- **Suggested Strategies:**

- **Integration of Hearing Care into Primary Healthcare:** This will close the present patient-doctor gap.
- **Clinical Screening at Strategic Points in Life:** To ensure early identification of any loss of hearing and ear diseases.
- **Promoting Hearing Assistive Technology and Services:** It includes measures such as captioning and sign language interpretation which can further improve access to communication and education for those with hearing loss.
- **Increasing Investments:** WHO calculates that governments can expect a return of nearly USD 16 for every USD 1 invested.
- **Increasing Immunisation:** In children, almost 60% of hearing loss can be prevented through measures such as immunisation for prevention of rubella and meningitis, improved maternal and neonatal care, and screening for, and early management of, otitis media – inflammatory diseases of the middle ear.
- **Maintaining Hygiene:** In adults, noise control, safe listening and surveillance of ototoxic (having a toxic effect on the ear) medicines together with good ear hygiene can help maintain good hearing and reduce the potential for hearing loss.

Source: IE

ICC Investigations into Israel-Palestine War Crimes

Why in News

International Criminal Court (ICC) has launched investigations into the war crimes in **Palestinian territories occupied by Israel** (West Bank and the Gaza Strip).

Key Points

- The decision for investigation is taken after a recent ruling that the court's jurisdiction extends to territories occupied by Israel since the **1967 Six-day Arab- Israeli war**.
In this war, Israeli forces seized the **Golan Heights** from Syria, the **West Bank & East Jerusalem** from Jordan and **Sinai Peninsula & Gaza strip** from Egypt.
- The investigation is also expected to cover the **2014 Gaza war, the 2018 Gaza border clashes** and **Israeli settlement-building in the West Bank**.
The inquiry will also look at whether rocket fire by **Hamas and other groups from Gaza** amounts to war crimes.
- **About ICC:**
 - Governed by an international treaty called '**The Rome Statute**', the ICC is the world's first permanent international criminal court.
 - Headquarters: **The Hague, Netherlands**.
 - It investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: **genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity** and the **crime of aggression**.
 - Through international criminal justice, ICC aims to hold those responsible for their crimes and to help prevent these crimes from happening again.
 - **India is not a party to Rome Statute** along with the USA and China.

Golan Heights

- The Golan Heights is a rocky plateau with an area of 1,800km² on the border between Israel and Syria in south-western Syria.
- It is a strategic location that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 war. Israel effectively annexed the territory in 1981.
- Recently, the USA has officially recognized Jerusalem and Golan Heights as a part of Israel.



Source: TH

WWF Conservation Drive on World Wildlife Day

Why in News

Recently, on the occasion of **World Wildlife Day (3rd March)**, the **Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)** called on multiple stakeholders, including the **European Union (EU)**, to save Europe's last old-growth forests.

WWF was **established in 1961** and is **headquartered at Gland, Switzerland**. Its mission is to conserve nature and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - Europe's Old-Growth Forests (OGF) are **primitive forests that are dominated by natural processes**. They include virgin, near-virgin, long-untouched forests by humans, eg: Białowieża Forest in Poland.
 - To date, 3,50,000 hectares (ha) of old-growth and virgin forests had been identified in Central and Southeastern Europe. Of these, only 2,80,000 ha were legally protected.
- **Location:**

The largest areas of surviving OGF and forest habitats in Europe (outside of Russia) were found primarily in Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia and Bulgaria.
- **Ecological Importance:**
 - They were **home to Europe's largest surviving large carnivore populations**, as well as thousands of other species of flora and fauna.
 - These forests **rendered important ecosystem services** such as filtering and storing freshwater to regulating the climate and were thus essential to people and to the economy.
- **Threats:**
 - Increasing pressure on forests from both **unsustainable legal and illegal logging**, as well as the **impacts of climate change**.
 - The fragmentation and destruction of forest habitats meant that **both animals and disease vectors were inadvertently coming into more frequent contact and conflict with humans**.
- **Steps that can be Taken:**
 - Developing and promoting **sustainable compensation mechanisms**.
 - Developing **forest-based local green business and investment schemes** to support sustainable development of such forests.

World Wildlife Day

- **About:**
 - It is celebrated every year on the 3rd of March, since 2013. The date chosen coincides with the day the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)** was signed in 1973.
 - The **United Nations General Assembly** resolution also designated the CITES Secretariat as the facilitator for the global observance of this special day for wildlife on the UN calendar.
- **Theme:**

The theme of World Wildlife Day 2021 is **Forests and Livelihoods: Sustaining People and Planet**. It is set in alignment with the UN **Sustainable Development Goals**.

- **In India:**

On this occasion, **the Union Environment Ministry declared that it is dedicated for reintroduction of Cheetah**, which went extinct in 1952.

Source: DTE

Similipal Biosphere Reserve: Odisha

Why in News

Recently, a massive fire broke out in the **Similipal Biosphere Reserve** in Odisha. The core area of the biosphere was untouched by the fire, however the fire is threatening damage to its rich biodiversity.

Key Points

- **About:**

- Similipal **derives its name from ‘Simul’ (silk cotton) tree.**
- It was formally designated a **tiger reserve in 1956** and brought under **Project Tiger in the year 1973.**
- It was declared a **biosphere reserve** by the Government of India in **June, 1994.**
- It has been part of the **UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserve** since **2009.**
- It is part of the **Similipal-Kuldiha-Hadgarh Elephant Reserve** popularly known as **Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve**, which includes 3 protected areas i.e. Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hadagarh Wildlife sanctuary and Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary.

- **Location:**

It is situated in the northern part of Odisha’s Mayurbhanj district. Geographically, it lies in the eastern end of the eastern ghat.

- **Coverage:**

The biosphere spread over 4,374 sq. km. has 845 sq. km. of core forest (tiger reserve), 2,129 sq km buffer area and 1,400 sq km of transition space.

- **Vegetation:**

Similipal has 1,076 flowering species and 96 species of orchids. It boasts of having tropical semi-evergreen forests, tropical moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous hill forests, high level sal forests and sprawling meadows.

- **Tribes:**

Two tribes, the **Erenga Kharias** and the **Mankirdias**, inhabit the reserve’s forests and practise traditional agricultural activities (the collection of seeds and timber).

- **Wildlife:**

Similipal is home to a wide range of wild animals including tigers and **elephants**, besides 304 species of birds, 20 species of amphibians and 62 species of reptiles.

- **Vulnerability to Forest Fires:**

- **Natural:** Natural causes such as lighting or even soaring temperatures can sometimes result in **forest fires** here.
- **Man Made Factors:** Instances of poaching and hunting wherein the poachers set a small patch of forest on fire to divert the wild animals, can lead to forest fires.

- **Mitigation Strategies:**

- Forecasting fire-prone days and including community members to mitigate incidents of fire, creating fire lines, clearing sites of dried biomass, and crackdown on poachers.
- The forest fire lines which are strips kept clear of vegetation, could help break the forest into compartments to prevent fires from spreading.

Other Major Protected Areas in Odisha

- **National Parks:**

Bhitarkanika National Park: It is home to the largest congregation of the endangered Salt Water Crocodile in the country.

- **Wildlife Sanctuaries:**

- **Badrama WLS**: It is characterized by the presence of Moist Sal Forests.
- **Chilika (Nalaban island) WLS**: Asia's largest and world's second-largest lagoon. Recently, direct sightings of school of Irrawaddy dolphins has been reported here.
- **Hadgarh WLS**: Salandi river passes through it which is home to mugger crocodiles.
- **Baisipalli WLS**: It is a sal dominated forest with a significant number of tigers, leopards, elephants, herbivores like Chousingha.
- **Kotagarh WLS**: It consists of dense deciduous forests with grasslands.
- **Nandankanan WLS**: First in the world to breed White tiger and Melanistic tiger.
- **Lakhari Valley WLS**: It is a dwelling place of a large number of elephants.
- **Gahirmatha (Marine) WLS**: It is a mass nesting spot in Indian Ocean region and the only turtle sanctuary in Odisha. **The Olive Ridley turtles** travel across the South Pacific to breed on the coast of Gahirmatha.

Source:TH

CRCL Recognized as Regional Customs Laboratory

Why in News

Central Revenues Control Laboratory (CRCL), New Delhi, under the **Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs** has been recognized as a **Regional Customs Laboratory (RCL)** of the **World Customs Organisation (WCO)** for Asia-Pacific Region.

With its recognition as RCL, CRCL joins a select group of Customs Laboratories in the region like those in Japan & Korea.

Key Points

- **About Central Revenues Control Laboratory (CRCL):**

- **Established:** 1939.
- With the introduction of instrument based testing, Revenue Laboratories are **facilitating faster clearances**, without compromising on law enforcement, and thereby playing a vital role in **trade facilitation**.

- **Regional Customs Laboratory:**
 - Their traditional work is the **chemical analysis** to determine tariff classification and the level of duties and other taxes.
 - Their role has evolved over time with changes in trade patterns and technical evolution.
 - Modern customs laboratories now play an important part in environmental protection (e.g., controlling the trade of **ozone depleting substances**), **endangered species protection**, control of dangerous goods such as pesticides, **persistent organic pollutants**, **chemical weapons**, as well as narcotics and drug precursors, etc.
- **World Customs Organisation:**
 - The World Customs Organization (WCO), established in 1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC) is **an independent intergovernmental body** whose mission is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.
 - At present, it **represents 183 Customs administrations** across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade.
 - **India had become the vice-chair (regional head) of the Asia Pacific region** of the WCO for a period of two years to June, 2020.
 - It is the **only international organization with competence in Customs matters** and which can rightly call itself the voice of the international Customs community.
 - It has its **headquarters in Brussels, Belgium**.
 - Some **Important Conventions/Mechanism** under WCO:
 - The **SAFE Framework** of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade.
 - The **International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System** (HS Convention).
 - The **International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs procedures** (revised Kyoto Convention or RKC).

Source: PIB
