



India as Counterbalance to China: USA

Why in News

Recently, the **Trump administration declassified a document** which asserted that a **strong India**, in cooperation with like-minded countries, would **act as a counterbalance to China** in the [strategic Indo-Pacific region](#).

- The document on the **USA strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific** from 2018 outlines objectives, challenges and strategies with regard to China, North Korea, India and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Key Points

▪ Challenges for USA:

- Maintaining **USA's strategic primacy in the Indo-pacific** and **stopping China** from establishing illiberal spheres of influence.
- Ensuring that **North Korea does not threaten the USA**.
- **Advancing the USA economic leadership globally** while pushing fair and reciprocal trade.

▪ Aspects Related to India:

- India is a **preferred partner on security issues** and to cooperate to preserve maritime security and **counter Chinese influence** in South Asia and Southeast Asia. To achieve this, **USA aims to:**
 - **Support India's aspiration to be a leading global power**, highlighting its compatibility with the USA, Japanese and Australian vision of the Indo-Pacific.
 - Work with India **"toward domestic economic reform"**.
 - **Enhance defence cooperation** and interoperability.
 - **Provide greater leadership roles for India** in the [East Asia Summit](#) and [ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus](#).
 - **Support [India's Act East policy](#)**.

▪ India vis-a-vis China:

- **Help India addressing disputes with China:** USA aims to support India via military, diplomatic and intelligence channels to **help address continental challenges** such as the [border dispute with China](#) and resolution of disputes over rivers, including the [Brahmaputra](#) and other rivers facing diversion by China.
- **Supporting India's reservations against Belt Road Initiative:** USA seeks the transparent infrastructure-debt practices in the countries facing debt due to Chinese financing under [Belt Road Initiative](#).
- **Working with India and Japan:** To help finance projects that enhance regional connectivity between India and countries of the region.

▪ India-USA Relations:

- **Shared democratic values** and increasing convergence of interests on bilateral, regional and global issues.

- **Broad-based and multi-sectoral relationship** covering trade and investment, defence and security, education, science and technology and [cyber security](#) etc.
- **People to people connection:** Vibrant people-to-people interaction and support across the political spectrum in both countries nurture bilateral relationships between the two countries.
- USA has signed **defence agreements** with India to provide **military information and mutual logistics support**. These are:
 - The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).
 - The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).
 - The Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA).
 - The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA): It was the result of the [Indo-United States \(US\) 2+2 talks](#).
- **Recent USA-China Rivalries:**
 - **Competition for dominating world finances:** To counter the USA-dominated International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization, China has come out with alternative financial institutions like [Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank](#), and [New Development Bank](#).
 - **Contending influence over international groupings:** In order to contain rising China's assertiveness, the USA under its 'pivot to Asia policy' has launched a [Quad initiative](#), [Indo pacific narrative](#). Most recently, the USA proposed to expand G7 to G-11 without including China in it.
 - **New Cold War:** USA-China confrontation is on multiple fronts including ideological and cultural hegemonic rivalry, trade wars which has often been called the [New Cold War](#).

Way Forward

- **Maintain interest oriented balancing:** India should realise its rising global power and rather than getting enmeshed in USA-China rivalry, **it should prioritize its own interests and growth by maintaining peaceful mutual relationships**.
- **Promote Multilateralism:** India can promote new multilateralism under the aegis of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**- which relies on restructuring both the economic order and societal behaviour for equitable sustainable development.

[Source: TH](#)

India's NSA Visit to Afghanistan

Why in News

Recently, the [National Security Advisor \(NSA\)](#) of India visited Afghanistan for talks on strategic issues with the leadership in Kabul.

Key Points

- **First official visit since initiation of Intra-afghan talks:**
 - This visit is significant because it was the first visit by any senior Indian official amidst the [Intra-Afghan Talks](#).
 - **Intra-Afghan** talks refer to the **negotiation meetings between the Taliban and the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation** (representative of Afghan Government) opened in Doha in 2020.

- These talks are **facilitated and supervised by the United States**, representatives of the Ghani government and the Taliban aimed at ending the decades-old war and forging a political settlement.

▪ **Issues discussed:**

- **Exchanged views** on the **Peace Process**, the beginning of **2nd round of (Intra-Afghan) talks**, and the **role of India in establishing peace in Afghanistan**.
- Emphasis to **synchronise efforts to combat terrorism** and maintain peace in Afghanistan which shall become more challenging after the USA troops withdraw after [Doha Peace Pact \(2020\)](#).

- **Doha Peace Pact:** In February 2020, the USA and the Taliban signed an agreement in Doha, (Qatar's capital) which included:

- USA to withdraw all of its troops from Afghanistan in 14 months and would also release Taliban prisoners, held captive by the Afghan government.
- Assurance by Taliban that they would not allow transnational jihadist organisations such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State to use Afghanistan as their base and also committed to start direct talks with the Afghan government, which began in September 2020.

▪ **India's Role in establishing Peace in Afghanistan:**

- By **participating in the intra-Afghan inaugural dialogue** in Doha, India has shown its willingness to engage with all Afghan parties including the Taliban for peace in Kabul.
- India conveyed that the peace process must:
 - Be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled;
 - Respect national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan; and
 - Promote human rights and democracy.
- India has a major stake in the stability of Afghanistan since it has [invested considerable resources in Afghanistan's development](#).



▪ **Significance of Stable Afghanistan for India:**

- A stable Afghanistan government in power is a **strategic asset vis-à-vis Pakistan**.
- **An increased political and military role for the Taliban** and the expansion of its territorial control should be of great concern to India since the Taliban is widely

- believed to be a protégé of Islamabad.
- The country has the **Central Asian Republics** to the North, Pakistan to its East, and through Iran and Pakistan the Indian Ocean deeper south.
 - Withdrawal of the USA troops could result in the **breeding of the fertile ground for various anti-India terrorist** outfits like [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#) or Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Way Forward

- India has reaffirmed its **support to the Doha Agreement (2020) and intra-Afghan peace negotiations** facilitating Afghan peace process and reiterated its commitment to Afghanistan's pursuit of **"sustainable peace and reconciliation"**.
- India's vision of a **sovereign, united, stable, plural and democratic Afghanistan** is one that is shared by Afghanistan, cutting across ethnic and provincial lines.
- **Continuing such active engagement** will enable India to work with like-minded forces in the region to ensure that the vacuum created by the USA withdrawal does not lead to an unravelling of the gains registered during the last two decades.

[Source:IE](#)

Impeachment of the President of the USA

Why in News

Donald Trump has become the **first President of the USA** in history **to be impeached twice** by the **House of Representatives**. He was charged for **inciting an insurrection**.

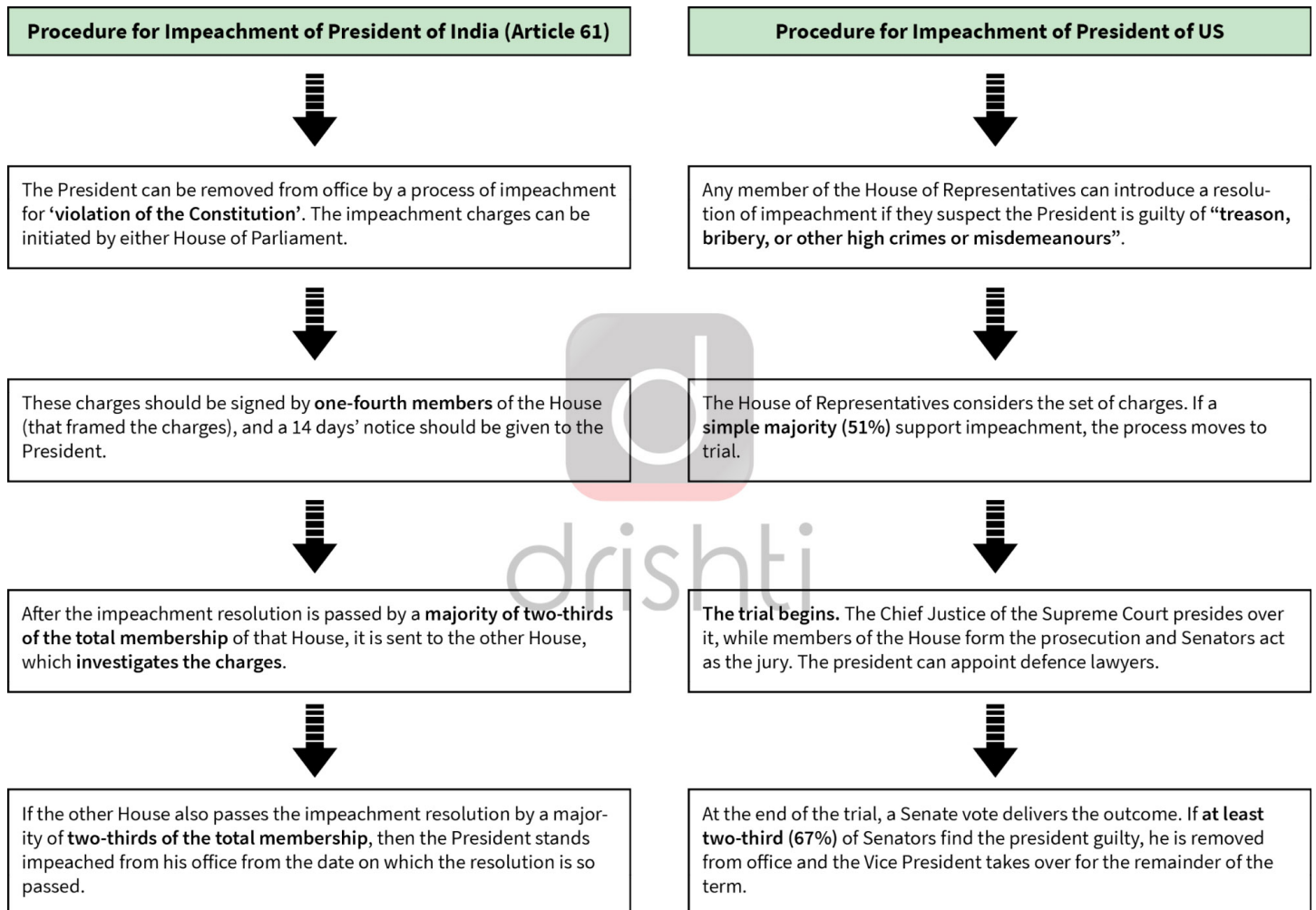
- On 6th January, 2021, as the USA Congress assembled to **certify [President-elect Joe Biden's victory](#)**, a mob of Donald Trump supporters occupied the USA Capitol in a failed bid to overturn the election results.

Key Points

- **Mechanism of Impeachment of President in USA:**
 - **Two Houses:** The legislature of the United States of America i.e. Congress of the United States consists of two houses:
 - **The Senate**, in which each state, regardless of its size, is represented by two senators.
 - **House of Representatives**, to which members are elected on the basis of population.
 - **Reasons for Impeachment:** The USA Constitution states that the President can be removed for conviction of **treason, bribery, or other high crimes or misdemeanour**.
 - **Earlier Impeachments:**
 - **Three USA Presidents, Trump** in 2019, **Bill Clinton** in 1998 and **Andrew Johnson** in 1868, previously were impeached by the House but **acquitted by the Senate**.
 - Thus, **no USA President ever has been removed from office through impeachment**.
- **Mechanism of Impeachment of President in India:**
 - In India, the President can be removed only for **'violation of the Constitution'** and the

- Constitution **does not define the meaning** of the phrase ‘violation of the Constitution’.
- The **impeachment charges can be initiated by either House of Parliament** - Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha.

Mechanism of Impeachment of President in India and the USA



[Source:IE](#)

India’s Potential to Increase Cereals Export

Why in News

The **US Department of Agriculture (USDA)** has noted in its latest **Grain: World Markets and Trade report** that **exports of wheat and rice from India are likely to increase**.

Key points

- **Findings:**

- **Increase in Wheat Exports:** The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has recently **upped its forecast of Indian wheat exports for 2020-21 (July-June) to 1.8 million tonnes (mt)**, as against its earlier estimate of **1 mt**.

- **Increase in Rice Exports:** USDA has also estimated India's rice exports to have hit a record **14.4 mt** in 2020, up from the **preceding two years**.
- **Causes for Increase in Wheat Exports:**
 - **Chinese Stockpiling:** The key driver of global price turnaround seems to be China. The reasons for its building strategic stockpiles of everything aren't as fully clear as their effect on international prices.
 - **Rising Global Prices:** For example, the **Russian government** is levying an export tax on wheat in response to high domestic prices. **Bangladesh**, a potential importer of wheat from Russia is beginning to **shift its purchases towards India**.
 - **Ultra-low interest rate** money increasingly being invested into **agri-commodity markets**.
 - In the wake of Covid 19 Pandemic Various Countries such as the USA, India, Russia are reducing their interest rates.
 - **For example:** Bank of England current bank rate: 0.1%
 - Reserve Bank of India current RBI repurchase rate: 4%
- **Causes for Rise in Rice Exports:**
 - **Impact of drought:**
 - The country's closest competitors **Thailand and Vietnam** have been facing drought leading to **decline** in rice productivity.
 - Increase in **demand in Bangladesh**
- **Potential Challenges to Rise in Export:**
 - Indian wheat is still not competitive at the government's **minimum support price (MSP)** of **Rs 19,750 per tonne**. Further additional cost of **cleaning, bagging, loading and transport to port** would be in addition making export uncompetitive.
 - **Solution:** Procurement of wheat below MSP from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Maharashtra, where not much government procurement happens.
- **Significance:**
 - Estimates for increase in these exports will be beneficial as India's **own domestic production of rice and wheat** has touched an all-time-high of 118.43 mt and 107.59 mt, respectively, in 2019-20.
 - Government agencies also procured **an all time high in 2019 -20** thus burdening **government exchequer**.

Cereals Exports of India

- India is one of the **largest producers** as well as **exporter of cereal products in the world**.
- The important cereals are - **wheat, paddy, sorghum, millet (Bajra), barley and maize**.
- Previously in 2008, India had imposed a ban **on export of rice and wheat etc.** to meet **domestic needs**.
 - Owing to **huge demand in the global market and country's surplus production**, India allowed limited amounts of export of the commodity.
- Rice (including Basmati and Non Basmati) occupy the **major share in India's total cereals export with 95.7% in 2019-20**. Whereas, other cereals including wheat represent only **4.3% share in total cereals exported from India during the year 2019-20**.
- **Major Export Destinations** (2019-20) of **Wheat** : Nepal, Bangladesh , UAE, Somalia.
- **Major Export Destinations** (2019-20) of **Non Basmati rice:** Nepal, Benin, UAE, Somalia.
- **Major Export Destinations** (2019-20) of **Basmati Rice:** Iran, Saudi Arab, Iraq, UAE.

Supreme Court's View on Pollution in Yamuna

Why in News

Recently, the [Supreme Court \(SC\)](#) has taken suo motu cognizance of pollution of water bodies by untreated sewage.

- The SC was hearing an urgent petition filed by the **Delhi Jal Board (DJB)**, to immediately stop Haryana from discharging [pollutants into the Yamuna river](#).

Key Points

- **Background:**
 - In the 2017 *Paryavaran Suraksha Samiti v. Union of India case*, the SC directed that **norms for generating funds, for setting up and/or operating the Common Effluent Treatment Plant and Sewage Treatment Plants**, shall be finalised by the State Pollution Control Board's on or before 31st march 2017.
 - It was **directed that for the purpose of setting up these plants, the state government will prioritise such cities, towns and villages**, which discharge industrial pollutants and sewer directly in rivers and water bodies.
- **SC's Ruling:**
 - **Constitutional Provisions Highlighted:**
 - **Article 243W** of the Constitution **vests municipalities and local authorities with the performance of functions and implementation of schemes as may be entrusted to them**, including those in relation to the matters listed in **item 6 of the 12th schedule**.
 - Item 6 of the Schedule includes **“public health, sanitation conservancy and solid waste management”**.
 - **Article 21:** The right to clean the environment, and further, pollution-free water, has been protected under the broad rubric of the [right to life](#).
 - **Directions to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB):**
 - The court directed the [CPCB](#) to **submit a report identifying municipalities along the river Yamuna, which have not installed total treatment plants for sewage** as per the requirement or have gaps in ensuring that the sewage is not discharged untreated into the river.
 - It asked CPCB to **highlight any other source of prominent contamination within the limits of Municipalities** and to **submit priority-wise list of Municipalities**, river stretches adjacent to which have been found to be most polluted.

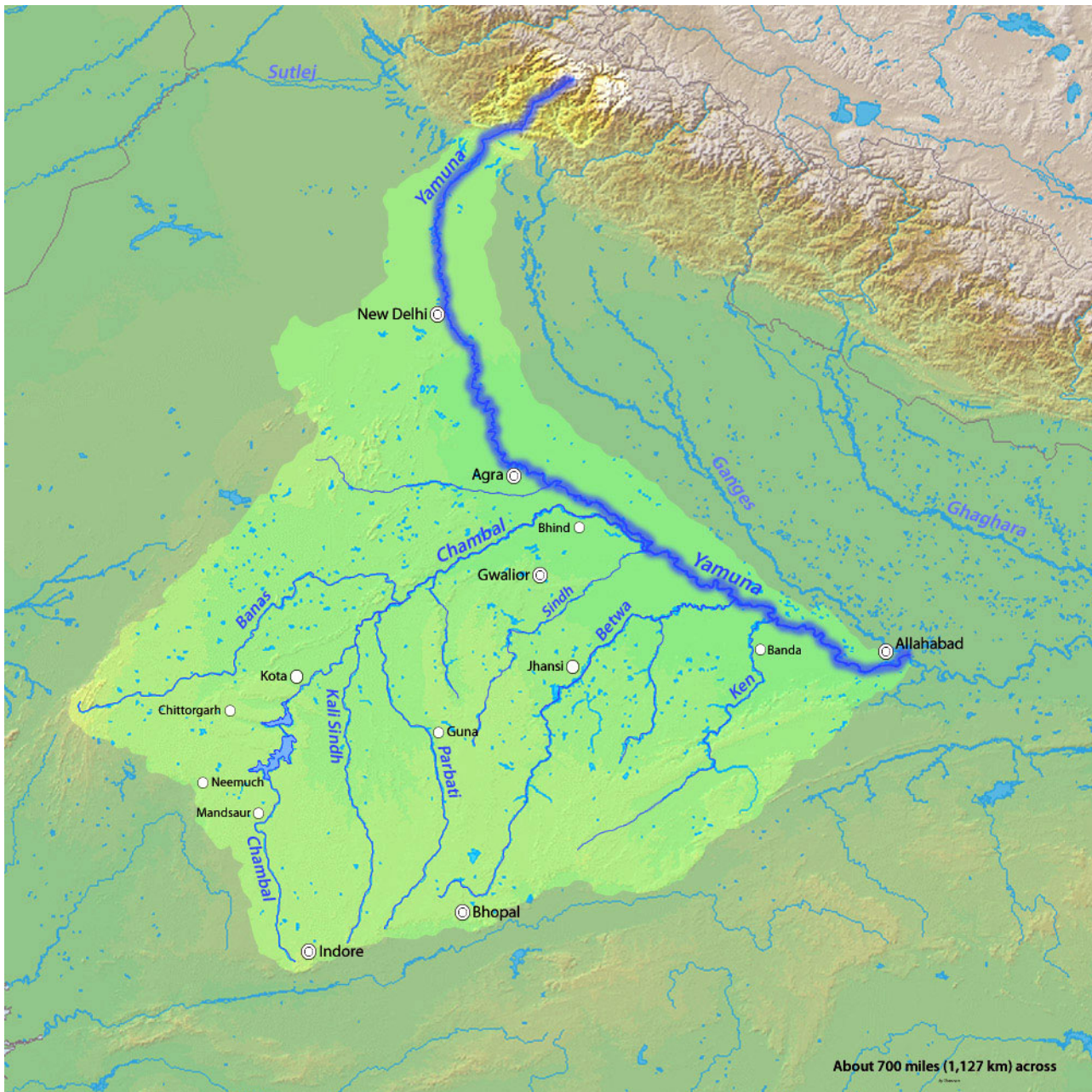
Pollution in Yamuna

- **Causes of Pollution in Yamuna:**
 - **Industrial Pollution:**

- The Yamuna flows into Delhi from Haryana and the state has industrial units in Sonapat (on the banks of Yamuna). **Ammonia is used as an industrial chemical** in the production of fertilisers, plastics and dyes.
- **Mixing of Drains:**
 - Mixing of **two drains carrying drinking water and sewage or industrial waste, or both**, in Sonapat. The two drains often mix due to overflow or damage to the wall that separates them.
- **Effects of Rising Ammonia:**
 - Ammonia reduces the amount of oxygen in water as it is transformed to oxidised forms of nitrogen. Hence, it also **increases Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD)**.
 - Water pollution by organic wastes is measured in terms of BOD.
 - If the **concentration** of ammonia in water is **above 1 ppm**, it is **toxic to fishes**.
 - In humans, **long term ingestion** of water having ammonia levels of 1 ppm or above may cause **damage to internal organs**.

Yamuna

- **Source:** The river Yamuna, a **major tributary of river Ganges**, originates from the Yamunotri glacier near Bandarpooch peaks in the Mussoorie range of the lower Himalayas in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand.
- **Basin:** It **meets the Ganges at the Sangam in Prayagraj**, Uttar Pradesh after flowing through Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi.
- **Length:** 1376 km.
- **Important Dam:** Lakhwar-Vyasi Dam (Uttarakhand), Tajewala Barrage Dam (Haryana) etc.
- **Important Tributaries:** Chambal, Sindh, Betwa, Ken, Tons, Hindon.



[Source:IE](#)

Henley Passport Index 2021

Why in News

India has been ranked **85th** in the most powerful passport report '**Henley Passport Index 2021**'.

Key Points

- **About the Index:**

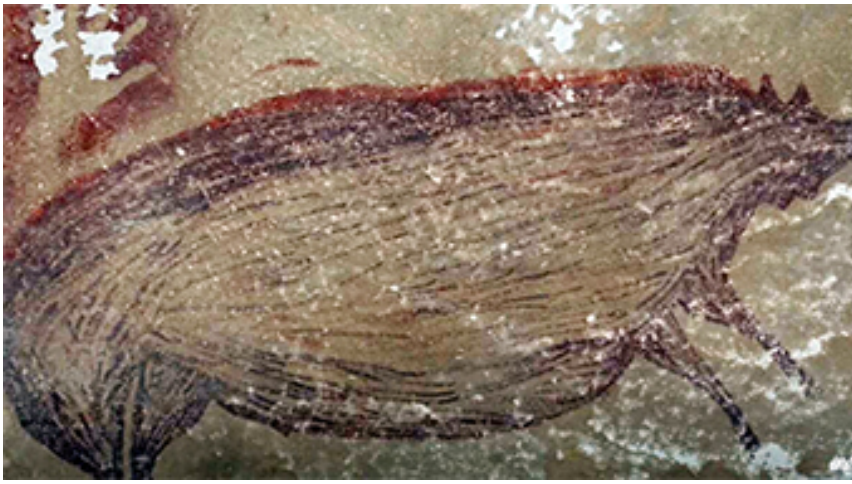
- The **Henley Passport Index** is the **original ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations** their holders can access **without a prior visa**.
- Originally **created by Dr. Christian H. Kaelin** (chairman of Henley & Partners), the ranking is based on exclusive data from the **International Air Transport Association (IATA)**, which maintains the world's largest and most accurate database of travel information.
- It was **launched in 2006** and **includes 199 different passports**.
- **Latest Rankings:**
 - **Top Rank Holders:**
 - **Japan continues to hold the number one position** on the index, with passport holders able to access 191 destinations around the world visa-free.
 - **Singapore** is in **second place** (with a score of 190) and **South Korea ties with Germany in third place** (with a score of 189).
 - The top spots were traditionally held by EU countries, the UK, or the US. This year, it is the Asia-Pacific (APAC) passports which are the most powerful in the world as it includes some of the first countries to begin the process of recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - **Bottom Rank Holders:**
 - **Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan** continue to be the countries with the worst passport to hold with a passport score of 29, 28 and 26 respectively.
 - **India's Performance:**
 - India **ranks 85th**, with a **visa-free score of 58**.
 - The Indian passport **ranked higher in both 2020** (84th) and **2019** (82nd).
 - **Comparison with Neighbouring Countries:**
 - **Pakistan** was ranked **107th** and **Nepal** was ranked **104th**.
- **Related Government Initiatives:**
 - The **government has been making efforts to increase the number of countries that provide visa free travel, visa-on-arrival and e-visa facilities** so as to further ease international travel for Indians.
 - While **issuance of visa and visa related process is the sovereign and unilateral decision** of the respective country, the matter regarding easier and liberalised visa policy for Indian nationals is taken up regularly in bilateral meetings and forums with foreign countries.

[Source: Mint](#)

World's Oldest Cave Art

Why in News

Recently, archaeologists have discovered the **world's oldest known cave art** which is a life-sized picture of a **wild pig** that was painted at least **45,500 years ago in Indonesia**.



Key Points

▪ Location:

- The picture was found in the **Leang Tedongnge cave in a remote valley on the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia.**

▪ Sulawesi Warty Pig Painting:

- It dates to at least **45,500 years ago.**
- It **shows a pig with a short crest of upright hairs and a pair of horn-like facial warts in front of the eyes,** a characteristic feature of adult male Sulawesi warty pigs.
 - **Sulawesi warty pigs** were the most **commonly portrayed animal in the ice age rock art of the island,** suggesting they have long been valued both as food and a focus of creative thinking and artistic expression.
- Painted using **red ochre pigment,** the pig appears to be observing a **fight or social interaction between two other warty pigs.**

▪ Previous Oldest Painting :

- The previously oldest dated rock art 'scene' at least 43,900 years old, was a depiction of **hybrid human-animal beings hunting Sulawesi warty pigs and dwarf bovids.**
- It was discovered by the same research team at a nearby limestone cave site.

▪ Some of the Caves with Paintings in India:

◦ [Ajanta](#) :

- This cave is located in **Aurangabad district of Maharashtra.**
- Famous fresco paintings of Ajanta are dying princesses, flying apsara and preaching Buddha.

◦ [Ellora](#) :

- It is located in the **Aurangabad district of Maharashtra.**
- It is famous for the **largest monolithic excavation** in the world- the great Kailasa.

◦ [Elephanta](#) :

- It is located on **Elephanta Islands in Mumbai.**
- There are seven cave excavations in the Elephanta group.

◦ [Bhimbetka](#) :

- It is located between Hoshangabad and Bhopal, in the foothills of the Vindhya Mountains.
- It has one of the **oldest paintings in India and the world.**

ASMI: The Machine Pistol

Why in News

India's **first indigenous 9mm Machine Pistol** has been jointly developed by **Infantry School, Mhow** and **DRDO's Armament Research & Development Establishment (ARDE), Pune**.

- Machine pistols are primarily self-loading versions of pistols which are either fully automatic or can also fire bursts of bullets.



Key Points

- The Pistol is named **“Asmi”** meaning **“Pride”, “Self-Respect” & “Hard Work”**.
- **Features of Asmi:**
 - The Machine Pistol fires the in-service **9mm ammunition**.
 - With an overall **empty weight of less than 2 Kg**, it features an **8-inch barrel** and **33 rounds high capacity magazine**.
 - It has an upper receiver made from Aircraft **grade Aluminium** and lower receiver from **Carbon Fibre**.
 - **3D Printing process** has been used in designing and prototyping of various parts including trigger components made by metal 3D printing.
- **Significance:**
 - The weapon has huge potential in Armed forces as **personal weapon for heavy weapon detachments, commanders, tank, aircraft crews, counter insurgency and counter terrorism** operations etc.
- **Cost Effective:**
 - The Machine Pistol is likely to have production cost under Rs. **50000** each and has

potential for exports.

[Source:PIB](#)

Indian Army day

Why in News

Army Day is **celebrated every year on 15th January** in India to commemorate the jawans and the Indian Army.

- This year India is celebrating its **73rd Army Day**.



Key Points

- **Historical Background:**
 - On **15th January 1949**, **Field Marshal Kodandera M. Cariappa**, who was then a Lieutenant General, **took over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army** from General Sir Francis Butcher, the last British person to hold that post.
 - **K. M. Cariappa** adopted the slogan 'Jai Hind' which means 'Victory of India'. He is also one of only two Indian Army officers to hold the Five-star rank of Field Marshal, the other being Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw.
- **Army Day :**
 - Army Day is **celebrated every year to honor the soldiers of the country**, who have

set the greatest example of selfless service and brotherhood and more than anything the love for the country.

- In the celebration of Army Day, the **parade is organised every year at the Cariappa Parade Ground of Delhi Cantonment.**

▪ **Indian Army:**

- The Indian army **originated from the forces of the East India Company**, which later became the '**British Indian Army**', and eventually, after Independence, the **Indian Army**.
- The Indian Army was founded almost **126 years ago by the British on 1st April, 1895.**
- According to the **Global Fire Power Index 2021**, India's army is considered the **world's fourth strongest army.**
 - **Global Fire Power Index:** The **rankings for the index are reached after judging the countries on 50 parameters**, including military resources, natural resources, industry and geographical features and available manpower.

[Source:HT](#)

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