



PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

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PIB Current Affairs

MoU between Environment Ministry and University of British Columbia on forestry science

Why in news?

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed today between Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada for next 10 years in New Delhi.

Highlights:

- Both the institutions shall explore opportunities for future collaborations in the field of forestry science through their respective organizations namely Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Wildlife Institute of India, Forest Survey of India, Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy and Directorate of Forest Education, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India and University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.
- The MoU will help in exchange of students, researchers and faculty, developing research projects, livelihood opportunities and augment income of the forest based communities and also assist the industries to optimize the utilization of forest based resources with access of technology to different stakeholders by the respective organizations.

The main areas of collaboration listed in the Memorandum of Understanding are:

- Collaborative research on wood sciences, forest resource management, adaptation and mitigation to climate change, forest genetics and breeding, wildlife, ecology, remote sensing, insect and disease pests, extension, conservation of flora and fauna, biotechnology, bio-energy, bio-economy, etc
- Exchange of students/researchers, faculty members and post-doctoral fellows through internship and other scholarship opportunities
- Capacity building on data collection and analysis of Permanent observational sample

plots under forest inventory for growth, stand structure, biodiversity and climate change parameters

- Training and exposure on developing suitable protocols for Linkage of Remote Sensing and field inventory data Arranging joint conferences, seminar, workshops and exhibitions.

About Wildlife Institute of India

- Established in 1982, Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is an internationally acclaimed Institution, which offers training program, academic courses and advisory in wildlife research and management. The Institute is actively engaged in research across the breadth of the country on biodiversity related issues.
- The Institute's idyllic campus that has been carefully developed to create state of the art infrastructure encourages scholarly work.

Aims & Objectives:

- Build up scientific knowledge on wildlife resources.
 - Train personnel at various levels for conservation and management of wildlife.
 - Carry out research relevant to management including the development of techniques appropriate to Indian conditions.
 - Provide information and advice on specific wildlife management problems.
 - Collaborate with international organizations on wildlife research, management and training.
 - Develop as a regional centre of international importance on wildlife and natural resource conservation.
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Operation Digital Board

Why in news?

The Minister of Human Resource Development launched Operation Digital Board to leverage technology in order to boost quality education in the country.

About Operation Digital Board:

- Operation Digital Board is a revolutionary step which will make the learning as well as the teaching process interactive and popularize flipped learning as a pedagogical approach.
- The idea of Operation Digital Board is aimed at providing better digital education in all schools. This will offer new opportunities and new ways of teaching and learning to schools.
- Digital board will be introduced all over the country in government and government

aided schools from class 9th onwards as well as in higher education institutions.

- ODB aims at converting a class room into a digital class room and in addition to availability of e-resources at any time and at any place to students, it will also help in provisioning of personalised adaptive learning as well as Intelligent Tutoring by exploiting emerging technologies like Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics.
- Digital / SMART board will be provided in all Government and Government - aided schools having Secondary and Sr. Secondary classes.

Implementation in Higher Education Institutions(HEIs)

- UGC will be the implementing agency for ODB in HEIs. UGC in its Commission meeting held on 29th Jan 2019, has passed a resolution for extending digital education to every classroom in the country by 2022.
- It is estimated that there would be 5 lakh classrooms in the institutions which are aided by Centre or State Governments.
- Out of this, based on the readiness, UGC proposed to take up 300 universities and about 10,000 colleges in the first phase covering 2 lakh classrooms.
- For the 2 lakh class rooms, the cost is estimated at Rs. 2000 crores. This can be implemented as a Central scheme, as a loan from HEFA.

Other Important initiatives of MHRD:

1. e-Patashala:

- The digital India campaign has promoted extensive use of ICTs in the teaching learning process. The ePathshala, a joint initiative of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Govt. of India and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has been developed for showcasing and disseminating all educational e-resources including textbooks, audio, video, periodicals, and a variety of other print and non-print materials for Students, Teachers, Parents, researchers and educators.
- It provides access to digital textbooks for all classes, graded learning materials and enables participation in exhibitions, contests, festivals, workshops, etc.

2. DIKSHA

- DIKSHA is a unique initiative which leverages existing highly scalable and flexible digital infrastructures, while keeping teachers at the center. It is built considering the whole teacher's life cycle - from the time student teachers enroll in Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) to after they retire as teachers.
- In India, many teachers are creating & using innovative tech-based solutions in their classrooms. Some state governments have also initiated programs to support their teachers digitally. This inspired MHRD and NCTE to coordinate these efforts at a national level and build DIKSHA.
- States, government bodies and even private organisations, can integrate DIKSHA into

their respective teacher initiatives based on their goals, needs and capabilities. They can use DIKSHA's features to create:

- In-class resources
- Teacher training content
- Assessment aids
- Teacher profile
- News and announcement
- Teacher community
- These features have emerged from consultations with multiple state governments, NGOs and more than 30 public and private organisations, who have collaborated in contributing to DIKSHA.
- DIKSHA will serve as National Digital Infrastructure for Teachers. All teachers across nation will be equipped with advanced digital technology.
- Diksha portal will enable, accelerate and amplify solutions in realm of teacher education. It will aid teachers to learn and train themselves for which assessment resources will be available.
- It will help teachers to create training content, profile, in-class resources, assessment aids, news and announcement and connect with teacher community.

3. SWAYAM

- SWAYAM is a programme initiated by Government of India and designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz., access, equity and quality.
- The objective of this effort is to take the best teaching learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged. SWAYAM seeks to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution and have not been able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy.

BEL Launches Atmospheric Water Generator safe Drinking Water, Straight From the Air

Why in news?

Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) has unveiled its new product, the Atmospheric Water Generator (AWG), an innovative solution to meet the ever-increasing need for drinking water worldwide, today at Aero India 2019.

How it works?

- BEL's Atmospheric Water Generator can be used to generate water straight from the humidity present in the atmosphere.
- BEL's Atmospheric Water Generator employs a novel technology to extract water from the humidity present in the atmosphere and purify it.

- It uses heat exchange for condensing the atmospheric moisture to produce pure, safe and clean potable water. The AWG comes with a Mineralisation Unit, which is used to add minerals which are required to make the water potable.
 - The AWG is configurable in static and mobile (vehicular) versions and is available in 30 litres/day, 100 litres/day, 500 litres/day and 1,000 litres/day capacities.
 - The Atmospheric Water Generator can be used to provide drinking water in community centres and public places like health care centres, schools, colleges, offices, railway stations, bus stands, airports, sea ports, off-shore oil rigs, military establishments, remote field areas and remote establishments and residential complexes.
 - The Atmospheric Water Generator is being manufactured by BEL in collaboration with CSIR-IICT and MAITHRI, a start-up company based in Hyderabad.
 - It is on display at the BEL stall at Hall-E at Aero India 2019. BEL has, as part of the Government of India's Start-up India Initiative, extending its support to start-up Companies.
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The Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Second Ordinance, 2019

Why in news?

Recently President of India has promulgated The Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Second Ordinance, 2019.

Highlights:

- The Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Ordinance, 2019 was promulgated on January 12, 2019. It repeals and replaces the Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 promulgated on September 26, 2018.
- The Ordinance amends the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956 which sets up the Medical Council of India (MCI) which regulates medical education and practice.

Supersession of the MCI: The 1956 Act provides for supersession of the MCI and its reconstitution within a period of three years. The Ordinance amends this provision to provide for the supersession of the MCI for a period of one year. In the interim period, the central government will constitute a Board of Governors, which will exercise the powers of the MCI.

Composition:

- The Act provides for the Board of Governors to consist of up to seven members including persons of eminence in medical education, appointed by the central government.
- The Ordinance amends this provision to increase the strength of the Board from seven members to 12 members. Further, it allows for persons with proven administrative capacity an experience to be selected in the Board.
- The Ordinance provides for the Board of Governors to be assisted by a Secretary General

appointed by the central government.

Benefits:

The proposal will enable the Board of Governors (BOG) appointed in supersession of Medical Council of India (MCI) as per the provisions of earlier Ordinance to continue to exercise the powers of MCI and that of Central Government under Section 10A of the Indian Medical Council (IMC) Act, 1956 so as to ensure transparency, accountability and quality in the governance of medical education in the country. It will ensure that the work already done by the BOG as per provisions of earlier Ordinance is validated and may continue.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

India-Saudi Arabia Relationship

Relations between the two nations are generally strong and close, especially in commercial interests. Indo-Saudi bilateral trade reached US\$ 27.48 billion in the financial year 2017-18, up from US\$ 25.1 billion in the preceding year. Saudi Arabia's exports to India stood at US\$ 22.06 billion whereas India's exports were US\$ 5.41 billion.

- Trade and cultural links between ancient India and Arabia date back to the third millennium BC. By 1000 AD, the trade relations between southern India and Arabia flourished and became the backbone of the Arabian economy.
- Arab traders held a monopoly over the spice trade between India and Europe until the rise of European imperialist empires.

Why Saudi Arabia matters to India?

- There has been a steady progress in the bilateral relationship since 2006, when King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud visited India. The two sides signed the landmark Delhi Declaration during that visit, which laid the framework for upgrading ties to the level of "strategic partnership" in 2010, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Saudi Arabia.
- The kingdom is **India's fourth largest trading partner**, and India is the **fourth largest market for Saudi exports**. Bilateral trade is in the region of \$28 billion, most of it crude oil exports to India, which imports around 19% of its oil requirements from Saudi Arabia.
- The Saudi Arabian oil major Aramco and a partner UAE company had decided to invest half in a planned \$ 44 bn in a refinery-cum-petrochemical project in Maharashtra billed as the world's biggest, but that project is on hold for now as political objection to its proposed location in Ratnagiri. The two countries have defence, security and counter-terror cooperation.
- India has the world's third largest Muslim population (after Indonesia and Pakistan), and

there is inevitably a religious-cultural aspect to the ties with the custodian of Islam's holiest sites.

- Plus, there are more than 2.7 million Indians working in Saudi. The Ministry of External Affairs described Prime Minister Modi's visit to the kingdom in 2016 as a "turning point" that took the strategic engagement "upward".
- Saudi Arabia honoured Modi with its **highest civilian honour**, the **King Abdulaziz Sash**. During the MBS visit, the two sides signed MoUs with a potential investment of \$ 100 bn, five times more than what he signed up for in Pakistan.
- Pakistan has complex and difficult relationships with the US and Iran and no relations at all with Israel. Since 2001, the bottom line of US-Pakistan ties is Pakistan's centrality to the US-led war in Afghanistan.
- With a huge Shia population of its own, Pakistan is mindful of Iran's importance, but has provided the battlefield for the Saudi-driven Sunni vs Shia geopolitics of the region.
- The only country that has more influence over Pakistan than China is Saudi Arabia, but its own irons in regional fires would prevent it from helping India on this front. This is why the MBS visit had to be a balancing act between India and Pakistan.
- On one side, Saudi Arabia supports and spreads radical Wahabism across Asian region for its own benefits. Its impact being felt in India. Anti India Terrorist groups like JeM, LeT, Hizbul Mujahideen inspired from this Wahab ideology.
- MBS since 2017 took middle path of Islam and acted against Radical terrorists. For this major reason, India hoped that MBS action will help to eradicate terrorism from Indian subcontinent and can squeezed money and resources from Middle East.

THE HINDU

Indus Water Treaty

Why in news?

Aftermath of Pulwama attack India government has decided not to allow its share of water from the Indus network of rivers to flow into Pakistan.



Government decision:

- Government reiterated India's position that has been under consideration, saying the water from the "eastern rivers" that fell in the Indian share would be diverted to Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.
- As per the Indus Waters Treaty, signed between India and Pakistan in 1960, India has full rights to utilise the waters of the Ravi, the Beas and the Satluj rivers, while the waters of the Indus, the Chenab and the Jhelum belongs to Pakistan.
- Government has decided to stop our share of water which used to flow to Pakistan. India will divert water from Eastern rivers and supply it to our people in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab.

Dam construction:

Government announced that the construction of a dam had started at Shahpur-Kanti on the Ravi and the Ujh multi-purpose project would store the Indian share of the water for use in Jammu and Kashmir and the balance water would flow from second the Ravi-Beas link to provide water to other basin States. These schemes had been declared national projects.

What is Indus water treaty?

- The Indus Water Treaty (IWT) is a **water-distribution treaty between India and Pakistan** signed on September 19, 1960.
 - The treaty was signed by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's President Ayyub Khan. It was brokered by the World Bank.
 - According to treaty, all the water of eastern rivers shall be available for unrestricted use in India.
 - India should let unrestricted flow of water from western rivers to Pakistan.
 - It doesn't mean that India can't use western river's water. The treaty says that India can use the water in western rivers in "non-consumptive" needs. Here non-consumptive means we can use it for irrigation, storage and even for electricity production. (But India has not fully utilized this provision so far).
 - The treaty allocates 80% of water from the six-river Indus water system to Pakistan.
 - A Permanent Indus Commission was set up as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the Treaty.
 - Though Indus originates from Tibet, China has been kept out of the Treaty.
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New Version of BrahMos

Why in news?

A sleeker, more lethal version of the supersonic cruise missile BrahMos is under development and the prototype should be ready for testing in about three years, said CEO and MD of BrahMos Aerospace.

New Version:

- Agency is working on BrahMos NG. The idea is to have a smaller missile with the same capabilities. So, the missile will fly at 3.5 times the speed of sound instead of 2.8 Mach. The range will remain at 300 km.
- For this several mechanical components in the missile are being replaced with electrical components which will also reduce the size. A structural study has been carried out and several sub-systems have already been developed.

BrahMos:

- BrahMos is a joint venture between India and Russia and named after Brahmaputra and

Moscow rivers.

- It is capable of being launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets.
- The development trials of an anti-shipping variant began in 2003 and combat trials began in 2005.

Significance of new version:

- The reduced weight enables the NG variant to be carried by the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA). An LCA can carry two missiles while a Su-30MKI can carry five of them.
- The land and sea variants of BrahMos are already operational with the Army and Navy and the air-launched version is under development.
- The original range of the missile was 290 kms in line with the limitations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
- After India joined the grouping in June 2016, the range was extended to 450 kms and is to be further extended to 600kms.

Seeker Technology:

- Recently India had also successfully test-fired the missile with an indigenous seeker, a critical technology, in missiles. So far the seeker, a critical technology in missiles, came from Russia. The plan is to replace all the seekers with indigenous ones.
- The seeker was jointly developed by Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad and BrahMos Aerospace.
- Presently the missile is deployed on most of the Navy's frontline warships and will be a standard fitment on all major warships in future. The Army has deployed three BrahMos regiments on the Western and Eastern borders. More BrahMos units are on order.
- The IAF is modifying some Su-30MKIs to enable them to carry the air launched variant. This gives the IAF a long range standoff capability to target key enemy infrastructure.

Anti-Zionism

Why in news?

France will adopt an international definition of anti-Semitism and look on anti-Zionism as one form of the hate crime, President Emmanuel Macron said.

France support:

- Speaking at a dinner attended by Jewish leaders Mr. Macron said a surge in anti-Semitic attacks in France was unprecedented since the Second World War and promised a crackdown, including a new law to tackle hate speech on the Internet.

- France will adopt the definition of anti-Semitism set by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and said Anti-Zionism is one of the modern forms of anti-Semitism.
- The IHRA definition does not use the phrase “anti-Zionism” but does say denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour” is anti-Semitic.
- Welcoming Mr. Macron’s actions, the World Jewish Congress said:” This is just the beginning of a long road ahead. Adopting this definition of anti-Semitism must be followed by concrete steps to encode into law and ensure that this is enforced.”
- The IHRA definition is not legally binding but does serve as an international guideline. Germany and Britain adopted the definition in texts in 2016, though the European Union in 2018 adopted a softer tone, calling the IHRA definition a “guidance tool” amid concern from some members that it could make criticism of Israeli policy, particularly with regards to Palestinians, difficult.

Anti-Semitism Movement:

- **Anti-Semitism**, hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group.
- The term *anti-Semitism* was coined in 1879 by the German agitator Wilhelm Marr to designate the anti-Jewish campaigns under way in central Europe at that time.
- Although the term now has wide currency, it is a misnomer, since it implies a discrimination against all Semites. Arabs and other peoples are also Semites, and yet they are not the targets of anti-Semitism as it is usually understood.
- The term is especially inappropriate as a label for the anti-Jewish prejudices, statements, or actions of Arabs or other Semites.
- Nazi anti-Semitism, which culminated in the Holocaust, had a racist dimension in that it targeted Jews because of their supposed biological characteristics even those who had themselves converted to other religions or whose parents were converts.
- This variety of anti-Jewish racism dates only to the emergence of so-called “scientific racism” in the 19th century and is different in nature from earlier anti-Jewish prejudices.

Monetary Transmission

Why in news?

Banks are set to reduce interest rates, particularly on retail loans like home and automobiles, following an interaction with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) top brass.

Banks Reluctance:

- Commercial banks have been reluctant to lower interest rates even after the central bank had reduced the key policy rate or the repo rate by 25 bps to 6.25% earlier this month.
- RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das met the chief executives of banks to discuss transmission

of the monetary policy rates.

- The central bank is expecting monetary transmission to happen. Banks have told RBI that they will look into it.
- While banks have been reluctant to reduce the lending rate after RBI rate cut, during the rate hike cycle of 2018 when the RBI had hiked interest rates by 50 bps banks responded by increasing their benchmark lending rate by at least 60 bps.
- After the central bank cut rate earlier this month, only the State Bank of India has reduced the interest rate by 5bps on home loans of up to 30 lakh.

Lack of scope:

- Bankers said while there is not much scope to reduce the benchmark rate that is marginal cost of fund-based lending rate (MCLR), the spread between the benchmark rate and the actual lending rate could be narrowed.
- Banks typically add a spread over MCLR while pricing the interest rate for a particular loan.

Liquidity deficit:

- At the same time, the bank chiefs have expressed concern on the liquidity deficit in the system and said the lack of liquidity is not allowing them to reduce deposit rates.
- Deposit rates are an important component of the cost of funds of banks to which the benchmark rate is linked.

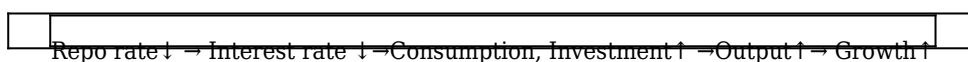
Higher cash holding:

- Banks have also highlighted increase in cash holding with the public, due to the general elections, which is also causing liquidity shortfall.
- Analysts said with the government announcing capital infusion of ₹48,200 crore in public sector banks, the move would also help the lenders to reduce interest rates.

What is Monetary Policy Transmission?

- Monetary transmission refers to the process by which a central bank's monetary policy signals (like repo rate) are passed on, through financial system to influence the businesses and households.
- There are many monetary policy signals by the RBI; the most powerful one is the repo rate. When repo rate is changed, it brings changes in the overall interest rate in the economy as well.
- As a result of a decrease in repo rate, the interest rate on loans by banks also changes and this encourages consumption and investment activities of businesses and households.
- In an economy, both consumption and investment are often financed by borrowings from

banks. As the repo rate brings changes in market interest rate, the repo rate channel is often referred as interest rate channel of monetary transmission.



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- Interest rate is the main channel of monetary policy transmission. Similarly, there is credit channel, asset price channel, confidence channel etc.
- An interesting development in recent times is that often central banks give certain communications in the form of guidelines which are aimed to create certain effects in the financial market.

Neptune moon may be result of cosmic collision:

Why in news?

Neptune's tiny, mysterious moon may be a 'chipped-off piece' from a larger moon as a result of collision with a comet that took place billions of years ago, scientists say. NASA's Hubble Space Telescope had discovered Hippocamp in 2013.

About Hippocamp:

- A newly discovered small moon of Neptune is coming into clearer focus as astronomers have now pinpointed this tiny rock's orbit and where it might have come from.
- The moon's existence heightens the possibility that there are even more tiny worlds around Neptune that we just haven't seen yet.
- Astronomers first spotted this moon in 2013 by combing through images of Neptune that were taken by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope.
- The discoverers have now dubbed the world Hippocamp, the name of a horse-like sea monster from Greek mythology.
- The title fits in nicely with the theme of Neptune's 13 other moons, all of which are named after Greek gods of bodies of water.
- Before this discovery, many of Neptune's inner moons had been found by NASA's Voyager 2 spacecraft, which flew by the cold, gassy planet on its tour of the outer Solar System.
- Voyager snapped images of five new moons that were never before seen at the Neptune system. But the spacecraft ultimately missed Hippocamp.

ILP will be applicable to entire Nagaland

Why in news?

Nagaland Governor P.B. Acharya said the government has decided to make the Inner Line Permit applicable throughout the State, including the commercial hub of Dimapur.

Covering entire state:

- ILP will be made applicable to the entire State, including Dimapur, and we are committed to streamline the system of issuing ILPs to ensure that no illegal immigrant is able to come to Nagaland Mr. Acharya said in his address on the first day of the State Assembly budget session.
- Under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1853, non-Nagas should have ILP to visit the State, but Dimapur district was not included under the provisions.
- The Governor said: "While the government will be taking all legal and administrative steps to ensure this, we would also need active support of the civil society, village councils and people in achieving this objective."
- Accordingly, the government had set up a panel to suggest measures to strengthen the existing system of issuing ILPs and recommend modalities to check influx of illegal migrants.

What is the Inner Line Permit?

- The Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official travel document issued by the Government of India to grant inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected area for a limited period.
- It is obligatory for Indians residing outside those states to obtain permission prior to entering the protected areas.
- Currently, the Inner Line Permit is operational in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.
- The document has been issued under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 and the conditions and restrictions vary from state to state.
- It can be issued for travel purposes solely.
- Visitors are not allowed to purchase property in these regions. However, there might be a different set of rules for long term visitors, though they are not valid for central government employees and security forces.
- In Manipur, for the past several months, protests are on to demand the implementation of the Inner Line Permit in the region.

More powers for Assam Rifles in Northeast:

Why in news?

Assam Rifles, deployed along the Myanmar border, has been empowered by the Centre to arrest anyone and search a place without warrant in the border districts of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram.

MHA Notice:

- According to a Home Ministry notification, “an officer of the rank corresponding to that of the lowest rank of members of the Assam Rifles” has been given these powers under the Code of Criminal Procedure.
- Earlier, Assam Rifles was making arrests only in areas where the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was in effect.
- They were finding it difficult to make seizures and arrest in Mizoram, which doesn't have AFSPA. This is to basically correct that anomaly. As per law, they have to hand over the suspects to the local police within 24 hours,” said a government official.
- MHA had lifted AFSPA from some areas in Arunachal Pradesh last year.
- Section 41 of the CrPC states that any police officer may, without an order from a magistrate and without a warrant, arrest any person. Section 47 gives powers for search of place entered by person sought to be arrested.
- Section 48 says a police officer may, for the purpose of arresting without warrant any person whom he is authorised to arrest, pursue such person into any place in India. According to Section 49, the person arrested shall not be subjected to more restraint than is necessary to prevent his escape.

About Assam Rifles:

- The Assam Rifles came into being in 1835, as a militia called the ‘Cachar Levy’. With approximately 750 men, this Force was formed to primarily protect British Tea estates and their settlements against tribal raids.
- Subsequently, all these Forces were reorganised and renamed as the ‘Frontier Force’ as their role was increased to conduct of punitive expeditions across the borders of Assam.
- This Force significantly contributed in opening the region to administration and commerce and over time they came to be known as the “right arm of the civil and left arm of the military”.
- In 1870, existing elements were merged into three Assam Military Police Battalions, named as Lushai Hills, Lakhimpur and Naga Hills. The ‘Darrang’ Battalion was raised just before the onset of World War-I. Since Reservists were difficult to be called on short notice and Gurkha Battalions’ soldiers were on leave in Nepal, the Assam Military Police were tasked to take their place.
- Thus, this Force sent over 3000 men as part of the British Army to Europe and the Middle East. In 1917, recognising their work during the Great War, fighting shoulder to shoulder with Rifle Regiments of the regular British Army, the name of the Force was changed to ‘Assam Rifles’.
- The Post-Independence role of the Assam Rifles continued to evolve ranging from conventional combat role during Sino-India War 1962, operating in foreign land as part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka in 1987 (Op Pawan) to peacekeeping role in the North-Eastern areas of India in the face of growing tribal unrest and insurgency wherein the maintenance of law and order, countering insurgency and reassuring the people of the region became important tasks for the Assam Rifles.
- Fondly called ‘Friends of the North East People’, the Force is the highest awarded and decorated Para Military Force of the Republic of India.

Rise in swine flu cases in Gujarat:

Why in news?

The number of swine flu cases in Gujarat continue to grow. More than 2,000 people have tested positive for the H1N1 virus since January 1 and 79 persons have succumbed to it.

Rise in affected cases:

- About 727 persons are undergoing treatment in various hospitals across the State.
- According to a Gujarat Health Department release, four persons died, taking the toll to 79 while as many as 118 new cases were registered across the State.
- Since January 1, 1,497 people have fully recovered and have been discharged from hospitals in the State.
- Gujarat is among the worst affected States due to higher number of cases and mortality.

PIL spurs action

- The Gujarat High Court directed the State government to form a high-level committee comprising bureaucrats and health department staff to plan and take necessary measures for the control of swine flu, which has spread wide as cases have been reported from across the State.
- The direction came from the division bench in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) pointing out the poor state of infrastructure in government-run hospitals for the detection and treatment of swine flu.
- Earlier, owing to rising cases of swine flu and resultant deaths in Gujarat, the Union Health Ministry had sent a team to assess the situation and assist the State in strengthening its response mechanism to contain the viral influenza.

Centre's advisory on preparedness

- The Union Ministry has also issued an advisory for preparedness to tackle the seasonal influenza. The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) and its State units have enhanced the surveillance for Influenza like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI).
- Further, the Drug Controller General of India has been asked to coordinate with drug manufacturers and monitor the availability of Oseltamivir - the drug recommended by the WHO (World Health Organization) - in various States.

What is swine flu?

- Swine flu, also known as the H1N1 virus, is a relatively new strain of an influenza virus that causes symptoms similar to the regular flu. It originated in pigs but is spread primarily from person to person.
- Swine flu made headlines in 2009 when it was first discovered in humans and became a pandemic.
- Pandemics are contagious diseases affecting people throughout the world or on multiple continents at the same time.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the H1N1 pandemic over in August 2010. Since then, the H1N1 virus has been known as a regular human flu virus.
- It continues to spread during flu season like other strains of the flu. The flu shot developed each year by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) usually includes a vaccination against a type of H1N1 virus.
- Like other strains of the flu, H1N1 is highly contagious, allowing it to spread quickly from person to person. A simple sneeze can cause thousands of germs to spread through the air. The virus can linger on tables and surface areas like door knobs, waiting to be picked up.
- The best means of dealing with swine flu is to prevent it. Hand sanitization is important to stop the spread of the virus. Staying away from infected people will help stop person-to-person transmission.

Heavy snowfall hampers rescue operations of Jawans:

Why in news?

Heavy snow and rain have hampered the operation to search for five Army jawans trapped in the snow avalanche near the **Shipki La border post in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district**.



Search operations:

- Six jawans of the 7 JAK Rifles of the Army unit - four from Himachal Pradesh, one each from Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir- are feared dead in the avalanche that occurred at around 11 AM on Wednesday
- The search and rescue operation has been adversely affected as **Pooh** witnessed 4 to 5 inches snowfall whereas more snowfall occurred at Shipki La and adjoining areas and it has been raining heavily at the spot since morning.
- When the avalanche descended rapidly down from the mountainside near Shipki La, 16 Army and ITBP jawans had gone towards the Shipki La border post from **Namagya** in order to repair a damaged water supply line.
- While eight ITBP jawans were on the hill overseeing the water supply line, the Army jawans were standing down the hill.
- Six Army jawans were buried alive. One of them was rescued, but he succumbed to injuries subsequently.



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