



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper - II

1. More ups than downs in India ties
2. GST collections

GS Paper - III

1. Assam-Mizoram border stand-off continues
2. Gilgit-Baltistan a part of India says MEA

DOWN TO EARTH

1. 'Protect & conserve model' displaced 13,450 families from 26 protected areas in 2 decades
2. Project Lion could displace Maldharis within Gir to create 'inviolable space'



More ups than downs in India ties

GS II: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: President Donald Trump has ended his first term in office with a big push for ties with India, sending his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for 2+2 talks just one week before the election.



Uneasy Start

1. Within a few months after the election in 2017, Mr Trump delivered a few blows to India's expectations from the U.S., including a decision on visa restrictions, a hard-hitting speech on India as the "tariff king", and clubbing India and China both on trade and on receiving an unfair advantage on climate change.
2. However, the invitation to PM Modi to the White House in June 2017 turned things around, and Mr Trump's South Asia policy, and the U.S.'s decision to revive the Quad and rename its Pacific Command as the 'Indo-Pacific' Command set into motion a more positive foreign policy framework for India.

China and Pakistan

1. More importantly, given the 2017 Doklam conflict with China and continuing cross-border attacks by groups from Pakistan, Mr Trump's policy towards both India's biggest headaches became the U.S.'s most important foreign policy shift.
2. One big marker was when on January 1, 2018, Mr Trump tweeted that the U.S. would end aid to Pakistan that had given the U.S. "nothing but lies and deceit" and "safe haven to terrorists".
3. Subsequently, the U.S. suspended its military assistance payments, military sales and led the way on Pakistan's grey-listing at the Financial Action Task



Force (FATF) to designate more terrorists at the UN Security Council, including those that targeted India.

4. On China too, after two years of reaching out to Xi Jinping, Mr Trump made a turnaround, and the U.S. offered India moral and military support to counter Chinese aggression, led its own attack on China's Belt and Road Initiative and its 5G telecom push and vowed a counter to China's loans to countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Setbacks

1. Regardless of the positives, several Trump decisions have come as a shock to the Modi government. His decision to forge talks with the Taliban, in concert with concessions to Pakistan in Afghanistan, has run counter to his administration's other promises.
2. USA withdrew India's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) status for exporters.

GST inflows cross ₹1 lakh cr. in October

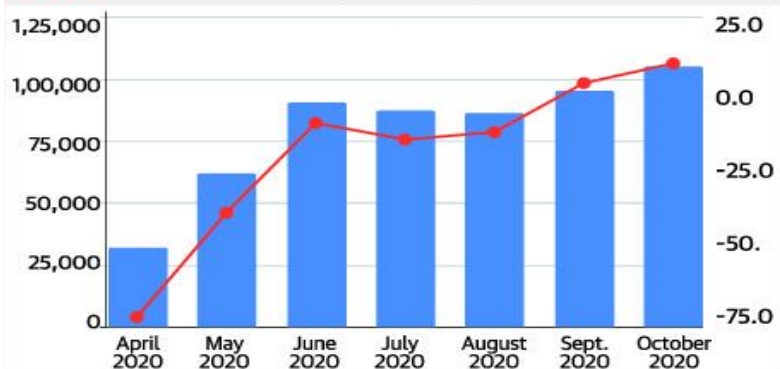
GS II: Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

News: Revenues from the Goods and Services Tax surpassed ₹1.05 lakh crore in October, up 10% from a year ago, and the highest recorded since February 2020.

On the rebound

GST collections recorded a 10.2% year-on-year rise in October. The ₹1,05,155 crore collected is the highest in FY21

■ GST COLLECTIONS (₹ CRORE)
● Y-O-Y CHANGE (%) (RIGHT-AXIS)



Highlights:

1. The government cited the GST inflows that crossed the ₹1 lakh crore mark for the first time in this financial year as a 'clear' sign of a recovery in the economy after its 23.9% contraction in the first quarter of this year.



2. Tax experts said the expected shortfall in GST compensation for the States could be lower than the current estimate of ₹2.35 lakh crore if this revenue momentum is maintained through the rest of 2020-21.
3. As per data released by the Finance Ministry on Sunday, the gross GST revenue collected in October was ₹1,05,155 crore, 10.25% higher than a year ago, and 10.1% more than the indirect tax revenue garnered in the month of September.

Assam-Mizoram border stand-off continues

GS III: Security Challenges and Their Management in Border Areas

The Assam-Mizoram border row continued for the fifth consecutive day on Sunday with the authorities of both States failing to make local groups in southern Assam lift the indefinite economic blockade.



Background:

1. In the Northeast's complex boundary equations, showdowns between Assam and Mizoram residents are less frequent than they are between, say, Assam and Nagaland residents.
2. Nevertheless, the boundary between present-day Assam and Mizoram, 165 km long today, dates back to the colonial era, when Mizoram was known as Lushai Hills, a district of Assam.
3. The dispute stems from a notification of 1875 that differentiated Lushai Hills from the plains of Cachar, and another of 1933 that demarcates a boundary between Lushai Hills and Manipur.
4. Mizoram believes the boundary should be demarcated on the basis of the 1875 notification, which is derived from the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) Act, 1873. Mizo leaders have argued in the past against the demarcation notified in 1933 because Mizo society was not consulted. The



Assam government followed the 1933 demarcation, and that was the point of conflict.

5. The boundary dispute between the two states has been simmering since the formation of Mizoram as a separate state in the 1980s.
6. According to an agreement between the governments of Assam and Mizoram some years ago, the status quo should be maintained in no-man's land in the border area. However, clashes have erupted from time to time over the issue.

Other boundary issues in the Northeast

1. During British rule, Assam included present-day Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya besides Mizoram, which became separate states one by one. Today, Assam has boundary problems with each of them.
2. Nagaland shares a 500-km boundary with Assam. The boundary dispute is now in the Supreme Court.
3. On the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary (over 800 km), clashes were first reported in 1992, this boundary issue is also being heard by the Supreme Court.
4. The 884-km Assam-Meghalaya boundary, too, witnesses flare-ups frequently. As per Meghalaya government statements, today there are 12 areas of dispute between the two states.

Geographical feature in news: Barak hills, Lushai Hills.

Gilgit-Baltistan a part of India, says MEA

GS III: Role of External State and Non-state Actors in creating challenges to Internal Security.

India on Sunday slammed Pakistan for its attempt to accord provincial status to the “so-called Gilgit-Baltistan”, saying it is intended to camouflage the “illegal” occupation of the region by Islamabad.





Highlights of Indian Statement:

1. Gilgit-Baltistan is an integral part of India by virtue of the legal, complete and irrevocable accession of Jammu and Kashmir to the Union of India in 1947.
2. Instead of seeking to alter the status of these Indian territories, India calls upon Pakistan to immediately vacate all areas under its illegal occupation.
3. Pakistan has announced holding elections for the legislative assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan later this month.

'Protect & conserve model' displaced 13,450 families from 26 protected areas in 2 decades

GS III: Conservation

Context: A total of 13,450 families from 26 protected areas (PA) across the country were displaced between 1999 and 2020 as a part of the Union government's 'Protect and conserve model', a new study has found.



Protect and conserve model

1. The model involves the creation of inviolate areas for the conservation of biodiversity and wildlife in the PAs — that comprise wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and conservation reserves. The process includes displacing the populations inhabiting those areas.
2. The number of PAs increased to 870 in 2020 from 67 in 1988.
3. However, these lands are not uninhabited: Approximately 4.3 million people are currently living in and around India protected areas, which now encompasses around 5 percent of the national territory.
4. India's conservation model fails to recognise the fundamental and customary rights of local and indigenous communities who have inhabited these areas for centuries, the study stated.



5. The model is often in violation of laws that aid conservation such as The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act [FRA], 2006, which recognises the need for a more inclusive form of forest governance, including co-management of PAs.
6. It claimed that community forest rights under FRA have been recognised in only three of the 26 studied PAs.
7. The study stated that criminalisation of community activities — such as collecting fodder, fuel, etc — and policies that seek to militarise conservation have led to large-scale violence in these territories, sometimes leading to murders of the community members.
8. The current conservation structure has failed to acknowledge justice and recognition of rights as primary elements to achieve biodiversity protection.

Global Wisdom and real reasons

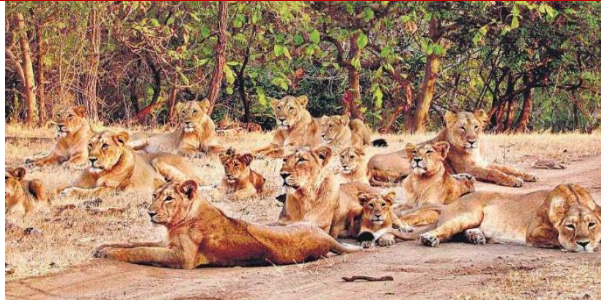
1. Major international conventions like the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) recognises the inclusion of indigenous communities and forest dwellers in the management of protected areas and governance of biodiversity.
2. Yet, a 'fortress conservation model' — that aims to protect biodiversity by isolating it from human activity — continues to be enforced on the Indian landscape, the study stated.
3. By actively alienating local people this model has ignored the real reasons behind the decline of the wildlife population.
4. These included intensive hunting of tigers and other large animals by the British and local rulers, and the continuous decline of wildlife habitat due to large-scale diversion of biodiversity-rich areas for mega infrastructure projects such as roadways and railways, dams, mining, etc.



Project Lion could displace Maldharis within Gir to create 'inviolable space'

GS III: Conservation

Maldharis, a traditional pastoral people found in and around the Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary, might end up being uprooted from their homes if the Project Lion proposal takes shape, a Down To Earth (DTE) investigation has shown. The proposal seeks to relocate 2,500 families of the community from the Gir protected area within 10 years.



Highlights:

1. The proposal, created by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Gujarat forest department, talks of creating 'an inviolable space of 1,000 square kilometres' (sq km).
2. Inviolable spaces are areas free from anthropomorphic pressures. Resource extraction of forest produce like fuelwood, fodder and minor forest produce as well as human habitation are not allowed in such places.
3. Project Lion was launched by PM on August 15, 2020.
4. Lions are found in Gujarat across an area of 30,000 sq km called the Asiatic Lion Landscape (ALL). But only 250 sq km of the Gir National Park is the exclusive space for lions while the rest is shared with people, according to the Project Lion proposal.
5. These people are the Maldharis, who have resided in the area for several generations. They live in settlements called nesses and make their living by selling milk from their water buffaloes.
6. It is important that Project Lion restores sufficient exclusive lion habitat of about 1,000 sq km through incentivised voluntary relocation of forest villages and Maldhari (local pastoral communities) settlements from within the Gir Conservation Areas so that the only surviving Asiatic lion population gets the space it requires for performing its ecological role.



Inspired by Project Tiger

1. The proposal draws from the practices adopted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the national body in charge of steering the government's flagship tiger conservation programme, Project Tiger.
2. An inviolate space of 800-1,000 sq km is required as 'core area' (Inviolate Space or Critical tiger habitat) for a tiger reserve and with a buffer of another 800-1,000 sq km, according to the NTCA's rules for tiger conservation.

Is coexistence impossible?

1. The importance of the human-lion relationship in Gir, as well as ALL, has been explained in scientific studies some of which have been done by members of WII themselves.
2. A study titled, Living with Lions: The Economics of Coexistence in the Gir Forests, said: "Presently Maldhari and lions coexist in a win-win state where lions get a considerable part of their food from Maldhari livestock and Maldharis profit substantially by free access to forest resources."
3. The study even found that the absence of Maldharis and their livestock would negatively impact the lion population in Gir.
4. When the researchers considered a hypothetical situation where there were no Maldhari settlements in the study area and therefore no availability of livestock biomass for lions, the predicted lion carrying capacity went down to 12 lions per 100 sq km.
5. In the case of lions, it has been clearly established that they are able to thrive and co-exist with people. About 50 per cent of the current lion population is living in human-dominated habitats.

Rights under FRA

1. The proposal for the relocation of Maldharis is also in contravention of the provisions of the Scheduled Tribe and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, (FRA) 2006.
2. Under the provisions of the Act, forest dwellers cannot be displaced unless the rights settlement process has been completed.



3. In the Gir region, which is a non-Schedule area, the process of rights recognition under FRA has not started at all.
4. Moreover, the Act has a special provision for setting up 'Critical Wildlife Habitats' (CWH), for the conservation of the species. However, for the CWH notification process to start, some conditions mentioned in FRA have to be met.
5. These conditions are the completion of the rights recognition process, establishment of the fact that the activities of people are causing irreparable damage to the species and that coexistence is not a possibility and free and informed consent of the Gram Sabhas.

Conclusion:

Planning wildlife conservation in 2020 devoid of people is wrong in so many ways. International thinking, practice and science have clearly established that there are robust ways to conserve, especially large mammals which are able to coexist with people, without having to relocate local communities.

Way forward:

1. Community-led model of conservation
2. Co-management of Protected areas as given in FRA or setting up 'Critical Wildlife Habitats' (CWH) under FRA with due process.

Mains Focus Issue:

1. Tribal Rights vs Colonial Wildlife Conservation Model

Prelims:

1. Critical Tiger Habitat-- WP act 1972
2. Critical Wildlife Habitat under FRA 2006
3. Maldhari tribes location, state
4. Project Lion