



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper III

- *Fleeting cheer*
- *Assam wetland at risk till dumping stops: activists*
- *Iron ore mining in Chhattisgarh drives deforestation*
- *India's biomass power sector meets target but stares at a stagnant future*



Fleeting cheer

1. The latest GDP estimates expectedly show that national output rebounded in Q1 of the current fiscal from the record contraction in April-June 2020 when the pandemic's onset and the lockdown gutted the economy.
2. National Statistical Office data show GDP expanded 20.1% from a year earlier. And the gross value added, which aggregates output from all the eight sectors, grew by 18.8%.
3. The numbers, however, show a different picture when compared with either the preceding quarter or the pre-pandemic first quarter of fiscal 2019-20. GDP at constant prices was estimated at ₹32.38-lakh crore, a 16.9% contraction from January-March's ₹38.96-lakh crore and more than 9% shy of the ₹35.66-lakh crore in April-June 2019. That the second COVID-19 wave extracted a significant toll is evident.
4. On the expenditures front, private consumption spending flattered to deceive, posting year-on-year growth of 19.3% but still shrinking by 17.4% from the preceding three months.
5. And most disconcertingly, government consumption expenditure, which has invariably in the past helped shore up the economy, contracted 4.8% from a year earlier and 7.6% from the previous quarter.

Silver lining:

1. Looking ahead, there have been signs of some traction in the current quarter as most States have gradually eased their localised second wave restrictions.
2. Exports have been one of the bright spots as the U.S. and other western economies have ramped up vaccinations and posted economic recoveries that have underpinned demand for goods and services from India.

Concerns:



With monsoon rains in deficit, agricultural output and wider rural consumption also face a likely downturn. Policymakers must remain laser-focused on expediting vaccination coverage and taking fiscal measures to ensure overall consumption demand does not weaken any further.

Assam wetland at risk till dumping stops: activists

1. Green activists in Assam say that the Environment Ministry's recent notification on the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Deepar Beel Wildlife Sanctuary is meaningless unless the government puts an end to the dumping of garbage near the wetland. Seepage from this dump and sewage from Guwahati has already made the sanctuary toxic.
2. The Environment Ministry's notification of August 25 specified an area "to an extent varying from 294 metres to 16.32 km" as the eco-sensitive zone, with the total area being 148.97 sq. km.
3. The 4.1 sq. km. the sanctuary is within the Deepar Beel, a wetland on the south-western edge of Guwahati that expands up to 30 sq. km in summer and reduces to about 10 sq. km in the winter. It is Assam's only Ramsar site, a wetland designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.
4. Greater adjutant storks are found near the Deepar Beel wetland.

Greater adjutant storks:

1. In a first, Bihar has decided to tag endangered greater adjutant storks locally known as 'Garuda', with GPS trackers to monitor their movement as a part of their conservation.
2. Bhagalpur's Kadwa Diara floodplains area is the third-most-popular breeding centre for the greater adjutant stork in the world after Assam and Cambodia
3. Historically the range of the Greater Adjutant covered India and Southeast Asia, but today the endangered storks are mostly found in the Indian state of Assam and in Cambodia.



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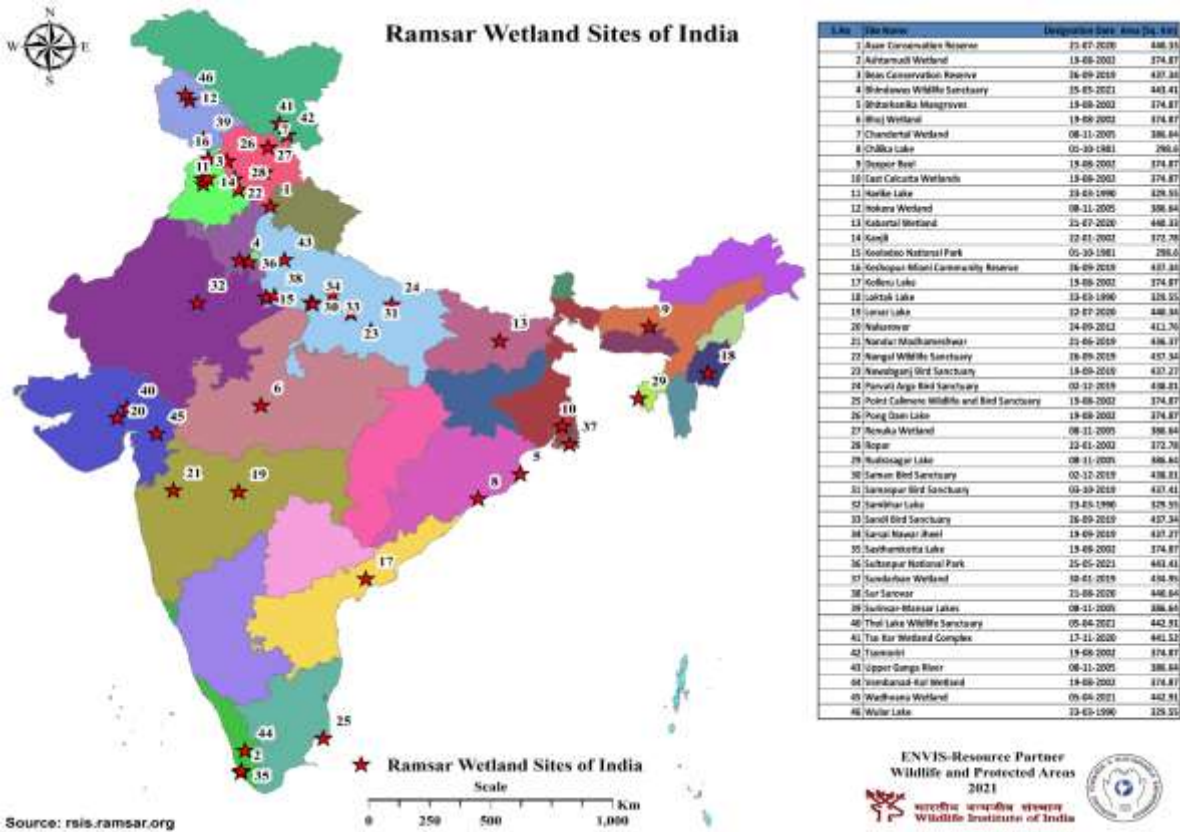
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4. In India, the Greater Adjutant is now confined to the northeastern state of Assam, their last stronghold. Deepor beel is located marked as 9 in following Map.



Practice MCQ

Q1. Which of the following is correctly matched?

	Ramsar Site	State
1	Deepor Beel	Assam
2	Lonar lake	Madhya Pradesh
3	Kanwar Taal	Bihar

Select the correct answer from the codes given below

a. 1 only
 b. 1 and 3 only
 c. 2 only
 d. 1, 2 and 3



Iron ore mining in Chhattisgarh drives deforestation

- Chhattisgarh accounts for about one-fifth of India's iron ore reserves and the race to extract that is driving deforestation in the state.
- According to the Chhattisgarh forest department, about 4,920 hectares of forest land has been diverted for iron ore mining projects over the years.
- Large scale mining projects, that require the clearing of forests, are threatening the environment as well as the rights of the indigenous communities. In some cases, the tribal people are protesting as the mining projects threaten areas sacred to them.

Forest and Minerals:

1. Chhattisgarh is home to some of India's most precious forests but it is also an area rich in minerals such as iron ore. The race for extraction of these resources, however, is consuming these forests.
2. The latest data by the Chhattisgarh forest department reveals that at least 4,920 hectares of forest land have been diverted over the past few years for mining of iron ore in the central India state.
3. Chhattisgarh has 4,031 million tonnes of iron ore reserve (hematite) which accounts for about 19 per cent of the total iron ore reserves in India.
4. The Bastar region in south Chhattisgarh comprises the heavily forested area dominated by indigenous communities who depend on forests for livelihood.
5. But the leases granted for iron ore mining which require large-scale clearance of forests is threatening the lives of the local people. In some cases, the locals allege that the permissions have been secured using fake documents.
6. The mining sites are near Abujhmar, which is known for the heavy presence of the left-wing extremists, is also home to indigenous tribes such as Gond, Muria and Abuj Maria.



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7. The local people alleged that the consent of the gram sabha (village council) was not taken for seeking diversion of forests in the area.

India's biomass power sector meets target but stares at a stagnant future

- India has achieved the target of 10 gigawatts of biomass power before 2022 with the present installed capacity of 10.17 GW of biomass power.
- The country has also nearly achieved the 5 GW target from small hydropower projects with the present installed capacity of around 4.8 GW.
- However, unlike the solar and wind power targets, the central government has no plans to scale up the biomass power and cogeneration target for 2030, even as the sector has potential.

India's Renewable Energy Target by 2022 (By Source)

Unit: Gigawatts



Graphic © Asia Briefing Ltd.



Climate goals success:

1. Whether India will achieve its solar and wind energy targets – an installed capacity of 100 gigawatts (GW) of solar power and 60 GW of wind power by 2022 – is yet to be seen.
2. But there is one component of its target of an installed capacity of 175 GW of renewable power that has been achieved – biomass power and cogeneration.
3. In 2015, just before the Paris Climate Summit, India had announced its climate goals, which included a target of 175 GW of renewable energy by 2022 and of that, 15 GW was supposed to come from biomass power, small hydropower and waste-to-energy plants.
4. Six years later, in 2021, the country has already achieved the 10 GW target of biomass power with the present installed capacity of biomass power at 10.17 GW compared to 4.4 GW in 2015.

Biomass Power:

1. According to the union ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE), biomass has always been an important energy source for the country as it is “renewable, widely available, carbon-neutral and has the potential to provide significant employment in the rural areas.”
2. More than 70 per cent of the country’s population depends on it for its energy needs, according to MNRE. To ensure its cleaner and efficient use, the Indian government had started bagasse-based cogeneration in sugar mills and biomass power generation for grid power generation.
3. The biomass materials used for power generation include bagasse, rice husk, straw, cotton stalk, coconut shells, soya husk, de-oiled cakes, coffee waste, jute wastes, groundnut shells, sawdust, etc.



4. The country has achieved its 10 GW energy generation target from biomass, largely due to abundant agro-waste availability all year round, proven scalable technologies and easy integration into the mainstream.
5. According to a study sponsored by the MNRE, biomass availability in India could translate to a potential of about 28 GW.
6. In addition, about 14 GW additional power could be generated through bagasse-based cogeneration in the country's 550 sugar mills, if they adopt technically and economically optimal levels of cogeneration for extracting power from the bagasse produced by them.

Challenges:

The sector is facing its own set of issues and future growth. According to the MNRE, non-signing of the power purchase agreements by DISCOMs (power distribution companies), lack of working capital and non-availability of biomass are among the major problems being faced by the sector and hampering the sector in achieving its full potential.

<p>Mains Answer Writing Practice</p>	<p><i>Biomass-based power generation has been a silent hero, a solid anchor, as India shines on global energy transition pathways crossing 100 GW installed capacity and nearly meeting its NDC Goals of 40 per cent non-fossil installed capacity. Discuss the progress so far and challenges faced by the sector.</i></p>
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