Art & Culture

Ramappa Temple Gets UNESCO Heritage Site Tag

Syllabus: GS1/ Indian Culture - Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

In News
Recently, Rudreswara Temple (Ramappa Temple) at Palampet, Warangal, Telangana has been inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List.

- The decision was taken at the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO.

Ramappa Temple
- The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva, it is situated in Palampet Village, around 67 km from the city of Warangal (Telangana).
- Constructed over 800 years ago, in 1213 AD, by Recharla Rudra, a general of Kakatiya king Ganapati Deva
- The Rudreswara Temple is popularly known as Ramappa temple in honour of the sculptor who worked on the project for 40 years.
- An engineering marvel, the Ramappa Temple is a manifestation of a distinct style, technology and decoration, standing as a testimonial to the Kakatiyan creative genius.
  - Kakatiya Dynasty was the South Indian dynasty that ruled Andhra Pradesh in India from 1083 CE to 1323 CE.
- The temple stands on a 6-feet tall star-shaped platform with walls, pillars and ceilings adorned with intricate carvings that attest to the unique skill of the sculptors.
- The foundation is built with the “sandbox technique”, the flooring is granite and the pillars are basalt.
  - Sandbox technique involved filling the pit — dug up for laying the foundation — with a mixture of sand-lime, jaggery (for binding) and karakkaya (black myrobalan fruit) before the buildings were constructed on these ‘sandboxes’.
- The lower part of the temple is red sandstone while the white gopuram is built with light bricks that reportedly float on water.
- European merchants and travellers were mesmerised by the beauty of the temple and one such traveller had remarked that the temple was the ‘brightest star in the galaxy of medieval temples of the Deccan’.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS
World Heritage Sites in India

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites are the important places of cultural or natural heritage as described in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention
  - The Convention was established in 1972.
  - India accepted the convention on 14 November 1977, making it's sites eligible for inclusion on the list.
- The first sites to be inscribed were
  - Ajanta Caves,
  - Ellora Caves,
  - Agra Fort, and
  - Taj Mahal,
- The latest site to be inscribed is Ramappa Temple, Telangana in 2021.
- As of July 2021, 19 of the 36 States and union territories of India are home to the World Heritage Sites
  - Maharashtra having the highest number of sites (6).
- Presently, there are 39 World Heritage Sites located in India.
  - 31 are cultural,
  - 7 are natural, and
  - 1 is mixed (meeting both cultural and natural criteria),
- India has the sixth largest number of sites in the world.
Benefits of becoming a World Heritage Site

The following are the most important advantages of being a World Heritage Site:

- It brings **international attention** to the need for the preservation and conservation of the site.
- It brings **tourism to the site**, with its accompanying economic benefits to the host country and local area.
- It can provide **funds for restoration, preservation, and training**. For example, in 2001, the Taliban destroyed two 6th century, 150-ft. statues of Buddha carved into the mountainside in the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan.
- It **promotes national and local pride** in the natural and man-made wonders of the country.
- It **promotes close ties with the United Nations** system and the prestige and support it provides.
- It provides **access to global project management resources**.
• It facilitates creating partnerships between government, the private sector, and NGOs to achieve conservation goals.
• The site is protected under the Geneva Convention against destruction or misuse during wartime.

Source: PIB

Social Justice

'Gatekeeper Model' to Prevent Suicides in Prisons


In News
Recently, the NIMHANS issued detailed guidelines to deal with mental health challenges of inmates and staff.

About
• In a bid to prevent suicides triggered by mental health issues in prisons across the country, the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru, has recommended the “Gatekeeper Model”.
• NIMHANS is acting on the request of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Gatekeeper Model
• Gatekeepers:
  ○ Gatekeepers are existing people who are in close contact with the prisoners and can provide help for the prisoners.
  ○ They could be other convicted prisoners, prison staff who will be able to identify and support prisoners needing psychological help.
  ○ People having a psychological problem or at risk of suicide can access the gatekeeper, who can bridge the gap between them and the professional services. This is of particular benefit in at-risk suicidal prisoners.

• Objective:
  ○ In this model, selected inmates, trained to identify prisoners at risk of suicide, would refer them to treatment or supportive services.

• Case Study:
  ○ Referring to the Bangalore Prison Mental Health Study, the advisory pointed to the prevalence of mental illness and substance use disorder in about 80% of the prison population.

Buddy system
• The concept of a ‘Buddy System’ — social support through trained prisoners called “buddies” or “listeners” — was found to have a good impact on the well-being of suicidal prisoners.
• Periodic telephone conversations with friends and family would also foster support
• e-Mulakat:
  ○ It is a part of implementation of ePrisons initiatives which had several modules, including e-Mulakat.
○ It is an online platform enabling relatives/friends/ advocates of prisoners to book prior appointments for interviewing prisoners through the National Prisons Information Portal.
○ This was in addition to the video/voice call facility through mobile phones/telephone booths.

Mental Health Issues in Prisoners
- Increased risk of self harm
- Curtailed provision of health services due to logistic barriers
- Suspension of trials and delay in court hearings
- Uncertainty about the course of the trial
- Reduced contact with loved ones due to restrictions
- lack of physical distancing
- Identification of mental illness in prisoners

Actions Taken by the Government
- Telemedicine Guidelines:
  ○ During the COVID-19 pandemic, patients are discouraged from travelling and visiting a hospital unless it is an emergency or for treatment for COVID-19 illness. This includes patients in prisons as well.
  ○ In this background, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, along with NITI Aayog released the "telemedicine guidelines" in the country and have provided a statutory status for the practice of telemedicine.
  ○ This had led to the development of "Telepsychiatry Operational Guidelines 2020" that can be referred to while implementing the telepsychiatry services in the respective establishments.

- Mental health care Act 2017:
  ○ It specifically deals with Minimum standards and procedures for mental health care services in prisons
  ○ Some of the provisions are:
    ■ Screening of all inmates during the time of entry to prison including the following:
      ● Mandatory physical and mental status examination
      ● Questionnaire screening for substance use
      ● Urine testing for common drugs of abuse
      ● Periodic random urine drug testing
    ■ Identification of persons with serious mental illness and proper treatment and follow-up for this group.
    ■ Ensuring the availability of minimum psychiatric medication in the prison to facilitate prompt treatment (Antipsychotic medication, antidepressant medication, anxiolytic medication, mood stabilizers, anticonvulsant medication, etc).
    ■ Availability of psycho-social interventions for prisoners with a range of mental health problems.
    ■ Protocols for dealing with prisoners with suicidal risk, with behavioural problems and crises related to mental illnesses as well as to prison life.
○ Various other provisions are also being worked upon to better the mental health conditions of inmates and staff of Prison.

**Suggestions to reduce Mental Health Issues**

- **At prison level:**
  - **Mental health awareness for prisoners:** Administrators/supervisors should PROMOTE awareness about Mental Health and Stress through organizing awareness classes, stress management workshops, etc.
  - **Communication:** Ensuring to keep up to date with the State Government guidelines. Keeping the prisoners informed about COVID-19 and following safety measures to prevent infection. Allowing prisoners to communicate with their family and friends at regular intervals over the telephone.
  - **Support during times of distress:** Staff should be alert to signs of prisoners undergoing an emotional crisis and in need of extra support - following, for example, disturbing news from their families related to COVID-19 and management should ensure that such support is provided.

- **At individual level:**
  - **Self-Care:** Self-care includes those activities to promote our emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual/religious wellness
  - **Exercise**

Sources: TH

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**Polity and Governance**

**Fake News: Solutions & Challenges**

*Syllabus: GS 2/Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency & Accountability*

**In News**

Stakeholders are attempting to find a robust and effective solution to deal with *Fake news* and its associated social problems.

**About**

- The Indian government has been attempting to bring in several legal amendments to deal with fake news, its creation, propagation and effects.
- Social media companies are also investing billions of dollars into technological solutions such as *Artificial Intelligence (AI)* to identify *fake news* and its proliferation.

**About Fake News (Yellow Journalism)**

- Fake news or hoax news refer to *false propaganda* published under the guise of authentic news.
- It is deliberately created to *misinform the readers.*
- Fake news can be propagated through any media: *print, electronic and social.*
- Fake news can be related to anything –
  - Commercially driven sensational content
○ Nation-state sponsored misinformation
○ Highly partisan news site
○ Social media itself
○ Satire or parody

● Some checks and balances exist in the mainstream media against fake news, but social media does not have such a mechanism.

Effects of Fake News
● With millions of people using social media in a country like India, fake news is no less than a potential disaster.
● It can be used to influence public opinions, to gain popularity or to malign the image, character of certain individuals or opponents or to defame them.
● It polarizes public opinion and affects political institutions, political disinformation campaigns in the Indian electoral system could lead to the deepening of existing social discord, loss of civic trust in the electoral system, and the compromise of basic democratic principles.
● It affects social & communal harmony by spreading extremists’ ideologies especially in sensitive areas like radicalization of youths, inciting violence and hatred among the communities, swinging public opinions etc.

Challenges in controlling the Fake News
● No standard definition: The term ‘fake news’ is vague and there is no official definition of what constitutes fake news.
● Lack of regulation: Self-regulation by mainstream media has largely been ineffective.
  ○ Any direct effort by the government to control fake news is prone to be seen as an assault on the freedom of media which functions as the fourth pillar of democracy.
● Difficult to achieve balance: The efforts to control fake news should not threaten to cramp legitimate investigative and source-based journalism or freedom of expression as guaranteed in Article 19 of the Constitution.
  ○ Also, distinguishing between the conscious fabrication of news reports and news reports put out in the belief that they are accurate.
● Tracking fake news on social media: The vastness of the internet users (over 35 crores in India) and social media users (over 20 crore WhatsApp users alone) makes tracing the origin of fake news almost impossible.

Legal remedies available to tackle this menace
● Indian Broadcast Foundation (IBF): This body was created in 1999 to look into the complaints against content aired by 24×7 channels.
● The Press Council of India: It is created by an Act of Parliament, is a statutory body and keeps vigil on fake news. It can warn, admonish or censure the newspaper, the news agency.
● IPC Sections 153A and 295: Under this action can be initiated against someone creating or spreading fake news if it can be termed as hate speech.
• Broadcasting Content Complaint Council (BCCC): A complaint relating to objectionable TV content or fake news can be filed to the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council.
• Defamation Suit: IPC Section 499 makes defamation a criminal offence. Section 500 provides for punishment for criminal defamation.
• The Information Technology (IT) Act: It imposes an obligation on intermediaries such as search engine giant Google to remove any objectionable content pursuant to takedown notices by law enforcement agencies.
• Contempt of Court laws: False stories about judicial proceedings would be covered by contempt of court laws and false stories about Parliament and other legislative bodies would violate privilege.
• The Constitution of India provides a long-term solution under Article 51A (h), which says, “It shall be the duty of every citizen to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.

Way Ahead
• Bring out policy: The government should bring out a draft seeking an opinion from stakeholders regarding issues of controlling fake news.
  ○ Any future guidelines on ‘fake news’ should target ‘fake news’ and not try to regulate media in the name of ‘fake news’.
• Regulatory mechanism: The PCI needs to be reformed and empowered in a way so as to enable it to strike a balance between the freedom of media and speech on the one hand, and the right to know on the other.
• Awareness: People must be made aware of the menace of fake news, its dissemination.
• Authentic news: Official accounts of government organizations should also be present on social media to spread authentic news.
  ○ Social media houses should also come forward to bring in measures to curb the menace of fake news such as Facebook recently announced that it has tied up with Boom Live, an Indian fact-checking agency, to fight fake news during the Karnataka elections.

Source: TH

Ecology & Environment

Declining Population of The Great Indian Bustards

Syllabus: GS3/Species in News

In News
Recently, the Central government informed that there were no Great Indian Bustards (GIB) in Kutch Bustard Sanctuary (KBS) as of January 1 2021.

About
• Kutch Bustard Sanctuary (KBS) near Naliya in Gujarat’s Kutch district Abdasa block is a tiny sanctuary notified in 1992 and **spread over just two square kilometres** (sqkm).
• Its **eco-sensitive zone spread** over 220 sqkm covers most of the present-day core GIB habitat.
• The creation of a **safe haven for the birds** led to an increase in the **GIB population in KBS from 30 in 1999 to 45 in 2007**.
• **Windmills and powerlines** started coming up right on the borders of the sanctuary **from 2008 onward** and GIB numbers started dwindling hence.
  ○ Due to the barrier created by the power infrastructure on all its sides, sightings of GIB inside the KBS’ notified two sqkm area is becoming increasingly rare.

Great Indian Bustards (*Ardeotis nigriceps*)

**About:**
• It is a large **bird with brown-and-white feathers** with black crowns and wing markings.
• It is one of the **heaviest birds** in the world.
• It is the **largest** among the **four bustard species found in India**.
  ○ The other three being **MacQueen’s bustard, lesser florican and the Bengal florican**.
• Males have **whitish necks and underparts** with narrow **black breast-bands**.
• Females are smaller, with a **greyer neck** and typically no or incomplete breast-band.
• It is the state bird of Rajasthan.

**Habitat and Distribution:**
  ○ The species occurs in the **Indian Subcontinent**, with former strongholds in the **Thar desert** in the northwest and the Deccan tableland of the Peninsula.
  ○ Rajasthan is now home to the single largest viable population of the species.
  ○ This species **inhabits arid and semi-arid grasslands** with scattered short scrub, bushes and low-intensity cultivation in flat or gently undulating terrain.
They feed on insects, lizards, grass seeds etc. and are considered the **flagship bird species of grassland** and hence barometers of the health of grassland ecosystems.

**Threats:**
- GIBs’ historic range included much of the **Indian sub-continent** but it has now shrunken to just **10 percent of it**.
- It has an **extremely small population** that has undergone an extremely rapid decline.
- **Widespread hunting for sport and food** precipitated its decline, accelerated by vehicular access to remote areas.
- **High-intensity poaching** still continues in Pakistan and egg-collecting was rampant in many states during the early 19th century.
- However, the current threats are mostly from habitat loss and degradation, caused by **Widespread agricultural expansion** and mechanization of farming.
- Infrastructural development such as **irrigation, roads, electricity pylons, wind turbines and constructions**.
- Mining and industrialization.
- Well-intended but ill-informed habitat management.
- Lack of community support.
- Power companies’ **high tension wires** are major threat factors, leading to the death of about **15 percent of the GIB population due to collisions** with power lines.
- **Overhead power transmission lines**: Scientists of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have been pointing out **overhead power transmission lines as the biggest threat to the GIBs**.
  - WII research has concluded that in Rajasthan, 18 GIBs die every year after colliding with overhead power lines as the birds, due to their poor frontal vision, can’t detect power lines in time and their weight makes in-flight quick manoeuvres difficult.

**Protection Status:**
- **IUCN Red List**: **Critically Endangered**
- **CITES Appendix I**
- **India Wildlife Protection Act**: **Schedule I**

**Conservation Efforts:**
- **Project Great Indian Bustard**
  - It was launched in **Rajasthan** including constructing breeding enclosures for the species and developing infrastructure to **reduce human pressure on habitats**.
- **State Action Plan for Resident Bustards’ Recovery Programme**
  - The Indian government has provided **financial support** to conservation actions for this species in some regions and in association with several
NGOs and experts have developed guidelines for the recovery programme.

- **Mitigating Powerline Mortality**
  - In April 2021, the Supreme Court mandated that all power lines in both the ‘potential’ and the ‘priority habitats’ of the bird be laid underground.
  - It would ensure the long-term conservation of the species and the successful reintroduction of captive-bred birds in the future.
  - Bird diverters, colourful discs meant to alert birds in flight from a distance to avoid a collision, have been installed.
  - However, there is debate in the scientific community about their efficacy for bustards.

- **GIB species recovery programme.**
  - In 2015, the Central government launched the **GIB species recovery programme**.
  - Under the programme, the WII and Rajasthan forest department have jointly set up conservation breeding centres where GIB eggs harvested from the wild are incubated artificially and hatchlings raised in a controlled environment.

- **Other Conservation Methods and Solutions:**
  - The local people and their active participation are central to conserving the species.
    - It now requires an urgent acceleration in targeted conservation actions in order to prevent it from becoming functionally extinct within a few decades.
  - Consolidate core breeding areas identified across the species’ range by creating strict refuges during prime breeding months (March–September).
  - Formulate landscape conservation strategies in priority areas.
  - Community outreach and linking local livelihoods with bustard conservation in priority areas by subsidy/incentive-driven agro-environmental schemes that promote bustard-friendly practices.
  - Provide more support and equipment to park staff, to better protect areas.
  - Commencing an ex-situ conservation breeding programme as an insurance against extinction.
  - Regulate and control eco-tourism to minimise disturbance to the species.
  - Assess the efficacy of these conservation actions by systematic, country-wide population monitoring on alternate years for the next 10 years.

*Source: IE*
Moon-Forming Disk Around Exoplanet

In News
Moon-forming region seen around exoplanet for the first time.

About
- The researchers used the ALMA observatory in Chile's Atacama desert to detect the disc of swirling material accumulating around one of two newborn planets seen orbiting a young star called PDS 70, located a relatively close 370 light years from Earth.

Discovery
- Scientists for the first time have spotted a moon-forming region around a planet beyond our solar system - a Jupiter-like world surrounded by a disc of gas and dust massive enough that it could spawn three moons the size of the one orbiting Earth.
- It is called a circumplanetary disc, and it is from these that moons are born. The discovery offers a deeper understanding about the formation of planets and moons.
- No circumplanetary discs had been found until now because all the known exoplanets resided in “mature” – fully developed – solar systems, except the two infant gas planets orbiting PDS 70.
- More than 4,400 planets have been discovered outside our solar system, called exoplanets.
- PDS 70:
  - The orange-coloured star PDS 70
  - It is roughly the same mass as our Sun and about 5 million years old – a blink of the eye in cosmic time.
- PDS 70c:
  - The two planets are even younger from Star.
  - Both planets are similar (although larger) to Jupiter, a gas giant. It was around one of the two planets, called PDS 70c, that a moon-forming disc was observed.
  - PDS 70c orbits its star at 33 times the distance of the Earth from the sun, similar to the planet Neptune in our solar system.

Exoplanet
- An exoplanet is any planet beyond our solar system. More than 4,400 planets have been discovered outside our solar system.
- Most orbit other stars, but free-floating exoplanets, called rogue planets, orbit the galactic center and are untethered to any star.

Planet Formation
- The dominant mechanism thought to underpin planet formation is called “core accretion”.
- Procedure: In this scenario, small dust grains, coated in ice, gradually grow to larger and larger sizes through successive collisions with other grains. This continues until the grains have grown to a size of a planetary core, at which point the young planet has a strong enough gravitational potential to accrete gas which will form its atmosphere.
- Some nascent planets attract a disc of material around them, with the same process that gives rise to planets around a star leading to the formation of moons around planets.

Birth of a Moon
Stars burst to life within clouds of interstellar gas and dust scattered throughout galaxies. Leftover material spinning around a new star then coalesces into planets, and circumplanetary discs surrounding some planets similarly yield moons.

**Light Year**
- It's a unit of distance.
- A light year is the distance light travels in a year, about 9.5 trillion km.

Sources: TH

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**Economy**

**India’s Falling Unemployment Rate**

Syllabus: GS 3, Indian Economy & Related Issues, Employment, Growth & Development

**In News**

Recently, the latest annual report of the [Periodic Labour Force Survey](https://example.com) (PLFS) has been released by the [National Statistical Office](https://example.com) (NSO).

**About the Survey**

- The PLFS is an annual survey conducted by the NSO.
- It was started in April 2017 and it essentially maps the state of employment in the country.
- In doing so, it collects data on several variables such as the level of unemployment, the types of employment and their respective shares, the wages earned from different types of jobs, the number of hours worked etc.
  - Earlier this job was done by Employment-Unemployment Surveys, which were conducted once in five years.
  - Unemployment rate is defined as the percentage of persons unemployed among the persons in the labour force.
- **Data Collection:** There are two ways and they differ in terms of the reference period.
  - **Usual Status (US):** In this approach, the survey ascertains whether a person had been employed for enough days in 365 days preceding the survey.
  - **Current Weekly Status (CWS):** In this, the survey tries to figure out whether a person was adequately employed in the seven days preceding the survey.
- The first annual report (July 2017-June 2018) was released in May 2019, showing unemployment at 6.1 per cent.
  - This edition created much controversy when it showed that India’s unemployment rate had touched a 45-year high.
The government tried to run down those findings as it was facing a national election in 2019 but eventually accepted the data after the elections.

- The second annual report (July 2018-June 2019) was released in June 2020, which showed an unemployment rate of 5.8 per cent.
- The third annual report on the PLFS was conducted by the NSO between July 2019 and June 2020.

**Unemployment in India**
- According to an estimate, between 2011-12 and 2017-18, the total employment (in absolute numbers) declined by 9 million, the first time in India’s history when the total employment itself had come down.
- In a nutshell, India had **two major concerns about unemployment**.
  - Firstly, a **low LFPR**, which means the proportion of people in the working-age who seek to participate in the economy is considerably lower than other economies. The main culprit here is the **extremely low LFPR for women** in India.
  - Secondly, despite a low LFPR, India’s unemployment rate has been quite high.

**Major Findings**
- The unemployment rate fell to 4.8 per cent in 2019-20.
- The Covid-19 pandemic hit the economy hard in March-April 2020 and made the unemployment worse.
- According to the Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy (CMIE), the monthly jobless rate for March 2020 was 8.75 per cent, which rose to 23.52 per cent in April 2020, then came down a little to 21.73 per cent in May and in June 2020, it was 10.18 per cent.
- The report shows that in 2019-20, India’s **Labour Force Participation Rate** (LFPR) improved marginally and the unemployment rate went down, meaning improved employment chances.
  - This is quite surprising as since 2019-20 saw the Indian economy’s GDP grow by just a paltry 4.2 per cent.
- **Two ways have been provided** to reconcile the trend of rise in LFPR and the fall in the unemployment rate.
  - First, with reference to the Usual Status-based data, both the rise in LFPR and the apparent fall in the unemployment rate can be explained by the rise in distress.
    - If one looks at the other tables in the annual report one finds that increased labour force participation rate is happening because **work opportunities have shrunk and incomes have fallen**.
    - People are being **forced to take up self-employment**, often designated as “helper in household enterprise”, **even** as the **relative share of wage** (or salaried) employment falls.
  - Second, the unemployment data based on CWS shows that unemployment did not really fall.
Different surveys have different metrics and while the magnitude may differ across surveys, the direction remains the same.
- The Usual Status is the only one that is showing a reversal in the unemployment trend.
- Through the year 2019-20, as the GDP growth faltered, the LFPR was falling further even as the unemployment rate worsened.
  - This is particularly true for the April to June quarter of 2020 when the Indian economy was hampered by strict lockdowns.

Suggestions
- Typically, the NSO unemployment number most routinely quoted is the one based on Usual Status.
  - However, this approach is not comparable with either the global norm (for example, the one followed by International Labour Organization or ILO) or the private sector practice (like the surveys done by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy or CMIE).
- It has been suggested that India should focus more on unemployment numbers derived from CWS.
  - The reason for this is that memory recall is much better in CWS.
  - Moreover, the nature of the Indian economy has changed.
    - The year-long reference period of Usual Status made more sense when the economy was predominantly agrarian but now more people are into jobs that do not follow a year-long schedule.
- The CWS is closer to the global norm and is also more relevant because it is this approach that the NSO uses for understanding quarterly changes in unemployment.
  - If the unemployment rate and LFPR trends are compiled using the CWS approach, the emerging picture will be more in sync with either the data from CMIE or indeed all the other indicators of the broader.

National Statistical Office
- It is the statistics wing of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation and consists of the Central Statistical Office (CSO), the Computer center and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- Key Responsibilities
  - Acts as the nodal agency for planned development of the statistical system in the country, lays down and maintains norms and standards in the field of statistics, involving concepts and definitions, methodology of data collection, processing of data and dissemination of results.
  - Coordinates the statistical work in respect of the Ministries/Departments, advises them on statistical methodology and on statistical analysis of data.
- Prepares national accounts as well as publishes annual estimates of national product, government and private consumption expenditure, capital formation, etc.
- **Maintains liaison with international statistical organizations** like the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.
- **Compiles and releases the Index of Industrial Production** (IIP) every month in the form of ‘quick estimates’, conducts the **Annual Survey of Industries** (ASI), etc.
- **Organizes and conducts periodic all-India Economic Censuses** and follow-up enterprise surveys, provides an in-house facility to process the data collected through various socio-economic surveys.
- **Conducts large scale all-India sample surveys** for creating the database needed for studying the impact of specific problems for the benefit of different population groups in diverse socio-economic areas.
- **Examines the survey reports from the technical angle and evaluates** the sampling design including survey feasibility studies in respect of surveys conducted by various departments and agencies.
- **Releases grants-in-aid** to registered Non-Governmental Organizations and research institutions of repute for undertaking special studies or surveys, etc.

Source: IE
## Facts in News

### I-STEM Web Portal

- Recently, the **I-STEM project** has been accorded an extension for five years, until 2026.
- The **I-STEM National Web Portal** was launched formally in January 2020 by Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.
- It began as an initiative to **“Link Researchers and Resources”** by creating a database of **Research & Development** resources in various institutions across the country.
- It is an initiative of the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India (PSA, GOI) under the aegis of Prime Minister Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) mission.
- **Aims and Objectives**
  - To **strengthen the R&D ecosystem** of the country by connecting researchers with resources and **providing necessary** supplies and support to researchers by enabling them access to existing publicly funded R&D facilities in the country through the I-STEM web portal.
India has scored 90.32% in United Nation’s Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific's (UNESCAP) latest Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. The Survey hailed this as a remarkable jump from 78.49% in 2019.

### About
- The Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation is conducted every two years by UNESCAP.
- The 2021 Survey includes an assessment of 58 trade facilitation measures covered by the WTO’s Trade Facilitation Agreement.
- The Survey is keenly awaited globally as it evidences whether or not the trade facilitation measures being taken have the desired impact and helps draw comparison amongst countries.
- A higher score for a country also helps businesses in their investment decisions.

### Assessment in India
- **Transparency:** 100% in 2021 (from 93.33% in 2019)
- **Formalities:** 95.83% in 2021 (from 87.5% in 2019)
- **Institutional Arrangement and Cooperation:** 88.89% in 2021 (from 66.67% in 2019)
- **Paperless Trade:** 96.3% in 2021 (from 81.48% in 2019)
- **Cross-Border Paperless Trade:** 66.67% in 2021 (from 55.56% in 2019)

### Comparison with other nations
- India is the best-performing country when compared to the South and South-West Asia region (63.12%) and the Asia Pacific region (65.85%).
- The overall score of India has also been found to be greater than many OECD countries including France, UK, Canada, Norway, Finland etc. and the overall score is greater than the average score of the EU.

### Reason for Improvement in ranking
- CBIC has been at forefront of path-breaking reforms under the umbrella of 'Turant' Customs to usher in a Faceless, Paperless and Contactless Customs by way of a series of reforms.
- This has had a direct impact in terms of the improvement in the UNESCAP rankings on digital and sustainable trade facilitation.
- During the Covid19 pandemic, Customs formations have made all efforts to expedite Covid related imports such as Oxygen related equipment, life-saving medicines, vaccines etc.
- A dedicated single window COVID-19 24*7 helpdesk for EXIM trade was created on the CBIC website to facilitate quick resolution of issue(s) faced by importers.

**United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

- It is a regional development arm of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region.
- **HQ & Establishment:** Bangkok, Thailand & 1947.
- **Objective:** To develop the institutional capacities of member and associate member governments in delivering effective policies for inclusive and sustainable development with special attention to least developed and landlocked developing countries as well as small island developing states.
- **Members:** 53 Member States and 9 Associate Members from Asia-Pacific Region including India.
| Amateur Radio Technology | Recently, it has been suggested to deploy HAM radio (also known as amateur radio) technology in cyclone prone coastal areas in Odisha and West Bengal.  
- It is the use of radio frequency spectrum for non-commercial two-way radio communications including exchange of messages, wireless experimentation, self-training, private recreation, radiosport, contesting and emergency communication.  
- It is a real-time communication network similar to wireless communication and is quick and transparent.  
- An amateur radio operators (also known as radio amateurs or hams) are individuals who typically use equipment at an amateur radio station to engage in communications with other similar individuals.  
  ○ They set up and operate organized communication networks locally for governmental and emergency officials, as well as non-commercial communication for private citizens affected by the disaster.  
- Indian Wireless Telegraphs (Amateur Service) Amendment Rules, 1984, describes amateur service as a service of self training intercommunications and technical investigation carried on by Amateurs that is, by persons duly authorized under these rules interested in radio technique solely with a personal aim and without pecuniary interest.  
  ○ Any citizen of India who is above 12 years of age can become a ham by qualifying in the Amateurs Station Operators (ASO) examination and obtaining a valid Amateur wireless telegraph station license.  
- The HAM operators employ high frequency signals to connect with other operators and it comes handy when mobile connectivity is down as it can be set up anywhere.  
  ○ Communication turns out to be a major challenge during the cyclones and particularly in the Sunderbans with more than 50 inhabited islands located in remote areas, which remain cut off often for days.  
- The empowerment of local youth to operate the technology will help the State’s disaster preparedness and management. |
Recently, the Prime Minister of India has paid tributes to Chandra Shekhar Azad on his Jayanti.

- **Birth:** On 23\(^{rd}\) July 1906 in Bhavra village of Alirajpur princely state, which currently falls under the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh.
- **Contributions**
  - He was drawn into the Indian national movement at a young age and participated in Mahatma Gandhi’s Non-cooperation Movement (1920–22).
    - When caught by the police, he gave his name as Azad (Free or Liberated).
  - However, the suspension of Non-cooperation in February 1922 disappointed him and he joined the radical Hindustan Republican Association (HRA).
  - He participated in several crimes, notably the Kakori train robbery (1925) and the revenge killing of a British police officer John Saunders (1928).
  - Known for his organizational skills, he played a key role in reorganizing the HRA as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA).
  - He was given the nickname ‘quicksilver’ by Ramprasad Bismil for his ability to move undetected between party hideouts.
- **Death:** On 27\(^{th}\) February 1931 in Allahabad.
  - He arranged to meet a revolutionary at Allahabad’s Alfred Park (now Azad Park) but was betrayed to the police, who surrounded him and he was fatally shot.

(Image Courtesy: TP)
Recently, casualties have been reported after clashes on the issue of compensation for damages to Maguri-Motapung wetland (or beel).

- The wetland derives its name from 'Magur', local word for the catfish *Clarius batrachus*, once found here in abundance. The second half of the name comes from a village nearby and Beel is the Assamese word for wetland.
- It is located close to the Dibru Saikhowa National Park in Upper Assam’s Tinsukia district.
  ○ The Dibru river flows from east to west through the wetland. To the north-west of the wetland is a river, which was once called Dangori. It has been captured by the bigger river Lohit.
- The wetland regime is a critical part of the Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve, an ecological corridor to Namdapha National Park and sustains the ecological integrity of the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot.
- This landscape is mostly water and comprises wetlands, swamp forests and grasslands.
  ○ It has a grassland adjacent to it and the entire ecosystem (grassland and wetland) is very important as it is home to at least 304 bird species, including a number of endemic ones like Black-breasted parrotbill and Marsh babbler.
- It is home to 37 species of mammals, 503 species of birds, 42 species of reptiles, 17 species of amphibia, 104 species of fish and 105 species of butterflies, according to one 2016 survey.
  ○ It has over 110 bird species, of which eight are regarded as threatened by the IUCN, which include the Falcated duck, Ferruginous duck and Swamp Prinia.
  ○ The Lesser Adjutant, Baikal Teal, Swamp Francolin and Marsh Babbler are classified as less threatened.
- It was declared an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) in 1996 by the Bombay Natural History Society.
- In May 2020, it was adversely affected by a blowout and fire at an Oil India Limited-owned gas well.
  ○ The resulting oil spill killed a number of fish, snakes as well as an endangered Gangetic dolphin, and the fire had burnt a large portion of the grassland.
India Among Top 10 Agricultural Produce Exporters In World: WTO

- As per a report from WTO on the trends in world agricultural trade in the past 25 years, India broke into the list of top 10 agricultural produce exporters in 2019.

**Key Points**

- India commanded a 3.1 per cent share in the global agricultural produce exports.
- Mexico commanded a share of 3.4 per cent, Brazil 7.8 per cent, China 5.4 per cent and the United States (US) 13.8 per cent.
- India is also the third-largest cotton exporter (7.6%), and the fourth-largest importer (10%) in 2019.
- The US, which topped the list in 1995 (22.2%), was overtaken by the European Union in 2019 (16.1%).
- China climbed from the sixth spot in 1995 (4%) to fourth in 2019 (5.4%).
- The top 10 exporters accounted for more than 96% of exports in both 1995 and 2019.