



## Weekly Current Affairs

Sources: The Hindu+Indian Express+PIB

20 June 2021 to 26 June 2021

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## **Land for Life Award: UN**

### **In news**

Recently, Shyam Sundar Jyani, a Rajasthan-based climate activist, has won the prestigious United Nations' Land for Life Award for his environment conservation concept, Familial Forestry.

### **About Land for Life Award:**

- The Award recognizes excellence and innovation in efforts towards land in balance.
- It was launched in 2011 at the UNCCD Conference of Parties (COP)10 in the Republic of Korea as part of the **Changwon Initiative**.
- The main components of the Changwon Initiative include:
  - Enhancing the scientific process of the UNCCD.
  - Mobilizing additional resources and facilitating partnership arrangements.
  - Supporting a global framework for the promotion of best practices.

**2021 Theme:**Healthy Land, Healthy Lives.

**Source->**The Hindu

## **Ebola Virus Disease (EVD)**

### **In news**

Recently, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared that the Ebola outbreak that started in February 2021 in Guinea, is over now.

### **About EVD**

- It is a viral hemorrhagic fever of humans and other primates caused by ebolaviruses.
- It is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through human to human transmission.
- Ebola virus was first discovered in 1976 near the Ebola River (the present Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Fruit bats of the Pteropodidae family are natural Ebola virus hosts
- Diagnosis:
  - ELISA (antibody-capture enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay), RT-PCR.

**Source->**The Hindu

## **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)**

### **In news**

NHAI has made use of drones mandatory for video recording of the national highway projects. These videos will be saved on NHAI's portal "Data Lake" to assess the progress made on the projects.

### **Key takeaways:**

- Enhance transparency and uniformity.
- The videos can be used during the physical inspection of the projects.
- They can also be used as evidence during the dispute resolution process before Arbitral Tribunals and Courts.
- The mandatory deployment of Network Survey Vehicle (NSV) to carry out road condition surveys on the National Highways will enhance the overall quality of the highways.

## TARGET4IAS: TOGETHER WE CAN

### About NHAI

- Set up under NHAI Act, 1988.
- It maintains the National Highways network to global standards and in a cost effective manner
- Entrusted with the National Highways Development Project, along with other minor projects for development, maintenance and management.

### NHAI's Portal "Data Lake"

- It is cloud based and Artificial Intelligence powered Big Data Analytics platform.
- All project documentation, contractual decisions and approvals are now done through the portal only.

Source->PIB

### Periodical cicadas

- Periodical cicadas, so called because of their 13 or 17 year life cycle, most of which is spent underground, emerge from their earthy digs to romance, reproduce and retire.
- This year is the year of the Brood X periodical cicadas. Here, X stands for the Roman numeral and refers to the sequence of emergence.
- Five developmental stages, known as "instars", entirely underground. The fifth instar nymphs emerge from the ground by making holes and then transform into adults, only to perish approximately four weeks later.
- They are found to the east of the Great Plains in the U.S. and north of Florida.
- They emerge earlier in the warmer southern areas (late April-May) and later in the colder zones (late May-June).
- In any given place, they come out only once every 13 or 17 years. Occasionally, part of a population will come out four years early and part four years late. With climate warming, we are seeing more four year early emergences in larger numbers.



Source->The Hindu

### Black Softshell Turtles

#### In news

The Hayagriva Madhava Temple Committee in Assam has signed an MoU with Turtle Survival Alliance India, Help Earth, and Assam Forests Department to conserve the Black Softshell Turtle and adopted a Vision Document to raise at least 1,000 black softshell turtles by 2030.

#### About Black Softshell Turtle (*Nilssonina nigricans*)

- Species of freshwater turtle. It is found in India and Bangladesh.

## TARGET4IAS: TOGETHER WE CAN

- **Distribution:** Brahmaputra's drainage and Near Temple Ponds in Assam and Bangladesh (Chittagong and Sylhet)
- **IUCN Red List:** Critically Endangered
- **CITES:** Appendix I
- It does not enjoy legal protection under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972.
- **Threats**
  - Hunted for its meat and cartilage, traded in regional and international markets.
  - Silt mining
  - Encroachment of wetlands
  - Change in flooding pattern.



The freshwater black softshell turtle. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

### About Hayagriva Madhava temple

- Exists in a hilly place which is located at Hajo nearby Guwahati, Assam. The temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu.
- Constructed by King Raghudeva Narayan in 1583.
- According to Historians, the temple was built during the Pala period of 10th-12th century A. D.
- The temple is revered by Buddhists also, as they believe that Hayagriva Madhava temple is the place where Buddha attained Nirvana. Thus, the temple becomes an ancient pilgrimage center for both Hindus and Buddhists.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### International yoga day

- The UN proclaimed **June 21** as International Day of Yoga by passing a resolution on December 11, 2014 during the 69th session of the General Assembly.
- The United Nations **theme for this year is "Yoga for wellness"**, which takes into account how the practice can promote the holistic health of every individual.

### M-Yoga' App

#### In news

Prime Minister has launched 'WHO M-Yoga' App while addressing on the occasion of 7th International Day of Yoga.

#### Key takeaways:

- It will provide many videos of Yoga training and practice based on common Yoga protocol in many languages.
- It will help in spreading Yoga world over and will contribute to the efforts of 'One World, One Health'.

## TARGET4IAS: TOGETHER WE CAN

- The Ministry of AYUSH and the World Health Organization (WHO) had jointly undertaken a project in mid 2019, focusing on mobile-Yoga.
- It envisaged the concept of the 'Be Healthy, Be Mobile' (BHBM) under the United Nations SDG to achieve Universal Health Coverage by 2030.
- BHBM initiative is a global partnership led by WHO which supports the scale up of mobile health (m-Health) technology within the scope of the National Health system to combat non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Source->PIB

### Pygmy hog

#### In news

Recently, eight captive-bred pygmy hogs were released in the Manas National Park of Assam. This is the second batch to have been reintroduced into the wild under the Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (PHCP) in a year.

#### About Pygmy hog( *Porcula Salvania*)

- World's rarest and smallest wild pigs + native to the grasslands in the foothills of the Himalayas.
- The pygmy hog is one of the very few mammals that build its own home, or nest, complete with a 'roof'.
- It is an indicator species. Its presence reflects the health of its primary habitat.
- Once found along a narrow strip of tall and wet grassland plains on the Himalayan foothills – from Uttar Pradesh to Assam. Today found mainly in a small population in Assam.
- Conservation status:
  - IUCN Red List: Endangered
  - CITES: Appendix I
  - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I



One of the pygmy hogs reintroduced in Assam's national park on Tuesday.

#### Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (PHCP)

- It is a collaboration among Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust of UK, Assam Forest Department, Wild Pig Specialist Group of IUCN and Union Environment Ministry
- It is currently being implemented by NGOs Aaranyak and EcoSystems India.
- Conservation of pygmy hog was initiated by noted naturalist Gerald Durrell and his trust in 1971.

Source->The Hindu

### Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas of India

- Released recently by Ministry of Environment on the occasion of World Day to Combat Desertification.
- It is helpful in prioritizing areas to be taken up for minimizing the impact of desertification and land degradation.
- Helpful in strengthening the proposed National Action Plan for achieving land restoration targets by providing important inputs.

### About World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought

- It is observed every year on 17th June.
- **Aim:** The day is observed every year to promote public awareness of international efforts to combat desertification.
- The **theme for 2021:** “Restoration. Land. Recovery. We build back better with healthy land”.

**Note:** Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. It is caused primarily by human activities and climatic variations.

**Source:** [PIB](#)

### GM Rubber

#### In news

The world’s first genetically modified (GM) rubber plant has been planted at the Rubber Board’s Sarutari research farm on the outskirts of Guwahati in Assam.

#### Key takeaways

- Developed at the Kerala based Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII).
- It has additional copies of the gene MnSOD, or manganese containing superoxide dismutase, inserted in the plant, which is expected to tide over the severe cold conditions during winter — a major factor affecting the growth of young rubber plants in the region.
- Natural rubber is a native of warm humid Amazon forests and is not naturally suited for the colder conditions in the Northeast, which is one of the largest producers of rubber in India.

#### About natural rubber

- Rubber is made from the latex of a tree called Hevea Brasiliensis.
- It is an equatorial crop, but under special conditions, it is also grown in tropical and sub-tropical areas.
- Temperature: Above 25°C with moist and humid climate. Rainfall: More than 200 cm. Soil Type: Rich well drained alluvial soil.
- Cheap and adequate supply of skilled labour is needed for this plantation crop.
- India is currently the sixth largest producer in the world.
- Top Rubber Producing States: Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka.

**Source->**The Hindu

### World Competitiveness Index 2021

- Released by the Institute for Management Development (IMD).
- The index measures the prosperity and competitiveness of countries by examining four factors: Economic performance, Government efficiency, Business efficiency and Infrastructure.
- Switzerland has topped the index. It was followed by Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands and Singapore.
- The UAE and the USA remain in the same spots as last year (9th and 10th, respectively).
- India maintained 43rd rank.



Source: [Business Standard](#)

## Delta Plus

- Formally known as AY1 or B.1.617.2.1
- It is a variant of Delta (B.1.617.2), but with a mutation called K417N, which has previously been identified in Beta Variant.
- This is an international Variant of Concern (VOC), marked by being highly infectious and
- An additional concern with the K417N mutation ->resistance to a newly developed monoclonal antibody treatment drug, Casirivimab and Imdevimab.

{ ANOTHER COVID TWIST? } DELTA 'PLUS'



## Delta variant picks up a new mutation

Scientists are closely watching a new mutation that has been found in some Delta variant samples - the particular change has been seen in other variants shown to be somewhat more resistant



### WHAT IS THE CONCERNING FACTOR?

The Delta variant is a collection of around 13-15 mutations, of which several are of concern. At least four of these - D614G, E484Q, L452R and P681R - are known or are being investigated for making the Sars-CoV-2 better able to spread, cause more serious disease or resist immunity from a past infection or vaccine. Now, it has picked up a mutation known as K417N. Delta with the K417N mutation has been designated as AY.1 for now, and is informally referred to as 'Delta plus'.

### 1 WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT K417N?

K417N is a mutation in the Spike protein, the portion of the Sars-CoV-2 that helps it latch on to and enter human cells. At a location coded as 417, the amino acid lysine (K) is changed to asparagine (N). In a study by researchers from Rockefeller University, K417N was among three mutations that diminished the potency of 14 of the 17 key neutralising antibodies produced after vaccination with mRNA doses.

### 2 WHICH OTHER VARIANTS IS K417N FOUND IN?

This mutation has also been found in the Beta variant (B.1.351 - seen first in South Africa) and some samples of the Gamma variant (P.1 - seen first in Brazil). Both these variants are known to be more resistant to immunity, but it is still being investigated which mutation in particular or what combinations of mutations do this.

### 3 HOW PREVALENT IS IT?

The AY.1 variant has been found in 159 samples worldwide, according to an analysis of GISAID data by outbreak.info. Of these, 8 have been found in India. All of these 8 cases were found between April 5 and May 15. Data from Nextstrain shows two clusters of the variant - one in the US and another spread over 8 countries in Asia and Europe. In the UK, the Public Health England - which carries out the most genome sequencing of all agencies worldwide - said the first 5 cases there were sequenced on April 26 and were contacts of people who travelled from, or through, Nepal and Turkey.

### 4 WHERE DID IT ORIGINATE?

It is unclear. One of the earliest recorded samples was collected on April 5 from a man in Maharashtra. Reports this month also said that Japanese authorities found this variant in 13 people who came from Nepal after an Everest expedition.

### 5 HOW WORRYING IS IT?

The closest major analysis is by PHE, which has found 36 cases of AY.1. Of these, it could determine vaccination status of 27 - only 9 had received vaccines and 2 had both doses. The preliminary findings don't yet suggest any major vaccine resistance.



Source->The Hindu, Indian Express

## NISHTHA

### In news

Ministry of Tribal Affairs and NCERT come together on a joint mission for NISHTHA Capacity Building Programme for Eklavya Model Residential Schools EMRS Teachers and Principals.

## TARGET4IAS: TOGETHER WE CAN

### About NISHTHA(National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement)

- **Launched** by The Department of School Education and Literacy under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Samagra Shiksha in 2019-20.
- **Aim:** to improve learning outcomes at the Elementary level through an Integrated Teacher Training Programme

### Eklavya Model Residential Schools

Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs) – EMRSs are set up with capacity of 480 students per school under grants in aid under Article 275(1) of the Constitution to States, to provide quality middle and high level education to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students.

Source->[PIB](#)

### IN-EUNAVFOR

#### In news

EU-INDIA conducted a joint naval exercise in the Gulf of Aden.

#### About IN-EUNAVFOR Exercise:

- **Aim:** To enhance and improve war-fighting skills. It also aims to promote their ability as an integrated force to promote peace, security and stability in the maritime domain.
- Along with the Indian Navy, the other countries participating in the exercise are: Italy, Spain and France.
- EUNAVFOR and the Indian Navy converge on multiple issues including counter piracy operations and protection of vessels deployed under the charter of World Food Programme (UN WFP).
- The two navies also have regular interaction **through SHADE (Shared Awareness and Deconfliction)** meetings held annually at Bahrain.

#### Note: SHADE

- It is an international operational counter-piracy platform, convened in Bahrain.
- **Aim:** to encourage partners for sharing information, assessing the evolution of trends.
- SHADE also de-conflict operations amongst counter-piracy actors in the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman and the Western Indian Ocean.

Source: [PIB](#)

### Global Peace Index 2021

- Released by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), an international think tank.
- It ranks countries according to their levels of peacefulness and identifies potential determinants of peace.
- The index is composed of **23 qualitative and quantitative indicators** from highly respected sources. These indicators are grouped into three key domains: ongoing conflict, safety and security and militarization
- Iceland has topped the peace index Afghanistan is the least peaceful country in the world for the fourth consecutive year.



## TARGET4IAS: TOGETHER WE CAN

- India has been ranked 135th in the 2021 Global Peace Index. Bhutan and Nepal are the first and second most peaceful in the South Asia region. India is the 5th most peaceful country in this region.
- Bangladesh was 91st out of 163 countries across the world, while it was at 3rd place in South Asia. Pakistan witnessed the most improvement in peacefulness, with 150th rank globally and 6th in the South Asia region.

### Facts:

The economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2020 was \$14.96 trillion in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. It is equivalent to 11.6% of the world's economic activity.

Source: AIR

## Shifting of jurisdiction of a High Court

### In news

The Lakshadweep Administration is mooted a proposal to shift legal jurisdiction over the islands from Kerala High Court to Karnataka High Court.

### Key takeaways

- The jurisdiction of a high court can be shifted only through an act of Parliament, according to the law.
- **Article 241 of the Constitution**:-Parliament may by law constitute a high court for a Union Territory or declare any court in any such territory to be a high court for all or any of the purposes of this Constitution.
- **Section 4 of the same article** mentions that “nothing in this article derogates from the power of Parliament to extend or exclude the jurisdiction of a high court for a state to, or from, any Union Territory or part thereof”.

Source-> The Hindu

## Delimitation Commission

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats to represent changes in population. In this process, the number of seats allocated to a state may also change.
- The objective is to provide equal representation for equal population segments, and a fair division of geographical areas, so that no political party has an advantage.
- The commission consists of a chairman — a retired or sitting judge of the Supreme Court — the chief election commissioner or any of the two election commissioners, and the election commissioner of the state in which the exercise is being carried out. In addition, five MPs and five MLAs of the state are chosen as associate members of the commission.
- The Delimitation Commission's orders cannot be questioned before any court.
- The commission is a temporary body with no full-fledged staff of its own, it relies on EC employees to carry out the long-drawn exercise
- After the abrogation of J&K's special status in 2019, delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in the newly-created Union Territory would be as per the provisions of

the Indian Constitution. On March 6, 2020, the government set up the Delimitation Commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai.

- As per the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, the number of Assembly seats in J&K would increase from 107 to 114, which is expected to benefit the Jammu region.

Source->Indian Express

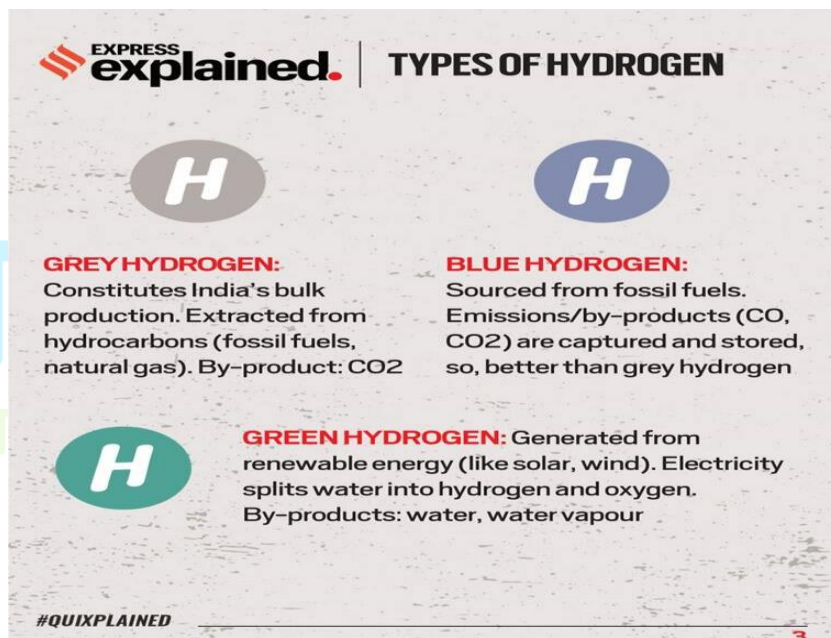
## Green Hydrogen

### In news

India had organised a two-day summit on green hydrogen involving BRICS nations on their initiatives around the green fuel. It was organised by state-run NTPC Ltd.

### About Green Hydrogen

- Hydrogen when produced by electrolysis using renewable energy is known as Green Hydrogen which has no carbon footprint.
- India has launched an ambitious National Hydrogen Mission to introduce hydrogen purchase obligations for fertilizers, refineries involving private sector in transparent and competitive manner to produce green hydrogen.
- India also plans to extend the PLI scheme for manufacturing electrolyzers, which are used for producing green hydrogen.
- The transition to a hydrogen economy will not only reduce India's import dependency on hydrocarbon fuels but also provide clean air to its citizens, reduce GHG emissions in absolute terms and fulfil India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision.
- It has a great amount of potential to ensure sustainable energy supply, increase the level of energy availability and minimize the negative impact on the environment.



Source->PIB, Indian Express

## Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS)

### In news

A 50 kWp Solar roof top was inaugurated in Solan, Himachal Pradesh under the Integrated power development scheme (IPDS) of Ministry of Power, Government of India.

### About Integrated power development scheme

- Launched by Ministry of Power in 2014
- All Discoms will be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme.

## TARGET4IAS: TOGETHER WE CAN

- It has following components:
  - Strengthening of sub-transmission and distribution networks in the urban areas.
  - Metering of distribution transformers in the urban areas.
  - IT enablement of the distribution sector and strengthening of distribution network.
  - Schemes for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and IT enablement of balance urban towns.
  - Underground cabling to include additional demand of States and smart metering solution for performing UDAY States and Solar panels on Govt. buildings with net-metering are also permissible under the scheme.

Source->[PIB](#)

### Project Seabird

- **Approved in 1999**, It is the largest naval infrastructure project for India.
- The project aims at creation of a naval base at Karwar on the west coast of India.
- Upon completion, the program will provide Indian Navy with its largest naval base on the west coast and also the largest naval base east of the Suez Canal.
- The **first phase** of the naval base called Operation Seabird was **completed in 2005** and the second phase started in 2011.
- INS Kadamba is currently the **third-largest Indian naval base** and is expected to become the **largest naval base in the eastern hemisphere** after completion of expansion Phase IIB.

### New E-Comm Rules

- Mandatory registration for e-commerce entities:
- Appointing a chief compliance officer.
- A nodal contact person for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies,
- Requiring e-commerce entities offering imported goods or services to 'incorporate a filter mechanism to identify goods based on country of origin
- Suggest alternatives to ensure a fair opportunity to domestic goods'.
- Specific flash sales or back-to-back sales "which limit customer choice, increase prices and prevents a level playing field are not allowed".
- All e-commerce entities must provide information within 72 hours on any request made by an authorised government agency, probing any breach of the law including cybersecurity issues.
- Introduced the concept of "**fall-back liability**": The rules made the e-commerce firms liable in case a seller on their platform fails to deliver goods or

### DOS AND DON'TS

#### EVERY E-COM COMPANY WILL HAVE TO:

- Register itself with DPIIT if it plans to operate in India
- Suggest Indian alternatives for foreign-made goods at pre-purchase stage
- Ensure that sponsored listings are clearly identifiable
- Ensure no logistics service provider offers differentiated treatment between sellers of the same category
- Provide adequate disclosure if engaged in cross-selling

#### E-COM COMPANIES CAN'T DO:

- Misleading consumers by manipulating search results
- Advertise a body of sellers for subsidising a sale on its platform
- Cannot share consumer information without the consent

## TARGET4IAS: TOGETHER WE CAN

services due to negligent conduct, which causes loss to the customer.

Source->Business Standard

### Important Terms

**Feminist technology (sometimes called “femtech”)** :It is an approach to technology and innovation that is inclusive, informed and responsive to the entire community with all its diversity.

**Poshan Tracker** :Monitor delivery of services at 14 lakh anganwadis.

**Familial Forestry** means transferring the care of the tree and environment in the family so that a tree becomes a part of the family's consciousness.

**Section 12 of the Disaster Management Act (DMA) 2005**: national authority shall recommend guidelines for the minimum standards of relief to be provided to persons affected by disaster, which shall include ex-gratia assistance.

**Gain-of-function research**: Involves deliberately altering an organism in the lab, altering a gene, or introducing a mutation in a pathogen to study its transmissibility, virulence and immunogenicity.

**Loss-of-function research** : Involves inactivating mutations, resulting in a significant loss of original function, or no function to the pathogen.

**Dual-use research of concern(DURC)** : Some forms of gain-of-function research reportedly carry inherent biosafety and biosecurity risks and are thus referred to as DURC.