

SOCIAL ISSUES

Urban local bodies (ULBs).

In context: Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa, stressed at the Urban-20 City Sherpas' meet that a master plan is crucial for any city to manage urbanisation.

What is a Masterplan?

- ✓ A master plan is a dynamic long-term planning document that provides a conceptual layout to guide future growth and development.
- ✓ It includes analysis, recommendations, and proposals for a site's population, economy, housing, transportation, Community Facilities, and land-use.
- ✓ Master plan consists of future directions of development, policy and implantation of the same.
- ✓ It sets out how a particular area can develop and redevelop into the future.

How significant is a masterplan for ULBs?

- ✓ A master plan is an instrument of governance for urban local bodies (ULBs).
- ✓ Master Plans may not be the panacea but is crucial for any city to manage urbanisation.
- ✓ It has an important role in determining the shape of the urban environment.
- ✓ Master plans blur the program particular plans to improve urban areas.
- ✓ The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has recommended that master plans in cities should be revisited for the improved governance of cities.

What are the challenges?

- ✓ Master plan is an archaic concept whose sales-pitch is more spectacular than its performance.
- ✓ **Dated instrument** - The legal and institutional frame of the master plan remained unchanged without accommodating later sensibilities for urban service rationalities.
- ✓ **Spatial vision** - A master plan is simply a spatial plan of land-use allocation supported by bye-laws and development control regulations.
- ✓ **Burden on ULBs** - The ULBs are cultivated and shaped by the agenda of regulating spatial growth and remain slaves to the master plan.
- ✓ The edifice of urban governance is built around this spatial vision and provision of urban services.
- ✓ **Spatial plans** - The statutory and spatial nature of the master plan can pose constraints on the programmatic plans, especially the spatially associated ones.
- ✓ **Most water-body** related projects negotiate the challenges of encroachment of floodplains as encroachments in ex-post.
- ✓ Close to 65% of India's urban settlements do not have master plans, according to NITI Aayog.
- ✓ **Absence of Master plans** - There is no set criteria for mandating a spatial plan to regulate urban growth.
- ✓ The approach is ad-hoc, to be notified by State governments.
- ✓ For a variety of reasons primarily lack of human and financial resources, such notifications of mandatory spatial plans are delayed.

What could be done?

- ✓ Urban planning in India must be reimagined urgently to accommodate these emerging demands and sensibilities of urban governance.
- ✓ Recent moves such as Gati Shakti and Model Rural Transformation Acts are a reflection of this growing demand but are remote and limited.
- ✓ Acceptance - Acknowledging that the master plan instrument is limited and address the expanded scope of urban governance through new ways.
- ✓ Best practices - Many States have tried supplementing the inadequacies of the master plan with innovative bye-laws.
- ✓ These Indian cities offer enough experiences to learn from.
- ✓ Focus Areas - The incapacities in urban planning and governance highlighted by the 2021 report of the NITI Aayog must receive priority.
- ✓ Cooperation - The Centre must work with the States to reconsider the spatial planning framework in India.

Sherpas

- ✓ A sherpa is the personal representative of a head of state or head of government who prepares an international summit, such as the annual G7 and G20 summits.
- ✓ Between the G20 & G7 summits there are multiple sherpa conferences where possible agreements are laid out

China's New foreign relations law (FRL)

In context: China's National People's Congress adopted new Law on Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China came into effect on July 1.

What is the new law about?

- ✓ China's foreign relations law (FRL) was approved and put in effect on July 1, 2023.

- ✓ It consists of 6 chapters and the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative are a part of it.
- ✓ The law involving foreign affairs was drafted to safeguard China's sovereignty, national security and development interests.
- ✓ Implications - The law will tighten President Xi Jinping's control over foreign policy.
- ✓ The broader aim of the law is to give a legal stamp to many of the key objectives of Chinese foreign policy under President Xi.
- ✓ Law also makes it a punishable offence if individuals or organisations were deemed to act against those objectives.

What will be the impact on foreign policy?

- ✓ Centralised power - President Xi took office in 2012 since then, the control over foreign policy has become increasingly centralised.
- ✓ Challenging - Now with legal stamp, challenging China's foreign policy may be deemed as a violation of Chinese laws.
- ✓ Political shift - The law also emphasises sovereignty and security as being at the heart of Chinese foreign policy as it is the case always.
- ✓ For the first time in the reform era, the policy prioritised security over development and opening up.
- ✓ Legal response to Western sanctions - China has repeatedly criticised US' bans and restrictions, refuted allegations of corporate espionage and currency manipulation.
- ✓ The law will reinforce the Law on Countering Sanctions.
- ✓ This will essentially make it illegal for Western companies operating within China to comply with sanctions aimed at the country.
- ✓ Legal toolbox - China tries to make full use of the Foreign Relations Law as response to acts of containment, interference, sanctions against China.
- ✓ Providing loans - The law appears to be a response to criticisms of China's foreign lending and the debt crises in several of its partners.
- ✓ According to Article 19 of the new law, China would
- ✓ Respect the sovereignty of recipient countries.
- ✓ Not interfere in their internal affairs or attach any political conditions to its aid.

What does the new law mean for India?

- ✓ Neighbours - The law says China will grow relations with its neighbouring countries in accordance with the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness.
- ✓ Border dispute - The emphasis of security, sovereignty and territorial integrity as key tenets of Chinese foreign policy coincide with the border dispute between India and China.
- ✓ The case of Border law (2021) - It formalises China's moves along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) upending both bilateral relations and decades-old mechanisms to manage the boundary dispute.
- ✓ Similarity - Both the law coincides with territorial disputes being framed as matters of national sovereignty by Beijing rather than issues to be negotiated by 2 sides, narrows the scope for resolution.
- ✓ India-U.S. ties - The US's increasing proximity to India is seen as threat by China.
- ✓ Agreements - It declares that implementation and application of treaties and agreements shall not undermine the sovereignty of the State, national security and public interests.
- ✓ This may have a potential bearing on the signing of agreements to resolve disputes between the countries.
- Article 8 - Any organisation or individual who commits acts that are detrimental to China's national interests in the course of engaging in international exchanges shall be held accountable by law.
- Indian companies - Article 8 impacts particularly Indian and foreign companies operating within China.
- Ambiguity - What is deemed as "detrimental to China's national interests" is not clear which gives wider scope to authorities implementing them.

ENVIRONMENT

Global Stocktake

In Context: The Bonn Climate Change Conference closed after two weeks of intense work that made progress on several critical issues including the global stocktake, climate finance, loss and damage among many others. It will help lay the groundwork for the political decisions required at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) at the end of the year.

About the Global Stocktake:

- ✓ Global Stocktake is essentially a periodic review of global climate action which aims to assess whether current efforts will enable us to reach the objectives set out in the Paris Agreement. This includes
 - Progress on greenhouse gas reduction,
 - Building resilience to climate impacts, and

- Securing finance to address the climate crisis.
- ✓ The Global Stocktake is mandated under Article 14 (1) of the Paris Agreement to assess collective progress towards long-term global goals.
- ✓ This is the first Global Stocktake year since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015 and the report has been underway for the past two years.

Key aspects of the Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement:

- ✓ **Assessment of Progress:** The primary purpose of the Global Stocktake is to assess collective progress made by countries in achieving the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement. This includes evaluating the implementation of countries' nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and assessing the overall effectiveness of global climate actions.
- ✓ **Review of Mitigation Efforts:** The Stocktake examines the mitigation efforts undertaken by countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It evaluates the adequacy and ambition of these efforts limiting global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- ✓ **Assessment of Adaptation Measures:** The Stocktake also considers the progress and effectiveness of adaptation measures implemented by countries to address the impacts of climate change. It assesses the extent to which countries are building resilience and adapting to the changing climate conditions.
- ✓ **Evaluation of Climate Finance:** It examines the mobilization and allocation of financial resources to support climate actions, particularly from developed to developing countries. The Stocktake reviews progress towards the commitment of developed countries to jointly mobilize \$100 billion annually by 2020 to support climate mitigation and adaptation efforts in developing nations.
- ✓ **Technology Transfer and Capacity Building:** The Stocktake reviews the efforts made in technology transfer and capacity-building activities to support developing countries in their climate actions. It assesses the provision of technology, knowledge, and technical assistance to enhance the capabilities of developing nations in implementing climate solutions.
- ✓ **Transparency and Reporting:** Transparency and accountability are integral components of the Stocktake process. The Stocktake ensures that countries provide accurate and reliable information to facilitate an objective assessment of global progress.
- ✓ **Informing Future Climate Action:** It provides guidance for countries to set more ambitious targets in their subsequent rounds of NDCs. The Stocktake also identifies areas where additional efforts and support are required to bridge the emissions gap and accelerate progress towards the Paris Agreement goals.

Challenges in GST Discussions:

- ✓ Countries can decide their contribution to climate action, but collective efforts are insufficient, necessitating some imposition.
- ✓ Faultline's arise between developed and developing countries regarding apportioning responsibility.
- ✓ Developed countries demand more from major emitters like China and India while developing countries highlight unfulfilled commitments.
- ✓ **The United States Position:** The US states that bridging the gap is not solely the developed countries' responsibility. It opposes including suggestions of 'closing of pre-2020 gaps' in GST decisions.
- ✓ **India's Response:** India rejects 'prescriptive messages' from GST on what the content of a country's climate action plan, (known as Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs) should be. India insists on determining its climate targets in pursuit of national goals and demands the closing of pre-2020 gaps.
- ✓ **China's Perspective:** China expresses disappointment over the insufficient capture of demands from 134 developing countries regarding pre-2020 gaps in GST discussions so far. It emphasizes the importance of addressing pre-2020 gaps and highlights carbon dioxide emissions generated before 1990.

Suggestive measures:

- Developed countries must honor their commitment to mobilize \$100 billion annually for climate finance as agreed upon at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference.
- There is a need for improved accounting mechanisms and transparency in climate finance. Focus should be on prioritizing adaptation finance for vulnerable countries.
- Mobilizing public and private finance is crucial, along with facilitating technology transfer.
- Strengthening international cooperation and prioritizing climate finance in global agendas are necessary for effective mobilization.

Thus, to ensure climate finance is in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement, it is crucial to involve and hold the World Bank accountable for its investments in fossil fuels. The pursuit of the Global Stocktake, a review mechanism under the Paris Agreement, should prioritize principles of equity, justice, and fairness.

PRELIM FACTS

1. Lansdowne to be renamed Jaswantgarh

In context: The Lansdowne Cantonment Board has decided to rename the quaint hill station in Uttarakhand as Jaswantgarh after the 1962 war hero Rifleman Jaswant Singh.

Lansdowne

- ✓ Lansdowne Cantonment is located in Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand.
- ✓ It is a Category III cantonment with a total area of 1503.8 acres. As per the 2011 census it had a population of 5,667 civilians and military personnel.

History of Lansdowne Cantonment:

- ✓ In 1886 Field Marshal Sir FS Roberts, Commander-in-Chief India recommended for a separate Regiment of the Garhwalis.
- ✓ The spot for the regiment as well as the regimental center for the training of recruits of the Garhwal Rifles, was a forest area popularly known as Kalundanda, situated about 6,000 feet above sea level.
- ✓ The new site was approved for the location of the Cantonment and the Regimental Centre by Brig Gen JI Murray, GOC, Rohilkhand and the first Battalion of the Garhwal Rifles, under Lt Col EP Mainwaring moved into Kalundanda on November 4, 1887.
- ✓ On 21 September 1890, Kalundanda was renamed as Lansdowne after the then Viceroy of India, Lord Henry Lansdowne.

Jaswant Singh:

- ✓ Jaswant Singh was serving in the 4th Battalion of the Garhwal Rifles. He played an important role in the Battle of Nuranang in 1962 against the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China in the North-East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh).
- ✓ He was awarded the second highest gallantry award, Maha Vir Chakra posthumously.

2. Gutti Koya tribe

In context: Gutti Koya tribes people erect stone memorials in the event of death of their three most important service providers namely physician, priest and village leader.

About Gutti Koya tribe:

- ✓ The Koya population is concentrated in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.
- ✓ They speak the Koya, which is a Dravidian language.
- ✓ The most important fair celebrated by Koyas is the Sammakka Saralamma Jatra once in two years on full moon day of the Magha Masam (January or February) at Medaram village in Mulug taluk of Warangal district.
- ✓ They practice Podu form of shifting cultivation, as practiced by various tribal groups in forest areas has for long been an economical survival versus environmental sustenance issue.
- ✓ They held ST status in Chattisgarh but they were not granted ST status in their migrated states such as Telangana.
- ✓ They earn a living through animal husbandry and minor forest produce.

3. Carbon molecules in space

In context: The CH₃⁺ molecule (methyl cation), has been detected in space for the first time by the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST).

Major Points

- ✓ JWST detected the carbon compound methyl cation (CH₃⁺) in a protoplanetary disk system called d203-506, which lies around 1,350 light-years from Earth in the Orion Nebula.
- ✓ The star at the center of the system is a red dwarf just 10% as massive as our sun, and the entire system is being bombarded by strong ultraviolet radiation from nearby hot, young, massive stars.

CH₃⁺ molecule

- ✓ CH₃⁺ is a simple organic molecule, just one carbon atom and 3 hydrogen atoms. But it reacts with other molecules to form more complex ones.
- ✓ Organic molecules are carbon based. They contain carbon atoms bonded to hydrogen atoms but can also bond to other elements, such as oxygen, nitrogen or phosphorus. Everything that makes us and all life on Earth is carbon based.

Why does detecting carbon molecules in space matter?

- ✓ Carbon compounds form the foundations of all known life, and as such are particularly interesting to scientists working to understand both how life developed on Earth, and how it could potentially develop elsewhere in our universe.
- ✓ The discovery of methyl cation in a region where planets that could eventually host life may help scientists better understand how and where in the universe life could get started.
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4. Kanwar Yatra

In news: Millions of devotees called Kanwariyas or kriyas started their journey for the Kanwar Yatra 2023 which commenced recently.

About Kanwar Yatra:

- ✓ It is an annual Hindu pilgrimage observed every year by Lord Shiva devotees.
- ✓ It usually starts in the month of July or August, commonly known as the month of Sawan, according to the Hindu calendar.

What happens at Kanwar Yatra?

- ✓ The yatra derives its name from the word 'kanwar', meaning a bamboo pole to which containers of holy water are tied at opposite ends.
- ✓ Millions of devotees called Kanwariyas or kriyas travel to pilgrimage places like Haridwar, Gaumukh, Gangotri in Uttarakhand, Sultanganj in Bihar, Prayagraj, Ayodhya and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, and return by carrying Ganga water in kanwars to seek the blessings of Shiva.
- ✓ The water is then offered to Shiva temples, including the 13 Jyotirlingas across India. The ritual is known as Jal Abhishek.
- ✓ During the whole journey, Kanwars have to make sure that the earthen pots do not touch the ground.
- ✓ While carrying the water, devotees walk barefoot, and some complete the pilgrimage by lying flat on the ground.
- ✓ They are clad in saffron clothing while undertaking the journey. Many observe fasts during the pilgrimage and restrict consumption of food, water and salt.

ANSWER WRITING

Q Identifying the major threats to biodiversity, discuss the significance of Kunming Declaration on biodiversity

Biodiversity is essential for the processes that support all life on Earth, including humans. Without a wide range of animals, plants and microorganisms, we cannot have the healthy ecosystems that we rely on to provide us with the air we breathe and the food we eat.

Threats to biodiversity

- ✓ **Invasive species:** Invasive species are the non-native species that invade normal and healthy ecosystems and threaten the survival of the native species either by attacking them or competing for the habitat's resources. Accordingly, they upset the native biota and ecosystems thereby causing extinctions and massive threats to biodiversity.
- ✓ **Overexploitation:** Overexploitation occurs when a resource is consumed at an unsustainable rate. This occurs on land in the form of overhunting, excessive logging, poor soil conservation in agriculture and the illegal wildlife trade.
- ✓ **Hybridization, genetic pollution/erosion and food security:** In agriculture and animal husbandry, the Green Revolution popularized the use of conventional hybridization to increase yield. Often hybridized breeds originated in developed countries and were further hybridized with local varieties in the developing world to create high yield strains resistant to local climate and diseases.
- ✓ **Human overpopulation:** It is self-evident that the massive growth in the human population through the 20th century has had more impact on biodiversity than any other single factor.
- ✓ **Pollution:** Atmospheric and hydrologic pollution have far-reaching negative effects on biodiversity. Pollution from burning fossil fuels such as oil, coal and gas can remain in the air as particle pollutants or fall to the ground as acid rain.
- ✓ **Poaching:** The main reasons for poaching are hunting for food, trade (market demand for skins and bodies of the animals) and lack of enforcement control.
- ✓ **Kunming declaration on biodiversity conservation:**
- ✓ The Kunming Declaration was adopted by over 100 countries part of the ongoing virtual 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. By adopting this, the nations have committed themselves to support the development, adoption and implementation of an effective post-2020 implementation plan, capacity building action plan for the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety. The declaration outlines general targets for the restoration and protection of biodiversity and lists 17 commitments for member countries, urging both international collaborations on several issues and increased efforts at a domestic level. One of the measures suggested by the declaration is increased funding for conservation in poorer countries, as well as vowing to create more sustainable and environmentally friendly supply chains. Also it calls for urgent and integrated action to reflect biodiversity considerations in all sectors of the global economy. It calls upon the parties to "mainstream" biodiversity protection in decision-making and recognize the importance of conservation in protecting human health.

Conclusion: Protection of biodiversity is urgent necessity to save the life on earth. The Kunming Declaration has provided a major boost to the slow moving UN biodiversity negotiations. Our governments need to make the Kunming process count. More such efforts are needed from time to time for preserving biodiversity.

MCQs

- Recently Gucci mushroom in news, Consider the following statements
Statement-I: Gucci mushrooms are rich in antioxidant and antimicrobial properties.
Statement-II: Gucci mushrooms are found in Jammu and Kashmir.
 Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?
 a) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I
 b) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I
 c) Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect
d) Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct
- Considered the following statement regarding Kanwar Yatra.
 1. It is an annual Hindu pilgrimage observed every year by Lord Shiva devotees.
 2. It usually starts in the month of Sawan, according to the Hindu calendar.
 Which of the above statement is/are correct?
 a) Only 1 b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2 d) None
- Gutti Koya tribe recently in news, considered the following statement:
 1. The Koya population is concentrated in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.
 2. They speak the Koya, which is a Dravidian language.
 3. Koya language is in 8th schedule of the Indian constitution.
 How many above statement is/are correct?
 a) Only 1 **b) Only 2**
 c) Only 3 d) None
- Consider the following statements with respect to Zo People.
 1. The Chins of Myanmar, the Mizos of Mizoram and the Kukis of Bangladesh are collectively called the Zo people.
 2. The Zomi tribes are an indigenous community living along the frontier of India and Burma are a sub-group of the Zo people.
 How many of the statements given above are incorrect?
 a) Only 1 b) Only 2
 c) Both 1 and 2 **d) None**
- Consider the following statements regarding Sagar Nidhi:
 1. It is an indigenously built multidisciplinary vessel operated by the National Institute of Ocean Technology.
 2. The vessel is capable of carrying out geo-scientific, meteorological and oceanographic research.
 3. It is India's third research vessel after Sagar Purvi and Sagar Paschimi.
 How many pair of the above statement is/are correct?
 a) Only 1 **b) Only 2**
 c) ONLY 3 d) None
- The National Chambal Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh will soon have a dolphin sanctuary area as well. Considered the following statement:
 1. It lies at the tri-junction of three states Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.
 2. The main focus of the sanctuary is to protect the critically endangered Gharial, Red-crowned roof turtle & endangered Ganges dolphin.
 Which of the above statement is/are correct?
 a) Only 1 b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2 d) None
- Orkney Islands is recently in news, it is located at:
 a) USA **b) UK**
 c) South America d) Indonesia
- Considered the following statement, About CH₃⁺ molecule:
 1. It is also known as methyl cation.
 2. CH₃⁺ is a very simple organic molecule
 3. It reacts with other molecules to form more complex ones.
 How many pair of the above statement is/are correct?
 a) Only 1 b) Only 2
c) Only 3 d) None
- "The Global Stocktake" is related to:
a) Paris Agreement
 b) Minmata agreement
 c) Kyoto protocol
 d) None
- Consider the following statements regarding the South Asia Regional Anti-Doping Organization:
 1. It aims to promote and co-ordinate the fight against doping in sport in all its forms.
 2. India is a founding member of this organization.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
a) Only 1 b) Only 2
 c) both 1 and 2 d) None