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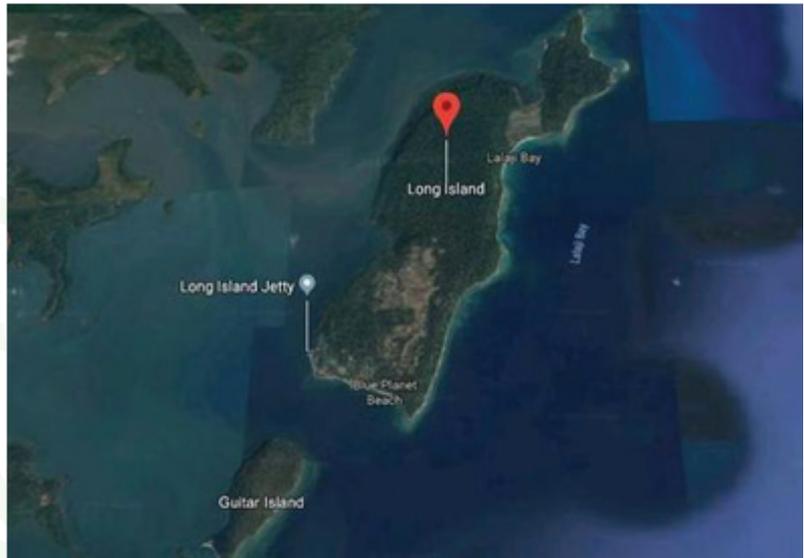
1. Panel defers resort project at Andamans

It doesn't account for the biodiversity of the islands' coast'

An expert committee of the Union Environment Ministry has “deferred” clearance to a 100 crore proposal by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIIDCL) to develop an island resort, as well as put up “premium tents” and “tree houses”, on the grounds that it doesn't account for the biodiversity of the islands' coast.

The ANIIDCL presented plans for the development of a premium Island Resort at **Lalaji Bay, Long Island, A&N islands** to an expert committee of the Environment Ministry tasked with evaluating infrastructure proposals along India's coasts.

The committee observed that as the area where the premium resort is proposed seems to be in an ecologically very fragile and biodiversity rich, a sub-committee shall undertake a site visit to assess the likely impact of tourism activities on the eco-system the proposal in its present form is premature for its consideration for appraisal and therefore deferred.” The committee also expressed “concern” over the management of solid waste collection, treatment and disposal



There were similar concerns with the proposal to set up luxury tents. “About 5.4 metric tons (MT) /month of solid waste would be generated during operation phase, out of which 3.2 MT would be biodegradable and 2.2 MT non-bio-degradable.

The arrival of domestic tourists in A&N islands rose from over 2.02 lakh in 2011 to over 3.84 lakh in 2016, the inflow of foreign tourists was stagnant at around 15,000, according to the NITI Aayog in a presentation in August 2018.

When the latest CRZ rules were announced in December, environmentalists had raised concerns that the A&N already vulnerable to soil erosion and threat of climate change—would be further susceptible to environmental challenges from infrastructure development along the coasts.

Prelims Perspect:

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands

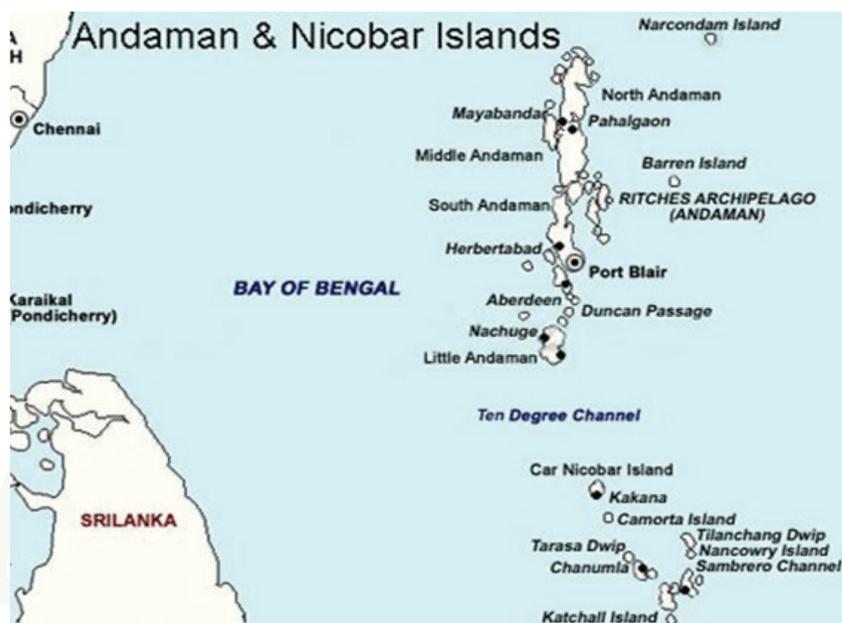
Andaman and Nicobar Islands situated in the Bay of Bengal, run like a narrow chain in the north-south direction extending between **6 39 N and 14 34 N**.

Note



The main islands under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands group are:

- North Andaman
- Middle Andaman
- South Andaman
- Little Andaman
- Car Nicobar
- Little Nicobar
- Great Nicobar



1. These islands are separated from one another by very narrow straits.
2. Andamans are separated from Nicobar by **10-degree channel** (10-degree latitude).
3. South Andaman and Little Andaman are separated by **Duncan Passage**.
4. The **Grand Channel** is between Great Nicobar Islands and Sumatra islands of Indonesia.
5. The Coco Strait is between North Andaman Islands and Coco Islands of Myanmar.
6. Andaman and Nicobar Islands group is a **Union Territory** administered by the President through a Lt. Governor.
7. **Port Blair** located in South Andaman is the administrative capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
8. The southernmost point of India is The **Indira Point**, (formerly known as Pygmalion Point and Parsons Point) which is the southern point of Great Nicobar Islands.
9. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are part of the **submarine tertiary fold mountains** which are protruding out of the sea. These mountains form a link with ArakanYoma and Sumatra.
10. The highest peak of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is **Saddle Peak**, located in the North Andaman.
11. The Andaman and Nicobar Island has a **tropical marine climate** influenced by the seasonal flow of monsoon winds.
12. The region is under dense **tropical rain forests**. The coastal regions have **mangrove forest**.
13. **Coconut** fruit is the staple food of the people. Fisheries, piggery are also followed.
14. The Islands are also famous for the largest and rarest species of crab, the **Giant Robber Crab**. It can climb the coconut trees and break the hard shell of the fruit.
15. Many islands are uninhabited. The inhabited islands are also **sparsely populated**.
16. The entire region is vulnerable to earthquakes as it is in the major earthquake zone.

Note



17. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are also known as the **Emerald Islands**.
18. the **Barren Island**, located in the east of Middle Andaman is India's only active volcano.
19. The **Narcondam Island** located in the north-east of North Andaman is also a volcanic island.

2. Efforts on to secure GI tag for 'royal rice'

Rajamudi is a traditional red rice variety of Old Mysore region

Rajamudi, a traditional red rice variety of Old Mysore region, which was patronised by the "royals" (and hence the nomenclature), will join the league of Basmati and get a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in recognition of its unique qualities.

The Department of Agriculture and Agricultural Price Commission have joined hands with Sahaja Samruddha, an NGO working on conservation of traditional and indigenous varieties of agricultural crops, to set the ball rolling.

This is the first case of an agricultural crop from the State being promoted for GI status though fruits such as **Kodagu orange** or **Nanjangudrasabale** have been accorded GI tags given their distinctive nature.

The best quality of Rajamudi is cultivated in **Mysuru-Hassan-Mandya** belt and we intend to prepare a database of the number of cultivators engaged in production of Rajamudi, the acreage under cultivation and then proceed further.

What is significant is that cultivators of other varieties of rice in Karnataka such as Ratnachoodi, Gandhasale, and Salem Sanna, which are equally exotic, will also take part as there are long term plans to secure GI status for some of the lesser-known but unique rice of the State.

Describing the history associated with Rajamudi it was cultivated in large swathes of land under the princely Mysuru ruled by the Wadiyars, who preferred it to other forms of rice.

It was also a preferred choice of the maharajas to procure it from farmers in lieu of tax.



Prelims Prespect:

Geographical Indications in India

1. A Geographical Indication is used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
2. Such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to its origin in that defined geographical locality.
3. Recently the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry has launched the logo and tagline for the Geographical Indications (GI) of India.

Note



4. The first product to get a GI tag in India was the Darjeeling tea in 2004. There are a total of 325 products from India that carry this indication.
5. Darjeeling Tea, Mahabaleshwar Strawberry, Blue Pottery of Jaipur, Banarasi Sarees and Tirupati Laddus are some of the GIs.
6. The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (GI Act) is a sui generis Act for protection of GI in India.
7. India, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), enacted the Act to comply with the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
8. Geographical Indications protection is granted through the TRIPS Agreement.
9. also refer Paris Convention, the Madrid Agreement, the Lisbon Agreement, the Geneva Act.



3. Centre bans Kashmir outfit

Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen banned for ‘terrorist attacks, besides subversive acts’

The Union Home Ministry has banned the Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen (TuM) under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for promoting terrorism and radicalising and recruiting youth for terrorist activities in India.

Set up in the 1990s, TuM claims to be fighting for the “liberation of Kashmir.

The TuM carried out a number of terrorist attacks besides subversive acts, namely grenade attacks, weapons snatching incidents, supporting other terrorist outfits such as Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), etc. in terms of financial and logistic support in the recent past,” the Ministry said.

Spreading terror

The govt. has banned the Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen for radicalising and recruiting youth for terrorist activities

- Mostly well-educated urban youth belonging to the outfit had carried out grenade attacks on checkpoints and snatched weapons from security forces in the past
- Last year, eight members of the group were killed
- TuM played a major role in the commission of terrorist acts and a number of its cadres have been arrested



Last year, eight TuM men were killed in various operations by security forces. Mostly, well-educated and belonging to urban settlements, the “gang” members had carried out grenade attacks on checkpoints and snatched weapons from security forces in the past. The TuM is headed by Jamil-ur-Rehman of Lajora in Pulwama. The Ministry said the Jammu and Kashmir Police had in the recent past registered a number of cases, in which it found

that the TuM had played a major role in the commission of terrorist acts and a number of its cadres had been arrested. “TuM is running terrorist training centres for Kashmiri youth and is likely to recruit more youth from Jammu and Kashmir; The members of TuM are getting financial and logistic support from their handlers based abroad. The Central

Note



government believes that TuM is involved in terrorism as it has committed and participated in various acts of terrorism in India.

TuM response

The ban would be used as an “election plank” by the ruling government. The resolution of Kashmir issue was in India’s interest. It should resolve this issue in the light of UN resolutions. This way this country can get over poverty and hunger.

Prelims Perspect:

- Steps taken by Govt. for the Economic and social development of the people.
- Special schemes for the handicrafts, tourism and employment like ‘Nai Manzil’, ‘USTTAD’
- Develop mutual trust and concern – Banning of pallet guns is welcome beginning + Indian government should also consider humanizing AFSPA
- TVSN Prasad Committee Report Recommendations on use of Pallet Guns.

4. India doesn’t gain from talks with Taliban now

India gains little by engaging the Taliban directly at this stage, a two-day ‘intra-Afghan’ dialogue of Afghan leaders and the Taliban, which did not include the Ghani government, ended in Moscow.

After the initial talks with the Taliban, there must be a ceasefire and an intra-Afghan dialogue. But this is a fact, that neither the U.S. nor Russia have the Ghani government at the table at present.

Engaging the Taliban directly adds no value at this stage. First there is a of lack access and equity with the Taliban. Secondly, the Taliban’s policies are too heavily governed by Pakistan and until those ties are loosened, it will be pointless for India to make a move. It will also be pointless to go ahead of the government in Kabul or public opinion in Afghanistan, because our biggest asset is the goodwill India has in the Afghan mind. Even the Taliban recognises that, and said in its statement this week that they will support Chabahar and other Indian projects.

Engaging Afghanistan through SAARC and evolve a policy for post-U.S. pullout is urgently required for a better development in Afghanistan.

Talibans in Afghanistan

The general political leadership in Afghanistan now accepts that the Taliban are Afghans at the end of the day, and we should accept that. The issue is, what sort of a government they run, and how they enter it. India would want that the democratic process, which has evolved over these past 10 years, is not jettisoned. That is the only fair way in assessing what the people of Afghanistan want. The Taliban can always take power through a coup or Kalashnikovs, but that doesn’t lead to stability.

Once the Taliban agrees to speak to other groups in Afghanistan, India should be willing to host a Jirga (Grand council meet). India is a safe country and a neutral country. India don’t pose a threat to either the Taliban or the others, and don’t choose winners or losers. Plus India have a huge Afghan population living in India, especially the younger generation that want their voice heard. So encouraging the population here to meet and voice opinions could provide a good platform.

Note



All such Jirgas will begin with grievances, but that is the only way reconciliation can happen. Eventually, the real reconciliation will have to happen outside foreign offices.

Now it is time for Pakistan to recognise they must let go, and treat Afghanistan as a sovereign country.

It may be seen as a great strategic victory for Pakistan for a few years, but the faultline between Taliban and Pakistan will emerge eventually.

If it is just the Taliban versus the ANSDF (Afghanistan National Security and Defence Forces), then I don't think they can beat the Afghan National forces. But the ANSDF can't be expected to take on a military operation with a nuclear-weapons state (Pakistan) or its proxies embedded in Afghanistan.

India's stand over Taliban's take over:

It will be very hard for India to accept a Taliban regime of the 1990s. Afghanistan has made too much progress on education, women's rights, democracy, on building an inclusive Afghanistan. And I think there are signs that the Taliban does not want a monopoly over power, and we must watch what they do if they come to the mainstream.

Prelims Prespect:



Note

5. Hiking MSPs distorts agri market

A key plank of the government's agriculture policy, that raising minimum support prices (MSP) for major crops may causes distortions in the agriculture market. This leads to a vicious cycle of oversupply of such crops and a crash in market prices, said the official, adding that cash transfers are a better strategy than increased MSPs.

The Centre's 2018 decision to hike MSPs for all major crops to 50% more than the cost of production is a major element of the National Democratic Alliance government's strategy for the agriculture sector; it has also featured prominently in the BJP's political messaging to the farming community at a time of agricultural distress.



In the run-up to the last Lok Sabha elections in 2014, the ruling party had promised to hike MSPs to 1.5 times the cost of production in accordance with the M.S. Swaminathan Commission's recommendations. It claimed to have fulfilled that promise in 2018, although there have been disputes regarding the formula used to calculate production costs.

Increasing MSPs affects cropping patterns as it becomes the basis for farmers to make choices on which crops to sow. In a sector marked by high levels of uncertainty, higher MSPs backed by guaranteed procurement offer the farmer a chance to significantly reduce risk.

Farmers over-invest in such crops, leading to a vicious cycle of over-supply, crashing prices, and increased government intervention and procurement, with burgeoning stocks then leading to a further fall in prices.

Prelims Perspect:

Crops Covered under MSP

KHARIF CROPS	NIGERSEED	OTHER CROPS
Paddy		Copra
Jowar	RABI CROPS	De-Husked Coconut
Bajra	Wheat	Jute
Maize	Barley	Sugarcane
Ragi	Gram	
Arhar(Tur)	Masur (Lentil)	
Moong	Rapeseed/Mustard	
Urad	Safflower	
Cotton	Toria	
Groundnut		
Sunflower Seed		
Soyabean Black		
Sesamum		

Calculation of MSP

- The government decides the support prices for various agricultural commodities after taking into account the following:
 - Recommendations of Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices
 - Views of State Governments
 - Views of Ministries
 - Other relevant factors.

Note: Refer

- Trade Distortion issues with WTO
- Market Assurance Scheme
- Priority based procurement

Note



6. Crows can identify ‘tool-making stem

Crows identify the best plants for fashioning hunting hooks from among myriad shrubs in the forest undergrowth.

The birds use leaves and plant stems to create an array of utensils they then wield to forage for bugs in the ground or prise prey out of deadwood.

Knowing what they want

If you imagine these birds live in dry forest, so there’s a lot of paperbark trees, different shrubs and bushes. The question is how do they recognise the right material? There are so many options in the forest and they clearly have a specific idea of what they want.

Previous studies showed that the crafty crows prefer a particular species of flowering plant, which has a robust but malleable stem that they fashion into hooks.

They knew the difference and frequently opted to approach their preferred material.

In a subsequent test, the leaves were removed from both plants and replaced with those of a third plant. But the crows weren’t fooled, once again plumping for their favourite shrub.

Focus on stems

The general idea we had is that they would look for the leaves because they are more conspicuous and maybe then they would look at the stems as a second step.

They did recognise the leaves, but this really showed us that the stem is the main thing they focus on. They are very picky.

The crows of New Caledonia a French territory around 1,500 km east of Australia — have impressed ornithologists for decades with their ingenious use of tools.

While debate persists over whether their skill-set is inherited or “learned” through social interaction. They are really well adapted to their environment and they have clearly evolved traits of tool use and picking these specific plants that tells us much about how they interact with their environment.

7. Kidneys grown in rats could pave way for human transplant

Scientists have successfully used mice stem cells to grow kidneys in rat embryos, using a technique that could one day help grow human kidneys for transplant.

But the researchers cautioned that their success was only a first step and that “serious technical barriers and complex ethical issues” remain before the process could be used for human organs.

The technique has previously been used to grow mice-derived pancreases in rats, but the new study is the first evidence that it could one day provide a solution to the massive shortage of donor kidneys for people with renal disease. The research, published in the Nature Communications journal, began with the development of a suitable “host” in which the kidneys could be grown.

Note



Genetically modified

The researchers collected rat embryo structures that had been genetically modified so they would not develop kidneys on their own.

The embryos were then injected with pluripotent stem cells from mice and implanted into rat wombs so they could be carried to term. Pluripotent stem cells are a kind of “master” cell that can develop into any of the cells and tissue that make up the body.

The researchers found that the mice stem cells produced apparently functional kidneys in the rats.

But the same did not hold when rat stem cells were injected into similarly modified mice embryos.

The process of growing human organs in animals poses an ethical conundrum because human stem cells could develop into brain or reproductive organ cells in the host. In the short-term, additional research is likely to focus on ways to genetically modify host rats without lethal side effects.



Note

