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Current Affairs

[1st January 2021]

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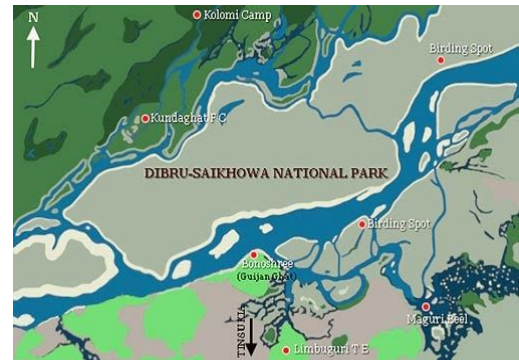
Topic-1: Dibru-Saikhowa National Park

Context-

- Rehabilitation of some 10,000 people of Laika and Dodhia villages has been hanging fire since 1999, when the Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary was upgraded to a national park.
- In this context Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has asked the State's Forest and Revenue departments to permanently rehabilitate the indigenous forest dwellers of the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park within January 31.

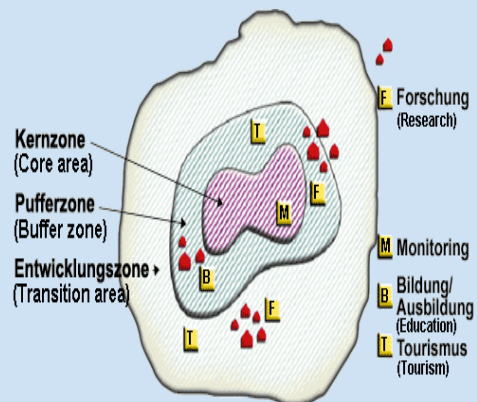
Dibru- Saikhowa National Park-

- Dibru-Saikhowa National Park is a national park in Assam, India, located in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts.
- It was designated a Biosphere Reserve in July 1997 .
- The park is bounded by the Brahmaputra and Lohit Rivers in the north and Dibru river in the south.
- It mainly consists of moist mixed semi-evergreen forests, moist mixed deciduous forests, canebrakes and grasslands.
- It is the largest salix swamp forest in north-eastern India, with a tropical monsoon climate with a hot and wet summer and cool and usually dry winter.



What are Biosphere Reserves?

- Biosphere reserves are 'learning places for sustainable development'.
- They are sites for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict



prevention and management of biodiversity.

- They are places that provide local solutions to global challenges.
- Biosphere reserves include terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Each site promotes solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use. Biosphere reserves are nominated by national governments and remain under the sovereign jurisdiction of the states where they are located.
- Biosphere Reserves are designated under the intergovernmental MAB Programme by the Director-General of UNESCO following the decisions of the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB ICC)

Topic-2: Nagaland: Disturbed Area

Context:

- The entire Nagaland was declared a “disturbed area” for six more months by the central government.
- This enabled the continuation of the controversial AFSPA which empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior warrant.



- **The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)** has been in force in Nagaland for several decades.

About AFSPA:

- Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958 is an act of the Parliament of India that grants special powers to the Indian Armed Forces the power to maintain public order in "disturbed areas".

- One such Act passed on 11 September 1958 was applicable to the Naga Hills, then part of Assam.
- In the following decades it spread, one by one, to the other Seven Sister States in India's northeast.
- Another one passed in 1983 and applicable to Punjab and Chandigarh was withdrawn in 1997.

What is Disturbed Area:

- A disturbed area is the one which is declared by notification under Section 3 of the AFSPA.
- It can be invoked in places where the use of armed forces in aid of civil power is necessary.
- The Central Government or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area.
- According to The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976 once declared 'disturbed', the area has to maintain status quo for a minimum of 3 months.

According to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), in an area that is proclaimed as "disturbed", an officer of the armed forces has powers to:

- After giving such due warning, Fire upon or use other kinds of force even if it causes death, against the person who is acting against law or order in the disturbed area for the maintenance of public order.
- Destroy any arms dump, hide-outs, prepared or fortified position or shelter or training camp from which armed attacks are made by the armed volunteers or armed gangs or absconders wanted for any offence.
- To arrest without a warrant anyone who has committed cognizable offences or is reasonably suspected of having done so and may use force if needed for the arrest.

- To enter and search any premise in order to make such arrests, or to recover any person wrongfully restrained or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances and seize it.
- Stop and search any vehicle or vessel reasonably suspected to be carrying such person or weapons.
- Any person arrested and taken into custody under this Act shall be made present over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station with least possible delay, together with a report of the circumstances occasioning the arrest.
- Army officers have legal immunity for their actions.
- There can be no prosecution, suit or any other legal proceeding against anyone acting under that law.
- Nor is the government's judgment on why an area is found to be disturbed subject to judicial review.
- Protection of persons acting in good faith under this Act from prosecution, suit or other legal proceedings, except with the sanction of the Central Government, in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act.

States under AFSPA-

- Presently, AFSPA, 1958 is operational in entire States of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur (except Imphal Municipal area), three districts namely Tirap, Changlang and Longding of Arunachal Pradesh and the areas falling within the jurisdiction of the eight police stations in the districts of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering the State of Assam.

Criticism of AFSPA-

- The UN's Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial summary or arbitrary executions had described AFSPA as 'hated' and 'draconian'. According to the UN It clearly violates International Law. A number of UN treaty bodies have pronounced it to be in violation of International Law as well.

- The Act has been criticized by Human Rights Watch as a "tool of state abuse, oppression and discrimination". Many human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch (HRW) have condemned it.
- A report by the Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis points to multiple occurrences of violence by security forces against civilians in Manipur since the passage of the Act.
- Justice Jeevan Reddy commission had recommended to repeal AFSPA as "the Act is a symbol of hate, oppression and instrument of high handedness."
- The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in its fifth report on "Public Order," recommended the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958.

Irom Chanu Sharmila

- She is also known as the "Iron Lady of Manipur" is a civil rights activist, political activist, and poet from the Indian state of Manipur, which is located on the north-eastern side of India.
- On 5 November 2000, she began a hunger strike in favour of abolishing the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958



Topic-3: **Mandatory implementation of FASTag**

Context:

- **Ministry of Road Transport & Highways** has mandated fitment of FASTag with effect from 1st January, 2021, in M and N categories of motor vehicles sold before 1st December, 2017.

What categories of vehicles are covered?

- **Category 'M'** stands for a motor vehicle with at least four wheels used for carrying passengers.

- **Category 'N'** stands for a motor vehicle with at least four wheels used for carrying goods, which may also carry persons in addition to goods. It is clarified that this Central Motor Vehicle Rule stands in force as it is.

What is FastTag?

- NHAH has rolled out a program for **Electronic Toll Collection on Toll Plazas on National Highways** to be called FASTag.
- FASTag is a device that employs **Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology** for making toll payments directly from the prepaid account linked to it. It is affixed on the windscreen of your vehicle and enables you to drive through toll plazas.
- FASTag has a **validity of 5 years** and after purchasing it, you only need to recharge/ top up the FASTag as per your requirement.
- FASTag offers near non-stop movement of vehicles through toll plazas and the convenience of cashless payment of toll fee with **nationwide interoperable Electronic Toll Collection Services**.

Benefits of FASTag

1. Saves Fuel and Time

- FASTag is read by the tag reader at the plaza and the toll amount is deducted automatically, when the vehicle approaches the toll plaza. The vehicle with FASTag doesn't need to stop at the toll plaza for the cash transaction.

2. SMS alerts for transactions

- Customer will receive SMS alerts on his registered mobile numbers for all the transactions done in his tag account

3. Online recharge

- Customer may recharge his tag account online through, Credit Card/

Debit Card/ NEFT/ RTGS or Net Banking

4. No need to carry cash

- Customer doesn't need to worry about carrying cash for the toll payments

5. Web portal for customers

- Customers can access their statements by logging on the FASTag customer portal.

Topic-4: **Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction**

Context:

- Recently, **the Turkish parliament has passed a bill** that would increase the monitoring of civil society groups.

About the Act:

- The act is called **“Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction”** in order to comply with **UN Security Council’s recommendations** to keep terror financing and money laundering in check.

Criticism:

- Certain provisions of the bill are arbitrary and it violates the provisions under the Turkish constitution since it interferes with the right to freedom of association.

What does the Bill say?

- The Bill has come following the **2019 report on Turkey prepared by the intergovernmental body Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** meant to fight money laundering and terror financing.

- **The bill consists of 43 articles** and has **made changes to seven laws on Turkey's Law of Associations** and is meant to keep Turkey from being blacklisted by the Paris-based watchdog of terror financing.

What are the implications of the Bill being passed?

- **The Bill gives the Turkish government the power to appoint trustees to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to suspend their activities, seize their assets and monitor their sources of funding.**
- As per various media reports, critics and human rights activists are seeing this move as a way to crack down on dissidents in a country where civil society is already not very free.

What steps has the government taken?

- After a failed coup in 2016 that was aimed at protecting democracy in the country, thousands of journalists, bureaucrats, academics and judges have been targeted by the government.
- Earlier this year, Turkish prosecutors ordered the arrest of nearly 700 including military and justice ministry personnel, as part of its moves against those accused of being involved in a 2016 coup attempt to overthrow Erdogan's government. Erdogan, who is considered to be an Islamist and conservative, has been in power for over a decade now and has brought in a series of reforms in Turkish society.

Topic-5: Financial Action Task Force

About FATF:

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is the **global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog**. It is an **inter-governmental body**.

What FATF does?



- The FATF reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and continuously strengthens its standards to address new risks, such as the regulation of virtual assets, which have spread as cryptocurrencies gain popularity.
- The FATF monitors countries to ensure they implement the FATF Standards fully and effectively, and holds countries to account that do not comply.

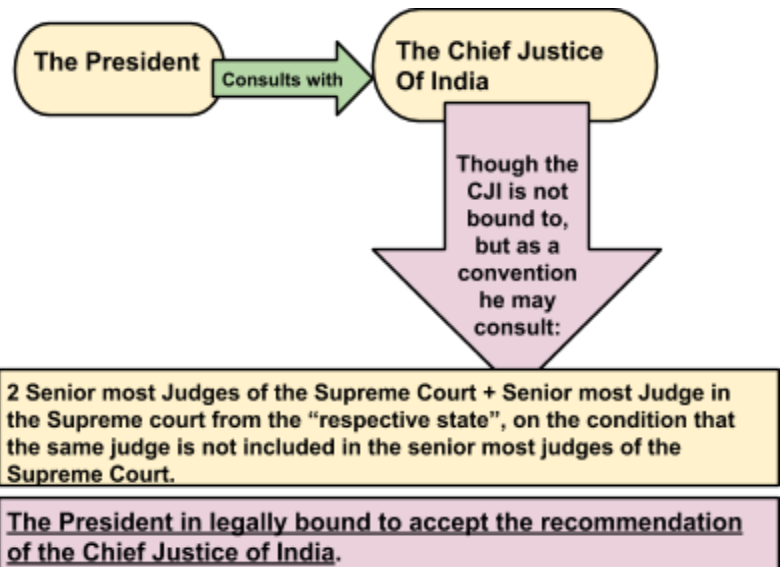
Topic-6: **Transfer of “High Court Judges”**

Context:

The President of India transferred 4 Chief Justices and 6 judges of the High Courts.

About it:

- As per the **Article 222** of the Constitution of India, the President is conferred power to transfer the Judges of High Courts after consultation with the **Chief Justice of India**.
- The Judge of the other High Court who has been transferred, is entitled to receive in addition to his/her salary such compensatory allowance as may be determined by the Parliament by law.



Important Points:

About Article 222:

- It comes under Chapter 5 of Part 6 of the Constitution of India.
- Article 222 of the Constitution makes provision for the transfer of a Judge (including Chief Justice) from one High Court to any other High Court.
- The initiation of the proposal for the transfer of a Judge should be made by the Chief Justice of India whose opinion in this regard is determinative.

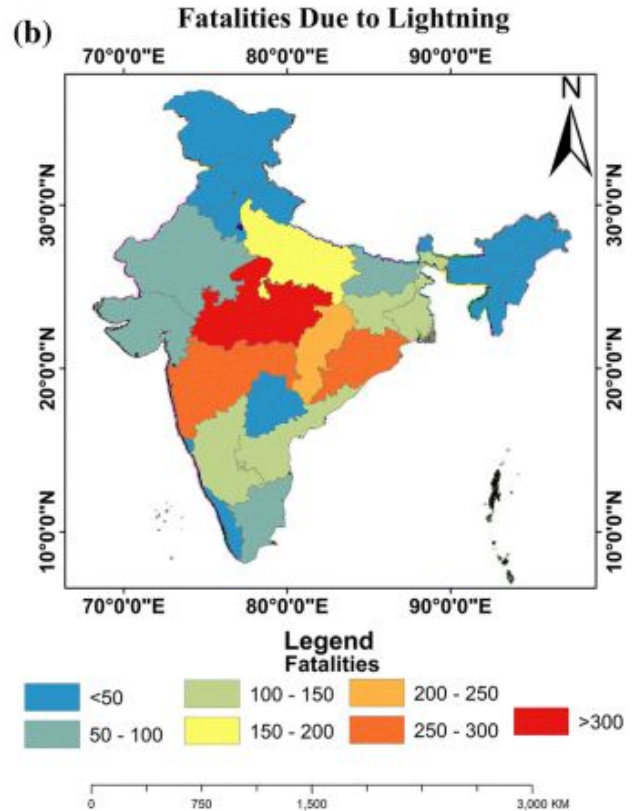
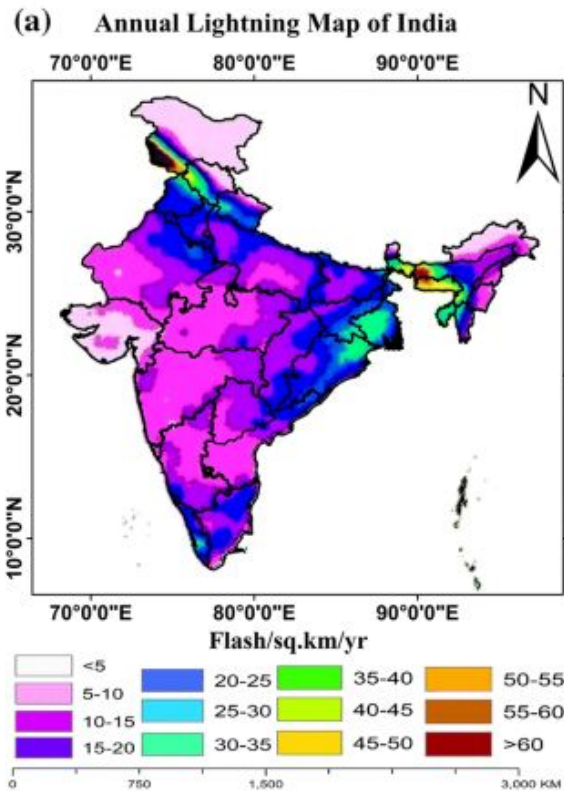
Topic-7: **Lightning incidents in India**

Context:

- Recently, **a report has been published that analyses the lightning incidents in India**. As per the report, lightning strikes have caused 1,771 deaths between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020.

Organisation:

- The report has been prepared by **Climate Resilient Observing Systems Promotion Council (CROPC)**, a non-profit organisation that works closely with **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** along with **Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM)**, **India Meteorological Society (IMS)** and **World Vision India** to disseminate early lightning forecasts.



So, how does lightning occur?

- Lightning is the **process of occurrence of a natural ‘electrical discharge of very short duration and high voltage between a cloud and the ground or within a cloud’**, accompanied by a bright flash and sound, and sometimes thunderstorms. Inter cloud or intra cloud (IC) lightning which are visible and are harmless.
- **It is cloud to ground (CG) lightning, which is harmful** as the ‘high electric voltage and electric current’ leads to electrocution.

How can deaths be minimised?

- Every lightning strikes around a fixed period and almost similar geographical locations in similar patterns.
- As per the report, **Kalbaishakhi—Norwesters, which are violent thunderstorms with lightning** — claims life in eastern India; pre-monsoon lightning deaths occur mostly in Bihar, Jharkhand,

Chhattisgarh and UP.

- So as per CROPC, early lightning warning to farmers, cattle grazers, children and people in open areas is key.
- Then a local lightning safety action plan, like installing **Lightning Protection Devices**, is also needed to prevent deaths.

What kind of technology is used to forecast lightning strikes?

- **CROPC has a MOU with the India Met Department (IMD), Ministry of Earth Science (MoES), Government of India** to disseminate early lightning forecasts which uses satellite observations, inputs from ‘**network of Doppler and other radars**’, ‘**lightning detection Sensors**’ among others.
- “This makes Lightning Forecast unique with best possible lead time of even a week taking into account the devastations caused by the severe thunderstorms during pre-monsoon,” says the report, adding how this new has scientists from IITM, IMD and others working in tandem with a “holistic prediction tool”.
- The report says during the 2019 pre-monsoon season of March-April-May, the tool helped forecast thunderstorms, which ‘helped in saving public life and properties’.

What is the economic impact of lightning?

- The Centre had increased **compensation for victims of natural disaster** to Rs 4 lakh in 2015.
- In the last five years there were 13,994 fatalities, which brings the total compensation to around Rs 359 crore.
- There have been phenomenal losses of animal life also from lightning strikes.

What are the recommendations of the report?

- As per the **Climate Resilient Observing Systems Promotion**

Council, a large number of affected states have notified lightning as a state **specific disaster**.

- However, since **this is not a notified disaster as per the Ministry of Home Affairs**, lightning risk management does not get required attention in national policy directives and developmental programmes. It needs to be notified at the earliest looking at its impact.
- **The NDMA has issued comprehensive guidelines** for preparations of Lightning action plans to states, but the large number of fatalities show **the implementation also needs a more 'scientific and focused community centric approach'** as well as convergence of various departments.

Way Forward:

- There is a need for a **National Lightning Resilience Programme**.
- **Mapping of lightning** is a major breakthrough in identifying the precise risk in terms of lightning frequency, current intensity, energy content, high temperature and other adverse impacts. With continuous mapping for at least three years, a climatology can be established.
- This would yield a **Lightning Risk Atlas map for India** which will form the basis for a lightning risk management programme.