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CIVIL SERVICES ACHIEVERS' POINT

A ONE STOP SOLUTION FOR UPSC/APSC/SSC & BANKING

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE ANALYSIS

DATE - 10TH APRIL 2021

For Preliminary and Mains examination

As per new Pattern of APSC

(Also useful for UPSC and other State level government examinations)

CSAP

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Leadership through knowledge...

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NEWS ARTICLES

India, China hold 11th round of military talks

- India and China held another round of military talks on Friday to take forward the disengagement process in the remaining friction points, such as Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang in eastern Ladakh, people familiar with the development said.
- The 11th round of the Corps Commander-level talks began at around 10:30 am at the Chushul border point on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, they said.
- The 10th round of the military dialogue took place on February 20, two days after both militaries concluded the withdrawal of troops and weapons from the North and South banks of the Pangong lake. The talks lasted for around 16 hours.
- The Indian delegation at Friday's talks is led by Lieutenant General PGK Menon, the Commander of the Leh-based 14 Corps.
- One of the people cited above said India will insist on completing the disengagement process at the remaining friction points at the earliest.
- Late last month, Army chief General MM Naravane said the threat to India has only "abated" following the disengagement in the Pangong Lake areas, but it has not gone away altogether.
- The border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted on May 5 last following a violent clash in the Pangong Lake areas and both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry.
- India has been insisting that the resolution of the outstanding issues is essential for the overall ties between the two countries. – PTI

Non-uniformity of Himalayas foresees significantly large earthquake events

- Scientists have found that the Himalayas are not uniform and assume different physical and mechanical properties in different directions which could result in significantly large earthquake events.
- The northwest region of India, an area covering Garhwal and Himachal Pradesh, has been hit by four destructive moderate to great earthquakes since the beginning of the 20th century – the

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Kangra earthquake of 1905, the Kinnaur earthquake of 1975, the Uttarkashi earthquake of 1991, and the Chamoli earthquake of 1999.

- These seismic activities manifest large-scale subsurface deformation and weak zones, underlining the need for deeper insights into the ongoing deformation beneath these tectonically unstable zones.
- Researchers from the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), Dehradun, an institute under the Department of Science and Technology, and Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur (IIT KGP) used the data from WIHG to show that the North-West Himalayan region exhibits a peculiar characteristic present in crystals.
- “They found that the Himalayas are not uniform and assume different physical and mechanical properties in different directions – a property present in crystals called anisotropy which could result in significantly large earthquake events in the Himalayas,” the DST said in a statement.
- The joint study using seismic waves from 167 earthquakes recorded by 20 broadband seismic stations deployed in the western Himalaya suggested that the major contribution of the anisotropy is mainly because the strain induced by the Indo-Eurasia collision which is going on since 50 million years and deformation due to the collision is found to be larger in the crust than in the upper mantle.
- It has been recently published in 2020 in the *Journal Lithosphere (GSA)*.
- The inhomogeneity along the Himalayas influences the stressing rate is because of variation in the geometry of the Main Himalayan Thrust (MHT) system, and it controls the rupture size during the earthquake.
- This lack of homogenous physical and mechanical properties of the Himalayas could help explore new perspectives about deformations taking place at the Himalaya-Tibet crustal belt involved in the formation of the Himalayan Mountains, the DST said. – PTI

Erosion-hit North Lakhimpur villagers seek divine intervention

- The perennially flood-hit and exasperated villagers of Dhalpur-Jamuguri area here, it seems, are resigned to fate.
- In a desperate bid to get rid of the imminent danger staring them in the face from the continued flood-induced river bank erosion by the Brahmaputra, they are holding a weeklong recitation of *Srimad Bhagawat*.
- The villagers of Bonpuroi, Lotabari, Dahgharia, Chenimari, Bottomchuk, Chengelisuti, Misamari, etc., have embarked on an uninterrupted recitation (*paath*) of the sacred text on the bank of the

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Brahmaputra near the ferryghat at Jamuguri in the hope that the Almighty would show mercy and save them from the plight of the unabated river bank erosion.

- Speaking to the media, an organiser of the event said they had opted for *Bhagawat Paath* as all other means had failed to halt the natural onslaught.
- “Thus far, all our pleas, demands and requests before the powers that be have gone in vain. As we have exhausted all other options, we think only God can save us,” said the organiser.
- The villagers were joined by like-minded sympathisers from the neighbouring Biswanath district, as the perennial river bank erosion has threatened to wash away the people’s land and property there as well.
- It may be recalled that the Jamuguri-Bonpuroi riverine area under Narayanpur Revenue Circle of Lakhimpur district had witnessed severe flood-induced erosion in the summer of 2020, in which a major portion of the embankment in that area was damaged.
- Massive erosion was caused by the Brahmaputra in No.3 check bund at Bonpuroi-Latabari village in Jamuguri despite the Bihpuria subdivisional Water Resources Department building stone spurs in the area. The department built six stone spurs in a bid to contain the erosion, but the initiative proved futile. The No.2 and No.3 check bunds on the right hand side of the river were severely damaged during the flood at that time. This was followed by massive erosion in November last year and in March this year. This prompted Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal to visit the area on July 28, 2020.
- It may be recalled that the Chief Minister had then announced that riverbank erosion had been categorised as a natural calamity under the 15th Finance Commission and works would begin as soon as funds meant for it were received.
- During that visit, the Chief Minister had also made public the formation of the North East Water Management Authority, with Deputy Chairman of NITI Aayog as its president, to prepare a project report on the erosion problem of the region.
- This was followed by a visit to the affected site of Bonpuroi-Lotabari by an inter-ministerial Central team comprising Sudhir Kumar, Director (Monitoring and Appraisal Directorate), Central Water Commission, Ministry of Jal Shakti, and Abhishek Agarwal, Assistant Executive Engineer, Ministry of Road and Transport, Govt of India, on August 28, 2020.
- On October 30, Chief Minister Sonowal, while laying the foundation stone of the Rs 2.51-crore multipurpose flood protection facility in the nearby Dhunaguri under Bihpuria Revenue Circle, announced the initiation of a Rs 10.5-crore project for erosion protection work at Jamuguri. However, despite erosion in November last year and in March this year, no such work has yet been started.

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- This typical apathy by the State and the delays in implementing the announced projects have left the villagers with no option but to invoke divinity to save their lives and land from the ravages of the fast-flowing river.

EDITORIALS

Groundwater extraction

- With the city witnessing a spurt in high-rises and the government authorities failing to put in place a regulatory mechanism for sustainable groundwater extraction, many areas have witnessed severe depletion in groundwater table.
- Things have acquired such disturbing dimensions that a large segment of lower middle-class people are now compelled to purchase potable water at exorbitant rates.
- The shocking inertia of successive State governments on this grave issue stands exposed by the fact that even after nearly a decade since the formulation of the Assam Ground Water (Control and Regulation) Act, the rules are yet to be notified! This is despite the ordeals increasingly being endured by the hapless common man in meeting their very basic need.
- The laxity of the Government and its machinery has had a direct bearing on the rampant loot of groundwater, with unscrupulous elements indulging in large-scale illegal extraction of groundwater even as the aquifers are fast drying up.
- The Government which spares no occasion to tom-tom its so-called achievements has remained a blind witness to the illegalities rather than checking those with stern action and putting in place a sustainable water use and management practice.
- This is borne out by the indiscriminate extraction of groundwater across the city, with many doing it for commercial purposes. This is in sharp contrast to the happenings in other parts of the country where governments have woken up to the challenge of growing water scarcity – especially depletion of groundwater reserves – and are adopting innovative practices to meet the people's water needs through sustainable use of water.

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- The Government needs to take serious note of the developments and intervene before things go completely out of hand. Shockingly, the authorities do not even know the exact status of the groundwater level as they do not have a scientific monitoring mechanism.
- Among other things, the authorities would do well to conduct periodical surveys on both quantitative and qualitative aspects of groundwater. As for use of groundwater, only that much amount which can be replenished should be allowed to be extracted.
- Optimum utilization of available surface water (which the State has in abundance) and rainwater harvesting should have been at the core of the State's water policy. Quality monitoring of groundwater is another imperative in view of the presence of harmful substances such as fluoride, arsenic, lead, cobalt, mercury, uranium, etc.
- The real estate boom in Guwahati which is subjecting its groundwater to tremendous pressure should be made to comply with rules and norms for extraction. Many cities of the country are facing water shortage but the situation is uncalled for in Guwahati because we have a huge reservoir of surface water in the form of the Brahmaputra.
- This holds true for the entire Brahmaputra Valley where a meagre 24 million cubic metres of the available 600 million cubic metres of surface water is being used.

Assamese speakers in Assam: An insecure future?

- The elections in Assam are over. Regardless of who wins, some eye-opening facts have emerged that are distinguishable from 2016 when the last elections were held. The dots only connect looking backward, to quote late Steve Jobs. Celebrating Holi this year, the Chief Minister gave an address in the middle of the capital city Guwahati, without uttering almost a single word in Assamese.
- In October 2020, the State Government declared that Assamese, Bengali and Bodo are not compulsory languages for applicants of the Assam Civil Services from the Barak Valley. In December 2019, Guwahati was perhaps the first city in the world to get a taste of 'lockdown' for two days, when military-enforced curfews brought an end to the unarmed protests, a sight similar to that of Srinagar.
- Like thousands of others, I moved back to my hometown Guwahati at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. This was the first time in five years I had stayed at home for such a long duration, and perceived that the city had developed considerably, but also changed. If you're on the streets, listen for a few minutes to the numerous conversations around you.
- You will notice that the percentage of conversations in Assamese is low (some people say it is only 30%). A Delhi-based journalist from Assam recently tweeted in irritation about restaurant staff in Guwahati's LGBI airport. She complained that the Assamese-speaking staff hesitated to

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talk in Assamese with the customers, as if it was prohibited. Many high-end spaces of the new economy – the polished malls, restaurants and cafes – are ‘sanitized’ of Assamese, operating mainly in Hindi or English.

- It is unfortunate that we are discussing ethnic identity and nativism in 2021. “Why does it matter?” This is the question raised more by the young post-liberalization generation, most of whom live away from Assam.
- Many of them see their goal in life as settling in India or abroad and becoming global citizens, not primarily Assamese, but Indian, American, Canadian, British, etc. But 2020 showed us that ethnic identity, inequality and conflict between Blacks and Whites in the US (after the George Floyd incident) literally set the world’s richest and most powerful country on fire. In India as well, ethnic identity is the axis along which politics revolves, according to political scientist Milan Vaishnav.
- Maharashtra, Haryana and Telangana recently enacted laws reserving private sector jobs for locals. These are among India’s richest, most industrially-advanced States. If they feel the need for policies that protect natives’ socio-economic security, such policies are even more necessary in Assam, which is one of India’s poorest.
- However, the major ethnic classification in mainland India is that of caste. You cannot escape your caste in India: recent research shows that caste determines many prospects in life, mainly access to jobs and housing. Inequality and discrimination based on caste is much lower in Assam than the rest of India.
- The Government’s own statistics show that in the rest of India, on average the Scheduled Caste (SC) households had a monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) 37% lower than the general category households. In Assam, the difference was much lower, with Scheduled Caste households actually having 11% higher consumption.
- The India Human Development Survey 2012 reported that only 16% households in Assam practised untouchability, compared to a national average of 24%. Being born in Assam makes it more likely that a person from a lower caste will have a higher economic status and dignity compared to the rest of India.
- While the rest of Indian society is arranged vertically on an imaginary ladder of ‘purity’, with Brahmins at the top and SCs at the bottom, Northeast India’s unique history means Assam’s society is more horizontal, and the identity of being Assamese override caste in most instances. In Assam and the Northeast, ethnic groups negotiate with each other as equals, not ranked on an imaginary system of superiority and inferiority.
- From 2015 to 2021, nine security forces personnel were killed in the Northeast, compared to 66 civilians (South Asian Terrorism Portal). This is compared to 283 deaths among security forces in Chhattisgarh during the same period. Even Meghalaya witnessed more deaths – 11 soldiers – and yet the government removed the AFSPA in 2018.

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- How do the statistics justify imposing the AFSPA in Assam? The reason is that Assam as a State has not been able to bargain effectively within India's federal structure for decades, ever since signing the Assam Accord. Assam and the Assamese speakers in particular have got almost the worst 'deal' in the entire Northeast, and perhaps the entire country.
- Even the smaller indigenous groups like Bodo, Karbi or Dimasa, once considered more vulnerable, have managed to convince the Centre to accept most of their terms, and enacted stringent laws to protect their common lands and language.
- The Assamese speakers constituted 46% of the State population according to the 2011 Census, and it is a safe prediction that the 2021 Census (currently under way) will reveal the percentage to dip lower below 40%. The ability to bargain will reduce further with more time. At the same time, Assamese culture is having a renaissance because of the internet.
- The YouTube artists making content about Assam have millions of combined subscribers. A particularly successful example is in music, with path-breaking new creations from new generation artists like Anurag Saikia, Abhi Saikia and Shankuraj Konwar.
- Their music, popular among national/ global audiences, is infused with the spirit of Assam. But such efforts require a large Assamese-speaking audience to be commercially viable, and perhaps government support.
- More creative policy suggestions will need to emerge from all walks of society if the Assamese language is to be secure in Assam; if necessary as implementing the recommendations of the panel on Clause 6 of the Assam Accord.



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