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# CIVIL SERVICES ACHIEVERS' POINT

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

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**THE ASSAM TRIBUNE ANALYSIS**

**DATE - 9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021**

**For Preliminary and Mains examination**

**As per new Pattern of APSC**

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

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## NEWS ARTICLES

### India, Sri Lanka agree to jointly work against terror groups, fugitives

- India and Sri Lanka on Thursday agreed to work jointly against terrorist groups and fugitives wherever they are present and active, and emphasised on sharing real time intelligence.
- In the first delegation-level virtual police chiefs' dialogue, India and Sri Lanka also decided to strengthen the existing cooperation mechanisms, as also designate "nodal points" for timely and effective handling of existing as well as emerging security challenges.
- The Indian delegation was led by Director of Intelligence Bureau Arvind Kumar and the Sri Lankan team was led by CD Wickramaratne, Inspector General of Police.
- Both sides agreed to work jointly against the terrorist entities, including the global terrorist groups and fugitives, wherever they are present and active, a home ministry statement said.
- While appreciating each other's ongoing action against drug traffickers and other organised criminals exploiting the narrow sea route between the two countries, the two sides emphasised on the need for sharing of real time intelligence and feedback.
- The institution of police chiefs' dialogue, assisted by the members of other security agencies on both the sides, will further enhance the existing cooperation between the police forces of both the countries, the statement said. – PTI

### China says India's proposal could be discussed

- China on Thursday said that India's proposal for the restoration of the status quo of April 2020 in eastern Ladakh could be discussed at the next meetings between the two countries.
- China also said that there is no delay in holding talks with India to discuss the disengagement of troops from the remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh, amid reports about the likelihood of the 11th round of corps commander-level talks on Friday.
- Asked to confirm the date for the 11th round of China-India Corps Commander-level meeting to discuss further disengagement in eastern Ladakh, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a media briefing here that "China and India are in communication on the holding of the 11th round of talks."
- "As for the specific date for the upcoming talks, I have no information," he said.

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- The spokesman also denied any delay in holding of the 11th round of talks when pointed out that it is going to be about two months since the first disengagement has taken place and a month since the 10th round of talks on the disengagement of troops.
- “There is no delayed meeting as you cited. I want to stress that the merits of the situation at the India-China border are very clear and the responsibility does not rest with the Chinese side,” Zhao said.
- “We hope the Indian side will work with China to follow through the important consensus of our two state leaders, abide by relevant agreements and treaties to de-escalate the tension at the border,” he said.
- He also said India’s proposal for the restoration of the status quo at eastern Ladakh could be discussed at the meetings between the two countries.
- About India’s stand that the status quo of April 2020 should be restored and whether China would consider such a proposal, Zhao said, “For the proposal, you mentioned I believe it should be talked in the meetings and I already made clear my position on the border issue just now.” – PTI

## Pobitora WLS: SC panel seeks clarification from Centre, State on alleged violation of laws

- The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court of India has sought comments from the Assam Chief Secretary and the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) on the complaints of violation of the apex court orders, provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 in the case of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS).
- The apex court constituted the CEC in writ petitions No.202/95 and 171/96. RTI-cum-environment activist Rohit Choudhury had lodged the above complaints with the CEC.
- Choudhury in his complaints alleged that apex court orders dated December 12, 1996, February 14, 2000, and December 11, 2018, and the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 were violated by the authorities concerned in the Pobitora case by not notifying the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) and ignoring the problem of rampant encroachment taking place within and outside this WLS.
- The apex court, in its order dated December 11, 2018, in IA No.1000 (of the WP-C No.202 of 1995) said that the ESZ should be treated as 10-km wide from the periphery of the national parks

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and wildlife sanctuaries, where this zone is yet to be notified. Problems for Pobitora WLS are compounding because of the fresh human settlements emerging in violation of the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and the apex court's orders dated December 12, 1996, and February 14, 2000, said Choudhury.

- Pobitora WLS is now a major habitat of the endangered one-horned rhinoceros. At present, the WLS has around 102 rhinos. The WLS, located in the State's Morigaon district, was initially declared a reserve forest (RF) with an area of 1,584.76 hectares (ha) on November 18, 1971, following the sighting of one-horned rhinos in 1961-62, when it was a grazing reserve. It has now a protected area of 38.81 square kms and on record, it comprises the erstwhile Pobitora RF (1,584.76 ha), Raja Mayong Hill RF (1,191.86 ha), and 1,104 ha of Government Khas Revenue Land.
- It was notified a WLS (notification number FRS/19/87/152) on March 17, 1998.
- Besides being an ideal habitat for rhinos, Pobitora is also an ideal home for different species of wild animals. Its Raja Mayong Hill is an excellent leopard habitat. The WLS has a significant wild boar population. It is also a good habitat for different residential bird species and an important destination for migratory birds, besides being an ideal habitat for different species of carnivorous and herbivorous animals.
- Choudhury referred to the September 3, 2019 letter of the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Guwahati Wildlife Division to the Deputy Commissioner (DC), Morigaon, on matters related to the reconciliation of revenue land records with respect to the Pobitora WLS notification. The DFO requested the DC, Morigaon, to stop collection of Khazana or Touzi Bahira, if any, from the local villagers against the Pobitora WLS' Khas Land occupied by them. The DFO also pleaded for a detailed survey of the area of the WLS to demarcate its notified boundary precisely and subsequently update the Morigaon land revenue records.
- The DFO wrote to the DC, Morigaon again on April 27, 2020, on the WLS' boundary demarcation issue and pleaded for steps to hand over 1098 ha of Khas Land to facilitate declaration of its ESZ.

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## EDITORIALS

### Recalcitrant Iran

- One of the pledges made by US President Joe Biden during his election campaign had been that he would re-enter the landmark 2015 accord with Iran which had placed restrictions on the latter's nuclear programme.
- Since then it has been a '*pahle aap*' syndrome which has been operating in the relationship between the two countries. It may be recalled that Iran had begun a nuclear enrichment programme when George W Bush was in power in Washington, proclaiming to the world that it was for peaceful purposes but arousing suspicion in nations of the West as to the veracity of that claim.
- The fact that Teheran would not allow inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit her nuclear facilities to ensure that global safety norms were met with had deepened suspicion and raised the spectre of destabilization in the Middle-east.
- The Bush administration had retaliated by imposing crippling economic sanctions against Iran but that country, despite suffering immense hardships, refused to allow international inspection.
- Moreover, the economic sanctions did not restrain Iran from carrying on with her aggressive policies, in particular against Israel. It had been prominent members of the global community, backed by the US under Barack Obama, who had engaged in tortuous talks with Iran in an endeavour to avert the nuclear threat, and finally had hammered out the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- Under the JCPOA, Iran agreed to eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98%, and reduce by about two-thirds the number of its gas centrifuges for 13 years, in lieu of lifted economic sanctions. To her credit Iran, as vouchsafed by the nations instrumental in getting the deal realized, stuck to the conditions stipulated and for a while the threat of another nuclear empowered country emerging was averted.
- Unfortunately, the maverick US President Donald Trump who followed Obama, without any provocation, unilaterally pulled the US out of the deal in 2018. It had been back to square one, with Iran again resuming her nuclear enrichment activities and the US imposing crippling sanctions.
- Having been once bitten, Iran appears to have become twice shy of entering into another deal brokered by the US, which explains its recalcitrance in responding positively to conciliatory gestures made by the Biden administration. Teheran wants the sanctions first lifted before

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engaging in talks, while the US wants her to stop her nuclear programme before sanctions can be lifted.

- However, the Biden administration's persistence has paid off, with Iran finally agreeing to preliminary discussions and EU-brokered talks kicking off in Vienna with the US, UK, China, France, Germany, Russia and Iran participating. Given the current instability which is being observed in the Middle-east, this is a positive development, though no doubt the talks would be even more tortuous this time around.

## Can we breathe freely anymore?

- India played a prominent role in the formulation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and much of the country's National Development Agenda is mirrored in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- At this juncture, when IQAir, a Swiss-based organization, recently ranked the city of Guwahati at the position of 40 in the list of most polluted cities of the world, a serious question arises for the people of Guwahati: "Are we going to suffer like New Delhi tomorrow?" Along with the city of Guwahati, there are more than 30 important urban centres of India, which are also listed in the category of most polluted cities of the world in 2020.
- With rampant construction going on in various sites, large number of vehicles plying on the road because of unreliable public transport, and various other factors such as pollution from small scale industries including brick kilns, resuspended dust on the roads due to vehicle movement and open waste burning, the city itself is not convenient for this generation to breathe freely.
- The air quality in the city of Guwahati has gone down to 'very poor' category as per the AQI index. AQI stands for Air Quality Index, which indicates the quality of air that we breathe. When the air quality index displays in the range of 300 to 400, it means you are breathing very poor quality air in your day-to-day life. For instance, on March 28 last, the AQI of Guwahati was indexed as 354. An AQI range of 0 to 50 up to 100 can be categorized as good and satisfactory.
- There are reports generated by UNICEF that all children are vulnerable to air pollution and the youngest children are at high risk.
- According to a UNICEF report of 2017 on air pollution, 17 million babies (children under the age of one) live in some of the most severely affected regions of the world, where outdoor air pollution is at least six times higher than international limits.

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- The majority of these babies, approximately 12 millions, lives in South Asia. The South Asian region is the most polluted region of the world with Bangladesh, India and Pakistan sharing 42 of the 50 most polluted cities worldwide.
- Generally the immune system in the young children is still developing, and their lungs are still in a growing stage. With every breath, children take in more air per unit of body weight than adults. By extension, when air is toxic, they take in more toxic air per unit of body weight than adults.
- Moreover, the impacts have ripple effects into other critical aspects of children's lives. Hence, collectively we have to decide, are we allowing our children to breathe polluted air, get sick and thereby limiting their learning and development potential or are we going to work in partnership with different stakeholders as a community for peace and prosperity of our planet?
- Air pollution consists of chemicals or particles in the air that can harm the health of humans, animals and plants. Pollution enters the Earth's atmosphere in many different ways. Most air pollution is from anthropogenic sources, which means it is caused by human factors. Along with these existing issues, climate change also contributes to the growing menace of air pollution to an extent. Climate change might also affect human health by making our air less healthy to breathe.
- The Goal No. 3 of Sustainable Development Goals mentions about ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages and the Goal No. 11 ensures making cities and human settlement inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by 2030. The blueprint for achieving a better future for the people and planet will have an adverse effect if we don't commit ourselves to bringing a balance to this rising trend of air pollution.
- Currently in India, air pollution is the second largest risk factor contributing to the country's disease burden. A *State of Global Health Report* published in 2018 by the Health Effects Institute based in the United States projects a rise in annual deaths in India due to air pollution from 1.1 million in 2015 to 1.7 million in 2030.
- On the other hand, the National Health Profile, 2018, released recently by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI) reported that Assam alone had 20,667 Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) cases and 200 deaths in 2016. This figure increased to 22,834 ARI cases with 225 deaths in 2017. Assam is said to be the most polluted north-eastern State in the country.
- Air pollution is one of the most serious environmental risks. Till the moment we understand that health is also an economic issue and air pollution can affect human health, agriculture and lead to a range of other impacts, we are not going for trade-offs between different policy objectives. Therefore, to bring this issue to the popular discourse, the role of the media is utmost important.
- One of the most recent policies launched to tackle air pollution is the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) launched in early 2019. The Centre has launched the programme to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024. The city specific action

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plans have been prepared which, inter-alia, include measures for strengthening the monitoring network, reducing vehicular/industrial emissions, increasing public awareness, etc.

- The programme was launched by the Ministry of Environment with the intention to cut the concentration of coarse (particulate matter of diameter 10 micrometre or less, or PM10) and fine particles (particulate matter of diameter 2.5 micrometre or less, or PM 2.5) by at least 20% in the next five years with 2017 as the base year for comparison.
- This five-year action plan intends to create a pan-India air quality-monitoring network and generate citizen awareness.
- Acknowledging the fact that air pollution is an issue majorly confined to cities in Indo-Gangetic plains, covering approximately 45-50 cities spreading across the States of Assam, Bihar, Haryana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, the total number of expected real time monitoring stations would be approximately 100 in number with average of 2-3 stations in each city to be decided on the basis of population, industrial activities, etc.
- In Assam, Guwahati as a city will have the maximum number of six real-time monitoring stations operating followed by the other 12 towns.
- With the growing medium and small towns falling in the perplexed statistics of a worsening index of air pollution, what is required now is a multilevel approach to the problem of sustainability primarily at three levels of the system, viz., Global (climate, energy, resources, ecosystem), Social (politics, economy, industry, technology) and Human (society, lifestyle, values, health).
- All these three system levels are crucial to the co-existence of human beings and the environment, and it is our view that the current crisis of sustainability can be analysed in terms of the breakdown of the system and the linkages among them.

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## Global problems need local solutions

- The Covid crisis is the story of two global solutions to a medical problem: one was lockdowns; the other, vaccines. Lockdowns with physical distancing were implemented in all countries on the advice of medical experts.
- They prevented the virus from spreading. Lockdowns also had many side-effects due to which people suffered greatly. Businesses closed down and people lost incomes. In crowded Indian

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cities, where the poor had no place to stay locked in, they had to venture out even to fetch water, and were harassed by police enforcing the lockdown.

- The single-minded focus on the treatment of Covid shut out patients of other ailments from hospitals. Doctors estimated that more people died from lack of treatments they were getting, but could not any longer, than the numbers who were treated for Covid.
- Closures of schools, even in richer countries, caused concerns about the long-term impacts on the development of children. In many countries, the US, UK, the Netherlands and others, citizens ailed by lockdowns, refused to follow the rules, causing law-and-order problems too.
- The rollout of new vaccines is a remarkable story of innovations produced by many scientists and many organizations in many countries. Citizens waited anxiously for the vaccines to become available.
- However, governments followed protocols established by medical scientists for testing new vaccines very strictly to ensure there would be no side-effects when solutions found in labs were applied to the masses. The contrast between how the two solutions were implemented raises important questions: about scale, centralization and the scientific approach.
- These must be addressed urgently because humanity has large challenges and needs effective ways to meet them.
- Problems such as persistent poverty and inequality, poor health, and environmental degradation that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to solve are systemic issues. They have multiple interacting causes. They cannot be solved by any one actor. Nor are they amenable to silver bullet solutions.
- Centralization is the wrong approach for solving complex problems which manifest in different shapes in different places. For example, environmental problems combine with livelihood problems in different ways in the Himalayan mountains in the north of India, in the dry lands of Rajasthan in the middle, and in the lush coastal regions of Kerala in the south.
- Therefore, local solutions are necessary for such global systemic problems. The solution is, responsibility for the governance of complex systems must be devolved to communities in their localities.
- However, not only politicians, also experts at the top, are reluctant to let go of their power. They claim that the locals will not have the capability to manage, and so the Centre must take on the burden of managing the locals.
- Clearly, we cannot carry on the way we are. Therefore, we must examine some prevalent beliefs driving the models of growth. For one, the paradigm of progress has swung too far towards the global and has forgotten the local. And another, in their drive for 'economies of scale', the economists and managers are overlooking the need for 'economies of scope'.

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- Economies of scope emerge when diverse capabilities, even on small scales, are easily accessible to each other, can produce innovations together, and improve the overall performance of the system.
- Large global supply chains create economic efficiencies. Food is grown in large farms across the world, each specializing in different vegetables and fruits. However, these large global chains consume more energy, cause more damage to the environment, and create more risk than local networks.
- The average morsel of food eaten by an American travels about 1,500 miles from these large farms to reach his fork. On the way, large quantities of oil are burnt for refrigeration and transportation and a lot of carbon is spewed into the atmosphere. Such global chains increase other risks too.
- When bad tomatoes were suspected to be the cause of a salmonella problem in the USA, it was impossible for retailers to pinpoint their source. So, supplier farms had to be shut down in many places across the world. The 'sub-prime' financial crisis was another example of risks in large interconnected supply chains.
- The theory was that the financial system would be safer by spreading risky loans across a wider system. However, when things began to go wrong, there was panic because it was not clear where the bad bits were hidden!
- When Thomas Friedman launched his paean to a global world, *The Earth is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century*, in Delhi in 2005, I was invited, along with Mani Shankar Aiyar, then A Union Cabinet minister for local self-government, to discuss Friedman's book with him at the launch.
- Aiyar pointed out the flaw in Friedman's thesis. Friedman said the world was flat because he observed that people in Bangalore could now talk to anyone, anywhere in the world. Aiyar retorted that people in Bangalore, while becoming integrated with the world, did not know what was happening in villages just 50 miles away. They were flying around the world connecting with people in New York and London and losing touch with those nearby.
- Big is not always better. Ecologists explain how small systems, with diversity within them, have the ability to adapt and evolve. They are more sustainable than large systems. They do not expend too much energy in making connections between their diverse parts. They may not have 'economies of scale' but they have powerful 'economies of scope'.
- Diversity makes life more interesting also. Thus, life within city neighbourhoods that have their own groceries, cafes, bookshops, and doctors is more pleasant than in cities which are segregated into large zones dedicated for different uses.
- Several foresighted people in the last century have suggested that we should look for more local solutions to what have become global problems. In their book, *Winning the Oil Endgame*, published in 2004, Amory Lovins and his colleagues in the Rocky Mountain Institute explained how 'a legion of small, fast and simple microgeneration and efficiency projects' could be the

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answer to the world's energy problems. In *Deep Economy* (2007), Bill McKibben made a compelling case for local food networks.

- There are many examples from India and elsewhere that show that local community solutions for water are more effective and sustainable than gigantic storage and long-distance transportation schemes. And micro-credit to local women's self-help groups has become a success story of micro-empowerment.
- Both Mahatma Gandhi and Adam Smith propounded the idea of market. And both expressed the idea in terms of local and social phenomena, rather than in terms of global commodity and currency markets. Smith's baker and candlestick maker lived in the same village and knew each other.
- Gandhi foresaw the village community as an environmentally and socially sustainable solution to India's needs. Into that interdependent community, in which people would respect each other, he wanted to draw all providers of services, including the village's scavengers. It is unlikely that the concept of the global village will be sustainable if local towns and villages do not thrive.



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