22nd January 2020

General studies-3

India, co-builder of Hawaii telescope, wants it shifted out of proposed site

Why in news?

- India, a partner in the construction of one of the largest telescopes in the world, has said it wants the project to be moved out of the proposed site at Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano in Hawaii.

Key points:

- The TMT or Thirty Metre Telescope, as it is called, is a joint venture (JV) involving five countries, but the $2 billion project has been marred by protests for over a decade.
- The TMT will enable scientists to study fainter objects far away in the universe, which would give information about early stages of evolution of the universe.
- Also, it will give out finer details of not-so-far-away objects like undiscovered planets and other objects in the Solar System and planets around other stars.
- Canada, the United States, China and Japan are the other — and more significant — partners in terms of the monetary and infrastructural aspects of the TMT. The level of contribution determines the amount of viewing time, or slots, that the member-countries' scientists get on the machine. Thus India, in a given year, stands to get 10% of the available slots; any downtime could potentially eat into those.
- The proposed site is considered sacred to indigenous Hawaiians, and also has too many observatories for one more such massive establishment to come up, say groups that have contested the site.

Issues:

- The TMT has been a litigious site since 2014. In 2018, the Supreme Court of Hawaii gave permission for construction to proceed but the project's proponents have not made progress because they were obstructed twice, in 2015 and 2019, respectively, from construction.
- Protests at the site in 2019 saw scientists unable to access other telescope facilities in Mauna Kea.
- The project has been delayed by nearly five years and should have begun operations by 2025.
- India has committed $200 million, which is about a tenth of the proposed cost.
- The telescope needs 492 precisely polished mirrors and India is to contribute 83 of them.
- The project delay has meant that these manufacturing contracts have also been delayed.
- India too has its problems with hosting ambitious science projects. The Indian Neutrino Observatory, proposed to come up in Theni, Tamil Nadu, has also been stalled due to protests against the project in the State

UNAIDS

- Recently, the high-level roundtable of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) was held at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland.
- Its theme was, "Access for all: Leveraging Innovations, Investments and Partnerships for Health".
- It laid emphasis on accessibility of health to all with innovative technologies and solutions and also on bridging economic inequalities.

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

- It is leading the global effort to end Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) as a public health threat by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. It was started in 1996.
- UNAIDS has a vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths, and a principle of leaving no one behind.
- The UN Political declaration on ending AIDS was adopted in 2016 which seeks to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

Wollemi Pine grove

- The prehistoric Wollemi Pine grove, which exists in the Wollemi National Park northwest of Sydney, has been saved from bushfires in Australia.

Key Points:

- Wollemi Pines are thought to have existed even during the Jurassic period. The oldest fossil of the rare pine species dates back 90 million years.
- Wollemi National Park is the only place in the world where these trees are found in the wild. Approximately, less than 200 trees are left.
- The pines, which prior to 1994 were thought to be extinct. Their location was kept secret to prevent contamination. They have benefited from an unprecedented environmental protection mission.
- Wollemi Pine (WollemiaNobilis) is listed as critically endangered in the IUCN Red List.
- Wollemi National Park is a part of the Greater Blue Mountains Area which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

General studies-2

World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 (WESO) report
Why in news?

- Recently, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has released the World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 (WESO) report.
- The annual WESO Trends report analyses key labour market issues, including unemployment, labour underutilisation, working poverty, income inequality, labour income share and factors

that exclude people from decent work.

Key Points:
- The number of people unemployed around the world stands at some 188 million.
- Some 267 million young people aged 15-24 are not in employment, education or training, and many more endure substandard working condition.
- Working poverty is defined as earning less than USD 3.20 per day in purchasing power parity terms.
- It affects more than 630 million workers or one in five of the global working population.
- 165 million people do not have enough paid work, and 120 million have either given up actively searching for work or otherwise lack access to the labour market.
- Almost half a billion people are working fewer paid hours than they would like or lack adequate access to paid work.
- It is projected to increase by around 2.5 million in 2020. Though, global unemployment has been roughly stable for the last nine years.
- Moderate or extreme working poverty is expected to increase in 2020-21 in developing countries, increasing the obstacles to achieving Sustainable Development Goal1 on eradicating poverty everywhere by 2030.

Statehood day
- On the Statehood Day of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura (21st January), Prime Minister and other leaders praised the traditions and culture of the three northeast states.
- On 21st January, 1972, all the three states became full-fledged states under the North Eastern Region (Reorganisation) Act, 1971.

Merger of Manipur with India
- Before 15th August 1947, peaceful negotiations had brought almost all states whose territories were contiguous to the new boundaries of India, into the Indian Union.
- The rulers of most of the states signed a document called the 'Instrument of Accession' which meant that their state agreed to become a part of the Union of India.
- A few days before Independence, the Maharaja of Manipur, Bodhachandra Singh, signed the Instrument of Accession with the Indian government on the assurance that the internal autonomy of Manipur would be maintained.
- Under the pressure of public opinion, the Maharaja held elections in Manipur in June 1948 and the state became a constitutional monarchy. Thus Manipur was the first part of India to hold an election based on universal adult franchise.
- In the Legislative Assembly of Manipur there were sharp differences over the question of merger of Manipur with India. The Government of India succeeded in pressuring the Maharaja into signing a Merger Agreement in September 1949, without consulting the popularly elected Legislative Assembly of Manipur.

Merger of Tripura with India

- Tripura was princely state till the merger with Indian union on 15th November, 1949.
- The last king BirBikram who was on the throne, immediately before India's independence, died on 17th May, 1947.
- After his demise, his minor son KirriBikramMannikya took the throne of Tripura kingdom, but he could not rule as he was minor.
- So his widow queen KanchanPrabha took the charge of regency of Tripura and took over the administrative charges.
- She was instrumental for Merger of Tripura kingdom in Indian Union.

Merger of Meghalaya into India

- In 1947 the rulers of the Garo and Khasi region acceded to the newly independent country of India.
- Meghalaya, a small hilly state located in the North Eastern Region of India, came into existence as an autonomous state within the state of Assam on 2 April 1970 comprising the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills districts.

Changes Made in 1972

- In 1972, the political map of Northeast India underwent a major change.
- The two Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura and the Sub-State of Meghalaya got statehood.

PRAGATI
Why in news?

- Prime Minister will chair the 32nd interaction through PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) on 22nd January 2020.
- It is held once every month on Fourth Wednesday at 3.30 PM and known as PRAGATI Day.

PRAGATI

- It is a platform which enables the Prime Minister to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground-level situation.
- It was launched in 2015 and has been designed by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).
- It is a three-tier system (PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States).
- The three objectives of PRAGATI are:
  - o Grievance Redressal
  - o Programme Implementation
  - o Project Monitoring
- The PRAGATI platform uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management,

video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
- It promotes cooperative federalism as it brings on one platform the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
- However, the direct interaction of the PM with the state secretaries without involving the political executives of the states is undermining the State political executive. It is also said that this is leading to a concentration of power in the extra-constitutional office of PMO.
- It is a robust system for bringing e-transparency and e-accountability with real-time presence and exchange among the key stakeholders.
- It is an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.

Geological survey of India
- Recently, Indian Navy has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Geological Survey of India (GSI) for 'Sharing of seabed sediments data, products and expertise for Naval Application in Meteorology and Oceanography'.

Key Points:
- GSI's Marine and Coastal Survey Division has mapped most of India's Exclusive Economic Zone and has a vast repository of offshore data.
- GSI collected this data using state-of-the-art oceanic research vessels SamudraManthan, SamudraKaustubh, SamudraShaudhikama and SamudraRatnakar.
- This data will be used by the Indian Navy's rapidly growing blue water fleet for reliable and accurate oceanographic modelling to support maritime operations in the Indian Ocean region.

Geological Survey of India
- It was set up in 1851 primarily to find coal deposits for the Railways.
- Over the years, it has not only grown into a repository of geo-science information required in various fields in the country but has also attained the status of a geo-scientific organisation of international repute.
- The main functions of the GSI relate to creation and updation of national geo-scientific information and mineral resource assessment.
- It is headquartered in Kolkata and has six regional offices located at Lucknow, Jaipur, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Shillong and Kolkata. Every state has a state unit.
- Presently, GSI is an attached office to the Ministry of Mines.

Integrated Check Post
- Recently, the Prime Minister of India along with Prime Minister of Nepal jointly inaugurated the second Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Jogbani (Bihar)-Biratnagar (Nepal).

Key Points:

- Jogbani-Biratnagar is equipped with modern facilities and is an important trade point between the two countries.
- It was built with Indian assistance to facilitate trade and people's movement across the India-Nepal border.
- This in line with India's Neighbourhood First Policy. Improving cross connectivity projects of Road, Rail and Transmission lines in Nepal, is an important aspect of it.
- India played the role of the first responder in relief and rescue operations in Nepal during the after the earthquake in 2015.