

## **1. Hornbill Festival**

### **Why in News?**

- The 20<sup>th</sup> Edition of Hornbill Festival began at Naga Heritage Kisama in Nagaland recently.

### **About:**

- Hornbill festival is annually held from 1 - 10 December. It was first held in 2000.
- Objective of the festival is to encourage inter-tribal interaction and to promote cultural heritage of Nagaland.
- The festival is named after the bird “Indian hornbill”, which is displayed in the folklore of most of the state's tribes.
- There are 9 hornbill species in India of which Great Hornbill is the most famous. Great Hornbill is also a state bird of Kerala and Arunachal Pradesh.
- It is organized by the State Tourism and Art & Culture Departments of the Government of Nagaland. Festival highlights include the traditional Naga Morungs exhibition and the sale of arts and crafts, food stalls, song and dance shows, indigenous games etc.
- One of the major highlights of this festival is the Hornbill International Rock Festival where local and international rock bands perform.
- It is also called the 'Festival of Festivals'.

## **2. BRUIE**

### **Why in News?**

- NASA recently displayed a new underwater robot for a mission that could one day search for life in ocean worlds beyond Earth.

### **About BRUIE:**

- Buoyant Rover for Under-ice Exploration (BRUIE), is being developed for underwater exploration by NASA'S Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.
- It is for exploring distant ocean worlds, such as Jupiter's moon Europa and Saturn's moon Enceladus.
- It will be rolling into Antarctica this month to perform a gymnastic feat driving upside down under sea ice.
- The ice shell covers the polar ocean serve as a window into the ocean below and the chemistry of the ice could help feed life within those oceans.

- It can dive deep beneath sea ice to explore ocean depths, which are normally hidden from view. It will measure various parameters, like dissolved oxygen, water salinity, pressure and temperature.

### **3. Mitra Shakti 2019**

#### **Why in News?**

- The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of India-Sri Lanka joint training exercise, Exercise ‘Mitra Shakti 2019’ is scheduled to be conducted at the Foreign Training Node (FTN) in Pune in December 2019.

#### **Exercise Mitra Shakti:**

- The exercise is aimed at enhancing interoperability and operational efficiency amongst the armies of both India and Sri Lanka when deployed as part of the United Nations peacekeeping forces.
- The objective of the exercise is to build and promote positive relations between armies of India and Sri Lanka through focus on sub unit-level training on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in urban and rural environment under the United Nations mandate.
- The joint training exercise also signifies the strength of India-Sri Lanka relations in the field of military cooperation and engagement, which is vital for refining the interoperability and operational preparedness.
- The joint exercise is designed for incorporating the current dynamics of the United Nations peacekeeping operations through practical and comprehensive discussions and tactical exercises.
- The primary focus of the joint training exercise will remain on field craft, battle drills and procedures as also the ability to operate jointly with seamless interoperability.
- India and Sri Lanka have collaborated on several counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations over the years.
- The two sides have a long history of military cooperation.

## 4. Exercise Surya Kiran – XIV

### Why in News?

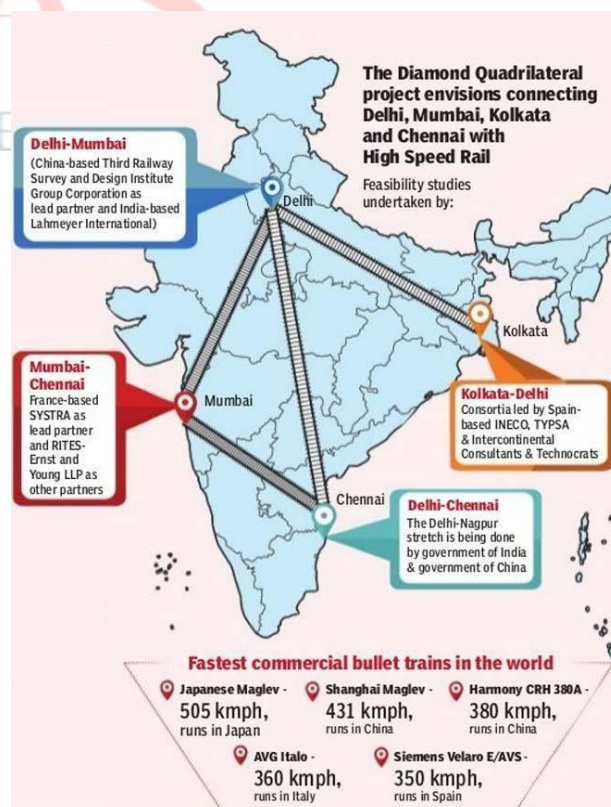
- Joint military exercise ‘SURYA KIRAN – XIV’ between India and Nepal will be conducted in Nepal in the coming week.

### Exercise Surya Kiran– XIV:

- It is an annual event which is conducted alternatively in Nepal and India.
- It is an important exercise in terms of the security challenges faced by both the nations in the realm of changing facets of global terrorism.
- The aim of this exercise is to conduct a Battalion level combined training between Indian Army and Nepal Army to increase interoperability in jungle warfare and counter terrorist operations in mountainous terrain, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, medical and environmental conservation including aviation aspects.
- The joint military exercise will enhance the level of defence cooperation which will further foster the bilateral relations between the two nations.

## 5. Diamond Quadrilateral Bullet Train Network Project

- Diamond Quadrilateral Bullet Train Network Project:
- In the Railway Budget 2014-15, it was announced to undertake planning of high-speed rail connectivity on Diamond Quadrilateral network connecting major metros and growth centres of the country.
- Accordingly, Ministry of Railways has undertaken feasibility studies for some routes namely Delhi-Mumbai, Delhi-Kolkata, Mumbai-Chennai, Mumbai-Nagpur and Chennai-Bengaluru-Mysuru.
- However, being highly capital intensive, the sanction of any High Speed Rail Project has not yet commended.



- Till now, Government has sanctioned Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) Project with technical and financial assistance of Government of Japan.
- This project is targeted for completion by the year 2023.

## **6. PSLV Gearing up for its 50<sup>th</sup> flight**

### **Why in News?**

- The 50<sup>th</sup> flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).

### **Highlights:**

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is preparing for the 50th flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), popularly called the agency's workhorse. The lift-off of the PSLV-C48 mission is scheduled for December 2019.
- To date, 49 PSLV missions have lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota. They include the initial three developmental flights and 46 operational flights. The total count includes two failed missions and the PSLV variants, such as PSLV-XL and PSLV-CA.
- Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), is ISRO's lead agency for launch vehicles.
- Along with the higher capacity Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), the PSLV continues to remain the mainstay of the Indian space programme.
- In a 'career' spanning nearly three decades, the PSLV has launched more than 45 Indian payloads – including the Chandrayaan 1 and Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan) spacecraft and the IRNSS satellites – and 310 foreign satellites. The C37 mission has the distinction of placing 104 satellites in orbit, a record.
- The 50th flight would have 10 satellites on board, including India's RISAT-2BR1 and nine small satellites from abroad.
- The successor to the SLV and the ASLV, PSLV is the ISRO's third-gen launch vehicle, capable of placing payloads in different orbits, including the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO).

## **7. Gangetic Dolphin**

### **Why in News?**

- According to the data released by Ministry of Environment, the count of Gangetic dolphins is increased in Assam and Uttar Pradesh.

### About Gangetic Dolphin:

- It is been notified as both India's national aquatic animal and also as the Assam's state aquatic animal.
- The population assessment in Assam was done between January and March 2018, while the UP count of 1,272 is for 2015, up from 671 in 2012.
- It is found in parts of the Ganges-Meghna-Brahmaputra and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
- It is popularly known as 'Susu'.
- It is otherwise called as **Platanista gangetica**.
- It is among the four freshwater dolphins in the world- the other three are:
- The 'Baiji' now likely extinct from the Yangtze River in China, 'Bhulan' of the Indus in Pakistan, and 'Boto' of the Amazon River in Latin America.
- They live only in rivers and lakes. Their presence indicates the health of the riverine ecosystem.
- According to the WWF, the main threat to the Gangetic dolphin is the creation of dams and irrigation projects.
- The Conservation Action Plan for the Gangetic Dolphin, 2010-2020, identified threats to these dolphins that include the impact of river traffic, construction of irrigation canals and depletion of their prey-base.

### Protection Status:

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has listed the Gangetic dolphin as an endangered species in India.
- It is listed on CITES Appendix-I.
- It is classified under Schedule 1, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 providing absolute protection as offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.
- India's only sanctuary for national aquatic animal is Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS) in Bihar's Bhagalpur district.

### About Irrawaddy Dolphin:

- It is not a River Dolphin, but an **oceanic dolphin** that lives in brackish water near coasts, river mouths and in estuaries in South and Southeast Asia.
- It is slaty blue to slaty gray throughout, with the underparts slightly paler.
- It is identified by a bulging forehead, a short beak.

- It is also known as **Orcaella brevirostris**
- Its population is established in freshwater rivers, including the Ganges and the Mekong, as well as the Irrawaddy River from which it takes its name.
- Its habitat range extends from the Bay of Bengal to New Guinea and the Philippines. They do not appear to venture off shore.

### **Protection Status:**

- IUNC has classified it as Endangered in Red Data list.
- Fishing nets, developmental projects like construction of dams, tourism and diseases are some of the threats for it.

## **8. First-Ever National Startup Awards 2020**

### **Why in News?**

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has announced the institution of the first-ever National Startup Awards.

### **National Startup Awards 2020:**

- The National Startup Awards seek to recognize and reward outstanding startups and ecosystem enablers that are building innovative products or solutions and scalable enterprises, with high potential of employment generation or wealth creation, demonstrating measurable social impact.
- The measure of success will not only be the financial gains for the investors but also the contribution to the social good. The Awards will recognize exceptional startups across various categories that are Providing innovative solutions to solve real problems and challenges for India, Developing innovative technologies, products and solutions from India to the world, Building businesses that are scalable, sustainable and responsible and delivering measurable Developmental Gains.
- The National Startup Awards will also reward exceptional Incubators and Accelerators as key building blocks of a robust startup ecosystem.
- The awards for startups will be given in 35 areas, classified into 12 broad sectors like agriculture, education, enterprise technology, energy, finance, food, health, Industry 4.0, space, security, tourism, and urban services.
- In addition, there are three special awards for startups from educational institutions, making an impact in rural areas and women entrepreneurs.

## **9. World Aids Day**

### **About:**

- World AIDS Day 2019 has been recently observed on the 1st of December with this year theme as “Communities make the difference.”
- Since 1988, 1<sup>st</sup> December is observed as World AIDS Day.
- It is the first global health day to be celebrated.

### **About Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS):**

- It is a chronic illness, which can also be potentially life-threatening.
- The disease is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus, HIV which affects the human immune system. According to the WHO, at the end of 2018, about 37.9 million people were living with HIV. Data suggests that about 75 million people have been infected with the virus until now, out of which 32 million lives have been lost because of HIV.

### **National AIDS Control Programme (NACP):**

- The government is implementing **National AIDS Control Programme (NACP)** as a hundred per cent Central Sector Scheme for prevention and control of AIDS.
- Its response to HIV epidemic comprises a comprehensive three-pronged strategy of prevention, testing and treatment.
- The Government has also developed a seven-year National Strategic Plan from 2017 to 2024 to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

## **10. Clownfish**

### **Why in News?**

- The clownfish, made so popular by the animated film Finding Nemo and its sequel Finding Dory, cannot be expected to be able to adapt to a rapidly changing environment, a new study has concluded.

### **Clownfish**

- Clownfish are found in various parts of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including the Great Barrier Reef.
- They typically live at the bottom of shallow seas in sheltered reefs or in shallow lagoons. It is this habitat that is under threat.

### **Habitat Under Threat:**

- Clownfish breed only in sea anemones, sharing a symbiotic bond.
- Clownfish shelter in the anemone and are the only fish that do not get stung by the nematocysts of the anemone.
- The anemone benefits because clownfish can defend the anemone from fish that might eat it. They never live anywhere but in the anemone.
- Like coral reefs in general, Anemones are under direct threat from the impacts of climate change.
- The anemones share another symbiotic bond, with algae. Under stress in warming waters, the algae leave the anemones.
- If the algae stay away too long, the anemone starve to death. Which leaves the clownfish without a home.

## **11. Nationwide Artificial Insemination Programme (NAIP)**

### **Why in News?**

- The Nationwide Artificial Insemination Programme (N.A.I.P) which was recently launched by PM covering 600 chosen districts including aspirational districts as identified by NITI Aayog.

### **Nationwide Artificial Insemination Programme:**

- The NAIP is a campaign mode genetic upgradation program covering all breeds of bovines to enhance the milk production using low cost breeding technology.
- It aims for improving genetic merit of Milch Animals with high quality seed.
- The gestation period for getting the benefits from the AI bovine is approximately 3 years.
- The aim of the program is to inseminate over 1 crore bovines in 6 months.
- The rate of Artificial Insemination is continuously increasing and has reached an average of 25,000 animals per day so far.
- 8 Lakh Artificial Inseminations has been performed under this programme benefitting more than 3.7 lakh farmers as on 29th November, 2019.

### **Pashu Aadhaar:**

- The NAIP also aims to ear-tag them with 'PashuAadhaar' which is a unique identification provided to the animals. This will enable the Government to identify and track the animals uniquely with all details such as the breed, age, gender and owner details.



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- Every cow and buffalo under AI will be tagged and can be tracked through the Information Network on Animal Productivity and Health (INAPH) Database.

## **12. Indian Railway Board**

### **Why in News?**

- Railway Board Chairman has recently stated that the railway infrastructure will be improved in the next five to ten years, so that the passenger trains will be able to operate at a speed of 160kmphs.

### **About Railway Board:**

- It is the apex body of the Indian Railways that reports to the Parliament of India through the Ministry of Railways headed by the Railway Minister of India.
- Currently Railway Board has 200 officials including the Chairman, Officers and Directors.
- Now the board will be reduced to 150 members by transferring the other 50 members to the Zonal Railways to Enhance Efficiency.
- It is also to be noted that Bibek Debroy Committee on Indian Railways in 2015 has also recommended the restructuring of the Railway Board to improve the efficiency.