

## **1. Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS)**

### **Why in News?**

- Recently, the seasonal migration of wild animals has begun from the adjacent wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) in Kerala.

### **Highlights:**

- The sanctuary is a haven for wild animals during summer owing to the easy availability of fodder and water throughout the year.

### **Where is the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary Located?**

- Located in Kerala, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) is an integral part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. It was established in 1973.
- Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve was the first from India to be included in the UNESCO designated World Network of Biosphere Reserves (designated in 2012).
- Other wildlife parks within the Reserve are: Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, Mukurthi National Park and Silent Valley.
- Spread over 344.44 sq km, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is contiguous to the tiger reserves of Nagarhole and Bandipur of Karnataka and Mudumalai of Tamil Nadu.
- Kabini river (a tributary of the Cauvery river) flows through the sanctuary.
- The forest types include South Indian Moist Deciduous forests, West coast semi-evergreen forests and plantations of teak, eucalyptus and Grewelia.
- Elephant, Gaur, Tiger, Panther, Sambar, Spotted deer, Wild boar, Sloth bear, Nilgiri langur, Bonnet macaque, Common langur, Malabar giant squirrel etc are the major Mammals.

## **2. Solar Tariffs**

### **Why in News?**

- Recently, The center is set to come up with rules to pool solar tariffs and is also aiming to increase bundling of renewable energy in existing thermal Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) to boost the procurement of Renewable Energy.

### **Highlights**

- The government Is aiming to boost installed renewable energy capacity to 500 GW (GigaWatts) by 2030.

- A Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), or electricity power agreement, is a contract between two parties, one which generates electricity (power generating companies (gencos)) and one which is looking to purchase electricity (Discoms).
- Solar tariffs have fallen consistently over the past decade to a low of under Rs 2 per unit (1 unit = 1 kWh) in December 2020 due to the falling price of solar panels and lower financing cost.
- The trend of lower solar tariffs has led to many many players waiting on tariffs to fall Further instead of entering into long term power procurement agreements.
- The country's Installed Renewable Energy (RE) capacity stands at 150.54 GW (solar: 48.55 GW, wind: 40.03 GW, Small hydro Power: 4.83, Bio-power: 10.62, Large Hydro: 46.51 GW) as on 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2021 while its nuclear energy based installed electricity capacity stands at 6.78 GW.
- India has the 4<sup>th</sup> largest wind power capacity in the world.
- This brings the total non-fossil based installed energy capacity to 157.32 GW which is 40.1% of the total installed electricity capacity of 392.01 GW.

### **3. Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**

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

- The US has recently Restored Sanctions waivers to Iran to allow international nuclear cooperation projects, as Indirect American-Iranian talks on reviving the 2015 international nuclear deal with Iran enter the final stretch.

#### **Highlights:**

- The waiver allows other countries and companies to participate in Iran's civilian nuclear programme without triggering US sanctions on them, in the name of promoting safety and non-proliferation.
- The waivers were revoked by the United States in 2019 and 2020 under former President Donald Trump, who pulled out of the Nuclear Agreement. The agreement is formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- Restoration of JCPOA may ease many restrictions over the Iranian regime, which may directly or indirectly help India. This can be reflected in the following examples:
- Boost to Regional Connectivity: Removing sanctions may revive India's interest in the Chabahar Project, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.

- This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.
- Apart from Chabahar, India's interest in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC), which runs through Iran, which will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost.
- Energy Security: Due to the pressure linked to the US' Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), India has to bring down oil imports to zero.
- Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in energy security.

#### **4. Why Opinion Polls need regulation**

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

- Every election season, we find television channels flooded with opinion polls and subsequently exit polls after the casting of votes.

##### **What are Opinion Polls?**

- Opinion polls are similar to surveys or an inquiry designed to gauge public opinion about a specific issue or a series of issues in a scientific and unbiased manner.
- This term has got wide recognition for assessing outcomes of elections in India.
- In most democracies, opinion and exit polls are common during elections.
- In India, the ECI allows the dissemination of the exit poll results half an hour after the end of polling on the last poll day.

##### **How are they Conducted?**

- Interviewers/reporters ask questions of people chosen at random from the population being measured.
- Responses are given, and interpretations are made based on the results.
- It is important in a random sample that everyone in the population being studied has an equal chance of participating.
- Otherwise, the results could be biased and, therefore, not representative of the population.

##### **Need of such polls:**

- **Popular opinion:** Polls are simply a measurement tool that tells us how a population thinks and feels about any given topic.
- **Specific viewpoint:** Polls tell us what proportion of a population has a specific viewpoint.

- **Opportunity to Express:** Opinion polling gives people who do not usually have access to the media an opportunity to be heard.

### Issues with Such Polls (in Context to Elections)

- **Authenticity:** Critics have often questioned their authenticity.
- **Manipulation of voters:** This largely manipulates the voting behavior.
- **Sensationalization by media:** The media, on the other hand, invariably opposes the idea of a ban as seat forecasts attract primetime viewership.
- **Ridiculing the public mandate:** The exit polls largely disrespect public opinions inciting Confusion Regarding the Election Mandate.

### Why does it Persist in India?

- The opposition to the ban in India is mainly on the ground that freedom of speech and expression is granted by the Constitution (Article 19).
- What is conveniently forgotten is that this freedom is not absolute and allows for “reasonable restrictions” in the same article.
- Limited restrictions that we have in India
- **RP Act:** The Indian Penal Code and Representation of the People Act, 1951 do contain certain restrictions against disinformation.
- **Restrictions on A19:** While the Constitution allows for reasonable restrictions on freedom of expression, its mandate to the ECI for free and fair elections is absolute.
- **Supreme Court Interpretations:** The Supreme Court (SC), in a series of judgments, has emphasized this requirement.
- **Basic structure doctrine:** It considers free and fair elections is the basic structure of the Constitution (PUCL vs Union of India, 2003; NOTA judgment, 2013).

### Examples of Restrictions:

- Restrictions are imposed in many countries, extending from two to 21 days prior to the poll — Canada, France, Italy, Poland, Turkey, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, to name a few examples.
- In India, all political parties too have opposed these polls, demanding a ban — except when they are shown as Winning.

### Why does the ECI feel that Opinion Polls Interfere with free and Fair Elections?

- **Prevalence of paid news in India:** Having seen “paid news” in action, it apprehends that some opinion polls may be sponsored, motivated and biased.

- **Opacity:** Almost all polls are non-transparent, providing little information on the methodology.
- **Propaganda:** Subtle propaganda on casteist, religious and ethnic basis as well as by the use of sophisticated means like the alleged poll surveys create public distrust in poll process.
- **Disinformation:** With such infirmities, many “polls” amount to misinformation that can result in “undue influence”, which is an “electoral offense” under IPC Section 171 (C). It is a “corrupt practice” under section 123 (2) of the RP Act.
- **Betting:** The polling agencies manipulate the margin of error, victory margin for candidates, seat projections for a party or hide negative findings.

### Call for a ban in India

- The demand for a ban on opinion polls is not new.
- At all-party meets called by the Election Commission in 1997 and 2004, there was Unanimous Demand for a ban. The difference of opinion was only on whether the ban should apply from the announcement of the poll schedule or the date of notification.

### Moves by ECI:

- In 1998, the ECI issued guidelines that were challenged in the SC.
- A five-judge Constitution Bench asked the ECI how it would enforce these decisions in the absence of a law. Realizing its weakness, the ECI withdrew the guidelines.
- Unfortunately, this left the constitutionality of the issue

### Way Forward:

- Independent regulator: Ideally a body like the British Polling Council would be a viable option. India could set up its own professional, self-regulated body on the same lines say Indian Polling Council.
- Mandatory disclosure: All polling agencies must disclose for scrutiny the sponsor, besides sample size, methodology, time frame, quality of training of research staff, etc.

## 5. BrahMos Deal and India's Defence Exports

### Why in News?

- On January 28, the Philippines signed a \$374.96 million deal with BrahMos Aerospace Pvt. Ltd. for the supply of shore-based anti-ship variant of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile.

### **Details of the Contract:**

- The Philippines contract includes delivery of three BrahMos missile batteries, training for operators and maintainers as well as the necessary Integrated Logistics SUPPORT (ILS) Package.
- The coastal defence regiment of the Philippine Marines, which is under the Navy, will be the primary employer of the missile system.

### **What makes the Deal Special?**

- This is the first export order for the missile which is a joint product between India and Russia and also the biggest defence export contract of the country.
- This adds impetus to meet the ambitious target set by the Government to achieve a manufacturing turnover of \$25 billion in aerospace and defence goods and services by 2025.

### **What is the BrahMos Missile System?**

- BrahMos is a joint venture between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya.
- The missile derives its name from the Brahmaputra and Moskva rivers.
- Beginning with an anti-ship missile, several variants have since been developed.
- It is now capable of being launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets and has constantly been improved and upgraded.

### **Its range**

- The range of the BrahMos was originally limited to 290 kms as per obligations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) of which Russia was a signatory.
- Following India's entry into the club in June 2016, plans were announced to extend the range initially to 450 kms and subsequently to 600 kms.
- BrahMos with extended range upto 450 kms has been tested several times since.

### **Deployments in India**

- The missile has been long inducted by the Indian armed forces.
- The Army has recently deployed the system along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Which other Countries are in Discussion for the BrahMos missiles?**

- While the first export order for BrahMos took a long time, the next order is likely to be concluded soon with negotiations with Indonesia and Thailand in advanced stages.

- Philippines is also looking at several other military procurements from India and South East Asia as the region has emerged as a major focus area for India's defence exports.
- For instance, the HAL has received interest from Philippines Coast Guard for procurement of seven Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters and eight Dornier Do-228 aircraft under the \$100mn Line of Credit.
- In addition, maritime domain and ship building is another potential area for Indian companies in the Philippines.

### **What is the status of defence exports?**

- India has put out a range of military hardware on sale which includes various missile systems, Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), helicopters, warship and patrol vessels, artillery guns, tanks, radars etc.
- From 2016-17 to 2018-19, the country's defence exports have increased from ₹1,521 crore to ₹10,745 crore, a staggering 700% growth.

### **Steps taken by the Centre to Boost Defence Production**

- Licensing relaxation: Measures announced to boost exports since 2014 include simplified defence industrial licensing, relaxation of export controls and grant of no-objection certificates.
- Lines of Credit: Specific incentives were introduced under the foreign trade policy and the Ministry of External Affairs has facilitated Lines of Credit for countries to import defence product.
- Policy boost: The Defence Ministry has also issued a draft Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy 2020.
- Indigenization lists: On the domestic front, to boost indigenous manufacturing, the Government had issued two "positive indigenization lists" consisting of 209 items that cannot be imported.
- Budgetary allocation: In addition, a percentage of the capital outlay of the defence budget has been reserved for procurement from domestic industry.

### **Issues Retarding Defence Exports**

- **Excess reliance on Public Sector:** India has four companies (Indian ordnance factories, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL)) among the top 100 biggest arms producers of the world.

- **Policy Delays:** In the past few years, the government has approved over 200 defence acquisition worth Rs 4 trillion, but most are still in relatively early stages of processing.
- **Lack of Critical Technologies:** Poor design capability in critical technologies, inadequate investment in R&D and the inability to manufacture major subsystems and components hamper the indigenous manufacturing.
- **Long Gestation:** The creation of a manufacturing base is capital and technology-intensive and has a long gestation period. By that time newer technologies make products outdated.
- **'Unease' in doing Business:** An issue related to stringent labour laws, compliance burden and lack of skills, affects the development of indigenous manufacturing in defence.
- **Multiple Jurisdictions:** Overlapping jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Industrial Promotion impair India's capability of defence manufacturing.
- **Lack of Quality:** The higher indigenization in few cases is largely attributed to the low-end technology.
- **FDI POLICY:** The earlier FDI limit of 49% was not enough to enthruse global manufacturing houses to set up bases in India.
- **R&D Lacunae:** A lip service to technology funding by making token allocations is an adequate commentary on our lack of seriousness in the area of Research and Development.
- **Lack of Skills:** There is a lack of engineering and research capability in our institutions. It again leads us back to the need for a stronger industry-academia interface.

### Way Forward:

- **Reducing Import Dependence:** India was the world's second-largest arms importer from 2014-18, ceding the long-held tag as the largest importer to Saudi Arabia, says 2019 SIPRI report.
- **Security Imperative:** Indigenization in defence is critical to national security also. It keeps intact the technological expertise and encourages spin-off technologies and innovation that often stem from it.
- **Economic boost:** Indigenization in defence can help create a large industry which also includes Small Manufacturers.
- **Employment generation:** Defence manufacturing will lead to the generation of satellites Industries that in turn will pave the way for a Generation of Employment Opportunities.