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# Daily News Discussion (DND)

26th & 29th March 2021

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# 1. Environment

## 1.1.Sundarban

- The Sundarbans comprises hundreds of islands and a network of rivers, tributaries and creeks in the delta of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal in India and Bangladesh.
- Cyclone Amphan hit on May 20 with heavy rains, a massive storm surge
- Indian Sundarban constitutes over 60% of the country's total mangrove forest area.
- It is the 27th Ramsar Site in India,
- The Indian Sundarban met four of the nine criteria required for the status of 'Wetland of International Importance' presence of rare species
  - ✓ Threatened ecological communities
  - ✓ Biological diversity
  - ✓ significant and representative fish and fish spawning ground and migration path.
- The Indian Sundarban, also a UNESCO world heritage site
- Sunderbans was designated as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 2001
- Critically endangered northern river terrapin (*Batagur baska*), the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*), and the vulnerable fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*).
- Two of the world's four horseshoe crab species, and eight of India's 12 species of kingfisher are also found here.

### Mangroves

- Mangroves are the plant communities occurring in inter-tidal zones along the coasts of tropical and subtropical countries.
- New species of red algae
- Two new species of seaweed have been discovered by a group of marine biologists from Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. Named *Hypnea indica* (after India) and *Hypnea bullata* (because of the blisterlike marks on its body – bullate), the seaweeds are part of the genus *Hypnea* or red seaweeds.

## 1.2.New species of red algae

- Two new species of seaweed have been discovered by a group of marine biologists from Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. Named *Hypnea indica* (after India) and *Hypnea bullata* (because of the blister like marks on its body – bullate), the seaweeds are part of the genus *Hypnea* or red seaweeds.

### Key points

- They grow in the intertidal regions of the coast, namely the area that is submerged during the high tide and exposed during low tides.

- The genus *Hypnea* consists of calcareous, erect, branched red seaweeds. “There are 61 species of which 10 were reported in India. With our two new species, the total number of species now would be 63,
- While *Hypnea indica* was discovered Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu, and Somnath Pathan and Sivrajpur in Gujarat, *Hypnea bullata* was discovered from Kanyakumari and Diu island of Daman and Diu.

### Significance of Algae

- **Food:** Algae are a healthy source of carbohydrates, fats, proteins, and vitamins A, B, C, and E as well as the minerals like iron, potassium, magnesium, calcium, manganese, and zinc
- **Fodder:** Algae are also used as fodder to feed livestock such as cattle and chickens.
- **Pisciculture:** In fish farming, Algae plays a very important role because it helps in the production process. Fish used plankton and zooplankton as food. It helps in maintaining the health of the marine ecosystem because algae are naturally absorbent of carbon dioxide and also provide oxygen to the water.
- **Fertilizer:** Algae are rich in minerals and vitamins. So they also used as liquid fertilizer which helps in the repairing level of nitrogen present in the soil
- **Binding Agent:** Algae act as binding agents against natural processes such as erosion.
- **Biological indicator:** Algae are very sensitive. If there is a slight change in the environment their pigments changes or might get died

## 1.3.African Elephant

- Africa’s forest and savanna elephants are now ‘critically endangered’ and ‘endangered’ due to population declines caused primarily by poaching and habitat loss, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) said March 25, 2021.
- Both species were earlier listed as ‘vulnerable’.
- The population of African forest elephants plummeted by 86 per cent in the last 31 years while that of the savanna elephants dropped by 60 per cent in the last 50 years, according to the IUCN.

### About Elephant

- There are two subspecies of African elephants, the Savanna (or bush) elephant and the Forest elephant. Savanna elephants are the larger of two
- Elephants are matriarchal, meaning they live in female-led groups
- They have two fingerlike features on the end of their trunk while Asian elephants have just one.
- Elephants have a longer pregnancy than any other mammal—almost 22 months.
- African elephants are the largest land animals on Earth. They are slightly larger than Asian elephants.
- African elephants are keystone species, meaning they play a critical role in their ecosystem. Also known as “ecosystem engineers,” elephants shape their habitat in many ways.

## 2. Science & Tech

### 2.1. Understanding genes help to adapt trees

- Climate change can transform the time when trees sprout leaves; understanding plant's genes can help tide over the problem

#### Need to Understand genetics of Bud break

- Bud-break – which is when trees leaf out – has undergone a change. Several trees initiate bud-break too early or too late, which affects the harvest.
- Spring, for example, arrived earlier than usual in Kashmir this year due to higher temperatures in February and March. Gul-tour, a spring flowering herb started blooming in mid-February in Kashmir. Its yellow flowers would usually blossom in March, heralding Spring.
- This is why understanding the genetics of bud-break helps scientists modify or select crop varieties that can be more resilient to climate threat.

#### Role of transcription factors

- The properties of transcription factors – genes that regulate other genes by binding to deoxyribonucleic acid and giving activation instructions – help scientists determine what other genes might be involved in a process such as a bud-break
- Researchers of the study had earlier identified transcription factors for early bud-break 1 (EBB1) and short vegetative phase (SVL), which directly interact to control bud-break. EBB1 is a positive regulator of bud-break, whereas SVL is a negative regulator of bud-break.
- Now, the research team has identified and characterised the early bud- break 3 (EBB3) gene. EBB3 is a temperature-responsive, positive regulator of bud-break that provides a direct link to activation of the cell cycle during bud-break.

### 2.2. Double mutant Coronavirus

- Recently health Ministry said a unique “double mutant” coronavirus variant – with a combination of mutations not seen anywhere else in the world – has been found in India.

#### Mutation

- an alteration in the genetic material of a cell of a living organism or of a virus that is more or less permanent and that can be transmitted to the cell's or the virus's descendants

#### Mutations in the virus

- Mutations in the virus per se are not surprising but specific mutations that help the virus evolve to thwart vaccines or the immune system, or are linked to a spike in cases or in disease severity, are of interest.
- While the two mutations have been individually identified in other variants of SARS-CoV-2 globally, and have been associated with a reduction in vaccine efficacy as well as infectivity, their combined effect and biological implication has not yet been understood.

- In the days ahead, the INSACOG will submit details of this variant to a global repository called GISAID and, if it merits, classify it as a “Variant of Concern” (VOC)

## Variants

- Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG), revealed the presence of two mutations, E484Q and L452R together, in virus samples from states such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Punjab and Gujarat.
- Till date only three global VOCs have been identified: the U.k variant (B.1.1.7), the South African (B.1.351) and the Brazilian (P.1) lineage

## Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG)

- Multi-laboratory, multi-agency, pan-India network to monitor genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2.
- It helps in the understanding of how the virus spreads and evolves.

## GISAID

- It is a public platform started by the WHO in 2008 for countries to share genome sequences

## 2.3.N. Korea launches ‘ballistic missiles’

- North Korea fired two suspected ballistic missiles into the sea on Thursday in its first substantive provocation to the new U.S. administration of Joe Biden.
- ✓ North fired two short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan, known as the East Sea in Korea, from South Hamgyong province.



Ballistic Missile	Cruise Missile
propelled only for a brief duration after the launch.	Self-propelled till the end of its flight.
Similar to a rocket engine.	Similar to a jet engine.
Long-range missiles leave the earth's atmosphere and reenter it.	The flight path is within the earth's atmosphere.
Low precision as it is <b>unguided for most of its path</b> and its trajectory depends on gravity, air resistance and Coriolis Force.	Hits targets with high precision as it is constantly propelled.
Can have a very long range (300 km to 12,000 km) as there is no fuel requirement after its initial trajectory.	he range is small (below 500 km) as it needs to be constantly propelled to hit the target with high precision.
<b>Prithvi , Agni</b>	<b>Brahmos missile</b>

## 3. Geography

### 3.1. Suez Canal

- The maritime world went into overdrive this week to dislodge one of the world's biggest ships after it got jammed in Egypt's Suez Canal, laying bare the fresh challenges the industry must navigate as mammoth vessels play an ever larger role in global trade.
- Is an artificial sea-level waterway in Egypt, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez; and dividing Africa and Asia.

#### History

- The Suez Canal was built in Egypt under the supervision of French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps.
- The man-made waterway opened in 1869 after ten years of construction and separates most of Egypt from the Sinai Peninsula. At 120 miles long, it connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean by way of the Red Sea, allowing goods to be shipped from Europe to Asia and back more directly.
- The 150-year-old canal was controlled by British and French interests in its initial years, but was nationalised in 1956 by Egypt

#### Suez crisis

- After World War II, Egypt pressed for evacuation of British troops from the Suez Canal Zone, and in July 1956 President Nasser nationalized the canal, hoping to charge tolls that would pay for construction of a massive dam on the Nile River.
- In response, Israel invaded in late October, and British and French troops landed in early November, occupying the canal zone.
- Under Soviet, U.S., and U.N. pressure, Britain and France withdrew in December, and Israeli forces departed in March 1957. That month, Egypt took control of the canal and reopened it to commercial shipping.
- Ten years later, Egypt shut down the canal again following the Six Day War and Israel's occupation of the Sinai peninsula.
- For the next eight years, the Suez Canal, which separates the Sinai from the rest of Egypt, existed as the front line between the Egyptian and Israeli armies.
- In 1975, Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat reopened the Suez Canal as a gesture of peace after talks with Israel.
- Today, an average of 50 ships navigate the canal daily, carrying more than 300 million tons of goods a year.

#### Concerns

- Around the world, ships have ballooned in size because the industry has looked for economies of scale, but these mega vessels have also drawn concerns.
- Shipping companies have used them to lower costs per unit, but that's putting pressure on ports to make their waterways deeper and spend on more crane

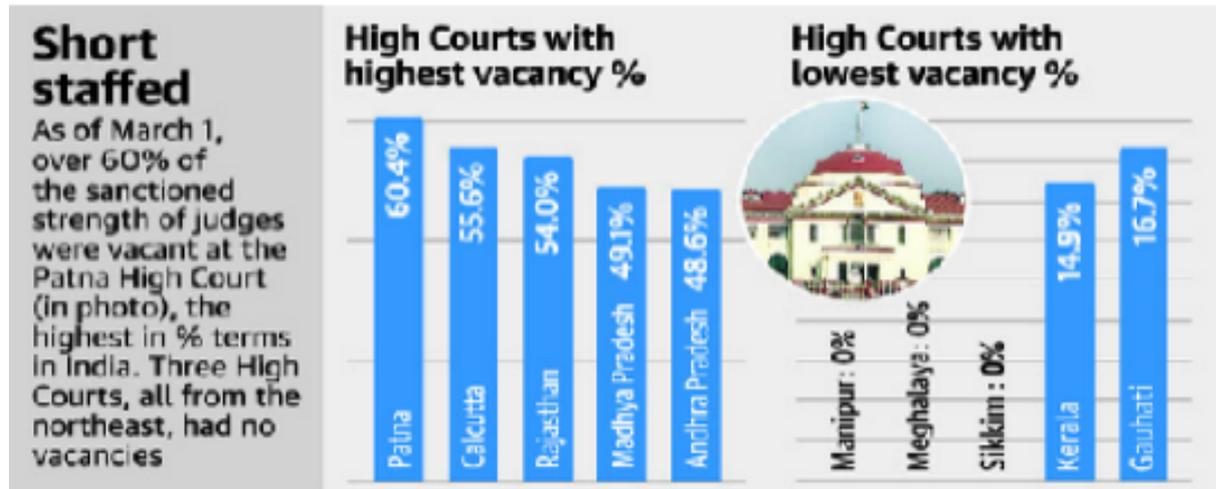


- The Suez Canal Authority said a lack of visibility due to bad weather and a sand storm led to the ship losing control and drifting.
- Global trade in merchandise has recovered to pre-pandemic levels as the coronavirus triggered demand for household goods

## 4. Polity

### 4.1. Appointment of Judges

- The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the government to clarify on the status of 55 recommendations made by the Collegium for judicial appointments to High Courts six months to nearly a year-and-a-half ago
- Of the pending recommendations, 44 were made to fill vacancies in the Calcutta, Madhya Pradesh, Gauhati, Rajasthan and Punjab High Courts.



#### Appointment of CJI 1950-1973

- A convention was formed where the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court was to be appointed as the Chief Justice of India.

#### Violation

- In 1973, A.N.Ray was appointed as the Chief Justice of India. This violated the convention formed earlier since Justice A.N.Ray superseded three other Supreme Court judges senior to him.
- Again in 1977, another chief justice was appointed who superseded his seniors.
- This resulted in a clash between the Executive and the Judiciary.

#### First judges case, 1982

- A petition was filed in 1982 in the Supreme Court of India.
- This case is known as the S.P.Gupta Case or First Judges case.
- When asked the Supreme Court of India whether the word “consultation” in the constitutional article 124 mean “concurrence”; the Supreme court overruled this and denied saying that Consultation does not mean concurrence.
- The President was not bound to make a decision based on the consultation of the Supreme Court

#### Second judges case, 1993

- In this case, the Supreme court overruled its earlier verdict and changed the meaning of consultation to concurrence.
- Thus binding the President of India with the consultations of the Chief justice of India.

- This resulted in the birth of the Collegium System.

### **Third Judges Case, 1998**

- The chief justice won't be the only one as a part of the consultation process. Consultation would include a collegium of 4 senior-most judges of the Supreme court.
- Even if 2 of the judges are against the opinion, the CJI will not recommend it to the government.

### **Collegium system**

- The SC collegium is headed by the CJI and comprises four other senior most judges of the court.
- A HC collegium is led by its Chief Justice and four other senior most judges of that court.
- Names recommended for appointment by a HC collegium reaches the government only after approval by the CJI and the SC collegium.

### **Governments role**

- Judges of the higher judiciary are appointed only through the collegium system and the government has a role only after names have been decided by the collegium.
- The government's role is limited to getting an inquiry conducted by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) if a lawyer is to be elevated as a judge in a High Court or the Supreme Court.

### **Intelligence Bureau (IB)**

- It is a reputed and established intelligence agency. It is authoritatively controlled by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It can also raise objections and seek clarifications regarding the collegium's choices, but if the collegium reiterates the same names, the government is bound, under Constitution Bench judgments, to appoint them as judges.

### **National Judicial Appointment Commission Act, 2014**

- The 1993 judgment was the basis on which a five-judge Constitution Bench declared the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act (NJAC) and the Constitutional (Ninety-Nine Amendment) Act, 2014 unconstitutional in October 2015.
- NJAC too would recommend names for the Appointment of Supreme Court Judge and Appointment and Transfer of High Court Judge.
- Composition of NJAC:
  - ✓ The Chief Justice of India.
  - ✓ 2 senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.
  - ✓ The Law Minister of India.
  - ✓ 2 eminent members that are chosen by the Selection Committee.

## **4.2.Right to Information (RTI)**

- The Centre has only rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information (RTI) requests in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate, according to the Central Information Commission's annual report

## Key Findings

- Almost 40% of these rejections did not include any valid reason, as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the RTI Act, according to an analysis of report data.
- This includes 90% of rejections by the Prime Minister's Office
- Public authorities under the Central government received 13.7 lakh RTI requests in 2019-20, out of which 58,634 were rejected for various reasons. Rejection rates have fallen since the 13.9% rate in 2005-06, and have been steadily trending downwards since the 8.4% spike in 2014-15. In 2019-20, they hit their lowest level so far.
- Home Ministry had the highest rate of rejections, as it rejected 20% of all RTIs received. The Agriculture Ministry's rejection rate doubled from 2% in 2018-19 to 4% in 2019-20. The Delhi Police and the Army also saw increases in rejection rates.
- The RTI Act allows public authorities to reject RTI requests on a number of grounds, ranging from information which would endanger life and safety to that which involves irrelevant personal information, Cabinet papers, foreign governments, copyrights, or sovereignty, security and intelligence matters. Public authorities are expected to cite the relevant clause of the Act to invoke the exemption
- In 38.7% of rejections in 2019-20, however, public authorities failed to cite these permissible exemption clauses, and were classified under the 'Others' category in the CIC data. This is an increase from the 33% seen the previous year.
- Of the permissible grounds for rejection, Section 8(1)(j) saw the highest use

## Section 8(1)

- deals with the exemption from disclosure of information:
- If it is related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, relation with foreign State or lead to incitement of an offence,
- Information including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property,
- Information, the disclosure of which would endanger the life or physical safety of any person,
- Information which would impede the process of investigation or prosecution of offenders,
- Information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest. Section 8(1) was used in around 46% of the cases.

## Section 9

- It empowers the Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer to reject a request for information which involves an infringement of copyright.

## Section 24

- It exempts information related to security and intelligence organisations except allegations of corruption and human rights violations.
- Around one in five (20%) permissible rejections coming under this category

## 5. History

### 5.1. Shigmotsav

- With the rise in COVID cases in Goa, questions are being raised over the scale of celebrations for the annual Shigmotsav.

#### What is Shigmo or Shigmotsav?

- Shigmo is the celebration of a 'rich, golden harvest of paddy' by the tribal communities of Goa.
- Agricultural communities including the Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips celebrate the festival that also marks the onset of spring. Shigmo celebrations last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar that correspond with March-April every year.
- While the Goa government decided to allow Shigmo festivities this year, the celebrations will be limited to parades in three locations – Panaji, Ponda and Mapusa.

#### Various activities in celebrations

- The festival begins with 'Naman' that is the invocation of the local folk deities on the village 'maand' or the village stage.
- It is held to the beats of percussion instruments like the Ghumat, Dhol, Mhadle and Tashe by the male folk.
- This is called the 'romta mell' that moves from one village to another.
- The celebration is replete with traditional, colourful costumes, mythological installations, painted faces and costumes of various hues.
- Folk dances like Ghodemodini (a dance of equestrian warriors), Gopha and Phugadi are among the many dances performed by the participating communities.

#### Other Names

- Shigmo is celebrated all over India but in different names:
  - ✓ North India - Holi.
  - ✓ South India - Kamadahan.
  - ✓ Assam and Bengal - Dolyatra.
  - ✓ Maharashtra - Shimga

## 6. International Relations

### 6.1. United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF)

- India on Saturday delivered on its promise of 2,00,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines for the United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF) worldwide, sending a shipment bound for Copenhagen.
- The cargo of AstraZeneca Covishield vaccines produced by the Serum Institute of India (SII) in Pune was sent despite the government's decision to reduce exports in view of the need for vaccines domestically, honouring a commitment made by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at a UNSC meeting in February.

#### About United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF)

##### Background

- United Nations peacekeeping was initially developed during the Cold War as a means of resolving conflicts between states by deploying unarmed or lightly armed military personnel from a number of countries, under UN command,
- The end of the Cold War precipitated a dramatic shift in UN and multilateral peacekeeping. In a new spirit of cooperation, the Security Council established larger and more complex UN peacekeeping missions, often to help implement comprehensive peace agreements between belligerents in intra-State conflicts and civil wars

##### Composition

- UN peacekeepers (often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets) can include soldiers, police officers, and civilian personnel.
- Peacekeeping forces are contributed by member states on a voluntary basis.
- Civilian staff of peace operations are international civil servants, recruited and deployed by the UN Secretariat.

#### UN Peacekeeping is guided by three basic principles

- Consent of the parties;
- Impartiality;
- Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

##### Funding

- Every Member State is legally obligated to pay their respective share towards peacekeeping
- The General Assembly apportions peacekeeping expenses based on a special scale of assessments under a complex formula that Member States themselves have established.
- This formula takes into account, among other things, the relative economic wealth of Member States, with the five permanent members of the Security Council required to pay a larger share because of their special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Decision making power

- Decisions about the establishment, maintenance or expansion of peacekeeping operations are taken by the Security Council.
- It is for the Security Council to determine when and where a UN peace operation should be deployed.
- The Security Council responds to crises around the world on a case-by-case basis and it has a range of options at its disposal. It takes many different factors into account when considering the establishment of a new peace operation

### **Past News**

- The Indian peacekeepers serving in South Sudan have been awarded the United Nations (UN) medal for their service and contribution to building peace in the country.
- India has a long tradition of sending women on UN peacekeeping missions.  
In 2007, India became the first country to deploy an all-women contingent to a UN peacekeeping mission

## 7. Economy

### 7.1. Business Responsibility And Sustainability Report (BRSR)

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has decided to introduce new requirements for business sustainability reporting by listed entities.
- This new report will be called the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) and will replace the existing Business Responsibility Report (BRR)

#### Background

- As a first step towards mainstreaming the concept of business responsibility, the 'Voluntary Guidelines on Corporate Social Responsibility' were issued in 2009.
- These guidelines were subsequently revised as 'National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environmental and Economic Responsibilities of Business, 2011 (NVGS)' after extensive consultations with business, academia, civil society organizations and the government.
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) through its 'Listing Regulations' in 2012 mandated the top 100 listed entities by market capitalization to file Business Responsibility Reports (BRRs) from an environmental, social and governance perspective.
- These BRRs enabled business to demonstrate the adoption of the NVG principles and the attendant core elements with the intent of engaging businesses more meaningfully with their stakeholders going beyond regulatory financial compliance.
- This was extended to top 500 companies in FY 2015-16 and further extended to top 1000 companies in December, 2019.
- Taking into account the national and international developments in the arena of business and human rights since 2011, the NVGs have been updated and released as NGRBC (National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct) in March 2019 to reveal alignments with the UNGPs, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Paris Agreement on Climate change etc.
- In furtherance to updation and formulation of the NGRBCs, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs had constituted a 'Committee on Business Responsibility Reporting' to develop new BRR formats.

#### About Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR):

- BRSR, which is from an Environmental, Social and Governance perspective, is intended to enable businesses to engage more meaningfully with their stakeholders.
- It will encourage businesses to go beyond regulatory financial compliance and report on their social and environmental impacts.
- The BRSR will be applicable to the top 1000 listed entities (by market capitalization), for reporting on a voluntary basis for FY 2021 - 22 and on a mandatory basis from FY 2022 - 23.  
Environmental, Social, and Governance Goals:

#### Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals

- are a set of standards for a company's operations that force companies to follow better governance, ethical practices, environment-friendly measures and social responsibility.

- Environmental criteria consider how a company performs as a steward of nature.
- Social criteria examine how it manages relationships with employees, suppliers, customers, and the communities where it operates.
- Governance deals with a company's leadership, executive pay, audits, internal controls, and shareholder rights.

## Current affairs Worksheet (26th & 29th March 2021)

### Factual sheet for Quick revision

Topic	Description	Update
<b>Environment</b>	<b>Sundarbans</b> <b>Mangrove adaptation</b> <b>Algae- Lichen</b> <b>Asian Vs African elephant</b>	
<b>SnT</b>	<b>Bud break genes</b> <b>Double mutant corona virus</b> <b>INSACOG</b> <b>GISAID</b> <b>Ballistic Vs Cruise Missile</b>	
<b>Geog/IR</b>	<b>Sea of Japan map based location</b> <b>Suez canal location</b> <b>UNPKF</b>	
<b>Polity</b>	<b>Appointment of judges &amp; Collegium system</b>	
<b>History</b>	<b>Festivals of states (Recently in news)</b>	
<b>Economy</b>	<b>Business Responsibility And Sustainability Report</b>	