

25th Jan – 31st January Weekly Compilation

(The Hindu+ Indian Express + PIB + Other World Wide News)

❖ **RAM Setu**

(Source: Express)

Why in News: Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has approved an underwater research project to ascertain the origins of the Ram Setu. Indian scientists will undertake an underwater scientific study. The study aims to determine the age of the chain of corals and sediments forming the Ram Setu.

Ram Setu

Ram Setu is also known as Adam's Bridge or Nala Sethu. It is a 48 km chain of limestone shoals between **Pamban Island known as Rameswaram Island on the coast of Tamil Nadu, India, and Mannar Island on the coast of Sri Lanka**. The bridge separates the Gulf of Mannar (south-west) from the Palk Strait (northeast).

The bridge holds religious significance. A bridge is mentioned in Ramayana, that Lord Ram and his army built to reach Lanka. The location of the Lanka of the Ramayana has been widely interpreted as being current day Sri Lanka and bridge as Ram Setu.

Study

- **The study will be conducted by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) Goa.**
- To study the process behind Ram Setu's formation. It will also look for any submerged habitations around the structure.
- Ram Setu's age will also be ascertained through the study of fossils and sedimentation. It is to see if it correlates with the Ramayana period.
- The indigenous research vessel named **Sindhu Sadhana** will be deployed. It will collect samples of sediment from 35-40 meters below the water level. The vessel can stay underwater for up to 45 days.

- The vessel will collect core samples at greater depths and perform bathymetry studies. Bathymetry is the study of the “beds” or “floors” of water bodies, including the ocean, rivers, streams, and lakes).

The study will conduct two planned tests namely

Side-scan SONAR: This test will provide bathymetry which is similar to studying the topography of a structure on land. Sound wave signals will be sent to the structure for this test. The sound waves will provide an outline of the physical structure of the Ram Setu.

Silo seismic survey: Mild earthquake-like tremor shocks will be sent at shallow depths closer to the Ram Setu structure. These shocks are the energized shockwaves capable of penetrating into the structure. The relevant instruments will capture the reflected or refracted signals. Based on the reflected signals one can get a clear image on subsurface structure.

Significance of the project: Most importantly, Scientists believes underwater exploration studies can have the possibility to trace numerous ship wreckages and remains from the past.

Sethusamudram Shipping Canal Project

It is a shipping canal project proposed by the UPA government in 2005. The project aims to link the Arabian Sea with the Bay of Bengal. For this, a channel passing through the limestone shoals of Ram Setu was to be dredged in the Setusamudram Sea between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. However, the project has not been implemented yet

❖ Green Tax

(Source: PIB)

Why in News: The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways has approved a proposal to levy a ‘green tax’ on old vehicles.

Green Tax

Green tax is also called pollution tax or environmental tax. It is the tax levied on goods that cause environmental pollution.

The tax will discourage people from using vehicles that damage the environment. It will motivate them to switch to newer, less polluting vehicles and reduce the overall pollution level and make the polluter pay for it.

- **The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will levy a green tax on transport vehicles older than eight years at the time of renewal of fitness certificate at the rate of 10% to 25% of road tax.**

- The revenue collected through the green tax will be kept in a different account and will only be utilised for tackling pollution.

Exemptions

Vehicles like strong hybrids, electric vehicles and those running on alternate fuels like CNG, ethanol and LPG and vehicles used in farming, such as tractor, harvesters and tillers will be exempted.

Differential Taxation

- **Transport vehicles** older than 8 years to be charged at the time of renewal of fitness certificate at the rate of 10-25% of road tax.
- **Personal vehicles** are proposed to be charged green tax at the time of renewal of registration certification after 15 years. Public transport vehicles, such as city buses, will be charged lower green tax.
- Higher green tax (**up to 50%**) will be levied on vehicles being registered in highly polluted cities. Differential tax will also be charged depending on fuel (petrol/ diesel) and the type of vehicle.

Why Green Tax

Combat Health Hazards by Vehicular Pollution: The major pollutants like carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), photochemical oxidants, lead (Pb), particulate matter (PM), etc. can have direct as well as in-direct impact, like reduced visibility, cancers, respiratory and cardiovascular ailments, increased mortality, morbidity and impaired pulmonary function.

Polluter Pays Principle: It is the commonly accepted practice that those who produce pollution should bear the costs of managing it to prevent damage to human health or the environment.

For example, a factory that produces a potentially poisonous substance as a byproduct of its activities is usually held responsible for its safe disposal. Similarly Green tax is to be paid by the owners of pollution causing vehicles.

❖ **Law Commission of India**

(Source: Express)

Why in News: The Supreme Court has issued notice to the Centre on a PIL to declare the Law Commission of India as a “statutory body” and also, appoint a chairperson and members for the body within a month

Law Commission of India

- Law Commission of India is neither a constitutional body nor a statutory body, it is an executive body established by an order of the Government of India. Its major function is to work for legal reforms.
- The Commission is established for a fixed tenure and works as an advisory body to the Ministry of Law and Justice.
- Its membership primarily comprises legal experts.

Functions

- It identifies obsolete laws: The laws which are no longer relevant, not in harmony with the existing climate and laws which require change.
- It suggests suitable measures for quick redressal of citizens' grievances in the field of law.
- It also undertakes studies and research for bringing reforms in the justice delivery systems for elimination of delay in procedures, speedy disposal of cases, reduction in the cost of litigation etc.

However, **recommendations of the commission are not binding on the government.** They are recommendations only. The government or concerned department may accept or reject these recommendations.

Establishment of Law Commission

- The first Law Commission was established during the British Raj era in 1834. It was established by the Charter Act of 1833 and was chaired by Lord Macaulay.
- In 1955, the first Law Commission of independent India was established for a three-year term. Since then, twenty-one more Commissions have been established.
- In 2015, The 21st Law Commission of India was established. Its tenure was up to 31st August 2018. In 2020, the Union Cabinet approved the creation of the 22nd Law Commission.

❖ Zoological Survey of India on Sunderban

(Source: The Hindu)

Why in News: Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has released a study titled "Birds of the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve". The study documents the avifauna of the Sundarbans and also serves as a comprehensive photographic field guide with detailed distribution and locality data for all the species from the region.

Sunderbans

Sundarbans is a mangrove area in the delta formed by the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna Rivers in the Bay of Bengal. It spans from the Hooghly River in India's state of West Bengal to the Baleswar River in Bangladesh.

- It is located in the southwestern part of the delta. It constitutes over 60% of India's total mangrove forest area. It covers 4,200 sq. km and includes the Sunder ban Tiger Reserve — home to about 96 royal Bengal tigers.
- **It is a World Heritage site and a Ramsar site (a wetland site designated to be of international importance).**
- Indian Sunder bans is part of the largest mangrove forest in the world and is home to 428 species of birds. **Among these birds listed, some like the masked finfoot and the Buffy fish owl are recorded only from the Sundarbans.**
- The area is also home to nine out of 12 species of kingfishers found in the country as well as rare species such as the Goliath heron and the spoon-billed sandpiper.
- **India has over 1,300 species of birds and if 428 species of birds are from the Sunder bans, it means that one in every three birds in the country is found in the unique ecosystem.**

❖ Remote Voting Project

(Source: The Hindu)

Why in News: As per Election Commission, the remote voting project would be launched soon.

Remote Voting Project

- A remote voting project will enable a voter to cast his or her franchise from any polling station in the country. It will remove the compulsion on voting only at the polling station, where the person is registered.
- This program would help lakhs of voters who live outside their home constituencies for work or education. **The project is being developed by the IIT-Madras using blockchain technology.**

Add ON

e-EPIC

It is an Electronic version of the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC). It would be a non-editable PDF version of the EPIC. Furthermore, it can be downloaded on the phone and stored on the DigiLocker app or printed from a computer.

All general voters who have valid EPIC numbers would be able to download the Electronic version of the Electoral Photo Identity Card.

❖ **Inequality Virus Report**

(Source: The Hindu)

Oxfam has released a report titled “Inequality Virus Report”. The report has highlighted the increasing inequalities in India. It is a part of its international report released on the opening day of the World Economic Forum’s ‘Davos Dialogues.’

The report states that COVID-19 has the potential to increase economic inequality in almost every country at once.

Highlights

Impact of the Pandemic: The wealth of Indian billionaires increased by 35% during the lockdown and by 90% since 2009 to USD 422.9 billion. It ranks India sixth in the world after the USA, China, Germany, Russia, and France.

- The Income rise of the top 100 billionaires since the lockdown in March is enough to give a cheque of ₹94,045 to each of 138 million poorest Indian people.
- The wealth earned by top 11 billionaires during the pandemic, can sustain the MGNREGS or the Health Ministry for the next 10 years.

Informal Sector: Out of the total 12.2 Crore people who lost their jobs in India, 75% of jobs were lost in the informal sector.

Education: As Education shifted online, the digital divide worsened inequalities in India. Only 4% of rural households had a computer and less than 15% of rural households had an internet connection.

Sanitation: Out of the poorest 20%, only 6% have access to non-shared sources of improved sanitation. It is 93.4% among the top 20%.

Women: The unemployment for women rose by 15% from a pre-lockdown level. This increase in unemployment of women can result in a loss to India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of about 8% or USD 218 billion.

It recommends re-introducing wealth tax and a one-time COVID-19 cess of 4% on taxable income of over ₹10 Lakh. It will help the economy to recover from the lockdown. According to its estimate, a wealth tax on the nation’s 954 richest families could raise the equivalent of 1% of India’s GDP.

❖ **Wildlife Crime Control Bureau**

(Source: The Hindu)

Why in News: Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and Barasat Forest Range have rescued a live pangolin in Kolkata.

Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)

It is a statutory multi-disciplinary body. It functions under the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Its responsibilities include combating organized wildlife crime in the country.

Under Section 38 (Z) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, it is mandated to:

- Collect intelligence related to organized wildlife crime activities. And to circulate it to the States and other enforcement agencies for immediate actions, to catch the criminals.
- Establish a centralized wildlife crime data bank.
- Coordinates with foreign authorities and international organization to facilitate universal action on wildlife crimes.
- Build capacity of the wildlife crime enforcement agencies for scientific and professional investigation into wildlife crimes.
- Assist State Governments to ensure success in prosecutions related to wildlife crimes.

❖ **Climate Adaptation Summit 2021**

(Source: The Hindu)

Why in News: The Prime Minister of India addressed the Climate Adaptation Summit 2021 virtually.

Climate Adaptation Summit 2021

- The summit is being hosted online by the Netherlands Government.
- Its aim is to accelerate, innovate and scale up global efforts in adapting to the effects of climate change. It will make the world as a climate-resilient world.
- Summit will keep up the momentum of the global efforts towards climate change adaptation till UNFCCC's COP26 in Glasgow in 2021.

Commitments made by India

During the summit, the Indian Prime Minister mentioned the following aims of India towards adaptation:-

- To increase the renewable energy capacity to 450 gigawatts by 2030.
- Promoting LED lights and saving 38 million tons of carbon-dioxide emissions annually.
- To restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.
- Providing clean cooking fuel to 80 million rural households.
- Connecting 64 million households to a piped water supply.

1000 Cities Act Now initiative

- The Initiative has been launched at Climate Adaptation Summit 2021.
- The initiative aims to at implementation of comprehensive climate resilience strategies and adaptation measures in 1,000 cities by 2030.
- To achieve this, the program is promoting a comprehensive package of measures. It includes the implementation of nature-based solutions, urban water resilience solutions, and a transformative capacity building program.

Add On

- **Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA):** It was launched in Hague in 2018 by the 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon. But it was established by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands and the leaders of 22 other convening countries
- Mandate: To accelerate adaptation by elevating the political visibility of adaptation and focusing on concrete solutions.
- The Commission's mandate came to an end following its Year of Action in 2020 with its work showcased at the Climate Adaptation Summit, 2021. The Global Center on Adaptation will be taking forward its work.

❖ Nilgiri Elephant Corridor

(Source: The Hindu)

Why in News: The Supreme Court has appointed a new member to Technical Committee on Nilgiri Elephant Corridor.

The Supreme Court last year constituted a committee to hear complaints by landowners against the action taken by the Nilgiri's Collector. The Nilgiri collector's action includes the sealing of landowners' buildings in the Nilgiris Elephant Corridor.

Nilgiri Elephant Corridor

Elephant corridors allow elephants to continue their nomadic mode of survival. Despite the shrinking forest cover, the corridors facilitate the traveling of elephants between distinct forest habitats.

- Nilgiri's elephant corridor is situated in the ecologically fragile Sigur plateau. The plateau connects the Western and the Eastern Ghats. Apart from that, the plateau also sustains elephant populations and their genetic diversity.
- It has the Nilgiri Hills on its southwestern side and the Moyar River Valley on its north-eastern side. The elephants cross the plateau in search of food and water.

Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

- The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve is the largest protected forest area in India. The Biosphere Reserve spread across three states, namely: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala.
- The Nilgiri Sub-Cluster is a part of the Western Ghats which was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2012.
- The reserve includes the Aralam, Mudumalai, Mukurthi, Nagarhole, Bandipur, and Silent Valley national parks. Similarly, the reserve also includes the Wayanad, Karimpuzha, and Sathyamangalam wildlife sanctuaries.
- It has the largest population of two endangered species, the lion-tailed macaque and Nilgiri tahr. The reserve hosts more than 400 tigers. Most importantly, the reserve is having more tigers than any other place on earth.
- About 80% of flowering plants reported from the Western Ghats occur in Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

❖ Akash-NG Missile Hindu)

(Source: The

Why in News: Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has conducted the successful maiden launch of Akash-NG (New Generation) Missile. It was launched from Integrated Test Range off the coast of Odisha

Akash missile

- It is a new generation Surface-to-Air Missile meant for use by the Indian Air Force. It will be used to intercept high-maneuvering low radar cross-section aerial threats.
- It is an advanced variant of Akash missile. It comes with Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) multi-function radar that features all three functions
 - Search
 - Track
 - Fire control in one platform

The earlier variant has a maximum range of 30 km while Akash-NG can strike targets up to 50-70 km.

❖ Future Investment Initiative

(Source: PIB)

Why in News: The Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare has addressed the 4th edition of the Future Investment Initiative (FII) Forum

- Future Investment Initiative (FII) is an annual investment forum held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Forum discusses trends in the world economy and investment environment.
- It was hosted by Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia (PIF). The first event was held in 2017.
- Its objective was to find solutions on how business and government can expand access to healthcare, train healthcare workers, remove regulatory barriers and encourage investment in advanced health technologies.

Key Highlights from the address

Union Minister has highlighted the five big trends which are influencing global business, due to COVID-19:

- The impact of Technology and Innovation
- Importance of Infrastructure for Global Growth
- Changes coming in human resource and future of work
- Compassion for environment
- Business-friendly governance with a focus on the whole of society and government approach.

❖ Strategic Partnership Agreement with IEA

(Source: Express)

Why in News: Indian Government has signed a strategic partnership agreement with the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Strategic Partnership agreement

The agreement aims to strengthen cooperation with India in global energy security, stability, and sustainability. Both IEA members and India will jointly decide the terms of the partnership. It will include a phased increase in benefits and responsibilities for India as an IEA strategic partner.

The IEA Secretariat will be responsible for:

- The implementation of the agreed activities in India.
- Facilitating discussion between the IEA members and India, to further develop the strategic partnership.

This strategic partnership will lead to an extensive exchange of knowledge. It would also be a stepping stone towards India's full membership of IEA.

International Energy Agency

- It was established in 1974 as an autonomous intergovernmental organization under the OECD framework
- Its objective is to ensure reliable, affordable, and clean energy for its member countries and beyond.

It has four main areas of focus

- Energy security
- Economic development
- Environmental awareness
- Worldwide Engagement

It has 30 member countries and eight association countries. India became an associate member in 2017. IEA member countries need to maintain total oil stock levels equivalent to at least 90 days of the previous year's net imports.

Add On

Clean Energy Transitions Program (CETP)

It was launched at the IEA Ministerial Meeting in 2017. It will provide technical support to governments, whose energy policies can facilitate the global transition towards a sustainable energy future.

Priority Countries: The CETP's priority countries are Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa. These countries collectively accounted for 41% of CO₂ emissions from fuel combustion in 2018 and two-thirds of emissions from developing economies.

❖ Reports and Index This Week

- **Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) Wave-1 Report**

- **The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has released the Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) Wave-1 Report.**
- It is a full-scale national survey of scientific investigation. It investigates the health, economic and social determinants and consequences of the ageing population in India. It was commissioned in 2016.
- It is conducted by The National Program for Health Care of Elderly, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. It undertakes the Study through International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai in collaboration with Harvard School of Public Health, University of Southern California, USA, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and National Institute on Ageing.

Highlights

Self Rated Health

- Every fourth Indian above the age of 60 and every fifth Indian above the age of 45, reported poor health.
- The prevalence of poor self-reported health (SRH) in those above 60 (24%) is twice than in the 45-59 age group.
- Among these age groups, a higher percentage of women and individuals from rural areas reported poor health.

Disabilities among ageing Population

- About 8% of Indians aged 45 years and above, reported having at least one form of impairment. The prevalence is almost twice among senior citizens (10.5%) than those between 45 years and 59 years.
- A high percentage of senior citizens in rural areas had a physical or mental impairment than their urban counterparts.
- The major disabilities reported are locomotive impairments (five per cent), followed by visual (three per cent), mental (two per cent), hearing (two per cent) and speech impairments (one per cent).
- Karnataka and Dadra & Nagar Haveli have the highest proportions of senior citizens with disabilities. Meghalaya, Lakshadweep, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh reported the least.

➤ Asia-Pacific Personalized Health Index

Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has released the 'Asia-Pacific Personalized Health Index'.

India has been ranked 10th out of 11 Asia Pacific countries in the index.

Asia-Pacific Personalised Health Index

- The index measures the progress of Asia Pacific countries in adopting personalised healthcare. It includes enabling the right care to be tailored for the right person at the right time.
- The index ranks 11 countries of Asia Pacific namely Australia, China, Japan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and New Zealand.
- **It measures performance against 27 different indicators of personalised health across four categories called 'Vital Signs'. These include:**
 - **Health Information Indicator:** It takes into account data, infrastructure, and technical expertise driving personalized healthcare.
 - **Health Services Indicators:** It takes into account planning, organization, and delivery of services with respect to personalized healthcare.
 - **Personalized Technologies indicator:** It takes into account the devices, applications, platforms, and reimbursement structures that will drive personalized healthcare based on the needs of stakeholders.
 - **Policy Context indicator:** It takes into account the polities, frameworks, partnerships, people, and drivers that will facilitate personalized healthcare.

Topped by: Singapore has topped the index followed by Taiwan (2nd), Japan (3rd), and Australia (4th)

Bottom in the index: Indonesia was ranked 11th in the index.

➤ **Bare Necessities Index (BNI)**

The Economic Survey 2020-21 has introduced the Bare Necessities Index (BNI)

Bare Necessities Index (BNI): This index is a means of assessing equity in economic development among states and regions in India. It uses the basic needs approach.

Indicators: This index uses 26 indicators on following dimensions of basic necessities

- Water
- Sanitation
- Housing
- Micro-environment

The index has been created for all states based on data collected by the National Statistical Office (NSO) in 2012 and 2018.

The index classifies areas on three levels of access: high, medium, low to bare necessities. The index has a range of 0 to 1 where 1 represents the best access to the basic necessities.

➤ **Corruption Perception Index, 2020**

Transparency International (TI) has released the Corruption Perception Index, 2020

The index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. Corruption is measured based on expert assessments and surveys of business people. It uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

India's rank on this index has slipped six places to 86th among 180 countries in 2020. However, the CPI score for India is constant at 40 this year as well as in 2019.

New Zealand and Denmark are ranked at the first position with scores of 88.

Somalia and South Sudan were ranked lowest at 179th position with scores of 12.

