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GS1

CULTURE

Gond paintings

- Gond comes from the Dravidian expression, Kond which means 'the green mountain'.
- Gond paintings are a form of painting **from folk and tribal art that is practiced Gond tribe** in India
- Gond paintings are considered to be from predominantly from Madhya Pradesh, it is also quite common in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhatisgarh and Odisha.

Features

- According to the Gond belief system, each and everything whether it is a hill, river, rock or a tree is inhabited by a spirit and, consequently, is sacred. So the Gond people paint them as a form of **respect and reverence**.
- Gond paintings are a reflection of man's **close connection with his natural surroundings**.
- Gond paintings can also take inspiration from myths and legends of India or alternatively, they may also showcase images from the daily lives of the tribe. It can also showcase abstract concepts like emotions, dreams and imagination.
- The Gond paintings stand out for **use of bright colours and intricate lines**. The Gond art mostly represents a tree emerging out of birds (peacocks) and animals (ox, horse, deer, elephant and tiger).

Context

- Tribal artists make a splash on online platform
- The paintings of tribal artists from the remote agency areas of Telangana have arrived on a global platform of Amazon, the largest e-commerce market place.

Other Paintings

- The **Koya artists** draw on the surface motifs of their sacred 'Hariveni' posts, sacred flags and big bottle gourds.
- The paintings of **Naikpod tribals** are reflections of face masks of their kings, Pandavas like Bheema, and traditional village temple deities.

GS2

POLITY

'Diary Entries' and Evidence Act

Context

- The documents involving former Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yeddyurappa, which disclosed alleged payouts in 2009, have once again raised the question: **Can entries in diaries be treated as admissible evidence?**

Details

Section 34 of the Indian Evidence Act requires 'diary entries' to cross a series of steep hurdles to pass muster as evidence.

- The diary entries should be made in a book. The book should be a **'book of account' kept regularly in the course of business**. The diary entries alone will not be sufficient evidence to charge any person even if all the requirements are fulfilled and the jottings are proved relevant and admissible.
 - The entries may, at best, be **some form of corroborative evidence**.
 - Further independent proof is required before an FIR is lodged against the persons named in the diary.

- The diary or book of account should be '**regularly kept in the course of business.**' That is, the entries should be part of "some continuous and uniform practice in the current routine of the business of the particular person to whom they belong."

Supreme Court Cases

- The apex court's judgment in **Beni v. Bisan Dayal** explains why diary entries alone cannot form the basis for an FIR.
 - "A man cannot be allowed to **make evidence for himself by what he chooses to write in his own books** behind the back of the parties.
 - There **must be independent evidence of the transaction** to which the entries relate and in absence of such evidence no relief can be given to the party who relies upon such entries to support his claim against another,"
- In **CBI versus V.C. Shukla (Jain Hawala case)**, reported in 1998, the apex court explains the import of each term used in Section 34, the provision which deals with entries in a diary or a book.
 - The term 'book' in the section means "a collection of sheets of paper or other material, blank, written, or printed, fastened or bound together so as to form a material whole."
 - A 'book of account' used in Section 34 means a record of "formal statement of transactions between two parties, including debtor-creditor relation and arising out of contract, or some fiduciary relations."
- In its order in **2017 in the Sahara-Birla pay-offs case**, a Supreme Court held that ordering the registration of an FIR against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, other national leaders and senior bureaucrats merely **banking on "some diary entries and random loose computer sheets" was "inherently improbable."**

IR

Golan Heights

Context

- President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. should recognise Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, an area seized from Syria and annexed in a move never recognised by the international community.

Details

- Israel captured the **Golan Heights from Syria during the Six-Day War of 1967** and formally annexed the territory in 1981.
- But that annexation has not been recognized by the international community, which has regarded the **Golan Heights as occupied territory and Israeli settlements there as illegal** under international law.
- Syria tried to regain the Heights in the 1973 Middle East war, but was thwarted. **Israel and Syria signed an armistice in 1974** and the Golan had been relatively quiet since.
- **In 2000, Israel and Syria held their highest-level talks** over a possible return of the Golan and a peace agreement. But the negotiations collapsed and subsequent talks also failed.

Why does Israel want the Golan?

- Security. Israel says that the civil war in Syria demonstrates the need to keep the plateau as a buffer zone between Israeli towns and the instability of its neighbour.
- Israel's government says it also fears that Iran, an ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, is seeking to establish itself permanently on the Syrian side of the border in order to launch attacks on Israel.
- Both sides covet the Golan's water resources and naturally fertile soil.

Who lives there?

- More than 40,000 people live on the Israeli-occupied Golan, **more than half of them Druze residents.**

- The Druze are an Arab minority who practice an offshoot of Islam and many of its adherents in Syria have long been loyal to the Assad regime.
- After annexing the Golan, Israel gave the Druze the option of citizenship, but most rejected it and still identify as Syrian.
- About another 20,000 Israeli settlers also live there, many of them working in farming and tourism.

Who controls the Syrian side of the Golan?

- **Before the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011**, there was an uneasy stand-off between Israeli and Syrian forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.
- But in **2014 anti-government Islamist rebels overran Quneitra province** on the Syrian side. The rebels forced Assad's forces to withdraw and also turned on US forces in the area, forcing them to pull back from some of their positions.
- The area **remained under rebel control until the summer of 2018, when Assad's forces returned** to the largely ruined city of Quneitra and the surrounding area following a Russian-backed offensive and a deal that allowed rebels to withdraw.

What is the current military situation?

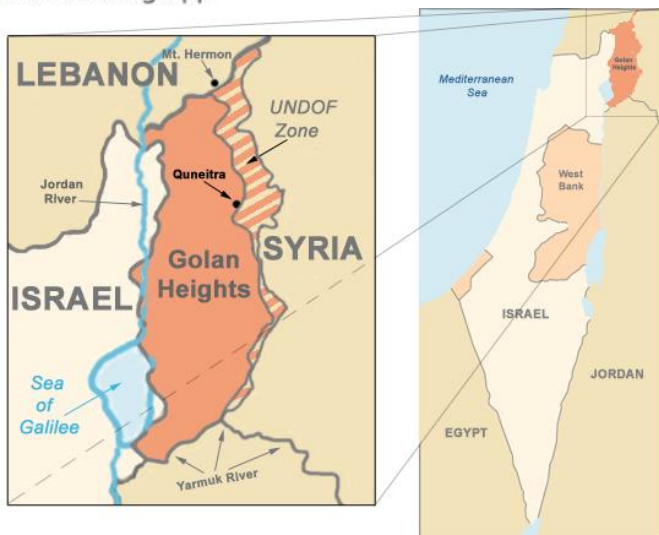
- Assad's forces are now back in control of the Syrian side of the Quneitra crossing, which reopened in October 2018.

What separates the two sides on the Golan?

- A **United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)** is stationed in camps and observation posts along the Golan, supported by military observers of the **United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)**.
- Between the Israeli and Syrian armies is a **400-square-km (155-square-mile) "Area of Separation"** – often called a **demilitarized zone** – in which the two countries' military forces are not permitted under the ceasefire arrangement.
- The Separation of Forces Agreement of May 31, 1974 **created an Alpha Line to the west of the area of separation**, behind which Israeli military forces must remain, and a **Bravo Line to the east behind which Syrian military forces must remain**.
- Extending 25 km beyond the "Area of Separation" on both sides is an **"Area of Limitation"** in which there are restrictions on the number of troops and number and kinds of weapons that both sides can have there.

Geography

- The Golan Heights borders Israel, Lebanon and Jordan.
- The area is hilly and elevated, overlooking the Jordan Rift Valley which contains the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River, and is itself dominated by the 2,814 metres (9,232 ft) tall Mount Hermon.



GS3

ENVIRONMENT

Indian Forest Act, 2019

Context

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has finalized the first draft of the comprehensive amendments to the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA).
- The Indian Forest Act, 2019 is envisaged as an amendment to the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and is an attempt to address contemporary challenges to India's forests.

Background

- The Indian Forest Act, 1927 was imposed by British rulers to take over Indian forests, use them to produce timber, while curtailing and extinguishing rights of millions
- The Indian Forest Act, 1927 has been **criticized for years for providing immense discretion and powers to the forest bureaucracy** to govern areas declared as forestlands of different classes and summarily arrest and prosecute forest-dwellers.
- On several occasions states have had to cancel prosecution in hundreds of thousands of cases of alleged petty crimes imposed against tribals and other forestdwellers.
- Many experts and several Central government reports submitted under different political dispensations have blamed the draconian powers of the forest bureaucracy under the Indian Forest Act, 1927

Definitions in the Draft

- **Forest** is defined to include "any government or private or institutional land recorded or notified as forest/forest land in any government record and the lands managed by government/community as forest and mangroves, and also any land which the central or state government may by notification declare to be forest for the purpose of this Act."
- **"Village forests"**, according to the proposed Act, may be forestland or wasteland, which is the property of the government and would be jointly managed by the **community** through the Joint Forest Management Committee or Gram Sabha.

- The amendment defines **community** as “a group of persons specified on the basis of government records living in a specific locality and in joint possession and enjoyment of common property resources, without regard to race, religion, caste, language and culture”.
- The amendment also introduces a new category of forests — **Production Forest**. These will be forests with specific objectives for production of timber, pulp, pulpwood, firewood, non-timber forest produce, medicinal plants or any forest species to increase production in the country for a specified period.

Features

- It accords **significant powers to India's forest officers** — including the power issue search warrants, enter and investigate lands within their jurisdictions, and to provide indemnity to forest officers using arms to prevent forest-related offences.
- The legislation also proposes a **forest development cess** of up to 10% of the assessed value of mining products removed from forests, and water used for irrigation or in industries.
 - This amount would be deposited in a special fund and used “exclusively for reforestation; forest protection and other ancillary purposes connected with tree planting, forest development and conservation,”
- The aim is to **strengthen the forest bureaucracy** in terms of deciding on how to decide on [title claims] over forest land, what parts to declare [off-limits] for conservation, checking encroachments
- The Union government has proposed that the **Centre will be able to intervene in the states on matters of management of forestlands, overruling the states** on several counts when it deems fit.
- While the preamble of IFA, 1927, said the Act was focused on laws related to transport of forest produce and the tax on it,
 - The amendment has increased the focus to “conservation, enrichment and sustainable management of forest resources and matters connected therewith to safeguard ecological stability to ensure provision of ecosystem services in perpetuity and to address the concerns related to climate change and international commitments”.
- The amendments specifically deal with the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA). The amendments say if the state government, after consultation with the central government, feels that **the rights under FRA will hamper conservation efforts**, then the state “may commute such rights by paying such persons a sum of money in lieu thereof, or grant of land, or in such other manner as it thinks fit, to maintain the social organisation of the forest dwelling communities or alternatively set out some other forest tract of sufficient extent, and in a locality reasonably convenient, for the purpose of such forest dwellers”.

Concerns

- It would lead to conflicts during implementation, particularly when seen in the context of the Forest Rights Act, 2006.
- Excessive powers to forest bureaucracy would not only directly **clash with decentralised governance mechanism but also turn the country's forest into a police state**.
- India's current dependence on import is to the tune of Rs 46,000 crore every year to meet its demand for wood. The idea of creating 'production forests' is catching imagination of all stakeholders **while generating apprehensions**.

GS4

Editorials

GS 2

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Next stage in the Great Game

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that as international talks with the Taliban leadership gain momentum, India's foreign policy establishment has gone through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.
- After the initial denial that several countries, including the U.S., Russia, U.A.E., Qatar and Saudi Arabia, were engaging with Pakistan in order to bring senior Taliban leaders to the table in late 2017, India protested against being cut out of the talks.
- It then negotiated to join them, followed by expressions of deep misgiving over where the talks would lead.
- And finally this has given way to acceptance today that the talks have not only progressed, but are being given priority over every other process in Afghanistan.

Concerns that are Valid:

- The misgivings are well placed, and confirmed by the results of the last round of talks between U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban leaders in Doha (February 25-March 12, 2019).
- The talks appeared to be held on the Taliban's terms, and at a venue of its choice.
- Therefore, while clear agreements have been forged on the withdrawal of foreign forces and on not allowing Afghan soil for use by foreign terror groups, agreements on a comprehensive ceasefire and an intra-Afghan dialogue, once considered the minimum "redlines" or starting point of engaging with the Taliban, have now been made the last priority.
- These talks have also broken the most important redline, that of being led by, or at least held with the full backing and knowledge of, the democratically-led government in Kabul.
- This became evident recently.

A Look at certain recent developments:

- During a visit to Washington on March 14, 2019, Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib lashed out at Mr. Khalilzad for "delegitimising" the Ashraf Ghani government by carrying out talks in the dark.
- Another reason for New Delhi's disquiet is that these talks continue without acknowledging a role for India, despite this being an expressly stated goal of Mr. Trump's **South Asia policy**.
- Recently, Mr. Khalilzad's conference at the U.S. State Department to discuss "international support for the Afghan peace process, the role each party can play in bringing an end to the war, and progress to date in peace talks" included only special envoys from Russia, China and the European Union.
- Finally, there is the uncertainty for Afghanistan's future that these talks have wrought that worries India.
- It is important to note that when talks with the Taliban began, the objective was to try to mainstream the insurgents into the political process, and at least have a working ceasefire by the time presidential elections, scheduled for April 2019, were held.
- The reality is far from that. The Taliban continues to carry out terror attacks in Afghanistan even as its leadership talks with the U.S. Despite the Ministry of External Affairs issuing a statement on the importance of holding the presidential elections, the Afghan vote has been further postponed to September 28, 2019.
- This makes Mr. Ghani's continuance more tenuous under the constitution, which could mean an interim government will be installed, something India has been opposed to as well.
- **New Delhi is worried about the prospect of chaos and civil war, akin to the scene after the previous U.S. pullout in the early 1990s that cut India out and brought the Taliban to power in Kabul with Pakistan's support.**
- Despite the restricted room for manoeuvre, however, there are several steps New Delhi can and must take in the

present scenario to ensure both its own relevance in Afghanistan and stability in the region.

Talks with Taliban

- To begin with, there is the question of talks with the Taliban, which India has thus far refused.
- In the recent past, the Modi government has shown some flexibility on the issue, by sending a “non-official” representation to the Moscow talks with the Taliban.
- After a visit to Delhi in January, 2019 by Mr. Khalilzad, Army Chief General Bipin Rawat even suggested that India should “jump on the bandwagon” of engaging the Taliban.
- However, experts opine that direct, open talks between India and the Taliban at this point would serve little purpose for either side.
- For India, it would mean casting aside a consistently held moral principle and speaking to a non-state actor that espouses terrorism.
- It is important to note that while backchannel talks between intelligence agencies and the Taliban have been conducted for years, recognising the Taliban as a legitimate interlocutor for India at this point would be a betrayal of India’s values without any visible gains.
- India’s policy for the past two decades is to deal with the government in Kabul, and this will hold it in good stead if the Taliban were to eventually be a part of the government there.
- The truth is, 2019 is not 1989, and much has changed inside Afghanistan as it has in the world outside.
- While Afghan security forces have suffered many losses in the past year (2018), it is unlikely that the Taliban would today be able to overrun and hold Kabul or any other big Afghan city as it did before.
- It also seems inconceivable that a “full withdrawal” of U.S. troops will include giving up all the bases they hold at present.
- Given technology, social media and the progress in education in Afghanistan since 2001 (the number of secondary graduates rose from 10,000 to more than 300,000 in 2015), it is also unlikely that the Taliban will be able to control the hearts and minds of Afghans if it were to revert to its brutal ways.
- Nor could it run policies that endanger Indian interests in the country, given the special place India enjoys, amongst thousands of Afghans who have studied in India, youth and women supported by Indian development projects, and hundreds of military officers trained in the country.
- It is important to note that every one of the 17 presidential tickets announced also has an “India-friendly” face on it, and India must leverage its influence across the spectrum.
- With presidential elections put off for the moment, India could work with these Afghan leaders to support a ‘Grand Jirga’ that ensures that the maximum number of representatives from across Afghanistan articulate their post-reconciliation vision.
- India is also host to a sizeable population of Afghans who live, work and study in the country, and an outreach is important.
- After all, when the Vladimir Putin government brought Taliban representatives and Afghan leaders to the table for the ‘Moscow process’, it was under the aegis of an association of Afghans resident in Russia.
- It was public support for talks with the Taliban that gave the reconciliation process legitimacy, and it is necessary that public opinion on issues like democracy, women’s rights, education and the media also be allowed to hold sway. The world must see Afghans as they see themselves, and not according to the often-skewed ideas generated at conferences on Afghanistan’s future that sometimes don’t even include an Afghan representation.
- Finally, both India and Pakistan have a shared responsibility in building a dialogue over Afghanistan post-reconciliation. It is necessary that officials on both sides find a way to sit across the table on Afghanistan some day.

Concluding Remarks:

- Despite all the many reasons for despondency, it is necessary that Indian strategists don’t lose sight of the bigger picture — India’s longstanding relationship with the people of Afghanistan.
- This is a relationship nurtured by every government in New Delhi, with more than \$3 billion invested by India since 2001, which has reaped manifold returns in terms of goodwill and friendship across Afghanistan.
- Defeatism or a lack of ambition for the India-Afghanistan relationship at this juncture would be much more detrimental to India’s interests than anything the Taliban’s return to Afghanistan’s political centrestage can do.

GS 3

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Kerala alert

Note to Students:

- The central theme being covered in this editorial revolves around the West Nile Virus.

Some Key facts:

- West Nile virus can cause a fatal neurological disease in humans. However, approximately 80% of people who are infected will not show any symptoms.
- West Nile virus is mainly transmitted to people through the bites of infected mosquitoes.
- The virus can cause severe disease and death in horses.
- Vaccines are available for use in horses but not yet available for people.
- Birds are the natural hosts of West Nile virus.
- West Nile Virus (WNV) can cause neurological disease and death in people. WNV is commonly found in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North America and West Asia. WNV is maintained in nature in a cycle involving transmission between birds and mosquitoes. Humans, horses and other mammals can be infected.
- West Nile Virus (WNV) is a member of the flavivirus genus and belongs to the Japanese encephalitis antigenic complex of the family Flaviviridae.

Outbreaks:

- West Nile Virus (WNV) was first isolated in a woman in the West Nile district of Uganda in 1937. It was identified in birds (crows and columbiformes) in Nile delta region in 1953. Before 1997 WNV was not considered pathogenic for birds, but at that time in Israel a more virulent strain caused the death of different bird species presenting signs of encephalitis and paralysis.
- Human infections attributable to WNV have been reported in many countries in the World for over 50 years.
- In 1999 a WNV circulating in Israel and Tunisia was imported in New York producing a large and dramatic outbreak that spread throughout the continental United States of America (USA) in the following years.
- The WNV outbreak in USA (1999-2010) highlighted that importation and establishment of vector-borne pathogens outside their current habitat represent a serious danger to the world.
- The largest outbreaks occurred in Greece, Israel, Romania, Russia and USA. Outbreak sites are on major birds migratory routes.
- In its original range, WNV was prevalent throughout Africa, parts of Europe, Middle East, West Asia, and Australia. Since its introduction in 1999 into USA, the virus has spread and is now widely established from Canada to Venezuela.

Transmission:

- Human infection is most often the result of bites from infected mosquitoes.
- Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, which circulate the virus in their blood for a few days. The virus eventually gets into the mosquito's salivary glands.

- During later blood meals (when mosquitoes bite), the virus may be injected into humans and animals, where it can multiply and possibly cause illness.
- The virus may also be transmitted through contact with other infected animals, their blood, or other tissues.
- A very small proportion of human infections have occurred through organ transplant, blood transfusions and breast milk. There is one reported case of transplacental (mother-to-child) WNV transmission.

Signs and symptoms:

- Infection with WNV is either asymptomatic (no symptoms) in around 80% of infected people, or can lead to West Nile fever or severe West Nile disease.
- About 20% of people who become infected with WNV will develop West Nile fever. Symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, occasionally with a skin rash (on the trunk of the body) and swollen lymph glands.
- The symptoms of severe disease (also called neuroinvasive disease, such as West Nile encephalitis or meningitis or West Nile poliomyelitis) include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis.
- It is estimated that approximately 1 in 150 persons infected with the West Nile virus will develop a more severe form of disease. Serious illness can occur in people of any age, however people over the age of 50 and some immunocompromised persons (for example, transplant patients) are at the highest risk for getting severely ill when infected with WNV.
- The incubation period is usually 3 to 14 days.

Why in the news?

The recent news of a death of a child in Kerala's Malappuram district has drawn attention to the epidemiology of the little-known West Nile Virus in India.

Editorial Analysis:

- It is important to note that though awareness is low, the virus is endemic to several States.
- The first documented WNV case in Kerala was in Alappuzha in 2011, with the numbers then growing.
- However, official records do not reflect this, given the difficulty of diagnosing WNV in its acute phase.
- This microbe is serologically similar to the Japanese Encephalitis virus, which means a go-to test, ELISA, often fails to differentiate JE antibodies from WNV antibodies.
- More tests are typically needed to confirm WNV, and while the results appear in journals, they don't always make it to State surveillance systems.
- This is why, though a 2014 Journal of Clinical Virology paper identified the 2011 Alappuzha outbreak as WNV, with around six deaths, Kerala's health department is calling the Malappuram death the State's first.
- The confirmation triggered an alert, but it doesn't mean Kerala did not have WNV deaths before.
- Nevertheless, experts believe that the alert is a welcome move. It means that State health authorities will look harder for the disease.

WNV Virus in India: A Perspective

- Historically, wherever Indian researchers have looked for the WNV, they have found it.
- The first sign of its presence came from positive antibody tests among residents of Bombay in 1952.
- Thereafter, it began showing up in encephalitis patients in many of the places it was tested for, including Maharashtra, Assam and Madhya Pradesh.
- In Malappuram too, the rapid diagnosis was driven by heightened surveillance in Kerala following the 2018 Nipah outbreak.
- Patient samples were sent to the Manipal Centre for Virus Research, which deployed the Plaque Reduction Neutralisation Test, more specific than ELISA. Experts opine that if more States used such diagnostics, it would help determine just how widespread WNV is in India.
- There is a good chance the virus is a significant cause of the **Acute Encephalitis Syndrome**, the infamous basket of illnesses with no known aetiology that affect over 10,000 Indians each year.
- Still, WNV rarely kills. In less than 1% of infections, the virus travels to the brain, triggering potentially fatal encephalitis. Otherwise, it merely causes a mild flu-like illness. This could change.

Concluding Remarks:

- Viruses are known to adapt for both greater virulence and more efficient transmission.
- It is important to note that urbanisation and land-use changes are bringing the virus's zoonotic hosts, such as birds, in more frequent contact with humans.
- Given increased mobility, viruses can hitch a ride to new regions via infected humans and vectors.
- All this makes the WNV a formidable foe.
- India's best defence is better surveillance, which will help doctors reach patients early to prevent complications.
- Kerala could not prevent the death in Malappuram, but other States should adopt its model of heightened surveillance.

GS 1

MODERN INDIAN HISTORY

Revolutionary ideas that live on

Larger Background:

- On 23rd March, 1931, Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukhdev were hanged to death.
- They were given the death sentence in the Lahore conspiracy case.
- The British Governor-General promulgated an ordinance to establish a special tribunal to try the Lahore conspiracy case, while denying the accused the right to appeal. "By all accounts, it was farcical Trial".
- Lala Lajpat Rai was brutally beaten up by the Superintendent of Police, J.S. Scott, while leading a demonstration against the Simon Commission. He died of fatal injuries on November 17, 1928.
- Enraged by this brutality, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev and Chandra Shekhar Azad decided to avenge Lala

Lajpat Rai's death by killing Scott.

- In the event, it was another police officer, Saunders, who was shot dead by them in a case of mistaken identity.
- The British were left clueless about this killing and, in all probability, Bhagat Singh would never have been arrested and executed if he had not decided to throw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly on 8th April, 1929, to protest against two draconian Bills.
- Ironically, it was a poster proclaiming why the British police officer was killed, hand-written by Bhagat Singh, which enabled the British to pin Saunders' killing on Bhagat Singh and his comrades.
- History tells us that the three young men showed neither remorse nor fear while they were being taken to the gallows at Lahore Central Jail, but happily embraced death, shouting 'Inquilab Zindabad'.
- Bhagat Singh was born on 27 September 1907 at the village of Banga, Lyallpur district (now in Pakistan) the second son of Kishan Singh and Vidya Vati.
- Bhagat Singh was imbued from childhood with the family's spirit of patriotism. At the time of his birth, his father was in jail for his connection with the Canal Colonization Bill agitation, in which his brother, Ajit Singh (Bhagat Singh's uncle), took a leading part.
- Through his father, who was a sympathizer and supporter of the Ghadr campaign of 1914-15, Bhagat Singh became an admirer of the leaders of the movement. The execution of Kartar Singh Sarabha made a deep impression on the mind of the young man who vowed to dedicate his life to the country.
- Having passed the fifth class from his village school, Bhagat Singh joined Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School in Lahore.
- In response to the call of Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, to boycott government aided institutions, he left his school and enrolled in the National College at Lahore.
- He was successful in passing a special examination preparatory to entering college.
- He was reading for his B.A. examination when his parents planned to have him married.
- He vehemently rejected the suggestion and said that, if his marriage was to take place in Slave-India, my bride shall be only death. Bhagat Singh left home and went to Kanpur where he took up a job in the Pratap Press.
- When Bhagat Singh was assured that he would not be compelled to marry and violate his vows sworn to his motherland, he returned to his home in Lahore.
- In March 1926 was formed the Naujawan Bharat Sabha.
- Bhagat Singh, one of the principal organizers became its secretary.
- After Bhagat Singh was hanged to death, his body was secretly cremated at Husainivala by police and the remains thrown into the River Sutlej. The next day, however, his comrades collected the bodily remains from the cremation site and a procession was taken out in Lahore.
- In 1950, after Independence, the land where Bhagat Singh and his companions were cremated was procured from Pakistan and a memorial built.
- In March 1961, a Shahidi Mela was held there. Every year, on 23 March, the martyr's memory is similarly honoured.

Why in the news?

- Bhagat Singh went to the gallows, along with two of his comrades, Sukhdev and Rajguru, on March 23, 1931.

Editorial Analysis:

- Bhagat Singh stands out in bold relief as someone who, at a young age, defined nation and nationalism for us.
- He had an alternative framework of governance, which is strongly reflected in the corpus of writings that he has

left behind.

- Unfortunately, we hardly care to revisit this serious intellectual inheritance and only venerate him as a martyr. This veneration is laudable but incomplete.

Incisive commentary:

- Singh was barely 17 when he published his first article, in 1924, in Matwala, a Hindi magazine from Calcutta.
- The subject was 'Universal Brotherhood', which was not a very easy issue to write on at such a young age. He imagined a world where "all of us being one and none is the other. It will really be a comforting time when the world will have no strangers."
- Experts opine that all those who are busy "othering" and creating strangers out of their own fellow citizens need to grapple with Bhagat Singh's views, instead of merely glorifying him as a martyr.
- He emphatically exclaimed that "as long as words like black and white, civilized and uncivilized, ruler and the ruled, rich and poor, touchable and untouchable, etc., are in vogue there was no scope for universal brotherhood".
- He went on to say, "We will have to campaign for equality and equity. Will have to punish those who oppose the creation of such a world." Among the heroes of our freedom struggle, he was perhaps the only one who had this vision at such a young age.
- His strongest critique was of untouchability and communalism, which continue to torment us as a nation.
- He was fiercely frank and bold enough to critically comment on the politics of senior leaders such as Lala Lajpat Rai and express his differences.
- He was also conscious of the international revolutionary struggles and ideologies, which is evident in a series of articles he wrote on 'Anarchism'.
- In 1928, he wrote, "Our country is in a really bad shape; here the strangest questions are asked but the foremost among them concerns the untouchables... For instance, would contact with an untouchable mean defilement of an upper caste? Would the Gods in the temples not get angry by the entry of untouchables there? Would the drinking water of a well not get polluted if untouchables drew their water from the same well? That these questions are being asked in the twentieth century, is a matter which makes us hang our heads in shame."
- He was aghast that we claimed to be a spiritual country, yet discriminated against fellow human beings while the materialist West had done away with such inhuman obscenities long ago.

Inclusiveness came first:

- It is important to note that the decade of the 1920s saw a rise in communal politics, from both Hindu and Muslim groups.
- However, Bhagat Singh steadfastly remained committed to the idea of a plural and inclusive India.
- He founded the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in Lahore in 1926, whose manifesto said, "Religious superstitions and bigotry are a great hindrance in our progress. They have proved an obstacle in our way and we must do away with them. 'The thing that cannot bear free thought must perish'."
- In 1928, Bhagat Singh was acutely conscious of the divisiveness of mixing religion with politics and he wrote, "If religion is separated from politics, then all of us can jointly initiate political activities, even though in matters of religion we might have many differences with each other. We feel that the true well-wishers of India would follow

these principles and save India from the suicidal path it is on at present.” None cared to listen to this voice of sanity then. Even now, many of us continue to peddle religion to promote political prospects.

- Bhagat Singh expressed his disenchantment with the politics of Lala Lajpat Rai, whom he and other youth otherwise venerated.
- He was not even remotely close to the political stature of Lalaji yet he had the courage and the conviction to publicly disagree with him. Not many can do such a thing now.
- Bhagat Singh referred to Lalaji’s growing proximity to the Hindu Mahasabha and other communal forces during the 1920s, and the older reader reacted to this in his speeches when some youth joined Bhagat Singh in expressing their concern.
- Singh was aware of international revolutionary struggles as well.
- His three-part article on anarchism (1928), appeared before he authored his masterly essay, ‘Why I am an Atheist’.
- Thus we can see here the evolution of his ideas on politics, society, religion and even faith in god. While writing on anarchism, Bhagat Singh observed: “Our retrogressive thinking is destroying us. We keep ourselves entangled in futile discussions about God and heaven, and remain busy in talking about the soul and God. We are quick to dub Europe as capitalist and don’t think about their great ideas or pay any attention to them. We love divinity and remain aloof from the world.”
- This is what an anarchist stood for, Singh reaffirmed; he was not a blood-thirsty young man who believed in the bomb and the pistol, as the colonial government labelled all revolutionaries.

Concluding Remarks:

- Today, we need to remember his revolutionary ideas.
- Mere valorisation of his nationalism and ultimate sacrifice is true but sadly incomplete. In these rancorous times, his intellectual bequest should be a beacon to build a new India.

Tidbits

Govt. earns ₹ 85,000 crore from disinvestment, overshoots target

- According to the Ministry of Finance, the government has overshoot its disinvestment target for the second consecutive year.
- As against a target of ₹80,000 crore for disinvestment for the current year, the divestment receipts have touched ₹85,000 crore

EU gives U.K. new Brexit deadlines

Minor reprieve

European Union (EU) leaders on Thursday gave British Prime Minister Theresa May a two-week reprieve before the country leaves the bloc without a deal. These are the four likely scenarios now:

1 LEAVE WITH DEAL ON MAY 22

British MPs have twice rejected Theresa May's draft withdrawal agreement. If MPs overcome numerous objections from "Brexiters" and "Remainers" and approve the deal, Britain will leave the EU on May 22



2 NO-DEAL BREXIT ON APRIL 12 OR LATER

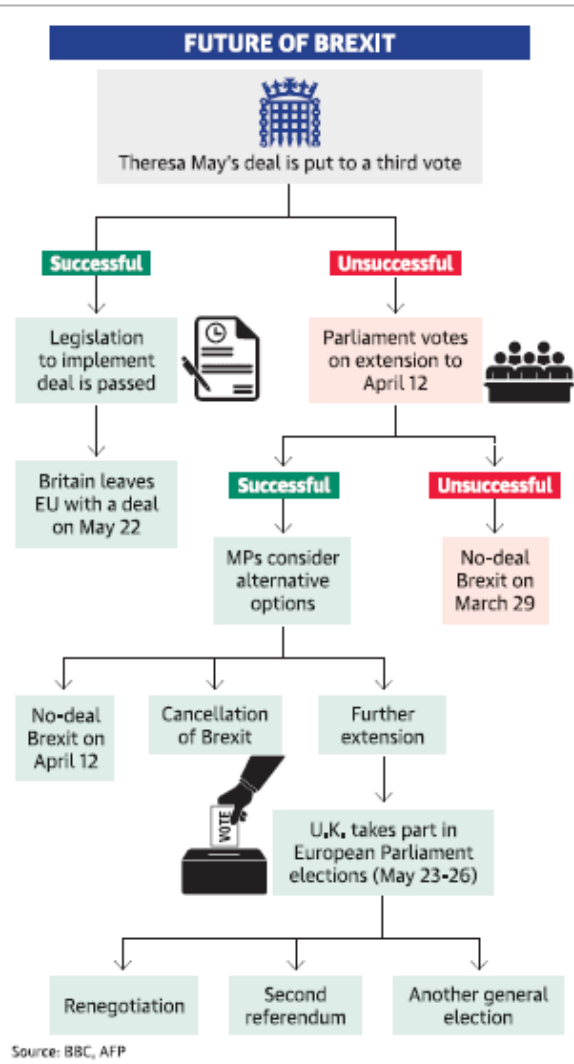
If MPs reject the deal for a third time, the default option would be that Britain leaves without a deal. According to a European official, the deadline would be midnight Brussels time on April 12

3 LONG BREXIT DELAY

Britain could also ask EU leaders for another, much longer delay that would mean it would have to hold European Parliament elections. The European Commission has advised EU leaders that this longer extension should be at least until the end of 2019. This would also open up other options such as holding a general election or, perhaps, a second referendum

4 STOP BREXIT

This is by far the least likely option. An online petition started on Wednesday asking for the government to do this has garnered more than 3,2 million signatures



Prelims Fact

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Consider the following about Fiat Money

- 1) Currency notes and coins are called fiat money
- 2) They have intrinsic value like Gold

Which of above statements are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both
- d) None

Ans: a

- Currency notes and coins are called fiat money, which do not have intrinsic value (like gold or silver).

- These are also called legal tenders as they cannot be refused by any citizen of the country for settlement of any kind of transaction.
- Currencies and coins cannot be refused for settlement of payment whereas cheques can be refused.

Galapagos Islands recently seen in news is in which country?

- a) Chile
- b) Ecuador
- c) Brazil
- d) Argentina

Ans: b



Scientists tag sharks in Galapagos Islands

QUITO
Scientists in the Galapagos Islands have attached tracers to five blue sharks for the first time as part of a project to study their migratory patterns, the government of Ecuador said. One female and four males were tagged in a marine reserve during an expedition to the islands of Isabela and Floreana. AFP

J curve in the economics is related to

- a) Index is a type of cost-of-living index that uses an expenditure function such as one used in assessing expected compensating variation
- b) Show the relationship between tax rates and the amount of tax revenue collected by governments
- c) The inverse relationship between unemployment rate and inflation
- d) Refers to the trend of a country's trade balance following a devaluation

Ans: d

Tax buoyancy is defined as

- a) Percentage change in tax revenue in response to change in tax rate and extension of coverage
- b) Refers to the % change in the tax revenue with the growth of national income i.e. growth based increase in tax collection
- c) The entity who bears the tax burden
- d) None of the above

Ans: b

- Refers to the % change in the tax revenue with the growth of national income i.e. growth based increase in tax collection.
- It is an indicator to measure efficiency and responsiveness of revenue mobilization in response to growth in the

Gross domestic product or National income.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1) With the GSP withdrawals initiated by USA, Critically examine if Globalization advances the economy or it can be a threat to National Economics and disturbs local manufacturing creating instability.
- 2) India's Taliban Policy needs to be examined again, taking into account various geopolitical pressures. Comment.
- 3) There needs to be greater surveillance across India for the West Nile Virus. Examine.

