

UPSC Daily Current Affairs 11 May 2021

1. Israel targets Gaza with air strikes

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Relation, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Israel unleashed new air strikes on Gaza, hitting a pair of high-rise buildings believed to be housing militants, as Hamas and other armed groups bombarded southern Israel with hundreds of rockets.
- The escalation was sparked by weeks of tensions in contested Jerusalem.
- Israeli armed forces stormed **Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Haram esh-Sharif in Jerusalem**, ahead of a march by Zionist nationalists commemorating Israel's capture of the eastern half of the city in 1967.



What led to escalation?

- Tensions have been building up since the start of Ramzan in mid-April when Israeli police set up barricades at the Damascus Gate outside the occupied Old City, preventing Palestinians from gathering there.
- As clashes erupted, the police removed the barricades, but tensions were already high.
- The threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah escalated the crisis further in the last week of Ramzan.

Sheikh Jarrah dispute

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- Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced out of their homes when the State of Israel was created in historic Palestine in 1948 (the Palestinians call the events ‘Nakba’, or catastrophe).
- Twenty-eight of those Palestinian families moved to Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem to settle there.
- In 1956, when East Jerusalem was ruled by Jordan, the Jordanian Ministry of Construction and Development and the UN Relief and Works Agency facilitated the construction of houses for these families in Sheikh Jarrah.
- But Israel would capture East Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967.
- By the early 1970s, Jewish agencies started demanding the families leave the land. Jewish committees claimed that the houses sat on land they purchased in 1885 (when Jews, facing persecution in Europe, were migrating to historic Palestine that was part of the Ottoman Empire).

Court Decision

- Earlier this year, the Central Court in East Jerusalem upheld a decision to evict four Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah in favour of Jewish settlers.
- The Israeli Supreme Court was scheduled to hear the case on May 10.
- But the hearing was postponed on advice from the government amid the ongoing violence in Jerusalem.

Why Jerusalem?

- Jerusalem has been at the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- According to the original 1947 UN Partition Plan, Jerusalem was proposed to be an international city.
- But in the first Arab Israel war of 1948, the Israelis captured the western half of the city, and Jordan took the eastern part, including the Old City that houses Haram esh-Sharif.
- **Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam’s third holiest site, and the Dome of the Rock are situated within Haram esh-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary).**
- One side of the compound, called Temple Mount by the Jews, is the Wailing Wall (Western Wall), which is believed to be the remains of the Second Jewish Temple, the holiest site in Judaism.
- **Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed it later.**
- Since its annexation, Israel has expanded settlements in East Jerusalem, which is now home for some 220,000 Jews.

Note :

- Israel sees the whole city as its “unified, eternal capital”, a claim endorsed by Donald Trump when he was U.S. President but not recognised by most other countries.

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2. Rajasthan to use MLA fund for vaccination

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, as a part of the efforts to mobilise financial resources for COVID-19 vaccination of people in the age group of 18 to 44 years, Rajasthan Chief Minister has approved a proposal to provide ₹3 crore each from the MLA Local Area Development (LAD) Fund.
- The CM had earlier announced enhancement in the MLA-LAD Fund in each Assembly constituency in the 2021-22 Budget.

About MLA Local Area Development (LAD) Fund

- Member of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development is a scheme that enables each MLA to undertake small developmental works in his/her constituency through the allocated funds (different for different states) per year.
- Under this scheme, funds will be provided in the State's Plan Budget every year.
- The MLALAD Scheme is intended to be utilised for small but essential projects/works based on the felt needs of the local public.

About MPLAD Scheme

- In 2020, the Government of India in the event of struggle against Covid-19 had suspended Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme or MPLADS funds for two years (2020 and 2021) and directed these funds to be transferred to the Consolidated Fund of India.
- The Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) was launched on 23rd December, 1993.
- Initially, Ministry of Rural Development was the Nodal Ministry for this scheme but in October, 1994 this scheme was transferred to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation as a nodal agency.

The salient features of the MPLAD Scheme include:

- It is a Central Plan Scheme fully funded by the Government of India under which funds are released in the form of grants-in-aid directly to the district authorities.
- The funds released under the Scheme are non-lapsable, i.e. the entitlement of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.
- Under MPLADS, the role of the Members of Parliament is limited to recommend works.
- Thereafter, it is the responsibility of the district authority to sanction, execute and complete the works recommended by Members of Parliament within the stipulated time period.

Note:

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- The elected Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective constituencies.
- The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the state from which they are elected.
- Nominated Members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha can recommend works for implementation, anywhere in the country.

3. Online Flood Reporting System

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, an online flood reporting and information management system was launched by Assam State Disaster Management.
- The new system for online flood reporting on a daily basis will be operational from May 15.
- **Assam became the first state to adopt the digital reporting system that will capture critical impact indicators during floods.**

About the Online Flood Reporting System

- The online system developed jointly by Assam State Disaster Management Agency and UNICEF will replace the existing manual flood control mechanism.
- It is driven by web-cum-mobile application technology which will help delivery of relief and rehabilitation grants to flood-affected people
- The digital initiative will facilitate tracking of damages to crops and loss of livestock and also help provide financial assistance for restoration.
- It will enable information feeding at the source, immediate alert-based verification at defined levels and automatic compilation.

4. Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)

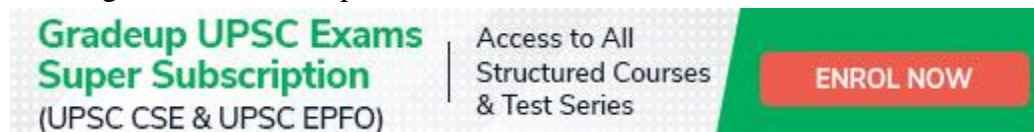
(Topic- GS Paper III–Agriculture, Source- PIB)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has provided an enhanced allocation of Rs. 2250 Crore for the year 2021-22 for ‘Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture’ (MIDH).

About Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture

- The Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture or MIDH is a scheme for the holistic growth and development of the Indian horticulture sector.



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- It is a centrally sponsored scheme.
- The Ministry is implementing MIDH with effect from 2014-15.
- The sector covering under this scheme are fruits, vegetables, root & tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa and bamboo.

Contribution

- Under MIDH, Government of India (GOI) contributes 60%, of total outlay for developmental programmes in all the states except states in North East and Himalayas, 40% share is contributed by State Governments.
- In the case of North Eastern States and Himalayan States, GOI contributes 90%.
- In case of National Horticulture Board (NHB), Coconut Development Board (CDB), Central Institute for Horticulture (CIH), Nagaland and the National Level Agencies (NLA), GOI contributes 100%.

The Mission includes the following sub-schemes:

- National Horticulture Mission (NHM)**
 - National Horticulture Board (NHB)**
 - Horticulture Mission for North East & Himalayan States (HMNEH)**
 - Coconut Development Board (CDB)**
 - Central Institute for Horticulture (CIH), Nagaland**
 - National Bamboo Mission (NBM)**
- MIDH also provides technical advice and administrative support to State Governments/ State Horticulture Missions (SHMs) for the Saffron Mission and other horticulture related activities Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)/NMSA.

Significance

- MIDH has played a significant role in increasing the area under horticulture crops.
- Area and production during the years 2014 – 15 to 2019 – 20 has increased by 9% and 14% respectively. The mission has boosted best practices to be followed in farms which have significantly improved the quality of produce and productivity of farmland.
- The initiative of MIDH has not only resulted in India's self-sufficiency in the horticulture sector but also contributed towards achieving sustainable development goals of zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, no poverty, gender equality etc.

5. WHO classifies India variant as being of global concern

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- The World Health Organization has recently classified a coronavirus variant first identified in India as a “**global variant of concern**”.

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- This variant called B.1.617 was classified as a variant under investigation (VUI) by authorities in the UK earlier in May.
- It has already spread to more than 17 countries and several countries have put travel restrictions for passengers coming from India as a result of the surge in cases here.

How does the WHO define a variant of concern?

The WHO says that a variant of interest (VOI) becomes a variant of concern (VOC) if, through a comparative assessment, it has been demonstrated to be associated with increase in

- transmissibility or detrimental change in COVID-19 epidemiology,
- increase in virulence or change in clinical disease presentation or
- a decrease in effectiveness of public health and social measures or available diagnostics, vaccines, therapeutics.

Alternatively, a variant may be classified as a VOC by the WHO in consultation with the WHO SARS-CoV-2 Virus Evolution Working Group.

Variants of a virus

- Variants of a virus have one or more mutations that differentiate it from the other variants that are in circulation.
- The SARS-CoV-2 virus is evolving fast because of the scale at which it has infected people around the world.
- **The B.1.617** variant of the virus has two mutations referred to as E484Q and L452R.
- Both are separately found in many other coronavirus variants, but they have been reported together for the first time in India.
- The L452R mutation has been found in some other VOIs such as B.1.427/ B.1.429, which are believed to be more transmissible and may be able to override neutralising antibodies.

Classification by US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on the other hand classifies variants into three categories–
 - variant of interest (VOI)
 - variant of concern (VOC)
 - variant of high consequence.
- In the US, the B.1.526, B.1.526.1, B.1.525 (previously designated UK1188 and first identified in the UK), and P.2 (identified first in Brazil) variants.
- On the other hand, the B.1.1.7, B.1.351, P.1, B.1.427, and B.1.429 variants circulating in the US are classified as variants of concern.

Definition

Variant of interest

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- The CDC defines a VOI as, “A variant with specific genetic markers that have been associated with changes to receptor binding, reduced neutralization by antibodies generated against previous infection or vaccination, reduced efficacy of treatments, potential diagnostic impact, or predicted increase in transmissibility or disease severity.

Variant of concern

- It is defined as “A variant for which there is evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (e.g., increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures.”

Note: So far, the CDC has not found variants of high consequence in circulation in the US

6. NASA’s OSIRIS-Rex

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, NASA’s Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security, Regolith Explorer (OSIRIS-REx) spacecraft will depart asteroid Bennu, and start its two-year long journey back to Earth.

About OSIRIS-Rex



- OSIRIS-REx is NASA’s first mission to visit a near-Earth asteroid, survey its surface and collect a sample from it.
- The mission was launched in 2016.

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- The Osiris-Rex mission is expected to return samples to Earth in 2023 and before attempting to obtain a sample from the asteroid, it will map out Bennu's surface in detail and orbit the asteroid to calculate its mass.
- The mission is essentially a seven-year-long voyage and will conclude when at least 60 grams of samples are delivered back to the Earth.
- As per NASA, the mission promises to bring the largest amount of extraterrestrial material back to our planet since the Apollo era.
- The spacecraft contains five instruments meant to explore Bennu including cameras, a spectrometer and a laser altimeter.

About Asteroids

- Asteroids are rocky objects that orbit the Sun, much smaller than planets. They are also called minor planets.
- According to NASA, 994,383 is the count for known asteroids, the remnants from the formation of the solar system over 4.6 billion years ago.

What is asteroid Bennu?

- Bennu is an asteroid about as tall as the Empire State Building, located about 200 million miles away from the Earth.
- It is a B-type asteroid, implying that it contains significant amounts of carbon and various other minerals.
- Because of its high carbon content, the asteroid reflects about four per cent of the light that hits it, which is very low when compared with a planet like Venus, which reflects about 65 per cent of the light that hits it.
- Earth reflects about 30 per cent.

Why Scientist study asteroids?

- Scientists study asteroids to look for information about the formation and history of planets and the sun since asteroids were formed at the same time as other objects in the solar system.
- Another reason for tracking them is to look for potentially hazardous asteroids.

7. Ivermectin drug

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Business Standard)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a day after Goa's health minister Vishwajit Rane recommended Ivermectin to all above 18 to combat Covid in the state, the World Health Organisation has warned against its use.

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More on the news

- The Goa state government has cleared a new Covid treatment protocol which recommends all residents above the age of 18 to take five tablets of the ivermectin drug, in order to prevent the steep and sometimes fatal viral fever, which accompanies a Covid-19 infection.

Concern with the Ivermectin drug

- Last week, a peer-reviewed research which included three US government senior scientists and was published in the American Journal of Therapeutics, touted the common anti-parasitic ivermectin as a miracle cure for Covid-19 by doctors and campaigners the world over.
- But the World Health Organisation Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan has said that WHO recommends against the use of Ivermectin.
- Apart from WHO, the German health care has also warned against the use of Ivermectin for COVID-19 treatment.
- These organisations are warning against the drug as there is no sufficient data or meaningful evidences for its clinical efficacy in patients.

8. Moody's lowers India's growth projection to 9.3%

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the Moody's Investors Service sharply scaled down this year's growth projection for India to 9.3% from its earlier estimate of 13.7%, citing "the negative impact of the second wave" of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It warned that the spread of the coronavirus as well as the rate of vaccinations will have a direct impact on economic outcomes.

Key highlights

- The Shortage of vaccines and logistical difficulties in reaching a large rural population (about two-thirds of the population) complicate the vaccine roll-out.
- Only around 10% of the country's population had received at least one dose of the vaccine by early May.
- The severe second wave of COVID-19 infections will slow the near-term economic recovery and could weigh on longer-term growth dynamics.

Healthcare spending

- Spending will have to be redirected towards healthcare and virus response relative to what the government had budgeted in February.

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