

## UPSC Daily Current Affairs 21 Jun 2021

### 1. Iran election: Hardliner Raisi will become president

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

#### Why in the news?

- Hardliner Ebrahim Raisi has recently won Iran's presidential election.
- Iran's president is the second-highest ranking official in the country, after the supreme leader.

#### About Iran President



- Iran's president oversees the civilian arm of the country's government.
- The president sets domestic policy, which is important as Iran has faced years of crushing sanctions from the US after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal.

#### Significant Issues for Iran

- The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) notes that the most pressing issue for Iranians at the moment is the economy that has been significantly impacted by US sanctions since it left the nuclear deal – formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – in 2018.
- The economy shrunk by nearly five per cent in 2020 and has not grown since 2017.

#### About Iran Election

- Iran describes itself as an Islamic Republic.

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- It holds elections and has elected representatives passing laws and governing on behalf of its people, though the supreme leader has the final say on all state matters.
- However, the Guardian Council barred most allies of Rouhani and reformists from running in this election.
- Those who led Iran's Green Movement after Ahmadinejad's disputed 2009 re-election also remain under house arrest.
- Iran does not allow international observers to monitor its elections, which its Interior Ministry oversees. Security forces answering only to the supreme leader also routinely arrest and hold closed-door trials for dual nationals, foreigners and those with Western ties, using them as pawns in international negotiations.

### **About Islamic Consultative Assembly**

- The Islamic Consultative Assembly also called the Iranian Parliament.
- It is the national legislative body of Iran.
- The Parliament currently has 290 representatives, changed from the previous 272 seats since the 18 February 2000 election.

## **2. Ashirvad scheme**

**(Topic- GS Paper II –Scheme/Policies for Vulnerable section, Source- The Hindu)**

### **Why in the news?**

- Recently, the Odisha Government launched a special scheme called Ashirvad.

### **About the Ashirvad scheme**

- Under the Scheme the ₹2,500 will be given every month to children who have lost their parents.

The beneficiaries have been divided into three categories -

1. Children who have lost both parents,
2. Loss of a single parent or
3. Loss of earning parent.

### **Related Information**

#### **About PM-CARES for Children Scheme**

- Recently, the central government has announced a special “PM-CARES for Children” scheme for all those orphaned due to Covid-19.
- Children who have lost both parents or their lone surviving parent or their legal guardian or adoptive parent due to Covid-19.

### **Key Feature of the PM-Cares for Children**

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Government stands with children **who lost their parents due to COVID-19**



Such children to **get a monthly stipend** once they **turn 18** and a **fund of 10 lakh** when they **turn 23** from **PM CARES**



**Free education to be ensured** for children who lost their parents to COVID-19



Children will be assisted to **get an education loan for higher education & PM CARES will pay interest on the loan**



Children will **get free health insurance of 5 lakh under Ayushman Bharat till 18 years** & premium will be paid by **PM CARES**



Children represent the future of the country and we will do everything to support and protect the children: **PM Narendra Modi**



It is our duty, as a society, to care for our children and instil hope for a bright future: **PM Narendra Modi**

### 3. Election Commission of India releases atlas on General Elections 2019

(Topic- GS Paper II –Governance, Source- AIR)

**Why in the news?**

- The Election Commission of India has recently released an atlas on General Elections 2019.

**About the Atlas**

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- The Atlas consists of all the data and statistical figures about the 2019 General Election.
- It has 42 thematic maps and 90 tables depicting various facets of the elections.
- The Atlas provides interesting facts, anecdotes and legal provisions related to the elections.
- This Atlas serves as an informative and illustrative document that brings to light the nuances of the Indian electoral process and empowers readers to analyse trends and changes.

### Key highlights

- The 17th General Elections conducted in 2019 were the largest democratic exercise in history.
- Election Commission of India set up over ten lakh polling stations in General Elections 2019.
- It witnessed the participation of over 61 crore voters.
- The 2019 General Elections witnessed the lowest gender gap in the history of Indian elections.
- The Elector Gender Ratio, which has shown a positive trend since 1971, was 926 in the 2019 General Elections.

### 4. Gulf of Aden

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

#### Why in the news?

- Recently, the Indian Navy and the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) has participated in the first ever exercise at the Gulf of Aden.

#### About the Exercise

- It was a two-day exercise that would see high tempo-naval operations at sea, including advanced air defence and anti-submarine exercises, cross deck helicopter operations,

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tactical manoeuvres, boarding operations, underway replenishment, search and rescue and other maritime security operations.

- The exercise will endeavour to enhance and hone their war-fighting skills and their ability as an integrated force to promote, peace, security and stability in the maritime domain," the statement said.
- Concurrently, a virtual "Information Sharing Exercise" is also being conducted between the Indian Navy Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region and Maritime Security Centre in the Horn of Africa.

### About Horn of Africa



- Horn of Africa is the easternmost extension of African land and includes the region that is home to the countries of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, whose cultures have been linked throughout their long history.
- It lies along the southern boundary of the Red Sea and extends hundreds of kilometers into the Gulf of Aden, Somali Sea and Guardafui Channel.
- In ancient and medieval times, it was known in the Western world as the "land of the Barbaria and Ethiopians".

### About Gulf of Aden

- The Gulf of Aden also known as the Gulf of Berbera is a deepwater gulf between Yemen to the north, the Arabian Sea to the east, Djibouti to the west, and the Guardafui Channel, Socotra (Yemen), and Somalia to the south.
- In the northwest, it connects with the Red Sea through the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, and it connects with the Arabian Sea to the east.

- To the west, it narrows into the Gulf of Tadjoura in Djibouti.

### Important Cities

- Important cities along the Gulf of Aden include the namesake Aden in Yemen.
- Other Yemeni cities are Zinjibar, Shuqrah, Ahwar, Balhaf, Mukalla.
- **On the Horn of Africa side, the cities of Djibouti, Berbera, and Bosaso.**

## 5. UNDRR Report on Drought 2021

(Topic- GS Paper III –Environment, Source- TOI)

### Why in the news?

- Recently in a report titled “Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: **Special Report on Drought 2021**” has been published by **UNDRR (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction)**.
- It will be a part of discussions at vital UN climate talks called COP26, scheduled to take place in Glasgow in November 2021.



### Key findings of the Report

- As per the report “Drought is on the verge of becoming the next pandemic and there is no vaccine to cure it.
- It has directly affected 1.5 billion people so far this century.

### Loss of Economy

- Economic cost was roughly estimated at \$124bn.
- However, True cost is likely to be many times higher as these estimates do not include much impact in developing countries.

## Scenario on Developed countries

- Report highlights that, even the developed countries are not immune to drought. US, Australia and southern Europe have experienced drought in recent past.
- Drought costs more than us dollar 6 billion a year in US while euro 9 billion in EU.
- As per report, Population growth is also exposing more people to the impacts of drought in many regions.
- In Australia, the study found its agricultural productivity fell by 18% during 2002-2010 due to drought-like conditions.
- Most of the world will be living with water stress in the next few years.

## India and the Report

- The GAR report has cited major droughts in India in the last 150 years: in 1876-1878, 1899-1900, 1918-1919, 1965-1967, 2000-2003 and 2015-2018.
- The report estimated the “impact of severe droughts on India’s GDP to be about 2-5% per annum”, despite decreasing contribution of agriculture in the country’s expanding economy.
- Most of world will be with water stress in next few years and demand will outstrip the water supply during certain periods.
- Report highlights, drought is now widespread and by end of this century most of the countries will experience it in some form.
- It has been found that severe droughts are occurring with increasing frequency in the Deccan.

## Special Focus on Deccan region

- The experts, commissioned by UNDRR, conducted case studies in the Deccan Plateau, comprising 43% of India’s landmass.
- The Deccan region sees the highest frequency (of more than 6%) of severe droughts in all of India.
- The report said, in recent major droughts in Tamil Nadu, a 20% reduction in the primary sector caused an overall 5% drop in industry and a 3% reduction in the service sector.
- The study found “significant drought conditions” once in every three years in the Deccan Plateau leading to large scale migration and desertification.
- A 2019 case study revealed “villages in Maharashtra and Karnataka’s districts were deserted as families left due to the acute water crisis; in one village in the Beed district of Maharashtra, which was abandoned with only 10-15 families remaining out of a population of more than 2,000,”

## Reasons for drought

- Changing rainfall patterns because of climate breakdown are key driver of drought.
- Inefficient use of water resources.
- Degradation of land under intensive agriculture and poor farming practices.
- Deforestation

- Overuse of fertilisers & pesticides
- Overgrazing & over-extraction of water for farming are some other factors.

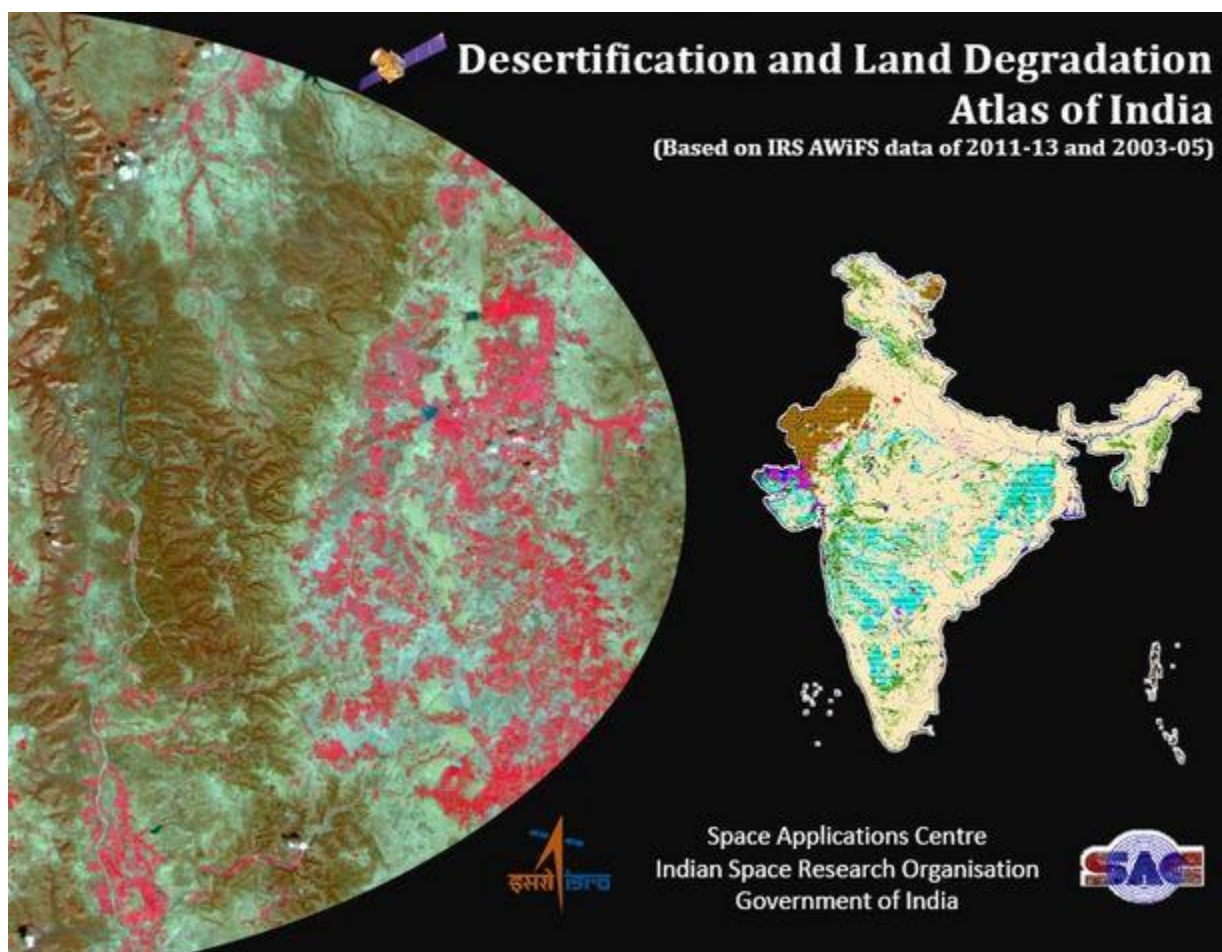
## 6. Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas of India

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

**Why in the news?**

- The Union Environment Ministry has recently released the latest version of “Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas of India.

**About the Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas**



- It has been published by Space Application Centre, ISRO, Ahmedabad.
- The Atlas provides a state-wise area of degraded lands for the time frame 2018-19.
- It also provides the change analysis for the duration of 15 years, from 2003-05 to 2018-19.
- It would provide important baseline and temporal data and technical inputs.

**Significance of the Atlas**

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- This Atlas presents state-wise desertification and land degradation status maps depicting land use, the process of degradation, and severity level.
- This was prepared using IRS Advanced Wide Field Sensor (AWiFS) data.
- The area under desertification/land degradation for both time frames and changes are reported state-wise as well as for the entire country.
- The outputs are helpful in prioritizing areas to be taken up for minimizing the impact of desertification and land degradation.

## India and desertification

- India hosted the 14th session of the Conference of Parties (COP 14) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in September 2019.
- India is striving towards achieving the national commitments of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and restoration of 26 million ha of degraded land by 2030.
- India has been at the forefront of bringing the issue of land degradation to the core of relevant international alliances for the protection and conservation of the environment.
- India has adopted a collective approach for making progress towards achieving the national commitments related to land restoration.

## Efforts to Combat Desertification

### Command Area Development

- It was launched in 1974 to improve the irrigation potential utilization and to optimize agricultural production through efficient water management.
- The Ministry of Water resources coordinates the implementation of the program with respective state governments.

### Integrated Watershed Management Programme

- It was launched in 1989-90.
- It aims to restore ecological balance by harnessing, conserving and developing degraded natural resources with the creation of Rural Employment.
- **It was named as “Haryali Guidelines” in 2003.**
- **It has been now subsumed under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (2015-16 to 2019-20) which is being implemented by NITI Ayog.**

### Desert Development Programme

- It was launched in 1995 to minimize the adverse effect of drought and to rejuvenate the natural resource base of the identified desert areas.
- It was launched for hot desert areas of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana and cold desert areas of Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh.
- **It is implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development.**

### National Afforestation Programme

- National Afforestation & Eco Development Board (NAEB) Division of the MoEFCC is implementing the “National Afforestation Programme (NAP)” for ecological restoration of degraded forest areas.

### **National Action Programme to Combat Desertification**

- It was prepared in 2001 to address issues of increasing desertification and to take appropriate actions.
- It is implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

### **National Mission on Green India**

- It is a part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).
- It was approved in 2014 with the objective of protecting; restoring and enhancing India’s diminishing forest cover with a deadline of 10 years.
- It is being implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

**Various other schemes like Green India Mission, fund accumulated under Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), Nagar Van Yojana also help in checking degradation and restoration of forest landscape.**

### **Global Efforts to Prevent Desertification**

#### **The Bonn Challenge**

- It aims to bring 150 million hectares of the world’s deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.

### **Goal 15 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), 2030**

- It declares that “we are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production.”

### **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**

- It was established in 1994, the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.

### **About the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought**

- It has been observed every year on 17th June.
- The day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution in 1995 after the day when the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was drafted.
- The theme for 2021: **“Restoration. Land. Recovery. We build back better with healthy land”.**

## 7. Illegal sale of “HT Bt cotton” seeds doubles in a year

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

### Why in the news?

- Recently, the illegal cultivation of (Herbicide Tolerant) HT Bt cotton has seen a significant increase in recent years.
- Similarly, the sale of HT Bt Cotton seeds has more than doubled from 30 lakh in 2020 to 75 lakh in 2021.

### About HT Bt Cotton Variant

- Herbicide-tolerant Bt (HT Bt) Cotton is another variant of Bt cotton.
- This variant adds another layer of modification, making the plant resistant to the herbicide glyphosate.
- This variant has not been approved by the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee**.
- Concerns regarding illegal cultivation of HT Bt Cotton:

### Several Concern for HT Bt cotton

- **Firstly**, the HT Bt cotton variant has serious environmental and economic consequences.
  - This is because there are fears that glyphosate has a carcinogenic effect.
  - Further, the unchecked spread of herbicide resistance is creating a variety of superweeds.
- **Secondly**, the illegal sale will eliminate small cotton seed companies and also threaten the entire legal cotton seed market in India.
- **Thirdly**, there is no accountability of the quality of cottonseed as it is being sold illegally.
- **Lastly**, the industry is losing legitimate seed sales and the government is also losing revenue in terms of tax collection.

### Government of India’s Response on illegal cultivation of HT Bt Cotton

- According to a report by the Department of Biotechnology, around 15% of the cotton area was sown with unapproved HT Bt cotton.
- Especially in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Gujarat.
- However, the Government of India has said that it has made the policy to ban this variant.
- But it is the State governments to enforce the ban and take action.

### About Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis) cotton

- It is a genetically modified organism (GMO) cotton variety, which produces an insecticide to bollworm.
- Strains of the bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis produce over 200 different Bt toxins, each harmful to different insect.
- Bt toxins are insecticidal to the larvae of moths and butterflies, beetles, cotton bollworms and ghtu flies but are harmless to other forms of life.

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- The gene coding for Bt toxin has been inserted into cotton as a transgene, causing it to produce this natural insecticide in its tissues.
- Bt cotton has been genetically modified to produce an insecticide to combat the cotton bollworm, a common pest.

### Adoption of Bt Cotton

- According to the Ministry of Agriculture, from 2005, adoption of Bt cotton rose to 81% in 2007, and up to 93% in 2011.
- Many short-duration studies examining Bt cotton, in the early years, pronounced that Bt was a panacea for dwindling yields and pesticide expenses.

### About GM Crops

- Genetically modified crops are plants used in agriculture, the DNA of which has been modified using genetic engineering techniques.
- The aim is to introduce a new trait to the plant which does not occur naturally in the species.
- **The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), India's regulator for genetically modified seeds.**

### About the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)

- It is the apex body constituted in the Ministry of Environment and Forests under 'Rules for Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells 1989', under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.
- It approves activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from the environmental angle.
- It is also responsible for approval of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered organisms and products into the environment including experimental field trials (Biosafety Research Level trial-I and II known as BRL-I and BRL-II).
- The Rules of 1989 also define five competent authorities i.e. the Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBSC), Review Committee of Genetic Manipulation (RCGM), Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), State Biotechnology Coordination Committee (SBCC) and District Level Committee (DLC) for handling of various aspects of the rules.

## 8. Black softshell turtle

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

### Why in the news?

- Recently, 'Hayagriva Madhava Temple' a major temple in Assam has signed a memorandum of understanding with two green NGOs, the Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden and the Kamrup district administration for the long-term conservation of the rare freshwater black softshell turtle or the Nilssonina nigricans.

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- A vision document 2030 was also launched after Turtle Survival Alliance India and Help Earth signed the pact involving the Hayagriva Madhava Temple Committee.

### About Black softshell turtle

- It is also called Bostami turtle (*Nilssonia nigricans*).
- It is a species of freshwater turtle found in India (Assam) and Bangladesh (Chittagong and Sylhet).
- Previously declared extinct by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 2002, these turtles were found still to exist in a temple's pond called the Hayagriva Madhava Temple located in Assam, India.



The freshwater black softshell turtle. Special ArrangementSpecial Arrangement

### Conservation Status

- These are listed as **Extinct in Wild** as per IUCN Status.
- Listed in **CITES: Appendix 1**

### About Hayagriva Madhava temple

- The Hayagriva Madhava temple is one of the important centers for Vaishnavism.
- The temple exists on a hilly place which located at Hajo nearby Guwahati, Assam.
- It was estimated that the temple was built during the Pala period of 10th-12th century A.D.