

1. World's Largest Marine Reserve Created Off Antarctica

GS3 - Environment

Context

A remote and largely pristine stretch of ocean off Antarctica received international protection on Friday, becoming the **world's largest marine reserve** as a broad coalition of countries came together to protect 598,000 square miles of water.

The new marine protected area in the Ross Sea was created by a unanimous decision of the international body that oversees the waters around Antarctica—**the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources**—and was announced at the commission's annual meeting in Tasmania. The commission comprises 24 countries, including the United States, and the European Union.

What is agreed??

The marine protected area covers 1.6 million square kilometres (617,000 square miles). There will be a **blanket ban on commercial fishing** across about three-quarters of that area. In the remaining ocean zones, some commercial fishing will be allowed.

A small amount of fishing for **research purposes** will be allowed throughout the protected area. The agreement will take effect from December 2017 and, for most of the reserve, will last an initial 35 years.

Ecosystem of the region

It is home to one third of the world's Adélie penguins, one quarter of all emperor penguins, one third of all Antarctic petrels, and over half of all South Pacific Weddell seals.

The Ross Sea is probably the largest ocean wilderness left on our planet, It is the **Serengeti of Antarctica**, a wild place full of wildlife such as emperor penguins, leopard seals, minke whales, and killer whales. It's one of these rare places where **humans are only visitors and large animals rule**.

The Ross Sea is a place of “**fish with antifreeze in their blood, penguins that survive the equivalent of a human heart attack on each dive, and seals that must use their teeth to constantly rake open breathing holes in the ice.**”



Significance of this agreement

This is important not just for the incredible diversity of life that it will protect, but also for the contribution it makes to building the **resilience** of the world's ocean in the face of **climate change**.

Covering **617,000 square miles**, an area roughly equivalent to France, Spain, and Germany combined, the Ross Sea reserve will be the largest in the world.

This agreement will safeguard one of **the last unspoiled ocean wilderness** areas on the planet home to unparalleled marine biodiversity and thriving communities of penguins, seals, whales, seabirds, and fish.

Some 16,000 species are thought to call the Ross Sea home, many of them uniquely adapted to the cold environment. A 2011 study in the journal **Biological Conservation** called the Ross Sea “the **least altered marine ecosystem on Earth**,” citing intact communities of emperor and **Adelie penguins, crabeater seals, orcas, and minke whale**.

The newly protected area “shows that the world can successfully cooperate on global environmental issues

However, conservationists have expressed concern at the **35-year time limit**, which they say could undermine the essential point of the reserve.

What is CCAMLR??

The **Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources** (CCAMLR) was established by **international convention** in 1982 with the objective of conserving Antarctic marine life. This was in response to increasing commercial interest in Antarctic krill resources, a keystone component of the Antarctic ecosystem and a history of over-exploitation of several other marine resources in the Southern Ocean

CCAMLR is an international commission with 25 Members, and a further 11 countries have acceded to the Convention. Based on the best available scientific information, the Commission agrees a set of conservation measures that determine the use of marine living resources in the Antarctic.

India is also a **member country** in this commission.

2. Religious freedom is not just for men

GS1 – Women's issues

Issue:

The Haji Ali verdict is a win for Indian Muslim women fighting for equality

Context

The Bombay high court's Haji Ali judgement lifting the ban on women's entry into the inner sanctum of the *dargah* is a historic verdict. It is a signal that nearly 70 years after independence, it is time Indian women got equality in religion, society, and in all spheres of life. It is a huge step forward for Indian Muslim women's struggle for justice and equality, which began earnestly in the

last decade or so. It is a signal that Indian women can no longer be discriminated against on any account, including religion.

What is Haji Ali Dargha?

The Haji Ali *dargah*, one of the landmarks of Mumbai, is where the Sufi *pir* Haji Ali Shah Bukhari lies buried. It is a historic monument that men and women from all faiths—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc.—regularly visit and find peace in the presence of the *pir*. The *pir* does not discriminate between men and women or Hindus and Muslims.

How it all started?

Women were suddenly prevented from entering the inner sanctum, or *mazaar*, in 2012. At a time when Indian women are demanding equality in all spheres of life, this restriction was clearly against the tide of the times. Such gender discrimination is unacceptable even if sanctioned by “custodians” of a religion.

What Islam says?

Islam does not forbid women from visiting any shrine or place of worship, the self-appointed male custodians do. The Ajmer *dargah* and, until 2011, the Haji Ali *dargah*, are proof of this. Besides, some of the holiest places in Islam, such as Kaaba and Karbala, don't discriminate between men and women. The question therefore is not about religion; it is patriarchy masquerading as religion.

What the constitution says?

Muslims are Indian citizens and Muslim women have equal rights according to the Constitution. Articles 13 and 14 uphold justice and equality and reject discrimination of any kind. Articles 24 and 25 uphold the right to religious freedom of all citizens, including female citizens.

Nowhere does the right to religious freedom give precedence to males over females. The right to religious freedom cannot be extrapolated to mean subjugation of women. Barring women from places of religious worship is not tenable under any precinct or law, religious or legal. The Haji Ali judgement establishes this beyond doubt.

Conclusion

Besides being a legal victory, it is also a huge moral victory—not just in the Haji Ali case but also the Shani Shingnapur temple case. In both cases, ordinary women fought against mighty and powerful religious trusts. And in both cases, the judiciary stood by the women and enabled gender justice. This victory will give a lot of encouragement and power to the ongoing struggles for gender justice in our country.

3. Questions about an encounter: GS3- challenges related to internal security.

Background:

Student Islamic movement of India is a banned student organisation formed in 1997. earlier the stated mission of Simi was liberation of India from the western materialistic cultural influence and to convert Muslims to live according to the Muslim code of conduct. but Simi made militant and extremist in the backdrop of Hindu Muslim riots in 1980s and 1990s. later in 2001 it was banned by government as it was found to have indulged in terrorist activities.

Why in news: eight alleged Simi men were shot dead by police, suspecting it to be an encounter.

Points of concern:

1. The state government and the police failed to provide a cogent explanation for the event of the day.
2. The circulation of the footage purportedly recording some moments before and after the encounter has invited charges that the encounter was fake.
3. Doubts have been raised whether 8 men were carrying any weapons or posed imminent danger to the police party that closed in on them.
4. How cctv cameras ,watchtowers and searchlights all mysteriously failed when the under trials were scaling two high walls one after another.
5. Issues of human rights and rule of law.
6. Only few security guards to look over men who are charged with serious offences.

Way forward:

As laid down by Supreme Court every police encounter has to be probed by cid or independent police team, so this case has to be investigated thoroughly to quell all doubts and suspicions.

4. Cyber attacks from Russia

GS3-cyber security

Why in news: Russia is pushing its foreign policy in an increasingly aggressive ways including cyber attacks and espionage.

Background: cyber security can be defined as the protection of systems ,networks and data in cyber space. cyber threats vary from simple hacking of an email to waging a war against a state. cyber crime is a posing threat in the post modern era. though impact of snowden revelations paved way for internet governance era but it is clear that all facets of the cyber security world have been indelibly changed, from ordinary people having their eyes opened to what is really going on, to governments becoming even more distrustful of each other.

Issue: m1(5) director general andrew parker had been a covert threat for decades, but what differed now from cold war era was there were more and more methods for it to pursue its anti western agenda.

points of concern: military secrets, industrial projects, economic information and government foreign policy are vulnerable to these kind of attacks.

conclusion:

Strategy to defend these kind of attacks is to strengthen cyber security defences.

5. EU lessons on economic integration:

Why is it in news: Canada-EU trade deal, Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), by the French speaking region of Belgium. This tiny sub region of an EU member holding up a trade deal with its own federal government and those of other EU members inherent in the reigning models of economic integration.

Issue: It has much relevance beyond the Europe project because the trade deals have been ratified by European national parliament, in the past, EU institutions have always taken point on them. This is in accord with the EU charter, which vests responsibilities exclusive competence for trade deals in the EU. The reason Brussels set an extra ordinary precedent in this case is the same reason the Wallonia govt calculated that blocking the deal would go down well with the wallonians: EU's lack of credibility.

Concern:

1. EU's structural inadequacies bear much of the blame since the euro crisis.
2. EU leaders and apparatchiks have often seemed to forget the political dimension of economic decisions.
3. Centralisation of monetary policy and constraint on deficit spending have undercut the ability of national governments to determine fiscal policy.
4. Add further stress points linked to the idea of integration -the migrant crisis, trade treaties like CETA, and the contentious Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership go far beyond trade and impinge national sovereignty.

Way forward: EU must make a choice: tighter integration with the institution to support it or carefully calibrated loosening of the bonds.

6. Long road to 'ease of undoing business'

GS3 & GS2--- policy formulation and implementation

Context:

India's global rank in the World Bank's annual Doing Business ranking came in at 130 out of 190 countries. It has moved up only one notch since last year. It is more significant because the current government wants India to be in top 50.

A critical analysis

How should we take that report

Firstly, and obviously, this is a relative ranking. So while India tries to improve its position, others are trying harder. So even if in

an absolute sense India is progressing along the 10 metrics that comprise the ranking, its rank will not improve unless its progress outpaces others.

Secondly, the desire to get a higher rank is not an end in itself. Rather, the main goal is sustained job creation on a large scale, which needs a business-friendly regime, measured by the ranking. India is already the world's fastest-growing big economy, even at rank 130

Some years ago, the ease of doing business ranking (EODB) had Bric (Brazil, Russia, India and China) economies ranked between 120 and 140. So the Bank was chided about the **lack of correlation between their ranks and economic growth rates**. But that chiding misses the point about the relationship between the ranking and long-term prospects for growth in jobs, businesses, and prosperity

The third caveat is that while India's ease of doing business ranking has stalled, its ranking on three other global indices has jumped smartly. Its **competitiveness ranking** is up 16 places according to the **World Economic Forum**. And its **innovation index** is up 15 places as per the **World Intellectual Property Organization**. **Inbound foreign direct investment** is the highest in the world, signalling the **confidence of global investors**. So even as the low ranking rankles, let's not overlook our growth record, and performance on other global indicators.

What to do – way ahead

- How then to perform better on the EODB ranking? It is by focusing on the 10 metrics that make up the rank. Specifically, on getting **construction permits (rank 185)**, **registering property (138)**, **paying taxes (172)**, **enforcing contracts (172)** and **resolving insolvency (136)**
- The first two are mostly local issues dealt with either at the state or local government level. With the rollout of the **goods and services tax (GST)** system, hopefully India's rank in the taxation metric should improve substantially in the coming years.
- As for enforcing contracts, it is an issue best addressed **by judicial reforms**. This calls for filling vacancies in various courts and greater encouragement to **arbitration and out-of-court settlements**
- Coming to the **insolvency resolution**, ease of doing business is all about how quickly you can get started. Competition is about the free entry of new businesses. But it is also about free exit. So it is also about ease of undoing businesses, or ease of quitting. On this count, India's rank has been abysmally low. It takes more than four years to wind up a business, and insolvency resolution is able to salvage barely 20% of the value. This is bound to change in a dramatic way with the rollout of the **new Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code regime**. This landmark law was passed in May, and is about to become operational very soon.

7. Xuan Zang or Hsuan tsang to build another bridge to India

About history

In the decade that began in 630 AD, Xuan Zang came to India through Kashmir after visiting Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan. He travelled from north to east during his 14-year stay and lived in Bihar for a couple of years. At Nalanda University, Xuan Zang interacted with students and scholars, mastered local languages and discovered Buddhist stupas. He provided detailed descriptions of 7th century India and its Buddhist links with China.

Many of Xuan Zang's sites are yet to be explored.

Current relevance-

Excavation would be done in varied locations, depending on clearance from the Archaeological Survey of India and the Bihar government.

The themed seminar on “Xuan Zang and China-India Friendly Interactions” will be held next week. and this will trace the philosopher’s role “in strengthening Indo-China relations.” It is **organized by the Consulate** in association with Nalanda University.

We and china over a period of time built-up differences on India’s entry to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, UN terror listing of Masood Azhar and campaign against Chinese goods. The effort is to focus on “cooperation” rather than “competition. Seminar and Excavations can help in strengthening Indo-China relations.

MAINS

Q. How can history be used in maintaining strengthening relations with other countries. Discuss.

8. Nepal drains risky glacial lake near Mount Everest

GS1 & GS3 - Geography Part And Disaster Management.

Climate change is causing Himalayan glaciers to melt at an alarming rate, creating huge glacial lakes which could burst their banks and devastate mountain communities.

The Himalayan nation was devastated by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake last year, raising alarm about the risks of flash flooding from glacial lakes. Therefore draining the lake was on the priority of the government. They have successfully mitigated a disaster right now.

Lake name- Imja Tsho

Location -just 10 km south of the world's highest peak mount everest.

Mains-

Q.Discuss relation between climatic change and disaster management.

9. ODF status

The State of Kerala has become the third State overall and the largest State so far to be declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) (Gramin).

- With this, all 14 districts, 152 blocks, 940 Gram Panchayats and 2117 villages of the State have been declared free from open defecation.
- Freedom from open defecation has been proven to lead to significant health benefits in terms of incidences of water-borne diseases, especially in children, and provide safety and dignity for all, especially women and senior citizens.
- Previously, Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh were declared ODF.

Background:

The Swachh Bharat Mission, launched in October 2014, consists of two sub-missions – the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) (SBM-G), which will be implemented in rural areas, and the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), which will be implemented in urban areas.

- SBM-G seeks to eliminate open defecation in rural areas by 2019 through improving access to sanitation. It also seeks to generate awareness to motivate communities to adopt sustainable sanitation practices, and encourage the use of appropriate technologies for sanitation.
- SBM-Gramin mainly focuses on ensuring the use of toilets, besides their construction. The States and their implementing agencies will be given incentives for meeting performance standards: reducing open defecation, sustaining their open defecation-free status and improving solid and liquid waste management in rural areas.
- The World Bank will also provide a \$25-million technical assistance for building the capacity of select State governments.