

Administrative Breakdown in Delhi

What is the issue?

Delhi administration faces a chaos due to a rift between political executive and Chief Secretary.

What are the duties of a Chief Secretary?

- The CS is a bureaucrat who is the head of the civil administration in the state or union territory.
- He represents his own service and all services within the civil administration.
- His word in sorting out contending arguments and dissension among officers is final.
- CS has to show leadership while overseeing that public interest is preserved in letter and spirit.
- It is his duty to run an efficient administration and give the CM fair and impartial advice.
- Thus for a good reason CS has a commanding presence in the administration.

What is the role of Chief Secretary in democracy?

- Democracy and participatory governance is preserved through rule of law and the authority to administer has to be integral to governance.
- This the reason the symbols of authority is given to every CS, in states and UTs.
- In Delhi, the CS has a more challenging role he has to report simultaneously to the CM and the lieutenant governor (LG).
- He needs to walk a tightrope between the vision and concerns of both, even when they are not always on the same page.
- CSs face challenges due to immense authority vested on them to organise and get things done.
- CS's authority will work only as long as both the CM and the LG understand and respect the role of the CS.
- If that is whittled down, the tremors will be felt across the services and an insult to the CS is seen as an insult to the official brotherhood.

What are the challenges before CS in UTs?

- In the states, the CS is invariably the choice of the CM and there is understanding and mutual trust between them.
- If the CS is unbending or difficult, it is easy to make a change quietly and elegantly.
- In the UT cadre or the AGMUT cadre as it is officially known, that is not so.
- By and large, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the authority controlling the cadre serving the NCT of Delhi as well as Goa, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Daman and Diu, Puducherry, Chandigarh and the Andaman and Nicobar administration, does not stand in the way of the CM having a CS of his choice.
- The officer knows his career is largely to be decided by the MHA and not by the CM of Delhi or elsewhere.
- Therefore, it is not necessary for the CS to always find a way to meet the demands of the CM, which is a point of difference with other state cadres.
- CMs recognise this and make the best use of what they have been given.

What needs to be done?

- Delhi government is known for its history of conflict and confrontation with the police and the bureaucracy.
- Delhi's political administration is embarrassed with the bureaucracy has a result of having to deal with officers who report directly to the Lt. Governor, who is not bound to act on the aid and advice of council of ministers of the state assembly.
- To feel that this is a restrictive administrative environment and seek greater powers for Delhi under the Constitution is one thing.
- But until Delhi is a full State, Delhi's administration need to understand that they have to work within the existing institutional arrangement.
- Proper demand for the constitutional changes to give Delhi full statehood rather than targeting police officers and civil servants is need of the hour.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

N Gopalaswami committee

Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

N Gopalaswami committee has been constituted to select 20 institutes of higher education in India that will be developed into "world-class" institutes. In a few months, 10 each (from public and private category) institutions will be accorded the eminence status with a mandate, and supported, to achieve the world-class status over a period of 10 years.

Facilities provided to these institutes:

These institutes will be provided with greater autonomy to admit up to 30% foreign students, to recruit up to 25% foreign faculty, to offer online courses up to 20% of its programmes and to enter into academic collaboration with top 500 in the world ranking institutions without UGC permission.

Background:

Last year, the Union ministry of Human resources Development, through the University Grants Commission, had invited institutes from across the country to be upgraded into "world-class universities." Following this the Commission had received 100 applications, maximum being from public institutions.

Need for world-class institutes:

India lacks world-class universities according to international rankings, and Indian academics, compared internationally, are rather poorly paid. Students also suffer an immense shortage of places in top academic institutions and throughout the higher education system. India today educates only half as many young people from the university age group as China and ranks well behind most Latin American and other middle-income countries.

Way ahead

If India is to succeed as a great technological power with a knowledge-based economy, world-class universities are required. The first step, however, is to examine the problems and create realistic solutions. Spending large sums scattershot will not work. Nor will copying the American academic model succeed.

Humanitarian Crisis in Syria

What is the issue?

- High civilian casualties are being reported in the Syrian regime's offensive to retake Eastern Ghouta from the rebels.
- The UN has called for a 30-day cease-fire, but that looks unlikely.

How is the ground situation?

- Eastern Ghouta, is a locality on the outskirts of the capital city of Damascus, with an estimated population of 4 lakh.
- It was taken over by the rebels during the early phase of the civil war (7 years ago) and is currently one of the last significant areas held by them.
- A wide range of militant groups are believed to be active here, which including the Saudi and Qatar funded groups, and the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda.
- While the areas were under a government blockade for years, it now appears to have been surrounded by ground forces who are preparing for the final assault.
- The government says the city is occupied by terrorists from these groups and that the few civilians remaining there are used as human shields.
- But despite the government's assertions, the rebels appear to have largely lost their momentum in the war and are on the run.
- Nonetheless, the government narrative is problematic as it seems to be pinning the blame on all the residents for the rebel occupation.

How deep is the humanitarian crisis?

- The recent airstrikes and bombardments launched by government forces to wash out the rebels from here saw at least 270 die in the past 3 days.
- Significantly, it was also here that chemical weapons were used in 2013, killing hundreds of people and highlighted the brutality of the war.
- Also, the years-long blockade has deprived Eastern Ghouta of food and medicines, and the bombing is only expected to worsen the plight further.
- While it is a certainty that Eastern Ghouta will fall to the regime's assault, the cost in terms of lives is proving to be morally unacceptable.
- Notably, from very early in the war, strategic consideration have dominated the narrative and there has been very less concern for human lives.
- After 7 years of war and over 4 lakh deaths, the Syrian regime seems to be parading to victory with little worry about the devastation it had co-precipitated.

Israel's Dwindling Options in Syria

What is the issue?

- Israel got itself involved in the Syrian war in order to contain increasing Iranian influence in Syria.
- But the tide seems to be against it and its option is limited at present.

How has the Israel - Syria hostility evolved over the years?

- In the 1967 war, Israel captured the strategic "Golan Heights" on the Israeli-Syria border from Syria and continues to occupy the region even now.
- In the 1980s, Syria intervened in Lebanon and helped militants like Hezbollah who were resisting Israeli occupation of Lebanon.
- While Syria and Israel do not have formal diplomatic ties, they've not had a direct confrontation for more than 50 years now.
- Additionally, despite the hostility towards the current longstanding Assad regime, Israel's border with Syria has been very calm for years.
- When the crisis broke in Syria in 2011, Israel was a fence sitter as it didn't want to displace the stable secular dictatorship of Assad.
- Notably, this was more because the possible replacement was an uncertain bunch of militant religionists.
- But as the Syrian civil war evolved into a regional conflict over the years, and Israel's strategic calculations seem to have changed too.

What forced Israel's intervention into the Syrian war?

- The Syrian war is very complex and multiple players have aligned with each-other for strategic reasons even if their end goals were non-compatible.
- As the Syrian regime's position weakened, Iran sent in trained Shia militants from various counties to fight for saving the regime.
- Notable among them is Hezbollah, which is a Lebanese Shia militia that is backed by Iran, which sent thousands of its troopers to fight in Syria.
- Besides the government army, these militias fought the war on the ground on behalf of the regime, and also received technical support from Iran.
- The growing role of Hezbollah and Iran in Syria alarmed Israel, as Hezbollah and Israel have had multiple direct confrontations in the past.
- Notably, it was Hezbollah's guerrilla resistance that forced the Israel withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 after 18 years of occupation.
- Also, Israel's 2006 bombardment on Hezbollah's weapons infrastructure in Lebanon and the subsequent month offensive failed in its stated objectives.
- Notably, Hezbollah now has a heavy military presence along southern Lebanon which is across Israel's northern border.

What was the Israeli strategy?

- To counter the Iranian activities, Israel had adopted a two-pronged strategy.
- **1st strategy** - The plan was to deter Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies from taking control of its Golan border region (Israel – Syria border).
- Israel hence decided to strengthen anti-regime rebels in southern Syria, which is closer to the Golan border.
- While initially, Israel offered mere medical aid and humanitarian assistance to the rebels, it has lately acquired military and logistical dimensions.
- Tel Aviv is said to be offering support to seven different rebel groups in the region, that also includes a faction of the US-backed Free Syrian Army.
- Besides providing money, weapons and intelligence, Israel also supported the advances by these groups on the ground with air cover.
- Notably, one such aerial mission saw Israel bombing regime positions in as the local rebel groups backed by it came under heavy attacks from the regime.
- **2nd strategy** – For its own strategic reasons, Russia intervened directly in the Syrian war in 2015 to support the regime.
- As this seems to be pitting Israeli backed forces in conflict with Russian endeavours, Israel commenced active war diplomacy with Russia.
- This ultimately helped Israel gain Russia's tacit acceptance to not interfere in Israeli offensive against Hezbollah positions within Syria.
- Hence, despite Russia controlling most of Syria's airspace since 2015, Israel retained the freedom to aerially strike Hezbollah positions at will.
- Notably, in 2017 alone Israel claims to have struck suspected weapons shipments to Hezbollah around 100 times.

How successful was the intervention?

- It wasn't regime change but the growing Iranian influence in Syria that concerned Israel, for which it was supporting rebel elements.
- Israel hoped that Russian intervention on the Syrian regime's behalf would reduce its dependence on Iran.
- But Russia remained ambiguous, and neither stopped Israeli assault on Hezbollah nor stopped the expansion of Iranian footprint in Syria.
- Hence, even as the government is recovering its control back, the regime-friendly Iranian presence is only growing in Syria.
- The network of rebels, who are being backed by Israel are currently losing ground rapidly and international support is also correspondingly dwindling.
- While the US was rock solid behind these rebel groups in the initial years, it has wanted to withdraw since Trump administration took over.
- Late last year, the regime regained a foothold near the Israeli border by washing out the rebels in some areas, which has also spooked Israel.
- Also, recently, Israel carried out an aerial assault in Syria against "Iranian targets", and an Israeli jet was subsequently downed by Syrian fire.
- On the whole, the entire episode looks like a comprehensive failure.

How does the future look?

- Israel has strengthened its bombing campaign in Syria this month and has also issued a sternly warned Iran of dire consequences.
- But beyond rhetoric, Israel's capacity to shape reality in Syria is limited, as Iran's clout has been established strongly over the war years.
- Hezbollah has also been emboldened and looks too strong to be eliminated by mere aerial rides, at a time when full-scale intervention is not an option.
- As the regime gains further strength, it will begin its onslaught on the Israeli backed rebels in the south, which will make things murkier for Tel Aviv.

Source: The Hindu

Global Corruption Index

- India's rank on the Corruption Perception Index fell two notches to 81 in 2017 from 79 in 2016.
- The Berlin-based non-government body Transparency International ranked 180 countries in 2017.
- New Zealand was the least corrupt and Somalia was the most.
- The 2017 index revealed — despite attempts to combat corruption, most countries were moving too slowly with their effort.

HOW INDIA FARES		
Nations	Rank in 2016	Rank in 2017
India	79	81
Brazil	79	96
Russia	131	135
China	79	77
South Africa	64	71
Pakistan	116	117
TOP, BOTTOM ONES		
Top nations	Bottom nations	
New Zealand	Syria	
Denmark	South Sudan	
Finland	Somalia	
Source: Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index		

ICGS Vajra

- The Indian Coast Guard ship 'Vajra', was decommissioned in Paradip.
- The Indian Coast Guard ship rendered three decades of service in maritime security along the northeast coastal waters.
- The ship monitored the coastal activities along with Odisha and West Bengal.
- It was built by Mazagon Dock, named 'Vajra', after the weapon of Lord Indra, and commissioned on 1988.

Eravikulam National Park

- Eravikulam National Park is located in the Kannan Devan Hills of the Southern Western Ghats in the Idukki District, Kerala State.
- In the local language, Eravikulam denotes streams and pools.
- The highest peak in peninsular India, Anamudi (2695 m), is situated in this park.

22-02-2018

- Three major types of plant communities found in the park are: Grasslands, Shrub Land and Shola Forests.



- Neelakurunji, a plant endemic to the Western Ghats, blooms once every 12 years and is found in this national park.
- It is also home to and the sanctuary of the Nilgiri tahr, an endangered goat species.
- The catchment area of three important rivers, Periyar, Chalakudy and Pambas is located in this area.
- The Muthuvans are the indigenous people, who have traditionally been associated with the management of the park.

Rare Fish Species from Australia

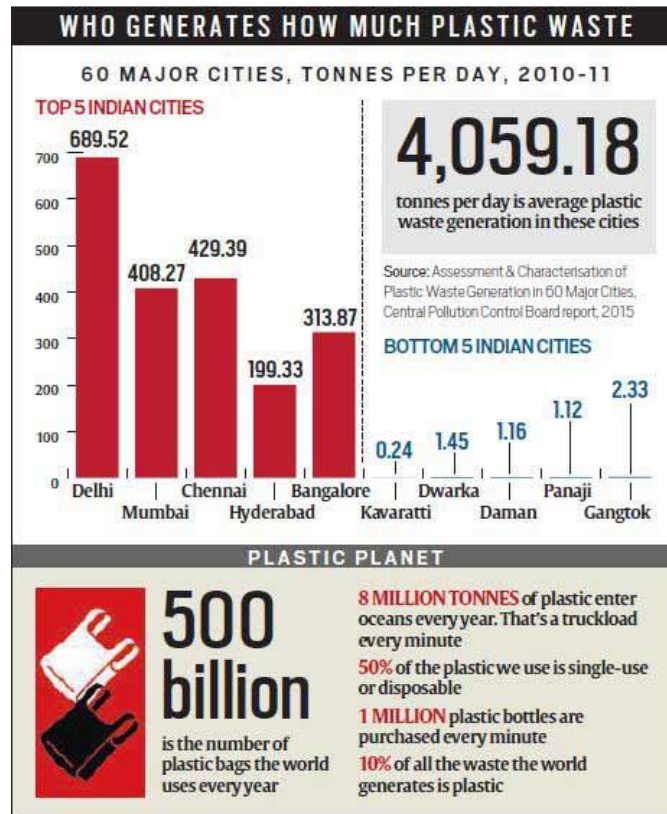
- Scientists hauled up thousands of fish in an attempt to examine life at abyssal depths along Australia's vast coastline.
- Life at such depths is one of crushing pressures, no light, little food and freezing temperatures, with animals that call it home evolving unique ways to survive.
- As food is scarce, they are usually small and move slowly and others are jelly-like and spend their lives floating about.
- Some species have ferocious spines and fangs and lie in wait until food comes to them.
- Over 42,000 fish and invertebrates were caught, some of which are potentially new species.
- Scientists gathering in the Tasmanian capital Hobart to examine them which is a first in its nature.
- It is the first systematic attempt to examine life at abyssal zone depths anywhere along Australia's vast coastline.

Plastic pollution

- India will host the official global World Environment Day celebrations on June 5.
 - The Theme of this year Environmental day will be "Beat Plastic Pollution".
 - The following are some insights into the plastic pollution in the country,
- The average production and consumption of plastic products between 2011-12 and 2015-16 at 707 million metric tons (MMT) per year.

22-02-2018

2. A report by Central Pollution Control Board in 2015 estimated that around 4,059 tons per day of plastic waste is generated from major cities.



3. In 2015, the government had approved a scheme for “setting up of need-based **plastic parks** with requisite state-of-the-art infrastructure to assist the sector move up the value chain.
4. Ockhi Cyclone resulted in agglomeration of plastic debris along the coasts of Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Gujarat.

Dara Shukoh

- An exhibition was conducted to showcase the forgotten Mughal Prince Dara Shukoh, at Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, in New Delhi.
- He was the eldest son of Emperor Shah Jahan and heir apparent to the Mughal throne.
- The religious insight of the Mughal prince marks him out from most other Mughal rulers.
- Dara Shukoh leaned towards the Chishti order of Sufism that is known to have promoted tolerance.
- He commissioned the translation of all the Upanishads from Sanskrit to Persian for Muslim scholar to learn.
- He wrote the Majma-ul-Bahrain (The confluence of two seas).to elaborate upon the syncretism between Sufism and Vedic philosophies.
- Prince Dara Shukoh was defeated by Prince Aurangzeb in the battle of Samugarh.

Source: PIB, The Hindu, Business Standard

Canada will not support separatists, says Trudeau

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asserted that his country believed in a united India and assured the Punjab government that it would not support any separatist movement in India.

- I took up the issue pertaining to Khalistan as it is a matter of primary concern to us. He (Mr. Trudeau) is aware of it and has assured us that he is going to look into the matter,” said Punjab CM Capt. Singh after the meeting.
- During the meeting, Capt. Singh sought the Canadian Prime Minister’s cooperation in cracking down on separatism and hate crime by a fringe element, constituting a minuscule percentage of Canada’s population.
- Mr. Trudeau assured Capt. Singh that “his country did not support any separatist movement in India or elsewhere.

India dismayed at Male’s move

Expressing its disappointment over the Maldives government’s decision to extend the state of Emergency for another month despite India’s objections, New Delhi issued statement, calling the move unconstitutional.

- “We are deeply dismayed that the government of Maldives has extended the state of Emergency for a further 30 days. The manner in which the extension of the state of Emergency was approved by the Majlis in contravention of the Constitution of Maldives is also a matter of concern,” the External Affairs Ministry said , referring to the passage of the Emergency extension resolution in Parliament despite there not being the requisite quorum of 43 members.

The Maldivian Ambassador to India, Mohamed Ahmed, denied the accusation that the move was unconstitutional.

- “Their [Ministry’s] interpretation is incorrect,” Mr. Ahmed . “In this case, the President [Yameen] declared a state of Emergency, Parliament extended it. And to check whether there are any issues with the extension of Emergency, it has been referred to the Supreme Court.” Later the Supreme Court reportedly cleared the validity of the Emergency extension as well.

Centre opposes PIL plea in PNB case, says probe on

The Centre opposed a PIL petition in the Supreme Court for an investigation into the alleged Rs 11,500-crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) banking fraud, saying cases had already been registered and the probe has begun.

- The petition asked the court to also direct the government to bring back diamond merchant Nirav Modi, at the centre of the fraud, in two months.

- But Vineet Dhanda, petitioner and advocate, said the issue was of utmost urgency as a “few influential and connected businessmen have decamped with thousands of crores of public money from right under the nose of the government”.
- The petitioner called for guidelines to be framed by the Finance Ministry for loans of over Rs 10 crore. Mr. Dhanda also sought a list of borrowers whose bank loans are worth over Rs 500 crore.

Centre reboots eNAM to draw more farmers

- In a bid to engage more farmers on the electronic National Agriculture Market (eNAM) platform, the government unveiled mobile payment facility BHIM, and other features in regional languages as well.
- The eNAM website is now available in Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali and Odia besides Hindi and English, while the eNAM trading facility is available in six languages.

Enhanced features

- The eNAM has been strengthened with features like MIS dashboard, BHIM and other mobile payment facilities, enhanced features on mobile app such as gate entry and payment via mobiles.

Blockchain tech could help prevent frauds like at PNB

- The adoption of blockchain by India's banks could help avert frauds such as the one at Punjab National Bank.
- The disaggregated and transparent nature of the technology updates information across all users simultaneously.
- It would have ensured that various officials would have instantly been alerted to the creation of the letters of undertaking (LoUs), according to bankers and blockchain specialists.

‘Immediate notification’

- Transaction reconciliation systems at present do not result in immediate notification.
- Using blockchain, all parties on the chain will be immediately notified about a transaction.
- Blockchain, a distributed ledger technology was originally developed as an accounting system for the cryptocurrency Bitcoin.

- It is being researched across the banking and financial services industries for the potential benefits it may offer in an increasingly digitised business environment.
- Central banks including the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Reserve Bank of India have been examining the technology to understand the regulatory challenges it may pose.
- Blockchain potentially has far-reaching implications for the financial sector, and this is prompting more and more banks, insurers and other financial institutions to invest in research into potential applications of this technology.
- Market participants in other securities markets are also exploring the usage of blockchain or distributed database technology to provide various services such as clearing and settlement, trading.

Implementation at SBI

- SBI had already implemented it in its reconciliation systems and in several cross-country payment gateways.
- In blockchain, from the source system it will try to match the transactions, so one can immediately verify any transaction using blockchain.
- Blockchains are immutable and distributed ledgers, which means that anything recorded on them cannot be changed or deleted, and is instantly uploaded to all users on that blockchain.
- However, simply depending on technology to prevent frauds is fraught, since they take place at the human level, where an official with the correct authentication can misuse the system.
- Still, blockchain's technology is such that even human error can be greatly mitigated. Blockchain can fix this by having everything linked to the same database.

Bangladesh fears exodus of Bengalis from Assam

- The ongoing process of compiling the National Register of Citizens in Assam may trigger an exodus of Bengalis. And it may create one more Rohingya-like refugee crisis for Bangladesh, fears Bangladesh.
- The process in Assam is threatening India-Bangladesh ties and will be exploited by anti-India elements and Islamic fundamentalists who are challenging the Awami League rule.

- Citizenship issue will be another disappointment after the setback on the sharing of water of the river Teesta.
- India should think of its friendship with Bangladesh before going ahead with the full implementation of the citizens register in Assam, sources in the country opine.
- Bangladeshi policymakers are unanimous that the failure to conclude the Teesta water sharing agreement between New Delhi and Dhaka has been a disappointment and that the ongoing process in Assam will complicate the situation further.
- These observations have gained significance as a section of the ruling Awami League believes that India has not reciprocated Ms. Hasina's support on counterinsurgency in the northeastern States.

Pak. claims reprieve over terror financing

- Pakistan claimed victory in the ongoing Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meeting as a preliminary discussion in the International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG) failed to build a consensus on putting it again on the terror 'watch-list'.
- However, U.S. and Indian officials said a final decision is still to come.
- Pakistan Foreign Minister said that Pakistan had won a reprieve of three months to convince the UN body not to put it on a 'grey-list' of countries where terror financing and money laundering needed scrutiny.
- Pakistan was on the FATF watch-list from 2012 to 2015.
- According to reports in Pakistani newspapers, countries including China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not back the resolution, which was originally supported by the U.S., Germany, the U.K. and France.

Canada court upholds ban on 'kirpan'

- A Canadian court has upheld the right of Quebec's National Assembly to prohibit people from entering the building with a kirpan, an article of faith for the Sikhs.
- Two members of the World Sikh Organisation of Canada were challenging a motion adopted in the Assembly in February 2011.

STATE-TELANGANA

EPTRI for regulation of groundwater exploitation

There is an urgent need to enact a Groundwater Regulation and Control Act in Telangana on the lines of a Central Model Bill. Such a law would help regulate groundwater extraction and prevent ruthless drilling of earth for pumping groundwater.

- The 'TS State of Environment Report', a draft prepared by the Environment, Protection, Training and Research Institute (EPTRI) and recently presented to the government, emphasised that the State has to promote the idea of conjunctive use of water from surface and rainwater harvesting, among others, to wean off excessive pressure on groundwater sources.
- Prepared with support of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the draft report indicated the dire current state of ecology and gave a series of recommendations to be followed in various sectors to lower pollution levels, and improve farm production and conditions for flora and fauna to thrive.

Deep water levels of over 20 metres have been observed in most parts of Medak, Mahabubnagar, Ranga Reddy, Nizamabad, Nalgonda and parts of Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam and Adilabad districts.

- It also stated that the government has been sanctioning Reserve Osmosis plants in quality/fluoride affected habitations, but the impact of such plants is that the water-rejection rate is around 25% to 45%.
- Although RO plants provide an immediate solution to get over water quality related problems, they were unsustainable in the longer run because of the high pressure it exerted on groundwater.
- The report called for an empirical investigation to ascertain the impact of such plants on groundwater and on water governance.
- Groundwater safety clearance should be made mandatory before according clearance to mines whether they are major or minor. Abandoned mines or quarries could be utilised for installing solar panels for generating solar energy, while mine quarry pits could be used for water storage.

TS Biodiversity Board should be strengthened with diverse experts working on bio-resources to manage and assess multiple implications of its depletion.

- Both botanical and zoological surveys should work in coordination with the Board to provide authentic information on biodiversity wealth and to take appropriate decisions, the report said.
- Telangana has 17 species of amphibians, 65 species of reptiles and 103 species of mammals are assessed for threatened status by Species Specialist Group of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- The species in IUCN red list constitute only 30% and rest of are either not assessed or data is insufficient.
- The species of birds in the State are estimated to be around 275-300.
- The information on invertebrate groups is limited to a few groups and explorations.

Over 50% of all vulnerable species occur in at least one or the other protected area in Telangana and there are 2,800 taxa belonging to 1,051 genera under 185 families.

All students in Telangana to get health cards

The State government has decided to conduct health tests for over 30 lakh students across the State and issue health cards to them from the next academic year.

- Accordingly, the Health Department officials had been directed to start comprehensive health check-ups for students from July and complete the process within six months. This would be followed by issue of health cards to the students.
- In addition, the government will distribute health and hygiene kits to close to eight lakh students enrolled in the SC/ST/BC/minority residential educational institutions, KGBVs, government high schools and other institutions.
- The officials concerned had also been directed to conduct awareness programmes for students studying seventh to tenth standards on the likely health complications they could face and the precautionary measures to be taken.

Centre defers meeting on AP Reorganisation Act

An important meeting of the chief secretaries of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh convened by the Union Home Ministry to take stock of the assurances given to the two successor States in Schedule 13 of the AP Reorganisation Act 2014 has been deferred.

- The Union Ministry sent a communication to the two States about its decision to postpone the meeting assuring that fresh dates of the meeting would be communicated soon.
- The communication came at a time when the governments of the two Telugu States were preparing information relating to the assurances that had been incorporated in the Reorganisation Act but had not been implemented so far.

Some of the assurances in the Schedule 13 included

- setting up of steel plants in Khammam and YSR Kadapa district,
- 4,000 MW power plant in Telangana by NTPC, rail coach factory in Telangana,
- measures for establishing rapid rail and road connectivity from the AP capital to Hyderabad and other important cities of Telangana and
- upgradation of Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada and Tirupati airports as international airports etc.,

Senior officials said the meeting assumed significance as it is expected to be chaired by the Union Home Secretary and secretaries of several Union Ministries had been invited to participate in the deliberations about the status of implementation of the assurances given to the two States.

- The last meeting chaired by the Union Home Secretary was held in May 2015. The sub-committees constituted by the Union Ministry had been holding discussions ever since.

Conference on women empowerment on March 1

A national conference on “Women empowerment and gender equality: Planet 50-50 by 2030” is being held in Guntur on March 1 in collaboration with United Nation Information Centre, New Delhi and British Deputy High Commission, Hyderabad.

Guntur based DEEDS organisation, and Yes We Can, Visakhapatnam based organisation are hosting the conference.

Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner is the chief guest at the conference.

The conference is being held as a precursor to International Women’s Day celebrated on March 8.

It will focus on the research problems in the gender equality and women empowerment and further give a platform for people from different fields to discuss on the issues.