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C.A Dated On 05-08-2019

GS-1

Groundwater resource

Context

Groundwater resources are over-exploited in 1,186 out of 6,881 “assessment units” (blocks, talukas, watersheds etc) in the country, the Jal Shakti Ministry said in reply to a question in Lok Sabha. This was as assessed in 2017, and translates to 17%, or one in every six of these units.

Details

- All these over-exploited assessment units are in 17 states and Union Territories.
- Punjab has the highest extent of over-exploitation at 79 per cent of its blocks, followed Rajasthan, Delhi, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, each at 50 per cent or more.
- Tamil Nadu, which has the highest number of blocks (1,116 firkas), also has the highest number of over-exploited units at 462 firkas, or 40 per cent.
- In Maharashtra, where the Marathwada region is drought-hit, 3 per cent of the talukas are over-exploited.
- In Uttar Pradesh with 830 units (820 blocks and 10 cities), 11 per cent are over-exploited. In the eight Northeastern states none of the assessment units (districts and blocks) is over-exploited.

GS-2

Section 144

Why in news?

The Jammu and Kashmir government imposed restrictions in Srinagar under Section 144 CrPC late Sunday night, shutting down mobile, broadband internet, and cable TV services. State leaders including Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti, and Sajad Lone have also been placed under house arrest.

According to an order issued by the government, “there shall be no movement of public and all educational institutions shall also remain closed. All public movement has been curtailed and educational institutions will remain closed”. Follow LIVE Updates



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What is Section 144 CrPC?

- Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) is issued in urgent cases of security threat or riot and bars the assembly of five or more people in an area where it has been imposed.
- The notification is issued by the District Magistrate of the area.
- The section also empowers the authorities to block internet access.

When is Section 144 CrPC imposed?

- When there are apprehensions of breach of public peace and order by some people, Section 144 CrPC is put into effect.
- Under this section, all civilians are barred from carrying of weapons including lathis, sharp-edged weapons or firearms in public places except for police or paramilitary or security forces.
- No order under this section can remain in force for more than two months.
- However, if the state government considers it necessary for preventing danger to human life or for preventing a riot, it can extend the impositions under the sections for not more than six months from the date of issuance of the initial order.

What is the punishment if someone violates Section 144 CrPC?

- Any person involved in such unlawful assembly can be booked for "engaging in rioting". The maximum punishment for such act is three years.
- Anyone who obstructs the police from breaking the assembly or abets the assembly is also punishable under law.



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What is the difference between prohibitory orders under Section 144 and curfew?

- It must be noted that Section 144 CrPC is not equivalent to a curfew.
- Curfew orders are issued in more severe situations where people are instructed to stay indoors for a specific time or period.
- Establishments such as markets, schools, colleges, etc. are ordered to remain shut, and only essential services are allowed to run on prior notice. There is a complete restriction on traffic as well.

ICJ on consular access

Why in news?

Pakistan has “offered” India consular access to Kulbhushan Jadhav, who has been in jail in Pakistan since March 2016. The former Indian Navy officer was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism.

Background

- The Hague-based International Court of Justice (ICJ) had ordered on July 17 that Pakistan must undertake an “effective review and reconsideration” of Jadhav’s conviction and sentencing, and grant consular access to him without delay.
- The ICJ upheld India’s stand that Pakistan is in egregious violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, 1963.
- India has asked Pakistan to grant “full consular access” to Jadhav in “full compliance and conformity” the ICJ verdict and the Vienna Convention.
- India wants to ensure that the meeting does not become a sham like the one in December 2017, when Jadhav’s mother and wife visited him.



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What is the concept of “consular access”?

- Consular access simply means that a diplomat or an official will have a meeting with the prisoner who is in the custody of another country.
- Usually, during the meeting, the diplomat will first confirm the identity of the person, and will then ask some basic questions — on how he/she is being treated in custody, and what he/she wants.
- .The principle of consular access was agreed to in the 1950s and 60s. The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR) was framed in 1963, at the height of Cold War.
- This was a time when “spies” from the US and USSR were caught in each other’s countries and across the world, and the idea was to ensure that they were not denied consular access.
- All countries agreed to the principle, and more than 170 have ratified the Vienna Convention, making it one of the most universally recognised treaties in the world.
- .
- Under Article 36 of the VCCR, at the request of a detained foreign national, the consulate of the sending State must be notified of the detention “without delay”.
- The consulate has the right “to visit a national of the sending State who is in prison, custody or detention, to converse and correspond with him and to arrange for his legal representation”.

GS-3

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty

Why in news?

The U.S. and Russia ripped up a Cold War-era missile pact on Friday in a move that raised the spectre of an arms race between the global superpowers.

About INF treaty



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- The 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty limited the use of medium-range missiles, both conventional and nuclear.
- The INF Treaty banned all of the two nations' land-based ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and missile launchers with ranges of 500–1,000 kilometers (310–620 mi) (short medium-range) and 1,000–5,500 km (620–3,420 mi) (intermediate-range).
- The treaty did not apply to air- or sea-launched missiles.
- By May 1991, the nations had eliminated 2,692 missiles, followed by 10 years of on-site verification inspections.

Economic growth

What does the government need to do? Will lower rates accelerate growth?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lowered the repo rate to 5.75% in the Monetary Policy Review in June.
- This was a level last seen nine years ago.
- Despite three rate cuts aggregating to 75 basis points in this cycle beginning February, economic growth has failed to pick up and, in fact, has been slowing down even more, There is clamour for another big cut from the RBI in the upcoming monetary policy announcement this week.
- This is because the transmission of the earlier cuts by banks to borrowers has been poor. By the RBI's own assessment, only 21 basis points have been passed on to borrowers by banks in this cycle.

What are the repo and reverse repo rates?

- The RBI uses the repo rate to influence the interest rate structure in the economy and to manage inflation.
- Technically, the repo rate is the rate at which commercial banks would borrow from the RBI, and the reverse repo is the rate of interest they would earn when they deposit funds with the central bank.

What is the stand worldwide as far as governments are concerned on cutting rates?



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- The traditional argument is that the lower the interest rate, the better for businesses as it brings down the cost of capital, making investments more attractive.
- Any government would love this as the country would then draw higher investments leading to higher growth and more job creation.
- Governments abhor higher interest rates as, theoretically, these push up project costs and keep investors away..
- A central bank also keeps an eye on the fiscal deficit maintained by the government. A high fiscal deficit usually makes it difficult for the central bank to rein in inflation, hence causing it to be hawkish and raising interest rates.
- The late economist and former RBI Deputy Governor Subir Gokarn's was a voice that was constantly egging the government of the day to keep the deficit under control.

Why aren't Indian commercial banks passing on the RBI's rate cuts to consumers quicker?

- Deposits from the public form a chunk of funds that commercial banks use to lend to borrowers. Deposit rates have remained high; only last week, the State Bank of India lowered its rates citing improved liquidity.
- If deposit rates remain high, then the cost of funds for a bank remains high no matter where the RBI pegs its repo rate.
- Deposit rates have remained high for two reasons.
- One, competing interest rates in the government's small savings schemes have remained high — even after a cut in late June, the Public Provident Fund and the National Savings Certificate yield 7.9%. Compare this with the 6.8% or so that one would get at SBI, the nation's largest bank.
- The other reason that deposit rates have remained high is the liquidity crunch triggered by the sudden inability of the non-banking finance company IL&FS to pay back loans since last September.

The RBI intervened to infuse liquidity soon after but these interventions were not enough..

Will lower rates spur economic growth?



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- Capital is one of the three main factors of production, which are critical to the growth of a commercial entity, the other two being land and labour.
 - But capital is only a necessary, not sufficient, condition. Land, unless allocated by the local government, is too costly for investors seeking to set up shop.
 - On labour, even if adequate hands are available for a job, the skill quotient is still low. Training graduates to be job-ready is a form of tax that companies pay.
 - Also to be taken into account is the market environment and demand. If end users are seeing lesser money in hand than earlier, demand will certainly be impacted.
 - Therefore, in an environment where the other factors of production are not favourable for an investor, low interest rates by themselves may not prove attractive enough.
 - Any revival of economic activity will be contingent on joint efforts by the government on the fiscal front to stimulate demand, and the RBI, to keep interest rates low.
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- A rate cut in the upcoming monetary policy announcement this week has to be backed with some positive measures from the government. To hope that a rate cut will suffice to re-ignite economic activity would be naive.

'Deep Ocean Mission'

The story so far:

India's ambitious 'Deep Ocean Mission' is all set to be launched this year. Dr. Madhavan Rajeevan, Secretary, Union Ministry of Earth Sciences, announced on July 27 that the ₹8,000-crore plan to explore deep ocean minerals will start from October. He said, "We finally have the in-principle approval to go ahead with the mission. Now expenditure plans will be drawn up and circulated [to various institutions affiliated to the Ministry] for executing programmes and we hope to launch by October 31."

What will be mined from the deep ocean?



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- One of the main aims of the mission is to explore and extract polymetallic nodules. These are small potato-like rounded accretions composed of minerals such as manganese, nickel, cobalt, copper and iron hydroxide.
- They lie scattered on the Indian Ocean floor at depths of about 6,000 m and the size can vary from a few millimetres to centimetres.
- These metals can be extracted and used in electronic devices, smartphones, batteries and even for solar panels.

Where will the team mine?

- The International Seabed Authority (ISA), an autonomous international organisation established under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, allots the 'area' for deep-sea mining.
- India was the first country to receive the status of a 'Pioneer Investor' in 1987 and was given an area of about 1.5 lakh sq km in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) for nodule exploration.
- In 2002, India signed a contract with the ISA and after complete resource analysis of the seabed 50% was surrendered and the country retained an area of 75,000 sq km.
- According to a release from the Ministry of Earth Sciences, the estimated polymetallic nodule resource potential in this area is 380 million tonnes (MT), containing 4.7 MT of nickel, 4.29 MT of copper, 0.55 MT of cobalt and 92.59 MT of manganese.
- Further studies have helped narrow the mining area to 18,000 sq km which will be the 'First Generation Mine-site'.

Which are the other countries that are in the race to mine the deep sea?

- Apart from the CIOB, polymetallic nodules have been identified from the central Pacific Ocean. It is known as the Clarion-Clipperton Zone.
- According to the ISA's website, it has entered into 15-year contracts for exploration for polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the deep seabed with 29 contractors.
- Later it was extended for five more years till 2022.
- China, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Russia and also some small islands such as the Cook Islands, Kiribati have joined the race for deep sea mining.
- Most of the countries have tested their technologies in shallow waters and are yet to start deep-sea extraction.



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When will India start mining?

- India's mining site is at about a depth of 5,500 metres, where there is a high pressure and extremely low temperature.
- The mining machine newly developed for 6000 metres depth was able to move about 900 metres and will be deployed soon at 5,500 metres.
- More tests are being conducted to understand how to bring the nodules up to the surface. A riser system comprising an umbilical cable or electromechanical cable and a hose is being developed."

What will be the environmental impact?

- According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), these deep remote locations can be home to unique species that have adapted themselves to conditions such as poor oxygen and sunlight, high pressure and extremely low temperatures.
- Such mining expeditions can make them go extinct even before they are known to science. The deep sea's biodiversity and ecology remain poorly understood, making it difficult to assess the environmental impact and frame adequate guidelines.
- Environmentalists are also worried about the sediment plumes that will be generated as the suspended particles can rise to the surface harming the filter feeders in the upper ocean layers.
- Additional concerns have been raised about the noise and light pollution from the mining vehicles and oil spills from the operating vessels.

Is deep sea mining economically viable?

- The latest estimate from the ISA says it will be commercially viable only if about three million tonnes are mined per year.
- More studies are being carried out to understand how the technology can be scaled up and used efficiently.



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