

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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## **SARISKA WEARS THE STRIPES OF SUCCESS**

**Tiger population now 25, years after they became extinct in the reserve**

- The measures for habitat management for tigers launched about six months ago at the famous Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan's Alwar district have started bearing fruit.
- The tiger population in the wildlife sanctuary has gone up to 25, while the resources are being provided to create water holes and develop grasslands for ungulates as a prey base.

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## **NEW TOURIST ROUTE**

- The forest administration has opened a new route in the tiger reserve's buffer zone, adjacent to Alwar town, for tourists to facilitate better sightings of the big cats. The new Bara-Liwari route, located in the region where a tigress gave birth to two cubs recently, will reduce pressure on the core area and increase livelihood opportunities for the rural population.
- A foundation established by a private bank has started delivering goods and resources which the Forest Department could not arrange because of a variety of handicaps. As part of its corporate social responsibility expenditure, the foundation is funding development of grasslands, earthen bunds and water holes for wild animals at 10 locations and making livelihood intervention for the villagers being relocated from the sanctuary.
- The tiger reserve, spread across 1,216 sq. km, witnessed the first-of-its-kind tiger relocation from the Ranthambore National Park by helicopter in 2008 after the felines became extinct in the sanctuary. Since then, the animal has taken some time in multiplying at its own ease, unlike the Panna tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh, where a similar aerial translocation was done in 2009.

## **Aid for guards**

- The foundation has distributed 23 motorcycles with helmets to the forest guards in Sariska for monitoring the tiger movement with the pledge that one new motorcycle per new tiger will be given in the future.
- Tourism & Wildlife Society of India honorary secretary Harsh Vardhan, who has been visiting Sariska for the last four decades, told The Hindu that the forest was now depicting an appropriate balance between the prey and predator.
- The grassland habitats developed in dry patches of land have helped ungulates to feed better and breed in the areas such as Naya Pani, Dabli and Bhagani, leading to enhanced feed for tigers.

## **RAJASTHAN READY FOR ITS FIRST SEPARATE AGRICULTURE BUDGET**

Focus on drip and sprinkler irrigation systems in view of water scarcity in State

## **CENTRE TO FORM FPOS WITH SMALL FARMERS**

Prime Minister says country committed to achieving net zero by 2070 to tackle climate change

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stated that the Union government is resolved to mobilise small farmers into farmer producer organisations (FPOs) and make them influential market forces in the years to come to improve their incomes by developing agriculture value chain.
- "We are also committed to save the farming community from the impact of climate change with focus on back to basics in fusion with march to future. In that direction, impetus was given to digital agriculture, natural and chemical-free farming in the recent Budget and it will throw open a world of opportunities to the youth too," the Prime Minister said at the 50th anniversary celebrations of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) at Patancheru here on Saturday.
- Speaking after launching the celebrations and inaugurating two new research facilities — Climate Change Research Facility on Plant Protection and Rapid Generation

Advancement Facility — he said drought proofing work was also going on in 170 districts across the country. He mentioned the successful example of ICRISAT's work in Bundelkhand on 'per drop more crop', on which he visited an exhibition stall too at ICRISAT.

- Stating that small and marginal farmers comprised about 80% of the community in the country and climate change was major crisis to them, the Prime Minister said the Centre would help them fight climate change with its commitment to achieve net zero (carbon emissions) by 2070.
- The Prime Minister stated that the new mediums would be made available to the farming community to overcome the challenges and problems in the agriculture sector as part of the Centre's plans for the next 25 years.
- Earlier, he unveiled a logo as part of 50th anniversary celebrations and released a commemorative stamp.

## **WILDLIFE MIGRATION TO WAYANAD SANCTUARY BEGINS**

Flow from T.N. and Karnataka low due to better rain in reserves

- With the onset of summer, the seasonal migration of wild animals has begun from the adjacent wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS).
- The inflow of wildlife is comparatively low this time owing to better rain in the sanctuary and adjacent tiger reserves, Jose Mathew, Assistant Conservator of Forests, WWS, told The Hindu. However, this would increase considerably by the end of February, he says.
- The sanctuary is a haven for wild animals during summer owing to the easy availability of fodder and water throughout the year. Nevertheless, officials have made highly structured measures to ensure the availability of fodder and water, apart from other protection measures.
- As many as 26 new brushwood check-dams have been constructed, and 34 check-dams of 168 dams have been desilted so far to ensure drinking water to the animals, says Mr. Mathew.
- As part of fodder management, 289 hectares of coarse grasslands have been trimmed to grow soft grass, and weeds removed on 83 hectares of forest land. Sanctuary authorities are also planning to map fields and waterbodies to ensure fodder supply during the dry season.
- Fire breakers have been erected along 195 km, including a 27-km stretch on the State borders, at a width of 10 metres.
- "We have conducted four awareness sessions on forest fire to sensitise those residing on the fringes of the forests. We are planning to organise 20 more similar sessions in the coming days," says Mr. Mathew.
- As many as 160 front-line forest staff, including 130 temporary forest watchers, are deployed for protection with essential equipment and wireless sets.
- Apart from 24 permanent anti-poaching camps and five watchtowers at strategic points, 15 new treetop machans (temporary watchtowers) have started functioning on the four forest ranges of the sanctuary.
- This year, the sanctuary authorities have registered 186 phone numbers of forest staff with the Forest Survey of India. The latter would issue alerts on incidences of forest fire to the registered phone numbers so that officials can respond quickly.
- A round-the-clock control room is set up to issue alerts in case of forest fires.

# CRYPTO RIDDLE: TAX FIRST, RECOGNITION LATER?

What is the debate around the legality of cryptocurrencies after the announcement of a 30% tax?

- **The story so far:** In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced a 30% tax on income earned from transfer of virtual digital assets. The Government is yet to recognise cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin and Ethereum, but this ambiguity has not stopped people from trading in digital assets in large numbers, which apparently forced the Government's hand in announcing a tax on such transactions. At a press conference after presenting the Budget, Ms. Sitharaman said consultation is underway with stakeholders on digital assets, adding that there is no clarity yet on how the Government of India will regulate cryptocurrencies.

## WHAT WOULD BE THE TAX COMPONENT FOR INCOME FROM VIRTUAL DIGITAL ASSETS?

- The Budget has proposed a 30% tax on income from the "transfer of any virtual digital asset." Secondly, except for the cost of acquisition, no deduction will be allowed. Thirdly, losses from such transfers cannot be set off against any income. Fourthly, tax will be deducted at source at the rate of 1%, so as to capture transaction details, thus initiating a tax deducted at source (TDS) mechanism.

## WHAT HAS BEEN INDIA'S APPROACH TO CRYPTOCURRENCIES?

- The Government and the Reserve Bank of India have in the past cautioned people against considering cryptocurrencies as legal tender. The fact that transactions using such currencies can easily bypass the tax net, and therefore be used for illicit transactions, have been bothering governments across the world.
- The Reserve Bank of India, in 2018, directed banks not to provide services to the cryptocurrency ecosystem. The Supreme Court set this aside, calling the move disproportionate, given that such currencies were not banned in the country. A law on cryptocurrencies, which was supposed to have been brought in last year, is yet to see the light of day. The broad expectation about the Government's approach to this was set by a 2019 report by an inter-ministerial committee which recommended a ban on all cryptocurrencies.
- Yet, through all this, cryptocurrency trading has grown in India. In fact, Ms. Sitharaman noted in her Budget speech that "there has been a phenomenal increase in transactions in virtual digital assets. The magnitude and frequency of these transactions have made it imperative to provide for a specific tax regime."

## HOW HAS THE CRYPTOCURRENCY ECOSYSTEM READ THIS MOVE?

- All major players have welcomed it. They have understood it as a move that provides clarity and "mainstreams" their industry. Nischal Shetty, the CEO of cryptocurrency exchange WazirX, tweeted that the Government has legitimised the industry. He wrote: "This doubles down on the fact that virtual digital assets are legal in India."
- The industry is now ready to lobby with the Government to bring down the tax on par with other asset classes.

## DOES THIS MEAN THAT CRYPTOCURRENCIES ARE LEGAL?

- Statements by ministers and bureaucrats after the Budget seem to suggest that the legality of cryptocurrencies in the country is still a grey area, never mind the tax.
- In an interview with Bloomberg TV, Finance Secretary T.V. Somanathan said: “They are in a grey area. It’s not illegal to buy and sell crypto.”
- He further said, “We have now put in a taxation framework that treats crypto assets the same way we treat winnings from horse races, or from bets and other speculative transactions.”
- Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar told NDTV a day after the Budget, “Yesterday’s Budget has given a direct answer —crypto won’t be banned.”
- However, Ms. Sitharaman, in an interview with Times Now, seemed to suggest that the question on the ban hasn’t been decided one way or another. She also seemed to divorce the taxability issue from the legitimacy issue.
- She said, “There is no way anything can stop a sovereign Government from taxing an activity. Banning or not banning will come subsequently when the consultations give me inputs. But would you say till then I do not even tax the huge profits being transacted? I will. Legitimate or not legitimate is a different question, taxing is completely my prerogative.”
- In recent days, experts have pointed out that the legal position is in sync with this thought process.
- For instance, the verdict in the Commissioner of Income Tax v. Piara Singh in 1980 quoted from the judgment in the Commissioner of Income Tax, Gujarat v. SC Kothari, in which the court had observed that “if the business is illegal, neither the profits earned nor the losses incurred would be enforceable in law. But, that does not take the profits out of the taxing statute.”

## WHY ARE INDIA’S IMPORTS FROM CHINA RISING?

If trade is booming, what is the state of other aspects of economic relations, including investments?

- **The story so far: While many countries, including India, have spoken of the need to reduce reliance on China particularly in the wake of COVID-19 and disruption to supply chains, trade figures released last month showed imports have only continued to surge in 2021, rebounding after a fall in trade in 2020 because of the pandemic. The rising trade comes amid continuing tensions with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), where disengagement negotiations have been slow moving. The rising trade does not, however, suggest a return to normalcy in relations. Other areas, such as investment, remain in a deep freeze amid the continuing chill in bilateral relations.**

### WHAT DID INDIA IMPORT FROM CHINA IN 2021?

- India’s trade with China in 2021 reached \$125.6 billion, according to figures released in January by China’s General Administration of Customs (GAC). This was the first time that trade crossed the \$100 billion mark. India’s imports from China accounted for \$97.5 billion, while exports reached \$28.1 billion, both records. Compared to 2019 —trade declined substantially in 2020 because of the pandemic, which exaggerates the year-on-year increase —imports are up 30%. Exports to China, meanwhile, are up by as much as 56%. The trade deficit, a long-term source of concern for India, is up by 22% since 2019, having declined last year.

### WHAT IS DRIVING INDIA’S IMPORTS?

- India’s biggest imports are electrical and mechanical machinery, a range of chemicals that are intermediate imports used by industries, active pharmaceutical ingredients

(APIs), auto components, and since 2020, a large amount of medical supplies. According to figures available with India's Ministry of Commerce, all those key imports continued to rise in 2021. The total value of the top 100 import categories —each of which accounts for more than \$100 million in imports —was up by \$16 billion in the last year, reaching \$45 billion. The top items included both finished goods such as integrated circuits (up 147%), laptops and computers (up 77%) and oxygen concentrators (up four-fold) and intermediate products such as chemicals (of these, acetic acid imports were up eight-fold).

### WHAT DOES THE RECENT TREND OF TRADE FIGURES SUGGEST?

- Experts say India's dependence on China for finished goods has shown no signs of easing, which is a cause for concern. The rise in intermediate imports is, however, less of a concern as it is a sign of industrial recovery and greater demand for inputs. While Indian exports to China have also grown, up by more than 50% in the last two years, these are mostly raw materials such as ores, as well as cotton and seafood, and not finished products. The five-year trend shows the trade deficit continues to widen. The deficit has grown from \$51.8 billion in 2017 to \$69.4 billion in 2021.

### WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS?

- While trade continues to boom, other aspects of economic relations have dramatically changed in the past two years. In the wake of the LAC crisis starting April 2020, the message from New Delhi was that it cannot be business as usual while there are tensions along the border. Investments from China in the past year have plunged amid tighter curbs. In the tech and telecom space, the once rapidly increasing Chinese investments in start-ups including from tech giants such as Alibaba and Tencent, has come to an abrupt halt, more than 200 apps remain banned, and Chinese firms have been kept out of 5G trials so far. India has also tightened scrutiny on Chinese firms in India, recently conducting tax investigations into companies including smartphone manufacturer Xiaomi. Those moves last month prompted a statement from China's Ministry of Commerce calling on India to "provide a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese businesses". While the trade pattern is unlikely to dramatically change in the near future, even as New Delhi considers a long-term plan to reduce some of these import dependencies by either accelerating long-discussed but slow-moving plans to manufacture some of these critical goods in India or source elsewhere, the rest of the India-China economic relationship still remains somewhat in a state of freeze as talks continue to resolve the tensions along the border.

## WHEN WILL NEW VANDE BHARAT TRAINS BE LAUNCHED?

- Who is designing the 400 trains? Where will they be manufactured? What is distinct about them?
- **The story so far: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has in the Union Budget for 2022-2023 proposed the development and manufacture of 400 new Vande Bharat trains in the next three years. In her speech, Ms. Sitharaman said these would be "new generation" trains with better energy efficiency and passenger riding experience.**

### WHAT IS IT?

- The Vande Bharat train is an indigenously designed and manufactured semi high speed, self-propelled train that is touted as the next major leap for the Indian Railways

in terms of speed and passenger convenience since the introduction of Rajdhani trains. These trains, dubbed as Train 18 during the development phase, operate without a locomotive and are based on a propulsion system called distributed traction power technology, by which each car of the train set is powered. The Vande Bharat coaches incorporate passenger amenities including on-board WiFi entertainment, GPS-based passenger information system, CCTVs, automatic doors in all coaches, rotating chairs and bio-vacuum type toilets like in aircraft.

- The first Vande Bharat was manufactured by the Integral Coach Factory (ICF), Chennai, in about 18 months as part of the 'Make in India' programme, at a cost of about ₹100 crore. The current version of the train has 16 coaches with 14 ordinary chair cars and two executive class chair cars. The train has a passenger carrying capacity of more than 1,100 people. It can achieve a maximum speed of 160 kmph due to faster acceleration and deceleration, reducing journey time by 25% to 45%. It also has an intelligent braking system with power regeneration for better energy efficiency thereby making it cost, energy and environment efficient. The Vande Bharat was India's first attempt at adaptation of the train set technology compared with conventional systems of passenger coaches hauled by separate locomotives. The train set configuration though complex is faster, easier to maintain, consumes less energy, and has greater flexibility in train operation, according to the Indian Railways.

#### **HOW MANY VANDE BHARAT TRAINS DO THE RAILWAYS CURRENTLY OPERATE?**

- Currently, two Vande Bharat Expresses are operational—one between New Delhi and Varanasi and the other from New Delhi to Katra. Following this, the Railways had issued a more than ₹2,000 crore contract for making 44 more such trains. However, the first tender was cancelled and reissued to align it with the 'Make in India' policy. For the first time, the tender required a minimum 75% local content requirement of the total value of the tender. In August 2020, Hyderabad-based Medha Servo Drives Ltd. won the contract for designing and manufacturing the propulsion, control and other equipment needed to make the 44 train sets. The rakes or train sets, the Railways had announced, would be manufactured at three of its production units— 24 rakes at ICF, Chennai and 10 rakes each at the RCF Kapurthala and at the Modern Coach Factory, Raebareli. On the delivery schedule of these rakes, the Railways had said that the first two prototype rakes would be delivered in 20 months (or by March-April 2022), thereafter on successful commissioning, the firm would be delivering an average of six rakes per quarter.

#### **WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE PROGRAMME?**

- Speaking to reporters after the Budget announcement, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that designing for version 2.0 of these trains had been completed and that testing was expected to commence from April onwards, while serial production for these rakes was likely to begin by September. On the 400 new trains, Mr. Vaishnaw said the announcement had given the Railways a target of coming out with an even better version. The design updates in the upcoming trains would focus on safety and comfort of the passengers, including reduced noise and vibration levels. The Railways is also said to be considering the use of aluminium instead of steel in the construction of the coaches as this would help make the trains much lighter thereby improving energy efficiency, and also making the trains faster.

## **MYSTERY ILLNESS**

## WHAT IS THE 'HAVANA SYNDROME' THAT HAS AFFLICTED MANY AMERICAN DIPLOMATS AROUND THE WORLD?

- **The story so far: A recent U.S. intelligence report says that 'Havana Syndrome' —a collection of symptoms and related brain injuries, reported by U.S. officials, particularly diplomats in embassies —could be caused by pulsed electromagnetic energy or close-range ultrasound. These findings are somewhat different in tone from a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report from January, which, in a majority of cases, suggested other causes for the phenomena, such as underlying medical conditions.**

### WHAT IS IT?

- 'Havana Syndrome' is a colloquial name given to a set of symptoms such as dizziness, hearing loss, headaches, vertigo, nausea, memory loss and possible brain injuries first reported by 16 U.S. Embassy staff and their family members in Havana, Cuba, in 2016-17. There have been other instances of the phenomenon, which has mostly impacted U.S. officials. A staffer traveling in India with CIA Director Bill Burns complained of 'Havana Syndrome' like symptoms last September. Officials were reportedly very concerned, as per reports, that an adversary could have obtained a confidential CIA travel itinerary. In August, Vice President Kamala Harris's arrival in Vietnam was delayed after reports of an 'anomalous health incident' or AHI, in Hanoi. Other countries from which American officials have reported AHIs include Colombia, Russia, China and Uzbekistan. Cases ascribed to the 'Havana Syndrome' have also been reported from within the U.S.

### WHAT DID THE LATEST INVESTIGATION FIND?

- A panel, constituted by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the CIA, said on Wednesday that some of the 'Havana Syndrome' cases could have been caused by pulsed electromagnetic energy in the radio frequency. The results of the investigation did not point to who may have been behind the phenomenon, nor commented on their motivations.
- A partially redacted report summary finds that the symptoms of AHI are "genuine and compelling." Some individuals were affected in the same space, and they showed temporary elevations in biomarker levels that are linked to cellular injury. Significantly, the investigation found that a subset of the AHIs could have been caused by external stimuli and could not be explained by known medical and environmental conditions. Psychosocial factors alone do not explain the core characteristics, the report finds, although they may cause other incidents or contribute to long-term effects. These other incidents could occur via hypervigilance or reactions to stress especially among individuals who are security-oriented. The investigation identified four "core characteristics" that describe all AHIs. First, a hearing impact. Second, the existence of other almost simultaneous symptoms such as a loss of balance or vertigo. Third, a "strong sense of locality or directionality." Fourth, the absence of other conditions, medical or environmental, that could have caused these symptoms. The core characteristics could plausibly be explained by pulsed electromagnetic energy, possibly sent using nonstandard antennas and techniques, from as far as "tens of hundreds of metres", including through building materials," the report says. Ultrasound, from a nearby source, could also explain the AHIs, the panel finds, as it rules out biological and chemical agents, ionising radiation, bulk-heating from electromagnetic energy, and sound of various frequencies as "implausible explanations."

### ARE THE LATEST RESULTS CONSISTENT WITH EARLIER FINDINGS?

- The interim results of a CIA investigation into ‘Havana Syndrome’ were reported by the American press in January. The investigation concluded, for the time being at least, that it was unlikely that a foreign power was attempting, in a sustained manner, to attack U.S. officials and diplomats. The majority of the cases were thought to be caused by medical conditions—including undiagnosed bacterial infections and brain tumours, the Associated Press reported. Only in a “few dozen” cases was the jury still out and foreign interference had not been ruled out in these instances. Lawmakers criticised the CIA for releasing an interim report that was inconclusive. While the panel’s investigation does not contradict the CIA’s findings, the thrust of it is different, pointing to the plausible involvement of an external frequency source and thereby leaving open the possibility that an actor—such as a country adversarial to the U.S.—might be behind some of the cases.

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- The publicly available part of the recommendations of the latest study seem to suggest a focus on collecting more data and identifying AHIs more clearly, such as by developing more sensitive and specific tests for biomarkers and rolling out more objective clinical measurements for the incidents. Another recommendation is communicating better to U.S. government employees in order to reduce the impacts of psychosocial factors and neurological disorders, irrespective of their causes. U.S. government bodies, such as the CIA and the State Department, also continue to investigate the source of these possible attacks.

## THE ISLAMIC STATE WITHOUT A ‘CALIPHATE’

The Caliphate Baghdadi established in 2014 has turned itself into an underground Islamist insurgency with branches across countries

- The life and death of Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi were similar to that of many other top commanders of the Islamic State (IS). He had served in Saddam Hussein’s military in Iraq. He joined Sunni militancy after the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003. In 2007, he became a member of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). In 2009, he was imprisoned in Camp Bucca, a notorious U.S.-run prison in Iraq that turned out to be a factory of radicalisation. Out of prison, he went back to the al-Qaeda fold, which was called the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Within the ISI, Qurayshi worked closely with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the future founder leader of the Islamic State ‘Caliphate’ who was also an inmate of Camp Bucca. In 2019, after Baghdadi killed himself during a U.S. raid at his house in Syria’s jihadist-controlled Idlib, Qurayshi, whose real name was Amir Muhammad Sa’id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla, was appointed by the ‘Shura Council’ as the new leader of the IS. Twenty-seven months later, on February 3, 2022, Qurayshi blew himself up along with his family, like his predecessor, amid a U.S. raid at his residence in Idlib. The IS will now have to find a new ‘caliph’ to run the caliphate that no longer exists.

### THE RISE

- The roots of the Islamic State can be traced to the ruins of Iraq. The chaos and anarchy that prevailed in Iraq after the 2003 American invasion threw open opportunities for jihadist networks in the region. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, born in Jordan and trained in Afghanistan, laid the foundations of the AQI after the invasion. Zarqawi turned the anti-American resistance into a sectarian civil war between the minority Sunnis and the

majority Shias. By 2005-06, the AQI plunged Iraq, especially the northern and central provinces, into a deadly cycle of violence.

- Zarqawi, a Salafi-Jihadist who set up AQI with the blessings of Osama bin Laden, was killed in an American strike in 2006, which was a body blow to his terror enterprise. Later, Iraq's Sunni tribesmen, fed up with the growing sectarian conflict and the AQI's mindless violence, set up, with support from the U.S., militia groups ('Sunni Awakening') to take on al-Qaeda. While the Awakening militias resisted the jihadists on the ground, the U.S. continued to carry out strikes targeting the AQI's leaders. Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, Zarqawi's successors, were killed in U.S. strikes. These setbacks substantially weakened al-Qaeda in Iraq. It was after Omar Baghdadi's death, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi rose to the leadership of the AQI, also called the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI).
- Desperately trying to revive the lost fortunes of the ISI, Baghdadi found an opportunity when a civil strife broke out in Syria in 2011. What began as anti-regime demonstrations as part of 'the Arab Spring' protests, the crisis in Syria quickly slipped into an armed conflict, with the government of President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Iran, on one side, and different armed militias, backed by Mr. Assad's regional rivals, from Turkey to Saudi Arabia, on the other. Baghdadi dispatched a group of militants, under the command of Abu Muhammad al-Joulani, across the border to set up an al-Qaeda unit in Syria. Joulani established Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian arm of al-Qaeda, which captured territories in the lawless, civil war-hit eastern Syria that was awash with money, weapons and militants. Baghdadi and Joulani would part ways when the former insisted that al-Nusra join the ISI to create the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), a new terrorist entity independent of al-Qaeda. Joulani refused to break ties with al-Qaeda and those who were loyal to Baghdadi joined ISIS, also called the Islamic State, or IS. (Joulani is now running Syria's Idlib province, the last outpost of the civil war).
- Exploiting the civil war in Syria and the growing resentment among the Sunnis against the sectarian policies of the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq, the IS, under Baghdadi's command, grew fast. It captured territories, from Raqqa in eastern Syria to Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, straddling the borders of the two countries.
- On July 4, 2014, the first Friday of the Muslim holy month Ramzan, Baghdadi, who then had a \$10 million bounty on his head, appeared at the minbar (pulpit) of the Grand Mosque of Mosul. Dressed in a wavy black robe and wearing a black turban, he announced the establishment of a new Caliphate. He also asked for obedience from the world's Muslims as he had been "elected" as their wali (custodian). At its peak, the IS Caliphate had spread from Deir Ez-zor in eastern Syria to the outskirts of Baghdad, encompassing territories as large as Great Britain.
- But the Caliphate would crumble within years. In Iraq and Syria, different coalitions were formed to defeat the IS. The first setback came in Kobane, a Kurdish town on the Syrian-Turkish border where Kurdish militias, backed by the U.S., defeated the IS. Palmyra, the ancient Syrian city, was recaptured from the IS by the Syrian government troops, backed by Russia. In Iraq, the national army, Iran-trained Popular Mobilisation Forces (Shia militias) and the Peshmerga (the Iraqi Kurdish militia), with help from the U.S., fought for every inch of the lost territory and reclaimed them. In 2019, the IS lost its last shred of enclave, Baghouz in Syria, to the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish militia. In the same year, Baghdadi was killed.

### **NEW MODEL**

- Baghdadi introduced a new model in the global jihadist landscape. Al-Qaeda largely operated as a hit-and-run organisation. The IS built a proto-state in the name of the

Caliphate and held on to its territories for years. The proto-state in Iraq and Syria became the core of the IS's operations, while the rest of the world made its periphery. The core imported recruits, radicalised Muslim youth, from across the world, and exported terror back. But when this model came under pressure with the collapse of the proto-state, the IS turned itself into an underground insurgency.

- Qurayshi, Baghdadi's successor, inherited this insurgency. Unlike Baghdadi, who occasionally released audio (and rarely video) messages, Qurayshi kept a low profile. The IS became a loose confederation of many wilayats (provinces). In the troubled Sahel region of Africa, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) strengthened its operations. In Afghanistan, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) stepped up attacks after the Taliban returned to power. In Iraq and Syria, however, the IS struggled to take back territories.
- A few weeks earlier, the IS carried out its biggest operation since the death of Baghdadi in Syria's al-Hasakah. It was a coordinated assault — suicide bombers struck a prison holding thousands of IS militants in Hasakah with a truck bomb and a gun battle followed, while IS inmates inside the jail revolted against the guards. It was also the most ambitious attack ordered by Qurayshi, who was personally involved in the raid, according to some reports. The raid was, however, a failure as hundreds of U.S. troops joined the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Kurdish militia, to push back the IS. In less than two weeks, came Qurayshi's death.
- The Caliphate was destroyed. The Caliphs were killed. And the foot soldiers are dispersed. For a terrorist group that grew from nothing to a proto-regime controlling some of the biggest cities in the Arab world within a span of few years, this is a period of setbacks and retreat. But its revivalist ideology and terrorist capabilities, as demonstrated in Hasakah last month, remain unbroken. Also, the geopolitical conditions that allowed the IS to rise in the first place haven't changed much in Asia and Africa. When conflicts continue in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and West Africa,

## MCQ OF THE DAY

**1-Q. Consider the following pairs**

**Tiger Reserve : State**

1. Sariska : Gujarat
2. Rajaji : Uttar Pradesh
3. Bandipur : Maharashtra

**Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?**

- a. Only -1
- b. Only -2
- c. 1,2,and 3
- d. None of these

**Answer: [D]**

**Notes: Sariska tiger reserve is in Rajasthan. Rajaji tiger reserve is in Uttarakhand. Bandipur tiger reserve is in Karnataka.**

**2. The maiden first semi high-speed train which was flagged off recently is called \_\_\_\_\_.**

- (A) Train Bharat
- (B) Vande Bharat Express
- (C) Indian Express
- (D) Bharat Express
- (E) None of the above

**Solution: (B)**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the maiden run of India first semi high-speed train “Vande Bharat Express” from New Delhi Railway Station. This can run up to a maximum speed of 160 km/hour

Q3. Find incorrect statement(s) about Vande Bharat Express that was inaugurated in 2019:

1. It can obtain a maximum speed of 300 kmph.
  2. Its engine has been imported from Japan.
  3. Technical name of this train is ‘Train 18’.
- a) Only 1 and 2
  - b) Only 2 and 3
  - c) Only 1 and 3
  - d) None of the given

**C- Manufactured in Chennai, and it is beyond our aukaat to produce a train that can run at a speed of 300 kilometres per hour.**

Q4) Bitcoin is an example of which of the following?

- a) Fiat cryptocurrency
- b) Non-fiat cryptocurrency
- c) Plastic money
- d) Fiat currency

Answer - b

Explanation -

- Bitcoin is an example of non-fiat cryptocurrency since it is issued by private entities. Fiat cryptocurrency will be when the Reserve Bank starts issuing digital crypto currency, which you can carry in the cyber space with you, when you don't have to keep physical currency in your pocket.
- A cryptocurrency is a digital asset designed to work as a medium of exchange using cryptography to secure the transactions and to control the creation of additional units of the currency. Cryptocurrencies are classified as a subset of digital currencies.

5. Consider the following statements regarding cryptocurrencies.

1. Crypto Currency is an encrypted centralized digital currency.
2. These currencies are regulated by central monetary authority.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct ?

- 1 only      b. 2 only      c. 1 and 2 both      d. Neither 1 nor 2

**ANS -D**

6. Which of the following is not a type of cryptocurrency ?

- A. Litecoin
- B. Bitcoin
- C. renminbi
- D. Gridcoin

**ANS -C**