BOUNDARY DISPUTE BETWEEN ASSAM AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Why in news?

- Recently, Chief Ministers of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh signed an MoU over disputed areas along the roughly 800-km shared boundary.

Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border dispute

- Arunachal Pradesh, which was earlier a part of Assam, shares a boundary of roughly 800 km with the state.

- Dispute between the two states came to the fore after the establishment of Arunachal Pradesh as a Union Territory in 1972.

- The dispute in question is over **123 villages** that stretch across 12 districts of Arunachal Pradesh and eight of Assam.

- The process of demarcation of the boundary between Assam and Arunachal started in 1972 and by 1979, 396 km of the boundary was demarcated.

- o However, a number of anomalies and disputes regarding the border surfaced during the survey.

- o As a result, the process of demarcation had to be suspended.

Background of the dispute

- The origin of this dispute dates back to colonial times, when the British in 1873 announced the inner line regulation.

- o This regulation demarcated an imaginary boundary between plains and the frontier hills.

- o This was later designated as the North East Frontier Tracts in 1915, which corresponds to the area that makes up present-day Arunachal Pradesh.

- After Independence, the Assam government assumed administrative jurisdiction over the North East Frontier Tracts.

- o Later, it became the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1954, and finally, the Union Territory (UT) of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972. It gained statehood in 1987.

Legal Battle

- After Arunachal Pradesh did not accept the recommendations, Assam filed a case in the Supreme Court in 1989, highlighting an "encroachment" made by Arunachal Pradesh.

- The apex court-appointed a local boundary commission in 2006, headed by a retired SC judge. In September 2014, the local commission submitted its report.

- Several recommendations were made and it was suggested that both states should arrive at a consensus through discussions. However, nothing came of it.

Key highlights of the MoU

- As per this MoU, disputes over 34 of these villages stand resolved.

o The disputes over 37 villages had been resolved through the Namsai Declaration of July 2022.

- The state governments agree that no new claim area or village will be added in future beyond these 123 villages.

- Both governments also agreed to effectively prevent any new encroachment in the border areas.

WHAT IS THE AUDIT QUALITY MATURITY MODEL (AQMM)?

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) recently launched the Audit Quality Maturity Model (AQMM) with the aim of enhancing the quality of audits and improving transparency.

Why in News?

- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) **has mandated the firms to undertake audit quality maturity evaluation through AQMM w.e.f. 1st of April 2023.**

- The mandate covers the firms auditing (a) A listed entity; (b) Bank other than a co-operative bank (except multi-state co-operative bank); or (c) an Insurance Company.

- Those firms which are conducting only branch audits are excluded from this mandate.

About Audit Quality Maturity Model (AQMM):

- It is a tool **for the self-evaluation of audit firms** & sole proprietors towards technologically driven mechanisms to increase operational efficiency.

- AQMM is an **amalgamation of a well-researched set of Audit Quality Indicators (AQIs).**

- It is a **cross-functional evaluation model** covering key areas of not only audit engagements but also audit practice at the firm level.

- It **includes operations of the firm**, viz. **revenue budgeting and pricing, audit practice manual, budgeting of engagements**, timesheet, use of technology adoption, quality control for engagements, **Human Resource Management** including resource planning and monitoring, performance evaluation and compensation, physical and IT infrastructure.

- The AQMM model **is structured into 3 sections with a total score of 600 points**,

  o **Practice Management (Operation)**;

  o **Human Resource Management**;

  o **Practice Management -Strategic/Functional**;

- Based on the score(s) obtained under each of the sections, **the firm shall arrive at a level ranging from Level 1 to 4.**

- While **Level 1 depicts that the firm is very nascent, Level 4 indicates that the firm has made significant adoption** of standards and procedures.

  Key facts about Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI):

- It is a **statutory body** established by an Act of Parliament, viz. **The Chartered Accountants Act, 1949.**

- **Mandate**: **Regulating the profession of Chartered Accountancy in the country;** Formulation of Accounting Standards; and Prescription of Standard Auditing Procedures.

- It functions under the **administrative control of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs**, Government of India.

- The affairs of the ICAI are **managed by a Council which comprises of 40 members**, of whom 32 are elected by the Chartered Accountants and the remaining 8 are nominated by the Central Government.

WHAT ARE BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE SITES (BHS)?

West Bengal recently notified four more biodiversity heritage sites (BHS), taking the tally in the state to eight.

About Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS):

- BHS are **unique ecosystems having rich biodiversity comprising** of any one or more of the following components:
  - **Richness of wild** as well as **domesticated species** or **intra-specific categories.**
  - **High endemism.**
  - Presence of **rare and threatened species**, keystone species, and species of evolutionary significance.
  - **Wild ancestors** of domestic/cultivated species or their varieties.
  - **Past pre-eminence of biological components** represented by fossil beds and having significant cultural, ethical or aesthetic values and are important for the maintenance of cultural diversity, with or without a long history of human association with them.
- Under **Section-37 of the Biological Diversity Act**, 2002, **the State Government**, in consultation with local bodies, **may notify areas** of biodiversity importance as BHS.
- The **State Government**, **in consultation with the Central Government, may frame r**ules for the management and conservation of BHS.
- The creation of BHS may **not put any restriction on the prevailing practices and usages of the local communities** other than those voluntarily decided by them.
- **The purpose** of declaring BHS **is to enhance the quality of life of the local communities** through the conservation of such sites.
- In 2007, the **Nallur Tamarind Grove in Bengaluru**, Karnataka, was designated as **India's first BHS.**

Key facts about Biological Diversity Act, 2002:

- It is an Act of the Parliament of India **for the preservation of biological diversity** in India and provides a mechanism **for the equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of traditional biological resources and knowledge.**
- It was enacted to **meet the obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, as India is a party to it.

- **Key Provisions:**
- o The Act defines, **Biological resources as "plants, animals and micro-organisms**or parts thereof, their genetic material and by-products (excluding value added products) with actual or potential use or value, but does not include human genetic material."
- o The Act **provides measures for safeguarding traditional knowledge and practices**, preservation of rare and threatened species and prevention of bio-piracy.
- o Under the Act, the **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) has been formed** and is headquartered in Chennai**. State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) also have been formed** in all Indian states.
- o The Act mentions that **every local body shall constitute a Biodiversity Management Committee** within its area for the purpose of promoting conservation, sustainable use and documentation of biological diversity.

KAMAKHYA TEMPLE

Recently, the Prime Minister of India appreciated Assam's landmark Maa Kamakhya temple corridor initiative.

About Kamakhya temple:

- It is situated on **Nilachal Hill** and adjoining the **southern bank of the Brahmaputra River** in Guwahati,
- It is one of the most **revered centres of Tantric practices.**
- It is regarded as one of the oldest of the **51 Shakti Peethas in India.**
- **Temple Architecture:**
- o It had been modelled out of a combination of **two** different styles namely, the **traditional nagara** or North Indian and Saracenic or **Mughal style of architecture.**
- o This unusual combination has been named the **Nilachala Style of Architecture.**
- o This is the only temple of Assam having a fully **developed ground plan**.

o It consists of **five chambers**, **garbhagriha** or sanctuary, **antarala** or vestibule, **Jagan Mohan** or principal chamber, **bhogmandir** or ritual chamber and **natmandir** or opera hall for performing traditional dance and music associated with sukti temples.

o It is interesting to note that the superstructure of each of the above chambers **exhibits different architectural features.**

- While the main temple contains a modified Saracenic dome, the antarala carries a **two-roofed design**, the bhogmandir (also called pancharatna) with five domes similar in appearance to the main temple and the natmandir having a **shell-roof with apsidal** end similar to some of the **impermanent namghars or prayer halls** found in Assam.

   Ambubachi Mela is one of the major festivals of this temple. The festival is held every year to commemorate the yearly menstruation of Goddess Kamakhya

SATHI PORTAL

Recently, the Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister launched the SATHI Portal and Mobile App.

About SATHI Portal:

- The **Seed Traceability, Authentication and Holistic Inventory (SATHI) portal** is a Centralized Online System designed to deal with the challenges of seed production, quality seed identification and seed certification.

- It has been developed by **the National Informatics Centre** (NIC) in collaboration with the **Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare** on the theme of 'Uttam Beej – Samriddh Kisan.

- There will be **a QR code under this system**, through which the seeds can be traced.

- It will ensure a **quality assurance system**, and identify the source of seed in the seed production chain.

- The system will consist of **integrated 7 verticals of the seed chain** - Research Organisation, Seed Certification, Seed Licensing, Seed Catalogue, Dealer to Farmer Sales, Farmer Registration and Seed DBT.

- Seeds with valid certification can only be sold by valid licensed dealers to centrally registered farmers who will receive a subsidy through DBT directly into their pre-validated bank accounts.

Key facts about the National Informatics Centre

- It was established in the year 1976 to provide technology-driven solutions to Central and State Governments.

- It works under the **Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** (MeitY).

FIRST-EVER CENSUS OF WATER BODIES: BENGAL TOPS LIST OF STATES WITH MOST PONDS AND RESERVOIRS

Why in News?

- The Union Ministry of Jal Shakti has launched the **first-ever census of water bodies** in convergence with the Sixth Minor Irrigation Census (reference year 2017-18), under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme – "**Irrigation Census**".

- **The objective of the census is to develop a national database** for all water bodies by collecting information on all important aspects including their size, condition, status of encroachments, use, storage capacity, etc.
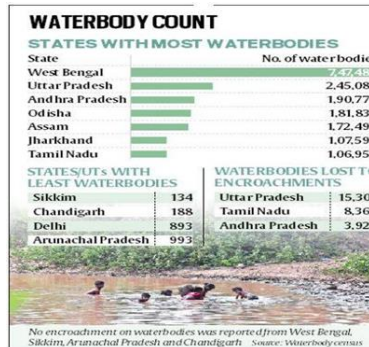
What is a Water body?

- **The census defines a water body** as all natural or man-made units bounded on all sides with some or no masonry work used for storing water for

o Irrigation or

o Other purposes (example industrial, pisciculture, domestic/drinking, recreation, religious, groundwater recharge, etc).

- **Water bodies are usually of various types** known by different names like tank, reservoirs, ponds and bundhies, etc.

- **A structure** where water from ice-melt, streams, springs, rain or drainage of water from residential or other areas is accumulated will also be treated as a waterbody.

What are the Key Highlights of the First-ever Census of Water bodies?

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- **24,24,540 water bodies** have been enumerated in the country, out of which **97.1%** (23,55,055)

  WATERBODY COUNT
  STATES WITH MOST WATERBODIES

State	No. of water bodies
West Bengal	7,47,48
Uttar Pradesh	2,45,08
Andhra Pradesh	1,90,77
Odisha	1,81,83
Assam	1,72,49
Jharkhand	1,07,59
Tamil Nadu	1,06,95

STATES/UTs WITH LEAST WATERBODIES		WATERBODIES LOST TO ENCROACHMENTS	
Sikkim	134	Uttar Pradesh	15,30
Chandigarh	188	Tamil Nadu	8,36
Delhi	893	Andhra Pradesh	3,92
Arunachal Pradesh	993		

  No encroachment on waterbodies was reported from West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Chandigarh   Source: Waterbody census

  are in rural areas and only **2.9%** (69,485) in urban areas.

  o The data of water bodies up to the fifth minor irrigation census is limited to village level whereas the first census of water bodies covers all types of water bodies in both rural and urban areas.

- **59.5% (14,42,993) of water bodies are ponds,** followed by tanks (15.7% i.e., 3,81,805), reservoirs (12.1% i.e., 2,92,280), water conservation schemes/percolation tanks/check dams (9.3% i.e. 2,26,217), lakes (0.9% i.e. 22,361) and others (2.5% i.e. 58,884).

- **West Bengal** accounts for the most (7.47 lakh) and Sikkim the least (134) number of water bodies.

- **West Bengal** has the highest number of ponds and reservoirs, whereas **Andhra Pradesh** has the highest number of tanks.

- **Tamil Nadu** has the highest number of lakes and **Maharashtra** is the leading state with water conservation schemes."

- **West Bengal's South 24 Parganas** has been ranked as the top district having the highest (3.55 lakh) number of water bodies across the country.

- The census also collected **data on encroachment of water bodies for the first time**.

  o **1.6% water bodies** are reported to be encroached, out of which 95.4% are in rural areas and remaining 4.6% in urban areas.

  Steps for Augmentation, Conservation and Efficient Management of Water Resources:

- **Water being a State subject**, steps are primarily undertaken by the respective State Governments.

- In order to supplement their efforts, **the Central Government provides technical and financial assistance** through various schemes and programmes.

  o **For example**, Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of Water Bodies under **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)- Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP)** scheme provides for the restoration of water bodies.

- **There is the need for taking necessary steps** for keeping all the water bodies encroachment free, such as

o Inclusion of water bodies in land records,

o Making them integral part of town planning process,

o Strict action for the encroachers, etc.

SCO MEMBERS MUST POOL RESOURCES, EXPERTISE ON DISASTER RESILIENCE: AMIT SHAH

Why in News?

- Union Home Minister **Amit Shah** has called on the nations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to adopt a collective approach to disaster resilience by pooling resources and expertise and avoiding the duplication of efforts.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation, established in 2001.

- It is built on the foundation laid by the Shanghai **Five** grouping of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

- The five countries had come together to work on regional security, reduction of border troops, and terrorism in the post-Soviet era in 1996.

- In 2001, the "Shanghai Five" inducted Uzbekistan into the group and named it the SCO, outlining its principles in a charter that promoted what was called the "**Shanghai spirit**" of cooperation.

Objectives:

- To strengthen mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states

- To promote effective cooperation in politics, trade & economy, research & technology and culture

- To enhance ties in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, etc.

- To maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region

- To establish a democratic, fair and rational new international political & economic order

- **Official working languages:** Chinese, Russian
- **SCO Secretariat**: Beijing, China

Member Countries:

- **8 member states**: China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan.
  o India and Pakistan became full members at the Heads of State Council meet in Astana in 2017.

o **Iran will be the newest member (9th) of the SCO, when it joins the forum in 2023** under the chairmanship of India.

- **4 Observer members:** Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, Mongolia

o In 2021, the procedure of granting Iran the status of Member State was started at the SCO Summit in Dushanbe.

o In 2022, a similar procedure was launched for Belarus at the SCO Summit in Samarkand

- **9 Dialogue Partners** —Azerbaijan, Armenia, Egypt, Cambodia, Qatar, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.

o In 2022, the procedure for granting the status of Dialogue Partners to Bahrain, Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar and the United Arab Emirates was initiated at the SCO Summit in Samarkand**.**