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News: Amazon Rainforests

- Recently, it was found that the area deforested in Brazil's Amazon reached a 15-year high after a 22% jump from the prior year (2020).

Amazon Rainforests

- Amazon Rainforests are **large tropical rainforests** occupying the drainage basin of the Amazon River and its tributaries in **northern South America**.
- The **Amazon rainforests cover about 80% of the Amazon basin** and they are home to nearly **a fifth of the world's land species** and is also **home to about 30 million people** including hundreds of indigenous groups and several isolated tribes.
- The Amazon basin is huge with **an area covering over 6 million square kilometres, it is nearly twice the size of India**.
- The basin produces about **20% of the world's flow of freshwater** into the oceans.
- Comprising about 40% of **Brazil's** total area, it is bounded by the **Guiana Highlands to the north**, the **Andes Mountains to the west**, the **Brazilian central plateau to the south**, and the **Atlantic Ocean to the east**.

- According to a recent study, **Amazon Forests have started emitting Carbon dioxide (CO₂) instead of absorbing it.**
- Growing trees and plants have taken up about a quarter of all fossil fuel emissions since 1960, with the Amazon playing a major role as the largest tropical forest.
- A significant amount of **deforestation** (over the course of 40 years) in **eastern and southeastern Brazil** has turned the forest into a source of CO₂ that has the ability to warm the planet.
- **Not only the Amazon rainforests, some forests in Southeast Asia have also turned into carbon sources** in the last few years as a result of formation of plantations and fires.



News: President of India Presents Gallantry Awards for the year 2020

Gallantry Awards

- Gallantry Awards have been **instituted by the Government of India to honour the acts of bravery and sacrifice of the officers/personnel of the Armed Forces, other lawfully constituted Forces and civilians.**
- These gallantry awards are announced **twice in a year - first on the occasion of the Republic Day and then on the occasion of the Independence Day.**

Gallantry Awards are classified into two Categories:

- **Gallantry in the Face of Enemy** (Param Vir Chakra (PVC) Mahavir Chakra (MVC) and Vir Chakra).
- **Gallantry Other than in the Face of Enemy** (Ashok Chakra, Kirti Chakra and Shaurya Chakra).
- Various level of bravery is awarded with these awards.
- **All the gallantry awards may be awarded posthumously.**
- **Ministry of Defence invites recommendations twice in a year from the Armed Forces and Union Ministry of Home Affairs for gallantry awards.**
- Recommendations are **invited normally in the month of August** for the awards to be announced on the occasion of the Republic Day and **in the month of**

March for the awards to be announced on the occasion of the Independence Day.

- In respect of the Armed Forces, a case for the gallantry award is initiated by the Unit and if found fit the same is forwarded to respective Services HQrs duly recommended by Commanders in chain, immediately after the act of gallantry is performed.
- Recommendations in respect of civilian citizens (other than Defence personnel) are received from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). MHA calls for recommendations (in respect of civilians) from all State/UT Governments, Central Ministries/ Departments, Central Armed Police Forces and Railway Protection Force etc.
- Recommendations received directly from private individuals, including VIP references are not accepted.
- In any case, the time limit for considering gallantry awards should not be beyond two calendar years from the date on which the act of gallantry is performed.
- Recommendations received from the Armed Forces and MHA are considered by the Central Honours & Awards Committee (CH&AC) comprising of Raksha Mantri, three Service Chiefs & Defence Secretary. Home Secretary is also member for the cases recommended by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- Thereafter, **recommendations of the CH&AC** are submitted for approval of the **Prime Minister and the President**.
- After approval of the President, **awards are announced on the occasion** of the Republic Day and Independence Day.

Padma Awards

- The Padma Awards are **announced annually on the Republic Day** (26th January).
- **Instituted in 1954**, it is one of the highest civilian honours of India.
- The Padma Awards were briefly **suspended twice**, from **July 1977 to January 1980** and from **August 1992 to December 1995**. Some of the recipients have refused or returned their conferments.

Objective

- The Award seeks to **recognize achievements in all fields of activities or disciplines where an element of public service is involved**.

The Awards are given in three categories:

- Padma Vibhushan (for exceptional and distinguished service),
- Padma Bhushan (distinguished service of higher-order) and

- Padma Shri (distinguished service).
- Padma Vibhushan is highest in the hierarchy of Padma Awards followed by Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri.

Disciplines

- The Awards are given in **various disciplines/ fields of activities**, viz.- art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service etc.
- **All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. However, Government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are not eligible for these Awards.**
- The award is **normally not conferred posthumously**. However, in highly deserving cases, the Government could consider giving an award posthumously.
- **A higher category of Padma award can be conferred on a person only where a period of at least five years has elapsed since conferment of the earlier Padma award.** However, in highly deserving cases, a relaxation can be made by the Awards Committee.

Selection Process

- The Awards are conferred on the **recommendations made by the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year.**
- The Padma Awards Committee is **headed by the Cabinet Secretary** and **includes Home Secretary, Secretary to the President and four to six eminent persons as members.** The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the Prime Minister and the President of India for approval.
- The awards are presented by the President of India usually in the month of March/April every year.
- The **total number of awards** to be given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) **should not be more than 120.**
- The award **does not amount to a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix** to the awardees' name.

Bharat Ratna

- Bharat Ratna is the **highest civilian award** of the country.
- It is **awarded in recognition of exceptional service/performance of the highest order in any field** of human endeavour.
- It is treated on a **different footing from Padma Award.** The **recommendations for Bharat Ratna are made by the Prime Minister to the President of India.**

- The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is restricted to a **maximum of three in a particular year.**

News: Govt notifies 12 percent GST rate on MMF, Yarn, Fabrics from 1st January

- The Union Government has notified uniform goods and services tax rate at 12 percent on Man-Made Fibre (MMF), MMF yarn, MMF fabrics, and apparel. The changed rates will come into effect from 1st January of next year.
- The **rates are decided by GST Council.**

GST Council

- Goods and Service Tax (GST) is an **ad valorem tax** (Tax on the basis of the monetary value of the item). **Specific tax is a fixed amount of tax placed on the units of a particular good sold** and not the monetary value of the good.
- GST Council is constituted under the provisions of Article 279A.
- GST Council is **chaired by Union Finance Minister & other members are Union State Minister of Revenue/ Finance & ministers in-charge of Finance or Taxation of all states.**
- It is the GST Council **who sets, alters or modifies or takeaway the GST slabs** for the Goods & Services in India.

- Constitution mandates the meet of GST council **at least once in every financial quarter.**
- **One half of the total number of members of GST Council constitutes the quorum** at its meetings.
- Every decision of GST Council is taken by a majority of not less than 3/4th votes of weighted votes of members present & voting provided that centre shall have 33% of voting weightage and all states have combined 66% of weighting average.
- In short, Centre enjoys a hidden VETO power in GST council.
- The **quorum for the meeting of GST council is one half of the members.**
- The **secretariat of GST council is located at New Delhi.**
- The **Union Revenue Secretary acts as the ex-officio Secretary** to the Council.
- As per Article 279A (4), The Goods and Services Tax Council **shall make recommendations to the Union and the States on the taxes, cesses and surcharges levied by the Union, the States and the local bodies which may be subsumed in the goods and services tax (GST), The goods and services that may be subjected to, or exempted from the goods and services tax; The threshold limit of turnover below which goods and services may be exempted from goods and services tax,** Special provision with respect to the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh

and Uttarakhand, Any special rate or rates for a specified period, to raise additional resources during any natural calamity or disaster.

- The GST Council dictates tax rate, tax exemption, the due date of forms, tax laws, and tax deadlines, keeping in mind special rates and provisions for some states.

News: A.P. to rework law on three capitals move

- The Andhra Pradesh Assembly on Monday passed a Bill to repeal the A.P. Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Act (aimed at setting up three capitals), and the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) Repeal Act of 2020.
- Earlier, Andhra Pradesh was planned to have Visakhapatnam as Executive, Amravati as Legislative and Kurnool as Judicial Capitals.
- It has been decided to have Amravati as its capital for all purposes.

States with Multiple Capitals

- The legislatures of three states Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand meet in different capitals for their summer and winter sessions.

- **Shimla** acts as the Summer capital of **Himachal Pradesh** while **Dharamsala** is its winter capital.
- **Mumbai** acts as the Summer capital of **Maharashtra** while **Nagpur** is its winter capital.
- **Garsain** acts as the Summer capital of **Uttarakhand** while **Dehradun** is its winter capital.
- **Ladakh** has both **Leh and Kargil** as its administrative capitals.

International Examples

Some countries round the globe has multiple capitals. They are:

- **Bolivia** has **Sucre and La Paz** as its Constitutional and Executive Capitals respectively.
- **Eswatini (Swaziland)** has **Mbabane and Lobamba** as its Administrative and Legislative Capitals respectively.
- **South Africa** has **Pretoria, Cape Town and Bloemfontein** as its Administrative, Legislative and Judicial Capitals respectively.
- **Malaysia** has **Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur** as its Administrative and Executive Capitals respectively.