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1. International School of Peace and Happiness to Bloom in Assam's Bodoland Territorial Region

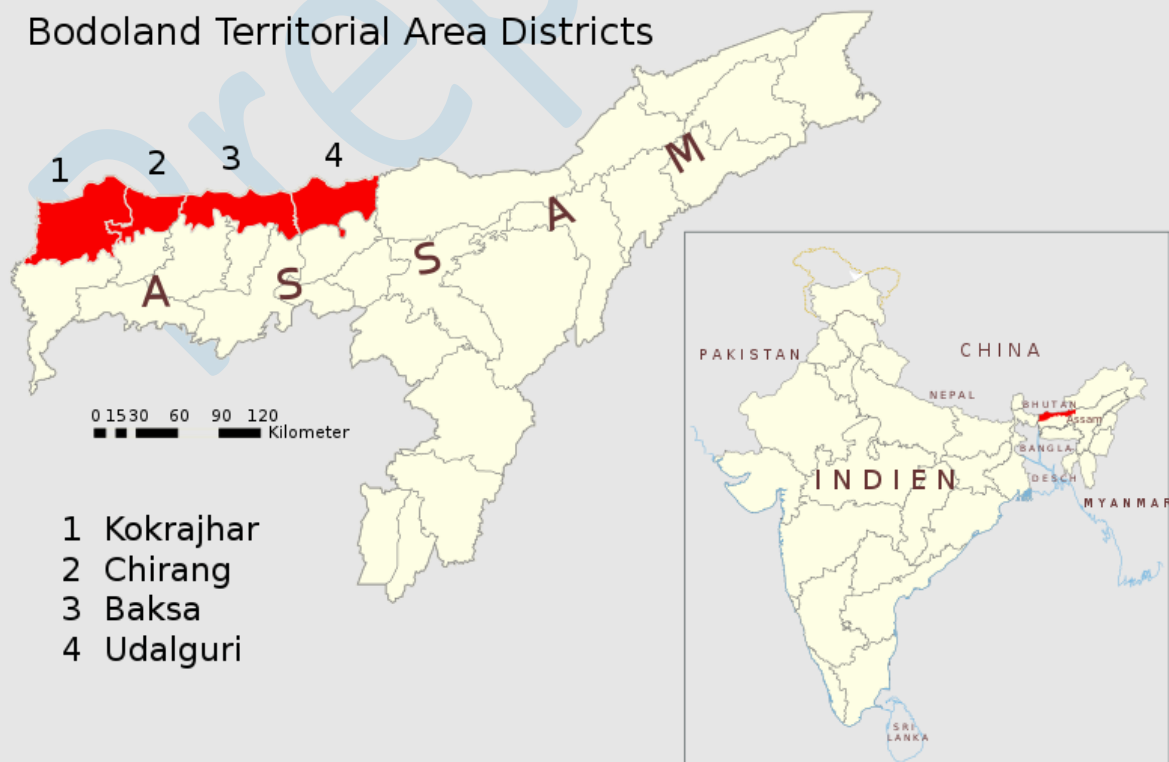
Why in news?

In a groundbreaking initiative, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) plans to establish the International School of Peace and Happiness in the Bijni area of Chirang district, western Assam. The project, scheduled to commence in January 2024, is the result of a year-long planning effort by the BTC, aimed at fostering humanity and societal well-being.

Addressing Historical Conflicts

Pramod Boro, Chief Executive Member of BTC, highlighted the historical conflicts in the Bodoland Territorial Region, drawing parallels with the challenges faced by Manipur. The region, encompassing five districts, has witnessed decades of ethnic tensions, particularly between the Bodos, the largest plains tribe in the northeast, and migrant communities. The proposed school is a proactive measure to address and mitigate such conflicts.

Bodoland Territorial Area Districts



Catalyst for Positive Change

The vision behind the school is to instill human values and promote co-existence. By providing formal education on peace-building and happiness, the school aspires to cultivate a generation of peace ambassadors capable of resolving conflicts at both micro and macro levels.

Historical Context and Regional Significance

The BTR areas have a tumultuous history, marked by extremism and communal clashes, resulting in significant displacement and loss of life. The International School of Peace and Happiness aims to break this cycle by equipping youth and community leaders with the skills and values necessary for fostering harmony in a region characterized by diverse faiths, cultures, languages, and ethnicities.

As the foundation is laid in the coming weeks, the school represents a beacon of hope for a region striving to build a future grounded in peace, understanding, and coexistence.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Indian Society

Source: The Hindu

2. Is the world closer to phasing out fossil fuel?

Why in news?

The 28th edition of the Conference of Parties (COP) concluded in Dubai this week with 198 signatory countries agreeing that the world must "transition" away from fossil fuels in a "just, orderly and equitable manner" to achieve net zero by 2050.

Does the wording of the agreement suggest that the end of fossil fuels is near?

Far from it. The Dubai Consensus, as this agreement is called, is significant only because this is the first time since 1995, when the first ever COP was held in Berlin, that there is a formal acknowledgement that emissions from fossil fuels are the main culprit driving global warming. So far, all agreements have only spoken of the need to stem "greenhouse gas emissions." This is despite it being common knowledge that three-fourth of such emissions and 90% of carbon dioxide are the result of burning coal, oil and gas. It was only in the 26th edition of the COP, in Glasgow in 2021, that countries agreed to tackle coal — the fossil fuel with the biggest global-warming footprint — by agreeing to "phase down" its use.

It's important to keep in mind here that "phase down" and "phase out" have no meaning on their own because they do not refer to any specific year by which the use of these fuels must terminate. Large, developing countries like India and China, have protested against the singling out of coal among fossil fuels, on the grounds that they need them for lifting their masses out of poverty and providing energy security. India,

while rich in coal reserves, is still an importer of the product and has limited oil and gas reserves.

China is rich in both coal and gas. The United States, that derives about a fifth of its energy from coal, has usually been supportive of calls to phase out coal but being heavily dependent on oil and gas reserves, has never voiced any call to action to eliminate the latter two. However, now that all fossil fuels have been included in the Dubai Consensus, it brings parity among fuels and acknowledgement that they all need to be done away with for the world to have a chance at preventing global, average temperatures from rising 1.5 degree Celsius over pre-industrial levels. But because there are no timelines yet, fossil fuels are going to be the mainstay of economies everywhere in the years to come.

Can fossil fuels be immediately replaced?

Nearly two centuries of industrialisation has meant that there is a well-oiled infrastructure system to extract, process and distribute coal, oil and gas to all kinds of power plants and convert them to electricity and combustible products, ranging from petrol and diesel to plastic. Then there is the infrastructure — transmission grids and pipelines — to channel these stores of energy to houses and vehicles. Unfortunately, power from natural sources of power such as solar and wind are not as easily available, on demand, as fossil fuel: the sun because of its unavailability at night and wind due to the temperamental nature of the ocean and atmosphere. The infrastructure to store all of the energy produced this way is grossly inadequate. India's National Electricity Plan, 2022-27, plans to add nearly 87,000 MW in this period in the form of fresh coal-fired capacity: 27,000 MW via under-construction power plants and 60,000 MW from new plants.

Oil production in the U.S. hit record levels this year. Since 2010, the number of oil barrels per day has tripled and gas production has risen two and half times in the country. At COP deliberations this year, one of the trickiest conundrums was the large presence of oil and gas manufacturers and of course, the hosting of a climate summit in a petro-state. The Dubai Consensus agreement stating that a transition from fossil fuel, while necessary, suggests that "transition fuels" could play a role in "facilitating the energy transition while ensuring energy security." Though there is no definition of what these fuels are, natural gas has been touted as one of the contenders. Even though natural gas production leads to methane emissions, estimates by the International Energy Agency proffer that in balance, switching from coal-to-gas reduces emissions by 50% when producing electricity and by 33% when providing heat. This of course invites criticism that such a framing of natural gas advantages countries which have natural production and distribution capabilities for this gas.

What does the Dubai Consensus say about methane?

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and has several times more heat-trapping capabilities compared to carbon dioxide. It is a key component of natural gas and responsible for about a third of planetary warming just behind carbon dioxide. "Accelerating and substantially reducing non-carbon-dioxide emissions globally, including in particular methane emissions by 2030," is necessary for humanity to have a shot at keeping average temperatures from rising beyond 1.5 degree Celsius by the end of the century, the agreement notes. The Global Methane Pledge to cut methane emissions 30% of 2020 levels by 2030 was signed on by nearly 150 countries at the COP-27 summit in Egypt, last year. China and the U.S. have also agreed to address industrial methane emissions, that result from natural gas production.

India has resisted pressure to cut methane emissions on the grounds that most of its methane results from the agricultural sector. However, it has unveiled plans to make its energy production processes more efficient to reduce its release.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Hindu

3. What is Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, and the Kashi Tamil Sangamam?

Why in news?

Addressing a Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra event in Varanasi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday (December 17) said, "In a way, the Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra is a touchstone for me. I want to gauge if everything that I said and did, has it happened in the way I wanted to? Has it happened for those it was intended for?" The PM added, "Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra is a big dream, a big resolution, and we have to fulfill this resolution with our own efforts."

PM Modi is on a two-day visit to Varanasi, his Parliamentary constituency. On Monday, he will participate in the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra programme at Barki Gram Sabha of Sewapuri development block. He will lay the foundation stone of 37 projects worth Rs 19,155 crore in Varanasi and the Purvanchal region.

The PM will also inaugurate the second edition of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam during his visit. What is the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra? What is the Kashi Tamil Sangamam?

Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra

The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is a government initiative being undertaken across the country, to raise awareness about and track the implementation of flagship central schemes, such as Ayushman Bharat, Ujjwala Yojana, PM Surksha Bima, PM SVANidhi, etc.

According to the scheme's websites, it has four aims: "reach out to the vulnerable who are eligible under various schemes but have not availed benefit so far; dissemination of information and generating awareness about schemes; interaction with beneficiaries of government schemes through their personal stories/ experience sharing; and enrolment of potential beneficiaries through details ascertained during the Yatra."

The programme is being undertaken with the active involvement of various Union ministries and state governments. The yatra was launched on November 15 from Khunti, Jharkhand.

According to the government's Press Information Bureau (PIB), "In a short span of just one month, the Yatra has reached more than 2.50 crore citizens across 68,000 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in the country. Further, nearly 2 crore individuals have taken Viksit Bharat Sankalp and over 2 Crore beneficiaries of Central Government Schemes have shared their experiences under 'Meri Kahani Meri Zubani' initiative." People can take the 'Sankalp' (pledge) by filling out a form on the scheme's website, and then downloading a certificate.



Kashi Tamil Sangamam

Starting last year, the Kashi Tamil Sangamam is aimed at celebrating the many aspects of the historical and civilisational connection between India's North and South. This

year, it will be held from December 17 to December 31. Various cultural groups from Tamil Nadu and Varanasi will perform in Kashi.

According to PIB, "The overarching objective of this people-to-people connect programme is to revive the living bonds between Kashi and Tamil Nadu — two important centres of learning and culture in ancient India. It aims to bring these two traditions of knowledge and culture closer together...The festival also has the objective of rediscovering and strengthening the ancient intellectual, cultural, spiritual and artisanal connect between the two cultures."

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express & The PIB