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Public Examinations Act

Syllabus: GS Paper II-Education

Why in the News?

The Centre recently notified the Rules required to operationalise the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, which came into force on June 21.

Need of the Act/Rule

- In recent times there have been **many cases** of question **paper leaks** in **recruitment exams** across the country.
  - For instance the recent NEET -NET controversy.
- Over the **last five years**, **paper leaks** have **affected** as many as **1.4 crore applicants** applying for a little over 1.2 lakh posts.
- At present, there is **no specific law** to **deal** with **unfair means** adopted or offenses committed.

About the Public Examinations Rule

- The Rules are **notified** by the **Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.**
- It provides a **framework** of **actions** to **prevent** the **use of unfair means** in public examinations.
- It **lays down** full **parameters** of **Computer Based Tests (CBT)** from the registration of candidates, allocation of centres, and issue of admit cards to the opening and distribution of question papers, evaluation of answers, and the final recommendations.
- The Rules **provide** for the **appointment of a Centre Coordinator** along with **venue in-charges**, and **Regional Officers** for Public Examinations.
  - **Centre Coordinator** may be **serving/ retired employees** of the **Central/ State Government, PSUs, PSBs, Government Universities**, **autonomous bodies** and other **Government Organisations**.
- The Rules also **lay down** the **definition of "service provider"** for the purposes of the Act.
  - *Service provider* **includes agencies, organization, body, business entity** *etc* **conducting public examination.**

Key Highlights of the Act

- The act seeks to **prevent** use of **unfair means** in **public examinations.**
  - **Public examinations** refer to **examinations conducted** by **authorities** specified under the **Schedule** to the act, or notified by the central government. These include:
  - Union Public Service Commission
  - Staff Selection Commission
  - Railway Recruitment Board
  - National Testing Agency
  - Institute of Banking Personnel Selection
  - Departments of the central government and their attached offices for recruitment.
- The act **lists** at least **15 actions** that **amount** to using **unfair means** in public examinations for monetary or wrongful gain.
  - Actions to be considered Unfair Means includes:
  - Leakage and/or Collusion in leakage of question paper/answer key.
  - Unauthorized possession and/or tampering of question paper/OMR sheet/answer sheets.
  - Assisting candidates indirectly/ directly.
  - Tampering with documents for candidate short-listing/merit finalization.
  - Tampering with computer systems or networks.
  - Creating fake websites, conducting fake examinations and issuing fake admit cards/offer letters.
  - The Act states that all **offenses** shall be **cognizable, non-bailable,** and **non-compoundable.**
  - **Punishment** for "any person or persons resorting to unfair means and offenses" can be **3 to 5 years in prison**, and a fine up to Rs 10 lakh.
  - **Organized crimes groups** will face **5 to 10 years of imprisonment** and a minimum fine of Rs 1 crore.
  - The Act proposes to **set up a high-level national technical committee** on public examinations.

About National Testing Agency (NTA)

- NTA was **established** in **2017** as an **autonomous** and **self-sustained testing organization** under the **Education Ministry.**

- It is a **registered society** under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860** and is under the **purview** of the **Right to Information (RTI) Act.**

- Its purpose is to **conduct entrance examinations** for **admission/fellowship** in **higher educational institutions.**

Significance of the Act

- The Act aims to:

  - **Bring greater transparency, fairness** and **credibility** to the public examinations system.

  - Curb malpractices in public examinations which leads to **delays** and **cancellation** of **examinations** adversely **impacting** the **prospects** of **millions** of youth.

  - **Legally deter** those who **indulge** in **unfair means** that impact the public examination systems.

- The act will serve as "a **model draft for States** to adopt at their discretion".

Challenges of the Act

- **Fate of exams** canceled due to use of unfair means like paper leakage still **remains** a matter of **concern.**

- As the **act** primarily **focuses** on **centralized exams**, overlooking malpractices in other types of examinations.

  - This could pose a significant **challenge to implementing the law** effectively at the **grassroots level.**

- **Underutilization of modern technology and AI** is another major drawback of the act.

- Other loopholes include the **absence** of **fixed timelines** for agencies like CBI to **probe malpractices**, and the **lack of interim measures** during investigations.

While the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, is considered to be a significant step towards combating the malpractices in the examination system, its success will depend on how well it is implemented and supplemented by other measures. By addressing the concerns, harnessing technology, and ensuring collaboration between central and state governments, India can move towards a more transparent, fair, and credible public examination system.

Q1. Critically examine the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, in light of its potential impact on Indian education and society.

(**150 Words/10 Marks**)

Leader of Opposition

Syllabus: GS Paper II-Parliament

Why in the News?

Rahul Gandhi recently became the Leader of Opposition (LoO) in the Lok Sabha, a position that had been vacant for 10 years because no party had numbers equaling a tenth of the strength of the House, which has been, by practice, a requirement for the post.

About the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha (LS) and Rajya Sabha (RS)

- The office of LoO is a **statutory position mentioned** in the **Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977**.

- The Act describes the LoO as:

  - A "member of the Council of States or the House of the People, as the case may be, who is, for the time being, the Leader in that House of the party in opposition to the Government having the greatest numerical strength and recognised as such by the Chairman of the Council of States or the Speaker of the House of the People".

- The **rule** stating that a party should have at least **10% of the total strength of the House** to be **recognised** for the **post of LoO** is **not a part** of this **act.**

Origin of the 10% Rule

- **GV Mavalankar**, the first speaker of LS stated that the **main opposition party's strength** must **equal** the quorum i.e 10% of the total strength of the House.
    - 10% for **LS** means **55 seats.**
    - 10% for **RS** means **25 seats.**
- This **rule** was later **incorporated** in **Direction 121 (1) in Parliament (facilities) act 1998.**
- However, many **critics rejected** the **convention** that to get the post of LoO, a party must have at least 10% of MPs in the House.
    - Former Lok Sabha Secretary General PDT Achary stated that the **rule** is **self-styled** as there is **no such rule** in the **act.**

Perks of the Leader of the Opposition (LoO)

- Privileges and Ceremonial Roles associated with the post of LoO are as follows:
    - **Occupies** a **front-row seat** in the House, to the **left** of the **Chair.**
    - **Escorts** the Speaker-elect to the rostrum.
    - **Front-row seat** during the **President's Address** to both Houses of Parliament.
- LoO **represents** the **opposition** in **high-powered committees**, headed by Prime Minister, for **key appointments** to the post of:
    - CBI Director
    - Central Vigilance Commissioner
    - Chief Information Commissioner
    - Chairperson and members of NHRC
    - Lokpal
- LoO is **ranked at seventh** in **order of precedence**.
- LoO becomes the **member** of **important committees** like Public Accounts, Public Undertakings, Estimates, and various Joint Parliamentary Committees.

Significance of the Position of Leader of the Opposition (LoO)

- **Balancing Power:** The LoO in the Lok Sabha "is considered as a shadow Prime Minister with a shadow Cabinet, ready to take over the administration if the Government resigns or is defeated on the floor of the House."
- **Constructive criticism of policies:** LoO is responsible for critically examining policies and actions of government for public interest.
- **Alternative Policies:** LoO proposes viable alternatives for Parliament's consideration to provide choices and foster healthy debate in Parliament.
- **Checks and Balances:** LoO holds the government accountable by questioning its motives, implementation and ensures that the government remains transparent.
- **Democratic mechanism:** LoO upholds democratic mechanism, ensuring government respect for the Constitution and rule of law.
- **Represents Parliamentary Minority:** LoO represents the voice and interests of those not in the ruling party, thus boosting the morale of the Opposition.

Challenges

- India's **multi-party system** often leads to a **fragmented opposition** due to which a **single party fails** to get the **10%** of the **seats** and the seat of **LoO remains vacant**.
- The LoO faces **resource constraints** compared to the ruling party.
- **Balancing** the **diverse ideologies** and **maintaining unity** within the **opposition bloc** is often **challenging.**

The Leader of the Opposition is a significant component of India's parliamentary system. Their role emphasizes accountability, transparency of the government, and the well-being of citizens. As India's democracy evolves, the LoO's significance remains undiminished, ensuring a balanced governance system.

Q. Why is it essential for a democratic government to have both a parliamentary majority and a parliamentary minority?

(**150 Words/10 Marks**)

Three New Acts

Syllabus: GS-II: Government policies and interventions

Why in the News?

The three new criminal laws - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Saksha Adhiniyam recently came into force from July 1 this year. These acts will replace the Colonial-era legislation with modern Indian laws.

Key Provisions of the Acts

Acts	Key Provisions
Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Act, 2023 to replace CrPC	• **Undertrial Prisoner Release Criteria:** An undertrial prisoner should be released if they have been detained for half the period of imprisonment prescribed for the offence, except if they are accused of an offence punishable with life imprisonment or death, or if proceedings are pending against them in more than one offence. • **Electronic Mode for Legal Proceedings:** Trials, appeal proceedings, and recording of depositions can be held in electronic mode. • **Trials in Absentia for Proclaimed Offenders:** Trials in absentia are proposed for proclaimed offenders. • **Timeframe for Mercy Petitions:** Introduced timeframe to file mercy petitions in death sentence cases. • **Magistrate's Authority to Order Samples:** Magistrates can order any person to give samples (signature, handwriting, voice/finger impressions) for the purpose of investigation without arresting them. • **Police Authority in Preventive Actions:** Police can detain or remove any person resisting, refusing, ignoring, or disregarding directions given as part of preventive action. • **Others:** Introduces the provision of Zero FIR (allowing to file FIRs at any police station irrespective of offense site) and witness protection scheme.
Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Act, 2023 to replace IPC	• **Sedition Repealed: Sedition,** as an offense, has been **repealed**. • However, armed rebellion, separatist activities, organized crimes, etc., have been made separate offenses. • **Terrorism Defined: Terrorism** has been **defined** for the first time. • **Stricter Punishment: Capital punishment** has been introduced for **mob lynching.** • **Sexual Misconduct: Sexual intercourse** with a woman on **false promise** of marriage, job, promotions or by concealing identity to be **considered a crime.** • **Leniency for petty crimes: Community service** is **introduced** as one of the punishments for **petty crimes.**
Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) Act, 2023 to replace Indian Evidence Act of 1872	• **Electronic/Digital Records:** Admissibility of an **electronic/digital record** as **primary evidence.** • **Evidence Handling Rules:** Establish precise and uniform rules governing the handling of evidence during the trial of criminal cases. • **Modifications of Provisions:** Repealed five existing provisions of the old Act, modified 23 provisions, and introduced one entirely new provision. • **Secondary Evidence: Expand** the **scope** of **secondary evidence.**

Significance of the three Criminal Acts

- **Victim-centric Justice:** These laws prioritize providing justice and support to victims of crime through features like allowing electronic FIRs for easier reporting, especially for crimes against women.

- **Introduction of alternative punishment form:** The new criminal laws offer community service as punishment for minor offenses, aiming to reduce prison overcrowding and rehabilitate offenders through giving back to society.

- **Improved justice delivery:** The new laws by setting strict time limits for investigations, filing charges, and delivering judgments, aims to reduce delays in the court system and ensure quicker improved resolutions for all parties involved.

- **Technological advancements:** These acts incorporate online features like filing complaints and receiving summons electronically. This can improve efficiency and communication within the legal system.

- **Addressing Hate Crimes:** The inclusion of offences for mob-lynching is crucial, and signals a legislative acknowledgement of such hate crimes.

Criticisms of the Acts

- Critics argued that the **Lok Sabha** had **passed** the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya acts without parliamentary debate.

- The **BNSS act** is criticized for **extending** the **days** under **police custody** from 15 days to 90 days.

- The BSA allows the admissibility of electronic records as evidence. In the absence of a robust data protection mechanism and given the documented **misuse of electronic evidence.**

- The **repeal of certain sections**, like the erstwhile section 377 addressing rape of an adult man, has **raised concerns** regarding the **effectiveness of the new laws.**

- Other criticisms related to the acts include **potential misuse of expanded powers,** and **concerns about over criminalization.**

> **Q.** The government introduced three acts in the Lok Sabha to replace Colonial-era legislation with modern Indian laws. In the context of delivering justice, critically analyze the effectiveness of the acts.
>
> (250 Words / 15 Marks)

Concerns of the Tea Industry in Assam **

Why in the News?

Recently, the All Assam Small Tea Growers' Association has come forward with a pledge to keep the quality of Assam tea intact, by appealing to small tea growers not to use certain pesticides.

Concerns Over Pesticide residues

Small tea planters often rely on pesticides to ensure a healthy yield. Since **50%** of the **tea leaf** is **produced** by the **Small Tea Growers** (STGs), who due to lack of awareness, **sprays pesticides** which are **not approved** for use in tea. Tests have shown that the levels of unapproved pesticides sometimes exceed the Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) in Assam tea. This raises some major concerns, such as:

- **Market Compliance:** National and international markets have strict regulations on pesticide residue levels. Thus high pesticide levels in Assam's tea may jeopardize its exports.

- **Consumer Health and safety:** High Pesticide residues can be harmful if consumed in large amounts.

- **Environmental Impact:** Exceeding MRL guidelines will harm soil, water, and biodiversity which can be detrimental for the ecosystem's long-term health.

- **Economic Viability:** Non-compliance with MRL standards can lead to financial losses due to the rejection of tea consignments, fines, and compensations.

- **Brand Reputation:** Not maintaining the MRL standards can affect the brand image of Assam tea in India and aboard.

> The **Maximum Residue Limit (MRL)** particularly in case of tea refers to the **highest amount of pesticide residue** legally **allowed** to **remain** on **tea leaves** after harvest.

Steps Taken to Prevent the Excessive use Pesticides

- There is **increasing support** from government bodies and industry organizations to **help small tea growers meet MRL standards** through training, resources, and certification programs.

- The **state government** also **launched** a strict **enforcement** to **prohibit** the use of **Monocrotophos** in **tea plantations.**

- **Warning** was **issued** to all bought leaf factories (BLFs) and estate factories by the Tea Board regarding **checking MRL** at **green leaf stage.**

- **North Eastern Tea Association** has recently **sought** to **prohibit sale, stock, distribution** and, or use of **certain pesticides in Assam** in the best interest of the tea industry.

  - These pesticides include **Cypermethrin, Acephate, Imidacloprid, Acetamiprid, Dinotefuran,** and **Fipronil.**

- In early March 2024, **FSSAI implemented** a **new mandate** requiring the **testing of specific pesticides** in tea.

- NABARD has sanctioned an unique project named **"Climate resilient tea cultivation and AI-based pest management for tea growers"** to prevent use of harmful pesticides.

What more can be done?

- **Training the STGs:** Small tea growers should be informed about:

  - **Chemical impact:** How pesticides affect consumers and tea bushes over time.

  - **Safe application:** Proper dosage, spraying techniques, and pre-plucking waiting periods to minimize residue.

- **Appoint qualified supervisors:** The tea garden should appoint experienced personnel to guide STGs on best practices, record-keeping, and compliance for producing high-quality tea.

- **Stricter Regulation:** The government should enforce strict regulation for potentially banning harmful pesticides.

- **Integrated Pest Management (IPM):** A shift towards IPM should be encouraged, using a combination of methods to control pests while minimizing chemical reliance.

- **Use of Technology:** Utilization of latest technological advancement to encourage STGs to reduce the use of harmful chemicals and pesticides in their farmland.

- **Research and Development (R&D):** R&D should be promoted in order to develop effective, environmentally friendly and safe pest control alternatives.

Significance of Assam's Tea Industry

- Assam's tea industry is **globally famous** for its rich, aromatic tea , **contributing** significantly to **India's total exports**.

- The industry is a **crucial source of livelihood for millions**, with many people depending directly or indirectly on tea plantations.

- Assam **produces** nearly **700 million kg tea annually** and **accounts** for around **half of India's** overall **tea production**.

- Tea exports from Assam **generate annual foreign exchange** equivalent to **Rs 3,000 crore**, boosting the state's economy.

- The tea plantation sector in Assam has a **200 years-old legacy** woven into the state's cultural fabric.

- **Challenges:** Despite the significance, the industry faces significant challenges. Such as:

  - Rising production costs

  - Stagnant consumption rates

  - Low crop prices and crop quality

  - Maintaining competitiveness in global market

History Of Assam Tea

- In **1823 Robert Bruce discovered tea plants** growing in the **upper Brahmaputra Valley.**

  - **Local Singpho tribesmen** were already **cultivating** and **consuming wild tea**, even before it became widely known.

- A **tea garden** was **started** by the Government in **1833** in erstwhile **Lakhimpur district.**

- The **Assam Company** was **formed** in **1839** to take over the experimental holdings of the East India Company's Administration over the tea gardens established in Assam till then.

  - This was the **first company in India** to undertake the **commercial production of tea.**

- In **1859,** the **Jorhat Tea Company**, the second important tea company, was formed.

- In **1911**, the **Tocklai Research Station** was **established** in **Cinnamora, Jorhat** to carry out research on cultivation and manufacture of tea.

- **Maniram Dewan** was the **first Indian tea planter** who established the **first-ever commercial plantation**.

Major Tea Producing Districts of Assam

Q. Examine the challenges faced by the tea industry in Assam. What measures do you suggest to make it a vibrant economic sector? (250/15)

India-USA

Syllabus: GS-II: International Relations

Why in the News?

Recently, the second meeting of the Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) initiative between India and the US was held in New Delhi.

What are Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)?

- It was launched during the **Quad summit** in **May 2023.**
- It is a framework agreed upon by India and the US for **cooperation on critical and emerging technologies**, such as AI, quantum computing, 5G/6G, biotech, space and semiconductor.

Significance of iCET

- It is expected to **foster technology diplomacy** and **flexibility** in a new template for statecraft.
- It will **provide greater collaboration opportunities** in critical and emerging technologies.
- **Co-development and co-production**, and ways to deepen connectivity in the innovation ecosystem.
- It is expected to **address regulatory barriers** and issues related to business and talent mobility.
- It is expected to **develop** a **new Defence Innovation and Technology Cooperation.**

How can iCET strengthen India-US relations?

Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) initiative is expected to strengthen India-US relations in the following ways:

- The forum can correct various information irregularities and maximize the benefits for both countries.
- Advancements in technologies can help address mutual security challenges.
- Increasing economic growth by developing a future ready technical workforce.
- Through emerging technologies India-US can contribute to solving global challenges like climate change, cyber crime etc.
- By Creating appropriate institutional frameworks and structures to support India-USA's Short, medium and long term goals.

Other Key Areas of Cooperation Between India and USA

Trade	• USA is **India's largest trading partner** with bilateral trade in goods and services crossing US$ 191 billion in 2022. • In 2022 bilateral merchandise trade reached US$ 133 billion and services trade reached around US$ 58 billion.

Defence Cooperation	• Major **Defense agreements** signed **India-USA** are:
	
	  • Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), 2016
	
	  • Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), 2018
	
	  • Industrial Security Agreement, 2019
	
	  • Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) 2020.
	
	• USA is India's **third largest defense supplier.**
	
	• The **two countries** conduct many **bilateral exercises** which include **Yudh Abhyas, Tiger Triumph, Malabar, Vajra Prahar** etc

S&T and Space Cooperation	• The **Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement** was **renewed** for 10 years in **2019.** • **India's contribution** of $250 million towards the **Thirty-Meter Telescope Project** in Hawaii and **Indian Initiative in Gravitational Observations** (IndiGO) with **U.S LIGO Laboratory** are some of the examples of joint collaboration. • **India** and the **USA** are both **signatories** to the **Artemis Accords**, and have established frameworks for **human spaceflight collaboration** and a **joint mission** to the **International Space Station.**
Clean Energy Cooperation	• The India-U.S. **New and Emerging Renewable Energy Technologies Action Platform** (RETAP) was launched. • RETAP major focus is on green and clean hydrogen, wind energy, long-duration energy storage, and the exploration of geothermal, ocean/tidal energy, and other emerging technologies
Multilateral Cooperation	• Both the countries are **engaged** in various **multilateral forums** like **Quad, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), UN, G20, WTO**, etc.
People-to-People ties	• About **4.4 million Indian Americans/Indian origin people** reside in the US. Persons of Indian origin (3.18 million) constitute the third largest Asian ethnic group in the US.

About the United States of America

- **USA** is a country in **North America** which includes **48 conterminous states** and the **state of Alaska**, and the **island state of Hawaii.**

- The country's 48 conterminous states are bounded by **Canada in the north, Mexico and Gulf of Mexico in the south, Atlantic Ocean in the east and Pacific Ocean in the west.**

  - **USA-Canada** shares the **longest border** in the **world.**

- The USA is the **fourth largest country** in the world in **terms of area**, after Russia, Canada, and China.

- The country is **home** to the **Great Lakes** which include **Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario.**

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Q. "India and the USA are natural allies." Discuss the strategic reasons for India's closeness to the United States of America.   (250 words, 15 marks)

Flood in Assam**

Syllabus: GS-V: Environment

Why in the News?

Assam's flood situation has turned critical as the Brahmaputra and all its tributaries are flowing above the danger level.

What is Flood?

- Flood, high-water stage in which water overflows its natural or artificial banks onto normally dry land, such as a river inundating its floodplain.

- Flooding may result from the volume of water within a body of water, such as a river or lake, which overflows or breaks levees, with the result that some of the water escapes its usual boundaries.

Flood in Assam

- Assam is prone to flood and erosion which has a negative impact on overall development of the state.

- As per **Rashtriya Barh Ayog** (RBA) about. **39.58 %** of the total land area of Assam (31.05 Lakh Hectares) is **prone to flood hazard.**

- The flood prone area of Assam is four times the national mark of the flood prone area of the country.

- Assam faced **major floods** in **1954, 1962, 1972, 1977, 1984, 1988, 1998, 2002, 2004 and 2012.**

- Almost every year **three to four waves of flood ravage** the flood prone areas of **Assam.**

- As per the Assam Disaster Management Authority (ADMA) the recent flood situation in Assam has claimed 26 lives so far, affecting 161K people in 15 districts.

Reasons for floods in Assam:

Natural Factors:

- **Assam's unique topography:** Assam is surrounded on 3 sides by hills, resulting in water from the hills and mountains to flow down rapidly causing rivers to overflow and flood the plains .

- **Heavy Rainfall:** Assam receives a high amount of rainfall especially during the monsoon season due to its location in the Himalayan foothills.

  - Also, the southwest monsoon winds bring abundant moisture resulting in intense rainfall.

  - For instance - During 2022 floods, Assam recorded 327% excess precipitation.

- **Sedimentation and Siltation:** The Brahmaputra, Barak and its tributaries carry large amounts of silt and sediment from the Himalayas.

  - This sedimentation raises the riverbeds reducing their water-carrying capacity and increasing the risk of floods.

- **Tectonic Activity:** The region is tectonically active and earthquakes and triggering of landslides further contribute to flooding.
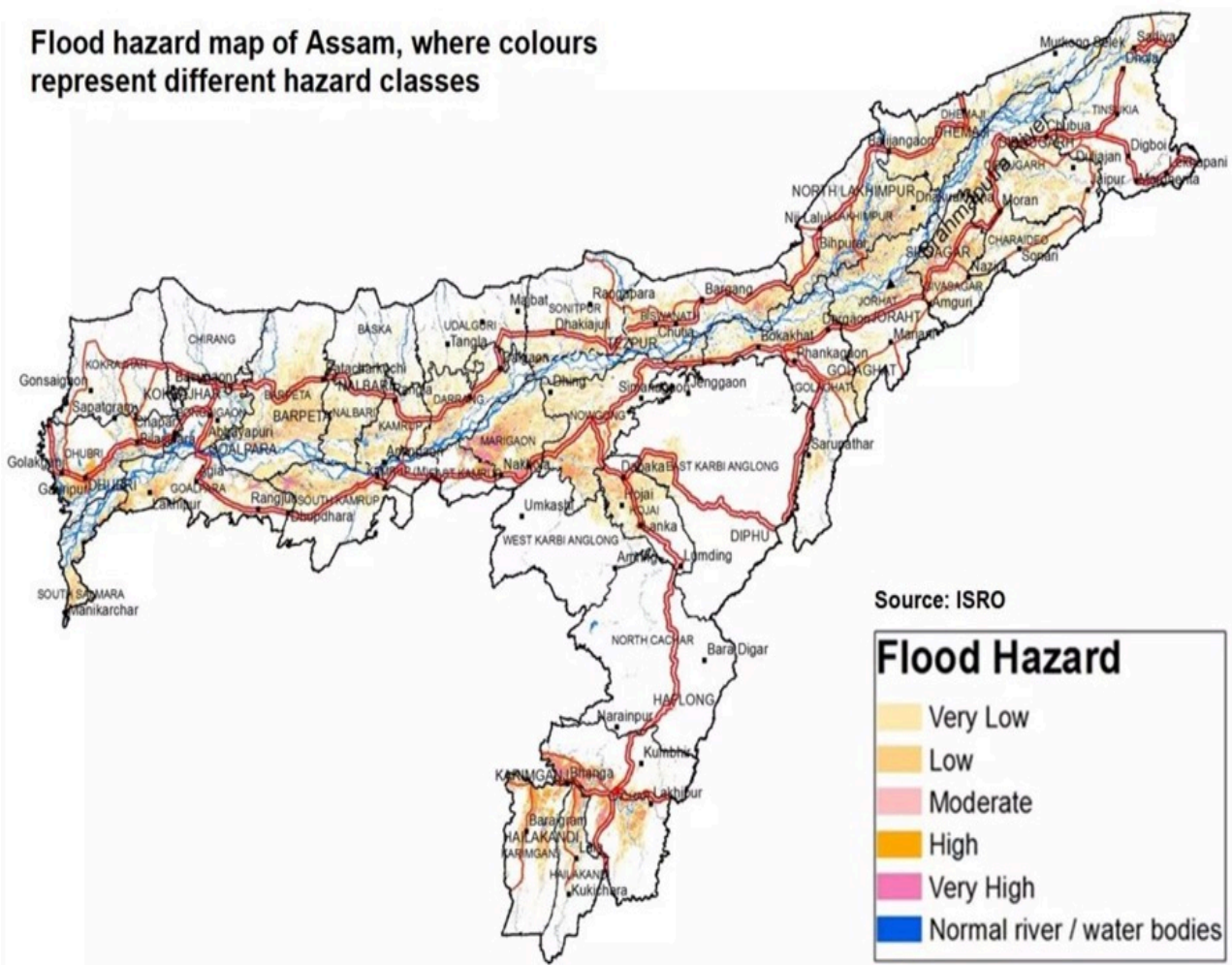
Anthropogenic Factors:

- **Deforestation:** Large-scale deforestation in the catchment areas of rivers has reduced the water-holding capacity of the soil, leading to increased runoff and flooding.

  - **For instance -** Assam lost 17,100 hectares (171 sq km) of natural forest in 2023.

- **Encroachment and unplanned settlements:** This leads to wetland destruction and settlement in flood plains, reducing the natural drainage channels making the areas more susceptible to flooding.

- **Embankments:** While embankments are built to protect areas from floods, its failure results in worsening the situation.

- **Climate Change:** Climate change is expected to increase the intensity and frequency of extreme rainfall events, further exacerbating the flood problem in Assam.

Why perennial problems of flooding?

- According to reports, **since** the **1950s**, Assam has built **423 embankments** along the **Brahmaputra River and its tributaries.**

  - Of these, **295** are believed to have **outlived** their **intended lifespan**.

  - It is therefore not surprising that they are being **breached regularly** and are even **damaged and destroyed**.

- During the **post-flood reconstruction phase**, **government agencies** often resort to **simply fixing damaged** or destroyed embankments and do **not build them back** properly.

- **Perennial flooding** in Assam is exacerbated by **the reliance** on and misuse of **grey infrastructure** like embankments.

  - These **concrete structures**, while intended to prevent flooding, often **create more problems** than they solve.

  - Assam continues to remain fixated on embankments. One major reason for this is the vested interests of engineers, contractors and politicians for whom embankments are "big business."

- Alluding to this, one expert opined that "Assam has increasingly moved towards becoming an 'embankment economy' - the construction of embankments along the Brahmaputra has become a business involving contractors for construction, maintenance and repair.

- He further lamented that "Floods actually mean a lot of money to a lot of people and many feed off the contractor lobby."

Flood hazard map of Assam, where colours represent different hazard classes

Source: ISRO

Flood Hazard
- Very Low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very High
- Normal river / water bodies

Impact of floods

- **Impact on humans Health risks:** Loss of lives, Displacement of people, increasing health risk like risk of waterborne borne diseases are some of the impacts of flood.
    - For instance- In 2022 about 9.3 million people were impacted due to flood.
- **Economic Impact:** Flood causes agricultural losses due to crop damage, loss of livestock, and infrastructure damage.
    - As per Assam Government the average annual loss due to flood in Assam is to the tune of Rs. 200 Crores.
    - According to ASAMA, the economic loss due to 2022 floods was estimated at around Rs 10,000 crore.
- **Environmental Impact:** Soil erosion, habitat loss, water pollution are some of the major impacts of flood.
    - **For instance-** Since 1950, about 4.27 lakh hectares area i.e. 7.40% of Assam has been eroded.
    - **Average Annual Erosion Rate** of Assam is **8000 hectares.**
- **Long term consequence:**
    - **Poverty and Food Insecurity:** Repeated floods can push people into poverty and food insecurity due to loss of livelihoods and assets.
    - **Psychological Trauma:** Floods can cause psychological trauma and distress, especially among children and vulnerable populations.
    - **Increased Vulnerability:** The cumulative effects of floods make communities more vulnerable to future disasters and hinder their ability to recover.

Recent Initiatives for flood management

- **Scheme under Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP)**
    - Launched by the Ministry of Jal Shakti scheme for erosion protection of the river Aie in Chirang District.
- **Assam Integrated River Basin Management Programme (AIRBMP):**
    - It is a World Bank and Govt of Assam collaboration.
    - Under this programme, two comprehensive flood management programmes (Buridehing river and Manas-Beki river) have been started.

- Subsequently funding will be considered for other critical rivers like Jiabharali, Gainadi- Jiadhal, Bhogdoi, Singhla and Jatinga.
- **Brahmaputra Flood and Erosion Risk Management Project (BFERMP):**
    - It is an Asian Development Bank and Govt of Assam collaboration.
    - It is for flood and erosion management in 4 zones of the Brahmaputra-Dibrugarh, Morigaon, Kamrup and Goalpara.
    - It will include bio engineering activities using nature based solutions for embankment slope stabilization and bank protection work.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen embankments and floodwalls:** As most flood protection structures in Assam are over 50-60 years old. So focus should be on strengthening those structures.
- **Dredging and Channel improvement:** It should be done regularly in waterways as sedimentation gradually fills channels and harbors.
- **Enact Flood plain Zoning Bill:** The Law must be enacted to regulate activities in the floodplains. So that flood damage can be minimized.
    - Flood plain zoning measures aim at demarcating zones or areas likely to be affected by floods of different magnitude or frequencies, probability levels and specify the types of permissible development in these zones.
- **Diversion of River Channels:** Interlinking rivers will transfer excess water from the regions receiving a lot of rainfall to drought-prone areas This way, it can mitigate both floods and droughts.
- **Other measures:** Measures like Afforestation, watershed management, afforestation & rejuvenation of wetlands, crop diversification and flood tolerant infrastructure can go a long way in mitigating the impact of floods.

> Q. Every year, Assam experiences devastating floods that result in significant economic loss. In this context, analyze the main reasons behind the frequent floods in Assam and suggest some steps that are needed to take for effective floods management.
>
> (250 words/15 marks)
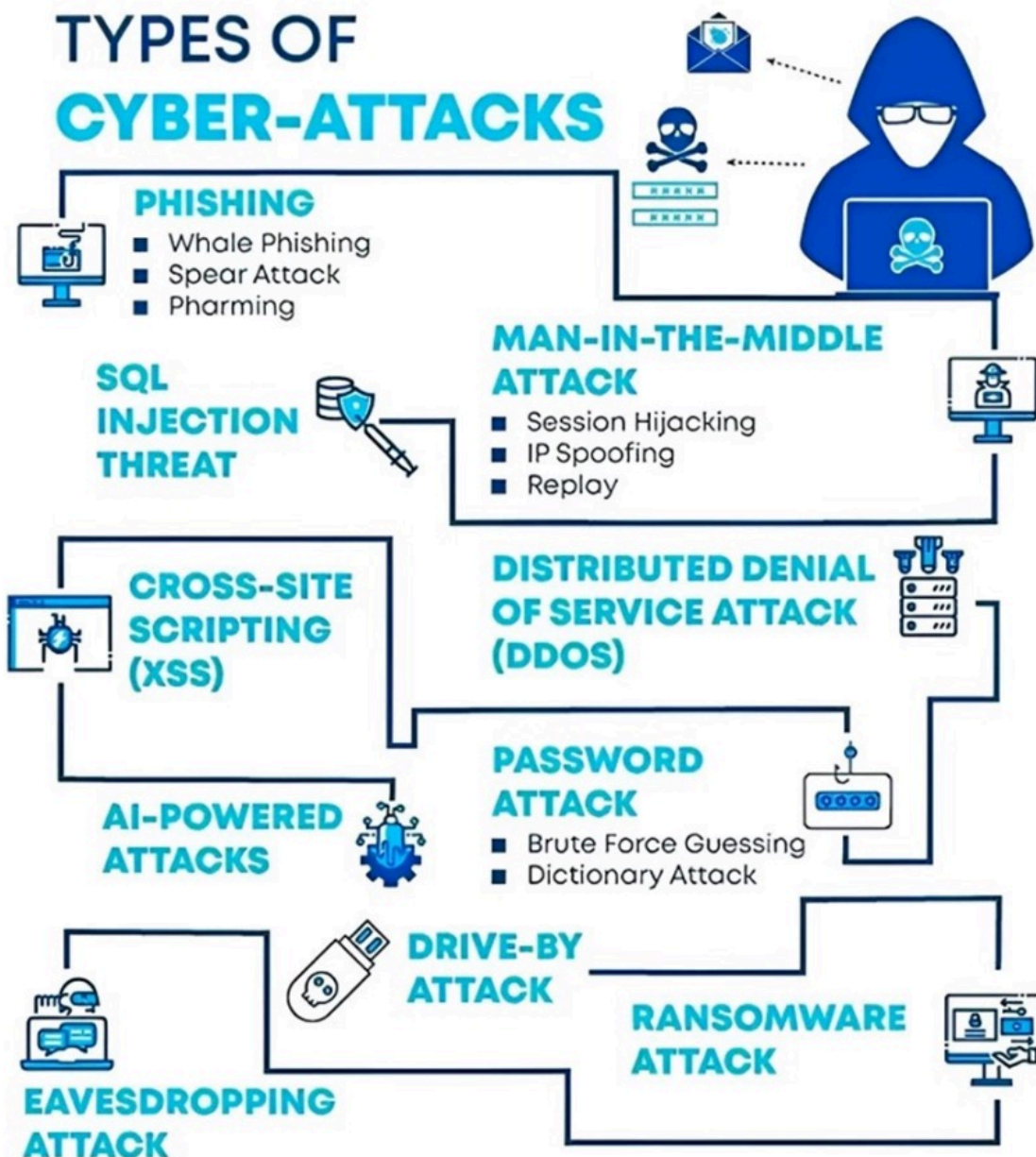
Cyber Security in Assam**

Syllabus: GS-V: Science & tech

Why in the News?

Cases of cybercrime, mainly financial fraud, have been increasing of late and Assam have also seen the menace rising in accordance with increased online activity, including making payments and doing banking through the internet.

What is Cyber Crime?

- Cyber Crime is defined as the **unlawful acts** where the **computer** is **used** either as a **tool** or a **target** or **both**.
- The reach of Cyber crimes has **no physical boundaries** and has become a **global threat** in recent times.
- **Cyber crime** falls under **State subjects** as per **Seventh Schedule** of the Constitution of India.

Cases of Cyber Crime in Assam

- As per the reports of financial fraud in the **Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting Management System** about **7621 complaints**, involving an amount of Rs 3,441.8 lakh were from **Assam**

- According to the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB),** the **rate of cybercrime** registered in **Assam** in 2020 was **10.1 %**, which is higher than the national cybercrime rate of 3.7 %.

Impact of Cybercrime

- Cybercrime can **negatively affect** the **economy**, resulting in the depletion of financial assets for individuals, businesses, and governments.

- Incidences of cyber attacks often **damage** the **reputation of institutions and organizations,** leading to loss of customer trust and potential long-term financial decline.

- Anti national forces and militant groups have been increasingly using cyberspace, adding a **new dimension** to the **challenges faced** by the police.

- Cybercrime can increase cases of cyberbullying and harassment, leading to **emotional and psychological harm.**

- It can **spread misinformation** causing severe social and political repercussions.

Challenges to Curb Cybercrime

- Cyber attackers are **constantly evolving** their approach, making it difficult for individuals, businesses, and governments to tackle and detect the issue.

- As cyber crimes have **no physical boundaries**, attacks can originate from anywhere in the globe making it **difficult to trace.**

- **Lack of awareness** and **constraints of human resources** often makes it difficult to combat cyber attacks.

- **Differences** in **laws and regulation** related to **cyber crime** across regions and countries make it **difficult** to **deal** with the **cases of cyber crime.**

Initiatives taken by Assam Government Against Cyber Crime

- **Cyber helpline numbers** are made available for easy reporting of cyber crime incidents in the state.

- Assam Police have launched the initiative of **cyberdome** to effectively tackle incidence of cyber crimes in the state.

  - **Cyberdome** is a **high-tech nodal centre** for **cyber security** and **innovation** that will enable the investigating officers to move forward and get hold on important information regarding cyber criminals and crimes using the latest technology.

- Apart from it, the **Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting & Management System, Cyber Security Operations Centre** and **Regional Cyber Crime Coordination Centre** is set up to combat cyber crime.

- **CyberSafety' awareness campaigns** are conducted to raise awareness on cyber crimes and safety, particularly among the youth.

- A **cyber security policy** is framed by the Assam government to protect vital data and institutions from cyber attack.

Initiatives taken by Central Government Against Cyber Crime

- **Cyber helpline number** has been established to help people in reporting cyber complaints.

- **Government** has provided **guidelines** in relation to **cyber insurance policy** to help individuals and organizations to recover from losses caused due to cyber attack.

- **CERT-In** (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) is the **national nodal agency** for responding to computer security incidents as and when they occur.

  - Under the IT act 2000, it is **mandatory** for **service providers/intermediaries/ data centres/corporate bodies** to **report cyber security incidents** to **CERT-In** within a reasonable time of occurrence of the incident.

- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** is a government initiative to deal with cybercrime in India, in a coordinated and effective manner.

- The Government has developed the **National Cyber Security Policy** to create a safe and resilient cyberspace.

- **Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre (Cyber Swachhta Kendra)** aims to create a secure cyberspace by detecting botnet infections and providing detection and cleaning solutions.

- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** and **Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System** are launched to allow citizens to report incidents of cybercrime.

> Q. What is a cyber crime? Discuss various challenges associated with cyber crime along with steps taken by the Assam government to prevent it. (250 words/15 marks)

Awards

1. Vishwa Hindi Samman

- **Dr. Usha Thakur** is recently **honored** with the prestigious **12th Vishwa Hindi Samman**, recognising her contribution in development of Hindi literature.
  - *She has translated more than 40 literatures in Hindi and Nepali and strengthened Hindi language.*
- Vishwa Hindi Samman in an Hindi Samvad event **organized by Embassy of India in Nepal.**
- This **award** is **given** by the **Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.**

Exercises

2. Exercise HOPEX

- The fourth joint military exercise between Indian Air Force (IAF) and Egyptian Air Force was recently concluded in Egypt.
- The exercise **aims** to **promote bilateral** and **regional cooperation,** reflecting the long-standing relations between India and Egypt.
- IAF's **Rafale fighter jets, C-17 Globemaster** and **IL-78 tankers participated** in the exercise.

Important Days

3. International Day Against Drug Abuse

- The International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, or World Drug Day, is annually **observed** on **26 June**.
- On **7 December 1987**, the **UN General Assembly** by a resolution **decided** to observe **26 June** as the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.
- **International Day Against Drug Abuse 2024 theme** is "The evidence is clear: invest in prevention"

Scheme

4. Witness Protection Scheme**

- The Assam government recently gave approval to the state's first-ever witness protection scheme for ensuring fair justice delivery system.
- The **Scheme** will be in **adherence** to Section 398 of **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.**
- As per the scheme, a **witness** could **apply** for **Witness Protection** in prescribed form before a competent authority through its member secretary for seeking Witness Protection Order.

- The competent Authority will be a **standing committee chaired** by the **District** and **Sessions Judge**.
  - Other members include Head of Police in the District and an officer not below the rank of the ADC nominated by the District Magistrate and Head of Prosecution in the District.
- **Protection measures** under the scheme includes **in-camera trials**, **installation of security devices** in the witness' home, **close protection/patrolling near witness' home**, **temporary change of residence**, escort to and from the court, provision of government vehicles for the date of hearing etc.

Miscellaneous

5. Chang'e-6

- **Chang'e-6** recently became the **first mission** in human history to **return** with **samples** from the **far side** of the **moon.**
  - It landed in the Inner Mongolia desert, after a nearly two-month long mission.
- It is **China's sixth lunar mission**, and also its second mission to land on the far side of the moon.
  - China's **Chang'e-4** was the **first mission** in the world to achieve soft landing on the far side of the Moon
- The **Moon's far side cannot be seen** from the **Earth**, because the Moon is tidally locked with the Earth and therefore, we see only one side of the Moon, also known as the near side.

6. Mission Annasthan**

- Recently, **Dibrugarh District** has **launched "Mission Annasthan"** in 100 schools.
- It is notable that through "Mission Annasthan," **clean** and **hygienic dining halls** will be **constructed** in **schools** of the district for students to have their **mid-day meals.**
- The **purpose** of the mission is not only to **ensure cleanliness** but also **educate students** about proper **etiquette** and **manners** to be observed during **communal dining.**
- In the first phase, dining halls will be constructed in 100 schools, and subsequently, similar arrangements will be made in other schools for students to have their mid-day meals.

7. Mission Maitri

- Australian-Indian in-space servicing arm Space Machines Company and Isro's commercial arm NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL) has signed an agreement for the launch of the second Optimus spacecraft, under the space mission MAITRI.

    - **Weighing 450 kg**, the **second Optimus spacecraft** is the **largest Australian**-designed and built **spacecraft** to date and is to be **launched in 2026**.

    - The mission will be **launched** on **ISRO's Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).**

- The **MAITRI** (Mission for Australia-India's Technology, Research and Innovation), will mark a significant moment for both nations in the arena of space collaboration.

8. Raimona National Park**

- 'Mainland Serow', a vulnerable mammal species, was recently spotted in Raimona National Park, the **western** most **national park of Assam**.

- Raimona National Park, located in the **Kokrajhar district** of Assam, was **declared** a **national park** on **June 5, 2021** on the occasion of World Environment Day.

- It **covers** the northern part of the **Ripu Reserve Forest** which forms the westernmost buffer to Manas Tiger Reserve.

- The park is home to a variety of wildlife including **tiger, clouded leopard, golden langur, Indian gaur, Asian elephant, spotted deer, wild buffalo,** and **hornbill**.

9. Mainland Serow

- Mainland serow, a rare mammal, was recently recorded at a low elevation of 96 metres at Raimona National Park.

- 'Mainland Serow', is a **mammal** that **appears** somewhere between a **goat** and an **antelope**.

- The mainland serow is generally **found** at an **altitudes** of **200-3000 meters.**

- The animal's habitat is spread across the **India-Bhutan border** in **Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary** and the **Royal Manas National Park** of Bhutan.

- **Conservation Status:**

    - **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable

    - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I

    - **CITES:** Appendix I

10. Carbon Tax on Livestocks

- Denmark will **impose tax** on its **livestock farmers** for the greenhouse gasses (GHGs) emitted by their cows, sheep, and pigs, effective from 2030.

- The **purpose** of the tax is to r**educe GHGs emission levels** and **help** the country **meet** its **climate goals.**

    - Denmark is a major dairy and pork exporter, and agriculture is the country's biggest source of emissions.

District At A Glance

Dhubri

Geography of Dhubri

- **Dhubri** is the **western most district** of Assam.

- It comes under **Lower Brahmaputra Valley agro-climatic zone.**

- **Geographic Area:** 2176 Sq. Km

- **Density of Population:** It is the most densely populated district of Assam

- **District Boundaries**:

    - **North-** Kokrajhar district

    - **East-** Goalpara and Bongaigaon district

    - **West-** West Bengal and Bangladesh

    - **South-** South Salmara

- **Brahmaputra flows** through the district roughly from **east to west**, dividing the district into two parts- north bank and south bank.

- **Tributaries of Brahmaputra flowing through Dhubri**:

    - Champavati, Gaurang, Sankosh, Tipkai, Gadadhar, Gangadhar in the north bank

    - River Ginziram and Kalo in the south bank.

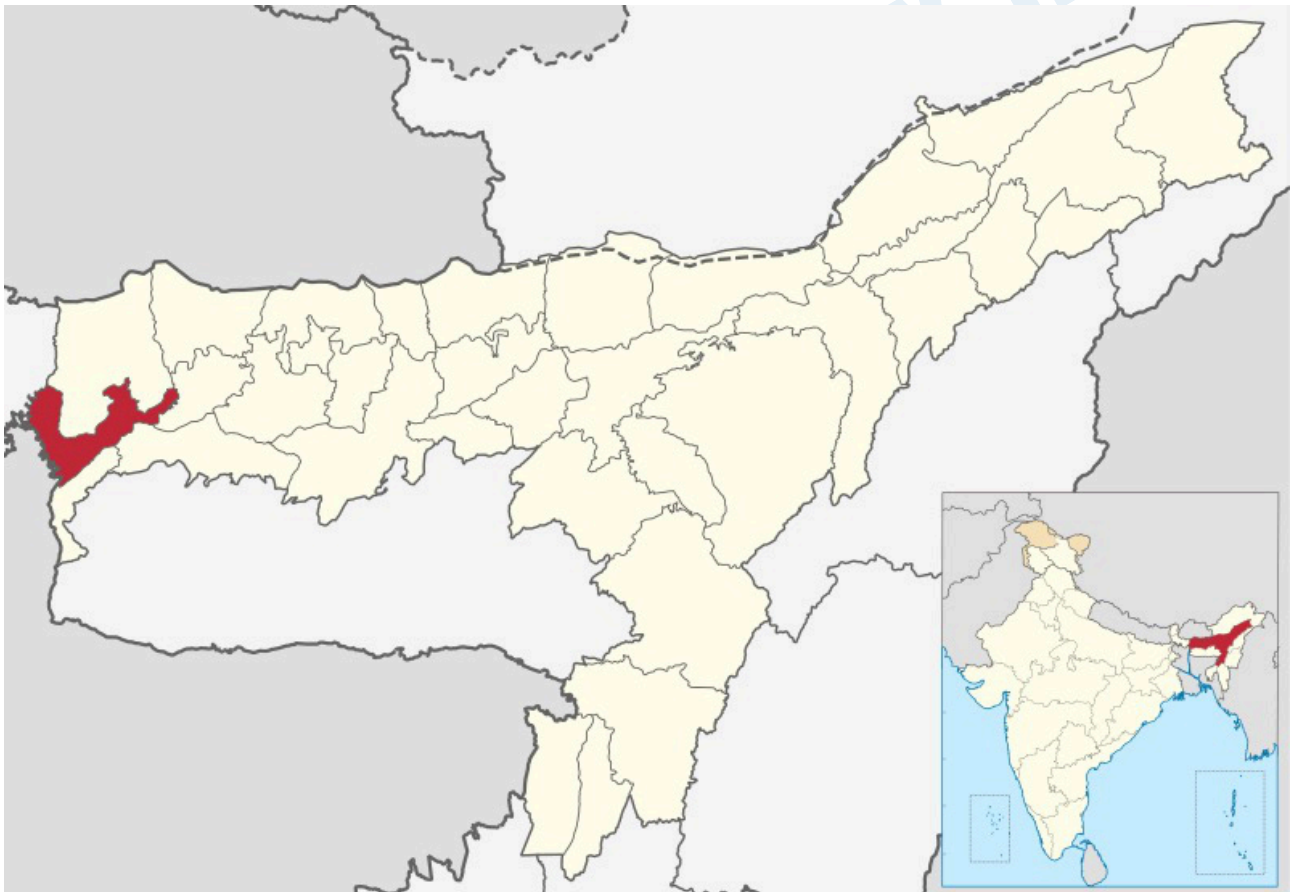- **Sub-Divisions-** Dhubri Sadar, Bilasipara.

Places of Interest

- **Gurudwara Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Sahibji**: Located on the bank of river Brahmaputra, the Gurudwara was established by the 9th sikh Guru Teg Bahadur during the 17th century.

- **Panchpir Dargah:** It is the dargah of five-sufi saints who accompanied Raja Ram Singh during his time of assam invasion.

- **Panbari/Rangamati Mosque:** Considered to be the oldest Mosque of Assam, it was built during 17th century by Hussain Shah (Governor of Bengal)

- **Mahamaya Dham:** It is one of the oldest Shakti Peeth of Assam.

- **Ramraikuti Satra:** It is one of the sacred sites of the Vaishnavites, where the historic marriage of Bir Chilarai was conducted in the 16th Century.

- It was established by Srimanta Sankardev with the aid of Cooch King Naranarayan.

- **Terracotta of Asharikandi:** It is one of the largest clusters of Terracotta and Pottery in India.

- **Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary:** The sanctuary is also extended into the Kokrajhar district. It is best known as the second protected habitat in India for the endangered golden langur.

Q. Locate the neighboring districts and country surrounding Dhubri in the given map.

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