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Justice Biplab Sarma Committee

Syllabus: GS II & G V: Government Interventions

Why In the New?

The Assam Cabinet has recently decided to implement 85% of the recommendations given by the Justice Biplab Sarma Committee.

About the Justice Biplab Sarma Committee

- The Biplab Sarma committee, **formed in 2019** in response to mass protests against the **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019**.
- It was **appointed** by the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** and it **submitted** its report to then **Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal** in 2020.
- The Committee **consisted of 14-members** and was **headed by retired Justice Biplab Sarma**.
- It **gave** a total of **67 recommendations** of which the **State Government** has decided to **implement 57 recommendations** falling under its ambit.
- The **committee's recommendations focus on protecting the rights of indigenous Assamese** people, particularly regarding Clause 6 of the Accord.

Government's Approach to Implementation of the Recommendation

- These recommendations are to be implemented by April next year.
- This development is particularly noteworthy because it marks the **first serious attempt to operationalise Clause 6 of the Assam Accord** since its inception.
- The **recommendations** will be **applicable only** in the districts of the **Brahmaputra Valley** and not in the three districts of Barak Valley and the Sixth Schedule areas in order to avoid stirring regional or ethnic tensions in these sensitive regions.
 - The three **districts of Barak Valley** in Assam are: **Cachar, Karimganj,**

and Hailakandi

- **Sixth Schedule areas of Assam consist of Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong and Bodoland Territorial Region.**

About Assam Accord

- The Assam Accord was a **Memorandum of Settlement (MoS)**, signed on **August 15, 1985**, that brought an end to **six-year-long violent anti-foreigner or Assam movement (1979-85)**.
- It was **signed by the Centre** and the **Assam government** with the **All Assam Student Union (AASU)** and the **All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad**, which had spearheaded the Assam Movement.
 - The **accord was signed** under **Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministership**.
- At the core of the Assam Accord was the **"Foreigners Issue"** in **Clause 5** of the MoS.
 - The **Clause 5 set March 24, 1971**, as a **cut-off**, anyone who had come to Assam before midnight on that date would be an Indian citizen, while those who had come after would be dealt with as foreigners.
 - The same cut-off was later used in updating the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** for Assam.
- To implement the various Clauses of Assam Accord a new Department has been established in the name of **"Implementation of Assam Accord Department"** during the year **1986**.
- But **no serious attempts were made to implement the recommendation of the accord**.
- **Clause 6 of the Assam Accord** states that appropriate constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards will be provided to protect cultural, social and linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

Collegium System

Syllabus: GS II: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Why In the News?

The Supreme Court has recently ruled that the high court chief justice cannot individually reconsider the Judge's appointment and it can only be done by the High Court Collegium acting collectively.

What is the Collegium System?

- It is the way through which all **judicial appointments/transfers** of the **judges** of the **Supreme Court** and **high court** take place.
- It is **neither mentioned** in the **constitution** nor a **specific law** is **promulgated** by **Parliament**, it is evolved through the judgements of Supreme Court.
- The **collegium system** was **laid down** by a nine-judge Bench in Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association vs Union of India (1993), commonly known as the **Second Judges Case**.

Structure of Collegium System

- The collegium of the Supreme Court is a **five-member body**, headed by the incumbent Chief Justice of India (CJI) and **comprises** the other **four senior most judges** of the court.
- A **High Court collegium** is led by the incumbent Chief Justice and **two other senior most judges** of that court.
 - However, the **high court collegium** only **sends the recommendation to the Supreme Court collegium** on judicial appointments.
- The **composition** of the **collegium** **keeps changing**, and its **members** **serve** only for the **time they occupy** their **positions** of **seniority** on the Bench before they retire.

Role of Government in the Appointment of judges through Collegium system

- The ruling of the **Second Judges Case** made the **recommendations** of the **SC collegium** binding on the **Centre**, and gave the power to **appoint/transfer judges** of the **higher judiciary** to the **judiciary**
- While the **government** can **delay** the judges **appointments**, it **cannot reject** the **collegium's choice**
- Thus, **the Government's role** is **limited** to getting an **enquiry conducted** by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) if a lawyer is to be elevated as a judge in a High Court or the Supreme Court.

Constitutional Provision related to appointment of judges in higher judiciary

1. Article 124(2)

- It **deals** with the **appointment** of the **judges** of the **Supreme Court** by the **President**.
 - The Chief justice is appointed by the President after consultation with such judges of the Supreme Court and high courts as he deems necessary.
 - The other judges are appointed by the President after consultation with the CJI and such other judges of the Supreme Court and high courts as he deems necessary.
 - The consultation with the CJI is obligatory in the case of appointment of a judge other than CJI.

2. Article 217

- It **deals** with the **appointment** of the **judges** of the **high court** by the **President**.
- The chief justice is appointed by the President after consultation with the chief justice of India and the governor of the state concerned.
- For appointment of other judges, the chief justice of the concerned high court is also consulted.
- In case of a common high court for two or more states, the governors of all the states concerned are consulted by the President.

Issues with collegium system

- Due to the absence of an official mechanism and secretariat the collegium system is criticized for its **lack of transparency and opaqueness**.
- It is seen as a **closed-door affair** with **no prescribed norms** regarding eligibility criteria, or even the selection procedure.
- The collegium system is sometimes blamed for creating **tussles between the judiciary and the executive**.
- The collegium system is also held responsible for the **slow pace of judicial appointments**.
- The appointment procedure under collegium system is often criticized, for being inclined towards **“upper class male elite”** and for having **inadequate representation of women and economically weak sections**.
 - Only three out of the 33 judges (12%) currently serving are women in the Supreme Court and in high court women judges account for only 11% of HC judges.

Justice M N Venkatachaliah Commission

- It was **constituted** to **examine** whether there was a **need** to **change** the **collegium system**.
- It recommended for the constitution of **National Judicial Appointment Commission (NJAC) consisting** of the **CJI** and **two senior most judges** of the **Supreme Court**, the **Law Minister** of India, and an **eminent person** from the public, to be chosen by the President in consultation with the CJI.
- Consequently in 2014, with the **99th CAA 2014**, **NJAC** replaced the **collegium system**.
- However, the Supreme Court has declared both the 99th **CAA** and **NJAC** as **unconstitutional** as it undermines the independence of judiciary and violates the Basic structure of the constitution.

Way forward

- Judiciary needs to identify the core areas which need to be improved such as transparency, an eligibility criteria, a secretariat to assist the collegium and dealing with complaints against persons being considered for appointment.
- The collegium has to be receptive to suggestions from responsible members of the lawyer community.
- Regional balance is maintained with adequate representation, including women should be ensured.

Q. The Collegium system is often criticized as “opaque and non-accountable”. In the light of this statement discuss the issues involved in the collegium system of India. **(10 Marks/150 Words)**

Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)

Syllabus: GS Paper III: Indian Economy

Why in the News?

The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) has been awarded the prestigious Gold Award under the category "Application of Emerging Technologies for Providing Citizen-Centric Services" in the National Awards for e-Governance (NAeG) during the 27th National Conference on e-Governance (NCeG).

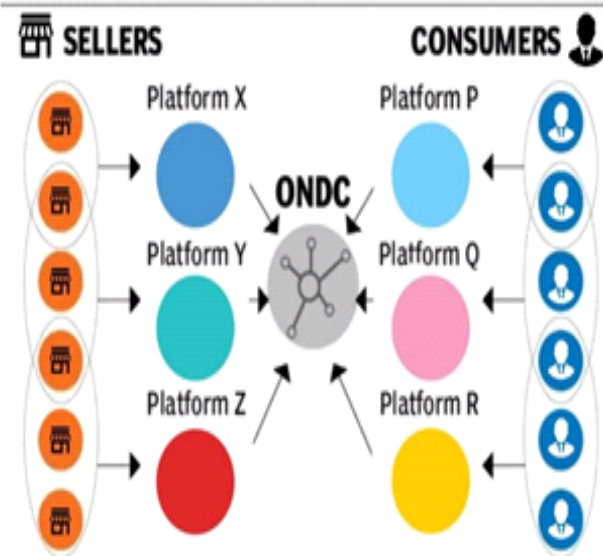
About Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)

- ONDC is a **key building block** of India's globally renowned **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** and acts as a bridge between public service delivery and technological enablement of the retail trade sector at large.
- ONDC utilizes and has deployed a unique approach towards **massifying e-commerce** i.e. deployment of technological led interventions.
- The ONDC is **modeled** around the **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)**.
 - The UPI allows people to send or receive money irrespective of the payment platforms on which they are registered.
- Similarly, **ONDC**, is an **open network** that **allows sellers** to voluntarily **display their products and services** across **all participating apps and platforms**.
- It **doesn't require buyers and sellers** to **use the same platform** to complete a transaction.
- For instance, under ONDC, a buyer registered on Amazon may directly purchase goods from a seller who sells on Flipkart.
- ONDC was **conceptualized** by the

Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

- ONDC is now enabling more than **12 million orders per month**, spread across categories ranging from fashion to electronics.
- Recently, **ONDC** crossed another **milestone** of having over **6 lakh sellers** across India live on the network.

Transactions Across Platforms



Objective of ONDC

- **Democratize** and **unbundle** the e-commerce ecosystem.
- To **provide alternatives** to proprietary e-commerce sites.
- To **enable various platforms** (big or small) to connect and **operate**.
- **Create** a more **inclusive** and **interconnected digital commerce** ecosystem.
- To **benefit both buyers and sellers**.

About Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)

Significance of ONDC	Challenges of ONDC
Networking effects over time tend to create virtuous cycles of growth like in the case of UPI.	ONDC is a complex ecosystem to implement, unlike UPI.
Democratization of the digital commerce space has reduced channel costs for all players.	Switching the customer base from the major e-commerce player will be difficult.
Increase transparency and accountability .	Lack of clarity on addressing customer complaints and returns.
Increase customer choices .	Growth in the seller base will not necessarily improve buyer experience on the network.
Levels the playing field .	Network participants may not make significant market development investments initially.
Widen the digital market access for/ MSMEs and small traders.	Attaining critical mass will be difficult as buyer and seller sides are disconnected.
Lower entry barriers to promote competition and in turn market growth.	It may take years before the network effect gains significant momentum.
Promotes innovation and competition .	Dominant e-commerce players like Amazon and Flipkart have not joined ONDC yet.

Way Forward

- The Government should provide a **simplified digital space** for e-commerce, in order to compete with the major e-commerce platforms.
- Proper **digital education policy** should be created, that takes into account various languages and user-friendly interfaces for the benefit of the consumers as well as sellers.
- An **adoption campaign** should be undertaken to bring over small sellers to the platform.
- **Proper Grievance Redressal Mechanism** should be provided to address various platform related issues.

Other Open Networks of India

- **Open Government Data Platform (OGD):** It is an initiative by the Government of India to provide open access to a wide range of government datasets.
- **OpenStack India:** OpenStack is an open-source cloud computing platform that enables organizations to build and manage private and public clouds.
- **Open Wi-Fi:** The Open Wi-Fi project is an initiative by the Indian government to provide free public Wi-Fi access in various locations across the country.
- **Open API Framework:** It is an initiative by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to enable standardized and secure APIs (Application Programming Interface) for interoperability among different payment service providers.

Q. The Open Network for Digital Commerce is set to break new ground in India's digital commerce ecosystem. In this context, discuss the challenges in promoting the platform and suggest suitable measures also. **(250 Words /15 Marks)**

Impact of Arctic Sea ice on Indian monsoon

Syllabus: GS Paper I: Indian Climate

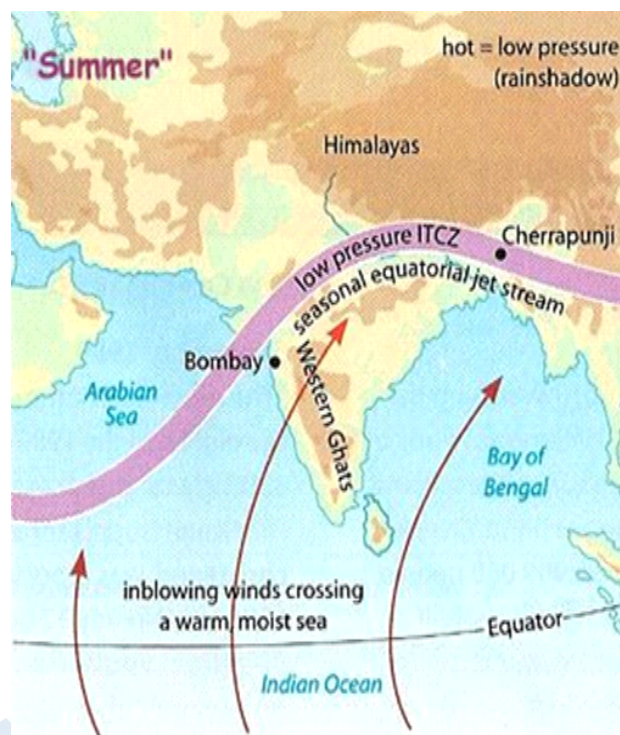
Why in the News?

A recent study has found that seasonal changes in the Arctic Sea ice affect the Indian monsoon as well.

What is the Indian Summer Monsoon Rainfall?

- The Indian summer monsoon rainfall (ISMR) over the Indian subcontinent, from **July to September** (highest rains recorded in July-August), is one of the most prominent monsoon systems in the world.
- In **summer months**, sunlight **warms** the Central Asian and Indian **landmass** more and **faster** than the **surrounding ocean**.
 - This creates a **low pressure** band at the **Tropic of Cancer** called the **intertropical convergence zone (ITCZ)**.
- **Southeast Trade winds** are subsequently **deflected** towards the **Indian landmass** due to the **Coriolis force** and the **low pressure** after they cross the equator.
 - As the **trade winds blow** over the **Arabian Sea**, they **pick up moisture** and **deposit** that as **rain over India**.
- Over the landmass, the **southwest monsoon splits** into **two branches** i.e the **Arabian Sea branch** and the **Bay of Bengal branch**.
 - The **Arabian Sea** branch brings **rain** to the **west coast** while the other arm travels to the Bay of Bengal and **brings rain** to **India's eastern and northeastern parts**.
- The arms finally converge over **Punjab** and **Himachal Pradesh** as the **Arabian**

Sea arm moves inward and the **Bay of Bengal arm** moves along the **Himalaya**.



Complexity of the Indian Summer Monsoon Rainfall

- The ISMR is much more complex than scientists first anticipated.
- Over the past two decades, climate models have demonstrated that **surface temperatures** in the **Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans** impact the ISMR.
- Additionally, the **circum-global teleconnection (CGT)** has also been found to **play a significant role** in **influencing the monsoon**.

Circum-global teleconnection (CGT) is a large-scale atmospheric wave in the mid-latitudes.

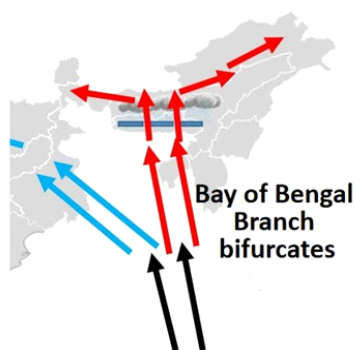
The Bay of Bengal Branch of ISMR further bifurcates into two parts due to the influence of Himalayas and thermal low in northwest India.

1. Northeastward Branch:

- This branch moves northward and northeastward from the Bay of Bengal.
- It travels over the northeastern states of India, including Assam.
- The interaction of these monsoon winds with the complex topography of the region, such as the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, further intensifies the rainfall, often leading to heavy and prolonged monsoon showers.

1. Northwestward Branch:

- The other branch moves northwestward across the Indo-Gangetic plains, bringing rainfall to areas in eastern and northern India.



Impact of Arctic Sea ice on the Indian monsoon

- The study reveals that **less sea ice** in the **central Arctic** leads to **lower rain** in **western/peninsular India** but **more rain** in **central/northern India**.
- On the other hand, lower sea ice levels in the upper latitudes, particularly in the **Barents-Kara Sea region**, delay the monsoon's onset and render it more unpredictable.

Barents-Kara Sea region encompassing the Hudson Bay, the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Sea of Okhotsk.

- When **sea ice levels** in the Central Arctic **increase**, the heat transferred from the ocean to the atmosphere **triggers** a **cyclonic circulation** at slightly lower latitudes, like in the North Atlantic.
- This strengthens the **Rossby waves**, which results in **high pressure** over **northwest India** and **low pressure** over the **Mediterranean region**.

Rossby waves are a fast-flowing stream of air, moving west to east, created by the earth's rotation and variations in temperature and weather systems.

- This in turn **strengthens** the **Asian jet stream**, over the Caspian Sea, **causing** the **subtropical easterly jet** to **shift northward**.

Subtropical easterly jet is a jet stream blowing over the Indian subcontinent during summer,

- It **brings more rain** over **western and peninsular India**.
- On the other hand, as **sea ice levels decrease** in the region, heat rises from the Barents-Kara Sea, **creating an anticyclonic circulation** (calm, clear skies) over northwest Europe.
- This **disturbs** the **upper atmospheric region** over subtropical Asia and India and **promotes high rainfall** over **northeastern India** while leaving central and northwest regions of the country without much.

Role played by climate change

- Climate change, by accelerating the reduction of Arctic sea ice, exacerbates the variability and unpredictability of the ISMR.
- **Lower Arctic sea ice** can lead to more frequent and severe **droughts** in some regions while causing excessive rainfall and flooding in others.
- Moreover the study highlighted the **urgent need to expand research** on **climate dynamics** and for scientists to prepare more accurate forecasts of the ever-changing monsoons.

About Indian Monsoon

- The Indian Monsoon is basically characterized by **seasonal reversal of wind** where the south west monsoon is followed by northeast monsoon.
- Although, monsoon brings heavy rains to the Indian subcontinent, there are some variation such as:
 - The **duration** of the monsoon **decreases** from **South to North**.
 - In **northern plains**, the amount of rainfall **decreases** from **East to West**.

Difference between South West Monsoon and North East Monsoon

Aspects	South-West Monsoon	North-East Monsoon
Months	June to September	October to December
Wind Direction	Southwest to Northeast	Northeast to Southwest
Source of Moisture	Indian Ocean	Bay of Bengal
Regions Receiving Rainfall	Most of India	South Eastern Coast of India, particularly Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu
Type of Rainfall	Heavy Rainfall	Moderate Rainfall

Centre-Tripura Sign Peace Accord

Syllabus: GS Paper III: Internal Security

Why in the News?

A Memorandum of Settlement was signed between the Union government, Tripura government, National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF).

Key Highlights of Agreement

- Under the agreement **NLFT & ATTF** have **agreed to give up violence, lay down arms** and ammunition and **disband** their armed **organizations**.
- The armed cadre of both the organizations have also agreed to participate in the peaceful democratic process established by the law and maintain the integrity of the country.
- **Centre** has **approved** a special **package of Rs 250 crore** to support the rebels' transition.

The peace accord marked the end of a 35-year-long insurgency in Tripura.

Background of Insurgency in Tripura

- **1967:** Armed struggle in Tripura dates back to 1967, when a small outfit called **Sengkrak** took up arms.
- **1971:** Formation of the **Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS)**, led to the thickening of insurgency in Tripura.
- **1981:** Establishment of the **Tripura National Volunteers (TNV)**, escalated the insurgency movement.
- **1989-90:** Formation of the **National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)** in 1989 with its armed wing, the **National Holy Army** and creation of the **All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)** in 1990, further intensified the insurgent activities.
 - NLFT and ATTF came up with a secessionist agenda, and disputed the merger of the kingdom of

Tripura with the Indian Union.

- They demanded sovereignty for Tripura, deportation of “illegal migrants,” the implementation of the Tripura merger agreement and the restoration of land to the tribal people under the Tripura Land Reform Act, 1960.

- **1990-1995:** Insurgency remains low-key.
- **1996-2004:** Insurgency grows significantly in extent and magnitude.

Reasons for Insurgency in Tripura

- **Demographic Changes Due to Illegal Migration:**
 - Large-scale migration from Bangladesh, especially post-1971, altered the demographic balance, marginalizing indigenous tribal communities.
 - From 63.77 % in 1881, the population of the tribals in Tripura was down to 31.80 % by 2011.
- **Loss of Land and Identity:**
 - Encroachment on tribal lands by migrants led to economic displacement and threatened the cultural identity of the indigenous tribes.
- **Disputed Merger with India:**
 - Insurgent groups contested the merger of the Kingdom of Tripura with India, viewing it as an infringement on their sovereignty.
- **Economic Marginalization:**
 - Economic policies were seen as favoring non-tribal populations, deepening economic disparities, lead the unemployed youths to join armed movements

- **Political and Social Exclusion:**
 - Limited political representation and social exclusion of tribal communities fueled resentment.
- **Cultural and Religious Tensions:**
 - The influx of migrants led to cultural and religious tensions between indigenous tribes and settlers.
- **Preference for Armed Struggle:**
 - Moreover, the ethnic communities perceive armed resistance as more effective than non-violent methods for drawing attention to their issues.
- **Logistical Advantages**
 - The rough terrain and porous borders (860-km) with Bangladesh provided logistical advantages and safe havens for insurgents.
- **Existence of External Support:**
 - Support from the Bangladesh establishment, external intelligence agencies, and networking with other insurgent outfits further bolstered the insurgency.

- **Northeast India** is the **most volatile** and **insurgency affected place** in the country after Kashmir.
- The **region is connected with 5 countries** — **Bhutan** (Assam, Sikkim & Arunachal), **Bangladesh** (Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya & Tripura) **Myanmar** (Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur & Mizoram), **China** (Sikkim & Arunachal) and **Nepal** (Sikkim) — by a 5,182 kilometer international border.
- The region, however, connects to India only through a narrow and tenuous land corridor measuring merely 22 kilometers (14 miles).
- **Reasons for Insurgency in North Eastern Region:**
 - The North East of India was **historically neglected** in terms of integration and development during both pre-British and British colonial rule.
 - The **lack of economic opportunities** has driven unemployed youth towards armed movements as a means of livelihood and expression of grievances.
 - Initially the **insurgency** in the northeast **enjoyed popular support** as they voiced genuine grievances of the people, like poor governance, alienation, lack of development, and indifference from the central government.
 - The **existence of external assistance**, including support from neighboring countries, has sustained and fueled insurgent activities in the region.

Peace Process in North Eastern Region

- Government has signed **12 important agreements** in recent times in the **North Eastern Region**, of which there have been **3 agreements** in **Tripura** so far.
- For instance, AFSPA from Tripura lifted in 2015
- Other agreements in NER includes
 - **NLFT(SD) Agreement (2019)**- Tripura
 - **Bru Agreement (2020)**- Tripura
 - **Bodo Accord (2020)**- Assam
 - **Karbi Accord (2021)**- Assam
 - **Adivasi Peace Accord (2022)**- Assam
 - **Dimasa peace accord (2023)**- Assam

- **United National Liberation Front (UNLF) accord (2023)**- Manipur
- The 2022 Assam-Meghalaya and the 2023 Assam-Arunachal Pradesh interstate boundary agreement.

Major Initiatives in North East India

- The Government of India is committed to making the North East an economic hub connecting Southeast Asia under the Act East Policy.
- The Government has spent a total amount of Rs. 2 lakh 65 thousand 513 crore from the year 2014 to March, 2021 for the development of various infrastructure projects in the North-East region.
- In comparison to the 13th Finance Commission, the 14th Finance Commission has given 251 % more Central taxes and 183 % more funds to the region.
- The budget of the DONER Ministry has also been increased by 65 % in 2019-20 as compared to 2014-15.
- In 2020, under the existing schemes of North East Council (NEC), 30 % of the allocation was earmarked for new projects.
- In the 13th Finance Commission, NEC allocated a budget of 3449 crore while in the 14th Finance Commission a budget of 5348 crore was allocated.

Tripura's success in overcoming insurgency and resolving conflict showcased that insurgency is not unsolvable. The key to addressing it lay in implementing a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy, guided by a positive mindset, strong determination, and clear vision. Effective leadership, characterized by wisdom, honesty, and credibility, played a crucial role. This approach required genuine intent, innovative responses, equitable socio-economic and infrastructure development for all communities, and well-calibrated, humane military operations. These efforts were complemented by psychological strategies aimed at transforming the mindset of those involved in the conflict.

Q. The North- East region of India has been infested with insurgency for a very long time. Analyze the major reasons for the survival of armed insurgency in this region. (UPSC 2017) (150 words/10 marks)

Reviving South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

Syllabus: GS: II: International Organisation

Why in the News?

Bangladesh's interim government's chief Advisor has recently called for the revival of the "spirit of SAARC", underlining the fact that SAARC can solve many of the problems faced by the region.

About South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

- It was **formed in 1985** as a platform for **promoting economic and cultural cooperation** among countries in the South Asian region.
- Its member States include **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**.
- Its **first summit was held on Dec 8, 1985** in **Dhaka**, which led to the **signing of the SAARC Charter** with **7 member countries** i.e **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**.
 - **Afghanistan joined Saarc** as the 8th member in **2007**.
- **SAARC summits** are usually **held biennially** and the hosting countries assume the chair.
- The **Headquarters and Secretariat** of the **block** are at **Kathmandu, Nepal** and the **chairmanship** of SAARC has been held by **Nepal since 2014**.
- Till date, **18th Summits** have been **held**. The **18th SAARC summit** held in **Kathmandu** in **2014** concluded with the adoption of the SAARC Declaration.
- SAARC collectively represents **3 % of the world's land area, 21 % of the global population, and contributes 5.21 %** (equivalent to \$4.47 trillion) to the **global economy**.

Effectiveness of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

- The Saarc has **not** been very **effective since 2016** as its biennial summits have not taken place since the last one in Kathmandu in 2014.

- The **2016 Saarc Summit** was to be **held in Islamabad** but was called off after the Uri terrorist attack in India,
- Several countries including **Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Afghanistan** also **declined to participate** in the Islamabad meet.
- The Indian external affairs minister recently stated that unlike the Saarc, cooperation under the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) is moving ahead.

The various South Asian leaders highlight the urgent need for SAARC to become a more active and functional body to address regional challenges, including security concerns, economic cooperation, and humanitarian crises such as the Rohingya situation.

Reasons for SAARC's Failures

- **Conflicts Between Member States:**
 - Ongoing conflicts between the member countries have hindered cooperation and consensus within SAARC. For instance:
 - India-Pakistan has a history of conflict and mistrust.
 - In 2019 India released a new map in which Nepal claimed that Limpyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani areas, shown under India's territory, lie within the Nepalese territory.

- **Bilateral Issues Overriding Regional Goals:**
 - Member countries often prioritize their bilateral disputes over regional cooperation, limiting SAARC's effectiveness.
 - For instance, Pakistan used the platform as a space to corner India and gang up with the smaller countries.
 - **Big Brother hegemony:**
 - India dominates the region in economic and political sphere, which creates resentment among smaller member states who feel overshadowed.
 - **Lack of Strong Leadership and Commitment:**
 - The absence of strong, committed leadership within SAARC has resulted in a lack of direction and motivation to achieve its objectives.
 - **Inefficient Structure:**
 - The unanimous decision-making approach and lack of dispute solving mechanism has slowed down the implementation of initiatives in SAARC.
 - **Economic Disparities Among Member States:**
 - The wide economic gap between member countries has created challenges in forming cohesive economic policies and initiatives.
 - **Internal Conflicts and Political Instability:**
 - Many of the SAARC countries, such as Afghanistan and Bangladesh are facing political instability, which hinders their ability to engage meaningfully in the cooperation.
 - **Overlapping Membership in Other Regional Organizations:**
 - Many SAARC members are also part of other regional organizations, such as BIMSTEC, which often dilutes their focus and commitment to SAARC.
 - **Failure to Address Non-Traditional Security Issues:**
 - SAARC has been slow to address non-traditional security issues like terrorism, climate change, and pandemics, which require collective regional action.
 - **External Powers:**
 - The involvement of external powers like China (Belt and Road Initiative) and the United States has complicated SAARC's internal dynamics.
 - **Limited Economic Integration:**
 - South Asia is one of the least economically integrated regions in the world and moreover there are no free trade agreements between the SAARC members.
- Need for SAARC Revival**
- **Impetus for India's Act East Policy:**
 - Reviving SAARC can link South Asian economies with Southeast Asia, boosting economic integration and benefiting India, particularly in the northeast region.
 - **Enhance the geostrategic significance:**
 - SAARC can leverage Southeast Asia's strategic position between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and its prominent maritime character.
 - **Addressing Common Issues:**
 - SAARC countries share issues like poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, and low GDP. Reviving SAARC can facilitate collaborative solutions to uplift socio-economic conditions across the region.
 - **Addressing Non-Traditional Security Issues:**
 - The region faces some common non-traditional security issues such as climate change, natural disasters, food & energy security, and mass migration and reviving of SAARC can address those issues.

- **Geostrategic Balance:**
 - In the wake of China's growing influence in South Asia through initiatives like BRI, Himalayan QUAD, pearls of string etc it has become crucial for India to revitalize SAARC at the earliest.
- **Enhancing South Asia's Global Influence:**
 - A revived SAARC can play a pivotal role in advancing South Asia's interests on the world stage like UN, WTO, UNFCCC, by leveraging the collective voice of the region.
- **Impetus to Economic Integration:**
 - A revived SAARC can facilitate the enactment of South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) for greater intra-regional trade, investment, and economic cooperation.
- **Addressing Security Challenges:**
 - A stronger SAARC could coordinate joint efforts to address these issues more effectively through regional initiatives and disaster response mechanisms.

How will the Reviving of SAARC benefit the Northeast region of India?

Northeast India shares borders with several SAARC countries, including **Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal**. This geographical proximity makes NE a strategic region for regional cooperation and development.

- **Enhanced Connectivity:**
 - Improved regional integration through SAARC could lead to better transport and trade routes, linking Northeast India with neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, facilitating easier movement of goods and people.
- **Economic Growth:**
 - Increased trade and investment opportunities could boost the local economy, especially in sectors like agriculture and handicrafts, which are vital to the region.
- **Infrastructure Development:**
 - Regional cooperation could attract more infrastructure projects, such as the development of a trans-Asian highway connecting Northeast India to Southeast Asia
- **Cultural Exchange and Tourism:**
 - Revived SAARC initiatives could promote cultural exchange and tourism, highlighting the unique cultural heritage of Northeast India and attracting visitors from across South Asia.
- **Strategic Significance:**
 - Strengthening SAARC could help address security concerns by fostering greater regional cooperation on issues like border management and cross-border insurgency, enhancing stability in the region.
- **Skill Development and Employment:**
 - Regional collaboration could lead to skill development programs and employment opportunities, addressing unemployment and helping to retain talent in the region.

Way Forward

- Member states should take inspiration from the European Union, where member have overcome historical differences, to prioritize regional cooperation over bilateral conflicts.
- Multilateral dialogue and confidence-building measures should be initiated to ensure smooth functioning of SAARC.
- SAARC's decision-making process, which requires unanimous agreement, should be revised to prevent delays and obstacles that arise when trying to make important decisions.
- Each member state should fully respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of other members. The principle of "non-interference in internal affairs," as stated in the SAARC Charter, should be actively practiced, not just stated.



Q. "Increasing cross-border terrorist attacks in India and growing interference in the internal affairs of several member-states by Pakistan are not conducive for the future of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)." Explain with suitable examples. (UPSC 2014) (250 words/15 marks)

India-Singapore

Syllabus: GS: II: International Relations

Why in the News?

India and Singapore recently elevated their ties to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership during the India PM's visit to Singapore.

Key Highlight of the Visit

- India and Singapore announced **four agreements** on **semiconductors, digital cooperation, health care and medical research, and education and skill development.**
- The two countries **backed for an open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region** that fosters free trade and peaceful resolution of differences in line with international law.
- Both the leaders agreed on further **expanding trade and investment flows** between the two countries and also called for **acceleration in green corridor projects.**

About the Four Key Agreement

- **MoU on Education and Skill Development:**
 - Both sides will cooperate on technical and vocational education and training and promote collaboration between higher education institutions
- **MoU on Healthcare and Medical Research:**
 - It envisages cooperation in disease surveillance, pandemic preparedness and prevention of communicable diseases.
- **MoU on Cooperation in Digital Technology:**
 - It will encourage greater interoperability between the digital economies of the two countries and build on earlier work, such as the

linking of UPI and Singapore's Pay Now in 2023.

- Singapore was the first country with which India launched the UPI person-to-person payment facility.
- Main areas of cooperation under this MoU are:
 - Governance frameworks for data flows
 - Rules for data protection
 - Digital utilities and digital public infrastructure
 - Business-to-business links
 - Enhancing cybersecurity (CERT-In and Singapore Cyber Emergency Response Team).
- **MoU on Semiconductor Ecosystem Partnership:**
 - It envisages cooperation to support India's growing semiconductor industry while facilitating Singapore's companies and supply chains to enter India's market.
 - It will also create a platform to connect and strengthen the complementary semiconductor ecosystems of the two sides.
 - A parallel business-to-business Cooperation Forum, led by India's Semiconductor Mission and Enterprise Singapore, will be established to catalyze private sector partnerships.

Key areas of Cooperation

<p>Diplomatic relations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India was one of the first countries to recognize Singapore in 1965. India-Singapore relations were elevated to Strategic Partnership during the visit of the Indian PM to Singapore in 2015.
<p>Economic Cooperation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singapore is currently India's largest trade partner within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and the 6th largest trade partner globally. Bilateral trade expanded after the conclusion of CECA in 2005 from USD 6.7 billion in FY 2004-05 to USD 35.6 billion in 2023-24. In FY 2023-24 Singapore was the largest source of FDI into India, and is among the largest sources of External Commercial Borrowings and FPI.
<p>Strategic Partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singapore is considered to be an "important anchor" for India's decade-old Act East policy Moreover, its location at the crossroads of major shipping routes makes it a critical hub for India's maritime trade and connectivity.
<p>S&T Cooperation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISRO has launched about 17 Singaporean satellites in the past 10 years. Singapore co-hosted the inaugural ASEAN – India Women Scientists Conclave in April 2024.
<p>People to People ties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People of Indian origin constitute about 9.1 % or around 3.5 lakhs of the resident population of 3.9 million in Singapore. This act as the "strong foundation" of bilateral relations
<p>Cultural cooperation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are regular cultural exchanges in the spheres of performing arts, theatre, museum exchanges, art, languages, and youth exchanges between India and Singapore. India's first Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre will soon be opened in Singapore.
<p>International Cooperation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singapore has joined India's initiative like the International Solar Alliance and Global Biofuel Alliance. Singapore was ASEAN Country Coordinator for India for period 2021-24, during which India-ASEAN relations were upgraded to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Both the countries are part of multilateral groups like IORA, NAM and Commonwealth.

About Singapore

- Singapore is a **city-state** located at the **southern tip** of the **Malay Peninsula**, north of the Equator.
- It consists of the diamond-shaped Singapore Island and some 60 small islets.
- The **main island** is **separated** from **Peninsular Malaysia** to the north by **Johor Strait**.
- The **southern limits** of the **state run through Singapore Strait**, where outliers of the Riau-Lingga Archipelago—which forms a part of Indonesia.
- Singapore is the largest port in Southeast Asia and one of the busiest in the world.
- It **dominates** the **Strait of Malacca**, which connects the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea.



India and Singapore's relationship, rooted in a shared history and mutual respect, has strengthened and expanded across various sectors over the years. The recent elevation of their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership marks a significant milestone in their deepening cooperation.

AWARDS

National Awards for e-Governance

- The **Open Network for Digital Commerce** (ONDC) has been **awarded** the prestigious **Gold Award** under the category "Application of Emerging Technologies for Providing Citizen-Centric Services" in the **National Awards for e-Governance (NAeG)** during the 27th National Conference on e-Governance (NCEG) hosted in Mumbai, Maharashtra.
- The National Awards for e-Governance **by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG)** is recognized amongst the most competitive and prestigious digital governance recognition in the country.
- The **objective** of the award is to **recognise and promote excellence** in implementation of **e-Governance initiatives** and to **encourage innovation** in successful e-Governance solutions.
- The NAeG are conferred under different categories each year during the National Conference on E-Governance (NCEG).
- The **Conference is organized** every year by the **DARPG** in collaboration with the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** and the respective State Government hosting the annual event.

DEFENCE

Agni 4

- India's defence capabilities received a significant boost with the successful launch of the Agni-4 ballistic missile from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur, Odisha.
- The launch successfully validated all operational and technical parameters and was conducted under the aegis of the Strategic Forces Command, a part of India's Nuclear Command Authority (NCA).
- It is a **two-staged, solid fueled surface-to-surface missile** and can be **fired from a road-mobile launcher**.
- The **range** increased even further with

Agni-4, which can hit as far as **4,000 km**.

- The **20-metre-long** missile can **carry a payload of 1,000 kg**.
- The Agni-IV uses **indigenous-built ring laser gyroscope** with **Micro Inertial Navigation System (MINGS)** which enables the missile to hit within 100 metres of its target.
- The Agni-4 missile was earlier called Agni-2 Prime.
- The Agni missiles are **designed and developed** by the **DRDO**.

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Suicide Prevention Day

- Every year, the World Suicide Prevention Day is observed on **September 10** to spread **awareness about suicide prevention, reduce stigma and help people**.
- The **International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP)** organised this day along with the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, in **2003**.
- The issue of suicides is a major challenge as more than **7,00,000 people** take their own lives every year across the world.
- The triennial **theme of World Suicide Prevention Day 2024-2026** is "Changing the Narrative on Suicide" with the call to action "Start the Conversation".

MISCELLANEOUS

Phrynarachne decipiens

- Researchers have **discovered** the **bird dung crab spider** (Phrynarachne decipiens) in Assam. The Phrynarachne decipiens, better known as the bird dung or bird-dropping crab spider, was **known** to be **distributed** in **Malaysia** and **Indonesia's** Java and Sumatra.
- It has been **recorded** for the **first time** in the **country** from Assam's Sonapur in the Kamrup (Metropolitan) district and the Chirang Reserve Forest in the Kokrajhar district.
- The **eight-eyed bird dung crab spider** was measured at **13.14 mm long**.
- The spider is usually seen lying motionless 1-2 ft above the ground on the upper side of broad leaves.
- The **chalky white colour** of the spider and **whitish deposition** (its web) on the leaves, looking like bird excreta, make it very difficult to be sighted

Three New Varieties of Ginger

- Researchers have discovered three new varieties of ginger with a distinctive appearance resembling graceful ballerinas.
- These **newly discovered species**, collectively named "**dancing girls**" **ginger species**, were **found** in **Mizoram** and **Meghalaya**.
- These plants **belong** to the **Globba genus**, which is **famous** for its **ornamental appeal** and delicate flowers.
 - **Globba** is the **fourth largest genus** in the **ginger family** (Zingiberaceae), encompassing approximately 136 species.

Law Commission

- The **government** has **notified** the **constitution** of the **23rd Law**

Commission of India with effect from September 1.

- The tenure of the **previous Law Commission chaired by** former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice **Ritu Raj Awasthi ended on August 31**.
- The Law Commission is a **non-statutory commission** formed by the **Union Ministry of Law** and Justice to help the government **review** the **functioning of laws**.
- It also **suggests repealing obsolete legislation**, and **makes recommendations** on matters referred to by the government.
- The commission is usually **chaired** by a **retired judge** of the **Supreme Court/ High Court**, and has legal scholars as members.
 - **Serving judges** can also be **appointed** to the commission.
- The **22 Law Commissions appointed** since **Independence** have submitted a total 289 reports to the government.
- The recommendations of law Commissions are **non binding** for the government to accept.
- However, the commissions' recommendations have over the decades led to the enactment of important legislation including the CrPC, 1973 and the RTE Act, 2009.

Chief Minister's Secretariat

- Assam Chief Minister recently inaugurated the **Chief Minister's Secretariat in Dibrugarh**.
- By December of the coming year, a segment of the Assam Secretariat would be established in Dibrugarh.
- The initiative is **aimed at improving governance and equal development**.

- The new office will **monitor state and central schemes, expedite grievance redressal,** and **enhance administrative connectivity** across **nine districts** i.e. *Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Majuli, Jorhat, and Golaghat.*
- The Chief Minister also announced that the **flag hoisting ceremony** on **Independence Day** would **continue** to be **held** in **Guwahati**, while **Republic Day** celebrations would now **take place** in **Dibrugarh.**

Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

- In a bid to protect the biodiversity of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, the National Green Tribunal has called for an investigation into allegations of illegal industrial activities encroaching on the eco-sensitive zone.
- Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary is situated on the **southern bank** of the **Brahmaputra** in **Morigaon district** of Assam.
- Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary is known for holding the **highest density of Greater One Horned Rhinoceros** in the country.
- This wildlife sanctuary was **established** in **1998** with a **total area** of **48.81 square kilometres.**
- The Sanctuary consists of the **Rajamayong Reserve Forest** and **Pobitora Reserve Forest.**
- It harbors several species including **Leopard, Capped Langur, Porcupine, Pangolin, Wild Water Buffalo, Monitor Lizard, Wild Boar** etc.
- The **Brahmaputra River** forms a natural **boundary** to the premises of the sanctuary on the **north**, while the **Garanga Beel** offers a natural **boundary** to its **south.**

- **Pobitora** also holds the **distinction** of being the **source population** of the **Indian Rhinoceros Vision, 2020 (IRV).**
- **Rhinos** were **translocated** from **Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary** and **introduced** into **Manas National Park** as part of the IRV 2020 program.

New Sub-Districts of Assam

- The Assam Cabinet recently approved the operationalization of 39 new sub-districts, which will be rolled out in the first phase from October 2 to October 8, 2024.
- Under this initiative each of Assam's districts will see new sub-districts established, with some prominent regions receiving multiple administrative units.
- Each sub-district will be **overseen** by an **Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC)** and **two Assistant Commissioners.**
- This initiative **aims to decentralize administration, streamline services, and improve accessibility for citizens** at the grassroots level.
- The Cabinet has also finalized the **establishment** of centrally located **headquarters** for each **sub-district**, ensuring easy access to administrative services for the local population.
- Additionally, the Cabinet approved the **creation** of a **new Circle** and **sub-district** in **Behali.**

Districts	Sub-districts	Districts	Sub-districts
Kamrup Metro	Dispur, Demoria, North Guwahati, Jalukbari	Biswanath	Gohpur, Behali
Darrang	Sipajhar, Dalgaon	Lakhimpur	Dhakuakhana
Morigaon	Jagiroad, Lahorighat	Dhemaji	Jonai
Hojai	Lumding	Tinsukia	Margherita, Sadiya, Doom Dooma
Sonitpur	Dhekiajuli, Noduar	Sivasagar	Nazira, Demow
Dibrugarh	Khuwang, Duliajan, Tingkhong, Naharkatia	Jorhat	Titabor
Charaideo	Mohmara	Golaghat	Bokakhat, Sarupathar, Dergaon
Karimganj	Patharkandi, Ramkrishna Nagar	Cachar	Lakhipur
Kampur	Rangia	Goalpara	Goalpara West
Nagaon	Kaliabor, Roha	Dhubri	Bilasipara, Golakganj
Bongaigaon	Abhayapuri		

Morung and Dekachang

- The new education policy 2020 plans to revive the knowledge system of North East India like Morung and Dekachang/ Chamadi.
- The **Morung** which was the **central institution** of the **Nagas** during the early period where young men were imparted knowledge on the past glories, customs, traditions and warfare.
- It served as a guard house of the village against enemies. It was also a place of feasts of merit and other religious ceremonies.
- The coming of the British and the spread of Christianity slowly led to the withdrawal of the Morung from the

Naga society which was once a significant aspect of the Naga culture and tradition.

- **Dekachang/Chamadi** is a traditional **concept** of the **Tiwa community** of Assam.
 - It serves as a recreational point for the youth.
 - Unfortunately, this traditional concept is almost on the verge of extinction.
 - In order to preserve this culture of the local Tiwa people and also to expose the same to the outside world, the college has built the Dekachang to serve as the boys' common room.

District At a Glance

Geography of Darrang

- Darrang is an administrative district at the center of the state, which comes under **North Bank Plain Zone (NBPZ)** of Assam
- **Geographic Area:** 1850.58 sq. km
- **Density of Population:** 586/sq. Km
- **District Boundaries:**
 - **North-** Udalguri District
 - **East-** Sonitpur & Morigaon District
 - **West-** Kamrup District
 - **South-** Kamrup Metro District
- The **river Brahmaputra** is the main river in the south of the district that flows from the east to west direction.
- Other important tributaries of the Brahmaputra are **Barnadi, Nanoi, Mangaldai, Nowanodi, Saktola, Dhansiri (N)**, which are the main River flowing through the district

History of Darrang

- The undivided Darrang district was created with effect from July 1983 with its headquarter at Mangaldai.
- The name Darrang was derived from the **Bodo word "Dourang"**, which means '**Lilabhumi**' (playground) of **Gods**.
- The name Mangaldai is, however, traced to **Mangola Devi**, the **daughter of Koch king Lakshminarayana**, who was **married to the Ahom king Pratapsingha**.
- **Ojapali** is one of the **unique forms of arts of Darrang**, which involves three art forms -Song, Dance and Drama.
- The village Patharughat of this district is famous for the historic Agrarian agitation of 1894 called the **Patharughat Ran**.

Places of Interest

- **Orang National Park:** It is also termed as a miniature Kaziranga, is located near Silbori, and on the north bank of river Brahmaputra.
 - It covers an area of 78 sq. km and is the smallest national park of Assam.
 - **Animals:** One horned Rhinoceros, Royal Bengal Tiger, Barking Deer, Elephant, Leopard, Sambar and Hogdeer, Pangolin, Civet Cat & Otter.
 - **Birds:** Both migratory and local birds. viz. Palican, Green Pigeon, Bengal Florican, Cormorant, Greylag Goose, Large Whistling Teal, Great Adjutant Stork, King Vulture.
- **Gandhi Smriti Park & Patharughat Swaheed Minar:** These are the two beautiful parks of the district.
- **Satra:** Khatara is one of the oldest Satras of Darrang District. Another Satra located here is the Dihing Satra.
- **Bar Maszid:** It is one of the oldest mosques in the District, and located at the heart of the Mangaldai Town.
- **Engil Baba's Mazaar:** The architecture is very beautifully constructed. Also Urus Mubarak is celebrated here on 5th of February every year.
- **Beels:** Batha Beel and Pukhuria Beel are two important bird watchers' places with thousands of migratory birds.
 - **Baladev Pukhuri**, located at Baldevpara, is a beel created during the reign of **King Dharma Narayana**. Today, it is serving as Govt. Fishery.
 - **Jaypal Pukhuri** is a huge Pond, known to be created during the reign of **King Jaypal**.

Q. Locate the neighboring districts surrounding Darrang district in the given map.



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