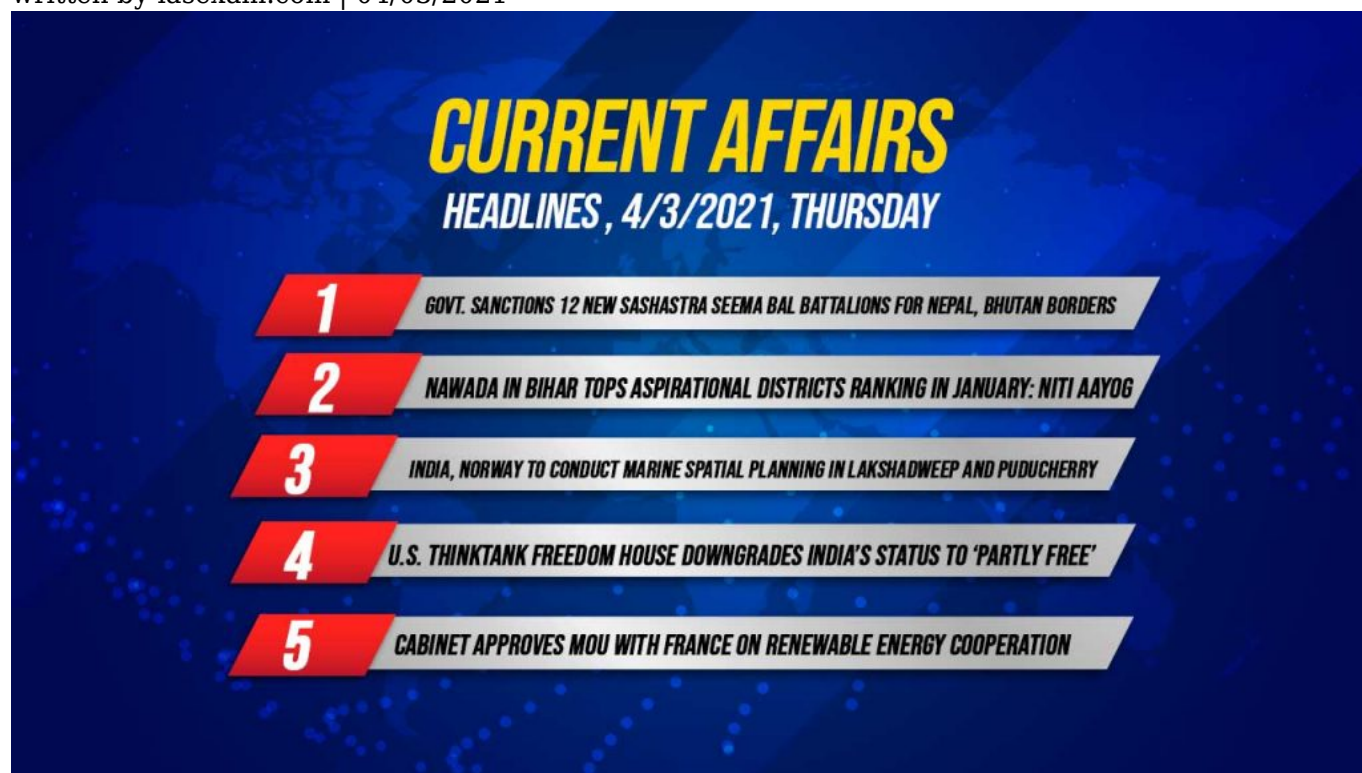


Headlines at a Glance - 4th March 2021

written by iasexam.com | 04/03/2021



Govt. sanctions 12 new Sashastra Seema Bal battalions for Nepal, Bhutan borders

The government has sanctioned a dozen fresh SSB battalions, comprising over 13,000 personnel for the Nepal and Bhutan borders guarding force, to “fortify” defences along these fronts including the tri-junction area in Sikkim that adjoins Bhutan and Tibet, officials said. Though the Union Home Ministry has denied creation of a new field frontier for the border force, it has allowed the SSB to create one out of three new sectors — responsible for the operations of about 5-6 battalions — and it is expected to come up in the Delhi-NCR region. The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), with an estimated strength of about 90,000 personnel, is the designated force to guard the open Indian fronts with Nepal (1,751 km) and Bhutan (699 km). SSB Director General (DG) Kumar Rajesh Chandra told that the 12 new battalions will be raised in phases, three units each over the next four years.

SOURCE: *The Hindu*

Nawada in Bihar tops aspirational districts ranking in January: Niti Aayog

Nawada in Bihar has topped the list of aspirational districts ranked by government think tank Niti Aayog in January. Kiphire (Nagaland) and Namsai (Arunachal Pradesh) are at the second and third positions, respectively, Niti Aayog said in a tweet on Tuesday. Hailakandi (Assam) and Chandel (Manipur) are at the fourth and fifth places, respectively. The delta rankings took into account incremental progress made by over 112 aspirational districts across six developmental areas in December 2020. Health and nutrition, education, agriculture and water resources, financial

inclusion, skill development and basic infrastructure were the development areas that were taken into consideration for the ranking. Aspirational districts programme, launched in January 2018, aims to transform districts that have shown relatively lesser progress in key social areas. The ranking of aspirational districts is done every month.

SOURCE: *The Indian Express*

India, Norway to conduct marine spatial planning in Lakshadweep and Puducherry

The Union Ministry of Earth Science on March 3 said that India and Norway have agreed to jointly work in the area of marine spatial planning in the oceanic space for the next five years. According to a press release by the ministry, the first project steering committee meeting with representatives from both nations was “successfully conducted”. The ministry added that the two countries have chartered out a plan to ensure that human activities at sea take place in an efficient, safe and sustainable manner in areas such as energy, transportation, fisheries, aquaculture and tourism. The recent agreement between the two nations is a part of the Indo-Norway Integrated Ocean Initiative under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two countries in 2019. The Indian ministry informed that Lakshadweep and Puducherry have been identified as pilot sites for the project. Further, the officials also added that the two countries have decided to extend support for sustainable ocean resources utilisation to advance economic and social development in coastal areas.

SOURCE: *Business Standard*

U.S. thinktank Freedom House downgrades India's status to 'partly free'

Washington-based noted think tank Freedom House has demoted India's freedom score from “free” to “partly free”, saying rights and civil liberties “have been eroding since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014”, specifically referring to attacks on Muslims, use of the sedition law, and the government's [coronavirus](#) response including the lockdown. India's score decreased from 71 to 67, with 100 being the ranking for the most free country, and its rank fell from 83 to 88 out of 211 countries. In its annual report, Freedom House said, “His (Modi's) Hindu nationalist government has presided over increased pressure on human rights organizations, rising intimidation of academics and journalists, and a spate of bigoted attacks — including lynchings — aimed at Muslims. The decline deepened following Modi's reelection in 2019, and the government's response to the coronavirus [pandemic](#) in 2020 featured further abuses of fundamental rights.”

SOURCE: *The Indian Express*

Cabinet approves MoU with France on renewable energy cooperation

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave ex-post facto approval to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and France on renewable energy cooperation. “The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was apprised of the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and French Republic in the field of renewable energy cooperation. The MoU was signed in January 2021,” a statement said. The objective of the MoU is to

establish the basis for promotion of bilateral cooperation in the field of new and renewable energy on the basis of mutual benefit, equality and reciprocity. It covers technologies relating to solar, wind, hydrogen and biomass energy. The MoU entails exchange and training of scientific and technical personnel; exchange of scientific and technological information and data; organisation of workshops and seminars; transfer of equipment, know-how and technology; development of joint research and technological projects.

SOURCE: *The Hindu*