GS-III: Flee Market

Context
The wheels of India’s multi-year stock market rally are slowly beginning to come off. Since the Union Budget was presented this month, there has been a palpable change in mood among investors, who in June led a mini-rally in the market as signs emerged one after another that the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be returning to power at the Centre.

Background
- The Nifty and the Sensex are down roughly by about 5% since the Budget was presented.
- Foreign portfolio investors have pulled out over ₹2,500 crore in July, in contrast to June when FPIs made a net investment of close to ₹10,400 crore.
- Investors who were quite enthusiastic about the prospects of structural reforms that could boost India’s economic growth under the second Modi government, have been quite disappointed by the Budget proposals.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman imposed new taxes on the “super rich” and on companies that buy back their own shares, and raised the mandatory minimum public shareholding in listed companies.

Falling stock market
- Even more worrying is the signal that is sent across by the falling stock market.
- As stock prices discount the future, lacklustre market performance could well be a prelude to the further worsening of general economic conditions in the near term.
- There is already a significant downturn in sectors such as automobile with major companies reporting falling sales and earnings, and automobile dealers closing down showrooms and slashing jobs.

Slowing Growth
- The overall gross domestic product growth, which slipped below 6% to hit 5.8% in the fourth quarter, has also been slowly catching up with the bleak picture painted by high-frequency economic indicators for quite some time.
- The underlying turmoil in Indian markets becomes evident when one looks beyond the Sensex and the Nifty at the mid-cap and small-cap space that has witnessed significant value erosion since the start of 2018.
- The small-cap index has lost almost a third of its value since January 2018 while the mid-cap index has lost about a fifth of its value.
Conclusion

Interestingly, many industrialists who were previously enthusiastic cheerleaders for the Narendra Modi government have turned vocal about their disappointment at the government not being bold enough in pushing through structural reforms needed to boost economic growth despite the majority it enjoys in Parliament. This suggests the deep sell-off in stocks over the last 18 months may well be a sign of disappointed investors voting with their feet.

Source: The Hindu

Too much quota may impact right to equal opportunity Supreme Court.

GS-II: Too much quota may impact right to equal opportunity Supreme Court

Context

The Bench is examining whether to refer to a Constitution Bench a batch of petitions challenging the validity of a constitutional amendment providing 10% economic quota in government jobs and educational institutions.

Why issue over Quota?

- The Supreme Court orally remarked that excessive quota may impact the right to equal opportunity guaranteed under the Constitution.
The court said quota benefits given to the most “forward” classes, especially to those who had no qualification whatsoever, would result in “excess” reservation and breach equality. Reservation itself is an exception. Reservation is intended to achieve equality of opportunity.

Referring Indra Sawhney case

• The economic reservation violated the 50% reservation ceiling limit fixed by a nine-judge Bench in the Indra Sawhney case.
• Further, the 1992 judgment had barred reservation solely on economic criterion.
• In a 6:3 majority verdict, the apex court, in the Indra Sawhney case, had held that “a backward class cannot be determined only and exclusively with reference to economic criterion.
• It may be a consideration or basis along with and in addition to social backwardness, but it can never be the sole criterion.

Issue over economically backward quota

• After a gap of 27 years, the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act of 2019 has provided 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for the “economically backward” in the unreserved category.
• The Act amends Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution by adding clauses empowering the government to provide reservation on the basis of economic backwardness.
• This 10% economic reservation is over and above the 50% reservation cap.
• The government however has justified to the apex court that the 10% economic quota law was a move towards a classless and casteless society.
• It said the law was meant to benefit a “large section of the population of 135 crore people” who are mostly lower middle class and below poverty line.

Source: The Hindu
A sandbox approach provides a secure environment for fintech firms to experiment with products under supervision of a regulator. It is an infrastructure that helps fintech players live test their products or solutions, before getting the necessary regulatory approvals for a mass launch, saving start-ups time and cost.

The concept of a regulatory sandbox or innovation hub for fintech firms was mooted by a committee headed by then RBI executive director Sudarshan Sen. The panel submitted its report in Nov 2017 has called for a regulatory sandbox to help firms experiment with fintech solutions, where the consequences of failure can be contained and reasons for failure analysed.

If the product appears to have the potential to be successful, it might be authorised and brought to the broader market more quickly.

About IRDAI sandbox

- For the IRDAI sandbox, an applicant should have a net worth of Rs 10 lakh and a proven financial record of at least one year.
- Companies will be allowed to test products for up to 12 months in five categories.
- It has said applicants can test products for up to a period of one year in five categories — insurance solicitation or distribution, insurance products, underwriting, policy and claims servicing.

Why sandbox is necessary?

- The RS allows the regulator, the innovators, the financial service providers (as potential deployers of the technology) and the customers (as final users) to conduct field tests to collect evidence on the benefits and risks of new financial innovations, while carefully monitoring and containing their risks.
- India accounts for approximately 6 per cent of insurance premium in Asia and around 2 per cent of the global premium volume.

Source: Indian Express
Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Delhi have seen the highest number of start-ups recognised under the government’s flagship Start-Up India Scheme in the period from 2016 to 2019. These three states also attracted the highest investments from Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) in start-ups.

About Start-Up India Scheme

- Startup India Scheme is an initiative of the Indian government, the primary objective of which is the promotion of startups, generation of employment, and wealth creation.
- It was launched on the 16th of January, 2016.
- A startup defined as an entity that is headquartered in India, which was opened less than 10 years ago, and has an annual turnover less than ?100 crore (US$14 million).

The action plan of this initiative is based on the following three pillars:

1. Simplification and Handholding
2. Funding Support and Incentives
3. Industry-Academia Partnership and Incubation

- An additional area of focus is to discard restrictive States Government policies within this domain, such as License Raj, Land Permissions, Foreign Investment Proposals, and Environmental Clearances.
- It was organized by The Department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPI&IT).

Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)

- An alternative investment is a financial asset that does not fall into one of the conventional investment categories. Conventional categories include stocks, bonds, and cash.
- Most alternative investment assets are held by institutional investors or accredited, high-net-worth individuals because of their complex nature, lack of regulation, and degree of risk.
- Alternative investments include private equity or venture capital, hedge funds, managed futures, art and antiques, commodities, and derivatives contracts.
- Real estate is also often classified as an alternative investment.

Source: Indian Express
Government introduces Bill to amend RTI Act, opposition protest

GS-II | 01 August, 2019

GS-II Paper: Government introduces Bill to amend RTI Act, opposition protest

Context

A bill to give the centre the power to set the salaries and service conditions of information commissioners was introduced by the government in Lok Sabha.

What is Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005?

RTI stands for Right To Information and has been given the status of a fundamental right under Article 19(1) of the Constitution. Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005 mandates timely response to citizen requests for government information by various Public Authorities under the government of India as well as the State Governments. The law imposes a penalty for wilful default by government officials. Citizens can ask for anything that the government can disclose to Parliament.

The basic object of the Right to Information Act is to:

- Empowers the citizen.
- Promote transparency and accountability in the working of the government.
- Contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense.

Achievements of Right to Information Act:

- The answer keys of civil service examination and IIT-JEE are now available on the websites of the Union Public Service Commission and IIT-JEE respectively, helping students to find out their scores even before the official announcement.
- Assets and wealth declaration of all public servants – PM and his entire council of ministers, civil servants — are now in the public domain.

How does Right to Information Act?

- Every citizen has freedom of speech and expression. Therefore, Citizens have a right to know how the governments, meant to serve them, are functioning.
- The Right to Information Act (RTI), 2015 is an Act of the Parliament of India – to provide for setting out the practical regime of right to information for citizens. "Simply put, it allows citizens of the country to request information from any public authority about its work, actions, etc".

Significance of Right to Information Act:
Improved citizen-government partnership
Greater transparency which gives citizens right to access information regarding rules, regulation, plans & expenditure of govt.
Greater accountability in the working of the Government.
To check corruption.
To make our democracy work for the people in real sense.

Source: Indian Express
Context

While it is important for a government to pursue a sound economic policy, including management of the public finances, it is yet another matter to make a fetish of any one aspect of it. The latter appears to govern this government’s approach to policy when the fiscal deficit is given pride of place in its self-assessment.

Thread of fiscal discipline

- Soon after the Budget for 2019-20 was presented, one of the Finance Minister’s predecessors remarked that “fiscal prudence rewards economies”.
- It figured in the most recent Economic Survey, and its anticipated magnitude for 2019-20 was the final statement in the Budget speech that had followed.
- The Finance Minister had commenced the speech saying how the government was committed to fiscal discipline.

Fiscal discipline

- In the context, “fiscal discipline” is understood as taking the economy towards the 3% of the gross domestic product.

Actually, the point is two-fold:

- Whether the fiscal deficit should be the sole index of fiscal management.
- What a reduction in the deficit would achieve.

Overall imbalance in the Budget –

- The fiscal deficit reflects the overall imbalance in the Budget.
- Embedded in the accounts of the government is the revenue account which is a statement of current receipts and expenditure.
- A fiscal deficit may or may not contain within it a deficit on the revenue account, termed the “revenue deficit”.
- The possible embeddedness of a revenue deficit within a fiscal deficit muddies the waters somewhat.
- For movements in the overall, or fiscal, deficit by itself tell us nothing about what is happening to the revenue deficit.
- A revenue deficit implies that the government is dissaving.

Rewards yet to be seen
A revenue deficit of the Central government is relatively recent, having been virtually non-existent till the 1980s. After that a rampant populism has taken over all political parties, reflected in revenue deficits accounting for over two thirds of the fiscal deficit such as the case today.

Implications of Revenue deficits

- Revenue deficits have become structural in India by now.

This has three implications:

- That the public debt is only bound to rise.
- We are permanently borrowing to consume.
- Leaving it to future generations to inherit the debt.

International borrowing

- In the last Budget the government has signalled its intention to borrow in foreign currency from the international market.
- This is an innovation alright as the Government of India has so far never borrowed in the international markets, leaving it to public sector organisations and the private corporate sector to do so.

Justification of the move

- In the Budget speech of the 17th Lok Sabha, the Finance Minister justified the move in terms of the very low share of foreign debt to GDP.
- The proposal has received criticism, some of it focussing on the consequences of exchange rate volatility.

Concerns with it

- Benefits have been flagged too, such as that Indian sovereign bonds will attract a lower risk premium because the price of the foreign-currency-denominated sovereign bond will now be discoverable.
- This though ignores the biggest lesson from the global financial crisis of 2007, that the market cannot be relied upon to price risk correctly.
- Dollar-denominated debt has to be repaid in dollars.
- Right now our reserves are fairly high but this could change.
- Oil prices could go back to where they were, the trade war initiated by U.S. President Donald Trump holds little prospect for faster export growth, and portfolio investment may flow out.

Conclusion

- In the final analysis though, it is not the risk of exchange rate depreciation or stagnant exports or even capital flight that is the issue it is the rationale for borrowing.
With revenue deficits the overwhelming part of the fiscal deficit, we would be borrowing to finance consumption.
Dollar denominated sovereign debt is just a matter of shifting this borrowing overseas.

Source: The Hindu

Transforming livelihood through farm ponds
GS-III | 02 August, 2019

GS-III: Transforming livelihood through farm ponds

Context
Prime Minister Narendra Modi explicated the need to implement innovative water management measures, stressing particularly the importance of rainwater harvesting both at the household and community levels. One intervention that has been tried out in various States, and needs to be taken up on a bigger scale, is the construction of farm ponds.

Background
With an increased variability of monsoons and rapidly depleting groundwater tables, large parts of India are reeling under water stress. A number of peninsular regions like Bundelkhand, Vidarbha and Marathwada have been facing recurring drought-like situations.

Benefits of Farm Ponds

- Farm ponds can be cost-effective structures that transform rural livelihoods.
- They can help enhance water control, contribute to agriculture intensification and boost farm incomes. A recent study on farm ponds in Jharkhand and West Bengal found that they aided in superior water control through the harvesting not just of rainfall but also of surface run-off and subsurface flows. Some of them functioned exclusively as recharge points, contributing to groundwater replenishment.
- They also helped in providing supplemental irrigation in the kharif season and an enhanced irrigation coverage in rabi. The yield of paddy, the most important crop in kharif, stabilised, thus contributing to greater food security.
- **Water retention**: Farm ponds retained water for 8-10 months of the year; thus farmers could enhance cropping intensity and crop diversification within and across seasons. The area used to cultivate vegetables and other commercial crops also increased.
- Figures indicate that the ponds were also a financially viable proposition, with a fairly high
Challenges

- In parts of peninsular India, the idea of a farm pond as an in-situ rainwater harvesting structure has taken a complete U-turn. Some of them are benefiting farmers at an individual level, but not contributing to water conservation and recharge.
- They are being used as intermediate storage points, accelerating groundwater depletion and increasing evaporation losses as the groundwater is brought to the surface and stored in relatively shallow structures.
- Such farm ponds have an adverse impact on the water tables and accelerate water loss. The usual practice here is to lift water from a dug well and/or a borewell, store it in the pond and then draw it once again to irrigate the fields, often using micro-irrigation. This intensifies competition for extraction of groundwater from the aquifer, which is a common pool resource.
- In the command area of the irrigation project, farmers fill up their farm ponds first when the canal is in rotation and then take it from the pond to the field. This can impede circulation of water.

Farm ponds can act as effective harvesting structures and also yield healthy financial returns. But if they are promoted merely for on-farm storage of groundwater and canal water, they could accelerate, rather than reduce, the water crisis in the countryside.

Source: The Hindu

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**Paramash Scheme**

**GS-II | 02 August, 2019**

**GS-II Paper: Paramash Scheme**

**Context**

The Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Ramesh Pokhriyal “Nishank” launched ‘Paramarsh’ – a University Grants Commission (UGC) scheme for Mentoring National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) Accreditation Aspirant Institutions to promote Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

**Aim of the Scheme**

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said the scheme will be a paradigm shift in the concept of mentoring of institution by another well performing institution to upgrade their academic...
performance and enable them to get accredited by focusing in the area of curricular aspects, teaching-learning & evaluation, research, innovation, institutional values & practices etc. The scheme is expected to have a major impact in addressing a national challenge of improving the quality of Higher Education in India.

Hub and Spoke Model

- The Minister informed that the Scheme will be operationalized through a “Hub & Spoke” model wherein the Mentor Institution, called the “Hub” is centralized and will have the responsibility of guiding the Mentee institution through the secondary branches the “Spoke” through the services provided to the mentee for self improvement.
- This allows a centralized control over operational efficiency, resource utilization to attain overall development of the mentee institution.

This “Paramarsh” scheme will target 1000 Higher Education Institutions for mentoring with a specific focus on quality as enumerated in the UGC “Quality Mandate”. Mentor-Mentee relationship will not only benefit both the institutions but also provide quality education to the 3.6 crore students who are enrolling to Indian Higher Education system at present.

Source: The Hindu

Anti-Defection Law

GS-II Paper: Anti-Defection Law

What is Anti-Defection Law?

The Tenth Schedule of Indian Constitution is popularly known as the Anti-Defection Act. Original constitution had no such provisions. It was included in the Constitution in 1985 by the Rajiv Gandhi government. The main intent of the law was to deter “the evil of political defections” by legislators motivated by the lure of office or other similar considerations.

Grounds of Disqualifications:

- If an elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
- If he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorised to do so, without obtaining prior permission.

Some points regarding Anti-Defection:
Is disqualification under anti-defection law judicially reviewable?

Speaker/chairman of the house is the authority to decide on defection cases. Speaker sits as a tribunal while deciding on defection cases. All proceedings in relation to any question on disqualification of a member of a House under this Schedule are deemed to be proceedings in Parliament or in the Legislature of a state. No court has any jurisdiction. However, the decision can be brought to court after Kihoto Hollohan case of 1992.

The law states that the decision is final and not subject to judicial review. The Supreme Court struck down part of this condition. It held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the presiding officer gives his order. However, the final decision is subject to appeal in the High Courts and Supreme Court.

GS-II Paper: Anti-Defection Law

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Some points regarding Anti-Defection:

- Articles 102 (2) and 191 (2) deals with anti-defection.
- The intention of the provision is to check the corruption/horse trading in parliament/to check the popular phenomenon “Aaya Ram Gaya Ram “ in the Indian polity which started in 1960’s. Note: The intention was never “to bring stability” to governments.
- The law disallows MPs/MLAs to switch parties after elections, make the members follow the whips issued by their party.
- It also applies to a nominated member if he/she joins a political party after 6 months of nomination and to an independent candidate if he/she joins a party after the election.
Is disqualification under anti-defection law judicially reviewable?

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Source: The Hindu

Going Electric: On plans To switch to Electric Vehicles.

GS-III Paper: Going Electric: On plans To switch to Electric Vehicles.

Electric Vehicles:

- An electric vehicle, uses one or more electric motors or traction motors for propulsion.
- An electric vehicle may be powered through self-contained battery, solar panels or an electric generator to convert fuel to electricity.

Need For EVs in India:

Climate change

Problem of rapid global temperature increase has created the need for a reduction in the use of fossil fuels and the associated emissions.

India has committed to cutting its GHG emissions intensity by 33% to 35% percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

Rapid urbanization
Economic development leads to rapid urbanization in emerging nations as rural populations move non-agricultural sectors in cities creating environmental problems. According to a recent study by WHO, India is home to 14 out of 20 most polluted cities in the world. EVs will help in tackling this problem by reducing local concentrations of pollutants in cities.

Energy security

India imports oil to cover over 80 percent of its transport fuel.

EVs can reduce dependence on imported crude oil promoting India’s energy security.

Innovation

It will encourage cutting edge technology in India through adoption, adaptation, and research and development.

EVs manufacturing capacity will promote global scale and competitiveness.

Employment

Promotion of EVs will facilitate employment growth in a sunrise sector.

Clean and Low carbon Energy

The shift towards renewable energy sources has led to cost reduction from better electricity generating technologies. This has introduced the possibility of clean, low-carbon and inexpensive grids.

Challenges for EV Industry in India:

Lack of a stable policy for EV production: EV production is capital intensive sector requiring long term planning to break even and profit realization, uncertainty in government policies related to EV production discourages investment in the industry.

Technological challenges: India is technologically deficient in the production of electronics that form the backbone of EV industry, such as batteries, semiconductors, controllers, etc.

Lack of associated infrastructural support: The lack of clarity over AC versus DC charging stations, grid stability and range anxiety (fear that battery will soon run out of power) are other factors that hinder the growth of EV industry.

Government Initiatives:

- Government has set a target of electric vehicles making up 30% of new sales of cars and two-wheelers by 2030 from less than 1% today.
- To build a sustainable EV ecosystem initiatives like – National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) and Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric vehicles in
India (FAME India) have been launched by India.

- Organization like Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Department of Heavy Industry, Automotive Research Association of India are devising design and manufacturing standards of EVs, Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment (EVSEs) & charging infrastructure to smoothen the advent of in-house production of EVs.

Source: The Hindu
GS-II: Finding the data on missing girls.

Context

The sex ratio at birth (SRB) has been dropping continuously since Census 2011, coming down from 909 girls per thousand boys in 2011-2013 to 896 girls in 2015-2017 as per the SRS Statistical Reports.

Facts

Female foeticide continues to increase at an alarming rate, as per the Sample Registration System (SRS) data released for the period 2015-2017.

In the 2014-2016 period, of the 21 large States, only two — Kerala and Chhattisgarh — had an SRB of above 950 girls per 1000 boys. Thus at present, about 5% of girls are ‘eliminated’ before they are born.

Data Problem

- Niti Aayog acknowledged the seriousness of the problem in its latest report.
- WCD Minister claimed in the Lok Sabha that SRB has improved from 923 to 931 girls. She was quoting data from the Health Management Information System (HMIS), a fundamentally flawed source that largely considers home deliveries and births in government institutions.
- Data from the HMIS are incomplete and not representative of the country as a whole as births happening in private institutions are under-reported.

Different data sources

- Private hospitals had a disproportionate excess of male children births, which the HMIS sample excludes.
- Sources in the Niti Aayog confirmed that they did consider HMIS data but found after statistical examination that it was unreliable and therefore used sex ratio at birth (SRB).
- Even when we only consider institutional deliveries in government hospitals, the SRB is falling.
- The worst regional SRB for government sector was for Northern India (885 girls per thousand boys).
- The picture was somewhat better for Central India (926) Southern India (940) while the performance of Eastern India (965) and Western India (959) was even better.
- In the Northeast, where the government is the dominant health-care provider, the government sector SRB rivaled that of the private sector (both are 900).
Protecting the integrity of birth statistics will help the people, governments and health professionals to focus on ameliorating the gender gaps at birth.

Bias over first-born child

- NFHS-4 data also revealed a bias when it comes to the first-born child the SRB is among first-born children was 927, meaning that 2.5% of first-born girls are eliminated before birth.
- Field visits in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar revealed a massive expansion of ultrasound clinics even in remote corners and in the absence of stringent implementation of the PCPNDT Act, practically anyone who wants to determine the sex of the foetus is able to get it done illegally.

Insights

- Increased deterrence in States like Maharastra, Haryana and Rajasthan in recent years has been undermined by the laxity of the biggest States.
- Central Supervisory Board established under the PCPNDT Act has not met for over one-and-a-half years. It should have ideally met at least thrice during this period.

Source: The Hindu

Urban spaces need better designed homes and an egalitarian housing policy.

GS-II: Urban spaces need better designed homes and an egalitarian housing policy.

Context

Homelessness is on the rise and has been for the past half a century. Eight years ago, after the 2011 Census, the demand for new housing was at 25 lakh units. With demand rising exponentially and increasing migration numbers the current requirement for shelter stands at 30 lakh units.

Challenges in providing housing
1. Ineffective Programmes

- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana aims to provide cheaper houses quickly to low-income groups, with substantial interest subsidies on housing loans. The previous scheme, Awas Yojna, has been attempting the same since 1985 without much success.
- State housing boards have similar unachievable goals.

2. Idea of worship

- In the early 1950s, new houses in most cities relied on the bungalow model. The home’s ownership, independence, and property rights were paramount.
- 70 years later, despite a 100-fold increase in city population density and land values, little has changed from that ideal.
- The unwillingness of a homeowner to rent out when the legal rights grossly favour tenants.

Factors need to be evaluated in the search for a new model

- Stringent urban land reforms would be the first step in that direction
- Making housing part of city infrastructure projects, the government takes away land and construction from private builders and creates diverse pockets of housing in different parts of the city.
- Ensuring citizens have easy access to subsidized rental housing without legal rights of ownership. Rental units would allow residents to live close to the office and employment, keeping the neighbourhood changing and dynamic.
- It is imperative that a system of tax incentives and new rental regulations be used to achieve that goal
- The imposition of a high un-occupancy tax on buildings that are vacant will help to inhabit almost a third of private housing that remains empty in most cities.
- Stricter construction restrictions are put in place; the government should see housing as a social service and not a business venture
- Expanding the supply of low-income housing
- Current densities of residential space need more efficient modifications – smaller multifunctional and compact unit makes more sense. Given the high land values, unless there is an increase in floor area ratio (FAR) and a decrease in a home’s occupancy footprint, economies of scale will never be achieved in city residential areas
- Subsidies on efficient space planning, environmental considerations, and design that create shared community spaces should be encouraged and rewarded.

Conclusion

Housing in India is both inefficient, poorly constructed, thoughtlessly designed and conforms to outmoded ideas that still hark to the bungalow prototype. Unless more thoughtfully-designed homes with newer materials and technologies and a more egalitarian housing policy become part of future government programs, it is these citadels of waste and decay that will remain the public face of the city.
Health care is ailing.
GS-II | 03 August, 2019

GS-II: Health care is ailing.

Context

The National Medical Commission Bill passed by Rajya Sabha addresses these concerns.

Why medical education needs these regulations?

- To ensure that doctors are appropriately trained and skilled to address the prevailing disease burden
- To ensure that medical graduates reflect a uniform standard of competence and skills
- To ensure that only those with basic knowledge of science and aptitude for the profession get in
- To ensure ethical practice in the interest of the patients
- To create an environment that enables innovation and research
- To check the corrosive impact of the process of commercialization on values and corrupt practices
- The problem of inappropriately trained doctors of varying quality has been known for decades. The report of the Mudaliar Committee set up in 1959 pointed out how doctors had neither the skills nor the knowledge to handle primary care and infectious diseases that were a high priority concern then as now
- Standards vary greatly with competence levels dependent upon the college of instruction.

Importance of the Bill

- In setting curricula, teaching content, adding new courses and providing the much needed multi-sectoral perspectives.
- It has the potential to link the disease burden and the specialties being produced. In the UK, it is the government that lays down how many specialists of which discipline needs to be produced, which the British Medical Council then adheres to. In India the MCI has so far been operating independently.
- It can encourage and incentivise innovation and promote research by laying down rules that make research a prerequisite in medical colleges.

Limitations

1. Bill has proposed mandating the NEET and NEXT. NEET was mooted for three reasons:
To reduce the pain of students taking almost 25 examinations to gain admission in a college.
Given the abysmal level of high school education, to ensure a minimum level of knowledge in science.
To reduce corruption by restricting student admission to those qualifying the NEET.
NEXT is an idea borrowed from the UK that has been struggling to introduce it. In all such countries, the licensing exams are stretched into modules, not a multiple choice questions type of exam. Bill has virtually given up inspections for assuring the quality of education.

2. Relying only on the NEXT as the principal substitute is to abdicate governance. Undoubtedly, there are grey areas giving scope for corrupt practices and production of substandard doctors.
3. The reduced oversight allowing extensive discretionary powers to government makes it virtually an advisory body
4. Permitting a registered medical practitioner to prescribe medicines.
5. While there is a need to decentralize, to give to non-medical personnel some powers and authority it needs tight regulation and supervision.

Conclusion

Government has under this Bill, arrogated to itself an unprecedented power to appoint people in the various arms of the proposed structure. The quality and integrity of these people will then define the future of the health system in India.

Source: Indian Express

Padding up for the next UNSC inning

GS-II: Padding up for the next UNSC inning

Context

India was recently elected for its 8th term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the term 2021-22. India has served as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) more often than any country other than Japan from the Asia-Pacific Group. India will need the vote of two-thirds of the 193 UN General Assembly members to win a non-permanent seat on the UNSC.
UNSC

- UNSC is one of the principal organisation of United Nation with an aim for the international peace and security. As of now there are 15 members of UNSC.
- Five of those US, UK, France, Russia and China are permanent members. India has been elected as a non-member of the UNSC for 7 terms.
- Prime function of the UNSC should be to maintain international peace and security. It should also focus on shared goals, especially international social and economic cooperation.
- India was seemingly offered the UNSC membership twice but in both cases the offer could not have materialised since multiple forces were at play.
- India is at the forefront of efforts at the UN to push for the long-pending reform of the Security Council, emphasising that it rightly deserves a place at the UN high table as a permanent member.

Objectives for Indian foreign policy in UNSC

- India should aim to have its decisions in UNSC based on legal merit. This would be well respected by international community. Enhance its credentials as a constructive and responsible member of international society, which can be used in future to push for a permanent UNSC seat.
- India should emphasize and strengthening multilateralism in international politics to counter existing trends towards unilateralism, ethno-centrism, protectionism and racial intolerance.
- India should attempt to make progress on the non-discriminatory elimination of weapons of mass destruction, protection of the environment against global warming & safeguarding outer space from weaponization.
- India should seek to protect the World Trade Organisation from American attempts to undermine it, since the WTO’s dispute mechanism is a resource for developing countries.
- India could use its presence on the UNSC’s sanctions subcommittee to proscribe Pakistan-based militant groups and individuals.

Conclusion

Diplomatic win for India and a testament to its growing global stature, India’s candidature for a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council for a two-year term was unanimously endorsed by the Asia-Pacific group of the world body, including Pakistan and China. India should aim to end its eighth term on the Council with its merit- and legality-based judgments intact and widely respected.
What’s NEXT
GS-II | 03 August, 2019

GS-II: What’s NEXT?

Context

In its second iteration, the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill seems to have gained from its time in the bottle, like ageing wine. The new version has some sharp divergences from the original.

Background

- Presented in Parliament in 2017, it proposed to replace the Medical Council Act, 1956, but it lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.
- The NMC will have authority over medical education approvals for colleges, admissions, tests and fee-fixation.
- The provisions of interest are in the core area of medical education. The Bill proposes to unify testing for exit from the MBBS course, and entry into postgraduate medical courses.
- A single National Exit Test (NEXT) will be conducted across the country replacing the final year MBBS exam, and the scores used to allot PG seats as well.
- It will allow medical graduates to start medical practice, seek admission to PG courses, and screen foreign medical graduates who want to practise in India.

Changes in National Exit Test (NEXT)

- It offers a definite benefit for students who invest much time and energy in five years of training in classrooms, labs and the bedside, by reducing the number of tests they would have to take in case they aim to study further.
- There are detractors, many of them from Tamil Nadu — which is still politically opposing the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) — who believe that NEXT will undermine the federal system, and ask whether a test at the MBBS level would suffice as an entry criterion for PG courses.
- The Bill has also removed the exemption hitherto given to Central institutions, the AIIMS and JIPMER, from NEET for admission to MBBS and allied courses.

Benefits

- In doing so, the government has moved in the right direction, as there was resentment
and a charge of elitism at the exclusion of some institutions from an exam that aimed at standardising testing for entry into MBBS.

- The government also decided to scrap a proposal in the original Bill to conduct an additional licentiate exam that all medical graduates would have to take in order to practise, in the face of virulent opposition.
- It also removed, rightly, a proposal in the older Bill for a bridge course for AYUSH practitioners to make a lateral entry into allopathy.

Way Forward

- It is crucial now for the Centre to work amicably with States, and the Indian Medical Association, which is opposed to the Bill, taking them along to ease the process of implementation.
- At any cost, it must avoid the creation of inflexible roadblocks as happened with NEET in some States.
- The clearance of these hurdles, then, as recalled from experience, become fraught with legal and political battles, leaving behind much bitterness.
- NEXT will have to be a lot neater.

Source: The Hindu
GS-I: India enters 37-year period of demographic dividend.

Context

- Since 2018, India’s working-age population (people between 15 and 64 years of age) has grown larger than the dependant population (defined as children aged 14 or below as well as people above 65 years of age).
- This bulge in the working-age population is going to last till 2055, or 37 years from its beginning.

Why it matters

- India’s demographics are the envy of the world.
- As populations in countries such as China, US, and Japan is getting older, India’s population is getting younger.

What is demographic dividend?

- Demographic dividend, as defined by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) means the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population’s age structure.
- This happens when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older).
- It is a boost in economic productivity that occurs when there are growing numbers of people in the workforce relative to the number of dependents.

Global Examples

Japan

- Japan was among the first major economies to experience rapid growth because of changing population structure.
- In five of these years, Japan grew in double digits the growth rate was above 8% in two years, and a little less than 6% in one.

China

- China entered this stage in 1994 16 years after Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms started in December 1978.
- Although its growth accelerated immediately after the reforms, the years of demographic
In the 16 years between 1978 and 1994 (post-reform, pre-dividend) China saw eight years of double-digit growth.

India

- In near future India will be the largest individual contributor to the global demographic transition.
- A 2011 IMF Working Paper found that substantial portion of the growth experienced by India since the 1980s is attributable to the country’s age structure and changing demographics.
- By 2026 India’s average age would be 29 which is least among the global average.
- Over the next two decades the continuing demographic dividend in India could add about two percentage points per annum to India’s per capita GDP growth.

Harnessing a golden opportunity

- India’s working-age population is now increasing because of rapidly declining birth and death rates.
- India’s age dependency ratio, the ratio of dependents (children and the elderly) to the working-age population (14- to 65-year-olds), is expected to only start rising in 2040, as per UN estimates.
- This presents a golden opportunity for economic growth that could be reaped through higher growth.

Way Forward

- India needs to pay special attention to skilling and reskilling its workforce, keeping in view the changing nature of today’s job
- There are serious gaps between what the skill development institutions currently do and what the industry requires.
- Improving education and health infrastructure, in terms of both quality and access and timely action in a co-ordinated manner by the Government, private sector and researchers is necessary to harness the window of opportunity provided by a favourable demography.

Source: Times of India
Background

- Districts with sizeable tribal populations saw several protests and demonstrations.
- The protests were organised by the Bhumi Adhikar Andolan. There were two issues that the demonstrators were decrying.
- One, the proposed amendments to the Indian Forest Act (IFA), 1927; the concerned amendments to the IFA have been sent to states for consultation.

What is the FRA case before the Supreme Court?

- In Feb this year, the Supreme Court ordered the eviction of lakhs of tribals and other traditional forest dwellers whose claims under The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (or FRA), 2006, had been rejected following a three-tier process.
- Later, the SC temporarily put on hold the eviction by an order giving state governments time to file affidavits on whether due process was followed before claims were rejected.

What are the proposed amendments to the IFA?

- The FRA, enacted in 2006, envisions the forest rights committee of a village as the central unit in managing forest resources.
- The proposed IFA amendments will revert to giving overriding powers to Forest Department officials.
- The greater policing powers to the Forest Department include the use of firearms, and veto power to override the FRA.
- Further, if rights under FRA are seen as hampering forest conservation efforts, the state may commute such rights through compensation to the tribals.
- The changes also propose to open up forest land specifically for commercial exploitation of timber or non-timber forest produce.

Who are the petitioners, and what is their contention?

- The petitioners are Wildlife First, Nature Conservation Society, and Tiger Research and Conservation Trust.
- They contend that the protection of forests has been severely affected due to bogus claims under the FRA.
- The bogus claimants continue to occupy large areas of forest lands, including inside national parks and sanctuaries, despite their applications being rejected under the appeals process of the FRA.

Source: Indian Express
The judicial presumption of non-citizenship

GS-II | 05 August, 2019

GS-II: The judicial presumption of non-citizenship.

Context

Innocuously framed as resolving a “perceived conflict” between two paragraphs of the Schedule to the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003, the judgment little reported in the media nonetheless had significant consequences for the ongoing events in Assam surrounding the preparation of the National Register of Citizens (“the NRC”).

Process concerning citizenship.

The issue arose because, in the State of Assam, there are two ongoing processes concerning the question of citizenship.

Foreigners Tribunals – The first includes proceedings before the Foreigners Tribunals, which have been established under an executive order of the Central government.

NRC – The second is the NRC, a process overseen and driven by the Supreme Court. While nominally independent both processes nonetheless bleed into each other, and have thus caused significant chaos and confusion for individuals who have found themselves on the wrong side of one or both.

Problems with judgement and tribunals

1. Establishment – Foreigners Tribunals were established by a simple executive order.

2. Qualifications – Qualifications to serve on the Tribunals have been progressively loosened and the vague requirement of “judicial experience” has now been expanded to include bureaucrats.

3. No specific process – Most importantly, under the Order in question (as it was amended in 2012), Tribunals are given sweeping powers to refuse examination of witnesses if in their opinion it is for “vexatious” purposes, bound to accept evidence produced by the police, and, most glaringly, not required to provide reasons for their findings.

Background Cases
Sarbananda Sonowal

- The Court’s observations in the Kuddus case, and indeed, the manner in which it has conducted the NRC process over the last few months, can be traced back to two judgments delivered in the mid-2000s, known as Sarbananda Sonowal I and II.
- In those judgments, relying upon unvetted and unreviewed literature, without any detailed consideration of factual evidence, and in rhetoric more reminiscent of populist demagogues than constitutional courts, the Court declared immigration to be tantamount to “external aggression” upon the country more specifically, it made the astonishing finding that constitutionally, the burden of proving citizenship would always lie upon the person who was accused of being a non-citizen.
- A parliamentary legislation that sought to place the burden upon the state was struck down as being unconstitutional.

Conclusion

Presumption of non-citizenship – What the rhetoric and the holdings of the Sonowal judgments have created is a climate in which the dominant principle is the presumption of non-citizenship.

Dehumanisation – Apart from the absurdity of imposing such a rule in a country that already has a vast number of marginalised and disenfranchised people, it is this fundamental dehumanisation and devaluation of individuals that has enabled the manner in which the Foreigners Tribunals operate, the many tragedies that come to light every week in the context of the NRC, and judgments such as Abdul Kuddus.

The right to life – It is clear that if Article 21 of the Constitution, the right to life, is to mean anything at all, this entire jurisprudence must be reconsidered, root and branch.

Source: The Hindu

Biometric Token System

GS-II: Biometric Token System

Context
The Western and Central Railways have introduced a new Biometric Token System (BTS) that seeks to streamline the process of boarding unreserved coaches.

**Biometric Token System (BTS)**

- Biometric Token System (BTS) is a system by which passengers travelling in the general coach, where seats are not reserved, are given a token roughly three hours before the train’s departure.
- These tokens are given on a first-come, first-served basis, and carry a serial number on them, which governs the order in which passengers will board the train.
- Tokens are issued after accepting biometric information of individual passengers.
- Passengers with valid tickets are required to place their fingers on a scanner, and are issued a token with a serial number against their biometric data.
- Passengers must queue up and enter the compartment in the order of their serial numbers.
- The tokens are issued three hours before a train’s departure. The use of biometrics cuts out the touts, and helps genuine passengers.

**Why such move?**

- Boarding ‘general’ compartments in which seating is not reserved especially in long-distance trains leaving major cities, has always been an ordeal for passengers.
- The massive mismatch between the numbers of travellers and the available seats drives people to queue up on platforms up to 10 hours in advance.

**Why use BTS?**

- The use of biometrics (fingerprint) rules out touts and ensures only bonafide travellers receive a token.
- In case of a mishap, officials will have details of the passengers, and with the help of this (biometric information) they can prevent black marketing of unreserved tickets.

Source: Indian Express
India is planning to launch its first Human Genome Mapping project.

What is Genome?

- A genome is an organism’s complete set of DNA, including all its genes.
- It contains all the information needed to build and maintain that organism.
- By sequencing the genome, researchers can discover the functions of genes and identify which of them are critical for life.

Genome Initiative

- Project involves scanning of 20,000 Indian genomes (in the next five years) in order to develop diagnostic tests and effective therapies for treating diseases such as cancer.
- It is to be implemented by The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology.

The project is to be carried out in two phases:

- The first phase of the project involves sequencing the complete genomes of 10,000 healthy Indians.
- Second phase, involves genome sequencing of 10,000 diseased individuals.
- Data on human sequencing would be accessible to researchers through a proposed National Biological Data Centre envisaged in Biological Data Storage, Access and Sharing Policy.

Significance

- **Healthcare:** For new advancements in medical science (like predictive diagnosis and precision medicine, genomic information) and in disease management, genome sequencing can play a crucial role.
- Through genome sequencing methodology, researchers and clinicians can easily detect the disease related to genetic disorder.
- **Genetic Screening:** The genome project will lead to improved techniques of genetic screening for diseases prior to the birth.

Way Forward

- **Discrimination:** Discrimination based on genotype is a possible consequence of genome sequencing.
- **Ownership and Control:** Apart from the issue of privacy and confidentiality, questions of ownership and control of genetic information becomes critical.
- **Fair Use of Genetic Data:** For insurance, employment, criminal justice, education, adoption, and military is necessary.
From Plate to Plough: In the shade of solar trees.
GS-I | 05 August, 2019

Gs- III: From Plate to Plough: In the shade of solar trees.

Context
The recent statement of our Finance Minister about transforming Annadata (farmer) into an Urjadata (producer of solar power) in her maiden Budget speech.

How
- Help farmers produce solar power on their lands
- Farmers occupy the largest chunks of land in this country.

Annadata Becoming an Urjadata:
The recent statement of Finance Minister on doubling farmer’s income is the idea of making the annadata an urjadata. This model will be much more inclusive and can help augment their incomes significantly. The two variants of this are:

Replacing all pump sets with solar pumps
One, replace all pump-sets, especially diesel ones, with solar pumps and the excess power generated through solar panels can be purchased by state governments at a price that gives the farmer a good margin over his cost of producing solar power.

Growing solar trees

Second, encourage farmers to grow “solar trees” on their lands at a height of about 10-12 feet in a manner that enough sunlight keeps coming to plants below. Under this variant, the farmer can keep growing two irrigated crops as he has been doing, but the solar tree generates a lot of excess power that can be purchased by the state government.

What surveys show

A global survey on this shows that it is being practiced in many countries from Japan to China to Germany, and India is ripe for this.

Conclusion:

- Since the power consumption per hectare (as shown in the graph) in Indian agriculture is very low and the above model holds great promise for several poorer states.
- But the ongoing tariff war and the imposition of safeguards duty on solar panels is becoming a growing challenge.
- Innovative Financing measures such as clean energy fund, generation-based incentive linked loan repayment and green bonds could give a financial boost to the successful implementation of this model.
- Reform in the Agriculture sector is most instrumental to effectively improve the lives of the farmers, to improve their lives and to bring economic stability by giving them a sense of security and hope.
- However, they have to effectively planned and implemented at various levels with multifaceted approach to achieve the desirable and feasible target.

Source: Indian Express
The article provides a critical analysis of Union Cabinet’s decision about increasing the strength of the judiciary and suggests for the focus of the Supreme Court on its role as interpreter of the Constitution.

About Supreme Court of India:

- Inaugurated on January 28, 1950, the Supreme Court of India succeeded the Federal Court of India, which was established under the Government of India Act of 1935.
- The Constitution of India, under Articles 124 to 147 in Part V deals with the organisation, independence, jurisdiction, powers, procedures and so on of the Supreme Court.
- The Parliament, through legislation, is authorised for regulating the Supreme Court.

Recent Decision of increasing the number of Judges:

- A recent written request by the CJI Ranjan Gogoi to the Prime Minister, highlighting the problem of paucity of judges.
- CJI also reasoned the same for his inability of constituting enough Constitution Benches to decide important questions of law.

Benefits of the move:

- Supreme Court of India is facing a large pendency of near about 59,331 cases as reported in July 2019.
- The decision will help in solving this perennial pendency issue.
- It will help in constituting more Constitutional Benches to decide important questions of law.
- It will also help in reducing time for the judicial procedures.

Measures to solve the Issue:

- Preserve the primary role of the Supreme Court for an ultimate arbitration of constitutional questions and statutory interpretation.
- There should be a proper mechanism and compartmentalisation of questions involving a final decision on routine matters, civil cases involving nothing more than the interest of the parties, so that there will not be any detraction from the Court’s primary role.
- There should be a reasonable restraint on the duration of oral arguments in the Court.
- Disciplined adherence to a schedule of hearings is needed.

Conclusion

- A mere increase in the court’s strength may not be enough to liquidate the burgeoning docket
- Reasonable restraint on the duration of oral arguments and disciplined adherence to a schedule of hearings may be needed
Preserve the apex court’s primary role as the ultimate arbiter of constitutional questions and statutory interpretation. All other questions involving a final decision on routine matters, especially civil cases ought to be considered by a mechanism that will not detract from the court’s primary role.

229th Report of the Law Commission suggested a new system under which there will be one Constitution Bench in Delhi, and four ‘Cassation Benches’ for different regions of the country. This may also increase access to justice to those living in far-flung areas of the country.

Source: The Hindu
Background

- Mr. Saleh, a former intelligence chief and a strong critic of the Taliban and Pakistan, is President Ashraf Ghani’s running-mate for the September 28 election.
- And the irony is that the assault occurred a few hours after President Ghani officially launched his campaign in which he promised that “peace is coming”.
- The message the insurgents are trying to send is that even the most fortified political offices in the country or its top politicians are not safe.
- The insurgents have made it clear they will carry out their offensive irrespective of the peace process, especially when Afghanistan gets down to a full-fledged election campaign.

Peace initiatives

- In recent months, even when the U.S. and Taliban representatives have held multiple rounds of talks in Doha, Qatar, insurgents have kept up attacks, both on military and civilian locations.
- The Taliban appears to be trying to leverage these assaults to boost its bargaining position in the talks with the U.S.
- And the Kabul government’s inability to prevent them and the U.S.’s apparent decision to delink the negotiations from the daily violence are giving the insurgents a free run in many Afghan cities.

Problems before Afghanistan

- Afghanistan’s crises are many.
- Half the country is either directly controlled or dominated by the Taliban.
- In the eastern parts, the Islamic State has established a presence and the group targets the country’s religious minorities.
- The government in Kabul is weak and notorious for chronic corruption.

Response by government

- It is true that Afghanistan needs a political settlement.
- The war has been in a stalemate for long.
- The government, even with U.S. support, is not in a position to turn the war around.
- The Taliban, on the other side, has expanded its reach to the hinterland, but not the urban centres.
Conclusion

- The result is that Afghans continue to suffer even when the Americans and the Taliban talk.
- There has to be more pressure, both political and military, on the Taliban to cease the violence.
- U.S. should back the Afghan government and the coming elections resolutely, while Kabul has to get its act together.

Source: The Hindu

Borrow abroad and profit

GS-III | 06 August, 2019

Context

The government is planning to issue 10 year bonds denominated in foreign currency.

Why it is a good idea

- Such borrowing would be cheaper because dollar or yen interest rates are lower than rupee interest rates.
- Our debt to GDP ratio is not very high, the exchange rate is stable, and foreign exchange reserves are high. So foreign borrowing, if its long term, is not a problem.
- If foreign bond issuance was accompanied by a move towards greater capital account convertibility then it may be worth pursuing.
- A country pays a country premium for borrowing in dollars; currently, the US 10-year bond is trading at 2%. A complex set of factors determine the country’s premium, but the magnitude of reserves and foreign currency debt are important attributes. India has less debt denominated in foreign currency, close to 5%. Thus, we should be able to borrow at a somewhat lower premium than 150 bp, possibly 130bp.
- Indian inflation has moved structurally downward over the last three years.
- It will also help to significantly lower the real repo rate to respectable levels.

Problems with these bonds

1. Usually, the lower dollar interest rate is offset in the long run by higher principal
No country has grown at “trend” rates with a real repo rate of around 3.4%, not even 2.4% or 2%. Issuing bonds now is an idea whose time has come.

Source: Indian Express

A case against punishing non-compliance of CSR guidelines

GS-IV | 06 August, 2019

Context
To mandate that private firms donate a part of their revenues to charitable causes is to profoundly misunderstand both the social responsibility of corporations and the meaning of the word donation.

Arguments against punishing non-compliance

- The fundamental social responsibility of corporates is to generate wealth for shareholders in a law-abiding, ethical and sustainable way.
- They generate surpluses for society, provide consumers with goods and services that they need, create employment, purpose and dignity among workers, and strengthen the nation.
- A profitable, well-run corporation does more for India and its people than any charity could possibly do.
- Government, through taxation, has the duty of providing public goods like education, public health, safety, and environmental protection. The government should not indulge in wasteful expenditures through loss-making airlines, wrong subsidies, etc.,

1. Philanthropy is a private matter—it is up to the individual to decide whether, how much and who to give to. The government can encourage this—through tax deductions, public acclamation, and moral suasion, but should not intervene.

Why CSR

- Allocate funds into activities that a government of a low-income democracy cannot.

- Faced with immense developmental challenges, our governments cannot easily justify allocations for world-class art galleries, museums, theatres, sports facilities, research
Individual philanthropy and CSR can support causes that democratic politics won’t allow the government to.

Problems with current CSR spending

- The bulk of CSR spending is going into education, health, rural areas, environment and so on. Already the government is spending hundreds of lakhs of crores for the same purposes.
- Corporate executives are unable to decide on the best social use of CSR funds because they are not equipped to do so.

Way ahead

- The right role and the right balance between corporate profits, government taxes, and individual charity promote social welfare.
- Do away with mandatory CSR, lower corporate taxes, and introduce tax deductions for certain activities that the government wishes to promote.

Source: Indian Express

Why we need to look beyond the ‘electric’ smokescreen

GS-III: Why we need to look beyond the ‘electric’ smokescreen

Context

The obsession with electric mobility makes it look as if it is the only solution for India’s transportation problems.

What the government must do instead

Bringing down the fuel import bill. Bringing down air pollution.

Do not push EVs

- We still cannot ensure a 24×7 electricity supply to hospitals. All our villages still do not
have a reliable electricity supply.

- Close to 80% of the electricity generated is from coal and gas. Yet another 50,000MW of coal-fired power plants are being set up under the National Electricity Plan.
- More than 20% of all the electricity generated goes into “transmission and distribution losses”.
- Most independent power plants operate at 12-15% below their declared capacity as they over-invoice plant costs.
- There will be immense pressure on the power grid that is not yet fully reliable.

**Other Solution**

- Air pollution – Construction dust, road dust, thermal power generation, diesel generators, traditional cooking fuels, stubble burning and open waste burning also contribute. Need action against each of these sources.
- Dependence on fossil fuels can be cut down not just by banning diesel, but by other more sane and immediate measures. Upgrade to the latest diesel-engine technology in public transport, reduce traffic congestion, ensure adequate power supply and get into diesel-blends.
- Ban all Bharat Stage 3 (BS3) vehicles and below. At once, close to 40% of all the 300 million vehicles on the roads will be gone. There’s no “vehicle scrappage policy”.
- Expand the traffic police strength by four-five times in over-jammed cities.
- Create and mandate dedicated parking spots for shared mobility services.
- Create vast grids of pedestrian skywalks. Operate multi-level parking lots.

**Public transport**

i. Assure top-notch public transport in India’s top 24 cities. A multi-modal grid of trains, buses, taxis, three-wheelers and two-wheelers could achieve this.
ii. Incentivize the manufacture and purchase of public transport vehicles through lower GST and cheaper loans.
iii. Encourage greater use of public transport among citizens through redemption and loyalty programs.
iv. Get all organizations with more than 100 employees to use bus fleets.

Each of these measures would show an immediate impact on vehicle-caused pollution and the use of fossil fuels.

Source: Live Mint

Fiscal wheels must also roll in order to make monetary policy effective.
GS-III: Fiscal wheels must also roll in order to make monetary policy effective

Context

Through four successive reductions in this year, RBI has reduced the repo rate by 110 basis points to 5.4%.

Status of the rate cut

- The economy has been slow to respond to these incremental monetary stimuli.
- Quarterly growth data show a continuing slowdown, mainly driven by sluggish demand, due to both external and domestic factors.
- There is substantial excess capacity in the manufacturing sector.
- With unutilized capacity, temporary and casual employees are being laid off and wage hikes are being postponed, reducing levels of aggregate disposable income, which is further reducing demand, particularly for consumer durables.
- Unless capacity utilization improves, investment demand from the private sector is not likely to improve.
- Repo rate reductions only provide enabling conditions to reduce the cost of borrowing. To be effective, adequate transmission needs to take place.

Limitations of Monetary Policy

- Demand for investment and consumer durables has to increase, which is a function of income, much more than the cost of borrowing. For this, momentum has to be generated at the fiscal side.
- Due to revenue constraints and legislative limits on borrowing, suitable countercyclical fiscal measures have not yet been taken.
- Without a demand push from the public sector, monetary policy alone would not be effective.

What the government should do:

- The countercyclical policy is primarily the responsibility of the central government.
- A one-year departure from the budgeted fiscal deficit of 3.3% of GDP for 2019-20 can be justified at the current juncture.
- It should be ensured that the entire additional borrowing above the budgeted level is spent on capital expenditure.
- It is established fact that increases in government capital expenditures have much larger multiplier effects, as compared to increases in government revenue expenditures.
- State governments and the central and state public enterprises should come on board and undertake additional investment spending on infrastructure.
- This will push investment from the private sector, uplifting the infrastructure and construction sectors, and later spreading out to other sectors.
Together, the joint impact of the fiscal and monetary stimuli is expected to uplift the country’s growth from its present low level to levels comfortably above 7% and, eventually, closer to 8.5-9%. Sustaining growth at these levels is required if India were to become a $5-trillion economy by the end of FY25.

Source: Live Mint
GS-II : Going Local

Context
A high-level government panel has recommended doing away with the requirement of foreign firms needing to store a copy of all personal data within India.

Background
- This approach marks a significant departure from the recommendations of the Justice Srikrishna committee report which had suggested that a copy of personal data must be stored in the country.
- The panel’s decision comes after a rethink by the Reserve Bank of India, which earlier relaxed its April 2018 circular that had mandated that all payment data generated in the country be stored.

Benefits of Localisation
It will address questions on privacy and security, enable greater governmental access to data, and help develop local data infrastructure.

1. No strong data protection law –
In the absence of a strong data protection law, questions of privacy and security are unlikely to be addressed.

2. Bilateral Treaties are better
While there are reasonable arguments to be made in favour of law enforcement having greater access to data, especially when it is not stored in India, interventions such as bilateral treaties aimed at addressing specific issues might be a more prudent approach.

3. Definition of critical Data
- The next set of questions are likely to centre around what constitutes critical personal data.
- The Srikrishna committee report had classified personal data pertaining to finances, health, biometric and genetic data, religious and political beliefs, among others, as sensitive personal data.

4. A single agency
It had envisaged a data protection agency which would list out further categories of sensitive personal data.

But it is debatable whether a single agency is best suited to draw up this list. As, globally the framing of localisation norms has been largely contextual, driven typically by the type of data and the sector it relates to — in Canada, any data may be sensitive based on the context sector-specific regulators might be better at identifying which data is sensitive.

Source: Indian Express

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

GS-II | 07 August, 2019


Context

The U.S has withdrawn from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

What’s the issue?

US in early December last year announced that it would suspend its obligations under the INF treaty by Feb. 2, citing Russian “cheating,” unless Moscow comes into compliance with the terms of the pact.

The U.S. government says the new Russian missile violates provisions of the pact that ban production, testing and deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 310 to 3,400 miles.

What would happen in the absence of treaty?

It is unclear what INF-prohibited systems the United States could deploy to Europe or Asia in the near term. The U.S. military has not developed any land-based missiles within the prohibited ranges for decades and has only just started funding a new ground-launched cruise missile to match the 9M729.

Russia could also effectively reclassify the RS-26 Rubezh, an experimental system that has been tested just above the INF Treaty’s 5,500-kilometer limit. To avoid violating the INF, Russian officials previously described the RS-26 as an intercontinental ballistic missile. However, it could form the basis for a missile of a slightly shorter range if Moscow wished to
boost its INF forces — without counting it under the U.S.-Russian New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or New START, governing longer-range systems.

This move is also likely to undermine the 2010 New START treaty governing U.S. and Russian long-range nuclear systems. The INF Treaty’s demise will undercut New START by reopening questions on the relationship between intermediate and strategic systems that have been resolved for 30 years by the elimination of ground-based, intermediate-range missiles.

**Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty:**


Under the INF Treaty, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. agreed to eliminate within three years all ground-launched-missiles of 500-5,500 km range and not to develop, produce or deploy these in future.

**Importance** of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in U.S.-Russia relations:

Under the Treaty, the two parties agreed that a whole important class of nuclear weapons would be removed from Europe, and only tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) or short-range missiles mostly deployed on the territory of Germany would remain.

The INF Treaty for years served to mitigate fears of both parties in relation to possibility of military escalation, operational miscalculation, and helping to shift the logic of MAD mutually assured destruction] to the higher “more sensitive” political level.

Source: The Hindu

Census 2021 may skip caste count

GS-I | 07 August, 2019

GS-I: Census 2021 may skip caste count

NEWS
Census 2021 is unlikely to collect “caste wise” data as a similar exercise conducted in 2011 by another ministry threw up about 40 lakh caste names that were difficult to tabulate.

The Census data would be available by the year 2024-25 as the entire process would be conducted digitally and data crunching would be quicker, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The 2011 caste data, collected as part of the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC), is yet to be released by the Centre.

As per the National Commission for Backward Classes, there are 2,479 entries in the Central list of the Other Backward Classes (OBC).

The Census would restrict itself to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes data.

What’s new in 2021 Census?

- The Census 2021 will be conducted in 18 languages out of the 23 scheduled languages, while Census 2011 was in 16 of the 18 scheduled languages declared at that time.
- It will be conducted in two phases: the house listing phase with 34 parameters from April 2020 to September 2020 and the population enumeration phase with 28 parameters from February 9 2021 to February 28 2021.
- The option of “Other” under the gender category, which roughly 5 lakh people marked in 2011, is now “Third Gender”.
- In a first time move, the process will now also include an optional mobile application that the 30 lakh enumerators can download on their own personal devices for data entry.

Source: The Hindu

Seriousness of the problem unemployment in India

GS-III: Seriousness of the problem unemployment in India

Context

Indian economy is slowing. This is largely a result of weakening demand, mostly in rural areas. Slowing demand has contributed to the declining availability of jobs, where jobless growth is already a problem.

The seriousness of the problem

Employment-unemployment surveys of National Sample Survey Office (NSSO): latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) tells us the following total number of workers in the economy was
472.5 million in 2011-12, which fell to 457 million in 2017-18. The absolute number of workers declined by 15.5 million over six years.

- This is the first time in the history of employment measurement by the NSSO that the total number of workers declined in absolute terms.
- 16-million decline in the number of workers reported by the Labour Bureau’s Annual Employment Surveys of the fourth and fifth rounds.

Reasons for Unemployment

- Fall in the number of workers in agriculture and a sharp fall in the absolute number of female workers.
- Crisis in agriculture in the last six years has only accelerated the process.
- The trend of declining women workers has absolutely no parallel in any developing or developed country of similar per capita income. In most East Asian countries, the period of rapid growth was also accompanied by a rising number of women workers.

Problems

- Number of people aged 25-64 years increased by around 47 million during the six-year period.
- The economy should have created at least 83 million jobs between 2012 and 2018 to accommodate those who have entered the labour force and those forced out of agriculture. But it witnessed a decline in the number of workers by 15.5 million.

Conclusion

Stagnant wages and jobless growth are not just indicators of a weakening economy, but also a recipe for political instability and a crisis in the countryside. The government should acknowledge the extent of the problem and then try to address it.

Source: Live Mint

A new medicine for drug-resistant TB

GS-II | 07 August, 2019
GS-II: A new medicine for drug-resistant TB

NEWS

Treating drug-resistant tuberculosis—multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) and extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB)—got a shot in the arm when the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) approved a new drug, Pretomanid.

Pretomanid

- It is only the third new anti-TB drug approved for use by FDA in more than 40 years.
- The drug was developed and tested in clinical trials by New York-based non-profit organisation TB Alliance.
- It has also provided data to the World Health Organisation (WHO) for consideration of inclusion in treatment guidelines for highly drug-resistant TB.

What makes the new drug so promising?

- The duration of treatment for drug-resistant TB can be drastically cut from 18-24 months to just six-nine months when pretomanid drug is used along with two already approved drugs—bedaquiline and linezolid.
- The all-oral, three-drug regimen can also vastly improve the treatment success rate and potentially decrease the number of deaths due to better adherence to treatment.

How is MDR-TB and XDR-TB identified?

- People with TB who do not respond to at least isoniazid and rifampicin, which are first-line TB drugs are said to have MDR-TB.
- People who are resistant to isoniazid and rifampin, plus any fluoroquinolone and at least one of three injectable second-line drugs (amikacin, kanamycin, or capreomycin) are said to have XDR-TB.

Which category of drug-resistant TB patients will benefit from this new drug?

- Pretomanid drug along with bedaquiline and linezolid is meant for treating adults with XDR-TB.
- In the case of MDR-TB, the three-drug regimen containing pretomanid can be used only in those patients who cannot tolerate the MDR-TB treatment or do not respond to standard MDR-TB treatment regimen.
- The three-drug regimen is meant only for treating pulmonary TB and should not be used for treating extra-pulmonary TB, drug-sensitive or latent TB.

How safe is the drug for clinical use?

- The US FDA has approved the drug based on limited clinical safety and efficacy data, and
so should the drug should be restricted to specific population of patients.

- Safety and effectiveness of the drug has been studied and established only when used in combination with bedaquiline and linezolid.
- Other than these two drugs, the safety of pretomanid has not been studied when used along with any other anti-TB drug.
- The three-drug combination should not be used in patients for whom bedaquiline and/or linezolid drug is not recommended.
- The drug has not been tested in pregnant women. Similarly, safety and effectiveness of the drug has not been established in children.

Why healing TB is deadly?

- According to the WHO, the treatment success in MDR-TB patients is about 54%, while it is just 30% in the case of XDR-TB patients.
- India has 24% of MDR-TB cases in the world. By the end of 2017, XDR-TB had been reported from 127 countries, including India.
- Most drugs are ineffective in people with XDR-TB and so a combination of eight drugs for more than a year is need for XDR-TB treatment.
- Treatment success in XDR-TB patients depends on many other factors — the extent of the drug resistance, the severity of the disease, whether the patient’s immune system is weakened, and adherence to treatment.
- Drugs used for treating MDR-TB and XDR-TB can cause serious adverse effects such as deafness. The drugs are highly toxic thus reducing adherence to treatment.

Source: The Hindu

Legislative Councils in States
GS-II | 07 August, 2019

GS-II: Legislative Councils in States

NEWS

The Madhya Pradesh government has indicated that it plans to initiate steps towards creation of a Legislative Council.

Debate over two houses

- Just as Parliament has two Houses, so can the states, if they choose to.
- Opinion in the Constituent Assembly was divided on the idea.
- Among the arguments in its favour, a second House can help check hasty actions by the
directly elected House, and also enable non-elected individuals to contribute to the legislative process.

- The arguments against the idea: a Legislative Council can be used to delay legislation, and to park leaders who have not been able to win an election.

Provision for a second House

- Article 71 of the Constitution provides for the option of a state to have a Legislative Council in addition to its Legislative Assembly.
- As in Rajya Sabha, members of a Legislative Council are not directly elected by voters.
- Under Article 169, a Legislative Council can be formed “if the Legislative Assembly of the State passes a resolution to that effect by a majority of the total membership of the Assembly and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting”.
- Parliament can then pass a law to this effect.

Members of LC

- Under Article 171 of the Constitution, the Legislative Council of a state shall not have more than one-third of the number of MLAs of the state, and not less than 40 members.
- In Madhya Pradesh, which has 230 MLAs, the proposed Legislative Council can have at most 76 members.
- As with Rajya Sabha MPs, the tenure of a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) is six years, with one-third of members retiring every two years.

Election of MLCs

- One-third of the MLCs are elected by the state’s MLAs, another one-third by a special electorate comprising sitting members of local governments such as municipalities and district boards, 1/12th by an electorate of teachers and another 1/12th by registered graduates.
- The remaining members are appointed by the Governor for distinguished services in various fields.

LC vis-à-vis Rajya Sabha

- The legislative power of the Councils is limited.
- Unlike Rajya Sabha which has substantial powers to shape non-financial legislation, Legislative Councils lack a constitutional mandate to do so.
- Assemblies can override suggestions/amendments made to legislation by the Council.
- Again, unlike Rajya Sabha MPs, MLCs cannot vote in elections for the President and Vice President.
- The Vice President is the Rajya Sabha Chairperson, an MLC is the Council Chairperson.

States with LCs
Currently, six states have Legislative Councils.
Jammu and Kashmir too had one, until the state was bifurcated into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.
Tamil Nadu’s then government had passed a law to set up a Council but the subsequent government withdrew it after coming to power in 2010.
Andhra Pradesh’s Legislative Council, set up in 1958, was abolished in 1985, then reconstituted in 2007.
The Odisha Assembly recently passed a resolution for a Legislative Council.
Proposals to create Councils in Rajasthan and Assam are pending in Parliament.

Source: Indian Express
National Creche Scheme

Context

National Crèche Scheme is being implemented as a *Centrally Sponsored Scheme* through States/UTs.

What is National Creche Scheme?

This scheme is implemented by the *Ministry of Women and Child Development*. It aims to providing a safe place for mothers to leave their children while they are at work. It is an intervention towards protection and development for children in the age group of 6 months to 6 years.

Significance

1. This scheme facility enables the parents to leave their children while they are at work and where the children are provided with a stimulating environment for their holistic development.
2. This scheme ensures to improve the health and nutrition status of the children.
3. It promotes physical, social, cognitive and emotional development of the children.
4. It also educates and empowers parents/caretakers for the better childcare.
5. The scheme is being structurally revised with the enhanced financial norms, stringent monitoring and sharing pattern between the Government of India and the implementing agencies and NGOs.

Fund sharing:

The fund sharing pattern under National Creche Scheme amongst Centre, States/UTs & Non Governmental Organisations/Voluntary Organisations for all recurring components of the scheme is in the ratio of 60:30:10 for States, 80:10:10 for North Eastern States and Himalayan States and 90:0:10 for UTs.

Source: The Hindu

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GI tag gets Odishaâ€™s Rasagola

GS-III | 08 August, 2019
News

The Rasagola, a popular dessert of Odisha has received the geographical indication tag from the Registrar of Geographical Indication.

About Odisha’s Rasagola

- The registration was conferred to ‘Odisha Rasagola’ under Section 16(I) or of authorized Section 17(3)(c) of Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act 1999.
- The GI number 612 has been registered in favour of the Odisha Small Industries Corporation Limited (OSIC Limited), a government of Odisha undertaking and Utkal Mistanna Byabasayee Samiti, a traders’ organisation, in the foodstuff category.
- According to the application submitted to the Registrar of GI, ‘Odisha Rasagola’ is a sweet from the state of Odisha made of chhena (cottage cheese) cooked in sugar syrup.
- Colour development of the ‘Odisha Rasagola’ is very specific, where without addition of external colour, various intensely-coloured rasagolas are prepared using the principle of caramelisation of sugar with specific methods of preparation.

Geographical Indications in India

- Geographical Indication is used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
- This tag is valid for a period of 10 years following which it can be renewed.
- Recently the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry has launched the logo and tagline for the Geographical Indications (GI) of India.
- The first product to get a GI tag in India was the Darjeeling tea in 2004.
- The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (GI Act) is a sui generis Act for protection of GI in India.
- India, as a member of the WTO enacted the Act to comply with the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

Geographical Indications protection is granted through the TRIPS Agreement.

Source: The Hindu
GS-II: Delimitations of Constituencies

Context

- Since the bifurcation of J&K State into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, delimitation of their electoral constituencies has been inevitable.
- While the government has not formally notified the Election Commission yet, the EC has held “internal discussions” on the J&K Reorganization Act, 2019, particularly its provisions on delimitation.

What is Delimitation? Why is it needed?

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and state Assembly seats to represent changes in population.
- In this process, the number of seats allocated to different states in Lok Sabha and the total number seats in a Legislative Assembly may also change.
- The main objective of delimitation is to provide equal representation to equal segments of a population.
- It also aims at a fair division of geographical areas so that one political party doesn’t have an advantage over others in an election.

Legal status

- Delimitation is carried out by an independent Delimitation Commission (DC).
- The Constitution mandates that its orders are final and cannot be questioned before any court as it would hold up an election indefinitely.

How is delimitation carried out?

- Under Article 82, the Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census.
- Once the Act is in force, the Union government sets up a DC made up of a retired Supreme Court judge, the Chief Election Commissioner and the respective State Election Commissioners.
- The Commission is supposed to determine the number and boundaries of constituencies in a way that the population of all seats, so far as practicable, is the same.
- The Commission is also tasked with identifying seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes these are where their population is relatively large.
- All this is done on the basis of the latest Census and, in case of difference of opinion among members of the Commission, the opinion of the majority prevails.

Implementation
The draft proposals of the DC are published in the Gazette of India, official gazettes of the states concerned and at least two vernacular papers for public feedback. The Commission also holds public sittings. After hearing the public, it considers objections and suggestions, received in writing or orally during public sittings, and carries out changes, if any, in the draft proposal. The final order is published in the Gazette of India and the State Gazette and comes into force on a date specified by the President.

How often has delimitation been done in the past?

- The first delimitation exercise in 1950-51 was carried out by the President (with the help of the Election Commission).
- The Constitution at that time was silent on who should undertake the division of states into Lok Sabha seats.
- This delimitation was temporary as the Constitution mandated redrawing of boundaries after every Census. Hence, another delimitation was due after the 1951 Census.

Why more independence to DC?

- Pointing out that the first delimitation had left many political parties and individuals unhappy, the EC advised the government that all future exercises should be carried out by an independent commission.
- This suggestion was accepted and the DC Act was enacted in 1952.
- There was no delimitation after the 1981 and 1991 Censuses.

Why was there no delimitation then?

- The Constitution mandates that the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to a state would be such that the ratio between that number and the population of the state is, as far as practicable, the same for all states.
- Although unintended, this provision implied that states that took little interest in population control could end up with a greater number of seats in Parliament.
- The southern states that promoted family planning faced the possibility of having their seats reduced.
- To allay these fears, the Constitution was amended during Indira Gandhi’s Emergency rule in 1976 to suspend delimitation until 2001.
- Despite the embargo, there were a few occasions that called for readjustment in the number of Parliament and Assembly seats allocated to a state.
- These include statehood attained by Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram in 1986, the creation of a Legislative Assembly for the National Capital Territory of Delhi, and creation of new states such as Uttarakhand.

Why postponed till 2026?
Although the freeze on the number of seats in Lok Sabha and Assemblies should have been lifted after the 2001 Census, another amendment postponed this until 2026. This was justified on the ground that a uniform population growth rate would be achieved throughout the country by 2026. So, the last delimitation exercise — started in July 2002 and completed on May 31, 2008 — was based on the 2001 Census and only readjusted boundaries of existing Lok Sabha and Assembly seats and reworked the number of reserved seats.

History of Delimitation in J&K

- Delimitation of J&K’s Lok Sabha seats is governed by the Indian Constitution, but delimitation of its Assembly seats (until special status was abrogated recently) was governed separately by its Constitution and J&K Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- As far as delimitation of Lok Sabha seats is concerned, the last DC of 2002 was not entrusted with this task. Hence, J&K parliamentary seats remain as delimited on the basis of the 1971 Census.
- As for Assembly seats, although the delimitation provisions of the J&K Constitution and the J&K RP Act, 1957, are similar to those of the Indian Constitution and Delimitation Acts. They mandate a separate DC for J&K. In actual practice, the same central DC set up for other states was adopted by J&K in 1963 and 1973.
- While the amendment of 1976 to the Indian Constitution suspended delimitation in the rest of the country till 2001, no corresponding amendment was made to the J&K Constitution. Hence, unlike the rest of the country, the Assembly seats of J&K were delimited based on the 1981 Census, which formed the basis of the state elections in 1996.
- There was no census in the state in 1991 and no DC was set up by the state government after the 2001 Census as the J&K Assembly passed a law putting a freeze on fresh delimitation until 2026.

Source: Indian Express

A law for those who testify

GS-II | 08 August, 2019

Context

Maharashtra came out with the Maharashtra Witness and Protection and Security Act 2017.
However, the Centre and most other states are yet to act on the directive.

Background

1. Supreme court gave its assent last year to the Witness Protection Scheme drafted by the Centre.
2. The scheme was meant to be a measure in force only until the government brought out its own law on the issue.
3. The objective of the scheme is to ensure the safety of witnesses so that they are able to give a true account of the crime without any fear of violence or criminal recrimination.

Poor implementation

1. Though the scheme provides for police personnel to be deployed to protect the witness, it is silent on the punishment to be given to those policemen who themselves threaten the witnesses.
2. Criminals continue to get support from the police. The shadowy politician-police nexus is so strong that no policeman dares take any action against his ‘master’.
3. The Witness Protection Scheme calls for more elaborate and stricter laws to be incorporated so that criminals find no loopholes that can be exploited to their advantage.

The sooner the Centre comes up with legislation codifying the protection to be given to witnesses, the better it is for India’s criminal justice system.

Source: The Hindu

An intervention that leads to more question

GS-II | 08 August, 2019

GS-II: An intervention that leads to more question

Context

Defence Minister tweeted that India’s ‘future’ commitment to a posture of No First Use of nuclear weapons ‘depends on the circumstances’.

Background of NFU
India is one of the two countries that adhere to a doctrine of No First Use (NFU) along with China.

India has maintained that it will not strike first with nuclear weapons.

But India reserves the right to retaliate to any nuclear first strike against it (or any ‘major’ use of weapons of mass destruction against Indian forces) with a nuclear strike ‘that will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage’.

**How it benefited us**

NFU simply raises the nuclear threshold in order to bring stability to a volatile environment.

The adoption of the nuclear doctrine came soon after Operation Parakram (2001-02).

The public adoption of the doctrine an attempt by India to restate its commitment to restraint and to being a responsible nuclear power. India used this restraint to repulse the intruders in Kargil and regain occupied land. despite India and Pakistan’s nuclear tests of 1998. It gave India the space for conventional operations and gained it sympathy in foreign capitals despite the fears of nuclear miscalculation. India’s self-proclaimed restraint brought it into the nuclear mainstream the initial application for the waiver in 2008 from the Nuclear Suppliers Group membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Wassenaar Arrangement, and the Australia Group ongoing attempts to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

**Need for change in stance**

- Revoking the commitment to NFU does not necessarily equate with abandoning restraint
- Many advocate a more muscular nuclear policy for India. Bharat Karnad, a member of the first National Security Advisory Board considered NFU ‘a fraud’ which would be ‘the first casualty’, if war were to break out.

Source: The Hindu

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**National Medical Commission Bill**

GS-II | 08 August, 2019

**GS-II: National Medical Commission Bill**

**Context:**
The National Medical Commission Act 2019 has been passed by both Houses of Parliament is historic and path-breaking.

What is the NMC Bill?

The National Medical Commission Bill seeks to improve the medical education system in the country by ensuring availability of adequate and high-quality medical professionals, periodic assessment of medical institutions, adoption of the latest medical research by medical professionals and an effective grievance redressal mechanism.

The Bill has the following key features:

1. The Bill proposes to set up a **medical commission**, both at the national and state level, within three years of the passage of the legislation.
2. The Bill also has a provision for setting up a **Medical Advisory Council** by the Centre. The council will act as a channel through which the states/Union Territories can convey their views and concerns to the NMC.
3. The legislation also talks of conducting a **uniform National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET)** for admission to under-graduate medical education in all medical institutions regulated under the Bill.
4. The Bill proposes to hold the **National Exit Test** for the students graduating from medical institutions to obtain the licence for the practice. The test will also allow students to take admission into post-graduate courses at medical institutions under this legislation.
5. The Bill says that the **NMC will have the authority to grant a limited licence to certain mid-level practitioners connected with the modern medical profession to practice medicine**.

NMC

1. The Bill aims to set up a **National Medical Commission** with 25 members.
2. These **members will be appointed by the central government** on the recommendation of a committee.
3. The members will include a chairperson, who must be a senior medical practitioner and academic with at least 20 years of experience, 10 ex officio members and 14 part-time members.
4. The **ex officio members** will include the presidents of the undergraduate and postgraduate medical education boards, the director general of Indian Council of Medical Research, and a director of one of the AIIMS, among others.
5. **Part-time members**, on the other hand, will include experts from the field of management, law, medical ethics, etc. and nominees of states and union territories.

Functions of NMC:
The NMC will frame policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals, assessing the requirements of healthcare-related human resources and infrastructure, and ensuring compliance by the State Medical Councils of the regulations made under the Bill. Besides this, the NMC will frame guidelines for determination of fees for up to 50 per cent of the seats in private medical institutions and deemed universities which are regulated under the Bill.

**Why doctors are so much against it?**

1. **Section 32** of the bill authorises the government to allow non-medical degree holders to practice medicine as community health providers. This provision has been vehemently opposed by Indian Medical Association that says it will legalise quacks in the country.
2. This will allow anyone with limited exposure to modern medical system to recommend medicines.
3. Compared to the present 70 per cent figure of elected representatives in the Medical Council of India (MCI), only 20 per cent members of the NMC will be elected representatives.
4. Unlike MCI, whose decisions were not binding on state medical councils, the NMC Bill allows the commission’s ethics board to exercise jurisdiction over state medical councils on compliance related to ethical issues.
5. Also, while action can be taken against the MCI president only on the direction of a court, the NMC Bill enables the central government to remove the chairperson or any other member of the commission.
6. National Exit Test (NEXT) has been conceptualised as a single test, which will act as a common final-year undergraduate medical exam and be used for granting medical licence as well as admission to postgraduate courses. It has been argued that a single exam is being accorded too much weightage, and it can have an adverse impact on the career of medical aspirants.
7. The Bill allows the commission to “frame guidelines for determination of fees and all other charges in respect of fifty per cent of seats in private medical institutions and deemed to be universities”. This increases the number of seats for which private institutes will have the discretion to determine fees. At present, in such institutes, state governments decide fees for 85 per cent of the seats.

**Positive aspects of the bill:**

Unlike MCI, the members of NMC will have to declare their assets at the time of assuming office and when they leave. They will also have to submit a conflict of interest declaration.

**Need of the hour:**

If the government wanted to improve the health services in the rural areas then it should strengthen the existing paramedics. Nurses and midwives are trained for administering injections and similar functions and the government should try to tap this trained manpower.
Primary care can be taken by these paramedics and only complex medical problems should be referred to a doctor with specialised knowledge. This kind of model has worked in other countries where doctors only treat complex problems.

Challenges ahead:

1. The primary issue in Indian healthcare is availability of doctors. Bulk of 78,000-odd doctors that pass out of medical colleges seem to find greater attraction in metros, not remote locations where trained, qualified and specialist clinicians are most needed.
2. The second challenge involves addressing the issue of standardisation and high quality with uniformity across the country. While the bill seeks to address some of these issues, there remain unanswered questions on the design, definition and the transparent execution of the bill and some of its provisions.
3. The fact that elected members to NMC itself and to its three principal bodies – committees on syllabus and curriculum, accreditation and medical ethics – can be inefficient, if not bad, there is still no guarantee that nominated persons will be any better.

Background:

India has a doctor-population ratio of 1:1456 as compared with the WHO standards of 1:1000. In addition, there is a huge skew in the distribution of doctors working in the Urban and Rural areas with the urban to rural doctor density ratio being 3.8:1. Consequently, most of our rural and poor population is denied good quality care leaving them in the clutches of quacks. It is worth noting that at present 57.3% of personnel currently practicing allopathic medicine does not have a medical qualification.

Source: The Hindu
Deep Ocean Mission

The Deep Ocean Mission (DOM) to explore the deepest recesses of the ocean has finally got the green signal from the government.

**Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)**

- Nodal Agency: Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)
- The mission proposes to explore the deep ocean similar to the space exploration started by ISRO.
- Underwater robotics and ‘manned’ submersibles are key components of the Mission which will help India harness various living and non-living (water, mineral and energy) resources from the seabed and deep water.
- The tasks that will be undertaken over this period include deep-sea mining, survey, energy exploration and the offshore-based desalination.
- These technological developments are funded under an umbrella scheme of the government – called Ocean Services, Technology, Observations, Resources Modelling and Science (O-SMART).

**Objective of the mission**

- A major thrust of the mission will be looking for metals and minerals.
- It has been estimated that 380 million metric tonnes of Polymetallic nodules are available at the bottom of the seas in the Central Indian Ocean.
- These are rocks scattered on the seabed containing iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt.
- The ‘Deep Ocean Mission’ plan will enable India to develop capabilities to exploit resources in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB).

**What are Polymetallic Nodules?**

Polymetallic nodules (also known as manganese nodules) are potato-shaped, largely porous nodules found in abundance carpeting the sea floor of world oceans in deep sea. Besides manganese and iron, they contain nickel, copper, cobalt, lead, molybdenum, cadmium, vanadium, titanium, of which nickel, cobalt and copper are considered to be of economic and strategic importance.

**About International Seabed Authority(ISA)**

International Seabed Authority (ISA) is a UN body set up to regulate the exploration and
exploitation of marine non-living resources of oceans in international waters. India actively contributes to the work of International Seabed Authority. Last year, India was re-elected as a member of Council of ISA. India’s nominees on Legal and Technical Commission and Finance Committee of the ISA were also elected last year.

Source: The Hindu

Dam Safety Bill, 2019
GS-II | 09 August, 2019

GS-II: Dam Safety Bill 2019

Context

Opposition MPs in the Lok Sabha have expressed deep reservations about the Centre’s decision to introduce the Dam Safety Bill, 2019, asserting that the legislation, which is ostensibly aimed at providing uniform safety measures across the country, would undermine the powers of State governments since water is a State subject.

Concerns

- The bill is too focused on structural safety and not on operational safety.
- There is inadequate compensation to the people affected by dams.
- There is need for an independent regulator as well as for a precise definition of stakeholders.
- Many states say it encroaches upon the sovereignty of States to manage their dams, and violates the principles of federalism enshrined in the Constitution.

Significance

- The Bill will help all the States and Union Territories of India to adopt uniform dam safety procedures which shall ensure safety of dams and safeguard benefits from such dams. This shall also help in safeguarding human life, livestock and property.
- It addresses all issues concerning dam safety including regular inspection of dams, Emergency Action Plan, comprehensive dam safety review, adequate repair and maintenance funds for dam safety, Instrumentation and Safety Manuals.

Need

1. Over the last fifty years, India has invested substantially in dams and related infrastructures, and ranks third after USA and China in the number of large dams.
The Yuanâ€™s devaluation has made investors nervous
GS-II | 09 August, 2019

**GS-II: The Yuan’s devaluation has made investors nervous**

**CONTEXT**

Chinese yuan broke the seven-to-one parity against the dollar for the first time since 2008. China deliberately devalued the Chinese currency after the latest tariff threats issued by US.

**Why China did this?**

1. **Economic reasons**
   1. China’s weakening manufacturing competitiveness is likely to strengthen with yuan-priced goods and services getting cheaper across supply chains in East Asia, parts of Africa, etc.
   2. It is likely to widen China’s trade surplus with the US in the immediate short run.
   3. It will also help China expand trade margins within its own region, especially with Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, etc.

2. **Political Reasons**
   1. The US’ own strategic engagement in Asia has weakened under Trump, who questioned the “value of US alliances with Japan and South Korea
   2. Japanese imposed trade restrictions on South Korea. China and Russia staged their first joint aerial patrols in the region, causing South Koreans to react militarily.
   3. China-US friction has offered significant economic and political leverage to smaller
Problems

1. Risk not only for those trading in the US and Chinese currencies or their stocks, but also for capital flows between emerging markets.
2. China, around 2015-16, tried something similar by letting the yuan depreciate; it led to a stock market crash in China, and billions of its dollar reserves disappeared in just a few days.
3. That devaluation saw led to a massive capital flight from China, further weakening its external position.
4. The debt denominated in foreign currencies has increased for global companies and developing nations across the world, and maybe vulnerable to a currency shock if the "currency war" continues.
5. Most foreign investors switched to the safety of gold or other currencies like yen.
6. China’s weakening of its currency to hurt US economic interests for political gains will only make other Asian countries more vulnerable to a political crisis that could quickly escalate to a financial crisis.

Source: Live Mint

Taken for a ride: on India’s gender-blind transport system

GS-III: Taken for a ride: on India’s gender-blind transport system

CONTEXT

A 2010 report by New-Delhi based NGO Jagori revealed that 51% of women in the capital faced harassment inside public transport, and another 42% while waiting for public transport.

Ola’s survey ahead of International Women’s Day 2019, highlighted how only 9% of the surveyed women commuters in the country felt safe in public transport, but still used it due to the lack of other options.
HOW TO MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORT SAFE FOR ALL

- Rope in traffic police at large bus depots, MRTC railway stations.
- Provide functional and responsive helplines.
- Ensure elevators and escalators are functional.
- Better footpaths and clean subways.
- Create safe and usable cycling tracks.
- Set up the gender advisory committee.
- Most importantly, educate and sensitize men.

Problems

1. As per a 2017 report by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, women may turn down better employment opportunities further away from home in favor of lower-paid local jobs when the public transport system is unreliable or unaffordable.
2. This holds true especially for those belonging to lower-income groups, thus impacting their access to better jobs, education and basic necessities.
3. The report also states that over 84% of trips by women are by the public, intermediate public and non-motorised modes of transport.
4. Efforts to improve our crumbling public transport systems used by a majority of the population — haven’t been addressed.

Motor Vehicles Bill 2019

1. The bill provides some relief to passengers as far as app-based taxi-hailing services go.
2. It gives power to the Centre to regulate these services and set ground rules on safety and surge pricing, and get them to invest in customer care teams.
3. It points out issues of road safety, heftier fines for errant drivers, vehicle recall norms.
4. There’s no mention of better roads or infrastructure development.

Unless we have gender-responsive plans for urban transport in place, our cities will be far from inclusive.

Source: The Hindu

What India has to offer in the Gulf

GS-II | 09 August, 2019

GS-II : What India has to offer in the Gulf
Context

Narendra Modi’s visit to the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain underlines India’s continuing commitment to relations with the Gulf region.

Gulf region – a new approach to India

- Gulf Kingdoms are eager to develop an independent relationship with India, independent of their relationship with Pakistan. Modi is being honored with the Zayed Medal, the highest civilian honor in the Emirates.
- Some Gulf countries have expanded counter-terror cooperation with India, extending support to India in the conflict over Jammu and Kashmir. They have sought to open the OIC platform for India despite Pakistan’s objections.
- Gulf kingdoms have begun to address many of the long-standing Indian concerns with respect to the Indian diaspora and expatriate labor.
- Gulf has begun to see India as a major economic partner. Saudi decision to pick up a 2% stake in the oil business of Reliance Industries Limited and UAE’s support for the construction of India’s Strategic Petroleum Reserve are two examples of deepening energy interdependence.

Challenges

1. Regional political turbulence – Paying greater attention to the domestic dynamics in the different kingdoms. A new trend has been the effort to promote moderate Islam in the region.
   - UAE has been at the forefront of this effort.
   - In Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince has taken some small but significant steps to liberalize the economy and society.
   - India should offer strong public support for the reform agenda in the region.

2. India must reciprocate the strategic economic cooperation ranging from energy and digital innovation to arms production and space technology. China has moved quickly to elevate its economic and commercial profile in the region.

3. Expanding security cooperation: The highly vulnerable Gulf has long depended upon Britain and the US to protect themselves from threats. Trump’s talk on downsizing America’s role in the Gulf is encouraging the region to diversify its security partnerships. India must have a proactive strategy for defense cooperation in the region.

4. India’s instinct was to avoid getting drawn into the conflicts. But it can’t be a permanent Indian security strategy in the Gulf. India must vision itself contributing to the regional security in whatever manner it can.

Source: Indian Express
The Pacific island nation of Papua New Guinea has the highest number of ‘living’ indigenous languages in the world (840), while India stands fourth with 453.

Background

1. 2019 is the United Nations’ International Year of Indigenous Languages
2. In 2016, the UN’s Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues pointed out that 40% of the estimated 6,700 languages spoken around the world were in danger of disappearing
3. Several languages are now “endangered”
4. For languages like Tiniguan (Colombian origin), there is just a single native speaker left
5. Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi and Arabic are the most widely spoken languages worldwide when only first-languages are considered
6. U.S. and Australia are among the countries where the highest number of languages are spoken
7. Asia and Africa account for the highest number of indigenous languages
8. ‘Greenberg’s diversity index’ – the probability that any two people selected at random would have different mother tongues. It ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates no diversity and 1 indicates total diversity. A higher diversity index would mean more languages spread across the country.
9. Most Indian languages are derivatives of languages that are spoken in other parts of Asia as well.
10. Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken across Northeast India, China, Bhutan, Nepal and other South East Asian countries.
11. But, Andamanese language family is confined to India alone.
12. According to UNESCO’s ‘Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger’, in India, five languages have become extinct since 1950, while 42 are critically endangered.
13. The International Year of Indigenous Languages aims to promote native tongues in five key areas like creation of favourable conditions for knowledge-sharing and dissemination of good practices on indigenous languages.

Source: The Hindu
Our notions of motherhood

NEWS

The Lok Sabha passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill 2019, to regulate the practice of surrogacy in India and allow only “ethical altruistic surrogacy”.

Challenges

1. Heavy reliance on criminal law for managing social issues, criminalisation of choice and prejudiced ideas of what constitutes a family.
2. Disallows single, divorced or widowed persons, unmarried couples and homosexual couples from pursuing surrogacy to have children.
3. It stipulates that only a man and woman married for at least five years, where either or both are proven infertile, can avail of surrogacy.

Why the provisions are discriminatory

1. India’s jurisprudence recognises the reproductive autonomy of single persons, the rights of persons in live-in relationships and fundamental rights of transgenders.
2. In Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India, Supreme Court decriminalised consensual same-sex between consenting adults and held that the law cannot discriminate against same-sex partnership.
3. Single persons have the right to adopt children in India.
5. Criminalisation of commercial surrogacy is a refusal by the state to actually consider the exercise of agency that leads a woman to become a surrogate mother.
6. A ban on commercial surrogacy stigmatises this choice and reinforces the notion of the vulnerable “poor” woman who does not understand the consequences of her decisions and needs the protection of a paternalistic State.
7. In our patriarchal society, it can be expected that young mothers will be coerced into becoming surrogates for their relatives. The Bill moves the site of exploitation into the private and opaque sphere of the home and family.

Altruistic surrogacy

1. The shift to altruistic-only surrogacy was made in the context of reports about cases of surrogate babies being abandoned and exploited.
2. Problems of surrogate mothers being kept in “surrogacy brothels” and rich foreigners using the bodies of poor Indian women to have children.
3. PIL in Jayashree Wad vs Union of India sought to end commercial surrogacy in India. Based on court judgement, the government declared that it did not support commercial surrogacy and would allow only infertile Indian couples to avail of altruistic surrogacy.

4. There is a danger of exploitation and abuse in commercial surrogacy.

Way ahead

1. Exploitation takes place because of the unequal bargaining power between the surrogate mother and the surrogacy clinics, agents and intending parents. This can be addressed by a strong regulatory mechanism with transparency and mandating fair work and pay for the surrogate mothers.

2. Viewing commercial surrogacy as inherently exploitative and banning it expands the potential for exploitation as it would force the business underground.

3. The Standing Committee had recommended a model of compensated surrogacy which would cover psychological counselling of the surrogate mother and/or her children, lost wages for the duration of pregnancy, child care support, dietary supplements and medication, maternity clothing and post-delivery care.

Surrogacy is an important avenue for persons to have a child through a willing surrogate mother who can also benefit monetarily from the process.

Source: GS-II

â€˜Public chargesâ€™ in US immigration policy

GS-II | 10 August, 2019

GS-II: ‘Public charges’ in US immigration policy

Context

- The US signalled a major change in its green card policy, by announcing an expansion in the meaning of the term “public charge”.
- The new rule could drastically reduce legal immigration to the US.

The ‘Public Charge’

- The present definition, according to the website of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), is as follows:
- For purposes of determining inadmissibility, “public charge” means an individual who is likely to become primarily dependent on the government for subsistence, as demonstrated by either the receipt of public cash assistance for income maintenance or
institutionalization for long-term care at government expense.

- The programs falling under the above definition include Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, state and local General Assistance programs and long-term care programs like Medicaid among others.

- Programs generally not considered under “public charge” include “non-cash benefits” such as public schools, childcare services, Medicaid (non long-term), public assistance for vaccinations, emergency medical services, Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), nutrition programs like Food Stamps, foster care and adoption assistance and job training programs.

Consequences of an immigrant becoming a ‘public charge’

- Under the existing policy, USCIS immigration officers can deny a green card on “public charge” grounds if the applicant is “likely to become primarily dependent on the government for subsistence”.

- This discretionary power has to be exercised only after looking into “the totality of the circumstances”, including factors such as age, health, financial status, education, and skills.

- Inadmissibility on “public charge” grounds can only take place in green card proceedings, and not in those for citizenship (which in most cases is sought when the applicant already has a green card).

What has the Trump administration changed?

- The new rule expands the ambit of the term “public charge”, by introducing additional conditions that could preclude an immigrant from obtaining a green card.

- Major changes include: More welfare programs being included in the “public charge” list, the taking into consideration of even past use of benefits, and a significant increase in the family and individual income criteria.

Impact of the move

- The rule is also criticised for its possible long term impact on the US, as legal immigrants already residing in the country would now be fearful of availing essential services.

- Critics have alleged a racial bias, saying that the move targets immigrants from developing countries, while prioritizing more affluent applicants from the global North.

Source: Inidian Express
GS-II: Household Air Pollution in India

Context

- A study published by the Collaborative Clean Air Policy Centre states that the single greatest contributor to air pollution in India is the burning of solid fuels in households.
- The burning of such solid fuels, like firewood, impacts the health of household members accounts for somewhere between 22% to 52% of all ambient air pollution in India.
- The study postulates that based on this evidence, switching to cleaner fuels such as LPG for household use will have a dramatic impact on pollution levels and health problems due to pollution.

What is Household Air Pollution and how dangerous is it?

- Fine particulate matter refers to particles or droplets with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers (0.000001 metres) or less, and is also known as PM2.5.
- The emissions of PM 2.5 generated by the burning of solid fuels in households is termed Household Air Pollution (HAP).
- The study claims that approximately 800,000 premature deaths occur in India every year as a result of exposure to HAP indoors.
- Moreover, the HAP produced indoors travels outdoors, and becomes a contributor to ambient air pollution, with around 300,000 more premature deaths per year attributable to exposure to outdoor HAP.
- The full impact of HAP is thus composed of the exposures to HAP 1) inside and around a given house and 2) from the household contribution to ambient air pollution states the study.
- The median estimate for the contribution of HAP is, according to the study, around 30%, far greater than that of industries (2%-10%), power plants (8%-15%), and transportation (8%-11%).
- The contribution of HAP to premature mortality is, as per the median across all studies, 58% higher than premature mortality due to coal use, 303% higher than that due to open burning, and 1,056% higher than that due to transportation.

Why should solid fuels used in India?

- In states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Assam, around 72.1% of the population regularly uses solid fuels.
- The median annual ambient is 125.3µg/m^3, a level that is rated “unhealthy” as per the Air Quality Index, and can lead to serious health concerns with prolonged exposure.

What are the study’s recommendations?
The study asserts that immediate action is required to rectify the harm caused by HAP (Household Air Pollution). It points to initiatives undertaken by the government of India to promote LPG for use in households as opposed to the traditionally used solid fuels, such as the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana. However, the study claims that more effort is required, in particular, increasing the use of electricity as a substitute in these scenarios, and ensuring that the use of LPG is sustained.

Source: Indian Express

World Biofuel Day

GS-III | 10 August, 2019

Context:
World Biofuel Day is observed every year on 10th August.

Aim:
To create awareness about the importance of non-fossil fuels as an alternative to conventional fossil fuels and to highlight the various efforts made by the Government in the biofuel sector.

Theme 2019: ‘Production of Biodiesel from Used Cooking Oil (UCO)’.

Why August 10?
On this day in 1893, Sir Rudolph Diesel (inventor of the diesel engine) for the first time successfully ran mechanical engine with Peanut Oil.

His research experiment had predicted that vegetable oil is going to replace the fossil fuels in the next century to fuel different mechanical engines. Thus to mark this extraordinary achievement, World Biofuel Day is observed every year on 10th August.

Government of India initiatives to promote the use of Biofuels:
Since 2014, the Government of India has taken a number of initiatives to increase blending of biofuels.
The major interventions include administrative price mechanism for ethanol, simplifying the procurement procedures of OMCs, amending the provisions of Industries (Development & Regulation) Act, 1951 and enabling lignocellulosic route for ethanol procurement.

The Government approved the National Policy on Biofuels-2018 in June 2018. The policy has the objective of reaching 20% ethanol-blending and 5% biodiesel-blending by the year 2030.

Among other things, the policy expands the scope of feedstock for ethanol production and has provided for incentives for production of advanced biofuels.

The Government has also increased the price of C-heavy molasses-based ethanol.

**Outcomes:**

These interventions of the Government of India have shown positive results.

Ethanol blending in petrol has increased from 38 crore litres in the ethanol supply year 2013-14 to an estimated 141 crore litres in the ethanol supply year 2017-18.

Bio-diesel blending in the country started from 10th August, 2015 and in the year 2018-19, Oil Marketing Companies have allocated 7.6 crore litres of biodiesel.

Oil PSUs are also planning to set up 12 Second Generation (2G) Bio-refineries to augment ethanol supply and address environmental issues arising out of burning of agricultural biomass.

**Classification of Biofuels:**

1st generation biofuels are also called conventional biofuels. They are made from things like sugar, starch, or vegetable oil. Note that these are all food products. Any biofuel made from a feedstock that can also be consumed as a human food is considered a first generation biofuel.

2nd generation biofuels are produced from sustainable feedstock. The sustainability of a feedstock is defined by its availability, its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, its impact on land use, and by its potential to threaten the food supply. No second generation biofuel is also a food crop, though certain food products can become second generation fuels when they are no longer useful for consumption. Second generation biofuels are often called “advanced biofuels.”

3rd generation biofuels are biofuel derived from algae. These biofuels are given their own separate class because of their unique production mechanism and their potential to mitigate most of the drawbacks of 1st and 2nd generation biofuels.

Source: The Hindu
GS-II: Patients and Victims

Context

Last year, a series of reports revealed the traumatic experiences of Indian patients who had received faulty hip implants manufactured by the pharma major, Johnson and Johnson.

Another investigation has revealed that Johnson and Johnson paid hefty compensations to US patients who had received the defective implants.

In India, however, the company has challenged government orders to compensate 4,700 patients who had undergone hip replacement surgeries.

Background

- The investigations pertain to implants manufactured under two brand names, ASR and Pinnacle.
- Both products are not in the market currently.
- Johnson and Johnson recalled ASR from the global market in 2010, while Pinnacle was withdrawn in 2013.

The slow reaction by India

- In India, in contrast, regulators were slow to react.
- Maharashtra’s FDA red-flagged ASR a few months after Johnson and Johnson withdrew the product from the global market.
- It took another year for the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation to ban the import of ASR.
- Another year went by before the drug regulator issued an advisory to orthopaedic surgeons asking them to not implant ASR.
- These delays are significant because last year, Johnson and Johnson told a Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) expert committee that it cannot trace as many as 3,600 patients who underwent surgeries involving the faulty implant.
- That India did not have a joint registry when these surgeries happened has compounded the problem.
- The want of a registry has also come in the way of ascertaining the damage caused by Pinnacle. Johnson and Johnson claims that it has no adverse reports of the device in the country.

Conclusion

In 2017, the MoHFW issued the Medical Devices Rules. However, the country’s base legislation on implants continues to be the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, which does not have the scope to cover most modern devices, including hip implants. The Indian orthopaedic
device market is valued at over 450 million dollars and is expected to grow by 30 per cent per year till 2025. The investigations into faulty hip implants bring out the urgent need for a law to regulate medical devices.

Source: Indian Express

Rupee Matters
GS-III | 12 August, 2019

GS-II: Rupee Matters

CONTEXT

Over the past few years, there has been a concern over the sharp rise in offshore rupee trading volumes.

Facts

Data from the Bank of International Settlements pegs daily offshore rupee trading at around $16 billion in 2016, almost equal to onshore trading.


Challenges

- Which forces determine the rupee’s value?
- What is the ability of the central bank to ensure “currency stability”?
- Offshore markets allow participants to trade in non-convertible currency. These markets have evolved for currencies where restrictions are imposed in domestic markets on foreign exchange convertibility.
- The constraints on foreign participation in domestic currency markets stem from cumbersome documentation and KYC requirements, restrictions on products, inconvenient trading hours. These restrictions push investors into the trade offshore markets to hedge their currency risks.
- These markets have begun to play a critical role in “price discovery”, more so during “periods of uncertainty” like the taper tantrum in 2013 and 2018 emerging market crises — when the offshore market was driving the onshore exchange rate. This has reduced the efficacy of foreign currency intervention by the central bank.

Recommendations
Incentivize market participants to shift to onshore markets, like extending onshore market hours, examining issues of taxation.

Allowing market participants to take exposure up to $100 million, without any need to establish the existence of an underlying risk

Incentivize greater participation in rupee-denominated bonds

As the economy grows, expand onshore currency markets in a calibrated manner

The ability to hedge currency risks will increase the rupee’s attractiveness for trade invoicing and portfolio diversification

This can lead to the gradual internationalization of the currency.

Source: Indian Express

Rooting AI in ethics

GS-III: Rooting AI in ethics

Context

Most commercially available AI systems are optimized using the teleological perspectives and not the deontological perspective.

Ethical issues – a case study

An AI system introduced in 2015 in the U.S. failed to recognize the faces of African Americans with the same accuracy as those of Caucasian Americans.

From a teleological perspective, this flawed AI system gets a go-ahead because Caucasian Americans constitute 72.4% of the country's population.

From a deontological perspective, it can be rejected as its intention was not to identify people from all races.

Digital platform companies, whose markets span many countries should aim to identify faces of
AI facial recognition systems are used for law enforcement. Someone can be labeled a threat to public safety just because of limited data based on one’s skin color was used to train the AI system.

The bias in the data used to train the algorithm stems from flawed historical and cultural perspectives and they contaminate the data.

NITI Aayog has a ₹7,500 crore plan to build national capability and infrastructure. The transformative capability of AI must be rooted in an egalitarian ethical basis.

Source: Indian Express

State-Run Oil Marketing Companies to Buy Biodiesel Made From Used Cooking Oil

GS-III: State-Run Oil Marketing Companies to Buy Biodiesel Made From Used Cooking Oil

Context:

The government has launched a ‘Repurpose Used Cooking Oil (RUCO)’ sticker and a phone app to enable the collection of used cooking oil. Restaurants and hotels interested in supplying used cooking oil can affix the sticker to show availability.

What is RUCO initiative?

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) had launched RUCO (Repurpose Used Cooking Oil), an initiative that will enable collection and conversion of used cooking oil to bio-diesel.

Under this initiative, 64 companies at 101 locations have been identified to enable collection of used cooking oil.

FSSAI wants businesses using more than 100 litres of oil for frying, to maintain a stock register and ensure that UCO is handed over to only registered collecting agencies.

Significance of the initiative:
FSSAI believes India has the potential to recover 220 crore litres of used cooking oil for the production of biodiesel by 2022 through a co-ordinated action. While biodiesel produced from used cooking oil is currently very small, but a robust ecosystem for conversion and collection is rapidly growing in India and will soon reach a sizable scale.

Background:

The initiative was launched after the food safety regulator notified standards for used cooking oil. According to FSSAI regulations, the maximum permissible limits for Total Polar Compounds (TPC) have been set at 25%, beyond which the cooking oil is unsafe for consumption.

What are Total Polar Compounds (TPC)?

- In many countries, TPC is used to measure the quality of oil. The level of TPC increases every time oil is re-heated. Some of the studies show that TPC accumulation in oil without food is slower than that in oil frying with food.
- Higher level of TPC in cooking oil leads to health issues like hypertension, atherosclerosis, Alzheimer’s disease and liver disease. One of the studies also noticed high levels of glucose, creatinine and cholesterol with declined levels of protein and albumin in cooking oil.

Significance of the initiative:

Currently, used cooking oil is either not discarded or disposed of in such a manner that it chokes drains and sewerage systems. Apart from setting quality standards, the new regulation addresses the way this oil is discarded. As used cooking oil is considered the most reasonable feedstock for biodiesel production, the FSSAI is planning to redirect the used cooking oil from the food business operators. It has already started collecting used oil in small quantities either through a barter arrangement or at cost.

National Policy on biofuels- salient features:

Categorization: The Policy categorises biofuels as “Basic Biofuels” viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and “Advanced Biofuels” – Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.

Scope of raw materials: The Policy expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava, Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.

Protection to farmers: Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.
Viability gap funding: With a thrust on Advanced Biofuels, the Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.

Boost to biodiesel production: The Policy encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.

Source: The Hindu

National Conference on e-Governance adopts ‘Shillong Declaration’™.

GS-II: National Conference on e-Governance adopts ‘Shillong Declaration’

Context

- 22nd National Conference on e-Governance adopts ‘Shillong Declaration’ with focus on Northeast.
- The declaration has outlined the future trajectory that would be taken in terms of e-governance with a focus on improving connectivity in Northeast.

Background:

- The Conference on e-Governance was organised by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions and Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology in collaboration with the Meghalaya Government.
- The conference was an attempt to streamline e-governance services for effective policy implementation while helping to bridge the technological divide.

The 10-point declaration includes:

1. The central government and state governments would collaborate to improve the citizens’ experience with government services.
2. In order to do so, they would promote the timely implementation of India Enterprise Architecture (IndEA).
3. They would also implement a single sign-on for interoperability and integration among e-Government applications throughout the country.
4. It also resolved to consolidate the plethora of successful state-level e-Governance
projects and domain-based projects with a focus to replicate them as common application software with configurable features.

5. The declaration also stressed the need to ensure improvement in ease of living and ease of doing business by making a big shift in the role of government from Service Provider to Service Enabler.

6. It also stressed on the need to take steps to further improve connectivity in the Northeast.

7. Issues and challenges of telecommunication connectivity at the grassroots and formulate and implement a comprehensive telecom development plan were also addressed in the declaration.

8. It was also resolved to improve the quality of delivery of e-Services in the Northeast to fulfil the vision of improved citizen experience.

9. It was also resolved to develop India as a global cloud hub and facilitate the development of Government applications and databases on Cloud by default.

10. To adopt emerging technologies for finding e-Governance solutions and to promote the Digital India Projects with focus on Smart Cities and Smart Villages through Startups and Smart Entrepreneurship were also resolved in the declaration.

Source: The Hindu
Explained: July 2019 was the hottest ever month on record; what now?

GS-III | 13 August,2019

GS-III: Explained: July 2019 was the hottest ever month on record; what now?

NEWS

The World Meteorological Organization announced that July 2019 matched, and broke the record for the hottest month since analysis began.

Background

1. The previous warmest month on record was July 2016, and July 2019 was at least on par with it.
2. July 2019 was close to 1.2°C above the pre-industrial level.

Problem

- Exceptional heat has been observed across the globe in recent weeks, with several European countries recording temperature highs.
- The extraordinary heat was accompanied by dramatic ice melt in Greenland, in the Arctic and on European glaciers.
- Unprecedented wildfires raged in the Arctic devastating the pristine forests which absorb carbon dioxide and turning them into fiery sources of greenhouse gases.
- If we do not take action on climate change now, these extreme weather events are just the tip of the iceberg.

Source: Indian Express

India’s economic mobility and its impact on inequality

GS-III | 13 August,2019
Context

There has been a phenomenal rise in economic inequality in India. It is important to measure the extent of economic mobility in India, which reflects the number of people moving up and down the economic ladder over time.

Facts

1. A 2018 Oxfam study reports a significant increase in the consumption Gini index in both rural and urban areas from 1993-94 to 2011-12.
2. According to the Global Wealth Report (GWR) 2017 by the Credit Suisse Research Institute, between 2002 and 2012, the share of the bottom 50% of the population in total wealth declined from 8.1% to only 4.2%. In the same period, the share of the top 1% of the total wealth increased from 15.7% to 25.7%.
3. A recent survey pointed out that the mobility rate for the population is remarkably low. In 7 years, at least 7 in 10 poor households remain poor or remain in an insecure non-poor state.

Economic mobility

In a mobile economy, the households move more freely throughout the income/consumption distribution.

Importance of mobility

- Long-term welfare effects of rising inequality depend crucially on the level of economic mobility.
- Economic mobility or the lack of it can accentuate the adverse effects of inequality.
- An economy with much economic mobility will result in a more equal distribution of incomes and consumption than an economy with low mobility.

Dimensions of mobility

- Muslims are more vulnerable to falling below the poverty line over the seven-year period compared to Hindus or other religious groups.
Compared to upper-caste groups and OBCs, SCs and STs are less likely to escape poverty and more likely to move into poverty.

Between upper castes and OBCs, the latter is more likely to move into poverty and less likely to become secure non-poor.

Rural households are more likely to remain in poverty compared to urban households.

Inequality in India can be characterized as chronic since households belonging to the lower rungs of the economic ladder are likely to find themselves caught in a poverty trap.

Way ahead

Poverty reduction efforts should focus on ways to improve the permanent economic status of households through the acquisition of assets and capabilities, rather than dealing with temporary volatility.

There is also doubt on the efficacy of existing affirmative action and social programs to improve the economic status of marginalized groups in the country.

Source: Live Mint

Sikkim from Choygal rule to Indian state

GS-II | 13 August, 2019

GS-II: Sikkim from Choygal rule to Indian state

Context

Last week in Sikkim, 10 MLAs from the Opposition SDF defected to the BJP, adding to the political uncertainty that has loomed over since Assembly elections this year delivered a fractured mandate.

The current instability follows a unique event: the voting out of a government in power for the first time in Sikkim’s history.

Since joining India in 1975, Sikkim has seen its government changed only twice in both cases, the government had fallen before the new one was voted in.

Departure from Monarchy
Before 1975, Sikkim was ruled by the Chogyal rulers, and democratic rights were limited. Analysts have described the current events as a departure from what has been called a "monarchic psychology". The overall trajectory has been seen as being geared towards strengthening democracy.

Sikkim under the Chogyal rulers

- For 333 years before 1975, Sikkim was ruled by the Chogya (or kings) of the Namgyal dynasty of Tibetan descent.
- According to one account, the first ruler, Penchu Namgyal, was installed as king by Tibetan lamas in 1642.
- At its zenith, the Sikkim kingdom included the Chumbi valley and Darjeeling. The former is part of China now.
- After 1706, there were a series of conflicts between the powers of the region, which included Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet, resulting in a shrinking of Sikkim’s territorial boundaries.

Contact with British India

- In 1814, Sikkim allied with the East India Company in the latter’s campaign against Nepal.
- After the Company won, it restored to Sikkim some of the territories that Nepal had wrested from it in 1780.
- In 1841, the Company purchased Darjeeling from the Namgyal rulers.
- A treaty in 1861 made Sikkim a de facto protectorate of British India.
- Subsequently, the Calcutta Convention of 1890 demarcated the border between Sikkim and Tibet, and was signed by Viceroy Lord Lansdowne and Qing China’s Imperial Associate Resident in Tibet.
- The Lhasa Convention of 1904 affirmed the Calcutta Convention.

Sikkim becomes a Protectorate

- After India became independent in 1947, the relationship between New Delhi and Gangtok had to be redefined.
- In 1950, a treaty was signed between Maharaja Tashi Namgyal and India’s then Political Officer in Sikkim Harishwar Dayal.
- The relationship between India and Sikkim was encapsulated in the clause: “Sikkim shall continue to be a Protectorate of India and, subject to the provisions of this Treaty, shall enjoy autonomy in regard to its internal affairs.”

Continued struggle in Sikkim

- In the following decades, gaping income inequality and feudal control over key resources led to popular discontent against the Chogyal rulers.
- In December 1947, diverse political groupings came together to form the Sikkim State Congress.
- In 1949, the Chogyal agreed to appoint a five-member Council of Ministers, with three
Congress nominees, and two of his own.
- In 1953, the Chogyal introduced a new Constitution, and four general elections were held based on separate electorates in 1957, 1960, 1967, and 1970.
- Plagued by distrust between the Chogyal and the Congress, none of these elections helped further democracy.

India comes in

- Matters came to a head in 1973, when the royal palace was besieged by thousands of protesters.
- The Chogyal was left with no choice but to ask India to send troops for his assistance.
- Finally, a tripartite agreement was signed in the same year between the Chogyal, the Indian government, and three major political parties, so that major political reforms could be introduced.

From protectorate to full state

- In 1974, elections were held, in which the Congress led by Kazi Lhendup Dorji emerged victorious over pro-independence parties.
- In the same year, a new constitution was adopted, which restricted the role of the Chogyal to a titular post.
- The Chogyal resented this, and refused to deliver the customary address to the elected Assembly.
- In the same year, India upgraded Sikkim’s status from protectorate to “associated state”, allotting to it one seat each in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.
- The Chogyal was unhappy with this move, and sought to internationalize the issue. This did not go down well with Sikkim’s elected leaders, and a referendum was held in 1975.
- A total 59,637 voted in favour of abolishing the monarchy and joining India, with only 1,496 voting against.
- Subsequently, India’s Parliament approved an amendment to make Sikkim a full state.

Source: Indian Express
NEWS

- In three months, the TN State government will put in place an M-sand policy that aims to promote the use of M-sand as an alternative building material.
- It is aimed to eliminate the pervasion of sub-standard products in the market through regulation of trade.

Manufactured sand (M-Sand)

- M-sand is a substitute of river sand for concrete construction.
- Manufactured sand is produced from hard granite stone by crushing.
- The crushed sand is of cubical shape with grounded edges, washed and graded to as a construction material.
- The size of manufactured sand (M-Sand) is less than 4.75mm.

Why use M-sand?

- Manufactured sand is an alternative for river sand.
- Due to fast growing construction industry, the demand for sand has increased tremendously, causing deficiency of suitable river sand in most part of the world.
- Due to the depletion of good quality river sand for the use of construction, the use of manufactured sand has been increased.
- Another reason for use of M-Sand is its availability and transportation cost.
- Since manufactured sand can be crushed from hard granite rocks, it can be readily available at the nearby place, reducing the cost of transportation from far-off river sand bed.
- Thus, the cost of construction can be controlled by the use of manufactured sand as an alternative material for construction.
- The other advantage of using M-Sand is, it can be dust free, the sizes of m-sand can be controlled easily so that it meets the required grading for the given construction.
- Usage of M-sand prevents dredging of river beds to get river sand which may lead to environmental disaster like ground water depletion, water scarcity.

Source: The Hindu

Breast milk banks to ensure all infants get protective cover

GS-II | 13 August, 2019
A breast milk bank proposed by the Neonatology Forum (NNF), Kerala, is expected to provide solutions to all such babies who required intensive care at birth or are not able to be breastfed immediately for various other reasons.

There are many mothers who are not able to produce breast milk for various medical reasons.

About the milk bank

- Any lactating mother can donate to the bank.
- The milk stored in the bank will be pasteurised and would follow the international guidelines for safety.
- Such milk becomes a blessing for working mothers who require joining work soon after their maternity leave.
- Breast Milk Bank provides a cheaper option for the needy.

Protection

- India faces the challenge of having the highest number of low birth weight babies with 20% mortality and morbidity in various hospitals.
- Death of preterm babies is among three major causes of neonatal deaths. In all the neonatal intensive care units, about one-third of the babies would be preterm.
- Feeding these babies with breast milk can significantly bring down the risk of infections.
- These milk banks help the baby not just with the feed, but gives protection from many infections because of its inherent property to provide immunity to the infant.

On WHO guidelines

- The World Health Organisation has said that breast milk is “tailor made” for human infants.
- If for some reason, mother is not able to feed the infant, her milk should be expressed and fed, according to WHO.
- The Neonatology Forum had been following this diktat and insists that the newborns are aggressively breastfed in the first hour.
What is Big Data?

Big data is a term that describes the large volume of data both structured and unstructured beyond the ability of commonly used software tools to capture, curate, manage, and process data within a tolerable elapsed time. It’s what organizations do with the data that matters. Big data can be analyzed for insights that lead to better decisions and strategic business moves.

Applications of Big Data

- Companies use big data to better understand and target customers by bringing together data from their own transactions as well as social media data and even weather predictions.
- Businesses optimize their processes by tracking and analyzing their supply chain delivery routes and combine that data with live traffic updates. Others use machine data to optimize the service cycles of their equipment and predict potential faults.
- Big Data is used in healthcare to find new cures for cancer, to optimize treatment and even predict diseases before any physical symptoms appear.
- Police forces and security agencies use big data to prevent cyber-attacks, detect credit card fraud, foil terrorism and even predict criminal activity.
- Big Data is used to improve our homes, cities and countries by optimizing the heating or lighting in our homes, the traffic flow in our cities, or the energy grid across the country.

Big Data in India

With a population of 1.2 billion, the relevance of Big Data becomes all the more pronounced for India. Recently, NITI Aayog also echoed the idea of evidence based policymaking guided by Big Data. Discoms in India are using data from last mile sensors to implement measures of cutting down aggregated technical and commercial losses.

Challenges

- Inefficient infrastructure (data management centers) for data collection and management
- Constant evaluation of feedbacks generated from new data required to use Big Data effectively for policymaking, the government must adopt a dynamic approach and be willing to be flexible regarding its policy structure and processes.

Way Forward

In order to effectively analyze the large chunks of data available, the government must establish
well-equipped data centres. It is essential to segregate the relevant data from the irrelevant. It must strengthen its cyber security in order to make the large pool of data available virtually safe. It must also address the ethical issues regarding big data analytics and formulate a policy regarding data privacy.

Source: Indian Express

 GS-II : ‘Trans Fat’ Logo

News

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has launched a new mass media campaign in order to create awareness about trans fats and eliminate them in India by 2022.

What are Trans Fat?

Artificial Trans fats are created in an industrial process that adds hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils to make them more solid. Since they are easy to use, inexpensive to produce and last a long time, and give foods a desirable taste and texture, they are still widely used despite their harmful effects being well-known.

Why this move?

Studies have recently shown that 60,000 deaths occur every year due to cardiovascular diseases, which in turn are caused due to high consumption of trans fats. Since the impact of trans fats on human health is increasing exponentially, it is very important to create awareness about them.

Other FSSAI Initiatives

- As part of the campaign, edible oil industries took a pledge to reduce trans fat content by 2 per cent by 2022.
Later, food companies also took a pledge to reformulate packaged foods with reduced levels of salt, sugar and saturated fat. Swasth Bharat Yatra, an initiative started under the “Eat Right” campaign which started on October 16 and will end on January 27, 2019, will also seek to create awareness among citizens about trans fats.

A Move to adopt WHO guidelines

1. In May this year, the WHO released a step-by-step guide for the elimination of industrially-produced trans-fatty acids from the global food supply.
2. Since then, a lot of countries have made efforts to reduce the levels of trans fats and in some cases, have completely banned them.
3. India is also moving towards same by first reducing the levels from 5 per cent to 2 per cent and then altogether by 2022.

Source: The Hindu

Ban or regulate? On India’s policy on cryptocurrencies

Context

The recommendation of an inter-ministerial committee that India should ban all private cryptocurrencies, that is, Bitcoin and others like it hardly comes as a surprise.

Background

- Indian policymakers and administrators have time and again made clear their distaste for them, their existence owed almost entirely to advanced encryption technologies
- In his Budget speech in 2018, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the government doesn’t consider them legal tender.
- The Reserve Bank of India has repeatedly warned the public of the risks associated with
dealing with cryptocurrencies.

- Bitcoin, the most prominent among them, has fluctuate value, even over short periods of time.

**No central authority to regulate**

- Governments and economic regulators across the world are wary of private cryptocurrencies.
- As they need neither a central issuing authority nor a central validating agency for transactions, these currencies can exist and thrive outside the realm of authority and regulation.
- They are even deemed a threat to the official currency and monetary system. The question then is whether banning cryptocurrencies is the most effective way to respond.

**Some important cryptocurrencies**

- Bitcoins
- Litecoin
- Namecoin
- Swiftcoin
- Bytecoin
- Gridcoin

**Risk associated with the use of cryptocurrency**

Digital currencies, being in electronic format, are prone to losses arising out of hacking, loss of password etc. Lack of any authorized central agency to regulate the payments or to turn to for redressal of grievances. There is no underlying of asset for Cryptocurrencies, making the value a matter of speculation. The exchanges are located in various parts of the world, making the law enforcement a tricky thing for the multiple jurisdictions available. Trading may subject the user to illicit and illegal activities since the cryptocurrencies, can easily be used for illegal activities anonymously.

**Conclusion**

- Even there, the report says, “owing to the network-based nature of cryptocurrencies, after banning domestic crypto exchanges, many traders turned to overseas platforms to continue participating in crypto transactions.”

- Trading in China is now low but not non-existent.
- But why would an outright ban be a superior choice to regulation, especially in a field driven by fast-paced technological innovations?
- The report, unfortunately, doesn’t clarify that point.
Integrated Battle Groups
GS-III | 14 August, 2019
GS-III: Integrated Battle Groups

News

The new concept of Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) which the Indian Army plans to create as part of overall force transformation is close to implementation.

What are IBGs?

- IBGs are brigade-sized, agile, self-sufficient combat formations, which can swiftly launch strikes against adversary in case of hostilities.
- Each IBG would be tailor-made based on “Threat, Terrain and Task” and resources will be allotted based on the three Ts.
- They need to be light so they will be low on logistics and they will be able to mobilise within 12-48 hrs based on the location.
- An IBG operating in a desert needs to be constituted differently from an IBG operating in the mountains.
- The key corps of the Army are likely to be reorganized into 1-3 IBGs.

Objective of IBG

Holistic integration to enhance the operational and functional efficiency, optimize budget expenditure, facilitate force modernization and address aspirations

Structure

- While a command is the largest static formation of the Army spread across a defined geography, a corps is the largest mobile formation.
- The idea is to reorganise them into IBGs which are brigade-sized units but have all the essential elements like infantry, armoured, artillery and air defence embedded together based on the three Ts.
- The IBGs will also be defensive and offensive. While the offensive IBGs would quickly mobilise and make thrust into enemy territory for strikes, defensive IBGs would hold ground at vulnerable points or where enemy action is expected.

Why need IBGs?
After the terrorist attack on the Parliament, the Indian military undertook massive mobilization but the Army’s formations which were deep inside took weeks to mobilise loosing the element of surprise.

Following this, the Army formulated a proactive doctrine known as ‘Cold Start’ to launch swift offensive but its existence was consistently denied in the past.

Its existence was acknowledged for the first time by Gen Rawat in January 2017.

Source: The Hindu

Free fall: On the Afghan conflict
GS-II | 14 August, 2019

GS-II: Free fall: On the Afghan conflict

CONTEXT

A recent suicide attack at a crowded wedding hall in Kabul killed at least 63 people and injured more than 180 others. It is a tragic reminder of the security situation in Afghanistan.

Background

- The blast is claimed by the local arm of the Islamic State. It occurred at a time when the U.S. and the Taliban are preparing to announce a peace agreement to end the 18-year-long conflict.
- It’s now a three-way conflict in Afghanistan — the government, the Taliban insurgents and the global terrorists.
- The Afghan government is fighting to preserve the existing system that offers a semblance of democracy. But it failed in ensuring the safety and security of the people.
- The Taliban controls the mountainous hinterlands and wants to expand its reach to the urban centers.
- IS declared a province (Khorasan) in eastern Afghanistan and has emerged as the third player.
- Attacks against civilians, especially the Shia minority, is the central part of its brutal military tactics. Afghanistan’s Hazara Shias were the target of the wedding hall bombing.
- IS has demonstrated an ability to survive and strike in Afghanistan despite the U.S.’s heavy air campaign in the east.
Afghanistan peace deal:

- **U.S. is ready to pull troops** from Afghanistan in return for assurances from the Taliban that they will not allow the Afghan soil to be used by transnational terrorists such as the IS and al-Qaeda.
- But the **Taliban’s** intentions are hardly clear. It ran most of Afghanistan according to its **puritanical interpretation of Islamic law** from 1996 to 2001.
- There are chances that it turns against Kabul once the Americans are out and the country may plunge into a **multi-party civil war** as it did after the Soviet Union pulled out in 1989.

Way ahead:

- Taliban and the government should **have their own peace talks** and settle differences. It would allow both sides to rechannel their resources to fighting terrorist groups.
- The **international community** should strengthen the hands of the Kabul government against all kinds of terrorists, before seeking a settlement with the insurgents.

Source: The Hindu
Context

Consumer Protection Bill, 2019 gets Parliamentary approval.

Provision of the Bill:

Definition of consumer:

A consumer is defined as a person who buys any good or avails a service for a consideration.

What it covers?

It covers transactions through all modes including offline, and online through electronic means, teleshopping, multi-level marketing or direct selling.

What it doesn’t cover?

It does not include a person who obtains a good for resale or a good or service for commercial purpose.

Six consumer rights have been defined in the Bill, including the right to:

(i) Be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property. (ii) Be informed of the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services; (iii) Be assured of access to a variety of goods or services at competitive prices (iv) Seek redressal against unfair or restrictive trade practices.

Functions of Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA):

- CCPA shall promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers.
- It will regulate matters related to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and misleading advertisements.

Jurisdiction of Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (CDRCs):

- The District CDRC will entertain complaints where value of goods and services does not exceed Rs one crore.
- The State CDRC will entertain complaints when the value is more than Rs one crore but does not exceed Rs 10.
Why is this Bill significant?

- Swift remedies: Presently Consumer only have a single point of access to justice, which is time consuming. Additional swift executive remedies are proposed in the bill through Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA).
- Deterrent punishment to check misleading advertisements and adulteration of products.
- Product liability provision to deter manufacturers and service providers from delivering defective products or deficient services.
- Ease of approaching Consumer Commission and Simplification of Adjudication process.
- Scope for early disposal of cases through mediation.

Source: The Hindu

Allocation are Keys

GS-III | 15 August, 2019

GS-III: Allocation are Keys

Context

The budget must focus on the priority areas for the budget allocations. It is expected to provide funds and an assurance that the allocations would be rule-based.

Rural distress needs to be allocated to funds.

- Drinking water
- Improving the efficiency of existing irrigation systems
- Rural finance including temporary waiver of loan repayments:

Job creation

- It will depend on the revival of industrial production, continuing growth of exports and an agricultural revival.
- Most policies have a lag of around four to six months.
- In the short run, the money will be needed for the MGNREGA.
- The budget should concretely raise public investment to revive private investment to
reverse the declining growth rate in every quarter.

Fiscal Deficit

- The fiscal deficit is a real issue and leads to pressures on the bank rate and exchange rates.
- The need is to raise resources by taxation and not cutting consumption by the government and non-government sectors.

Banking sector

- The cleanup of the banking and NBFC sectors should be immediate and it needs funds.
- Though these are outside the budget, they determine the fiscal deficit.
- Raise government investment at the central, state and parastatal level.
- The economy is suffering from a decline in investment ratios. This is reflected in the declining growth rate, which is below the potential of 8%.
- The last round of the NSS data shows that girl child dropped out of school more than earlier. If she goes to college, marries late, the first child comes later the real demographic dividend starts.

Source: Indian Express

Centre unveils plan for coastal zone management

GS-III | 15 August, 2019

GS-III: Centre unveils plan for coastal zone management

NEWS

The Environment Ministry has unveiled a draft plan that will dictate how prospective infrastructure projects situated along the coast ought to be assessed before they can apply for clearance.

Plan

1. The draft Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) is part of a World Bank-funded project.
2. It lays out guidelines for coastal States to adopt when they approve and regulate projects
in coastal zones.
3. It seeks to assist the Government of India in enhancing coastal resource efficiency and resilience by building capacity for adopting and implementing integrated coastal management approaches.
4. The document was prepared by the Society for Integrated Coastal Management, a Ministry-affiliated body.
5. As per the report, Integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) has to be a continuous process rather than a “one-off” investment action.
6. The key activities proposed for coastal zone development include:
   1. mangrove afforestation/shelter beds
   2. habitat conservation activities such as restoration of sea-grass meadows
   3. eco-restoration of sacred groves
   4. development of hatcheries
   5. rearing/rescue centres for turtles and other marine animals
   6. creation of infrastructure for tourism
   7. restoration and recharge of water bodies
   8. beach cleaning and development
   9. small infrastructure facilities
7. Livelihood improvement projects include:
   1. demonstration of climate-resilient or salinity resistant agriculture
   2. water harvesting and recharge/storage
   3. creation of infrastructure and facilities to support eco-tourism
   4. community-based small-scale mariculture
   5. seaweed cultivation
   6. aquaponics
8. Environmental and social aspects ought to be integrated into the planning, design, implementation of projects.
9. Projects should avoid or minimise impacts on cultural properties and natural habitats, compensate any loss of livelihood or assets, adopt higher work safety standards, occupational and community health and safety

Action so far

1. So far three coastal States, Gujarat, Odisha and West Bengal, have prepared Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plans with support from the World Bank.
2. Such plans would be prepared for the selected coastal stretches in other States/UT.
3. Inadequate planning has often obstructed coastal zone development projects.

Source: The Hindu
Every child to get Rota virus vaccine by September

GS-II | 15 August, 2019

Context
Health Ministry has decided to provide Rotavirus vaccine to every child across all States and Union Territories by September 2019.

Background
- diarrhoea is one of the biggest killers in children and Rotavirus was one of the most common causes of severe diarrhoea in children less than 2 years of age.
- Rotavirus vaccine along with proper sanitation, handwashing practices, ORS and zinc supplementation will go a long way in reducing the mortality and morbidity due to diarrhoea in children.
- In India, every year, 37 out of every 1,000 children born are unable to celebrate their 5th birthday, and one of the major reasons for this is diarrhoeal deaths.
- Out of all the causes of diarrhoea, Rotavirus is a leading cause of diarrhoea in children less than 5 years of age.
- Rotavirus diarrhoea can be prevented through vaccination. Other diarrhoea can be prevented through general measures like good hygiene, frequent hand washing, safe water and safe food consumption, exclusive breastfeeding and vitamin A supplementation.

Rotavirus Vaccine
Rotavirus vaccine was introduced in 2016 and is now available in 28 States/Union Territories. It is expected to be available in all 36 States/Union Territories by September 2019.

Source: The Hindu

Incisive interventions that blunt the RTI™s edge
GS-II: Incisive interventions that blunt the RTI's edge.

Context
The RTI Act, 2005 proved transformative to India’s democracy; it revolutionized the citizen’s ability to engage with the state, arming people with a mechanism to ferret out some of the truth from the government’s otherwise secretive operations.

Amendments to the act
- Amendments have been passed without scrutiny by a parliamentary committee.
- It changes the term in office of the information commissioners (ICs) and the manner of determination of their salaries.
- In place of the existing five-year term, it grants to the Union government the power to notify their terms through executive regulations.
- It deletes the RTI Act’s mandate that the salary paid to the CIC and the ICs should be equivalent to that of Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
- Now, the salary, allowances, and terms and conditions of service of the CIC and the ICs will be determined by executive guidelines.

Challenges it poses
- Supreme Court has affirmed RTI’s position as intrinsic to the right to freedom of expression (for example, in PUCL v. Union of India, 2004)
- For democracy to be valuable, citizens must possess a right to freely express themselves and have a right to know what the state is up to.
- When a plea for information goes unheeded, CIC and the ICs play an especially vital role.
- These amendments subvert the independence of the information commission.
- The delegation of the power to fix the tenure and the salaries of the CIC and the ICs to the political executive places the information commission’s autonomy in a state of peril.

Efficacy of RTI
Through a response to an RTI request, it was discovered that between 2006 and 2010 more than ₹700 crore had been diverted from Delhi’s special component plan for the development of Scheduled Caste communities to projects related to the Commonwealth Games.

An exposé into the horrifying processes of the “Foreigners Tribunal” in Assam was made by securing information through the RTI Act.
Context

India’s severe ‘water crisis’ is in the news recently. India’s cities are running out of water. Chennai witnessed the worst drinking water woes.

Facts

- Niti Aayog’s report ‘Composite Water Management Index: A tool for water management’ stated that 21 major cities are expected to run out of groundwater as soon as 2020, affecting nearly 100 million people.

- The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) has been reporting on the increasing number of over-exploited blocks across India, labeled as the ‘dark’ category blocks. The recent annual book of CGWB has reported 1,034 units, out of the 6,584 units it monitors, as over-exploited.

- CGWB’s 2013 estimates say that the groundwater development in India is just about 62% of the utilizable groundwater reserves.

- A recent report by the Central Water Commission and ISRO asserted that India is not yet in “water scarcity condition”, but in a “water-stressed condition”, with reducing per capita water availability.

Way ahead

- Ensure adequate access to quality water, more so in urban areas where inequities over space and time are acute.
With rapid urbanization, demand cannot be met by groundwater reserves alone. Groundwater meets just 10% of Delhi’s drinking water needs. The rest is met by surface water sources transported from outside Delhi.

Water resource departments in States are following conventional approaches to supply augmentation. They should reorient themselves and deploy demand management, conservation, and regulation strategies.

Centre and states should work towards an institutional change by building federal governance of water resources.

Source: The Hindu
GS-II : Code of Conduct for MPs and MLAs

Context:

- Vice President Venkaiah Naidu has sought a consensus on a Code of Conduct for MPs and MLAs. This has been a longstanding concern — progress has been slow and uneven.
- A Code of Conduct for members of Rajya Sabha has been in force since 2005; there is no such code for Lok Sabha.

Background:

1. Code of conduct for high constitutional functionaries and representatives of the people have been discussed for long. A code for Union ministers was adopted in 1964, and state governments were advised to adopt it as well.
2. A conference of Chief Justices in 1999 resolved to adopt a code of conduct for judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts — this 15-point ‘Re-instatement of Values in Judicial Life’ recommended that serving judges should maintain an air of “aloofness” in their official and personal lives.
3. In the case of MPs, the first step was the constitution of Parliamentary Standing Committees on Ethics in both Houses. The Committee in Rajya Sabha was inaugurated by Chairman K R Narayanan on May 30, 1997 “to oversee the moral and ethical conduct of the Members and to examine the cases referred to it with reference to ethical and other misconduct of Members”.

Why do We Need a Code of Conduct For Politicians?

- Elections in India are often remembered for personal attacks, snide remarks and hate speeches made at the expense of taking political discourse to its nadir.
- In a bid to assert their superiority over the rest, some political leaders go overboard and blur the line between public and private lives. Some even threaten voters with dire consequences if they are not voted to power.
- Therefore, to ensure civility in political speeches and expressions, establishing code of conduct for politicians is mandatory.

In short, Code of Conduct for Politicians is needed mainly because of the following reasons:

1. The politicians representing their constituencies in the Parliament have time and again brought ill-repute to the institution with their incivility.
2. Creating ruckus in the Parliament; making unacceptable remarks and disrupting the House proceedings are some of the major allegations they face.
3. Tenure of some of the politicians is also fraught with severe charges of impropriety.
4. It has been long since a parliamentary panel had recommended a 14-point code of conduct that somewhat outlines what’s expected from the politicians.

**Key recommendations:**

1. Prohibit MPs from misusing the power and immunities they get.
2. An MP should avoid conflict between a private and a public interest.
3. No parliamentarian should be allowed to vote on those questions in the House, in which he/she has a vested interest.
4. Amend the Constitution to ensure a minimum of 110 days of sitting in a legislature having more than 100 members, and 90-50 days of sitting in Houses with less than 100 members depending on the size of the State involved.
5. The filing by legislators of a statement of income, assets and liabilities, and an indication of changes in these figures over time.
6. Punishment of members by admonition, reprimand, censure or withdrawal from the House in case of violations or breach of the code of conduct.
7. Automatic suspension from the House of any member involved in offences of grave misconduct.

**Need of the hour:**

- There’s a lot more that the Election Commission ought to do to make it difficult for the errant politicians. Its responsibility doesn’t end with the filing of an FIR against a candidate who is violating code of conduct. *It should direct political parties to withdraw such candidates.*
- **Stronger actions such as derecognizing political parties** and other powers need to be exercised for the larger interest of the democracy.

**Conclusion:**

A code of conduct for legislators is absolutely essential at this point of time, when coalition Governments mean increasing and more intense activity within the walls of the legislatures.

Source: The Hindu

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**Shimla Agreement**

GS-II | 16 August, 2019

**GS-II: Shimla Agreement**

**Context:**
United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has expressed concern over the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. Referring to the **Simla Agreement**, which was signed by India and Pakistan in 1972, Guterres said the “final status of J&K is to be settled by peaceful means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations”.

**What is Simla Agreement and why was it signed?**

The Simla Agreement was signed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on **2 July 1972**, following a full-blown war between India and Pakistan in 1971.

The Simla Agreement was “much more than a peace treaty seeking to reverse the consequences of the 1971 war (i.e. to bring about withdrawals of troops and an exchange of PoWs).” It was a comprehensive blueprint for good neighbourly relations between India and Pakistan.

Under the Simla Agreement both countries undertook to abjure conflict and **confrontation** which had marred relations in the past, and to work towards the establishment of durable peace, friendship and cooperation.

The two countries not only agreed to put an end to “conflict and confrontation” but also work for the “promotion of a friendly and harmonious relationship and the establishment of **durable peace in the sub-continent**, so that both countries may henceforth devote their resources and energies to the pressing task of advancing the welfare of their peoples.”

**How was this to be achieved?**

- In order to achieve this objective, both the governments agreed that that **the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations would govern bilateral relations and differences would be resolved by “peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them.”**
- Regarding Jammu and Kashmir, the two sides had agreed that the line of control “**resulting from the cease-fire of December 17, 1971 shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognized position of either side.**” Neither side shall seek to alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations. Both sides further undertake to refrain from the threat or the use of force in violation of this Line.”
- Both governments had also agreed that their respective Heads would meet again at a “**mutually convenient time in the future the representatives of the two sides will meet to discuss further the modalities and arrangements for the establishment of durable peace and normalization of relations**, including the questions of repatriation of prisoners of war and civilian internees, a final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir and the resumption of diplomatic relations.”

*India had three primary objectives at Shimla:*
1. First, a lasting solution to the Kashmir issue or, failing that, an agreement that would constrain Pakistan from involving third parties in discussions about the future of Kashmir.
2. Second, it was hoped that the Agreement would allow for a new beginning in relations with Pakistan based upon Pakistan’s acceptance of the new balance of power.
3. Third, it left open the possibility of achieving both these objectives without pushing Pakistan to the wall and creating a revanchist anti-India regime.

Source: The Hindu

Women Transforming India Awards
GS-I | 16 August 2019

Women Transforming India Awards

Context
To create awareness about the importance of non-fossil fuels as an alternative to conventional fossil fuels and highlight the various efforts made by Government in the biofuel sector.

Significance
This year the theme of the World Biofuel Day is “Production of Biodiesel from Used Cooking Oil (UCO)”. Biofuels have the benefits of reduction of import dependence, cleaner environment, additional income to farmers and employment generation.

Biofuel programme also compliments Government of India’s initiatives for Make in India, Swachh Bharat and increasing farmers income. A number of initiatives have been undertaken to increase production and blending of biofuels since 2014.

In India, the same cooking oil is used for repeated frying which adversely affects the health due to formation of polar compounds during frying. These polar compounds are associated with diseases such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, Alzheimer’s disease, liver diseases among
UCO is either not discarded at all or disposed off in an environmentally hazardous manner choking drains and sewerage systems.

The National Policy on Biofuels, released by the Government of India in 2018, envisages production of biofuel from UCO.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is implementing a strategy to divert UCO from the food value chain and curb current illegal usage.

The benefits of transformation of UCO will help bring health benefits as there would be no recycling of the UCO, employment generation, infrastructural investment in rural areas & cleaner environment with reduced carbon footprint.

To facilitate the production of Biodiesel from UCO, the Oil Marketing Companies shall float an Expression of Interest (EOI) for procurement of Biodiesel from Used Cooking Oil across 100 cities.

The purpose of inviting this EOI is to encourage the applicants to set up Biodiesel producing plants from Used Cooking Oil (UCO), processing plants and further utilizing the existing potential of UCO based Bio-diesel in India.

Source: The Hindu

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**SBM 2.0 focussed on ODF sustainability: Govt**

**GS-II | 16 August, 2019**

**GS-II: SBM 2.0 focussed on ODF sustainability: Govt**

**Background**

Nearly 93.1% of rural Indian households have access to toilets and 96.5% of these toilets are in constant usage, according to the second edition of NARSS in 2018-19.

**SBM 2.0**

1. Sustaining investment on ODF.
2. Faecal sludge management dedicated programme, which will ensure that each district will have FSTP (faecal sludge treatment plant).
3. Plastic waste management by creating material recovery facility and plastic treatment and management facility in each gram panchayat.

4. Solid and liquid waste management support to villages for safe disposal of solid and liquid waste.

5. Investing funds for behaviour change through IEC (Information, Education and Communication) exercise, training masons to promote retrofitting of toilets and panchayat pradhans to sustain ODF status.

Way ahead

- The government should make a paradigm shift from IEC to BCC – behaviour change communication approach.

- While IEC collects information on the use of toilets, BCC talks about underlying factors of why they are not using the toilets and tries to address them through behavioural science.

Source: Indian Express

â€˜Uber for tractorsâ€™: Government to launch app to aid farmers.

GS-III | 16 August, 2019

NEWS

A laser-guided land leveller uses technology to accurately flatten a field in a fraction of the time than an oxen-powered scraper. But such Hitech levellers cost at least ₹3 lakh and is beyond the reach of the average small farmer. A new app described as “Uber for tractors” offers a solution.

Benefits

- Farmers save precious groundwater and increase productivity by 10 to 15%.
- Provide farmers to have affordable access to cutting-edge technology.
- There are now more than 38,000 custom hiring centres (CHCs) across the country, which rent out 2.5 lakh pieces of farm equipment every year. The app connects farmers with
The app will also create an invaluable database for policy-makers, who can track the use and cost of equipment.

Source: The Hindu
India gets its first national essential diagnostics list.

GS-II: India gets its first national essential diagnostics list

Context

National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL)

- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has finalised India’s first National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL). With this, India has become the first country to have such a list.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) released a first edition of its essential diagnostics list (EDL) in May, 2018. This has acted as a reference for ICMR’s NEDL.
- The NEDL is on the lines of the essential drugs list, the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) which was first released in 1996. It was last updated in 2015.
- The NEDL has recommended that at least 159 tests should be made available for patients in even primary government health facilities.
- The diagnostics list mentions 105 general laboratory tests for a broad range of common conditions. It also mentions 30 disease-specific tests such as for HIV, hepatitis, tuberculosis, and 24 imaging tests including X-rays, CT and MRI scans and ultrasound sonography.
- The NEDL has been based on the Free Diagnostics Service Initiative and other diagnostics initiatives of the Health Ministry to provide an expanded basket of tests at different levels of the public health system.

How are diagnostics regulated?

- In India, diagnostics (medical devices and in vitro diagnostics) follow a regulatory framework based on the drug regulations under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Drugs and Cosmetics Rules 1945.
- Diagnostics are regulated under the regulatory provisions of the Medical Device Rules, 2017.

Why need NEDL?

- Diagnostics serve a key role in improving health and quality of life.
- While affordability of diagnostics is a prime concern in low, middle-income countries like India, low cost, inaccurate diagnostics have made their way into the Indian market which has no place in the quality health care system.
- NEDL builds upon the Free Diagnostics Service Initiative and other diagnostics initiatives of the Health Ministry to provide an expanded basket of tests at different levels of the
Importance

- Availability of quality assured diagnostics would be helpful in optimal utilization of Essential Medicine List (EML).
- It will help India in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.8 i.e. Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
- Implementation of NEDL will enable improved health care delivery through evidence-based care, improved patient outcomes and reduction in out-of-pocket expenditure effective utilization of public health facilities effective assessment of disease burden, disease trends, surveillance, and outbreak identification and address antimicrobial resistance crisis.
- It will also enable standardization of technology services and will aid in the promotion of R&D for new appropriate and effective diagnostics which in turn will lead to reduction in costs.

Source: The Hindu

India™s doctrine of Nuclear No First Use

GS-III: India’s doctrine of Nuclear No First Use

Context

India’s ‘No First Use’ doctrine (NFU) on the use of nuclear weapons is open for change in the future, defence minister has indicated, reflecting thinking within the establishment that no policy is writ in stone and could be modified to deal with current realities.

No First Use doctrine

- A commitment to not be the first to use a nuclear weapon in a conflict has long been
India’s stated policy.
- Pakistan, by contrast, has openly threatened India with the use of nuclear weapons on multiple occasions beginning from the time the two nations were not even acknowledged nuclear powers.
- After the 1998 nuclear test when India declared itself a nuclear weapon state, it also enunciated a doctrine of ‘no first use’ of nuclear weapons.
- Indian decision-makers categorically rejected the idea of initiating the use of nuclear weapons in any conflict scenario. India’s nuclear doctrine was purely retaliatory in nature.
- On January 4, 2003, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) met to review the progress in operationalizing the country’s nuclear doctrine.
- Among the major points in the doctrine was “a posture of No First Use”, which was described as follows: “Nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere”.
- However, the doctrine made it clear that India’s “nuclear retaliation to a nuclear attack strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage”.

Why in news?
- The successive governments are following Vajpayee’s doctrine and have directly or indirectly reaffirmed their commitment to NFU.
- The doctrine has been questioned at various times by strategic experts in domestic policy debates, and the idea that India should revisit this position has been put forward at various high-level fora.

Source: The Hindu

A Jan andolan of Water
GS-I | 17 August, 2019

GS-III: A Jan andolan of Water

Context

PM Modi announced this Independence Day the Jal Jeevan Mission which plans to suplly water to all households by 2024.

Jal Jeevan Mission:
A New Ministry—“Jal Shakti Mantralaya” to manage water resources and water supply in an integrated and holistic manner with the State Governments has been created. Jal Jeevan Mission is to ensure HarGharJal (piped water supply) to all rural households by 2024. The Jal Jeevan Mission will converge with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.

Implementation status of the National Rural Drinking Water Programme:

- The National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) aims at assisting states in providing adequate and safe drinking water to the rural population in the country.
- As of February 2018, 74% habitations are fully covered (receiving 55 litres per capita per day), and 22% habitations are partially covered (receiving less than 55 litres per capita per day).
- The Ministry aims to cover 90% rural households with piped water supply and 80% rural households with tap connections by 2022.

Need of Piped water:

- The World Bank estimates that 21 percent of communicable diseases in India are linked to unsafe water and the lack of hygiene practices.
- According to World Bank, more than 500 children under the age of five die each day from diarrhea in India alone.
- By 2020, India will be formally categorized as a “water stressed” country, one where per capita availability of water is less than 1,000 cubic metres or less.
- A June 2018 Niti Aayog report grimly forecasts water demand will be twice the present supply and India could lose up to 6 per cent of its GDP.
- In 2017, his government launched the Har Ghar Jal programme with the same objective. It was to ensure safe drinking water to all household with piped supply being the main mode.
- Contamination of drinking water it has been noted that NRDWP is over-dependant on ground water. However, ground water is contaminated in over 20 states. According to NITI Aayog, nearly 70 per cent of all of the country’s fresh water sources are contaminated.
- For instance, high arsenic contamination has been found in 68 districts of 10 states. These states are Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam, Manipur, and Karnataka.

Challenges

- The proposed Jal Jeevan Mission will make source sustainability measures mandatory prior to pumping and distributing water to households.
- In the traditional approach, the provision of drinking water was viewed primarily as an engineering solution, with schemes being planned and executed by the public health and
Conclusion

Water is an ideal sector for the applicability of the principle of subsidiary that is the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. The ongoing Jal Shakti Abhiyan will help in creating awareness about the importance of integrating source sustainability and water reuse with the provision of household water supply.

Source: Indian Express

Transgender Bill.

GS-II | 17 August, 2019

GS-II: Transgender Bill

Context

The community is unhappy with the transgender Bill passed in Lok Sabha.

Definition of a transgender person

The Bill defines a transgender person as one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth. It includes trans-men and trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons with socio-cultural identities, such as kinnar and hijra. Intersex variations is defined to mean a person who at birth shows variation in his or her primary sexual characteristics, external genitalia, chromosomes, or hormones from the normative standard of male or female body.

Aim

- The Bill aims to stop discrimination against a transgender person in various sectors such as education, employment, and healthcare.
It directs the central and state governments to provide welfare schemes for them.
The Bill states that a person will be recognised as transgender on the basis of a certificate of identity issued through the district screening committee. This certificate will be a proof of identity as transgender and confer rights under this Bill.
Going by the bill, a person would have the right to choose to be identified as a man, woman or transgender, irrespective of sex reassignment surgery and hormonal therapy.
It also requires transgender persons to go through a district magistrate and “district screening committee” to get certified as a transperson.

Need of the hour:

The Bill must recognise that gender identity must go beyond biological gender identity is an individual’s deep and personal experience. It need not correspond to the sex assigned at birth. It includes the personal sense of the body and other expressions such as one’s own personal inducing proceeds.

Source: Indian Express

Making CSR work On Companies Act amendments.

Context

Amendments to the relevant sections of the Companies Act in the last session of Parliament have now made non-compliance with CSR norms a jailable offence for key officers of the company, apart from hefty fines up to ₹25 lakh on the company and ₹5 lakh on the officer in default.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):

Corporate Social Responsibility is defined as the voluntary integration of company’s social and ecological concerns into their business activities and their relationships with their stakeholders. Being socially responsible means not only fully satisfying the applicable legal obligations but
also going beyond and investing ‘more’ in human capital, the environment, and stakeholder relations.

The Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2019 and CSR:

- The Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2019 which amends the Companies Act, 2013 was passed in monsoon session have made non-compliance with CSR norms a jailable offence.
- Under the Act, if companies which have to provide for CSR, do not fully spent the funds, they must disclose the reasons for non-spending in their annual report. However, under the Bill, any unspent annual CSR funds must be transferred to one of the funds under Schedule 7 of the Act (e.g., PM Relief Fund) within six months of the financial year.

High level committee

Recommendations of CSR:

1. Making CSR expenditure tax deductible
2. Provision for carry forward of unspent balance for a period of 3 – 5 years
3. Aligning Schedule 7 with the SDGs by adopting a SDG plus framework (which would additionally include sports promotion, Senior Citizens’ welfare, welfare of differently abled persons, disaster management and heritage protection
4. Balancing local area preferences with national priorities
5. The Committee has emphasized on not treating CSR as a means of resource gap funding for government schemes.
6. The Committee discourages passive contribution of CSR into different funds included in Schedule VII of the Act.
7. It has emphasized on CSR spending as a board driven process to provide innovative technology based solutions for social problems.

Conclusion

CSR is not the main business of a company they should rightly be focusing their energies on the business rather than on social spending.

Source: Indian Express
Prime Minister called “population explosion” a challenge in his Independence Day speech.

**Facts**

1. India’s headcount is over 1.3 billion. It is headed even higher.
2. The number might stabilize in a few years ahead. From data between 2013 to 2016, the country’s total fertility rate has fallen to an estimated 2.2. This figure is only marginally higher than 2.1, the replacement rate of the existing population.

**Challenges**

- Failure to arrest and reverse a trend in population: the gender gap. India has approximately 930 females per 1,000 males.
- The ratio is even worse if we look at new births. The country’s sex ratio at birth declined from 900 females per 1,000 males in 2013-15 to 896 in 2015-17.
- Male preference among parents is not unique to India. Of the 201 countries listed on the United Nations Human Sex Ratio chart for 2018, India is at No. 191. There exist worse performers.

**Conclusion**

We are heading for a gender crisis if a balance is not restored.

Source: The Hindu
GS-II: Sacrificing liberty for national security

Context

The amendments to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967 empowers the Central government to name any individual a terrorist if it believes him or her to be so.

Background of UAPA

- UAPA was passed by the Indira Gandhi government to deal with the secessionist Dravidian movement.
- Against this backdrop, an unlawful activity was defined as any action taken
  1. To bring about the cession of a part of the territory of India.
  2. To incite any individual or group of individuals to bring about such cession.
  3. To disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India.

Arguments against the bill:

- As per Section 35(2), the Central Government shall exercise its power in respect of an organisation or an individual only if it believes that such an organisation or individual is involved in terrorism.
- There is a close parallel between sedition and unlawful activity. The act almost equates the two.
- Ban on organizations vs. individuals
  1. UAPA has now been extended to cases of terrorism too. After TADA and POTA were repealed due to repeated misuse, UAPA was amended in 2004 to bring into its fold cases of terrorism. Organizations such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Hizbul Mujahideen, and the Khalistan Commando Force have been scheduled as banned organizations.
  2. Most of these bans are not challenged, and judicial tribunals have upheld the imposition of such bans from time to time.
  3. Banning an organization renders its members vulnerable to prosecution. Consequences include loss of property linked to terrorism. The organization itself may challenge the notification in a judicial tribunal.

Defending the amendments

- The act aims to fight terror.
- It strengthens the government’s powers to deal with disaffection and anarchy.
- The predominant duty of the government is to keep the country united against
existential threats.

Conclusion

Benjamin Franklin said: “Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.” Indians deserve better respect for their liberties than this ill-thought-out law.

Source: The Hindu

Privacy rights, wrongs

GS-II | 19 August, 2019

GS-II: Privacy rights, wrongs

Context

Supreme Court has agreed to hear together multiple public interest litigations pending in Madras, Bombay and Madhya Pradesh high courts, calling for the linking of Aadhaar with social media accounts.

Why the linkage

- Death threats, criminal intimidation, smearing and stalking are commonplace in social media.
- The mills of rumor and fake news have the capacity to spark violence and conflict.

Challenges to the linkage

- It could have international implications and inspire litigation in other nations.
- Privacy is at stake Supreme Court clarified it and defined it as a “guaranteed fundamental right” in 2017. That SC judgment was hailed by Electronic Frontier Foundation, the pioneering digital civil liberties group.
- The right to privacy is fundamental and cannot be reduced under normal circumstances.
- The data security of Aadhaar remains doubtful and it is not mandatory even for banking purposes.

What needs to be taken care of:
The balance between the imperatives of privacy and security should be maintained. Right to life is absolute until a death sentence is pronounced, and the right to liberty can be conditional only in a state of unrest or emergency. The question of striking a balance with an absolute right cannot arise under normal circumstances.

Way ahead

- Phone numbers associated with social media accounts can identify owners with complete accuracy since sim cards are issued against identity documents.
- The technical solution to the problem — AI can identify dubious content by textual analysis and flag it as spam or malware. Twitter proactively swept away Chinese accounts spreading disinformation about the Hong Kong protests.

Source: Indian Express

How an Indian citizen is defined?

GS-I | 19 August, 2019

Context

In the run-up to the publication of the final NRC in Assam, citizenship has become the most talked about topic in the country.

How is citizenship determined?

- Citizenship signifies the relationship between individual and state.
- It begins and ends with state and law, and is thus about the state, not people.
- Citizenship is an idea of exclusion as it excludes non-citizens.

Principles for grant of citizenship

- There are two well-known principles for grant of citizenship.
- While jus soli confers citizenship on the basis of place of birth, jus sanguinis gives recognition to blood ties.
- From the time of the Motilal Nehru Committee (1928), the Indian leadership was in favour of the enlightened concept of jus soli.

Citizenship in India
Citizenship is in the Union List under the Constitution and thus under the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament. The Constitution does not define the term ‘citizen’ but gives, in Articles 5 to 11, details of various categories of persons who are entitled to citizenship. Unlike other provisions of the Constitution, which came into being on January 26, 1950, these articles were enforced on November 26, 1949 itself, when the Constitution was adopted. However, Article 11 itself confers wide powers on Parliament by laying down that “nothing in the foregoing provisions shall derogate from the power of Parliament to make any provision with respect to the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all matters relating to citizenship”. Thus Parliament can go against the citizenship provisions of the Constitution. The Citizenship Act, 1955 was passed and has been amended four times — in 1986, 2003, 2005, and 2015. The Act empowers the government to determine the citizenship of persons in whose case it is in doubt.

Who is, or is not, a citizen of India?

Article 5
- It provided for citizenship on commencement of the Constitution.
- All those domiciled and born in India were given citizenship.
- Even those who were domiciled but not born in India, but either of whose parents was born in India, were considered citizens.

Article 6
Since Independence was preceded by Partition and migration, Article 6 laid down that anyone who migrated to India before July 19, 1949, would automatically become an Indian citizen if either of his parents or grandparents was born in India.

Article 7
Even those who had migrated to Pakistan after March 1, 1947 but subsequently returned on resettlement permits were included within the citizenship net.

Article 8
Any Person of Indian Origin residing outside India who, or either of whose parents or grandparents, was born in India could register himself or herself as an Indian citizen with Indian Diplomatic Mission.

Amendments to the Citizenship Act, 1955

1986 amendment
The constitutional provision and the original Citizenship Act gave citizenship on the principle of jus soli to everyone born in India. However, the 1986 amendment to Section 3 was less inclusive as it added the condition that those who were born in India on or after January 26, 1950 but before July 1, 1987, shall be Indian citizen.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019

- The amendment proposes to permit members of six communities - Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to continue to live in India if they entered India before December 14, 2014.
- It also reduces the requirement for citizenship from 11 years out of the preceding 14 years, to just 6 years.
- Two notifications also exempted these migrants from the Passport Act and Foreigner Act.
- A large number of organisations in Assam protested against this Bill as it may grant citizenship to Bangladeshi Hindu illegal migrants.

Source: Indian Express

Biodiversity in the time of deluge

GS-III | 19 August, 2019

Context

Floods impact the poorest strata of society the most, causing a loss of lives, livelihood options, and assets. There is a need for assessment of floods from a ‘sustainable development’ perspective.

Causes for floods

- The root cause of such floods is the high precipitation levels.
- Anthropogenic factors like unscientific development and over-exploitation of nature
The global climate has been changing in an unpredictable manner. As per an IPCC report, the Global Green House Gases emissions grew by 70% between 1970 and 2004. Global warming has critical effects on the hydrological cycle. In Kerala, a structural transformation and changing patterns of land use are affecting its environment. A loss in a wetland area will naturally impact the ability to handle floods.

Impact of floods

- The changing precipitation alters the hydrological systems, resulting in floods and droughts in different regions.
- Floods wash away topsoil and substantial biodiversity of the area, resulting in a reduced river-water flow, death of earthworms and spread of viral and bacterial diseases among crops.

Way ahead

- Adequate precautions through dam management and timely public alerts.
- In construction, it is important to take appropriate decisions on the type and size of the structure, location, materials, and permissible damage it will cause to nature.
- We need to account for the damage done to natural ecosystems while estimating losses suffered due to natural disasters.

Source: The Hindu

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**Negative rate policy**

**GS-III | 19 August, 2019**

**Context**

Negative rate policy once considered only for economies with chronically low inflation such as Europe and Japan is becoming a more attractive option for some other central banks to counter unwelcome rises in their currencies.

**Why have some central banks adopted negative rates?**

- To battle the global financial crisis triggered by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, many central banks cut interest rates near zero.
A decade later, interest rates remain low in most countries due to subdued economic growth. With little room to cut rates further, some major central banks have resorted to unconventional policy measures, including a negative rate policy. The euro area, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and Japan have allowed rates to fall slightly below zero.

How it works?

Under a negative rate policy, financial institutions are required to pay interest for parking excess reserves with the central bank. That way, central banks penalise financial institutions for holding on to cash in hope of prompting them to boost lending.

What are the pros of negative rates?

- Lowers borrowing costs.
- Help weaken a country’s currency rate by making it a less attractive investment than that of other currencies.
- A weaker currency gives a country’s export a competitive advantage and boosts inflation by pushing up import costs.

What are the cons?

- Negative rates put downward pressure on the entire yield curve.
- Narrow the margin financial institutions earn from lending.
- If prolonged ultra-low rates hurt the health of financial institutions too much, they could hold off on lending and damage the economy.
- There are also limits to how deep central banks can push rates into negative territory depositors can avoid being charged negative rates on their bank deposits by choosing to hold physical cash instead.

Source: Indian Express
GS-II: One Ration One Card Scheme: A boon for poor migrants

Context

Recently the government has launched the pilot project for the inter-state portability of ration cards between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and between Maharashtra and Gujarat, as part of its ‘One Nation, One Ration Card’ scheme.

What is a ration card?

- A ration card is issued to the head of the family, depending on the number of members in a family and the financial status of the applicant.
- It is used by households to get essential food grains at subsidised prices from designated ratio shops (also called fair price shops) under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- Over the years, different types of ration cards were issued depending on the level of deprivation.
- Later, in 2013, when the National Food Security Bill (NFSA) was passed, different ration cards were compressed to just two — priority and Antyodaya (for the most poor).
- The responsibility of identifying eligible families and issuing ration cards to them rests with the state/UT government.

What is a ration shop?

- Ration shops can be privately owned or owned by cooperative societies or by the government.
- Ownership licenses are issued by the concerned state government.
- Presently, commodities including wheat, sugar, rice and kerosene are being allocated as part of the TPDS.
- State governments have the discretion to provide additional commodities.

‘One Nation, One Ration card’ scheme

- Since ration cards are issued by state governments, this implied that beneficiaries could procure food grains only from the designated ration shops within the concerned state.
- If a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state. There were other complications.
- For instance, after marriage, a woman needed to get her name removed from the ration card issued to her parents, and get it added to the ration card issued to her husband’s family.
- The ONORC scheme attempts to address this gap in TPDS delivery.
Essentially, the scheme has been launched keeping in mind the internal migration of our country, since people keep moving to different states in search of better job opportunities and higher standards of living.

As per Census 2011, 4.1 crore people were inter-state migrants and 1.4 crore people migrated (inter- and intra-state) for employment.

Good signs of implementation

- With the ONORC scheme being implemented in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the beneficiary can buy food grains from ration shops located in either of the states.
- The same is the case with Maharashtra and Gujarat.
- The government hopes to implement the scheme across India by June 1, 2020.

Source: Indian Express

No harmful chemicals in PET bottles, finds CSIR study

GS-II: No harmful chemicals in PET bottles, finds CSIR study

Context

- PET bottles are safe, a comprehensive evaluation by the CSIR-Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore has determined.
- For years there's been a swirling debate internationally on whether PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) bottles, which are the mainstay of plastic bottles, leach harmful chemicals when exposed to high temperatures.

About PET

- PET is short for polyethylene terephthalate, the chemical name for polyester.
- PET is a clear, strong, and lightweight plastic that is widely used for packaging foods and beverages, especially convenience-sized soft drinks, juices and water.
- It is also popular for packaging salad dressings, peanut butter, cooking oils, mouthwash, shampoo, liquid hand soap, window cleaner, even tennis balls.
- Special grades of PET are used for carry-home food containers and prepared food trays that can be warmed in the oven or microwave.
- The basic building blocks of PET are ethylene glycol and terephthalic acid, which are combined to form a polymer chain.

Toxins are below detection limits (BDL)
The CFRTI analysis, commissioned by an industry body, concluded that antimony, arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, lead, mercury, selenium and zinc “were below” their detection limits (BDL) of 0.001 mg/kg. Along with metals, the scientists also measured terephthalic acid, Isophthalic acid, Ethylene Glycol, BPA (bis-phenol A) and phthalates. Bisphenol-A (a synthetic organic compound and used in the manufacture of PET bottles) was below its detection limit of 0.02 mg/kg. BPA is now phased out after research found a link between the presence of BPA and the disruption of hormone regulation, as well as breast cancer. The CFTRI scientists found that the presence of metals, BPA and phthalates were “below detection limit”.

Compliant with global standards

- The analysis found that no chemicals breached the EU-specified norms.
- The reports were also below the EU regulation norms of the “specific migration limit”, which is the maximum amount of a substance that can migrate from a food packaging material or food container into food.

Safe for packaged water

- The studies further confirmed that antimony does not leach out of PET bottles.
- These findings further establish that no endocrine disruption happens from the use of PET bottles.
- The scientists also studied water stored in PET bottles and checked whether it affected the hormone levels of rats and mice.
- The evaluation found that the experimental male and female rats exhibited comparable blood hormone levels in both cases.
- This conclusively proved that PET bottles did not cause any Endocrine Disruption activity if used to package water.

Source: The Hindu

Delimitation of Constituencies in J&K

GS-II | 20 August, 2019

GS-II: Delimitation of Constituencies in J&K

News

The Election Commission held internal discussions on the delimitation of constituencies ahead
Resizing new constituencies

- According to the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019, the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the UT of J&K would be increased from 107 to 114.
- The total population would be divided over the 114 seats to get an average number of electors per constituency.
- The Act also specifies that delimitation will be based on the 2011 census till 2026.

Delimitation Commission of India

- The Delimitation commission or Boundary commission of India is a commission established by the Government of India under the provisions of the Delimitation Commission Act.
- The main task of the commission is redrawing the boundaries of the various assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies based on a recent census.
- The representation from each State is not changed during this exercise. However, the numbers of SC and ST seats in a state are changed in accordance with the census.
- The present delimitation of constituencies has been done on the basis of 2001 census under the provisions of Delimitation Act, 2002.
- The Commission is an independent body whose orders cannot be challenged in any court of law.
- The orders are laid before the Lok Sabha and the respective State Legislative Assemblies. However, modifications are not permitted.
- The most recent delimitation commission was set up on 12 July 2002 after the 2001 census with Justice Kuldip Singh, a retired Judge of the Supreme Court as its Chairperson.

Source: The Hindu

Panchamirtham™ of Palani temple gets GI tag

GS-III | 20 August, 2019

GS-III: ‘Panchamirtham’ of Palani temple gets GI tag

News

The famous Palani panchamirtham, given as ‘prasadam’ at the Murugan temple at Palani has
been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag. This is the first time a temple ‘prasadam’ from Tamil Nadu has been given the GI tag.

About the Panchamirtham

- It is sweet in taste and one of the main offerings for Lord Dhandayuthapani Swamy, the presiding deity of Arulmigu Dhandayuthapani Swamy Temple, situated on Palani Hills.
- The panchamirtham is a combination of five natural substances — banana, jaggery, cow ghee, honey and cardamom.
- Dates and diamond sugar candies are added for flavour.
- The panchamirtham is an ‘abhishega prasadam’ (food that is a religious offering), which is served in a semi-solid state.
- Not even a single drop of water is added during the preparation of the panchamirtham.
- This gives it its classic semi-solid consistency and taste. No preservatives or artificial ingredients are used.

What’s special with it?

- The whole process of producing the panchamirtham is automated. It is doubly ensured that the hygienic aspects are maintained.
- Devotees who visit the temple are offered the panchamirtham as a prasadam in the hill temple as well as in stalls run by temple administration at Adivaram.
- It is believed that the panchamirtham cures diseases of devotees.

About the region

- GI application, the geographical area for production of panchamirtham is Palani town in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu. It lies within latitude of 10.44 ° and longitude of 77.52 °.
- According to the GI application filed, the Palani panchamirtham is prepared under the guidance given by the CFTRI (Central Food Technological Research Institute) Mysore, a government of India undertaking.

Source: Indian Express

RBI issues final norms for regulatory box

GS-III: RBI issues final norms for regulatory box

News
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued the final framework for regulatory sandbox in order to enable innovations in the financial technology.

**Regulatory Sandbox**

- A regulatory sandbox usually refers to live testing of new products or services in a controlled regulatory environment for which regulators may permit certain regulatory relaxations for the limited purpose of the testing.
- The objective of the sandbox is to foster responsible innovation in financial services, promote efficiency and bring benefit to consumers.
- It provides a secure environment for fintech firms to experiment with products under supervision of a regulator.
- It is an infrastructure that helps fintech players live test their products or solutions, before getting the necessary regulatory approvals for a mass launch, saving start-ups time and cost.
- The concept of a regulatory sandbox or innovation hub for fintech firms was mooted by a committee headed by then RBI executive director Sudarshan Sen.
- The panel submitted its report in Nov 2017 has called for a regulatory sandbox to help firms experiment with fintech solutions, where the consequences of failure can be contained and reasons for failure analysed.
- If the product appears to have the potential to be successful, it might be authorised and brought to the broader market more quickly.

**What are new RBI norms?**

- RBI will launch the sandbox for entities that meet the criteria of minimum net worth of ₹25 lakh as per their latest audited balance sheet.
- The entity should either be a company incorporated and registered in the country or banks licensed to operate in India.
- While money transfer services, digital know-your customer, financial inclusion and cyber security products are included, crypto currency, credit registry and credit information have been left out.

Meeting norms on customer privacy, data protection, security and access to payment data, the security of transactions, KYC, anti-money laundering will be mandatory.

Source: Indian Express
On this April 11, the Israeli spacecraft Beresheet attempted to land on the Moon, but crashed on the surface. It was carrying a number of items — including thousands of specimens of a living organism called Tardigrade.

Tardigrade

- The Tardigrade, also known as water bear, is among the toughest and most resilient creatures on Earth.
- The Tardigrade can only be seen under a microscope.
- Half a millimeter long, it is essentially a water-dweller but also inhabits land and, a 2008 study found, can survive in the cold vacuum of outer space.
- It derives its name from the fact that it looks like an eight-legged bear, with a mouth that can project out like a tongue.
- Its body has four segments supported by four pairs of clawed legs.
- A tardigrade typically eats fluids, using its claws and mouth to tear open plant and animal cells, so that it can suck nutrients out of them.
- It is also known to feast on bacteria and, in some cases, to kill and eat other tardigrades. Although they are famed for their resilience, they are destructible too.
- Should a human being swallow a tardigrade with her food, her stomach acid will cause the flesh of the tardigrade to disintegrate.

Survival instinct
In 2017, a study found that if all other life were to be wiped out by a cataclysmic event — a large asteroid impact, a supernova or a gamma-ray bursts — the tardigrade would be the likeliest to survive.

- It can endure extreme hot and cold temperature levels.
- Although the tardigrades on the Israeli spacecraft were dehydrated, the organism is known to “come back to life” on rehydration.
- In fact, they themselves expel water from their bodies and set off a mechanism to protect their cells, and can still revive if placed in water later.
- However, there is no evidence of liquid water on the Moon, although there is ice.
- Without liquid water, it is possible that the tardigrades will remain in their current state, unless future astronauts find them and revive them in water.

Source: Indian Express

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What ails the existing microcredit model

GS-III | 21 August, 2019

GS-III: What ails the existing microcredit model

Context

Microcredit has gained much traction as a tool for ensuring the welfare of the most impoverished in society, and boosting development alongside.

What is Microcredit?

- Microcredit refers to the granting of very small loans to impoverished borrowers, with the aim of enabling the borrowers to use that capital to become self-employed and strengthen their businesses.
- Loans given as microcredit are often given to people who may lack collateral, credit history.
- Microcredit agreements frequently do not require any sort of collateral, and sometimes may not even involve a written agreement, as many recipients of microcredit are often illiterate.
Part of Microfinance

- Microcredit falls under the larger umbrella of microfinance, financial services for individuals who don’t have access to traditional services of this kind.
- Microfinance activities usually target low-income individuals, with the goal of helping them to become self-sufficient. In this way, microfinance activities have an aim of poverty alleviation as well.
- An example of a microcredit institution is the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, founded in 1976 by Mohammed Yunus.

Why?

- The primary reason for the lackadaisical effects of microcredit is the stringent repayment schedule offered by most microcredit institutions.
- Since most borrowers to whom microcredit is given have little to no credit history as a result of their exclusion from traditional systems of credit.
- Hence institutions offering microcredit are unable to judge the risk associated with lending to certain borrowers, and cannot be sure what the risk of them defaulting will be.
- To lower the risk of defaulting, microcredit lenders therefore resort to repayment schedules that demand an initial repayment that is almost immediate, to which borrowers must adhere.

What are the other applications of microcredit?

- Conventionally, microcredit has been used mainly for entrepreneurs to begin production and attain self-sufficiency.
- Small microcredit loans can allow rural labourers – those who are employees, as opposed to entrepreneurs, who are employers to migrate to urban areas to find work during the lean season, when there is no work to be found on farms.
- Those who migrated temporarily during this season experienced increased spending in both food and non-food areas, and increased their calories consumed.
- Microcredit can be used in situations where seasonal factors cause drops in income to overcome these “seasonal credit crunches” and avoid taking decisions which cause people long-term negative impacts.

Conclusion

- Microcredit has a vast range of applications for poverty alleviation and general development, but existing systems require reform in multiple areas to allow for unfettered benefits that last.
- In areas were the application of microcredit is relatively new, microcredit systems must be carefully evaluated before they are put into place, so as to enable the greatest benefit from such institutions.
Henley Passport Index 2019

GS-II: Henley Passport Index 2019

Context
The latest Henley Passport Index ranks India at 86, down five places from 81 in 2018. The index ranks passports based on their power and mobility. Last year, an Indian passport holder had visa-free access to 60 countries this year, it has access to 58.

Henley Passport Index 2019

- Prepared by Henley and Partners, a London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm, the Henley Passport Index claims to be the “original ranking of all the world’s passports”.
- The index gathers data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) that manages inter-airline cooperation globally.
- The Index is updated in real time according to countries' visa policy changes. It covers 227 destinations and 199 passports.
- The index receives data from the IATA on a fixed day every year that forms the basis of the index.

How are passport ranks and scores interpreted?

- Each passport is attributed with a score and a rank.
- For instance for 2019, India’s score is 58 and it ranks 86 in the list. Japan and Singapore, on the other hand, are ranked 1 and have a score of 189.
- The score is the sum of the number of countries accessible by that passport holder without requiring pre-departure government approval for visa-types including a visitor’s permit, visa on arrival or an electronic travel authority (ETA).
- For every territory/country that a passport holder of a particular country/territory is able to access through these visa-types (without pre-departure government approval), a value of 1 is attributed to it.
What does this mean for Indian passport holders?

- India has a score of 58. That is the number of destinations an Indian passport holder can travel to today, without pre-departure government approval.
- That is the same as a citizen of any country, on an average, could travel to 13 years ago.
- In 2006, a citizen, on an average, could travel to 58 destinations without needing a visa from the host nation; by 2018, this number had nearly doubled to 107.
- Afghanistan holds the weakest passport, with a score and ranking of 25 and 109, respectively. Syria and Pakistan follow with rankings of 107 and 106 and scores of 29 and 30, respectively.
- Passport rankings point towards the strength of diplomatic relations between countries.

What assumptions does the index make?

- The index assumes that the passport is valid, belongs to an adult who is a citizen of the issuing country and that it is not diplomatic, emergency or temporary in nature.
- It also assumes that the person travelling is doing so alone, rather than in tourist groups and meets all the basic requirements for entry such as hotel reservations.

Source: Indian Express

Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research (FEDOR)

Russia has launched an unmanned rocket carrying a life-size humanoid robot that will spend 10 days learning to assist astronauts on the International Space Station.

Fedor

- FEDOR is a Russian humanoid that replicates movements of a remote operator as well as
performs a limited set of actions autonomously.

- Named Fedor, short for Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research, the robot is the first ever sent up by Russia to the International Space Station.
- Instead of cosmonauts, Fedor, also known as Skybot F850, was strapped into a specially adapted pilot’s seat, with a small Russian flag in hand.
- “The robot was heard saying during launch, repeating the famous phrase used by first man in space Yuri Gagarin”.
- The silvery anthropomorphic robot stands 1.80 metres (5 foot 11 inches) tall and weighs 160kg (353 pounds).

**What’s so special with Fedor?**

- Fedor copies human movements, a key skill that allows it to remotely help astronauts or even people on Earth to carry out tasks while the humans are strapped into an exoskeleton.
- Fedor is described as potentially useful on Earth for working in high radiation environments, demining and tricky rescue missions.
- Though initially developed for the emergencies ministry, Fedor can also be seen shooting at targets from two handguns in a video posted by Russian space agency.
- On board, the robot will perform tasks supervised by Russian cosmonaut and will wear an exoskeleton and augmented reality glasses in a series of experiments later this month.
- Since Fedor is not trained to grab space station handles to move about in microgravity conditions, its legs will be immobilised on the space station.

**Fedor not the first**

- Fedor is not the first robot to go into space.
- In 2011, NASA sent up Robonaut 2, a humanoid robot developed with General Motors that had a similar aim of working in high-risk environments.
- It was flown back to Earth in 2018 after experiencing technical problems.
- In 2013, Japan sent up a small robot called Kirobo along with the ISS’s first Japanese space commander. Developed with Toyota, it was able to hold conversations — albeit only in Japanese.

Source: The Hindu
GS-I: Rains apart, blame the dams for Maharashtra, Karnataka floods.

Context

With Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala among other states under deluge, questions are being raised over their flood management system. The disaster aggravates by the release of water from overflowing dams in the region at the same time that relentless rainfall hits it.

Cause of recent floods

- **Mismanagement** on releasing the water from various dams worsened the flood situation in Kolhapur, Sangli, and Satara districts of Maharashtra.
- The dams, that were *supposed to help moderate the flood situation, instead ended up exacerbating it*.
- *Due to uncertainty in rainfall and fear of dry conditions in future, dam operators think of storing as soon as water is available but that proves costly during flood fury as then there is no alternative but to release all the inflow downstream.*

Resilient to climate change?

- The 5,745 reservoirs in the country, of which, 293 were more than 100 years old. The age of 25 per cent of dams was between 50 and 100 years and 80 per cent were over 25 years old.
- These dams pose a serious risk due to their ageing and structural deterioration.
- Dams that span decades, experience differential settlement of foundation, clog of filters, increase of uplift pressures, reduction in freeboard, cracks in the dam core, loss of bond between the concrete structure and embankment, reduction in slope stability in earthen and rockfill dams, erosion of earthen slopes, and deformation of dam body itself.
- Thus, dam components lose strength differently during their lifetime and every component within a large dam ages at a different rate. Hence, as a dam ages, the impact of the erosion of earthen components, through the dam body and foundations, and sedimentation occur at a rate different (or adverse) than what has been assumed by the policymakers and planners.

Conclusion

“In the era of climate change, following the rule curve is still more urgent. This is because we do not know when and how the rainfall will increase or decrease”.
Source: The Hindu
GS-III: Global assessment of forest biodiversity by WWF

Context

World Wide Fund for Nature released the first-ever global assessment of forest biodiversity.

Background

Forest biodiversity had never been assessed, but forest area was often used as a proxy indicator. The new findings were based on the Forest Specialist Index, developed following the Living Planet Index methodology - an index that tracks wildlife that lives only in forests.

Keys of report

- There has been a 53 per cent decline in the number of forest wildlife populations since 1970, according to the first-ever global assessment of forest biodiversity by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).
- Wildlife is an essential component of natural and healthy forests. They play a major role in forest regeneration and carbon storage by engaging in pollination and seed dispersal.
- While the decline was consistent in these years among mammals, reptiles and amphibians (particularly from the tropical forests), it was less among birds (especially from temperate forests).

Threats by Climate Change

- 43% of amphibian populations
- 37% of reptile population.
- 21% of bird population.
- Loss of habitat due to logging, agricultural expansion, mining, hunting, conflicts and spread of diseases accounted for almost 60 per cent of threats.
- More than 60 per cent of threatened forest specialist populations faced more than one threat.

Main Concern

Protecting wildlife and reversing the decline of nature requires urgent global action. The need is to preserve harmonious land use in our region, including forest management and protect the most valuable surviving ecosystems.
Report of the Competition Law Review Committee submitted

Report of the Competition Law Review Committee submitted

Context


Recommendations

- The Competition Law Review Committee headed by Injeti Srinivas has submitted its report to the Government.
- Government had constituted Competition Law Review Committee in 2018 to review the existing framework and recommend changes to strengthen it.
- The committee has recommended a ‘Green Channel’ for faster regulatory approvals for mergers and acquisitions that may have no major implications on competition.
- It has also said that combinations arising out of the insolvency resolution process under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code should also be eligible for Green Channel approvals.
- The report has also suggested setting up of Competition Commission of India (CCI) offices at the regional level for non-adjudicatory functions such as research and advocacy.
- The Committee has also recommended that a dedicated bench be introduced in the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) for hearing appeals under the Competition Act.
- The report has asked CCI to issue guidelines on imposition of penalty to ensure more transparency and faster decision making which will encourage compliance by businesses.
- It has also recommended for strengthening the governance structure of CCI with the introduction of a Governing Board to oversee advocacy and quasi-legislative functions leaving adjudicatory functions to the Whole-time Members.

Background

The Government constituted a Competition Law Review Committee on 1st October, 2018 to review the existing Competition law framework and make recommendations to further strengthen the framework to inter alia meet new economy challenges.

The Competition Act

The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates
combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

Source: The Hindu

CBI Autonomy
GS-III | 22 August, 2019

GS-III: CBI Autonomy

Context

Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi has recommended a comprehensive legislation to make the Central Bureau of Investigation functional as an efficient and impartial investigative agency.

Problems with CBI

- The agency is dependent on the home ministry for staffing many of its investigators come from the Indian Police Service. The agency depends on the law ministry for lawyers and also lacks functional autonomy to some extent.
- The CBI, run by IPS officers on deputation, is also susceptible to the government’s ability to manipulate the senior officers, because they are dependent on the Central government for future postings.
- The 19th and 24th reports of the parliamentary standing committees (2007 and 2008) recommended that the need of the hour is to strengthen the CBI in terms of legal mandate, infrastructure and resources.
- CBI which handles cases which are of national importance has been criticised for its mishandling of several scams due to political pressure. It has also been criticized for interfering in the investigation of prominent politicians, such as P. V. Narasimha Rao, Jayalalithaa, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav; this tactic leads to their acquittal or non-prosecution. Some of the examples in which CBI was misused are Bofors scandal, Hawala scandal, 2G spectrum scam, coal scam, etc.

CBI Autonomy

SC raised the question of CBI’s independence and said that “The CBI has become the state’s parrot. Only screaming, repeating the master’s voice” The SC had then asked the Centre to make the CBI impartial and said it needs to be ensured that the CBI functions free of all external pressures.
In the Vineet Narain case, 1997 The Supreme Court agreed that the CBI had failed in its responsibility to investigate allegations of public corruption. It laid down guidelines to ensure independence and autonomy of the CBI and ordered that the CBI be placed under the supervision of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), an independent governmental agency intended to be free from executive control or interference.

About CBI

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is the premier investigating agency of India.
- Operating under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, the CBI is headed by the Director.
- CBI, India’s first agency to investigate corruption, the Special Police Establishment, was set up in 1941, six years before independence from British rule to probe bribery and corruption in the country during World War II.
- In 1946, it was brought under the Home Department and its remit was expanded to investigate corruption in central and state governments under the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act.
- The special police force became the Central Bureau of Investigation after the Home Ministry, which is in charge of domestic security, decided to expand its powers and change its name in 1963.

Source: The Hindu
Context

Former IAS officer has been detained under the Public Safety Act (PSA).

What is Public Safety Act in Jammu and Kashmir

- The act brought into 1978, primarily to adopt a tough measure against timber smuggling in the state. It was much later that the act was frequently used to control militancy-related incidents. Under this act, government can declare any area as ‘protected’ and exercise authority to regulate entry of any citizen in the protected area.
- The ‘PSA’ gives J&K government the power to detain anyone who acts in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order.
- The PSA allows for administrative detention for up to two years “in the case of persons acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State”, and for administrative detention up to one year where “any person is acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order”.
- Detention orders under PSA can be issued by Divisional Commissioners or District Magistrates.

Criticism of PSA

Human rights group are almost unanimous in their stand- PSA result wrongful detentions. Amenity International has been aggressively churning out reports on number of people detained over the past. Many innocent people become prey to politician because this act giver power to the ruling party.

According to the rights activist, Jammu and Kashmir uses PSA to keep people they can’t convict through proper legal channels locked up and out of the way. On the other side PSA has been criticized for denying citizen the right to fair trial and justice.
GS-II: Notified Disease

Context

A month after Union Health Minister asked the Delhi government to make malaria and dengue notifiable diseases, the local authorities has initiated the work to notify malaria in the capital.

What is a notifiable disease?

- A notifiable disease is any disease that is required by law to be reported to government authorities.
- The collation of information allows the authorities to monitor the disease, and provides early warning of possible outbreaks.
- The World Health Organization’s International Health Regulations, 1969 require disease reporting to the WHO in order to help with its global surveillance and advisory role.
- Registered medical practitioners need to notify such diseases in a proper form within three days, or notify verbally via phone within 24 hours depending on the urgency of the situation.
- This means every government hospital, private hospital, laboratories, and clinics will have to report cases of the disease to the government.
- The onus of notifying any disease and the implementation lies with the state government.
- The Centre has notified several diseases such as cholera, diphtheria, encephalitis, leprosy, meningitis, pertussis (whooping cough), plague, tuberculosis, AIDS, hepatitis, measles, yellow fever, malaria dengue, etc.

Why notify diseases?

- Making a disease legally notifiable by doctors and health professionals allows for intervention to control the spread of highly infectious diseases.
- The process helps the government keep track and formulate a plan for elimination and control. In less infectious conditions, it improves information about the burden and distribution of disease.
- Any failure to report a notifiable disease is a criminal offence and the state government can take necessary actions against defaulters.
Source: Indian Express
In response to Prime Minister’s call on India’s 73rd Independence day, to make India free of single use plastics, a massive public campaign will be launched engaging all stakeholders.

What are single use of plastics?

- **Single-use plastics**, or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These items are things like plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.
- Some states like Telangana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh banned plastic bottles and Tetra packs, single-use straws, plastic/styrofoam tea cups/containers, etc. But many like Bihar banned only polythene bags.

Problem of plastic in India

- India is responsible for about 60% of all the plastic dumped annually in the world’s oceans.
- Over 42% of our plastic use is in packaging.
- India produces 25,940 tonnes of plastic waste every day and nine million tonnes every year.

Plastic ban and its impact on economy

- Plastic bags are not safe for the ecosystem, since they are not easy to recycle. They cause severe health hazard for human, animals and the environment. Though plastics is banned in several states including Maharashtra, which has become the 17 other states and Union Territories so far, in order to prevent litter and help the environment.

Gaps existing:

**Waste plastic from packaging** of everything from food, cosmetics and groceries to goods delivered by online platforms remains unaddressed.

**Collect-back system** The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 are clear that producers, importers and brand owners must adopt a collect-back system for the plastic they introduce into the environment. However, not much has been done to take the process forward.

**Extended Producer Responsibility clause**: Small producers of plastics are facing the ban.
while more organised entities covered by the Extended Producer Responsibility clause continue with business as usual.

**What is needed?**

- Governments must start **charging the producers for their waste**, and collect it diligently, which will lead to recovery and recycling.
- **State and local governments should upgrade their waste management systems, which is necessary** to even measure the true scale of packaging waste.
- **Role of local bodies:** Local bodies should consult manufacturers or importers to assess the problem. Cities and towns need competent municipal systems to achieve this.
- **A central legislation with a clear definition** of what constitutes single-use plastic is also necessary.

Source: The Hindu

Lessons after the great deluge

GS-III | 23 August, 2019

**Context**

- Almost 60 people are feared dead, buried alive under layers of mud and rocks in the Kavalappara landslide.
- It is the worst tragedy in Kerala’s devastating monsoon so far this year.

**Causes of Landslides**

**Natural causes**-

1. Landslides are generally associated with natural calamities like earthquake, volcanic eruptions, floods, cloudburst, etc.
2. Long spell of rainfall.
3. Loose soil cover and sloping terrain.
Anthropogenic causes-

1. Rapid urbanization and changes in land use patterns
2. Rampant deforestation and mining activities like blasting and quarrying, etc.
3. Increased industrialisation leading to climate change and weather disturbances
4. Change in river flow due to construction of dams, barriers, etc.

Various measures needed to mitigate them are:

- Hazard mapping by demarcating areas prone to landslides and avoiding stress on those areas for settlement.
- Construction of retention walls to avoid land from slipping.
- Increasing afforestation and vegetation cover.
- Practise measures to check soil erosion like terrace farming, contour ploughing, etc.
- Implementing surface drainage control works to control the movement of landslide along with rain water and spring flows.
- Proper planning of developmental processes following sustainable methods.

Source: The Hindu

Village Volunteer System.

GS-II | 23 August, 2019

GS-II: Village Volunteer System.

Context:

The ward and village volunteer system has been launched in Andhra Pradesh.

About Village Volunteer System

- The scheme would be officially launched on 2 October 2019, which also marks 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. It is aimed at providing governance services at doorsteps of people. Basic idea behind implementing scheme is to infuse confidence among people in government and to see that their basic needs are met at their door-steps.
- Village secretariats would be set up in each village to deliver governance to people in 72 hours. This scheme involves provision of one volunteer to cover 50 families in each village. Identity cards would be given to the volunteers and they would be given an honorarium of Rs 5,000 per month. The volunteers would first identify the beneficiaries,
get to know their problems and then delineate the schemes being provided by the government for them.

- Telephone No Toll-free telephone number 1902 would be set up at call centre in Chief Minister Office (CMO) to receive grievances of people.

**Significance**

The scheme will be able to reach poorest of poor and make all villages self-sufficient.

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**Chief Defence Service**

**GS-II: Chief Defence Service**

**Context**

In his Independence Day address, Prime Minister announced the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff.

**Who is Chief Defence Service?**

- The Chief of Defence Staff is meant to be a single-point military advisor to the government on important defense and strategic issues for the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense.
- On long-term it provides for defence planning and management, including manpower, equipment and strategy, and above all, “jointsmanship” in operations.
- In most democracies, the CDS is seen as being above inter-Service rivalries and the immediate operational preoccupations of the individual military chief.
- India being a nuclear weapons state, the CDS will also act as the military advisor to the Prime Minister on nuclear issues.
- It is not clear yet how long the tenure of the CDS will be and whether the rank of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) will be the same or higher than the three army chiefs.
- *Worth to mention here that all major countries, especially the nuclear weapon states, have a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).*

**History behind Chief Defence Service in India**

It is not the first time that creation of post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is in progress. The
proposal for setting up a Chief of Defence Staff has been contemplated around 20 year ago after the Kargil war of 1999 by the K. Subrahmanyam committee. But in the absence of political consensus and apprehensions among services it never moved forward.

What is the current status?

As of now the senior-most of the three Chiefs functions as the Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). The role of COSC is additional and the tenures have been very short.

Why change it now?

- CoSC arrangement is seen as “unsatisfactory”, and its Chairman as a “figurehead”.
- The post did not further tri-service integration, resulting in inefficiency and an expensive duplication of assets.
- The CoSC system is a leftover from the colonial era, with only minor changes being carried out over the years.
- Apprehensions in the political class about a powerful military leader, along with inter-Services bickering, have long worked to disincentivise the upgrade of the post.

Naresh Chandra Committee recommendations

- In 2011, more than a decade after the KRC Report, the UPA government which had opposed the CDS proposal when in opposition, set up the Naresh Chandra Committee on defence and security.
- The 14-member Committee, comprising retired Service Chiefs and other defence experts, suggested a watered-down version of the CDS proposal, in which the Chairman CoSC in the rank of a four-star officer would have a fixed tenure of two years.

Way Forward

- Navy played a silent role while the Army and Air Force collaborated to evict intruders from Indian soil.
- The lessons learnt then prompted the K. Subrahmanyam Committee to propose having a CDS for the first time.
- But the threat matrix has changed since 1947 and the Indian Ocean region is fast metamorphosing into a major arena of friction, with increasing forays by the Chinese Navy and building up of regional navies with help from China.
- In a conflict situation, what would unfold are short and swift skirmishes which call for agility and swift action by the three services in unison.

Source: The Hindu
GS-II: FATF group ‘blacklists’ Pakistan

Context

Terror funding watchdog FATF Asia-Pacific Group ‘blacklists’ Pakistan.

News

- Pakistan has been placed on the lowest rung, or “Enhanced Expedited Follow Up List (Blacklist) of the Financial Action Task Force’s Asia Pacific Group (APG).
- The APG is one of nine regional affiliates of the FATF.
- APG has found Pakistan non-compliant on 32 of the 40 compliance parameters of terror financing and money laundering.
- While the placing does not bring any new punitive measures on Pakistan, it will mean quarterly reporting to the group on improvement in its financial safeguards.
- In June, the FATF had warned Pakistan that its failure to complete its action plan on terror financing could possibly lead to the country getting blacklisted.
- The Paris plenary of FATF in October will decide whether to remove Pakistan from the greylist, continue the listing, or downgrade it to a blacklist of non-cooperative countries.
- Officials said the downgrade might not occur, given that any three countries in the FATF can veto it, and Pakistan is likely to secure the backing of China, Turkey and Malaysia.
- Nevertheless, the APG decision on Friday would make it difficult for Pakistan to extricate itself from the greylist.

What are Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established in July 1989 by a Group of Seven (G-7) countries in a Summit held in Paris. Initial motive of FATF was to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
- In October 2001, the FATF expanded its wings to incorporate efforts to combat terror financing, money laundering and human trafficking.

Functions

- The FATF is an independent inter-governmental body that develops and promotes policies to protect the global financial system so that it could bot be used by the terrorists and other anti social elements.
The FATF has started dealing with the virtual currency. The FATF is an international policy-making body. It does not have any role in law enforcement matters, investigations or prosecution.

What are Black List and Grey List of the FATF?

**Black List**

Countries which are supporting terror funding and money laundering activities are listed in the Black List. The FATF blacklist or OECD blacklist has been issued by the Financial Action Task Force since 2000 and lists countries which it judges to be non-cooperative in the global fight against money laundering and terror funding.

**Grey List**

Those countries which are considered as the safe heaven for supporting terror funding and money laundering; included in this list. The inclusion in this list is not as severe as black listed.

Source: The Hindu
A new report by Greenpeace India shows the country is the largest emitter of sulphur dioxide in the world, with more than 15% of all the anthropogenic sulphur dioxide hotspots. This was detected by the NASA OMI (Ozone Monitoring Instrument) satellite. Almost all of these emissions in India are because of coal-burning, the report says. The Singrauli, Neyveli, Talcher, Jharsuguda, Korba, Kutch, Chennai, Ramagundam, Chandrapur and Koradi thermal power plants or clusters are the major emission hotspots in India.

The vast majority of coal-based power plants in India lack flue-gas desulphurization technology to reduce air pollution. In a first step to combat pollution levels, the MoEFCC introduced, for the first time, sulphur dioxide emission limits for coal-fired power plants in December 2015. But the deadline for the installation of flue-gas desulphurization (FGD) in power plants has been extended from 2017 to 2022.

The report also includes NASA data on the largest point sources of sulphur dioxide. The largest sulphur dioxide emission hotspots have been found in Russia, South Africa, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India, Mexico, United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Serbia. Air pollutant emissions from power plants and other industries continue to increase in India, Saudi Arabia and Iran, the report says. In Russia, South Africa, Mexico and Turkey, emissions are currently not increasing — however, there is not a lot of progress in tackling them either.

Of the world’s major emitters, China and the United States have been able to reduce
emissions rapidly.
  - They have achieved this feat by switching to clean energy sources.
  - China, in particular, has achieved success by dramatically improving emission standards and enforcement for sulphur dioxide control.

Source: Indian Express

Oxytocin and issues over its commercial use

GS-II | 24 August, 2019

Context

The final decision on whether the government can block private pharmaceutical companies from manufacturing and selling vital pregnancy drug oxytocin in India handed to the Supreme Court.

Oxytocin

  - Oxytocin is a natural hormone that causes the uterus to contract.
  - Oxytocin is used to induce labor or strengthen labor contractions during childbirth, and to control bleeding after childbirth.
  - Oxytocin is a neurotransmitter and a hormone that is produced in the hypothalamus.

Issues with the use of Oxytocin

Misuse by Farmers

  - It is excessively used to extract more milk from the cows and buffaloes which makes the cows barren sooner and lowers the lifespan of the animal
  - It is used to increase the size of vegetables such as pumpkins, watermelons, brinjals, etc.
Misuse In healthcare

- It is used to speed up deliveries for pregnant women in overcrowded government hospitals.
- Overuse causes symptoms of dizziness, nausea, early puberty, mood swings, erratic heart rate and fetal damage, among others.

What are the case?

- The health ministry in April 2018 notified a ban on private firms from manufacturing and selling oxytocin.
- It wanted to restrict the responsibility of supplying the drug to a Karnataka-based public sector manufacturer to avoid its misuse in the veterinary field.
- Following a case by drug makers like some private players the Delhi High Court in December 18 quashed the ban on various grounds, including that it lacked scientific basis.

Source: Indian Express

Amazon Fires

GS-III | 24 August, 2019

Context

- Over the last several days, the ‘lungs of the Earth’ Amazon rainforest has been burning at a rate that has alarmed environmentalists and governments worldwide.
- The fires are so large that they are visible from space.

Amazon Fires

- Started in the Amazonian rainforests, the fires have impacted populated areas in the north, such as the states of Rondônia and Acre, blocking sunlight and enveloping the region in smoke.
- The smoke has wafted thousands of miles to the Atlantic coast and São Paulo, according to the World Meteorological Organization.
Brazil has reported that forest fires in the region have doubled since 2013, and increased by 84% compared to the same period last year.

How did the fire start?

- Mostly caused by farmers clearing land, the fires have thrown the spotlight on Brazilian policies and anti-environment stance.
- The farmers had organised a “fire day” along a highway that runs through the heart of the rainforest.
- Local farmers set ablaze to sections of the rainforest a few days ago to get the government’s attention.
- And dry weather has further fuelled the fire.
- The dry season creates the favourable conditions for the use and spread of fire, but starting a fire is the work of humans, either deliberately or by accident.

A cause for concern

- The Amazon rainforest is a repository of rich biodiversity and produces approximately 20 per cent of oxygen in the Earth’s atmosphere.
- It is also home to indigenous communities whose lives and homelands are under threat due to encroachment.
- The Amazon basin matches the emissions released by nations in the basin. The burning of forests, therefore, implies additional carbon emissions.
- Deforestation could lead to the Amazon’s transformation from the world’s largest rainforest to a Savanna, which would reverse the region’s ecology.

Importance of Amazons

- A National Geographic report said the Amazon rainforest influences the water cycle not only on a regional scale.
- The rain produced by the Amazon travels through the region and even reaches the Andes mountain range.
- Moisture from the Atlantic falls on the rainforest, and eventually evaporates back into the atmosphere.
- The Amazon rainforest has the ability to produce at least half of the rain it receives. This cycle is a delicate balance.

Source: The Hindu
GS-I: Letting the pearl on the Silk Road shine brighter

Context

The Dunhuang city has been witness to multiple interactions and mutual learning between China and India. Recently, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang city of China to inspect cultural relics protection and research work.

About Dunhuang

- The city of Dunhuang, in north-west China, is situated at a point of vital strategic and logistical importance, on a crossroads of two major trade routes within the Silk Road network.
- Lying in an oasis at the edge of the Taklamakan Desert, Dunhuang was one of the first trading cities encountered by merchants arriving in China from the west.
- It was also an ancient site of Buddhist religious activity, and was a popular destination for pilgrims, as well as acting as a garrison town protecting the region.
- These works of art are exquisitely crafted, with unique craftsmanship, vivid charm, and combination of form and spirit. Like an amazing and colourful movement, they tell a beautiful and touching legend of magic charm lasting thousand years.
- Dunhuang is a witness to interactions and mutual learning between China and India, two ancient civilisations. The Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang remind me of Ajanta Caves and Elora Caves in India.
- All being world-famous, the murals and Buddha figures in these caves tell the historical and cultural ties between Chinese and Indian civilisations, and witness the light of inter-civilisational exchanges and mutual learning.

Dunhuang as an important hub city:

- Dunhuang is known as the “Pearl on the Silk Road”.
- For thousands of years, envoys and officials, merchants and caravans, monks and scholars, capital and technology, integrated and communicated through this silk road, nourishing the development and prosperity of countries along the route.
China and India have also developed close economic, trade and cultural exchanges along the ancient Silk Road of both land and sea. China’s paper making, silk, porcelain and tea were introduced to India, while Indian singing and dancing, astronomy, architecture and spices were introduced to China, which became the historical witness of the mutual exchanges between the two sides. Zhang Qian was sent on a diplomatic mission to the Western Regions. Zheng He sailed to the Western Ocean seven times and visited India six times.

Road of friendship-India and China

- The Silk Road is not only a road of trade, but also a road of friendship and mutual learning among civilisations.
- It will certainly further promote the deep inter-connectivity and cultural exchanges between countries along the route.
- The Silk Road spirit is about openness, exchanges and inclusiveness. It reveals the truth that there will be no progress without openness, no development without exchanges and no strength without inclusiveness.

Way Forward

In the long course of history, China and India, two ancient oriental civilisations, have engaged in exchanges and mutual learning, created two vigorous and charming civilisations, and made great contributions to the development of human civilisation. In the new era, China and India should also adhere to inclusiveness and resolve differences through building common ground. We should transcend civilisation barriers through exchanges, rise above “civilisation conflicts” by mutual learning, and overcome the sense of superiority by promoting coexistence of civilisations.

Source: The Hindu

Government responds to downturn with steps to boost growth

GS-III | 24 August, 2019

GS-III: Government responds to downturn with steps to boost growth
Context
The announcements come at a time when the perception that the slowdown has been aggravating in recent weeks and spreading across sectors. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a partial rollback of the enhanced surcharge on foreign portfolio investors (FPI) levied in the Budget and indicated a review of the surcharge levy for high net worth individuals as well.

Announcements

- Surcharge on long and short term capital gains arising from transfer of equity shares has been withdrawn.
- The CSR violation would be treated as a civil offence, and not a criminal offence.
- The FM announced a slew of measures aimed at boosting a flagging domestic economy.
- This includes an assertion that ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicles will coexist with EVs (electric vehicles) and that there is no phasing out of ICE vehicles, a fear expressed in certain quarters of the auto industry.
- Banks would also be asked to pass on the full impact of the interest rate cuts to consumers.
- Repo rate-linked loans.

Loans, repo rate

- Loans for home, vehicles and consumption goods to become cheaper and widely available through banking and non-banking finance companies.
- Banks will launch repo rate and external benchmark-linked loan products that will lead to reduced easy monthly installments for housing, vehicle and other retail loans.
- Working capital loans for industry to become cheaper.
- Public sector banks (PSBs) will ensure mandated return of loan documents within 15 days of loan closure.
- NBFCs will be permitted to use the Aadhaar authenticated bank ‘Know Your Customer’ (KYC) to avoid repeated processes.

What is the surcharge that’s been withdrawn?

- The surcharge of 3 per cent and 7 per cent on those earning between Rs 2 crore and Rs 5 crore, and over Rs 5 crore respectively had been announced by Sitharaman as part of her Budget proposals.
- This had led to different taxation outcomes for FPIs registered as Association of Persons or trusts and companies, even as those registered as companies were spared of this surcharge.
- Ever since the budget announcement, markets have been seeing a selloff on most trading days, largely in light of the FPI impact.

Why was the CSR announcement controversial?

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The amendment to the Companies Act, passed earlier this month, introduced harsh penalties including jail term for non-compliance on CSR (corporate social responsibility) by listed companies. This had been slammed by industry as a regressive move, especially given the fact that in the last five years, the total CSR spend of companies has progressively jumped from 70% to over 90% now, according to data sourced from Prime Database.

Conclusion

For an economy that is downbeat in growth and in sentiment, the comprehensive package of measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday may just be the right boost. They address growth slowdown concerns free up funds for investment and spending by banks, housing finance companies and MSMEs and importantly, undo some controversial proposals, in the budget and outside it, which were affecting sentiment in the markets and the corporate sector. And, importantly, these have all been done without any significant financial burden on the government. Some of the measures promote the ease of doing business and even the ease of living for ordinary citizens.

Source: The Hindu
Abrogation of Article 370

- Passage of a statutory resolution in Parliament recommending the declaration of Article 370 as inoperative.
- Adoption of a resolution accepting the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019
- Issuance of a notification by the President declaring Article 370 inoperative.

Problem with president rule

- He also suspends portions of the Constitution such as Article 3. J&K constitution has an additional proviso which says J&K’s legislature has to give its consent to any altering of its boundaries or size or name. But the Presidential proclamation suspended this.
- During the period, decisions that a popular regime would never make may become possible.
- Even suits instituted by the State against other States or the Centre under Article 131 may be withdrawn or claims against it conceded.
- The power of a State Assembly to ratify Constitution amendments may be exercised by Parliament.

Constitution and Judiciary

- A presidential proclamation is subject to judicial review after the Supreme Court verdict in S.R. Bommai vs. Union of India (1994).
- The scope for judicial intervention is limited to the adequacy and relevance of the material on the basis of which the President believes that governance of a State cannot be carried on in accordance with the Constitution.
- It said the initial exercise of the power is limited to taking over the executive and legislative functions without dissolving the Assembly. Once Parliament approves the proclamation, the Assembly may be dissolved.
- Courts have always emphasised that States remain ‘supreme’. They are not “mere appendages of the Centre”. There are certain functions that the States alone can do.

Source: The Hindu
Nirmala Sitharaman’s stimulus plan falls short on vision

GS-III: Nirmala Sitharaman’s stimulus plan falls short on vision

Context

Indian economy is slowing down. In this context, the Finance Minister offered a stimulus package.

What does it offer?

- It rolled back the tax surcharge on overseas investors imposed in the budget.
- The angel tax on startups has been removed.
- The government will buy more cars for its fleet.
- Injection of 700 billion rupees of additional capital into state-run banks.

Analysis

- It gives global banks a break on derivatives they trade in India while denying the same tax benefit to local hedge funds. This can be called unfair discrimination against a nascent industry in domestic alternative assets in India.
- Govt buying cars may arrest the slide in the industry, where July sales slumped 36%. Vehicles purchased now won’t become illegal when stricter pollution standards kick in next year. This can help deal with inventory build up.
- Banks are yet to absorb the 2.4 trillion rupees of bad debt accumulated in just 16 companies.
- Half of that reflects loans to troubled shadow banks, according to Credit Suisse Group AG.
- A parallel move by RBI to link loan rates to its policy benchmark is laudable.

CONCLUSION

Allowing larger firms to flourish, enabling smaller firms to secure cheap financing and...
forcing the state to retreat from the business will benefit the private sector in the long run.

Source: Live Mint

Gravitational Licensing
GS-III | 26 August, 2019

GS-III: Gravitational Licensing

Context

- Using NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope as a sort of time machine, researchers plan to investigate how new stars are born.
- For this, they will take the help of a natural phenomenon called “gravitational lensing”.

How it Works?

- The phenomenon occurs when a huge amount of matter, such as a massive galaxy or cluster of galaxies, creates a gravitational field that distorts and magnifies the light from objects behind it, but in the same line of sight, NASA explained on its website.
- In effect, these are natural, cosmic telescopes they are called gravitational lenses. These large celestial objects will magnify the light from distant galaxies that are at or near the peak of star formation. The effect allows researchers to study the details of early galaxies too far away to be seen otherwise with even the most powerful space telescopes

Targeting Extremely Magnified Panchromatic Lensed Arcs and Their Extended Star Formation:
The Milky Way today forms the equivalent of one Sun every year, but in the past, that rate was up to 100 times greater.

NASA now plans to look billions of years into the past in order to understand how our Sun formed.

The programme is called Targeting Extremely Magnified Panchromatic Lensed Arcs and Their Extended Star Formation, or TEMPLATES.

Source: Indian Express

Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS) of IMF

GS-III: Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS) of IMF

Context

India failed to comply with multiple requirements prescribed in the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) mandatory for all IMF members.

Special Data Dissemination Standard

- The Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) was established by the IMF for member countries that have or that might seek access to international capital markets, to guide them in providing their economic and financial data to the public.

- Although subscription is voluntary, the subscribing member needs to be committed to observing the standard and provide information about its data and data dissemination practices (metadata).

- The metadata are posted on the IMF’s Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board. The SDDS is expected to enhance the availability of timely and comprehensive data and improve the functioning of financial markets.

- India subscribed to the SDDS on December 27, 1996.
Indian datasets not updated

- India failed to comply with multiple requirements prescribed in the SDDS, a practice mandatory for all IMF members.
- Whereas comparable economies comprising the BRICS grouping of Brazil, China, South Africa and Russia, have maintained a near impeccable record in the same period.
- Also, India’s non-compliance in multiple categories in 2018 and to an extent in 2017 breaks with an otherwise near perfect dissemination record.
- When contacted, the IMF acknowledged India’s deviations but termed them “non-serious”.
- However, independent observers see these deficiencies as a result of indifference to data dissemination procedures.

A recent phenomenon

- India’s non-compliance with IMF standards is a recent phenomenon.
- When asked for the reason for the delays in 2018, Deputy Director in the Department of Economic Affairs termed it as a “one off event due to technical glitches”.
- They were made available on other (Indian) government websites on a timely basis through links on the NSDP to these websites.

Implications of non-compliance

- The IMF document states that monitoring observance of the SDDS is central to maintaining the credibility of the IMF’s data standards initiatives and its usefulness to policymakers.
- It further states that if the IMF staff considers a non-observance as a “serious deviation” then procedures would be initiated against the member country.
- When the IMF was asked to explain why India’s non-observance was deemed as non-serious, their statistical department persisted that this was due to “information availability in other government websites.”

Source: The Hindu
The government is likely to withdraw the Special Protection Group (SPG) from a former Prime Minister’s security detail.

**Special Protection Group**

- The SPG was set up in 1985 after the assassination of PM Indira Gandhi, and Parliament passed the SPG Act in 1988 dedicating the group to protecting the Prime Ministers of India.
- At the time, the Act did not include former Prime Ministers, and when V.P. Singh came to power in 1989 his government withdrew SPG protection to the outgoing PM Rajiv Gandhi.
- After Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in 1991 the SPG Act was amended, offering SPG protection to all former Prime Ministers and their families for a period of at least 10 years.
- The SPG cover would only be reduced on the basis of threat levels as defined in the SPG Act of 1988.

**What is it?**

- It is an armed force of the Union for providing proximate security to the following Prime Minister (PM) of India.
- Former PM of India and
- Members of their immediate families wherever they are.

**Type:**

It was formed in 1985 after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as an executive body on the recommendation of Birbal Nath committee. Later on it became a statutory body under Special Protection Group Act, 1988.

**Governance:**

- It is governed by Cabinet secretariat of India.
- SPG chief is an officer of the rank of inspector-general.

**Tenure of security cover to former PM:**

SPG Security is provided to former PM and the members of his immediate family for a period of one year from the date on which the former PM ceased to hold office and beyond one year based on the level of threat as decided by the Central Government. However, the security to them can be extended in case the threat is of grave and continuing nature.

Source: The Hindu
India’s Deep Ocean Mission
GS-III | 26 August, 2019

Context

Ministry Of Earth Sciences Plans Rs 8000 Crore ‘Deep Ocean Mission’ To Boost India’s Sea Exploration Capabilities.

Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)

- The mission proposes to explore the deep ocean similar to the space exploration started by ISRO.

- Underwater robotics and ‘manned’ submersibles are key components of the Mission which will help India harness various living and non-living (water, mineral and energy) resources from the seabed and deep water.

- The tasks that will be undertaken over this period include deep-sea mining, survey, energy exploration and the offshore-based desalination.

- These technological developments are funded under an umbrella scheme of the government called Ocean Services, Technology, Observations, Resources Modelling and Science (O-SMART).

What will be mined from the deep ocean?

- One of the main aims of the mission is to explore and extract polymetallic nodules. These are small potato-like rounded accretions composed of minerals such as manganese, nickel, cobalt, copper and iron hydroxide.

- They lie scattered on the Indian Ocean floor at depths of about 6,000 m and the size can vary from a few millimetres to centimetres. These metals can be extracted and used in electronic devices, smartphones, batteries and even for solar panels.
How is it regulated?


- India was the first country to receive the status of a ‘Pioneer Investor’ in 1987 and was given an area of about 1.5 lakh sq km in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) for nodule exploration. In 2002, India signed a contract with the ISA and after complete resource analysis of the seabed 50% was surrendered and the country retained an area of 75,000 sq km.

Which are the other countries that are in the race to mine the deep sea?

- Apart from the CIOB, polymetallic nodules have been identified from the central Pacific Ocean. It is known as the Clarion-Clipperton Zone.

- China, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Russia and also some small islands such as the Cook Islands, Kiribati have joined the race for deep sea mining. Most of the countries have tested their technologies in shallow waters and are yet to start deep-sea extraction.

What will be the environmental impact?

- According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), these deep remote locations can be home to unique species that have adapted themselves to conditions such as poor oxygen and sunlight, high pressure and extremely low temperatures.

- Such mining expeditions can make them go extinct even before they are known to science. The deep sea’s biodiversity and ecology remain poorly understood, making it difficult to assess the environmental impact and frame adequate guidelines.

- Environmentalists are also worried about the sediment plumes that will be generated as the suspended particles can rise to the surface harming the filter feeders in the upper ocean layers. Additional concerns have been raised about the noise and light pollution from the mining vehicles and oil spills from the operating vessels.

Is deep sea mining economically viable?
The latest estimate from the ISA says it will be commercially viable only if about three million tonnes are mined per year. More studies are being carried out to understand how the technology can be scaled up and used efficiently.

Source: The hindu
GS-III: Regional Connectivity

Context

Very few States in India have active civil aviation departments. Currently, the penetration of the aviation market in India stands at 7%. There is potential to be among the global top three nations in terms of domestic and international passenger traffic.

The passive role of states

- Civil aviation is a Central subject and barely got significant attention from the States.
- States had a passive role as the Central government continued the development of airports and enhancing air connectivity.

The increasing role of states:

- The cooperation of States is seen as a major factor in the growth of the civil aviation sector.
- Regional Connectivity Scheme, UdeDeshkaAamNaagrik (UDAN) has a built-in mechanism to develop stakes of State governments in the growth of the sector.
- Thirty states and Union Territories have already signed memoranda of understanding with the Central government.
- The policies of States and Centre are now being interlinked to make flying accessible and affordable.

Air Development

- There are many regional airports which can be developed by States on their own or in collaboration with the Airports Authority of India (AAI).
- Different models of public-private-partnership can be leveraged to develop infrastructures.
- Innovative models can be explored to create viable ‘no-frill airports’.
- India had about 70 airports since Independence until recently. Under UDAN, the Union government has operationalised 24 unserved airports over the past two years; 100 more are to be developed in the next five years.

What is UDAN Scheme?

- The scheme UDAN envisages providing connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports.
- UDAN has a unique market-based model to develop regional connectivity.
- Interested airline and helicopter operators can start operations on hitherto un-connected
routes by submitting proposals to the Implementing Agency.
- The operators could seek a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) apart from getting various concessions.
- All such route proposals would then be offered for competitive bidding through a reverse bidding mechanism and the route would be awarded to the participant quoting the lowest VGF per Seat.

Significance

The scheme gives India’s aviation sector a boost by giving a chance to small and first-time operators to be a part of the rapid growth in passenger traffic.

Conclusion

Considering the infrastructural constraints and difficult terrain, small aircraft operators need to be encouraged. Areas which cannot be connected meaningfully by road or rail have to be linked by air. Air connectivity would not only bring down travel time but also be a boon in emergencies. This is also true for northeast India, the islands and also the hilly States.

Source: The Hindu
The 2018 IPCC Special Report on Global warming of 1.5°C delivered a clear message: Human activities have caused an approximately 0.87°C rise in global average temperature over pre-industrial times.

**IPCC**

- This is an intergovernmental body under the UN
- It is a scientific body
- Formed in 1988 by WMO (World Meteorological Organisation) and UNEP
- It produces report based on scientific developments across the world.
- The IPCC does not carry out its own original research, nor does it do the work of monitoring climate or related phenomena itself. The IPCC bases its assessment on the published literature

The aims of the IPCC are to assess scientific information relevant to:

- Human-induced climate change.
- The impacts of human-induced climate change.
- Options for adaptation and mitigation.

**Impact**

- World’s **land systems** have a direct impact on human well-being, livelihood, food security, and water security.
- **Desertification** of land under agricultural use will exacerbate the already worsening dangers of declining crop yields and crop failures.

**What is 1.5-degree C target?**

- Since 1990s, countries started discussing climate change and began negotiating an international arrangement for tackling it together. The objective has been to limit rising global average temperatures to within 2°C from pre-industrial times.
- Periodic Assessment Reports produced by IPCC, suggest that the impacts of climate change could be “irreversible” and “catastrophic” if the rise in temperature was allowed to go beyond the 2°C ceiling.
- Small island states and the least developed nations are likely to suffer the worst consequences of climate change. These countries negotiated that the goal should be to restrict the temperature rise within 1.5°C from pre-industrial times.
- A 1.5°C target demanded much deeper emission cuts from the big emitters, which in turn required massive deployment of financial and technological resources.
- The Paris Agreement ‘hold’ the increase in global average temperature to “well below” 2°C. It also promised to keep “pursuing efforts” to attain the 1.5°C target.

**Challenges to India**

- The dilution of environmental impact assessments (EIAs) in India seems regressive.
Agriculture in India accounts for more than an estimated 86% of the country’s freshwater use. The water intensity of Indian paddy is also below global best practices. 2019 HIMAP report by ICIMOD has shown that with receding glaciers, there is a need to manage water better both in the short and in the long run to address the challenge of food security.

Conclusion

- Industrial development and environmental protection can be planned prudently to be compatible.
- Land sparing industrialisation, appropriate zoning and environmental safeguards are possible without the replacement of the ecological services provided by the forest ecosystem.
- Global assessment reports have shown that consulting indigenous people is an important way of integrating local knowledge with scientific knowledge.
- Water management is also critical. Union government has taken up the goal of “irrigation water productivity”.

Source: Indian Express

18th CoP of CITES, Geneva
GS-III | 27 August, 2019

GS-III: 18th CoP of CITES, Geneva

Context

Over a hundred nations approved a proposal by India, Nepal, and Bangladesh to prohibit commercial international trade in a species of otter native to the subcontinent and some other parts of Asia. India’s proposal to remove Rosewood (Dalbergia sissoo) from Appendix II of Convention is also under consideration.
Indian proposals

- Members at the Conference have voted to move the smooth-coated otter (Lutrogale perspicillata) from CITES Appendix II to CITES Appendix I because it is considered to be facing a high risk of extinction.
- It is detrimentally affected by international trade, as well as habitat loss and degradation and persecution associated with conflict with people (and fisheries).
- The other proposal that was passed was to include the Tokay gecko (Gekko gecko) in CITES Appendix II.
- The proposal on protecting the Tokay gecko mentioned threats from hunting and collection for use in traditional medicine.

About CITES

- The CITES is as an international agreement aimed at ensuring “that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival”.
- CITES was drafted after a resolution was adopted at a meeting of the members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1963.
- CITES entered into force on July 1, 1975, and now has 183 parties.
- The Convention is legally binding on the Parties in the sense that they are committed to implementing it; however, it does not take the place of national laws.
- India is a signatory to and has also ratified CITES convention in 1976.

Source: Indian Express

Single Use Plastic

GS-III | 27 August, 2019

GS-III: Single Use Plastic

Context
In G7 session on environment highlighted India’s large scale efforts towards eliminating single-use plastic.

**The Problem of Plastic in India: Facts and Figures**

- India is responsible for about 60% of all the plastic dumped annually in the world’s oceans.
- Over 42% of our plastic use is in packaging.
- India produces 25,940 tonnes of plastic waste every day and nine million tonnes every year.

**The Problem with the Practice of Banning**

Lack of consultation with stakeholders such as manufacturers of plastics, eateries and citizen groups: This leads to implementation issues and inconvenience to the consumers.

Exemptions for certain products such as milk pouches and plastic packaging for food items severely weaken the impact of the ban.

No investment in finding out alternative materials to plug the plastic vacuum: Until people are able to shift to a material which is as light-weight and cheap as plastic, banning plastic will remain a mere customary practice.

Lack of widespread awareness among citizens about the magnitude of harm caused by single-use plastic: Without citizens ‘buying in’ to a cause, bans only result in creating unregulated underground markets.

No strategy to offset the massive economic impact: Sweeping bans like the one in Maharashtra are likely to cause massive loss of jobs and disruption of a large part of the economy dependent on the production and use of plastic.

**What Needs to be Done?**

- Incentivise sustainable, eco-friendly and cost-efficient alternatives to plastic.
- The government and all stakeholders involved must work together to find affordable as well as convenient alternatives to plastics.
- Create public ‘buy-in’ strategies by making them aware regarding the harmful effects of plastic.
A judicial overreach into matters of regulation

GS-III | 27 August, 2019

Context

The Madras High Court has been hearing a PIL petition since 2018 has asked to linking adhar with government identity proof.

Background

In response to a PIL seeking stay on the implementation of the Unique Identification (UID)/Aadhaar Scheme the top court ruling stated that the 23.8 billion dollar scheme, set up by the central government aiming to create a unique identity for each resident of India, through biometric – retinal and finger print scans, cannot be made mandatory.

Arguments of the Supreme Court

- Many state governments had been trying to make the Aadhaar card compulsory for services such as gas connections, bank accounts and other such public services. The Maharashtra government had been trying to make the Aadhaar card mandatory for marriage registrations. It infringed on people’s fundamental rights under Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (right to life and liberty).

- Under many instances the Aadhaar cards has been issued to illegal immigrants and it would legitimise their stay in the country. There have been reports of a huge number of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants being issued Aadhaar cards.

- No citizen should suffer in absence of aadhar number. The Centre and state governments must not insist on Aadhar cards from citizens before providing them essential services.
Those opting for Aadhaar are required to give personal information including biometrics, iris and fingerprints, which infringes the fundamental right to privacy under Article 21.

The bench was also informed that there were no safeguard to protect the personal information and no provision for penalties if it comes to public domain.

Availability Unique Aadhar id Number of every Individual:

- It is a 12 digit individual identification number issued by UIDAI (Unique identification authority of India) on behalf of Government of India
- It will serve as identity and address proof anywhere in India. It is available in 2 forms, physical and electronic form i.e. (e-Aadhaar).
- Aadhaar is meant to help benefits reach the marginalised sections of the society and takes into account the dignity of people not only from personal but also from community point of view.
- Any resident (a person who has resided in India for 182 days, in the one year preceding the date of application for enrolment for Aadhaar) of India irrespective of age, sex, class can avail it.
- The UID authority will authenticate the Aadhaar number of an individual, if an entity makes such a request.

Challenges apparent in the linking of Aadhaar number with social media profiles:

- The private use of Aadhaar itself has been controversial since striking down of Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act.
- The limited eKYC provisions, which has been allowed only for banks and other regulated entities are indicative of this.
- The use of Aadhaar, further, has mainly been restricted to receiving government benefits such as the Section 7 benefits.
- It is thus difficult, legally, to find a way to permit Aadhaar-social media linking within the ambit of the Supreme Court’s verdict on Aadhaar.

Conclusion

- The Madras High Court reiterated its stand that Aadhaar cannot be used to authenticate social media accounts.
- It has dismissed the plea made by the PIL petitioners, but given that the Supreme Court is hearing Facebook’s transfer petition, the Madras HC has adjourned the hearing on WhatsApp traceability case until September 19.
- The Supreme Court said that there is a need to find a balance between the right to online privacy and the right of the state to trace the origins of hateful messages and fake news.
- The government needs to move away from relying on Aadhaar and linking as a one-stop solution for issues ranging from terrorism (SIM linking), money laundering (bank account linking), electoral fraud (voter ID linking) and now cybercrime (social media account linking).
Source: The Hindu
GS-II: India’s Child Well-being Report

Context

India’s Child Well-being Index was recently released.

India’s Child Well-being Report

- The India child well-being index is a crucial report that can be mined both by the Government and civil organisations to achieve the goal of child well-being and we will use this report effectively.
- The report is released by the NGO World Vision India and research institute IFMR LEAD.
- One of the primary objectives of this index is to garner attention to the under-researched theme of child well-being in India, and inspire further academic and policy conversations on related issues.
- This report provides insights on health, nutrition, education, and sanitation and child protection.
- The report is an attempt to look at how India fairs on child well-being using a composite child well-being index.

Performance States:

Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh bagged the top three slots in the index. Meghalaya, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh featured at the bottom, the index said.

Indicators

Focusing on the three key dimensions, 24 indicators were selected to develop the computation of the child well-being index. The index captures the performance of each state and union territory on a composite child well-being score.

Way Ahead

The report also emphasised on triggering policy level changes, seek better budgetary allocations and initiate discussions with all stakeholders which can help in enhancing the quality of life of all children in the country.
Land Degradation Neutrality
GS-III | 28 August, 2019

Context

Union Environment Ministry has committed to rejuvenate 50 lakh hectares (5 million) of degraded land between 2021 and 2030. A Centre for Excellence would be set up in Dehradun for land degradation neutrality.

Why such move?

- India faces a severe problem of land degradation, or soil becoming unfit for cultivation. About 29% or about 96.4 million hectares are considered degraded.
- The State of India’s Environment report, 2017 calculates that nearly 30 per cent of India is degraded or facing desertification. This figure touches 40 to 70 percent in eight states—Rajasthan, Delhi, Goa, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh.

Land Degradation Neutrality

Land degradation neutrality (LDN) is a condition where further land degradation (loss of productivity caused by environmental or human factors) is prevented and already degraded land can be restored.

Benefits of Land Degradation Neutrality

- As land is fixed in quantity, there is ever-increasing competition to control land resources and capitalize on the flows of goods and services from the land.
- LDN represents a paradigm shift in land management policies and practices.
- It is a unique approach that counterbalances the expected loss of productive land with the recovery of degraded areas.

India’s Initiative

- This January, India became part of the “Bonn Challenge”, a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world’s deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.
India’s pledge is one of the largest in Asia. Schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Soil Health Card Scheme, Soil Health Management Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana are seen as prongs to tackle this land degradation.

Source: The Hindu

It’s time for a direct tax regime that’s growth-focused and fair.

GS-III | 28 August, 2019

**CONTEXT**

India overhauled its indirect tax system with the introduction of goods and services tax (GST). It now has to do the same with the direct tax system.

**Background**

The task force on the direct tax code (DTC) submitted its final report to the finance minister. The proposed new code will replace the Income-tax Act of 1961.

**DTC – what it has to say about direct taxes**

- The report says that the direct tax system is designed to improve the efficiency, equity, and effectiveness of the tax system.
- A good tax system has to promote rather than hinder economic activity, aid economic equality rather than inequality, and be easy rather than complicated to administer.
- The task force argued that high tax cost on return on equity inhibits private sector investment.
- They suggested that a sharp reduction in the corporate tax rate can substantially reduce the tax cost on equity. This will also eliminate the bias in favor of debt.
- This will enable the revival of private sector investment and reduce bankruptcy risk.
- A lower tax on capital could increase inequality. The task force has sought to counter it with the reintroduction of a wealth tax.
- It recommended that policymakers have to think of the tax system as a whole, rather than obsessively focus on each part separately.
Debating the proposals

- International experience shows that zero tax on capital is impractical. But lower corporate taxes could bring down the general cost of capital in India.
- Global tax reforms over the past few decades have flattened marginal tax rate schedules. There is now a narrower gap between the lowest and top marginal tax rates.
- Some ideas on optimal tax theory suggest that tax rates should generally be higher in societies with greater income inequality.

GST lessons

- The GST design was based on sound economic principles derived from the theory of optimal taxation.
- The tax is imposed on final consumption goods rather than intermediate goods.
- It sought to impose a uniform tax rate on most consumption goods. But this was compromised during the complex federal bargain.
- The idea that each tax has to be progressive has led to a complicated GST that is now resulting in suboptimal revenue.

Direct – Indirect tax shares

- In the distribution of revenues from income versus consumption taxes, the former tends to be progressive, while the latter tend to be regressive.
- Before the 1991 reforms, India had a regressive tax system because of the overwhelming dependence on indirect taxes. Direct taxes then contributed less than one-fifth of total tax revenue.
- Now, the two types of taxes have approximately equal weights in government revenues.

Way ahead

Direct taxes have to keep growing in importance as labour and capital incomes rise. A new DTC will be important in a distributional sense. Higher direct tax collections can create space for a restructuring of the GST.

Source: Live Mint
The RBI Board approved a surplus transfer of Rs 1,76,051 crore to the central government.

**How does a central bank like the RBI make profits?**

- The RBI is a “full service” central bank— not only is it mandated to keep inflation or prices in check, it is also supposed to manage the borrowings of the Government of India and of state governments; supervise or regulate banks and non-banking finance companies; and manage the currency and payment systems.
- While carrying out these functions or operations, it makes profits. Typically, the central bank’s income comes from the returns it earns on its foreign currency assets, which could be in the form of bonds and treasury bills of other central banks or top-rated securities, and deposits with other central banks.
- It also earns interest on its holdings of local rupee-denominated government bonds or securities, and while lending to banks for very short tenures, such as overnight. It claims a management commission on handling the borrowings of state governments and the central government.

**Arrangement for surplus transfer**

- The RBI isn’t a commercial organisation like the banks or other companies that are owned or controlled by the government – it does not, as such, pay a “dividend” to the owner out of the profits it generates.
- Although RBI was promoted as a private shareholders’ bank in 1935 with a paid up capital of Rs 5 crore, the government nationalized it in January 1949, making the sovereign its “owner”.
- What the central bank does, therefore, is transfer the “surplus” – that is, the excess of income over expenditure to the government, in accordance with Section 47 (Allocation of Surplus Profits) of the RBI Act, 1934.

**Does the RBI pay tax on these earnings or profits?**

- Its statute provides exemption from paying income-tax or any other tax, including wealth tax.
- Section 48 (Exemption of Bank from income-tax and super-tax) of the RBI Act, 1934 provides that the Bank shall not be liable to pay income-tax or super-tax on any of its income, profits or gains.

**Is there an explicit policy on the distribution of surplus?**

- But a Technical Committee of the RBI Board headed by Y H Malegam, which reviewed the
adequacy of reserves and a surplus distribution policy, recommended, in 2013, a higher transfer to the government.

- Earlier, the RBI transferred part of the surplus to the Contingency Fund, to meet unexpected and unforeseen contingencies.
- It was also transferred to the Asset Development Fund, to meet internal capital expenditure and investments in its subsidiaries to build contingency reserves of 12% of its balance sheet.

Issues

- The government has long held the view that going by global benchmarks, the RBI’s reserves are far in excess of prudential requirements. Former Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian had suggested that these funds be utilised to provide capital to government-owned banks.
- The central bank, on its part, has traditionally preferred to be more cautious and build its reserves – keeping in mind potential threats from financial shocks, and the need to ensure financial stability and provide confidence to the markets.
- From the central bank’s perspective, bigger reserves on its balance sheet is crucial to maintaining its autonomy.

Source: The Hindu
Democracy and its discontents

News

Civilisation progresses with the evolution of institutions designed by humans to govern their affairs. Institutions of electoral democracy have evolved over the centuries, with notable innovations in the U.K., France and the U.S. that provided models for electoral democracies everywhere.

Basic forms of democracy are:

DIRECT DEMOCRACY: Citizens participate in the decision-making personally. Example—Switzerland.

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY: Elected officials represent a group of people. It is an element of both parliamentary and presidential systems of government. Examples—United Kingdom, India, USA, etc.

Democracy in India

- India is the world's largest democracy. India became a democratic nation post its independence in the year 1947. Thereafter, the citizens of India were given the right to vote and elect their leaders. In India, it gives its citizens the right to vote irrespective of their caste, color, creed, religion, and gender. It has five democratic principles—sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic.
- Abraham Lincoln in his famous speech at Gettysberg described democracy as government of the people, by the people, for the people. Democracy is slightly more than that. Apart from political it is social also. It envisages not only a democratic form of government but a society in which there is free exchange of ideas and each individual enjoys the same status in society.
- Democracy is a way of life in India. It has grown deep roots. The making of democratic India was not only result of an ideological preference, but a pragmatic understanding of ground realities.
- There is no doubt that the present age is the age of democracy, and it has developed into a very strong movement all over the world. Even the Communist countries, which reject the basic western philosophy of democracy, call themselves people’s democracy.
- India not only survived but flourished as a democracy. An important aspect of the Indian democracy is that it has grown deep roots.
democratic resilience is the ability to adapt and accommodate to changing realities. In a democracy, economic reforms are an exercise in political persuasion and management and yet our direction remains clear as also our determination to deepen the reform process. 

- Many countries have been unable to resist the temptation of achieving certain economic goals at the cost of effectively curtailing the right of dissent and the freedom of expression. But in India the democratic spirit been instrumental in creating change.

**Conclusion**

Democracy is important because it gives representation to a larger section of society in the Government. But the world still witnesses full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and even authoritarian regimes. Efforts from institutions like United Nations and nations world over are needed so that representation by citizens of various nations of the world may be met and their voices be heard. At the same time, democracy also needs to have various internal checks like independence of judiciary so that its real goals are achieved.

Source: The Hindu

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**GS-III: Star tortoise, otters get higher protection at CITES**

**GS-III | 29 August, 2019**

**Context**

India’s proposal to upgrade the protection of star tortoises (Geochelone elegans), the smooth-coated otter (Lutrogale perspicillata) and small-clawed otters (Aonyx cinereus) in CITES have been approved. The proposal to remove Rosewood (Dalbergia sissoo) from Appendix II of Convention is also under consideration.

**Benefits of the move**

These species have been listed under Appendix I of CITES and will now enjoy the highest degree of protection as there will be a complete international ban enforced on their trade.
About CITES

- It is an international agreement aimed at ensuring “that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival”.
- It was drafted after a resolution was adopted at a meeting of the members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1963.
- It entered into force on July 1, 1975, and now has 183 parties.
- The Convention is legally binding on the Parties in the sense that they are committed to implementing it; however, it does not take the place of national laws.
- India is a signatory to and has also ratified CITES convention in 1976.

CITES Appendices

- CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls.
- All import, export, re-exports and introduction from the sea of species covered by the convention has to be authorized through a licensing system.

It has three appendices:

Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.

Appendix II provides a lower level of protection.

Appendix III contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES parties for assistance in controlling trade.

Source: The Hindu

Why women are still being treated as unequal to men

GS-I | 29 August, 2019

GS-I: Why women are still being treated as unequal to men

CONTEXT

According to a study published in American Psychologist, for the first time in history, 86% of US
adults have admitted that men and women are equally intelligent. In 1946, only 35% of those surveyed thought both men and women are equally intelligent.

Status of gender equality

- From the days when one had to hunt for food, to the days of agricultural output and the industrial economy, the superior physical abilities of man gave him an advantage over women in work efficiency. With the arrival of the knowledge economy, the human brain has become the most important tool for work.
- According to the World Employment And Social Outlook Trends For Women 2018 report, more women than ever before are both educated and participating in the labour market today.
- Men’s rates of graduation remain relatively stagnant, while women across socioeconomic classes are increasingly enrolling for and completing post-secondary degrees.
- The Global Gender Gap Report 2018 by the World Economic Forum says that it will take 108 years to close the gender gap and 202 years to achieve parity in the workforce.

Suggestions to Bridge Gender Gap:

- Apart from providing education to women, they need to be provided with all kinds of opportunities and skills without any discrimination or stereotyping.
- The health and safety of women should be given priority to enable them to participate in public life efficiently.
- The disparity in pay structure for women for same work and skill set needs to be closed at all levels.
- Women should be given the right to decide the size of their family i.e. number of and spacing between children. Further, all women need to be made aware about contraception.
- Support from the society, family and corporate is required to create a soothing working environment for a woman.
- A working couple needs to spend part of their income on domestic arrangements; otherwise the woman will get marginalized.
- The family of a woman needs to understand that she is pursuing a particular job as her passion, not just to earn some income.
- Life of the child needs to be planned by couple in advance so that s/he does not suffer.
- Change in the mindset is required to bridge the gaps in gender equality. Apart from family and workplace support, use of technology is required to maintain work-life balance.

Conclusion

Achieving gender parity is not about organizing awareness programmes and pasting a few posters in offices. It is all about fundamentally altering beliefs upheld by the two strongest institutions of any society the family and religion.
Reforming the Law Commission: Govt should enshrine in law, the composition, tenure, functions and work procedure of the panel

GS-II | 29 August, 2019

Context

There are reports that the cabinet will take a call on reconstituting the Law Commission.

Background

- The Law Commission of India is the oldest amongst the national-level parastatal bodies.
- It is a legacy of the country’s colonial past. In 1833, British rulers unified the three presidencies and planned to enforce the English common law in “British India”. For this, they constituted many law commissions.
- After the fourth commission completed its work towards the end of 19th century, they did not continue the exercise.
- The first commission was set up in 1955 for a three-year term, assumed charge on September 1 that year and vacated office on August 31, three years later. The same pattern was then irrationally adopted as the fixed term for the commission for all time to come.

Ad Hoc nature of Law commission

- It has no fixed composition, no defined eligibility criteria for its chair and members, and no set functions as everything rests on the government’s will.
- The terms of reference are specified afresh each time it is reconstituted as if it were an ad hoc body.
- Three of the other national commissions for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes, are now regulated by the Constitution and there are laws for each of the national commissions for human rights, minorities, women, children and safai karmcharis.
- Though the commission’s job requires research-oriented juristic learning, the commission has been a haven for retired judges.
The chairpersons of the four pre-independence Law Commissions — C H Cameron, John Romilly, Whitley Stokes and Thomas Macaulay — were eminent jurists, not judges, and so were many of their members.

Independent India initially maintained the tradition by appointing the distinguished jurist M C Setalvad as the chairman of its first Law Commission. The policy was later changed, and with the exception of K V K Sundaram, the commission has always been headed by judges.

Members of the commission are also generally drawn from the judiciary, and the member-secretary is always from the bureaucracy.

Conclusion

If the commission has to work without regard for extra-legal and political considerations it must have a governing statute defining its powers and responsibilities, and limitations. It must be placed under a proper parliamentary charter.

Source: Indian Express

Public health versus free speech

GS-II: Public health versus free speech.

Context

Tobacco companies will try their best to prevent pictorial warning on cigarette packages in the U.S.

Fight against Tobacco

- It is ten years since U.S. Congress passed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, but now, the Food and Drug Administration issued a rule that pictorial warnings be carried on cigarette packages and advertisements.
- At present, cigarette packages in the U.S. carry only text warnings and only on one side.
Canada was the first to introduce pictorial warnings on cigarette packets in 2001. The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing more than 8 million people a year around the world. More than 7 million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while around 1.2 million are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke.

Importance of Messaging

- Due to their small size and placement text warnings remain invisible and fail to convey the harmful effects of smoking.
- Gory pictures are very likely to be noticed, leave a lasting impression of the varied risks of smoking.
- They also convey the central message immediately and easily.
- A 2017 study based on modelling found that pictorial warnings could reduce the prevalence of smoking in the U.S by 5% by 2020 and up to 10% by 2065.
- Canada there was 125 relative reduction in smoking prevalence in just 6 years after graphic images were made mandatory.

Challenges to stricter of tobacco law from USA

- Stiff opposition from the tobacco industry on the ground that graphic images violate rights protecting free speech.
- The biggest threat that pictorial warnings pose to tobacco companies is in reducing the appeal and consumption of tobacco.
- About 30% of young adults in 28 European countries and Canada reported that graphic images made them less likely to start smoking.

Conclusion

Pictorial warnings can turn the power of packing on its head far from brand building, packages with graphic images will become a mobile medium to spread public health messages at no cost to the government.

Source: The Hindu
The Prohibition of E-cigarettes Ordinance 2019 is being sent to a Group of Ministers as directed by the Prime Minister's Office.

E-cigarettes:
- An electronic cigarette (or e-cig) is a battery-powered vaporizer that mimics tobacco smoking. It works by heating up a nicotine liquid, called “juice.”
- Nicotine juice (or e-juice) comes in various flavors and nicotine levels. e-liquid is composed of five ingredients: vegetable glycerin (a material used in all types of food and personal care products, like toothpaste) and propylene glycol (a solvent most commonly used in fog machines.) propylene glycol is the ingredient that produces thicker clouds of vapour.
- Proponents of e-cigs argue that the practice is healthier than traditional cigarettes because users are only inhaling water vapour and nicotine.

Why it is hard to regulate them?
As e-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, they do not fall within the ambit of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA), which mandates stringent health warnings on the packaging and advertisements of tobacco products.

The draft ordinance
- The draft ordinance was necessitated by the fact that an earlier order by the Centre asking the states to crack down against e-cigarettes could not stand judicial scrutiny.
- However, a recent order, in which the High Court threw out a petition asking for protection from an ordinance against e-cigarettes, has emboldened the Health Ministry.
- It now seeks legal backing for a ban (rather than just an advisory) in the form of an ordinance.
- The ordinance makes any violation of its provisions punishable by imprisonment of one to three years, and a fine of Rs 1-5 lakh.
Why ordinance?

- Under the Constitution, health is a state subject, so any move to ban manufacture and sale of a product on health grounds needs to come from the state government.
- In February, the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation had written to all state drug controllers, saying they should not allow sale, online sale, manufacture, distribution, trade, import or advertisement of ENDS.
- The Delhi HC stayed the Centre’s circular banning sale and manufacture of ENDS like e-cigarettes and e-hookah with nicotine flavour, saying as the products were not a “drug”.

WHO report on e-cigarettes and effects:

- As per the report, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) (also known as e-cigarettes) emits nicotine, the addictive component of tobacco products. In addition to dependence, nicotine can have adverse effects on the development of the foetus during pregnancy and may contribute to cardiovascular disease.
- The WHO report further says that although nicotine itself is not a carcinogen, it may function as a “tumour promoter” and seems to be involved in the biology of malignant disease, as well as of neurodegeneration.
- Foetal and adolescent nicotine exposure may have long-term consequences for brain development, potentially leading to learning and anxiety disorders.
- The evidence is sufficient to warn children and adolescents, pregnant women, and women of reproductive age against ENDS use and nicotine.

Way Ahead

The government should also impose appropriate restrictions on the sale and advertisement, online and otherwise, of e-cigarettes, including proper health warnings, in order to plug the existing regulatory vacuum. This should be done with immediate effect, and simultaneously the government should also commission independent scientific research on the benefits and risks posed by these products in the Indian context.

Source: Indian Express
A new report titled “Status of Policing in India Report 2019 Police Adequacy and Working Conditions” was released by Common Cause and the Lokniti programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS).

Key finding of the report:

- 28% police personnel believe that pressure from politicians is the biggest hindrance in a crime investigation. The other obstacles cited were related to society, legal systems and internal working systems in police.
- 38% personnel reported always facing pressure from politicians in cases of crime involving influential persons. Roughly one third also reported “always” facing pressure from their seniors in the police force.
- 50% of police personnel feel that Muslims are likely to be “naturally prone” to committing crimes.
- 35% of police personnel think it is natural for a mob to punish the “culprit” in cases of cow slaughter, and 43% think it is natural for a mob to punish someone accused of rape.
- 37 per cent personnel feel that for minor offences, a small punishment should be handed out by the police rather than a legal trial.

Working Condition:

- More than one-third of police personnel would be willing to give up their profession if they were given a chance to join another job with the same salaries and perks.
- Three in four personnel said the workload made it difficult for them to do their job well and was affecting their physical and mental health.
- The survey found that except for Nagaland, the average working hours of police officers were between 11 and 18 hours.
- An average police officer works for 14 hours a day, six hours more than what the Model Police Act recommends.
- A quarter of the respondents said they worked for more than 16 hours a day.
- Other than working overtime, every second police personnel reported not getting any weekly off day.

Rule of law?

- Every third police personnel surveyed agreed with the statement that for minor offences, a minor punishment handed down to the accused by the police was better than a legal trial.
- About 20% personnel agreed with the statement that killing dangerous criminals was better than a legal trial.
A three-fourths majority believed it was alright for the police to adopt a violent attitude towards criminals.

Minorities at risk

- One in two police personnel surveyed feel that Muslims are likely to be “naturally prone” to committing crimes.
- It also found that 35 per cent of police personnel interviewed for the survey think it is natural for a mob to punish the “culprit” in cases of cow slaughter, and 43 per cent think it is natural for a mob to punish someone accused of rape.

Source: Indian Express

Hurricane Dorian

GS-I: Hurricane Dorian

News

The hurricane Dorian is to hit the east coast of Florida as a “major” hurricane, in Category 3 or possibly Category 4.

What do the categories mean?

- Powerful winds are what define a hurricane, so they are named and classified based on how hard their winds are blowing.
- To qualify as a hurricane, a storm must have sustained winds of 74 mph or more.
- All hurricanes are dangerous, but some pack more punch than others.
- So meteorologists try to quantify each storm’s destructive power by using the Saffir-Simpson scale placing it in one of five categories based on sustained wind speed.

Saffir-Simpson scale

Category 1, 74 to 95 mph: These storms’ winds may knock down some trees and power lines and do a bit of damage to buildings.

Category 2, 96 to 110 mph: These storms are likely to uproot many trees, disrupt electric power over wide areas and do significant roof and siding damage.
Category 3, 111 to 129 mph: These are major storms that can take roofs off even well-constructed houses and knock out electric and water systems for days or weeks. Roads will be blocked by falling trees and poles. Dorian is forecast to be at least this strong when it makes landfall.

Category 4, 130 to 156 mph: These major storms do catastrophic damage, felling most trees and power poles and wrecking some buildings. Affected areas may be uninhabitable for days or weeks afterward.

Category 5, 157 mph or more: Storms this powerful are rare, and when they strike, they are immensely destructive. Few structures will come through a direct hit unscathed, and a large percentage of frame buildings will be destroyed. Recovery may take weeks or months.

What is the difference between hurricane, a cyclone, and a typhoon?

- The only difference between a hurricane, a cyclone, and a typhoon is the location where the storm occurs.
- In the Atlantic and Northeast Pacific, the term “hurricane” is used.
- The same type of disturbance in the Northwest Pacific is called a “typhoon” and “cyclones” occur in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean.
- A tropical cyclone is a generic term used by meteorologists to describe a rotating, organized system of clouds and thunderstorms that originates over tropical or subtropical waters and has closed, low-level circulation.

Source: The Hindu

National Register of Citizen
GS-II | 30 August, 2019

GS-II: NRC

Context

More re-verification notices days before NRC publication.

What is National Register of Citizen?

- National Register of Citizens, 1951 is a register prepared after the conduct of the Census
of 1951 in respect of each village, showing the houses or holdings in a serial order and indicating against each house or holding the number and names of persons staying therein.

- The NRC was published only once in 1951.

**National Register of Citizen in Assam:**

- The issue of its update assumed importance as Assam witnessed large-scale illegal migration from erstwhile East Pakistan and, after 1971, from present-day Bangladesh.
- This led to the six-year-long Assam movement from 1979 to 1985, for deporting illegal migrants.
- The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) led the movement that demanded the updating of the NRC and the deportation of all illegal migrants who had entered Assam after 1951.
- It set March 25, 1971, as the cut-off date for the deportation of illegal migrants.
- Since the cut-off date prescribed under articles 5 and 6 of the Constitution was July 19, 1949 - to give force to the new date, an amendment was made to the Citizenship Act, 1955, and a new section was introduced.
- It was made applicable only to Assam.
- There had been intermittent demands from AASU and other organisations in Assam for updating the NRC, an Assam based NGO filed a petition at the Supreme Court.
- In December 2014, a division bench of the apex court ordered that the NRC be updated in a time-bound manner.
- The NRC of 1951 and the Electoral Roll of 1971 (up to midnight of 24 March 1971) are together called Legacy Data. Persons and their descendants whose names appeared in these documents are certified as Indian citizens.

**What is the significance?**

- Assam is the only State that had prepared an NRC in 1951.
- It has also now become the first State to get the first draft of its own updated NRC.
- The Register is meant to establish the credentials of a bona fide citizen as distinguished from a foreigner.
- This is to detect Bangladeshi migrants who may have illegally entered Assam after the midnight of March 24, 1971.
- This cut-off date was originally agreed to in the 1985 Assam Accord.

**What is the Assam Accord?**

- Assam witnessed a range of law and order problems and political turbulence driven by the anti-foreigners movement, in the early 1980s.
- Responding to this, the Assam Accord (1985) was signed by the Centre and the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU).
- Accordingly, those foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and 1961 were to be given full citizenship, including the right to vote.
- The entrants between 1961 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but...
would enjoy all other rights of citizenship.
- Anyone who entered the state without documents after March 24, 1971 will be declared a foreigner and were to be deported.
- Besides, the Accord had a package for the economic development of Assam.
- It also had assurance to provide safeguards to protect the cultural, social, and linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

Challenges

- **Flawed Process** - People who found themselves on the first list that was released on January 1, 2018, didn’t find their names in the second. Even the family of a former President of India did not mention on the list.
- The parallel processes of NRC, the voters list of the Election Commission, and the Foreigners’ Tribunals with the help of the Assam Border Police, have led to utter chaos, as none of these agencies are sharing information with each other.
- Though the draft provides a window for re-verification, due to large number of people being excluded from the list, it will be very difficult to physically verify all of them.
- Since such ‘non citizens’ can resort to judicial relief to substantiate their citizenship claim, it can lead to overburdening of judiciary which already reels under large number of pending cases.
- There is uncertainty about the future of those left out from the list.
- Expelling them to Bangladesh is not an option since Dhaka has never accepted that they are its citizens or that there is a problem of illegal immigration. In the absence of a formal agreement, India cannot forcibly push the illegal migrants back into Bangladesh.
- Moreover, raising this issue can also jeopardise relations with Dhaka. Such an attempt would not only damage bilateral relations but also sully the country’s image internationally.

Way Forward

- India, as a country which follows the ideology of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, should not be hasty in taking decisions that can disenfranchise her citizens – contradicting its centuries-followed values.
- The need of the hour is that Union Government should clearly chart out the course of action regarding the fate of excluded people from final NRC data and political parties should refrain from coloring the entire NRC process through electoral prospects that may snowball in to communal violence.

Source: The Hindu
GS-III: Revised FDI Norms

News

Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for the review of Foreign Direct Investment in various sectors. This will result in making India a more attractive FDI destination, leading to benefits of increased investments, employment and growth.

Revised Norms

- 100% FDI under automatic route is permitted for sale of coal, for coal mining activities including associated processing infrastructure.
- The government has allowed 100% FDI through the automatic route for contract manufacturing.
- It will augment the Make in India initiative and will attract global companies in India looking to establish alternative manufacturing hubs.
- Easing norms for FDI in Single Brand Retail Trading (SBRT): Retail trading through online trade by SBRT, can also be undertaken prior to the opening of brick and mortar stores (it should be opened within 2 years from the date of start of online retail).
- Online sales will lead to the creation of jobs in logistics, digital payments, customer care, training and product skilling.
- It has been decided to permit 26% FDI under government route for uploading/ streaming of News & Current Affairs through Digital Media, on the lines of print media.
- In India, FDI policy provisions have been progressively liberalized across various sectors in recent years to make India an attractive investment destination.
- Some of the sectors include Defence, Construction Development, Trading, Pharmaceuticals, Power Exchanges, Insurance, Pension, Other Financial Services, Asset reconstruction Companies, Broadcasting and Civil Aviation.
- Due to these measures, a total FDI into India from 2014-15 to 2018-19 has been $ 286 billion.
- Despite the dim global picture (UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2019), India continues to remain a preferred and attractive destination for global FDI flows.
- India seeks to use this potential to attract far more foreign investment which can be achieved inter-alia by further liberalizing and simplifying the FDI policy regime.

Source: The Hindu
GS-III: Spelling out the government’s RBI windfall

News

The transfer of Reserve Bank Of India surplus to the government in a routine manner.

- The government was, it must be noted, acting on the recommendations of a committee chaired by former RBI governor Bimal Jalan, on capital transfer.
- Some economists have welcomed the move as it will help the government counter the shortfall in revenue and tax collection.
- Since inflationary pressure is low, economists believe that the move will not have a negative impact in the long run.
- Another group of economists which include the likes of Raghuram Rajan and former RBI governor Urjit Patel said earlier that the move could put RBI in a vulnerable position apart from diminishing its autonomy.

Bimal Jalan committee Recommendations:

- The surplus from the central bank comprised two components-Rs 1.23 lakh crore of surplus for the year 2018-19 and an additional Rs 52,637 crore of excess provisions that was made available as per the revised economic capital framework recommended by the Bimal Jalan committee.
- Of the Rs 1.23 lakh crore, the RBI has already transferred Rs 28,000 crore to the government in the previous fiscal, which will reflect in RBI's upcoming annual report.
- It suggested that the framework may be periodically reviewed after every five years.
- It recommended to align the central bank’s accounting year with the financial year, which could reduce the need for paying interim dividend.
- The panel recommended clear distinction between the two components of economic capital, realised equity and revaluation balances. This is because of the volatile nature of the revaluation reserves.
- Jalan committee has given a range of 5.5-6.5% of RBI's balance sheet for Contingent Risk Buffer.
- Revaluation gains from market fluctuations on foreign currency, gold or other assets must be retained. Revaluation balances were not distributable.
- Hence bulk of RBI’s legacy reserves are ring-fenced from transfer demands.
- The Bimal Jalan committee should also be complimented for clearly specifying that the revaluation reserve cannot be used to bridge shortfalls in other reserves.
Economic Capital Framework

The RBI had formed a committee chaired by former Governor Bimal Jalan to review its economic capital framework and suggest the quantum of excess provision to be transferred to the government.

The panel recommended a clear distinction between the two components of the economic capital of RBI i.e. Realized equity and Revaluation balances.

Revaluation reserves comprise of periodic marked-to-market unrealized/notional gains/losses in values of foreign currencies and gold, foreign securities and rupee securities, and a contingency fund.

Realized equity, which is a form of a contingency fund for meeting all risks/losses primarily built up from retained earnings. It is also called the Contingent Risk Buffer (CBR).

Every year RBI transfer the surplus to government:

- RBI is not a commercial organisation like banks and other companies owned or controlled by the government to pay a dividend to the owner out of the profit generated.
- What the RBI does is transfer the surplus excess of income over expenditure to the government.
- Under Section 47 of the RBI Act, “after making provision for bad and doubtful debts, depreciation in assets, contributions to staff and superannuation funds and for all other matters for which provision is to be made by or under this Act or which are usually provided for by bankers, the balance of the profits shall be paid to the Central government”.

What are the sources, RBI generate money?

A significant part comes from RBI’s operations in financial markets:

- It intervenes for instance to **buy or sell foreign exchange**.
- **Open Market operations**, when it attempts to prevent the rupee from appreciating.
- **As income from government securities** it holds.
- As returns from its foreign currency assets that are investments in the bonds of foreign central banks or top-rated securities.
- From deposits with other central banks or the Bank for International Settlement or **BIS**.
- Besides lending to banks for very short tenures and management commission on handling the borrowings of state governments and the central government.
- RBI buys these financial assets against its fixed liabilities such as currency held by the public and deposits issued to commercial banks on which it does not pay interest.

Conclusion:

Normally, the money is transferred to the Consolidated Fund of India from which salaries and pensions to government employees are paid and interest payments done, besides spending on government programmes. The large pay-out can help the government cut back on planned borrowings and keep interest rates relatively low. Besides, it will provide space for private
companies to raise money from markets. And if it manages to meet its revenue targets, the windfall gain can lead to a lower fiscal deficit.

Source: The Hindu

Liberalism into national populism.

GS-II: Liberalism into national populism

News

No country has found the golden mean between free-range liberalism and statism.

What is Liberalism?

Liberalism is one of the major political traditions of the Western world and the prevailing political ideology in the United States. Whereas classical liberalism emphasises the role of liberty and social liberalism focuses the importance of equality. Liberals adopt numerous views depending on their understanding of these principles, but generally they support ideas and programmes such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free markets, civil rights, democratic societies, secular governments, and international cooperation.

Concept of liberalism:

- Liberalism is a group of political, social and economic theories that centres on the values of individual liberty, equality, economic freedom, limited and democratic government and the rule of law.
- Liberalism, from the Latin liberalis, is a broad political ideology or worldview originated from the ideas of liberty and equality.
- Economic freedom is also closely related with liberalism and involves support for free markets and private property rights.
- Liberalism also holds a promise to the rule of law, which is vital for a democratic and limited government.
- The rule of law is a proposition that law should not be random and must be applied honestly to all.
Elements of Liberalism:

- Liberalism has been branded by many as meta-ideology which means that it encompasses many principles, values and elements within its fold. Whereas other ideologies do not possess this capacity.

The following are the main elements of liberalism—individualism, freedom, constitutionalism and justice.

1. **Individualism**: It believes that the interests or welfare of the individual should be given primacy over all other values and principles. Individual is the basic concept of political theory and arrangements shall be made to safeguard his interest. Liberalism says that since a political system consists of individuals it should be the chief objective of this system to see that their interests are fully protected and the individuals are quite capable of doing their own job.

2. **Freedom**: Another important core value, principle or element of liberalism is freedom. To the liberals it is the value of supreme importance because without it the individual will simply be a unit without any dignity. Moreover, liberty or freedom is the best vehicle for developing the best qualities. But the liberals do not advocate for absolute or unrestricted freedom because freedom/liberty will do more harm.

3. **Constitutionalism**: Constitutionalism is an important element of liberalism. It has two meanings narrow and broad. In its narrow meaning constitutionalism means certain limitations upon the government specified by constitution. The narrow meaning further states that whenever a government intends to discharge any function or adopt a policy it must follow the restrictions. Constitutionalism is a basic principle of liberalism. It, in simple language, states that government’s business never specifies that it has the unlimited freedom to do anything without considering the advantages or disadvantages of the common people. It must follow certain basic rules and procedures laid down in the basic or ordinary laws.

4. **Justice**: Though justice is a principle of both socialism and liberalism, the latter gives it more importance and politically declares that the very basis of liberalism is justice. The liberal justice has several forms or meanings. Everyone will get the chance to have a share of opportunity. Liberalism also speaks of social equality. All these interpretations lead to the liberal conception of justice.

Source: The Hindu

Australia downgrade Great Barrier Reef to â€˜very poorâ€™

Source: The Hindu
GS-III: Australia downgrade Great Barrier Reef to ‘very poor’ status

News

Australia’s Great Barrier Reef is in very poor condition because of climate change.

What is Coral Bleaching?

Bleaching occurs when abnormal environmental conditions, such as warmer sea temperatures, cause corals to expel tiny photosynthetic algae, draining them of their colour. Corals can recover if the water temperature drops and the algae are able to recolonise them.

About the Great barrier reef:

- The Great Barrier Reef is the world’s largest coral reef system composed of over 2,900 individual reefs and 900 islands stretching for over 2,300 kilometres over an area of approximately 344,400 square kilometres. The reef is located in the Coral Sea, off the coast of Queensland, Australia.
- The Great Barrier Reef can be seen from outer space and is the world’s biggest single structure made by living organisms. This reef structure is composed of and built by billions of tiny organisms, known as coral polyps. It was selected as a World Heritage Site in 1981.

Why Great Barrier Reef Graded?

Global warming is destroying the Great Barrier Reef’s ability to recover from disasters and reducing its biodiversity by changing the species that live there. The decline is bad news for the reef’s long-term future. It is also changing the mix of coral species that replenish the reef, which will reduce the amount of suitable habitats for marine life. For the first time, recruitment of a group of weedy corals, known as brooding pocilloporids, outstripped spawning acroporids, a type of coral that is vital for giving a reef the three-dimensional complexity that many animals rely on. Losing some of that three-dimensionality means a loss of biodiversity, in coral species and other marine life.

Conclusion

The Great Barrier Reef can be seen from outer space and is the world’s biggest single structure made by living organisms. This reef structure is composed of and built by billions of tiny organisms, known as coral polyps. It was selected as a World Heritage Site in 1981.
Source: Indian Express