

# November - 2020

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# POLITY

## Indian Constitution

### 1. Andhra Pradesh's capital conundrums

- » Prelims: Article 2 and 3.
- » Mains: State reorganization acts and various committee recommendations

#### Context:

- The Andhra Pradesh government, in its previous session, proposed a three-capital plan for the state.
- As per the Andhra Pradesh Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill, 2020, the State will have Visakhapatnam, Amaravati and Kurnool respectively as the executive, legislative and judicial capitals of the State.

## Andhra's three capitals?



#### Issues:

- The matter has become contentious and the Bill is facing myriad legal and procedural challenges.
- The proposal is set to replace the ambitious plan (of the previous government) of building Amaravati as a world-class greenfield capital city.

#### Origins of the three-capital plan:

- It is opined that attribution to similar plans in South Africa and elsewhere can be shallow.
  - \* South Africa has three capital cities: executive Pretoria, judicial Bloemfontein and legislative Cape Town.

- The K.C. Sivaramakrishnan (KCS) Committee constituted in the aftermath of a bifurcation driven by an agitation legitimised and politicised by regional imbalances in development made recommendations along similar lines.
- Though the current government's rationalisation of the three-capital plan leans on the KCS committee's recommendations, there is a difference between the two.
- While the government's formula of three capitals — calling them judicial, legislative and executive capitals — appears to be an imported idea, perhaps inspired by the South African example, the KCS committee stressed distributed development through decentralised governance.
- The essence of the 'distributed development' concept was to make deliberate efforts to spatially deconcentrate executive power, driven by region-specific economic activities. For instance:
  - \* While discussing the Vizag region's suitability, the committee recommended having government offices relevant to local economic potential, such as for ports, shipping, fisheries and industry, in Visakhapatnam. It recommended developing the Visakhapatnam region as a high-tech zone.
  - \* In a similar manner, it recommended developing the 'Rayalaseema Arc', building on the Hyderabad-Kurnool-Anantpur-Bengaluru highway.
  - \* It recommended the 'Kalahasti Spine', using the potential of the Nadikudi-Kalahasti railway line.

#### Challenges:

##### For Government's functioning:

- Running legislative business with most of the secretariat located 400 km away can lead to logistic inefficiencies, in the absence of efficient infrastructure.
- Andhra Pradesh can learn from Maharashtra's experience of running Winter Sessions in Nagpur, aimed essentially at placating regional sentiments.
- International experiences — including that of South Africa — of deconcentrating executive power by shifting capitals to address regional sentiments do not inspire confidence either.

***Ability to cope with intense development:***

- Infrastructure development within the proposed growth centres is critical. The KCS committee stressed this extensively.
- Visakhapatnam, as the executive capital, will experience much stress.
- Visakhapatnam, in spite of its excellent and natural advantages, is woefully lacking in its infrastructure. It could not even deliver a functional Bus Rapid Transit system, even with the availability of resources.

***Environmental impact:***

- The KCS committee has warned about the environmental impact of intensification and densification in cities, with a special reference to Visakhapatnam.
- The recent environmental disasters, including the LG Polymers gas leak, expose the city's vulnerabilities.
- The ongoing processes of preparing the Master Plan and Strategic Plan for the Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region are an opportunity to address these challenges.
- Adhocism and a casual approach can undo its future potential.

***Way forward:***

- The Andhra Pradesh Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill, 2020 is thin in details but offers hope in its broad contours of pursuing inclusive development through Zonal Planning and Development Boards.
- There may be other reasons for the functionally organised, multiple-capital plan. But the key principle of distributed development must not be lost in executing it.
- The success of distributed development depends on a well-developed infrastructural network linking the growth centres.
- Andhra Pradesh lacks these linkages now, and the sooner the State focuses on these preconditions the better for it.
- A re-invigorated focus on projects like the Chennai-Visakhapatnam Industrial Corridor is important.
- The proposed three-capital plan claims to produce decentralised growth, but it should also be ensured that it achieves the primary goal of decentralised development, irrespective of how the functionalised multiple-capital plan plays out.

***Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure*****2. Finance panel submits report with separate section on States' finances**

- » Prelims: Finance Commission devolution pattern
- » Mains: Recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission

**Context:**

- The 15th Finance Commission has submitted its report.

**Details:**

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission has finalised its report for fund devolution from the Centre to States for the five years from 2021-22 to 2025-26.
- The Commission was asked to give its recommendations on many unique and wide-ranging issues in its terms of reference.
- Besides its main recommendation on devolution of funds between the Centre and the States for the period 2021-22 to 2025-26, the Commission addressed all its unique terms of reference, such as:
  - \* Considering a new non-lapsable fund for financing national security and defence spending.
  - \* Offering performance incentives to the States that deliver on reforms.
- Apart from the main report, uniquely titled Finance Commission in Covid Times, the 15th Finance Commission presented two volumes as part of its submissions.
  - \* One focuses on the state of the Centre's finances, with in-depth scrutiny of the key departments, medium-term challenges facing the Centre and a road map for future.
  - \* The other volume is dedicated to the States, with the finances of each analysed in great depth. It has come up with State-specific considerations to address the key challenges that individual States face.

***Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies*****3. General consent to CBI**

- » Prelims: CBI composition.
- » Mains: CBI powers, jurisdiction.

**Context:**

- A meeting of the Cabinet decided to withdraw the general consent accorded to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to operate in Kerala.

**Details:**

- It would curb the agency's operational independence in the State.
- Now, the CBI can probe local cases or chargesheet suspects only with the permission of the State administration.

**What is General Consent?**

- The CBI is governed by the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act that makes consent of a state government mandatory for conducting an investigation in that state.
- The general consent is routinely given by State governments for periods ranging from six months to a year to the CBI and all agencies under the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946.
- The consent is necessary as the jurisdiction of these agencies is confined to Delhi and Union Territories under this Act.
- There are two kinds of consent: case-specific and general. Given that the CBI has jurisdiction only over central government departments and employees, it can investigate a case involving state government employees or a violent crime in a given state only after that state government gives its consent.
- "General consent" is normally given to help the CBI seamlessly conduct its investigation into cases of corruption against central government employees in the concerned state. Almost all states have given such consent. Otherwise, the CBI would require consent in every case.
- Other states such as West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra have also withdrawn consent to the CBI to operate freely in their respective jurisdictions.

**Does withdrawal of General Consent mean that the CBI can no longer probe any case in the state?**

- Withdrawal of consent will only bar the CBI from registering a case within the jurisdiction of such states.
- The CBI would still have the power to investigate old cases registered when general consent existed.
- Also, cases registered anywhere else in the country, but involving people stationed in a state that has withdrawn general consent, would allow CBI's jurisdiction to extend to these states.
- There is ambiguity on whether the agency can carry out a search in either of the two states in connection with an old case without the consent of the state government.
- However, there are legal remedies to that as well. The CBI can always get a search warrant from a local court in the state and conduct searches.

- In case the search requires a surprise element, there is CrPC Section 166, which allows a police officer of one jurisdiction to ask an officer of another to carry out searches on his behalf.
- And if the first officer feels that the searches by the latter may lead to loss of evidence, the section allows the first officer to conduct searches himself after giving a notice to the latter.

**Lack of consent won't vitiate CBI probe: SC****Context:**

- The Supreme Court has said that the cognisance and trial in a CBI case against public servants "cannot be set aside unless the illegality in the investigation can be shown to have brought about miscarriage of justice".

**Details:**

- The Supreme Court has held that, once a court takes cognisance of a corruption case investigated by the CBI, it cannot be set aside for lack of the State government's prior consent for the probe against some of the accused, unless it is shown that it has resulted in prejudice.
- Thus, if the State had given a general consent to CBI investigation in a corruption case and cognisance has been taken by the court, the case cannot be set aside unless the public servants plead that prejudice has been caused to them on account of non-obtaining of prior consent under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act.

**Fundamental Rights****4. 'Producing suspects before media violates their rights'**

- » Prelims: Article 20, 21 and 22.
- » Mains: Media trial.

**Context**

- Observation of the Gwalior Bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court with respect to producing suspects before media.
- The court was examining whether the State government through an executive order could violate the privacy of an accused by publishing his face in the media or by parading them.

**Details:**

- It has observed that producing suspects before the media violates their fundamental rights under Article 21 of the Constitution and encourages media trials.
- Media Trial has lately become a trend to increase the circulation and TRP of newspapers and news channels.



- The court observed that although the general public was entitled to know about the progress of an investigation, producing suspects or victims before the media had no foundation under any statutory provision of the law, including the Code of Criminal Procedure.
- The privacy of a citizen is an integral part of Article 21 and cannot be infringed unless a reasonable restriction was imposed under the law.
- The justice observed: "Even if a person is a hardcore criminal, but still his details/history sheet/surveillance has to be kept discreet and there is no question of posting the photographs of history sheeters even at police stations".
- In addition, the court noted that the police must concentrate on ensuring the timely appearance of the police witnesses before the trial court, so that the guilt of a person could be established.

### *Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.*

#### **5. Right to recall panchayat member**

- » Prelims: Election of various Panchayat bodies.
- » Mains: Accountability mechanism, direct democracy

##### **Context**

- The Haryana Assembly passed the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Bill, 2020.

##### **Details:**

- It gives women 50% reservation in the rural bodies.
  - \* It is aimed at enhancing participation of women in the three-tier panchayati raj system.
  - \* It allows 50% reservation to them in gram panchayats, panchayat samitis and zila parishads
- The Bill allows the recall of village sarpanches and members of the block-level panchayat samitis and district-level zila parishads if they fail to perform.
  - \* The right to recall gives the power to ensure accountability of a person in a democracy.
  - \* To recall a sarpanch and members of the two bodies, 50% members of a ward or gram sabha have to give in writing that they want to initiate proceedings. This will be followed by a secret ballot, in which their recall will require two-third members voting against them.
  - \* The amendment is aimed at increasing their accountability to the voters.

- The Bill also proposed 8% reservation to the "more disadvantaged" among the Backward Classes.

##### **Supreme Court**

- In the State of Madhya Pradesh vs Shri Ram Singh, Supreme Court of India said that a corruption-free government is a basic need of the society; it can be argued that right to recall is undoubtedly one way to achieve it.

##### **Significance**

- India is witnessing a constant rise in unethical and irresponsible behaviour on the part of the elected legislators. The amendment is aimed at increasing their accountability to the voters.
- They may not indulge in corrupt practices because of the fear of recall.
  - \* Such a right would be a significant check on corruption along with ongoing criminalisation of politics.
- If the people have no control over their elected representatives, democracy will become meaningless and the representatives and the officials will act arbitrarily.

### *Indian Constitution.*

#### **6. Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020**

- » Prelims: Article 25
- » Mains: Religious freedom, Right to marry, Right to convert.

##### **Context:**

- The Governor of Uttar Pradesh, has promulgated the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance 2020.

##### **What is Conversion?**

- The Ordinance defines conversion as renouncing one's existing religion and adopting another religion.

##### **Details**

- The Ordinance seeks to regulate religious conversions and prohibits certain types of religious conversions (including through marriages).

##### **1. Prohibition on conversions:**

- The Ordinance prohibits conversion of religion through means, such as: (i) force, misrepresentation, undue influence, and allurement, or (ii) fraud, or (iii) marriage.
- It also prohibits a person from abetting, convincing, and conspiring to such conversions.
- The Ordinance assigns the burden of proof of the

lawfulness of religious conversion to the persons causing or facilitating such conversions.

- However, a person re-converting to his/her immediate previous religion is allowed.

## 2. Marriages involving religious conversion:

- Under the Ordinance, a marriage is liable to be declared void if it was done for the sole purpose of unlawful conversion, or vice-versa.
- However, a marriage involving religious conversion is permitted if the conversion is undergone as per the procedure laid down under the Ordinance.

## 3. Procedure for conversion:

- The Ordinance requires individuals (seeking to convert) and religious convertors (who perform such conversions) to submit an advance declaration of the proposed religious conversion to the District Magistrate (DM).
- The declarations have to be given with a notice of:
  - \* 60 days by the individual,
  - \* one month by the convertor.
- On receiving both the declarations, the DM is required to conduct a police enquiry into the intention, purpose, and cause of the proposed conversion.

### Punishment for unlawful conversions

The Ordinance provides for punishment for causing or facilitating unlawful religious conversion. It also makes such an act of conversion a non-bailable criminal offence

Type of offence	Term of imprisonment	Fine amount
Mass conversion (conversion of two or more persons)	3 - 10 years	Rs 50,000 or more
Conversion of a minor, woman, or person belonging to SC or ST	2 - 10 years	Rs 25,000 or more
Any other conversion	1 - 5 years	Rs 15,000 or more

### States that have anti-conversion laws

- The first state to implement it was Odisha in 1967.
- This was followed by Madhya Pradesh in 1968.
- The other states which have this law are Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand.

### Supreme Court on Conversions

- While upholding the validity of the Freedom of Religion Acts of Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, in *Stanislaus (1977)*, the Supreme Court had held that the "right to propagate" a religion did not include the "right to convert".
  - \* The Supreme Court said that the act of religious proselytisation is not protected by Article 25 of the Constitution
- The Supreme Court of India, in both the *Lily Thomas and Sarla Mudgal* cases, has confirmed that religious conversions carried out without a bona fide belief and for the sole purpose of deriving some legal benefit do not hold water.
  - \* Those cases concerned religious conversions by Hindu men to Islam in order to conclude bigamous marriages.
  - \* This approach has also been confirmed by the high courts of other states.

### Observations made by Courts in India on Marriage

- In the *Hadiya* case, the Supreme Court ruled:
  - \* "The right to marry a person of one's choice is integral to Article 21 (right to life and liberty) of the Constitution".
  - \* "The choice of a partner whether within or outside marriage lies within the exclusive domain of each individual. Intimacies of marriage lie within a core zone of privacy, which is inviolable".
  - \* The Supreme Court held that a person's right to choose a religion and marry is an intrinsic part of her meaningful existence. Neither the State nor "patriarchal supremacy" can interfere in her decision.
- Allahabad High Court has said the right to live with a person of one's choice is intrinsic to the right to life and personal liberty irrespective of religion.
  - \* "The Courts and the Constitutional Courts in particular are enjoined to uphold the life and liberty of an individual guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Right to live with a person of his/her choice irrespective of religion professed by them, is intrinsic to right to life and personal liberty. Interference in a personal relationship, would constitute a serious encroachment into the right to freedom of choice of the two individuals".

### Why do we need such a law?

- The ordinance lays down a procedure to ensure that any conversion from one religion to another is only done with free consent. The procedure is enforced to prevent conversions by unfair means.



- It is not against a community or a religion as nowhere in the ordinance, comprising of 14 sections and three schedules, the terms 'Hindu', 'Muslim', 'Christian' or 'Parsi' or 'religious majority' or 'minority' are used. It is equally applicable on everyone irrespective of their religion or gender.
- The law would apply to people of all religions equally and would ban any kind of religious conversions for marriage.

### Concerns

#### 1. The procedure which was adopted to enact the legislation

- Article 213 (1) of the Constitution of India
  - \* It provides: "If at any time, except when the Legislative Assembly of a State is in session, or where there is a Legislative Council in a State, except when both Houses of the Legislature are in session, the Governor is satisfied that circumstances exist which render it necessary for him to take immediate action, he may promulgate such Ordinances as the circumstances appear to him to require: ..."
- Conspicuously, the situation of conversion for the purpose of marriage (and vice versa), is not something that has come to light suddenly, or for that matter even as serious.
  - \* If one fraudulent or coercive inter-faith marriage is taking place, the police can certainly prevent it, as they supposedly do in child marriages. An ordinance is not required for it.
  - \* However, if more than one such fraudulent or coercive inter-faith marriage is expected to take place, the State government would have information of mass conversions for the purpose of marriage.
  - \* In the normal course, it is unlikely that these mass conversions would be in secret and almost simultaneous. Surely, these can also be prevented by an alert police force by invoking existing legal provisions.
  - \* With laws already present and if conversions were prevalent from a long time, What was the need of passing an ordinance all of a sudden?

#### 2. Infringes the Right to Privacy

- Through numerous decisions, the Courts have recognised and upheld the sanctity of personal space which includes the decisions with respect to marriage and family life.
- Right to choose a partner irrespective of caste, creed or religion, is inhered under right to life

and personal liberty, an integral part of the Fundamental Right under Article 21 of the Constitution of India (Salamat Ansari v State of UP).

- In the case of Lata Singh v State of U.P, the Supreme Court has very clearly laid down the law regarding inter-faith and inter-religious marriages, and has held thus-

\* "This is a free and democratic country, and once a person becomes a major he or she can marry whosoever he/she likes. If the parents of the boy or girl do not approve of such inter-caste or inter-religious marriage the maximum they can do is that they can cut-off social relations with the son or the daughter, but they cannot give threats or commit or instigate acts of violence and cannot harass the person who undergoes such inter-caste or inter-religious marriage."

3. There is no data produced by the state government on any harm from inter-faith marriages.

4. It treats women as property.

- It infantilises women and perceives them as lacking any agency, as if they are property that needs to be recovered.
- It assumes that women have no independent thinking and cannot make decisions with respect to marriage and choice of religion.

5. The ordinance is prone to abuse and consequences — of intimidation, bullying and arbitrary arrests.

- It vilifies all inter-faith marriages and places unreasonable obstacles on consenting adults in exercising their personal choice of a partner, mocks the right to privacy and violates the right to life, liberty and dignity.

### Conclusion

- The Supreme Court has now agreed to hear petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the laws passed against unlawful religious conversions

### *Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.*

#### **7. Form a commission to monitor tribunals: SC**

- » Prelims: Tribunals – Article, types, functions.

### Context

- The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to constitute a National Tribunals Commission (NTC) which would act as an independent body to supervise appointments and functioning as well as take care of the administrative and infrastructural needs of the tribunals in the country.

**Why constituting the commission is important?**

- Impartiality, independence, fairness and reasonableness in decision-making are characteristic of the judiciary, and, equally, of these tribunals.
- But this is violated because the tribunals depend on the sponsoring or parent department for infrastructure facilities or personnel which undermines their independence
- Dependence of tribunals for all their requirements on the parent department would not let them work free and the come under the control of the executive.
- Stressing on the "imperative need" to ensure that tribunals discharge the judicial functions without any interference of the executive whether directly or indirectly, the apex court said that till NTC is constituted, a separate wing in the Ministry of Finance shall be established to cater to the requirements of tribunals.

**Significance**

- Setting up of such commission would enhance the image of tribunals and instil confidence in the minds of litigants

The observations by the apex court came in its judgement delivered on a batch of pleas challenging the constitutional validity of the 'Tribunal, Appellate Tribunal and other Authorities (Qualification, Experience and Other Conditions of Service of Members) Rules, 2020

**Indian Constitution****8. Amid a judicial slide, a flicker of hope on rights-Bail applications**

- » Mains: Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) provisions.

**General Criminal Procedure**

- Sections 436-439 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) has provisions for bail for various offences.

Factors to be considered in bail application as decided in State of U.P. through CBI vs. Amarmani Tripathi, (2005):

- whether there is any prima facie or reasonable ground to believe that the accused had committed the offence;
- nature and gravity of the charge;
- severity of the punishment in the event of conviction;
- danger of the accused absconding or fleeing, if released on bail;

- character, behaviour, means, position and standing of the accused;
- likelihood of the offence being repeated; reasonable apprehension of the witnesses being tampered with;
- danger of justice being thwarted by grant of bail.

**Section 4(2) CrPC**

- It gives power to special laws apart from the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to lay down separate procedures.
- Various statutes dealing with a special set of crimes have thus crafted distinct provisions for bail and a few of them have made a grant of bail more stringent than CrPC.

**Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**

- Special statutes have additional restrictions apart from these eight conditions. The criteria for bail under UAPA therefore differ.

**Background**

- Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali was alleged to have been involved in unlawful acts and terror funding.
- He was accused of transferring funds received from Lashkar-e-Taiba chief Hafiz Saeed, the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, among others, to Hurriyat leaders.
- The NIA claimed Watali helped them wage war against the government of India by repeated attacks on security forces and government establishments.

**National Investigation Agency (NIA) vs Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali**

- The Supreme Court on the interpretation of UAPA said the National Investigation Agency has gathered enough evidence to believe that the accusations against Watali are prima facie true.
- The Court has ruled that an accused must remain in custody throughout the period of a trial, even if the evidence against the person is eventually proven inadmissible (and the accused is acquitted).
- The SC under the UAPA said that the burden of proving whether the allegations made in the first information report is correct or not rests on the accused and he has to refute the allegations if bail has to be granted to the accused.
- The Supreme Court's interpretation was on the UAPA alone, and not on general criminal procedure.

**Concerns**

- Broad offences included under the UAPA and difficult bail conditions mean individuals can be detained indefinitely even without the conviction of the accused.

- Even if the person is eventually acquitted of the charges, the delays in conducting judicial proceedings mean the case may only get heard several years after their arrest – failure to get bail means they have to spend the entire time in jail.
- It has left a glaring loophole for rampant abuse by the government, police and prosecution alike.

### Conclusion

- Therefore, the bail provision under UAPA is distinct. While other statutes require recording of an opinion by the court that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accused is “not guilty” of the alleged offence, UAPA requires recording of an opinion by the court deciding bail that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is “prima facie” true.

## *Salient features of the Representation of People's Act*

### **9. Former CEC calls for a ban on opinion polls**

» Mains: Opinion polls, criminalization of politics.

Reforms suggested by former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi.

- The former CEC called for a ban on opinion polls stating that they vitiate the purity of the election process.
- He also suggested counting of votes from the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips instead of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).
- He suggested changing the process of removal of Election Commissioners, who can be removed on the recommendation of the CEC while the removal of the CEC is by impeachment.
- Stating that the EC should have the power to de-register political parties, he said, that there were lots of defunct and bogus parties that only exist for money laundering.
- He flagged the problem of criminalization, with 30%-40% of the members of any legislature having pending criminal cases.

## *Indian Constitution*

### **10. Kerala law to curb abusive content**

- » Prelims: Ordinance power of Governor.
- » Mains: Free speech, defamation.

### Context:

- Kerala Governor had signed an ordinance amending the law to give the police more powers to prosecute persons who exploit various communication platforms to slander fellow citizens.

### Details:

- The ordinance had introduced a new provision, Section 118-A, to the Kerala Police Act, 2011.
- The amendment proposed three years of imprisonment and a fine of up to ₹10,000 for those convicted of producing, publishing or disseminating derogatory content through any means of communication to intimidate, insult or defame any person.

### Issues:

- The drastic amendment to the Kerala Police Act, 2011, would have given the local law enforcement more powers to curb defamation.
- The ordinance would have allowed whimsical interpretations by law enforcement agencies.
- It is opined that conferring power on the police to gauge mental injury, loss of reputation and such matters due to dissemination of information would result in widespread abuse.
- Section 118A lays down a three-year prison term.
  - \* It is two years under the IPC.
- It is in conflict with the central laws.
  - \* By making defamatory statements cognisable and raising the prison term, the Kerala ordinance effectively amends the IPC and Cr.P.C., a move for which the Centre's assent is mandatory.
- The ordinance itself required prior presidential assent.

### Section 66 A of the Information Technology Act, 2000:

- In 2015, the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which gave the government power to arrest and imprison an individual for allegedly offensive online posts.
- The court ruled that as it did not distinguish between speech that was merely “offensive or annoying” and that which was guilty of inciting a disruption of public order, Section 66A was liable to have a chilling effect on free speech.
- The same judgment also declared as invalid Section 118 (d) of the Kerala Police Act, which prescribed a jail term for those who caused annoyance to others by indecent statements, comments, calls or messages.

In effect, the new ordinance tries to resurrect a section struck down as unconstitutional by the apex court.

### Conclusion:

- Despite the guarantees in the Constitution, free speech, dissent and even legitimate criticism is looked at as an exercise in bad faith, and projected as an attack on democratically elected authority. As a result, existing laws are being weaponised to arrest journalists and citizens for a tweet or a slogan or a Facebook post.

- The ordinance decides to strike a blow against liberty and is a sign of an endemic intolerance to dissent, cutting across ideological lines.
- The institutions of a mature democracy should shrug off such comments.
- The Kerala government must withdraw an ordinance that does not pass the constitutional test.

### Are tougher laws the answer to check online abuse?

#### Context

- The Kerala government has decided to withdraw an Ordinance that gives unbridled powers to the police to arrest anyone expressing or disseminating any matter that it deems defamatory.
- However, the move to introduce such a law in the first place shows that State governments believe that existing laws are not adequate to deal with social media abuse.

#### To what extent is this true? Yes we have enough laws

Our existing laws are actually adequate.

- We have the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that criminalises speech that is obscene, defamatory, that insults the modesty of women and intrudes upon her privacy.
  - \* Section 294 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) punishes obscene acts or words in a public place. To be considered a crime, the obscenity must cause "annoyance to others". A person convicted under this law can face up to three months imprisonment.
    - » Obscene books are similarly criminalised under Section 292.
  - \* It punishes anonymous criminal intimidation, it punishes voyeurism, it punishes digitally enabled stalking, hate speech, and even non-consensual sharing of sexual images online.
    - » Section 153A of the IPC criminalises and punishes making statements, speeches or acts which have the effect of disturbing public tranquillity or law and order by promoting enmity
    - » Section 505 of the IPC, on the other hand, criminalises making statements, reports or rumours that encourage members of the armed forces or a police officer to refuse to perform his duty, encourage a person to commit offences against the state or disturb public tranquillity and incite persons to disturb public tranquillity.
- In addition to that, we have the Information Technology Act of 2000 that punishes speech that is obscene.

- \* Section 67 in The Information Technology Act, 2000
  - » Punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form
- \* The IT Act also places obligations on intermediaries, where intermediaries have a duty of due diligence; they have to take down content based on a request by the government or a court order.
- \* This obligation is actually very broadly worded — any information that is grossly harmful, harassing, blasphemous, defamatory, obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, libellous, invasive of another's privacy, hateful, or racially or ethnically objectionable, disparaging, etc.

#### No- We need more stringent laws

- Law Commission of India in its 2017 report suggests adding new provisions to make speech inciting hatred and speech that causes fear, alarm or provocation of violence, a criminal offence under IPC
  - \* They wanted two new provisions be introduced to the IPC to specifically deal with online hate speech.
- The Supreme Court in its judgment of 2015 struck down 66A of the IT Act? Has there been any significant legislation or guidelines on grievance redressal or removal of offensive content and do these work effectively?
- A lot of the public discussion has focused on how intermediaries need to do more to make the Internet a safer place.
  - \* Changes were proposed in IT act but since it drew criticism it was not considered.
  - \* In the absence of any changes in the legislative structure, courts and governments have largely resorted to blocking content or forcing intermediaries to take steps to limit the spread of illegal content.
    - » The Madras High Court threatened to ban TikTok because it was supposedly enabling the circulation of obscene content.
    - » It's also important to remember that the government from time to time issues directions, which has happened most recently in the context of WhatsApp, where they have been asked to take certain steps pertaining to illegal content on their platform.

*Way forward*

- As in the Kerala example, rather than rush into making a new law that is likely to be struck down by the courts, it might have been better if the government had actually outlined the specific problem and conducted more transparent consultations with the stakeholders involved to try and figure out solutions.
- The Kerala government has backtracked once there was significant criticism, and that is very rare to see. But we should also hope that the Kerala government's most recent move of withdrawing the Ordinance will make other States stop and think before they pass such laws, or have proper public consultation.
- Governments can actually afford to be responsive to criticism and take back laws that face significant public opposition.



# ECONOMY

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## *Food processing and related industries in India*

### **1. Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on Fortification of Rice & its distribution through Public Distribution System**

- » Prelims: Food fortification, key vitamins and minerals.
- » Mains: Nutritional status of the population, PDS system.

#### **Context:**

- 15 States have been identified for implementing the Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on Fortification of Rice & its distribution through Public Distribution System.

#### **About the Scheme:**

- The “Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on Fortification of Rice & its distribution through Public Distribution System” is being implemented by the Department of Food & Public Distribution (DFPD).
- The Pilot Scheme has been approved for a period of three years beginning 2019-2020 with a total budget outlay of Rs.174.6 Crore.
- Fifteen State Governments have identified their respective districts (1 district per state) for implementing the Pilot Scheme.
- Already 5 states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh have started the distribution of fortified rice in their respective identified districts.

#### **Fortification of Rice:**

- Fortification is the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as Iron, Iodine, Zinc, Vitamins A & D to staple foods such as rice, wheat, oil, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.
- Either these nutrients would have been lost during the processing, or they would not have been present at all in these food items.
- Fortified rice contains nutrients such as iron, folic acid, zinc, vitamins A, B1 and B12.

#### **Benefits of fortification:**

- Fortification of food helps address the issue of micronutrient malnutrition, which is also known as hidden hunger.
- Many times, due to the inadequate intake of a balanced diet, or due to the lack of variety in food, people do not get sufficient micronutrients.
- Fortification of food is a safe method of improving nutrition among people since the addition of micronutrients to food does not pose a health

risk to people. It also does not change the taste, aroma or texture of food.

- Fortification of rice is especially important since micronutrient deficiency is particularly seen in countries where the consumption of rice is more prevalent.
- The World Health Organisation also recommends rice fortification in regions where rice is a staple food as a health strategy to enhance the iron status of populations.

## *Industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.*

### **2. Code on Social Security Bill, 2020**

- » Prelims: Social security schemes
- » Mains: Labour codes, social security measures taken

#### **Background:**

- The Code on Social Security Bill, 2020, replaces nine laws related to social security. These include the Employees' Provident Fund Act, 1952, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008.
  - \* Social security refers to protection measures provided to workers to ensure healthcare and income security in case of certain contingencies such as old age, maternity, or accidents.

#### **Significance:**

Defines platform work:

- The Code on Social Security Bill for the first time in Indian law, attempted to define 'platform work' outside of the traditional employment category.
- As per this bill, "Platform work means a work arrangement outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities which may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment."
- This marks a significant move to recognize platform work.

Social security to platform workers:

- One of the major proposals of the Social Security Code Bill is to bring the platform workers under the ambit of social security schemes, including life and disability insurance, health and maternity benefits, provident fund and skill up-gradation.

**Concerns:**

No differentiation between platform work and unorganized work:

- The Code has drawn criticism from platform workers' associations for failing to delineate platform work from gig work and unorganised work. Only such a categorical clarification could help ensure that social security measures are provided to workers without compromising the flexibility and a sense of ownership character associated with platform work.

No fixed accountability:

- The Code states the provision of basic welfare measures as a joint responsibility of the Central government, platform aggregators, and workers without delineating the exact responsibility of each stakeholder.

Continued reliance on platform companies:

- While platform work promises workers flexibility and ownership over the delivery of work, they are still largely dictated by mechanisms of control wired by the platform algorithms. This affects pricing per unit of work, allocation of work, and work hours.
- The entry into on-demand platform work like ride-sharing and food delivery is dependent on existing access to vehicular assets. Given that the average Indian worker on a ride-sharing platform has limited access to such capital, platform workers rely on intensive loan schemes, often facilitated by platform aggregator companies. This results in dependence on platform companies, driven by financial obligations, thus rendering flexibility and ownership ineffective in the short- to middle-term.

**Benefits of platform work:**

For the platform workers:

- The flexibility available in platform work is a significant attraction. The platform work offers a low barrier to entry and flexibility of work timings depending on the workers' time availability and intent.

For the society and economy:

- The platform workers played a critical role during the pandemic. Platform workers were responsible for the delivery of essential services during the pandemic at great personal risk to themselves.
- They have also been responsible for helping the demand-driven platform companies remain afloat despite the pandemic-induced financial crisis. This also helped small businesses remain afloat during the lockdowns, hence playing a critical role economically.

**Way forward:**

Employment status to platform workers:

- The global conversation on platform workers' rights has been around the misclassification of platform workers as 'independent contractors' as against the granting of employee status to platform workers.
- The emerging amendments to labour laws in Canada and the U.S. have shown that a move towards granting employee status to platform workers would help guarantee minimum wage and welfare benefits to such workers.
- India too should work towards granting employment status to platform workers.

Legal framework for platform workers:

- There should be an effort to acknowledge the heterogeneity of work in the gig economy through an appropriate socio-legal framework and have supportive policies for such jobs.

Ensuring social security:

- To mitigate any operational breakdowns in providing welfare services, a tripartite effort by the State, companies, and workers is required with a more robust responsibility to platform aggregator companies and the State.

**Challenges to internal security, money laundering.****3. Global Conference on Criminal Finances and Cryptocurrencies**

- » Prelims: 4th Global Conference on Criminal Finances and Crypto currencies.
- » Mains: Challenges to internal security, money laundering.
- The conference is an initiative of the Working Group on Cryptocurrencies and Money Laundering established in 2016 by the three organisations Interpol, Europol and the Basel Institute on Governance.
- It was launched with the objective of strengthening knowledge, expertise and best practices for investigations into financial crimes and intelligence on virtual assets and cryptocurrencies.

**Context:**

- The 4th Global Conference on Criminal Finances and Cryptocurrencies was organised by the Interpol, Europol and the Basel Institute on Governance.

**Details:**

- Representatives from 132 countries attended the virtual conference to shape international cross-sector solutions against the criminal use of cryptocurrencies.

- The conference's agenda included trends and investigations on cryptocurrency-related offences, exploring criminal flows and operations in the dark markets, ransomware and sextortion case studies, money laundering involving virtual assets, and the transfer of drug proceeds using cryptocurrencies.

#### **Significance:**

- Recently, there has been an increase in the number and quality of investigations in the field of cryptocurrency-facilitated crime and subsequent money laundering.
- Law enforcement and other public entities are continuing to enhance their level of knowledge and expertise in this crime area.
- The conference serves as an opportunity to underline the need for countries and jurisdictions to increase the exchange of tactical information and best practices.

### **Infrastructure: Energy**

#### **4. Luhri Stage-I Hydro Power Project**

- » Prelims: River Satluj and its tributaries.

#### **Context**

- Cabinet approves the investment proposal of the 210 MW Luhri Stage-I Hydro Power Project.

#### **About the Project:**

- The Luhri Stage-I Hydro Electric Project, located on river Satluj, is situated in Shimla & Kullu districts of Himachal Pradesh.
- This project will generate 758.20 million units of electricity annually.
- This project is being implemented by Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (SJVN) on Build-Own-Operate-Maintain (BOOM) basis with active support from the Government of India and the HP State Government.

#### **Significance**

- The power generated from the project will help in providing grid stability and will improve the power supply position.
- Besides adding valuable renewable energy to the grid, the project would also lead to a reduction of 6.1 lakh tons of carbon dioxide from the environment annually, thus contributing to an improvement in air quality.
- The construction activity will also generate employment for around 2000 people.
- The Project Affected Families will be provided with 100 units of free electricity per month for ten years.

### **Indian Economy**

#### **5. National Animal Disease Control Programme for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Brucellosis**

- » Prelims: Foot and Mouth Disease and Brucellosis disease.
- » Mains: Livestock farming

#### **Aim:**

- It aims to control Foot and Mouth Disease and Brucellosis by 2025 with vaccination and eventual eradication by 2030.

#### **Funding**

- It is a 100% centrally funded programme, with a total outlay of Rs.12,652 crore from 2019 to 2024.
  - \* The programme earlier was implemented on cost sharing basis between the Central and State Governments.
  - \* In a rare instance of departure, the Central Government has decided to now bear the entire cost of the programme to ensure complete eradication of these diseases and better livelihood opportunities for all the livestock rearing farmers in the country.

#### **The threat of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Brucellosis:**

- These diseases are very common amongst the livestock – cow-bulls, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs etc.
- If a cow/buffalo gets infected with FMD, the milk loss is upto 100% which could last for four to six months.
  - \* Further, in case of Brucellosis the milk output reduces by 30%, during the entire life cycle of animal. Brucellosis also causes infertility amongst the animals.
- The infection of brucellosis can also be transmitted to the farm workers and livestock owners.
- Both the diseases have a direct negative impact on the trade of milk and other livestock products.

#### **Significance**

- The mission mode approach for eradication of these diseases is the biggest step any country has ever taken either for human or animal vaccination programme to control any disease.

### **Mobilization of Resources**

#### **6. RE-Invest 2020**

- » Prelims: Details about RE-Invest 2020.

#### **Context:**

- PM inaugurates RE-Invest 2020.

**About RE-Invest 2020:**

- The 3rd Global Renewable Energy Investment Meeting and Expo (RE-Invest 2020) was organised by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
- The theme for RE-Invest 2020- 'Innovations for Sustainable Energy Transition'.
- The event was showcased as India's biggest renewable energy event.
- The 3-day event included conferences and exhibitions on renewables and future energy choices for manufacturers, developers, investors and innovators.
- RE-Invest 2020 aimed to accelerate the worldwide effort to scale up the development and deployment of renewable energy and connect the global investment community with Indian energy stakeholders.
- The first such event was held in 2015 followed by a second one in 2018.

**Employment****7. Time Use Survey**

- » Prelims: Components of survey
- » Mains: participation of men and women in paid and unpaid activities.

**Context:**

- The all India Time Use Survey, 2019 has been published by the Government of India.

**Time Use Survey**

- The survey measures the participation rate and time spent on paid activities, care activities, unpaid activities, etc.
- It is an important source of information about the activities that are performed by the population and the time duration for which such activities are performed.
- The primary objective of Time Use Survey (TUS) is to measure participation of men and women in paid and unpaid activities.
- TUS is an important source of information on the time spent in unpaid caregiving activities, volunteer work, unpaid domestic service producing activities of the household members.
- It also provides information on time spent on learning, socializing, leisure activities, self-care activities, etc., by the household members.

**Has India conducted a TUS earlier?**

Over the last three decades, a number of developed countries have been conducting time use surveys with increasing frequency.

- The United States has been doing one annually since 2003.

- Australia conducted its first full-scale national survey in 1992, Canada has been doing it since 1961.
- Germany, Austria, and Israel have also conducted these surveys.
- The "NSS Report- Time Use in India 2019" whose findings were revealed, is the first such pan India survey conducted.

**Why measuring TUS is important?**

- It is because we have to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030 and the path-breaking Resolution of the 19th International Conference on Labour Statistics
  - \* The Government of India is fully committed to the SDGs and has also indicated its inclination to implementing the second.
- TUS data are also required for understanding and monitoring major socioeconomic concerns of countries.

**SDG**

- Goal 5: Gender equality
  - \* Target 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
  - \* 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate
  - \* 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life

**Concerns**

- Experts have always argued that Indian Employment/Unemployment Surveys (EUS), tend to under-report informal workers, due to the nature of informal employment. Being frequently intermittent, scattered, temporary, short term or unstable, it is frequently not reported accurately by the EUS.
  - \* Again, women frequently view work as a part of household work and under-report it.
  - \* Also, the EUS are not equipped to collect data on multiple jobs performed by people, the time spent on work (i.e. intensity of work), the scattered nature of work, subsistence work, and work performed under simultaneous activities.
- The Indian TUS data are not adequate.
  - \* A TUS collects data only for one or two days per person in a week, while according to the ILO, "a person is a worker if she/he has spent at least one hour on work in the reference week".



- \* As informal work is frequently intermittent and irregular, the TUS information on one day's work (for less than one hour) or non-work cannot qualify the person to be a worker or non-worker.
  - » It is quite likely that the person reporting as a non-worker on one day may be working on other days, or one reporting work may not work for one hour totally in the week. Thus, the TUS cannot provide information on the workforce/employment status of persons.

### Conclusion

- In short, the Indian TUS has missed two important opportunities — of implementing the SDG 5.4 and the ILO's important resolution.

### Mobilization of Resources

#### **8. Virtual Global Investor Roundtable (VGIR)**

- » Mains: India's investment climate, need for foreign investment.

#### Context:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently addressed at the Virtual Global Investor Roundtable (VGIR) 2020

#### VGIR

- The VGIR was organized by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, and National Investment and Infrastructure Fund.
- It was an exclusive dialogue between leading Global Institutional Investors, Indian business leaders and the highest decision makers from the Government of India and Financial Market Regulators.
  - \* Union Finance Minister, Union Minister of State for Finance, RBI Governor and other dignitaries were present.
- VGIR 2020 focussed on discussions around India's economic and investment outlook, structural reforms and the government's vision for the path to a USD 5 trillion economy.
- The event provided an opportunity to leading global investors and Indian business leaders to engage and deliberate with senior policymakers on how to further accelerate the growth of international investments in India.

#### Highlights of the Meeting

- PM Modi pitched India as the ideal destination
  - \* India offers the investors Democracy, Demography, Demand as well as Diversity
- India has an ambitious plan to invest \$ 1.5 trillion under the National Infrastructure Pipeline

- \* India is investing in massive infrastructure building spree of highways, railways, metros, water-ways, airports across the country.
- Government has also aimed at improving the manufacturing potential and improving ease of doing business
  - \* One Nation One Tax system in the form GST, one of the Lowest Corporate Tax rates and added incentive for new manufacturing, Faceless regime for IT assessment and appeal, a new labour laws regime balancing the welfare of workers and ease of doing business
  - \* Production Linked Incentive schemes in specific sectors and empowered institutional arrangement to handhold investors

#### Why was this meeting important?

- RBI in the past has said that investment was already in contraction mode and it suffered a further massive pandemic shock.
- Fixed investment continues to face an uncertain outlook given the weak consumption demand and excess capacity in most industries, especially when coupled with stretched balance sheets that cramp businesses' ability to borrow and invest.
- And the government's ability to apportion more funds for growth-spurring capital projects is hamstrung by a widening fiscal deficit amid a protracted
  - \* Border stand-off,
  - \* The health crisis
  - \* A debilitating revenue shortfall.

### Changes in industrial policy

#### **9. Centre unveils incentives to boost manufacturing**

- » Mains: PLI scheme in the times of COVID-19, India's electronic manufacturing sector.

#### Context:

- The Central government's new Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme.

#### Background:

- Previously, a Production Linked Incentive scheme was announced for the electronic manufacturing sector.
- The government had proposed expanding this scheme to other sectors as well.

#### Details:

- The new scheme focuses on 10 sectors. The sectors have been identified on the basis of their employment creation potential and with the vision to make India self-reliant. Sunrise sectors and products with linkages with the global value chain have been prioritized.



- \* The selected sectors include food processing, telecom and networking products, electronics, textiles, speciality steel, automobiles and auto components, solar photovoltaic modules, advanced chemistry cell battery, pharmaceuticals and white goods, such as air conditioners and LEDs.
- According to the scheme, companies will get incentives on incremental sales from products manufactured in domestic units.
- The scheme has an estimated outlay of about Rs. 1.46 lakh crore for over the next five years, with around ₹57,000 crore allocated for automobiles and auto components production.
- Individual Ministries in charge of the sectors would be implementing the scheme.
- Applications to avail of the benefits will be vetted by an Empowered Finance Committee, following which they will be taken up to the Cabinet for final approval.

#### Significance:

- The PLI scheme would encourage domestic manufacturing investments in the considered sectors.
- The increased domestic investments would lead to job creation and assuage some of the employment pressures in the Indian economy.
- Given the focus on cutting-edge technology, the scheme is expected to help fulfil the vision of making India self-reliant. This will help reduce imports.
- The scheme will help make Indian manufacturers globally competitive, by creating economies of scale. This will help enhance exports from India and make India an integral part of the global supply chain.
- The scheme is also aimed as a clear signal to potential foreign investors that India is not turning protectionist as foreign companies are also encouraged to set shop in India as the government is providing incentives.
- The above moves are expected to help India in its economic revival in the post-pandemic phase.

### Indian Economy

#### **10. Dumping by Vietnam hits Indian pepper**

- » Prelims: Countervailing duty and anti-dumping duty

#### Context:

- Dumping of Vietnamese pepper in India.

#### Details:

- The dumping of Vietnamese pepper in India is happening via Nepal and Sri Lanka.

- \* In the case of dumping a country or company exports a product at a price that is lower in the foreign importing market than the price in the exporter's domestic market.
- \* Dumping leads to price-suppression in destination countries and could lead to long term ill effects on the domestic producers.

- Vietnam pepper exporters are making use of bilateral trade concessions between India and Sri Lanka and Nepal to dump the pepper into the Indian market. Sri Lanka and Nepal have lower custom duties on their pepper exports to India.

- \* Under the FTA, Sri Lanka can export up to 2,500 tonnes per year at zero duty to India, while the duty is 8% under the SAARC Agreement and 50% under the ASEAN Pact.

#### Concerns:

- Indian pepper has suffered a sharp erosion in domestic prices due to the glut in supply.

#### Way forward:

Rein in misuse of available provisions:

- The Centre must take quick measures to curb misuse of imports. The recently introduced Customs Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements Rules, 2020 (CAROTAR, 2020), will help rein in misuse of import provisions.
- Also the governments must prohibit Export Oriented Units (EOUs) and units in SEZs from selling black pepper in the domestic market as these units enjoy special import provisions.

### Effects of liberalization on the economy

#### **11. India's mask of economic liberalism is off**

- » Prelims: RCEP countries
- » Mains: Pros and cons of trade agreements.

#### Context:

- The article analyses the recent developments and argues that trade protectionism seems to have become the official policy in India.

#### Background:

- India's External Affairs Minister recently disapproved of free trade and globalisation.
- He remarked that in the name of openness, India had allowed subsidi[s]ed products and unfair production advantages from abroad to prevail... justified by the mantra of an open and globali[s]ed economy.
- He also said that it was quite extraordinary that an economy as attractive as India allowed the framework to be set by others.

- These comments came in the backdrop of the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, by 15 countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

#### Criticisms:

#### **Not joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):**

- With trade multilateralism at the World Trade Organization (WTO) remaining sluggish, FTAs are the gateways for international trade.
- By not being part of any major FTA, India cannot be part of the global value chains.
- By refusing to sign RCEP India is now at the margins of the regional and global economy.
- India's competitors such as the East Asian nations, by virtue of being embedded in mega-FTAs, are in a far superior position to be part of global value chains and attract foreign investment.

#### **India continues to remain a relatively closed economy:**

- While India is a much more open economy than it was three decades ago, globally, it continues to remain relatively closed when compared to other major economies.
- According to the WTO, India's applied most favoured nation import tariffs are 13.8%, (highest for any major economy).
- According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, on the import restrictiveness index, India figures in the 'very restrictive' category.
- From 1995-2019, India has initiated anti-dumping measures 972 times (the highest in the world), in an endeavour to protect the domestic industry.

#### **Blaming the FTAs for the woes of India's manufacturing:**

- The external affairs minister took a dig at the FTAs by stating that "the effect of past trade agreements has been to de-industrialise some sectors."
- However, the economic survey concluded that India has benefitted overall from FTAs signed so far.
- Moreover, impugning FTAs for deindustrialisation means being oblivious to the real problem of the Indian industry.
- The real problems are:
  - \* Lack of competitiveness
  - \* Absence of structural reforms

#### Way forward:

- India has been one of the major beneficiaries of economic globalisation — a fact attested by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

- Post-1991, the Indian economy grew at a faster pace, ushering in an era of economic prosperity.
- According to Arvind Panagariya (economist), poverty in rural and urban India, which stood at close to 40% in 2004-05, almost halved to about 20% by 2011-12. This was due to India clocking an average economic growth rate of almost 8% with international trade being a major engine of progress.
- India cannot expect foreign investors to invest if trade protectionism is the government's official policy.
- India must work towards economic liberalisation, globalisation and free trade for its advantage. It would also help India gain an image as a global destination for foreign investment.

#### Effect of Liberalization on the Economy:

#### **12. Jobs, exports and the trade pacts link**

- » Prelims: Bilateral FTAs.
- » Mains: Impact of trade agreements, Make in India, export policy

#### Context:

- As per the figures presented by the Reserve Bank of India, India is in an economic recession for the first time in its independent history.

#### Issues:

#### **Job loss:**

- Jobs are the first casualty during a recession.
  - \* Thousands of people lost their jobs due to the slowing economy in 2018-19 and 2019-20. Unemployment had reached a 45-year high.
  - \* More than 2 crore people lost their jobs and incomes during the lockdown.
- In any country, the ultimate economic test is, to ensure that there are sufficient jobs, incomes and livelihoods for all in the workforce. The single biggest challenge confronting India today is jobs.

#### **Reduction in export volumes:**

- Despite the "Make in India", export volumes have decreased in the last six years.
- The reason for this is seen as the complete reversal in the direction of India's foreign trade policy with higher tariffs, non-tariff barriers, quantitative limits, the return of licensing, border country restrictions and the appreciating value of the rupee.

#### **Trade agreements:**

- Exports are linked to trade agreements.
  - \* The member-countries of a trade agreement promote trade among themselves with easy

rules but restrict trade with non-members with hard rules.

- Some historic trade agreements that were successful were the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). Half-hearted and hesitant agreements like the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) failed.
- Unfortunately, India has turned towards what seems like an anti-FTA policy.

### Way Forward:

#### **Job creation:**

- The biggest priority for India must now be to recover the jobs that were lost and create new well-paying jobs.
  - \* According to the Economic Survey 2016-17: If the government makes available ₹10 lakh as a loan to four companies for capital investment; a steel manufacturing company will create one new job with this amount. An automobile manufacturer will create three new jobs. A producer of leather goods will create 70 new jobs. An apparel and garment maker will create 240 new jobs including 80 for women (Economic Survey 2016-17).
  - \* Large numbers of good quality jobs can be created only in sectors that are labour intensive, and where India has a comparative advantage, such as apparel, leather goods, value-added agriculture and so on.
  - \* These job-creating sectors depend not only on the domestic market but, significantly, on export markets.
  - \* More than one-half of the leather goods and one-third of the apparel produced in India is exported to other countries.

#### **Export promotion:**

- India's economy is in shambles and exports are one of the main engines to revive economic growth and create many new jobs.
- In order to revive exports, India needs greater and frictionless access to global markets.
- India needs to find more export markets, nurture them, and sustain them amid intense global competition.
  - \* There is irrefutable evidence that India's new trade policy, unveiled first in 1991-92, and taken forward by every subsequent government until 2014, has paid rich economic dividends in generating jobs, incomes and consumption.
  - \* Also, exports were the most significant factor that drove the Indian economy in the 'boom years' of 2003-2012.

- Merchandise exports also create supporting jobs. It is therefore very important to encourage and incentivise exports to be able to create many new jobs in the country.

#### **Bilateral Free Trade Agreements:**

- India needs to shed exaggerated fears of trade agreements.
- India cannot protect its domestic industry with high trade barriers while aspiring for bilateral trade treaties to promote exports.
- Most manufacturing today has a long supply chain that cuts across many countries.
  - \* To be able to export goods, India must import raw materials or equipment or technology from other countries in the supply chain.
- Hence, India must re-learn to engage with other countries and negotiate favourable trade agreements through the bilateral and multilateral routes.

### Conclusion

- The art of survival in a fiercely competitive world is engagement and negotiation.

### Effect of Liberalization on the Economy.

#### **13. Lessons from Vietnam and Bangladesh**

» Mains: Global value chains

#### Context:

- While Bangladesh has become the second-largest apparel exporter after China, Vietnam's exports have grown by about 240% in the past eight years. The article throws light upon the best practices followed in both the countries for and what India can learn from them.

#### Vietnam's Success:

- Vietnam's exports rose from \$83.5 billion in 2010 to \$279 billion in 2019.
- Vietnam pursues an open trade policy mainly through Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) which ensure that its important trading partners like the U.S., the EU, China, Japan, South Korea and India do not charge import duties on products made in Vietnam.
- Vietnam's domestic market is open to the partners' products.
  - \* 99% of EU products will soon enter Vietnam duty-free.
- The country has agreed to change its domestic laws to make the country attractive to investors.
  - \* Foreign firms can compete for local businesses.

- \* EU firms can open shops, enter the retail trade, and bid for both government and private sector tenders.
- \* They can take part in electricity, real estate, hospital, defence, and railways projects.
- An open trade policy, a less inexpensive workforce, and generous incentives to foreign firms contributed to Vietnam's success.

#### ***Constraints for India:***

- While Vietnam being a single-party state can ignore domestic voices, this model may not be good for India as it offers no protection to farmers or local producers from imports.

#### ***Bangladesh's Strategy:***

- In Bangladesh, most of the country's export constitutes large export of apparels to the EU and the U.S.
  - \* The EU allows the import of apparel and other products from least developed countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh duty-free.
  - \* However, Bangladesh may not have this advantage in a few years.
- The country is working to diversify its export basket.
- In India, as a good neighbor, all of Bangladesh's products are accepted duty-free (except alcohol and tobacco).

#### ***Way Forward:***

Here are a few suggestions of elements followed in Vietnam and Bangladesh models that India can look to emulate:

#### **Support Large Firms:**

- The key learning from Bangladesh is the need to support large firms for a quick turnover.
  - \* Large firms are better positioned to invest in brand building, meeting quality requirements, and marketing.
  - \* Small firms begin as suppliers to large firms and eventually grow.

#### **Export Diversification:**

- Vietnam has changed domestic rules to meet the needs of investors. Yet, most of Vietnam's exports happen in five sectors.
- In contrast, India's exports are more diversified.
  - \* The Economic Complexity Index (ECI), which ranks a country based on how diversified and complex its manufacturing export basket is, illustrates this point.
  - \* The ECI rank for China is 32, India 43, Vietnam 79, and Bangladesh 127.

#### **Setting up pre-approved factory spaces:**

- India, unlike Vietnam, has a developed domestic and capital market. To further promote manufacturing and investment, India could set up sectoral industrial zones with pre-approved factory spaces.

#### ***Conclusion:***

- For India, the focus is on organic economic growth through innovation and competitiveness.
- With reforms promoting innovation and lowering the cost of doing business, India is poised to attract the best investments and integrate further with the global economy.

### ***Employment***

#### **14. NHRC notes a drop in women workers**

- » Prelims: Labour force participation rate.
- » Mains: Women in labour force, women safety at workplace.

#### ***Context:***

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has noted a drop in women's participation in the workforce.

#### ***Issue:***

- According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey reports released by the National Statistical Office, women's participation in the workforce "fell to its lowest points since independence in the year 2017-18.
- The most major decline was seen since 2004, from 29.4% to 17.5% in 2017-18.
- The decline has marginally increased to 18.6% in the year 2018-19.

#### ***Details:***

- NHRC would issue guidelines to the government to improve the participation of women in the workforce.
- The expert group met to discuss the reasons for the low participation of women in the workforce.

#### ***Suggestions to improve participation in the workforce:***

- Investments must be encouraged in the care economy while having a regulatory mechanism.
- While there already exists a law against sexual harassment, much more needs to be done in terms of ensuring its implementation and providing better working conditions.
- Gender sensitivity must be ensured at workplaces.
- Equal sharing of household work will help in increasing the participation of women in the workforce.



- It was suggested that an urban employment guarantee scheme be started along the lines of the MGNREGA with a reservation for women.
- There is a need for skilling and encouraging women to take up unconventional jobs like drivers and electricians.

### ***Indian Economy***

#### **15. Reinforcing RBI's accountability**

- » Prelims: Types of inflation, monetary policy committee composition.
- » Mains: Inflation targeting, inflation-growth dynamics.

##### **Context:**

- The article analyzes the inflation targeting role played by the Reserve Bank of India.

##### **Background:**

##### **Inflation targeting in India:**

- Inflation targeting is a monetary policy strategy used by central banks for maintaining inflation at a certain level or within a specific range. With many central banks adopting it, inflation targeting has emerged as an important monetary policy framework.
  - \* This approach was in contrast with the multiple indicator approach that predated this inflation targeting framework where the central bank focused on both growth and price stability.

##### **Monetary Policy Committee and its mandate:**

- In 2016, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) signed an agreement with the Indian government that led to the creation of the first-ever Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in the country. The MPC was given the target of keeping inflation at 4% with a tolerance limit of 2%, over the next five years till 2021. This meant that inflation should be between 2% and 6%.
- Average inflation overshooting the upper tolerance level or remaining below the lower tolerance level for any three consecutive quarters constitutes a failure to achieve the inflation target.
- In case of failure to achieve the inflation target, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is required to send a report to the Centre, stating the reasons for the failure to achieve the inflation target, the remedial actions it proposes to initiate, and an estimate of the time period within which it expects to achieve the inflation target through the corrective steps proposed. The report is aimed at ensuring enhanced transparency and accountability of the RBI in its inflation targeting role.

##### **Concerns:**

##### **Missed targets:**

- In the last three quarters of the current financial year, average inflation has exceeded the target remaining above the upper tolerance limit set by the Centre.
  - \* Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), was 6.7% in the January-March quarter, 6.6% in the April-June quarter (based on imputed data) and 6.9% in the July-September quarter.

##### **Unjustified arguments:**

- The MPC in its August policy review has cited the lack of adequate and quality data and called for a break in the CPI series for the purpose of monetary policy decisions and exempting the RBI from complying with the requirement of writing to the Finance Ministry, explaining why inflation missed the set targets.
  - \* The normal data collection exercise of the National Statistics Office was disrupted during the lockdown imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The justification of data complications does not hold ground due to the following reasons:
  - \* There has been a continuous upward trend in the inflation figure. The break that the MPC referred to is not visible in the inflation data. The data for the last four quarters — 5.8%, 6.7%, 6.6%, 6.9% — appear continuous.
  - \* The range around the inflation target (+/- 2%) provided to the RBI is for accommodating constraints and challenges like data limitations, projection errors, short-run supply gaps and fluctuations in the agriculture production.

##### **Questions on the inflation-targeting regime:**

- Of late there have been calls from certain sections questioning the desirability of persisting with the inflation-targeting regime.
- Such an approach would only help artificially prop up numbers like business revenues and profits, or tax collection figures but would not be good economically in the longer run given the experience in some economies. Price stability is equally important as growth.

##### **Way forward:**

##### **Upholding institutional mechanisms:**

- RBI should not be allowed to side-step the institutional mechanism provided under the RBI Act. RBI must abide by the law and apprise the Centre of why it failed to control inflation and what measures it intends to take.



- Transparency can enable more informed decision-making within the government, greater public scrutiny of the RBI's performance, and an improved inflation-targeting regime. This would also help improve the credibility, transparency and predictability of monetary policy.

#### **Coordination and collaboration:**

- The central bank should also be allowed to state expressly what support by way of government policy it needs to meet the inflation target.

#### ***Inclusive growth and issues arising from it***

### **16. Needed, a policy framework in step with technology**

» Mains: Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The article argues that the rapid pace of technology blurring standard boundaries that dictate policy framework in the government, calls for a holistic view of schemes.

- With the evolution of technology in the latter part of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century, the traditional boundaries between goods and services have blurred.
- Computing capabilities have surged faster than capabilities in traditional industries. These information-based technologies have been widely adopted across a broad range of industries and products that traditionally have not been perceived as electronic or software-based.

#### **Data is the new currency:**

- Information is the new currency powering economies.
- The expansion of computing power has driven the pace of information gathering and analysis.
- The new currency drives processes and decision-making across a wide range of products and services, making them more efficient and value accretive for consumers.
- There is increasing digitisation and electronification of industrial activities, products and services. This influences the evolving skill sets in the industry.
- This revolution is taking place across products (information availability drives efficiency and creates value for customers by providing greater control over the product and its surrounding environment). And, therefore such products with evolving technologies are valued more.

#### **Working in silos:**

- As governments have focused on improving the lives of people, they have looked at economic development and industry as catalysts to progress.

- Specialised departments and policies have been formulated to govern those areas.
- Over time, as each of these departments grew, they have tended to operate in silos (isolation).
- The recent developments in technology have, however, blurred standard boundaries that dictate policy frameworks in most governments.

#### **Way forward:**

#### **Capital formation through intangibles:**

- Technology is driving an increasing share of the value addition coming from digitisation and data analytics in products and services across industry segments.
- There needs to be a way of encouraging capital formation by way of intangibles in traditionally tangible industries.
  - \* For example: increasing electronification and digitisation of the automobile are not covered by industrial policies that govern the Electronics and Information Technology Ministry.

#### **Inter-departmental cooperation:**

- There is a need for inter-departmental cooperation and synergy not only in policy framework but also in deployment.

#### **Taking a holistic view of policies:**

- Departmentalisation of policies is facing a challenge from technology that very often blurs the boundaries served by different policies.
- There is a need to have a holistic view of policies for economic development as technology is becoming a significant enabler in most industries.
- A change in policy framework regarding economic development that enables various ministries to work together is essential.
- A sufficiently empowered policy clearing cell could ensure a holistic view on policy across departments of government, at the State and the Centre.

#### **Developing a nourishing ecosystem for attracting investments and capital formation:**

- For attracting investments, policies have always been driven by subsidies and incentives but increasingly, in a competitive scenario, these are becoming hygiene factors.
- A nourishing ecosystem for industry, including the hard infrastructure and softer areas such as education, skilling, technical institutions, laboratories, testing centres, etc., has to be cultivated.
- The creation of clusters of companies in adjacent but complementary areas could constitute an ecosystem that encourages multi and cross-disciplinary learning and spur innovation and economic development.

**Conclusion:**

- There is also the larger issue of a shift of value between manufacturing and services as technology changes. The policy, by and large, promotes and gives incentives for manufacturing.
- It is important to include intangibles such as software, research and development or even servicing of products even in traditional manufacturing companies to encourage innovation and technological development.
- In this evolving policy framework, it is important that there are close cooperation and alignment between the Centre and State to ensure effective implementation on the ground.
- Some of these changes would help in navigating through an ecosystem that is changing with technology.

**Mobilization of Resources****17. The financial capacity of States is being weakened**

- » Prelims: Finance Commission criteria for devolution of funds.
- » Mains: Financial autonomy of states

**Context:**

- The article discusses the decreasing financial capacity of the states; the causative factors and its consequences.

**Causative factors:****Declining actual devolution:**

- There has been a notable shortfall in actual and recommended devolutions given by the Finance Commission.
  - \* In the year 2014-15, the actual devolution was 14% less than the Finance Commission's projection. Subsequent devolutions have been consistently less every year, with the period 2019-20 resulting in a 37% decrease.
- Finance Commissions recommend the share of States in the taxes raised by the Union government. Their recommendations are normally adhered to. But the current Union Government has discarded this constitutional obligation.

**Shrinking divisible pool:**

- The Union government has resorted to imposing or increasing cesses and surcharges instead of taxes wherever possible and, in some cases, even replaced taxes with cesses and surcharges.
- Various cesses and surcharges levied by the Union government are retained fully by it. They do not go into the divisible pool. This allows the Centre to raise revenues, yet not share them with the States.

- Between 2014-15 and 2019-20, cesses and surcharges soared from 9.3% to 15% of the gross tax revenue of the Union government.

**GST shortfall:**

- GST shortfalls have been persistent and growing from the inception of GST.
- Compensation to state revenues has been paid from the GST cess revenue. However, the COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdown has drastically reduced GST collections.
- Of the nearly ₹3 lakh crore GST shortfall to the States, the Centre will only compensate ₹1.8 lakh crore. The States will not get the remaining ₹1.2 lakh crore this year.

**Central grants:**

- Apart from the streams discussed above, Central grants are also likely to drop significantly this year due to lower than expected revenue collection for the government as well as the increased expenditure on health.

**Consequences:**

- Due to the combined effect of cutbacks in devolution, the shrinking divisible pool, failure to pay full GST compensation this year and fall in Central grants, the States may experience a fall of 20%-25% in their revenues for the current fiscal year.

**Short term impact:**

- State governments drive a majority of the country's development programmes. A large number of people depend on these programmes for their livelihood, development, welfare and security. Any shortfall in the availability of resources may have a negative impact on the state's ability to deliver on these development programmes.
- There has been increasing consensus on the need for a fiscal stimulus to induce economic recovery. Governments ought to spend money this year to stimulate demand. The reduced spending capability with the states will impede the recovery process as well.

**Long term impact:**

- Given the huge shortfalls, the States are now forced to resort to large borrowings. Repayment burden will overwhelm State budgets for several years. This would impair the state's ability to spend on development and welfare activities.
- The decreased investment in development and welfare programmes will have an adverse impact on per capita income, human resource development and poverty thus impairing economic growth potential as well.

**Conclusion:**

- States are at the forefront of development and growth. Strong states lead to a stronger India.
- Given that the weakening of states serves neither federalism nor national interest, there is the need to guard against any such policies that weaken the states' status or capabilities.

**Inclusive growth and issues arising from it****18. Fixing the rules of the economy**

- » Prelims: Gini Co-efficient, OXFAM report on inequality.
- » Mains: Income inequality.

**Context:**

- The article evaluates the current economic policies in India and argues for a change keeping in view both the short and long term needs of the Indian economy.

**Background:****1. Income inequality:**

- Income inequality is a critical issue plaguing the Indian economy. The prevalent trend indicates that income inequality in India is rising independent of absolute incomes.
  - \* Income inequality is how unevenly income is distributed throughout a population. The less equal the distribution, the higher the income inequality is.
- Incomes of people in the lower half of the income pyramid are too low. India's richest 1 per cent hold more than four-times the wealth held by 953 million people who make up for the bottom 70 per cent of the country's population.

**2. Gini Coefficient:**

- The Gini coefficient is indicative of income inequality in India. It is a statistical measure to gauge the rich-poor income or wealth divide.
- The Gini Coefficient for India is estimated to be close to 0.50, which would be an all-time high.
  - \* Its value varies between zero to 1, zero indicating perfect equality and one indicating the perfect inequality.
  - \* A Gini figure below 0.40 is generally considered to be within tolerable limits by economic experts.
- A general rise in the Gini Coefficient indicates that government policies are not inclusive and may be benefiting the rich as much as (or even more than) the poor.

**3. Consequences of income inequality:****Concentration of power:**

- The power to influence policymaking has become concentrated with wealthy investors and large multinational corporations. The rules do not favour workers and tiny enterprises because they have too little power. This does not augur well for the development process of the large population which make up the labour class and the tiny enterprises.

**Economic inefficiency:**

- The growing inequality is not good for the economic growth of the country.
- The lower disposable income among the large population does not augur well for demand in the economy which in turn has a vicious impact on investment decisions and economic growth.
- The inequitable economic growth is not sustainable.

**Details:**

- There has been a growing emphasis on freeing up markets, improving productivity, and applying technology. The article calls for a re-examination of the fundamental economic policies being propounded.

**1. Freeing up markets:**

- There has been a growing emphasis on liberalizing the economy through measures such as freeing up the markets for agricultural products to ensure higher price realization for the farmers or deregulation of labour laws to attract investments.

**Concerns:**

- The freeing up markets for labour is expected to reduce the burden of wage costs on investors.
- This would have a degrading effect on the income of the labour class just when wages and the size of markets must be increased to counter the economic downturn. Without adequate incomes, people cannot be a good market for businesses. In fact, it is the inadequate growth of incomes that has caused a slump in investments due to poor expectations of demand.

**2. Improving productivity:**

- Improvement of 'productivity' is considered a key aspect of economic progress.
  - \* Productivity measures the efficiency of production. Productivity is expressed as the ratio of the aggregate output to the aggregate input i.e. output per unit of input, typically over a specific period of time. The larger the output that is produced with a unit of input, the higher the productivity of the system.

- Economists generally use labour productivity as a universal measure of the productivity of an economy.
- The number of people in the system (the country/the economy) is the denominator, and the gross domestic product the people produce is the numerator. Companies also measure their labour productivity similarly, by dividing the total output of the enterprise by the number of workers employed.

#### ***Strategies for increasing productivity:***

- Labour productivity can be increased by either increasing the total output of the factory while maintaining the number of workers or by decreasing the number of workers involved in the production.
- The total output can be increased by adding more machines and technology to supplement the capacity of workers to increase total output. This is a good strategy for capital-rich enterprises and countries.
- The total output can also be increased by enhancing the workers' skills and create a culture of continuous improvement in the factory, whereby workers and managers cooperate to improve the capability of their system to produce more from limited resources. This is the strategy of 'total quality management', famously employed in Japanese companies to reduce their costs of production and to improve the quality of their products. This contributed to the improvement of the total productivity of their enterprises.

#### ***Concerns:***

- The companies seem to be taking the easy way out to improve productivity in the economy.
- There seems to be the growing reliance on reducing the workforce and squeezing out the maximum work possible from this limited workforce to increase productivity.
- This has given rise to a 'hire and fire' strategy in companies. This goes against the labour welfare principle and could prove detrimental to the labour class.

### **3. Technology-led growth:**

- There is a growing emphasis on inducting high-end technology for economic growth. This is evident in the recent push for technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, etc.

#### ***Concerns:***

- The very idea of defining the level of technology in terms of 'equipment cost per work-place' may be inappropriate.
- For capital-scarce and human resource-abundant countries, such as many developing countries, such a policy may be inappropriate.

- The current attempt of the 'developing' countries, supported by foreign aid, to infiltrate capital intensive technology into their economies inevitably kills off the low-cost indigenous technology at an alarming rate, destroying traditional workplaces at a much faster rate than modern workplaces can be created and producing the 'dual economy' with its attendant issues of mass unemployment and mass migration.

#### **Way forward:**

#### **Following the social contract principle:**

- A good job implies a contract between workers and society. Workers provide the economy with the products and services it needs. In return, society and the economy must create conditions whereby workers are treated with dignity and can earn adequate incomes. Good jobs require good contracts between workers and their employers.
- The government should, apart from ensuring ideal conditions for the investors, also ensure a protective cover for the workers. This would require it to regulate contracts between employers and employees.

#### **Empowering the most vulnerable:**

- Small enterprises and workers must combine into larger associations, in new forms, using technology, to tilt reforms towards their needs and their rights.

#### **Employment promoting policies:**

- The economic reforms should incentivize the firms to employ more numbers of less-skilled workers.

### ***Industrial Policies***

#### **19. A recipe to tear down trade unions**

- » Prelims: Trade union movement in pre-independent India.
- » Mains: Trade Union legislations, labour codes.

#### **Context:**

- The article analyses how the new labour laws are an attack on workers' ability to safeguard their rights.

#### **Background:**

- Labour law reform has been on the table since 1991 as every government's favourite solution for economic growth. Yet, there was no consensus between governments, political parties, workers and their trade unions, and employers, on what this meant.
- In 2019, the Central Government introduced four bills on labour codes to consolidate 29 central laws.



- While the Wages Code was passed in 2019, the other three bills were referred to a Standing Committee on Labour. As per the recommendations of the Committee, the government replaced these bills with new ones in September 2020, and these were passed in the same month.
- The government, in 2020 passed three Bills (Labour codes) to amalgamate laws on social security, occupational safety and health and industrial relations.

#### **Criticisms:**

- Concerns are being raised that the Central government has actively excluded trade unions from pre-legislative consultations on drafting the new labour codes, repealing all existing labour laws and replacing them with four new labour codes.
- It is opined that they dilute workers' rights in favour of employers' rights, and together undermine the very idea of workers' right to association and collective action.

#### **Long History of Trade Unions:**

- Trade unions first emerged in the 19th century as self-managed organisations of workers in the face of extreme exploitation.
  - \* They provided, and continue to provide, a collective voice to working people against employers' exploitative, unfair and often illegal practices.
  - \* It is through trade unions that workers have been able to win better wages, fairer employment conditions, and safe and secure workplaces.
  - \* It also provided members (workers) and elected officers of a union a degree of immunity, including against the law on criminal conspiracy.
  - \* The law recognised that actions based on collective decisions by workers were legal and did not constitute a criminal conspiracy.
- In India, workers won the legal right to form trade unions under the colonial rule in 1926, when the Trade Union Act (TUA) was adopted.
  - \* The law provided a mechanism for the registration of trade unions, from which they derived their rights, and a framework governing their functioning.
  - \* The TUA also bound workers' actions within a legal framework by providing for deregistration if a trade union "contravened any provisions of the Act".
- The creation of the Industrial Relations Code (IRC), has a very sinister outcome for workers' right to association.

- \* The code widens the grounds under which a trade union may be deregistered.
- \* Under the TUA, deregistration was limited to the internal functioning of a union — in case a union violated the financial rules set down under the law or its own constitution.
- \* The Standing Orders Act and the Industrial Disputes Act had nothing to do with the internal functioning, and, therefore, with the existence of a trade union.

#### **Vague definitions:**

- Under the new IRC, a trade union can be deregistered for contravention of unspecified provisions of the code.
  - \* The possibility of deregistering a trade union in this unspecified manner shifts the balance completely in favour of employers, who continue to enjoy protection under the Companies Act.
  - \* This violates the principles of equality before the law and of natural justice.
- When a trade union is deregistered, it can no longer represent its members (the workers) before the dispute resolution machinery or in court and any collective decision taken by its members and elected officers can be treated as illegal.
- The new code would deter collective action by workers' unions.

#### **Extra-legal formations:**

- With the threat of deregistration ever-present, workers and their unions will be pushed to create extra-legal formations like 'struggle committees' and 'workers' fronts, that existed before the TUA, in order to advance their demands against unreasonable employers.
- This would have two outcomes:
  - \* It will push employment dispute resolution outside the legal framework.
  - \* It would lead to criminalising working-class dissent, since workers' agitations will have to take place through extra-legal formations.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Once a trade union is deregistered or is effectively silenced by a constant and amorphous threat of deregistration, workers effectively lose their fundamental right to freedom of association. This has grave implications for the working class's ability to defend its rights.



### *Effects of liberalization on the economy*

## **20. Shifting sands for Asian economies**

» Mains: Global value chains, impact of RCEP.

### **Context:**

- The Article argues that India could face an uphill task in maintaining its viability against highly competitive countries in the post-pandemic world.

### **Post-pandemic global economy:**

- Discussions on the near future of the global economy have often predicted that China's appeal as a business destination would fade, losing favour as the global manufacturing hub.
- Arguments have been made that production would be dispersed to Asia and even to those outside.
- It was expected that the relocation would benefit emerging labour-abundant economies.

However, while a few labour-intensive industries, such as textiles and apparel, have been moving to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as labour costs in China are increasing, trends in other industries show that businesses have mostly remained in China.

### **China's importance:**

- An expert points out that the combination of the trade war and the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in firms establishing relatively small-scale operations elsewhere. This is perceived as a buffer against being completely dependent on China, referred to as the 'China +1' strategy.
- There are three reasons for firms to remain in China and pursue this strategy:
  - \* Starting an enterprise and maintaining operations in China are much easier than elsewhere.
  - \* Chinese firms are nimble and fast (evident from the quick recovery of Chinese manufacturing after the lockdown).
  - \* Many global companies have spent decades building supply chains in China.
- Hence, getting out would mean moving the entire ecosystem, which involves time and expenditure. This strategy of global firms has led to an intensification of competition among Asian economies to be that 'plus one' in the emerging manufacturing landscape.

### **Growth in Asia:**

- In 1968, Swedish Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal published 'Asian Drama – An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations', (focusing on South and Southeast Asia).
- This was pessimistic about the development prospects in the region. Half a century later, there has been remarkable growth in the very region with openness and exploding trade.

- These newly industrialised economies scaled up their exports, while raising their own levels of living.

### **Predictions about the post-pandemic global economy:**

- The Asia region is expected to see remarkable growth with the formal launch of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
- Its growth would depend on the role of trade and investment flows into these economies, and this would again be the centrepiece of global growth.
  - \* The 15 RCEP member countries account for nearly 30% of the global GDP.
  - \* This largest free trade agreement in the world includes provisions to cover the entire gamut of trade and commerce.

### **Challenges facing India and way forward:**

- The RCEP and the 'China +1 strategy' are likely to impact investment flows into Vietnam, India, Bangladesh and Indonesia, which have emerged as key investment destinations.

### **Increasing public investments:**

- Private investments would continue to be depressed, due to the uncertainty on the future economic outlook. This calls for high-quality public investments.
  - \* Domestic public investments have a central role in economic activity, for both the demand and supply sides.
  - \* According to the IMF, "increasing public investment by 1% of GDP could boost GDP by 2.7%, private investment by 10%, and employment by 1.2%, if investments are of high quality and if existing public and private debt burdens do not weaken the response of the private sector."
  - \* It is an opportune time for India to bolster public investments as interest rates are low globally and savings are available.

### **Overhaul in trade policy:**

- There is a need for a major overhaul in India's trade policy. The challenge is to make the exporting activity more attractive for all firms in the economy.
- In the pre-COVID-19 era, world trade had been rattled by tendencies of rising economic nationalism and unilateralism leading to the return of protectionist policies.
- A revamped trade policy needs to take into cognizance the possibility of two effects of the RCEP: the 'Walmart effect' and a 'switching effect'.

- \* Walmart Effect would sustain demand for basic products and help in keeping employee productivity at an optimum level, but may also reduce wages and competition due to sourcing from multiple vendors at competitive rates.
- \* Switching effects would be an outcome of developed economies scouting for new sources to fulfil import demands, which requires firms to be nimble and competitive.
- Trade policy has to recognise the pitfalls of the present two-track mode, one for firms operating in the 'free trade enclaves' and another for the rest.
- A major fallout of this 'policy dualism' is the dampening of export diversification.

#### **Increasing women's participation in the workforce:**

- In India, three out of four Indian women are neither working nor seeking paid work.
- Globally, India ranks among the bottom ten countries in terms of women's workforce participation.
- While India's GDP has grown by around 6% to 7% per year on an average in recent years, educational levels of women have risen, and fertility rates have fallen, women's labour force participation rate has fallen from 42.7% in 2004–05 to 23.3% in 2017–18.
- India could gain hugely if barriers to women's participation in the workforce are removed.
- The manufacturing sector should consciously create labour-intensive jobs that rural and semi-urban women are qualified for.

#### **Conclusion:**

- The intensity of competition is evident from the fact that after India passed three labour code bills, the Indonesian Parliament passed legislation slashing regulations, to open up the country to more foreign investment, Bangladesh on its part plans to start negotiations with a dozen countries, including the U.S. and Canada, for signing preferential trade agreements.
- India's approach to the changed scenario needs to be well-calibrated.

#### **Indian Constitution**

### **21. Right to work**

- » Prelims: Article 21 and 41.
- » Mains: Employment guarantee programmes, labour codes.

#### **Background:**

- Given the large population in India, providing for adequate employment for all has always been a challenge in the Indian scenario. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have further

deteriorated the employment situation in India. The unemployment rate has been soaring.

#### **Right to Work:**

- The right to work is the concept that people have a human right to work, or engage in productive employment, and may not be prevented from doing so.

#### **Broader understanding of the right to work:**

- Often 'right to work' is interpreted as the right to employment guarantee. This, however, is a narrow interpretation of the right to work. Ensuring the right to work in the broader sense entails creating employment opportunities which can ensure gainful employment and a dignified living for the worker. This dignity is supposed to come from work conditions, such as being paid a fair wage and having regulated work hours which constitute the equally important right 'in work' principle. Apart from mere employment guarantee, such work should be fulfilling, work should be creative.
- From a philosophical perspective, the demand for the right to work should also involve aspects such as the right to leisure given that work is but just a part of life. The right to work is often criticized by some as being too narrow an interpretation of the right to a life with dignity. If a person is guaranteed a good eight hours of work, then automatically he/she is guaranteed right to leisure to enjoy one's life.

#### **Legal status of the right to work:**

##### **International status:**

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the right to work in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They recognise the right to work in an employment of one's choice and the State's responsibility to safeguard this right.
- India has acceded to both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

##### **Status in India:**

##### **Constitutional status:**

- The Indian Constitution does not explicitly recognise the 'right to work' as a fundamental right. It is placed in Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy) of the Constitution under Article 41, which hence makes it unenforceable in the court of law.
- \* Article 41 of the Constitution provides that "the State shall within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of deserved want."

***Judicial interpretation:***

- Despite the absence of an express wording of the 'right to work' in Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Constitution, it became a 'fundamental right' through a judicial interpretation. The wider interpretation of Article 21 made by the Hon'ble Supreme Court through its judgement in *Olga Tellis & Ors. v Bombay Municipal Corporation & Ors.* 'right to work' was recognised as a fundamental right inherent in the 'right to life'.

***MGNREGA:***

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), aims to guarantee the 'right to work' in a limited fashion. It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Notably, under MGNREGA, a person can hold the state accountable for not fulfilling the right by demanding an unemployment allowance.
- However, it has to be noted that MGNREGA only ensures the right to work as a statutory right, which can be amended or withdrawn as per the government's whims and fancies.

***Arguments in favor of Right to Work:*****To meet basic needs:**

- The 'right to work' is an essential element of life to be able to live. To enable the fulfilment of the basic need for food, water, clothing and shelter and also something more than just the basic requirements of life, one must work to earn.

***Creation of public infrastructure:***

- The right to work can help fill the gap created by the profound lack of public goods and assets, in India.
- The state's responsibility to provide basic public goods can be combined with an employment creation programme just like MGNREGA does in rural areas.
  - \* Three States — Odisha, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh — have launched an urban employment guarantee programme in the wake of COVID-19, focusing on the creation of public infrastructure.

***Countering side effects of a market economy:***

- Most countries have embraced the market economy where demand and supply are the major factors influencing economic decisions. In such a scenario even labour is subject to the laws of the market.
- In a capitalist economy where welfare and employment are not a guaranteed by-product of private economic activity, the state has an inherent responsibility to ensure the right to work for all.

***Inequitable growth:***

- Though the liberalization of the Indian economy has helped India record impressive growth numbers, the growth has been largely inequitable.
- Only economic growth with adequate employment opportunities for all can ensure equitable growth. Only this can result in economic development which is a more comprehensive measure of progress than mere economic growth.
- Also, this makes economic sense because only equitable growth can ensure adequate disposable income in the hands of the larger population which in turn will drive demand in the economy and economic growth. This can lead to a more sustainable economic growth model.

***Profit motive:***

- Profit considerations alone may require the industries to go in for the adoption of capital-intensive methods of production. However, this approach may not be suitable for a country like India which is essentially a labour surplus economy. Increasing automation in a country like India is likely to lead to jobless growth.

***Weak bargaining power of labour:***

- India being a labour surplus economy, in the capital-labour bargaining process, labour is structurally weak in India. This necessitates State's regulation and the need for the State to provide support to labour. This necessitates the state's active role in ensuring the right 'in work' to ensure the right 'to work'.
  - \* The recent amalgamation of 44 labour laws into four labour codes has been criticized by labour organisations as a dilution of workers' rights. This dilution of rights 'in work', would have an impact on the right 'to work'. In this sense, the dilution of worker rights in India is a cause of concern.
- An employment guarantee programme from the government can help significantly reduce the surplus labour, particularly in the casual market and could automatically create favourable conditions for better treatment of workers.
- An effective employment guarantee programme can be an excellent solution to the structural weakness of labour.

***Economic scenario in India:***

- India has been seeing a declining jobs-to-GDP ratio, and mostly jobless growth.
- The path of economic development has not only failed to create adequate new employment opportunities, but has also led to displacement and dispossession of people from their means of livelihood. This necessitates the need to envision

the right to work in a creative way and make it legally enforceable.

- Current circumstances necessitate the need for greater focus on the principle of the right to work.

#### **Way forward:**

- Some of the possible policy approaches to the right to work would involve the following measures:

#### **Urban employment programme:**

- Together with MGNREGA, an Urban Employment Guarantee scheme can help ensure the right to work.
- One approach is Decentralised Urban Employment and Training, or DUET. For DUET, urban local bodies can issue job vouchers to certified public institutions such as schools and universities for pre-approved tasks. These institutions can only use the vouchers to hire labour for pre-defined tasks.

#### **Government jobs:**

- There are a considerable number of vacant posts in government jobs. These are posts that are sanctioned but not yet filled. This needs to be filled in a time-bound manner.
- Also, there has been a massive decline in government sector job growth from 1.3 million per annum from 2005 to 2012 to only 0.4 million per annum from 2012 to 2018. The government should consider increasing the availability of government jobs. The focus will have to be the health and education sectors apart from the police and the judiciary which too have few government staff. These are sectors where the new government can expand government jobs. Many of these are essential services — teachers, nurses, ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, doctors, etc. So, not only will it create employment, but it will also hopefully fill the void in essential public services.

#### **Increasing public expenditure:**

- India should consider increasing its public expenditure on public goods.
- The labour-intensive universal basic healthcare system of Thailand is a model that could be adopted in the Indian scenario as it would solve two problems at the same time: it builds social infrastructure, and creates jobs.

#### **Encouraging private sector and self-employment:**

- Given the constraints in state capacity, it may not be feasible to adopt an approach where the state is the major employer. Apart from government employment opportunities, there should also be room for private job opportunities.
- \* Only about 7% of the total employment is created in the government, including the public sector undertakings (NSS, 2017-18). Of the total 465 million jobs in India, only

34 million are created in the government sector. Hence, private sector employment through appropriate government policy is crucial.

- This could involve incentivizing domestic investments through supportive measures and the provision of adequate infrastructure.
- The state could also encourage entrepreneurship and self-employment by providing quality skill training and appropriate credit support.

#### **Safeguarding right 'in work':**

- Apart from generating enough employment opportunities, the state is also supposed to safeguard people's employment through appropriate interventions and supportive measures.
- The existing labour codes are applicable only to a minuscule proportion of the labour force. For the rest, there is very little legal protection, very poor awareness of the protections that exist, and weak implementation. The state should take appropriate measures to overcome these shortcomings.

#### **Employing suitable growth strategies:**

- Each economy is unique given the underlying factors at play and any economic policy should consider this uniqueness. This necessitates a comprehensive deliberation of the growth strategy to be employed in India.
- \* Given the labour surplus status of India, labor-intensive sectors should be adequately supported along with the capital intensive sectors. This requires some political will and provisioning of adequate fiscal resources.
- \* The state should focus on generating enough non-agricultural employment opportunities to absorb the labour exiting the agricultural sector.
- \* As per the 2015-16 NSS survey, more than 99% of Indian enterprises are micro-enterprises (based on both investment and employment criteria). With appropriate support, these enterprises can grow into small and then medium enterprises.

### **Mobilization of resources.**

#### **22. Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB)**

- » Prelims: Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC),
- » Mains: NPAs, Bank run.

#### **Context:**

- After the failures of IL&FS, Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative Bank and DHFL, and the bailout of Yes Bank, Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) has been



in the headlines due to their bad loans fiasco, management reshuffling and the consequent controversies with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

### **Why is Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) in trouble?**

It is a Chennai-based Bank, which has a network of 563 branches and deposits of Rs 20,973 crore.

- It has undergone a steady decline with the bank incurring continuous losses over the last three years, eroding its net worth.
  - \* The central bank also mentioned LVB's inability to come up with a plan to counter its negative net-worth and continuing losses.
- It has also experienced serious governance issues and practices in the recent years which have led to deterioration in its performance
  - \* Shareholders were not too happy with the management because of wealth destruction and losses on the books.
  - \* They recently ousted the bank's seven directors, including RBI-appointed MD and CEO.
- In absence of any viable strategic plan, declining advances and mounting Non-Performing Assets (NPAs), the losses are expected to continue.
  - \* Almost one fourth of the bank's advances have turned bad assets.
- As bank-led and market-led revival efforts are a preferred option over a regulatory resolution, the RBI had made all possible efforts to facilitate such a process, and gave enough opportunities to the bank's management to draw up a credible revival plan, or an amalgamation scheme, which did not materialise. In the meantime, the bank was facing regular outflow of liquidity
- After taking into consideration these developments, the RBI has come to the conclusion that in the absence of a credible revival plan, with a view to protect depositors' interest and in the interest of financial and banking stability, there is no alternative but to apply to the Central Government for imposing a moratorium under section 45 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

### **Steps taken by RBI**

- Accordingly, after considering the Reserve Bank's request, the central government imposed a moratorium for 30 days.
- It has superseded its board of directors and announced a draft scheme for the amalgamation of the bank with DBS Bank India, a subsidiary of DBS of Singapore, in the wake of "serious deterioration in the financial position of the bank".

### **What is a moratorium?**

- The RBI, the regulatory body overseeing the country's financial system, has the power to ask the government to have a moratorium placed on a bank's operations for a specified period of time. Under such a moratorium, depositors will not be able to withdraw funds at will.
- Usually, there is a ceiling that limits the amount of money that can be withdrawn by the bank's customers.
- In most cases, the regulator allows for funds of a larger quantum to be withdrawn in case of an urgent requirement, such as medical emergencies, but only after the depositor provides the required proof.
- Often, the moratorium is lifted even before the originally stipulated deadline is reached.

### **When does it come into play?**

- Usually, the RBI steps in if it judges that a bank's net worth is fast eroding and it may reach a state where it may not be able to repay its depositors.

### **How does a moratorium prevent a 'run' on the bank?**

- A moratorium primarily helps prevent what is known as a 'run' on a bank, by clamping down on rapid outflow of funds by wary depositors, who seek to take their money out in fear of the bank's imminent collapse.
- A moratorium gives both the regulator and the acquirer time to first take stock of the actual financial situation at the troubled bank.
- It allows for a realistic estimation of assets and liabilities, and for the regulator to facilitate capital infusion, should it find that necessary.

### **Are depositors and the financial system safe?**

- The RBI, which put a cap of Rs 25,000 on withdrawals, assured depositors of the bank that their interest will be protected.
- One safety net for small depositors is the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), an RBI subsidiary, which gives insurance cover on up to Rs 5 lakh deposits in banks.

### **Which banks are insured by the DICGC?**

- All commercial banks that include branches of foreign banks in India, local area banks as well as regional rural banks are insured by the DICGC.
- All State, Central and Primary cooperative banks, or in other words, at present all co-operative banks are covered by the DICGC.

### **Significance**

- The merger will provide stability and better prospects to Lakshmi Vilas Bank's depositors, customers and employees following a period of uncertainty



- A key objective of a moratorium is to protect the interests of depositors.
- Even if they are temporarily handicapped by facing restricted access to their funds, there is a high probability that the bank would soon return to normal functioning once a bailout is arranged.

### **Concerns**

- Overall banking sector health, however, remains a significant concern notwithstanding the rescue effort.
- Gita Gopinath, the IMF's chief economist, flagged the wide-ranging damage the COVID-19 pandemic had inflicted on the global economy more stress on corporate balance sheets and governments burdened with large debt.

### **Crisis in the banking**

- The collapse of IL&FS in 2018 had set off a chain reaction in the financial sector, leading to liquidity issues and defaults.
- Punjab & Maharashtra Co-op Bank was hit by a loan scam involving HDIL promoters and the bank is yet to be bailed out.
- The near-death experience of Yes Bank in March 2020 sent jitters among depositors

### **What are the issues facing old-generation private banks?**

- The functioning of many such banks has been under scrutiny in the last couple of years, as most of them do not have strong promoters, making them targets for mergers or forced amalgamation.
  - \* Two other South-based banks – South Indian Bank and Federal Bank – have been operating as board-driven banks without a promoter.
  - \* In Karur Vysya Bank, the promoter stake is 2.11%, and in Karnataka Bank, there's no promoter.

### **Will loan stress caused by the pandemic impact the banking system?**

- NPAs in the banking sector are expected to increase as the pandemic affects cash flows of people and companies.
- However, the impact will differ depending upon the sector, as segments like pharmaceuticals and IT seem to have benefited in terms of revenues.
- NPA accretion in cash-rich sectors like IT, pharmaceuticals, FMCG, chemicals, automobiles is expected to be smaller when compared to areas like hospitality, tourism, aviation and other services.

### **Way forward**

- RBI needs to review its broader framework of dealing with weak lenders.

- For all its liquidity bolstering measures, the RBI now faces the prospect of having to maintain a heightened vigil over scheduled commercial banks, as well as non-banking financial companies and mortgage lenders, given the threat of contagion from a failure here.
- The RBI has its task cut out in ensuring it keeps the crucial engine of credit ticking over as the economy strives to revive.

## **Indian Economy**

### **23. Corporate houses in Indian banking**

- » Prelims: Indian Banking.
- » Mains: Nationalization of banks, corporate ownership of banks and its impact on the economy.

#### **Context:**

- Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan and ex-deputy governor Viral Acharya's comments on the recent recommendations by RBI working group to allow corporate houses to set up banks.

#### **Background:**

- Since the nationalization of 14 large private banks in 1969, the RBI has not given licenses to large corporate and industrial houses for setting up banks.
- At present, there are 12 old and nine new private banks (established in the post-1991 period) with the majority of ownership held by individuals and financial entities.

### **Internal committee of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**

- Headed by Prasanna Kumar Mohanty, the RBI had constituted a five-member Internal Working Group (IWG) to examine existing licensing and regulatory guidelines related to private sector banks within a larger context of meeting the credit demands of a growing economy
  - \* fostering greater competition in the domestic banking sector through the entry of new private players;
  - \* Scaling up the presence of India's banks in the world rankings.

#### **Recommendation**

- It had proposed an overhaul of the licensing policy for private banks.
- It suggested allowing large corporate and industrial houses to float banks in India after suitable amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, which should be aimed at preventing the concentration of risks and unabated lending among group companies.

- The other significant proposal is to allow large Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) with asset size of Rs 50,000 crore and above (including those within the fold of corporate houses), and with a decade's track record, to convert to banks.
- Reserve Bank may take steps to ensure harmonisation and uniformity in different licensing guidelines, to the extent possible.
  - \* Whenever new licensing guidelines are issued, if new rules are more relaxed, benefit should be given to existing banks, and if new rules are tougher, legacy banks should also conform to new tighter regulations, but a non-disruptive transition path may be provided to affected banks.
- For Payments Banks intending to convert to a Small Finance Bank, track record of 3 years of experience as Payments Bank may be considered as sufficient.
- The minimum initial capital requirement for licensing new banks should be enhanced from ₹500 crore to ₹1000 crore for universal banks, and from ₹200 crore to ₹300 crore for small finance banks.

## Criticism

### 1. Joint write-up by Raghuram Rajan and Viral Acharya

- In an article, the former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan and ex-deputy governor Viral Acharya have opined that the RBI working group's proposal to allow corporate houses to set up banks is a bombshell at this juncture and that it is more important to stick to the tried and tested limits on the involvement of business houses in the banking sector.
- For years, the question of allowing corporates to float banks has been a contentious issue with the banking laws barring it.
- The approach of the RBI regarding ownership of banks by large corporate/industrial houses has, by and large, been a cautious one in view of serious risks, governance concerns and conflicts of interest that could arise when banks are owned and controlled by large corporate and industrial houses.
- Rajan and Acharya have raised questions over how the banks by corporate houses could make good loans when it is owned by the borrowers themselves.

- They noted that the rationales for not allowing industrial houses into banking are two:
  - \* Industrial houses need financing, and they can get it easily, with no questions asked, if they have an in-house bank.
  - \* It will further exacerbate the concentration of economic (and political) power in certain business houses.

### 2. India's experience with corporate-owned banks

- Surprisingly, the IWG report does not examine India's past experience with corporate-owned private banks for over two decades after independence.
- Before the nationalisation of banks in 1969, India's banking system was in the hands of the private sector. Most of the privately-owned banks were in the form of joint-stock companies controlled by big industrial houses.
- In those times, connected lending practices were rampant in private banks. As promoters of private banks, corporate and industrial houses used to channel large sums of low-cost depositors' money into their group companies.
  - \* Connected Lending is a system where the owner of the bank gives their company or companies or connected parties (his friends and families) loans at lesser rates of interest
- With many private banks pursuing imprudent lending, bank failures ballooned. During 1947-58, for instance, 361 banks of varying sizes failed in India. The failed banks were amalgamated or ceased to exist.

### 3. RBI has maintained a cautious approach towards corporate ownership of banks.

- Apart from the inherent conflict of interest, the poor quality of corporate governance practices is another key reason why the RBI has not issued banking licenses to corporate houses.
- The pervasive use of front and shell companies makes it difficult to identify the actual owner of businesses.
- Opaque onshore and offshore ownership structures can easily circumvent any regulatory measures put in place by the RBI to curb connected lending within a corporate conglomerate.

### 4. 'Circular banking'

- It is another potential risk posed by corporate-owned banks because of the widespread prevalence of cartels in corporate India.
- Under circular banking, a corporate-owned bank A would finance the projects of corporate-owned bank B, B would finance the projects of corporate-owned bank C, and C would finance the projects of A, hence completing the cycle.

5. Corporate ownership of banks would further concentrate economic power in the hands of a few corporate and industrial houses

- Increased economic concentration would have adverse effects on the domestic economy and politics. It would not only widen inequalities but would also lead to policy capture where special interests would shape public policies.

### Conclusion

- There is no robust evidence to support the entry of large corporate and industrial houses into the Indian banking sector.
- The potential benefits do not outweigh the potential risks inherent in corporate ownership of banks. It is an idea whose time has not yet come

### Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements

#### **24. India's no to RCEP could still be a no**

- » Prelims: RCEP countries
- » Mains: Utility of mega trade agreements, rules of origin issue, India's decision not to join.

### Context:

- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)— a mega trade bloc comprising 15 countries led by China, has come into existence.
- It is expected to represent at least 30% of the global GDP and will emerge as the largest free trade agreement in the world.
- India had ended negotiations on the RCEP in November 2019 over terms that were perceived to be against its interests.

### The objectives:

- The initiative to establish RCEP was taken by the member-states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2011.
- These countries had adopted a resolution to establish an ASEAN-led process by setting out principles that would allow ASEAN members to engage interested ASEAN FTA partners in establishing a regional comprehensive economic partnership agreement.
- The "Guiding Principles and Objectives" spoke of progressively eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers on substantially all trade in goods and achieving a high level of tariff liberalization, through building upon the existing liberalization levels between RCEP participating countries and through tariff elimination on a high percentage of both tariff lines and trade value.

- RCEP negotiations were based on a framework for investment to cover the four pillars of promotion, protection, facilitation and liberalization.

### Re-engaging India:

- In the months following India's disengagement from RCEP negotiations, several members had expressed their strong desire to get India re-engaged.
- The door has been left open to India to join the RCEP Agreement as an original signatory.
  - \* India would have to write expressing intention to join the organisation to restart negotiations for membership.
- Further, India has been invited to participate in RCEP meetings as an observer and in economic cooperation activities undertaken by RCEP members.

### Have the circumstances under which India had distanced itself from the RCEP negotiations become any better for it to join the agreement in the near future?

- During the RCEP negotiations, India had raised a number of concerns, two of which, namely, the levels of market access it was expected to provide, especially the deep cuts in tariffs on imports from China, and provisions relating to the investment chapter, have become even more significant over the past months.
  - \* Since the border clashes, India has imposed a number of import restrictions on Chinese products.
  - \* India has also subjected investment flows from its northern neighbour to greater scrutiny.
  - \* Both these measures would have been pointless if India were a party to the RCEP.
- India's initiative for its economic turnaround, the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, is primarily focused on strengthening domestic value chains, while RCEP, like any other FTA, is solely focused on promoting regional value chains.

The circumstances under which New Delhi had distanced itself from the RCEP negotiations have hardly improved. Therefore, the answer seems to be unambiguously in the negative.

### Why did India stay out of the RCEP deal?

India's concerns:

- India had registered a bilateral trade deficit with 11 of 15 RCEP participating countries in 2018-19. There was every reason to believe that these deficits would increase if India joined the RCEP. The trade deficit with China has burgeoned from about \$4 billion in 2005-06 to nearly \$50 billion today, even without a trade agreement.

- One major observation from India's experience of prior preferential trade agreements with East Asian countries has been the large rise in manufactured goods imports, which displaces many vulnerable domestic producers further worsening the unemployment situation. This had led to fears of de-industrialisation in some sectors.
- Other sectors of the economy would have also suffered. The farmer's interests specifically the dairy sector and plantation sectors could have been hit due to the dumping of the cheaper products from other members.



#### Counter-arguments:

##### **Root cause for trade deficits:**

- While deficits have increased for India in all foreign trade, India's FTAs or PTAs (Preferential Trade Agreements) do not account for a bigger chunk of the trade deficit than they did before.
- The growing trade deficits can be mainly attributed to the downturn in India's GDP since 2016, and the decline in manufacturing. The lack of goods like machinery, bulk drugs, chemicals in sufficient amounts or at competitive prices may be the factor for increasing imports from China.

##### **Impact of the pandemic:**

- The COVID-19 pandemic has left the global economy in a state of disarray. The economic recession and trend worldwide against globalisation has led to a growing call for smaller trading coalitions outside of the World Trade Organization.
- Another incentive to join RCEP would be the fact that as the world's second largest economy and one of the only ones to show GDP growth this year, China offers potential investment to RCEP countries.

##### **Several RCEP countries still hope India will reconsider its decision of staying out.**

- The RCEP has left a special window open for India to rejoin at a future date.

##### **Measures taken to incentivize India into joining RCEP:**

- The special statement on India drafted under the leadership of Japan, proposes waiving the 18-month mandatory waiting period if India applied formally to rejoin the group.
- India's concerns over guidelines on rules of origin, find clear mention and an entire chapter devoted to it in the final RCEP text of 20 chapters.
- There is also a chapter on allowing trade in services particularly financial, telecommunications and professional services, which was another key demand by India during the negotiations.

##### **Significance of India to RCEP:**

- For Japan and Australia, the large size of the Indian economy and its negotiating heft would pose a valuable counterpoint to China within the grouping.
- For ASEAN countries that led the RCEP negotiations, India's presence would provide weight to the centrality of the ASEAN grouping in the region.
- For China, too, having India within the RCEP tent would not just open up India's market access for its goods, but would also provide one more forum on which to cooperate that does not include its biggest rival the United States (U.S.).

**Conclusion:**

- Despite repeated invitations India has skipped every meeting of the RCEP grouping and has reiterated that there would be no rethinking on the decision to stay out of the RCEP.
- There is the need to wait and watch if India will accept the invitation from RCEP countries to be an "observer" at their meetings.



# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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## International Relations

### 1. Bhutan establishes formal ties with Germany

» Mains: India-Bhutan relations.

#### What's in News?

Bhutan announced that it had established diplomatic relations with Germany.

- The ties with Germany mark the first new diplomatic agreement made by Bhutan since March 2013, when it had established ties with Oman.
- This has increased the restricted number of capitals that it has formal ties with to 53 states and the EU.
- In 1949 Bhutan first signed a friendship agreement with India, which kept the two countries closely engaged on all foreign policy issues.
- Since then, Bhutan has been historically cautious about establishing ties with other countries.
- Until 2007, when Bhutan conducted its first election, it had formal relations with just 22 countries, mostly donor countries such as Japan, Australia and several Nordic countries.
- It also made a firm decision not to open ties with any of the permanent five members of the UN Security Council, despite many requests from them and in particular from the U.S. and China.

#### Note:

- After the election of Prime Minister Jigme Thinley in 2008, the Bhutanese government rapidly increased its diplomatic forays.
- It signed agreements with 31 countries in five years, possibly with a view to winning the election for a non-permanent seat at the UNSC in 2013-14, which it eventually lost.

## International Relations

### 2. 'Canadian leaders' comments on protests are illinformed'

» Mains: India-Canada relations, farm acts.

#### Context:

- Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was the first international leader to comment on the farmers' protest taking place in India.
  - \* He said that the farmers situation in India is concerning.

\* Canada always stood for peaceful protests and would continue to "defend" the rights of peaceful protestors in India.

#### India's Response

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) hit back at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and some Canadian leaders over their remarks on the ongoing farmers' protest at Delhi's border areas, saying they were "ill-informed" and "unwarranted". Such comments are unwarranted, especially when pertaining to the internal affairs of a democratic country.

#### Double standards of Canada

- Canada, which had once opposed India's farm subsidies at the World Trade Organization (WTO), has backed Indian farmers' protests on Minimum Support Price (MSP).
  - \* Canada had challenged India at WTO meetings when it sought to defend its agricultural programmes like the minimum support price (MSP) for staple crops such as rice, wheat and pulses.
- Canada, along with the US, Japan and the European Union had questioned India on exceeding the permitted limits on food subsidies
- From 2015-18, attempts were made by Canada and other developed nations to also question India's food stocks programme.
- Canada has repeatedly questioned India's farm policies.

## India and its neighborhood-relations.

### 3. Chinese dam projects on Brahmaputra

- » Prelims: Indian states through which the river flows through, the tributaries of the river.
- » Mains: Need for water sharing agreement.

#### Context:

- China's dam constructions on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet.

#### About the Brahmaputra

- The 2,880 km-long Brahmaputra is a perennial river which originates in Tibet, where it is known as Yarlung Tsangpo.
- It flows eastwards through southern Tibet for a distance of 1,625 kilometers and at its easternmost point, it swings around to make a spectacular U-turn at the Shuomatan Point or Great Bend before it enters India's easternmost

state, Arunachal Pradesh. Here it is known as the Siang River.

#### **Issues faced by inhabitants along the river**

- People living near the Brahmaputra region have to deal with two floods annually:
  - \* One caused by the melting of the Himalayan snow in summer.
  - \* The other due to the monsoon flows.
- Climate change has further intensified the frequency of floods in this region which has posed a major threat to lower riparian countries like India and Bangladesh, which is impacting their food security.
- The river is in itself dynamic as frequent landslides and geological activity force it to change course very often.

#### **Why is China constructing more dams on the Chinese side?**

- China is growing economically and demographically, which is resulting in increased water consumption.
- China, which is home to close to 20 per cent of the world's population, has only 7 per cent of its water resources.
- Rapid industrialization has polluted the surface and the groundwater.
- China's northern part is water-stressed and its southern part is water-rich. The southern region is a major food producer and has a significant industrial capacity as a consequence of more people living there.
- China has an ambitious plan to link its south and north through canals, aqueducts and linking of major rivers to ensure water security. In pursuit of these goals, China, being an upper riparian state in Asia, has been blocking rivers like the Mekong and its tributaries.

#### **Impact**

- It is affecting Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Dam construction has resulted in widely fluctuating river flow, threatening fish productivity, which is key to the region's people and economy.
- It has caused immense damage to the environment.

#### **Why India is worried?**

##### **Water scarcity in India**

- India is severely water-stressed as well.
- In summer, a vast majority of urban areas face water shortages. Similar to China, India has 17 per cent of the world's population and 4 per cent of water.

- While a majority of India's population reside in the Gangetic plains, the southern and western regions experience harsh and dry summer and the rainfall is scarce and erratic in the eastern coast.
- As in China, an equally ambitious north-south river-linking project has been proposed in India, though it has come under criticism for potentially disturbing fragile ecosystems.

#### **Concerns**

- First, they will eventually lead to degradation of the entire basin: Massive amounts of silt carried by the river would get blocked by dams leading to a fall in the quality of soil and eventual reduction in agricultural productivity.
- Second, the location of the dams in the Himalayas poses a risk. Seismologists consider the Himalayas as most vulnerable to earthquakes and seismic activity.
  - \* Landslides resulting from earthquakes pose a significant threat — the 2015 Nepal earthquake and the resultant landslides wiped out several dams and other facilities.
  - \* The sheer size of the infrastructure projects undertaken by China, and increasingly by India, poses a significant threat to the populations living downstream.
  - \* Close to a million people live in the Brahmaputra basin in India and tens of millions further downstream in Bangladesh. The projects in the Himalayas threaten the existence of hundreds of thousands of people.
- Third, for the Chinese, water is a key weapon in their expansionist designs. China believes dam building on the Brahmaputra helps it assert a claim over Arunachal Pradesh.
- Fourth, dams, canals, irrigation systems can turn water into a political weapon to be wielded in war, or during peace to signal annoyance with a co-riparian state.
  - \* Many feel low lying areas in India will be completely inundated if China suddenly releases all this stored up water.

#### **Way forward**

- Both sides must cease new constructions on the river and commit to potentially less destructive solutions.
- Building a decentralised network of check dams, rain-capturing lakes and using traditional means of water capture have shown effective results in restoring the ecological balance while supporting the populations of the regions in a sustainable manner.

## *International Relations*

### 4. Ethiopia political Crisis

» Prelims: Mapping.

#### Context:

- Recently, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared war on the country's Tigray region, which is ruled by the powerful Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).
- It was in response to its attack on a federal military base in Tigray.

#### Tigray People's Liberation Front

- The militia-turned-party – TPLF had played a dominant role in the country's ruling coalition – the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.
  - \* It was part of the coalition that brought an end to the military dictatorship in 1991.
- After Mr. Abiy came to power, he concentrated more power in the hands of the government and alienated the TPLF.
- Rising tensions led to the recent outburst, with the attack on the base.

#### Details:

- The Tigrayans, who make up roughly 6% of Ethiopia's 110 million people, have traditionally enjoyed outsized influence in the government whereas the Oromos, the largest ethnic group, have complained of marginalisation.
- Abiy (an Oromo) has said his mandate is to place Ethiopia's interests over the regions and correct the uneven distribution of power.
- The conflict between Tigray authorities and the federal government can be traced to when Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018.

#### Concerns:

- Abiy's actions often produced unintended consequences.
- In the Oromo region, his critics complain that he is trying to grab more powers for the federal government, while the Tigrayans accuse him of taking away their rights.
- Now, with his decision to bomb Tigray, he has declared war on his people at a time when ethnic tensions are running high.

#### What impact will this have on the Horn of Africa?

- If the conflict between the Ethiopian federal government and Tigray authorities exacerbates, it will spill over to neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa.
- Eritrea may be hardest hit, due to its proximity to Tigray.

- If the violence and conflict spill outside Ethiopia's borders, it may potentially destabilize the Horn of Africa region where the US and China have several strategic military bases – the closest being Djibouti.

\* If these military bases were to be impacted by the disturbances in any way, it may cause foreign powers to get militarily involved in the region and the conflict.

#### Way forward:

- The stability of Ethiopia is important for the entire Horn of Africa region.
- Measures must be taken for immediate de-escalation of tensions and a peaceful resolution to the dispute.
- Instead of bombing his own country, Mr. Abiy should reach out to regional political leadership, especially the TPLF, find common ground, and run the country peacefully by restoring the balance between ethnicities and regions and decentralising the federal government.

## *International Relations*

### 5. Five Eyes (FVEY)

» Mains: China-Hong Kong protests

- It is an intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States
- The origins of the FVEY can be traced back to the post-World War II period, when the Atlantic Charter was issued by the Allies to lay out their goals for a post-war world.

#### Context:

- China has rejected the attack on its Hong Kong policy by the U.S. and several of its allies, saying they "should face up to the reality" that the former British colony has been returned to China.

#### Details

- The Five Eyes had accused China of violating international commitments by ousting pro-democracy lawmakers from Hong Kong's legislature.
- Hong Kong, a city of 7.5 million people, was promised autonomy over local affairs for 50 years after its return to China in 1997.
- China's parliament body issued a decree that local authorities could expel any politician who was being seen a national security threat without getting court orders.

### *Important International Institutions, agencies and fora-their structure, mandate.*

#### **6. G20 Leaders' Summit**

- » Prelims: G20 grouping and its members.
- » Mains: The outcome of the summit.

The 15th G20 Leaders' Summit was held virtually in November 2020. The summit was hosted by Saudi Arabia. It was a virtual event owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- G20 Summits are held every year and they hold tremendous importance for international affairs owing to its membership which spans the major economies of the world.
- The yearly summit of the G20 has been happening since 2008 and is attended by the heads of government/state of the member nations.
- Throughout the year, other than the summit, events, sherpa meetings, ministerial meetings, working groups, etc. are organised.

#### **About the G20**

G20 is an international grouping that comprises the major economies of the world. Its members account for more than 80% of world GDP, 75% of global trade and 60% of the population of the planet. The forum is an active space for countries to discuss financial and socioeconomic issues and concerns.

#### **G20 Members:**

Argentina	Australia	Brazil	Canada
China	France	Germany	Japan
India	Indonesia	Italy	Mexico
Russia	South Africa	South Korea	Turkey
UK	USA	European Union	

- Spain is a permanent guest invitee.
- In every Summit, guest countries and organisations are also invited giving the forum a broader representation.

The G20 does not have a permanent secretariat. Its activities & agenda are established by the rotating Presidencies, in cooperation with the membership. A "Troika", represented by the country that holds the Presidency, its predecessor and its successor, works to ensure continuity within the G20.

#### **G20 Summit 2020**

- The 2020 Summit hosted by Saudi Arabia had the following theme: "Realizing Opportunities of the 21st Century for All".

- The three aims of the Summit were:
  - \* Empowering People by creating the conditions in which all people – especially women and youth – can live, work and thrive.
  - \* Safeguarding the Planet: by fostering collective efforts to protect our global commons.
  - \* Shaping New Frontiers: by adopting long-term and bold strategies to share the benefits of innovation and technological advancement.
- At the end of the Summit, the presidency of G20 2021 was passed on to Italy. India will have its turn at the presidency in 2023. Thus, India will enter the G20 Troika in January 2021.
  - \* Originally, India was supposed to host the summit in 2021 and Italy in 2022. However, after mutual consultations and considerations, the presidency was swapped.
- The summit concluded with a goal to create a free, fair, predictable, and stable trade and investment environment.
- The leaders also committed to ensuring that global transportation routes and supply chains remain open, safe, and secure to ensure economic recovery following the adverse impact of COVID-19.
- The grouping announced that the top 20 economies have mobilized resources to address the immediate financing needs in global health to support the research, development, manufacturing, and distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccine.
- The grouping reinforced its support to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and also supported the Anti-Money Laundering (AML)/Counter-Terrorist Financing (CFT) policy responses of the FATF, especially in response to India's call for effectively controlling terror finances globally.
- Other areas the leaders reiterated support include fighting corruption, cooperation for a globally fair, sustainable, and modern international tax system

#### **India and G20 Summit 2020**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his speech, talked about the importance of effective global governance and reformed multilateralism through improvement in character, governance and processes of multilateral institutions for a sustainable recovery in the post-COVID phase.



- Talking about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, Mr Modi mentioned India's 'Reform-Perform-Transform' strategy to move forward.
- He also talked about India's adoption of the Self-Reliant India (Atma Nirbhar Bharat) approach in the changed situation after COVID-19. At a global level, India also took the initiative of establishing institutions such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.
- Talking about climate change, the Prime Minister talked about how India would be exceeding the Paris Agreement targets.

### **Saudi Arabia Banknote Controversy**

To mark Saudi Arabia's presidency of the G20, the Kingdom had released 20 Riyal banknotes. However, the banknotes depicted a global map which showed the whole of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh as a separate entity and not as part of India.

- The Ministry of External Affairs took up the issue of misrepresentation of the Indian map with Saudi Arabia.
- India has termed it an incorrect depiction of India's external territorial boundaries.
- Reiterating that both Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh are integral parts of India, the MEA conveyed its serious concerns to the Saudi Ambassador and also the Saudi government in Riyadh.
- After this, Saudi Arabia withdrew the controversial banknotes.
- The banknotes were released before the summit and the incorrect portrayal would have flared up into a diplomatic issue had the map not been withdrawn in which case, it would have been untenable for India to participate in the summit.

### **International Relations**

#### **7. India, Vietnam hold bilateral discussions**

- » Prelims: South China Sea mapping
- » Mains: India-Vietnam bilateral relations, Vietnam-China tensions in the South China Sea.

#### **Context:**

- India and Vietnam signed an agreement for cooperation in the field of hydrography to enable sharing of data and assist in production of navigational charts by both countries

#### **What is Hydrography?**

- It deals with the measurement and description of the physical features of oceans and seas.
- It will help in the prediction of change over time, for the primary purpose of safety of navigation

and in support of all other marine activities, including economic development (resource exploitation - fishing, minerals), security and defence, scientific research, and environmental protection.

#### **Hydrographers**

- Measure water depth, and search for shoals, rocks, & wrecks that could be hazards to navigation. They also collect information on:
  - \* Water level & tides
  - \* Currents
  - \* Temperature
  - \* Salinity

#### **Brahmos**

- Vietnam is said to be interested in buying the Brahmos supersonic cruise missile --- a joint venture between India and Russia --- to shore up its defences at a time of Beijing's aggressive posturing in the South China Sea.
  - \* Responding to China's aggressive posturing in the South China Sea, Vietnam has called on India to play a more proactive role in Southeast Asia.
  - \* Supply of military spares, maintenance of hardware, and ship visits are also other important facets of the defense cooperation.
  - \* The two sides have also signed a MoU for Coast Guard-to-Coast Guard collaboration.
- Both India and Vietnam have genuine interests in collaborating to ensure an open, transparent, collaborative and productive regional order in Indo Pacific region.
- India and Vietnam could foster cooperation with other middle-powers in the Asia Pacific such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Australia, to further check Chinese belligerence in disputed waters.

### **International Relations**

#### **8. SIMBEX-20**

- » Prelims: Bilateral maritime exercises.
- India – Singapore Bilateral Maritime Exercise
- The annual bilateral exercise, started in 1994, is aimed at enhancing mutual inter-operability and imbibing best practices from each other.



## *International Relations*

### **9. SITMEX**

- » Prelims: Details of trilateral maritime exercises.
- It is a trilateral maritime exercise between the navies of India, Singapore and Thailand.
- Commenced in 2019, the first exercise was hosted by India.
- The 2020 exercise was hosted by the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN).
- Besides improving inter-operability between the friendly navies, SITMEX series of exercise also aims to strengthen mutual confidence and develop common understanding and procedures towards enhancing the overall maritime security in the region.

## *Effect of politics and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.*

### **10. UAE to widen 'golden' visa's eligibility criteria**

- » Mains: Indian expatriates In West Asia, remittances from UAE .

#### **Context:**

- The United Arab Emirates will extend its golden visa system.

#### **What is the Golden visa system?**

- The golden visa system grants a 10-year residency in the United Arab Emirates — to certain professionals, specialised degree-holders and others.
- All holders of doctorate degrees, medical doctors and also computer, electronics, programming, electrical and biotechnology engineers are eligible for the golden visa system.
- Those with specialised degrees in artificial intelligence, big data and epidemiology, as well as high school students living in the UAE who rank top in the country and students from certain universities with a GPA of 3.8 or higher are also eligible.

#### **Details:**

- Foreigners in the UAE usually have renewable visas valid for only a few years tied to employment.
- The government in the past couple of years has made its visa policy more flexible, offering longer residencies for certain types of investors, students and professionals.
- After first announcing a long-term visa plan in 2018, the UAE in 2019 started granting 5- and 10-year renewable visas to certain foreign investors, entrepreneurs, chief executives, scientists and

outstanding students.

## *International Relations*

### **11. China slaps 200% tax on Australian wine**

- » Mains: Trade war and its implications on global economy.

#### **Context:**

- China has added wine to the growing list of Australian goods barred from its markets in a trade war against Australia
- Earlier, China stopped or reduced imports of beef, coal, barley, seafood, sugar and timber from Australia

#### **Why china has taken this decision?**

- The decision was taken because Australia had supported calls for a probe into the origin of the coronavirus pandemic
- Australia is working on a mutual defence treaty with Japan, which Chinese leaders see as a strategic rival, and
- It has joined Washington and Southeast Asian governments in expressing concern about China's construction of military facilities on islands in the disputed South China Sea, a busy trade route.
- Australia has also joined the United States in imposing curbs on use of technology from Chinese telecom equipment giant Huawei Technologies Ltd. on security grounds.

#### **Australia's economy is heavily reliant on China**

- Australia needs to increase its competitiveness by expanding its export market opportunities.
- While Australian trade with India has grown steadily, there is much more potential for export market access. India presents a lucrative option for Australian exporters to diversify.

#### **Strategic benefits of closer ties with India**

- Economic relations aside, closer ties also present strategic political benefits. Unlike China, India shares more in common with Australia. Both countries are federal democracies, former British colonies, and English is the primary language of both foreign ministries. These similarities go a long way in ensuring smooth diplomatic communication

***Important International Institutions, agencies and fora-their structure, mandate.***

## **12. Terror funding: Saeed gets 10 years in jail**

- » Prelims: FATF and its functions.

### **Context:**

- Hafiz Saeed – the chief of Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Mumbai terror attack mastermind has been sentenced to 10 years in jail by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan in two more terror financing cases.

### **Details:**

- Saeed and his two close aides (Zafar Iqbal and Yahya Mujahid) have been sentenced to 10 and a half years each, while the chief's brother-in-law Abdul Rehman Makki was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.
- The sentencing comes weeks after the Paris-based global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog — the Financial Action Task Force — retained Pakistan on its grey list till February 2021.
  - \* Pakistan has failed to fulfil FATF's six key obligations, including failure to take action against two of India's most wanted terrorists — Saeed and Maulana Masood Azhar.

Earlier, Hafiz Saeed was sentenced to jail in Pakistan for five-and-a-half years on terror finance charges.

***Important International Institutions, agencies and fora-their structure, mandate.***

## **13. PM seeks respect for 'territorial integrity'**

- » Prelims: SCO members, its vision.
- » Mains: India's role in SCO platform.

What's in News?

20th Summit of SCO Council of Heads of State was held on the 10th of November 2020 (in Video Conference Format).

- In the address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to respect "territorial integrity" and "sovereignty".
- He reminded that India has traditionally supported infrastructure and connectivity projects in the SCO region and cited examples of the Chabahar port and the North-South Corridor.
- He reiterated India's firm belief in regional peace, security and prosperity and raising voice against terrorism, smuggling of illegal weapons, drugs and money-laundering.

- As a member of the UNSC, India's attention will be on changing the global rules of governance, he said.

- \* From 2021 India will take part in the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member.

- He announced that in 2021, the National Museum of India will hold an exhibition on the Buddhist heritage of the SCO countries.
- The President of China hinted at the difficulties among members and said differences should be resolved through dialogue.

### **Note:**

- This was the first SCO Summit held in Virtual Format and the third meeting that India participated in after becoming a full member in 2017.

## ***International Relations***

## **14. India and Biden**

- » Prelims: Various defence pacts signed
- » Mains: Election procedure of the US President, India-USA bilateral relations.

### **Context**

- Joe Biden won the US Presidential election and is expected to assume the Presidency in January 2021. Ever since the Democrat Biden defeated his republican rival, the current US President Donald Trump, there has been a lot of speculation in India about the manner in which his Presidency would impact the India-US relationship.

### **Background**

- There are concerns that the current Indian administration's virtual endorsement of a Trump re-election (as seen during the Houston and Ahmedabad rallies; India's invitation to senior Trump officials, for "2+2" talks just before the U.S. elections; and the Indian External Affairs Minister refusing a meeting with the Democrat-led House Foreign Affairs Committee) can have an antagonising effect as far as the new president-elect's approach to India is concerned.
- However, there are arguments that the change in administration in the world's oldest democracy is a mixed bag for India's relations with the country.

### **Biden - History of relations with India**

- Biden had always advocated a strong Indo-US relation, even before he took office as the American Vice President in 2009.

- He played an important role in strengthening US ties with India during his vice presidency and also before, as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- Even when Barack Obama was hesitant as a senator to support the Indo-US civil nuclear deal, Biden worked with Democrats and Republicans to get support for the deal and push it through in 2008.
- During Biden's term as VP, Washington officially declared its support for India's membership in a reformed and expanded United Nations Security Council.
  - \* This had been a major demand of previous Indian governments.
- The Obama-Biden Administration also named India a "Major Defense Partner" – a status approved by the US Congress.
  - \* This holds significance because it was for the first time that the US accorded this status to a country outside its traditional alliance.
  - \* This move strengthened defence ties between both countries as it became easier to share advanced and critical technology to India.
- The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the first of the three 'foundational pacts' for stronger military ties was signed in August 2016, during the end of the Obama presidency.
- The remaining foundational agreements were signed during the Trump presidency.

There could be positives and negatives for India as far as Biden's policies are concerned.

**Biden's positions on various issues and how they affect India are discussed below.**

#### **Climate Deal**

- The Biden presidency will probably return America to the Paris Climate Agreement.
- This could augur well for India given India's stance of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) in climate negotiations.
- The US's return to the climate accord will make a positive impact on global climate action and also help in the provision of finances and technology to developing countries such as India.

#### **Iran Nuclear Negotiations**

- Biden could once again bring the US to the negotiating table with Iran, which would water down the tension between the two countries.
- This is good for India as then India would not be required to walk the tightrope between doing business with Iran and being in America's good books by not engaging with Iran.

- This would foster the relationship between India and Iran in the right direction as it has been on a downturn off late. India could deepen its relationship with Iran without fearing American sanctions and also counter China's influence in that region.
- This will also facilitate India's regional connectivity ambitions through projects such as the Chabahar port project and the construction of the Chabahar-Zahedan rail link.

#### **Afghan Peace Process**

- Although Biden might not reverse the US pullout of Afghanistan, the process could be more measured rather than an abrupt exit.
- This augurs well not only for the war-torn Afghanistan but also for India's own security and interests in that country.

#### **Multilateralism**

- Biden's stated intention to re-energise the multilateral global order is in line with India's support for global rule-based multilateralism.

#### **Trade Relations**

- Under Donald Trump, the US followed more of a protectionist policy with his 'America First' rhetoric. India could expect a more favorable US trade policy under Biden.

#### **Leadership Style**

- Another major change with respect to Biden's presidency is the working style. Biden is expected to be more process-driven and not prone to sudden moves seen during Trump's regime like the withdrawal of the GSP for India.

#### **Immigration and visas**

- As Democrats are seen to be more liberal on immigration, Biden is expected to be softer towards Indians who go to the US to study, work and live there.
- He has promised to support family-based immigration, increase the number of visas offered for permanent, work-based immigration, reform the temporary visa system for high-skill, specialty jobs, eliminate the limits on employment-based green cards.
- He has also promised to restore the naturalisation process for green card holders.

#### **China Angle**

- Though the new president is expected to maintain the pushback against China, the overtly pro-India and anti-China approach under President Trump may not continue. This may place India in a disadvantageous position vis-a-vis China in the ongoing border dispute in Ladakh.

- However, it is to be noted that Biden's campaign document stated that Biden's administration would work with India to support a rules-based and stable Indo-Pacific region in which no country, including China, is able to threaten its neighbors with impunity.

### India's Internal Issues

- Biden had made statements on India's internal matters like the revocation of Article 370 and the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act, disapproving the Indian government's stance.
- This position, as well as the fact that his Vice President elect Kamala Harris is a fierce champion of human rights issues, could be a bone of contention for New Delhi.
- Trump had ignored the CAA, J&K issues, in India, or at best issued some perfunctory statement on them, however, the Indian government should be prepared for tough statements from the Biden administration on issues of such nature.
- The Indian government should hold its own ground on internal issues, but nevertheless, it should also make adjustments in its responses to the US administration.

### Conclusion

- International relations are always transactional and it does not matter which party/individual is in power unless and until there are mutual interests involved. The same holds true for the India-U.S. relationship.

### International Relations

#### **15. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh assassinated**

- » Prelims: Iran bordering countries.
- » Mains: West Asia tensions, Impact on India's interests in the region, Iran Israel conflict.

### Context

- Iran's senior-most nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was assassinated near Tehran. Fakhrizadeh was the head of the Research and Innovation Organisation of the Ministry of Defense.
- It is the most high profile killing of an Iranian regime figure since the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani

### Who was Mohsen Fakhrizadeh?

- Fakhrizadeh who is said to be the father of Iran's nuclear programme, according to the U.S. and Israel, had overseen Iran's nuclear weapons programme in the 1990s and early 2000s, and remained a key figure in the country's nuclear programme and the Defence Ministry.

- \* One of the most prominent scientists of Iran, Fakhrizadeh was also a member of the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

- Fakhrizadeh is sometimes described as Iran's Robert Oppenheimer

- \* Robert Oppenheimer, during the Manhattan Project, was responsible for the research and design of an atomic bomb.

- He was a "key player" something that Israel has alleged in the past — especially since Iran started breaching its nuclear deal commitments.

- \* Iran started violating the terms of the nuclear deal, called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), after President Trump unilaterally pulled the U.S. out of the agreement in 2018.

- \* Iran had also increased its stockpile of low-enriched uranium beyond the limits set by the 2015 nuclear deal

### Who killed Mohsen Fakhrizadeh?

- Iranian Foreign Minister has said there are "serious indications" that Israel was involved in the attack.
- In the past 10 years, at least six Iranian scientists were killed in bomb and gun attacks in which Israeli hands were suspected.

### How was Mohsen Fakhrizadeh assassinated?

- Fakhrizadeh's car was targeted by an explosion and machine gun in Absard, which is located about 40 km east of Tehran.

### What are the implications of his killing?

The main fear is that the killing will set off a chain reaction within the regime, building pressure to retaliate

- The killing of Fakhrizadeh could "complicate" the effort by US President-elect Joe Biden to revive the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, which Biden has pledged to do.
- Significantly, ties between the US and Iran - which first became acrimonious during the 1979 Iranian revolution — have continued to worsen since President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal and imposed sanctions on Iran.

### Will it be a setback to Iran Nuclear Program? Yes

- The loss of Fakhrizadeh, at a time when Iran is taking baby steps to expand its nuclear programme, either as a strategy or as a bargaining chip, is a clear setback to its plans.



- Therefore, his assassination could also be an attempt to slow down Iran's nuclear ambitions.

No

- There are many other scientists and his death would not impact their nuclear program

#### **Iran faces a growing dilemma.**

- If it doesn't retaliate in the wake of repeated provocations, there would be questions, both inside and outside the country, about its ability to protect the regime's top leaders or take counter-measures against what it calls "terrorism" of its sworn enemies.
- If it takes any major retaliatory steps, it could escalate the conflict, providing room for Israel and the Trump administration to take rapid military steps, which would cut off the diplomatic path for Mr. Biden to take the U.S. back to the nuclear deal.

#### **Role of Saudi Arabia**

- The assassination of Fakhrazadeh appears to be part of a larger Israeli plan in conjunction with Saudi Arabia to force the U.S. into taking military action against Iran.
- Mr. Netanyahu's recent semi-clandestine trip to Saudi Arabia to meet with the Crown Prince along with the U.S. Secretary of State was aimed at cementing the anti-Iran front and putting pressure on the Trump administration to destroy Iran's nuclear installations.
- Riyadh considers Tehran to be its principal adversary and the primary threat to its leadership aspirations in West Asia.

#### **Impact on India**

- West Asia being part of India's extended neighbourhood, instability in the region can have economic, security implications on India.
- Further US sanctions on Iran might put India in a tough spot, especially when India is seeing Chabahar port as the gateway to Central Asia and Iran is one of the key crude oil suppliers to India and also not to forget India enjoys civilizational ties with Iran.
- Escalation of ties will also cause fluctuation in crude oil supplies not only from Iran but from West Asia, which could increase the crude oil prices and it can further have a domino effect on various sectors of Indian economy which is already reeling under COVID stress.

### **India and its neighborhood - relations.**

#### **16. Myanmar Elections**

- » Prelims: Indian states bordering Myanmar, Indian projects in Myanmar.
- » Mains: India-Myanmar bilateral relations, Myanmar transition to democracy.

#### **Context**

- Myanmar's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party headed by Aung San Suu Kyi has secured enough seats in parliament to form the next government defeating the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

#### **Election results**

- The ruling party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by the Nobel Peace Prize-winning champion of democracy Aung San Suu Kyi, won 346 seats, more than the 322 seats needed to form the next government.
- This showed the people of Myanmar are pushing forward for a functioning democracy, after years of military government.
- The main opposition party is the Union Solidarity and Development Party, which is the successor to the formerly ruling military junta's mass organisation, the Union Solidarity and Development Association.

#### **Electoral system in Myanmar**

- Myanmar follows a first-past-the-post system.
- But a quarter of parliamentary seats are reserved for the military under a controversial 2008 constitution drawn during junta rule.
  - \* Even though the military allowed free elections, it made sure that its interests were preserved.
  - \* A bloc of seats in Parliament is reserved for soldiers, which would prevent any amendment to the Constitution.
  - \* The constitution also gives the military control of three key ministries - home affairs, defence, and border affairs.

#### **To change constitution and bring reforms**

- The military will continue to control at least 25% of the seats in national and regional legislatures. There will be no possibility of effecting any change in the constitution as support of at least 75% of the houses is required for accomplishing any amendment to the constitution.
- Any attempt to make the constitution more democratic and representative of the wishes of the people and reduce the power of the military is most likely to be infructuous as it would most likely be vetoed by the army.

**Controversy about the elections**

- According to some overseas observers, the elections were controversial because of the exclusion of virtually all of the Rohingyas.
  - \* Myanmar's electoral commission had cancelled voting in large parts of Rakhine state, which is the centre of the Rohingya crisis.
- There were cancellations of elections in a few other areas as well which outraged ethnic minority parties. Almost 2 million people were disenfranchised in a country of almost 37 million registered voters.
- The NLD and Suu Kyi were subject to condemnation from various quarters internationally owing to their alleged indifference to the plight of the Rohingyas.

**India and Myanmar**

- India has traditionally taken a neutral stance vis-a-vis Myanmar.
- It has tried to keep a good relationship with both the army and the civilian government.
- Myanmar is strategically quite important to India as it stands at the centre of the India-Southeast Asia geography.
- It is the only Southeast Asian country that shares a land border with northeastern India, stretching some 1,624 kilometres. The neighbours also share a 725-km maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal.
- Given that the country sits at the intersection of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and the 'Act East' policy, it is an important element in India's practice of regional diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific, and serves as a land bridge to connect South Asia and Southeast Asia.
- It is therefore in India's geostrategic interest to see Myanmar prevail as a stable and autonomous country, thereby making possible greater bilateral engagement in India-Myanmar relations.
- A failed Myanmar would lead it to fall into the lap of China as a 'satellite state', a move that would be disastrous for India.
- India is trying to manoeuvre the relationship with Myanmar in a manner which would make the country less dependent on China, and give India the much-needed tilt in the balance of power in mainland Southeast Asia in its own favour.

**Indian Projects in Myanmar**

- India's total bilateral trade with Myanmar is worth \$1.5 billion (2019-20), which is way behind China's economic engagement with the country.
- Facilitating connectivity is central to improving India-Myanmar economic relations.
- Infrastructure projects are underway, such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT), which aims to connect the eastern Indian seaport of Kolkata with the Sittwe deep-water port in Myanmar's Rakhine state by sea.
- India also developed the Sittwe Port as part of the policy for the Indian Ocean called Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), central to which is "port-led development".
  - \* India's long-term strategic goal is to create a Special Economic Zone surrounding the Sittwe port, and in so doing, cement India's footprint in Rakhine and boost its presence in the Bay of Bengal.
  - \* The Sittwe port is meant to be India's answer to the Chinese-fronted Kyaukpyu port, which is intended to cement China's geostrategic footprint in Rakhine.
- New Delhi is assisting Myanmar in areas such as information technology, agriculture, and infrastructure.
- A number of Indian companies have also set up operations in Myanmar, including oil and gas players like ONGC Videsh and GAIL.

**Rohingya Issue**

- India has been tactful in its approach to the Rohingya issue with Myanmar.
- India kept its distance even when Myanmar was taken to the ICJ over the Rohingya genocide.
- India has played it safe by providing humanitarian relief even while deporting Rohingya refugees from India for security reasons.
  - \* India provided 250 prefabricated houses and relief materials for displaced persons in northern Rakhine in 2019.
- India will need to perform a balancing act between Muslim-majority Bangladesh and Buddhist-majority Myanmar as far as the Rohingya issue is concerned.

**Election results**

- For India, the victory of NLD, with which Delhi has long-standing relations, will provide continuity of policies

- The crushing defeat faced by many USDP candidates including senior (retired) army officers will also work in India's favour.

\* That's because many USDP leaders who had served in the 'Tatmadaw' have close links with China and, had they been voted to power, would have furthered Beijing's interests in Myanmar.

### International Relations

#### **17. Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA)**

» Mains: India-US bilateral relations, defence cooperation, other agreements

The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) was signed between the governments of India and the United States in October 2020.

- The agreement is about the exchange of geospatial information between the two nations, enhancing the operational efficiency of US platforms currently operated by India.
- BECA was signed during the third 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue.

##### What is the 2+2 Dialogue?

- The 2+2 dialogue is the highest-level (Ministerial) institutional mechanism between India and the USA. It is aimed at bringing together the perspectives of both the countries on issues relating to foreign policy, defence and other strategic issues.
- India holds such dialogues with Japan also. With Australia, India holds a 2+2 dialogue at the secretary level.

#### **Foundational Military Communication Agreements between India and the USA**

Prior to the signing of the BECA, India and the US had signed three foundational military agreements. They are:

- 1. General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) – It was signed in 2002, to facilitate sharing military intelligence between India and the USA.
- 2. Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) – It was signed in 2016. As per this agreement, India and the USA can use each other's military bases to carry out repairs and for resupplying.

- 3. Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) – This agreement is to share and secure communications exchange between both the nations during training exercises and operations.

An extension to the GSOMIA, the Industrial Security Annex (ISA), was signed in 2019.

##### What is BECA?

The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for geo-spatial cooperation is essentially a communication agreement between the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency of the US Department of Defence and the Ministry of Defence of the Government of India.

- It will allow India and the US to share military information including advanced satellite and topographic data such as maps, nautical and aeronautical charts and geodetic, geophysical, geomagnetic and gravity data.
- Most of the information shared will be unclassified. However, the pact includes a provision for sharing classified information with safeguards to prevent it from being shared with any third party.

##### Benefits for India

- The BECA will allow US armed forces to provide advanced navigational aids and avionics on US-supplied aircraft to India.
- It will allow India and the US to share geospatial and satellite data with each other, thereby enhancing the geospatial cooperation between the two countries.
- It will boost the Indian military's accuracy of automated hardware systems and weapons like cruise missiles, ballistic missiles and drones.
- Additionally, it is a major step for India when it comes to acquiring armed drones such as MQ-9B from the US.

##### Significance of the Agreement

- The signing of the agreement came in the backdrop of deteriorating US-China relations and the recent India-China border clash in the Galwan Valley.
- BECA is to help India and the US counter growing Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

*International Relations***18. Nagrota encounter**

- » Prelims: District Development Council.
- » Mains: FATF action on Pakistan Cross border terrorism, border infrastructure
- The article talks about the steps taken by India to highlight the terror threat from Pakistan, in the backdrop of the Nagrota encounter.

**Background:**

- Indian security forces recently defeated a nefarious plot to target grassroots level democratic exercises in Jammu and Kashmir by killing four terrorists belonging to the Pakistan-based terrorist organisation Jaish-e-Mohammad.
- District Development Council elections are due to start in Jammu and Kashmir.

**Details:**

- More details have been uncovered on the planned terror strike in Jammu and Kashmir by four men, believed to be members of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed.
- The government believes that the recent attack was planned on the same scale as the Pulwama bombing that killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel.
- The attack is believed to be timed for the anniversary of the 2008 Mumbai attacks.
- Also, a tunnel has been discovered in the Samba sector from where the men are supposed to have infiltrated into India.

**Steps taken by India to highlight the terror threat from Pakistan:**

- The government of India has decided to step up its diplomatic campaign to hold Pakistan accountable.
- The Foreign Secretary briefed a select group of ambassadors on the plot.
  - \* The envoys were part of the first batch of diplomats being briefed.
- Indian missions have been instructed to pass on details of the "information docket" handed over, which includes details of the encounter in Nagrota between the suspected terrorists hiding in a truck and security forces, as well as the equipment the men allegedly had.

**Significance:**

- By apprising the international community of the details of the Nagrota encounter, the government seems to have a multi-pronged strategy.
- The first imperative is to ensure that the full implications of the aborted attack and what could have occurred are understood worldwide.
- Secondly, India wants to ensure that the threat it continues to face from cross-border terror is acknowledged.
- India aims to put Pakistan, which has itself been making allegations about a terror threat from India, squarely on notice.
  - \* It is important to note that Pakistan still faces the final FATF decision in February 2021 on whether it will be blacklisted.
  - \* Pakistan can be blacklisted for its inability to curb terror financing and to shut down groups such as the JeM and the LeT.
- It is opined that the government of Pakistan would be better positioned in fulfilling the action plan it has been tasked with rather than flashing unsubstantiated dossiers with counter-claims against India.

**Way forward:**

- India must note that invoking the international community can be a double-edged sword in its bilateral conflict with Pakistan, that could invite discomforting interventionary interest.
- Eventually, India's success lies in protecting its borders, as done in Nagrota, and by providing a peaceful and stable environment in J&K so as to restart the much-delayed democratic process despite all attempts to derail it.

*India and its neighborhood-relations***19. India, Maldives sign MoUs to boost ties**

- » Prelims: Mapping
- » Mains: Bilateral relations, maritime security

**Context:**

- The visit of the Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to the Maldives.

**Details:**

- MoU includes a \$100 million Indian grant for an ambitious connectivity project.
  - \* This is a part of India's "\$500 million package" for the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP).



- \* The two governments had earlier inked a deal for a \$400 million line of credit from the Exim Bank of India.
- Two MoUs have been signed for high impact community development projects.
- A fourth MoU was signed on cooperation in sports and youth affairs.

### **Background:**

#### **India-Maldives bilateral ties:**

##### ***People to people relations:***

- India and the Maldives have had bilateral relations for centuries.
- Maldivian students attend educational institutions in India and Maldivian patients come to India for super-specialty healthcare, aided by a liberal visa-free regime extended by India. This has increased the people to people contact between the two countries.

##### ***Economic relations:***

- Tourism is the mainstay of the Maldivian economy accounting for a major proportion of its economy. Indian tourists account for a large share of tourist inflow into the Maldives.

##### ***Humanitarian assistance:***

- India has always offered emergency assistance to the Maldives.
  - \* In 1988, under Operation Cactus, India sent paratroopers and Navy vessels when armed mercenaries attempted a coup against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.
  - \* India offered medical aid and essential goods to the Maldives in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.
  - \* When the Maldives faced a drinking water crisis, India rushed fresh water supplies through the Indian Navy.
  - \* Considering the geographical limitations of Maldives, India has exempted the Maldives from export curbs on essential commodities during the ongoing pandemic. India has also offered \$250 million aid to the Maldives apart from offering medical supplies.

##### **See-saw in India-Maldives relations:**

- The robust bilateral relations between India and Maldives took a downturn under the Presidentship of Abdulla Yameen, under whom the Maldives increasingly tilted towards China and exhibited a negative bias against India and its interests.

- The election of Ibrahim Solih as the Maldivian President has provided the much-needed impetus to India-Maldives bilateral relations, especially on the economic front.

- \* India has offered massive developmental funding for creating physical, social and community infrastructure in the Maldives.
- \* The Solih government has propounded an 'India First' policy from day one of assuming the office and has proposed a balanced approach towards trilateral equations between India-Maldives-China.

### **Concerns:**

- There have been 'India Out' protests going on in the Maldives, mainly headed by the Yameen camp. They are complaining against the Solih government's increasing reliance on Indian funding and the administration's decision to retain two India-gifted helicopters and their operational military personnel.
- Though India can take respite in the 'strategic comfort' of the 'India First' policy of the Solih government, India should be concerned about the 'India out' protests.
- The intra-party rumblings within the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) do not augur well for its prospects in the upcoming 2023 presidential polls.

### **Significance of the bilateral relation:**

#### **For India:**

- The Maldives constitutes a major component of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy given its proximity to India. India and Maldives are neighbours sharing a maritime border.
- The Maldives is also important for India for its Indian Ocean region policy. The Maldives could play a significant role in protecting India's increasing geostrategic concerns in the shared seas. Closer India-Maldives relations can help limit the growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean region.
- The increasing influence of radical Islam in the Maldives could pose a security threat for India in the coming years. Engaging and supporting the Maldives in its fight against extremism could also help India.

#### **For the Maldives:**

- India contributes to maintaining security in the Maldives. It has gifted defence equipment based on Maldives' requests.
- India has provided extensive economic aid and has participated in bilateral programmes for the development of infrastructure, health, telecommunications and labour resources.
- Given that India is a major power in the Indian

Ocean region, Maldives would be served well to maintain a robust relationship with India.

**Conclusion:**

- India and Maldives must push for taking forward the multifaceted cooperation between the two nations to the next stage. This could serve the mutual interests of both nations.
- India should also work towards building bipartisan consensus in the Maldives for strengthening the bilateral relations.

# ART AND CULTURE

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## *Salient aspects of Art Forms*

### 1. Warli Paintings

- » Prelims: Region and tribe associated with Warli paintings.

#### Tribe

- They are an indigenous tribe or Adivasis, living in mountainous as well as coastal areas of Maharashtra-Gujarat border and surrounding areas
- The Warlis speak an unwritten Varli language, classified as Konkani, with some degree of influence from the Gujarati language.

#### Painting

- It is vivid expression of daily & social events of Warli tribe, used by them to embellish the walls of village houses.
  - \* While there are no records of the exact origins of this art, its roots may be traced to as early as the 10th century A.D.

- Women are mainly engaged in the creation of these paintings. These paintings do not depict mythological characters or images of deities, but depict social life.
- These tribal paintings of Maharashtra are traditionally done in the homes of the Warlis.
- Painted white on mud walls, they are pretty close to pre-historic cave paintings in execution and usually depict scenes of human figures engaged in activities like hunting, dancing, sowing and harvesting.

#### Features

- It uses very shapes: a circle, a triangle and a square. The circle represents the sun and the moon, the triangle derived from mountains and pointed trees, the square indicates a sacred enclosure or a piece of land.
- Painted on austere mud base using one color.
- Human and animal bodies are represented by two triangles joined at the tip; the upper triangle depicts the trunk and the lower triangle the pelvis. Their precarious equilibrium symbolizes the balance of the universe

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## Awareness in the fields of IT

### 1. Param Siddhi Supercomputer

- » Prelims: Supercomputers around the world.
- » Mains: Application of supercomputers, National Supercomputing Mission.

#### Context

- India's AI supercomputer Param Siddhi 63rd among top 500 most powerful non-distributed computer systems in the world.

#### About Param Siddhi:

- Param Siddhi is a High-Performance Computing-Artificial Intelligence (HPC-AI) supercomputer established under the National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) at C-DAC.
- The supercomputer with Rpeak of 5.267 Petaflops and 4.6 Petaflops Rmax (Sustained) was conceived by C-DAC and developed jointly with the support of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) under NSM.
- Param Siddhi Supercomputer is built on the NVIDIA DGX Super POD reference architecture networking along with C-DAC's indigenously developed HPC-AI engine, software frameworks and cloud platform and will help deep learning, visual computing, virtual reality, accelerated computing, as well as graphics virtualization.

#### Applications

- The AI system will strengthen application development of packages in areas such as advanced materials, computational chemistry and astrophysics, and several packages being developed under the mission on platform for drug design and preventive healthcare system, flood forecasting package for flood prone metro cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Patna and Guwahati
- It is a boon for application developers and will help testing of weather forecasting packages by NCMRWF & IITM, geo-exploration packages for oil and gas recovery; packages for aero-design studies; computational physics and mathematical applications and even online courses for education.

#### Powerful supercomputers in the world

- Japanese supercomputer Fugaku (442 petaflops) and IBM's Summit (148.8 petaflops) are the two most powerful supercomputers in the world, according to the Top500 list.
- Chinese Sunway TaihuLight is number four on the list (93 petaflops), developed by the National

Research Center of Parallel Computer Engineering & Technology (NRCPC) in China.

- PARAM-Siddhi is the second Indian supercomputer to be entered in the top 100 on the Top500 list.
- Pratyush, a supercomputer used for weather forecasting at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, ranked 78th.

### **National Supercomputing Mission (NSM)**

- Launched in 2015, NSM is the only dedicated programme launched to boost India's supercomputing capacity.
- The Rs 4,500-crore, seven-year-long programme is spearheaded by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) and Indian Institute of Science (IISc), under the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- As part of the programme, a network of over 70 supercomputers will be installed in multiple national-level research and academic institutions.
- These machines will be part of the National Supercomputing grid over the National Knowledge Network (NKN)
- Under NSM, the long-term plan is to build a strong base of 20,000 skilled persons who will be equipped to handle the complexities of supercomputers.

#### The broad objectives defined for National Supercomputing Mission NSM are:

- To make India one of the world leaders in Supercomputing and to enhance India's capability in solving grand challenge problems of national and global relevance
- To empower our scientists and researchers with state-of-the-art supercomputing facilities and enable them to carry out cutting-edge research in their respective domains
- To minimize redundancies and duplication of efforts, and optimize investments in supercomputing
- To attain global competitiveness and ensure self-reliance in the strategic area of supercomputing technology



**Applications**

- It will have wide-scale applications in the fields of climate modelling, weather prediction, aerospace engineering, computational biology, molecular dynamics, atomic energy simulations, national security and defence applications, seismic analysis, disaster prediction and management, computational chemistry, big data analytics, finance and more.

**Space****2. PSLV-C49/EOS-01 Mission**

- » Prelims: Important PSLV missions, applications of PSLV-C49/EOS-01 Mission.

**Context:**

- India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, in its fifty-first flight (PSLV-C49), successfully launched EOS-01 along with nine international customer satellites from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC)

**Details**

- EOS-01 carried an X-band synthetic-aperture radar.
- It is an earth observation satellite intended for applications in agriculture, forestry and disaster management support.
- The mission also included the placing in orbit of nine other spacecrafts. The nine customer satellites were from the United States, Lithuania and Luxembourg.

**Significance**

- Mission amidst the pandemic:
  - \* This is ISRO's first mission in 2020 after the COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdown disturbed 10 missions planned by the agency. The success of the mission is an indication of the resilience of the organization to succeed in the mission even in the face of restrictions on the movement of goods and people.
- Increasing commercial reach of ISRO:
  - \* The launch of other smaller customer satellites with India's own satellites has become a recurrent feature in ISRO's operation. ISRO has gained credence as a leading provider of rideshare services for small satellites, due to its numerous multi-satellite deployment campaigns with auxiliary payloads usually ride sharing along an Indian primary payload.
  - \* As of December 2019, PSLV has launched around 300 plus foreign satellites from 33 countries.

- \* This points to the growing trust in ISRO and also opens up enormous opportunities in the commercial space sector for India.
- \* Additionally, this approach also helps reduce the cost of launch for Indian satellites as a proportion of the launch cost is shared by the customer satellite owners.

**Indigenization of technology and developing new technology****3. Swarna Jayanti Fellowships**

- » Prelims: Details about the fellowship.

**Context:**

- 21 scientists have been selected by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) for the Swarna Jayanti fellowship 2020.

**Details:**

- The Swarna Jayanti Fellowships scheme was instituted by the Govt. of India to commemorate India's fiftieth year of independence.
- It provides special assistance and support to a selected number of young scientists with a proven track record to enable them to pursue basic research in frontier areas of science and technology.
- Under the scheme, the awardees are given support by the DST, which will cover all the requirements for performing the research and will include a fellowship of Rs. 25,000/- per month for five years.
- In addition to this, DST supports the awardees by giving them a research grant of 5 lakh Rupees for 5 years. The fellowship is provided in addition to the salary they draw from their parent Institution.
  - \* They are also provided with grants for equipment, computational facilities, consumables, contingencies, national and international travel, and other special requirements, if any, are covered based on merit.
- The fellowships are scientist specific and not institution-specific, very selective, and have close academic monitoring.

**Awareness in the fields of Space.****4. Traffic cops of Space**

- » Mains: Space situational awareness, space wars, satellite collision.

**Context:**

- Skylark would be the first dedicated satellite constellation looking at managing the situation in space such as congestion, threats of collisions, and addressing space traffic management.

**Concerns:**

- Sputnik 1 was the first human-made object to orbit the Earth. Its launch created new opportunities in space.
- However, it has also added 29,000 objects as debris (larger than 10 centimetres in diameter) in addition to the 2,500-plus active satellites in space.
- Numerous space missions have contributed to the build-up of debris and artificial space objects are only expected to grow.
- Most 'space junk' can reach a speed of nearly 29,000 kilometres per hour.
- According to NASA, because of the amount of debris in low Earth orbit and the speed at which they are moving, current and future space-based services, explorations, and operations pose a safety risk to people and property in space and on Earth.

**Details:**

- NorthStar plans to provide safe and sustainable solutions through its Skylark satellite constellation designed specifically for Space Situational Awareness (SSA).
- It plans to provide the information to prevent accidents as the number of satellites exponentially increase.
- NorthStar Earth & Space is a Canada-based space company that made headlines for its efforts to address the threat of space debris, which has increased over the recent years.
- It has received investments from the Canadian government, the Québec government, Telesystem Space, and the Space Alliance.
- It has announced signing the contract for the first three satellites to build the constellation. It plans to launch them by mid-2022 and the rest by 2024.

**How does it work?**

- The system works on NorthStar's algorithms to provide space traffic data and collision avoidance navigation services.
- SSA tracks natural and artificial objects in the orbit around the Earth, and predicts where the objects are going to be at any given time.
  - \* Each satellite weighs about 200 kilograms and is equipped with a 60-centimetre long sensor.
  - \* The set of three satellites form a spiral, so the constellation will have four spirals with different orbits, all of which will be circular and polar at about 575 kilometres from the Earth's surface in the low Earth orbit (LEO).
- The constellation of 12 satellites would be equipped with optical sensors to monitor space objects

including active and inactive satellites and debris that could pose a threat.

- This is intended at helping in the management of space traffic in a safe and sustainable way.

**Advantages:**

A space-based satellite system has certain advantages over ground-based systems, including:

- Having multiple points of view for an object.
- Not reliant on weather changes and atmospheric interferences.
- The ability to make frequent revisits.

# SECURITY AND DEFENCE

## Defence

### 1. MQ-9B Sea Guardian

- » Prelims: Defence Procurement manual, Defence acquisition procedure.
- » Mains: Maritime security.

#### Context

- The Indian Navy has inducted two MQ-9B Sea Guardian unarmed drones procured from the U.S. on lease for one year.

#### Details

- The Guardian, which is the maritime variant of the Predator MQ-9 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), has a maximum endurance of 40 hours and a maximum flying altitude of 40,000 feet.
- It has a maritime surveillance radar and an optional multimode maritime surface search radar.
- The drone can “perform over-the-horizon long-endurance, medium-altitude Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions.”
- The new Defence Acquisition Procedure, as well as the older Defence Procurement Manual enables swifter leasing of military equipment and platforms for urgent operational requirements. It cuts down time delays and initial capital cost for inductions.

#### Significance

- These drones are going to help the Indian Navy to expand its monitoring of the Indian Ocean and to further strengthen its surveillance of its coastal boundaries.
- With an endurance of 40 hours, the Navy can deploy the Sea Guardians to monitor all the “choke points” from the Persian Gulf to Malacca Strait in the IOR.
- The lease is yet another strong indicator of the continuing strategic partnership between India and the US

#### Data Collection and storage

- There will be an American crew for maintenance, technical and training purposes
- The Indian Navy is totally in control of the operations and the huge amount of data being generated in the ISR missions, as per the lease agreement.
- The intelligence data from the two drones is being fed into the NCO (Network- Centric Operations) network of the Navy.

## Defence

### 2. QRSAM Missile System

- » Prelims: Nature of the missile system, it's applications.

#### Context:

- QRSAM Missile system achieves a major milestone.

#### Details:

- Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM) System has achieved a major milestone by a direct hit on to a Banshee Pilotless target aircraft at the medium range & medium altitude.
- The missile launch took place from ITR Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.
- The system is capable of detecting and tracking targets on the move and engaging target with short halts. The system is designed to give air defence coverage against strike columns of the Indian Army.
- The missile system was fully indigenous with active radio frequency seekers, electro-mechanical actuation systems sourced from various industries.

#### About QSRAM:

- The QRSAM, like many modern missiles, is a canister-based system, which means that it is stored and operated from specially designed compartments.
- In the canister, the inside environment is controlled, thus along with making its transport and storage easier, the shelf life of weapons also improves significantly.
- The QRSAM is a short-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system, primarily designed and developed by DRDO to provide a protective shield to moving armoured columns of the Army from enemy aerial attacks.
- The entire weapon system has been configured on a mobile and manoeuvrable platform and is capable of providing air defence on the move. It has been designed for induction into the Army and has a range of 25 to 30 km.
- The QRSAM weapon ensemble, which functions on the move, consists of a fully automated command and control system, two radars — Active Array Battery Surveillance Radar, Active Array Battery Multifunction Radar — and one launcher.

- Both radars have a 360-degree coverage with “search on move” and “track on move” capabilities.
- The system is compact, uses a single-stage solid propelled missile and has a mid-course inertial navigation system with two-way data link and terminal active seeker developed indigenously by DRDO.
- The weapon system would be ready for induction by 2021.

### *Defence*

#### **3. Scorpene submarine Vagir**

- » Prelims: Project 75, technology transfer, Kalvari class submarines.
- It is the fifth Scorpene conventional submarine of Project 75, i.e., the fifth of the Indian Navy's six Kalvari-class submarines being built in India.
- It is built by the Mazagon Docks Ltd. with technology transfer from France.
- After harbour and sea-acceptance trials, it will be delivered to the Navy.

#### **Note:**

- Scorpene submarines can undertake multifarious types of missions i.e. Anti-Surface warfare, Anti-Submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying, area surveillance, etc.
- The first two submarines of the Project-75 have been commissioned into the Navy, third and fourth submarines are progressing their Sea Trials.

### *Security Challenges*

#### **4. Vienna's woes**

- » Mains: Measures to tackle terrorism, radicalization of youth.

#### **Context:**

- The terror attacks in Vienna, Austria.

#### **Background:**

- The Vienna attack follows the beheading incident of a schoolteacher in a Paris suburb and a knife attack in Nice. These incidents point to the transnational threat European countries face from terrorist attacks.

#### **Steps to be taken:**

#### **Security aspects:**

- The fact that the person involved in the Vienna incident had been previously convicted in a terrorism case and was still able to slip off the security radar and launch an attack in the capital city at a time when Europe was on high alert poses serious questions on the security apparatus.
- Austria will also have to plug the security loopholes.
- It should clamp down on terror networks, isolate and punish the radical forces.

#### **Social aspects:**

- The larger challenge in countering the threat of terrorism is how to address the issue of radicalisation among youth and counter attempts to disrupt the social cohesion.
- Given that radical forces use violence to create social discord, there is a need for unity in the fight against terrorism.
  - \* Leaders of France, Austria and other terror-hit countries should not allow the fundamentalists to have their way.
  - \* They should clamp down on terror networks, isolate and punish, counter the ideology and build on the values of pluralism, secularism, democracy and equality, and step up deradicalisation efforts with help from communities. This is a fight they cannot afford to lose.



# ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

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## *Environmental pollution and degradation.*

### 1. Climate action portal launched

- » Prelims: Details about the portal

#### Context:

- Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change launched a single point information source for climate action known as the "India Climate Change Knowledge Portal".

#### About the Portal:

- The portal will provide information on the different climate initiatives taken by various line ministries enabling users to access updated status on these initiatives.
- The portal captures sector-wise adaptation and mitigation actions that are being taken by the various line ministries in one place including updated information on their implementation.
- The knowledge portal will help in disseminating knowledge among citizens about all the major steps the government is taking at both national and international levels to address climate change issues.
- The eight components of the portal are India's climate profile, national policy framework, India's NDC goals, adaptation actions, mitigation actions, bilateral and multilateral cooperation, international climate negotiations, reports & public.

## *Conservation*

### 2. Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary

- » Prelims: Location, flora and fauna of the area.
- It is spread over a vast 2220 sq km area and is by far the largest sanctuary of Himachal which also occupies some of the highest regions of the state.
- Kibber happens to be the only cold desert wildlife sanctuary in India.
- Extreme conditions, high altitudes and remoteness keep the area isolated for about six months, making it a naturally protected region for rare flora and fauna to exist without human intrusions. Herbs found in the sanctuary find use in traditional medicinal systems.
- Kibber one of the highest villages of Spiti is on the periphery of the sanctuary. The sanctuary also offers magnificent views of snow-clad peaks of Chau Chau Kang Nilda in the backdrop and sweeping sandy basins of Spiti River flowing in the valley.

## *Conservation*

### 3. Odisha to compensate fishermen

- » Prelims: IUCN status of Gharials, tributaries of River Mahanadi.

#### Context

- The Odisha government has decided to compensate fishermen for the loss or damage of nets if gharials get entangled during fishing in the Mahanadi River.
- The decision was taken recently after instances of fishermen killing gharials coming to the fore.

#### Issue

- Gharials were getting caught in fishing nets of fishermen.

#### Details

- Odisha is the only State in India having all three species of gharial, mugger and saltwater crocodile.
- IUCN status of Gharial is Critically Endangered
- The State government has been involved in conservation of three crocodile species by establishing rearing centres —
  - \* Tikarpada for gharial in Angul,
  - \* Ramatirtha for muggers in Mayurbhanj and
  - \* Bhitarkanika for saltwater crocodile in Kendrapara district.
- \* Besides, there is a captive breeding centre at Nandankanan for all the three crocodiles.

## *Conservation*

### 4. Operation Thunder 2020

- » Prelims: Agencies involved
- » Mains: Wildlife conservation measures.
- It was an operation against environmental crimes
- It was coordinated by the Interpol and the World Customs Organisation, which involved law enforcement agencies in 103 countries.
- It resulted in large seizures of protected wildlife and forestry specimens and products, triggering arrests and investigations worldwide
- The participating countries focused mainly on the species protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

**Background**

- "Operation Thunder 2020" is the fourth in a series of "Thunder" operations carried out annually since 2017.

**Context**

- The India Customs intercepted an 18-tonne shipment of red sandalwood destined for the United Arab Emirates, during "Operation Thunder 2020"

**Conservation****5. Punchakkari-Vellayani wetlands**

- » Prelims: Freshwater lakes in the region, famous migratory birds.
- It is in the state of Kerala
- Vellayani Lake is the largest fresh water lake in Thiruvananthapuram district
- The Vellayani Lake and the adjacent Punchakkari paddy fields are a major landing site for several migratory birds and home to many resident birds
- The sighting of the bird reinforces the ecological significance of the Punchakkari-Vellayani wetland complex and the need for its protection

**Context:**

- Willow warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*), one of longest migrating small bird which breeds throughout northern and temperate Europe and the Palearctic, sighted for the first time in the country at Punchakkari

**Details**

- Weighing around 10gm, the long wing feathers used to migrate a long distance makes it peculiar.
- It is usually seen in European and Palearctic regions and they migrate to sub Saharan Africa during early winter.
- Warblers are generally difficult to identify due to the small size and change in plumage twice a year.

**Environmental pollution and degradation.****6. 'Sea sparkle' has affected marine food chain:****CMFRI**

- » Mains: Eutrophication, waste water disposal measures in the coastal region

**Context:**

- The Karnataka coast has been witnessing the bloom of *Noctiluca scintillans* that has displaced microscopic algae called diatoms.

**Details:**

- Diatoms form the basis of the marine food chain.

- The bloom of *Noctiluca scintillans* displacing diatoms has deprived food for the planktivorous fish.
- The toxic blooms of *N. scintillans* are linked to massive fish and marine invertebrate kills.
- Though the species does not produce a toxin, it is found to accumulate toxic levels of ammonia, which is then excreted into the surrounding waters, possibly acting as the killing agent in blooms.
- The ammonia makes *N. scintillans* unpleasant for most creatures. Only jellyfish and salps are known to prey on it.
- *N. scintillans* graze on other micro-organisms such as larvae, fish eggs, and diatoms.
- But the unicellular phytoplankton that lives inside *N. scintillans* can photosynthesise, turning sunlight into energy. They help their host cell survive even when food is scarce. Thus, *N. scintillans* acts as both a plant and an animal.

**Note:**

- *Noctiluca scintillans* are commonly known as "sea sparkle".
- The bioluminescent *Noctiluca scintillans* also brightens the seawater at night.
- Bioluminescence is the production and emission of light by a living organism and occurs due to a chemical reaction, involving a light-emitting molecule and an enzyme, called luciferin and luciferase.

**Environmental pollution and degradation.****7. The cost of clearing the air**

- » Prelims: NCAP
- » Mains : Health hazards of air pollution.

**Context:**

- In February 2020, the Finance Minister had announced a ₹4,400 crore package for 2020-21 to tackle air pollution in 102 of India's most polluted cities.
- The funds would be used to reduce particulate matter by 20%-30% from 2017 levels by 2024 under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

**Concerns:**

- There is no clarity on what the budgetary outlays for subsequent years are likely to be.
- Though it was the largest-ever yearly allocation by a government to specifically tackle air pollution, only half the money was finally allotted to 15 States (and 42 cities in them) in November 2020.

- \* The rest will be given in January 2021 based on how cities achieve certain 'performance parameters' that are still being worked out by the Centre.
- It is unclear if this amount is adequate to handle the task of improving air quality as the scale of the problem itself is unknown.
- Historically, cities have used manual machines to measure specified pollutants and their use has been inadequate.
- Several States with the most polluted cities that have been allotted NCAP funds are expected to spend a substantial fraction of the amount in the act of measurement than on tackling pollution.
- The funds don't account for the trained manpower and the support system necessary to effectively maintain the systems. These costs are likely to be significant.
- Budgetary allocations alone don't reflect the true cost of reducing air pollution.
  - \* Pollution clean-up activities have been assigned 50% of this budget and another ₹11 crore are allotted for mechanical street sweepers.
  - \* Depending on the specific conditions in every city, these proportions are likely to change.

#### **Way forward:**

- Tackling pollution requires various other measures besides the allocation of sufficient funds.
  - \* In the case of the National Capital Region, at least ₹600 crore was spent by the Ministry of Agriculture over two years to provide subsidised equipment to farmers in Punjab and Haryana and dissuade them from burning paddy straw. Yet in 2020, there have been more farm fires than in the previous year.
- While funds are critical, proper enforcement, adequate staff and stemming the sources of pollution on the ground are vital to the NCAP meeting its target.

### **Environmental Impact Assessment**

#### **8. COVID-19, climate and carbon neutrality**

- » Prelims: State of Global Air report
- » Mains: Principle of carbon neutrality, inter-linkage between COVID-19 and air pollution

#### **Context:**

- The article written by former Union Minister for Environment, Jairam Ramesh argues for India to pursue the carbon neutrality principle.

#### **Background:**

#### **III effects of ecological disequilibrium:**

##### **Epidemic diseases:**

- The COVID-19 pandemic reflects fundamental ecological disequilibrium. Available scientific evidence points to the fact that the loss of biodiversity and the ever-increasing human incursions into the natural world could be contributing to the outbreak and spread of epidemic diseases.
- The high levels of air pollution have been found to exacerbate the health impact of COVID-19.

##### **Negative impact on health:**

- The environmental problems — such as air pollution, water pollution, chemical contamination, deforestation, waste generation and accumulation, land degradation and excessive use of pesticides — are having profound public health consequences for humans.
  - \* The State of Global Air report notes that air pollution contributed to 6.7 million annual deaths globally in 2019 while India faced 1.67 million deaths due to polluted air.
  - \* Ambient air pollution also aggravates respiratory and cardiovascular conditions including chronic bronchitis, lung cancer and asthma.

##### **Climate Change:**

- Climate change, the result of GHG emissions is leading to uncertainties in the monsoon, the retreat of the Himalayan glaciers and the increase in mean sea levels and is also increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme events.

##### **Carbon neutrality:**

- Given that the traditional approach of 'grow now, pay later' model is not only unsustainable in the medium- to long-term but also dangerous to public health in the short term, there have been growing calls for more active measures.
- Rather than resorting to ad hoc techniques like geo-engineering, which itself is riddled with complications, there is the need for more long term solutions like planning for carbon neutrality.
- Carbon Neutrality is being proposed as a necessary measure in global climate action.
  - \* Carbon neutrality refers to achieving net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by balancing carbon dioxide emissions with carbon absorption.

##### **Carbon neutrality commitments:**

- In September 2018, the American State of California became the first to commit itself to carbon neutrality (by 2045).

- In December 2019, the European Union also committed to carbon neutrality by 2050.
- In September 2020, China, the world's largest GHG emitter, also declared its goal of carbon neutrality by 2060.
- This was followed by the announcements by Japan and South Korea to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

**Way forward:****Need for carbon neutrality:**

- The COVID-19 crisis provides an opportunity for reset, recalibration and rethink with respect to environmentally sustainable economic growth models.
- Given India's vulnerability to climate change, rather than arguing that its per capita emissions continue to be low, India too should plan for achieving carbon neutrality.
- India's commitment to ensure 40% of its energy supply through renewable energy sources would help reduce India's GHG emissions.

- India has committed to creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 -3 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. India's commitment on carbon sequestration through forests could help increase carbon absorption in India's forest reserves.
- Carbon neutrality is a worthwhile goal, the attainment of which has to be consciously engineered through government action and policies.

**System level restructuring:**

- Renewable energy though may be an integral part of the solution, going forward they alone may not be sufficient and there should be efforts made at re-architecting systems as a whole. The overhaul in the German electricity sector is a classical example of such re- architecting.
- Given that much of the infrastructure we need for the future is still to be put in place — one estimate widely quoted that something like 70% of the infrastructure required in India by the year 2050 is waiting to be established, the future investment decisions should have sustainability as an important parameter.



# HEALTH ISSUES

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## *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health*

### **1. Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR)**

- » Prelims: Red-line campaign
- » Mains: AMR as a threat to Public health, government initiatives and one health approach.

#### **Antibiotics**

- Antibiotics are chemical compounds used to kill or inhibit the growth of bacteria.
- The discovery of antibiotics has helped in treating human infections.
- It has demonstrated its efficacy in many cases but its impact has gradually reduced due to two reasons:
  - \* The ingenuity and survival instinct of germs and
  - \* The irrational use of antibiotics in humans and animals.
- It has resulted in Antimicrobial resistance.

#### **What is Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR)?**

- Antimicrobial resistance is the ability of microorganisms such as bacteria to nullify the effects of antimicrobial drugs, resulting in these drugs becoming ineffective.
- The inability of antibiotics to treat patients and animals is wreaking havoc on human health, nutrition safety and economies.
- The long-term impact of AMR is almost comparable to that of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **A look at key stats**

- AMR is estimated to cause 10 million deaths annually by 2050 unless concerted actions are initiated now.
- It will result in a 7.5 % reduction in livestock production and negatively impact the global GDP by 3.5%.

#### **Tackling the AMR challenge**

- There are two major possible solutions to combat the AMR menace:
  - \* Discovery of new drugs, before the emergence of resistance in germs; and
  - \* Prudent use of available antibiotics.
- The first option is an expensive and unpredictable process.
  - \* From the year 1984, the development of new antibiotics is nil. It is said that for the development of a new antibiotic the cost

exceeds \$1 billion.

- \* Even if one develops the antibiotics, since there is a rapid development of resistance, the life of new antibiotics becomes limited and the return on investment on new molecules gets diminished. This discourages the pharmaceutical industry to invest in these initiatives.

- The world is left with only one option: to use the available antibiotics carefully to ensure their efficacy for as long as possible.

#### **World Health Organization Global Action Plan on AMR (2015)**

It sets out five strategic objectives:

- to improve awareness and understanding of antimicrobial resistance;
- to strengthen knowledge through surveillance and research;
- to reduce the incidence of infection;
- to optimize the use of antimicrobial agents; and
- Develop the economic case for sustainable investment that takes account of the needs of all countries, and increase investment in new medicines, diagnostic tools, vaccines and other interventions.

These objectives are part of national action plans in nearly 80 countries and the plan was also endorsed by the UN General Assembly. These multi-sectoral, multidisciplinary and multi-institutional actions constitute the 'One Health' approach.

#### **What is 'One Health'?**

- It is an approach to designing and implementing programmes, policies, legislation and research in which multiple sectors communicate and work together to achieve better public health outcomes.
- The areas of work in which a One Health approach is particularly relevant include food safety, the control of zoonoses (diseases that can spread between animals and humans, such as flu, rabies and Rift Valley Fever), and combatting antibiotic resistance (when bacteria change after being exposed to antibiotics and become more difficult to treat).

#### **How does it work?**

- Many professionals with a range of expertise who are active in different sectors, such as public health, animal health, plant health and

the environment, join forces to support One Health approach with a focus on inter-sectoral coordination, collaboration, and communication.

- Other relevant players in a One Health approach could include law enforcement, policymakers, agriculture, and communities. No one person, organization, or sector can address issues at the animal-human-environment interface alone.
- So the 'one health' approach advocates a multi-sectoral response to public health problems, particularly pandemics, as also to address issues related to AMR.
  - \* The approach supports focused actions on the human-animal-environment interface for the prevention, detection and response to the public health events that influence global health and food security.
  - \* AMR is one of the biggest challenges to human and animal health.

### **Conclusion**

- There is a need to optimally utilize emerging technologies to improve human health and development.
- One Health thus has been acknowledged as the optimum approach to counter the impact of AMR and future pandemics and must be adopted expeditiously.

### **Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health**

#### **2. Ayurveda PGs can do surgeries**

- » Mains: AYUSH initiatives, National Medical Commission Act.

#### **Context:**

- According to a notification by the Central Government, postgraduate students in Ayurveda will now be trained and allowed to perform a variety of general surgery, ENT, ophthalmology, and dental procedures.

#### **Details**

- The Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) amended the Indian Medicine Central Council (Post Graduate Ayurveda Education) Regulations, 2016, to include the regulation that will permit PG students of Ayurveda to practise general surgery.
- Accordingly, students will be trained in two streams of surgery and would be awarded titles of:
  - \* MS (Ayurved) Shalya Tantra: General Surgery
  - \* MS (Ayurved) Shalakya Tantra: Disease of Eye, Ear, Nose, Throat, Head and Oro-Dentistry

- As per the new regulations, during the training period, the PG students will be given practical training on the procedures so that after the completion of their studies, they would be able to perform them independently.

#### **List of procedures which would be taught:**

- All types of skin grafting
- Ear lobe repair
- Excision of simple cyst and benign tumours (lipoma, fibroma, schwannoma, etc.) of non-vital organs
- Excision/amputation of gangrene
- Traumatic wound management — all types of suturing, ligation and repair of tendon and muscles
- Foreign body removal from stomach
- Colostomy
- Cataract surgery
- Local anesthesia in the eye
- Rhinoplasty
- Hair lip repair, loose tooth extraction, caries tooth/teeth, root canal treatment

There are 58 surgical procedures that are being allowed to be performed by PG scholars of Ayurveda.

#### **Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)**

CCIM is a statutory body under the Indian Medicine Central Council Act which regulates the Indian Medical systems of Ayurveda, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Unani Medicine (AYUSH)

#### **What is the issue/why the protest?**

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has been opposing this move of the central government.

- The IMA is against the mixing of traditional medicine and allopathy.
- Hence, it is opposed to the permission given to traditional systems of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) to offer allopathic therapies and treatment.
- IMA doctors also clarify that they are not against traditional medicine systems developing their own procedures and surgical processes, but they were against 'legitimising mixopathy'.
- According to people against this new regulation, they give the impression that the skills or training of the Ayurveda doctor in performing modern surgeries are the same as those practising modern medicine, and this was not true.

- They claim that even if Ayurvedic medicine is taught with modern medicine textbooks also, this is no reason for this kind of 'encroachment' on its domain.

#### What Ayurveda practitioners say?

- According to them, the new regulations just bring more clarity to procedures that they are already performing as part of their treatment.
- They say that these are already part of their course but there was not much awareness about them.
- Earlier, people were not clear on what procedures an Ayurveda practitioner could perform and now the regulations only defined the skill sets that an Ayurveda practitioner is capable of performing.

#### Ayurveda and surgery

- Ayurveda is an ancient system and practice of medicine and healing that originated in India.
- Sage Sushruta displayed his surgical dexterity at a time when the world had not yet woken up to the art and the science of surgery.
- There are detailed descriptions in the Sushruta Samhita, the ancient Sanskrit text on medicine and surgery, of procedures such as rhinoplasty where the nose is reconstructed with tissue from the cheek.
- It was thousands of years later that modern plastic surgeons described this procedure.
- As a system of medicine, Ayurveda is still very popular in India.
- However, currently, the complex nature of surgeries performed in allopathic medicine has no parallels in the Ayurvedic system.
- To allow doctors trained in Ayurveda to perform modern surgeries, it might require re-training Ayurvedic practitioners in the science of surgical approaches in modern medicine. Even then, there might be a limit to what they are allowed to do.

#### What State did after independence?

- After Independence, the Indian state was faced with the difficult task of accommodating both the ascendant modern medicine brought in by the British and India's traditional systems of medicine, notably Ayurveda.
- For a brief period, there actually existed integrated courses, wherein both Ayurveda and modern medicine were taught to students.
- But these withered away partly due to opposition from purists in Ayurveda who were outraged by the dilution of their science.
- Therefore, the degree in Ayurvedic medicine became largely an Ayurveda course.

- Subsequently, as modern medicine made rapid strides, Ayurvedic graduates experienced an identity crisis.

#### Importance of traditional medical practitioners in India

- Non-MBBS doctors have become an increasingly important part of the modern medicine machine in India.
- They are resident doctors, intensive care duty doctors and operation theatre assistant surgeons.
  - \* In Maharashtra, the '108' emergency response ambulance service is manned by non-MBBS doctors.
  - \* During COVID-19, a large number of the quarantine centres were manned by these doctors.
- Incidentally, they work for less pay which allows hospitals to control costs and even make profits.
- Ayurvedic graduates including surgeons are a large workforce in India and given the right kind of training, they can play a crucial role in the country's healthcare system.
- The healthcare system in India is mired with many problems, one of them being the inadequate number of healthcare professionals, especially in rural areas.
- The large number of non-MBBS doctors can be utilised to improve the provision of decent healthcare to the citizens of the country.
- Given the right training, pay and identity, Ayurvedic surgeons can be trained to strengthen on site or ambulance care of trauma victims and save hundreds of lives.

The current government's move to standardize traditional medicine systems along with modern medicine can be a step in the right direction, but only if the treading is done with utmost caution and the right intentions.

#### Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

### **3. Kala-azar was eliminated from a highly endemic district in Bihar**

- » Prelims: Vector involved, causes for the disease.
- » Mains: Preventive measures.

#### Background:

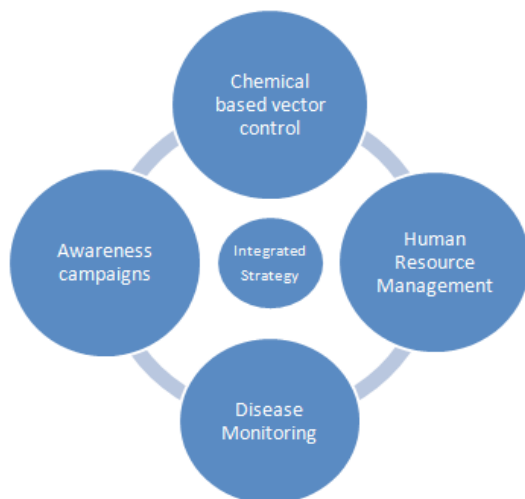
- Kala-azar or Visceral Leishmaniasis (VL) is a tropical disease characterised by irregular fever, weight loss, anaemia and swelling of the spleen and liver. It is caused by a protozoan Leishmania parasite and is transmitted to humans by the bite of infected female sandflies.

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) India accounts for about two-thirds of the total 7 to 10 lakh new global cases annually, and the disease is endemic to Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. An initiative was launched by WHO to eliminate VL as a public health problem from the South East Asia region by 2020, which has since been extended to 2023.

\* A disease eliminated when the annual incidence is reduced to less than 1 case per 10,000 people at the sub-district or block level. Eradication would mean there are zero cases.

#### Details:

- Integrated control strategy in Vaishali district has helped drastically reduce Kala-azar cases.



#### Chemical-based vector control:

- Once a person is diagnosed with VL, indoor residual spraying was done at his house and at the neighbouring houses within 500 metres.
- Though the disease is not contagious, the infected sand fly may be present in the area and the chemical spray will help kill them.

#### Human resource management:

- Hospital staff and medical doctors in these regions were trained. Nearly 2,500 ASHA workers and 1,000 field workers were also trained.

#### Monitoring disease:

- Sustained monitoring of active cases – track, test, and treat strategy – in the hotspot region is a crucial aspect of the integrated strategy. This would involve mapping of the case distribution and early case detection.
- GIS-based mapping, and case data management and spatial visualisation systems would aid in the disease monitoring phase and help in the proper implementation of control strategies.

#### Community awareness campaigns:

- The population susceptible to the disease need to be made aware of suitable behavioural changes that could help prevent the spread of the disease and also help improve the immunity in the susceptible population.

#### Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

#### **4. National Organ Donation Day**

» Mains: Organ donation.

#### Context:

- 27 November is observed as 'National Organ Donation Day' in India.

#### Organ donation in India:

- To raise awareness of organ donation, the Indian government observes this Day every year.
- Organ donations have always been abysmally low in India. According to estimates, only 0.65 donations per million population take place in the country, compared to 35 in Spain and 26 in the US.
- The pandemic and the lockdown adversely affected organ donations in India.
- However, even before the pandemic, organ donations have always been low in India.
- According to data released by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in 2019, 1.5-2 lakh people require kidney transplants annually but only about 8,000 (4 per cent) patients receive them.
- Similarly, almost 80,000 patients require liver transplants every year but only 1,800 of these transplants are performed. About 1 lakh patients require corneal or eye transplants annually but less than half manage to get them.
- Even for cardiac patients, of the 10,000 who require heart transplants, only about 200 of them match with viable donors.
- A major reason for this shortage is the lack of awareness among people about the process of donation.
- Several myths associated with organ donations also hamper the process in India, along with fears of disfigurement, non-acceptance of brain death, religious beliefs and migrant workers not having relatives on-site to give consent.
- Those who wish to become organ donors need to register themselves on online portals like the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO), Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (ROTTO) or the Organ Retrieval Banking Organisation (ORBO).



- Family members of a deceased person can also consent to donate their organs.
- As per a 2019 report, only 3% of the population across 12 cities in the country have registered to donate organs.

### *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health*

#### **5. RT-LAMP: a new technology for detecting COVID-19**

- » Prelims: RT-LAMP technology, difference between RNA and DNA.

##### **Context:**

- The high infective rate of the novel coronavirus, SARSCoV-2 causing the Coronavirus disease 2019 has meant that testing needs to be large in scale and accurate in diagnosis.

##### **Details:**

- The currently deployed Real-time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test and the COVID-19 serology tests have highlighted the need to have a diagnostic tool that is accurate, scalable and quick.
- The challenges with the Real-time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test and its drawbacks has highlighted the need to have an improved diagnostic tool. The RT-LAMP (Reverse Transcriptase loop-mediated isothermal amplification) technology offers hope in this context.

The drawbacks experienced with the RT-PCR tests are as follows:

- Cost- The test requires expensive and complex apparatus.
- Human Resource training- This would require high financial outlays.
- Specificity and sensitivity- Currently it is estimated to be around 95% and there is a possibility of false-negative results, which can have cast doubts in the minds of Health practitioners and policymakers.
- Time- Turnaround time is estimated to be around 10 hours and this can stretch to higher range in remote areas. The high time interval will hinder efforts to contain the spread of the disease.

The serology tests which is used to discern antigens associated with COVID-19, though it has the advantage of being time-saving, it has been found wanting on the accuracy, the high false positives/negatives have cast aspersions.

#### **RT-LAMP (Reverse Transcriptase loop-mediated isothermal amplification) technology.**

- Loop-mediated isothermal amplification, or LAMP, is an assay that can be used for viral RNA detection. Reverse-transcription LAMP (RT-LAMP) allows for quicker analysis of genetic material than traditional PCR and has been successfully used in the detection of the COVID-19 virus
- This is a one-step nucleic acid amplification method to multiply specific sequences of RNA of the coronavirus.
- Here, the RNA is first made into cDNA (copy DNA) by the usual reverse transcription (the process in cells by which an enzyme makes a copy of DNA from RNA. The enzyme that makes the DNA copy is called reverse transcriptase and is found in retroviruses), then the DNA is amplified by the LAMP technique.

#### **Advantages associated with Reverse-Transcription LAMP (RT-LAMP)**

- 1. Time- Result will be obtained within a span of 30 minutes and in addition, the positive samples are amplified in around 10 minutes. Such a short testing time duration helps to meet the increasing demand for testing.
- 2. Temperature- The desired temperature for DNA amplification in LAMP technology is 65 degrees celsius whereas RT-PCR testing requires a set of temperatures for DNA amplification, ranging from 92 degrees Celsius to 56 degrees celsius, thus needing thermal cylinders which would inflate the cost.
- 3. Quantity of DNA amplified- Several hundred thousand times more than the RT-PCR test, therefore the final assay is possible with a simple colour reaction, removing the need for very costly real-time PCR machines.
- 4. Reagents storage- Reagents used for chemical analysis can be stored at around 4 degrees celsius in LAMP technology whereas they need to be stored and transported at around -20 degree celsius, thus requiring deep freezers, which in turn leads to an escalation of costs.
- 5. Simpler procedure entails minimum skill and minimum infrastructure thus paving the way for massive deployment.
- 6. Accuracy- Indian Council of Medical Research has validated the sensitivity of LAMP technology to be 98.7% and specificity of 100%.

RT-LAMP is the perfect technology for use in the COVID-19 pandemic due to its accuracy, relatively simple equipment, low cost. This means tests can be carried out in non-standard institutions, such as airports or rural hospitals or medical centers, which will help in decongesting the Health centres and also help in ramping up testing which is a prerequisite for containing the pandemic.

## *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health*

### 6. Dose of optimism

- » Prelims: m-RNA technology.
- » Mains: Vaccine development stages.

#### Context:

- Multinational Drug Company Pfizer and BioNTech have announced that their vaccine candidate against COVID-19 based on the mRNA technology has achieved success in the first interim analysis from phase 3 study.

#### Background:

#### **m-RNA technology:**

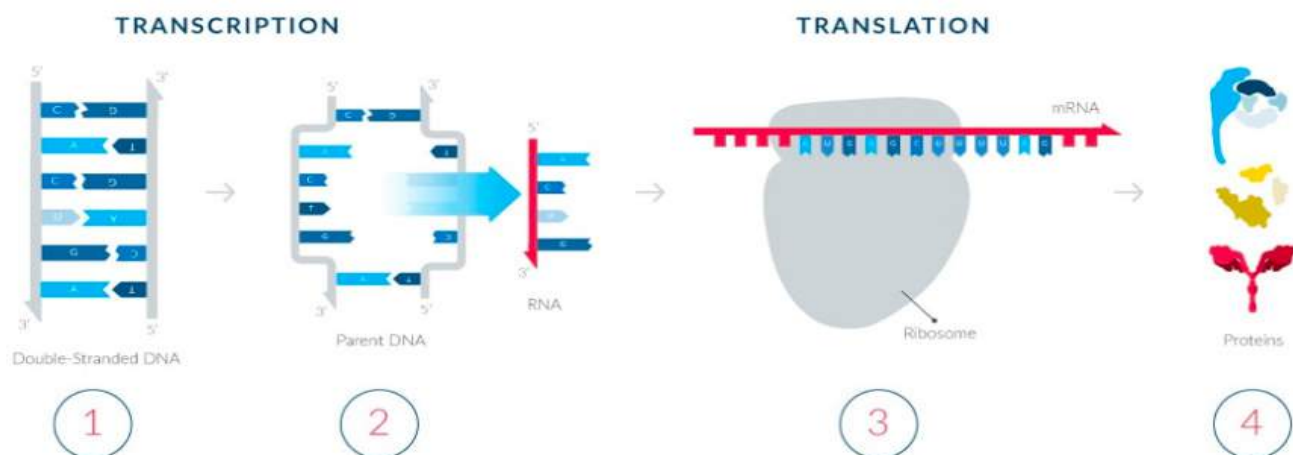
##### **mRNA:**

- Messenger ribonucleic acid or mRNA plays a vital role in human biology, specifically in a process known as protein synthesis. mRNA is a single-stranded molecule that carries genetic code from DNA in a cell's nucleus to ribosomes, the cell's protein-making machinery.
- Thus mRNA is the set of instructions by which cells make all proteins and send them to various parts of the body.

#### **Potential:**

- mRNA medicines take advantage of normal biological processes to express proteins and create a desired therapeutic effect. This would lead to minimal side effects.
- mRNA medicines can go inside cells to direct protein production, something not possible with other drug approaches. This enables the potential treatment of a broad spectrum of diseases, many of which cannot be addressed with current technologies. This could have a positive effect on improving human health and impacting lives around the world. Using mRNA as a drug opens up a breadth of opportunities to treat and prevent disease.
- mRNA technology has the potential to transform how medicines are discovered, developed and manufactured.

## mRNA's role in protein synthesis



#### **mRNA medicines:**

- Using mRNA as a medicine is a fundamentally different approach in drug therapy.
- Unlike the traditional pharmaceuticals which are small therapeutic molecules or the traditional biologics (recombinant proteins and monoclonal antibodies), mRNA medicines are sets of instructions. These instructions direct cells in the body to make proteins to prevent or fight disease.

#### **Details:**

- The early results of the phase 3 study have indicated the candidate vaccine being "90% protective" in the nearly 40,000 volunteers involved in the trial.
- The Pfizer vaccine candidate is based on mRNA technology. The Pfizer vaccine candidate uses an infectious particle, such as a portion of the virus, and uses a piece of RNA that is then made into

an antigen by the body's own machinery. This induces the development of antibodies by the body's immune system.

#### Significance:

- The mRNA technology-based vaccine reduces the risks of untoward reactions in people who have been administered the vaccine as it does not introduce attenuated or inactivated viruses.
- The mRNA technology-based vaccine also does not need to be cultured in chicken eggs or other mammalian cells, allowing it to be made faster and at a cheaper price.
- The initial success validates the scientists' basic strategy of developing a vaccine to target the spike protein of the virus. Given that a similar approach is being followed by most vaccine developers, the chances of several encouraging results are high. The mRNA technology-based vaccine marks a new frontier of novel vaccine production methods.

#### Challenges:

- There are still no commercially available m-RNA based vaccines to accurately predict the efficacy of mRNA technology-based vaccines.
- These mRNA technology-based vaccines need to be refrigerated to nearly minus 70°C and India, with its limited cold chain infrastructure, lacks efficient vaccine storage capacity.

#### Way forward for India:

- India should try to sign agreements with the major vaccine developers to ensure that it is assured of early access to even a fraction of the vaccine output.
  - \* In India 'Covishield' by the Serum Institute and 'Covaxin' by Bharat Biotech Ltd., are undergoing trials.
- India must keep a close watch on the mRNA-based vaccine technology and develop expertise. Additionally, India should also focus on improving its cold chain infrastructure to meet the storage demands on any new COVID-19 vaccine.

#### Conclusion:

- Though the results are said to be announced by an expert independent committee, they have not yet been announced by the standard procedure of a peer-reviewed journal. There is a need to ascertain whether the results would hold up in a wider population.

### Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

#### **7. Strengthening public health capacities in disasters**

- » Mains: Public sector investment in Indian health sector.

#### Context:

- The article analyzes important lessons for India's health care sector from the COVID-19 pandemic experience.

#### Lacunae in India's approach:

##### **Inadequacy of the Indian public health sector:**

- Given that the public sector investment in the health sector has been found to be inadequate over the years, the health sector infrastructure has been found to be too inadequate to meet the demands generated during the pandemic.
- Though the public health expenditure as a percentage of GDP has been increasing since 2015-16, it still remains within a narrow band of 1.02 – 1.28 per cent of GDP. The country has a long way to go in achieving the targeted public expenditure of 2.5 per cent of the GDP by 2025 under the National Health Programme.

##### **Drawbacks in private sector:**

- The private sector accounts for a large share of the Indian health sector. India also envisages a publicly financed health insurance based hospital care service model, which would very likely be private-sector led.
- Though the private sector has been able to play a crucial role in filling the vacuum left by the low public health sector presence, there are several drawbacks associated with the private health sector.
  - \* A large majority of private hospitals in the country are small enterprises. Many of these small hospitals are unsuitable for meeting disaster-related care needs.
  - \* The Indian private health sector is characterized by weak regulation and poor organization and is considered inadequate for mounting a strong and coordinated response to disasters.
  - \* The private sector, led by the profit motive, has in many instances indulged in overcharging despite the capping of treatment prices by the governments. This illustrates how the requisitioning of private sector services during disasters can hardly be a dependable option in the Indian context.
  - \* Private hospitals do not prefer to invest in disaster preparedness as they consider it non-profitable or economically non-viable.

**Neglect of public health in disaster management:**

- In 2005, India enacted the Disaster Management Act, laying out an institutional framework for managing disasters across the country. The act prescribed a systematic scheme for prevention, mitigation, and responding to disasters of all kinds.
- Disaster management considerations were to be incorporated into every aspect of development and the activities of different sectors, including health. Though some headway has been achieved, the approach continues to be largely reactive, and significant gaps remain particularly in terms of medical preparedness for disasters.
- The public health angle in disasters and disaster management has been largely under-emphasised and this has been evident during the pandemic.

**Neglect of critical public health issues:**

- The Disaster Management Act fails to identify progressive events as disasters, thus neglecting pressing public health issues such as tuberculosis and recurrent dengue outbreaks.
- This has resulted in the neglect of many pressing public health issues which too have a substantial impact on the health profile of the Indian population.

**Way forward:****Planning for future challenges:**

- The health services and their future development plans must consider the possibility of disaster-imposed pressures as well.

**Greater role for public sector:**

- Given the lacunae in the private sector, a strong public sector capacity is imperative for dealing with disasters. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen public sector capacities, including capacity-building of staff.

**Integration of disaster management with primary health care:**

- There is ample scope for greater integration of disaster management with primary care. Making primary health care central to disaster management can be a significant step towards building the health system and community resilience to disasters.
- Community engagement, disease surveillance, and essential health-care provision, important characteristics of primary care, are central themes to disaster management as well.
- This becomes all the more relevant for a developing country like India, which owing to its low-income settings cannot afford to invest in the costly secondary and tertiary health care sectors. The primary care sector offers a low cost and highly effective investment opportunity in the healthcare sector.

**Legal framework:**

- The legal framework for disaster management must push a legal mandate for strengthening the public health system with suitable regulation of the critical private sector.

***Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health*****8. 'India makes progress in vaccination coverage'**

- » Prelims: Mission Indradhanush, Universal Immunization Programme.
- » Mains: WASH programmes.

**Context:**

- According to the latest annual Pneumonia and Diarrhoea Progress Report released by the International Vaccine Access Centre (IVAC), India has made significant progress in its vaccination coverage to prevent child pneumonia and diarrhoea deaths.

**Details:**

- The report suggests that India has achieved the global target of 90% coverage for three of the five vaccines whose coverage is monitored in the report. These vaccines are:
  - \* Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus (DPT) vaccine
  - \* Measles-containing-vaccine first dose
  - \* Haemophilus influenzae type B
  - \* Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV)
  - \* Rotavirus vaccine
- While India's coverage of rotavirus vaccine increased by 18 percentage points (35% rotavirus coverage in 2018 expanded to 53% in 2019), coverage against pneumococcal pneumonia increased by 9 percentage points (6% PCV coverage in 2018 expanded to 15% in 2019).
- In 2019, India completed the "100-day agenda" (an unprecedented national scale-up of rotavirus vaccine). This landmark vaccine expansion will help protect 26 million children born each year against life-threatening cases of rotavirus diarrhoea.
- Of the 15 focus countries included in the report, India is one of just four countries that exceeded targets for exclusive breastfeeding.
- The report tracked progress by analysing 10 indicators from the latest available data on how countries are delivering key interventions — including breastfeeding, immunisation, care-seeking and antibiotics, oral rehydration solution (ORS), and zinc supplementation — shown to prevent pneumonia and diarrhoea deaths.

**Concerns:**

- Nearly every country included in the report lagged in access to treatments against pneumonia and diarrhoea.
- India failed to reach all four targets for treatment and the treatment for diarrhoea has the lowest coverage, with only 51% of children receiving ORS and 20% getting zinc.
- Although there has been progress in India in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens the hard-won gains because of disruptions caused in routine health services like immunisation and access to medical oxygen.



# SOCIAL ISSUES

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## *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections*

### **1. Ambedkar Social Innovation Incubation Mission (ASIIM)**

- » Prelims: Details about the scheme
- » Mains: Social welfare, inclusive growth.

#### **Context**

- With a view to developing entrepreneurship amongst the SC/Divyang youth and to enable them to become 'job-givers', Ministry of Social Justice, Government of India had launched the Venture Capital Fund for SCs (VCF-SC)

#### **The main objectives of the ASIIM initiative are:**

- To promote entrepreneurship among the SC Youth with special preference to Divyangs.
- To support (1,000) innovative ideas till 2024 through a synergetic work with the Technology Business Incubators (TBIs) set up by Department of Science and Technology.
- To support, promote, handhold the start-up ideas till they reach commercial stage by providing liberal equity support.
- To incentivize students with innovative mind-set to take to entrepreneurship with confidence.

#### **How does it work?**

- Under this fund, 117 companies promoted by SC entrepreneurs have been sanctioned financial assistance to set up business ventures.
- Additionally, 1,000 SC youth would be identified in the next 4 years with start-up ideas through the Technology Business Incubators (TBIs) in various higher educational institutions.
- They will then be funded INR 30 Lakhs in 3 years as equity funding so that they can translate their start-up ideas into commercial ventures.
- Successful ventures would further qualify for venture funding of up to INR 5 Crore from the Venture Capital Fund for SCs.

#### **Significance**

- It will promote innovation in the SC youth and would help them to become job-givers from job-seekers
- It would further give fillip to the 'Stand up India' initiative.

## *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections*

### **2. Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge**

- » Prelims: Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (2013)
- » Mains: Social welfare schemes.

#### **Context:**

- The Minister for State for Housing & Urban Affairs launched the Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge across 243 Cities.

#### **Background:**

- The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (2013) and various judgements of the Supreme Court expressly prohibit hazardous cleaning, i.e. manual entry into a septic tank or sewer without protective gear and observing operating procedures.
- Despite this, recurring episodes of human fatalities among those engaged in the cleaning of septic tanks and sewers, typically belonging to the economically disadvantaged and marginalized communities of society, continue to be an issue of concern.

#### **About the Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge:**

- The challenge is aimed at preventing 'hazardous cleaning' of sewers and septic tanks and promote their mechanized cleaning.
- The challenge will focus extensively on creating citizen awareness on this critical issue along with infrastructure creation for mechanized cleaning and capacity building of the workforce.
- Along with this, a dedicated helpline number has been set up to register complaints and provide real-time solutions on desludging or sewer overflow.
- The actual on-ground assessment of participating cities will be conducted in May 2021 by an independent agency and results of the same will be declared on 15 August 2021.
- Cities will be awarded in three sub-categories –
  - \* With a population of more than 10 lakhs
  - \* 3-10 lakhs
  - \* Up to 3 lakhs

- The total prize money is of Rs 52 crores and it will be given to winning cities across all categories.

### ***Urbanization***

#### **3. Urban Mobility India (UMI) Conference**

- » Prelims: Details of the conference
- » Mains: National Urban Transport Policy of the Government of India, problems of mobility in cities.
- The first UMI Conference was held in 2008 in New Delhi.
- The annual Urban Mobility India (UMI) Conference and Expo is a flagship event held under the aegis of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India.
- The genesis of UMI is from the National Urban Transport Policy of the Government of India, 2006 (NUTP), which lays a very strong emphasis on building capabilities at the State and city level to address the problems associated with urban transport and undertake the task of developing sustainable urban transport systems.
- The primary objective of the conference is to disseminate information to the cities, whose officials attend the conference, and to help them keep up-to-date with the best urban transport practices.
- The conference provides an opportunity for key decision-makers and delegates to interact with other professionals, experts, academia, industry, civil society, technology, services providers and other stakeholders in Urban Transport both domestic and international so that the delegates can carry home ideas to develop their urban transport along a sustainable path.
- It is also a forum to discuss key issues relevant to the sector and suggest measures to address them.

#### **Context**

- The 13th Urban Mobility India (UMI) Conference was organized by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- The theme of the UMI Conference 2020 is "Emerging Trends in Urban Mobility".

### ***Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.***

#### **4. 'All insults not offence under SC/ST Act'**

- » Prelims: Right to equality
- » Mains: The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

#### **Context:**

- In a judgement, the Supreme Court has said that all insults or intimidations to persons belonging to Dalit or tribal communities will not be an offence under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

#### **Details:**

- A three-judge bench said that an offence is made out under the statute only if "such insult or intimidation is on account of the victim belonging to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe".
- "Offence under the Act is not established merely on the fact that the informant [complainant] is a member of Scheduled Caste unless there is an intention to humiliate a member of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe for the reason that the victim belongs to such caste," the court said.
- The court said that in order to be considered an offence, the insult should be specifically intended to humiliate the victim for his caste.
- The court said that the object of the Act is to punish violators who inflict indignities, humiliations and harassment.
- The Act is intended at punishing the acts of the upper caste against the vulnerable section of society for the reason that they belong to a particular community.

### ***Poverty and developmental issues.***

#### **5. The nutrition fallout of school closures**

- » Prelims: Global Hunger Index, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020.
- » Mains: Nutritional status, Mid-day meal scheme.

#### **Context:**

- The article analyzes the negative impact the school closures have had on the nutrition status of children.

#### **Background:**

Mid-day meal scheme:

- The mid-day meal scheme (MDMS) guidelines recommend providing one hot-cooked mid-day meal for school-going children. All school-going children from classes I to VIII in government and government-aided schools are eligible under the scheme. The National Education Policy, 2020 recommends extending the MDMS to cover other school-going children as well.
- MDMS is the largest school-feeding programme in the world, which has played an extremely significant role in increasing nutrition and learning among school-going children.
- The school's mid-day meals are a major source of nutrition for children, particularly those from vulnerable communities.

- The mid-day meal in India should provide 450 Kcal of energy, a minimum of 12 grams of proteins, including adequate quantities of micronutrients like iron, folic acid, Vitamin-A, etc. This amounts to approximately one-third of the nutritional requirement of the child.

Challenges posed by the lockdown:

- The MDMS has been virtually dysfunctional due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Serving hot meals, at the children's homes or even at the centre, poses many challenges in the present scenario.
  - \* Even states like Tamil Nadu, with a relatively good infrastructure for the MDMS, are unable to serve the mandated 'hot cooked meal' during the lockdown.

### **Concerns:**

Loss of school meals:

- The report of 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020', released by the Food and Agriculture Organization in partnership with other UN organisations estimates that in April 2020 at the peak of school closures, 369 million children globally were losing out on school meals, with an estimated 116 million of them from India.

Nutritional insecurity for children:

- The current situation has exacerbated the problem of child hunger and malnutrition.
- The recent Global Hunger Index (GHI) report for 2020 ranks India at 94 out of 107 countries and in the category 'serious'. The Global Hunger Index is a combination of indicators of undernutrition in the population and wasting, stunting, and mortality in children below five years of age.

Goal of Zero hunger:

- India is already far from achieving the 'Zero Hunger' goal envisaged under the Sustainable Development Goals. The current circumstances will only further increase the gap.

Non-implementation of government orders:

- Despite the orders in March and April 2020 that the usual hot-cooked mid-day meal or an equivalent food security allowance/dry ration would be provided to all eligible school-going children even during vacation, to ensure that their immunity and nutrition is not compromised, states are still struggling to implement this decision. The dry ration distributions in lieu of school meals have been irregular.
- According to the Food Corporation of India's (FCI) food grain bulletin, the off-take of grains under MDMS from FCI during April and May 2020 has been 22% lower than the corresponding off-take during April and May 2019. Most states have reported a decline in the grain offtake from FCI in April-May 2020.

Increase in child labour:

- There are also reports of children engaging in labour to supplement the fall in family incomes in vulnerable households.
- A recent report by the International Labour Organization and the UNICEF notes that unless school services and social security are universally strengthened, there is a risk that some children may not even return to schools when they reopen and may indulge in child labour.

### **Way forward:**

Retrospective distribution of dry ration:

- Given that the distribution of dry ration started only in late May, there needs to be the immediate distribution of the April quota with retrospective effect.

Innovative strategies:

- Across the country and the world, innovative learning methods are being adopted to ensure children's education outcomes, similar efforts are necessary to ensure nutritional security of the children.

### **Decentralised and local supply chains:**

- Nutrition experts have suggested local smallholder farmers' involvement in the school feeding programme. This could involve a livelihood model that links local smallholder farmers with the mid-day meal system for the supply of cereals, vegetables, and eggs.
- Locally produced vegetables and fruits may be added to the MDMS, also providing an income to local farmers.
- This would lead to decentralised models and local supply chains.
- This envisaged system apart from enabling nutritional security of children will also aid in diversifying production and farming systems, transform rural livelihoods and the local economy, and fulfill the 'Atmanirbhar Poshan' (nutritional self-sufficiency) agenda.

### **School Nutrition (Kitchen) Garden:**

- Initiatives such as the School Nutrition (Kitchen) Garden under MDMS to provide fresh vegetables for mid-day meals should be further strengthened.

School mid-day meal centre:

- Hot meals can be provided to non-school going but eligible children in the school mid-day meal centres, similar to free urban canteens or community kitchens for the elderly and others in some states.

### *Role of women and women's organization*

#### **6. SC lays down guidelines for matrimonial cases**

- » Mains: Domestic violence, women's rights, women rights NGOs.

##### Context:

- The Supreme Court has held that deserted wives and children are entitled to alimony/maintenance from their husbands from the date they apply for it in a court of law.

##### Details:

- The judgement laid down uniform and comprehensive guidelines for family courts, magistrates and lower courts to follow while hearing applications filed by women seeking maintenance from their estranged husbands.
  - \* The plea of the husband that he does not possess any source of income by the very fact does not spare him of his moral duty to maintain his wife, if he is able-bodied and has educational qualifications.
  - \* Both the applicant wife and the respondent husband have to disclose their assets and liabilities in a maintenance case.
  - \* Factors such as "spiralling inflation rates and high costs of living" should be considered while calculating the alimony.
- Any violation would lead to punishment, such as civil detention and even attachment of the property of the latter.

##### Issue:

- In India, for many girls, marriage before completion of higher education is an inevitable reality.
- Girls are married off early and bear children long before they should.
- This results in poor maternal health which is one of the root causes of high levels of child stunting and wasting in India.
- There is also the possibility of a marriage not working out for varied reasons, leaving the girl or young woman in extreme distress because often, she is not financially independent.

##### What was the need for the guidelines?

- Women deserted by husbands are often left in difficult situations or are reduced to destitution for lack of means to sustain themselves and their children.
- One of the judges reasoned that if maintenance was not paid from the date of application, the party seeking maintenance would be deprived of sustenance, owing to the time taken for disposal of the application, which often runs into several years.

- That the maintenance must be granted from the date when the application was made is based on the rationale that the primary object of maintenance laws is to protect a deserted wife and dependent children from destitution.

##### Legislations and constitutional provisions that protect women's rights:

- Parliament and the courts have persistently enacted legislation to give women better rights.
- The two key constitutional safeguards are Article 15(3), which states 'nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children', read together with Article 39, which directs state policy towards equal pay and opportunities for both men and women, and protecting the health of women and children.

##### Significance

- A Bench of Justices Indu Malhotra and R. Subhash Reddy, outlined specifics, including reasonable needs of a wife and dependent children, her educational qualification, whether she has an independent source of income, and if she does, is it sufficient.
  - \* These guidelines have to be followed by the family courts, magistrates and lower courts on alimony cases.
- Given the large and growing percentage of matrimonial litigation, some clarity was necessary.
- The bench laid down criteria that must be considered while calculating the quantum of maintenance.
- The Court laid down that while women can make a claim for alimony under different laws, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Section 125 of the CrPC, or under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, it would be inequitable to direct the husband to pay maintenance under each of the proceedings, urging civil and family courts to take note of previous settlements.
- Keeping in mind the vastness of India and its inequities, the Court also added how an "order or decree of maintenance" may be enforced under various laws and Section 128 of the CrPC.

### *Urbanization*

#### **7. Reinventing cities**

- » Mains: Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Urban planning.



**Context:**

- Post COVID-19, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has called for changes in urban planning to make our cities more liveable and sustainable, with better amenities.
- He emphasized resetting the mindset, processes and practices for safe urban living, and acknowledged that governments actually do little for the working millions.

**Liveable Cities**

- According to the PM, liveable meant having better housing, better work environment and short and efficient travel facilities.

**Need for change**

- In the first hundred days of the pandemic, the top 10 cities affected worldwide accounted for 15% of the total cases.
- In the Indian context, cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai, became the epicenters of the disease.
  - \* It was due to the density of the population infections erupted, and this eventually spread to smaller towns as well due to reverse migration from the cities.
- Therefore the PM is looking at developing a strategy beyond the current pandemic.

**Affordable Housing**

- Mumbai is estimated to have added only 5% of rental housing in New Residential Construction (1961-2000), and that too led by private funding.
- The abject housing conditions of migrant labourers in major cities in India has come under scrutiny during the pandemic, with virus hotspots in slums.
- Creating well-designed good affordable housing to tackle inequality is one way governments can help economies recover from the crisis.
  - \* The post-COVID-19 era, therefore, presents an opportunity to make schemes such as the Centre's Affordable Rental Housing Complexes deliver at scale, focusing on new good houses built by the state — on the lines of the post-war reconstruction in Europe, Japan and South Korea.

**Way forward**

- The Ministry of Housing, which until now has focused on smart cities, can work with State Governments to collect the data on housing requirements to meet the demand and supply in each city.
- Laws on air pollution, municipal solid waste management and water quality should be implemented in its true spirit.

- Past scourges such as cholera, the plague and the global flu pandemic a century ago led to change in waste handling, social housing and health care. It is now important that governments show the political will to reinvent the cities.

**Social Issues****8. Poshan Abhiyaan**

- » Prelims: The various hunger and nutrition indices, POSHAN Abhiyaan, national nutrition strategy
- » Mains: Nutritional status of the country, schemes to address hunger, public health, NFHS surveys.

**Context:**

- According to a report by NITI Aayog, the Poshan Abhiyaan must be stepped up to meet the targets set by the Centre to reduce stunting, wasting and anaemia by 2022.

**What is Malnutrition?**

- Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients. The term malnutrition covers 2 broad groups of conditions.
- One is 'undernutrition'—which includes
  - \* stunting (low height for age),
  - \* wasting (low weight for height),
  - \* underweight (low weight for age) and
  - \* Micronutrient deficiencies or insufficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals).
- The other is overweight, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer).
- Malnutrition occurs when a person gets too much or too little of certain nutrients.

**POSHAN Abhiyaan:**

- POSHAN Abhiyaan is also known as the National Nutrition Mission.
- The term 'Poshan' in the name of the programme stands for 'Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition'.
- It is the world's largest nutrition programme for children and mothers.
- The mission is a multi-ministerial initiative and aims at removing malnutrition from the country by 2022.
- It aims to reduce stunting and wasting by 2% a year (total 6% until 2022) among children and anaemia by 3% a year (total 9%) among children, adolescent girls and pregnant women and lactating mothers.



**Issues:**

- More than a third of the children under five face stunting and wasting and 40% aged between one and four are anaemic.
- Over 50% of pregnant and other women were found to be anaemic, said the National Family Health Survey 4 released in 2016.
- India's targets are conservative as compared to the global targets defined by the World Health Assembly (WHA), which is a prevalence rate of 5% of stunting as opposed to India's goal of reducing stunting levels to 13.3% by 2022.
- The target of reducing prevalence levels of anaemia among pregnant women from 50.3% in 2016 to 34.4% in 2022 and among adolescent girls from 52.9% in 2016 to 39.66%, is also considered conservative.

**Way forward:**

- NITI Aayog's third progress report on the Nutrition Mission highlights the need to graduate to a POSHAN-plus strategy
  - \* Its suggests continued strengthening of the four pillars of the Abhiyaan and a renewed focus on other social determinants in addition to addressing the governance challenges of National Health Mission (NHM)/Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) scheme delivery mechanisms.
  - \* The report calls for a need to lay as much emphasis on complementary feeding as it does on breastfeeding, which it points out can help avert 60% of the total stunting cases in India.
- A major shift in policy has to encompass the immediate universalisation of the Public Distribution System.
  - \* There is a dire need for the distribution of quality food items.
- Innovative interventions such as the setting up of community kitchens must be planned, among other things.
- The need of the hour remains the right utilisation and expansion of existing programmes to ensure that at least some part of this growing concern of malnutrition in the country is addressed.

# EDUCATION

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## *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.*

### **1. Academic Freedom Index (AFI)**

- » Prelims: Source of report, components of report
- » Mains: Status of higher education institutions in India.

#### **Context**

- India has scored low in the international Academic Freedom Index (AFI) with a score of 0.352. In the last five years, the AFI of India has dipped by 0.1 points.

#### **Details:**

- The index proposes a score for each country to help determine the level of academic freedom its universities and academic centres really enjoy, and which the researchers behind the idea say could be used to understand a university's attractiveness in addition to its infrastructure, research output.
- Specifically, the index and accompanying report try to quantify the freedom of university scholars to debate politically and culturally controversial topics without fearing for their safety or studies, and without any external influence on the institutions' affairs, based on a combination of factual data and the assessments of 1,800 academicians worldwide.

#### **Eight components to evaluate the scores:**

- Freedom to research and teach,
- Freedom of academic exchange and dissemination,
- Institutional autonomy,
- Campus integrity,
- Freedom of academic and cultural expression,
- Constitutional protection of academic freedom,
- International legal commitment to academic freedom under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and
- Existence of universities.

#### **Findings of the report**

- India has an AFI of 0.352, comparable to the scores of Saudi Arabia and Libya.
- Countries that scored higher than India include Pakistan (0.554), Brazil (0.466), Ukraine (0.422), Somalia (0.436) and Malaysia (0.582).

- Uruguay and Portugal top the list with scores of 0.971 each, followed closely by Latvia and Germany.
- At the bottom are North Korea (0.011), Eritrea (0.015), Bahrain (0.039) and Iran (0.116).

#### **Concerns:**

- India's dismal score on the Academic Freedom Index is a reflection of the critical issues plaguing the country's education system, particularly the higher education sector.
  - \* India has not fared well in components like institutional autonomy, campus integrity, freedom of academic and cultural expression and constitutional protection of academic freedom.

#### **Political interference:**

- Most universities in the country are subjected to unnecessary interference from governments in both academic and non-academic issues.

#### **Rent-seeking culture:**

- A majority of appointments, especially to top-ranking posts like that of vice-chancellors, pro vice-chancellors and registrars, have become highly politicised.
- Such political appointments, apart from choking academic and creative freedom, also lead to corrupt practices, including those in licensing and accreditation, thus promoting unhealthy favoritism and nepotism in staff appointments and student admissions. This reflects a 'rent-seeking culture' within the academic community.

#### **Bureaucratization of the education system:**

- Currently, many public educational institutions and regulatory bodies, both at the Central and State levels, are headed by bureaucrats.

#### **National Education Policy, 2020:**

- India's recently announced National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 aims at overhauling the educational system in the country. The following provisions will go a long way in addressing some of the issues plaguing the educational system in India, particularly the higher education sector.
  - \* The NEP 2020 aims to de-bureaucratise the education system by giving governance powers to academicians and ensuring enhanced autonomy to higher education institutions by handing over their administration to a board comprising academicians. This may help

de-bureaucratise the education system and reduce political interference to an extent.

- \* The NEP 2020 emphasizes the principles of creativity and critical thinking and envisions an education system that is free from political or external interference. The NEP 2020 states that faculty will be given the "freedom to design their own curricular and pedagogical approaches within the approved framework, including textbook and reading material selections, assignments and assessments".

#### **Conclusion:**

- The NEP, 2020 envisions some much-needed measures for the Indian educational system and there is the need for political will to put these provisions into practice.
- This can ensure the fulfilment of the vision of making India a global knowledge superpower and also achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG 4).

### **Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.**

#### **2. Annual State of Education Report (ASER) Survey**

- » Prelims: Publisher of the survey
- » Mains: Educational outcomes, regional variation in the infrastructure.
- ASER is a nationwide survey of rural education and learning outcomes in terms of reading and arithmetic skills.
- It has been conducted by the NGO Pratham for the last 15 years (Since 2005).
- It provides reliable estimates of children's enrolment and basic learning levels for each district and state in India.
- ASER continues to be an important national source of information about children's foundational skills across the country.

#### **Context**

- According to the Annual State of Education Report (ASER) survey, about 20% of rural children have no textbooks at home.

#### **Details:**

- In 2020, the survey was conducted via phone calls, reaching 52,227 rural households with school-age children in 30 States and Union Territories.
- The ASER survey provides a glimpse into the levels of learning loss that students in rural India are suffering, with varying levels of access to technology, school and family resources, resulting in a digital divide in education.

#### **Key Findings:**

- In Andhra Pradesh, less than 35% of children had textbooks, and only 60% had textbooks in Rajasthan.
- More than 98% had textbooks in West Bengal, Nagaland and Assam.
- During the survey week:
  - \* About one in three rural children had done no learning activity at all.
  - \* About two in three had no learning material or activity given by their school.
  - \* Only one in 10 had access to live online classes.
- Despite the levels of smartphone ownership having almost doubled from 2018, a third of children with smartphone access also did not receive any learning materials.

### **Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.**

#### **3. ATAL Faculty Development Programmes**

- » Mains: Technical education, measures to promote innovation and entrepreneurship.

#### **Context**

- Union Education Minister inaugurates online ATAL Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs) organised by AICTE.

#### **Details:**

- 46 online AICTE Training and Learning (ATAL) Academy Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs) were inaugurated to train teachers of higher education institutions associated with the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) in thrust and emerging areas in technology.
- The FDPs will be conducted in 22 Indian states.

#### **ATAL Academies:**

- The main objective of the ATAL Academy is to provide quality technical education in the country and to promote research and entrepreneurship through training in various emerging fields. IITs, IIITs, NITs CU and research labs are organizing these ATAL FDPs.
- The ATAL Academy seeks to establish AICTE Training and Learning (ATAL) cells in all the technical institutions, Universities, Deemed-to-be Universities and other institutions of technical learning.
- The ATAL Academies also conduct a series of training programmes in various emerging fields across the country

*Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.*

#### **4. Lilavati Award 2020**

- » Prelims: Details of the award
- » Mains: Women in higher education.

##### **Context**

- Union Minister of Education launches Lilavati Award-2020.

##### **About the Lilavati Award 2020:**

- The Lilavati Award is an initiative of the technical education regulator, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and it aims to recognise efforts by AICTE-approved institutions to treat women with 'equality and fairness'.
- The theme of the Lilavati Award is women's empowerment. It aims to create awareness about issues like sanitation, hygiene, health and nutrition using 'traditional Indian values'.
- It also aims to create awareness about issues like literacy, employment, technology, credit, marketing, innovation, skill development, natural resources, and rights among women.
- Entries for the Award can be submitted at the institution or team level, comprising students or faculty or both from AICTE approved institutions.

that Muslims were a separate nation and so was against the partition of India. He censured the League leaders for putting their own interests ahead of the country's.

- He was influenced by revolutionaries like Aurobindo Ghosh and Shyam Sunder Chakravarty. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad He protested against the partition of Bengal which went against popular Muslim sentiment of the day.
- Even though he was educated towards becoming a cleric, he steered towards journalism and politics.
- His journals Al-Hilal and Al-Balagh were banned by the government.
- He supported the Khilafat Movement. He also took part in the non-cooperation movement against the Rowlatt Act of 1919. He supported Mahatma Gandhi's views of non-violent satyagraha and was committed to the civil disobedience movement. He also promoted Swaraj and the Swadeshi movement.
- In 1923, he became the youngest president of the Congress Party at the age of 35.

*Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.*

#### **5. National Education Day**

- » Prelims: Details of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

##### **Context**

- 11 November is observed as 'National Education Day' in India.

##### **About National Education Day:**

- The day is observed in honour of India's first education minister Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, whose birth anniversary falls on 11 November.
- During his stint as education minister from 1947 to 1958, Azad made several significant contributions in the field of education.
- The Union HRD Ministry (currently the Education Ministry) institutionalized the observance of the National Education Day in 2008.

##### **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad – Role in Independence Struggle**

- He developed an interest in nationalism quite early. He was a vehement critic of the British government for its racial policies and its blatant disregard for the needs of the common Indians.
- He was also for Hindu-Muslim unity. He was vehemently against the Muslim League's idea

# HISTORY

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## *Modern Indian History*

### 1. Aruna Asaf Ali

- » Prelims: Details about Aruna Asaf Ali
- » Mains: Role of Aruna Asaf Ali in Indian freedom struggle, participation of women in freedom movement
- Aruna Asaf Ali was an Indian political activist and freedom movement activist.
- An active participant in the Indian independence movement, Aruna Asaf Ali participated in public processions during the Salt Satyagraha and was arrested.
- She rose to prominence during the Quit India movement when she hoisted the Indian National flag at the Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay during the Quit India Movement in 1942. In fact, when all the major leaders and all members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested, young Aruna Asaf Ali presided over the remainder of the Congress session.
- She was called the Grand Old Lady of the Independence Movement in her later years.
- She also edited Inquilab, a monthly magazine of the Congress Party, along with Ram Manohar Lohia.
- Post-independence, she remained active in politics, becoming Delhi's first Mayor.

## *Modern Indian History*

### 2. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

- » Prelims: Details about Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay
- » Mains: Role of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in Indian freedom struggle, participation of women in freedom movement
- Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was an Indian social reformer and freedom activist.

#### Freedom struggle:

- Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay is most remembered for her contribution to the Indian independence movement.
- Kamaladevi returned to India from London in 1923 to take part in Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. She joined the Seva Dal, a Gandhian organisation set up to promote social upliftment. Made in charge of the women's section of the Dal, she got involved in recruiting, training and organising girls and women of all ages across India, to become voluntary workers, 'sevikas'.

- Kamaladevi was a part of the seven-member lead team, announced by Mahatma Gandhi, in the famous Salt Satyagraha (1930), to prepare salt at the Bombay beachfront.

#### Social causes:

- Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay played a significant role in the upliftment of the socio-economic standard of Indian women by pioneering the co-operation movement among Indian women.
- She became the first woman to run for a legislative seat in India (Madras Provincial Legislative Assembly).
- She played an active role in the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC).

#### Indian art and culture:

- Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay played a major role in the renaissance of Indian handicrafts, handlooms, and theatre in independent India. She played a stellar role in institutes such as the National School of Drama, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Central Cottage Industries Emporium, and the Crafts Council of India.
- She stressed the significant role which handicrafts and cooperative grassroots movements play in the social and economic upliftment of the Indian people.

## *Modern Indian History*

### 3. Lachit Borphukan

- » Prelims: Battle of Saraighat, Ahom dynasty.

#### Context

- 24th November is observed as Lachit Diwas in Assam in honour of Lachit Borphukan to commemorate his heroism and the victory of the Assamese army at the Battle of Saraighat.

#### Who was Lachit Borphukan?

- Lachit Borphukan was a commander in the Ahom dynasty, located in present-day Assam.
- He showed exemplary leadership in the Battle of Saraighat (1671).
  - \* The Battle of Saraighat was a naval battle fought between the Mughal Empire and the Ahom Kingdom.
  - \* It was fought on the Brahmaputra River at Saraighat, in Guwahati.



- \* This battle was the last major attempt by the Mughals to extend their empire into Assam.
- \* The smaller Ahom force defeated the mighty Mughal Empire by the use of the terrain, diplomatic negotiations, guerrilla tactics, and also by exploiting the weak navy of the Mughals.
- \* The Mughal forces were led by the Kachhwaha King Raja Ram Singh I while the Ahoms were led by Lachit Borphukan.

# DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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## *Disaster Management*

### 1. Aapda Mitra

- » Mains: Disaster management personnel.
- It is a centrally-sponsored scheme by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) aiming to impart training to the 200 community volunteers in disaster response in the 30 most flood-prone districts identified across the country on the basis of past floods.
- The focus of the scheme is to identify and train community volunteers to build their capacity for mitigating disasters. The volunteers will be trained to respond to the immediate needs of the community during emergency situations like floods
- Volunteers will undergo training in basic skills with focus on flood relief

#### Significance

- Volunteers will be able to act as first responders and assist the community in effective disaster response and assist the district administration in providing immediate relief to the affected people.

## *Disaster Management*

### 2. Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

- » Mains: Coordination of efforts in disaster management among countries and agencies.
- It is a multi-stakeholder global partnership of national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, and academic and knowledge institutions.
- It aims to promote disaster-resilient infrastructure
- CDRI will act as a convening body that pools best practices and resources from around the world for reshaping construction, transportation, energy, telecommunication and water
  - \* CDRI envisions enabling measurable reduction in infrastructure losses from disasters, including extreme climate events.
  - \* CDRI will provide member countries technical support and capacity development, research and knowledge management, and advocacy and partnerships to facilitate and encourage investment in disaster resilient infrastructure systems.

- CDRI thus aims to enable the achievement of objectives of expanding universal access to basic services and enabling prosperity as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals, while also working at the intersection of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Climate Agreement.

#### When was the idea of CDRI proposed?

- The CDRI was launched by the Prime Minister of India during his speech at the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019.
- The CDRI Secretariat is based in New Delhi, India.

#### What is the funding system of CDRI?

- A large share of the estimated fund requirements to cover the core costs over the first five years has been invested by India.
- There are no obligations on the part of members to make financial contributions to CDRI.
- However, at any point (during the first five years or beyond), members of the CDRI may make voluntary financial or in-kind contributions to the CDRI such as assignment of experts from national institutions to the CDRI Secretariat, hosting of thematic workshops and meetings and travel support.

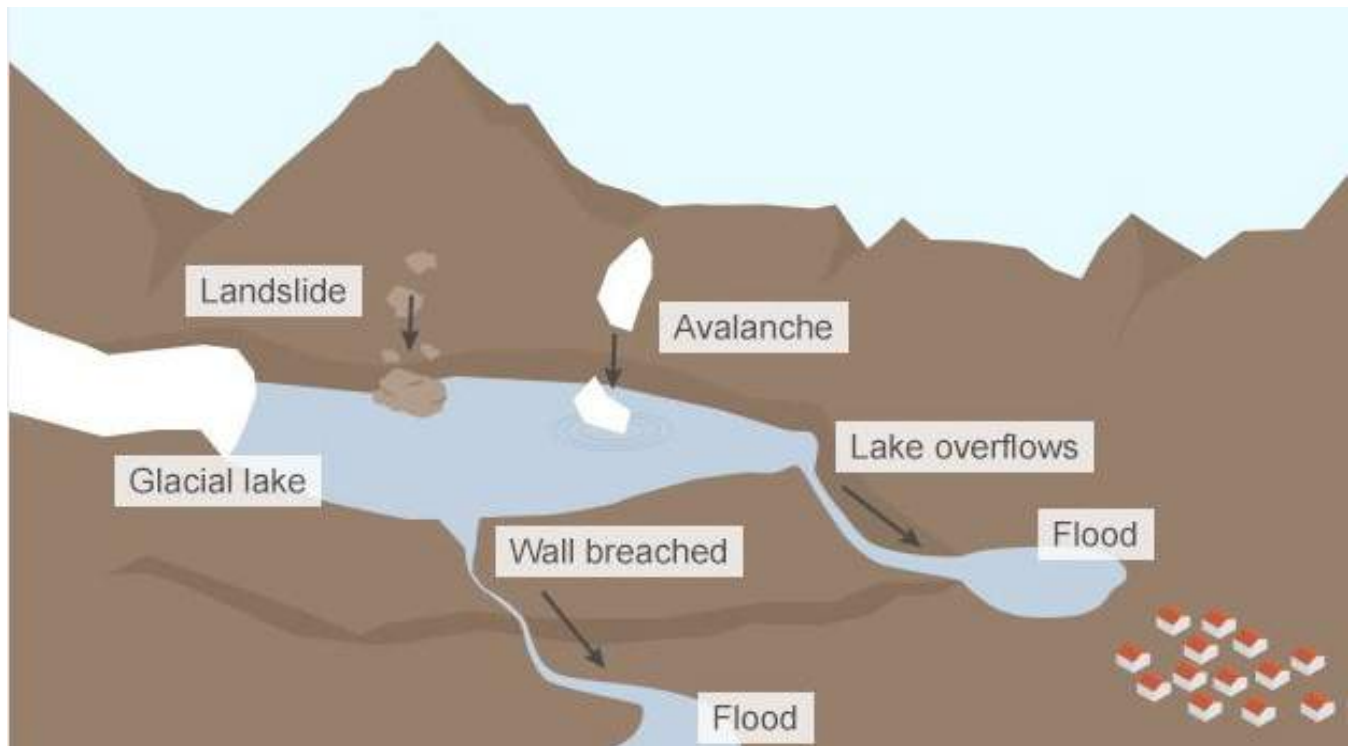
## *Disaster Management*

### 3. Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)

- » Prelims: Glaciers of Himalayas
- » Mains: Climate change, Environmental impact assessment of industrial activities in the region.
- A Glacial Lake Outburst Flood, or GLOF, is sudden release of water from a lake fed by glacier melt that has formed at the side, in front, within, beneath, or on the surface of a glacier.
- GLOFs have three main features:
  - \* They involve sudden (and sometimes cyclic) releases of water.
  - \* They tend to be rapid events, lasting hours to days.
  - \* They result in large downstream river discharges

#### There are two types of GLOFs.

- One type occurs when the moraine banks, deposited rock and mud that dam glacial lakes, burst when the earth is disturbed, such as by an earthquake.



- Another type can occur when glacial lakes rise in volume due to increased glacial melting caused by climate change (ICIMOD).

#### Concerns

- GLOFs have immense potential of flooding in downstream areas, causing disastrous consequences due to release of large volumes of water in very short interval of time.
- These floods wipe out villages, bridges and even hydroelectric plants permanently damaging important infrastructure.
- GLOFs are an insidious danger, for which there is no warning system. Consequently, floods can wipe out families and culture associated with geographical areas

#### What can be done to address GLOF's impact?

- Building artificially reinforced channels that lower a lake's volume, so that it does not overflow.
- Remote sensing that is used to map and record the status of glacial lakes as a preliminary step for creating an alert system.
  - \* Alert system based on radar level and water content sensors
- Educating the community about the risks of living near glacial lakes, so that they can be prepared in times of emergency.

#### Context

- Study of the Gya glacial lake outburst.

#### Details

- Study of the Gya glacial lake incident has thrown light on the causes of the flood.
- The glacial lake outburst induced flood was not due to the spillovers due to an avalanche or landslide but rather due to tunnelling drainage process induced by the thawing of the ice cores in the moraine. The water had drained out through the subsurface tunnels.
  - \* A moraine is any accumulation of unconsolidated debris (regolith and rock) that occurs in both currently and formerly glaciated regions, and that has been previously carried along by a glacier or ice sheet.

#### Concerns

- Global warming:
  - \* Given that the thawing of ice cores is expected to accelerate in the future due to global climate change, it is almost certain that other glacial lake outburst floods will happen all over the Indian Himalaya.
- Unsustainable development process:
  - \* It is important to note that not all glacial lake outbursts have catastrophic outcomes. It largely depends on urban planning, the size of the lake, the distance between the lake and affected villages, the valley section etc.

- \* The unsustainable development process in these areas will only increase the hazard potential of glacial lake outbursts.

#### Way forward:

- Early warning system:
  - \* There is an urgent need to use multiple methods for better risk assessment and early warning. It is important to regularly monitor lake development and dynamics.
  - \* This approach could help limit the damages caused by the glacial lake outburst events.
- Better land planning:
  - \* Further development processes in these ecologically fragile areas should be guided by better land-use planning.

### Disaster Management

#### **4. Cyclone Nivar**

- » Prelims: Cyclone formation and conditions aiding it, classification on cyclones.
- » Mains: Early warning system, NDMA guidelines.

#### Context

- Cyclone Nivar made its landfall near Puducherry.

#### What is landfall?

- A landfall, in simple words, is the storm moving over the land after its intensification in the ocean (heat source).
- Landfall is the process of a storm moving from sea to land

#### Impact

- The landfall usually brings with it high-speed winds, severe storm surge and torrential downpour, all of which can have a severe impact on the region.

#### Name of the cyclone

- The storm has been named Cyclone Nivar, based on the guidelines of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).
- According to WMO guidelines, countries in every region are supposed to give names for cyclones.
- North Indian Ocean Region covers tropical cyclones formed over Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. The 13 members, which come under the region, are Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand. In 2018, five more countries were added. These are Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Yemen.

- Cyclones are named to make their identification easier. It is also believed that names like these make it easier for the media to report and generates interest from the people, resulting in easier dissemination of information and increased preparedness.

- The name Nisarga was given by Bangladesh, Gati was taken from India's suggested names. Nivar or Nivara has been selected from the list of names given by Iran.

#### How are cyclones classified?

**Cyclones are classified on the basis of the wind speed by IMD.**

- Cyclonic storm: speeds of between 39–54 mph (62–88 km/h)
- Severe Cyclonic Storm: Severe Cyclonic Storms have storm force wind speeds of between 55–72 mph (89–117 km/h)
- Very Severe Cyclonic Storm: Very Severe Cyclonic Storms have hurricane-force winds of 73–102 mph (118–166 km/h).
- Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm: Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storms have hurricane-force winds of 166–221 km/h (104–137 mph).
- Super Cyclonic Storm: The highest classification used in the North Indian Ocean is a Super Cyclonic Storm, which has hurricane-force winds of above 138 mph (222 km/h).

#### How are cyclones forecast?

##### **1. Doppler Weather Radars (DWR)**

- Over the years, India's ability to track the formation of cyclones has improved significantly. There is a network of Doppler Weather Radars (DWR) along India's coast
- The conventional radars (earlier generation of radars), were able to track and predict cyclones, but the DWR provides detailed information on storm's internal wind flow and structure.
  - \* The Doppler Weather Radar (DWR) provides advance information, enhancing the lead-time helps in saving lives and property, in the event of natural disaster associated with severe weather.
  - \* The severity of the weather systems can thus be quantitatively estimated more accurately than ever before and more precise advance warnings can be generated for saving human lives and property.

##### **2. Collaboration**

- The IMD also collaborates with similar international networks, such as the Japan Meteorological Agency, the U.S. National Hurricane Center, and the U.S. Central Pacific Hurricane Center, and these bodies constantly send warnings and forecasts about changes in the ocean weather.

### 3. Satellites

- There are dedicated meteorological satellites to improve the odds of early detection.
- SCATSAT-1 (Scatterometer Satellite-1) is a satellite providing weather forecasting, cyclone prediction, and tracking services to India

### 4. Ocean-Buoys

- Ocean buoys are equipped with an array of sensors that measure all the parameters of air and water.
- They measure a whole range of weather variables such as wave height, swell period and direction, wind speed and direction, air and water temperature, and barometric pressure.
- They help in forecasting monsoon as well as provide cyclone warnings. They send out real-time data on wave parameters like height and period.

### How difficult was it to track Nivar's progress?

- April-June and October-December are India's cyclone seasons.
  - \* The arriving monsoon, as well as its retreat, stir up the surrounding seas and generate cyclones.
- Though the Bay of Bengal is three times more likely to generate cyclones, the ones that originate in the Arabian Sea are trickier, as the cyclone, while ostensibly moving away from India's western coast, can suddenly 'recurve' and move back in.
- There are also fewer radars along India's west coast than the eastern coast, and all these reasons make the Bay of Bengal cyclones more tractable.
- In this context, Nivar, because it conformed to a fairly predictable trajectory and was not super cyclonic in intensity, gave State administrations in Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh time to prepare, and was far less damaging than Amphan.

### Areas affected by the cyclone

- Northern districts of Tamil Nadu faced the maximum hazard.
- Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Nellore and Chittoor districts of Rayalaseema, Telangana, south interior Karnataka also received rainfall due to this cyclone.

### Damage

- Temporary houses and huts suffered damage.
- Power and communication lines, trees were uprooted.
- Standing crops were hit due to the saline water carried landwards by the cyclone.

### Way forward:

- The aftermath presents an opportunity to make a full assessment not just for distribution of relief but also to understand the impacts of extreme monsoon weather.
- To keep Tamil Nadu competitive, governments and local bodies should hardwire urban planning and invest heavily for a future of frequent disruptive weather.



# GOVERNANCE

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## Indian Constitution.

### **1. Attacks on journalists**

- » Prelims: Article 19.
- » Mains: Freedom of speech, role of media, independent media.

#### Context:

- Many instances of attacks on journalists have come to light.

#### Examples

- A 26-year-old television journalist who reported on illegal encroachment of land and the sale of ganja was hacked to death in Tamil Nadu.
- Another journalist was found brutally murdered in a jungle on the outskirts of Bhopal.
- A prominent journalist from Kashmir and the Chief Editor of Kashmir Times was shot dead by three militants in the heart of Srinagar, when he was returning home from office

#### A look at stats

- According to the United Nations, "Journalism is one of the most dangerous professions in the world". Between 2006 and 2019, over 1,200 journalist have been killed the world over.
- In 2009, as many as 32 journalists were killed in Philippines; ten were killed in Afghanistan in 2016, and ten journalists were among those killed in a suicide bomb attack in Kabul in April 2018.
- India has been going down on the World Press Freedom Index during the last few years.
  - \* In the annual reports of Reporters without Borders, India has steadily gone down in the global index from a rank of 138 in 2018 to 140 in 2019, and further down to 142 in 2020.

#### How and when are Journalists silenced?

- Violence against the press continues in the form of harassment, threats, kidnappings, illegal detainment, physical attacks, or murder
- They receive threats for publishing stories on illegal sand mining, criminal mafia
- When they expose corruption in the system and police brutality
- When not hit with violence or murder, journalists are being slapped with hefty civil defamation suits. This tactic is often employed to intimidate reporters and harass them through legal fees.

## Impact

- Violence against members of the press is an attack on freedom of expression, which in turn is an attack on democracy and human rights.
- An attack on the press is an assault on fundamental principles of democracy, namely "transparency, accountability, as well as the right to hold opinions and to participate in public debates."
- Assaults against media workers suppress one's right to access and attain information as well as to express and share ideas.

## Measures taken

1. Maharashtra has emerged as the first State in the country to enact a law.

- Under the Maharashtra Media Persons and Media Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss to Property) Act, 2017, any attack on journalists would be non-bailable and cognisable, and would be investigated by an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.
- A conviction under this Act could lead to imprisonment of up to three years and/or a fine of up to ₹50,000.
- The attacker will also have to compensate for medical treatment in case of injuries to the journalist and also pay for damage to any equipment.

2. Chhattisgarh is in the final stages of enacting a law known as Chhattisgarh Protection of Mediapersons Act.

- It has a wider definition of journalists, covering drivers, and even relatives of journalists.
- On conviction, the attacker would be liable to be punished under relevant sections of the IPC.
- But any public servant found guilty of dereliction of duties is liable to be punished with imprisonment of up to one year and/or fine of up to ₹10,000.

## Way forward

- The State needs to ensure stringent punishment for the perpetrators if a journalist is assaulted or intimidated in connection with the performance of duty.
- The Chairman of the Press Council of India (PCI), counselled the government "to enact a special law for protection of journalists and speedy trial of cases of attacks and assaults".

## Indian Constitution.

### **2. OTT platforms**

- » Mains: Regulation of media, IT Act 2000.

#### Context

- Gazette notification placing 'Over the Top' (OTT) platforms or video streaming service providers like Netflix, Hotstar, Amazon Prime and digital news under the ambit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- The change was made through the amendment of the Allocation of Business Rules.

#### Key Stats

- With a market size of nearly Rs 500 crore at the end of March 2019, the online video streaming platforms may become a Rs 4000-crore revenue market by the end of 2025, according to reports.
- At the end of 2019, India had as many as 17 crore OTT platform users.

#### What are OTT platforms?

- OTT, or over-the-top platforms, are audio and video hosting and streaming services which started out as content hosting platforms, but soon branched out into the production and release of short movies, feature films, documentaries and web-series themselves.
- These platforms offer a range of content and use artificial intelligence to suggest users the content they are likely to view based on their past viewership on the platform.
- Most OTT platforms generally offer some content for free and charge a monthly subscription fee for premium content which is generally unavailable elsewhere.
- The premium content is usually produced and marketed by the OTT platform themselves, in association with established production houses which historically have made feature films.

#### Laws regulating OTT platforms

- Currently, there is no law or autonomous body governing digital content. Complaints regarding these had largely been dealt with by the Communications and IT Ministry with laws such as the Information Technology Act and the Indian Penal Code being invoked.

\* Traditional media such as films, entertainment and news television channels and newspapers are covered under mechanisms such as government's Central Board of Film Certification, the independent Broadcasting Content Complaints Council, the cable and television act, and Press and Registration of Books (PRB) Act.

- The government wanted the platforms to come up with a self-regulatory body on the lines of the News Broadcasting Standards Authority, which governs the TV news channels.
- In January 2019, eight video streaming services had signed a self-regulatory code that laid down a set of guiding principles for the content on these platforms. The code prohibited five types of content, including content which deliberately and maliciously disrespects the national emblem or flag, any visuals or storylines that promote child pornography, any content that "maliciously" intends to outrage religious sentiments; content that "deliberately and maliciously" promotes or encourages terrorism; and any content that has been banned for exhibition or distribution by law or by a court.
- The government had refused to support this code.

#### Need

- The government had been receiving complaints about unregulated, sexually-explicit, vulgar and legally restricted content being put out by the OTT platforms and others. There was no mechanism to redress the grievances that people had.
- The ministry of electronics and information technology, that could have any jurisdiction over the digital media, is not equipped to monitor content but only the technical aspects.

#### What might happen with this notification?

- The central government's move to bring the OTT platforms under the I&B Ministry could mean that these platforms would have to apply for certification and approval of the content they wish to stream.
- This would imply that even international on-demand streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Videos would be required to register with the government and follow the ground rules for the videos that they stream

#### Significance:

- The gazette notification gives the government control over the OTT platforms, which were unregulated till now. The exponential growth in the reach of the OTT platforms and digital media forums and their ability to influence necessitates the need to regulate them and the current move is a step in this direction.
- The move will help tackle the issue of fake news being propagated through some of the digital media platforms.
- The move will also help create a level playing field between linear TV and over-the-top (OTT) services.

- The government would be able to prevent objectionable content that some smaller and newer companies in the space have been distributing.

#### Concerns:

- The move has raised fears of censorship.
- Some digital media creators have lamented that the move and the subsequent regulation could undermine creativity due to undue regulation.

#### Circumventing judicial scrutiny:

- The move seems to neglect the fact that the issue of freedom of the press and freedom of expression are currently under judicial scrutiny in the Sudarshan News channel issue.
- Similarly, another public interest litigation is pending in the Supreme Court relating to content on "Over The Top" (OTT) platforms not being subject to regulation or official oversight.
- This move of the central government could be aimed at circumventing any judicial pronouncement on this issue.

#### Fate of digital media:

- The fate of the digital media under the control of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting could leave a detrimental impact on the media practitioner and the media entrepreneur and for the startups that have been the new vibrant face of contemporary journalism.

#### Conclusion

- It will also have to be seen as to what guidelines, if any, does the I&B ministry put in place for regulating these OTT platforms.

### ***Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies***

### **3. TRP norms**

- » Prelims: TRAI composition, mandate.
- » Mains: Need for objective reporting, role of media.

#### Context:

- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has constituted a committee to review "Guidelines on Television Rating Agencies in India".

#### Background:

- The committee has been constituted in the backdrop of the Mumbai police investigations which revealed that a few news channels had tampered with the ratings.
- Another reason for having constituted the committee is to have a fresh look keeping in view of the recent recommendations of TRAI,

technological advancements and for further strengthening of the procedures for a credible and transparent rating system.

#### Details:

- The four-member committee will review the guidelines on television rating agencies notified by the Ministry in 2014.
- The committee is headed by Shashi Shekhar Vempati, CEO of Prasar Bharati.

#### Terms of Reference for the Committee:

- Study past recommendations made by various forums on the subject of television rating systems in India and matters incidental thereto;
- Study recent recommendations of Telecom Regulatory Authority on the subject;
- Suggest steps for enhancing competition in the sector;
- Review of the presently notified guidelines to see if the intended purpose(s) of issuing the guidelines have stood the test of time and has met the needs of various stakeholders involved. The lacunae, if any, shall be specially addressed by the Committee;
- To make recommendations on way forward for a robust, transparent and accountable rating system in India.

### ***Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections***

### **4. Getting MGNREGS wages harder than the labour**

- » Mains: Employment guarantee programmes.

#### Context:

- Problems being faced by the rural workers dependent on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

#### Issue:

- According to a study by LibTech India, many of the workers are forced to make multiple trips to the bank, adding travel costs and income losses, and face repeated rejections of payment, biometric errors and wrong information, just to get their hands on their wages.
  - \* The study found that almost 40% of the workers must make multiple trips to the bank branch to withdraw their money.
  - \* The branch is usually at the block headquarters, a significant distance from the home village, and the time spent at the bank is three to four hours, a worker will also lose the day's wages while he/she attempts to withdraw money.

- \* This effectively works out to spending a third of the weekly wage just to withdraw it.
- The study found that only one in 10 workers get an SMS message that their wages have been credited. A third of workers must visit the bank branch just to find out whether their wages have been credited.
- It was also found that despite being informed that their wages had been credited, they found that the money was not in the accounts.
- The last mile challenges make it hard for workers to access their own wages in a timely manner. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation is exacerbated as transport becomes harder.

### Challenges to internal security through communication networks

#### **5. Govt. bans 43 more apps citing threat to security**

- » Mains: Security threat, section 69A of the Information Technology Act, data protection laws.

#### Context

- India bans 43 more Chinese apps

#### Details

- Under section 69A of the Information Technology Act, the government reserves the right to block access to mobile apps deemed threat to national security.
  - \* Power to issue directions for blocking for public access of any information through any computer resource.
  - \* The intermediary who fails to comply with the direction issued under sub-section (1) shall be punished with an imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years and shall also be liable to fine.
- This action was taken based on the inputs regarding these apps for engaging in activities which are prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order
- The Ministry of Electronics and IT issued the order for blocking the access of these apps by users in India based on the comprehensive reports received from Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Center, Ministry of Home Affairs

#### Security concern

- A lot of apps collected massive amounts of data which has nothing to do with the service it provides.
- It takes several security-sensitive and intrusive permissions which the user doesn't understand but ends up agreeing to.

- \* These apps are very dangerous because the Chinese can put any bug in the software.

#### Apps that were banned

- Other banned apps include Alibaba's e-commerce platform AliExpress, streaming app Taobao Live and workplace messaging app DingTalk, as well as delivery app Lalamove India and a handful of dating sites.

#### How will it work?

- Both Google and Apple will have to comply with the ruling and remove these apps from the Play Store and App Store respectively.
- ISPs will also have to selectively block these apps so existing users can't access them until further notice.

#### Larger picture

- First, this approach runs the risk of triggering an unconventional battle between the two countries in the larger technology realm, if not in the larger business space. China, being an important player in the technology global supply chain, will be hard, if not impossible, to sideline.
  - \* The Chinese will lose ads from Indian markets, and the vacuum that Indians will feel will encourage them to develop their own apps, which will generate good domestic revenue and ultimately hit the Chinese market
- Second, there is a risk that moves such as blocking apps would be perceived adversely by global investors and Internet companies.
  - \* While it is true that there has been some push back against Chinese companies and technology globally, India must stick to a rules-based approach in regulating the Internet.

#### China's Reaction

- China has accused India of discriminatory practices that violate World Trade Organization
- China crying discrimination is ironical — its version of the Internet is tightly controlled and heavily censored
  - \* Among the foreign sites banned by China are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp.

#### Conclusion

- There is a need to implement the long-pending data protection law. It is also important to engage with the ecosystem and provide clarity on these issues as India has to win the technology battle as well.



# MISCELLANEOUS

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## *Science and Technology - developments*

### **1. ARTPARK (AI & Robotics Technology Park)**

- » Mains: Application of AI and Cyber physical systems.
- It is a joint initiative of the Indian Institute of Science & AI Foundry, set up as a Section 8 company (Not for Profit) with a seed grant from the Department of Science and Technology (Govt. of India).
- It is set up as the premier research translation park with a global collaborative ecosystem.
- It is getting incubated at Robert Bosch Centre for Cyber-Physical Systems at IISc.
- ARTPARK is committed to leveraging AI & Robotics in a mission-driven model to bring a better quality of life for people.
- Its mission includes lowering the cost of living with AI and robotics, ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, and improving access to AI awareness, education and enablement.

## *Science and Technology - developments*

### **2. Gandhian Young Technological Awards (GYTI)**

- » Prelims: SITARE-GYTI, SRISTI-GYTI.
- Gandhian Young Technological Innovation (GYTI) Awards celebrate the spirit of student innovation in all the fields of engineering, science, technology and design through extremely affordable/frugal solution or the ones pushing the technological edge.
- The awards are given in two categories:
  - \* SITARE-GYTI: Students Innovations for Advancement of Research Explorations – Gandhian Young Technological Innovation [Under Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), Department of Biotechnology (DBT)]
  - \* SRISTI-GYTI: Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technological Innovations – Gandhian Young Technological Innovation
- The awards and appreciations are given under these two categories to encourage technology students to move towards setting up biotech and other start-ups.

#### **Context**

- Union Health Minister gave away the Gandhian Young Technological Awards.

## *Biotechnology*

### **3. National Cancer Awareness Day**

- » Prelims: National Cancer Control Programme .

#### **Context**

- The National Cancer Awareness Day is observed in India on 7th November.

#### **About the National Cancer Awareness Day:**

- The National Cancer Awareness Day is observed to generate awareness about cancer prevention and early detection.
- The day coincides with the birth anniversary of eminent scientist Madame Curie.
  - \* Marie Curie is remembered for her discovery of radium and polonium, and her huge contribution to the fight against cancer.
  - \* Her work led to the development of nuclear energy and radiotherapy for the treatment of cancer.
- The first National Cancer Awareness Day was observed in 2014 in India.

#### **Cancer in India: A look at stats**

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), cancer is the second leading cause of death globally and in 2018, there were approximately 18 million cases globally, of which 1.5 million were in India alone.
- There were around 0.8 million cancer deaths in India in 2018 against 9.5 million globally.
- The number of new cases are estimated to double in India by 2040.
- In India, nearly 1.1 million new cases are being reported annually.
- Two-thirds of cancer cases are diagnosed at an advanced stage, reducing patients' chances of survival.
- It is estimated that one woman dies of cervical cancer every 8 minutes in India.
- Tobacco (smoked and smokeless) use accounted for 3,17,928 deaths (approximately) in men and women in 2018.
- Cancers of oral cavity and lungs account for over 25% of cancer deaths in males and cancer of breast and oral cavity account for 25% cancers in females.



- The National Cancer Control Programme was initiated in 1975 with a view to provide cancer treatment facilities in the country. The programme was modified in 1984-85 to provide thrust to prevention and early detection of cancer.

### Governance

#### **4. Sahakar Pragya**

- » Prelims: SAHAKAR-22, SAHAKAR MITRA , YUVA SAHAKAR, AYUSHMAN SAHAKAR.

#### Context

- Union Minister unveiled Sahakar Pragya.

#### Details:

- The 45 new training modules of Sahakar Pragya of the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) will impart training to primary cooperative societies in rural areas of the country along with Lakshmanrao Inamdar National Cooperative Research and Development Academy (LINAC).
- Sahakar Pragya is the latest in the series of farmer-focused steps by NCDC.
- NCDC had earlier launched various initiatives and programmes like:
  - \* SAHAKAR-22 to develop cooperatives in Focus 222 districts, including aspirational districts
  - \* SAHAKAR MITRA – Scheme on internship programme
  - \* YUVA SAHAKAR – Start-up scheme in cooperatives
  - \* AYUSHMAN SAHAKAR – for the creation of healthcare infrastructure and services

### Social sector

#### **5. SDG Investor Map**

- » Mains: Implementation of SDGs through various social sector programmes.

#### Context

- UNDP and Invest India launch the SDG Investor Map for India.

#### Details:

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Invest India have launched the SDG Investor Map for India, laying out 18 Investment Opportunities Areas (IOAs) in six critical SDG enabling sectors, that can help India push the needle forward on Sustainable Development.

- SDG Investor Maps translate SDG-needs and policy priorities into actionable investment opportunities.

- \* They identify concrete, investable solutions to increasingly pressing needs at the country level.
- \* By mapping the overlaps and gaps between public sector priorities and private sector interest, the SDG Investor Map lays out pathways that can bring together private-sector investment and public sector support for six SDG-enabling sectors including Education, Healthcare, Agriculture & Allied Activities, Financial Services, Renewable Energy & Alternatives and Sustainable Environment.

- Notable IOAs include 'Online Supplementary Education for K12' (Education), 'Tech-Enabled Remote Care Services' (Healthcare), 'Digital Platforms to service input/output needs of farmers to enable easy access to markets' (Agriculture) and 'Access to credit by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Low-Income Groups especially through digital platforms for Income Generating Purposes' (Financial Services).

### Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health,

#### **6. World Toilet Day**

- » Mains: WASH initiatives.

#### Context

- World Toilet Day is observed on 19th November annually.

#### About World Toilet Day:

- World Toilet Day is a United Nations Observance that celebrates toilets and raises awareness of the 4.2 billion people living without access to safely managed sanitation.
- It is about taking action to tackle the global sanitation crisis and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6: water and sanitation for all by 2030.
- The theme of World Toilet Day 2020: Sustainable sanitation and climate change.
- The first official World Toilet Day was observed in 2013.
- Importance of this Day:
  - \* 1 in 3 people on this planet still don't have access to a clean and safe toilet; 1,000 children die each day due to poor sanitation; and better sanitation supports better nutrition and improved health, especially for women and children.

- In India, the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), Ministry of Jal Shakti leads the observance of the Day under 'Swachh Bharat Mission – Grameen (SBMG)' for promoting awareness on access to safe sanitation and felicitating districts/states for making a significant contribution towards Swachhata.

# PRACTICE QUESTIONS

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**1. Arrange the following from West to East:**

1. Dibru Saikhowa National Park
2. Manas National Park
3. Rajiv Gandhi Orang National Park
4. Kaziranga National Park

Choose the correct option:

- A. 2, 4, 3, 1
- B. 2, 3, 4, 1
- C. 1, 4, 3, 2
- D. 1, 2, 4, 3

**2. Consider the following statements:**

1. Natal Indian Ambulance Corps was created by Mahatma Gandhi for use by the British during the Second World War.
2. Mahatma Gandhi was bestowed with the 'Kaiser-i-Hind' by the British for his work in Boer war.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**3. Consider the following statements:**

1. Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) was signed in the third India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue.
2. BECA would entitle India to receive highly classified U.S. defence and sensitive geo-spatial intelligence information.
3. India is a signatory to all U.S.-related foundational military agreements.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 3 only
- D. None of the above

**4. Which of these states share their Formation Day?**

1. Andhra Pradesh
2. Karnataka
3. Kerala

4. Punjab

5. Tamil Nadu

Choose the correct option:

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 1, 2, and 5 only
- C. 1, 4 and 5 only
- D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**5. Consider the following statements:**

1. Both the Supreme Court and High Courts have the jurisdiction to punish for contempt of court.
2. Criminal contempt is committed when someone willfully disobeys a court order or wilfully breaches an undertaking given to the court.
3. Civil contempt is committed when someone interferes with or obstructs the administration of justice.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

**6. Consider the following statements with respect to 'Red Sanders':**

1. It is a tree endemic to the Western Ghats.
2. The tree is valued for its aromatic wood.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**7. The Global Hunger Index is calculated using which of the following indicators?**

1. Undernourishment
2. Child Wasting
3. Child Stunting
4. Child Mortality
5. Infant Mortality
6. Mortality rate

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1, 2, 3 and 6 only

- B. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2, 3, and 5 only
- D. 1, 4, 5 and 6 only

**8. Consider the following statements with respect to Purchasing Managers' Index:**

1. The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) is an index of the prevailing direction of economic trends in the manufacturing sector.
2. It is published every month by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO).
3. A PMI reading at 50 indicates no change as compared to the previous month.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 2 only

**9. Khudai Khidmatgar movement was led by:**

- A. Mohammad Ali Jinnah
- B. Abdul Ghaffar Khan
- C. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan
- D. Syed Ahmed Bareilvi

**10. Which of the following is another term that describes "Whale Beaching"?**

- A. Cetacean Stranding
- B. Whaling
- C. Aqua Stranding
- D. None of the above

**11. Consider the following statements with respect to Aruna Asaf Ali:**

1. She hoisted the national flag in Bombay during the Quit India Movement.
2. She was the editor of the "Inquilab" monthly magazine.
3. She is known as the Grand Old Lady of the Independence Movement.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

**12. Consider the following statements with respect to Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay:**

1. She became the first woman to contest for and win a legislative seat in India.
2. She is a Ramon Magsaysay Awardee.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor

**13. Consider the following statements with respect to the District Development Council:**

1. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India allows for the formation of the District Development Council (DDC).
2. The term of the DDC will be five years.
3. The members of the DDC will be selected through direct elections.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

**14. "Nurturing Neighborhoods Challenge" is implemented by the-**

- A. Ministry of External Affairs
- B. Ministry of Home affairs
- C. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- D. Ministry of Tribal Affairs

**15. The Vohra Committee report dealt with:**

- A. Financial Inclusion
- B. Reforms in Criminal Law
- C. Centre-state relations
- D. Criminalisation of politics

**16. Which of the following states in India have a State Butterfly?**

1. Maharashtra
2. Tamil Nadu
3. Telangana
4. Kerala
5. Himachal Pradesh

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 1, 4 and 5 only
- C. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**17. Consider the following statements with respect to Guru Nanak Dev:**

- 1. He founded the holy city of Amritsar.
- 2. He started the institution of Guru ka Langar.
- 3. He was a contemporary of Mughal emperor Akbar.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**18. "Tigray" recently seen in news is located in:**

- A. Ethiopia
- B. Sudan
- C. Yemen
- D. Kenya

**19. Consider the following statements with respect to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe:**

- 1. It is the largest security-oriented intergovernmental organization in the world.
- 2. Its areas of work include arms control, promotion of human rights, freedom of the press and fair elections.
- 3. Its decisions are legally binding on the participating states.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

**20. Which of these countries do not border Austria?**

- 1. Hungary
- 2. Croatia
- 3. Serbia
- 4. Germany
- 5. Albania

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 and 4 only
- B. 1, 3 and 4 only

- C. 2, 3 and 5 only
- D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**21. Consider the following statements with respect to Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas:**

- 1. It is a statutory authority.
- 2. The Commission will supersede bodies such as the central and state pollution control boards of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP and Rajasthan.
- 3. The Commission does not have any penal powers.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 3 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. None of the above

**22. Pakke Tiger Reserve is located in:**

- A. Kerala
- B. Tamil Nadu
- C. Arunachal Pradesh
- D. Odisha

**23. Consider the following statements with respect to Kalapani:**

- 1. It borders Himachal Pradesh in India and Nepal.
- 2. It is controlled by India's Indo-Tibetan Border Police.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**24. Which of the following vitamins are added in fortified Rice?**

- 1. Vitamin B12
- 2. Vitamin B1
- 3. Vitamin A
- 4. Vitamin D

Choose the correct option:

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4



**25. Which of the following are potential areas of application of earth observation satellites?**

1. Estimating agricultural crops inventory
2. Water resources information system
3. Ground water prospects
4. Identifying potential fishing zones
5. Disaster management support

Options:

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 1, 2, 4 and 5 only
- C. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- D. 1, 2 and 5 only

**26. Which of the following pairs is incorrectly matched?**

- A. Warli paintings: Maharashtra
- B. Kalamkari: Andhra Pradesh
- C. Phad: West Bengal
- D. Madhubani: Bihar

**27. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?**

1. The Central Information Commission includes one chief information commissioner and not more than ten information commissioners
2. The members of the Central Information Commission are appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.
3. The Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners shall hold office for a maximum term of five years and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**28. Which of the following is/are biodiversity heritage site/s in India?**

1. Nallur tamarind grove
2. Hogrekan
3. Dialong village
4. Majuli
5. Khlaw Kur Syiem Kmielng
6. Asramam

Options:

- A. 1 and 4 only
- B. None of the above
- C. All of the above
- D. 1, 2, 4 and 6 only

**29. Consider the following statements with respect to National Air Quality Index (AQI):**

1. The AQI has five categories of air quality with a distinct colour scheme.
2. AQI considers eight pollutants for which short-term National Ambient Air Quality Standards are prescribed.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**30. Consider the following statements with respect to Ambedkar Social Innovation Incubation Mission:**

1. The mission was launched by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
2. It has been launched under the Venture Capital Fund for SCs.
3. The beneficiaries will be funded with Rs. 30 lakhs in 3 years as equity funding.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 only
- D. None of the above

**31. "Carbon neutrality" refers to:**

- A. The long-term removal, capture or sequestration of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- B. Achieving net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by balancing carbon dioxide emissions with carbon absorption.
- C. Achieving negative carbon dioxide emissions by increasing the carbon absorption and measures such as afforestation to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- D. Removing carbon oxide from the atmosphere and then storing it.

**32. Consider the following statements with respect to Chlorpyrifos:**

1. It is an organophosphate pesticide used on crops to kill a number of pests and insects.

2. It is used to control ticks on cattle.
3. It has the potential for acute toxicity and neurological effects in fetuses and children.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

**33. Consider the following statements with respect to OPEC+:**

1. OPEC+ refers to the alliance of crude producers, who have been undertaking corrections in supply in the oil markets since 2017.
2. OPEC+ countries include Oman, Russia and Malaysia.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**34. Consider the following statements:**

1. Competition Commission of India (CCI) is a statutory body established under the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969.
2. The Competition Appellate Tribunal (COMPAT) hears and disposes of appeals against any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the CCI.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**35. Consider the following statements with respect to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI):**

1. It is governed by the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act.
2. The state governments have the power to withdraw the general consent for investigation accorded to the CBI.
3. Cases registered anywhere else in the country, but involving people stationed in states which have withdrawn general consent, would allow CBI's jurisdiction to extend to these states.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only

- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. None of the above

**36. Consider the following statements with respect to Mission Shakti:**

1. It is a joint programme of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
2. Under the mission, an anti-satellite (A-SAT) weapon was launched and it targeted an Indian satellite that had been decommissioned.
3. India is the first country to acquire the capability to defend its assets in outer space.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 3 only
- D. None of the above

**37. Which of these border the "West Bank" area?**

1. Lebanon
2. Jordan
3. Dead Sea
4. Israel

Choose the correct option:

- A. 2, 3 and 4 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

**38. Consider the following statements with respect to "Nagorno-Karabakh":**

1. It is a mountainous land-locked region in the South Caucasus.
2. It is internationally recognised as a part of Azerbaijan.
3. The major ethnic group of the region is Armenian.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**39. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to mRNA Technology-based vaccine development?**

1. mRNA medicines are basically a set of instructions that direct cells in the body to make proteins to prevent

or fight disease.

2. The Polio vaccine is a successful adoption of mRNA technology to vaccine development.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**40. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to the National Policy on Health, 2017?**

- 1. It aims to increase government healthcare spending to 2.5% of the GDP by 2025.
- 2. It aims to reduce the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to 2.1 at the national and sub-national levels by 2025.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**41. When travelling from Gairsain to Challakere, what is the minimum number of states that one would pass through including the two states in which the mentioned places lie in?**

- A. 5
- B. 6
- C. 7
- D. 8

**42. Which of the following is/are correct with respect to the Convention on International trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora?**

- 1. It prohibits the trade of only such species of flora and fauna which are listed as critically endangered under the IUCN Red List.
- 2. In States that have agreed to be bound by CITES, the Convention takes the place of national laws to ensure there is a uniform legal framework in the countries party to the CITES agreement.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**43. Which of the following correctly explains the term viability gap funding?**

- A. It means a grant to support projects that are economically justified but not financially viable.
- B. It implies government equity in infrastructural PPP projects.
- C. It means a loan at a low rate of interest to infrastructural PPP projects.
- D. It implies private-sector owned equity in governmental projects.

**44. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act?**

- 1. As per the FCRA, members of legislatures, political parties, government officials, judges and media persons are prohibited from receiving any foreign contribution.
- 2. NGOs receiving foreign grants have to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs and are also required to renew their registration number every 5 years.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**45. Consider the following statements with respect to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP):**

- 1. It is published by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO).
- 2. It is used for estimating the Gross Value Added of the manufacturing sector quarterly.
- 3. The base year for calculating IIP is 2011 – 12.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**46. Consider the following statements with respect to submarine 'Vagir':**

- 1. It is the last one of the six Kalvari-class submarines being built in India.
- 2. It is a part of Indian Navy's Project 75.
- 3. It was built in India with technology transfer from Russia.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 2 only
- B. 3 only

- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

47. "Nyingchi", recently in news, is located in?

- A. China
- B. Bhutan
- C. Armenia
- D. Indonesia

48. Consider the following statements with respect to "Swarna Jayanti Fellowships"

1. The scheme was instituted by the Govt. of India to commemorate India's fiftieth year of independence.
2. It provides special assistance and support to a selected number of young scientists with a proven track record to enable them to pursue basic research in frontier areas of science and technology.
3. Under the scheme, the awardees are advanced a research grant of 5 lakh rupees for 5 years.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. None of the above

49. Western Disturbance originates in the:

- A. Mediterranean Sea
- B. Arabian Sea
- C. Pacific Ocean
- D. Indian Ocean

50. Which of the following gharanas of Kathak was established by Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Oudh?

- A. Raigarh Gharana
- B. Banaras Gharana
- C. Lucknow Gharana
- D. Jaipur Gharana

51. Consider the following statements with respect to Kuchipudi:

1. It is known as the fire dance.
2. Dancing on the rim of a brass plate and with a pitcher full of water on the head is a feature of this dance form.
3. The dance form originated in Kerala.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. None of the above

52. Consider the following statements with respect to Birsa Munda:

1. Birsa Munda proclaimed his rebellion directed against the dikus.
2. He was referred to as 'Dharti Abba'.
3. His rebellion forced the government to enact the Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

53. Which of the following are the possible causes of deflation?

1. High Supply and Low Demand.
2. High Demand and Low Supply.
3. A decrease in the money supply in the economy.
4. Net capital outflow.

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1, 3 and 4 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 4 only
- D. 3 only

54. Consider the following statements:

1. The Global Gender Gap Report is an annual report published by the United Nations Development Programme.
2. The Global Gender Gap Index ranks countries according to the calculated gender gap between women and men in health, education, economy and politics.

Which of the following statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

55. Wholesale Price Index is released by:

- A. Office of Economic Advisor
- B. National Statistical Office

- C. Reserve Bank of India
- D. National Sample Survey Office

**56. Which of the following is/are the mandate(s) of the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM)?**

1. Advise the government in matters of financial restructuring of Central Public Sector Undertakings.
2. Advise on matters relating to the sale of Central Government equity through private placement.
3. Decisions in matters relating to Central Public Sector Undertakings for purposes of Government investment in equity-like capital restructuring, bonus, dividends.

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**57. Sri Lanka has handed a 99-year lease to China for which of these ports?**

- A. Trincomalee Harbour
- B. Hambantota Port
- C. Colombo Port
- D. Port of Point Pedro

**58. Brus/Reangs are recognised as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in which of these state/s?**

1. Manipur
2. Tripura
3. Mizoram
4. Nagaland

Choose the correct option:

- A. 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 3 and 4 only

**59. Consider the following statements with respect to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):**

1. It is an international organisation that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
2. It has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize twice.
3. It reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.
4. Program of Action for Cancer Therapy is one of its key programmes.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 4 only

**60. Consider the following statements:**

1. Minsk Group was established to envisage a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
2. Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognised as a part of Armenia.
3. The major ethnic group in the Nagorno-Karabakh region is Armenian.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. None of the above

**61. Consider the following statements:**

1. DNA sequencing is the process of determining the order of nucleotides in DNA.
2. Human Genome is made up of 23 chromosome pairs.
3. Genomics involves the sequencing and analysis of genomes through the use of high throughput DNA sequencing.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. None of the above

**62. Consider the following statements with respect to the National Population Register (NPR):**

1. The NPR is a register of usual residents of the country.
2. For the purpose of NPR, a person who has resided in a local area for the past 7 years or more or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next 7 years or more is a usual resident.
3. The NPR database would contain demographic as well as biometric particulars.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 only
- D. 2 and 3 only



**63. Global Prevention Coalition (GPC) for HIV Prevention is under the aegis of:**

- A. United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
- B. World Health Organisation (WHO)
- C. International Health Organisation (IHO)
- D. International HIV/AIDS Alliance (IHAA)

**64. Consider the following statements:**

- 1. Sex ratio is the number of men per thousand women in a given population.
- 2. Child sex ratio takes into account children in the age group of 0-6 years.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**65. Consider the following statements with respect to the Office of Profit:**

- 1. The Constitution of India states that an MP or MLA is not allowed to hold any office of profit.
- 2. The office of profit comprises any place or position that carries or offers some remuneration, financial advantage, benefit, etc.
- 3. The office of profit concept has been adopted from the British parliamentary model.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. None of the above

**66. Consider the following statements with respect to "Five Eyes":**

- 1. It is an anglophone intelligence alliance.
- 2. It comprises Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- 3. The "Five Eyes" are parties to the multilateral UKUSA Agreement.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 2 only

**67. Consider the following statements with respect to Vellayani-Punchakkari wetlands:**

- 1. Vellayani-Punchakkari wetlands is located in Tamil Nadu.
- 2. It is included in the list of Ramsar wetlands of international importance.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**68. Consider the following statements with respect to Global Depository Receipt (GDR):**

- 1. It is a depository receipt which is issued by the international depository bank, representing the foreign company's stock.
- 2. GDR is denominated in any foreign currency but the underlying shares would be denominated in the local currency of the issuer.
- 3. GDRs enable a company to access investors in capital markets outside of its home country.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**69. Consider the following statements with respect to Doklam:**

- 1. Doklam trijunction is the point where the borders of Arunachal Pradesh in India, Bhutan and China meet.
- 2. It is surrounded by China's Chumbi Valley to the north, Bhutan's Ha Valley to the east and India's Nathang Valley to the west.
- 3. India claims it is at Batang La, China claims it at Gyomo chen.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 3 only
- D. None of the above

**70. Consider the following statements with respect to the Arria Formula meeting:**

- 1. It is an informal meeting of members of the United Nations Security Council.
- 2. It requires the presence of all 15 members of the council.

3. Arria formula meetings are presided over by a member of the UNSC.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 2 only
- D. None of the above

**71. Consider the following statements with respect to Inner Line Permit (ILP):**

- 1. It is a document that allows an Indian citizen to visit or stay in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.
- 2. Its origin dates back to the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations, 1873.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**72. Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan is an initiative of which of the following ministries?**

- A. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
- B. Ministry of Human Resource and Development
- C. Ministry of External Affairs
- D. Ministry of Tourism

**73. Which of the following are potential advantages of the 'Pusa decomposer' usage as against the other strategies for stubble management?**

- 1. Step towards organic farming practices
- 2. Makes use of naturally occurring processes
- 3. Helps increase soil carbon content
- 4. Helps improve soil's water retention potential
- 5. Improves soil fertility
- 6. Cheaper method
- 7. Easily scalable model

Options:

- A. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- B. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 only
- C. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7
- D. 3, 4 and 5 only

**74. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Kala Azar?**

- 1. Kala-azar also known as visceral leishmaniasis (VL) is a tropical disease.

2. It is caused by a protozoan Leishmania parasite and is transmitted to humans by the bite of infected female sandflies.

3. India accounts for about two-thirds of the total global cases.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 2 only

**75. Which of the following statement/s is/ are correct?**

- 1. India is the world's largest oil refiner and a net exporter of refined products.
- 2. Gas based fuels account for about 25% of the energy consumed in India.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**76. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to tropical cyclones?**

- 1. Tropical cyclones, form when water gets 37 °C or hotter.
- 2. The tropical cyclones do not form very close to the equator due to the absence of coriolis force near the equator.

Options:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**77. "SITMEX" is a maritime exercise between the navies of which of the following countries?**

- 1. India
- 2. Singapore
- 3. Thailand
- 4. Malaysia
- 5. Maldives

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 3 and 5 only

**78. Consider the following pairs:**

1. INS Kamorta – Anti-Submarine Warfare stealth corvette
2. INS Karmuk – Missile corvette
3. INS Kalvari – Scorpene-class submarine

Which of these is/are correctly matched?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**79. Consider the following statements regarding the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):**

1. It sets a framework for limiting the emissions of greenhouse gases by individual countries.
2. It is legally binding.
3. Nagoya Protocol is an international agreement linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
4. Paris Agreement is an agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 1 and 4 only
- D. 1, 3 and 4 only

**80. Consider the following statements with respect to River Brahmaputra:**

1. It originates in Tibet and is known as the Yarlung Tsangpo there.
2. The river flows eastwards through southern Tibet and makes a U-turn at the Shuomatan Point before it enters Arunachal Pradesh.
3. The river also flows through Bangladesh.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**81. Arrange the following capitals from North to South:**

1. Astana
2. Tashkent
3. Bishkek
4. Dushanbe

Choose the correct option:

- A. 4-3-2-1
- B. 2-4-3-1
- C. 1-3-2-4
- D. 3-1-2-4

**82. Which of the following describes the aim of the KUSUM scheme introduced by the Government of India?**

- A. Providing irrigation facilities to every village in the country
- B. Promoting decentralized solar power production
- C. Ensuring that the farmers growing oilseeds, pulses and copra get the minimum support prices
- D. Providing outcome-based skill training to unemployed youth in rural areas

**83. Which of the following pairs is/are correctly matched?**

Islands	Country
1. Assumption Island	Seychelles
2. Agalega Islands	Maldives
3. Gaadhoo Island	Mauritius

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**84. Consider the following statements with respect to Chang'e 5:**

1. It is a Navigation Satellite of China to support its global navigation and positioning network.
2. It is being developed as an alternative to the Global Positioning System of the United States.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**85. Consider the following statements with respect to tropical cyclones:**

1. More cyclones are formed in the Bay of Bengal than the Arabian Sea.
2. Cyclones gain their energy from the heat and moisture generated from warm ocean surfaces.
3. From the centre of a cyclonic storm, pressure

increases outwards.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 2 only

**86. Consider the following statements with respect to POSHAN Abhiyaan:**

1. The scheme aims at improving the nutritional outcomes of adolescents, children, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
2. The programme has specific targets for reducing stunting, anaemia, under-nutrition and low birth weight.
3. The chairman of NITI Aayog is the chairperson of the National Council on Nutrition set up under the mission.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

**87. Consider the following statements:**

1. National Stock Exchange is Asia's first stock exchange.
2. Sensex is India's benchmark stock index that represents 30 of the largest and most well-capitalized stocks on the National Stock Exchange.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**88. "Lachit Borphukan" is associated with which of the following?**

- A. Battle of Saraighat
- B. Gorkha War
- C. First Anglo-Burmese War
- D. Moplah Rebellion

**89. Consider the following pairs:**

1. SITMEX: India, Thailand, Singapore
2. AUSINDEX: Australia, India, Japan
3. Malabar: India, USA, Japan

4. SLINEX: India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh

Which of the pairs is/are correctly matched?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3 only
- C. 3 only
- D. 2, 3 and 4 only

**90. Which of the following statements best describes the UMANG App?**

- A. It provides an account in cloud to every Aadhaar holder to access authentic documents/certificates in digital format from the original issuers of these certificates.
- B. It provides a single platform for all Indian citizens to access pan India e-government services ranging from Central to local bodies and other citizen-centric services.
- C. It is an innovative web and mobile-phone-based application to improve service delivery and programme management of Integrated Child Development Services.
- D. It is an application designed to help women and children travelling in taxis and autorickshaws to raise an alarm in case of any emergency.

**91. Consider the following statements with respect to Jallikattu:**

1. Jallikattu is a traditional bull-taming sport organised in Tamil Nadu during Pongal.
2. It is also known as Eruthazhuvuthal or Manju virattu.
3. Silappatikaram has mentions of Jallikattu.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

**92. North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is a free trade agreement between which of these countries?**

1. United States of America
2. Mexico
3. Cuba
4. Canada

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 1, 2, 3 and 4
- C. 1, 3 and 4 only
- D. 2, 3 and 4 only

**93. Which of the following is the nodal agency to implement price stabilization Measures under Operation Greens:**

- A. Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)
- B. National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited (NAFED)
- C. Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO)
- D. Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare

**94. Consider the following statements:**

- 1. India is among the world's top five honey producers.
- 2. Nosema disease is a fungal disease that affects honey bees.
- 3. A Beekeeping Development Committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Bibek Debroy for identifying ways of advancing beekeeping in India.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 3 only

**95. Consider the following statements:**

- 1. The treaty of Sugauli was signed between the British East India Company and the Gurkha rulers of Kathmandu.
- 2. It was signed at the end of the Anglo-Nepal War.
- 3. Under the treaty, one-third of the Nepalese territory was lost to the British.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**96. "Pichvai Paintings" is a traditional art form that has its origin in which of these states?**

- A. Odisha
- B. Maharashtra
- C. Bihar
- D. Rajasthan

**97. Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) is located in:**

- A. Devasthal, Nainital, Uttarakhand
- B. Narayangaon, near Pune, Maharashtra

- C. Indian Astronomical Observatory, Ladakh
- D. North Rhine-Westphalia region of Germany

**98. Consider the following statements:**

- 1. Gross Value Added (GVA) provides for the value of the amount of goods and services that have been produced in a country, minus the cost of all inputs and raw materials that are directly attributable to that production.
- 2. Gross domestic product (GDP) is the monetary measure of the market value of all the final goods and services produced in a specific time period in a country.
- 3. Gross national product (GNP) is the value of all goods and services made by a country's residents and businesses, regardless of production location.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

**99. Consider the following statements with respect to *Noctiluca scintillans*:**

- 1. They accumulate toxic levels of ammonia, which is then excreted into the surrounding waters.
- 2. They produce a toxin that acts as a killing agent in algal blooms.
- 3. They are commonly known as "sea sparkle".

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. 1 and 2 only

**100. Consider the following statements with respect to exceptions under the Anti-defection Law:**

- 1. The law allows a nominated member to join a party within six months after he becomes a member of the legislature.
- 2. The law allows a party to merge with or into another party provided that at least one-third of its legislators are in favour of the merger.
- 3. The law allows an independent candidate to join a political party within six months after the election.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3



**101. Which among the following is not a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)?**

- A. Uzbekistan
- B. Turkmenistan
- C. Tajikistan
- D. Kyrgyzstan

**102. Consider the following statements with respect to Central Bureau of Investigation.**

- 1. CBI is a statutory body
- 2. CBI Director shall be appointed by the Central Government on the recommendations of a selection committee headed by the Home minister

Which of the following statements are correct?

- A. 1 only.
- B. 2 only.
- C. Both 1 and 2.
- D. Neither 1 nor 2.

**103. Which of the following places are correctly matched:**

- 1. Neom : Qatar
- 2. Natanz : Iran
- 3. Mosul : Iraq
- 4. Absard : Saudi Arabia.

Options:

- A. 1 and 2.
- B. 2 and 3.
- C. 3 and 4.
- D. 1 and 4.

**104. Arrange the following hills of Eastern Ghats from north to south.**

- 1. Shevroy hills.
- 2. Nagari hills.
- 3. Nallamalla hills.
- 4. Palani hills.

Options:

- A. 2-3-1-4
- B. 3-2-1-4
- C. 3-2-4-1
- D. 2-4-1-3

**105. Which of the following are left-bank tributaries of River Brahmaputra?**

- 1. River Dhansiri

- 2. River Lohit
- 3. River Subansiri
- 4. River Dibang
- 5. River Kameng

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- D. 3, 4 and 5 only

**106. Which of the following rightly describes Mission SAMPARK?**

- A. The mission is aimed at tracing patients with HIV/AIDS, who are left to follow up and are to be brought under Antiretroviral therapy (ART) services.
- B. The mission is aimed at formulating developmental policies for accelerating growth of the telecommunication services.
- C. The mission launched in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic to have a safe arrangement to fly passengers between two countries.
- D. The mission is aimed at assisting the needy disabled persons in procuring standard aids and appliances that can promote their physical, social and psychological rehabilitation.

**107. Consider the following statements with respect to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC):**

- 1. It is the second-largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- 2. Its Permanent Secretariat is in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- 3. The OIC has permanent delegations to the European Union.

Which of the given statement/s is/are INCORRECT?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. None of the above

**108. Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary is located in:**

- A. Uttarakhand
- B. Himachal Pradesh
- C. Punjab
- D. Uttar Pradesh

# ANSWER KEYS

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1	B
2	A
3	D
4	D
5	A
6	C
7	B
8	B
9	B
10	A
11	D
12	B
13	C
14	C
15	D
16	A
17	C
18	A
19	B
20	C

21	A
22	C
23	B
24	C
25	C
26	C
27	D
28	C
29	B
30	A
31	B
32	D
33	D
34	C
35	C
36	C
37	A
38	D
39	A
40	C

41	A
42	D
43	A
44	C
45	D
46	C
47	A
48	C
49	A
50	C
51	B
52	D
53	A
54	A
55	A
56	D
57	B
58	A
59	C
60	B

61	D
62	C
63	A
64	B
65	D
66	C
67	C
68	D
69	A
70	C
71	C
72	B
73	C
74	C
75	D
76	B
77	B
78	D
79	C
80	D

81	C
82	B
83	A
84	D
85	C
86	B
87	D
88	A
89	A
90	B
91	C
92	A
93	B
94	C
95	D
96	D
97	B
98	D
99	B
100	B

101	B
102	D
103	B
104	B
105	A
106	A
107	D
108	B

# MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

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## GS Paper 1

### **Social Issues**

1. The recent alimony guidelines by the Supreme Court offer a glimmer of hope to poor women who are often overlooked in discourses. In the light of growing percentage of matrimonial litigation in India, discuss the significance of the judgement. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. Anti-conversion laws barring inter-faith marriages will lead to the path of social regression. Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

### **Geography**

1. Explain the phenomenon of 'recurving of cyclones' with recent examples and also highlight the factors aiding such events. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

## GS Paper 2

### **International Relations**

1. Analyze the challenges/concerns that India could face from its perceived closer alignment with the U.S. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. How will the electoral outcome in the United States of America affect India-US relations? Analyse. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
3. International Relations are always transactional and it does not matter which party/individual is in power unless and until there are mutual interests involved. Comment in the context of the change in U.S. president ship and its impact on the India-U.S. relationship. (15 marks, 250 words)
4. The armed clashes in Ethiopia's Tigray could spiral and impact the Horn of Africa region at large. Comment. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
5. In the backdrop of general elections being held in Myanmar, discuss the geopolitical dimension of Myanmar's democratization. What are the challenges facing the country? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
6. What is the new peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan? What are the stakes for Russia? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
7. What are Sri Lanka's prospects with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in India's absence? Examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
8. Have the circumstances under which India had distanced itself from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations become any better for it to join the agreement in the near future? Critically comment. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
9. Evaluate India's decision to not be part of the RCEP grouping. Also in the light of several measures proposed by the RCEP to leave a window of opportunity for India to return to the group, discuss the significance of India to the RCEP grouping and its member nations. (15 marks, 250 words)
10. Discuss the concerns of India and other lower riparian countries with China's dam construction on the River Brahmaputra. What are the alternative solutions in the interest of all the stakeholders? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
11. Discuss the security challenges and the problems faced by India in resisting infiltration or bringing it to a minimum level along the international borders. What are the steps taken by the government in this regard? (10 Marks, 150 Words)
12. Explain the role and significance of West Asia to India's economic and security goals. (10 Marks, 150 Words)



**Nutrition**

1. Analyze the negative impact the school closures due to the pandemic have had on the nutrition status of children and suggest requisite short- and long-term measures to ensure nutritional security for the children. (10 marks, 150 words)

**Education**

1. The low score of India in the international Academic Freedom Index (AFI) is a reflection of the critical issues plaguing the country's education system, particularly the higher education sector. Analyze. (10 marks, 150 words)

**Polity & Governance**

1. Given that the weakening of States serves neither federalism nor national interest, there is the need to guard against any such policies that weaken the state's status or capabilities. Comment with respect to the issue of fiscal federalism in India. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. The central government's move to bring 'Over the Top' (OTT) platforms or video streaming service providers and digital news under the ambit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for their regulation is a much-needed step. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
3. Discuss the significance of the 'Right to work' principle in the Indian scenario and analyze the challenges in implementing such a scheme. (15 marks, 250 words)
4. Undermining the trade unions poses a grave challenge for the working class in their ability to defend their rights. Examine the statement in light of the newly introduced Labour Codes. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
5. With journalists facing various kinds of harassment and false cases across the country, there is an urgent need to enact comprehensive legislations that protect media persons. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
6. Judicial recusals have the potential to turn into a tool to manoeuvre justice. Critically comment. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
7. What do you understand by "Office of Profit"? Discuss the purpose of including the 'Office of Profit' as a criterion for disqualification of legislators. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
8. Discuss the components and significance of the National Digital Health Mission. How would it address the current requirements and gaps in the health system in the country? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
9. The Kerala Government's law on social media posts violates the principles of free speech and individual liberty. Critically analyze. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
10. Explain with relevant case laws the views of courts in India with reference to inter-caste and interfaith marriages. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

**Health**

1. Discuss the major challenges in the Indian health sector and analyze how the National Health Policy of 2017 aims to address these challenges. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. The 'One Health' approach is the optimum approach to counter the impact of antimicrobial resistance. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
3. India must utilise its large workforce of non-MBBS doctors to improve access to decent health care. Elucidate (10 Marks, 150 Words)

**Social Justice**

1. Providing affordable housing is an opportunity to make Indian cities more liveable for all residents, and can be a game-changer in the urban sector. Explain. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
2. COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing issues of food insecurity and malnutrition across the world. In light of this statement, examine the current scenario in India in comparison with other South Asian countries and suggest measures to check the growing problem of malnutrition in India. (15 Marks 250 Words)

**GS Paper 3****Economy**

1. Discuss the salient provisions with respect to platform workers in the Code on Social Security Bill, 2020. Discuss the significance of these provisions and also the lacunae in the code. Suggest appropriate measures to truly empower the platform workers. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. What is meant by inflation targeting? Discuss the significance of inflation targeting and also enumerate the inflation targeting framework in India. (10 marks, 150 words)
3. The growing economic inequality poses serious challenges for India. Comment. Also evaluate the efficacy of the economic policies being propounded to counter this challenge. (15 marks, 250 words)
4. Despite the recent signs of a rise in economic activity, the underlying economic conditions cast serious doubts on whether this rise in economic activity is indicative of a sustainable recovery or not. Analyze. (15 marks, 250 words)
5. What is meant by dumping in the context of international trade? Discuss how it adversely affects the destination nation and enumerate recent governmental measures to counter this challenge. (10 marks, 150 words)
6. The central government's new production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme is envisioned to play a critical role in the economic recovery process in the post-pandemic scenario. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)
7. Providing adequate and quality employment to all is a sine qua non for sustainable economic growth and economic development. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
8. With the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership likely to impact investment flows into India, the country faces challenges in maintaining its viability against highly competitive countries in the post-pandemic world. Critically examine. (GS 3 Economy)
9. Will the Atmanirbhar Package and various incentives approved by the Government help in reviving the economy? Critically examine. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
10. In the light of the IEA projections that India's per capita energy needs will almost double by 2050, discuss what measures should be taken by India to ensure secure, affordable and sustainable energy to all its citizens. (15 marks, 250 words)
11. Is the time ripe for granting bank licenses to corporate houses in India? Substantiate your answer. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
12. With India on the verge of an unprecedented economic catastrophe, it is time for India to let its guard down and consider Free Trade Agreements. Critically comment. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
13. With the recently introduced labour reforms set to change industrial relations, trade unions must include effective social dialogue to get their grievances redressed. Elucidate. What are the other options available to the trade unions to confront the recent reforms? (15 Marks, 250 Words)
14. Ban on Chinese mobile applications is not only a geopolitical move but also a strategic trade manoeuvre that can have a significant positive economic impact for India. Critically analyse. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
15. The recent farm acts aim to increase the availability of buyers for farmers' produce thereby ensuring the goal of doubling farmers' income. Critically discuss various apprehensions in its effective implementation along with concerns it has generated in various federal units. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

16. The pandemic has led the Indian economy into a recession. Discuss the measures needed to be taken by the Government to revive private consumption in order to improve overall demand in the economy. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

### **Environment & Ecology**

1. Climate action would not only help address the challenges posed by climate change but will also help capitalize on the long-term economic and environmental benefits of a low-carbon world. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. What is meant by Carbon Neutrality? Discuss the significance of the carbon neutrality principle. Also analyze the viability of such a principle for a developing country like India. (15 marks, 250 words)
3. Discuss measures to improve the outcomes of the National Clean Air Programme. What are the challenges involved in the implementation? (15 Marks, 250 Words)

### **Internal Security**

1. Apart from the security challenges in countering terrorism, the larger challenge is how to address the issue of radicalization among youth and counter attempts to disrupt the social cohesion. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

### **Science & Technology**

1. As the COVID-19 vaccine development efforts are progressing the focus would be shifting towards achieving the effective delivery of COVID vaccines to all. Analyze the challenges in this regard. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. What is the mRNA technology-based vaccine development strategy? Discuss the significance of this novel vaccine development strategy. (10 marks, 150 words)

# INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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## **Candidate Details:**

- Name: Varsha Meena
- AIR: 580 (CSE 2017)
- Chairperson: Manoj Soni
- Duration: 35 minutes
- Hometown: Dholpur, Rajasthan

## **About Varsha Meena**

- Optional Subject: Geography
- Work Experience: No work experience
- Education: B.Tech in Electrical engineering, IIT Roorkee
- Hobbies:
  - \* Playing volleyball, origami, clay art
  - \* Gold medalist in Inter-IIT sports meet
  - \* Captain of IIT Roorkee girls' Volleyball team

## **Interview**

### **Questions based on DAF and follow-up questions**

- So you are from Dholpur, how does it feel like to come to Dholpur House?
- An important historical incident of Dholpur
- Why do you think an IAS officer is more important than an electrical engineer?
- Why do you think you are suitable for IAS?

### **Agriculture**

- How far was the Green Revolution successful?
- What were the key elements of the Green Revolution?
- What are the problems our agriculture sector is facing?
- What is a greenhouse?
- Has the share of agriculture in GDP increased or decreased?

### **Science and Technology**

- What are your views on artificial intelligence?
- Give an example where complete automation has happened in India?

**Economy**

- About the evolution of the telecommunication sector in India.
- Recently there was a player of the telecom industry in news? (Reliance Jio)
- So, has TRAI raised any objection regarding the schemes of Jio?
- What are the issues in the power sector in India?
- What are the issues with the manufacturing sector in India?
- What are smart cities?
- How are smart villages important for the success of smart cities?
- What are a few things that India should learn from China?
- Poverty, poor education and corruption are three main problems India is facing - so what will be your priority while tackling these issues?

**Security**

- How far has the Indian government been successful in curbing insurgency in India?
- About Punjab insurgency.